

# Access Press

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*History Note*

## Fifty-cent piece

by Luther Granquist

At least until the late 1960s, Minnesota's state hospitals could not operate without the help provided by "details," the men and women confined there who worked in the kitchen and laundry, cleaned the buildings and helped care for many of the other residents. In the summer of 1959, Melville Krafve, the director of administrative services at Faribault, reported problems running the laundry and kitchen because of the number of patients home on vacation. That summer there were 24 "citizen employees" and 90 patients working in the kitchen, and 12 "citizen employees" and 132 patients working in the laundry.

Both Memorial Day and July 4 fell on a Saturday that year. Because of a routinely heavy workload in the laundry, which was even greater on weekends, the patients working there could not be excused from work to participate in holiday activities. To make up for having to work on those holidays, the institution gave them a special party later in July, including dancing, games and favors. Another treat was being served lunch in the employees' cafeteria.

Later that summer the institution also gave these laundry workers an increase in their monthly pay. Krafve explained how this increase was made in a report to Superintendent E. J. Engberg: "Nine dollars were added to the laundry details' payroll for adjustments... All details formerly on the payroll for 20¢, 30¢, and 40¢ were raised to 50¢. Those who had been on the payroll for 50¢ were raised to 60¢. There is now no one less than 50¢ on the laundry payroll."

These practices eventually changed, in part because the Association for Retarded Citizens (now Arc) and Governor Karl Rolvaag decried the "institutional peonage" revealed by a study done in early 1964 showing that at Faribault patients did 43 percent of the institutional work. ■

*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)*



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