

Board of Control Takes Charge

The Board of Control of State Institutions was created under provisions of Chapter 118, Laws of the 27th General Assembly which, with the amendments thereto, clothed the board with full power to manage, control, and govern, subject only to the limitations contained in the act, the institutions under its management.

Organized April 6, 1898, the Board of Control became operative on July 1, 1898. The three members appointed to the first board by Governor Leslie M. Shaw were William Larrabee, a former governor of Iowa, John Cownie, and L. G. Kinne, a former judge of the Iowa Supreme Court. All were to devote full time to their new duties. Another provision of the law called for quarterly meetings with the heads of the several institutions under the board's control.

M. T. Gass, who had been named superintendent by the old Board of Trustees, continued in that capacity under the new Board of Control. At a quarterly meeting in Des Moines on December 13, 1898, Gass replied to a question which had been directed to him:

Now, I think in the 35 years of existence of that institution it has educated and sent out girls and boys which

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you will find in almost every walk of life. They have all the capabilities and possibilities of becoming not only self-supporting citizens but useful citizens, and you will find them, as I say, in every walk of life. Frequently men and women return that were in the institution years ago that are now prominent men in business and the professions. There are bankers; there are ministers and college professors; there are railroad conductors that have been back in the three years that I have been there.

In a speech delivered in Burlington on March 25, 1899, Gass could not hide his satisfaction in the good work done by his institution:

Iowa is proud, and boasts of the fact that she was the first state to provide a home for the orphans or destitute children of union soldiers, and while they were at the front, fighting our battles, the institution which I have the honor to represent, was founded, and has been maintained since as one of our worthy and patriotic charities. Twenty-three years ago its doors were opened to destitute children other than those of soldiers, to be cared for as wards of the counties from which they came.

In 1904, the state assumed one-half the cost of non-veterans' children and total cost for veterans' children lodged in the institution.

It was during the Gass period that "and Home for Indigent Children" was dropped from the name. Gass died May 6, 1904, and was succeeded by a Cedar Rapids resident, F. J. Sessions, on June 9. Sessions had been connected with Iowa schools for 20 years. Showing up on the employee records also was the name of Harriet R. Rowles

as librarian. In a few years she was to become head matron, a post she held until her retirement on July 15, 1936.

During the 1906-1908 period Sessions dropped military drill because of the decrease in the average age of the boys but retained the band; noted the need of hospital and primary school buildings; and in his biennial report to the board wrote:

The population of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home is increasing. The June, 1906, roster shows an enrollment of 496, while that of May, 1910, includes the names of 569 boys and girls, an increase of 73 in the four years. . . .

A new concept in handling children developed in 1910 — that of keeping children in their own homes. To accomplish this worthy objective, parents were to be given financial assistance in order to keep the children out of the home for strictly poverty reasons only.

While superintendent, Sessions battled problems of an overcrowded institution, inadequate monies, and an undermanned supervisory staff. For a solution he recommended in his report for the period ending June 30, 1914:

The per capita allowance, now \$12 per month, per child, half of which is paid by the county of residence and half by the state, save in the case of soldiers' children, whose expenses are borne entirely by the state, was fixed ten years ago when the cost of living and salary schedules were very materially less than they are now. It is only reasonable and just that the income of the institution

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should be increased. The 35th General Assembly provided that the institution should have a minimum income of \$6,600 per month. This is too small by at least \$400 monthly. The monthly per capita allowance per child should be raised to \$14, and the minimum income for a population of less than 500 fixed at \$7,000. This would insure funds to cover the necessary expenses of the institution not provided for by special appropriations, but provide nothing for extravagant expenditure. So far as I am able to discover no state children's institution carries on a work comparable with that of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home at as small an expense per capita.

Psychologists from the State University of Iowa were first used in 1914. Two additional workers were added to the field staff in that same year.

Fred L. Mahannah succeeded Sessions early in 1916 and his biennial report to the board showed a population of 463 children and recommended a gymnasium as "the foremost need." He also noted that in June 1915, the number of children under care had risen to 639, the largest number in history. Three years later the number had dropped to 349, primarily because of the activity of three state agents working diligently in the placement of children. However, the cost of maintenance had increased — to \$15 per child.

A. P. Doe, who had served at one time as president of the Board of Trustees, contributed a short history of the home to the Board of Control's quarterly publication, *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions*.

Writing in 1900, Doe concluded his article with these words:

In the thirty-six years of the "Home's" existence more than five thousand children have gone out from it to become citizens of the state and the records of many of the men and women, at one time little wards of Iowa, would make a page in our history which would do us honor.

Iowa was first in 1864. A year or two later a few states adopted her plan and many others followed until at the present time most of the states support their homeless and indigent children in Homes under state control. The voices of children are no longer heard in the alms houses and county poor houses.