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## Restraints were just plain wrong back then, too

Monday, August 10, 2009

by [Luther Granquist](#)



Minnesota State  
reformatory -1933

METO, the Minnesota Extended Treatment Option at Cambridge, opened in 1999 to serve persons with developmental disabilities who present a risk to public safety. Last September, the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities documented excessive use of restraints at the program in a report, *Just Plain Wrong*. Last month a METO resident filed a lawsuit in federal district court seeking redress for residents who had been subject to restraint procedures there.

In 1945 the Minnesota Legislature established a comparable program, the Annex for Defective Delinquents, at the St. Cloud Reformatory to serve about 60 “chronic defective delinquent males” from the Faribault School for the Feeble-Minded. The Faribault superintendent acknowledged that these men had lived in a “cottage” that was more like a jail. During the next two decades, almost 300 men with developmental disabilities were sent to the Annex, where the men lived in a large dormitory apart from the regular prison population and worked, or learned to work, on jobs in the prison.

Both state officials and the surveyor for a 1954 mental health study praised the program developed by the reformatory Director of Education Ralph Rosenberger. The program sought to teach a sense of social and moral responsibility, as well as offer vocational training. But others, including the Minnesota State Bar Association, objected to a program which placed men in a prison without a trial and a conviction. Those objections prompted the Legislature to close the Annex in 1963.



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When the Annex opened, the director of the Division of Public Institutions said that the men there would have to follow the general rules governing the reformatory inmates, but that “any disciplinary measures must be moderate and tempered by the fact that these patients are mentally deficient.” Nothing in published reports or the records of the Annex suggests any widespread use of physical or mechanical restraint. A state official told the Governor’s Advisory Committee that army discipline was used, such as placing someone on KP. The

*Minneapolis Tribune* reported in 1961 that Rosenberger “rules his annex delinquents with firmness sprinkled with a sense of humor and optimism.” The actual Annex records, however, reveal that some of these men were locked in cells, kept in “solitary,” or placed in segregation for offenses ranging from fighting to disobedience to insolence. A significant number of the men were also transferred to St. Peter State Hospital or the Security Hospital.

Neither state officials nor the mental health study surveyor nor the Bar Association committee challenged the type of prison discipline actually used. Today, fortunately, the Ombudsman office can scrutinize disciplinary actions in programs like the Annex or METO, and persons with disabilities can challenge those actions in court.

*The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, [www.mnddc.org](http://www.mnddc.org) or [www.mncdd.org](http://www.mncdd.org) and [www.partnersinpolicymaking.com](http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com)*