

FIRE ESCAPE LAW

Have been greatly gratified by the response made by those responsible when fire escapes have been ordered, of course there have been exceptions to the rule, but generally speaking a ready recognition of the necessity has been accorded, and even in cases where financial hardship has been involved. While at the present time there are a couple of hangovers the orders of our inspectors have been well obeyed. The architects of our state have shown a desire to make the new buildings safer and better in eliminating fire hazards by using more fireproofing materials, and designing superior methods of escape.

In this department the cooperation of the Hotel Inspection Group has been of material benefit to both departments.

BOILER AND HIGH PRESSURE VESSELS

Boiler and high pressure vessels. One of the notable features of the administration of this office is the number of calls coming in for boiler inspection, and the fact that Iowa has nothing of the kind makes her the dumping ground for second hand boilers which are unsalable elsewhere, thus we are led to repeat the recommendation of our predecessor to the effect that Iowa needs a Boiler Inspection Law.

State of Iowa

1929

Annual Report

OF THE

Commission for the Blind

For the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1929

Published by
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Des Moines

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To His Excellency, John Hammill, Governor,

HONORABLE SIR:

Complying with the provision of Paragraph 7, Section 7, Chapter 75, Acts of the 41st G. A., the report of the Commission for the Blind for the year ending June 30, 1929 is herewith submitted.

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

ETHEL TOWNE HOLMES,

Executive Secretary.

November 2, 1929

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

The Iowa Commission for the Blind began its work in February 1926 and though steadily progressing feels itself still in the pioneer stage. The public is becoming increasingly aware of the fact that there are large numbers of self-respecting blind people in our state who need its friendly interest as well as its patronage of their various industries. It is not surprising that the education of seeing people along these lines is slow, for there is a comparatively small group of blind people and one may live all his life in his community without ever having known or seen a person without sight.

The commission regrets the resignation of Mrs. M. Russell Perkins, one of its first members, because of her removal to California. She has always brought intense interest and keen insight to bear upon the problems confronting us. We are fortunate in having Governor Hammill appoint Mrs. E. H. Hall of Davenport to fill the vacancy, the term of office to begin July, 1929. Mrs. Hall has been very active in civic activities and has held many state offices in the Federation of Women's Clubs and other important organizations. She has shown an unusual ability to meet and overcome new situations and with her deep interest in people, she will be a valuable member of the commission. Mr. F. E. Palmer, the superintendent of the Vinton school, and Mr. C. E. Lastrup of Council Bluffs, who is without sight, are the other two members of the commission.

REGISTRY OF THE BLIND

We have the names of 1,818 blind and partially blind in the state. Of these, 136 under 21 years of age and 6 over 21 were pupils at the Vinton school for the blind. There are 138 in institutions and various lodge and church homes, and homes for the aged. There is no state home for the adult blind and but one private one, exclusively for blind women, the Iowa Home for Sightless Women, located in Des Moines. This home is maintained by gifts, endowment, contribution from the Des Moines community chest and small entrance fees. It has been a haven of refuge to many who otherwise would have had no place to go but the county farm. A movement to provide a home for blind men is under way through some interested individuals.

Twenty-two young people under 21 years of age have been found in their own homes, either receiving private instruction

or unable to attend school because of some other physical handicap. Iowa's compulsory school laws apply to Vinton, and the field agent is very successful in finding those who should be in school. Some times it is necessary to take cases to court, but usually she is able to persuade parents to avail themselves of the opportunities offered, without the aid of the law. Unfortunately we have not an age classification for all those whose names we have as the counties do not always report the ages. Those we have are:

185 between 21 and 50
 113 between 50 and 60
 186 between 60 and 70
 229 between 70 and 80
 130 over 80

Doubtless those whose ages are not reported are over fifty because we are usually informed of the younger ones to whom we might be of service and have much more definite information concerning them. While we do not know more than 10 blind-deaf people in the state, increasing attention is being paid to this particularly handicapped group and there is some agitation for a national institution for the young ones because no one state has enough to afford state instruction.

The commission is urging the counties to have an oculist rather than a physician examine those applying for the pensions. Doubtless in many cases partial vision could be restored through operations if the cause of the trouble were recognized, and also through treatment the small degree of sight remaining could be preserved. Consequently information furnished the commission concerning the degree of sight is most inaccurate for there is no standard vision test used.

RELIEF

The first pension law for blind people in Iowa was passed in 1915 and since then various changes have been made until as the law now stands, it is a permissive one administered entirely by the individual counties. It provides that any person declared to be blind, if male over 21 and if female over 18 years of age, who is not an inmate of any charitable institution and who has not an income of more than \$300 per annum and who has resided in Iowa five years and in the county one year immediately before applying therefor, may receive as a benefit the sum of not more than \$300 per annum as the board of supervisors may de-

termine. A physician is employed for examinations. Every county grants pensions but the amount given varies widely. Some never grant the full \$300. The sum given should be based on actual need and not on the mere fact of blindness. As the number of county social workers increase more careful investigations are being made. It is readily seen that the full amount of \$300 is not adequate if there is no other means of support, but even a small sum often makes life bearable in the home of a relative who otherwise would not welcome the blind person.

Pensions are now being paid to 1,058 people. If Iowa had an old age pension, many of the 545 people over sixty years of age would be included, for physical infirmity otherwise than blindness is often the cause of dependency. Then, too, we must take into account that physically fit men over fifty years of age outside of the professions are finding it increasingly difficult to hold their jobs while those attempting to find new employment learn their experience counts for nothing as against the mere fact of youth. One great injustice of our present law is that often a blind person moving from one county to another for a legitimate reason is served with non-resident papers, thus making it impossible for him to receive a pension in the new county, while his former county after a while cuts him from their list.

PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

In all lines of health work more and more attention is being paid to prevention. The National Society for the Prevention of Blindness came into existence for the express purpose of fighting blindness caused by ophthalmia neonatorum, commonly known as babies' sore eyes, on a nation-wide scale. So successful has been their campaign in educating the public and securing necessary legislation that this cause of blindness is now negligible and the committee has widened their scope extensively to embrace all phases of prevention and the conservation of vision. They are now stressing the examination of the school child.

Iowa was fortunate enough to have Miss Mildred Smith sent here last spring by this organization. Working with Miss Countyman, the head of the public health nurses, she talked to nurses, doctors, parent-teachers groups and club women in the larger centers and demonstrated her simple but thorough method of testing the eyes of little children. She was enthusiastically received everywhere and her work will have lasting effects. The commission has distributed thousands of pamphlets dealing with

prevention of blindness and conservation of sight at fairs, club meetings, exhibits, etc.

We co-operate with public health nurses through the state and also with the school nurses in locating and securing medical attention for those who need it. The free service offered by the hospital at Iowa City has given an opportunity for excellent examination and care. Oculists throughout the state give generously of their time to those who cannot afford to pay. When necessary the commission pays for examination but not for continued care. Iowa is very fortunate in being almost entirely free from trachoma, while our neighboring state on the south has thousands of cases. We have no industries which are particularly hazardous to vision. In the list of 65 accident cases reported the largest single cause given was explosions, which for the most part were dynamite explosions in clearing stumps.

For the third year the Board of Education loaned the commission the school buildings at Vinton for the summer school for adults. Everything is entirely free to the pupils after arriving at the school. This year we had 25 in attendance, an increase of seven over last year. Summer schools are peculiar to the middle west, only Kansas, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa having them, because in our rural communities it is impossible to meet the needs of widely scattered blind people by supplying home teachers. To a blind person who has never known another blind one, the inspiration derived from associating with such a group is tremendous. He finds that someone may be more handicapped than he and has carried on more successfully. For instance there was a young woman, who in addition to recent blindness had the added handicap of having been born with but two fingers on each hand. She read Braille more rapidly than anyone else, wove rugs on a large loom and made perfect baskets to the great admiration of every man and woman there. She also had great skill on the typewriter. Each one had his individual problems to be solved and the teachers were untiring day and night in helping in a hundred ways outside the particular subject they were teaching. One man aged 43, who was overwhelmed the first day by the varied subjects introduced, on the second day had gained his courage and started to work determined to learn what others did. At the end of the school he said he might never use some of the material things he had learned, such as weaving, etc., but he would use the things of the spirit, courage, determination, patience and understanding, which would enable him to

undertake projects which before with his sight he should not have dared attempt. A woman 58, blind only since Christmas, determined to come, notwithstanding the objections of her family. She was naturally very reticent and her blindness had made her more so, and every effort was made to arouse her. She became so proficient in typing that a typewriter was loaned to her by the commission on her return home and now she writes to all her friends. A man blind for two years, whom the secretary had not been able to persuade to go to the school until this year, after the first day said, "Now I know what you were talking about. I don't ever want to go home." He wrote the following letter of appreciation:

"Two years ago I was just a blind man sitting in the corner doing nothing and didn't know there was a thing in the world that I could do. Now thanks to the commission I am able to read and write Braille, use the typewriter, make door mats, baskets, cane chairs, and have a good start on piano work. Now instead of sitting in the corner I am the busiest man trying to fill my orders.

"I have just returned from summer school at Vinton and I am trying in my crude way to thank you and the commission and everyone who made the summer school possible for us. You have not only done so much for me, but I know from talking to others that there are dozens of men and women in Iowa that have got as much out of the school as I have got. I will always feel that I owe you and the commission a debt that I can never pay.

"Thanking you again so much for all you have done for me and all the blind, I am

Your sincere friend."

A man active in business all his life, about sixty years of age, who was losing his sight wanted to learn all he could to prepare himself for blindness. His attitude was unusual, for ordinarily one is unwilling to attempt to learn to do things until the sight is entirely gone. There were some who had come to the school for the second year, but many more were new. Great care is taken in selecting those who will work and who will take advantage of the opportunities and not come just for a pleasant summer picnic. Mr. Palmer gives his time to the school and the secretary of the commission usually is there the first and last week, which enables her to see the great changes that have come about in the short time of six weeks. To observe a man who literally had to be taken there, with no interest in life, become so thrilled that he worked every evening, with his whole attitude changed toward the world, gives a satisfaction beyond words to express. So valuable is the school that the legislature was asked to give \$2,000 in addition to the usual budget to make it possible to have it eight weeks next year instead of six. This sum was

granted. There will always be those who are not able to attend the school and for those home teaching has been provided to the best of our ability. The blind home teacher in Polk county has continued this year, 203 lessons in Braille and Braille writing being given. One blind man extremely proficient in chair caning was hired to give another man instruction. In two different cities teachers from good commercial schools gave typing lessons. With no blind teacher available for basketry in another place, a proficient teacher with sight was used. Where no teacher could be provided, a member of the family was given instruction in Braille by correspondence and he instructed the blind person. A small industrial center is gradually developing in Sioux City through the efforts of a blind man and his wife who has sight. We have often used him to give instruction in weaving and caning to people in that part of Iowa. He has an excellent point of view, is always cheerful and is a thoroughly good workman. The Goodwill Mission gave him a room for his looms, etc., and now every day he goes to his work. The commission has purchased many of his products and advanced him material but has not subsidized the shop in any way. The Lions club is interested in the group and at the Sioux City fair this man and his wife were instrumental in getting the local blind people to bring their products for display in their booth. There was a large sign displayed, "In co-operation with the State Commission for the Blind." It is the earnest desire of the commission to stimulate local interest in communities because it is not possible to have direct supervision everywhere in the state.

Following the plan outlined at their state convention a year ago, the Lions clubs have held six sales for products made by the blind. One club conducted a continuous sale of rugs in one of the larger cities in the department stores, moving the rugs from one to the other. About \$400 worth of goods has been sold by this club alone. The coming year more sales will be held. Some places the Lions club has shown its interest by backing an individual blind person; such as in a small northern community, a young man had finished at Vinton and needed help in establishing himself as a piano tuner. The members employed him and persuaded others to give him work, which was the best possible service they could render. Another town took one of our summer school men as their special interest. He has more caning and basket making than he can do and the town is proud of him. The Lions club of Sigourney has presented two books to the

Library Commission, transcribed in Braille by Miss Beulah Burdine, one of its own young blind women.

Because we have no shops, we have no record of the amount of work which has gone to the men in their homes through us. We always try to have the purchaser deal directly with the man himself, such as ordering rugs, taking chairs to be caned, etc. It develops independence and initiative.

The State Federation of Women's Clubs continued its interest in the blind women by making the purchase of towels hemmed by them a club project through its committee on the Education of the Deaf and Blind. Last winter was a particularly bad one for club meetings as the country roads were impassable for weeks and the women did not attend. Notwithstanding, 19,852 towels were sold, an increase over our first year. The women say they are just becoming interested so we are looking forward to increased sales. Sixty-five women were given towels to hem regularly for which they were paid nine cents each for hand hemming. Our list of workers steadily grows. To give the club women a tangible proof of how much their efforts in buying were appreciated we published a little pamphlet called, "An Appreciation, by the Blind Women of Iowa to the Federated Club Women," excerpts from letters received in our office from the workers. Each club will receive one of these booklets in the fall.

The commission has loaned six typewriters and provided four looms to workers, which remain our property. We have advanced material to anyone who wished it, which is one of our most appreciated services. A small sum has been set aside for the purchase of radios and we have provided four for elderly people.

The Board of Education has a very limited fund for the advanced education of young blind men and women and this year it is being stretched to its full capacity in educating nine people at six different colleges in the state.

The secretary of the commission attended the biennium of the State Federation of Women's Clubs at Sioux City in May and by request had an exhibit. The entire collection of baskets was made by a Sioux City man, thus again interesting the local community in its own people. She also attended the state convention of the Lions clubs in Council Bluffs, had an exhibit and spoke at one of the morning sessions on the work of the commission. Last fall she attended and spoke at all of the eleven district meetings of the women's clubs, sometimes on just the

work of the committee which meant towels, but usually on the general work of the commission. Two radio talks were given at Shenandoah on the same day she spoke to three clubs. At a Sunday school meeting in northern Iowa she was introduced as a home missionary. Mr. Palmer, the president of the commission is in great demand as a speaker at the Lions and other service clubs, because of his great sympathy and understanding of the problems of the blind.

In a monthly report which the secretary sends to the members of the commission is a detailed statement of the work done day by day, with details of cases, visits made, services rendered, etc. As rapidly as possible the secretary is making personal visits on all those reported in the different counties, whether or not any service has been asked for. The commission wishes to serve every blind person in the state to the best of its ability and one of the greatest pleasures it experiences is the appreciation of our earnest endeavors to help, shown by someone through some mark of confidence.

As will be seen from the following financial statement, \$7,476.51 was paid in to the state treasurer's office as against \$6,327.24 last year, from the sale of merchandise.

Appropriation	\$10,000.00	
Balance forward	3,809.16	
Receipts	7,476.51	
Expenses		
Salaries	\$ 3,775.00	
Traveling expenses	507.79	
Express and drayage	181.76	
Supplies	100.21	
Postage	335.24	
Printing	19.15	
Marketing and manufacturing	8,185.50	
Training	6,947.04	
Telephone and Telegraph	66.47	
Miscellaneous	706.07	
	<hr/>	
	\$21,285.67	\$20,824.23
Balance on hand 6-30-29		461.44
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	\$21,285.67	\$21,285.67

The Budget Department in its general comment and conclusion, said:

"The books and records of the department are in good shape and up to date. The foregoing report and the statements submitted herewith show the condition of the department as of June 30, 1929.

"We are of the opinion that all funds have been used for the purpose for which appropriated.

"Efficiency is maintained and the maximum results are obtained for the money expended.

"The work of the department does not conflict with or duplicate that done by any other department."

They also recommended that a balance unexpended of \$461.44 be carried forward and added to the account for this department from July 1, 1929, to June 30, 1930.