

# Improvement Pledged At 'Neglected' Ft. Wayne Institution

## Feeble-Minded School Inspected by New Mental Health Chief

Overcrowded, Understaffed Home Promised Aid, but Dr. Zeller Says Solution Is Not Easy

By ROBERT BLOEM, Times Staff Writer

FT. WAYNE, Sept. 25.—Now Indiana's new mental health director, Dr. Charles A. Zeller, has seen the overcrowding and understaffing problem in state institutions at its worst.

He made his first trip to the school for the feeble minded here, Dr. Zeller, Governor Gates, Council President Dr. Norman Beatty and Health Commissioner Dr. Leroy Burney promised early emergency relief, primarily in the form of more attractive salaries, but warned that ultimate solution to the problem still seemed a long way off.

Out of the brief preliminary inspection came these developments:

ONE: A new salary schedule is in the making to pit emergency relief funds granted by the legislature as an "afterthought" against the critical problem of keeping institutions staffed.

TWO: The money isn't enough to go around, so Superintendent Luther Hurley was warned use of the new salary schedule would have to be highly selective. No blanket pay increases for institutional staffs is in sight—it will be limited to key shortage categories on the basis of qualifications.

THREE: Expansion of mental institution facilities, when it comes, will probably occur in the "wide open spaces." Nobody said so, but the feeling clearly indicated the beginning of the end of the Ft. Wayne institution, hemmed in by the growth of the city. The attitude appeared to extend also to Central hospital in Indianapolis, another "dated" institution engulfed by city expansion.

Only scratched surface. The inspection by the doctors only scratched the surface. But when the governor's limousine rolled through the front gate the first glimpse of the venerable institution set the pitch of the feeling.

The administration building was constructed in 1888. It is the heart of a set of buildings which range from fairly new and modern to so old and rickety that even an experienced layman could see they should have been razed years ago.

Improvement has not kept pace with the growth of the state "outside"—on that inspectors and institution heads agreed.

Mr. Hurley told Dr. Zeller his "population" was a little over 1900 patients. The 99th patient admitted—and that was back in the "gay nineties" is still there.

Although capacity is something the state's institutional heads have been forced to disregard for years, Mr. Hurley said that even a good stretch wouldn't place the capacity here at more than 1600.

"School" inadequate. At the "school," the new mental health chief saw a layout which he said wouldn't be "adequate" even if the institution could get the 22 teachers it had a few years back instead of nine it struggles along with now. The "school" pays its teachers around \$160 a month to do an ordinary job teaching normal pupils commands a salary "outside" of \$200 to \$300 a month 12 months a year.

Classes weren't fully under way for the term yet when the state-house session came through, but at least one class that was scheduled for the afternoon was canceled because the teacher was ill. Dr. L. P. Harshman, the only psychiatrist in the entire place, showed the governor the class schedule. It was 25 per cent blank—no teachers available at the pittance pay the budget allows.

The group then was conducted to a women's ward ironically named "Sunset." There they found three attendants trying to handle a round-the-clock schedule of care



**EMPTY CLASSROOMS**—When one of the meager staff of teachers becomes ill at the Ft. Wayne School for the Feeble Minded, there is no substitute. Here Dr. Charles Zeller, new state mental health head, discusses with Governor Gates and Superintendent Luther Hurley the financial squeeze which has sent most of the teaching staff scurrying for better paid jobs in public schools. The "sense training" specialist, a "must" in such an institution, resigned two years ago and no replacement has been obtained.

for 120 feeble-minded patients.

They were bolstered by a corps of "working girls," inmates whose mental age qualified them to be of some assistance in the care of fellow patients even less fortunate.

**Escape Doors Locked**

Fire escapes in the old buildings came up for discussion. The school now has the tubular type fire escapes down which patients must slide in case of fire. Because of the "elopement" problem, doors to the fire escapes must be kept locked—it's unavoidable, but places an appalling burden on the meager staff of attendants in case of emergency.

To get the tubular fire escapes, the old stairway escapes had to be condemned by the fire marshal's office. Once condemned, they had to be pulled out despite the sug-

gestion of Mr. Hurley that they would enable extra help to enter a burning building to speed the job of evacuating patients.

As it stands now, if fire cuts off regular exits, it would be virtually impossible for anyone to scramble up the slippery slide tubes to help the attendants in the building.

In negotiations now going on with the personnel board, the mental health council hopes at least to attract a few more high grade professional staffers to the institution until bigger things can be authorized by the general assembly.

**SCHOOL BENEFIT PLANNED**

A fish fry and auction, to benefit the public-school 20-cent lunch program, will be held tomorrow at 6 p. m. at Clay center school, one mile west of Meridian on 116th st.



**HEAD TO FOOT**—Dr. L. P. Harshman, who plays a lone hand at caring for the psychiatric needs of 1900 inmates at Ft. Wayne state school, shows Mental Health Director Dr. Charles Zeller an example of the overcrowding problem. Twenty-seven beds were crammed into this tiny room, jammed so tightly that the only way an inmate can reach some of them is to clamber over his neighbor's bed. The space in which Dr. Zeller stands was left only because a ceiling support to his left made it too small into which to cram a bed.

## Hoosiers to Play In F. F. A. Band

The Future Farmers of America have selected four members from Indiana to play in the national F. F. A. band at the organization's convention at Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 19-22.

Billy Record and Melvin Maxwell of Martinsville high school, Jim Schinlaub of Tipton, and Charles Cain, Hagerstown, were selected for the band assignment by Dr. Henry S. Brunner of Pennsylvania State college, who will direct the band.

**Plan Baked Goods Sale**

The Ladies Aid society of St. Matthew's Lutheran church will hold a baked goods sale Saturday from 10 a. m. to 4 p. m. in the basement of the church, at Oxford and E. New York sts.

## Letter Writing Week Proclaimed

The week of Oct. 12 to Oct. 18 will be observed as "National Letter Writing Week," Postmaster Adolph Seidensticker announced today.

Governor Gates has signed a proclamation, setting the week aside for observance of national letter writing week in Indiana.

**Traffic Club Changes Annual Dinner Date**

The Indianapolis Traffic club today announced a change of date for the annual dinner. The dinner will be held Nov. 6, instead of Oct. 4 as originally announced.

A meeting also is scheduled at 9 p. m. Oct. 18 at the K. of C. hall

## Lutheran Mission Group Convenes

Mrs. H. S. Bechtolt To Speak at Dinner

The annual meeting of the Woman's Missionary society of the United Lutheran church in Indiana was to open today at 2:15 p. m. with Holy Communion in St. Mark's United Lutheran church. Sessions will continue through Saturday.

A Young Women's congress will follow the convention beginning at 1:30 p. m. Saturday and closing with a communion service Saturday night.

"The Church and the Atomic Age" will be discussed by Mrs. H. S. Bechtolt of Chicago at the 6:45 p. m. dinner tonight in the host church. Mrs. Bechtolt is national vice president of the Woman's Missionary society of the United Lutheran church.

**Sister Ebert to Speak**  
Sister Anna Ebert, head of the Lutheran sisters' motherhouse in Philadelphia, and Mrs. Clara B. Lauridsen Hansen, also of Philadelphia are scheduled to give addresses tomorrow. Mrs. Hansen is national promotion secretary of the woman's missionary society.

Miss Pauline Ziegler, missionary nurse to Liberia, Africa, will talk about her work at the afternoon session tomorrow. The Rev. Thomas B. Kline, host pastor, will officiate at the opening communion assisted by the Rev. Robert Heine and the Rev. Donald Elder.

Mrs. Virgil Yohe of Lagrange, Ind., will speak at the congress and Miss Hilda Weaver of Auburn, president of the state society, will preside at the convention sessions. Lutheran families in Marion county will entertain delegates in their homes. And St. Mark's women will serve as convention hostesses in the church.

**Serves as Jeep Driver**

Pfc. Marion O. Dobbs, son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dobbs, Columbus, Ind., is serving as a jeep driver with the 8th army in Tokyo, Japan. He entered the army in Sept. 1946, and received his basic training at Ft. Bliss, Tex.

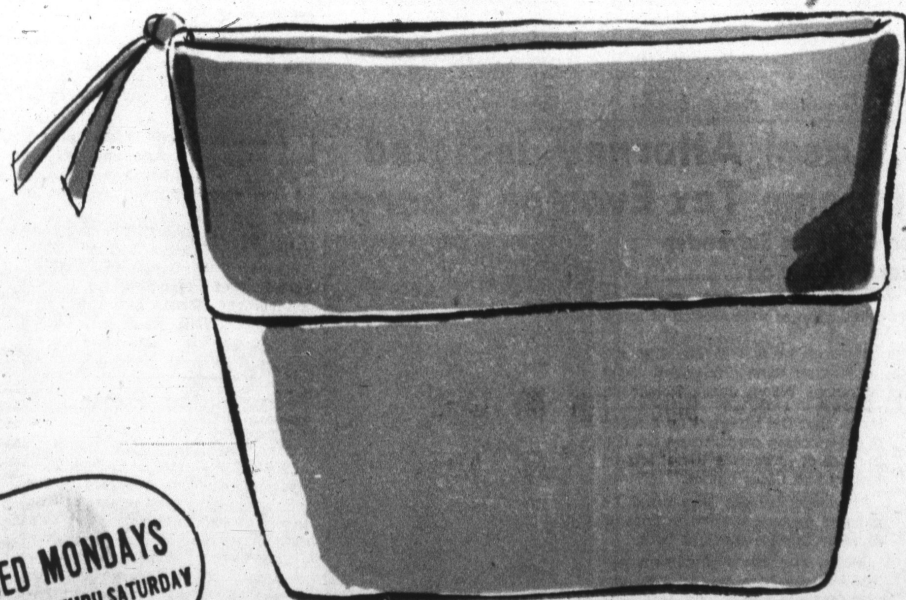
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