



Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa

J. L. Gillin

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1914



IOWA APPLIED HISTORY SERIES

EDITED BY BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH

VOLUME II

NUMBER 11

*Poor Relief Legislation  
in Iowa*

BY

J. L. GILLIN



IOWA  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
C41P

REPRINTED FROM VOLUME TWO OF THE IOWA  
APPLIED HISTORY SERIES PUBLISHED AT IOWA CITY  
IN 1914 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA



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**POOR RELIEF LEGISLATION IN IOWA**



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IN IOWA

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

POVERTY is such a persistent and perplexing social problem and its amelioration through government action so difficult that it is not surprising to learn that poor relief legislation and administration in Iowa have not been altogether successful. There is need for new legislation and more scientific methods of administration. But changes in the system should be made in the light of experience both in Iowa and in other jurisdictions.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND EDITOR  
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA CITY IOWA





## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN the reaction against the hopelessness of the old methods designed to relieve poverty the long-established institutions for dealing with that problem have been sadly neglected. The subject of the relief of poverty is not popular. The presence of poverty among us is so constant and its alleviation apparently so hopeless that it has been accepted as if it were a decree of blind fate against which it is useless to struggle. Preventive measures seem much more hopeful than efforts at cure. The time has come, however, when we are beginning to realize that the ordinary institutions for the care of the poor have a very important function to perform in the prevention of poverty.

It is all very well to enact child labor laws, a compulsory education law, and a contributory dependency law. These pieces of legislation in Iowa indicate forward steps in the attitude of the legislators towards the problem of poverty. But as has been pointed out in the writer's *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa*, published by The State Historical Society of Iowa in the *Iowa Social History Series*, the legislators of Iowa have been so engrossed with preventive legislation that constructive legislation with reference to those ancient institutions, the poorhouse and the system of outdoor relief, has been



utterly neglected. In the volume above mentioned the writer holds that to make the social legislation enacted during the last ten years really effective it must be supplemented by legislation aimed at the reform of the poor-house and the system of outdoor relief.

The paper which follows contains a brief historical survey of the history of poor relief legislation in Iowa, an outline of the present system of poor relief, and finally, some suggested changes which will, it is believed, make the poor relief laws of Iowa really efficient in the prevention and cure of poverty. For a full discussion of the history of poor relief legislation in Iowa and for citations to materials the reader is referred to the larger volume mentioned above.

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## I

### A SURVEY OF POOR RELIEF LEGISLATION IN IOWA

UNTIL 1860 the poor laws of Iowa were, for the most part, borrowed from other States and Territories — very little independent thought being given to the relief of the poor by the legislators of Iowa before the Civil War. This lack of concern relative to the subject of poor relief was due to the conditions of pioneer life. In the first place, the people on the frontier were all poor: only the very poorest needed any attention. Again, where the population was sparse very few institutions were needed for the care of the poor. Then too, with characteristic neighborliness pioneer society looked after the poor in its midst in a manner which made special institutions almost unnecessary.

In spite of these conditions the early legislators of Iowa, in adopting laws for the Territory and later for the State, felt that they must have poor relief legislation like that of the other States. Since Iowa had been a part of the Territory of Wisconsin it was natural that the law-makers of the Territory of Iowa should look to Wisconsin for models of legislation. The first poor law adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa, approved on January 16, 1840, was practically the same as the Wisconsin act. It was a simple law, well adapted to pioneer conditions, and it remained on the statute books of the Territory until 1842. In that year two new acts



regulating the relief of poverty were passed. One act, approved on February 16, 1842, pertained to outdoor relief; and the other, approved on February 17, 1842, had to do with poorhouses. These laws were almost verbatim copies of the Ohio acts of March 14, 1831, and March 8, 1831, respectively. They were very poorly suited, however, to the needs of pioneer Iowa. As a matter of fact there were very few counties in the Territory of Iowa at this time that needed poorhouses. Yet this act providing for poorhouses was most arbitrary in its terms and complicated in its machinery. Suited to conditions in Ohio, these acts were at least fifty years beyond the stage of development reached at that time in Iowa.

While certain changes were made in these laws from time to time between 1842 and 1851, they remained practically unaltered upon the statute books until the adoption of the *Code of 1851*. In this Code a new influence appears in the poor laws of Iowa, namely, the influence of New York. In the *Code of 1851*, the county judge was made the primary authority to investigate cases of poverty and to afford relief. The makers of this Code did not, however, turn aside entirely from the precedent set by the Ohio legislation in the relief of the poor. The system resulting from this combination of methods remained in force until 1860. In that year the county judge system of local administration was overturned, and the board of supervisors was created in its place. This was practically the only change made in the system of poor relief.

The great increase of poverty incident to the Civil War first aroused careful and constructive thought for the relief of the poor in Iowa. Thousands of men had been called to the defense of the Nation, while their

families, in many cases, were left in dire need. The authorities of Iowa called attention to this need and the legislators responded by various acts intended to afford relief. It was during this period that a law was enacted forbidding the sending of the wives or children of a soldier to the poorhouse in case they could and preferred to be supported in their homes at a cost of not to exceed two dollars a week, to be paid out of the county treasury; and the same privilege was extended to any poor persons living in families. At about this time, also, there grew up the Soldiers' Relief Fund, which was designed at first for the relief of the families of soldiers, but which later came to be employed for the relief of soldiers themselves. Other effects of the Civil War as seen in poor relief legislation in Iowa are the establishment of the Soldiers' Home and the Soldiers' Orphans' Home, designed at first only for the children of soldiers, but now open to other children, with a system of placing out and careful supervision. Indeed, it may be said that the public sentiment which demanded provision for the care of the soldier and his family continued to be felt in Iowa at least until the year 1897, when the present Code was adopted.

From 1897 to the present time the increasing influence of modern, scientific philanthropy is to be seen in the legislation bearing upon the relief of the poor. It was during this period that the compulsory education law, the contributory dependency law, the child labor law, the juvenile court law, and the mothers' pension law were passed. The spirit of modern philanthropy has, however, hardly touched the organized system of poor relief. To be sure, State inspection and control over those county poorhouses that contain insane persons has been introduced. Moreover, the creation of special institutions



like the Institution for Feeble-minded Children, the Soldiers' Orphans' Home, the authorization of private organizations to care for and place out children, the establishment of schools for the blind and for the deaf and dumb, and the creation of a Colony for Epileptics and a special institution for inebriates have come to pass in Iowa during the last four or five decades. These movements have had the result of taking certain classes of dependents from the poorhouse and placing them in special institutions better adapted to their care.

With all of these advances, however, no striking change has been made in the character of the poorhouse. It is still largely the catch-all for moral, mental, and physical wrecks. Whatever coöperation there has been between the authorities for the outdoor relief of the poor and scientific charity workers has been entirely voluntary and without the stimulation of positive legal enactment. Progressive legislation like that of Indiana has been almost entirely lacking in Iowa. No revolutionary change in the methods of poor relief, so far as the poorhouse and outdoor relief are concerned, has been made by recent legislation aside from removing from the poorhouses some of the defective classes.

## II

### CHIEF FEATURES OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF POOR RELIEF IN IOWA

THE system of poor relief employed in Iowa at the present time is based upon the double system of indoor and outdoor relief. All but four counties in the State — Crawford, Emmet, Ida, and Osceola — maintain county homes, or poorhouses as they were formerly called. In each county this institution is under the control of the county board of supervisors. If it contains insane persons, it is subject to inspection twice each year by a representative of the State Board of Control, which may impose upon it certain regulations. If, however, it contains no insane persons, there is absolutely no provision for its inspection and regulation by the State. It has no supervision except that which is given by the county board of supervisors. In 1912 the poorhouses of forty-nine of the ninety-nine counties in the State had no inmates who were insane. Thus, half of the poorhouses are subject only to inspection by the board of supervisors, who, being busy with many other matters, have little time to do more than endeavor to administer them as economically as possible; and thus only incidental attention is given to the comfort and happiness of the inmates.

In immediate charge of the county homes are the stewards. In care of these officials in ninety-five institutions in the State for the year ending June 30, 1912, there was a total of 1137 inmates who had not been adjudged



insane. In addition to these there were 36 who were insane, but had not been so adjudged, 482 insane persons, 57 blind people, 21 deaf and dumb, 282 feeble-minded, and 34 epileptics — a total of 1313 defectives. Thus, more than half of the inmates of the county homes and asylums of Iowa are such as should not be in a home for the aged and infirm. In Iowa a county home is a refuge for defectives rather than a home for the old and sick poor.

The average salary of the stewards of these poor-houses for the fiscal year 1911-1912 was \$724, while the matrons received an average salary of \$265 — the salary, in most cases, being in addition to board and room.

Admission to the poorhouse is in the hands of the county board of supervisors. Legally the discharge of inmates is authorized by the steward and the board of supervisors, but as a matter of fact inmates discharge themselves at will. According to the letter of the law the steward may require labor of those able to work, but in reality about the only inmates who can be made to observe this law are those who are feeble-minded or insane. There is no provision in Iowa for a county board of charities whose business it should be to inspect the poorhouse, as in Indiana; and there is no system of reports to the State Board of Control, except in those county homes which contain insane. Nor is there legal provision for regular religious exercises to be held in these institutions, or for reading matter or entertainments with which to relieve the tedious monotony of the daily lives of the inmates.

Supplementary to the county home as a method of relieving poverty is relief in the homes of the poor. The recipients of this relief may be divided into three classes. In the first class are all soldiers, sailors, and marines,

and their families who are not willing to go to the Soldiers' Home at Marshalltown, or who can not for any reason be admitted to that institution. In the second class are all children who are orphans as defined by law and whose mothers, in the judgment of the court, are the proper persons to care for and rear them. These children in an earlier period in the history of the State would have been bound out. Before the passage of the mothers' pension law in 1913, the mother probably would have received some relief from the overseer of the poor or the township trustees and from private relief agencies in the community, or her children would have been sent to some orphans' home to be placed out in normal family relationships.

The third class includes those persons in families who can not quite support themselves and who, occasionally in winter or in case of sickness, must have some aid to supplement their incomes for a short period. Sometimes they are old couples left destitute with no one upon whom they may rely for even a part of their support. Or they may be widows with children who for the most part can make a living, or they may be those who because of temporary sickness or accident to the breadwinner are unable to support themselves. The law in such cases is intended to apply only to those who have family relationships, and therefore a limit is placed upon the amount that may be given to each person.

The Iowa law properly contemplates that fathers, mothers, children, and grandsons, shall support natural dependents, and that grandparents shall support grandchildren if they are able to do so without personal labor.

Dependent children, if illegitimate, are to be supported by the putative father if he is known, or by the



mother, or they may be bound out or adopted, or sent to a home approved by the Board of Control. In case both the father and mother are unable or can not be forced to support the child, he becomes a charge on the county. He may be kept in the poorhouse or he may be sent to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home and be kept there partly at the expense of the State and partly at the expense of the county. If legitimate, he must be supported by the relatives named above, if they are able. If they are unable to support him, he may be bound out or placed in some family for adoption or committed to some private association or home for orphan children approved by the Board of Control, or be sent to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Davenport. Since the passage of the mothers' pension law, if the child has a mother living and she is considered the proper person to rear the child, he may be supported at the expense of the county in the home of his mother. In addition to these measures, the State has a contributory dependency act, very comprehensive in its nature, providing for the protection and support of a child by those upon whom he is naturally dependent or, in case they are unable to do so, providing for his support and care in one of the ways just mentioned.

Should the dependent person be feeble-minded, but not pronounced so by the proper authorities, it is permissible under the Iowa law to send him to a county home for support. He may, however, be committed to the State Institution for Feeble-minded Children at Glenwood if he is less than forty-six years of age. Should he be insane, but not yet adjudged so by the county commissioners of insanity, he may be sent by the county supervisors to the poorhouse. A person adjudged insane may be sent to one of the State Hospitals for the Insane; but if he is there

pronounced incurable, he is committed back to the poorhouse of the county from which he came by the Board of Control, with the consent of the county supervisors or the county commissioners of insanity. In case the county has a separate institution for the insane, he will be cared for there under the supervision of the Board of Control. If, however, there is no asylum for the insane in the county, he will be kept in the county home with the other inmates, although sometimes in a separate ward, and in any case under the supervision of the Board of Control.

A dependent person who is blind and above the age when he can be admitted to the College for the Blind at Vinton has no other refuge in the State of Iowa except the county home. Perchance he may have family relationships, in which case, at the discretion of the board of supervisors and the secondary relief authorities, he may be supported from the county funds in the same manner as any other poor person in a family. Again, should the dependent be a person who is deaf and dumb, or is so deaf as to be unable to acquire an education in the common schools, if he is between the ages of five and twenty-one, or if above twenty-one but not yet thirty-five, provided he can secure the consent of the Board of Control, he may be sent to the School for the Deaf and Dumb at Council Bluffs, and supported at the expense of the State.

Until the Thirty-fifth General Assembly provided for the State Colony for Epileptics, an indigent epileptic had no legal refuge but the poorhouse. When the Colony for Epileptics is opened, persons of this class may be cared for in that institution on terms yet to be determined. Sick persons who are unable to provide their own physician may be treated by the county physician at county



expense. In those counties which have county hospitals they may also receive hospital treatment at the expense of the county.

To a certain extent there is State supervision over the care of dependent children unless they are in poorhouses in which no insane are kept, or are bound out by the county supervisors, or are cared for by the juvenile court. Only those dependent soldiers, sailors, marines, and their widows who are inmates of the State Soldiers' Home are under the supervising care of the State Board of Control. Furthermore, all outdoor relief is unsupervised by the State, as are all poorhouses in which there are no insane. Outdoor relief is administered in cities of the first and second classes by an overseer of the poor. In other places it is furnished by the township trustees. Supervision of their work is supposed to be exercised by the county supervisors.

Thus, in Iowa, there are three sets of agencies concerned with the relief of the poor. Immediately connected with the actual furnishing of relief are the overseers in cities, the township trustees outside of cities, and the stewards of the county homes. Above these officials there are the county supervisors, who are supposed to visit the poorhouse at least once a month and to supervise the relief given by the overseers of the poor and the township trustees. As a matter of fact, however, their main function is to give general orders to the overseers of the poor and the township trustees without being required to give specific directions as to how the relief shall be administered. In the case of certain classes of dependents certain functions are performed by the judge of the district court. Finally, it is to be noted that all dependents in State charitable institutions, in county homes where

insane are kept, and in private institutions keeping children or insane persons are under the general supervision of the State Board of Control.

At first sight this may appear to be a very complex system. As a matter of fact, however, complexity is not its chief difficulty. The citizens of the cities of Iowa experience very little trouble in ascertaining what authority is chargeable with the care of a particular case. The chief obstacle in the way of successful public relief work in Iowa to-day is that centralized supervision has not gone far enough. Some counties spend very little on the relief of the poor in their homes. Others spend a great deal. Even in the absence of careful figures showing comparatively what the different counties spend, from the data at hand it is possible to see that the situation in Iowa is much as it was in Indiana before 1897. In that State it was found that the per capita amount spent on the relief of the poor in their homes varied from six cents in some counties to sixty-eight in others. The amount depended much upon the personnel of the officials concerned in its distribution. Moreover, the methods used in different counties vary greatly; and while some variety of method is doubtless necessary, the remarkable variation to be found in the different counties of Iowa indicates the lack of a desirable uniformity of method on fundamentals.



## III

SOME SUGGESTED CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM  
OF POOR RELIEF IN IOWA

## DEPENDENT CHILDREN

THE system of caring for dependent children in Iowa is one of the wisest pieces of poor relief legislation upon the statute books and therefore needs very little change. There is no doubt that the State Soldiers' Orphans' Home, as a receiving home for children until they are placed in normal family relationships in homes within the State, serves a most useful purpose. More children, however, could be placed out in homes were there more State agents employed by the Board of Control to secure homes for orphans. The present force of State agents probably should be increased, in order that they might not only place more children in suitable homes but also more efficiently supervise the care of those already placed out. The present force of two State agents should either be doubled, or else the law should provide that a county agent be appointed in each county to coöperate with the State agents and to supplement the work of the latter.

The system of county agents has been used in a number of the States with considerable success. In private child-saving associations this system has been tried frequently. The State Charities Aid Association of New York State has a system of county agents for the placing of children which seems to work very well. In Iowa the present system, therefore, should be improved either by

an increase in the number of State agents, or perhaps better, by keeping the two State agents as at present and supplementing them with county agents. If the plan suggested below — namely, the plan of creating a county board of charities — should be adopted, one or more members of this board might well be made the county agent or agents of the Board of Control for the placing out and supervising of the care of dependent children in families in the county.

The system in use at the present time among private organizations for the placing out of dependent children is one that has worked very well, and the work of these institutions has been unexpectedly good. These associations are under the supervision of the State Board of Control. Supervision under an efficient board insures sanitary conditions in the homes in which the children are temporarily cared for. It also insures that they shall not be cruelly treated, that they shall be adequately fed and clothed, and in addition provides some sort of control over the placing-out system employed by these institutions and associations. So far as has been discovered, there is very little fault to be found with the plan which the State is following in caring for orphan children through these private organizations.

One change, perhaps, would increase the efficiency of these organizations. Doubtless their usefulness would be very greatly increased if the law should require that they work in coöperation with the county agents above proposed. The county agents, if they were members of the county board of charities, could very easily place out and supervise the care of children from these private associations. The county agents would then make their reports both to the private association and directly to the State



Board of Control, and thus a double supervision would be placed over the work of these private associations; and at the same time the work of the private organizations and the public authorities would be more closely correlated in the effort to secure homes for orphan children.

The present system is a confession of distrust of the public authorities. But the reason for such distrust has ceased to exist. To-day the correlation of private and public agencies should be closer, and State control more complete. If this plan were provided for in the law, then the placing out of children under the authority of the county board of supervisors now provided for in our statute books should be transferred to this county board of charities and correction. In a good many cases if this were done, children would not need to be taken to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Davenport at all, but could be placed directly from the home from which they were taken to a new home in the county secured by that member of the county board of charities designated as the county agent to place out and supervise the care of dependent children.

#### MOTHERS' PENSIONS

Disguised though the fact may be, there is no denying that mothers' pensions are essentially a special form of poor relief. It may be questioned, therefore, whether there is any valid reason why the administration of the mothers' pension law should not be placed under the legally constituted poor relief officials. The problem will not be solved by putting the burden of endeavoring to provide relief for needy mothers and children upon the shoulders of the local court. The judge is probably the best official to deal with juvenile delinquency. It is doubt-

ful, however, whether he is qualified by training or has the necessary time to deal successfully with dependency. The mothers' pension law is now administered by the court, but it is believed that it should be administered under the supervision of an expert in the State Board of Control.

The question of the desirability of creating a board of children's guardians such as exists in New Jersey, as a supplement to the ordinary relief officials and as an agency to prevent pauperism in children, is worthy of serious study. Such a board of guardians provided under the law and made up of experts would have the advantage of special knowledge of the subject and could not only concentrate attention upon the care of dependent children, but also devote themselves to constructive plans for children in danger of falling into poverty and crime.

Considering the fact, however, that such a board would be an innovation in this State, and the further fact that there is already a Board of Control whose powers could easily be widened to include the care of dependent children who are not in institutions, and since the experience of the State of Indiana has shown that it is possible to handle children successfully through the ordinary channels of poor relief, it seems quite clear that a better plan for Iowa would be to change slightly the system at present in vogue so as to provide for the care of dependent children through the local authorities under the supervision of a special agent of the Board of Control. This special agent should be a special administrative officer either within the Board of Control or appointed by it, with headquarters at Des Moines.

The local administration of the mothers' pension law should be in the hands of the county board of charities



mentioned above, under the general direction of the State expert. Such a plan would unify the administration of the relief of children whether in the homes of their mothers, in private children's homes, in State or county institutions, or in foster homes. Such unification is necessary since mothers' pensions are really a form of poor relief designed to benefit children. In this case, as in the case of children taken away from their families, the county board of charities and correction would be the local link connecting the Board of Control with the administration of this problem in the various localities of the State.

The State agent for the administration of the law concerning dependent children should be an expert and should be able to advise changes as to methods of treating cases which come under the provisions of the law. Furthermore, the suggestions of this agent, if possible under the Constitution, should have the force of law within due limitations to be set by statute. With very few changes this might be secured by requiring that the suggestions of the State expert on the care of children first receive the approval of the Board of Control, and then be considered as orders from that Board.

#### THE COUNTY HOME

Radical changes are needed with respect to the county home. Ideally the county home can never be a successful institution in the less populated counties of Iowa. It is bound to fail in these counties because of the fact that if it is the kind of an institution it should be the almshouse will have very few inmates. Much more important, however, is the fact that if it is but a small institution, it will be almost impossible to deal in a scientific manner with the various classes of dependents and defectives there

gathered together. It will always be less economical than a larger institution. Moreover, the inmates can not be as well classified as in an institution containing more people.

Therefore, unless the county is prepared to spend a great deal more per capita on the care of each person in its poorhouse than it is spending at the present time, it would be much better that the present county home should be supplemented, or in some cases even supplanted, by a district institution serving several counties. Let a number of counties unite to erect at some point centrally located a joint county home. The law should prohibit the keeping in this institution of children above the age of two years. Neither should it permit to remain there feeble-minded persons, epileptics, or other defectives, except the blind and the deaf and dumb who are too old to be kept in State institutions for these classes. The law should provide, in the writer's opinion, that the dependent blind and the deaf and dumb who are too old to profit by the State schools for these classes should be cared for in colonies attached to the schools for such defectives. However, should it seem best that these classes of defectives should continue to be cared for in the local institution, a large district institution could care for them very much better than is possible in the present county home. The district institution would make it possible to segregate them in a cottage by themselves. It would also enable the authorities to devise entertainment and occupations suitable to their special defect, thus increasing the usefulness and happiness of such unfortunates much beyond the possibilities in an institution where no such segregation can be practiced. The aim of this legislation should be to make the district home a real home for the aged and infirm.



By a slight change in the law a farmer could be employed for each of these institutions, while an adept in caring for the poor could be placed in actual charge of the inmates of the institution. As a result of this arrangement the farm probably would pay much better than it does at present when run by a man who is usually neither an expert farmer nor an expert relief official. On the other hand, the law should provide for certain definite qualifications in the overseer or superintendent of the county home. His chief qualification should be that he knows how to deal with the sometimes eccentric individuals who find their way into the poorhouse, and how to make life as pleasant for the inmates as possible. While he should be nominated by the local relief officials and finally appointed by them, his appointment should be subject to confirmation by the State Board of Control.

The advantages of the district home for the aged and infirm, for all but the most populous counties of a rural State like Iowa, are numerous. First, there would be a larger body of inmates, allowing better classification and specialization in treatment, with careful attention to the needs of each group of inmates. Again, there would probably be more able-bodied persons who could be set at useful work; and the authorities would be better able to solve the problem of a work test for the inmates. Without such a test it is impossible to keep the poorhouse from becoming a winter refuge for drunken vagrants. Moreover, the group of the infirm and defective inmates would be large enough so that it would be worth while to secure the services of a better doctor and have him in more constant attendance for their treatment and care.

If the chronic insane were retained in connection with the district home, there would be a sufficient number of

them to enable the institution to have a trained alienist and a trained nurse to care for them, and so it would be possible to give more attention to measures for their entertainment and happiness. Furthermore, the treatment of large numbers together would be more economical and would provide at the same cost much better care. Once more, such an institution would make it possible to install the cottage system of caring for special groups like old couples, and defectives such as the blind and the deaf.

Still another advantage of a district home for the aged and infirm would be to make possible the establishment in connection therewith of a work-house for the misdemeanants of the counties concerned. It need not be in the same yard but could very well be upon the same piece of land, removed a sufficient distance from the district home. Such a plan has been worked out with far-sighted wisdom by the city of Cleveland in its "Cooley Farms". In such an institution the inmates of the work-house perform a large part of the labor on the farm connected with the almshouse, and thus assist not only in the support of themselves but also in the maintenance of the inmates of the latter institution. It is to be noted in this connection that the Thirty-fifth General Assembly of Iowa provided for the levy of a tax for a district custodial farm, and if this plan should be further developed it would perhaps be even more satisfactory than the scheme above outlined.

Since in Iowa there has been considerable agitation for the establishment of county sanatoriums for the care of chronic tubercular patients, and since the General Assembly has now authorized the counties to establish such institutions, the district plan would also enable the counties within such a district to combine in the erection of a



joint sanatorium which could be separated on the farm by a sufficient distance from the infirmary and the work-house to cause no stigma to attach to the inmates of the sanatorium. With such a combination of institutions for the care of the poor, the sick, and the petty criminal, better buildings could be provided, and expert attendance could be hired because better salaries could be paid. Better classification of the inmates could be secured, and a more complete division of labor between the infirm and the able-bodied could be provided for.

Doubtless a district plan of this kind could be carried out at a greatly decreased expense. In 1910 it cost the counties of the State of Iowa approximately half a million dollars to keep the poor in its county homes, above the income from the farms on which these homes were located. It can safely be said that a dozen or more district homes could be established and the necessary land could be purchased from the proceeds of the sale of the present county farms, and there could still be returned to the counties approximately half of what they now have invested. At the same time the new district home would probably be very much better equipped to care for the poor, and the treatment of the poor there would be very much more humane and efficient than it is in the present county home. In 1910 and 1911 the capital value of eighty-nine county farms and homes in Iowa, stocked and furnished, was practically two and one-half million dollars, as ascertained by the writer in an investigation for the State Conference of Charities and Correction.

These district institutions should be under the supervision and regulation of a special agent of the State Board of Control. Without supervision it is doubtful whether the district home would be much better than the

present county home. Being few in number, however, they could be supervised more efficiently by the Board of Control at a very great decrease in the expense now entailed in overseeing the county homes in which there are insane persons. The plan of district homes would do away with the present lack of supervision in almost half of the county homes of Iowa. Should the present county home system be preserved and the Board of Control authorized by law to extend their inspection to all of the present county homes, and not merely to those where insane persons are kept, it would mean that the present expensive and inefficient plan would be continued and be extended, with no likelihood that the present institutions would be administered by experts or conducted economically or efficiently with reference to their main purpose, namely, the proper care of the poor.

In the case of counties having large cities within their boundaries one of two plans could be followed. Either the district home could be placed near the city, thus obviating the transportation of the larger number of the inmates any great distance; or that county could retain the county system. The former plan would enable the present county institution of those counties containing large cities to be used by the less populous counties around it. Certain extensions would have to be made in view of the larger numbers to be accommodated in the new district institution, but the initial cost of such extensions would be much less than the value of the county homes displaced. Thus no new institutions aside from the larger ones now already in existence need be built. Moreover, even in many of the less populous counties the best county home now in existence in a given district could be made over by slight changes into an institution entirely suit-



able for the needs of the enlarged areas. This could be done in practically every case by a system of cottages which would be very much more economical than the present large institution, and at the same time would provide for the segregation of different classes by themselves and for the increased comfort of the inmates.

One other advantage of the district system, which ought to be mentioned, is that if connected with it there was an institution for misdemeanants, it would do more than any plan that is employed at the present time to help to solve the tramp problem. These men could be sent to the district work-house or farm for a period that would make it unlikely that they would visit that community again in the near future.

District institutions might be objected to on the ground that they would take the poor away from their relatives and friends. This objection, however, is absurd when one considers that in most cases those who are taken to the poorhouse are taken there because their friends do not wish to see them, and in actual experience they are visited only very rarely by those who are responsible for having them sent thither. There is no one who either can or will care for them, else they would not be sent to the poorhouse.

Another question that would arise, of course, would be the question of how to raise and administer the taxes necessary to support a district institution. One of a number of plans might be adopted. In the first place, the cost of building the new institution might be divided between the counties according to the average number of inmates supported in each county institution during the preceding five years. A redistribution of the burden could be made by the Board of Control periodically —

perhaps every five years thereafter. Another feasible plan would be to have a new taxing district laid out co-terminous with the limits of the poor relief district. This would probably be the most practicable method of solving the problem of taxation. The counties embraced within the territory of the new district home would then sell their county farms except that one which by vote of the people, or by the decision of the State Board of Control, should be chosen as the new district home; and the proceeds of the sale of these various county farms would go toward a fund for the enlargement and the improvement of the new district farm and home. The support of the district home and farm would then be taxed back against the property of the whole district, and apportioned to the various counties on an equal basis for the purposes of collection.

Or, should such a plan be repugnant to the less populous counties, the division of the burden of support might be upon the basis of the number of paupers kept in the county poorhouse during the preceding five years with a readjustment of the basis by the Board of Control by five year periods. In order to avoid the multiplication of new tax officials, the county officers dealing with the levying and collection of taxes in the county where the district home would be located, could be required to perform these functions, or the board of trustees of the district institution might determine the amount needed and this amount would then be apportioned among the counties concerned in the manner above suggested.

Whether the present system is continued or the proposed district system initiated, the Board of Control should have the authority to approve the plans for poorhouses before new buildings are erected by counties.



This system in Indiana has resulted in the erection of an altogether different and better type of poorhouse, and has prevented the squandering of money on buildings poorly adapted to the purposes they are supposed to serve.

#### COUNTY BOARD OF CHARITIES

In case the suggested plan for a system of district homes for the aged and infirm should not commend itself, at least an unpaid county board of charities and correction should be provided for in the law. In addition to the services already noticed in connection with the relief of the poor in their homes and with dependent children and aside from its possible service as a local board to inspect the jail and to serve as probation officers, such a board would be able to render service of great value by inspecting the county home and recommending to the supervisors from time to time necessary changes in the conduct of that sadly neglected institution. Moreover, the State Board of Control should be given complete supervision over the county homes if they are retained. To this Board, as well as to the county supervisors, the proposed county board of charities would report their findings. Another copy of their report should be published in the county papers.

These two suggestions have grown out of a careful consideration of the problem of so conducting institutions for the relief of the poor that poverty will be cured when found and prevented when preventable. The present system is the result of neglect of the subject and ought to be so changed that its various parts will be correlated.

#### OUTDOOR RELIEF

An examination of the present system of outdoor relief reveals the need of at least two supplementary measures. There is need of a county board of charities such as is suggested above, not only for the purpose there stated, but also to supervise the outdoor relief of poverty. This board would be made up of people appointed because of their intelligent interest in the problems of social pathology and who would be paid only their actual expenses in connection with the work. This county board of charities should merely investigate, advise and report to those charged with the responsibility of performing the work. It should be the business of the members of the board to visit the county institutions at least once a month and as frequently as they deemed necessary. They should be charged with the responsibility of investigating the relief work of the township trustees and overseers of the poor. One or more of them should be the county agent or agents to look after the placement and supervision of the care of children who are placed in families within the county. They should report once a month to the board of supervisors, sending a duplicate copy of the report to the State Board of Control; and they should report once a year perhaps to the district judge. A duplicate of this report to the court should be published in the newspapers.

The other measure should require each county board of supervisors to make a report at least quarterly to the State Board of Control on the outdoor poor relief given in the county by townships and cities. These measures are based upon the experience of Indiana, where they have wrought remarkable results in the last fourteen years. They are designed to bring to the administration



of outdoor poor relief both a highly centralized supervision under the State Board of Control and local inspiration and guidance.

These measures will also make it possible to bring together the now scattered facts with regard to the cost of poor relief and enable the State Board of Control to make a careful study of the causes of poverty and the results of the methods of poor relief. It is believed on the basis of the experience of Indiana that it will materially decrease the amount of money spent upon relief, while at the same time providing more adequate relief for those found worthy of assistance. This system in Indiana in fourteen years reduced the amount spent for official outdoor relief from \$355,255.29 to \$279,967.31, while raising the amount given each person aided from \$4.97 to \$5.13. These results were accomplished in spite of the growth of the population of the State during those fourteen years and the increasing cost of living. Such a system has the advantage of requiring very little change in the laws of Iowa relative to the relief of the poor, and of being based upon the experience of the last fourteen years in Indiana.

To-day the poor relief system of Iowa might be compared to a great factory where there is a powerful engine, a large number of machines, and plenty of workers, but where there are no belts connecting the shafts with the individual machines. Each machine is being worked by a little group of workers. They must furnish the power necessary to run the machine. They have had no expert to tell them how the machine should be worked, no master, no foreman with training and experience in running such machines. In a like manner, in the system of poor relief in Iowa there is the Board of Control, fully capable of

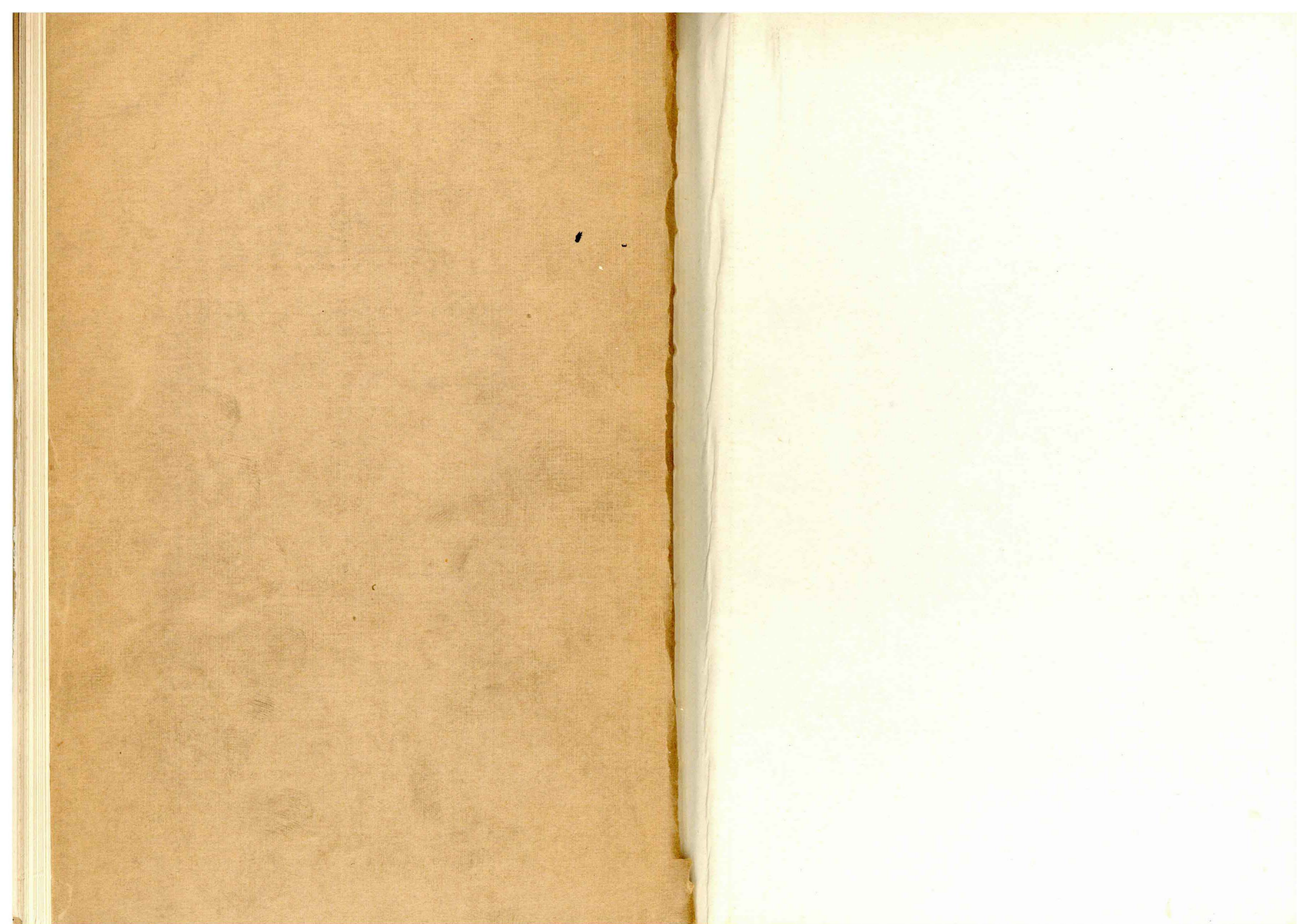
putting the entire system into harmonious action if only there were sufficient connection between that body and the various local institutions, boards, and officials concerned with the relief of the poor.

To be sure, there are several State institutions for the care of special classes of dependents and defectives which are being conducted with excellent results. But there are also many county homes and county, township, and city officials, each with an important part to play in the general scheme of poor relief; and each one is working for the most part without reference to what is being done by other workers in the same field and without expert supervision and advice. What is needed in Iowa is a correlation of all this effort and complete supervision by the State Board of Control or a similar body of experts. Centralization should take the place of diversity of authority; while expert direction of poor relief should be substituted for the haphazard efforts of officials wholly untrained in the methods of the scientific relief of poverty. All this could be brought about by a very few changes in the poor relief legislation of Iowa as it stands to-day.













Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa  
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