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## Children's needs met by opening of Faribault in 1879

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by [Luther Granquist](#)

Cyrus Bartlett, the Superintendent of the Minnesota Hospital for the Insane in St. Peter, complained in 1875 that probate judges had committed "idiots and young imbeciles" there for whom a mental hospital could offer no treatment. He said these "troublesome" children were committed because there was no other place for them to go.



Minnesota Hospital for the Insane, St. Peter, 1867

- In 1873, the probate judge for Meeker County sent Nels there, an eight-year-old boy who had suffered a head injury three years earlier. He was committed because he became "restless, running about from place to place without any apparent object" and destroyed clothing and everything that came in his way.
- The probate judge in Otter Tail County sent nine-year-old Johan to St. Peter in July 1875 for "imbecility" and "weakness of mind" from "teething fits" and "convulsions" which caused him to be unable to take care of himself. The first entry in his one-page record from St. Peter described him as "restless and mischievous—in constant motion & delights in throwing things about & making trouble," but with a "bright look."
- In 1876, the probate judge in Houston County committed Maggie, an 11-year-old girl from Brownsville. Her parents had died. She did not speak. According to the Examination on Charge of Insanity form completed by the judge, "She rushes about in a restless way all over town and makes herself an annoyance— plays quietly by herself."

In a later report, Bartlett and two members of the State Board of Health emphasized that these children and others like them ought not to be there. The Legislature responded in 1879 by appointing a commission to identify the "idiotic and feeble-minded children and youths" at St.

Peter who would be “proper subjects for training and instruction” and directing the trustees of the School for the Deaf in Faribault to set up a school for them there. That commission selected Nels, Johan, Maggie and 11 other children. On July 25, 1879, 130 years ago this month, these children moved to the Minnesota Experimental School for Imbeciles in Faribault, the first special education program in Minnesota for children with cognitive limitations.

The superintendent of this school, a young doctor from Connecticut, George Henry Knight, urged the Legislature to make the program permanent, which they did in 1881. In that session, the Legislature also appropriated funds for a larger building, the first of many buildings of what ultimately became the Faribault Regional Treatment Center.

*Dr Knight’s published Bio: Dr. Knight studied medicine in New York. and afterwards. became superintendent of the State Institute for Feeble Minded in Minnesota. In September, 1855, Dr. Knight was appointed superintendent of the Connecticut School for Imbeciles at Lakeville, CT. Dr. Knight had a high reputation in the community in which he lives and wherever he is known, as a citizen, physician and careful trainer of those whose misfortune it is to be affected with clouded or immature developed intellects.*

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