

PROVINCIAL TRAINING SCHOOL  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
RED DEER ALBERTA

SUPERINTENDENTS REPORT for 1926

To the Honorable,  
The Minister of Health,  
Provincial Government Buildings,  
Edmonton, Alberta.

Sir :

I have the honor of submitting to you the fifth Annual Report of the Provincial Training School for Mental Deficiency, Red Deer, Alberta.

MOVEMENT OF PATIENTS IN 1926

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total.</u>
Number actually present Dec. 31st. 1925 --	66	67	133
<u>Admissions during the year</u>			
Voluntary admissions -- -- -- --	6	3	9
Court commitments -- -- -- --	2	1	3
Re-admissions -- -- -- --	0	1	1
Number enrolled during the year --	74	72	146
<u>Discharges ect. during the year</u>			
Discharged-- -- -- -- -- --	1	2	3
Deaths-- -- -- -- -- --	1	2	3
Transfers to Ponoka-- -- -- --	1	0	1
Paroled-- -- -- -- -- --	0	1	1
Escaped-- -- -- -- -- --	1	0	1
Number actually present Dec. 31st. 1926 --	<u>70</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>137</u>
Wards of the Province -- -- -- -- -- --		20	
Wards of Municipalities-- -- -- -- -- --		102	
Wards of the Department of Municipal Affairs--		8	
Private cases -- -- -- -- -- --		7	

## GENERAL REMARKS

The close of the year 1926 finds us in a very satisfactory position in so far as it applies to institutional work. The routine of the various departments has been carried on in an efficient manner, and the heads of departments have co-ordinated their respective duties in a satisfactory manner. The turn-over of staff has been large; In a work of this nature the movement of staff is usually active, for obvious reasons,- the hopelessness of the condition of many of the patients, the drudgery associated with the constant care of the helpless idiot child, the desire for change, inefficiency, lack of response to discipline,- All these and other factors enter into the problem and render it difficult to secure and hold a type of employee that is efficient and dependable.

The movement of patient population has been small, due in a great measure to our being filled to capacity at the beginning of the year, and to the fact that no new construction was undertaken. Vacancies created through deaths and discharges have been few. When we consider the predominantly low grade type of case now under care at the School we cannot hope for any great amount of relief to present demands through possible future discharges. We have hesitated to parole certain cases who might be considered eligible for parole, because of the unsatisfactory home and community environment to which they would be subjected, should they be released to return to their homes, or on account of the probable disaster that would overtake them should they be permitted to go out without good home restraint or without proper supervision. The longer I am associated with the work for the mental defective the more I am convinced of the need for colony provision for the higher grade feebleminded boy and girl. Unable to find for themselves we invite almost certain disaster for them should we set them free from the nominal restraint of the institution to be subject only to the caprice of their own uncontrolled instincts and impulses.

The "way of the transgressor" is, I might almost say, the natural way for the feebleminded, - deficient as they are in that finer moral and ethical sense which we associate with the normal individual. Inherently they are not more vicious than their more fortunate brother, but not having his power of inhibition, his wisdom and his adaptability, - requirements absolutely essential to successfully meet the complex problems of modern life, - they drift with the tide to meet the ultimate fate of all drifters, - dependency upon others of stronger mental and moral fibre than themselves. If then this is the ultimate goal, would it not be more to our mutual interests if some provision be made that these potential public charges be given an opportunity to maintain themselves, free from those problems of life which will inevitably prove their undoing? Certainly from the humanitarian point of view it is the least we can do, and I am satisfied that from the utilitarian point of view as well, it is the logical thing to do. Colonize and provide suitable work for this class and you diminish to that extent the inadequate, the misfits and the recidivists who people our slums and our jails, - Allow them their freedom and you but add to the problems with which the courts and welfare associations are already over-burdened.

As I have previously stated we cannot hope to institutionalize all of our feebleminded, but I do maintain that it is in the public interest that we care for those who have already proven themselves inadequate, as well as those who by the very nature of their defect must sooner or later fall by the way. If they are hopeless as citizens we should not permit them the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. We should treat them as children making use of all the restraints and supervision essential to the child life. The whole problem then is one that demands serious study on the part of those in whose hands the mental health of the Province rests. We need not be unduly concerned over the low grade custodial type of defective. Eugenically they do not constitute a serious problem; The high grade defective, on the other hand is first and foremost a eugenic problem, as the procreation of his kind but accentuates the already established vicious circle. By selective eugenical sterilization of the high grade hereditary type of feebleminded we would eliminate to that extent

this aspect of the problem. There are however many aspects of the situation that will require attention ere we can make a law dealing with eugenical sterilization really effective. And after sterilization what then? As one writer has put it, "sterilization will prevent these persons propagating it,"- but it will not make a mental defective competent, a pauper independent, a criminal moral,- in the great majority segregation will still be called for, on account of personality traits" (see article by the writer,- "Is sterilization of the mental defective practicable as a preventive measure")

I am in favor of selective eugenical sterilization and a law covering such procedure is indicated, but we must not forget that it will be easier to get a registration of the poor man's child, for economic reasons, if for no other, than it will be of the rich man's child, though each may be equally dangerous eugenically, and it is just possible it would also be easier to convince the responsible humble parent of the desirability and necessity for sterilization. These and other difficulties incident to the effective carrying out of such a law should be given due thought, else it will prove as other radical legislation has proven, ineffective and impotent and useless as a means of eradicating hereditary mental defect. A sterilization law then is desirable, and under favorable conditions should prove an effective means in any effort leading to the eradication of hereditary mental defect, still, the fact remains, that no matter how complete the law, or how thorough its enforcement our present generation of feebleminded will continue feebleminded, they will continue dependent, and many will remain potentially criminal, the majority of them will require external support either within the institution or which is less desirable outside of the institution, in the homes and the communities in which they are found; This being so, I would urge that steps be taken not only to put into effect a law for eugenical sterilization but also as a conservative institutional policy for selected cases of all grades and for those of the moron and borderline type especially. Such policy to take the form of colonies for both sexes where vocational work suited to the mental capacity of the individual may be carried out and where they may

wholly or in part maintain themselves with a minimum of cost to the Province. This course is progressive and practicable and in line with what is being done in other countries and states.

Three children were discharged, - one paroled (a girl of 17, to her parents) and there was one elopement, this was a boy, a high grade defective delinquent, 15 years of age chronologically, who had been in the School almost two years. He was thoroughly bad, a constant source of worry and as he eloped to his own home, I advised the father to try and keep him there, warning him that should he have to be re-committed it would be a correctional institution. The boy who was returned to the institution from parole the fall of 1925 was finally sent to the Mental Hospital, Ponoka; as a psychotic (D.P.) He escaped from there and from last reports is on a dairy farm in Oklahoma. The other boy is still on parole and has done indifferently well. His future is not hopeful as he is of the drifter type, this was the only case transferred during the year.

#### General Health

The health of the children continues remarkably good. Preventative medicine is our watchword, - good nourishing food, regular habits, daily exercise outside of doors if at all possible, combined with routine checking up of minor illnesses, have resulted in a minimum of sickness and a very low mortality rate.

There were three deaths, one a low grade idiot child, one of higher grade but a cerebral paralytic, due to chronic endocarditis, and one an imbecile girl, due to status epilepticus.

The Matron Miss Conroy and her attendants are to be complimented on the efficient way in which they have worked for the general physical well being of all classes of patients. All of our population have had the wasserman test, have been vaccinated, and immunized for diphtheria, The Superintendent is considering the feasibility of immunization against scarlatina this year.

The School has been free from contagious disease of any kind, nor has there been any serious organic disease other than in those cases whose deaths are recorded.

We have many cases of epilepsy, the majority of whom are to be found among our low grade population, Unfortunately owing to existing conditions we are not in a position to segregate them from the others

a procedure which for many reasons should be done. The segregation of the idiot group from the higher grades is also desirable, but this we cannot do unless more complete accommodation is provided. A number of our older boys and girls were taken during the year to the local optometrist for correction of errors of refraction.

#### DENTAL ATTENTION

The children have received adequate attention from the dentist appointed by the department. A thorough examination was made of all patients, and treatment given where indicated. We could wish that this special service might be extended to include a visiting oculist as well.

#### INSTITUTIONAL PROGRESS

There is little to add to what I have already said regarding institutional progress. The visiting committee appointed by the Department, which visited the School in 1925 brought down their report early in 1926. The inspection was most thorough and the information which they sought and carried away with them, and which was embodied in the report reflected most favorably on the general work of the Red Deer institution. The Superintendent has always welcomed visitors whether official or not, feeling as he does, that such visits can only have a beneficent effect on the work for the feebleminded of the Province. We also welcome inspection and constructive criticism from such a representative group as this Government Committee; confident in the knowledge that each member is keenly interested in mental health problems and sympathetic towards such work as we are endeavoring to carry on here.

I wish to record our feeling of great loss in the death of Dr. W. C. Laidlaw late Deputy Minister of Public Health. He ever showed a keen interest in the varied activities of the School, and his unflinching kindness and sympathy towards the Staff and patients, his grasp of and wise counsel in all the problems confronting the management, had proven him a real friend whose loss can not be easily estimated at this time.

I wish to record my thanks to the Department for such assistance as they have given us. True we felt disappointed that for various reasons nothing constructive in the way of a building policy could be

undertaken during the year. We sincerely hope that the Government may see their way clear to provide accommodation during 1927 for some of the more urgent cases, that are pressing for admission. We are in sore need of additional infirmary space and also some further accommodation for higher grade girls of the sex delinquent type. The Welfare associations and Juvenile Court judges are continually seeking through this channel for a way to institutionalize girls that are definitely feeble-minded, who have become delinquent through lack of proper supervision in the homes. Our experience has been all in favor of institutional care for this class, where suitable work can be found for them, as an aid towards self maintenance. This is possible in an institution with a mixed population such as we have at Red Deer.

I wish also to record my thanks for the sympathy and help given by the Department of Public Works, through their representative Mr. D. E. McDonald, Superintendent of Construction. Mr. McDonald has always shown a spirit of co-operation in any necessary work coming within his jurisdiction.

The varied activities of the School were carried on much as they were in 1925. Any increase in Institutional activity must of necessity rest upon increased facilities for the carrying on of the same. Our greatest handicap in the curriculum of training, is the lack of room for further vocational work, and our need for a capable vocational teacher for both male and female patients. At present, such work for boys is practically nil, and any work we have carried on for the girls has been under the supervision of our grade school teacher. Miss Gorman has done excellent work in the supervision of sewing and needlework, but more varied work could be undertaken given the necessary facilities and an experienced capable instructress. In any programme of expansion that may take place in the near future this phase of training should be considered.

The institutional grounds have been maintained at a high standard of beauty and our vegetables garden yielded an abundance of roots and other vegetables. I might mention that our head gardener is considerably handicapped with our present green house facilities. The building, which is a small lean-to has practically passed its sphere of usefulness, and

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it is our hope that should the Institution remain at Red Deer early action will be taken to provide a new green house of suitable size, detached from the main building.

The clerical work seems to be increasing and considerable difficulty is experienced by the Bursar in keeping up with his many duties. At the present time he is stenographer, record keeper, book-keeper, store keeper and bursar, and he is finding it increasingly difficult to do justice to all these varied tasks; with the appointment of a capable stenographer and record keeper, he would find time to do his other work more effectively.

Minor alterations and improvements have been made in the main building, out-buildings and play-grounds. The fencing in of one of the play grounds solved one of our greatest difficulties viz: control and supervision of the lower grade children when out of doors.

#### EXPENDITURES

Our budget has been carefully watched, and we closed the year without having to apply for an overdraft. We were well within our salary vote, but this was not due so much to over-estimation, as to the changes in the staff, and our hesitancy in filling positions unless assured of applicants with qualifications suitable to the work. This may have worked a hardship in management at times, but on the other hand it helped in the maintenance of a higher standard of service.

#### REVENUES

The collections for maintenance have been very satisfactory, passing the \$20,000.00 mark. Some of the rural municipalities have paid up long over-due accounts and other have shown a greater willingness to meet the accounts as rendered. We experienced no difficulties in our collections from the urban centres.

I am of the opinion that our request that parents obtain the approval of the municipality before a case is admitted works to the advantage of the Municipal District and the Institution, but not always to the advantage of the child or the parents. At the present time we have twenty six cases on our waiting list who have not secured this approval. Many of these are of an urgent nature, but either because the parents refuse to meet or cannot meet the terms laid down by the Municipality for reimbursement, or because the Municipality fears to assume a liability that may run for years, admission has not been



approved, with the result that the child and the home that is marginal economically must suffer. I would be glad if this point is given consideration by the Department, that some way out may be found, that will not make property or lack of property a criterion of acceptance, or rejection of any child. Really if either is to be a criterion, the latter is much to be preferred as it is in the economic borderline home where relief is most urgently needed.

#### INSTITUTIONAL NEEDS

It would be superfluous for me to enumerate a list of requirements at this time, without any definite knowledge of what the future policy of the Government is to be. We are being pressed on all sides for the admission of worthy cases, but these we have rejected and must continue to reject until accommodation is found for them. This is our most pressing need, and I would respectfully urge the Department to give it their consideration regardless of whether the institutional work is to be permanently carried on at Red Deer or not. Should a change be decided upon, it must be remembered that relief cannot be looked for in this way before 1928. I would ask then, that a cottage for the farm "boys" be constructed this coming spring, that we may be enabled to move our adult and adolescent males out of the present building, to make room for other younger and of a more educable type. It might be that we could use the space thus provided for girls of the delinquent type, by making a few simple alterations, and by vacating the space now used by male staff. It would not provide additional much needed accommodation on the infirmary floor however, as I am averse to putting this class of patient on any but the ground floor on account of the fire hazard.

At the present juncture it is difficult to work out any scheme that would benefit the infirmary type, but the cottage would relieve the pressure from the male and possibly the higher grade female side as well, and thus enable us to carry over another year. Extra-institutionally I am still in favor of the travelling mental clinic, to check up on the subnormal in our schools, it would also give us valuable data as to the incidence of feeble-mindedness in given areas, and a more comprehensive idea of the condition as it affects the

Province as a whole.

The accompanying charts and summaries will further add to what I have said regarding the year's activities.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED.

*W. M. Alister*  
MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT.