

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR LUTHER W. YOUNGDAHL  
at the burning of restraints

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ANOKA STATE HOSPITAL, OCTOBER 31, 1949

It is just a little more than 250 years ago since mentally ill and other citizens were burned at the stake at Salem as witches.

A long period of time has elapsed since then. We discarded the stake but retained in our attitudes toward the mentally ill the voodooism, demonology, fears, and superstitions associated with witchcraft.

Tonight -- Hallowe'en eve -- we employ the stake and fire for another purpose -- to destroy the strait-jackets, shackles, and manacles which were our heritage from the Salem days.

As little as eighteen months ago all but one of our mental hospitals used mechanical restraints. Today most are restraint-free.

The bonfire which I am lighting tonight consists of 359 strait-jackets, 196 cuffs, 91 straps, and 25 canvas mittens.

No patient in the Anoka State Hospital is in restraint. These restraints were removed from the patients not by administrative coercion, but by the enlightened attitudes of the superintendent, staff, employees, and volunteer workers of the Anoka State Hospital. They were removed as the hospital's answer to witchcraft.

By this action we say more than that we have liberated the patients from barbarous devices and the approach which these devices symbolized.

By this action we say that we have liberated ourselves from witchcraft -- that in taking off mechanical restraints from the patients, we are taking off intellectual restraints from ourselves.

By this action we say to the patients that we understand them -- that they need have no fears -- that those around them are their friends.

By this action we say to the patients that we will not rest until every possible thing is done to help them get well and return to their families.

We have no easy job. The roots of demonology are deep. We have burned one evidence of this tonight. We must be on our guard that it does not creep up in other forms -- that what the bonfire symbolizes tonight will carry on in public thinking until every last thing is done to make the state hospital truly a house of hope for these most misunderstood of all human beings.