

Proceedings of the Twenty-third Minnesota State  
Conference of Charities and Correction Held in  
Bemidji September 26-29 1914

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MINNESOTA STATE CONFERENCE

**"MENTAL DEFICIENCY IN MINNESOTA AS SHOWN IN  
FIELD WORK."**

Dr. A. C. Rogers, Superintendent Faribault School for Feeble-  
Minded and Colony of Epileptics.

(Dr. Rogers used a large number of charts in connection with his address which made it impossible for the reporter to reproduce the address in form suitable for printing.)

Dr. Rogers: Miss Sadie Devitt, our head worker, will follow and will give an explanation of the field work itself.

Miss Devitt: Field work is of comparatively recent origin, that is field work carried on in a systematic way.

It is the outgrowth of an earnest desire on the part of the heads of the more progressive institutions for clearer, fuller, more accurate and far reaching data than could be obtained from the printed forms sent to family or friends. While these proved valuable they could cover the subject only in the most general way and the information thus obtained was far too meagre and inaccurate for the study of heredity and social conditions.

The problem of the defective was so insistent that it needed immediate and careful attention. It was deemed wise to put trained workers, preferably women for obvious reasons, in the field to visit the homes and interview persons who could and would give the desired information.

For carrying on the field work it was necessary to obtain a special appropriation from the State. When the importance of the work was brought to the attention of the legislators there was no hesitancy in appropriating the necessary funds, and Minnesota has the distinction of being the first state west of New Jersey to take up the research work and trace the cause of defectiveness to its source.

The field worker aside from her special training, which is an absolute necessity, must be temperamentally fitted for the work; she must be thoroughly imbued with, and realize in the fullest measure, the delicate and confidential nature of her mission. She must be the most discreet of the discreet,—one failing in this essential is wholly unfitted for the work; let her training be what it will; she must be something of a diplomat also, for much depends on the manner in which she approaches her people, and frequently means success or failure; she must be sympathetic and fully appreciative the effort it often times costs the one interviewed to give the desired information in detail, for it is sometimes baring the family skeleton and never is this a pleasant process for any of us.

Before going into the field to visit the home and friends we learn all possible about the patient under study from the material at the office, such as application blanks, correspondence, medical and psychological; examinations,—addresses of relatives and friends and other

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information that may be helpful in locating them is recorded and put in form to be taken with us. Just before starting we visit the patient in his cottage, just a friendly call, get real well acquainted with him and learn all he can tell us of friends and relatives especially with reference to their addresses; we also take any messages he may wish to send to those we are about to visit.

We then visit the home and interview the relatives and friends. They are urged, for the child's sake, to tell all they possibly can, and to tell us of others who may be able to give the information which may be used to help their child, or some one's child. The response has usually been full, free, and hearty. Parents do all in their power to help us get the facts. There is rarely any attempt to conceal facts that they know. Many times the parents are ignorant, often feeble-minded and cannot give us what we want to know. Nevertheless, by adroit questioning one gets at the facts.

In studying our patients it is absolutely necessary that all data be verified. It is cold, hard facts we want, not fiction-, hence we endeavor to see as many relatives as possible. In this way facts overlooked or omitted by one will be recalled in detail by another, discrepancies can be rectified, and by this means information already obtained is confirmed.

Since beginning my work in this state some three years ago I have met with the heartiest sort of co-operation not only from the relatives and friends of the patients but also from physicians, state, city, town, and county officials. I had only to make known my mission and all were willing to help on the "good work" as far as they could.

This hearty co-operation and the honest endeavor to give every fact possible that might be of benefit in our study is one of the most encouraging features of the work.

I remember when I first, entered the work to have called upon a dear old lady who had an epileptic son at our institution. I reached her home one bitterly cold day in early January. Upon introducing myself and telling her the object of my call, she took both my hands in hers and said with much feeling "Indeed, my dear, you shall have the family history in fullest detail possible. What would I not do to help my poor boy! Every weakness as well as the strong characteristics of our family shall be given. We have our share of bright and prominent but here and there a weakness has shown forth. Oh, if this great work should bear fruit to the extent of finding, if not a cure, at least the cause of the intractable trouble from which my son suffers, it will be a great boon to humanity."

She insisted on my having a cup of hot tea while she chatted in her interesting way, giving vivid word pictures of a talent, a peculiarity, or an interesting characteristic possessed by some member of the family. Her fund of information and her memory were both wonderful. When I left her home I had a very intelligent family history of five generations.

Several days later I received word that she wished to see me. On calling I found that she had gotten into communication with relatives at a distance and had learned of some things which she thought we ought to know. The facts she had collected were most important and I told her how helpful she had been, and how thoroughly we appreciated, all co-operation such as hers. She replied that she felt repaid by being allowed to contribute her share.

Another time I called on a lady whose boy (middle grade feeble minded) had died at our institution. When she learned the reason of my visit she said with tears in both her voice and her eyes, "Oh, I had thought that chapter of my life closed forever. I just cannot talk about it." •

Realizing what it meant to her to open up the wound I hastened to assure her that since it was going to prove such a painful ordeal we would forget that I had asked for the information. She replied, "No, I think I ought to give all the information possible no matter what it costs me, while it cannot now help my poor boy it may benefit the child of some other suffering mother. As I left that home, I wondered if I under similar circumstances would have been as brave as that poor woman.

Once when within 1,000 miles of Bemidji I was compelled to drive eighteen miles in the country. The last two miles was through swamps rather heavily wooded. We finally reached the clearing on which stood a tiny log cabin and beside it was a little story and a half frame house.

Mrs. Blank was in the yard feeding the chickens as I drove up and she returned my greeting in the most cheerful way possible, saying, "Good afternoon, I don't know who you are, but I spose you are one of them rich bugs who likes to go round once in a while and see how us poor folks live. Well, come in, I'm glad to see you anyway." She told me she had just moved from the tiny log cabin into the new house which consisted of one. room and an attic. The walls were not yet plastered, just the rough joists and studding and I wondered how they were going to keep warm with cold weather so near (it was then late, October.)

The little home was barely furnished, nothing to speak of, but was scrupulously clean and neat. I had a very pleasant visit with Mrs. Blank. She had been an epileptic since eighteen years old and it had left its impress upon her.

She had married a man who was shiftless and lazy—would do nothing but hunt and fish, a worthless fellow.

They had a family of eight children, one of whom was married, and she, her husband, and their young child were living with Mrs. Blank in, her one room cottage. What little farm work was done, was done by the mother and children and as she tersely put it, "It keeps me steppin' lively to give them pertaters enough to eat."

Another time in getting a family history a man told me his sister was feeble-minded. I asked why he thought she was feeble-minded?

He replied, "Why, she married an Irishman!"

Mr. Vasaly: Now we are going to hear from the Superintendent of the Red Wing School, who will speak on a very important phase of the work among the boys, boys who become tramps. I am sure it will be very interesting indeed.