

A Time of Change

When Treat left in 1927 to become head of the Masonic Sanitarium in Bettendorf, R. E. Zerwekh succeeded him. Both men were concerned with overcrowded conditions. In his 1924 biennial report, Treat noted an increase from 421 to 505 children in the two year period. He said a predicted increase in the number of soldiers' orphans failed to materialize. At the time there were 13 such orphans in the home — the children of 11 Spanish-American and two World War I veterans.

Two years later, Treat said the average age of children in the home was growing younger. In 1897 there were 19 children four years or younger; in 1926 the number had increased to 96. Meanwhile the number of children 14 years old and over totaled 137 in 1897 and only 35 in 1926. He said this meant a rise in operating costs because of the additional care needed by the younger inmates and the loss of help from the older children. In the late 1920's, with more younger admissions and a waiting list for adoptable babies, an increased adoption program was begun.

The population continued to fluctuate, most of the time over 500 and occasionally topping the 600

mark. In his biennial report to the board, June 30, 1932, Zerwekh wrote:

Conditions have increased the demand for the care of children and our population has attained a new all-time record mark. That this demand has been fully met and the biennial period closed with every child receiving admission provided for, is in itself, a tribute to the unceasing work, cooperation and care of the officers, matrons and state agents connected with the institution. This surplus of population has been handled to the extent of 200 children without the increase of an employee list, with the exception of one nurse whose service was made necessary because of our increased hospital facilities.

On July 1, 1930, there was enrollment of 589; at the close of the period on June 30, 1932, our population was 691. The average daily attendance was 639. . . .

These and other problems plagued those who followed Zerwekh — H. A. Mitchell, Syl. McCauley, and Harvey E. Daines in 1940. While Daines was in military service, Mrs. H. O. Hyatt was acting superintendent. Daines returned to his post in 1944. He died July 3, 1946, and was succeeded by E. G. Wiggins, as acting superintendent on July 9 and as superintendent on December 16, 1946. H. R. McPhail took over on August 1, 1949.

A hospital, costing \$30,000, and a new primary school building were constructed just prior to World War I. This represented the last major construction project until 1929 when a new hospital was erected. The old hospital then be-

came the receiving unit. Ten years later the old school building was replaced. Under Daines' direction, the chapel received a new roof, the stage was modernized, and a Hammond electric organ was installed. The latter replaced one given by Governor Larrabee in 1900. There would be no further major construction until the erection of the Mental Health Unit in 1966, a building made possible by sale of the institution's farm land.

While Zerwekh headed the home, the defective child became a major problem. The staff had not been adequately trained nor did the institution have the facilities to treat and handle this type of child. His solution is hinted at in these comments on population and commitments:

During the past several years groups of children have been transferred to the institutions for the feebleminded of the state. This relieves us for a time, and makes room for others who are in need of institutional care.

The causes of commitment have not varied in the past few years. Economic conditions have not contributed a large number of new arrivals, but rather, the lack on the part of parents to perform their duties, and accept their own responsibilities.

During this period there began an intensive association with the Child Welfare Research Station in Iowa City. Another program was developed to help employees to understand better the problems of children. A thorough psychological testing program was initiated also.

Zerwekh discontinued the use of uniforms in 1934. The uniform was a hallmark for the home's boys. The basic blue coat and pants were made in the home's sewing room. The pants were knee length and had bronze buttons on each outside seam, near the knee. The coat had similar buttons. The boys wore a white shirt with a hard, detachable collar. The hat was visored, military style. The uniform was worn on Sunday and for official visits away from the home.

Under McCauley the educational system was considerably revised. A ninth grade was added to the program. All children were expected to attend school a full day. A four year college degree was suggested for all teachers. If still in residence after graduation from the ninth grade, children were sent to Davenport high schools.

The period of World War II was a trying one for the home. Its superintendent was one of 12 employees and 180 boys and girls who served in the armed forces. Shortage of competent personnel was a problem; in fact it was difficult to secure employees at all. However, free food and vacancies on the institution's payroll made it possible to operate within the budget.

The legislature, in 1949, took steps to recognize the lady from Keokuk who was primarily responsible for initiating Iowa's splendid child care program. By official action the Davenport institution became the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home.