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PRAIRIE PAUPERS:
NORTH DAKOTA POOR FARMS, 1879-1973

by

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A Doctoral Research Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

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This Doctoral Research Paper, submitted by Steven R. Hoffbeck in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Chairperson of the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


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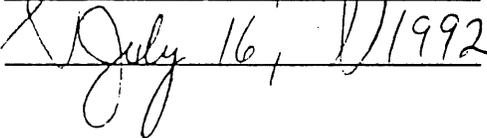


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PREFACE

The history of poor farms in North Dakota has not been fully recorded for several reasons. First, poorhouses have always been located in places on the edges of towns, always off the main thoroughfares. Situated away from public scrutiny, the almshouses have been little noted by contemporary observers. Poor farms are not a popular subject for study.

Second, most people want to concentrate on the happy side of life and the presence of poverty and distress makes almost everyone uncomfortable. In a land that glorifies success and money-making, failure and poverty provide only shame. The American Dream still survives but the defeat and despair found on poor farms make up an American nightmare.

Third, historians have difficulty with the subject because it falls between two disciplines. Part of the story involves sociology and social work, and the student of poorhouses has to enter another realm of literature and research. Because I have previously studied poor farms in the state of Vermont, I have gained some perspective on earlier forms of the institution.

The story is also very large. Involving Elizabethan poor laws, colonial times, frontier life, and the onset of the welfare state, the story of poorhouses is not consistent or tidy. With fifty states following slightly different methods of local poor relief, the history is complex.

Historians have different interests and many are not interested in this type of social history. To some historians falls the work of writing about businesses, wars, politics or government; others take on the tasks of writing about the darker, perhaps less popular types of history. Poorhouses are found under the shadow of the American Dream and the history of the institutions constitute an ugly aspect of our history.

I have undertaken this history for a number of reasons. First, the story of poorhouses in North Dakota needs to be told. Few North Dakotans know about poor farms; and although few care, documentation of the tale preserves the story of past forms of poor relief. The available studies of the subject have been written from a sociologist's viewpoint and have not sought to create a comprehensive history.

The second reason is that the topic is a challenge of a historian's endurance. The records are scattered across this large state. The researcher has to travel to the county court house to see the records. The old county commissioners' minutes are hand-written and, depending upon

the writer, may be difficult to decipher. Only rarely will a poorhouse be mentioned in the local newspapers, making the sources fairly scarce. The county poorhouse histories contained in this volume are sketchy at times because the records are incomplete. John M. Gillette, who studied poorhouses in 1913, wrote in his article "Poor Relief and Jails in North Dakota," that the poor relief records were "incomplete, fragmentary and unintelligible." I have attempted to make the subject a bit more understandable. If nothing else, I hope that the information is more available to those who might like to delve into it further. I enjoy regional history and I have had great enthusiasm for completing this project.

A third reason for doing this history involves my interest in the subject. When I was a little boy my family would drive past the Redwood County poor farm near Redwood Falls on our way to visit my uncle and aunt, and my parents told me a little about the poorhouse. The large, Spanish Mission-style building has always stuck in my mind. I wondered how people ended up in such a place. I understand now that most people wanted to avoid ending up in the poorhouse, but they were trapped in poverty, misfortune or illness.

Finally, there are so many good stories that need to be told in North Dakota. Anyone who studies history knows that there are a multitude of areas of historical interest and

far too many gaps in the written records of America and Americans. This paper seeks to fill one of those gaps, namely, that of chronicling the history of paupers and poor farms in the peopling of a fascinating Great Plains state.

The form of this research paper involves an overview of poor laws and poor relief in the United States and in North Dakota. The individual county poor farm histories are included so that residents of those counties may easily read the story of the poorhouse in their home county. The County Auditors in the respective counties have requested a copy of the county poor farm history for their permanent record. Some of the county poorhouse histories could be fleshed out considerably by a local historian, using the chapter in this paper as a starting point. Cass county, in particular, has merit for a longer work.

To Dianne,
Leah, Katie, and Mary
Hoffbeck

ABSTRACT

This study examines the history of county poor farms in North Dakota and places them within the wider perspective of poor relief in the United States.

North Dakota inherited its system of poor relief from the Elizabethan and American colonial poor laws. Poorhouses were a part of poor relief practices that also included local responsibility, outdoor relief, indenture of paupers, the poor list, expulsion of non-resident paupers, pauper burial, discouragement of vagrancy, and family responsibility for the poor.

Chapter One outlines Elizabethan poor laws and poor relief in the American colonies. The increase in numbers of poor farms in the nineteenth century is examined in light of policies which discouraged relief applications. The growth of private charity and the role of reform movements in the United States is documented within the context of the poor relief apparatus.

Chapter Two is a study of the Dakota laws concerning pauper relief and the application of the law. The establishment of county hospitals, poorhouses, and other relief practices in response to changing population

pressures shows a modest adaptation of inherited poor-relief practices. The drought and depression period of the 1890s is the background for a limited involvement by the state government.

Chapter Three charts the growth of Progressive changes in poor relief, particularly the protection of children. Children were present in poorhouses in the state until the 1940s. New Deal programs changed the nature of poor relief from a local to a federal responsibility during the Great Depression. Poor farms were discontinued as a result of the rise of the federal welfare state.

Chapters Four through Seventeen contain the histories of fourteen North Dakota poorhouses, drawn from original records.

The poor farms were discontinued by 1973 and were replaced by modern nursing homes and welfare programs.

CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN POOR RELIEF

The problem of caring for the downtrodden poor has plagued local governments from ancient times. Assistance has sometimes been provided as a deep religious duty or as a preventative to social disorder. The Hebrews of the Old Testament supported widows and fatherless children according to holy commandments. The Roman Empire provided bread and circuses to keep the poor people from destroying Rome through agonizing riots. The followers of Islam were taught to provide alms for the poor as a proper service to Allah. In medieval times the Christian Church provided almshouses and hospitals as a merciful haven for who were those caught in the grip of grinding poverty or for the elderly who had no means of support. The church saw paupers as an inevitable result of the Fall of Man, for Christ had said, "The poor ye always have with you." Christian kingdoms accepted the idea that the greater majority of the population would live and die in squalor, making excess aid of little value. In fact, philosopher Thomas Malthus insisted that if paupers were allowed to flourish against the laws of nature, the total number of impoverished people

would increase and all of society would be further impoverished. Yet, underneath a certain loathing for the poor lay the injunction from Christ to visit the sick, feed the hungry, minister to those in prison, practice hospitality to strangers, and clothe the naked. For much of the history of Western Civilization, poor relief depended more upon religious canons rather than upon civil law.¹

The English system of law provided the foundation for American poor relief practices. When King Henry VIII gained the throne of England in the early sixteenth century, he found himself confronted with the brutal face of poverty. During the reign of Henry VII and continuing in Henry VIII's own tenure, poor people in England found themselves caught in the ravages of a slow, yet tumultuous, period of change. The poor were displaced from a wretched and stable situation on medieval manors to a wretched and unstable position in a fledgling market economy. When landlords began to rent out their lands or changed from crop agriculture to sheep culture, less work was available in the rural areas. In the new market economy, cycles of prosperity and recessions alternated in the kingdom due to the vagaries of foreign trade. England became heavily dependent upon a single resource, wool. In medieval times plagues and famines took turns at decimating the population. In the new market system boom and bust times led to another woe, the new scourge of unemployment. Some of the dispossessed people

drifted to the cities, especially London, seeking a new life; others just drifted.²

When England parted ways with the Catholic Church and the Church of England was founded in the 1530s, the established means of caring for indigents changed. The Catholic monasteries had provided a rudimentary apparatus for the care of the elderly poor and the handicapped. With the dissolution and seizure of the Catholic monasteries, King Henry destroyed the longstanding source of comfort for paupers and the elderly poor. Without the alms given by the monks and nuns, swarms of vagrants or rogues threatened to overturn organized government through thievery, riot and anarchy. A new system had to be developed to handle the unavoidable cases of human misery. The poor laws that came about during the reigns of Henry VIII and his ultimate successor, Elizabeth I, were instituted to keep order in England. Parliament sought to enact laws to somehow bring the calamitous situation under control. A long series of legal acts known as the Elizabethan Poor Laws delineated a system for the control and care of paupers. The town led the way in poor-relief, for the parliamentary laws developed from the experiments of the individual towns. The poor laws would establish only a rude sort of safety net for the poorest sort of people in the society.³

When the numbers of beggars in England noticeably increased in the 1520s, the legal response was simply to

attempt to reduce the number of beggars. In a statute of 1530 elderly and handicapped beggars were required to secure a license to beg. All others were simply prohibited from begging with strong penalties for noncompliance with the law. A town did not want to be known as a place that allowed begging, because a mass of beggars could be expected.⁴

The poor were classified into the categories of the elderly poor, the impotent poor (handicapped), and poor children. The children were to be put into apprenticeships, which would keep them off the streets and roads and give them a skill of some sort. The glimmerings of a poor policy were set up in 1530s, but the administrative apparatus for implementing the statutes were inadequate. Some of the largest towns did carry through on this early plan by providing the necessary financing locally.⁵

London, as the receptor of the drifting population, assumed the lead in poor-relief by the mid-sixteenth century. In 1547 the city instituted a poor tax and established four hospitals for various types of paupers. Charity became a civic duty, where it had once been a religious duty. By 1553 the aged, sick and infant poor were judged to be worthy of assistance in London. Sturdy beggars were required to wear identification badges made of painted cloth or metal in 1562. Later paupers had to wear the letter "P" on their persons.⁶

In 1572 Parliament issued a statute that instituted a poor tax throughout all of England. The law required each town to enumerate paupers in a written list and to appoint overseers of the poor and collectors of the poor tax. To limit beggary, a fine of twenty shillings was imposed upon those who gave money to beggars. Penalties for begging became harsh. First-time offenders, over age fourteen, found guilty of begging were to be "grievously whipped, and burnt through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about." A person caught begging a third time received the death penalty "without benefit of clergy."⁷

The Elizabethan Poor Laws were the culmination of an evolutionary process of poor relief legislation. Prior attempts at poor relief were admittedly ineffectual, and a parliamentary codification of the law was needed. The statutes of 1597-1598 made the local church parish responsible for the administration and care of the local poor. The overseer of the poor was to be appointed by the local church-wardens. The parish levied a poor tax on every householder in the town. The idea of a local poor tax came to characterize the English poor relief system, differentiating it from other systems on the continent. The overseer had authority to enforce tax collection. Money for the overseer's activities came first from the offerings raised through the admonitions of the local pastor. The

poor tax could be in the form of money or materials for use in the almshouse. Flax, hemp, wool, thread or iron could be given as materials to be finished in the almshouse. Some towns used the tax money to built inexpensive houses on the town commons land or town waste land. Other communities constructed or purchased the work house or almshouse building.⁸

Workhouses had been deemed necessary in 1576 to keep "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars" occupied and "also punished from time to time." For individuals or families so destitute as not to have a home, these almshouses, or workhouses, would provide a modicum of shelter. The poor laws empowered local officials to obtain at least one "house of correction" per county or city. The presence of a workhouse encouraged vagabonds to continue on their way or be put to work in an indelicate manner. The threat of being forced into working in the institution could spur a local individual to find other work in a town. The work in the poorhouse would be harder than the hardest work available locally, and would give benefits slightly worse than the worst available. In these poorhouses or workhouses, inmates were expected to help provide their own support by accepting work assignments.⁹

Classification of the poor became extremely important, for either relief or punishment would be meted out by the local authorities according to the local judgment of each

case. The 1597-1598 Poor Law had two parts dealing with classification. The first was entitled "An Act for the Relief of the Poor," and the second was inscribed as "An Act for the punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars." This division illustrated the view of poverty of those days, in which the poor who were impoverished by disease, age or the death of parents were differentiated from those who appeared to choose to be poor. The English church parish was charged with administering assistance to the poor who were worthy of receiving aid. Widows, orphans and invalids were deemed to be the "worthy poor" because circumstances, not sloth, had brought on their woe.¹⁰

The passing of a substantial poor law in England did not absolve families of their obligation for the care of other family members. Responsibility for poor relief always fell first on the relatives of the poor people. The poor laws obligated children to support their elderly parents and ruled that parents had to aid their children throughout their lives. Similarly, grandparents had to give sustenance to their grandchildren. The Elizabethan legislation, noting that families were failing to support their impoverished members, placed responsibility for aiding the poor at the community or township level.¹¹

The overseer of the poor could provide a home and work for orphans or young paupers by binding them out as servants to the lowest bidder. The caregiver would receive payment

from the local funds in order to purchase a meager amount of food and clothing for the pauper. This "binding out" was similar to slavery in that a male could be indentured until age twenty-four and a female until age twenty-one. The long apprenticeship would confer a worthy trade upon the child, making the arrangement constructive to society. The temperament of the caregiver determined the quality of life for the poor child.¹²

The type of assistance which came to be known as "indoor relief" proved to be the most enlightened provision of the poor laws. Poor tax funds could pay for shoes, food, clothing, medical care, and shelter for the unfortunate population of a town. Local decisions were made concerning the details of such care, making the compassion of the overseer of the poor vital in determining how aid would be given to paupers. Though unevenly carried out in actual practice, the indoor relief provisions had the greatest potential for the humane care of the poor.¹³

As the care of paupers in England moved from the Catholic monasteries to the local towns and villages, the problem of determining legal residency in the community complicated poor relief administration. Preferring not to assist unworthy vagrants, the poor laws of 1601 began to regulate the amount of time required to become a legal resident of a town. A person had to live in a town for a period of three years in order to get help from the local

parish. Therefore many parishes sent indigents back to their town of birth or of previous residence. One of the main features of the century following the passage of the poor laws in 1601 was the effort to "warn out" potential paupers, sending them packing to another locale. Thus the policy of legal settlement, or residency, joined the older dictums of family responsibility and local responsibility for paupers.¹⁴

The 1601 Poor Law, generally known as "the" Elizabethan Poor Law, simply re-established the provisions of the 1597-1598 Poor Law. However, there were small additions and revisions that make it distinct from the earlier law. The 1601 law reinforced the principle of family provision for its members by stating that grandparents had an obligation to help all members of their families, meaning the grandchildren as well as the children. The apprenticeship provision was modified to allow the apprenticeship to end upon the marriage of the individual. In addition, if a town was cursed with too many poor people, a tax of the larger area, the hundred, or the county could be levied under the auspices of the new law. Hence a regional population center could get financial assistance from the outlying areas that had produced the migrants. The Poor Law of 1601 provided the administrative machinery to enforce its provisions, contrary to earlier efforts that became diluted according to the distance from London. Political pressure encouraged

parishes to carry out the laws. Obviously, some local areas took better care of the poor than other areas.¹⁵

English explorations of North America coincided with the codification of the Elizabethan poor laws. Shortly after the enactment of the 1601 Poor Law, the colony at Jamestown (1607) opened up the period of English settlement in the New World. The first plantation at Jamestown suffered at the start, providing a halting beginning to colonization. But with the expansion of settlement by the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1620, the idea of moving to North America became a more viable option. The Massachusetts Bay Colony brought some of the "poorer sort of people" as indentured servants when they arrived in 1630. The option of moving to the New World gave a new option to able-bodied poor people and would act as a safety valve for population pressures in England.¹⁶

The English poor relief practices followed the migration of settlers to America. The care of the poor in the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colonies was wholly within the realm of the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Families were expected to take care of their own members. The common pasture land provided grazing for all the inhabitants of a town. When a family experienced distress in early Plymouth, the town's common stock of cattle were entrusted to their keeping. The poor would get the milk from the cows and

could keep the calves that were born while in the family's care.¹⁷

Generally relatives and neighbors were able to help the poor in the early years of the Massachusetts and Virginia colonies. In a new country people who were unable to make a living in one place could find a new opportunity by moving to another town or farm. In England the residency laws had limited the movement of persons of modest means. Eventually, however, the same economic cycles of boom and bust that existed in post-medieval England accentuated the plight of the poor in Colonial America. When large numbers of poor people became a reality, the local leaders reverted to the English system of poor relief that had been their experience while in England. The poor law accouterments of overseers, almshouses and indentures of children became the normal mode of providing relief in the new American colonies. The principles and practices of English law were well-ingrained in the minds of the colonists.¹⁸

Boston served as the site of the first American almshouse. In 1662 the city had enough worthy poor persons to build a poorhouse on Beacon Street. The Quakers established an almshouse in Philadelphia in 1713. Charleston erected its poorhouse in 1734. New York City entered the arena of institutional care by renting a house for use as a hospital for poor patients in 1696 and, in 1736, built a combination "Poor House, Work House, and House

of Correction" to deal with the "Continual Increase of the Poor within this City."¹⁹

Emigration to the English colonies created a total of thirteen entities; all followed the Elizabethan poor law system. As population increased, more cities grew to accept the poor house concept. The town or township system of administering poor relief worked especially well in the small geographic areas of New England. In South Carolina and across the southern colonies, the church parishes became responsible for the care of the poor within the local church's domain. The colony of New York, with vast amounts of land, opted for county administration of poor relief, rather than the parish or town system, in legislation enacted in 1683. Most of the smaller towns and rural counties in colonial America did not need to build an almshouse, preferring to use the Elizabethan "outdoor relief" instead. Outdoor relief meant outside of the almshouse; hence the pauper received assistance in his or her own home, or in a rented home. The overseer of the poor investigated the circumstances of those who applied to the town or county for aid. According to the generosity of the overseer, the suppliant for help might get wood for heating; boots, shoes and other articles of clothing; food; medical attendance or medicine; or shelter. The local government also had the responsibility to arrange and pay for the burial of those who died without means or relatives. The

overseer of the poor had to make difficult decisions concerning which individuals would be granted aid by the town and which would be left to fend for themselves.²⁰

Pauper auctions constituted another form of outdoor relief. Sometimes referred to as the "New England Method" of public poor relief, pauper auctions involved the auctioning of the care of paupers to the lowest bidder. The successful bidder received payment from the town or county to provide subsistence for the pauper and would also have the benefit of whatever labor the pauper could perform. The care and food given to the poor person might be adequate at best, but "more often the one to whom the person was struck off was looking for a bargain, was not overscrupulous as to the clothes and food furnished or the amount of service demanded."²¹ The lowest bidder would often be "some sordid soul, who pinched and starved the unfortunate beings, who were thus at his mercy."²² The auction system worked well to discourage potential public charges from applying for aid, and gave the town an economical way of dealing with poverty cases. In use before the American Revolution, the pauper auctions were most widely used from 1800 until Indiana banned the practice in 1834. Even before various states prohibited the auctions, some towns, such as Hartford, Vermont, would not allow the overseer to sell paupers at auction, preferring boarding contracts. Auctions were held, in various numbers, all across the colonies

except in Maryland and Delaware. Increased population pressures probably resulted in more auctions. The laws of the Northwest Territory, heavily influenced by the legislation of the New England states, authorized the use of auctions.²³

In the new United States growing towns and counties had no legal responsibility to provide assistance for individuals who were not established residents of the governmental entity. Just as towns in England had been concerned with the residency or "settlement" of poor persons, the various states followed the English practices of sending potential paupers away from the town. To keep relief expenses low, communities adopted a "warning out" policy. Poor people or persons who appeared likely to become poor were informed that the local government was not responsible for their care if they became destitute and that they must depart from the town. Individuals singled out in this manner typically were forced to return to a previous residence or to move on in hopes of finding a more hospitable place. Local officials served warnings to newcomers to relieve the community of the responsibility for relief of paupers. In some states, South Carolina for example, church and benevolent societies might give transients "some funds to help them get home or at least out of the city." Throughout the nineteenth century, communities continued to dispute the residency and origins

of drifting poor people. The conflicts over legal residency caused "more lawsuits than almost anything else" during the expansion of the nation.²⁴

Poorhouses grew in numbers after the American Revolution. In new areas of settlement local governments gave aid to the few poor persons in the paupers' homes (outdoor relief). As the population increased, the problem of poverty proved larger than outdoor relief efforts could handle. Local governments hoped that indoor relief, or relief in poorhouses or almshouses, would provide a solution to the pauper problem. The almshouses were considered necessary as a reform of the poor relief system in an effort to curb excessive relief costs. Population and economic pressures led to the establishment of increasing numbers of poorhouses in the first half of the nineteenth century. The institutions were called by various names, either almshouses, poor farms, poorhouses, asylums, workhouses or infirmaries; but they were essentially the same type of public care-giving operations. Some institutions, such as the new almshouse at Bellevue in New York City (built 1816), were built to provide hospital facilities for sick paupers.²⁵

In New England the towns and townships had wide authority to determine whether or not to establish poorhouses. Virginia influenced the southern states to follow the county poorhouse system when the House of

Burgesses approved the establishment of joint county/parish workhouses in landmark legislation in 1668 and 1755. New York passed legislation enabling counties to establish poorhouses in 1824; prior to this, a number of towns had built almshouses. The laws of the Northwest Territory (1795 and 1799), based on the poor laws of Pennsylvania, authorized taxes in the counties to raise funds for poorhouses or workhouses.²⁶

Several states used poorhouses as a public welfare reform measure. The Quincy Report, prepared in 1821 by Josiah Quincy, president of Harvard College, chronicled the rise of pauperism in Massachusetts and outlined various means of relief. A committee of the Massachusetts legislature concluded from Quincy's research that almshouses were the most economical form of relief. The best type of work was judged to be that associated with agriculture because various unskilled types of work could be provided. The food grown on the farm helped feed the paupers. The results of the investigation inspired the growth of poor farms as a welfare measure.²⁷

The Yates Report, prepared by New York's Secretary of State John Yates in 1823-1824, also concluded that poorhouses and poor farms were the best means of caring for the poor. Yates also noted that outdoor relief for paupers should be curtailed. The report pointed to the success of Rhode Island, Delaware and Virginia in controlling poor

relief expenses. These states had utilized the poorhouse system for the longest time and to the greatest extent. The New York legislature heeded the report and authorized the furtherance of county almshouses.²⁸

The Yates Report encouraged limitations on poor relief in the state and made the poorhouse a deterrence to pauperism. Because the frontier lay close by, paupers might decide that moving west might be a better choice than moving to the poor farm. Americans and Britains alike were influenced by the works of Thomas Malthus, especially his 1798 work entitled Essay on the Principle of Population, which stated that any relief of poverty actually increased the numbers of paupers by allowing them to survive and reproduce when they would otherwise perish. The British government also produced a report on poor relief in 1834, close on the heels of the Yates Report. Exasperated by increasing expenses for poor relief, referred to as "the Scandalous Expenditure on the Poor," the 1834 report brought great changes in British poor relief administration. Government relief to able-bodied paupers would be provided only through poorhouses. While medical treatment for ill and elderly poor people was acceptable, the coddling of healthy persons became anathema. Those who refused to live in the workhouse would be refused relief. This became known as the Workhouse Test, which would separate the worthy poor from the indolent poor. Astute observers had noted that

even lazy people would prefer to find work outside the poorhouse if the institution looked too undesirable.²⁹

The British Poor Law of 1834 greatly influenced American poor relief. In the United States, as well as Great Britain, private rather than public charity was encouraged. Also pauperism became morally condemned as a burden upon society. The stigma attached to public charges became ever more highlighted. Accepting poor relief in a supposed land of plenty was viewed by most people as a disgrace, and the Malthusian ideas made the shame of poverty a wide-spread belief in America.³⁰

Throughout the nineteenth century, two modes of poor relief existed side by side. Although local governments hoped to consolidate expenditures into poorhouses alone, relief measures provided for paupers in their homes continued. Two main types of poor were distinguished; the able-bodied or temporary paupers and the permanent cases. The counties and town often found that the elderly or ill poor persons were better cared for outside of poorhouses, either in boarding homes or hospitals. Widows and orphans needed specialized institutions for proper care.³¹

The inmates in poorhouses consisted of all types of paupers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The greatest number were elderly people who had no relatives to care for them. In the almshouse "a dozen classes of the public poor were thrown together, higgledy-piggledy," with a

mixture of "the healthy infant" and other children with "idiots and insane persons," tramps, beggars, persons with "every variety of disease," and the deaf and dumb. Every variety of the "wretched, the fraudulent, and the vicious" were represented in poorhouses across the nation.

Gradually, as the century wore on, private charities and state institutions removed various classes of people from the almshouses.³²

The counties and town entrusted the care of paupers in almshouses to superintendents or overseers of the poor. The treatment of the inmates depended upon the character of the overseer. If the institution included a poor farm, the overseer had to devote much of his time to the management and cultivation of the farm. County officials often chose an overseer based upon his "capacity to manage horses and cattle," and his ability to "make the farm productive." Reformers hoped that a superintendent might be selected for "his capacity to manage men and women, so as to encourage the good and reform the bad," in a combination of a "wise humanity and a wise economy." Since the efficiency of the poorhouse was measured in dollars, the residents of the poor farm would receive, at best, decent care and, at worst, cruel care. The majority got caretakers who were indifferent, because the selection of the superintendent was "seldom selected with any reference to his humanity or his moral qualifications." Counties were advised that there was

"no danger of getting too good a man for the place." If a superintendent could "avoid extremes of leniency and severity," and use "sympathy and sound judgment," then paupers might have respectable care.³³

By the 1880s knowledgeable reformers attempted to warn county officials about the perils of selecting a poorhouse manager. He should not be a political appointment, or hired as the cheapest man available. Too many poorhouse managers seemed to care "only for the money and do not care properly for the poor."³⁴ Allowing the keeping of paupers on contracts to the lowest bidder led to poor care for the inmates, because "avarice gets the better of what philanthropy" the overseer might have had. One sage believed that county officials could tell how well an overseer would do in a poorhouse by observing the condition of the person's home. Adequate pay for the superintendent, when combined with regular repair of the poorhouse, would prove less expensive than pinching pennies.³⁵

Reform movements in the United States concentrated on the alcohol problem. The link between alcohol and poverty had been noted in association with the poor law reform movements in both Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The temperance movement carried the bulk of reform energy in the U.S. into the Civil War Era and beyond. Reformers such as Dorothea Dix called attention to abuses in the care of the insane in her ground-breaking efforts. The work of Dix led

to the creation of state-supported hospitals for mentally ill patients. Still, in rural areas insane paupers were still dumped into the poorhouse system.³⁶

A select committee of the New York State Senate investigated the care of children in poorhouses in 1856. The committee helped spread the notion that the presence of children in such institutions had been a "terrible mistake." The first laws concerning the removal of children from the institutions became operational a few years after the report. By then, a variety of regulations either forbade the introduction of children into almshouses; limited their stay to thirty, sixty or ninety days; or established alternate places for the care of youngsters. In 1863 Iowa founded the Iowa Home For Soldiers' Orphans for those rendered fatherless by the Civil War. Ohio followed with a system of county children's homes after 1866 and a restriction upon the placement of children over three years old in poorhouses in 1883. Other states (Michigan after 1869; New York in 1875; Wisconsin in 1878; Pennsylvania and Connecticut in 1883; New Hampshire in 1895; Indiana (1897); New Jersey (in 1899) limited or eliminated the tenure of children at almshouses. Progress in the removal of children from the poorhouses was uneven and slow.³⁷

Nineteenth century reformers were influenced by the rise of scientific thinking as applied to human society, Darwinism and the scientific method. Scientific charity

arose in the United States by 1870. As a mixture of traditional charity methods and scientific ideas, the movement had great influence but little practical effect. Rather than moving toward benevolent state socialism, as Germany did in the 1880s, the scientific charity movement sought a return to private charity. The leaders of the movement hoped to close the gap between rich and poor by leading the poor to independence and work by eliminating the dependency of state poor relief. The organization of charity proved to be beneficial, but the underlying philosophy would not work in an industrialized society. The future of welfare would lie in some form of socialism. The charity organization societies, first established by reformer Josephine Shaw Lowell in New York in 1882, were an idea transplanted in the U.S. from like organizations in Great Britain. The focus was on preventing poverty, but the depression of the 1890s showed that such a goal was unreachable.³⁸

By 1874 the National Conference of Charities and Correction (also an offshoot of the British charity organization societies) led a drive to examine the care of prisoners and poor people in the United States. The first conference, held in New York, began a process of disseminating information about reform in medical care and relief for paupers, the disabled, and prisoners by private and public organizations. Only four states were involved in

the first conference, but the group grew quickly so that by 1892, 28 states, including North Dakota, were represented in conference. Influenced by charity organizations in London, groups such as the Boston Provident Association coordinated private relief efforts in cities on the East Coast. Buffalo, New York, became the first city in the nation to "produce a complete Charity Organization Society of the London type" in 1877. The goal was not to give money directly from the group, rather, it helped existing groups help the needy. State Boards of Corrections and Charities were also encouraged to form, and Minnesota formed such a board in 1883.³⁹

Some critics of the poorhouse system in the 1870s called for state supervision of the almshouses, with regular reports and inspections by a state board. An associated idea set forth the merits of larger, well-organized almshouses, operated by a large district or a small state. Some reformers advocated the establishment of county infirmaries or hospitals, to avoid the dumping of sick paupers with children, families and other able-bodied poor persons. General R. Brinkerhoff, a member of the Ohio legislature, publicized the fact that large poor farms were expensive to operate because "pauper-labor" could not provide the musclepower necessary to perform farm tasks. A garden would be sufficient for their energies. Brinkerhoff insisted that practical economy dictated the building of

county hospitals near the largest city in any area, for transportation costs would run too high at any other location.⁴⁰

The design of poorhouses had been the subject of considerable thought by the 1880s. The experiences of the New England and southern states in almshouse development provided some measure of knowledge for improvement of the institutions. H.W. Giles, Chairman of the Standing Committee on the Organization and Management of Poorhouses of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, addressed the issue of poorhouse organization in 1884. Giles believed, foremost, that poorhouses must not "encourage the growth of dependent classes." The best location for a poorhouse had proven to be "near the principal town of the county or a place easily accessible." The "proper distance" from the town was from one and one-half to three miles. He advised a location near a railroad station for easy transport of paupers and poorhouse supplies. Giles warned against buying land in "some out-of-the-way place" simply because the "land was cheap" there, because the cheap land was often poor for farming. Scrutiny by the public made overseers more responsible, making an inaccessible location further undesirable. Giles warned against attempting to run a large farm, because hired help would become necessary. The average poorhouse population could care for a vegetable garden and a modest number of animals.⁴¹

H.W. Giles from Wisconsin considered that poorhouses should be two stories in height, at most. Elderly inmates could use the stairs only to a certain extent. Giles felt that the building should be marked by "plainness" with no "architectural embellishment." Experience had proven that the sexes must be segregated, and Giles believed that married couples in the poorhouse should also be separated. Yards must be fenced, with areas reserved for men and women so they would not mix. Superintendents of poorhouses were warned that the "low and vicious tendencies" of male and female paupers were "vivified and excited" by mere proximity. Enlightened poorhouse management meant that no children or mentally ill person should be in the establishment. Dissemination of the plans to county commissioners proved difficult. Some local commissioners might know some of the principles espoused by the Commission on Charities but most would carry traditions of poorhouse management rather than learn about the principles of good management.⁴²

Massive immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century forced a turn in policy toward those who could not take care for themselves. Laborers had been in great demand but by 1880 workers born in America demanded that the government protect their jobs from the new arrivals. Some states began to feel the financial burden of caring for too many poor immigrants. Parish officials in

Britain had discovered that paying for paupers' passage to America was cheaper than keeping them in the town. Some politicians gained support by denouncing European governments for using the United States as "the dumping-ground of Europe." Local governments were responsible for the regulation of immigration to port cities until the Federal Government assumed that role in 1882. The State of New York, with its status as the largest port receiving immigrants, ended up with numerous disabled and elderly aliens. Frustration arose as Congress refused to address the problem of indigent emigrants, many of whom were shipped to this country "only when nearly worn out by field-labor at home." The state, therefore, appropriated money in 1880 to return "these helpless classes" to their former European homes. By 1892 New York had sent 1,879 people back to Europe, at an expense per person of \$21.78. Removal of these paupers from the poorhouses and other institutions "effected a great saving to the State" over the amount that would have been necessary for their long-term care.⁴³

The 1882 legislation gave the United States its first general federal immigration law. The act excluded as immigrants "any convict, lunatic, idiot or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge." Congressional regulation of immigration in 1882 included a provision for the collection of a 50 cent tax on every foreign passenger ticket sold on immigration ships.

Immigrants were examined and all excluded persons were sent back to their former homelands at the expense of the ship owners who had brought them to America.⁴⁴

By the time that settlement came to Dakota Territory in the 1870s and 1880s the laws and procedures of American poor relief had become firmly established. The system operated very much as it had in Elizabethan England. The greater open spaces in America had fostered the addition of farmland onto the traditional town poorhouses to create poor farms. Basically what had been done in England in 1601 was still being done in America two centuries later.

ENDNOTES

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2. Sir George Nicholls, A History of the English Poor Law in Connection with the State of the Country and the Condition of the People (London: P.S. King and Son, 1904), 112, 113, tells of the increase of "sheep-pasturing."

3. Nicholls, A History of the English Poor Law, 151-183. J.H. Thomas, Town Government in the Sixteenth Century (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1933), 13, 125. Paul Slack, The English Poor Law 1531-1782 (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1990), 16. Tierney, 127-132.

4. Nicholls, 115; Slack, 17.

5. Nicholls, 114-124.

6. Nicholls, 151. London's hospitals included St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas's for disabled and diseased paupers and Christ's Hospital and Bridewell for foundling children and vagrants, listed in Paul Slack, The English Poor Law 1531-1782 (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1990), 16. Thomas, 115.

7. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th ed., s.v. "Poor Laws." Slack, 18.

8. The poor laws accumulated over the course of the sixteenth century, see Nicholls, 167, 192; also Slack, 18-20.

9. Nicholls, 182.

10. Nicholls, 181, 185.

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14. Thomas, 114. Ethel McClure, More Than A Roof: The Development of Minnesota Poor Farms and Homes for the Aged (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1968), 2.

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19. Heberd, "Institutional Care," 516, 520, 523, gives starting dates for Boston, Philadelphia and New York City almshouses. Charleston data from Barbara Ulmer, "Benevolence in Colonial Charleston," The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association, (1980), 5. Quotes of the New York City almshouse are from Raymond A. Mohl, "Poverty in Early America, A Reappraisal: The Case of Eighteenth-Century New York City," New York History 50, (1969), 10, 11.

20. Ulmer, "Benevolence in Colonial Charleston," 1. New York county administration in Mohl, "Poverty in Early America," 7. Katz, In The Shadow Of The Poorhouse, 14, 3.

21. Quote from William Monroe Newton, History of Barnard, Vermont (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1928), vol. I, 289.

22. Frederick P. Wells, History of Newbury, Vermont (St. Johnsbury, VT: Caledonia Company, 1902), 286.

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25. Edward T. Devine, "Relief And Care Of The Poor In Their Homes," Charities Review 10, (May 1900), 121. Hospitals in Heberd, "Institutional Care of Destitute Adults," 524.

26. Virginia's laws in McCartney, "Virginia's Workhouses for the Poor," 288, 291. Joan Underhill Hannon, "Poor Relief Policy in Antebellum New York State: The Rise and Decline of the Poorhouse," Explorations In Economic History 22, no. 3, (1985), 235. Northwest Territory in McClure, More Than A Roof, 6.

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CHAPTER 2

POOR RELIEF IN DAKOTA TO 1900

Poor laws spread west as settlers brought the laws with them from the eastern states. The Northwest Territory inherited poor relief programs from the original Thirteen Colonies, and kept the basic system. Parts of what are now North and South Dakota were within the boundaries of Minnesota Territory, created in 1849. The Minnesota territorial laws concerning poor relief came from Wisconsin Territory, which had jurisdiction over the area from 1836 until 1848. Minnesota Territory extended west into the largely unsettled Dakotas and theoretically controlled the activities on the plains. Minnesota accepted the provisions of the Wisconsin territorial and state laws regarding care of paupers by means of county governmental units. When Minnesota became a state in 1858, settlers in the unofficial Dakota Territory took the Minnesota laws for their own, amending the Minnesota Code to apply to Dakota in 1859.¹

After gaining official status as a territory in 1861, the Dakota territorial organizers first adopted a code of laws (in 1862) taken from Ohio statutes. In 1868 Dakota Territory adopted the New York law code as a replacement for

the Ohio code. The poor laws for Dakota Territory were thus copied from those of New York. In this roundabout way, Dakota found itself the heir of poor laws transmitted from the time of Queen Elizabeth I to New England and passed along through the Northwest, Wisconsin and Minnesota territories, Ohio, and the State of New York. Each governmental entity in turn accepted the established traditions of English poor relief, at times questioning the expense but not the rationale of the system.²

National reformers hoped that the new states that would form from the territories west of the Mississippi River would "avoid the errors elsewhere existing" in poor relief and profit from the experiences of the older states. C.S. Watkins, of Davenport, Iowa, condemned the poor relief system in 1879 because the new nature of life in the western states had not been taken into account in the copying of the almshouses from the eastern sections. To Watkins, the almshouses had deviated from the proper agricultural basis and had become "cesspools or reservoirs" for shiftless urban paupers. The evolution of the titles of the workhouses from true almshouses to poorhouses seemingly reflected an American change in the institution. Dakota based its early forms of relief upon what had been done in states to the east: outdoor relief, indoor relief in hospitals or poorhouses, expulsion of unwanted paupers and vagrants, poor lists, and binding out of public charges.³

Outdoor Relief

The structure of county government came first to Pembina County, organized in 1867. County commissioners in North Dakota, as overseers of the poor, were responsible for the well-being of county citizens. The county governments of Dakota Territory were authorized to provide aid to poor persons living within the geographic boundaries of each county. Early welfare measures were of the outdoor relief variety, in which basic necessities of food, clothing, heating fuel and medical attention were given to those in urgent need of them. Territorial lawmakers, following older law codes, mandated the appointment of a physician at any existing poorhouses. The counties that had poorhouses or hospitals hired a reputable doctor to care for the paupers in the institutions. Other counties, even without poorhouses, also appointed physicians to give medical attention to county residents who were too poor to pay for the aid. Grand Forks County first appointed an official county physician in 1881, before a county hospital or poor farm was in place. Dr. W. Collins was authorized "to attend to the poor and sick of the county."⁴

Outdoor relief provisions were granted on an emergency basis. Frontier life on the plains and prairies of North Dakota could be extremely hazardous, especially for settlers who had just arrived in the area. Winters especially were

not kind to the unready or the unlucky. Wendlin Auslett of Grand Forks County found out this grim truth in the winter of 1880. Auslett froze his feet "so badly as to be entirely disabled for laboring." Finding himself destitute and unable to care for his large family, he asked for help from his local county commissioner. As the local overseer of the poor responsible for Auslett, the commissioner gained proof that Auslett was "an industrious man," not a "layabout," who definitely deserved aid. The commissioner therefore recommended that Wendlin Auslett be awarded twenty dollars "for his relief."⁵

Disease often proved to be an even more formidable obstacle to successful homesteading in Dakota. The early county records contain a number of cases similar to one in Richland County in 1888, before the county operated a poorhouse. A farmer, his wife, and seven children fell prey to diphtheria. Two of the children died, and the farmer continued to be too ill to do his chores. The county stepped in because the family was "nearly destitute of everything." The local county commissioner ordered "all the necessaries of life" for the family, "including bedclothes." Neighbors were contracted to care for the stock and do the farmer's chores for him. The proud man paid the grocery bills that he had incurred and promised to repay the county for the other assistance after his crops were harvested in the fall.⁶

In the spirit of frontier charity, Dakotans would never "stand by and see women and children starving and freezing for the want of provisions." A Wahpeton writer said that such hardheartedness had "never been done and probably never will be" done in America, and certainly not in Dakota Territory. Neighborly charity worked especially well in the most rural areas of the state. Louis Connolly, chairman of the Oliver County Board of Commissioners, claimed in 1889 that there had "never been a case of destitution in the county" and insisted that no resident of Oliver County had "ever been assisted or needed assistance from any charitable source." The farmers of Oliver County seemed to typify the image of the hardy husbandmen who could succeed in North Dakota because he depended on "his own efforts, grit and patience for success."⁷

Care of the poor on the new frontier seemed crude at times. Sometimes the best medical treatment might be some "whiskey for [a] county patient," as occurred in Bismarck in 1882.⁸ When the Crick family needed shelter from the bitter January cold, Burleigh County gave funds for the "rent of a shack." Morton County agreed to purchase a "wooden leg for a pauper" in 1885. This was the nature of some forms of early outdoor relief.⁹

Indoor Relief in Hospitals

The farm economy of Dakota Territory had its basis in wheat production. The lure of the golden grain brought bonanza farmers to the level fields of the Red River Valley in the time of the "Bonanza-Boom Years" from 1879-1885. Others settlers tilled smaller fields, and filled the fertile land with wheat farmers. The increased population brought into Dakota in the Bonanza days caused a demand for county services to relieve suffering in cases of epidemic disease or unfortunate illness. County physicians traveled to see impoverished patients in far-flung sections of the counties, where some Bonanza farms operated far from major towns.¹⁰

When counties in Dakota Territory gained a sufficient population, outdoor relief could no longer handle the poor problem. An almshouse or a county hospital was built to care for unfortunate cases of destitution or disease under its roof, hence the name "indoor relief." The almshouse, as it evolved in the United States, was either a hospital or a poorhouse. Some counties in Dakota favored the hospital approach, believing that a separate poor farm or poorhouse might then be unnecessary. Optimists could see no poor people in a county, only those temporarily incapacitated by sickness. When health returned, surely wealth would also. Cass County opened the first county hospital in northern Dakota in 1879. The county hospital consisted of rented rooms in Fargo and served as a convenient central point for

the county physician to examine and visit patients. At least five other counties operated hospitals. The Barnes County Hospital opened in Valley City in 1881; and Burleigh County started one in 1882. Others followed in succession: Grand Forks County (1887); Richland County (1888); and Ward County in 1897.¹¹

The first county hospitals in all of the six counties were ramshackle affairs. Little more than boarding houses, the hospitals afforded but primitive care for patients. Still the county facilities provided care until the large cities in the state gained substantial private hospitals during the 1890s. Before St. Luke's Hospital opened in Grand Forks in 1891, wealthy residents received treatment in their homes. Poorer people could go to the first county hospital in Grand Forks for medical care from 1887 to 1895.¹²

Private charitable organizations, inspired by the Social Gospel movement to help all of society's destitute brothers and sisters, soon supplemented or supplanted the county hospitals, both nationally and in North Dakota. Bismarck's St. Alexius Hospital, founded in 1885, gave assistance to "all classes" of patients, including contagious diseases in the central portion of northern Dakota. Other areas benefitted from care given by the Mayville Union Hospital (founded in 1898); St. John's Hospital in Fargo (1900); Grafton Deaconess Hospital

(operated by the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, 1903); Lisbon Hospital (1903); and the Northwood Deaconess Hospital (United Norwegian Lutheran Church, 1902).¹³

The first county hospitals were not modern institutions. The first Cass County Hospital in Fargo, a rented building, operated from 1879 until the county board authorized a commodious new hospital in 1896. By that time the old building had been condemned as being "unfit for use" as a medical facility. Lacking sewer and water connections, the county hospital did not measure up to the new standards of health and sanitation of the 1890s.¹⁴

While the first Grand Forks County Hospital consisted of buildings owned by the county, the conditions were not much better. In 1887 the county board purchased a city lot in Grand Forks with buildings on it for \$1,800. The main building was modified into a hospital ward, and an addition was built in 1888. However, the hospital superintendent, Mr. Robert Purdy, gave the facilities a bad reputation in 1890. The county commissioners received a number of complaints "condemning the actions" of Mr. and Mrs. Purdy "on account of misuse of patients and by reason of his habit of becoming intoxicated." An investigation revealed that the institution was being "run more like a saloon than a hospital," and reportedly found "more beer and whiskey bottles than ought to grace the back rooms of any public charity in a prohibition state." Purdy supposedly fed the

patients a daily menu of cold coffee and "Porridge a la Purdy" for breakfast; meat, boiled potatoes and milk for dinner; and a supper consisting of the "Remnants of the previous feasts." The board believed that the charges were "sufficiently founded on fact to justify the removal" of the Purdys.¹⁵

The large hospital facilities maintained by Cass and Grand Forks counties served a useful purpose in providing free medical care for county poor people. Patients were expected to reimburse the county for the care they received, but few paid off their bills. Paying patients could receive better care at other hospitals in Grand Forks and Fargo, thus they would not patronize the pauper hospital. When workers were injured on the job or when farmers suffered from accidents, the injured party might get treatment at a county hospital. In 1895 a Cass County farm hand working west of Amenia was gored in the face by a cow. The horn "inflicted a vicious wound across the nose and tore the flesh from his face upward across the forehead." The gash required thirty-six stitches to "bring the parts together," and the laborer endured a long recovery in the county hospital in Fargo.¹⁶

Young women, daughters of prosperous but unsympathetic parents, occasionally came to the county hospitals to birth surreptitiously illegitimate children. In one such case in 1908, the daughter of a wealthy North Dakota farmer came to

the Arvilla hospital to avoid her family's disapproval. The twenty-two year old woman died in childbirth and her father later came to take her home for burial.¹⁷

Cass County Hospital records indicated that it was a busy place in 1894. Two hundred seventeen patients were admitted and twenty-four surgical operations were performed. The figures were a bit higher than usual, due to an outbreak of dreaded typhoid fever. Of the seventy-two patients treated for typhoid, seven perished. Nine other died that year, of various causes, including "strangulated hernia," cancer of the brain, "Lagrippe," consumption of the bowels, cirrhosis of the liver, and cancer. As the place of last resort for people short of cash, the county hospital sometimes served as the final resort.¹⁸

Grand Forks County established the state's first substantial hospital in a large hotel donated to the public by the wealthy Arvilla merchant, Dudley Hersey, in 1893. When the modified hotel burned to the ground in 1894, a new two-story structure replaced the Hersey Hotel. Designed specifically as a combination hospital and poor farm by Grand Forks architect John W. Ross, the impressive brick hospital stood ready for patients in December 1895.¹⁹

Cass County quickly followed the lead of Grand Forks, authorizing Architect John W. Ross to design a similar hospital and poor farm building two miles north of the city. The building was ready for occupancy in January of 1897.²⁰

The only other county to erect a substantial hospital was Barnes County. The well-known Fargo architectural firm of the Hancock Brothers designed the Riverside Hospital and Poor Farm building in Valley City in 1908. Ready for occupancy in 1910, the structure was built with an emphasis on service as a hospital, with poorhouse considerations pushed aside as being of secondary importance.²¹

Indoor Relief in Poorhouses

During territorial days, other counties built poorhouses or poor farms for indoor relief rather than county hospitals. The presence of a poorhouse was intended to discourage applications for poor relief, for the pauper would have to move to an institution that long had been associated with despair and shame. People who are so desperate as to ask for poorhouse relief were considered to be truly deserving of assistance just "for the very heroism displayed" in humbling themselves to submit to subsistence in the almshouse.²²

The models for Dakota almshouses were those found in the states that had formerly been the home of the county leaders in the East or the Midwest. Some of the first poor asylums in Dakota Territory were described in 1884 as being "fair, old-fashioned poorhouses." The inmates of the institutions were said to be the "few drones," or non-

workers, in the great Dakota "bee-hive." The only residents were those who had suffered "illness or other unavoidable misfortunes." An educated observer noted some abuses in the system, due to the "great rush of population" to the territory and the "scramble after fortunes." But such abuses in the administration of the poorhouses were, supposedly, quickly detected and corrected.²³

In the northern part of the territory, Burleigh, Traill, and Morton Counties founded poor farms in the early 1880s. Morton County had the first poor farm in northern Dakota in 1882, and Traill and Burleigh Counties followed, in 1883. Both Burleigh and Morton suffered from allegations of graft and impropriety in county administration at the time of the founding of the institutions. A "disgusted taxpayer" in Morton County believed that one of the county commissioners was promoting projects that helped his real estate interests. The complainant, referring to the commissioner as "Boss Gill," charged that Gill authorized the construction of roads that just happened to go past places where he owned property. In addition, the county clerk and county treasurer were ordered to "correct and post up their books" or face legal measures. The placement of the poorhouse in the county, taking place under the tenure of Boss Gill and the suspect clerk and treasurer, left serious questions about the propriety of the transactions

perpetrated with the railroad for the property and with the builder for the construction of the poorhouse.²⁴

Burleigh County Sheriff Alexander McKenzie, who settled in Bismarck in 1873, handled early relief requests there and boarded paupers for the county. One of the most powerful men in the history of the state, McKenzie profited from all his positions. He could get provisions to the Oleson family after an 1882 flood, care for prisoners and paupers, and manage to further his own career and fortunes at the same time. McKenzie built up extensive real estate holdings and reaped gains by renting houses to paupers, at county expense. The impropriety of a county sheriff renting his own buildings for county charges barely raised an eyebrow in Bismarck as the town grabbed the territorial capital in the early 1880s. A grand jury, late in 1883, investigated the management of county affairs and found, not surprisingly, that the county commissioners kept "no records of the poor" or how the money was expended. The court meekly stated that proper records should be kept.²⁵

Expulsion of Paupers

The poor relief provisions in territorial days were implemented if a needy person had legal residence within a county. Dakota law specified a residence period of ninety days in order to qualify for poor relief. After statehood,

the residence requirement was raised to one year. The county commissioners were required by law to provide temporary relief to paupers who were not residents of the county. But the commissioners did not have to give permanent relief to a non-resident pauper. Therefore, the county board could force a non-resident person who seemed "likely to become a public charge" back "to the place where such person belongs."²⁶

Such expulsion of paupers found considerable application in North Dakota. Just as the port of New York City found savings by forcing indigent immigrants to return to their homelands, counties in the state would send poor emigrants back to their previous residences. In 1880 Grand Forks County returned Thomas Wilson to Ontario by train. With its location of the border with Minnesota, Grand Forks County sometimes had to deny aid to persons who temporarily slipped across the state line. The county had the right in such a case to declare that the pauper was properly a "Minnesota charge," and order the person to leave town.²⁷

Other counties also spurned persons likely to become paupers or those who had relatives in other places. In 1892 citizens of the Pembina County town of Bathgate petitioned the county board for funds to pay for a pauper's passage to Olympia, Washington, so she could live with her sister.²⁸ The Stutsman County Physician, Dr. R. G. Depuy, forthrightly determined that a county pauper should be sent away from the

county because "it would be far cheaper for the county" to send him to a "warmer climate." The man would otherwise have been a county charge for "two or three years." Upon the doctor's recommendation the county board allowed the pauper \$26.80 for a ticket to Hot Springs, Arkansas.²⁹

Many others were sent away. Morton County officials spent \$35.00 for a one-way ticket to Chicago for a "French pauper" in the late winter of 1885. In 1896, Cass County sent a "young sick lady" to Hunters Hot Springs in Montana; and, later, returned an invalid woman to her former home in New York State in 1899. Burleigh County bought a railroad ticket for a "crazy man" rather than bear the burden of his care.³⁰

Even orphan children could be sent away. In the spring of 1899 a boy "in destitute circumstances" gained railroad fare from the Morton County commissioners so that he could leave Mandan. The friendless child went to the state of Washington to live with friends who would take care of him.³¹

Immigrant paupers who had not yet become official residents of North Dakota could be sent sailing back to Europe. The cost of the passage was far cheaper than providing long-term care for a person who had become an invalid. The Richland County Commissioners sent a pauper back to his homeland in 1887, spending \$52.50 for a steamship ticket for his passage. Ward County arranged

passage for Mr. Dahl and Mr. Erickson to their Swedish homeland in 1909. In the most remarkable case Grand Forks county expelled an immigrant leper from its poorhouse in 1895, sending him all the way back to Bergen, Norway. The surrounding community was said to be "greatly relieved" by his departure.³²

Treatment of Vagrants

Most counties would not give aid to hoboes or vagrants. Although the law stated that temporary relief could be granted to paupers, the county commissioners were directed to use "their discretion" in such matters. Territorial law mandated that aid be withheld from non-resident paupers unless the person was sick or injured. The traditional governmental response to begging was to ignore such requests. Tramps with no established residency had to find private parties willing to give them food or shelter.³³

Hoboes were reputed to have arisen from the trauma of the Civil War. Accustomed to camp life in the army, some "preferred to wander about the country to returning to regular occupations." At first the men walked, but "it was an easy and natural step to ride" on the trains and the "railroads became their highways." After the 1873 Panic "the hobo had come into existence as a class." By 1885 they were "recognized as a nuisance."³⁴

Seasonal farm workers, needed in the planting and harvest seasons in the Dakota wheat fields, were allowed by the railroads to catch rides to North Dakota. If the farm laborers were injured at work or became ill, the county physician or hospital often gave them medical attention.³⁵

As a main railway entrance to North Dakota, Fargo attracted a large number of transients. Observers noted that the numbers of wandering vagrants increased in times of recession or depression. Numbers of former working men took to the roads and rails after the 1873 "financial crash", for example. The depression of the 1893 led Fargo to try a novel system for dealing with hoboes. The city government decided to trade work for meals. Families were given tickets, which were to be used when tramps came to call. When a hobo approached a family for food, the family put him to work for an hour's time, after which the hobo received his ticket. The ticket was good for a "meal at a designated restaurant." Policemen could also direct hoboes to work assignments in the city parks, and then provide a meal ticket. In this manner persons who really needed help could trade work for food, but hoboes would tend to avoid the city.³⁶

The Burial of Paupers

When a stranger died in Dakota Territory, "without friends or money," the law code required that the counties pay for the burial of the pauper. The county let out the contract for such burials to the lowest bidder. Ramsey County advertised for bidders in the Devils Lake Interocean newspaper, asking for specific bids. The prospective bidder had to list the total costs for various sizes of pine boxes for "infants--children--and adults." The burial service had to include a "rough box, coffin, robe, digging of the grave, [and] tram hire."³⁷

Counties had a burial field, or "potter's field," as a final resting place for paupers. If a county had a poor farm, the potter's field was generally located near the poorhouse. Poorhouse inmates did not have far to travel get to the cemetery.

The Poor List

Publication of the names of paupers in the official reports of the county business served as one means of keeping a stigma on accepting relief. The 1887 laws of Dakota Territory followed the English system in prescribing the keeping of a county "poor book." The names of all paupers were to be inscribed in the book, along with the date of each entry. Since the poor book could consist of the minutes of the meetings of the county board of

commissioners, the listing of the poor people would then appear in the minutes as printed by the official county newspapers.³⁸

Counties often grew lax in reporting the names in good economic times. The public listing of the names served as a deterrent to proud Dakotans when the hard times came, however. Richland County commissioners, determined to limit extensive relief payments in 1888, required that each commissioner had to "make a full and detailed report in writing" for each applicant for aid. The inclusion of the name, the amount of relief, and the "general condition" of the pauper increased public awareness of welfare costs. The shame associated with poverty was emphasized when the listing of a purchase of clothing for a Pembina County pauper included the mention of three dollars spent for his underwear.³⁹

Pembina County put a double disgrace on a person whose appeal for county support faced rejection because no proof had been presented that the person was "too poor to pay." The applicant faced approbation both for applying for relief and for trying to cheat the system.⁴⁰

As relief became more extensive after the enactment of Mothers Pensions in 1915 and the extension of numerous payments to county charges during the Great Depression, the Elizabethan practice called the poor list continued. Recipients of Mothers' Aid would see their names in the

official proceedings of the county board printed in the official county newspapers. Neighbors might look in the papers to see the names of those getting Old Age Pensions or regular county assistance during the Depression, when the listing grew to extreme lengths.⁴¹

Farming Out to the Lowest Bidder

Paupers were "farmed out" to the lowest bidder on rare occasions in North Dakota. The practice was a holdover from colonial times and New York State laws copied by Dakota Territory, but it was implemented in the state when county boards felt overwhelmed by applications for relief. The practice limited the choices of paupers for care, in that the winning bid might not come from the home community of the pauper, thus necessitating a move for the poor person. The practice discouraged poor relief requests, and was intended to cut costs to some degree for the county.⁴²

Richland County, in response to public outrage at outdoor relief payments, advertised for sealed bids for the care of county paupers for the year in 1888. Bidders were to list monthly amounts they wished to receive for furnishing "houses, fuel, water, groceries, meat and clothing." The county did not have a poor farm at the time.⁴³

Indenture or "Binding Out" of Paupers

North Dakota poor relief legislation held provisions for the indenture or "binding out" of paupers and children long after other states had abolished the practice. The inclusion of the practice came about from the copying of other territorial and state constitutions as North Dakota came into the Union. Binding out was seldom practiced like it had been used in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was used at various times. The earliest state legal codes carried over a practice from New York State that had fallen out of favor there by the time of North Dakota's statehood in 1889. Legal provision for the practice in 1887 authorized county commissioners to bind out poor children in apprenticeships. The commissioners were supposed to "see that children so bound be properly treated by the persons to whom they are bound."⁴⁴

In 1891 the county commissioners of Grand Forks County bound out Frank Russell, an orphan from Inkster Township. The boy had been unable to perform in school, so an apprenticeship was arranged for young Mr. Russell.⁴⁵

In a late example, in 1912 a Stutsman County family consisting of a husband, wife and eight children (aged 2 to 19 years), were broken up by the county after living on "direct and indirect" relief for a period of ten years. The parents were directed to live at the county poor farm, and

the older children were to "be put out to work." In this sense, the children were not indentured for years at a time, but were to work for wages at the direction of the county.⁴⁶

Seed Wheat and Relief, 1888-1895

The greatest crisis for North Dakota in the 1880s came as a result of the temperamental weather. In 1888 severe frosts in May, June and August "knocked the wheat crop to the dogs" in the Red River Valley and in Barnes County. Scores of farmers in the eastern half of the state suffered from extremely poor harvests in that year. The situation got even more serious, when, in 1889 a severe drought, "such as was never known in Dakota" destroyed the crops for the second successive season. The double disaster left the farmers with no cash with which to pay their bills, forcing many to the brink of starvation. The new settlers in the region, such as a number of Russian Jews in Ramsey County, were the hardest hit by the crop failures, for they were "wholly dependent" on what they grew in the first year. The disaster was said to have devastated recently-arrived Norwegian immigrants in LaMoure County. In the depth of winter, some were reduced to eating the wheat seed that was needed for planting in the spring.⁴⁷

In order to help farmers stricken by the weather, the State Supreme Court used a permissive interpretation of Section 185 of the Constitution to allow the implementation of a Seed Grain Statute. Section 185 granted county government officials the right to extend loans for "the necessary support of the poor." Generally, this clause would apply only to paupers, but, in the seed wheat crisis, numerous farmers stood to become county charges though they were not paupers yet, in any sense of the word. The State Legislature considered loaning \$100,000 in state funds to farmers for the purchase of seed wheat in 1890, but the measure was defeated. Defying the tradition of local relief, however, the lawmakers appropriated \$2,500 in state funds for direct relief for the most needy farmers. County boards were permitted to loan local funds to farmers in North Dakota. South Dakota, with constitutional restrictions against state relief payments, also allowed the counties to extend loans to desperate citizens for seed wheat.⁴⁸

Officials in Richland County gave money for seed wheat in 1888 only to "parties likely to become county charges in case that such seed grain [was] not furnished them," and if the farmer appeared physically "able and in condition to seed and harvest" the crop. Seed would be granted only if the farmer would accept a lien against his fall crop. In

addition the county required that the crop be insured against loss by hail.⁴⁹

LaMoure County purchased 150 tons of coal from the Northern Pacific Railroad, which the railway delivered at no charge. The coal would help the destitute Norwegians through the winter of 1889-1890. Counties across the Red River Valley drained their treasuries to help their fellow citizens. When the local money was gone, the commissioners appealed to the state government. As a result of strong local pressure, the state felt forced to provide some assistance. Immigration to the state would suffer if potential residents heard of starvation in North Dakota.⁵⁰

The North Dakota State Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor, T.H. Helgeson, took on the role of State Relief Agent in the early months of 1890. As State Relief Agent, he investigated all reported "cases of destitution." Establishing himself in Grand Forks, Helgeson assisted the counties in caring for the suffering farmers in the eastern portion of the state.⁵¹

Ramsey County farmers got help in the winter of 1889-1890 from the Scandinavian Relief Committee, which saved the county board a great deal of expense, "work and worry," and carried the farmers of Scandinavian heritage through springtime. The Russian Jews in Ramsey County accepted railroad tickets to Chicago to escape the devastation. Aid to the 1,400 Indians near Devils Lake was slowly granted

through federal funds. Grand Forks County appropriated \$4,000 in April of 1890 to buy "seed wheat, and wheat for stock" for county farmers albeit with a lien on the crop and seven percent interest.⁵²

The counties provided money for seed wheat loans when drought conditions became severe. Stark County allowed \$2,500 for the purchase of seed grain for needy farmers in 1890.⁵³

The "severe depression" of the 1890s came swiftly on the heels of the Seed Wheat crisis. The depression "injuriously affected" all "classes and interests" across the state. The depression caused a "prolonged period of poor business, lessened employment, reduced wages, and general confusion and misfortune." The poor farms in Grand Forks County in 1893-1894; Cass County in 1894-1896; and Richland County in 1895 came in part as a response to the increased economic dislocations of the depression of the early 1890s. By 1895 North Dakota hoped for a "restoration of good times," according to a contemporary source in Fargo. Nationally, better times came with the discovery of gold in Alaska in 1898 and the stimulus of war with Spain.⁵⁴

ENDNOTES

1. McClure, More Than A Roof, 6, 7. Minnesota law in William W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1921), 231-248, 256, 262-265. Dakota Territory amending Minnesota law in J. Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman, eds., Dakota Panorama (Sioux Falls, SD: Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1961), 326. Outline of Dakota Territorial History in Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 99, 128, 132; also Lewis F. Crawford, History of North Dakota (Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1931), vol. I, 319.

2. Information about the evolution of Dakota Territory law codes is from "Preface To Revised Codes Of 1905," in State of North Dakota, The Compiled Laws of the State of North Dakota, 1913 (Rochester, NY: The Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company, 1914), vol. I, preface. A. B. Levissee and L. Levissee stated that the New York and California law codes were both transcribed as parts of the North Dakota law codes, see A. B. Levissee and L. Levissee, eds., The Annotated Revised Codes of the Territory of Dakota 1883, 2d ed., (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1885), iii.

3. C.S. Watkins, "Poorhouses and Jails in the North-Western States," Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of Charities, 1879 (Boston: A. Williams & Company, 1879), 97, 98, 99-104.

4. Poor laws in The Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887 (Bismarck: Dakota Territory, 1887), Chapter 22, Section 2141, 476; county physicians in Chapter 22, Section 2164.. Proceedings, Grand Forks County Commissioners, vol. 1-B, 17 January 1881, 14. Hereafter, the minutes of the county commissioners' meetings will be referred to as C.C. with the various counties identified in the endnotes.

5. C.C., Grand Forks County, 6 January 1880, 87. Further information about winter storms is in Hiram Drache, The Challenge of the Prairie; Life and Times of Red River Pioneers (Fargo: N.D. Institute for Regional Studies, 1970), 147-159.

6. "Overseer's Report of the Poor," The Wahpeton Times, 19 April 1888, 8.

7. "Charity and Aid," Wahpeton Times, 8 March 1888, 1. Oliver County in Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 29 November 1889, 3. A cursory examination of the Oliver County Commissioners'

Minutes in the aforementioned paper lent credence to the claim for very little business was conducted in the county meetings. Success quote is from a Minneapolis Journal article reprinted in the Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 3 February 1888, 1.

8.C.C., Burleigh County, 16 November 1882, 231.

9.C.C., Burleigh County, 15 January 1884, 112-113. Wooden leg in "County Commissioners," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 2 January 1885, 2.

10. Bonanza-Boom days discussed in Stanley N. Murray, The Valley Comes of Age: A History of Agriculture in the Valley of the Red River of the North (Fargo: N.D. Institute for Regional Studies, 1967), 120-149. Also Hiram M. Drache, The Day of the Bonanza: A History of Bonanza Farming in the Red River Valley of the North (Fargo: N.D. Institute for Regional Studies, 1964), 73-74.

11. Editorial, Wahpeton Times, 15 March 1888, 4, tells of a discussion of poorhouses and hospitals in Brown County in what is now South Dakota. Cass County Hospital in C.C., Cass County, 16 January 1879, 201; 4 October 1880, 296; and 6 October 1880, 298. Barnes County Hospital in C.C., Barnes County, vol. A, 25 June 1881, 34; 2 September 1882, 50; and 27 January 1883, 63. Burleigh County Hospital in C.C., Burleigh County, 3 April 1882, 182-183; 4 April 1882, 184-185; 8 July 1882, 200-201; and 10 July 1882, 202-203. Grand Forks in C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 2-A, 18 November 1887, 351; 28 December 1887, 355; vol. 2-B, 3 April 1888, 28, and 3 March 1888, 23. Richland Hospital in "New Board Organized," Wahpeton Times, 12 January 1888, 10; and "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 19 January 1888, 8. Ward County Hospital in C.C., Ward County, vol. B, 11 July 1896, 2; 7 January 1897, 58. Other towns may have built joint city/county hospitals, but such information lies outside the limits of this paper.

12. St. Luke's Hospital, founded in 1891, became Deaconess Hospital in 1899, see D. Jerome Tweton, Grand Forks: A Pictorial History (Norfolk: Donning Company, 1986), 25; and Census Bureau, Benevolent Institutions, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1905), 192.

13. Census Bureau, Benevolent Institutions: 1904, 192.

14. C.C., Cass County, vol. D, 1 October 1894, 358-359.

15. C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 2-B, 6 February 1890, 190; and "A New Manager," Grand Forks Weekly Plaindealer, 13 February 1890, 2.

16. Charles Johnson going in "Wheatland," The Casseltonian, 8 March 1895, 2; "City and Vicinity," 3.
17. "Unknown Woman Dies," Larimore Pioneer, 30 January 1908, 1.
18. C.C., Cass County, vol. D, 8 January 1895, 401.
19. C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 3, 14 August 1893, 113. Fire in "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 31 January 1895, 10. Ross in C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 3, 3 April 1895, 272; 20 June 1895, 285.
20. Ross in C.C., Cass County, vol. E, 22 October 1895, 42; "Ross A Winner," Grand Forks Herald, 24 October 1895, 3; construction in C.C., Cass County, vol. E, 9 April 1896, 112; 8 July 1896, 143, 144; 1 June 1896, 127.
21. C.C., Barnes County, vol. E, 10 November 1908, 27; Valley City--City of Five Names, 1883-1983 (Valley City: Valley City Times-Record, 1983), 43. John M. Gillette, "Poor Relief and Jails in North Dakota," Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota 3, no. 2, (January 1913), 121.
22. Editorial, Mandan Daily Pioneer, 11 May 1882, 2.
23. Elijah Coffin, "Report for Dakota," Proceedings of National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1884 (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1885), 22-23.
24. Morton County's dubious administration in "The Past Official Record," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 4 November 1882, 1; and "Special Meeting of County Commissioners," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 15 March 1883, 1. In "A Point To Officials," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 19 August 1887, 8, the editor makes allegations of continued shady practices in county purchasing practices.
25. McKenzie in County Commissioners Minutes, Burleigh County, 29 June 1881, 127; 5 July 1881, 130-131. House rentals in C.C., Burleigh County, 9 July 1880, 32-33; 3 April 1880, 10-11. Sketch of McKenzie and the acquisition of the capital in Robinson, History of North Dakota, 200-201. Grand jury in "Burleigh County," Mandan Sunday Pioneer, 9 December 1883, 1. Although the investigation of the poor relief records made the front page of the Mandan newspaper, a cursory examination of the Bismarck newspaper by the author of this paper uncovered no further information about the court's actions. It appears that Alex McKenzie had supreme control of his jurisdiction.

26. Dakota Territory, Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Sections 2151, 2152, 2153, page 478. Later residence requirements listed in Compiled Laws of the State of N.D., 1913, Chapter 38, Section 2501, page 616.

27. C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 1-A, 4 October 1880, 123; Minnesota charge in vol. 2-B, 7 January 1890, 187.

28. C.C., Pembina County, vol. C, 6 October 1892, 167.

29. C.C., Stutsman County, 20 November 1908, 289.

30. Chicago in "County Commissioners," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 6 March 1885, 1. C.C., Cass County, vol. E, 7 May 1896, 126; vol. F, 4 January 1899, 95. C.C., Burleigh County, 7 July 1880, 31.

31. "County Commissioners," Mandan Pioneer, 21 April 1899, 4.

32. "The County Fathers Transact A Large Amount of Business," The Wahpeton [ND] Times, 21 July 1887, 5. Swedes in C.C., Ward County, vol. D, 9 July 1909, 290; and 23 July 1909, 309. Leper in "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 22 November 1894; and "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 18 April 1895.

33. Illness in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2161, page 479.

34. "Suppressing Trampdom," Mandan Pioneer, 24 February 1899, 1, gives information from author Frank Willard on the origins of hoboes.

35. Hoboes and farm workers discussed in Hiram M. Drache, The Challenge of the Prairie; Life and Times of Red River Pioneers (Fargo: N.D. Institute fo Regional Studies, 1970), 189, 190.

36. Increase in tramp numbers in J.J. McCook, "The Tramp Problem: What It Is And What To Do With It," Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1895 (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1895), 288-289. Meal tickets in "City and Vicinity," Casseltonian, 26 April 1895, 3; Editorial, Casseltonian, 23 April 1895, 2. A similar plan in Ann Arbor, MI, is described in J.W. Bradshaw, "The Treatment of Tramps in Small Cities," Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1896 (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1896), 230.

37. Pauper burial in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2161, page 479. Bids in C.C., Ramsey County, vol. B, 10 January 1903, 573.

38. Keeping of a poor book listed in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2149, page 478.

39. Full disclosure listed in C.C., Richland County, vol. B, 29 February 1888, 53. C.C., Pembina County, vol. 1900, 7 February 1900, 19.

40. C.C., Pembina County, vol. C, 9 May 1905, 199.

41. Lists of names for Mothers' Pensions are in C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 9, 3 October 1916, 486; vol. 10, 7 April 1919, 213-214; vol. 12, 31 July 1925, 170-171.

42. Farming out law in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2147, page 477.

43. Article #2146 of the Dakota Territory laws was cited as the justification for the binding out of Richland County paupers as listed in "Bids Wanted," Wahpeton Times, 22 March 1888, 5.

44. Binding out law in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2165, page 480.

45. Frank Russell in C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 2-B, 17 February 1891, 292.

46. C.C., Stutsman County, vol. E, 2 April 1912, 95.

47. Frost reported in "Notes About Town," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 5 October 1888, 8. Hiram Drache's The Challenge of the Prairie, 172-173, provides further information on the frosts of 1888. Conditions discussed in Editorial, Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 24 January 1890, 5. "The Alleged Suffering," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 29 November 1889, 3. Quote of 1889 drought is from a letter "To Whom It May Concern," found in the first Minute Book, Ramsey County, n.p.; Russian Jews in C.C., Ramsey County, 8 January 1890, n.p. Russian Jews in William C. Sherman, Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota (Fargo: N.D. Institute For Regional Studies, 1983), 112.

48. "Necessary support of the poor" in "Constitution of North Dakota," in Compiled Laws of the State of N.D., Article 12, Section 185, page civ. Explanation of the section is from "County Commissioners, Kidder County," The Steele [ND] Ozone, 18 May 1904, 7. Loan information from

Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmers' Frontier, 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 108-109. Discussion of Section 185 in "County Commissioners," The Steele [ND] Ozone, 18 May 1904, 7.

49. "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 5 April 1888, 1.

50. LaMoure County coal in "The Alleged Suffering," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 29 November 1889. "Local News In Brief," Drayton Echo, 1 November 1889, 5, tells of public meetings concerning the crop failures in Ramsey County.

51. "Editorial Notes," Mandan Weekly Pioneer, 21 February 1890, 5.

52. Scandinavian Relief Committee in Minute Book, Ramsey County, 8 January 1890, n.p.; Scandinavian Relief, Devils Lake Indians and Russian Jews in "Starving Indians," Grand Forks Weekly Plaindealer, 13 February 1890, 5. Also C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 2-B, 7 April 1890, 196. Crop liens governed by laws in Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Sections 5478-5484, page 936.

53. C.C., Stark County, vol. A, 1 April 1890, 204.

54. Description of depression in Editorial, Fargo Forum and Daily Republican, 31 July 1895, 2.

CHAPTER 3

POOR RELIEF SINCE 1900

The Second Dakota Boom period began in 1898 and brought a waves of new settlers across North Dakota's wide prairies and plains. Between 1900 and 1920 the population of the state almost doubled, growing from 319,146 to 577,056. The increased population created a concurrent need in several counties for poorhouses. Pembina County attempted to procure a full-fledged poor farm but got a only a pale imitation of a true poorhouse in the town of Pembina from about 1902 through about 1910. A small poorhouse, without cropland for a poor farm and without medical facilities, was established by the county fathers of Kidder County in 1903 and phased out by 1910. In 1902 Ramsey County began a peculiar process of purchasing land for a poor farm and then refusing to outfit it for farming. These almshouse enterprises in the early years of the new century lacked the decisiveness, optimism and hope that marked the first wave of poorhouses in the 1880s; and lacked the scope of the second wave of combined county poorhouses/hospitals that arose in the depression of the 1890s. These counties were chiefly agriculturally based, with moderate-sized

communities. All were realistically hesitant about the need for such an institution in their midst.¹

While some counties were building poorhouses, others were discontinuing them. Morton County discontinued its part in the operation of its almshouse in 1897. The poor farm in Burleigh County faded into oblivion by 1904. Kidder County and Pembina County phased out low-budget poorhouses, located not on farmland but in small towns, in 1910. Varied local conditions brought about this dichotomy of purpose.²

Ward County, with a healthy economy and vibrant growth, built an impressive, stylish poorhouse in 1909. Stutsman County bought a large poor farm in 1909 and then hoped it would do more than such an institution could ever achieve. These two counties needed the poorhouses as a safety valve for unfortunates among the lower class in the burgeoning cities of Minot and Jamestown. Ward and Stutsman Counties approached a poor farm operation almost as a progressive change from the former policies of outdoor relief. The counties seemed to be caught between the methods of the conservative nineteenth century and the optimism of the new progressive twentieth century.

Outdoor relief served as the primary mode of poor relief in the counties that had no poorhouses throughout the territorial periods and into the twentieth century. Relief expenditures for paupers were quite modest in the less-populated counties of the state. Billings County, with

approximately 3,000 residents in 1920, serves as an example of a county that provided outdoor relief. Relief expenses in Billings County in 1917 totalled only \$229.38 out of a total county budget of nearly \$100,000. Relatives, neighbors and friends were able to help those who needed assistance in obtaining the necessities of life. Farmers and ranchers were quite self-sufficient and were reluctant to accept any charity whatsoever.³

Protection of children became a focal point of turn-of-the-century reform. The drive for the protection of children, however, had its antecedents in the practices of the Scientific Charity movement from 1870-1900. From the movement came a mass of institutional building, especially homes for orphan or friendless children. County governments in North Dakota afforded merely adequate provisions for orphans and abandoned children. Rural counties sometimes supported children in local homes. In 1887 Barnes County officials advertised for "some humane person" to keep an infant child whose mother could not provide proper care for the baby. Grand Forks County sent some of its homeless children to the Children's Aid Society of Minnesota in 1892.⁴

The North Dakota Children's Home represented the best part of the Scientific Charity movement. Abandoned and neglected children from counties all over the state were sent by county officials to the North Dakota Children's Home

in Fargo for residential care or for temporary placement "into Christian family homes in order that they may become useful citizens."⁵ The North Dakota Children's Home in Fargo, founded in 1891, provided service for the whole state after a period of struggles. When its new building burned down in the great Fargo fire of 1893, it used rented quarters in Grand Forks until 1894. Operated by the North Dakota Children's Home Society, it served "dependent and neglected children." Counties could send poor children to the North Dakota Children's Home by officially declaring the child to be a pauper and a county charge and by paying for transportation to Fargo. Most counties made a \$100 annual contribution to the institution. In addition, Cass County provided \$500 in 1900 to assist the Home in building "suitable buildings" on donated lots for homeless children.⁶

The Florence Crittenton Home, operated by the National Florence Crittenton Mission, opened in Fargo in 1892. The Crittenton Home provided a temporary home to "homeless or fallen women and their children." Unwed mothers could deliver their babies away from the prying eyes of local busybodies by taking up temporary residence at the Fargo institution. The directors of the organization would care for the immediate needs of homeless families, assist families to live independently outside the Home, and place

children in permanent homes, away from a parent if necessary.⁷

Fargo was also the location of St. John's Orphanage, founded by the Presentation Sisters in 1896. Destitute or orphan children were accepted there and placed on adoption lists. Sixty-five children were in residence at the orphanage in 1904, with the total growing to 102 in 1910. St. John's Orphanage placed children into adoptive homes in cooperation with the North Dakota Children's Home Society until 1923, when the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Fargo began to administer the placements of the children.⁸

Fargo became the center of child abandonment in North Dakota, due to the presence of the orphanages there. The Fargo Forum commented that abandonment was "not uncommon" in the city. The child care institutions present in Fargo handled the cases as they came to their attention, but the county government had to administer the process when infants were left alone in the community, entirely "dependent upon the charity of the citizens of Fargo." In one case in 1920 a woman from Canada left her child with a Fargo family, whereupon the family attempted to get a "pension from the county" because they were "unable to even purchase milk for the youngster." The county board investigated the case and referred the child to the North Dakota Children's Home for remedial action.⁹

The Progressive Movement came rather slowly to North Dakota, but then exploded onto the scene in the form of the socialist Nonpartisan League. But the NPL was more of a political and economic reform movement than a social reform movement. It took quieter types of radicals to change the relief system in the state. The Nonpartisan League advocated improvements in rural life and economics. National Progressive attention had focused on rural issues through the work of the Country Life Commission of 1908. This commission, a part of Theodore Roosevelt's administration, proved to be more informational than innovative. However, North Dakota, under the leadership of Professor John M. Gillette of the University of North Dakota, soon took up leadership in the area of rural sociology. One of the key elements in progressive reforms in the state, springing from the larger movement, was the founding of the Mothers' Pensions in 1915. The legislation coincided with the rise of the NPL and constituted the first major Progressive change in North Dakota relief policies in the twentieth century.¹⁰

The Mothers' Pensions sprang from the efforts of the sociologists and social workers who merged science with society in the latter part of the nineteenth century. After Missouri passed the first Mother's Pension Law in 1911, other states followed suit. Mother's Pensions provided aid for women who were the sole means of support for dependent

children. North Dakota enacted its Mothers' Pension Law in 1915. Mothers could receive up to \$15 per month per child (under 14 years of age), but the counties varied in generosity in providing this aid. Grand Forks County allowed its first payments to two families in February 1916. Cass County initially resisted the implementation of the pensions, claiming the act was unconstitutional. However, by 1917, Cass County paid out its first pensions under the plan.¹¹

D. D. Swank, a Richland County Commissioner (1917-1937) who ruled on Mothers' Pensions cases, commented that applicants "had to be really poor before they got money in those early days, and they were really poor before they asked for help."¹²

Poor farms in North Dakota often had children among the inmates. Twenty-three children under age 15 were in residence at the poorhouses in 1903. In 1910 the total was nine children under age 15 in almshouses statewide. In 1911 the Ward County Poor Farm alone had seventeen children living there among the total twenty-seven inmates. In Grand Forks County the children at the county poor farm attended school in Arvilla. In 1911 the Arvilla school district, not wanting to provide teachers for the collected children of county paupers, protested using its facilities for children who were properly residents of other parts of the county. The poor children continued to attend school in Arvilla, as

is evidenced by the presence of 16 poorhouse children attending school in Arvilla in 1915.¹³

The presence of children in poorhouses began to get attention due to the efforts of Professor John M. Gillette of the University of North Dakota. Gillette, internationally known for his work in rural sociology and sociological research, investigated North Dakota's poorhouses in 1913. He was dismayed that children were kept in the institutions, mixing youngsters with the "human wreckages" found there. "Certainly, a child should not be committed to the poor house," wrote Gillette, "save for a short period of time." Well aware that other states had passed legislation restricting or proscribing the presence of children in almshouses, Gillette attempted to arouse public opinion and lawmakers concerning the problem.¹⁴

Gillette made progress when his efforts were merged with other Progressive reformers in North Dakota. Henriette Lund, one of the first professional social workers in the state, organized the first meeting of what became the North Dakota Conference on Social Work in 1920. Conference participants formed the glimmerings of a North Dakota Children's Code Commission to advocate changes in the care of children in the state. This idea followed in the path of the child welfare proposals of other Children's Code Commissions across the nation. By 1923 the North Dakota Children's Code Commission (created in 1921) had

disseminated enough public knowledge of their goals that the State Legislature enacted a mass of proposals for child protection. These advances in child welfare concerned child labor laws, licensing of child care institutions, and legal protection for orphans and juveniles. However, the laws did not place restrictions on the placement of children on poor farms, and the practice continued. Certainly public awareness brought by the Children's Code Commission did something to limit the numbers, as did the benefits of the Mothers' Pensions provisions of 1915.¹⁵

Other states had prohibited the retention of children on poor farms during the latter part of the 1800s. In 1874, the Michigan legislature removed all children from poorhouses and opened a state public school for them in Coldwater, Michigan. New York (1875), Wisconsin (1878), Rhode Island (1892) and other states required removal of children from almshouses in order to protect them from unhealthy influences. North Dakota lagged seriously behind these other states in this area.¹⁶

In the early 1920s, North Dakota Governor R.A. Nestos requested that the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Inc., conduct a survey of the mental health system in the state. The survey included poor farms, reporting on the condition and numbers of mentally ill and mentally handicapped persons present in three county poorhouses (in Cass, Grand Forks, and Ward counties.) The three counties

had a total of 86 inmates in 1922, with ten under ten years old and eleven others under age twenty. The report concluded that most were "mental defectives," of "borderline intelligence," or were classified as "dullards." The families present in the poorhouses studied had a history of residing in similar institutions in other states, and some were suffering from the debilitating effects of marriage to first cousins. The survey concluded that children should have more protection from placement on poor farms, so that the feeble-minded might get specialized training elsewhere. The report determined that poorhouses were "not fitted to render the social service needed by the great majority" of the children placed there.¹⁷

In January 1923 fifteen children under fifteen years old were among the 120 total paupers in North Dakota's eight operating poorhouses. In addition twenty-four of the eighty-six poor people admitted to the almshouses during the year were children under age fifteen. Of the twenty-four, nine were children under five years of age. Some of the children were born in the county hospitals or accompanied one of their parents to the poorhouse for temporary shelter.¹⁸

Children were present on poor farms until the 1940s. Grand Forks county records indicate that the county still paid tuition for its child inmates to the Arvilla school district as late as 1941. The placement of children on poor

farms faded away during the 1940s. The state did not pass legislation that specifically abolished the practice, instead the juvenile courts provided alternative placement of children in foster homes.¹⁹

The North Dakota revised law codes of 1943 still included a law directing poorhouse superintendents to provide for the "education of the poor children of the asylum" at "any common school within the county." Removal of children from poorhouses came by default, for children gained support from the extensive Social Security programs for dependent children, advances in county social work placements, and a general enlightenment of responsible officials.²⁰

The Great Depression of the 1930s significantly intensified the problem of the poor. After the stock market crash in 1929, unemployment became more common across the nation. In Grand Forks Mrs. E.M. Pierce, city overseer of the poor, found a number of jobs for unemployed men with the city street department in 1930. By November of 1931, the city spent \$4,800 in payments to the poor of the city, a figure that was \$2,167.76 more than in November of 1930. City relief cases had totalled 105 in November 1930, and increased to 190 in November 1931. The men needed work, and Mrs. Pierce found employment for them. Twenty-one were given work with the street department, clearing the streets of snow from an early snowfall. Another twenty-seven

assisted the Red Cross in picking potatoes for the drought area in the western North Dakota. Odd jobs were found for another eight men and two were employed on local farms. Pierce authorized the removal of one family from the city, the supervision of one young person by the "juvenile commissioner," and sent one person to the county poor farm at Arvilla.²¹

Mrs. Pierce faced an unpleasant situation. In one month she had 818 interviews with distressed persons seeking advice or assistance from the city. She allowed aid for sixty-eight unemployed people and "fourteen widows with practically no income." Pierce had to expel two "transients" from Grand Forks, and refuse help to four applicants who were "unworthy of assistance." Private charity was swamped with requests for aid, but local merchants managed to donate some food. A large box of clothing from the American Legion was distributed immediately to "needy families on the city list." Clearly Mrs. Pierce and Grand Forks needed help caring for the heavy burden of unemployment in the early 1930s.²²

The magnitude of distress to citizens of the state was "unparalleled in its history." Unprepared for the economic collapse of banking, industry and agriculture, the state found its relief "machinery in state, county, city, and village pitifully inadequate to the task." Governments in the state "had never before been called upon to support a

large number of unemployed persons." Changes became necessary in the administration of relief due to the collapse of the Elizabethan poor law system. In North Dakota federal programs provided the impetus and framework for such changes.²³

In March 1931 Ward County officials in Minot lamented that the poor relief budget had been depleted and had been "overdrawn by several thousand dollars" trying to cope with the hazards of unemployment. The county commissioners admitted that they had not anticipated "such a calamity." County officials in Ward County and other North Dakota counties first attempted to put more stringent qualifications on relief recipients. Richland County would honor no relief claims coming from "any person operating an automobile or radio while receiving such relief." Ward County first cut off aid to all persons who owned a car and later extended the restrictions to those known to be "driving" autos and those caught "attending public dances and movies." Even these limits could not stop the torrent of relief applications. Frantically, the commissioners groped to get some help from outside the state.²⁴

In the course of the Depression, with so many people on relief, "the feeling grew that relief was not a disgrace." Although individual pride prevented some people from asking for county aid, the "combination of drouth and depression"

caused such hardship that county relief budgets were quickly overspent in North Dakota counties.²⁵

The first federal assistance came from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which had \$300,000,000 to spend after receiving authorizing legislation from Congress on 21 July 1932. Cass County applied for \$40,700 of the RFC funds in early 1933 in order to supply "relief and work relief to needy and distressed people and in relieving the hardship resulting from unemployment" in its jurisdiction. Residents of Fargo especially needed aid because the Community Welfare Association had done all that it could, but could not help all the families that needed aid. The county estimated that 900 families and 750 individuals would need relief in March 1933, and the county had already found that county expenses had already exceeded the tax collections. With four more months remaining in the fiscal year, the county desperately desired the RFC funds. With no help available from the state government, federal help looked vital. For even with an expected 800 bushels of flour from the Red Cross, county government had failed in its mission to care for its citizens.²⁶

Ward County applied for and received a \$40,000 RFC loan by November 1932. The funds bolstered the county poor fund, and helped residents survive the first months of the Depression. Stutsman County officials also sought help from the RFC in 1933. But the RFC funds were nearly exhausted by

April 1933. The responsibility for public assistance switched from the RFC to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in May 1933. FERA provided grants to states rather than the loans of the RFC program. Because of the severity of conditions in North Dakota and to gain better coordination of federal and state relief in North Dakota, the FERA Administration assumed control of emergency efforts in the state on 1 March 1934.²⁷

Soon the broad spectrum of New Deal programs made contributions to the relief of North Dakotans. Six months after FERA began its operations, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) program got underway. Persons formerly on relief could now work gainfully on CWA projects. After the discontinuance of the CWA in early 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration by executive order on 6 May 1935. The WPA provided work for thousands of North Dakotans on road, dam and building crews across the state.²⁸

Federal initiatives involving the distribution of commodities, work relief programs and agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps all helped North Dakota counties survive the Depression years. Yet the New Deal programs did not immediately dismantle the county poor farm and hospital system in the state. Instead the institutions made important but not overwhelming contributions to the counties in which they were located. The old-fashioned local

poorhouses worked alongside the new federal programs to lend aid to the increased numbers of people who fell upon hard times in the 1930s.

Two counties, Ward County in the west and Grand Forks County in the east, kept monthly tallies of the poorhouse residents. The numbers reveal the awful proportions of the economic problems besetting North Dakota. Severe and long-lasting drought in the western portion of the state forced thousands to leave the state, with the greatest numbers moving to Minnesota, Washington, and California. Others moved to the Red River Valley, hoping to find conditions better than in the Dust Bowl out west. The Grand Forks and Ward County poorhouses served the same purpose in the 1930s but had contrasting outcomes.²⁹

In Grand Forks County the population at the combined County Hospital and Poor Farm rose from twenty-seven inmates in 1928 to forty-one inmates in 1929 and increased to seventy residents by January of 1930. Totals hovered between about sixty to seventy paupers in residence at the poorhouse from 1930 until the late summer of 1934. Forty to fifty inmates were in the almshouse from 1934 to 1936, probably as the result of large federal programs operating in the county. 1936 brought a severe drought in the Red River Valley, and the poor farm population jumped accordingly to an unprecedented eighty-five paupers in January 1937. The totals remained high for the rest of the

decade, culminating in a maximum of ninety people in the Grand Forks County poorhouse with an additional twenty-seven patients in the County Hospital. The County Commissioners stated that the relief load in Grand Forks County had increased from 1938 to 1940 over prior budgets due to a "definite migration" into the Red River Valley. The commissioners urged the State Welfare Board to increase the funding for Grand Forks County because this migration had made its relief burden heavier than other counties in the state.³⁰

Ward County also experienced heavy increases in paupers in residence at its poor farm south of Minot. A count of the residents in 1927 showed seventeen paupers there; this rose to thirty-one by June of 1931; and then climbed to forty-seven in January of 1932. After 1932 the poor farm population dwindled, year by year, until in 1938, the poorhouse returned to pre-Depression inmate levels (nineteen in June, 1938). In 1940 rather than ask the state government for more money for relief programs, the county board discontinued the poor farm.³¹

Changes in the general populations in the two counties point to reasons for the divergent courses of the two poorhouses. Grand Forks County experienced an eight percent increase in population from 1930 to 1940. Ward County decreased in population by 4.8 percent over the course of the decade. Minot gained only 478 people while Grand Forks

added 3,116. Bismarck, as the state welfare administration grew during the Depression, had the largest population influx of the state's major cities from 1930 to 1940, gaining 4,406 people.³²

The Social Security program of the federal government reduced poor farm populations in some areas of the nation. The old-age assistance provisions of the plan gave poorhouse inmates an opportunity to seek shelter elsewhere. With the government money, elderly persons could afford care in private homes or nursing homes. A study of the effects of Social Security pensions on almshouse, conducted by the University of Tennessee in 1937, showed a limited impact. Sixteen states noticed a reduction in population that could be attributed to the effects of Social Security dollars. Most of these former inmates moved to private homes with their care paid for by their old-age assistance pensions. Sixteen states reported that almshouse populations had been only slightly reduced, due to the fact that various reforms in poor relief had already moved all but the impotent elderly out of the poorhouse system. Several states reported an increase in paupers in almshouses when Social Security recipients found that they could not live on their pensions.³³

The poorhouses in North Dakota contributed to the well-being of poor people in those counties that had them. In general the poorhouses held more inmates than ever before,

yet had reduced budgets during the 1930s. The Richland County Poor Farm at Wahpeton stayed at pre-Depression spending levels, but the money paid for the care of more inmates than previously. The Stutsman County Poor Farm in Jamestown, continuously filled to its capacity of seventeen people, experienced cuts from \$6,000 in 1930 to a sparse \$3,750 in 1934. McHenry County cut its poorhouse budget from \$4,965 in 1930 to \$3,535 by 1933. Even with its hospital, the Grand Forks County Poor Farm at Arvilla had its funding levels dropped from \$19,000 in 1930 to \$17,000 in 1931, and further down to \$15,000 in 1933. The budget held steady at \$15,000 until the county board raised it to \$17,000 in 1937 and increased it again in 1939, to \$21,000. Cultivation of gardens and frugal management made the available food go far, as one visitor commented, the inmates had "plenty to eat and drink" on the farm. The poor farms ran most efficiently during the 1930s, for no waste was allowed.³⁴

The Cass County Poor Farm and Hospital bore the greatest number of poor people of any of the North Dakota poorhouses during the Great Depression. In 1930 the institution had "from eighty to one hundred inmates at practically all times of the year." Approximately fifty patients and disabled inmates lived in the main brick hospital building, and another 50 more or less able-bodied men lived in the two outside barracks.³⁵

Counties without poor farms depended heavily upon federal programs and funding. With "nine of the eleven years from 1929 through 1939" bringing below-average rainfalls, many people moved away from the parched land. Billings County, in the far western portion of North Dakota, exemplified the dusty despair of the decade. In 1938, seventy-five percent of the families in Billings County were on some form of relief. The purchase of submarginal lands in the county by the federal government helped farmers leave the area, but the county lost almost half of its taxable property, and, with it, the tax revenues necessary for local poor relief. The state legislature considered liquidating the county in 1939 because it was bankrupt. Billings County lost nearly twenty percent of its population between 1930 and 1940, and seven other counties (Adams, Bowman, Burke, Divide, Mountrail, Renville, and Slope) had twenty to twenty-nine percent of their residents move elsewhere. The population of the state dropped from 680,845 in 1930 to 641,935 in 1940. The land could not support the number of people who had attempted to make a living in its semi-arid environment.³⁶

New Deal programs and benefits led to the elimination of almshouses in some states. Alabama proved to be the most notable example of the effect of Social Security programs with the discontinuance of thirty-nine poorhouses between November 1935 and August 1937. Old Age Assistance payments

allowed the elderly to move to private homes. Five almshouses closed in Arkansas, ten in Georgia, and four in Colorado during the same period. Delaware changed from county poorhouses to a single large State Welfare Home in 1933. Northern states, where poorhouses had functioned as county homes for the aged for a number of years due to the placement of persons with other disabilities elsewhere, did not experience the massive closure of almshouses, however. Massachusetts and Illinois, with urban populations, witnessed no change in numbers of almshouse inmates. North Dakota had an increase in paupers in the poorhouse during the Depression. Vermont, rural in character and with a population equal to that of North Dakota, had one poor farm close during the 1930s.³⁷

But the long-term effects of Social Security and the prosperity of the World War II years contributed to the demise of poorhouses in North Dakota. The old-age assistance payments gave poorhouse inmates the option to move away from the county institutions. Existing nursing homes added space for more residents and new facilities began to be built after 1945. The private sector could operate more care-giving residences with the federal dollars provided to elderly men and women. An additional factor was the greater expense involved in mechanized farming; a poor farm became an expensive proposition after the Depression. County commissioners determined that care of the elderly

might better be passed on to other "means and agencies" which had "more workable and convenient system[s]" than the tired old poor farms.³⁸

Ward County discontinued its poor farm in 1940, leasing the former poorhouse and property to Louis and Sophie Holum. The county board believed that the new arrangement would prove economical because the county would no longer provide equipment, supervision and labor for the farm operation. Holum's Residence for the Aged, operating from 1940 to 1945, cared for the same people who had formerly been inmates at the county farm.³⁹

Five of the seven poor farms in North Dakota closed in the period from 1940 to 1955. After fire destroyed the wood-frame McHenry County poorhouse in 1946, county officials decided not to rebuild the dwelling; former inmates found shelter in private homes and care facilities. The Richland County Commissioners terminated the County Poor Farm in 1950, declaring that the operation had not been profitable. Traill County leased its poor farm property near Caledonia to the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society for use as a nursing home in 1952. Stutsman County sold its 430 acre farm and poorhouse in 1955. Only Grand Forks and Cass counties, with county hospitals, continued operation of an almshouse institution after 1955.⁴⁰

Grand Forks County could have gotten out of the almshouse business after a fire levelled the County Hospital

and poorhouse in Arvilla in 1940. The facility moved into a refitted hotel in Larimore but it changed its focus. The farm operation in Arvilla became too far away for the superintendent to supervise properly, so the poor farm was phased out by 1951. The hotel, with improvements, qualified as a hospital until 1951, when it failed to meet state regulations for such facilities. State officials allowed the county to continue operations as a "County Home" for the elderly. The county board supervised the operations of the county home from 1940 until it closed in 1973.⁴¹

Cass County continued to use its poor farm and hospital building, built in 1896, until it was forced to make changes by the State of North Dakota. The county hospital lost its designation as such in 1951, at the same time that the Grand Forks facility lost its hospital license. The county commissioners decided to drop the hospital label and accepted a "convalescent home" license instead. The poor farm fields continued as a gainful diversion for sturdy residents until 1969, when the land was sold as residential property. The nursing home facility operated under the new title of "Golden Acres Haven" (acquired in 1962) until it was discontinued in 1973.⁴²

ENDNOTES

1. Robinson, History of North Dakota, 235, 236. Census Bureau, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1931), vol. I, 808.

2. The concept of local variation is explained in Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, x.

3. "Annual County Expenditures Nearly Hundred Thousand," The Fryburg [ND] Pioneer, 20 July 1917, 1.

4. C.C., Barnes County, vol. B, 22 July 1887, 53. C.C., Grand Forks County, 9 February 1892, 377; 10 February 1892, 379. Grand Forks County later sent children to Fargo.

5. A Ramsey County orphan listed in C.C., Ramsey County, 11 July 1903, 630.

6. Bureau of the Census, Benevolent Institutions, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 134. C.C., Cass County, vol. F, 2 May 1900, 308. James C. Baccus, "Your Gift Is Their Tomorrow: A History of the North Dakota Children's Home Society," North Dakota History 32, no. 3, (July 1965), 139, 142, 143.

7. A Cass County fatherless family received care at the Crittendon Home in C.C., Cass County, vol. E, 14 May 1897, 295. The Home is listed in Bureau of the Census, Benevolent Institutions, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 230. The Crittendon Home had been the former "Women's Christian Temperance Union Home" in South Fargo which was listed as being founded in 1891, as found in Bureau of the Census, Benevolent Institutions, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1905), 286; on page 286, the Census Bureau also listed a Florence Crittendon Home in Bismarck, located at 419 Second Street (founded in 1903), but the Bismarck location is not recorded in Benevolent Institutions, 1910. Kenneth J. Dawes, "The North Dakota Children's Code Commission of 1922: Protecting the Youth," North Dakota History, 17, gives information about the Crittendon Home. History of the Crittendon Home is recorded in Theodora Allen, "The Development of Protective Services for Children in North Dakota, 1889-1943," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1944, 98-101.

8. Benevolent Institutions, 1904, 106-107; Benevolent Institutions, 1910, 134-135. Theodora Allen, "Development of Protective Services for Children in N.D.", 141, 142.

9. "Abandon Two More Babies," Fargo Forum, 26 June 1920, 9.

10. For a discussion of the efforts of the Country Life Commission of 1908, see D. Jerome Tweton, "Progressivism Discovers the Farm: The Country Life Commission of 1908," North Dakota Quarterly 39, no. 3, (Summer 1971), 58-67.

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CHAPTER 4

CASS COUNTY HOSPITAL AND POOR FARM, FARGO

Cass County, fully organized in 1873, has traditionally been one of the foremost leaders among counties throughout North Dakota's history. Fargo served as the county seat and as the center of steamboat and railroad activities for the Red River Valley. From the Bonanza wheat farms to state political offices to commerce and education, Cass County and Fargo have contributed greatly to the North Dakota historical record. In early poor relief Cass County exhibited leadership for the rest of the state. Later poor relief measures, however, were often enacted as afterthoughts in the local political arena and proved to be a source of great conflict within the county. Always the most populous of the state's counties, Cass struggled to develop a cost-effective and humane system for the maintenance of its downtrodden poor.¹

Early relief efforts consisted of emergency supplies, shelter, or medical provision to those brought low by weather, disease, personal misfortune or economic downturns. Only when the basic needs of the early settlers could not be met, did the county government intervene. This concept is

well illustrated by the nature of the first relief case recorded in the county, when water was furnished for "E. Griffin (pauper)" in 1874, for \$5.40. The county board sent a mentally ill man to the "Minnesota Hospital for the Insane" and paid his keep for a long-term stay from 1876-1877.²

In 1879, however, Cass County sought to better organize its fledgling poor relief system. Commissioner H. Fuller received an appointment as a committee of one to "look after county paupers." Fuller became fully authorized to "make contracts for their Board, Medical Treatment, etc., and to take such other measures as he will deem expedient." One of the measures included the outfitting of a county hospital, the first in the area that was to become North Dakota. The hospital evolved as a convenience to the county physician, E.M. Darrow, M.D., making access to patients more efficient with all the patients in one centralized place. The Fargo hospital, little more than a boarding house, consisted of rented space for sick paupers and their nurses. Even though Fargo stood far from the physical center of the county, the commissioners located the hospital there because it was the trade center of the area. Commissioner Fuller realized that the county's largest city provided the greatest number of patients for the hospital.³

By 1889 the Cass County Hospital contained enough patients to require the employment of separate

superintendents for its male and female patients. J.C. Probert managed the whole operation, getting additional help when Mrs. Lizzie Probert became the matron in charge of the female ward.⁴

But the county hospital, a rented facility, proved to be an embarrassment for the county. The hospital building itself had not been constructed as a specially-designed facility for the practice of modern medicine. Instead, it arose out of convenience, in reaction to events rather than in anticipation of the county's need to care properly for its paupers. Grand Forks County residents, participants in a strong rivalry between its chief city, Grand Forks, and Cass' Fargo, had outfitted a commodious building as an up-to-date County Hospital in 1893-1894. The Grand Forks County Hospital and Poor Farm opened for occupancy in January of 1894.⁵

By October 1894 the Cass county commissioners resolved to catch up to rival Grand Forks County. The board admitted that the "building now leased and being used by Cass County for a County Hospital" stood in disrepair. They confessed that the property did not even have water and sewer connections. By humane and sanitary standards it was "unfit for use" as a hospital. The commissioners resolved to ask Cass County citizens to approve a \$15,000 bond issue for the "purchase of the necessary land for a poor farm and the erection of a Hospital" on the poor farm property. The twin

institutions would "best serve the interests of the County," and would allow the commissioners to match or surpass similar institutions in existence in other neighboring counties.⁶

Newspapermen in Casselton responded favorably to the poor-farm proposition put forth by the county leadership. Many there believed that the poor farm would offer "proper and economical care of the county poor." The Casseltonian's editors publicly urged citizens to vote in favor of the poor-farm land purchase, believing that a combined hospital and poorhouse would "save a large sum yearly."⁷

The November voter turnout on the poor-farm proposition, wrote a Casselton correspondent, proved to be "quite large for a question of this kind." Taxpayers approved the measure by a count of 986 to 660. As Cass County's governmental officials prepared to raise the funds according to the will of the people, some insightful community leaders outside of Fargo began to wonder exactly where and how the money would be spent.⁸

The citizens of Casselton, as the second-largest town in Cass County, began a campaign to persuade the county officials to locate the poor farm and hospital in their city. Casseltonians hoped that all county residents would favor the establishment of the asylum near the center of the county, which would minimize the expense necessary to move paupers and patients to the new institution. Thus, the poor

farm should be on the lines of the major railways for ease of transport. Casselton, by geography, merited attention as "by far the most central location" for a poor farm.⁹

The Casseltonian newspaper's editors believed the poor farm question "should be discussed and determined in a reasonable and amicable spirit" but realized that Casselton might have to create a "little showing of teeth" to draw attention to its cause. The city immediately organized a grassroots effort to convince the commissioners and the county as a whole that Casselton was the logical choice for a centralized poor farm and hospital.¹⁰

The city of Fargo, characterized as a "big foe," held enough power to determine the outcome of the poor farm location. The "rich metropolis" already monopolized the "courthouse and jail--built at great cost to the country taxpayers." As the "big county seat," it served as the home of "all the county officials, and their clerks." Fargo reaped "the rich travel fees connected with a swarm of courts, and the income of court expenses." Like the great Temple in Jerusalem of old, the Cass County Courthouse profited from the "never-ending tribute of taxpayers." County residents, suppliants bearing gold and silver coins, were "compelled to visit the county capital for the transaction of official business" and deposited the coins in the county treasury before journeying home.¹¹

Citizens of Casselton complained that Fargo "had her fill in everything," and were of the opinion that their city deserved "something from the County too." Casselton believed its standing as "the second city of the county," entitled it to serious consideration as the hospital center. "Previous neglect" of its claims on county largesse should, in fairness, result in actions favorable to Casselton's poor farm bid.¹²

Realists throughout the county knew that Fargo held a strong advantage regarding the hospital portion of the question due to its ready access to a number of physicians living in the city. But knowledgeable citizens pointed out that Fargo attracted paupers and sick paupers from the "Minnesota frontier," opportunists who would swarm across the border if a county hospital were located in the big city. This migration would greatly increase county taxes with so many sick persons obtaining care "on the public expense."¹³

The leading lights in Casselton hoped that county authorities would allow a "respectful hearing" to the advantages of the city after acquainting "themselves with the arguments" concerning the poor farm issue. Mayor C.R. Meredith led the Casselton businessmen in their efforts to sway the county board to the merits of a centralized location for the new institutions. The town's "two firms of attorneys" agreed to represent Casselton's views at the

county board's meetings. The Casselton businessmen and property-owners offered a site just one-half mile south of the railroad depot to the county as a prime location for a county poor farm. The reasonably-priced acreage, crowed the Casseltonians, was "as fine a piece of ground as North Dakota can boast."¹⁴

Most of the "northwestern and southwestern parts" of the county clearly favored the Casselton poor farm site. The community of Hunter, near the northern border of the county, urged other small towns in the county to "raise as much money as possible," buy a 160 acre plot near Casselton, and give the land "as a present if they will build and locate" the new poor farm on it. The residents of northern Cass County wished to avoid the longer trip to Fargo, which was on the "extreme eastern border of the county." The savings in transportation costs and a fear of control by Fargo operatives motivated the Hunter efforts.¹⁵

The village of Buffalo, however, situated near the west central edge of Cass County, made a strong effort to get the poor farm for itself. A nearby critic in Tower City mistrusted the "local sincerity" of the plan, believing that the Buffalo bid served only as a ruse to divide Casselton's strength. Since the Fargo Sun newspaper owned the Buffalo Express, the ploy clearly sought to help the Fargo bid. The Buffalo newspaper attempted to refute the advantages of Casselton's premier central location and rail connections,

stating that "people going to a poor farm are not in such a hurry as to demand rapid transit." Casselton forces pointed to the great savings in railroad fares made possible by a centrally-located poor farm and hospital. The Casselton forces denounced the Buffalo "effort to befog the county poor house and hospital question," noting that Fargo and Casselton represented the only real choices in the debate.¹⁶

The agenda for the late December county board meetings featured two main topics. Both issues--the elimination of thistles from county fields and the poor farm location--were thorny issues for debate. Twelve poor farm proposals faced the county board at the 27 December meeting. The large number of bids indicated that the county had "plenty of men who would like to sell at county expense." Fargo appeared especially formidable with a proposal put forth by a "committee of citizens of Fargo." The Buffalo and Fargo factions submitted the low bids. Wishing to keep some degree of impartiality, the commissioners postponed action until the properties had been inspected by the whole board.¹⁷

Visits to the various sites had to wait until spring. Citizens of Casselton disliked the delay, believing that the Fargo crowd could peddle considerable influence in the interim. The Fargo businessmen concentrated upon giving the county the lowest price on a property, thereby deflating the

importance of Casselton's central location. The Fargo faction offered the county a choice of two prime tracts of land at a low price of \$2,500. The citizens of Fargo would pay the difference between \$2,500 and the higher, actual purchase price of the property. The other bids ranged from \$2,700 to \$7,200. Casselton offered its site for \$4,000. Casseltonians denounced Fargo's strategy because it deflected the scrutiny of the county commissioners from the "proper basis" of the decision on a poor farm site by the most economical location in the long run. No one, however, could doubt the short-term effectiveness of Fargo's plan.¹⁸

Casselton put on its best face for the county commissioners' visit in April. "Four handsome rigs" with enthusiastic escorts served to impress the board members with the assets of the convenient poor farm property. The Mayor did his best to win over the county fathers by staging a "thoroughly pleasant event." Neighboring Buffalo made a big show of "five different spots that they thought would do nicely" for poor farm purposes.¹⁹

The first vote on the "poor farm matter" occurred in early May. Astute observers of county matters understood that one commissioner, Mr. F.J. Langer, had always been "strongly of the opinion that Casselton ought to have the poor farm." The commissioner from the northern section of the county would vote against Fargo. Fargo had a lock on the vote of two commissioners. Since Commissioner Stafford

lived in Buffalo, he would vote for his hometown bid as long as it remained viable. The county board, seeking to protect itself, agreed to use a secret ballot for determining the location. As expected, the commissioners bounced off the issue like "a rubber ball from a stone pavement." After two ballots which stood deadlocked at two votes for Casselton, two for Fargo and one for Buffalo, the board postponed the decision until the next month.²⁰

The county board voted again, month by month, from May until September. The result came out the same each time. Mr. Stafford, from Buffalo, held the balance of power but refused to commit his vote to either Fargo or Casselton. The rural citizens of the county could not understand why the Fargoians would not grant them this one concession. Critics in Grand Forks castigated Fargo for its "swine act" which tore "heart from heart in Cass county." Some pundits suggested that "the city of Fargo and [its] surrounding townships be made into a separate county." Mr. Guthrie of Casselton hinted that a group of wily men would sneak down to Fargo some night and "dig a trench over to the big slough from the Red River south of Fargo, to turn the river thus to the west of Fargo." The new geography would "place Fargo in Minnesota," thus saving Cass County from its deadly power and influence.²¹

The editors of the Fargo Forum attempted to defuse the issue by calling for the establishment of two separate poor

relief institutions. Why not, postulated the Forum, put the hospital in Fargo and the poor farm elsewhere? The hospital required close proximity to physicians, and Fargo had them. The residents of each institution would be placed therein for different purposes and the separation "would be better for each class of inmates." But the Forum had little influence on the decision, owing to its usual position of opposition to the county board. The newspaper had failed to gain designation as the official newspaper of the county, and thus criticized the board unmercifully. The main point of contention arose over the county's practice of awarding contracts for building bridges without calling for open bids. When the editors called for an investigation of shady county bridge contracts, the commissioners retaliated by closing the August meeting, using secrecy to muzzle the Forum. The newsmen portrayed various closed meetings as equivalent to the dreaded English royal "star chamber." The board became a target of the press at the same time it was being hounded by the public.²²

In the meantime, the "efficient committee" from the Fargo "Business Men's Union" used the extra time to "pull the strings" necessary to place the poor farm and hospital in its vicinity. The county board agreed to reduce the size of the poor farm property from 160 acres to only 80 acres. The owner of the proposed Casselton location, Mr. N.K. Hubbard, would not break up his acreage, which impaired its

eligibility. F.J. Langer became the sole proponent of Casselton's interests, and Fargo had captured its intended prize. Opponents to Fargo called the whole action the "biggest robbery of all," but the city had flexed its muscle and carried the day.²³

Cass County purchased 80 1/2 acres, located "three and one-half miles north of Fargo." A visitor to the former William Gamble property said it was "most beautifully located at the edge of the woods on the south bank of Red River as it bends eastward." Critics from Casselton noted that the property had no railroad connections, which would force patients and paupers alike to get there by wagon or coach. Being downriver from Fargo, the hospital was "excellently situated to enjoy the sewerage of the Gateway burg." The Casseltonian wondered if the poor farm controversy had ended or the if the actions of Fargo citizens had created "an enmity deep and lasting."²⁴

Plans for the new institution proceeded quickly. Plans and specifications for the county hospital called for a large building, "about 34' X 74', and an addition for poor house about 24' X 36', with full basement." The building was to cost less than \$10,000. To create more interest, the county board offered prizes of \$75 for the best plan and \$50 for the second best one. Seven architectural firms submitted ideas for the building, including the firm of Jason F. Richardson of Ottawa, Illinois. Three Fargo

outfits--Hancock Brothers, Andrew O. Shea, and J. Friedlander--were considered the favorites. However, John W. Ross of Grand Forks won the highest prize and the contract, with Hancock Brothers finishing second.²⁵

The county board proceeded circumspectly in the construction of the new hospital. Numbers of citizens were upset about the selection process and the editor of the Hunter Herald continued to be "madder than a wet hen about it." Other county residents expressed outrage at how bridge contracts had been awarded by the county board, charging that a cash "rake off" served as the distinguishing feature of such construction. The secretive meetings of the county commissioners made it look "as though crooked work was being done." Commissioners were indignant about unproven charges of "irregular, illegal and fraudulent acts in letting of contracts in and for Cass County." To allay such fears, all bidding for the hospital project went through proper channels and procedures. Awarding the architectural contract to Grand Forks' J.W. Ross made sense from a design standpoint and for ethical integrity as well.²⁶

J.W. Ross had plenty of experience in county hospital and poorhouse design. After all, he had just completed the plan and construction of the new Grand Forks County Hospital in Arvilla. The original wooden structure had burned down and the county replaced it with a substantial brick building. The "handsome building" had cost \$15,443.80,

complete with all plumbing, painting and decorating. The "well ventilated" hospital appeared to be an "ideal public building." Cass County wanted one for \$10,000, but the first round of bids came in \$2,000 to \$4,000 too high. To avoid even the hint of an impropriety, all the bids were rejected. Architect Ross scaled down the plans slightly in order to reduce the cost to "about \$9,000."²⁷

Bids were finally awarded for the poorhouse in April of 1896. Builder Aug. Vallentin of St. Paul, Minnesota, agreed to build the structure for \$9,478. Spriggs, Black and Company of Grand Forks captured the contract for steam heating, "plumbing and sewerage [straight to the Red River]." Work proceeded through the summer months, with finishing touches and furnishings completed by November. A three-person committee of commissioners purchased the furnishings and prepared the county hospital for occupancy.²⁸

The county officials purchased a "three seat carriage" to transport patients and new inmates from Fargo to the new Cass County Hospital and Poor Farm. A telephone line from the city to the hospital allowed for relatively rapid notification of doctors in emergency situations. A new administration of the Hospital and Poor Farm took over in January 1897. Mr. and Mrs. James Coleman accepted the positions of Superintendent and Matron, replacing J.C. Probert of Fargo. Outlying communities were pleased to note

that the Colemans were from Mapleton, not Fargo. The commissioners considered raising the superintendent's salary from \$45 to \$50 per month, but the consensus determined that "\$45 was a good thing considering the many good things on the side," basically, free food and shelter. The matron made \$25 per month.²⁹

The position of Superintendent of the County Hospital held attraction for potential job-seekers. In 1898 "numerous applications" were filed for the post held by the Colemans. County Commissioner Newton, however, introduced a resolution to abolish the position, claiming that "hospitals throughout the country" were "conducted without a superintendent." After "inquiry and investigations" he had judged that the work could be handled by "an able Matron" at a considerable savings to the county. Newton failed to convince his fellow commissioners of the wisdom of his plan, though he introduced the measure three times. The Colemans kept their jobs.³⁰

As with other poor farms, the provisioning of the institution required constant attention. The Chairman of the Hospital Committee purchased "12 cows and 40 tons of hay" for the farm portion of the operation. A new ice house became necessary in 1898, and, of course, it had to be filled with ice. New "plants and shrubbery" for the hospital brightened the aspect of the exterior. By 1901 the city of Fargo and the county cooperated to fund the erection

of a pest house, on the hospital grounds, for the isolation of contagious diseases. Other expenses involved hiring numerous employees including a janitor, cook, ward maid, three laundresses, three nurses, and a teamster.³¹

Reports concerning the operation of the county hospital and poor farm were required monthly from the superintendent and annually by the county physician. Appropriations for expenses at the institution were included in the annual tax levies for the county. By 1902 the hospital and poor farm budget stood at \$8,000 while other forms of poor relief came to \$2,500. This figure rose considerably by 1903, when poor farm costs totalled about \$10,000 and poor relief amounted to \$4,000.³²

In 1904 Mr. and Mrs. S.A. Moore supervised twenty-eight inmates at the Cass County Poor Farm. Of these, seventeen were foreign-born, and another five people had parents of foreign birth. In January of 1905, thirty-one paupers lived at the poorhouse. The county budgeted \$10,000 for the poor farm and hospital, with a modest \$4,000 ticketed for the "County Poor."³³

By 1905 Mr. and Mrs. D.A. Hodgson replaced the Moores, with no apparent controversy. The Hodgsons supervised the poorhouse and hospital for a period of five years. During their tenure, some changes occurred in the operation of the poor farm. Reverend O.E. McCracken, a member of the Ministerial Association of Fargo, asked the county board to

appoint a chaplain for the poorhouse and hospital. The board agreed to appoint McCracken to the post. Reverend McCracken, also Charity Agent for Fargo, asked the county commissioners for an endorsement of his work to coordinate public and private charity work in the city. The commissioners promised to support his organizational efforts which would result in assuring "the helping of those who seek help" and avoiding "the abuse of charity by the unworthy."³⁴

The purchasing of medicines, food and other provisions for the county hospital became regularized. By 1908 Cass County advertised for businesses to obtain contracts for supplying goods needed at the large institution. The county accepted the "lowest and best" bids for groceries, drugs, meats, ice and fuel at the hospital. The winning bidder also supplied goods for the county poor outside the poorhouse, upon the order of the county commissioners.³⁵

In 1911 the Hodgsons became overextended mentally and physically by the care required for their "invalid daughter," and the family moved to California in the hopes that its climate would "prolong her life." The pair had been "most successful" while managing the county institution, but felt that they must be true to their daughter as "their first duty." Mr. and Mrs. R.R. Gill of Casselton became the new overseers of the hospital, marking

a late victory for the town that had been bypassed as a poor farm location.³⁶

In 1910 twenty-eight paupers lived in the county poorhouse. Twenty-one of the inmates had emigrated to the United States. During the year two of the residents died. The men greatly outnumbered the women, twenty-five to three. Because of the overcrowding in the men's ward, the county government added extra living space by converting the old pest house into living quarters for the men.³⁷

When University of North Dakota Professor John M. Gillette visited the Cass County Hospital and Asylum for the Poor (about 1912), he commented favorably on the work of the Superintendent Gill and Matron Gill. He judged them to be "intelligent people who take an interest in the care of the institution." The three story brick building appeared "clean and well kept." He described the arrangement of the institutional dwelling, explaining that the county used the front side, on the first two stories, solely "for hospital purposes." "The rear part of the building," he wrote, was "the home of poor inmates" which consisted of separate rooms. About 20 paupers, the "usual nondescript and paralytic class" of people, occupied the rooms in the main building. The former pesthouse, a wood-frame building at the rear of the house, served as residence for "eight or ten more or less able-bodied men." Although they could do some

work, the superintendent had considerable trouble trying to "get regular labor from them."³⁸

Professor Gillette noted that the inmates were "largely foreign." A number of elderly persons of Bohemian extraction lived at the poorhouse. Gillette believed that the younger family members in that ethnic group lacked "family pride" because they deposited their relatives in the almshouse.³⁹

The 80-acre poor farm furnished the "larger portion of the vegetables used in the institution, and feed for the stock." Sociologist Gillette could not understand all of the financial arrangements for the poor farm, because there was "no accounting system by which an estimate" could be made of the farm's contribution to the overall budget. He did, however, list the total of the increasing expenses for the county almshouse, denoting a rise from \$13,303.42 in 1907 to \$21,951.49 in 1911. Cass County officials concentrated heavily on the poor farm and hospital aspect of poor relief, spending only \$2,535.05 in 1907 and \$4,828.12 in 1911. According to Gillette, the Fargo Associated Charities (formed in 1909 or 1910) helped care for paupers but lack efficient leaders and adequate funding. The charity association spent approximately \$3,000 in 1912.⁴⁰

Cass County continued its population growth from 1910 to 1920, rising from a total of 33,935 to 41,477. It had by far the largest population in the state. In contrast, Ward

County (with Minot as the county seat) grew to become the second most populous county in North Dakota, with 28,811. Grand Forks County had slightly less people, at 28,195.⁴¹

Relief expenditures increased during the decade, in conjunction with the increase in population. In 1915 the tax levy included \$18,000 for the County Hospital and Poor Farm, and an additional \$7,000 for the county poor. By 1920, the tax levy rose to \$25,000 for the hospital and \$9,000 for the county poor (which included the salary of a visiting nurse). But a new spending category, the Mothers' Pensions, amounted to \$21,000, causing most of the total increase for the decade. The Cass County government officers led a major legal battle with the state of North Dakota over the Mothers' Pension issue. The county commissioners resisted payment of a pension to a woman in Casselton although she and her five children were eligible for aid. The county wished to test the constitutionality of the Mothers' Pension Act. The key point centered on the power granted a county judge to set the amount of the pension to be awarded to families. The county held that the law gave the judge "a judicial power that the constitution didn't intend" to give to his office. The case served to clarify the law, and in 1917 Cass County accepted its first Mothers' Pension case.⁴²

Cass County depended upon other institutions to assist it in caring for local paupers. A number of benevolent

institutions were based in Fargo. The North Dakota Children's Home, operated by the North Dakota Children's Home Society, offered care for "dependent and neglected" children since its founding in 1890. By 1910 nineteen children lived in the institution, while the Society kept children in homes under its supervision. 1891 marked the beginning of the Florence Crittenton Home, which gave aid to "homeless or fallen women and their children." The Crittenton Home helped a total of fifty-nine adults and forty-nine children in 1910. The National Florence Crittenton Mission operated the home. St. John's Orphanage, dating from 1897, ministered to the needs of 102 orphans within its walls during 1910. The Sisters of St. Joseph started St. John's Hospital in 1900, serving a total of 1,410 patients in its wards in 1910. Fargo had the largest number of benevolent institutions within its city limits of any city in North Dakota, a fact that helped the county administer poor relief more efficiently than any other county government in the state.⁴³

The presence of the two orphanages helped the county, assuredly, but made the city of Fargo a regional center for child abandonment. Some North Dakota parents journeyed to Fargo, left infant children in the city and then fled, knowing that the babies would quickly be placed in the Fargo orphanages. Had the children been abandoned in smaller towns, the counties would have to arrange for temporary care

locally before making arrangements for travel to the orphanages. In 1917 a child born in Hunter was left at the North Dakota Children's Home, no doubt right on the doorstep. Such "friendless and homeless" children, named Glen Shafter (eight months old); Mary Erickson (two months of age); or Lucille Johnson (five days) became wards of the county and were placed in the Children's Home for adoption. County government officials became accustomed to the practice, and developed a process to get the children to adoptive homes promptly.⁴⁴

The farming aspect of the poor farm, always a secondary emphasis for Cass County, expanded in the period from 1910-1920. In 1915 the county leased an additional 60 acres west of the original property, in order to cultivate enough land to assist in growing "food and subsistence for the inmates." The potato crop of the previous year had been so bountiful that the poorhouse superintendent donated fifty bushels of potatoes to St. John's Orphanage and to the North Dakota Children's Home. The visiting committee recommended the construction of a silo to provide better fodder for the animals. The purchase of a shorthorn bull named "Western Magnet" improved the breeding stock at the farm. By 1916 the county believed that the increased acreage of land had proved to be a benefit and purchased the property upon the approval of the voters.⁴⁵

A portion of the poor farm land had been set aside as a final resting place to those who died penniless, whether at the hospital, poorhouse, on an accident scene or at home. In 1914 the lack of gravestones on this "potter's field" became a concern of the poorhouse administration. Upon the urging of the local visiting committee, the county board had finally authorized the purchase of markers for the burial sites. Robert Johnson, who submitted the winning bid of 75 cents per marker, placed simple headstones in the black earth above the remains of one hundred persons who had died in bitter poverty.⁴⁶

A progressive women's club in Fargo, the Fine Arts Club, agitated for improvements in the management of the poorhouse in 1914. Appearing before the county board, a committee from the club advocated the construction of a "screen porch at the County Hospital" for the benefit of the patients. Other suggestions of the women were supposedly "well received," but any action on the recommendations were put off until the "early summer months" of an unspecified year. The group was not put off so easily in 1918. Buoyed by advances in woman's suffrage, three representatives of the Social Economics Division of the Fine Arts Club, asked that a "woman be appointed by the Hospital Visiting Committee." One of the women, Mrs. J.F. Schoeninger, joined the visiting committee within a month.⁴⁷

Small changes occurred in the administration of the poorhouse during the 1920s. The hospital gained the use of County Physician P.H. Burton's new X-ray machine but had to endeavor to replace mundane items such as the purchase of new bedding. The visiting committee suggested that new beds be put in the "Old Men's Building," and an additional twelve beds were added in the hospital. As with most of the poor farm equipment, the beds were to be bought at "the lowest price obtainable."⁴⁸

A group of concerned citizens appeared before the County Board in 1925, wishing to convince the commissioners of the wisdom of hiring a social worker, but "no action was taken" immediately. By the end of the decade, however, a case worker, Mrs. McFadgen, became employed by the county with the mission of "investigating the county poor." McFadgen assumed the role held previously by the county commissioners, namely, judging the worthiness of a pauper's claims for aid from county poor funds.⁴⁹

By 1929 on the eve of stock market crash and the Great Depression, Cass County budgeted a considerable amount of tax money for poor relief in three major categories. The care of the county poor outside of the poor farm received appropriations totalling \$27,500. Mothers' Pensions amounted to \$30,000, while the poor farm and hospital garnered \$25,000. In 1925 the county tax levy had included \$25,000 for the operation of the County Hospital and Poor

Farm, \$21,000 for the county poor, and \$40,000 for Mothers' Pensions. Although the amounts varied in the categories, the total amount (\$86,000 in 1925, \$82,500 in 1929) was roughly the same through the last half of the decade.⁵⁰

Poor relief spending rapidly increased as banks failed and unemployment jumped in the early years of the 1930s. The poor farm took some of the overflow of humanity caught in the jaws of poverty. In 1930 "from eighty to one hundred inmates" lived in the hospital and poorhouse environs. As unemployment grew in the fall of 1932, the county added a barracks building for unemployed single men. From fifty to seventy men, at various times, were housed and fed. The men cooperated to keep the household running, under supervision from the county. These men were technically not reported as inmates of the poor farm, but the purpose of the operation was essentially an extension of the almshouse.⁵¹

In 1931 the visiting committee for the hospital told the county commissioners that the county should build a new county hospital and remodel the old building. The committee recommended "more room and conveniences for the men in the cottage." The county board did not act upon the report, although the committee presented the replacement of the hospital as "an urgent need."⁵²

Actual relief expenses exceeded the expectations of the county board even in 1930. In that year, the totals for all kinds of relief went over the \$100,000 mark. These

unprecedented expenditures forced the commissioners to make adjustments in the way the county handled poor relief. To help alleviate unemployment, the board ordered the County Surveyor to try to employ "only citizens of Cass County who are heads of families," for "all public work" within his jurisdiction.⁵³

Other problems made the situation worsen in Cass County. Grasshoppers attacked farmers' fields in 1932, and the commissioners had to commit \$5,000 in desperately-needed local funds to fight the winged hordes. Relief expenses increased to a figure over \$130,000 in 1931 and grew to over \$170,000 the following year. By early 1933 the county ran out of money because the relief budgets could not alleviate all the relief needs in the county. All possible funds had been transferred into the relief budget, including the accumulations in the "Dog Tax" Fund. Private agencies were also overburdened. The county reduced the amount it would allow for rental payments for those on the relief rolls by 20%, hoping to bring spending under some measure of control. At the same time, the board applied for aid from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation in order to pay the next two months' relief bills. Although the Red Cross had given the county enough flour for each needy family, the situation was catastrophic.⁵⁴

Help came slowly, and by various means. By October 1933 the county selected twenty young men to work on

"reforestation" work for the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Bismarck. The Fargo Park Board offered quarter-acre plots for the use of families on the "county poor list" as vegetable gardens. The county hired a new county relief worker, Thomas A. Hendricks, to assist in administering aid to its citizens. Hendricks dropped the word "poor" from his department's name, henceforth, he operated the Cass County Relief agency, not the "Poor Relief" department.⁵⁵

The county board determined by 1934 that the relief burden could only be handled by federal programs and administration. Some of the fields in the western portion of the county had been "blown out" from the combination of wind and drought. In a remarkable confession of the failure the old poor relief system was "declared inadequate" by the board, and they requested that "the proper agencies of the Federal Government . . . assume the entire burden of relief in Cass County." The commissioners felt unable to continue "paying the larger share" of the cost of public relief. In the regular meetings, various forms of federal programs were considered. Civil Works Administration (CWA) projects held hope for employing county citizens, and various plans were investigated. Separating the poor farm from the hospital operation received a measure of consideration as a potential public works project. The Old Age Pension program held great promise to help in the reform of the welfare system, and the county grasped it closely. So many applications

poured in that the county government had to meet for three days straight before accepting 142 of them.⁵⁶

While expenditures for relief for 1934 were reduced to just over \$110,000, the initial federal measures were considered inadequate for the overall good of the county. Federal Emergency Relief Administration funding for Cass County was requested, in order to care for the "needy in need of medical attention" over the winter. The Cass County Tax Payers Association appealed to the county fathers to "cut down instead of increase expenditures" on poor relief. Although farm valuations had been reduced, the property tax burden weighed heavily on citizens who had little available money. The commissioners reduced the budget somewhat but felt that the suffering had to be alleviated by authorizing relief spending.⁵⁷

In late 1934 the county board unanimously supported the implementation of the Townsend Old Age Retirement Plan or "some National Act" to bring the nation out of the grips of the Depression. The commissioners saw the suffering of fellow citizens who were "left without opportunities of applying themselves to anything whereby they may be able to properly maintain themselves," and wanted to change a society which was "breaking down the security and future prospects of our entire population." Thus when the Social Security program became available, the county board promised to faithfully pay part of the cost.⁵⁸

Some relief and economy measures were quite unusual. The contract for the burial of county paupers went to all six Fargo undertakers who agreed to cooperate to provide the service. The six firms took turns burying paupers, passing the business to the next firm "in alphabetical order." The county board decreed that no county relief money could be spent for "teeth or [dental] plates for the county poor" until the county could "see how the taxes" came in. The county persuaded the WPA to start a project worth \$30,000 to \$40,000 for the "construction of outside toilets for the various WPA projects, other political subdivisions, and private citizens." The outhouses would be assembled in a room and then "hauled out to their locations."⁵⁹

New Deal programs aided in the survival of the county and its citizens. The work of Federal Relief Administrator E.A. Willson and the transformation of the American welfare system provided for a modicum of recovery after 1935. The county had to pay its share of costs, but the federal help worked for the benefit of Cass County citizens.⁶⁰

The taxpayers' group in the county remained uneasy about the Depression and its supposed solutions. The group had some political success in 1938, when its pressure led the county board to cut the proposed county budget by about \$50,000. The group and its president, Mr. Joseph Runck of Casselton, urged the board to "divorce itself from all direct state aid for relief to avoid dictation from state

officials on relief work." The association believed that the work could be "handled more efficiently by the county alone." J.M. Cathcart maintained that the state relief officials would "perpetuate" its programs as a "permanent setup" once the relief emergency had ended. The commissioners cut the amount slated for the "county poor" from \$85,000 to \$80,000. The poor farm and hospital, vital in the overall relief picture, got \$26,000 for the year.⁶¹

The Cass County Poor Farm and Hospital proved to be a silent partner to larger programs in the 1930s. The actual expenses for the combined institutions came to \$20,000 to \$25,000 throughout the decade. The hospital continued to provide vital medical service to county residents afflicted with illness and burdened with financial travail. The barracks at the poor farm were filled to capacity, fulfilling its function as a work-relief facility. The poorhouse and hospital merited little mention in the newspapers or in the meetings of the board. But the contributions of the superintendent and matron of the poorhouse allowed the county to handle its relief burden.⁶²

In 1943 Mr. and Mrs. Bert J. Tandsetter assumed the administration of the hospital and poor farm. In that year some improvements were made in the plumbing and linoleum floors were laid on the first floor. The Tandsetters supervised an institution with a budget of \$28,721 in 1945, with salaries increasing since 1940.⁶³

By 1949 the county appropriated \$50,000 for the county hospital. Seventeen persons were on the staff, including four nurses, one male orderly, two cooks, "six girls for miscellaneous work, a laundryman, two firemen and a hired man." The County Physician, Dr. Arthur Burt of Fargo, made daily trips to the hospital. The county built a "third separate barracks for aged men" in 1948. Other improvements included two metal fire escape chutes for the second and third floors of the hospital building and the purchase of a large clothes washing machine and a electric "deep freezer."⁶⁴

The average population of the poorhouse and hospital was "about 120 patients and residents." In 1948 there were twelve women patients in the main hospital building, with a total of fifty-four "bed-ridden" inhabitants in the hospital. Approximately seventy men lived in the three barracks on the farm. Each person in the barracks had his own "dresser and bed." The residents received \$47 per month from old age pensions and paid \$45 of that for their care. The other two dollars could be spent for "personal items." The hospital provided tobacco for those who desired it.⁶⁵

The poor farm utilized seventy-eight acres for crops, which included oats, corn, barley and potatoes. Residents helped care for the 1 1/2 acre garden, providing food for themselves and those who could not work. The kitchen staff supervised the preparation of "5,000 cans of vegetable and

fruit" from the bounty of the farm. Animals on the farm included "400 chickens, seven hogs for brood purposes in the spring, two horses and three cows."⁶⁶

The original building from 1896 had proven to be too small, for it had been built when the population of the county was considerably less than in the 1940s. Critics of the building stated that it was in "a deplorable condition." A County Hospital Inspection Committee disagreed with the critical appraisal of the building in 1949. The Committee had recommended the replacement of the hospital "a long time ago," but realized that the times had not allowed such a possibility. The Committee granted that the building was old and "not fireproof," but good maintenance through the decades had made the building "as perfect of its kind as a building of its age could be."⁶⁷

The addition of a 55,000 gallon water supply system in 1949 and the two escape chutes brought the hospital up to state fire code standards, but new state standards for hospitals caused difficulties for the institution by 1951. The State Health Council withheld the license of the Cass County Hospital due to its failure to measure up to the updated requirements set by the state hospital act of 1947. The problems involved failure to employ enough registered nurses; lack of sufficient bath, shower and toilet facilities for the patient population as defined by state regulations; and outmoded surgical wards. The county board

decided to drop the designation of the building as a hospital and instead opted for a "convalescent home" license. Dr. Burt, County Physician, acknowledged that the hospital had been used as a nursing home since the end of World War II. Patients who required surgery were moved to Fargo hospitals.⁶⁸

Cass County operated the facility as a nursing home throughout the remainder of the 1950s. Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Myers replaced the Tandsetters as superintendent and matron of the Cass County and Hospital and Farm in 1960. Mrs. Myers brought experience as a practical nurse to her position, while Myers had worked "nine years as state hail insurance manager, two years as a field inspector for the state laboratories department and for several years had interests in a Fargo liquor store and two cafes." Mr. Myers had also sold insurance. The county did not budget any funds for the County Hospital and Farm in 1960, since the Social Security and welfare payments of the patients paid the costs, which totalled \$96,303.99 for the year ending 30 June 1961.⁶⁹

A panel discussion in the Fargo Elks Club lead to a movement to change the name of the Cass County Hospital to a name that carried "no stigma." Mrs. Manfred Ohnstad of Southwest Fargo spearheaded the drive to change the name from the "asylum for the poor or the poor farm." Ohnstad believed that a name change would reflect the modern

character of the institution, which functioned well as a nursing home. The County Board agreed with the idea, accepting the new name of "Golden Acres Haven" in 1962.⁷⁰

The county commissioners sold the farm portion of the old hospital property in 1969. The property, located next to a golf course, had sufficient value for residential housing to bring \$151,625 into the county treasury. Roy Van Raden of Moorhead, Minnesota, bought 97.22 acres, which did not include the nursing home facility.⁷¹

In 1968 the State Welfare Board reduced the amount it would pay nursing homes for welfare patients, causing the county board to "call for a professional survey to determine whether the county should continue in the nursing home business." By 1973 the commissioners decided to phase out its operation of the "Golden Acres Haven." The patients were moved to other nursing home facilities, and the institution closed on 1 April 1973.⁷²

Equipment at the county home was sold at auction in May 1973, and the site of the old hospital became the new Trollwood Park. The county authorized the demolition of the old hospital building, and two of the barracks were moved to the county fairgrounds. The barn remained on the site and remains in use as an arts center for the city of Fargo.⁷³

Cass County operated the first county hospital and kept in operation, several forms, longer than any other county. The administration of the institution through the years was

competent, marked by long tenures by the administrators. No cases of fraud or abuse of inmates were reported, due, no doubt, to the location of the poor farm close to the county courthouse in Fargo. Communication between the county board and the poor farm appeared to be closely monitored, with frequent visits to the site by both the visiting committee and the county commissioners. The Cass County Poor Farm rates as among the most humane of the institutions located in the state of North Dakota.

ENDNOTES

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4. C.C., 7 January 1889, 208.

5. C.C., Grand Forks County, vol. 3, 11 January 1894, 157.

6. C.C., vol. D, 1 October 1894, 358-359.

7. "The County Poor Bonds," The Casseltonian [Casselton, ND], 28 September 1894, 2. Editorial, Casseltonian, 2 November 1894, 2.

8. "\$15,000 County Bonds," Casseltonian, 13 November 1894, 3. Official vote tally in C.C., vol. D, 17 November 1894, 379.

9. "\$15,000 County Bonds," Casseltonian, 13 November 1894, 3. "The County Poor Farm," The Record 1, no. 3 (July 1895), 36.

10. Editorial, Casseltonian, 23 October 1894, 2; "Additional City Items," Casseltonian, 16 November 1894, 2. "Poor Farm Meeting," Casseltonian, 16 November 1894, 2.

11. "Big Foe" in "The Poor Farm At Casselton," Hunter Herald article reprinted in full in Casseltonian, 18 December 1894, 2. Editorial, Casseltonian, 18 December 1894, 2. "\$15,000 County Bonds," Casseltonian, 13 November 1894, 3.

12. "Casselton Aroused," Casseltonian, 16 November 1894, 2; "City & Vicinity," Casseltonian, 7 December 1894, 3.

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17. C.C., vol. D, 7 December 1894, 391, 392; 27 December 1894, 396. Editorial, Casseltonian, 1 January 1895, 2; "City and Vicinity," Casseltonian, 1 January 1895, 3.

18. "The Proper Basis," Casseltonian, 11 December 1894, 2. Details of Fargo bid in "The Poor Farm," Casseltonian, 28 December 1894, 2.

19. "An Official Visit," Casseltonian, 19 April 1895, 3.

20. "City and Vicinity," Casseltonian, 11 December 1894, 3. "The Poor Farm," Casseltonian, 10 May 1895, 2. C.C., vol. D, 8 May 1895, 467. Editorial, Casseltonian, 11 June 1895, 2.

21. Votes in C.C., vol. D, 8 May 1895, 467; 7 June 1895, 479; vol. E, 13 July 1895, 2. "City and Vicinity," Casseltonian, 10 September 1895, 3; Grand Forks Plaindealer quoted in Casseltonian, 13 September 1895, 2.

22. Editorial, Fargo Forum and Daily Republican, 10 September 1895, 2. "Violating the Law," Forum, 10 July 1895, 1; Editorial, Forum, 11 July 1895, 2; Editorial, Forum, 6 July 1895, 4; "That Tax Levy," Forum, 15 July 1895, 4; Editorial, Forum, 1 August 1895, 2; Editorial, Forum, 1 August 1895, 2.

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36. "Official Proceedings," Fargo Forum, 11 May 1911, 7; "Cass Commissioners," Forum, 4 May 1911, 10.

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39. Gillette, 122.

40. Gillette, 122, 103, 117.

41. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the U.S.: 1930, vol. I, Population, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1931), 808, 809.

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69. "C.J. Myers, Wife Get Cass Hospital Posts," Forum, 30 December 1960, 3. Budget in C.C., vol. O, 13 July 1961, 4,351.

70. "Cass Hospital Name Change Campaign Afoot," Forum, 6 June 1962, newspaper file collection; "It's Official, Name of Cass Hospital 'Golden Acres Haven,'" Forum, 5 October 1962, 2; also C.C., vol. O, 4 October 1962, 4,457.

71. C.C., vol. P, 4 June 1969, 5,103; "County Farm Sold to Van Raden," Forum, 4 June 1969, 11.

72. "Cass Home Heads Resign, Board to Study Disposal," Forum, 9 May 1968, 22; "The Last Sorrowful Stop," Forum, 26 May 1968, C-1; "Professional Study of County Home Set," Forum, 15 May 1968, 3; C.C., vol. P, 31 January 1973, 5,441.

73. "Squirrels, Ghosts Live Alone After Golden Acres Auction," Forum, 27 May 1973, 1. C.C., vol. P, 24 April 1973, 5,436. "Trollwood Suggested As Name for Park," Forum, 5 February 1975, 32.

CHAPTER 5

BARNES COUNTY HOSPITAL AND FARM, VALLEY CITY

No county in North Dakota ever matched Barnes County for its variety of poor relief experiments. Shortly after it was fully organized as a part of Dakota Territory in 1878, Barnes County officials tried virtually every means of poor relief. The county seat, Valley City, became the center of varied programs to assist county residents in periods of economic hardship.¹

The early poor relief efforts were characterized by sloppy record-keeping and vague authorizations for work ordered. Expenditures in Barnes County were under the control of County Treasurer A.M. Pease, and he kept himself busy attempting to cover up his theft of county funds. By 1884 other county officials uncovered his embezzlement of about \$29,000 from county coffers. After that date financial procedures were better supervised, and all county actions, including poor relief, were conducted under closer scrutiny.²

An overseer of the poor, John Russell, was appointed in early 1880. Russell judged the propriety of granting county poor relief funds to supplicants for aid. For instance,

Russell authorized payment of \$8.00 to Mr. John Morrison for providing board for a pauper in that year.³

In 1881 the county established a "temporary hospital" for the care of patients who were too poor to pay for medical services. It appears that S. B. Coe operated a larger hospital/boarding house for the county poor, since he received payment as the "Superintendent of [the] Poor" regularly by December of that year. Other landlords also took care of county paupers at locations other than the centralized hospital/boarding house. For example, Hans Oppegaard obtained \$118 in county funds to care for an unlisted number of paupers in December 1882.⁴

By 1882 the temporary hospital apparently became a permanent hospital. Although the county commissioners had passed no resolutions to obtain a hospital, the county had one and outfitted it with "comforter[s]" and "bed and pillows."⁵

The county board called for a special election in May 1883, authorizing a county-wide vote on the establishment of a poor farm for paupers. Although the voters defeated the proposition by 28 votes, the county records mention the existence of a county "poorhouse" in October of that year. The poorhouse probably existed in the same building with the county hospital. The county paid \$1,000 to Charles Hollinshead for the official purpose listed as "repairing

hospital." John Block [or Black] supervised the county hospital/poorhouse in 1884.⁶

After County Treasurer A.M. Pease's indictment for theft of county funds in 1884-1885, accountability for county expenditures tightened up. The new Superintendent of the Poor, J. J. Connelly, received instructions from the county commissioners to "render to the Board a statement of the amount of expenses incurred by him for each individual." The prior practice involved "cash advanced" to the superintendent for distribution to paupers. Because of Pease's perfidy, the cash-strapped commissioners urged the "strictest economy" upon Superintendent Connelly.⁷

The poor relief system became regularized in 1885 when the county officials required the keeper of the poorhouse, William Thomson, to sign an official contract for his services. Thomson had been operating the poorhouse for some time without a contract. Thomson's responsibility was to provide board and basic care for poor people in the county poorhouse.⁸

Superintendent of the Poor J. J. Connelly investigated poor relief requests and provided supplies to the "worthy" poor. Connelly also functioned as an old-fashioned overseer of widow's property. He managed the farm of the Widow Collins, hiring help and purchasing all necessities for her. All farm operations, including "cutting and stacking hay," were a part of Connelly's supervisory tasks. Under his

management, the farm came out "\$155.40 ahead of expense" for the year 1885.⁹

William Thomson served as keeper of the poorhouse from 1885 until his dismissal in January 1887. Thomson became the subject of an official investigation by the county commissioners after violating his contract with the county. The commissioners heard the evidence and pronounced the verdict that Thompson was "an unfit man for that position," and summarily dismissed him. The substance of the charges against Thomson regarded his improper manner in the use of county property at the poorhouse.¹⁰

The county immediately hired Mrs. Ida G. Fox as the keeper of the county poorhouse. To prevent the theft of poorhouse furniture and other property, the county board authorized a listing of all county property at the poorhouse, so Mrs. Fox would then be held responsible for that official list. Fox supervised the poorhouse from 1887 until 1890, obtaining 30 cents per day for each child three to ten years old, and 60 cents per day for children age two to three, but children "under 3 years and not orphans" received free care. The rates for adults were specified by contract, at about 54 cents per day.¹¹

The depression of the 1890s affected poor relief in Barnes County. During this decade, the county preached a doctrine of deterrence by issuing railroad tickets to new residents who seemed likely to become permanent county

charges. The county officials did not hesitate to spend \$100 on tickets for Joseph Diebold, his wife and four children. The exact destination being unclear, the tickets allowed for passage to "some point in Canada." The money included, grudgingly, a small provision for "what clothing [was] absolutely necessary" for a train ride north in December cold. Others among the faltering poor were sent away to Butte, Montana; Duluth and St. Paul, Minnesota; and Hot Springs, Arkansas. Some got a passage to other points within the state, to a previous residence in Fargo or Jamestown or to other places in North Dakota.¹²

Barnes County gave a generous measure of seed wheat to "Peder Olson, pauper," to help get himself back on his feet. But the county fathers limited other supplies to the poor. An 1894 measure limited "all parties being supported by the county outside the county poor house" to the basics of life-namely, "flour, beans, meat, tea or coffee, salt, fuel, potatoes and soap." In the poorhouse itself, the manager, Frederick Grasser, fed and sheltered the inmates for a charge of "50 cents per day." In 1890 six inmates resided at the poorhouse. Two were foreign-born and two others were born in the U.S. of foreign parents. The remaining two were born of a parent or parents of "unknown" nativity.¹³

The poorhouse building stood on the western edge of Valley City, under the shadow of high bluffs. Although it lay just six blocks west of the county courthouse, the

poorhouse remained on the outskirts of the prosperous center of the community. In 1897 it the subject of renewal. The county commissioners appointed a committee to "look over the poor house and arrange for fixing" the dwelling. Because the house stood on one small city lot (lot 12 in Block 15 of Benson's Addition to Valley City), the committee initially felt that the building should be moved to a larger property. Soon the prospect of purchasing the rest of the city block became the favored scheme. The other lots would make a good-sized garden to help feed the almshouse residents and would give them honest toil, as well. Lots 1-18, minus #12, came to be the poorhouse grounds for a mere \$250.¹⁴

Local workmen fixed the roof of the house and added a "good stone wall" foundation for the structure. A "neat porch" offered new comfort for sweltering summer evenings. The "overseers room" got a new layer of wallpaper. County officials felt confident that Overseer Frederick Grasser and his wife were doing well for the inmates "under the present circumstances." A small barn sheltered Grasser's team and buggy. After being thoroughly painted, re-plastered and "Kalsomined" (for germ-killing), the poorhouse seemed ready for the new century.¹⁵

However, in 1901 the county physician recommended that "an addition of 20 feet be built" on the west side of the poorhouse for use as an operating room. The county board admitted that the building was "very much crowded" and

consented to the construction of the operating room. The contractor raised the roof at the same time, which afforded "larger windows in all rooms" and gave "better ventilation" in the whole building. The cost totalled about \$900, all told. Two coats of new paint on the outside of the poorhouse improved the outlook of the residents and the townspeople of Valley City toward the almshouse.¹⁶

By 1904 the commissioners opted for a county-wide referendum on the purchase of a larger poor farm property. Twelve paupers (ten foreign-born, one Black) filled the rooms of the poorhouse on 1 January 1904. The citizenry agreed that an asylum for the poor seemed "advisable," passing the measure with 1,766 affirmative votes to a mere 409 nay-sayers. It took another two years before the commissioners decided upon the price of the poor farm and hospital package. The voters again approved the measure for an institution priced at \$15,000. In a closer margin, the "yeas" outnumbered the "nays" by 1,159 to 814.¹⁷

It took another two years for the county officials to purchase eighteen acres on the east side of Valley City, just across the Sheyenne River. At \$3,500, the land represented a bargain. The site, not easily accessible from the city until a footbridge was built, stood near the rim of hills on that edge of the city. In purchasing such a small poor farm site, the commissioners plainly indicated that the new building would be more of a county hospital than a

county poor farm, for the acreage was too small for efficient farming.¹⁸

Hancock Brothers, Fargo architects, designed the large combined "house and hospital." The two-story structure featured a Neoclassical triangular front gable and a stylish cupola. Airy porches on two sides gave a healthful aspect to the building. Valley City builder, W.J. Curren, secured the construction and plumbing contracts for the brick structure.¹⁹

Costs exceeded the \$15,000 limit. The Board of County Commissioners decided to build a new pest house at the site, in order to provide isolation for people plagued with contagious diseases. The pest house, (building cost: \$1,045), replaced the old one (formerly the German Lutheran parsonage) bought for only \$300 in 1903. By the time that a barn (\$900), an artesian well, and a chicken house (\$198) were added on the site, the total costs became considerable.²⁰

County officials hoped to offset the costs of the new Riverside Hospital by attracting paying patients. The second floor contained private rooms and an operating room reserved for paying patients. The first floor was "set aside for the use of the county poor," with "three wards, two single rooms, a nurses' room, superintendent's room, and public parlor." The attic held "a typhoid ward, medical floor [for paupers], and nurses' room." The basement

included a "kitchen, two dining rooms, a store room, furnace, bath, laundry, two pantries, a bed room for the furnace man, and the cooks' room as a part of the store room."²¹

The Riverside Hospital opened in 1910 with a total of four resident paupers, all foreign-born. Mrs. Lois Getchell served as the matron, keeping the position she had held at the old poorhouse. County physician, Dr. S.A. Zimmerman, supervised the modern institution. County taxpayers seemed happy with the concept but not with the cost. The total price came to \$25,735.55, including land acquisition costs, a figure far higher than the promised \$15,000. By 1911 the county board responded to public concerns by appointing a committee to investigate the "comparative costs of the old and new county hospitals."²²

The committee found that the receipts from the paying patients offset most of the increased operating costs of the new hospital. The difference between the old and new plans amounted to a modest \$114.45. The commissioners sent the report to the newspapers in the county for the "benefit of the taxpayers" and their concerns.²³

According to Professor John Gillette, the eminent University of North Dakota sociologist who visited the hospital in 1912, the county placed emphasis on "the hospital idea." He stated that "the proper care of the poor" stood as a "secondary consideration." A pauper with

tuberculosis could not be properly separated from the other residents. Gillette questioned what the hospital would do with sick women or sick babies. The emphasis upon the hospital aspect of the operation became reflected in the choice of the manager of the Riverside Hospital. Mrs. Getchell, a holdover from the old poorhouse, resigned her position in late 1911. Her replacement, Mrs. John Simons, quickly gave way to Miss M.E. Canning, who gained the title of "Matron and Head Nurse of the County Hospital" in 1913. By 1914 the modest poor farm gained a separate manager under the ultimate direction of the matron. The matron/nurse earned almost twice as much in salary as the manager of the county farm, \$1,020 to \$600.²⁴

Constant improvements were needed in the modern hospital. An investigating committee recommended a new coat of varnish on the floors by 1912. The walls had to be continually "rekalsomined" for sanitary purposes. The committee apparently responded to Professor Gillette's call for a "diet kitchen," to separate food served to paupers from that prepared for patients. For safety, the committee urged the purchase of "sufficient fire escapes," and for the "convenience of the public," the group wanted a footbridge installed over the Sheyenne River.²⁵

The county farm operation slowly expanded from 1910 to 1920. At first the farm served as a large vegetable garden, providing fresh food for the patients and inmates at the

Riverside Hospital. The little surplus of vegetables looked good to the public, but added little to the county ledgers (\$14 in 1913). Gradually, livestock were added to the farm, and the feed bill rose year by year, from \$120 in 1915 to \$1,200 in 1920. The farm manager's salary grew also, from \$720 in 1915 to \$1,200 in 1920 (almost equal to the hospital matron's pay of \$1,320).²⁶

Of course, the new combined hospital and poor farm did not provide aid for all the poor people in Barnes County. Those who received help in their own homes or received rental payments got assistance from the county much as they had before until the Mothers' Aid program started in the middle of the decade. But the amount of aid increased from \$3,500 in 1915 to a considerably greater \$11,000 in 1920.²⁷

Barnes County officials sold the buildings from the old poorhouse on the west side of town but realized only a small gain from the transactions. The barn brought only \$30, and the "old county poorhouse" brought \$250 in 1918.²⁸

The County Hospital and Farm continued as an efficient operation throughout the 1920s, perhaps the best in the state. The farm aspect of the institution waned to the status of a "small potatoes" operation by 1925, with a tiny budget of only \$100. The county spent considerable sums on nurses and "servants"--laundresses, cooks, and assistants, showing its emphasis on the hospital aspect of the dual facility. By 1929 the county commissioners believed that a

private institution could operate the county facility more efficiently than the county had done.²⁹

The county board negotiated a lease of the hospital and 18-acre property to the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society. This progressive move led to a name change for the hospital, from the "county hospital and farm" to the "Old Peoples Home." The Good Samaritan Society agreed to "receive all County Poor patients," at a fixed fee, to the satisfaction of both parties.³⁰

Barnes County thus turned over the operation of its institution for the poor just prior to the traumatic years of the early Depression. The first lease continued for a period of five years, and the county joined in the various New Deal programs, unencumbered with the administrative woes of operating a poor farm or hospital. Barnes County commissioners participated in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration programs in 1934. In 1936 after an "almost complete crop failure" in the previous year, the Board sought to join a Federally-sponsored "county-wide road program." The commissioners felt that the measure would "furnish work for the farming community" which had endured so much recent suffering.³¹

The county sold the old poor farm property, all of Block 15 in Benson's Addition, to the Park District of the City of Valley City in 1935. The purchase price of \$1.00 reflected a courtesy of the county to the city. The city

put its unemployed citizens to work in the block, creating Pioneer Park on the location of the dwelling-place of the poorest among the county pioneers.³²

Later, the Lutheran Hospitals and Homes Society of America, Inc., successors of the Good Samaritan Society, purchased the hospital property from Barnes County in 1942. The Old Folks Home continued operation on the 12.7 acre site through the decade.³³

The hospital building no longer stands on the site. The former location was just south of the present-day Eagles Club property near the Sheyenne River. A golf course lies just to the north of the Eagles Club.

In summary, the first Barnes County poorhouse represented one of the sorriest efforts in North Dakota poor relief history. Gillette labeled it a "miserable makeshift" operation. The poorhouse on the west side of Valley City truly had an uncertain parentage, a despicable keeper, a confusing jumble of roles as both a hospital and a poorhouse (while succeeding at neither role), and a hodge-podge of added wings, porches and roofs.³⁴

By contrast, the Riverside Hospital represented one of the best efforts for efficient, caring poor relief in the state of North Dakota. Gillette gave the new hospital mild praise as a "relatively modern institution." Yet, the hospital compares favorably with any of the other North Dakota county hospitals of the same era. Part of the reason

lies in the selection of an educated nurse as matron of the Riverside Hospital. The other reasons lie in the nature of Barnes County. The relatively stable farming population of the county stayed quite prosperous throughout the existence of the county hospital after 1910. Barnes County's modest-sized population fit the size of the hospital/farm institution. Finally, the wealth of the fertile farms allowed Valley City to provide steady jobs for county citizens in its businesses and in the State Normal School located there.

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long, ed., Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), vol. 5, 179.

2. County Commissioners' Minutes, Barnes County, vol. A, 24 May 1884, 112. The Pease case occupied the attention of Barnes County officials for a number of years, because the county attempted to get the funds back from former Treasurer Pease. It seems that the early records in the county were kept in a haphazard manner in order to cover graft by Pease and other county officials. Burleigh and Morton County also experienced corruption in early county government, but the county commissioners' minute books in those counties were far more orderly than those of Barnes County.

3. C.C., vol. A, 3 May 1880.

4. Temporary hospital in C.C., vol. A, 25 June 1881, 34. Coe listed in 23 December 1881, 39; 22 January 1882, 41, and later. Other board provided by J. M. McPherson in 11 March 1882, 42; and D. O'Malley in 18 March 1882, 43. Oppegaard in 27 December 1882, 57. It appears to the author that plenty of slack was allowed in the poor relief system so that political favors could be granted through the poor relief system, for the records do not indicate the number of paupers boarded at someone's house nor are the lengths of stay or names of the paupers listed.

5. Further investigation into the county hospital history is needed to clear up confusion in the chronology. The Barnes County History (Valley City, ND: Barnes County Historical Society, 1976), 319, relates that the "first county hospital was placed in operation" on January 19, 1884, for indigent patients. However, the commissioners' minute-books mention an already-operational hospital on several occasions before 1884. The citations include C.C., vol. A, 2 September 1882, 50; and 27 January 1883, 63.

6. Special election in C.C., vol. A, 15 February 1883, 66; 19 March 1883, 66; and 12 May 1883, 73. Poorhouse mentioned in 1 October 1883, 93; Hollinshead in 13 October 1883, 95. Block listed in 10 May 1884, 105; listed as "Black" in Barnes County History, 319.

7. Accountability in C.C., vol. A, 12 February 1885, 159. Cash mentioned in 12 January 1883 [to S.B. Coe in the large sum of \$270.76], 62; 10 May 1884, 105.

8.C.C., vol. A, 30 September 1885, 196, tells of the contract. Thomson had been listed in 10 February 1885, 157; 3 March 1885, 162; 2 April 1885, 166; 5 May 1885, 171; 2 June 1885, 173; and 12 September 1885, 194.

9.Widow Collins case listed in C.C., vol. A, 1 October 1885, 193; 7 January 1886, 212; 7 December 1885, 208. Collins was under the care of the County Superintendent of the Poor at least through 1888, as recorded in vol. B, 2 February 1888, 101. The position was an appointed position.

10.C.C., vol. A, 5 January 1887, 286; 6 January 1887, 289.

11.C.C., vol. A, 7 January 1887, 291; 8 January 1887, 293; vol. B, 7 April 1890, 249. Adult rates are from the bids for 1890 as listed in vol. B, 7 April 1890, 249.

12.C.C., vol. B, 6 December 1892, 66; vol. B, 9 April 1893, 83; vol. B, 9 October 1895, 230; St. Paul in vol. C, 8 January 1898, 48; vol. B, 13 November 1895, 236. In N.D., vol. C, 1 November 1897, 21; vol. C, 25 July 1898, 114.

13.C.C., vol. B, 1 April 1895, 198; 3 April 1894, 136. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the United States at the Eleventh Census, 1890 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 685.

14.C.C., vol. B, 15 April 1897, 351, 352. Land transaction recorded in Deeds, Barnes County, vol. 5, document # 1387, 14 April 1897, Farmers and Merchant National Bank to Barnes County, page 157.

15.C.C., vol. B, 16 July 1897, 373. Barn in vol. C, 1 November 1897, 21.

16.C.C., vol. C, 11 July 1901, 517; 15 July 1901, 522; 7 October 1901, 538; 2 December 1901, 549; 3 December 1901, 552; 6 May 1902, 608.

17.C.C., vol. D, 3 October 1904, 184; 12 November 1904, 194; 1 October 1906, 364; 9 November 1906, 377. Pauper population is from Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 82.

18.The Goodale tract purchase is in C.C., vol. E, 12 October 1908, 19, 20. The legal description was complicated, but read "a part of the NE Qtr. of the SW Qtr. of Sect. 22, township 140 North of Range 58 West," basically amounting to 18 acres in the center of the township. The full legal description is in Deed Record, Barnes County, vol. 330, document #35879, H.W. Goodale to Barnes County, 10

October 1908, page 31. The Standard Atlas of Barnes County, N.D. (Chicago: Alden Publishing Co., 1910), 11, provides a clear understanding of the poor farm location.

19.C.C., vol. E, 10 November 1908, 27, lists the architect; 19 December 1908, 37, 38, lists Curren as builder. Description of the building is from Valley City--City of Five Names, 1883-1983 (Valley City, ND: Valley City Times-Record, 1983, 43.

20.Pest house and barn in C.C., vol. E, 7 June 1909, 116; well in 9 June 1909, 121; chicken house in 2 May 1909, 249. Old pesthouse in vol. D, 5 May 1903, 67.

21.Description of the interior is from John M. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota 3, no. 2 (January 1913), 121.

22.Valley City--City of Five Names, 43; Gillette, 121; C.C., vol. E, 13 January 1911, 361. Population figures at the hospital are from Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 70; the figures reveal that a total of 14 paupers were admitted to the "Barnes County Asylum" during the year, and that 9 transferred or were discharged, and four of the 14 died during 1910. Of the 14 persons admitted in 1910, 7 were foreign-born.

23.C.C., vol. E, 13 January 1911, 361, 362.

24.Gillette, 121; matrons in C.C., vol. E, 5 December 1911, 475; and vol. F, 4 June 1913, 230. Poor farm manager in vol. F, 17 January 1914, 309; salaries in 25 July 1914, 398.

25.C.C., vol. F, 5 March 1912, 33; Gillette, 121.

26.Vegetables in C.C., vol. F, 7 January 1913, 170. Budgets in vol. G, 15 July 1915, 66; and vol. H, 15 July 1920, 376.

27.C.C., vol. G, 15 July 1915, 66; vol. H, 15 July 1920, 377.

28.C.C., vol. G, 4 October 1916, 248; vol. H, 4 June 1918, 10.

29.Budget in C.C., vol. I, 18 July 1925, 468.

30.The lease is in C.C., vol. J, 2 October 1929, 237, 238.

31.FERA in C.C., vol. K, 11 May 1935, 24; road program in 9 July 1936, 129.

32.Deed Record, Barnes County, vol. 68, Barnes County to the Park District of the City of Valley City, document # 108538, 14 December 1935, 48.

33.Deeds, Barnes County, vol. 72, County of Barnes to the Lutheran Hospitals and Homes Society of America, Inc., document # 117232, 7 May 1942, page 450.

34.Gillette, 121.

CHAPTER 6

BURLEIGH COUNTY POOR FARM, BISMARCK

Burleigh County has maintained a position of importance throughout the history of Dakota Territory and North Dakota. Since 1873, when the county became fully organized, its county seat of Bismarck has been the home of some of the region's most influential people. The early prominence of Bismarck came from its location as a steamboat port on the Missouri River, and it prospered when the Northern Pacific Railroad connected the young city to a potential flood of emigrants after 1876.¹

Bismarck's location on the railroad and on the river made it a "metropolis of commerce and labor for the whole northwest," and thus attracted "thousands of people" searching for employment. The railroad work and bridge building brought all kinds of people to the city: hunters, ex-soldiers from nearby Fort Lincoln, steamboat captains and freightmen, farmers, and adventurers who liked the excitement of a young bustling town. Early Bismarck residents felt deep pride in giving aid to those who were overtaken by misfortune or sickness and fell into poverty. Before the county relief apparatus became fully operational, the "hotel men, boarding house keeper, doctors, masons, Odd

Fellows, Sisters of Mercy, ladies of the Christian union," and regular citizens offered aid to those who became sick or injured during the course of the massive construction efforts on the railroad and the railroad bridges. Local volunteer relief efforts benefitted many and local citizens boasted that Bismarck was "famous for charity, liberality, and hospitality."²

Under the laws of Dakota Territory, the county commissioners acted as the overseers of the poor and were to investigate reported cases of destitution within their constituency. As a major railroad town, Bismarck had many poor people drift into the area. Early efforts concentrated upon providing shelter and medical care for those with no means to purchase it. Sheriff Alex McKenzie arranged housing for county paupers and county prisoners. McKenzie also got provisions to local residents in times of floods. Dr. H.R. Porter, as County Physician, earned \$300 per year to supervise the administration of "all medicines and medical attention by other doctors to paupers and others who are county charges." Undesirable paupers were summarily shipped out by rail, as in July 1880, when the county bought a "Railroad ticket for crazy man."³

By 1881, however, the county government began to feel overburdened by the numbers of paupers new to Burleigh County. County officials felt that the railroad contractors took advantage of the local poor relief system rather than

take any responsibility for the care of sick employees. The commissioners referred to a case in which "a man who was employed by the North Pacific bridge contractors," had become "very sick" while on the job. The contractors "had him shipped to Fargo to become a pauper on Cass county." Cass County officials quickly ascertained that the man was not a county resident there, and sent the man back to Bismarck "to become a pauper on citizens" of Burleigh County. Others who became sick on the job were similarly dumped into the county's collective lap.⁴

The County Board complained that local "hotel keepers, doctors, and North Pacific railroad bridge contractors" would "harbor, keep, attend upon or otherwise contract debts" by providing some measure of care to paupers without prior notification to the county commissioners. The county commissioners accused the bridge contractors of increasing the number of local paupers through their "neglect or carelessness." Similarly, the commissioners objected to doctors or landlords who gave care or shelter to poor persons without authorization of the county, and then expected full payment for the expenses. All violators were informed that the "board will not be responsible for any debts contracted" through the devious methods practiced by over-enterprising caregivers.⁵

The commissioners also targeted the Bismarck City Board of Health for criticism for its neglect of disease cases

within the city boundaries. The county acted to aid sick persons in the city because the Board of Health did not perform its "special and well-defined duty" regarding contagious diseases. The county stepped in and helped the sick people "from a sense of humane feeling," although such aid should rightfully have come from city officials. If the city abdicated its responsibilities, the county would take the right and necessary steps nonetheless.⁶

To correct the situation, the county board demanded that all bills presented for payment by county funds be "accompanied by the Oath of the person presenting" the bill that the amount was "just and correct" and that no part of the bill had already been paid. The board also indicated that the establishment of a county "poor house or hospital" might meet with favorable action if county residents petitioned for such an institution.⁷

Burleigh County utilized the hospital concept first. A smallpox epidemic in the spring of 1882 quickly pointed out the need for a county institution for care of disease cases. Rental of a pest house from Linda W. Slaughter and the employment of four nurses there initially gave some assistance to smallpox sufferers and impeded the rapid spread of the malady. By summer the county rented the Slaughter house as a "hospital." The hospital needed basic supplies such as bread, water and whiskey (for medicinal

purposes), all purchased with county funds. The hospital apparently served as a temporary measure.⁸

A permanent institution for the care of paupers began with the decision of the county board to call for a special election on the poor farm question in August 1883. The main purpose of the election centered around Burleigh County's contribution to the construction of the new capital building for Dakota Territory in Bismarck. Voters were called upon to approve the actions of the county to borrow \$100,000 for the new capital. The proposal to "purchase a farm for poor house purposes" for a cost "not to exceed \$6,000" stood secondary to the big-time political coup of grabbing the Territorial Capital from Yankton. Voters, however, dutifully approved the purchase of 160 acres for poor farm purposes, just as they approved the more impressive capital question.⁹

Bids were opened for "proposals for a poor farm," and the county bought 280 acres of land "situated eight miles from Bismarck." The purchase price for the land in Burnt Creed Township near Arnold village totalled \$2,000. An additional \$3,000 was scheduled to be spent for buildings on the site. At the time the location north of Bismarck and off the railroad line seemed to pose no real problems for the operation of a county poor farm.¹⁰

The county advertised for plans and specification for a "main building without Ls" [ells or wings]. The board hoped

to have the building completed by 15 December 1883. In October poorhouse construction bids came in, ranging from a low of \$2,900 to a high bid of \$3,400. With winter rapidly approaching, the county board chose to hold off on construction until the spring, in order to avoid the extra expense of building in cold conditions. The new bidder for the poorhouse had specifications "not to exceed \$3,000," and, accordingly the winning bidder came in at \$2,946.75. One of the competitor's bids included a water closet for the convenience of the residents, but the added expense of the option priced the builder out of a job. The J.R. Lacey-designed plan finally reached completion by July 1884.¹¹

Since the money placed in the "Special Poor Farm Fund" had been almost entirely spent, the county board had to equip the poor farm operation on a piecemeal basis. Provisions for furnishing the poorhouse and setting up a working farm delayed the official opening of the pauper asylum until August of 1887.¹²

Olaf A. Anderson served as the manager of the poor farm during 1889. He was replaced the following year by the George A. Jay. Jay, the lowest bidder among only two bids, agreed to care for the county poor at the poor farm for 47 cents per day per person. He had only three paupers in residence in 1890. Two of them were of foreign birth, the other had been born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents.¹³

The presence of the Sanborn (or St. Alexius) Hospital in Bismarck by 1890 allowed Burleigh County to obtain medical treatment for poor people conveniently. The poor farm never had to keep sick paupers for any long period of time, and the county physician could easily work at the Sanborn Hospital.¹⁴

Through the decade of the 1890s, the burden of caring for the poor who required medical treatment centered on the St. Alexius Hospital, run by the Sisters of St. Benedict. Burleigh County grew little in population, from a total of 4,247 in 1890 to 6,081 in 1900. Largely agricultural, the county had a small proportion of paupers. Bismarck thrived as the center of state government, giving the city more wealth than its close neighbor, Mandan. As a result the inconveniently-located poor farm found little use, as most of the poor in Bismarck were housed in rented facilities in the city.¹⁵

By 1904 the county relied on private care-givers for the board and care of resident paupers. The Federal Census did not include Burleigh County in its list of active poor farms. Although the county had buildings on the site, the fact that the land was not "located in a suitable place" had discouraged easy commerce between it and the county seat only eight miles away. Although picturesque to view, the actual tillage of the hilly land proved too difficult. The

land near beautiful buttes worked well for pasture but could not be farmed efficiently.¹⁶

In March of 1909 the Burleigh County commissioners offered the forsaken poor farm property for sale. The board members acknowledged that the poorhouse had failed to fulfill "the purpose for which it was purchased," and provided "no revenue, either in taxes or otherwise" for the county treasury. To sell the land would at least allow the county government to collect property taxes on the acreage. Hannah Larson purchased the former poor farm for \$2,277.25 in April 1909.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long, ed., Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), vol. 5, 188.
2. "Take It Out," Bismarck Tribune, 16 December 1881, 4.
"The Sick and Poor," Bismarck Tribune, 16 December 1881, 3.
3. McKenzie in County Commissioners' Minutes, vol. 1880-1882, 13 April 1880, 10-11; 18 May 1880, 28-29; 9 July 1880, 32-33; flood in 9 June 1881, 127. Dr. Porter in 4 January 1881, 74. Railroad tickets in 10 April 1880, 7; 7 July 1880, 31; 9 November 1881, 154-155.
4. "To Whom It May Concern," Bismarck Tribune, 16 December 1881, 3.
5. "To Whom It May Concern," Bismarck Tribune, 9 December 1881, 3.
6. "To Whom It May Concern," Bismarck Tribune, 9 December 1881, 3.
7. C.C., 5 January 1882, 166-167; "To Whom It May Concern," Bismarck Tribune, 9 December 1881, 3.
8. Pest house in C.C., vol. 1880-1882, 3 April 1882, 182-183; 4 April 1882, 184-185; 8 July 1882, 200-201; 10 July 1882, 202-203. Further information about Linda Slaughter is in Hazel Eastman, ed., Linda W. Slaughter's Fortress to Farm or Twenty-three Years on the Frontier (New York: Exposition Press, 1972), 136, wherein she speaks of the medical practice of her husband, Dr. B. Frank Slaughter. Dr. Slaughter would aid the "poorer people . . . gratuitously" in 1873.
9. Special election results in C.C., vol. 1883-1884, 3 September 1883, 84-85.
10. C.C., vol. 1883-1884, 13 July 1883, 64-65. Sale recorded in Deed Record, Burleigh County, vol. H, Harriet M. Wallace to Burleigh County, 20 October 1883, page 111. Origin of the poor farm in Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, The Lakeside Press, 1884), 191; which lists the property as "the east half of the SW Qtr., and the NE Qtr. and the SE Qtr. of the NW Qtr. of Section 22, in Township 140 of Range 80, which contains 280 acres." In C.C., vol. 1883-1884, 3 October 1883, 90-91, the property is described as "the east 1/2 of the NE 1/4 and

SW 1/4 of NE 1/4 and SE 1/4 of NW 1/4, Section 22, township 140 Range 80 West, 160 acres for \$2,000."

11.C.C., 3 October 1883, 90-91; 15 October 1883, 92-93; 16 October 1883, 92-93; 16 April 1884, 162-163; 19 May 1884, 164-165; 20 May 1884, 166-167.

12.C.C., 9 November 1883, 96-97. "Official Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, 1 August 1887 meeting," Bismarck Tribune, 10 August 1887, 4.

13.Olaf A. Anderson in C.C., 9 August 1889, 8; 11 November 1889, 26. Jay in 10 March 1890, 63. Inmate total from Frederick H. Wines, Bureau of the Census, Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the U.S. at the Eleventh Census, 1890 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 685.

14.Sanborn Hospital in Minute Book, Burleigh County, July 1889, 101-104, this record book documents the patients from the county poor rolls, giving all persons in a yearly list. C.C., 2 December 1889, 36; 31 December 1889, 41.

15.Bureau of the Census, Report on Crime, Pauperism, and Benevolence in the U.S. at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 924. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the U.S.: 1930 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1931), vol. I, 808.

16.Keeping of the poor recorded in C.C., 9 January 1909, 230. Failure of the site in C.C., 3 March 1909, 245.

17.C.C., 3 March 1909, 245. Sale recorded in Miscellaneous Deeds, Burleigh County, vol. 12, County of Burleigh to Hannah Larson, 21 April 1909, page 605.

CHAPTER 7

MORTON COUNTY POOR FARM, MANDAN

Mandan, the chief city and county seat, has always been the largest community in Morton County. The Northern Pacific Railroad platted the townsite in March 1879, but the town experienced little immediate building activity for two years. The city "population increased four or five fold," from a foundation of 300 people in 1881 to a substantial 1,500 just one year later. Mandan became the "terminus of the Dakota division" of the North Pacific, with a large influx of railroad workers. Mandan became another "railroad town," with great prospects for growth based upon its railroad connections.¹

The county commissioners of Morton County intended to be fully prepared to provide organized relief for needy persons as settlement increased after the county was organized in 1881. Rather than respond haphazardly to poor relief problems, the county board wanted to have a system in place. A poor farm would serve as the centerpiece of the county's provision for paupers. The commissioners expected that land for a poor farm would cost more as time passed, therefore a suitable property should be purchased before the demand for land grew greater. Accordingly, the county

called for a special election to decide upon the purchase of a poor farm with "suitable buildings" to be held on 16 May 1882. Citizens were to decide on the wisdom of spending \$2,000 to establish a poor farm.²

The editor of the Mandan Pioneer believed that the poor farm would prove to be a great benefit for Morton County. He felt that \$2,000 would buy "a large piece of land" and would allow for a "substantial poorhouse." It seemed "probable" that the almshouse would "do more than pay for itself," because the paupers could perform useful tasks there. The county would be wise to buy the land now and build a poorhouse "while it is yet possible at a trifling expense."³ The editor urged voters to approve the measure in order to give Morton County "another advantage over some of its much older sister counties" who lacked the vision necessary to build a poorhouse at an advantageous time.⁴ Establishing a poor farm could give the county assurance that "her future paupers will never be a great burden" upon the taxpayers.⁵

The special poor farm election brought a predicted light voter turnout, with forty-five of the forty-six votes cast favoring the proposition. In two of the three precincts, not a single vote was reported. The county board immediately struck a deal with the Northern Pacific Railroad Company to purchase eighty acres of land just two miles north of the city of Mandan. The legal description of the

acreage was the "west 1/2 of the southwest 1/4 of section 9, town 139 north of range 81 west." The property cost only \$247.06, leaving a considerable amount of money for erection of buildings on the farm.⁶

The county fathers accepted the \$1,550 bid of builder John Phelps for the construction of the poorhouse. In a related move, the county also awarded the contract for building a "county pest house" to Phelps and a partner for \$600.⁷ The poorhouse stood ready for occupancy by the fall of 1882.

The county board hired Mr. George Norton as the "manager" of the new county poor farm. Norton's parents were of New England stock, his father hailing from Connecticut and his mother originating in New York state. George, born in Ohio about the year 1840, moved to Dakota Territory from Minnesota at an opportune time, when "Yankees" could get in on ground floor county organizational activities. Norton's German immigrant wife, Josephine, assisted him in the operation of the poorhouse. Their two children, Mathilda (born in 1875 in Minnesota) and Celia (born in 1883, while her parents operated the poorhouse), lived with them at the poor farm. Norton was about 43 years old when he started work as the Morton County Poor Farm manager.⁸

George Norton found that the poorhouse needed some refinements. Due to the feebleness of the residents, in

1883 he authorized the installation of a "water closet" to make personal care quicker and easier. In the same year, the commissioners appointed a small committee of its members to "investigate and make the necessary improvements at the poor farm." Accordingly, the committee approved the digging of a new well at the farm. The county also hired a man to break the sod for farming the land there.⁹

As with all poor farms, the expenses exceeded the initial optimistic expectations. The county had to pay for a team and driver to take paupers to the poor farm, at \$2.50 a trip. Ironically, the land purchased from the Northern Pacific Railroad had no rail connection, forcing the county to hire draymen to deliver their destitute human cargo to the poorhouse.¹⁰

Despite the foresight of the commissioners, the poor farm could not house all of the paupers that migrated to the county. By 1884 a number of indigent persons were housed in private homes, not at the poor farm. The county officials boarded an "abandoned child" at the home of Mary Coleman in 1885, rather than send the youngster to the uncertain company of elderly folk at the poorhouse.¹¹

Poorhouse manager George Norton assumed a new duty in 1885. Not only did he care for the poor people while they were yet alive, he also put in a bid to bury deceased paupers. His offer of \$15 per burial beat out a much-higher bid of \$25 per occurrence. Since the poor people were

concentrated on the poor farm, presumably Mr. Norton had less distance to find customers. Norton provided "board of paupers" and served as the salaried superintendent of the poor farm until 1887, when Charles F. Miller received the contract from the county.¹²

Miller took care of the county's poor at a rate of \$3 per week per person. His salary amounted to \$30 a month. Mr. Miller soon found the poor farm and its inhabitants not to his liking. In 1888, he asked the county board for "certain improvements" at the poorhouse. The committee of commissioners allowed the purchase of lumber and window glass for the almshouse and soon pronounced that "all necessary repairs" had been made.¹³

Unfortunately for Charles Miller, the improvements made at the poor farm included his swift removal. A grand jury of the county's judicial district investigated matters in "relation to the poor house" and other county issues, concentrating on charges of abuse of poorhouse residents. The grand jury concluded that the poorhouse patrons were subjected to unclean conditions in the institution. Also, the inmates were not being fed well and were not receiving good care.¹⁴

The county board investigated the charges, talking to the county physician and others who had visited the poorhouse. The commissioners ordered Charles Miller to appear before them at their regular meeting.¹⁵

Miller "made a long statement denying all the charges and claimed that the inmates were well fed and taken care of." County Physician, Dr. Read, testified that he considered Miller to be a "competent man," and that he did not "consider the house in a filthy condition." Read, who had occasionally "dined with the patients" there, gave a weak testimonial that he believed the food to be "as good as [that] served in most poor houses."¹⁶

Mr. E. J. Steele, a frequent visitor of Miller, also gave faint praise to the superintendent, stating that he considered the "hospitality" to be "not bad."¹⁷

The county commissioners listened to the few witnesses who could come to the meeting and "in the absence of an unfavorable witness," took "no further action." Miller, who had just put out a personal brush fire, returned to the area just north of town to combat some raging October prairie fires.¹⁸

However, when the board awarded the poor farm contract the following year, Miller found himself out of a job. Five other bidders vied for the position. Stephen Mitchell won the contract, although his bid was identical to that of Charles Miller. Apparently the county board would stand for no more allegations of abuse of the paupers under its administration. For the first time, the county demanded that the superintendent of the poorhouse be bonded in the amount of \$1,000.¹⁹

In further action the commissioners humanely spent \$32.80 on "clothing for [the] Poor House" paupers. To make the superintendent more responsible to the inmates, the board required him to "make out a quarterly report" and submit it at the commissioners' meetings. Interested persons were also reminded that the county could "pay board for paupers outside the county poor house."²⁰

Morton County shared a portion of the suffering experienced in the Territory and State from 1888 through 1890. While the county did not have widespread crop failures, it still gained some negative publicity associated with poor relief. By 1890 the new state of North Dakota had designated the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor as an acting "State Relief Agent." From his temporary headquarters in Grand Forks, the Commissioner, T. H. Helgeson, heard of some cases of destitution near Fort Lincoln. Since the fort lay within the boundaries of Morton County, Helgeson contacted the County Auditor for confirmation of the truth of the reports.²¹

T. H. Helgeson received a letter from a "St. Paul party," telling of a "poor sick woman" with "five children and one sick child" near Fort Lincoln who had "lived on vegetables most of the winter." The letter also told of a family that survived by eating only "jackrabbits and a few vegetables." The State Relief Agent also got a letter from Major Powell, of Fort Lincoln, which stated that "there were

seven families destitute near the fort." Helgeson wrote to County Auditor, John Foran, "to ascertain if Morton County [was] able to take care of its own poor, or if they need state aid." An indignant Mr. Foran responded that no one from the fort had applied for aid. The "very few" relief cases had not come from the vicinity of Fort Lincoln. Foran forthrightly declared that the "county is thoroughly able to take care" of the few impoverished families in its domain. He further admonished Helgeson by saying "that Morton County will be one of the many counties of the state that will respectfully decline to receive aid from the state government for its citizens."²²

The editor of the Mandan Pioneer delved into the matter, seeking some culprits. He charged that five families from the vicinity of Fort Lincoln had sought to get some state relief money without being subjected to the publicity and scrutiny involved in an application for local relief. The heads of the five families had asked for aid from the commander of the fort, who, in turn, reported the matter to the State Relief Agent. The Pioneer reported that the farmers had harvested a good crop in 1888 and had reaped "something" in 1889. The newspaper castigated the men for hoping to "get their provisions for nothing" from the state and for using devious means so that "nobody would be able to find out" about their application for aid. The editor published the names of "Fritz Frederick, John Frederick,

John Wenger, Gottlieb Rapp and Doerr," so the public might hold the culprits in low esteem for the attempted circumventing of the county poor relief process.²³

County officials also felt a duty to spend a minimum amount for poor relief. In 1890 a woman by the name of Mary Butler also found her name in the newspapers. The county commissioners announced publicly in the published minutes of their meeting that Butler would be discharged from the poor farm "as soon as [the] county physician declared her no longer in need of medical attendance." The board refused to "allow pay for her keeping any longer."²⁴

Stephen Mitchell continued as the superintendent of the county poor farm through the decade of the 1890s. A motley collection of paupers found sufficient care at the institution through the depression periods of that era. Some children passed through the doors of the institution, away from the nurture of home and relatives. One young pauper, "the child of Dan McKinnon" spent some time at the almshouse. The county paid Mrs. Alice Kennedy to make clothes for the "baby pauper." The county commissioners decided to remove the youngster from the poorhouse, hoping to find a better place for the child. The county board authorized Commissioner McGillic "to deliver the child to its grandparents," who should rightfully care for a family member.²⁵

In 1890 a total of seven county charges lived at the poor farm. Five of them were American citizens who were born in the United States. The other two were foreign-born. Of the citizens, two had parents who had emigrated to the United States. All of the residents on the poor farm were whites.²⁶

By 1897 the tax levy of Morton County for poor relief totalled \$3,150. The county board members considered the amount to be excessive. The commissioners looked at various ways to save money and decided that "the present county poor farm should be discontinued." They reasoned that the "continuance of the county poor farm and the expense incurred on account of the same is more than the revenues of the county will warrant." The early hopes for the thriftiness of the institution fell prey to the realities of operating a farm for profit with workers who could not survive in society on their own and who barely survived with others caring for them.²⁷

The local newspaper applauded the decision of the commissioners, crowing that the move represented "one good stroke of economy which will meet with the approval of the taxpayers." The Pioneer recognized the "folly" of paying the poor farm superintendent "\$300 a year for the privilege of boarding county poor at a fixed sum." Now the county would allow the former superintendent, Stephen Mitchell, the use of the poorhouse rent-free as a boarding house for

county paupers, but would not have to pay him any salary. Mitchell agreed to the arrangement, which seemed to the board to be a justification of their wise action. If Mitchell could afford to board the poor people without a salary, then the county had been paying him too much. Under the new arrangement, the county would pay no more than three dollars a week for the care of each pauper.²⁸

The county still owned the poor house and the poor farm property, but Stephen Mitchell could use the facilities as a boarding house for indigent county residents. Other care-providers made bids for county paupers, and Mitchell had varied success in getting people for his poorhouse. The county officials set the tax levy for poor relief for 1898 at a drastically-reduced level of only \$1,000.²⁹

According to the U.S. Census Reports, Morton County no longer had a poorhouse in operation by 1904. Instead the county depended upon various providers of care for its poorest citizens. The county held the ownership of the poor farm property until selling it in 1929 for \$550.³⁰

The Morton County Poor Farm represented an effort of the county board to anticipate poor relief needs before the need became overwhelming. The commissioners could not foresee the peculiar beneficial nature of the county's resources and businesses.

First, the county had rich veins of lignite coal. Not only could this resource provide fuel for heating the county

courthouse, but it also lay readily available for use in homes. Farmers in the county did not need to get government help with their heating bills, because "their hills [were] their forests." One farmer, Mr. R. M. Eastman of Sanger in Oliver County, called the lignite coal "the salvation of the farmers of the West Missouri country," allowing them to avoid "feeling the pinch of poverty." The folks on the other parts of the treeless plains became dependent upon the "coal barons in the coal regions of the east."³¹

The strong presence of the Northern Pacific Railroad became another significant advantage for Morton County over most others in the state. A large number of railroad employees lived in Mandan, making the town and immediate area quite prosperous. When railroad employees got hurt on the job, they could go to the Northern Pacific hospitals. A number of Mandan people received care at the Northern Pacific Hospital in Brainerd, Minnesota, in the 1890s. One "tramp" who had been run over by a train in Morton County, had been "kept by the county" for some time and then managed to wheedle his way into the railroad hospital.³²

Lastly, the city of Mandan benefitted from its sister city status with Bismarck, the state capital. Hospital facilities were readily available across the river, relieving Morton County from the burden of maintaining a county hospital for its poor patients.

The county had a quite small population in 1890 of about 5,000 people, but that number was concentrated in the wealthy rail center of Mandan. By 1900 the county had a larger number of people than neighboring Burleigh County, (10,277 for Morton County, including 2,208 of part of Standing Rock Indian Reservation to Burleigh's 6,081) but decided to get out of the poor farm business while Burleigh pursued that course until 1909. Morton County grew even more rapidly from 1900 to 1910, when the county rose to 25,289 people (it was the third largest county in the state in that year). This population was then cared for by means of indoor relief. The other factors such as railroad prosperity, access to hospitals and the abundance of heating fuel helped the county keep poor relief expenditures low.³³

ENDNOTES

1. "Mandan," [from New York Daily Graphic] Mandan Daily Pioneer, 18 October 1882, 1. "Morton County," Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, the Lakeside Press, 1884), 193, 194.

2. "Official Proceedings," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 14 April 1882, of the 8 April 1882 meeting. Editorial, Mandan Daily Pioneer, 11 May 1882, 2; "The Poor Farm Election," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 16 May 1882, 1.

3. Editorial, Mandan Daily Pioneer, 11 May 1882, 2.

4. "The Poor Farm Election," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 16 May 1882, 1.

5. Editorial, Mandan Daily Pioneer, 16 May 1882, 2.

6. "Special Meeting of County Commissioners," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 25 May 1882, 1, concerning the 24 May 1882 meeting. "Official Special Meeting of County Commissioners, Morton County," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 31 May 1882, 1, of the meeting held 30 May 1882. The original price stood at \$200, but an additional 47.06 was necessary to "complete the purchase of the county poor farm," as recorded in "Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, 8 August 1882," [hereafter, referred to as "C.C."] Mandan Daily Pioneer, 9 August 1882, 1. The poor farm purchase is described in "Early History of Morton County," The Record, no. 12, (June 1898), 245.

7. "Proceedings [9 August 1882]," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 9 August 1882, 1; pest house in "Proceedings [21 August 1882]," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 21 August 1882.

8. Dakota Territorial Census of 1885 (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1885), "Morton County," 1 June 1885, 91 (on microfilm).

9. "Special Meeting of County Commissioners (of 14 March 1883)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 15 March 1883, 1. "Board of County Commissioners (5 April 1883 meeting)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 9 April 1883, 1. "C.C. (5 July meeting)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 7 July 1883. Breaking in "C.C. (18 June 1883 meeting)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 19 June 1883, 3.

10. "C.C. (1 October 1883 meeting)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 6 October 1883; and "C.C. (4 October 1884 meeting)," Mandan Daily Pioneer, 10 October 1884, 4.

11. Three cases of paupers boarding at places other than the poor house are listed in "C.C. (of 4 October 1884)," Mandan Pioneer [weekly], 10 October 1884, 4. Coleman listed in "C.C. (7 January 1885 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 16 January 1885, 2.

12. "C.C. (6 January 1885 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 16 January 1885, 4. Although Norton was responsible for the burial of paupers, on occasion those who died in the far-flung areas under the county domain were buried by a special contract, as when a man had to be buried at Little Missouri, in "C.C. (3 October 1885 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 9 October 1885, 1.

13. "C.C. (2 April 1888 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 6 April 1888, 1; "C.C. (17, 18 July 1888 meetings)," Mandan Pioneer, 27 July 1888, 8.

14. "C.C. (9 September 1888 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 14 September 1888, 2; "C.C. (4 October 1888 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 12 October 1888, 4.

15. "C.C. (4 October 1888)," Mandan Pioneer, 12 October 1888, 4.

16. "C.C. (4 October 1888 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 12 October 1888, 4.

17. "C.C. (4 October 1888 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 12 October 1888, 4.

18. "Notes About Town," Mandan Pioneer, 12 October 1888, 8.

19. "C.C. (12 March 1889 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 15 March 1889, 8.

20. "C.C. (2 April 1889 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 12 April 1889, 4; "C.C. (8 January 1890 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 17 January 1890, 1; "C.C. (10 July 1889 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 19 July 1889, 4.

21. "Editorial Notes," Mandan Pioneer, 21 February 1890, 5.

22. "Editorial Notes," Mandan Pioneer, 21 February 1890, 5.

23. "Editorial Notes," Mandan Pioneer, 7 March 1890, 5.

24. "C.C. (7 July 1890 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 11 July 1890, 5.

25. "C. C. (7 July 1890 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 11 July 1890, 5.
26. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part II: General Tables, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 685.
27. "C.C., (4 January 1897 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 15 January 1897, 4.
28. Mandan Pioneer, 8 January 1897, page 1, column 5; and "C.C. (4 January 1897 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 15 January 1897, 4.
29. "C.C. (26 July 1898 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 19 August 1898, 4; care of paupers after the change in the poor farm operation are in "C.C. (6 January 1898 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 28 January 1898, 5; "C.C. (26 July 1898 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 19 August 1898, 4; "C.C. (25 July 1898 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 19 August 1898, 5.
30. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 82. Sale of the property recorded in Deeds, Morton County, vol. 80, document # 137416, 10 May 1929, 264.
31. Lignite as the fuel for the courthouse in "C.C. (5 October 1889 meeting)," Mandan Pioneer, 11 October 1899, 8. Lignite as "forest" in "Editorial Notes," Mandan Pioneer, 5 October 1888, 5. Eastman quote in "A Farmer's Report, (reprinted from his letter in the St. Paul Globe, written from Sanger on 9 January 1888)" Mandan Pioneer, 20 January 1888, 4.
32. "Mandan, N.D.," Mandan Pioneer, 6 January 1899, 1. "Brainerd Hospital," Mandan Pioneer, 11 February 1898, 1. Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, The Lakeside Press, 1884), 194.
33. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the U.S., 1910, Abstract of the Census, Supplement for North Dakota (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 44.

CHAPTER 8

TRAILL COUNTY POOR FARM, CALEDONIA

Trail County, fully organized in 1875, provided aid from its inception for individuals who had severe financial difficulties. The presence of the Grandin Bonanza Farm assured the success of the county, attracting numerous farmers and farm workers to the area. One of the earliest recipients of county poor relief worked on the Grandin Farm. The county allowed ten dollars to the local doctor for his attendance on the man, who could not pay the bill. The typical "indoor relief" consisted of buying provisions or paying medical bills for those unable to take care of themselves. The minutes of the County Commissioners' meetings in the early years did not always list the names of the needy people; instead the commissioners recorded aid given to a "sick pauper" or "pauper." At other times, the official record contained the names of the individuals in distress. County officials in the county seat at Caledonia supervised the administration of early poor relief.¹

The completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad from Fargo to Grand Forks in 1882 allowed easier access to the county and stimulated an increase in population. Caledonia

faced a crisis, however, because the railroad passed west of its site. In hopes of establishing themselves as the center of county government, even though the future looked shaky, Caledonia's leaders acted decisively and organized a poor farm near Caledonia. Commissioners Peter Herbrandson and I. L. Rockne inspected potential properties in June 1883, choosing a site on the Red River about three miles northeast of the town. The selection of the Caledonia location made good political sense for Caledonia, notwithstanding the views of the rest of the county.²

The commissioners purchased nearly three hundred acres of land on 14 July 1883 for \$4,800. The property consisted of about two hundred acres of open farmland and seventy acres of woodlands along the river. By August plans were underway to outfit the farm with buildings, farm animals and machinery. The county board accepted plans and specifications for the poorhouse from E. R. Tischler and S. C. Lauterman, architects, from Fargo. J. Sercombe of neighboring Buxton received the contract for construction of the poor farm residence. By November, the two-story wood frame poorhouse stood completed. The first floor consisted of a kitchen and dining room, with rooms and an office provided for the superintendent. Ten small, separate bedrooms, 9' X 12', formed the second floor of the institution. The cost of the side-gabled structure totalled \$3,475. Fireplaces provided heat for the building, as is

evidenced by the six chimneys included in the building plans.³

The Hillsboro Banner boasted about the new and "splendid asylum for the poor." The property with its "large and commodious building" had cost less than \$10,000, and county leaders expected it to provide long-term savings. The commissioners believed that county poor relief would be reduced by "one-half" through "proper management" of the county poor farm. Accordingly, the county informed its residents that "no relief or support will be allowed permanent county charges . . . except at the Asylum."⁴

The county hired a superintendent, William Holmberg, in March 1884, at a monthly salary of \$35. T.J. Kelly soon replaced Holmberg in January 1885 with an increase in pay to fifty dollars per month. By 1888 the county board revamped the system. In order to save money, the superintendency would go to the person who offered the lowest bid for operating the farm. The superintendent had to care for the residents and farm the land with money that the county provided. With only one bidder, a savings was not assured. In 1889 the county advertised for a superintendent who would work under either a bid system or a monthly salary. The confusion over the best way to pay the caretaker revealed the doubts held by the county officials as to the real economy of operating a poor farm. The commissioners accepted Carl Aune's 1889 bid for the "renting and

superintendency of the Poor Farm," as "the most profitable for the county." The bidding system resulted in frequent changes in the office of superintendent which became undesirable. Accordingly, in 1892 the county reverted to the original practice of appointing a superintendent.⁵

The relative disorganization of the management of the county poor farm reflected the deep divisions in Traill County which arose from the county seat fight between Hillsboro and Caledonia. Supported by its location on the Great Northern Railroad, Hillsboro exercised its influence to have the county seat removed to its locale in 1890. Court battles consumed much time and energy, but, in the end, Hillsboro captured the prize of the county seat designation after the litigation reached the highest courts in the state by 1896. Caledonia kept the poor farm but had lost its great hope for any real prosperity.⁶

The accumulation of expenses in operating a farm forced the county to grope for economy. Money flowed out of the county coffers to build a granary, buy a cow, employ a hired man and a hired girl, pay for threshing, and purchase the food and clothing that the inmates needed. Such considerations were not apparent to residents of surrounding counties, however. The editor of the Grand Forks Herald praised the Traill county board for its foresight in operating a poor farm. Steele county commissioners negotiated with the Traill county officials in 1891 for

arrangements to send Steele county paupers to the poor farm in Caledonia. Traill County officials needed to find additional residents for the poor farm. The main problem for the poor farm came to be a lack of inmates, calling in question the need to support a superintendent and a large farm. Only two inmates resided on the farm in 1890.⁷

After building a new barn on the poor farm in 1897, the thriftiness of the institution came into serious question. The barn measured 20' by 44', with a solid stone foundation. After this expense, the county commissioners became engaged in a lengthy process of getting out of the poor farm business. In 1899 the board entertained offers to buy or lease the poor farm. Mrs. Antonia Heger offered \$5,000 in cash for the operation. The commissioners insisted on \$6,000 and the sale failed. The county leased the farm to Mr. Theodore Guttormson for a year. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory, and the practice of electing a superintendent resumed with the hiring of John Vennes of Caledonia in 1900. Vennes operated the farm until 1906 when the county again tried to sell the poor farm. The population at the farm had become too low to justify such a large-scale operation. Only two inmates were living in the poorhouse on 1 January 1905. The commissioners authorized a vote of the people to determine the fate of the poorhouse. County officials deemed the sale of the farm to be "advisable" and in the "best interest" of the county. Even

though the electorate voted to sell the farm by a vote of 856 for and 694 against the sale, the county continued to retain the farm. The county board ultimately determined that the purchase price for the farm would not correspond to the true value of the county's investments in the place.⁸

The appointment of Gust Herbrandson and his wife in about 1908 finally provided a measure of stability for the Traill County poor farm operation. The Herbrandsons supervised the county farm until 1927. The board was "highly pleased" with their management and declared that the farm stood in "first class shape."⁹

After the tenure of the Herbrandsons, Mr. and Mrs. Otinius Foss assumed the supervision of the poor farm. The Foss' were considered "well qualified" because they possessed "genial personalities" and had the "sense of farmers."¹⁰

By the time that Mr. and Mrs. Foss took over the operation of the poor farm in 1927, the original wooden poorhouse had stood for nearly 50 years. In 1929, however, the poorhouse fell prey to a disastrous fire that completely consumed the dwelling. The county board immediately met in special session to deal with the emergency. The commissioners hastily arranged to build a basement to house the poor farm residents in a temporary arrangement on the same site until better quarters could be built in the spring. Political considerations came into the picture as

the city leaders of Hillsboro questioned the rebuilding of the poorhouse in Caledonia. A committee of the Hillsboro Civic Club proposed that the poor farm be relocated nearer the county seat at Hillsboro in the center of the county. The county board dodged the issue by asserting that it was "powerless" to "legally relocate the farm."¹¹

The five residents of the poor farm suffered during the winter of 1929-1930. The basement quarters proved to be excessively damp and caused "considerable sickness" in the cramped confines. The spring brought warmer weather and improved health, and the residents soon moved into a new large brick building. The two-story building, designed by the Fargo architects, Braseth and Houkom, provided considerably more room than had the old structure. The new residence house featured modern plumbing, heating and electrical wiring, providing improved living conditions for the residents. A visiting committee called the new building "a credit to Traill County," that met "all requirements for such institutions." The visitors believed that the new poorhouse measured up with "the best of its kind in the land."¹²

Traill County followed the rest of the nation into the throes of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The new and larger poorhouse, built at a cost of \$25,000, came at a time when the county faced increased demands for the relief of poverty within its boundaries. "Quite a few more" inmates

were added in the summer of 1930.¹³ The only real change in public welfare in the county since the institution of the poor farm in 1883 came with the advent of Mothers' Pensions in 1915. The Taxpayers' Association in Traill County, responding to the strain of the hard times, pressured the county board in 1932 to reduce the salaries of all county employees by 20 percent, provide a full public listing of all Mothers' Aid recipients, and forego the employment of a school nurse for county schools. The commissioners tightened the proverbial belt that year but soon found that county poor relief expenditures increased phenomenally. The 1934 tax levy for relief stood at \$16,600 but rose to \$20,000 a year later. The poor farm provided relief for a small proportion of the population and the tax levy for the farm increased from \$4,400 to \$4,650 from 1934 to 1935. (This compares to levies for operation of the poor farm of \$1,375 in 1929 and \$2,245 in 1930.) The severe drought in 1936 brought economic conditions in the county to such a "low level" that the county board felt that it "could not cope with the situation" which would develop during the winter and spring of 1936-1937. Fortunately for the county, the New Deal programs gave needed funds and work for residents of Traill county. The county petitioned for the establishment of a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, utilized Civil Works Administration, Rural Rehabilitation Resettlement, and Works Progress Administration projects,

and worked with state and federal officials to combat the effects of the depression. The poor farm budget fell to \$4,040 in 1938 but stabilized at that level. The Old Age Assistance program (1935) under the Social Security Administration eased the strain on the poor farm establishment.¹⁴

During the 1940s the poor farm continued its function of caring for the indigent elderly upon the recommendation of the county commissioners. However, the institution became known as the "County Farm." As the elderly came to have improved options for nursing-home care and access to homes, the population of the Traill County Home dropped during the decade. Accordingly, in 1952 the county entered into an agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, based in Arthur, N.D., for the lease of the county farm. The commissioners canceled the lease with the Society in 1954 as they attempted to sell the property. After a buyer backed out of an agreement, in 1955 Clarence Blake of Caledonia leased the premises and operated a private "home for the aged." Gerald Kimbrell soon took over the operation from Blake and continued the institution until business dwindled to only a couple of mentally handicapped individuals. The county sold the property to Kimbrell in 1958.¹⁵

The poor farm residence, built in 1930, still stands on the site. The granary remains, but the large barn built in

1920 burned to the ground. The poor farm cemetery, located just north of the main building, is marked by a bed of weeds. Eleven gravestones, dating from 1933 to 1942, are present in the cemetery. The earlier wooden grave markers have long since deteriorated.¹⁶

Traill County, with a stable population (about 12,000 from 1900 through 1940) based on agriculture, provided care for its relatively small pauper population through the poor farm system and by the other traditional forms of poor relief. When the poorhouse burned in 1929, the county decided to continue the poor farm operation with little debate. After the new institution was built, the county continued the poor farm in order to justify the expense of the rebuilding effort. To discontinue the operation of a new building made no sense to the stalwart commissioners of Traill County, until the passing of time brought the rebuilding decision of 1929 into a serious time of questioning in the 1950s. Political expediency had brought the institution into existence and political inertia kept it in operation.

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long, ed., Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), vol. 5, 256. Traill County Commissioners' Minutes, Volume A, 8 July 1879, 86. 5 October 1880, 141; 5 October 1881, 186; 5 April 1880, 122; 9 January 1880, 113; record variants of pauper identification. The County Commissioners' Minutes will be hereafter cited as C.C.

2. Gerhard D. Olson, County Auditor, "Poor Farm History," in "Poor Farm Papers, Caledonia Township," in a folder in Traill County Auditor's Office, page 1.

3. Purchase of the land recorded in Warranty Deed, 14 July 1883, John Mickelson to Traill County; and Warranty Deed, 14 July 1883, John Morgan to Traill County, in "Poor Farm Papers," Traill County, Auditor's Office. The land consists of Lots 6, 7, 8, 9, and the SE 1/4 of SW 1/4 of Section 2, Township 146, Range 49 W. (153.7 acres); and the North 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Section 2, Township 146 N. of Range 49 W. (120 acres). C.C., vol. B, for 4 August 1883, 37; 10 August 1883, 39; 11 September 1883, 46; describe the plans, architects and builder. Information about the poor house is from "Specifications of Poor House, Traill County, D.T.," drawn by E.R. Tischler, Architect, Fargo, in "Poor Farm Papers, Caledonia Township." Also Olson, "Poor Farm History," 1, 2.

4. The Hillsboro newspaper is quoted in "County Almshouses," Grand Forks Herald, 13 December 1883, 2. C.C., vol. B, 20 November 1883, 63.

5. Holmberg in C.C., vol. B, 19 March 1884, 87. Kelly in vol. B, 17 March 1885, 133. First bids for rental in vol. B, 12 November 1887, 349; 6 January 1888, 361; vol. B, 8 February 1888, 366. Bid or rental in vol. B, 12 January 1889, 423; Aune bid and profitability in vol. B, 6 February 1889, 426; bid approved in vol. C, 3 February 1891, 109; appointment resumed in vol. C, 6 January 1892, 166.

6. County seat fight mentioned in Traill County Historical Society and the Red River Valley Historical Society, Yesteryears in Traill: Traill County, North Dakota (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1976), vol. 1, 10, ; and in Illustrated Historical Atlas of Traill and Steele Counties, N.D. (Mayville, ND: J.J. Kelly & Company, 1892), 11.

7. Expenses listed in C.C., vol. B, 7 October 1884, 108; 21 October 1884, 110; 21 May 1885, 143; 3 June 1887, 319. G.F. Herald, 13 December 1883, 2. Steele county in C.C., vol. C, 8 June 1891, 125. Population at the poor farm is found in Frederick H. Wines, Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, part II: General Tables (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 685.

8. C.C., vol. D, 14 February 1899, 15; 6 April 1899, 24; Vennes in 1 March 1900, 71; vote in 10 July 1906, 395. Population of the poorhouse in Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906, 82. The barn was built by contractor M.O. Rudrud of Hillsboro, N.D., according to "Bid," in "Poor Farm Papers, Caledonia Township," Traill County Auditor's Office.

9. Appointment of Herbrandson noted in C.C., vol. D, 10 October 1908, 527; report on couple in 9 April 1909, 557.

10. C.C., vol. F, 6 August 1930, 545.

11. C.C., vol. F, 9 September 1929, 500; and 25 September 1929, 501.

12. C.C., vol. F, 6 August 1930, 545;

13. Olson, "Poor Farm History," 4.

14. C.C., vol. G, 20 July 1932, 34, tells of taxpayer concerns; CWA programs in 9 December 1933, 118. 1929 and 1930 tax levies in vol. F, 16 July 1929, 489; and 22 July 1930, 542. Later budgets in vol. G, 24 July 1934, 163; 24 July 1935, 219; 21 July 1936, 277; and 22 July 1938, 409. CCC in vol. G, 11 June 1937, 330; Resettlement in 8 July 1938, 401; WPA in 22 July 1938, 410.

15. "Contract," 21 March 1952 between County and Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society in "Poor Farm Papers, Caledonia Township," Traill County Auditor's Office; "Notice," of sale of poor farm at public auction 12 May 1954; "Contract," between Clarence Blake and County, 1 February 1955; "Contract," between Gerald and Ruby Kimbrell and County, 1 July 1958, for sale of poor farm property.

16. Telephone interview by Steven Hoffbeck with Millard Stigen, Caledonia, N.D., October 19, 1991. Gravestone records are from "Cemetery Records," vol. 5, Traill County (Fargo: Fargo Genealogy Society, n.d.), 30.

CHAPTER 9

WALSH COUNTY POOR FARM, PARK RIVER

Walsh County, located in the Red River Valley, became fully organized in 1881 with Grafton as the county seat. The county board of commissioners soon faced some serious problems in 1882, when smallpox broke out in the area around Garfield Post Office. The county officials, "acting as a Board of Health," authorized a Kensington physician to vaccinate "all persons within five miles from any house" where the disease had been found. In addition, all horses in the vicinity of the disease outbreak were to be quarantined.¹

In the early years of the county, relatively few citizens required poor relief. The commissioners decided which persons would receive assistance and received appeals directly from the affected individuals or from concerned doctors or neighbors. Occasional sicknesses were unavoidable, and "medicine for poor" constituted the bulk of early poor relief. Those who ran seriously short of heating fuel in the winter found some help from the county. If a new arrival fell into extreme financial difficulty and had not yet become an official resident of the county, the county might send the person or persons back to the prior place of

residence. In one such case from 1883, a woman and her children received transportation back to Minneapolis. The \$47.00 involved stood as a bargain compared to the expenses for long-term aid to the family. The county sent another pauper even farther out of the state for \$51.60 in that same year.²

The system for providing aid to the poor of the county took shape over a period of years. To help a county commissioner regarding the allocation of poor relief, the commissioner who first received a petition for relief had to submit the case to another member of the county board for approval before aid would be granted. This could help the county hold down poor relief expenses by passing the responsibility to a second party who might find disapproval of an aid request an easy matter. If one commissioner became an easy touch, the other commissioners could keep county expenses down in this manner.³

In the East, the names of those accepting county poor relief were published in the local newspapers as a means of discouraging proud pioneers from seeking financial assistance. In Walsh County the names were sometimes included in the official minutes and sometimes not. To tighten up the system, the board resolved to include the "name of the party" involved in the official record.⁴

By 1884 settlement in the county increased. The Minneapolis, St. Paul and Manitoba Railroad line opened up

the area around Park River, and a "flourishing city" sprouted up there. County-wide, the population grew during the decade to a total of 16,587, making Walsh County the third-largest in the state. At first the county made generous provision for poor cases, going so far as to provide \$48 worth of "lumber for [a] house for [a] pauper." Yet the increased numbers of poor relief supplications caused the county fathers to turn down several requests for aid. The county physician, given the responsibility of caring for the poor, received direction to desist from giving free medicine "to any but county charges."⁵

By the spring of 1885 the care of the poor in Walsh County became a "heavy" expense. The county commissioners decided that the placement of destitute persons on a poor farm was "advisable and economical." Accordingly, the county advertised for the purchase of a poor farm for "the lodging of those who are or may become county charges." The farm should be "not more than two hundred acres," and possess both prairie land and wooded acreage. The property had to be accessible, therefore, the county desired a location within four miles of a railroad station.⁶

Of the fourteen properties submitted to the board, six were deemed as unsuitable. The county officials closely inspected the eight remaining properties. Of the final three properties, that of John H. McCulloch, a mile north of Park River, met the qualifications and had the best price.

For \$1650, the board purchased 160 acres of land with some timber and much prairie. In order to get more woodland, the county bought an adjacent 20 acre plot from William Davis for \$500. The McCulloch land was located in the Northwest quarter of Section 21, Township 157, Range 55. The legal description of the Davis property was the Southeast quarter of Section 20, Township 157, Range 55.⁷

The county authorized the construction of a court house and jail in Grafton in the same year that it bought the poor farm property. Grafton felt pride in the new buildings, but the community of Park River felt pride in capturing the new poor farm. While not as desirable as a designation as a county seat, the poor farm represented a coup for the town. The Park River newspaperman exulted in announcing that the Grafton gang had been found to be "unable to run the county board." Referring to Grafton as "the frog pond," the editor judged that locating of the poor farm there would have been "obnoxious to the tax payers of Walsh County."⁸

The property secured, the county made provision to raise buildings for the poor farm in 1886. The initial poorhouse design proved to be too expensive for the county. Finding the bids all to be near the \$5,000 level, the board authorized a lesser building for the farm. The bid of Suter & Company for \$3,468 met the approval of the county commissioners on 22 May 1886. The county hired Mr. J. Lewis as a superintendent to insure proper construction of the new

poorhouse. In addition, Mr. Lewis built a stable and a granary in his "spare time." The construction of a barn completed the necessary poor farm buildings.⁹

Walsh County instituted a novel approach to reducing poor farm expenses. The system blended an old method of bidding out the care of paupers to the lowest bidder with the rental of the poor farm property. Thus the renter had to "furnish all implements, machinery, and stock necessary to work the farm." The county did not have to buy farm equipment or animals for the farm. The renter also had to "furnish his own apartments." The county outfitted the living quarters for the paupers with "beds, bedding, stoves and furniture." The county also had to buy the seed for the fields. The county paid the renter a negotiated amount per week for the care of the paupers. The poor-farm manager did not pay any cash rent but shared the grain harvest with the county.¹⁰

N. R. (Nate) Carman won the Walsh County poor farm contract. Mr. Carman agreed to give one-half of the grain crop to the county for the use of the land. He accepted \$2.50 per week for the care of adult paupers and \$2.00 per week for the care of children aged five to fifteen. The board expected Carman to feed and clothe adequately the poor people in his care with the money it paid him. The first contract ran for the period of one year so that the board could evaluate the effectiveness of the system.¹¹

Bouyed by hopes for the new system, the county commissioners resolved to pay "no more board bills" for paupers. Anyone seeking such assistance had to "be prepared to move to the poor house . . . if requested to" do so. The county would still provide heating fuel assistance, medical aid, and food to persons in their homes, but expected that long-term poor relief would take place on the poor farm.¹²

Administration of the new poorhouse involved some adjustments as residents moved into the building in 1887. Control of supplies for the residents came fully under the control of the county commissioners rather than the renter/supervisor. The county board voted to authorize one commissioner as the purchasing officer for the poor farm. Only written requisitions from the purchasing officer would be honored for payment. To reduce temptations for persons to steal county property at the farm, the county ordered a stencil for use in clearly marking county poorhouse property. In the summer, the county board drew up rules for the governance of the operation. No record of the rules is extant, but the commissioners did make a strong effort to be sure that "no one who is sent to the poor house sick is kept there at the county expense after they are better and able to work."¹³

Nate Carman lost the poor farm contract after one year. In 1888 Mr. H. Loughhead received the appointment as the supervisor of the poor farm.¹⁴

The poor farm could not give help to the large numbers of farmers who fell into financial difficulties in the winter of 1888-1889. The western portion of the county plunged into a period of "distress and destitution," due to poor crops and a harsh winter. The Minneapolis Tribune reported that settlers in that part of the county "were without means to obtain food, clothing and fuel," and were "in immediate danger of perishing from hunger and exposure." County commissioners John Nicholson and Knut Levang accompanied Lieutenant Leon Roudiez of nearby Fort Pembina in an official investigation of the conditions in that area. After visiting over fifty houses, the inspectors found "only two settlers" to be nearly out of wood, and only one settler reduced to one-half sack of flour. The commissioners considered four or five families to be in need of short-term assistance, with eight or ten more requiring aid until the next harvest. The commissioners contended that the newspaper report stood as a "gross exaggeration" of the situation. The county leaders proclaimed that Walsh County had "always been willing to help persons actually in need." In order to help the settlers, the county board ordered "two lots of fifteen sacks each of family grade flour" for the needy in the western section of the county and also gave \$3,000 worth of seed wheat in the spring of 1889.¹⁵

The poor farm did not live up to the early expectations of the county officials. Not all persons who needed shelter

could be sent to the poor farm, so some poor people received "board" and care in their local communities over short periods of time. The county continued occasionally to ship out non-resident paupers to their former place of residence.¹⁶

Serious diseases required powerful corrective measures at times. In 1895 diphtheria struck a family at Conway. The house had to be destroyed along with clothing and all the contents of the dwelling that "could not be disinfected." Since the mother of the family could not afford a new house and clothing, the county furnished timber for a new 12' X 18' house with a shanty roof built by the town board. The citizens of Park River graciously furnished new clothing and bedding. In another case, a family with an unidentified disease gained medical assistance from the county physician and also were "furnished [with] lumber for [the] floor" of their dwelling.¹⁷

The Walsh County Poor Farm harbored only a relatively small number of residents at any time. In 1890 it housed only four inmates. In 1895 six adults and two children were present. The figure in 1900 stood at six inmates. The highest total came in 1905, when twelve residents were counted by the Federal Census. In 1910 eight persons lived on the poor farm.¹⁸

In 1896 the county board directed the county physician to care for the residents of the poor farm. This action

came as a response to an 1895 state law that required a "physician to attend the County Asylum." Although the county physician had always been responsible for the poor farm, the official designation by the county fulfilled state requirements.¹⁹

The poor farm renter also gained a more official status. By 1897 George Elliott, the renter responsible for the farm and its inmates, gained the designation as "Superintendent" of the poor farm. The superintendency ran on a two-year contract. Renewal depended upon outbidding other aspirants for the position. Elliott won his bid over two other contenders.²⁰ But in 1899 he did not even try for the contract. In that year Hugh Loughead and Richard Solberg sought the position. Solberg presented the lowest bid and the county commissioners recorded the complete proposal. The bid, reprinted here, reveals the preoccupation with the farming aspects of the poor farm and the secondary position of inmate care.

I hereby offer to act as Superintendent of the Poor Farm of Walsh County for two years, beginning March 1st, 1899, on the following terms: I will farm the said Poor Farm, I will furnish all necessary teams, utensils, and machinery, and farm the land in good manner. I will deliver one half of the grain, which is to be wheat, raised on said farm during each of said years to the County as its share of the crops each year at any elevator in the City of Park River, in said County, or at the granary on said farm, according to the orders of the County Board. The County is to furnish seed and pay the threshing bill for its share of the grain at not to exceed four cents per bushel. Twine and all other expenses to be furnished and paid by me, except improvements on farm or buildings, which the county must pay for.

I offer and agree to board inmates of the poor farm, or poor house, at the following rates: Children under one year of age with mother--nothing per week. Children under one year of age without mother, 75 cents per week. Children from one to five years old, \$1.75 per week. Children from five to 12 year of age, \$1.50 per week. Adults, male, \$2.50 per week. Adults, female, \$2.25 per week. I also agree to pull foul weeds on said land and to cultivate the trees planted thereon without extra charge. And also, to summer fallow free of charge each year, at least 15 acres of said land. It is also understood that I am to have the exclusive use of ten acres of said land each year at an annual rental fee of \$2.00 per acre, to be paid by me to said county, on or before the first day of November, each year. I will furnish satisfactory bond in the sum of \$500. Richard Solberg.²¹

But Superintendent Solberg had made no bid which would include the care of paupers inflicted with the ancient scourge of leprosy. Neighboring Grand Forks County had harbored one poor soul who suffered from the insidious disease. Due to fears ingrained in North Dakota citizens from Biblical injunctions against association with lepers, the malady created a complex problem for county governments. The nature of the disease also inspired revulsion. People wanted to keep a distance from those who had a disease that caused "death by inches." Grand Forks County sent the Norwegian pauper-leper back to Bergen, Norway. Walsh County had not just one leper, but two. One was a fifty-year-old Norwegian, the other, a Swede (age thirty-five). The men lived fifteen miles west of Edinburgh. The county quietly had given funds for the support of the pair from 1897 until a controversy in 1900 brought the whole situation into the public eye.²²

Dr. John E. Engstad of Grand Forks, in a humanitarian effort, visited the lepers after hearing of their situation. His report, published in the Grand Forks Herald, caused a sensation across the face of the two counties. Engstad described the sod house of the afflicted men as a "living tomb," built for them by the county. The doctor told how the pair were "shunned by the entire community." Engstad contended that no one had visited the men for the past two years, and that no one would dare to provide care for them. He stated that even the Norwegian's wife refused to see him. According to the newspaper story, the Norwegian's children occasionally shouted a "greeting to him from the top of a ridge nearby," which constituted his only communication with the outside world. The children had also been anathema to the community and were thus not allowed to attend the public school.²³

The county commissioners attempted to repudiate the assertions of the Herald and Dr. Engstad. The county had not built the sod house for the lepers, instead, the dwelling had been built by the Norwegian for his family before the effects of the disease had begun to accelerate. The county believed that the structure stood as a "good building of its kind," being "fairly well lighted, cleanly white-washed," and "weatherproof." It was not a "tomb" but served as a convenient place for the Norwegian's wife to provide care for her husband and the Swede. Since 1897 the

county had paid the wife \$30 per month to cook for the lepers. Far from shunning them, the county commissioners themselves had often visited the afflicted men.

Commissioner Shepherd had stopped in "at least once each month." The county board had brought members of the State Board of Health to visit the site and had written to officials from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and had sought advice from the U.S. Surgeon General about how to best care for lepers. The county had even provided "Scandinavian literature" for the men, so deep ran the concern for the "care and comfort of the said unfortunate persons."²⁴

Walsh County had spent about \$1,800 on supporting the lepers since 1897, and estimated that further care would cost \$600 per year. Several efforts had been made to establish a "new building as a permanent home" for the men, but a suitable site had not been found. The controversy forced the county to find a location quickly. Accordingly, in the same month that the county defended its treatment of the men, the county board leased one acre of the Norwegian leper's property as a building site. Within a month a wooden frame building stood on the property. Measuring fourteen by twenty-four feet, the house had been built for \$209. The Norwegian woman got \$1 a day to feed the lepers. Walsh County could not properly send a legal resident out of the territory, even if he or she was a leper. The county lived up to its responsibility, even if public prodding

forced the issue. The county fathers did not attempt to place the lepers on the poor farm.²⁵

The upkeep of paupers in the county took place either in the home community of the individual or at the poor farm. Obviously, long-term care of persons impaired by illness or old age might take place in the poorhouse. An impoverished person would prefer to gain support while living in familiar surroundings, with friends nearby. In 1899 a woman from Minto challenged the county board over its ruling to place her on the poor farm rather than provide sustenance in her place of residence. Twice the woman "indignantly refused" an order to move to the poorhouse. The board publicly proclaimed its right to "determine the manner in which . . . relief shall be given." The county decided to continue the offer of assistance to the woman and her child, but only at the poorhouse, "otherwise, she [was] at liberty to act for herself."²⁶

The county commissioners could be more accomodating for others. William Thompson applied for assistance in getting a new artificial leg in 1901, and the commissioners granted his application. Thompson also gained railroad transportation to St. Paul, Minnesota, and back.²⁷

The poor farm continued in operation until about 1918. Two-year contracts were granted to superintendents until midway between 1910 and 1920. By 1911 the county seriously reconsidered "how best to care for the poor of the county."

The costs of the operation had increased from \$1,048.40 in 1909 to \$1,597.82 in 1910. The county began to pull out of the poor farm business, for the population of the farm had never been very large in numbers. By 1917 the tax levy for the poor farm fell to only \$500. In 1918 the county simply rented out the poor farm land and stopped authorizing a tax levy for the support of the farm.²⁸

The Walsh County Poor Farm faded away without a fanfare and without an official explanation. However, the relatively low population at the farm at the time of the federal almshouse census enumerations indicates that the county commissioners generally allowed paupers to reside in or near their own communities. Also, the population within the county leveled off at 19,000 between 1910 and 1920. The provisions of the Mothers' Pension reform in mid-decade spelled a progressive change in poor relief administration that moved away from the poor farm concept. The county kept the poor farm property, renting the acreage for a cash payment from 1918 until 1953. In that year C. D. Lewis bought the farm for \$8,500.²⁹

The experience of Walsh County in the decision to implement a poor farm and then discontinue it in the early years of the twentieth century seems tied to its choice position in the Red River Valley. Blessed with exceptional cropland like its neighboring counties in the Valley, the county did not face the urban pressures found in Grand Forks

County and Cass County. Freed from a concentration of poor, the agriculturally-centered county government could turn from the poor farm idea more easily than could the larger, more populous counties in the Red River Valley.

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long (ed.), Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980, volume 5, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), 179. Smallpox in County Commissioners Minutes, Walsh County, vol. A, 6 February 1882, 17.

2. C.C., vol. A, 14 November 1882, 45; 5 February 1883, 60; tickets in 2 April 1883 and 4 June 1883, 87.

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6. C.C., vol. A, 6 April 1885, 245, 246.

7. C.C., vol. A, 14 May 1885, 253; 4 June 1885, 268; 11 June 1885, 273. Also "County Commissioners," News and Times [Grafton, ND], 16 December 1886, 1; "County Board," Park River [ND] Gazette, 22 May 1885, 1; "Town and Country News," Park River Gazette, 12 June 1885, 1. Deed Record, Walsh County, volume H, 6 July 1885, 264.

8. C.C., vol. A, 5 October 1885, 293. "Town and Country News," Park River Gazette, 19 June 1885, 1.

9. C.C., vol. A, 20 March 1886, 343, 344; 6 April 1886, 348; 3 May 1886, 354, 357; 22 May 1886, 360, 361; Lewis in 7 June 1886, 363; 2 August 1886, 379; 23 August 1886, 385; and 6 September 1886, 386.

10. C.C., vol. B, 10 November 1886, 402, 403.

11. "City and Country News," Park River Gazette, 10 December 1886, 1; and "County Commissioners," News and Times [Grafton], 16 December 1886, 1. A. Slater offered to care for the paupers for a mere \$1.00 per week per person, but would give only 1/3 of the grain to the county; Archibald Shaw would give care to adult paupers for \$2.50 per week and Children under age 10 for \$2.00 per week, with 1/2 of the

harvest given to the county, but his contract would have run for two years.

12. "County Commissioners," News and Times [Grafton], 16 December 1886, 1; "Official Report," Park River Gazette, 10 December 1886, 4; and "Official Report," Park River Gazette, 31 December 1886, 1.

13. C.C., vol. B, 10 June 1887, 31; 7 July 1887, 37; 8 July 1887, 39.

14. C.C., vol. B, 4 January 1888, 73.

15. C.C., vol. B, 12 January 1889, 156; 19 January 1889, 159; the minutes from 19 January 1889, 161, also contain a detailed letter, written by Lieutenant Roudiez, of the inspection tour to the western part of the county. Seed wheat in 28 February 1889, 170.

16. C.C., vol. B, 5 March 1890, 270; 6 March 1890, 270; and 7 May 1890, 299.

17. C.C., vol. C, 9 January 1895, 336; 6 March 1895, 365.

18. Frederick H. Wines, Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, part II: General Tables, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895, 685. C.C., vol. C, 6 March 1895, 365; and vol. D, 7 March 1900, 402. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 82. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 70.

19. C.C., vol. C, 6 January 1896, 454. The territorial law required a physician in attendance at county poorhouses, see Compiled Laws of the Territory of Dakota, A.D. 1887, Chapter 22, Section 2164; and the Compiled Laws of the State of N.D., 1913, Chapter 38, Section 2531, refers to the listing of the law in the Revised Codes of 1899 and 1905. It appears that the requirement for a poorhouse physician was confused between 1889 and 1895.

20. C.C., vol. D, 1 February 1897, 99.

21. C.C., vol. D, 10 February 1899, 301, 302.

22. C.C., vol. D, 8 March 1900, 404. Grand Forks County leper in "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 22 November 1894; and "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 18 April 1895.

- 23.C.C., vol. D, 8 March 1900, 404, 405.
- 24.C.C., vol. D, 8 March 1900, 404-406.
- 25.C.C., vol. D, 8 March 1900, 404-406; 5 March 1900, 400; 8 May 1900, 421.
- 26.C.C., vol. D, 5 December 1899, 374.
- 27.C.C., vol. E, 7 January 1901, 7.
28. Superintendents at the poor farm included: W.H. Gemmill of Edinburgh (1901-1902), in C.C., vol. E, 5 February 1901, 16; Ole Gullickson (1905-1907), vol. E, 5 June 1905, 465; Hans Olson (1907-1909), vol. F, 5 February 1907, 169. O. Hadland was the only bidder in 1909 and served from 1909-1915, vol. F, 4 March 1909, 436; vol. G, 17 March 1911, 191; vol. G., 6 March 1913, 419. Expenses on the poor farm are from John M. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota 3, no. 2 (January 1913), 108; and C.C., vol. H, 5 April 1915, 109; vol. H, 10 July 1915, 130; \$500 tax levy in vol. H, 2 July 1917, 263; cash rent in vol. H, 7 May 1918, 307; no levy in vol. H, 11 July 1918, 329.
29. Rent in C.C., vol. H, 7 March 1922, 563; sale authorized in vol. M, 11 December 1952, 513, record of sale in Deeds, Walsh County, vol. 72, 7 April 1953, 425.

CHAPTER 10

GRAND FORKS COUNTY HOSPITAL AND POOR FARM, ARVILLA

A man known only as the "poor Swede" lay near the corner of Fourth Street in Grand Forks in late September of 1883, burning with a fever. He had only one dollar to his name and he gave that to a passing doctor who wrote him a prescription to relieve his suffering. Other passersby donated enough coins to buy the medicine for the suffering man. The poor Swede had arrived in St. Paul just a month before and had journeyed to East Grand Forks for employment in digging a railroad ditch across the Red River. His fellow railway workers, in fear of contracting his fever, had loaded him in a wagon, shipped him to Grand Forks and dumped him on the street corner. Because he seemed to be a resident of Polk County in Minnesota, any further help from Grand Forks County citizens would "doubtless have been criminal." The Swede's Grand Forks friends notified Deputy Sheriff Dwyer of East Grand Forks of his plight and sent him back across the river. The poor immigrant struggled to cross the Red River, but his strength failed, forcing him to collapse on wisps of hay in an abandoned house. Dwyer took the man to a home in East Grand Forks, where he died. The

major question facing the respective county governments was not one of sorrow or guilt, but a matter of determining which county was responsible for this pauper's burial. In truth the man had not been properly a legal resident of either county. The local newspaper writer hoped that the matter would be speedily resolved in a way that would not "leave the coffin kicking from one side of the river to the other till it is worn out."¹

The tragic misfortunes of the "poor Swede" pointed out the depth of the poor relief problems faced in Grand Forks county. Situated right on the border with Minnesota, the city of Grand Forks attracted all classes of people. Prosperous newcomers were surely welcome but people with little money were questionable prospects for residency. East Grand Forks, just across the Red River, flourished as a wicked city after North Dakota adopted prohibition of alcohol in 1889. The human wreckage from the saloons and brothels in East Grand Forks often drifted into Grand Forks county. County authorities had to wrestle not only with residency disputes with other counties in the state but also with counties in Minnesota as well.

Grand Forks County needed new settlers and welcomed them in their prosperity and promised to care for them in times of adversity. The evolution of the poor relief system in Grand Forks county involved countless false starts and numerous sideroads on the way to today's modern Welfare

State. Poverty in the midst of seeming plenty forced local governments to shape an apparatus that would aid their fellow citizens when they became "broke," nurse them when they became sick and bury them with some measure of dignity when they died penniless. The county experimented with various forms of relief and utilized the poor farm approach in an effort to provide humane care for the aged, infirm and the downtrodden.²

By the time settlement began in the Dakota Territory along the Red River near Grand Forks in the 1870s, poor farms and other typical forms of relief were established concepts in the minds of the first leaders of the towns. In the frontier setting, equality was preached more than it was practiced. The town boosters were often old Yankees from the East who prospered by selling real estate to newcomers. The immigrant settlers often were at the same low economic level and would give as much aid to fellow pioneers as they could manage. When a town reached a significant size, however, caring for disabled and elderly people put a considerable burden on the new towns.

In Grand Forks County, a tax of five mills on a dollar was levied in the first month that the county was organized in 1875. The first officially documented relief case recorded in the county was for burying a woman who had drowned in the Red River in 1876, however, the county commissioners rejected the proposal for reimbursement of

expenses. Not until 1877 was the first bill allowed for repayment, in which medicine, board and attendance was allowed to a pauper. In the same year a separate county poor fund was established, in accordance with new territorial laws.³

The sufferings brought about by epidemic diseases put heavy demands on the county poor funds. In 1879, a Norwegian immigrant known only as "D. Thompson" joined his countrymen in a settlement about twelve miles southwest of the town of Grand Forks. People flocked to visit Thompson to get news from the old country. Thompson shared not only news but also the contagion of smallpox. Many caught the disease, as did the attending physician, Dr. Haeston. The county tried to hide the epidemic at first, fearing its effect on emigration to the area. Because the county poor funds were exhausted by the emergency, county officials requested vaccine and medical assistance from the Board of Health of St. Paul, Minnesota. Two doctors from St. Paul established a pest house to quarantine the many people exposed to the smallpox. Of the twenty-six people who had the disease, eight died. Although the local citizenry "contributed liberally of their means," the county spent more money than they had in their treasury. Approximately \$2,000 was contributed by the citizens and another \$2,000 was spent by the county. Despite these expenditures, not all of the clothing of infected individuals had been

destroyed due to lack of sufficient funds. As a result the pestilence spread and the county asked the Territorial Legislature for help. The Territorial Legislature, fortunately under the leadership of George Walsh of Grand Forks, funded the debt of Grand Forks County.⁴

The arrival of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad in 1880 brought a wave of poor people to the town of Grand Forks. The county handled numerous cases wherein "indigent persons" and "invalid paupers" pleaded for support. Lots were purchased in both the Protestant and Catholic parts of the local cemetery for the purpose of burying the likes of "Lawrence Sweeney, an indigent person killed by the [railroad] cars." With the increased demands came an increased scrutiny of the cases, one bid for reimbursement for expenses was denied because it was deemed to be "for a much greater amount than is reasonable for the county to pay," and the individual had not been proven to be a resident of the county. Another response to the increased demand for aid was simply to send the person back to his or her previous place of residence. The county spent \$40 to send "Thos. Wilson, a pauper" back to Ontario.⁵

In an effort to reduce questionable medical billings, the county commissioners appointed a county physician in 1881. Dr. W. Collins became entrusted with the task of attending to the poor and sick of the county. Almost immediately, the city of Grand Forks was hit with a smallpox

epidemic. A special smallpox committee considered purchasing an isolation house or pest house several miles out of town, but the brick building was filled with wheat. Instead, a log structure, measuring 18 X 24 feet, was secured by 7 December 1881.⁶

The county physician served to reduce the expenses of the county in the first year. Dr. Collins claimed to have saved \$118.25 in comparison with 1880. Evidently, his skills and the pest house minimized the smallpox threat. Collins felt pressured to respond to charges that the city of Grand Forks was the center of poverty in the county. In his annual report, Collins declared that most of the paupers were "residents of newly settled townships, who through lack of anything like comfortable shanties and proper food, were overtaken with sickness, came or were brought" to Grand Forks because medical and surgical care was not available in the outlying townships. This episode was the first evidence of a strong city versus country rivalry that was to characterize intra-county politics.⁷

The basic framework for the establishment of county governments in the territories remained the same since the days of the founding of the Northwest Territories. The Dakota Territory Code of 1877 identified the county commissioners as the overseers of the poor within their county boundaries and charged them with the support of all "persons lawfully settled therein." Legal settlement was

established after 90 days residence. A "poor-book" or list of paupers was to be kept. Even though the county commissioners were required to care for the poor, in early 1884, the burden on their time became so great that they resolved that the township supervisors were to care for their own poor. The county commissioners were subjected to great travel demands in order to investigate appeals for county aid.⁸

Threatening the townships did not work, and the county agreed to provide for the care of the poor of the county, "as usual." Obviously requests for relief were increasing, and the county continued to pay for the care of indigents. In fact, the county made it easier for indigents to apply for county help. More county physicians were hired by 1885 to cover "the vast proportions of Grand Forks county." There were so many cases of poor relief that often the names were not even listed for the public record during the mid-1880s. The purpose of the poor list was to publicly shame those who applied for help and thereby reduce the number of applicants. In the transfer of institutions to the frontier, the spirit of the law was relaxed from about 1884 through 1888. Generosity was exhibited when a pauper was given a ticket to Decorah, Iowa, to have an operation on his eyes. A whole family of poor people was given \$70 in tickets to return to their former home in Ohio. The increased number of county indigent sick led to a call for a

county hospital to help care for them in a centralized location.⁹

Towns across the nation considered different ways to care for the most tragic poor-relief cases, namely, invalids and fatherless families. Grand Forks County often paid rents, bought groceries and clothes and other necessities for these people. One family presented a particularly difficult case. In 1882, Mr. Olsen, described as a "helpless blind paralytic" and his family from Walle Township began to receive county help. By late 1883, the Olsen family was to occupy the old county jail, but that could not be made comfortable, so they moved into the adjoining coal shed. Ladies at the Alexander Griggs House hotel collected money to help clothe the Olsens. Believing that they could not feed the family, the women issued a call for "refuse victuals" from other Grand Forks hotels. The Griggs House could not do so because it was already supporting a family of seven "from the refuse of its table."¹⁰

Public awareness of the plight of the Olsons and other similar families led concerned government leaders to look for different methods of poor-relief. When Traill County, just south of Grand Forks County, established a poor farm of 300 acres in 1883, the Editor of the Daily Herald, Mr. George B. Winship, felt that Grand Forks was "somewhat behind the age." Traill County officials claimed that the

cost of keeping the poor would be reduced by one-half. Vagrants would be persuaded to leave town rather than be forced to work for their keep on such a farm. Any pauper who could work would thereby help pay for his own keep. The push for a poor farm began through envy of neighboring Traill County and continued as local poor relief expenses kept increasing.¹¹

The year 1887 marked the first attempt by the county commissioners to "erect an asylum for the poor." A special election to be held on 8 February 1887 was to decide whether or not the county would spend almost \$10,000 for poor farm purposes. Voters in the areas outside of the city viewed the proposition as a "scheme to fatten Grand Forks with another public institution." Country voters believed that the city aspired to "grasp everything which by force of vote or petition or wheedling of commissioners she can lay her unclean hands upon." The proposition failed dismally by a 736 to 158 count. Farmers and village voters rejoiced that the "monopolizing municipality" had been defeated.¹²

Believing that the "accommodations for the county poor and infirm are inadequate to the necessary demand," the Board appointed a special committee to find a central location suitable for a county hospital by December of 1887. Since the establishment of a county hospital, unlike a poor farm, did not require a vote by the people, the Board proceeded to purchase a lot with buildings on it for \$1,800.

The refurbished buildings in Lindsay's addition to Grand Forks city were occupied by seven patients by New Year's Day of 1888. Demand for hospitalization was so great throughout that winter that an addition to the hospital was authorized in early March.¹³

Another special election to decide the poor farm question was arranged for 1 October 1889. The board felt that the \$8,000 spent annually for poor relief could be reduced through judicious use of a poor house, where "persons capable of doing light work . . . could partially repay the county the cost of keeping" them. The County Grand Jury had been repeatedly recommending such a move in the belief that petty crimes might also be deterred through the mere presence of such a county facility. A new county hospital was to be built in combination with the poor house. The voters again rejected the proposal, fearing the accumulating power of Grand Forks.¹⁴

The decade of the 1890s began with severe economic circumstances for the new state of North Dakota and for the nation at large. Needy farmers, unable to purchase new seed in the spring of 1890, received seed wheat from the county. More orphans began to be placed as wards of the county. Families without prospects of employment looked to the county for sustenance. Grand Forks County responded to the tough times with tougher measures than before. Six paupers were whisked out of town on the railway in the month of

January 1890 alone; one indigent man was shipped all the way back to Toronto. It was cheaper to send the poor back to their previous residence than to face the prospect of caring for them in the long run.¹⁵

Although it had been authorized by law, the county had not bound out young paupers until the case of young Frank Russell, an orphan. Finding him without adequate clothing in Inkster Township, the local county commissioner provided young Russell with "the necessaries of life." Since the boy proved to be incapable of absorbing typical schoolbook learning, Commissioner William Barry recommended that the boy should be apprenticed to "some good and responsible man" so that he could "acquire some industrial skill that will enable him to gain an independent living." Young Mr. Russell was then bound out. Other wards of the county, even though their parents were living, were thought to be better off by taking them out of the home rather than to be "brought up in evil surroundings" which tended "to prevent their becoming good citizens." If the parents refused to sanction such actions, "all further aid from the county" was to be discontinued. Six children, ranging in age from seven days to nine years, were sent to the Children's Aid Society of Minnesota in February of 1892, so that better homes could be secured for them.¹⁶

The new tougher policies also produced increasing numbers of disputes with neighboring counties over the

official residency of paupers. Grand Forks County brought suit against Polk County in Minnesota to receive payment for the care of one man. The county board refused to allow the admission of an impoverished patient from Nelson County into the Grand Forks County Hospital. The Commissioners rejected a bill for the boarding of a pauper because he was properly "a Minnesota charge." ¹⁷

As a result of all the suffering associated with the depression of the early 1890s, sentiment within the county changed towards favoring a county poor farm. A positive outcome of the special election of 27 May 1893 was expected. Newspaper editors in the county campaigned actively in support of a poor farm. Horace F. Arnold of the Larimore Pioneer felt that a poorhouse "if properly managed" would "make some of the county charges much less." The Grand Forks Daily Herald urged voters to "Vote for the poor farm" on election day, emphasizing that the "present method of caring for the county poor, sick and infirm has been found a very expensive method." The Plaindealer claimed credit for their early endorsement of the poor farm concept, having done the "pioneer work" in the fall of 1892 toward passage of a poor farm proposition.¹⁸

The poor farm measure passed overwhelmingly, 811 to 198. Only one vote was cast against the proposition in the city of Grand Forks and in Larimore. The outlying townships of Johnstown, Michigan, Union and Northwood (not Northwood

town) were still opposed to the measure. The county board received twenty-six sealed bids for 160 acres of land on which to build a poor farm. E. J. Jacobi entered the lowest bid at \$1,800. The highest bid came from James Duckworth at \$75 an acre for 170 acres for a total of \$12,750. Duckworth had been a County Commissioner from 1881 through 1885. Some of the sites were in the western and southern portions of the county. Some of the locations had houses and outbuildings on them. The Board, after considering transportation costs, availability of medical supplies and skills, concluded that the "only suitable location would be one within two miles of Grand Forks city." The commissioners aroused resentment around the county when they proposed visiting only the prospective sites in "the vicinity of Grand Forks city."¹⁹

The commissioners then decided to investigate other poor farms in order to "more intelligently decide on a location" for the facility. A three person committee inspected poor farms in Ramsey, Washington, Goodhue counties in Minnesota and St. Croix county in Wisconsin. In addition, they conducted interviews with the Minnesota State Board of Corrections and Charities and with the Board of Control for Ramsey County in Minnesota. The investigators discovered that North Dakota was far more generous with aid to paupers than was Minnesota. In the older state, a pauper had to be over sixty years of age or maimed, blind or

"decrepit." All others were sent to hospitals or homes "specially provided for them." In North Dakota, by contrast, all people "unable to provide for themselves are considered paupers," with the result that their numbers "often swelled to almost alarming proportions by the transient population."²⁰

The special committee, as a result of their investigations, stated that the poor farm must have "good water and drainage privileges," be convenient for railway transportation and that it be a "dairy and vegetable" farm. The only farming was to be that necessary to feed the "inmates" and farm animals. They recommended just one team of horses and only five cows and a few pigs. They felt that central heating in the basement was a necessity. The committee understood that transportation of sick people to the county hospital required good railroad connections in "all seasons of the year." For this reason, a locale near Grand Forks was most desirable.²¹

However, a Larimore faction created enough opposition that the County Commissioners decided to venture out to Larimore on July 18 to look at poor farm locations in that part of the county. But, just before the visit, Dudley H. Hersey of Arvilla issued a surprise offer to the Board. For the sum of one dollar, he would give his Hersey House hotel and 170 acres to the county. Hersey had been a bonanza farmer and a founder of the town of Arvilla in 1881. By

1888, Hersey owned 1,130 acres of wheat and 333 acres planted in other crops. His Hersey House, was an "extravagant and costly undertaking," built for the entertainment of Hersey's friends at a cost of \$25,000. The two story building measured ninety feet by thirty feet and was "one of the best and most expensively built wooden buildings" in the county. It had been operated as a hotel for ten years, and provided fine fare on tables "resplendent with the glitter of silver, the dancing colors of cut glass and the beauties of imported china." For several years it was known as "the finest hotel in the northwest." Hersey sold the building because the railroads no longer used his hotel as a main dining stop and had no prospects for renting it out. Rather than have it "decay for want of a tenant," he wanted to donate it out of his largess.²²

Commissioner E.J. Lander of Grand Forks favored the Duckworth site near Grand Forks over the Arvilla site. He felt that good water was unavailable at Hersey's site, that it offered poor "sewerage" and was generally "inconveniently located." Lander contended that the hotel was a very old building and that the expense to repair the place would exceed the price necessary to buy a property in a better location. The editor of the Daily Herald, Mr. Winship, believed that public opinion in Grand Forks favored the Hersey site and he felt that the Board should accept the Hersey offer even though it was not the ideal location, "for

poor farm purposes it would have filled the bill." The Northwest News, also located in Grand Forks, claimed to favor "no particular farm or locality" but feared that the Hersey hotel would cause the county to "have an elephant on its hands." The editor believed that a truck farm near Grand Forks could be successful, while all Arvilla could provide would be "a wheat farm, a buckwheat farm or a stone quarry."²³

The first vote on the proposal resulted in a two to two tie, one member being absent. The second vote rejected Hersey's offer by a vote of three to two and a third informal ballot found "each one of the five members of the board had a choice of his own different form the rest." Citizens outside of Grand Forks were aghast that the commissioners could reject Hersey's offer worth from \$25,000 to \$35,000 and instead pay \$75 an acre for Duckworth's land which had no suitable buildings on it. Some individual questioned the motives of Lander, thinking that he was guilty of "bullheadedness or something worse." The insinuation was that Lander was in collusion with Duckworth to land the property. Mass meetings were held in Larimore and in Reynolds to discuss the poor farm question. The Inkster Business Mens' Association called a special meeting to vent their rage against the Board. Agitated citizens declared that the water from the Turtle River was purer than that available from the Red River at the Duckworth site.

Some felt that if the sanitary conditions in the Hersey hotel had been "good enough for guests paying \$2 and \$3 per day" it "should be good enough for paupers." One citizen feared that a Grand Forks location would force the county to "support all the bummers from Polk county, Minn." The Larimore group sent "strong resolutions" to the commissioners and each of the Grand Forks newspapers urging support for Hersey's offer. The Inkster faction expressed great surprise that the board would turn down Hersey's "generous and substantial offer." The Reynolds contingent simply condemned the commissioners for their actions.²⁴

Finally, on August 14, the Board voted to reconsider the Hersey gift and then voted to "thankfully" accept the properties. Lander voted against both resolutions.²⁵

The old hotel required considerable repairs and replastering. A new brick foundation was put under the entire building, allowing space for a storage cellar and a heating plant. The building had to be outfitted as a hospital and supplies and patients were transported by rail from Grand Forks. A barn was purchased near Arvilla for \$100 and moved to the site. The board of county commissioners appointed Richmond Fadden, former Indian scout and county sheriff, as the first superintendent of the county hospital and poor farm at Arvilla in January 1894. Fadden, clearly a political appointee, soon appeared to be more interested in growing wheat on his private farm and

racing his horses in Grand Forks than with the operation of the poorhouse.²⁶

Shortly after the institution opened a news item appeared in the Larimore newspaper concerning the poor farm. The Pioneer reported that "one of the female paupers died of inflammation last Wednesday night. This is the first death that has occurred at the poorhouse." Many others followed.²⁷

The first year of the new county hospital and poor farm held great hope that this experiment in poor relief would be an improvement upon past practices. The county launched into the project with optimism. The superintendent of the poor farm had the satisfaction of having a secure job in the local government, after all, there would always be poor people around. The newly refurbished Hersey hotel carried with it a legacy of an elegant past, one that might inspire the paupers within its bounds. The new residents of the place got to take a rare train ride twenty miles across the prairie from Grand Forks to the village of Arvilla.

The close of the first year on the poor farm, however, brought too much excitement. On 28 January 1895, "one of the insane inmates" set the all-wooden structure ablaze and the once-regal Hersey House was reduced to cinders in what was described as "one of the greatest catastrophes" that ever struck tiny Arvilla. A strong southwest wind kept most of the village's buildings from destruction, but an illicit

saloon burned to the ground. Due to the quick action of the staff and neighbors, no lives were lost and most of the building's contents were saved. But the residents, somewhere between thirty and forty in number, had to be housed in the town. Within a short time they were concentrated in a large structure known as the Wood Block Building in Arvilla.²⁸

County commissioner E.J. Lander of Grand Forks saw the disaster as another opportunity to capture the poor farm for his home city. Cass County, following the lead of Grand Forks county, had approved the erection of a hospital and poorhouse of its own in 1894. The city leaders of Fargo appeared able to located the twin institutions near the city. Lander refused to give up his quest for having the poor farm located within the environs of the Grand Forks community, for he saw it as an economic boon for the city and as a feather in his own cap. Matching Fargo was a secondary, yet still important, goal to Lander.²⁹

In the first County Board meeting after the fire, the members could not agree on a location upon which to rebuild the poor farm and hospital. Dudley H. Hersey wisely avoided the fray, journeying to his winter home in Lake Worble, Florida. The plans for the new facility stipulated that it was to be made of brick and "sufficiently roomy for about 40 persons" and to have apartments for the superintendent and nurses. Lander voted against the plan. Three of the five

commissioners believed that the poorhouse should be rebuilt on the Arvilla land because it was now owned by the county and that bids "for a building at any other point will not be considered." Lander voted against this resolution also. Since he was not winning the battle in the public arena, Lander worked behind the scenes to influence the bids. When the contractors submitted their bids for the new poorhouse, they provided two options. If the facility was built in Grand Forks, a certain price was quoted, but if the facility would be built in Arvilla, a higher price was quoted on the grounds that materials would have to be shipped by rail to Arvilla. Residents of Larimore and Arvilla knew that the vital swing vote of one commissioner could be bought and they feared it would be compromised. However, the bid of W.P. Alsip for \$10,732 for the Arvilla site was approved by the county board on a typical three to two vote. Lander dissented, but he had lost the battle.³⁰

The new brick poorhouse and county hospital, designed by architect J. Ross of Grand Forks, stood completed and ready for occupancy in December of 1895. The building, consisting of three stories and a dirt-floored partial basement, had one wing for the men and another for the women. The front of the building faced to the east and many large windows afforded plenty of light within. One could see the Red River and the electric lights in Grand Forks from an upper balcony. A spacious front porch spread across

the entire front of the poorhouse. The building presented a substantial facade and contained "every convenience needed" for hospital patients.³¹

The residents of the county poor farm and hospital fell into three general groups, either permanent residents, hospital patients, or transient residents. The transient residents usually were physically able persons who had fallen upon hard times and were expected to leave the poorhouse as soon as possible. Many of these would enter the poor farm in the late fall and leave in the spring rather than face a cold winter with little fuel for their heating stoves. Tramps and vagrants were not accepted at the poor farm. Since all poor relief cases had to be reviewed by one of the county commissioners, vagrants would not meet the residency requirements. Not all persons on the county relief rolls had to live at the poor farm, although the commissioners often threatened just such an action. As early as 1903 the county resolved that "when practicable hereafter, all paupers receiving support and being supported by the county, must reside at the poor farm." The county Board believed that the "spirit of the law" carried an expectation that all of the county poor should reside at the poor farm. But the practical reality of displacing so many people from their home locales prevented a such a wholesale removal. Many poor received assistance in their own homes

or rental residences. Only severe cases would require transferral to the poor farm.³²

The patients at the county hospital obviously would come and go as their health dictated. Each patient had to be admitted through a review process conducted by the county board. They had to demonstrate that they were genuinely needy. Emergency cases in the Arvilla area were, of course, also admitted. If a person had a perceived ability to pay his or her bill, the county would pursue payment. Only a tiny minority of patients ever did pay for their care at the county hospital.

Pregnant women who were accepting county assistance were often sent to the county hospital to have their babies. From time to time, unwed mothers would also appear at the county poor farm and hospital for the birth of their children. In one such case in 1908, twenty-two-year old Miss Albright rented a room at Mrs. Carlson's boarding house in Arvilla. She stayed there for several days and "told many conflicting stories as to where she came from." When the time came for the birth of her child, she was taken to the nearby county hospital. While she was in labor, two men stopped at Carlson's boarding house, one claiming to be the young woman's brother. When told that she had been taken to the hospital, both men disappeared. Miss Albright died after having given birth to her child. Her father, "a wealthy farmer," came to the poor farm and "took the body of

the unfortunate girl back to his home." No mention was made of the fate of the baby.³³

The poorhouse, however, served primarily as a permanent residence for those mentally and physically ill or elderly persons whose relatives could not handle their care at home or who had no living relatives. A contemporary newspaper account, when referring to the inmates, stated that some were "partially crazy, others . . . were ill or in feeble health." Certifiably insane people in territorial days were sent to Yankton to the Dakota Hospital for the Insane and, after 1885, to the State Hospital in Jamestown, but those who could not be certified as mentally ill by the county insanity board sometimes ended up at the poor farm. In 1896, the deputy county sheriff brought "an insane patient" to the county hospital, presumably for temporary care. Professor Gillette of the University of North Dakota revealed that the institution contained "two padded rooms for [the] insane and for discipline purposes. They are said to be used infrequently." Basically, though, the permanent residents were simply elderly or physically disabled persons such as those in nursing homes today.³⁴

One symbol that pervaded the history of the poor farm was that of the "Death House." Whenever an inmate of the poor farm died, he or she was placed in an out building just away from the poorhouse itself. The corpse remained there until the doctor and the mortician arrived. The deceased

from the poor farm were buried either near the fence at the Arvilla graveyard or in the Potters Field on the poorhouse grounds. There was another Potters Field in the city of Grand Forks for paupers who died there, in order to save the expense of burying them at Arvilla.³⁵

The permanent inmates at Arvilla were generally elderly. In 1900 the average age of all the residents at the poor farm, including hospital patients, was forty-four years old. One woman was ninety-six years old and Louis Williams, a black person, was 102. Mr. Williams died at the poor farm eight years later. The local newspaper exaggerated his age and claimed that he had been "probably the oldest man in the United States" at 127 years of age. In 1910 the average age of the adult residents rose to fifty-seven. In the same year eight individuals died at the institution.³⁶

The residents came "from all nationalities," and the majority were, in fact, born on foreign soil and came to North Dakota as emigrants. Twenty-two of the thirty inmates in 1900 were foreign born, with nine of them coming originally from Norway, three from Canada and Ireland, and two from Germany and Sweden. These totals reflected the ethnic mix of the county. By 1910, of the twenty-three adults on the poor farm, twelve were originally from other nations. Only one black permanent resident was listed in 1900 and seven blacks were temporary residents in 1910. No

native Americans were specifically mentioned or listed as residing at the poor farm.³⁷

Yet not all the inmates were elderly. A 1910 count revealed that fourteen of the thirty-seven inmates were children ranging in age from two months to thirteen years. Professor Gillette observed eight children there during his visit in 1910. State law required the counties to provide for the education of poor children if it was necessary to keep them at a poor farm. The county paid for tuition and school books for children living at the poor house at various times from 1895 until 1941. The children were taken to and from school in a wagon by the poorhouse hired man and were also taken home for the noon meal.³⁸

Other states had laws that limited the stay of a pauper child at a poor farm, for perhaps ninety days at most. Some of the cases at Arvilla were temporary, perhaps while a parent was a patient at the hospital, but in one case, a mother and her five children were at the poor farm from about 1910 until 1913 when four of the children were sent to the North Dakota Children's Home Society of Fargo.³⁹

Children at the poor farm were not kept separate from the older people until 1909. In that year, a "separate apartment for the keeping of children" was implemented. This was considered to be a "very proper" move at the time. At any time, the care of the children was only as good as the integrity of the hired man and the supervisor and matron

of the poorhouse. The potential for abuse of the children was certainly present. The states attorney for Grand Forks county, Tracy R. Bangs, investigated charges of brutality by the superintendent toward poor farm children in 1909. Bangs found that "certain children, inmates of the Institution, are frequently thrashed, beaten, kicked and knocked down by him, and that his treatment of the said children is brutal to the extreme and dangerous to life and limb." The superintendent's usual custom, even toward small children was to "cuff, beat, kick and otherwise maltreat them." Later administrators were watched closely for such potential abuses.⁴⁰

The basic everyday care of the poor farm residents was considered to be humane, but not extravagant in any sense of the word. The table fare in the first years included chicken, pork, beef, potatoes, onions and other food produced upon the poor farm. A vegetable garden provided variety for the larder. The poor farm always had some cows, making milk readily available. Other food was supplied at a percentage above cost by Grand Forks, Arvilla or Larimore grocers who secured the yearly contract by closed bidding. Coffee was a vital commodity for the poor farm and hospital went through 100 pounds of it in most months. Throughout the years of its operation, the food at the poor farm was generally considered to be "good and wholesome." The residents had their daily bread "as good as any average

farmer has it." Neighboring farmers at times were hired to bring butter and eggs to the farm two or three times a week. The staff would bring meals to invalids and would feed residents who were unable to do so themselves.⁴¹

Recreational opportunities at the poorhouse were limited by the energy and abilities of the residents. Little provision was made for the creature comforts of the residents. Rocking chairs, six for the men's and six for the women's sitting rooms, were a recommended purchase in 1907. The visiting committee also in that year suggested that "a dozen bibles be furnished: Six in English, Four in Norwegian and two in Sweed [sic]." Reading the Bible could benefit most of the inmates but, in 1910, five of the twenty-three adult poorhouse residents could neither read or write. Caring citizens in 1934 donated "quite a lot of fine reading materials, books and magazines" so that the poorhouse and hospital had "quite a library" for "anyone who likes to read." The residents could read the Evening Fargo Forum after a subscription was ordered in 1928. The advent of affordable radios provided a quality of entertainment previously unknown at the institution. Rev. O.T. Ness of Grand Forks lobbied for regular religious services at the poor farm and these began in 1928. Although the services were conducted only once a month, Rev. Ness reported that the "rough spirit which before showed itself in rough talking among some of the inmates are in most cases done

away with. The board knows that this condition is due to the religion that has been given the inmates by holding services in the institution."⁴²

Despite the efforts of the visiting preachers, some of the vices of the residents died hard. Those who had the habit could use a reasonable amount of tobacco. A percentage of the inmates suffered from alcoholism and this disease led to conflicts with the administration of the poor farm. In 1907, the county physician responsible for the hospital heard complaints from "a few habitual drunkards" at the Arvilla institution because the superintendent would not give them intoxicants to drink. The bills for the poor farm sometimes included items like "Brandy for county hospital," so someone was undoubtedly using it for medicinal purposes. Noticing that the use of alcohol often produced poverty, a drop in the number of inmates in 1919 was believed to have occurred because national prohibition closed "the saloons in East Grand Forks" in that same year.⁴³

The residents were expected to work according to their physical abilities. Those who could handle outdoor labor were employed in the tasks of a typical farmyard. The poor farm always had one or two hired hands because the residents could not handle all the work that had to be done. Those who were too old or infirm to work merely passed the time as best they could. The women residents helped in the canning and other household chores.⁴⁴

The superintendent and matron of the poor farm were a husband and wife team. The superintendent was hired according to his ability as a farmer, since the institution was expected to carry some of its own weight through the sale of grain and livestock. The matrons throughout the years were reported to be decent and caring individuals. The early years of the poor farm saw numerous troubles with the affairs of the superintendents. The very first person in charge of the poorhouse, Richmond Fadden (1894-1900) had to relinquish the position because his performance was deemed "unsatisfactory" by the County Board. Improprieties with the bookkeeping and possible illicit sales of oats and barley led to his demise.⁴⁵

The third superintendent, Mr. P.J. Mahon (1907-1909), proved incapable of working with the difficult situations and individuals that existed at the poorhouse. Complaints about Mahon's behavior filtered their way to the commissioners and Mahon had to publicly explain his actions before the board. Some of the commissioners attempted to replace Mahon in January 1908 with Mr. John Oxender, but with the support of a petition from residents of Arvilla and the vicinity, Mahon retained his position. States attorney Tracy R. Bangs conducted an independent investigation of Mahon's activities and charged him with several improprieties. The charges were called "the most sensational ever made in the state," and stirred much

controversy in the county. Bangs officially charged Mahon with opening and reading the mail of the inmates without their permission. When an "elderly and badly crippled" inmate objected, Mahon allegedly "beat, kicked and choked him and finally in his rage pounded his head upon the stairs." The attorney characterized the superintendent as "violent and abusive" during his frequent drinking binges. In a fit of anger, he choked a woman inmate and when she wailed that he was killing her, he "brutally remarked that he didn't care if he did." The charges included other beatings of "children, cripples or aged women" and punishments that involved placing inmates in cells for hours and days without food, "chairs or a bed upon which to rest."⁴⁶

The board gave Mahon a chance to answer the charges, at which time he said that he had used "rather harsh" methods at times but that he had not been "brutal." The board asked for his resignation and got it. After hiring Mr. and Mrs. Michael Reidy (1909-1919), the commissioners dared not be lax again with their supervision of the poor farm. The Reidys were generally acknowledged to be caring and compassionate individuals throughout their tenure as administrators of the poorhouse and hospital. Yet complaints against the Reidys were raised by some of the inmates in 1911, especially by Mrs. Armstrong. Further quiet rumblings against them were voiced in 1914. Residents

were asked to write down their grievances and sign their names, a procedure bound to discourage these people, who were at the edge of literacy anyway and who were not among the boldest in society. The Reidys were more thoroughly scrutinized in 1916 after charges were raised by Miss Wolf, a former nurse at the institution. Wolf contended that the beds were filthy, the children were still being mistreated and had signs of vermin, and that the food was inadequate. Members of the visiting committee refuted the cries of Wolf. The troubles with administrators served to reinforce the public image that the poor farm was very much a lowly institution, one that must be avoided by respectable citizens.⁴⁷

New twentieth-century legislation and programs in local poor relief modified the role of the poor farm and county hospital in caring for the poor of Grand Forks County. The Social Gospel movement, Progressive reforms and the beginnings of the modern welfare state within the setting of the Great Depression led to new institutions and agencies in the state of North Dakota. The new philosophies made the poor farm look like an outmoded Elizabethan relic, doomed to a decline in importance, if not an actual decline in usage.

Even as the poor farm began in the 1890s, new institutions paralleled its role. In 1893 the state of North Dakota founded the Lisbon Soldiers Home of North Dakota as a permanent home for aged and disabled soldiers

and their wives, widows and children. Locally the Ursuline Sisters of St. Bernard's Academy of Grand Forks (founded in 1885) assisted the poor by boarding and educating a few homeless children. The county made an annual contribution to the sisters because they were taking care of individuals who otherwise would be wards of the county. By 1910 Grand Forks County sent "pauper inmates" to the Florence Crittenton Home of Fargo and by 1913 pauper children to the North Dakota Childrens Home Society of Fargo (established in 1891 for the care of homeless children).⁴⁸

In the 1880s the Ladies Aid Society of Grand Forks gave charitable support of the local worthy poor. Charity benefits such as the 1884 skating reception at the Fashion Skating Rink raised money for good causes. Sprint races provided great fun for participants and spectators and also produced \$100 in gold for the poor of the city. Their work was augmented by that of the Union Aid Society, which acted as the main fund-raising organization through the turn of the century. The Associated Charities of Grand Forks, organized in 1910, became the successor of the Union Aid Society. Outlying towns had similar groups, for instance, the Appomattox Woman's Relief Corp provided local aid in Larimore.⁴⁹

National groups, such as the Y.M.C.A. in 1886 and the Red Cross in 1898, founded local chapters in Grand Forks to provide certain types of assistance to area residents. A

Salvation Army office, organized in Grand Forks in 1894, provided direct relief for the needy. These organizations served to give support to county and private relief efforts, rather than to replace them.⁵⁰

The County Hospital no longer served as the sole vehicle for medical care of the poor after the Grand Forks Deaconess hospital opened in 1899. When indigent persons suffered emergency maladies, they were often admitted to the Deaconess Hospital and the county reimbursed the hospital. Care of alcoholic paupers was improved through the work of the North Dakota Liquor Institute where the "treatment" was administered for selected county charges beginning in 1899. The Northwood Hospital and Home Association, owned and used for charitable purposes, began to serve residents of the southern part of the county around 1904. St. Michael's Hospital in Grand Forks also received county paupers and provided care and nursing for them, subject to payment by the county.⁵¹

The state of North Dakota legislated some changes in poor relief. In 1907, the counties were required to appoint a visiting board, which would inspect poor farm premises regularly and make reports to the county boards "at least quarterly." The visiting boards for always included at least one clergyman among the three members, which made the reports at times more sermonizing than informative. The work of the committee was uneven at best, for at times only

one of the committeemen would show up for the inspections. It appears that the unannounced visits took the visiting board, as well as the poor farm administrator, by total surprise.⁵²

Changes made by the state in 1913 brought the responsibility for relief of paupers closer to the lowest level of local government. In that year, the administration of poor relief changed from being a county-wide process to one of a township system. Each township appointed an overseer of the poor and the township had to provide twenty-five percent of the cost of caring for those in their jurisdiction. In theory this meant that the townships would more closely scrutinize applicants for relief because each township would have to raise money for their care. This process would make the work of the county commissioners easier because they would not have to investigate cases from their whole area.⁵³

In reality the 1913 law changed the theory of poor relief. One of the purposes of the new (yet very Elizabethan) system was to limit the number of applicants for county aid by making the agent of administration closer to the people, at the township rather than the county level. Yet as the system was put into practice, applicants could more easily obtain relief. Prior to 1913, names of all persons receiving county assistance were listed in several official county newspapers in the monthly county

commissioner reports. After the new law was passed, the township overseers of the poor simply grouped all their cases together and the total amount of aid was published in the newspapers. The names were left unpublished. Professor Gillette wrote that "publicity of the full details as to number of persons assisted, time aided, and amount of relief given is a necessary checking device on prodigal giving." Gillette decried that the "full facts" were not being published in North Dakota, because such a practice tended to reduce relief applications in other states. He felt that better state supervision of the whole system was needed.⁵⁴

Efforts had been made to improve the methods of administering poor relief in the county prior to the state changes. In 1910 the Associated Charities Association lobbied the city of Grand Forks and the county for a more unified system of charity administration in the county's largest community. The city and county shared the cost of hiring a "Director of Poor Relief in the city of Grand Forks" to investigate all applications for relief in the city proper. Mr. J. F. Smith, as overseer, became a very busy man, looking into sixty cases in his first month on the job. He tried a system whereby needy families would raise vegetables in vacant lots in various places around the town, like the poor farm on a miniature scale. The program and position lasted only for a year. The county and the city split the cost of Smith's salary equally, but the county

felt that the new position had served to increase the amount of poor relief expenditures, rather than reduce them, as was hoped. The arrangement ended after a one year trial.

Professor Gillette believed that Smith had done an effective job, being more discriminating in his approval of applications than the county commissioners who would "aid practically all who apply for relief."⁵⁵

Surely the relief apparatus stood ripe for adjustments, for the burden on county governments grew during the period from 1910 to 1924 as North Dakota still felt the impact of new waves of immigration. The growth of bigger businesses in cities like Fargo and Grand Forks gave greater prosperity in good economic times, but also provided greater jolts of disruption in economic downturns. The attempt to consolidate relief services in a single director stood as a laudable effort to respond to the greater relief burden in the county. Less applaudable was a strange movement to send numerous paupers away from the county in February 1913. In one month the county bought railroad tickets for 10 individuals or families to places as far away as Tacoma, Washington and Duluth, Minnesota, at a total cost of \$108. Frustrated by paying rent for twenty-seven families and groceries and other essentials for forty-six families in addition to the fifty-nine inmates at the poor farm, the commissioners were ready to try anything.⁵⁶

Fortunately for the county, Progressive reforms led to the passage of a Mothers Pension plan in North Dakota in 1915. The legislation purposed to make better homes for children in the state by giving aid "for the care of minor children." Mothers Pensions were first disbursed in Grand Forks County in February of 1916. The commissioners still had to judge the worthiness of the applicants, but the formulation of standardized requirements made their job a bit easier. The program grew from two cases in the first month to nine cases in 1916, to thirty-eight in 1919 and then mushroomed to ninety-three approved payments by mid-1925. The program made it less likely for single mothers and their children to end up on the poor farm, although such occurrences still happened after Mothers Pensions were begun.⁵⁷

The number of poor farm inmates ranged from a high of fifty in April 1916 to a low of twenty-five in June 1917 in the decade from 1910 to 1920. The pattern of higher totals in the winter and a reduced number of summer inmates remained unchanged through the 1920s. With the stock market crash of late 1929, the nation acknowledged that hard times were besetting its citizens. The number of poor farm inmates jumped from forty in the November 1929 report to sixty in the March 1930 report. More significantly the total in the summer dropped only to 55 inmates in the July report and actually rose to 58 by the August report. The

1931 totals reflected increased pressure on the poor farm system with seventy-one poor farm residents tallied in June of 1932. Even with the increased numbers in the poorhouse, a member of the visiting board declared that people on the county farm "have [it] much better than many people battling for lifes existence by themself [sic]." Having "plenty to eat and drink" there, they did not have to worry about where the next meal might be found.⁵⁸

The county found itself scrambling to find funds to pay for relief. The 1925 fiscal year budget allocated \$16,500 for poor relief, \$37,000 for Mothers Pensions, and 16,000 for the county poor farm and hospital. The budget for 1931 allowed \$40,000 for poor relief, only \$30,000 for Mothers Pensions and \$17,000 for the poor farm. The worst of the depression busted the budget, however, and the county had to constantly transfer funds from budgets like the auto tax budget (\$13,000) into the poor relief budget, because the poor relief budget was "exhausted." In 1932, things got so bad that the county Auditor was instructed to take \$3,000 from the poor farm budget and put it into the poor relief budget. This would be like the mother of a large family taking food from a two year old child to feed a teenager. Undoubtedly the county board began to feel as exhausted as its budgets under the strain of the human misery they witnessed daily. Mr. McIntyre of the Grand Forks Chamber of Commerce suggested in the summer of 1932 that a committee of

businessmen and others take a more active position in poor relief matters. McIntyre expressed his firm belief that the commissioners could not "take care of the amount of work that would fall on the department in the coming winter."⁵⁹

The local Community Chest strove to help the needy in Grand Forks but their 1931 fund drive total was a decrease from the 1930 figure due to less money available from local sources. The American Red Cross attempted to raise money nationally for aid to drought-stricken North Dakota. Local schoolchildren were released from classes in the autumn of 1931 to pick the potatoes that farmers could not afford to harvest. These efforts were noble and helped to some degree, but more needed to be done. Real changes were not forthcoming until the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt made groping attempts to ease the burden on local governments in 1933.⁶⁰

In 1933 the county was authorized to appoint a county emergency relief committee to distribute funds of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to provide "relief of the suffering of the needy and distressed" because public and private contributions proved to be "inadequate to meet such immediate needs." George Larmour became the county poor commissioner, in charge of investigating needs in the county and distributing aid with the help of three employees.⁶¹

A plethora of New Deal programs were utilized in the county during 1934. The county appointed a Mothers Pension

representative to administer the program for all cases in the city of Grand Forks. Still it was left to the County Board to examine numerous Old Age Pension applications and to allocate the \$150 yearly pensions to county residents in the state version of the program. The board requested that the Civil Works Administration approve a project to remodel the Court House basement as a Memorial Hall to remember the "Great World War." The commissioners chose young men to serve in the Civilian Conservation Corps in April. In September a more buoyant County Board could purchase milk and meat for the Salvation Army Kitchen in Grand Forks. With more possibilities for relief, the numbers on the poor farm actually went down to forty-nine in July.⁶²

The provisions of the New Deal, including such programs as Social Security in 1935, the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, and the Works Progress Administration (1935-1942), improved the welfare outlook for the nation as a whole. North Dakota, however, was so hard-struck with drought and poverty that the number of poor farm inmates in Grand Forks County actually increased as the decade of the 1930s came to a close. The February 1937 poor farm report showed a total of eighty-five inmates at Arvilla. By February of 1940 the poorhouse reached an all-time high of ninety inmates and twenty-seven other patients. The county petitioned the State Welfare Board for an increased allocation for direct relief purposes due to an influx of

impoverished persons from other parts of the state. The county commissioners concluded that it was evident that for the "past two years or more" they had witnessed a "definite migration into the more populous centers in the Eastern Part of this State."⁶³

1940 proved to be a pivotal year for the Grand Forks County poor farm. The second floor of the main building had just been modernized as a WPA project, projecting a sense of renewed commitment by the county toward the care of the downcast people housed there. In addition, the county had recently purchased a farm home "as an annex to the main farm," to better provide for the late increase in the poor farm population. On the very day that Superintendent Aaker and his wife were meeting with Mr. E.W. Yard, the WPA formen, to discuss plans for a new hospital addition, disaster struck. Paint rags carelessly tossed near the furnace had ignited and the resulting blaze left the poorhouse a mere brick shell within one hour. Despite the heroic efforts of Aaker and nearby WPA workers, three disabled men on the third floor, unable to flee, perished. Included among the seventy-odd survivors were three mothers with children not even a week old. Homes in Arvilla and Larimore were opened to the residents until a different place could be secured in which to house them. The inmates were fed through the efforts of the CCC camp at Larimore. Donations of food and clothing from Grand Forks were so

generous that the "largest truck available" could not carry the goods over to Larimore and Arvilla in a single trip.⁶⁴

The destruction of the poor farm building by fire in January 1940 served as an oddly-fitting metaphor of the change in the Grand Forks county poor farm as an institution. After the fire the residents moved into the Prevost Hotel in Larimore and the name was changed to the Grand Forks county hospital and farm. The Hotel was refitted in a crash program to make it comply with state standards. In the moving process, the farming aspect of the whole operation was soon lost and the name of the place became more properly the "County Home."

The relative prosperity of the war years of 1940-1945 finally reduced the numbers of inmates on the poor farm in Grand Forks County. The totals for February 1941 showed seventy-one inmates and thirty-six patients at the facility, and the January 1945 report revealed a decrease to thirty-four inmates and fifteen patients. The poor farm had provided basic care for increased numbers of poor people throughout the Depression years, but with better times, its role changed. In 1951 a new director, Mr. R.R. Jasper and his wife Edith, discontinued the farming operation and sought to achieve status for the county home as a regular old folks home. In that year, the farm equipment was sold at a public auction and the land was leased by a farmer. At

the public sale of 15 October 1954, A.H. Petsinger of Grand Forks bought the farm.⁶⁵

The stigma of the poorhouse colored the last years of the County Home. Citizens, grown accustomed to the title, "poor farm," still referred to the institution by its outmoded name. The Jaspers worked hard to achieve legitimacy for the home and succeeded, making it every bit as good as other nursing homes albeit with a shoestring budget. The Larimore structure housed the County Home until July 1973 when the final accounting of the records was completed. The building still stands empty in Larimore.⁶⁶

ENDNOTES

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2. "Take It Out," The Bismarck (ND) Tribune, 16 December 1881, 4.
3. Proceedings of the Grand Forks County Commissioners, vol. 1-A, 25 March 1875, 1; 12 July 1876, 21; 27 January 1877, 24. Hereafter, the minutes of the county commissioners for Grand Forks County will be designated as "C.C.."
4. Details of the smallpox epidemic may be found in the Letter of Jacob B. Eshelman, Chairman of the Grand Forks Board of County Commissioners, to Governor Howard of Dakota Territory, in C.C., vol. 1-A, 6 January 1879, 45-47. Grand Forks' denial is found in "News and Notes," Bismarck Tribune, 2 December 1878, 5. "Legislative Assembly XIII Session," Press and Dakotian (Yankton, D.T.), 16 January 1879, 2. Laws Passed at the Thirteenth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Dakota (Jan., 1879-Feb. 22, 1879) (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1883), 148-149.
5. Railroad information is from D. Jerome Tweton, Grand Forks: A Pictorial History (Norfolk: Donning Company, 1986) 24. C.C., vol. 1-A, 3 May 1880, 99; 6 July 1880, 108; 7 July 1880, 112; 26 July 1880, 116, 117; 4 October 1880, 122.
6. C.C., vol. 1-B, 17 January 1881, 18. "To Rent," The (Grand Forks) Daily Herald, 2 December 1881, 1. "Common Council," Daily Herald, 7 December 1881, 1.
7. "The County Commissioners," The Daily Herald, 4 January 1882, 1.
8. Poor Relief, Poor Farms, and Mothers' Pensions in North Dakota (Bismarck: North Dakota Judicial Council, 1932), 9. A. B. Levissee and L. Levissee, eds., The Annotated Revised Codes of the Territory of Dakota 1883, 2d ed., (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1885), 515-517, iii. C.C., vol. 2-A, 29 January 1884, 76.
9. The backtracking from the township plan is in C.C., vol. 2-A, 9 April 1884, 88. A proposal for increasing the number of county physicians is in C.C., vol. 2-A, 8 January 1884, 1. Railroad ticket information is in C.C., vol. 2-A, 9 April 1884, 88; and 10 July 1884, 105. A recommendation

for a county hospital is in "Proceedings," The Daily Herald, 9 December 1882, 2.

10. "The County Commissioners," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 15 November 1883, 1. "For Sweet Charity's Sake," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 21 December 1883, 1.

11. "County Almshouses," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 13 December 1883, 2.

12. C.C., vol. 2-A, 5 January 1887, 291; and 14 February 1887, 296. Voter opinions in "Squelched," Grand Forks Weekly Plaindealer, 10 February 1887, 5; and "Poor Farm Monopoly," Grand Forks Weekly Plaindealer, 27 January 1887, 6.

13. C.C., vol. 2-A, 18 November 1887, 351; 28 December 1887, 355; vol. 2-B, 3 April 1888, 28; 3 March 1888, 23.

14. C.C., vol. 2-B, 11 July 1889, 146; 2 August 1889, 152.

15. Seed wheat data is from C.C., vol. 2-B, 7 April 1890, 196; 26 April 1890, 210; and 17 March 1891, 301. Railway ticket information is from C.C., vol. 2-B, 7 January 1890, 181; and 12 November 1890, 265.

16. The case of Frank Russell is in C.C., vol. 2-B, 17 February 1891, 292; the other cases in 9 February 1892, 377 and 10 February 1892, 379.

17. Proceedings, vol. 2-B, 11 November 1889: 174; 6 February 1890: 190; 7 January 1890: 187.

18. C.C., vol. 3, 5 April 1893, 78 (regarding the favorable opinion and the special election date). Arnold in The Larimore (ND) Pioneer editorial of 25 May 1893, 7. "Nubs of News," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 27 May 1893, 8; "For the Poor Farm," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 10 March 1893, 3. "Poor Farm It Is," Daily Plaindealer (Grand Forks), 31 May 1893, 4.

19. "Official Canvass of the Votes Cast in Grand Forks County . . . at a Special Election Held on Saturday, May 27th, 1893," The Larimore Pioneer, 3 August 1893, 6. Bids from C.C., vol. 3, 19 June 1893, 90-91. Duckworth's commissioner record is from C.C., vol. 1-B, 25 November 1881, 55 and vol. 2-A, 5 January 1885, 149. "Location of Poor Farm," The Larimore Pioneer, 22 June 1893, 2. Grand Forks site visitation in C.C., vol. 3, 19 June 1893, 91.

20.C.C., vol. 3, 19 June 1893, 92. The visitation committee printed valuable information about the poor farms they visited in C.C., vol. 3, 3 July 1893, 93, 96.

21."Supplementary Report of the Poor Farm Committee, C.C., vol. 3, 5 July 1893, 101.

22.C.C., vol. 3, 11 July 1893, 103. Hersey's letter to the County Commissioners dated 17 July 1893, is in "County Commissioners Proceedings, 19 July 1893" Larimore Pioneer, 10 August 1893, 8. Grand Forks County, Assessment Roll of the town of Arvilla for the Year 1888, 4-5, in the county records in the Robinson Special Collections Library at the University of North Dakota. The size of the hotel is revealed in "Larimore Resolutes," The Northwest News (Grand Forks, ND), 29 July 1893, 7. "Most Elaborate Northwest Hotel Once 'Entertained' County Charges," Grand Forks Herald, 7 April 1940, 18. The quote calling the hotel the finest in the northwest is from "Accepted the Offer," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 15 August 1893, 3. Hersey's reasons for giving the hotel to the county are in "Mr. Hersey's Offer," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 21 July 1893, 3.

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24.Votes recorded in C.C., vol. 3, 20 July 1893, 111; "Nubs of News," Daily Herald, 27 July 1893, 8; and "Not Yet," Daily Plaindealer, 26 July 1893, 4. The board's motives are questioned in "'Why?'" Larimore letter to Editor and County Commissioners," Daily Herald, 21 July 1893, 3. Rural agitation is recorded in "The Poor Farm," Daily Herald, 25 July 1893, 1.

25.C.C., vol. 3, 14 August 1893, 113.

26."Accepted the Offer," Daily Herald, 15 August 1893, 3. C.C., vol. 3, 13 October 1893, 127; and 13 October 1893, 128. Fadden is listed in C.C., vol. 3, 11 January 1894, 157; and featured in "A Pioneer," Grand Forks Herald, 30 October 1898.

27."Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 8 February 1894, 4.

28."Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 31 January 1895, 10.

29.The location of the Cass County poor farm is in C.C., Cass County, vol. E, 14 September 1895, 20. Controversy over building the poorhouse in Fargo or in

Casselton embroiled the county from the time of the vote on the poor farm question in November of 1894.

30. "Additional Local," Larimore Pioneer, 31 January 1895, 4. "The Local News," Larimore Pioneer, 14 February 1895, 8. C.C., vol. 3, 3 April 1895, 272; 20 June 1895, 285, 286.

31. "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 12 December 1895, 8. "The Local News," Larimore Pioneer, 11 August 1899, 6. J.M. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," North Dakota Quarterly, vol. 3 (1913), 122.

32. C.C., vol. 5, 14 March 1903: 277.

33. Serene, "The Poor Farm," 1. "Unknown Woman Dies," Larimore Pioneer, 30 January 1908, 1.

34. "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 31 January 1895, 4. "Arvilla," Larimore Pioneer, 27 February 1896, 8. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," 123.

35. Serene, "The Poor Farm," 1. The Potters Field in Grand Forks was located at Lot 9, Block B, Westacott Subdivision according to C.C., vol. 10, 27 December 1918, 158.

36. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 48 B. "Locals and Personals," Larimore Pioneer, 23 April 1908, 5. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1912), 55A. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915) 70.

37. "Report of the Visiting Board of 15 December 1932," C.C., 30 December 1932, 609. Census, 1900, 48B; Census, 1910, 55A; Paupers in Almshouses 1910, 70.

38. Census, 1910, 55A. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails," 123. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 46. The last tuition figure is from C.C., vol. 14, 2 July 1941, 107. Information on delivery to the school is from C.C., vol. 9, "17 November 1914 Report of the Visiting Board," 5 December 1914, 171.

39. The Alsburg family was included in the 1910 Federal Census listings and then the children were sent to Fargo as recorded in C.C., vol. 8, 5 November 1913, 581.

40.C.C., vol. 7, "Visiting Board Examination of the Hospital," 3 November 1909, 284. "P.J. Mahon is Charged With Inhuman Acts," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 11 August 1909, 8.

41.Proceedings, vol. 3, 6 March 1894: 167; vol. 9, 5 December 1914: 171. "Board Hears The Evidence," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 17 September 1909, 6.

42.C.C., vol. 9, 2 July 1917, 606; vol. 6, "Suggestions of Visiting Committee," 14 June 1907, 393; vol. 13, 5 April 1934, "Report of Visiting Committee of 27 March 1934", 67; vol. 12, 8 February 1928, 320; 14 March 1928, 324; quote from the "Visiting Board Report of 23 September 1929", 416.

43.Tobacco in C.C., vol.12, 8 February 1928, 320. "Board Hears The Evidence," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 17 September 1909, 6. Brandy in C.C., vol.9, 3 January 1917, 531. East Grand Forks saloons are mentioned in C.C., vol. 10, "Report of the Visiting Committee of 26 April 1919," 6 May 1919, 234.

44."Hospital and Poor Farm," Grand Forks Herald, 14 August 1904, 7.

45.Fadden is described in C.C., vol.4, 5 February 1900, 350; and 3 July 1899, 285; The board had to buy the "necessary keys, locks and stamps for the proper care of property on the poorfarm." When Michael Reidy was appointed superintendent of the poor farm in 1909, his main qualification was that he "is said to be a capable farmer," as quoted in "Michael Reidy Is Superintendent," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 22 September 1909, 10.

46."Trouble At Poor Farm," Larimore Pioneer, 12 August 1909, 5 and C.C., vol. 7, 10 August 1909, "Report of States Attorney," 252.

47."Board Hears The Evidence," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 17 September 1909, 6. Wolf charges are in C.C., vol. 9, 1 August 1916, 470; the Armstrong complaints, vol. 8, 16 August 1911, 157; other complaints in vol. 9, 5 December 1914, 172. The charges raised by Wolf can be identified only by noting how the charges were refuted by the visiting committee. When the position as poor farm superintendent was opened up in 1909, a total of ten candidates applied for the job, see "Will Appoint His Successor," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 21 September 1909, 10.

48.Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Benevolent Institutions 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1905), 252, tells of the Soldiers Home. C.C., vol. 4, 14

November 1899, 330 and vol. 7, 8 December 1909, 291 tell of the Ursuline Sisters. C.C., vol. 7, 5 October 1910 tells of the Crittenton Home and vol. 8, 5 November 1913, 581 speaks of the Children's Home Society.

49. "Remember the Poor," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 6 February 1884, 1 and "The Charity Benefit," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 7 February 1884, 1. For the Union Aid Society, see Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," 117 and "Union Aid Society Appeals to People," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 24 February 1910, 10. The Larimore group is identified in C.C., vol. 6, 14 December 1904, 55; further information on the larger role of the Woman's Relief Corps is detailed in "Woman's Relief Corps and Work," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 23 April 1910, 7.

50. Dates for the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross are from Tweton, Grand Forks, 26; Salvation Army from Robert Samuel Anderson, A Social History of Grand Forks, North Dakota, unpublished Master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1951, 109.

51. Deaconess information in C.C., vol. 4, 6 May 1902, 162 and Census Bureau, Benevolent Institutions 1904, 192. St. Luke's Hospital, founded in 1891, became Deaconess Hospital in 1899, see Tweton, Grand Forks, 25. Neighbors could request treatment for local alcoholics at the Liquor Institute, as in C.C., vol. 4, 30 December 1899, 341. The Northwood Hospital is first mentioned in the C.C., in vol. 6, 7 February 1905, 73 and is called the "Old Peoples Home," in vol. 9, 1 October 1917, 3. The county sent patients to St. Michael's in C.C., vol. 7, 26 January 1909, 153.

52. The visiting board and the state law according to "H. B. No. 299, session laws of 1907" is described in C.C., vol. 9, 6 November 1914, 156.

53. Chapter 121 of the Session Laws of 1913 made the change from a county to a township system of poor relief, in which the county would provide 75 percent of the aid, see C.C., vol. 9, 6 January 1914, 8.

54. For changes in reporting see C.C., vol. 8, 4 November 1913, 579. Gillette's ideas are included both in his article "Poor-Relief and Jails in North Dakota," and in J.M. Gillette Papers, Box 6, Folder 16, pages 53, 65; in the E. Robinson Special Collections Library at the University of North Dakota.

55. "Hard To Make Loafers Work," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 24 May 1911, 10; and "Herald Is The Official Paper," Grand Forks Daily Herald, 2 May 1911, 6. Gillette in "Poor-

Relief and Jails," 118, believed that Smith had done well and had reduced the number of families on relief in the city by 22.

56. The February 1911 disbursements are in C.C., vol. 8, 8 March 1911, 52.

57. Poor Relief, Poor Farms, and Mothers' Pensions in North Dakota (Bismarck: North Dakota Judicial Council, 1932), 18, tells of Chapter 185 of the Session Laws of 1915 which instituted Mothers' Pensions. For numbers of county cases, see C.C., vol. 9, 7 March 1916, 390; 3 October 1916, 486; vol. 10, 7 April 1919, 213-214; vol. 12, 31 July 1925, 170-171. The names of Mothers Pensions recipients were listed in the newspapers.

58. The totals on the poor farm are from the respective County Commissioners Minute Books. The quotes are from C.C., vol. 12, 30 June 1931, 514; and 30 June 1932, 575.

59. Information is from the C.C., vol. 12, 15 July 1925, 166; 29 July 1931, 527; 4 May 1932, 570; 4 May 1933, 631. McIntyre's quote is from "City Budget Gets Approval of Civic Body Committees," Grand Forks Herald, 12 July 1932, 2.

60. "Chest, Red Cross \$35,000 Campaign Starts Monday," Grand Forks Herald, 18 October 1931, 1. "School Children To Pick 'Spuds' as Bit in Drouth Aid Drive," Grand Forks Herald, 7 October 1931, 1.

61. C.C., vol. 12, 17 May 1933, 633; 14 June 1933, 638-641.

62. See C.C., vol. 13, 18 January 1934, 53; 14 February 1934, 59; 6 April 1934, 67; 5 September 1934, 107; 8 August 1934, 49.

63. WPA projects in Grand Forks included the Central High School auditorium, a new swimming pool at Riverside Park, the UND Winter Sports Building, a grandstand at the fairgrounds, the airport, and many other smaller projects, see Tweton, Grand Forks, 106. The surplus commodities are described in Public Welfare Board, First Biennial Report of the Public Welfare Board of North Dakota (Fargo: North Dakota Public Welfare Board, 1936), 22. C.C., vol. 13, 3 February 1937, 361; 2 February 1938, 450; vol. 14, 9 February 1940, 2. Quote from C.C., vol. 14, 7 June 1940, 32.

64. The WPA project at the poor farm was authorized in C.C., vol. 13, 18 May 1939, 545. The fire and its aftermath are from "3 Inmates Perish As Fire Destroys County's

Hospital-Home at Arvilla," Grand Forks Herald, 30 March 1940, 1, 3; "Arvilla Refugees Housed," Grand Forks Herald, 31 March 1940, 20; and "City Responds To Arvilla Appeal," Grand Forks Herald, 2 April 1940, 7.

65. Sale and leasing information is from "Resolution," File C, County Farm Leases and Sale, County Auditor's Office, Grand Forks County, 1. Also, Proceedings, vol. 15, 28 March 1951: 94. Jaspers hired in vol. 15, 7 December 1950: 72.

66. Proceedings, vol. 18, 3 July 1973: 697. Interview of Mrs. Edith Jasper in Larimore, ND, in April 1990.

CHAPTER 11

RICHLAND COUNTY POOR FARM, WAHPETON

In the rich Red River Valley, Richland county attracted farmers as early as the 1870s. Its chief city, Wahpeton, served as the county seat after the county became fully organized in 1875. Poor people required help with fuel, medicines, medical treatment, shelter, clothing and food, in varying degrees, from the earliest days of settlement. In the 1880s the county board attempted to add a poor farm as a poor relief option, but the taxpayers frustrated the plan by "eternally voting down the proposition to erect a poor farm."¹

In 1888 the poor farm issue reached a crisis stage. The county treasury had been accumulating tax collections for the "County Poor Farm Fund" for several years. The county commissioners had established a tax for the poor farm several years before, and the total in the fund amounted to well over \$2,000. Newspaper editors, county commissioners and vocal citizens believed it was certainly enough to start a farm operation. Some county residents saw the county's relief practices as being overly generous, noticing that the most-recent county board meeting included "payment for goods

furnished paupers" totalling over \$500. A resident of Brandenburg charged that merchants, false paupers and collusionists were working together in a devious "speculation in poverty." A neighbor would petition the county for "a doctor and fuel and provisions" and other benefits for a supposed sick man, and the sick man would live off the largesse of the county over the winter. Other hotelmen, storekeepers or boarding-house keepers were accused of padding "bill[s] of charges for support of paupers," knowing that the commissioners would pay the bill in full with "no questions asked." While most of the charges amounted to perennial welfare-bashing or carping, resentment toward county relief practices was accumulating.²

The editor of The Wahpeton Times, George P. Garred, stated that Richland County had "no proper means for taking care of the improvident." Garred believed that a poor farm represented the "most practical" and "most economical method" for poor relief ever "provided by law." Poor farms had been "proven through years and years of experience to be the better plan" over the alternative of liberal provisions for paupers in their own homes.³

The county board tried to head off such criticism by opening a county hospital in Wahpeton. Previously, seriously ill paupers had been sent to hospitals as far away as St. Paul, Minnesota.⁴ In January 1888 the board

inspected bids for a building that was to be converted into a county hospital for paupers. The county resolved to buy a building on the "east 1/2 of lots 7 and 8, block 30" from Dr. George D. Swaine for \$2,100. Immediately, Mrs. F. A. Abbott was hired as the superintendent of the new hospital at a salary of \$120 per year. Richland County furnished "board and fuel and all provisions," plus "medicines and supplies for county patients."⁵

The county fathers quickly moved to counter the charges of welfare fraud, as well. Each commissioner, as overseer of the poor in his district, had to submit detailed reports on each poor relief case, including names, dollar amounts, and the "general condition" of the pauper. In addition, each overseer would provide quarterly reports on pauperism which would be included in the official proceedings of the county commissioners. To reduce costs, the care of all county paupers was let out on sealed bids which included the amounts expected for "houses, fuel, water, groceries, meat and clothing." The pauper would live under the care of the lowest bidders.⁶

Other factors complicated the work of the county. An extremely poor crop year in 1887 had forced officials to help some impoverished farmers by obtaining seed wheat for that year's spring planting. As in the rest of the Red River Valley, the situation worsened in 1888. The county board authorized the distribution of "seed grain to certain

needy parties" to allow them a chance to raise a crop that year. Several conditions were placed on the charitable seed. First, the seed grain would be furnished only to "parties liable to become county charges in case that such seed grain is not furnished them." The farmers had to be "perfectly able and in condition to seed and harvest this crop, without any further expense to or aid from the county." The county took a lien on the seed grain, as required in territorial law. Finally, all the crops had to be "insured in a good and reliable insurance company against loss by hail." Farmers were to be helped but the seed grain was not to be a gift, by any measure.⁷

The newspaper editor in Wahpeton noted the good work of the county government in establishing a county hospital, but still insisted that the commissioners would still be "undoubtedly . . . under the necessity of erecting a poor farm before long."⁸ Even if the "farm should not prove more economical" than the system then in operation, surely it would "prove more satisfactory to the overseers of the poor, and the taxpayers [would be] better satisfied."⁹

In an attempt to mollify the clamor for a poor farm, Richland County officials immediately called for a special election in May to determine the will of the people regarding the purchase of a poor farm. Although the city of Wahpeton voted overwhelmingly in favor of the almshouse proposition, the measure lost by eight votes (581 for, 590

against). The outlying areas carried the day, with the recalcitrant Walcott area voting against the proposition seventy-six to zero. Once again, the poor farm measure failed.¹⁰

Spurned by the voters and nagged by the newspapers, the county board soon made further money-saving moves. A two-member committee of commissioners set out to "secure cheaper houses for county paupers kept in the city of Wahpeton." The committee recommended extensive action with little economy. Mrs. Theo. Reiter and her seven children had to move from one house to another to save \$1 a month. Pauper Jentges transferred into Albert Chezick's house at "\$6 per month," an improvement upon the "present rent [of] \$8." The reform forced Mrs. Thompson to move to William Klein's house even though the rent remained at \$5 per month. Two paupers were left where they were living.¹¹

By 1890 Richland County had developed a poor relief system with accountability for the overseers (county commissioners in their districts) and paupers alike. The commissioners listed the names of all recipients of county aid, with notations of variations in needs, such as "everything needed," "groceries and wood," or "monthly allowance." The county hospital gave adequate provision for sick paupers. The Federal Census noted the presence of eight patients in the hospital at the time of enumeration.¹²

A drought in 1894 helped sway county citizens to the poor farm idea. Only eleven inches of rain fell that year (compared to an average of about twenty inches per year), with less than an inch per month in the key months of May, July and September. Rainfall had diminished each year from a high of 18 inches in 1890. Paupers had increased in those depression years, burdening the county with heavy poor relief expenses. Neighboring Cass County held an election on the poor farm question simultaneously with Richland County, and the Fargo and Casselton newspapers publicized the issue. Grand Forks County also grasped onto the poor farm concept. Voters in Richland County overwhelmingly approved the poor farm proposal on the November ballot by a count of 1,047 to 425.¹³

Immediately the County Auditor advertised for "lands suitable for the County Poor Farm." In February 1895 the commissioners selected the D.E. Rice property situated just south of the city limits of Wahpeton, near the banks of the Bois de Sioux River. The 260-acre farm cost \$9,000.¹⁴

The buildings at the old hospital site were moved out to the county poor farm, thereby reducing costs. The old hospital building became the south wing of the poorhouse. Three county commissioners purchased "all necessaries for the poor farm," including a clock, a potato planter, and a wagon. The main building needed some plaster, a coat of paint and a new stone foundation, and then stood ready to

house the wretched poor of Richland County who consented to live there. The county paid H.H. Bader \$500 annually to supervise the poorhouse.¹⁵

The budget figures for poor relief began to seem reasonable to county officials, for example, in 1898 the total for "temporary relief for poor" amounted to \$3,600, while the expenses for the poor farm and its superintendent came to \$3,800. In that year ten bidders vied for the Superintendent and Matron positions at the poorhouse. Peder Overboe and his wife won the contract, getting \$450 in salary.¹⁶

The poor farm had good land for growing crops. In 1903 wheat, barley, oats, potatoes and hay were grown on the property. The superintendent sold \$955 worth of wheat and grain during the year, along with \$132 of meat and poultry. Some meat and food crops were eaten by the inmates of the farm. Animals on the farm included "5 calves, 17 hogs, and 1 colt." Total receipts for the year amounted to \$2,030, which did not quite match the expenses of \$2,561. By this time the poor farm was not a hospital in a real sense, although limited nursing care was used on the premises, when necessary. The farm had been blessed with very good summer rainfall, which boosted the crop yields to peak levels.¹⁷

The crops were not very good in 1904, when the "grain raised on the farm, and on hand" amounted to only \$800 (compared to \$1,575 in 1903). As a result, the

superintendent kept more meat on hand at the farm for food during the winter. Income from the farm operation totalled \$1,248.95 for the year, while expenses came to \$4,739.99. The expenditures were abnormally large because a new barn (for about \$2,000) was built as a capital improvement.¹⁸

Federal census officials counted a total of 14 paupers on the premises in 1903. Seven were foreign-born, and the other seven had foreign-born parents. In 1905, thirteen inmates lived on the poor farm. The inmates ate fairly well, in relation to how much of the food purchased came to the stomachs of the paupers rather than the superintendent and his family. The January-February, 1905, table fare included bananas, lemons, oranges and cranberries. Staple foods consisted of oatmeal, cheese, eggs, carrots, rice, and tea or coffee. Coconut, salmon, walnuts, cocoa, prunes and raisins were relatively rare treats. The men got a regular provision of tobacco. An order for 500 pounds of flour indicates that they all ate considerable quantities of bread and baked goods. Meat was obtained from the animals raised on the farm, supplemented with an occasional meal of chicken or codfish.¹⁹

The poor farm superintendent, Mr. W.P. Cairncross, hired workmen to cut ice for the icehouse on the property. Two days were spent in cutting and hauling the blocks of ice, with another three days stacking them in the icehouse.

The January crop of ice amounted to 120 cakes at ten cents apiece.

The county provided clothing for the poorhouse residents as the old clothes became too worn to wear. The men would get overalls or pants, according to preference, while the women got plain gingham with enough buttons to make dresses. The poor farm managers would grant special requests for "hose supporters," slippers or shoes when necessary.²⁰

Population at the farm totalled six people, one male and five females in 1910. Of these, half were foreign-born, half were born in the United States. One of the six died during the year. By 1912, a state-mandated Local Visiting Committee to the Poor Farm reported the presence of "six helpless inmates" there, indicating that all were either disabled or too elderly to move much any more. The paupers were said to be "in good hands," with "no complaints of any kind."²¹

The Richland County poorhouse celebrated a remarkable occurrence in 1913. For the first time ever, and probably for the first time in North Dakota, the poor farm account books showed "a balance to the good." Always before, the almshouse had "shown a deficit," and had never "come near paying expenses." The report of the visiting committee gave no explanation for the miracle.²²

The county estimated the poor farm budget to be \$1,500 for the fiscal year 1915-1916, a substantial drop from the much-earlier figure of \$3,800 in 1898. Superintendent W.P. Cairncross had turned the institution into an efficient operation which made significant contributions to the county treasury through sales of beef, seed wheat, and butter. County Commissioners no doubt welcomed the stability of the poor farm operation while they coped with starting and administering the new Mothers' Aid program in that same year.²³

Progressive concerns for the well-being of the poorhouse inmates burst into the consciences of the Richland county commissioners from a remarkable report of the visiting committee in 1919. Although the eight residents were found to be "well-treated," the bleak poorhouse atmosphere created a deep sense of "lonesomeness." The visiting committee suggested that the rooms be made more "homelike by some simple and inexpensive decoration of the walls." Because few of the folks could read, they had little to do. The quality of the lives of the elderly people there should be enhanced by allowing their local friends to take them out of the building "to church or elsewhere." The committee members felt that the inmates and their friends were not getting together because both parties were embarrassed because the paupers lacked any nice-looking clothing. The situation might be improved if county funds

could be spent on "a plain special suit" for church or other outings. The humanitarian committee burrowed into the minds of the county commissioners and imprinted a startling question there: "If special clothes are provided inmates for burial purposes, why should they not secure them while they live?" The commissioners immediately directed the poor farm superintendent to look into getting clothes for his county charges.²⁴

The pauper population at the poorhouse increased during the 1920s. The superintendent made regular reports which listed the number of inmates there. The 1920 total of six residents steadily grew to a total of fifteen by January of 1930. Children could be present in the institution, as evidenced by the temporary poor farm stay of "Mary Hoffman and her baby" in the latter part of 1921. As the inmate totals climbed, so, too, did the almshouse budget--to \$4,000 by mid-decade. County poor relief expenses off the poor farm came to \$6,000, and Mothers' Pensions amounted to a massive \$15,000.²⁵

The Great Depression rocked Richland County as it did all of North Dakota. County agricultural production suffered from decreased annual rainfall beginning in 1929 and extended for almost all of the next eight years. In 1936 the county experienced its second worst all-time annual precipitation total, a dry 9.87 inches. The normal rains of 1931 and 1935 gave brief respite from the drought. The

ripple effect of the hard times was felt on the county poor farm. Inmate totals climbed above twenty for the first time in the history of the institution. By October 1934 the poor farm reached its all-time high population of twenty-seven residents.²⁶

The poor relief budgets increased substantially, but not at the rate felt by other counties in the state. Estimated relief budgets amounted to \$26,000 in 1932 and rose to \$36,000 by 1934. The poor farm expenses stayed at pre-Depression levels, owing to the increased burden placed on the farm by more inmates. The poor farm was allocated \$5,000 to \$6,000 from 1932 to 1935. County commissioners hoped to improve the poorhouse by authorizing a \$5,000 tax levy designated for a "Poor Farm Building Fund" in 1933, but the full amount could not be reached and the fund stood suspended as the hard times did not relinquish a stranglehold on the human population of North Dakota. To limit relief payments, the commissioners resolved that the county would honor "no claim for relief of poor . . . to any person operating an automobile or radio while receiving such relief."²⁷

Relief administration began to change when E. P. Cox became the relief administrator and the county organized under the federal setup. In August 1935 the county started a welfare board to work under the new Social Security laws. The Old Age Assistance program allowed some of the elderly

at the poor farm to live elsewhere, and helped the poorhouse population begin to decrease by 1937 to a more comfortable level of seventeen inmates.²⁸

The poor farm continued to operate during the 1940s, with lower operating budgets and fewer inmates. In 1941 the budget fell to \$2,500 (from the 1940 level of \$3,600) and stayed there for the duration of World War II. By 1946 only 8 residents lived in the county poorhouse.²⁹

In 1950 the county commissioners notified Mr. and Mrs. Henry Witt that their positions as superintendent and matron of the county poor farm would be terminated on 10 July 1950. Mr. Witt, formerly a Wahpeton policeman, attended the residents as they prepared to use their old age subsistence allowances at nursing homes or private dwellings. The commissioners had determined that the poor farm property was "no longer needed by the county for any purpose." With the changes in assistance to the elderly and the realization that the poor farm had "not been profitable," the county sold the land at Public Auction on July 15. H.B. Hubert of Grand Forks, who also owned other properties in Richland County, paid \$20,000 for the 211 acre farm with buildings. The household and farm equipment had been auctioned off, too, bringing \$5,450.³⁰

The Richland County Poor Farm achieved its goal of providing rudimentary care for the small number of elderly poor people requiring its services. However, the goal of

operating a profitable farm never reached fruition. Because the residents were incapable of providing much assistance, the planting and harvest required the employment of outside help. The county continued the farm partly by inertia, but kept it going after World War II, when modern equipment replaced older horse-drawn farming implements. By the time that the farm was sold in 1950, the poor farm had both a Ford tractor and a complete set of harness minus the horses. The tractor pulled a full line of implements, including a plow, triple-box trailer, "ensilage cutter," manure spreader and an assortment of drags, planters and hay racks. The dairy barn with "6 Holstein milk cows" had a new McCormick-Deering cream separator, which sold for less than the county had paid for it when it was purchased. The buildings and equipment necessary to raise 230 chickens and 12 swine, made the poor farm a substantial investment. As a result, the very early taxpayer protests that no poor farm "would prove economy" turned out to be true.³¹

ENDNOTES

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2. "July Settlement, 1887," Wahpeton Times, 21 July 1887, 4. "Poor Farm Wanted," Wahpeton Times, 23 February 1888, 1. "For Charity's Sake," Wahpeton Times, 23 February 1888, 4.
3. "Charity and Aid," Wahpeton Times, 8 March 1888, 1.
4. "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 5 May 1887, 4.
5. "New Board Organized," Wahpeton Times, 12 January 1888, 10; "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 19 January 1888, 8.
6. County Commissioners' Minutes, Richland County, vol. B, 29 February 1888, 53; "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 8 March 1888, 5. Bids in "Bids Wanted," Wahpeton Times, 22 March 1888, 5.
7. "County Commissioners," Wahpeton Times, 14 April 1887, 5. "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 5 April 1888, 8.
8. Editorial, Wahpeton Times, 15 March 1888, 4.
9. "Local News," Wahpeton Times, 5 April 1888, 1.
10. "The County Fathers," Wahpeton Times, 19 April 1888, 8. "The County Dads," Wahpeton Times, 24 May 1888, 5.
11. "The County Dads," Wahpeton Times, 26 July 1888, 8.
12. C.C., 9 April 1890, 285. Bureau of the Census, Report on Crime, Pauperism, and Benevolence in the U.S. at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 685.
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CHAPTER 12

WARD COUNTY POOR FARM, MINOT

Ward County, organized in 1885, had its beginnings as a result of the construction of the Great Northern Railroad across the northern plains. Burlington served as the county seat until the enterprising town of Minot captured that prize in 1888. Minot expanded due to its railroad connections and served both as the center of the county's poor relief systems and as its chief source of poor people.¹

Funds for poor relief came from a tax levy for general county and poor revenue, starting in 1886 at "six mills on a dollar." The county extended its first help for a pauper in May 1887, providing Mr. H. Haczerall with "nine days board and care." However, since Mr. Haczerall had recently arrived in the county, the commissioners sent the bill to his county of prior residence in order to get recompense.²

Minot soon became a collection point for the poor of the county, due to its size and importance as a railroad town. By 1891 the town cared for its own indigents and presented the bill to the county for payment. Most of the expenses resulted from payments to physicians for care of illnesses and accidental injuries among the poor. The

founding of a county hospital in Minot appeared to be a logical move. The county board thus purchased a site for a county hospital across the street from the court house in 1896. The county completed the construction and outfitting of the building in 1897. This hospital allowed the county physician to visit patients in his care more conveniently in Minot.³

Continued settlement in Minot and its environs resulted in increased numbers of unfortunate persons whose care became the responsibility of Ward County. By 1903 the expenses for the county poor stood at \$1,831 per year. The county board expected to handle the present load of poor cases and future increases in poor relief by building institutions for such cases. The county built a large addition to the hospital in 1905. Builder D.A. Dinnie of Minot landed the contract for \$8,571. The modern addition featured the latest improvements in plumbing and heating installed by Spriggs Brothers of Grand Forks for \$1,987.⁴

In addition, the county fathers advertised for "160 acres or more of land to be used as a county poor farm" in 1906. The establishment of a poor farm had been "carried by a large majority" at a general county-wide election in that year. The new poor farm was to be founded on 320 acres of land offered by A.D. Murphy located four miles south of Minot. Commissioner William Black approved the \$8,000 purchase with reservations. He believed that the county

hospital best served the interests of the county for economy and humanitarian care of the poor. To Black, the poor farm was too great of an additional expense to the taxpayers. Since the taxpayers had approved the poor farm measure, the county had no choice but to purchase the land, yet Commissioner Black went on record as "strictly against erecting buildings or other improvements at this time." He soon resigned from the county board and returned to his property interests in the western part of Ward County.⁵

County expenses for the poor greatly increased due to these improvements, jumping to \$7,426 for the year 1906-1907. Some of these expenses came from the establishment of a pest house for isolation of contagious disease cases in Minot in early 1907. Another pest house built in Kenmare provided quarantine for severe cases later in the year.⁶

In the time before the poor farm became operational, the commissioners used harsh measures to discourage applications for county assistance. To reduce expenses for long-term care of the incapacitated, a poor man in the county hospital received a \$75.00 railroad ticket back to his old home in Oklahoma in 1907. Two years later, recent immigrants Erick Dahl and Gust Sikstrom were given passage all the way back to Sweden. Arranging the land and water transportation to accomplish this de facto extradition of aliens involved considerable time for the commissioners. However, the costs involved in sending paupers back to

Europe were small in comparison to caring for them for the rest of their days.⁷

In 1909 Ward County built a poorhouse. Advertisements for bids appeared in the official county newspapers and in the Improvement Bulletin of Minneapolis. Contractors placed bids just below the \$10,000 limit to be spent on a house and barn. One bidder foolishly proposed wooden buildings for just over \$9,000, while the other two bids provided for a brick house and a wooden barn. Emmett & Bartelson, contractors, successfully gained the contract for \$9,775, just \$4.00 under the bid of the local D.A. Dinnie construction company. To watch over the interests of the county, Martin C. Thorpe received pay as a superintendent of the poor farm project. December 1, 1909, stood as the completion date.⁸

Ewold (or Avald) Wendt, employed as the first superintendent of the Ward County poor farm, worked to purchase supplies for the institution and equip it for farming. Wendt's salary of \$850 per year represented but a small part of the expenses of the poor farm. The barn necessities included everything from two milkcans (cost: \$1.00) to a forty-five cent oil can to items like a curry comb (25 cents), a garden rake (65 cents) and rope (\$1.80). Of course the curry comb required a cow, which came at a cost of \$40.00. The poorhouse could not operate without a butter churn (\$5), two clocks costing \$11.00, five hair

brushes (\$1.25), carpet slippers, and a "potato smasher" (\$.25). Farm equipment came at a goodly price, for a plow cost \$78.00, a seed drill \$110, and a dependable wagon demanded another \$90.00. The proper horses, ready for work, were garnered for \$900.⁹

The horses had to eat and the residents of the farm did, too. A listing of the actual items purchased for meals at the poor farm shows that the inmates ate well according to the tastes of the superintendent, who shared the same meals. A listing of the meat served at the poorhouse in the month of July 1910 revealed the wide variety of good food eaten there. The list included fourteen different types and cuts of meat from the Valley Meat Market. Salted salmon; veal; beef roast and steak; pork chops, bacon, and ham; baloney, sausage, and "wienies" made for meals that could be the envy of most citizens of Ward County. The table fare included berries, tomatoes, Cream of Wheat cereal, bananas, celery, currents, apricots, lemons and chocolate. The core menu of potatoes, oatmeal, eggs, grits, cheese and rice found accompaniments of "spagetta," apples, corn, tea and coffee, and oysters. "Bay Rum" added flavor to the food and sardines provided a taste from the past for immigrant inmates.¹⁰

County officials perhaps overestimated the amount of work that poor farm inmates could provide, and laborers had to be hired to tend the crops and help with the residents.

Thus the poor farm supplied employment to local citizens. In 1911 twenty-one persons worked at the poor farm for varying lengths of time. The farm hands received a dollar a day for help in the planting and harvest seasons. Blacksmiths from Minot kept the workhorses well-shod and occasionally came to the farm for "general blacksmithing."¹¹

The expenses of operating the poor farm led the county board to find economy in other places. The county hospital, newly re-named the "County Northwestern Hospital," received close scrutiny. The hospital accepted regular patients, but found collection of fees for their care to be extremely difficult. Apparently, the regular patients felt entitled to some charity from the county. Some reasoned that if the paupers did not have to pay for medical services at the institution, why should other residents of the county have to pay for care there? To solve this problem, the county decided to sell the hospital. The county officials determined that the brick poorhouse could accommodate both the county poor and the county sick people. By this means, the county could be relieved of a "source of constant trouble" and the taxpayers could be freed of the "heavy drain" of funds from support of the now-"superfluous and unnecessary" hospital.¹²

In a chain of blind causation, the transfer of the hospital patients to new quarters in the poorhouse caused a

strain on that facility. The poor farm housed twenty-seven people in 1911, seventeen of which were small children. The new arrivals, described by the visiting committee as mostly "invalids and derelicts," needed a "great deal of care and attention." The new building required improvements to aid Mr. and Mrs. Wendt, superintendent and matron, in fulfillment of their duties. The committee recommended a larger water pump, a bigger root house for vegetable storage, and extension of the cess pool to drain into a coulee farther from the house. Finding the furnace "too small for the building," a larger heating plant seemed necessary. In addition, the drinking water proved to be of a poor quality.¹³

With a number of disabled elderly persons and some small children living on the farm, the visiting board called on the county to live up to its "moral responsibility" toward good care of these people. The poorhouse needed another woman to care for their special needs. The lack of proper schooling for the children stood as a prime concern. The nearby schoolhouse, convenient to the poor farm, was open only a few months of the year. The visiting committee recommended that the school be open for seven or eight months of education for the pauper children. The children, in turn, made too much noise for the elderly inmates, and rubber matting installed in the hallways might reduce the noise level.¹⁴

By the 1920s the population of the poor farm stabilized at about seventeen inmates. Children found better care off the poor farm after passage of the Mothers' Pensions legislation in 1915 and from other state laws forwarded by the Children's Commission in the early 1920s.¹⁵

Extremely severe economic conditions in 1931 wreaked havoc in Ward County. The county suffered an almost complete crop failure in that year. So little precipitation fell that "most grain crops failed, gardens yielded almost nothing, [and] pastures were destroyed," making food shortages for people and farm animals alike. Farmers had so little income that the payment of property taxes became extremely difficult.¹⁶ The county board had not anticipated "such a calamity when the Budget was made in July 1930, although it was made larger than for any previous year." The commissioners resolved to pay no more house rent for poor persons after April 1, and transferred \$10,000 from the County Road Fund to help the "poor and needy." In addition, no relief would be supplied to persons who owned or operated an automobile, upon the order of the state Secretary of Social Services Department. Relief demands had overdrawn the budget by "several thousand dollars." The poor farm absorbed the most-stricken cases, and the population there soared to thirty-one inmates by June. Superintendent Earl Halliday and Matron Laurie Halliday found increased demands on their time and efforts starting

in 1931, when the number of inmates climbed to a stifling forty-seven by December.¹⁷

North Dakota Governor George Shafer headed a delegation to Ward County to discuss the problems of poor relief there in November 1931. C. F. Rowland, National Red Cross representative from the Montana District; N. D. Gorman, County Agent Leader of the State Agricultural College; Dr. A. D. McCannel of the local Red Cross Chapter; and State Senator Hyland met with local leaders to seek solutions to the crisis. Little could be done due to the concurrent problems found in the surrounding counties. Minot served as a magnet for helpless individuals from the nearby area. One family from McHenry County, asking for help from the Ward County officials, got a directive from the States Attorney to go back home to McHenry County.¹⁸

The general farming and economic situation in the county worsened further in 1932. Because the taxpayers had no money with which to pay county taxes, the county board found itself in an impossible situation. All available dollars had already been transferred into the poor relief fund, and further financial help withered. Neither the state nor the local banks had any money for county use. The city of Minot owed the county over \$10,000 as its share of poor relief and could not pay it. The board confessed that poor relief had gotten beyond their "control and ability to pay." The county could not even pay for the costs of

conducting elections. In order to cut costs to the bone, all recipients of house-rental funds from the county had to appear before the county commissioners in person to justify their needs. The county tried to reduce expenditures for groceries and rent, and vowed to cut off all aid to those who were known to be "driving an automobile" or "attending public dances and movies." If a person could afford frills, that same person could pay for food and shelter.¹⁹

Ward County faced total disaster. Hardships led to the organization of an Unemployed Citizens League of Minot, a group that lobbied for more relief efforts in the area. The commissioners groped for some means to gain financial stability. The board attempted to obtain more federal aid for roadbuilding, wheat from the "Farm Board for relief purposes," and loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. By November a \$40,000 transfusion from the RFC gave some life to the county Poor Fund. The poor farm stayed near the bursting point, with thirty-seven inmates still in residence in January 1933.²⁰

Federal aid eventually gave some economic health to Ward County. Some aid seemed quite modest, such as government provision of several carloads of potatoes for relief, yet yielded great help to impoverished citizens. By 1934 FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Administration) road and dam projects employed numbers of the Ward County unemployed. In fact, FERA activity became so heavy that the Community

Room in the county courthouse was turned over to FERA workers' uses.²¹

The poor farm population hovered around thirty from 1936 until a drop to twenty-two inmates came in January 1938. Old Age Assistance awarded to the elderly provided better access to nursing care and allowed some persons to stay in places other than the poor farm. By 1940, the county decided to get out of the poor farm business. The heavy demands placed upon the commissioners during the heart of the Depression created a desire to pass some of the responsibilities to other parties. Accordingly, the county board voted to discontinue the poor farm, placing the residents in other "satisfactory arrangements" at a savings to the county. Louis and Sophie Holum leased the property and renamed the former poor farm, creating "Holum's Residence for the Aged." For about \$18 per month per person, the county placed about twenty people in the former poor farm under the care of the Holums. Most of the individuals were over 65 year of age, and thus eligible for Old Age Assistance. Henry Miller leased the farmland from 1940 until 1945.²²

The decade from 1930 to 1940 had been extremely difficult for the residents of Ward County. The total population dropped almost 5 percent during the Depression, from 33,597 to 31,981. The city of Minot managed a slight increase of 478 people, growing from 16,099 to 16,577.

Federal programs proved to be of great benefit, allowing people to get by until better times came.²³

Miller and the Holums used the property until 1945, when Ward County sold the 480-acre farm and buildings to the State of North Dakota for the purpose of creating an agricultural experiment station. The new proprietors converted the poorhouse into three apartments and an office. In 1947 the old barn and the icehouse were torn down, and the material was used for the construction of a machine shed.²⁴

The poor farm building still stands and continues in use as an agricultural experiment station.

ENDNOTES

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3. C.C., vol. B, 11 July 1896, 2; 7 January 1897, 58; Van Wagoner as builder in 8 April 1897, 65.
4. C.C., vol. B, 10 July 1903, 464. C.C., vol. C, 4 April 1905, 43.
5. C.C., vol. C, 18 November 1906, 419; bids in 17 January 1907, 465; 6 May 1907, 550; Black resignation in 8 June 1907, 565.
6. C.C., vol. C, expenses in 30 July 1907, 588; pest houses in 19 January 1907, 468, and 4 September 1907, 605.
7. C.C., vol. C, 11 January 1907, 448. Vol. D, 9 July 1909, 290, and 23 July 1909, 309.
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10. Day-Book, Ward Poor Farm, meat in July 1910, 20; sundry foods from 1911-1912, pages 91, 108, 200, 201, 205.
11. Day-Book, County Poor Farm, shows hired help in 1911, 63, 64, 75.
12. C.C., vol. E, 25 February 1911, 139. The matron of the hospital had been discharged from the position for poor performance of her duties just prior to the decision to sell the building, in 23 February 1911, 136.
13. Visiting committee report in C.C., vol. E, 22 August 1911, 234, 235.
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22.C.C., 21 March 1940, 514, 515. T. N. Tangedahl, From Vision To Legacy: Social Services in North Dakota (Bismarck: North Dakota Department of Human Services, 1989), 7. Miller in Janet Rosencrans and Peggy Smetana, People, Places and Events, Minot-Ward County: Bridging the Century (Winnipeg: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1986, 75.

23.Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1942), 794.

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CHAPTER 13
RAMSEY COUNTY

Ramsey County became fully organized in 1885, with the county seat in Devils Lake. County assistance for the poor in the early years consisted of provision for rent, heating, rudimentary medical care in emergencies, and burial expenses.¹

The county soon experienced disastrous conditions for its farmers. In the spring of 1888 the rural residents planted extensive fields of grain. The wheat grew well and "promised well for an abundant crop until about the time the berry was forming," when a fierce late frost killed the crop. Having borrowed money at the stores in order to put in the seed, the farmers needed a good crop in order to pay off their debts. They found their hopes blasted by the cold. Forced to renew the notes at "exorbitant interest," the wheatgrowers suffered through the long winter, hoping for better fortune in 1889.²

In an effort to recover the losses of the previous year, the farmers increased their acreage of grain. All paid a "fancy price" for the seed, meaning "more notes and more interest and a lien upon whatever crop he should raise." But in the summer "came a drouth such as was never

known in Dakota," allowing a small harvest, "not enough to repay the seed." The liens on the crop left the farmers with a harvest of unpaid premiums and interest. The county had to assist a "large number" of county citizens with clothing and provisions during 1888 and 1889. Some outside agencies, such as the Scandinavian Relief Committee, relieved the suffering of some of the needy.³

In early 1890 the county commissioners wrote an open letter, appealing for more help for the county residents. Two-thirds of the local farmers were unable to plant any crops in the spring, lacking seed to put in the ground. Nearly all the needy farmers were "heavily mortgaged, both in their real and personal property" and were "thus completely tied up from assisting themselves in this direction." Numbers of farmers had failed because of the succession of poor crops. Some found the struggle too great and left on their own, hoping to find better fields elsewhere. A few, like four impoverished Russian Jews, accepted railroad tickets from the county to attempt a new start in St. Paul, Minnesota.⁴

Ramsey County weathered the crisis of 1890 and Depression of the 1890s with conventional relief practices. In 1895 the tax levy for the poor amounted to \$1,500. But, by 1901 the actual expenses for relief of county paupers totalled \$3,422. The county board authorized the purchase

of a poor farm in 1902, hoping to provide care in a centralized location for less expense.⁵

The county commissioners wanted the prospective poor farm property to be of reasonable size, not more than 320 acres and not less than 200 acres. In order to provide for transportation of the paupers to the farm, the land had to be located "within a radius of three miles of any railroad station along the main line of the Great Northern Railway." Three landholders offered properties in the summer of 1902, ranging in price from \$5,500 to \$6,400. The board of county commissioners rejected all of the bids, for reasons unspecified.⁶

The county re-advertised for a poor farm location later in the year, with a slight variation in the requirements. Due to protests of discrimination by the Farmer's Railroad, the poor farm could lay along its lines as well as those of the Great Northern. In addition, the acreage could be within four miles of a station on either railway. Twelve offers poured into the County Auditor's Office, with prices ranging from \$20 to \$25 per acre. A committee examined the Hale, Noonan, and Smith farms in Stevens Township, the Manseau farm in Lake Township and the Goozer property in Freshwater Township. The land offered by John H. Smith near Crary appeared to be the "best bargain offered." In an attitude of fairness, the county board accepted the majority report of the Committee on the Purchase of a Poor Farm for

the centralized location near Crary. Located about a mile south of Crary on the Great Northern Railway, the 315 acres were purchased for \$21 an acre.⁷

After the county purchased the land, the commissioners took no action to procure the buildings necessary to outfit a poor farm. The county used a portion of the land as a "potter's field" for the burial of indigents. However, due to the lack of a great demand for placement of paupers at a poor house, the county simply rented out the farmland and gained some income from that source. The decision seemed justified, for relief expenses for 1909-1910 totalled only \$3,540, at the same level of expenditures in 1901. Poor people concentrated in Devils Lake, the largest town in county, and made up the great majority of cases in the county. By 1915 the county board reported that the rest of the county required little assistance.⁸

Conditions changed, so that by 1919 Ramsey County officials decided to proceed with equipping the poor farm for county charges. Consequently, the board arranged to buy and move a house from the town of Crary to the farm that spring. Bids were let and accepted for the construction of a new barn on the site. The addition of a granary made for a fine set of buildings for a poor farm. However, the board stopped right at that point. No further provisions were made to buy furniture for the house or farm equipment for tilling the land.⁹

An explanation for this decision came from the County Auditor in 1932. Ramsey County had "few dependents" which were placed in homes in the county at a cost of "about \$22.00 per month per person." The county deemed that the numbers of poor relief cases did not justify equipping the poor farm for the purpose of housing the county paupers. Instead, the county rented the land, buying seed and gaining a "part of the crop each year." Generally the county coffers were enriched by \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year, with a small expense (\$200 or \$300 per year) for barley or flax seed.¹⁰

The county sold the farm in 1943 for \$6,500 (less than the original purchase price in 1903) to Duane Bye and Caspar Bye of Crary.¹⁴

The indecision of the County Commissioners in committing the county to the full operation of a poor farm produced a financial burden upon the initial purchase in 1903. However, the purchase of the buildings, farm equipment, furniture and employees in that year would have cost at least as much as the purchase price of the land alone. When the county board moved to place buildings on the site, the structures did not involve a great expense. The house from Crary cost less than \$1,000 and the barn totalled \$1,115. The additional expense for farm machinery, tools and household items gave caution to the board, and quitting at that point did not waste huge sums of tax money.

Yet the county officials appeared hasty in the original decisions while being thrifty in the ultimate decision to refrain from operating a poor farm in the county.

The experience of Ramsey County best illustrates the cautious approach of North Dakotans to providing relief to distressed citizens. Unsure of the best plan, the actions of the county commissioners were halting at best and indecisive at worst. But when an emergency arose that affected the residents of the county, the county gave as much help as it could.

ENDNOTES

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3. Letter, Ramsey County Commissioners, 1890. Minute Book, Ramsey County, vol. 1, 8 January 1890, n.p.

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10. Poor Relief, Poor Farms, and Mothers' Pensions in North Dakota (Bismarck: North Dakota Judicial Council, 1932), 43. Rental proceeds and seed expenses in C.C., vol. E, 10 July 1915, 172; 10 October 1919, 383; 1 June 1920, 409; 13 July 1922, 529; vol. F, 3 June 1925, 55; vol. G, 14 May 1935, 9; vol. G, 12 July 1940, 311.

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CHAPTER 14
PEMBINA COUNTY

Pembina County, the oldest county in what became North Dakota, never had an official poor farm but did operate a semi-official poorhouse for a short time in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. From the time when the county became fully organized in 1867, provisions for relief were given in emergency situations. Mostly, the people depended upon relatives or neighbors in time of need. Consistent poor relief practices became possible after the large area of Pembina County became split into more manageable units in 1873, when ten counties were created from it. County government operated from the town of Pembina.¹

The first years of the 1880s brought the railroad to Pembina County and the population stood at a substantial 14,334 in 1890. The plentiful number of residents brought about a consistent demand for poor relief for unfortunate individuals and families. Outdoor relief stood as the accepted mode of aid to the impoverished persons of the county. Generally the county commissioners did not list the names of those receiving relief, however, near the end of the decade, some names were printed. Non-resident poor people were allowed emergency aid but would be sent away to

the place of prior residence if they were likely to become permanent county charges. For instance, one "invalid pauper" was sent packing on the train back to Chicago in 1888. Noting a linkage between poverty and alcohol, the county fathers prohibited saloons from selling "any intoxicating liquors whatsoever" to "county paupers." In addition, the injunction also forbade giving alcohol to such persons. Obviously, the enforcement of this rule proved impossible.²

The realization of statehood for North Dakota in 1889 coincided with a county-wide vote "on the question of purchasing a poor farm." The county commissioners accepted the widely-held belief that a poorhouse would reduce total poor relief expenses and could deter some individuals from seeking aid from the county. The proposed "asylum for the poor" would cost less than \$4,000 for land and buildings. The special election brought few voters to the polls and those who came voted against the proposition by 538 to 425.³

The county board faced other difficulties associated with the failure of grain crops in 1888 and 1889. The county felt impelled to provide wheat to desperate farmers for seed purposes in the spring of 1890. The county arranged for a supply of 12,000 bushels of seed wheat at 75 cents per bushel. A flood of applications brought about the disbursement of over 9,000 bushels of seed. 122 farmers

received aid from the county, ranging from 15 to 150 bushels per applicant. Each person agreed to a lien against the wheat crop in order to pay for the seed. After the harvest, the county commissioners had to contend with collecting the liens. After repeated entreaties for payment, the county hired F.A. Hart to visit those who had not paid and "enforce collections."⁴

The failure of the poor farm proposal and the difficulties of the farmers led to a serious examination of county relief expenditures in 1890. Each county commissioner visited and closely scrutinized each pauper in his district. The county board printed the name and condition of each of these persons in the official minutes for February. The commissioners reported on twenty-six cases of pauperism, some of whom were receiving aid and others who needed some assistance. The descriptions graphically portray the face of poverty, from various causes, in the county:

1. John Beck, a Spaniard, aged about seventy, unable now in my opinion to do any work. Thin in flesh, sickly look, and severe chronic cough, lives with John Reese three miles from Pembina, Reese gets three dollars per week for his board. Have furnished him some clothing which he absolutely needed, have tried to find someone who will board and care for him for less, but cannot find anyone who will take him.

2. Michael Corcoran, Irish, aged about 65, with wife and one child living with him. Have a little house of their own, but very poor. Michael quite sick, recently been attended by doctor. Still unable to work, a worthy subject for aid from the county, but thus far has asked for nothing from me, he lives in Pembina.

3. Mrs. L. Bouvette, mixed blood, aged about seventy-five or eighty years, is living by herself in a small house in Pembina, gets aid from the county according to her necessities, more or less being required according to the weather or as others may supply her with wood.

4. Mrs. Patrigins [?], American or Canadian, four children all small, lives in rented rooms in Pembina, apparently has nothing, husband died in Carlisle last fall, received aid according to her necessities.

5. Sophie Thompson's child (illegitimate) about one year old--the mother has two other children which she has thus far with the aid of others, managed to support, but claims and seems to be unable to support this one. \$2.00 per week paid for keeping this child.

6. Charles Pilen, mixed blood, wife and three children, resides three miles from Pembina, recent applicant for aid, worked a rented farm last summer but got no crop, has nothing left, took sick about a month ago and his recovery is very doubtful. Must have help according to absolute necessities.

7. Mrs. B. Johnson, Icelander, one child four years old, kept by O. Thorsteinson of South Pembina at \$10.00 per month. This woman apparently should be able to support herself and child, but I am informed that she is mentally afflicted at times, and it is argued that therefore she is not to be depended upon, hence her services are of little value.⁵

Other poor persons were described as "consumptive," "partially blind," "incapacitated and helpless," or "partially demented." One 80-year-old woman suffered because of "a son who does not support her." Many, as in the case of the woman aged 104 years, were old and incapable of caring for themselves. Some required only "temporary relief," dependent upon the harshness of the weather. Only one commissioner's district had no paupers within its boundaries.⁶

As a result of the investigation, the county decided to better organize its method of poor relief. Accordingly, the board advertised for bids for boarding and care of eight persons judged to be permanent paupers. In this manner, the board hoped to get lower bids than by the previous haphazard manner of finding caregivers. The others would receive aid on a temporary, case-by-case basis. While conducting the study, the commissioners determined that Holmfridur Sigurdadotter, as a recent arrival from Winnipeg, appeared "likely to become a public charge" and immediately sent her back to the place where she belonged.⁷

The depression of the 1890s brought about suffering in Pembina County as it did around the nation. The economic hard time gave rise to the spirited Populist Party, the colorful Coxey's Army which marched on Washington, D.C., and the growth of the Socialist Party under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs. As the difficulties continued, the Pembina county board again conducted an investigation of all poor relief cases in 1892. The study revealed a total of sixteen paupers requiring county aid. Eight of the cases required assignment as permanent paupers and the county awarded relief according to the perceived needs of the individuals. One man, in "poor health," found his monthly aid cut from five dollars and a "sack of flour" per month to only the monthly flour, because he owned a "team of ponies and a cow." Of the total of twenty-six individuals or families

receiving relief in 1890, only ten were still getting help in 1892. Some of the elderly had died, others had perhaps moved away, and an unknown total went off the relief roster. Aged John Beck still stayed with John Reese, for no one else, apparently, would agree to keep him. The new cases, six in number, present by 1892 represented a fall into poverty for those who had become too ill, old or poor to care for themselves.⁸

A new century brought a new call for an old remedy, a county poor farm. Population in the county had risen to a new high of 17,869, the fourth largest in the state. In 1901 some of the Pembina County newspapers, led by the Walhalla Mountaineer, nursed a public clamor for a poorhouse. The Walhalla editor, a Mr. Lee, believed that a poor farm "would fit Pembina county all right." Some citizens expressed their views in letters to the editors of the various local newspapers, generally favoring the poorhouse as a "proper remedy." A number of people believed that a poor farm might bring "considerable expense" at the start yet would "be a saving to the county in the long run."⁹

The Mountaineer most shrilly proclaimed the benefits of a poor farm. Editor Lee claimed that county paupers could "do nearly all of the work" involved in the operation of a county poor farm. He asserted that "the proceeds of the farm" would pay the wages of both a manager and a matron and

"go a long way towards paying the expenses of keeping the poor who are deserving and need the comforts of home." Lee felt that the paupers placed in boarding homes would benefit from placement in a more humane poorhouse. He charged that those who provided a room for keeping county paupers had but one aim, namely, "to secure as much money from the county as possible." To get the most money, the caregivers would give only enough care to keep the paupers alive so they could "still draw their monthly allowance."¹⁰

The Walhalla newspaperman slurred the relief recipients, calling them "parasites" who would shun the labor involved in a poor farm situation. Stressing the deterrent nature of a poorhouse, Lee believed that county would realize a reduction in total poor relief expenditures by means of a poor farm.¹¹

The Pembina Pioneer Express argued with the positions set forth by Mr. Lee. The editors knew of "about half a dozen permanent paupers" near Pembina, and stated that "the total value of these as farm workers would not nearly equal one ordinary farm hand." None of them could be judged an "imposter or [a] parasite." The editors concluded that there was "no such thing in this county as an able bodied pauper, except some widows with children." As for the keepers of the poor, the newspapermen in Pembina, after visiting with "several of the paupers" in boardinghouses, concluded that the care was "excellent." The Pioneer

Express editors opposed the poor farm idea solely on "financial grounds," believing that "the lessee of a poor farm" could not board paupers "any cheaper than anyone else."¹²

The county board desired to examine the issue in a serious manner, so that the matter might "be better understood and intelligently discussed." Accordingly, a committee of two commissioners tabulated the actual poor relief expenses for the prior year. Sixteen persons received "full maintenance" as the "permanent poor," at a total expense of \$1,902.88. (The total of sixteen could be compared with the eight persons who received full maintenance in 1890 and 1892.) Those "partially able to support themselves but who receive some assistance regularly from the county" got \$1,178.14. Those temporarily poor in the winter months, or rendered helpless by sickness or accident gained \$1,456.08 in county funding. The total for "doctors, hospital and medicine" came to \$1,841.95. Funeral expenses for paupers came to a modest \$306.10, while transportation of the sick or elderly amounted to \$75.15. The grand total for the year stood at \$6,761.30. This total could be compared to the 1895 tax levy of \$4,000 for the support of the poor, in order to understand how increased population would result in more expenses for poor relief. The main question that occupied the minds of taxpayers and

county officials alike remained: "Could a poor farm reduce poor relief expenses?"¹³

The editors of The Pioneer Express, F.A. Wardwell and G.G. Thompson, examined the commissioners' report and concluded that the poor relief system worked well. The aggregate total of "60 to 70 individuals" receiving full-time county aid were but a small part of the county's total "population of 17,000 people." Each pauper received an average of \$100 per year, which represented a "cheap rate for support." Wardwell and Thompson concluded that the county would find it "difficult to conceive of any plan that would support them more cheaply." The editors also noted that the county farmers depended upon seasonal laborers who helped in the "harvest and threshing" seasons. When a migratory worker became sick or injured, he usually became a county charge. Medical expenses for such "temporary pauper[s]" were very expensive, but would not be relieved by a poor farm establishment. The editors contended that Pembina County had too few cases of poverty to warrant a poor farm.¹⁴

The county board agreed with the Pembina newspapermen. The commissioners decided, after the controversy and the investigation, not to pursue the poor farm method. Rather than purchase land, build houses and barns, and buy farm equipment, the county board instead made use of boarding houses, hospitals and other institutions built and

maintained by other parties. Mrs. Mary Gerardine's boarding house in Pembina served as the dwelling place for several of the county's permanent paupers. Gerardine provided board and care for the county poor in the first quarter of 1902 for a total of \$171.25, which meant that a considerable number of paupers were staying with her. Using a figure of \$10 to \$15 per month for board and care of paupers, based on 1892 and 1903 figures from the county records, Mrs. Gerardine boarded four to six people per month. The other permanent county charges were boarded near where they normally lived. It would be reasonable to conclude that Mrs. Gerardine cared for the paupers from the city of Pembina, for transportation charges could be saved by providing local care for the paupers. County records indicate that a number of Pembina County citizens were paid to provide care, house rent and food for local paupers on a case-by-case basis.¹⁵

Mary Gerardine had boarded county paupers before 1902, and the local newspaper publically expressed the belief that the persons under her care were "well treated and comfortably provided for." Tom Clover, who had once been a boarder at Mrs. Gerardine's establishment as a county charge, issued mild slanders about her. Clover, considered to be of dubious character in Pembina, complained about the quality of the food served to him during his tenure at the boarding house. He contended that the house "was very cold"

during the winter months. Mr. Clover charged that the "butter dish wasn't washed" often enough for his tastes, and that he had been issued "only one towel" for bathing purposes. Most of his ire seemed directed more at one of his fellow boarders, 76-year-old Mrs. Saeve, and at "Prof. Amie Balcan," a French teacher who assisted Gerardine in the operation of the boarding house.¹⁶

County officials sent paupers to the Winnipeg General Hospital for treatment of serious illnesses until 1905. In that year, the county agreed to have its poor patients undergo treatment at Dr. H.M Waldren's hospital in Drayton. Waldren provided "care, board, medicine and medical attendance" for county charges for \$1.50 per day. Care in Drayton saved on transportation costs to Winnipeg. Some patients were also sent to the Deaconess Hospital in Grand Forks. By 1910 the county board compelled all county poor patients to receive treatment in the Drayton City Hospital.¹⁷

The county began to use the services of other area institutions. In 1902 several women were sent to have their babies in the "Maternity Home" in Fargo. In 1905 county officials brought a "deserted child from Cavalier" to the Children's Home at Fargo for adoption.¹⁸

The county commissioners cut costs by making county residents pay for services formerly rendered them at no cost. For instance, in 1902, the board judged that free

treatment of smallpox patients was now "unsatisfactory." A new policy required that smallpox patients "must pay for all services and necessaries when found to have the means to do so." The former policy of appointing a quarantine officer for each case of epidemic disease proved to be too costly, so the board opted to allow only one quarantine officer for a "number of cases." Newspaper inquiries into smallpox expenses in 1901 had drawn ire upon the quarantine expenses remitted to the county. Taxpayers objected to replacing carpets, wallpaper, pillows destroyed as a result of smallpox quarantines. Most citizens believed that the sufferer should absorb some of the expenses associated with the disease. After all, an individual that suffered from "typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria" or other diseases had to pay their own medical bills and other expenses associated with the disease.¹⁹

The boarding home of Mary Gerardine concentrated paupers in one place and thus Gerardine's house became the county almshouse. The 1904 special federal census included Pembina County on its list of almshouses in North Dakota but gave no indication of the total number of inmates. By 1910 federal officials did not count the boarding house as a poorhouse. However, Pembina county records did, on two occasions, refer to Gerardine's establishment as the "poor house." A druggist annually provided "all medicine for [the] county poor" in the First Commissioner's District,

including the county jail and "poor house." The county had a contract with Gerardine, renewed yearly from 1902 until at least 1910. In that year, the county seat moved from Pembina to Cavalier, and one volume of county commissioner's minutes (1910-1914) was lost.²⁰

Mary Gerardine boarded her largest number of paupers during the first three months of 1906, receiving \$263.25. By the summer of 1909, the quarterly figure dropped to \$90.00, and, by early winter, to \$65.35. She received "\$10 per month for board and washing for each pauper" in her care. In 1910, Gerardine had just two "county charges" in her care. They were the LaBogue sisters, ages 7 and 11, who attended school in Pembina. Both girls had been born in North Dakota of a Canadian mother and an American father (also born in North Dakota). Mrs. Gerardine's two unmarried sons (twenty and twenty-four years of age), one a music teacher and the other of "no profession," also lived in the house. Another room was let to a local male teacher. Contemporary newspaper accounts indicate Mrs. Gerardine provided "the kindest of care at all times" to the paupers in her care.²¹

Population pressures eased in Pembina County, for the number of county residents dropped from the high point of 17,000 people in 1900 to a stable figure which hovered around 15,000 for the next 40 years. Poor relief administration shifted from Pembina to Cavalier, but the

methods continued to provide only the basic necessities to those who would endure the public scrutiny involved in asking for aid. Pembina County accepted the changes in poor relief administration determined by state government (Mothers' Pensions) and the national government during the New Deal without utilizing the poor farm option.

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long, (ed.), Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980, vol. 5, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), 179.

2. Population figure from Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, Abstract With Supplement for N.D. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 44. County Commissioners' Minutes, Pembina County, vol. B, 8 February 1882, 14; 11 February 1882, 19; 2 April 1889, 594; paupers' names listed in 3 September 1889, 623; pauper transport in 14 November 1888, 562; prohibition in 7 February 1882, 13.

3. C.C., vol. B, 9 October 1889, 632; election results in 11 November 1889, 633; also in "Pembina County Elections," The Drayton [ND] Echo, 8 November 1889, 5.

4. C.C., vol. C, 3 April 1890, 29; list of recipients in 5 April-7 April, 1890, 29-32; collections in 13 November 1890, 72, and 27 February 1891, 82.

5. C.C., vol. C, 11 February 1890, 22, 23.

6. C.C., vol. C, 12 February 1890, 24, 25.

7. C.C., vol. C, 12 February 1890, 25.

8. C.C., vol. C, 11 February 1892, 124; 10 March 1892, 128; 5 April 1892, 133.

9. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census, 1910, 44. "Stray Shots," Drayton Echo, 2 May 1901, 1; C.C., vol. 1900, 23 May 1901, 169.

10. Mr. Lee's comments are reprinted in "The Poor Farm, [Pembina] Pioneer Express, 24 May 1901, 1.

11. "The Poor Farm," [Pembina] Pioneer Express, 24 May 1901, 1.

12. "The Poor Farm," Pioneer Express, 24 May 1901, 1. "A Poor Farm," Pioneer Express, 10 May 1901, 1.

13. "Poor Fund Report," in C.C., vol. 1900, 12 July 1901, 187; C.C., vol. C, 13 July 1895, 403.

14. "The Report on Poor Expense," The Pioneer Express [Pembina, ND], 5 July 1901, 1. "Tom Clover On The Stand," Pioneer Express, 21 June 1901, 1.

15. Mrs. A. Gerardine listed in C.C., 10 April 1902, 259, as boarding county charges. Mrs. Mary Gerardine has several different spellings of her name in the official records, namely, "Jaradine," "Geradine," or "Gerardine," but she could not speak English and could not read or write it, (knowing only French), and thus, her name could easily be confused or spelled as it sounded. Mrs. Gerardine owned 74 acres of land 1/2 or 1 mile south of the city of Pembina (c. 1892), as recorded in Plat Book of Grand Forks, Walsh and Pembina Counties, North Dakota (Philadelphia: D.W. Ensign & Co., 1893), 121, 97. Mrs. Gerardine had a county charge as a boarder earlier, from 14 June 1889 to 7 April 1890, as listed in C.C., vol. C, 9 April 1890.

16. "Tom Clover Takes The Stand," [Pembina] Pioneer Express, 21 June 1901, 1.

17. Winnipeg hospital in C.C., vol. 1900, 25 August 1902, 297; 16 December 1902, 335; 4 March 1903, 374. Waldren in C.C., vol. 1903, 5 April 1905, 192. Deaconess Hospital in vol. E, 11 June 1907. Drayton Hospital in vol. E, 8 January 1910, 550.

18. C.C., vol. 1900, 22 February 1902, 249; vol. 1903, 23 May 1904, 91.

19. C.C., vol. 1900, 8 April 1902, 255; vol. 1903, 20 November 1903, 52. Newspaper comment in "Small-pox is Expensive," The [Pembina] Pioneer Express, 3 May 1901, 1; and "Small Pox Bills," Pioneer Express, 31 May 1901, 1.

20. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 82. Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 70. Reference to a "poor house" in C.C., vol. 1900, 3 March 1903, 362; and vol. E, 14 May 1907, 257, is direct to Gerardine. Gerardine's contract mentioned in C.C., vol. 1900, 8 April 1903, 374. The county auditor's office stated that C.C., vol. F, has been lost for a long time, perhaps when the records were moved from Pembina to Cavalier. County seat from Bicentennial Book Committee, Heritage '76: Pembina County, North Dakota, Then and Now (Cavalier, ND: Pembina County Commissioners and the Pembina County Historical Society, 1975), 31.

21. Largest number computed by largest amount paid to Gerardine in C.C., vol. 1903, 6 April 1906, 324. Quote on county monthly provisions for paupers and quality of care are from "The Poor Farm," Pioneer Express, 24 May 1901, 1. Dollar figures from C.C., vol. E, 8 July 1909, 504; and 7 January 1910, 546. Information on the household is from

Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, Population, Pembina County, Pembina City, Ward 1, Sheet 1B, 23 April 1910.

CHAPTER 15

KIDDER COUNTY POORHOUSE, TAPPEN

Kidder County merely experimented with the poorhouse concept and found it unsuited to the needs of the county. Fully organized in 1881, the county board governed from the county seat at Steele. Steele owed its existence to the Northern Pacific Railroad, serving as a commercial center for the immediate area due to the rail line.¹

The county had few residents, hence it had few relief cases. In 1890 population stood at only 1,211. Persons who needed assistance petitioned the local county commissioner, who decided the merit of the case and brought the funding request to the county board. Even in the depression year of 1894, the tax levy for poor relief stood at a modest \$200 annually. On the treeless plains, winter heating fuel represented the largest single item that the poor required. The railroad brought in coal supplies and the county purchased plenty of it for those who faced death by freezing.²

By 1899 population increased little to only 1,754, and the county accordingly issued a poor tax levy of \$300 for the upcoming year. Occasional smallpox outbreaks, as in 1902, put greater demands on the county poor funds. Still,

relief expenses were quite low. The names of the poor persons were not printed in the official minutes of the county commissioners, sparing them some damage to their reputations.³

Although the actual expenditures for paupers in Kidder County totalled a modest \$124.30 in 1903, the commissioners issued a poor tax levy of \$500 for the "support of the poor" for 1904. Population began a considerable increase as the Second Dakota Boom came to Kidder County. Census enumerators counted a gain of over 4,000 people in the period from 1900 to 1910 (1,754 to 5,962). The county board responded to "an immediate need for the purchase of a small house for the use of the poor of this county" in October, 1903, by purchasing a house in Tappen. The "suitable" house with "sufficient ground" became the property of the county for a "reasonable price" of \$175. This house, located on lot 8, block 9, in the Tappen townsite, became the Kidder County Poorhouse. With a few minor repairs, the house stood ready to provide a haven for indigent county residents.⁴

The poorhouse, however, could not accommodate all those who needed help in the first winter after its purchase. The Kruger family faced deep trouble in the bitter January of 1904. The Krugers found themselves "out of fuel and provision" and a house deemed unsafe due to "being drifted over with snow." The county commissioners spent three days work moving the family to Steele to rental quarters paid for

by the taxpayers. Mr. Kruger got a job in Wilton and moved his family there by March. The poorhouse, obviously already occupied or too small, proved of no help to the Kruger family. The poorhouse had two residents in December 1903 and had two more residents added during 1904, for a total of four inmates by January 1905. All four paupers were foreign-born.⁵

The actual poor expenses of the county for the 1903-1904 fiscal year totalled \$607.52. Bouyed by faith that the poorhouse in Tappen could reduce overall expenditures, the commissioners issued a new poor tax levy for only \$300 for the upcoming year. Expenses did, indeed, go down to \$290.08, but the county paid for boarding paupers at houses other than the poorhouse.⁶

In 1905 the county purchased a lot in the Woodlawn Cemetery in which to bury paupers. The action had been prompted by the need to bury an unknown man who had been found "lying on the prairie about one mile north of Steele" in late November 1904. The county coroner had found no evidence of violence upon the person of the man, but he had to be buried somewhere. The county got into the business of providing a "potter's field" for paupers in a permanent manner.⁷

According to historian Elwyn B. Robinson, the county felt the effects of the "Second Dakota Boom," a period of considerable emigration to the state from 1900 to 1913. As

waves of new settlers flowed into the area, the county relief expenses fluctuated according to the luck of the weather, rain and crops. Accordingly, the county spent an unheard of \$811.53 for the poor in 1906. 1907 and 1908 brought good years, and poor relief dropped to \$184.49 and 264.66, respectively. Poor taxes levied in 1909 anticipated expenses for the "ordinary support of the county poor" to total \$1,000, much higher than the county had ever before spent. In 1909, poor relief totalled \$676.93.⁸

Poor expenses levelled off at about \$600 per year after 1909, with the poorhouse in Tappen having little effect. The poorhouse probably held no more than four persons and never had a superintendent or paid supervisor. With good weather and stable rainfall, the county was prosperous from about 1906 through 1917. Even when yearly rainfall accumulation was lower than average, the rain had fallen normally during the important summer growing season. Accordingly, the county phased out the poorhouse by 1910 and sold the dwelling and lot in 1913.⁹

The poorhouse in Tappen represented a small-scale attempt to establish an almshouse in Kidder County. Lands appropriate for expanding the operation into a poor farm were never purchased. The poorhouse could accommodate only a few persons who needed shelter and did not provide for all those in the county who needed such assistance. County officials had not benefitted from the experience of nearby

Burleigh and Morton counties to the west, but had tried to proceed with the poorhouse concept used in Barnes county to the east without spending money on a new building. The commissioners felt a humanitarian desire to help the poor in the county, but a total committment seemed lacking. For instance, while the poor relief expenses for 1904 totalled \$607.52, the bounties paid on dead gophers in that same year came to a whopping \$864.26. One could surmise that the county had more gophers than paupers or that the rodents caused more discomfort to the county than did the poor people.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Long, (ed.), Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), 179.

2. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the U.S.: 1910, Abstract with Supplement for N.D. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 44. "Commissioners," The Steele Ozone [Steele, ND], 30 June 1894, 3; and "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 9 March 1895, 3.

3. "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 22 July 1899, 5; and "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 6 January 1902, 3.

4. "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 7 July 1903, 8; "Financial Report of Kidder County, 1903," Steele Ozone, 29 August 1903, 1. Population figures in Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census, 1910, 44. Poorhouse purchase in "Commissioners Proceedings," Steele Ozone, 10 October 1903, 2; repairs in "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 25 November 1903, 2. Sale of the Tappen property is listed in Warranty Deeds, Kidder County, "Frank and Ida Hogan to Kidder County," 21 October 1903, Book 14, page 216.

5. "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 13 January 1904 with the minutes of the 6 January 1904 meeting; "The Facts," 9 March 1904, 1. Residents of the poorhouse are from the Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses, 1904 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 82.

6. "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 13 July 1904, 7; "Annual Statement of the Auditor and Treasurer of Kidder County," Steele Ozone, 3 August 1905, 8; and board in "Official County Board," Steele Ozone, 5 January 1905, 1.

7. "Commissioners," Steele Ozone, 28 January 1905, 4; "Official County Board," Steele Ozone, 26 January 1905, 1.

8. "Annual Statement," Steele Ozone, 9 August 1906, 2; "Commissioners' Proceedings," Steele Ozone, 30 July 1908, 1; "Annual Statement," Steele Ozone, 13 August 1908, 2; "Annual Statement," Steele Ozone, 5 August 1909, 2. Corroborating and additional information is from John Morris Gillette, "Poor Relief and Jails in North Dakota," The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota 3, no. 2 (January 1913), 104.

9. Gillette, "Poor Relief and Jails," 104. The Kidder County poorhouse was not listed as existing in Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Paupers in Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 70. Sale of the poorhouse and property is recorded in Warranty Deeds, Kidder County, Kidder County to Richard Bousfield, Book 37, dated February 28, 1913, page 166. Kidder County rainfall is based upon T.R. Karl, C.N. Williams, and F.T. Quinlan, U.S. Historical Climatology Network Serial Temperature and Precipitation Data (Oak Ridge, TE: Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, 1990), data for Steele, Kidder County, N.D., which recorded precipitation totals of 19.73 inches in 1906; 13.93 inches in 1907 with substantial summer rainfall of 1.38 inches in May, 2.91 inches in June, 4.96 inches in July; 18.35 inches in 1908; 14.89 inches in 1909 with good summer totals; only 12.16 inches in 1910 but 2.96 inches in June, 1.80 in July, 1.38 in August; 22.42 in 1911; 20.44 in 1912; 14.30 in 1913 but with good summer rain; 18.68 in 1914; 23.49 in 1915; 28.68 in 1916; and 13.27 in 1917 with poor summer rainfall totals.

10. "Annual Statement of the Auditor and Treasurer of Kidder County," Steele Ozone, 6 October 1904, 8.

CHAPTER 16

STUTSMAN COUNTY POOR FARM, JAMESTOWN

Stutsman County, a fully-organized county since territorial days in 1873, operated its poor relief system without a poor farm until 1909. The county had an advantage over other North Dakota counties in managing elderly paupers due to the presence of the State Hospital of the Insane (opened in 1885). Senile or demented poor people could be easily sent to the State Hospital, thereby relieving the county authorities from providing care for them in a county institution.¹

Population in the county, however, doubled in the decade from 1900 to 1910. The turn-of-the-century total of 9,143 zoomed to 18,189 by the end of the first decade. This growth came from the Second Dakota Boom when a flood of new settlers came into the state. The county poor relief budgets grew from \$3,250 in 1900 to \$5,000 in 1906 and a comparatively staggering sum of \$8,900 by 1907. Clearly, reasoned the county commissioners, some change in poor relief programs had become a priority.²

In 1908 the county board submitted a proposition to start a poor farm to the voters of Stutsman County, deeming it an "advisable" enterprise. The proposal included a

request for the voters to authorize the expenditure of \$20,000 to acquire the necessary lands and buildings. The November elections brought about a mandate to establish the "asylum for the poor."³

Accordingly, the county officials entertained offers for a poor farm property. Seventeen bids were forthcoming, as numerous property owners hoped to cash in on the anticipated largesse of the commissioners. The county board zealously investigated "quite a large number of tracts of land offered" as poor farm locations. The priorities for the land were clearly presented by the county fathers. First, the land had to have a "favorable location close to the city" of Jamestown. As the only major city in the county, placing the institution there made sense, for most of the poor came from Jamestown. The acreage also had to have "running water," a "large amount of good timber," suitable "pasturage land, valley land," and a "good portion" of cultivatable land.⁴

The county board selected a large property, 362 acres, located "just north of the Pipestem river bridge and less than a half mile from the Northern Pacific round house." Access to the railroad tracks allowed for a "future siding" there, allowing the convenient delivery of "coal and other merchandise" to the poor farm. The county paid \$38 an acre, about midway between the range of acreage offered from \$25 to \$60 per acre by the many bidders. The former G. W. Smith

property lay adjacent to the Garden Hill Addition to the City of Jamestown. The total purchase price, \$13,756, included a house and barn already standing, ready to harbor local paupers.⁵

The commissioners congratulated themselves on obtaining a poor farm for a total expenditure well below the anticipated \$20,000 price. However, the realities of operating a poor farm soon became readily apparent. First, the buildings had to be painted (\$98), furniture procured (\$235), and wood stoves purchased and installed. Then the commissioners ascertained that the house needed repairs, including new maple flooring. Since no one had properly considered the necessity of segregation of the sexes, a new "woman's ward" (\$839) had to be added to the poorhouse.⁶

The expenses for the farming operation no doubt opened a few eyes around the county, for procurement proceeded at a furious pace. "Chicken, pigs, etc." had to be bought, along with "hay and millet" for the poor farm. Two cows were judged as sufficient and were purchased with dispatch. Bids were let for a team of horses, and Charles Schumacher won the bid with his "lowest and best" bid of \$325 for two mares, one "Brown" and the other of "Bay" coloration. The new team required new collars and harness, and a brand-new "farm wagon."⁷

But that was not all, for personnel were needed to get the whole operation ready for the poor people. The board

accepted the application of C.R. Day as manager of the poor farm, not at the salary of \$100 per month (as hoped-for by Day), but at \$75 a month for the work of both Day and his wife. The commissioners judged Mr. and Mrs. Day to be "humane and responsible" enough for the position, yet hoped that the terms of their employment would prove "most advantageous for the interest of the County."⁸

The poor farm stood ready for occupancy by December 1909. The freshly reappointed farmhouse awaited its weary human occupants. The county faced the problem of deciding which among the county poor people should move to the poorhouse. Accordingly, the commissioners visited the paupers around the county and reported on the condition of the "county charges." The report reveals the face of poverty in North Dakota and the burden of responsibility that the local commissioners felt. The report, dated 7 December 1909, was presented to the whole board as follows:

Your committee have the painful duty to report as follows:-On November 30th we made a visit of inspection to all parties herein after mentioned, county charges. First we called at the residence of Mrs. Nacey and we investigated carefully her circumstances. She has ten children, four of those are of age caring for themselves, one holding a claim in South Dakota and comes to Jamestown occasionally, the other two boys are working around town and one girl is earning \$30 per month in Jamestown in a restaurant. Three children are at school, the rest are at home with the mother. This woman only gets partial help from the county. Second; next we visited Mrs. Genzel, and our opinion is she is not competent to take care of a family. Third we next called on Mrs. Nelson, who has six children. This woman came here from Valley City about two years ago, without either money or means, according to her own

statement and she has been a charge on the county direct or indirect, ever since. The opinion of this committee is that she is not qualified to have the care and custody of those six children. Fourth we next called on Mrs. Wagner. We found this old lady apparently in a very filthy condition. All alone in a little shack about ten feet square. She could not speak English to us, and Mrs. Dunn, a neighbor, interpreted. We found the old lady had near relatives in the county, who are well off and we recommend they be notified of her circumstances. Fifth, we next called on Mrs. C. O. Alton, we found out from her, that she came to Jamestown from Pingree several years ago. She has two sons and one daughter all grown up, and we believe they are competent to care for their mother if they want to. We stated to Mrs. Alton that about the middle of December or the 1st of January, we would have to remove her and all those depending wholly on the county for sustenance to the County Poor Farm. Seventh, we next tried to find Mrs. Ellen Froggett who has been on the county, but could not find her. Eighth, and Mrs. Tomzack who had been on the county lately, we found out she had moved out to her man on the farm. Ninth, and Mrs. Zabels, who was also a county charge had disappeared, as we could not find her. Tenth, as to the Darchuk children, four in number; we recommend that the Board take up the matter with Dr. Baldwin of the Asylum to find out the condition of the mother, if there is any possibility of her being able to care for them in the near future, then we will be able to act on their case. Eleventh, in regard to the Sikma family, Dr. Peake will report on the condition of this family."

Most of the paupers were women with children, without the father around to support his offspring. Several were elderly, with relatives who were not fulfilling their legal responsibility to care for their own family members. Most were new arrivals to the county or were of immigrant surnames. Several were of questionable mental capabilities. A couple of the individuals were so transient, that they had left suddenly, seemingly upon a prairie wind, or, more likely, by a blast of frigid December air.

The county commissioners made the decisions concerning which paupers had to move to the poorhouse. Alton and Sikma apparently refused to go there, for the county eventually had to cut off house rental payments for them by 1910.¹⁰

The first manager, C.R. Day, presided over the poor farm for just over a year. In March 1910, his successor, H.F. Hobart, assumed the position. Hobart received \$75 per month salary, but his wife also got \$75 per month for "care of J. Albrecht." The county allowed the couple's three children to live in the poorhouse but noted that the Hobarts would have to pay \$10 per month rent if they decided to have more children live on the premises.¹¹

County officials soon learned that poorhouse inmates did not make competent farm workers, and thus, the county had to find renters who would till the fields. Local farmers worked 150 acres of the poor farm land in 1910.¹²

The poor farm buildings also were found inadequate. The county contracted to secure an "addition to and alterations of the buildings" on the farm in 1910. Since the county still had about \$5,000 of the poor-farm fund on hand, it spend the cash on improvements which included \$1,829 for new heating and plumbing at the almshouse.¹³

The Proberts held control of the poor farm for only one year, for the county hired Lorenz Joos for the position in 1911. Joos, his wife and son took over the poorhouse in April. The family were required to "furnish all the help

required inside and outside except one nurse, when necessary, . . . and except the extra help required during haying and harvest."¹⁴

State legislators had mandated that a visiting committee of county citizens visit the county poor farm on a quarterly basis. Stutsman County commissioners appointed "Reverend E. W. Burleson, H.E. White and Wilbert B. DeNault" to the county Board of Visitors for Asylums and Poor Farms in 1911. The appointment of visiting committees represented a Progressive-style reform of county and state benevolent institutions. In the case of the new three-man committee, a Progressive attitude became zealously evident.¹⁵

The newly-appointed Joos and the newly-commissioned committee clashed almost immediately. Burleson, White and DeNault visited the poor farm in September and issued a scathing report in early October. The visiting committee found that Manager Joos had "in at least two instances" refused to allow relatives to visit inmates. Even though the county physician had approved the visits, Joos blankly refused entry without giving any "sufficient excuse."¹⁶

Joos had also stopped a local Episcopalian churchman from bringing musicians to the poorhouse for participation in a "simple religious service." The churchman, who had "gratuitously and gladly volunteered to serve as a kind of County Chaplain for several years," had been coldly informed that the musical service "was against the rules."¹⁷

More seriously, Joos forced the inmates to "sleep in blankets." No sheets were allowed on the beds except for sick residents. The blankets "were washed not oftener than once in three or six months." The visiting committee recommended that the "blankets be washed at least as often as the average of the county commissioners would wish them washed" for their own use.¹⁸

The visiting committee concluded that Joos lacked a "personal interest and sympathy toward the inmates." The men believed that the manager should exhibit "a little . . . personal kindness" in his work." The committee also felt that the residents should be transported into the city in order to visit, at least twice a month. The humanitarian commission also criticized Joos as a skinflint who would only allow only one box of matches per month for the elderly men who smoked at the poorhouse. The committee recommended the men be given at least two boxes of matches per month. Burleson, White and DeNault commented that they knew of "two things which are still cheap: water and matches." The report implied that Joos might be just as stingy with the necessities of life as he seemed to be with privileges.¹⁹

The visiting committee also questioned the competence and compassion of the poorhouse nurse. The nurse had not taken a wheelchair-bound inmate outside of the building for "some months." The man plainly would benefit from "a little

outside airing," but such a reasonable, simple act had been neglected by the nurse to the detriment of the patient.²⁰

The response of the county board came fairly quickly, for by 1912 the visiting committee had all new members! Rather than change the management of the county poor farm, the county dismissed the criticisms of the institution. Joos kept his position, and the new committee found "clean and sanitary conditions" at the poor farm. Joos responded quickly to complaints that the farm's eggs were only for sale by incorporating them into the bill of fare for the inmates.²¹

By October 1912, however, Joos resigned his post because he was "leaving the state." I.L. Wright supervised the farm for the following year, and then Phillipp Range assumed the position in 1913. Mr. and Mrs. Range received praise for their operation of the poor farm. Inmates expressed their "entire satisfaction" with the Ranges. The visiting committee extolled the couple for their "orderly and clean" house and "neat and tidy" farm operation. Mr. and Mrs. Range took a "personal interest" in the poor farm and under their management, the food production soared and the expenses decreased.²²

Range concentrated on raising beef cattle and brought "the institution nearer to the point" of self-sufficiency. In order to do this, the county had to purchase more grazing land in 1913 and 1914, which counterbalanced any true

economy by the increased beef production. The poor farm cost the county more money when electric lights were installed in 1914 and a new "stock barn" was added in 1917. Despite the expenses, the Ranges brought competence to the poor farm. As a result, discouraging words about their handling of the poor farm were seldom heard during their tenure from 1913-1918.²³

When the state legislature passed an act that changed the method of paying for local poor relief, the Stutsman County Poor Farm faced a challenge to its existence. The 1916 law made the local township or village "primarily and directly liable for the care and maintenance" of indigent persons. The county commissioners from the districts outside of Jamestown felt that their constituencies would be bearing "an unequal and inequitable pro rata of taxes" for the operation of the poor farm. The representatives of the outlying townships and villages believed that the upkeep of the poor farm would fall more heavily upon themselves than upon the large city of Jamestown. The new law contained provisions for Mothers' Pensions, which would, presumably, allow more paupers to get assistance at home, and hence, less people likely to move to the poorhouse. Accordingly, the county board called for a vote for the sale of the poor farm at the November elections.²⁴

The preponderance of voters located within the city of Jamestown assured the continuance of the poor farm. A total

of 1,273 people voted to sell the institution while 2,159 voted against the sale of the property. The county commissioners conformed to the wishes of the electorate yet tried to make some changes to fit the old poorhouse system with the new changes in poor relief legislation. The commissioners set dollar amounts for care at the poor farm at \$7.50 per person per month, with the local district responsible for its own paupers. If a poorhouse patient required nursing care, the "local poor district" had to pay "1/4 of the total cost." The county board attempted to rent out the poor farm, with the renter being also responsible for the "support and care of the poor thereon," but had to continue with the old system of hiring a superintendent.²⁵

Walter Lange, who succeeded Mr. H.A. Wasser (appointed 1918) as superintendent in 1921, witnessed the decline of the poor farm as a principal form of relief in Stutsman County. By 1925 the county tax levy for poor relief was divided into three major categories: Mothers' Pensions (\$12,000), "indoor" poor relief (\$12,000), and the county poor farm (\$5,000). In addition, the county spent \$14,000 yearly for the "care of county insane at the State Insane Asylum". The county poor farm had found its clients reduced to a handful of elderly and physically-handicapped inmates as other institutions and programs increased in scope.²⁶

By 1929 Stutsman County increasingly spread its needy to various institutions around the state. The county

supported the Florence Crittenton Home and the North Dakota Children's Home in Fargo.²⁷

With the onset of the Great Depression, Stutsman County came to rely upon federal relief programs for survival. By 1933, finding that county funds were "inadequate for those who suffered unemployment," the county board applied for aid from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. In the period from 1930 to 1933, county expenditures for supplies and medical attendance for the poor had increased from \$33,000 to \$75,000 (including Mothers' Pensions). The commissioners sought help in bearing the administration of relief by forming a "County Emergency Relief Committee" in that same year.²⁸

The County Poor Farm could not help handle the overflow of poor persons during the Depression. Built as a family farmhouse, with two additions, the poorhouse had severe space limitations. During the 1930s the institution held no more than seventeen persons, thereby offering little aid to the drastic situation in Stutsman County. Mr. and Mrs. James E. Murphy, supervisors of the poor farm from 1928-1936, found their budget reduced from \$6,000 in 1930 to a low of \$3,750 in 1934.²⁹

When E.R. Finch accepted the superintendency of the poor farm in 1936, the welfare picture had changed considerably from the situation found in 1930. The provisions of the New Deal's Old Age Assistance plan gave

the elderly poor a fresh infusion of hope and dollars. By 1940 the overall situation in the county had stabilized, so that the poor farm budget (\$5,000) had returned to near its pre-Depression level.³⁰

Superintendent Finch and his wife continued to manage the poor farm throughout the 1940s. While the numbers of inmates slowly decreased, the budget began to increase, from \$8,000 in 1945 to \$9,000 in 1950. The county commissioners seriously questioned the necessity of continuing the operation. The county realized that the poor farm had never "been an economically self-sustaining unit," making it necessary to use tax revenues to prop up a 431-acre farming operation. The development of other "means and agencies" had brought about an era of "more workable and convenient system[s]" for the proper care of elderly poor persons. Therefore, in 1955 Stutsman County discontinued the poor farm and sold it for \$22,100. The Jamestown Sun stated that the poor farm had fallen as a "victim of prosperity."³¹

William Finch, son of Mr. and Mrs. E.R. Finch, along with a partner, Mr. John Hoeckel of Jamestown, purchased the property. The younger Finch hired his father to continue the operation of the farm, minus its former inmates. Only two elderly men had been in residence on the poor farm, and they had proper boarding homes found for their care. The farm equipment auction brought in \$8,972, and marked the end of the poor farm era in the county. In a concession to the

long tenure of the Finch family, Mrs. E.R. Finch was allowed to purchase the "deep freeze and stove" from the former poor farm for her use in the now-quite-empty former poorhouse.³²

ENDNOTES

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- 28.C.C., vol. G, 15 July 1933, 637; 22 July 1930, 375; 7 February 1933, 609.
- 29."Stutsman County Poor Farm Sold at Public Auction Today," The Jamestown Sun, 21 March 1955, 1. Funding in C.C., vol. G, 22 July 1930, 375; vol. H, 21 July 1934, 78.
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CHAPTER 17

MCHENRY COUNTY POOR FARM, VELVA

McHenry County, like a handful of other counties in North Dakota, reaped the benefits and hazards of the Second Dakota Boom. From 1900 to 1910, the population expanded rapidly from 5,253 to 17,627, an incredible increase of 235 percent. In the good times, the land could support that number of people. However, in times of drought or economic downturns, the once-hospitable county could not hold its population. The people of McHenry County had to adjust to the limits of the land, and the lessons were learned the hard way.¹

Poor relief in McHenry County consisted of provisions, rent and heating fuel for individuals and families from the founding of the county in 1884 until a poor farm was purchased in 1923. The names of the recipients of relief were published in the Minutes of the County Commissioners' Proceedings, which discouraged poor but proud individuals from seeking county help.²

The McHenry County Board of County Commissioners found extreme difficulty in helping needy county residents from 1920 to 1923. The agricultural recession which followed the First World War caused great hardships in the county. The

commissioners appointed a two person committee to investigate poor relief expenses and an option to purchase a poor farm. The committee reported that the "poor cases in this County" were "getting more numerous" and the financial condition of the county government prevented the commissioners from increasing relief expenditures. The county board accepted the report of the committee and resolved that the county would only pay for items that were "termed a necessity of life." A county commissioner had to personally authorize any clothing requests.³

Expenditures for the county poor had risen from \$13,179 in 1918-1919 to \$16,660 the following year and had skyrocketed to \$20,551 in 1920-1921. The county had gone \$6,109 into debt in order to make the relief payments. No reductions in aid were possible in 1922 due to continued economic hard times, so the county board decided to establish a poor farm as a money-saving measure.⁴

The motivation to save money spurred the county board to purchase and outfit a poor farm in the summer of 1923. However, the actual expenditures for poor relief greatly increased, largely due to the expenses of buying the farm. The county procured 480 acres of land from A.E. Walley for a total price of \$18,000. The property, located about six miles east of Velva, had dubious value as farmland. Some county residents considered the selling price to be "extremely high."⁵

The Walley property did possess a house, but it was considered so inadequate that the commissioners authorized the construction of a large addition to the residence. The addition, bid out at \$8,344 for the construction and \$3,358 for the plumbing and heating, made the dwelling a substantial structure. James Burriss of Minot won the bid for the general construction of the addition. Anderson Plumbing of Velva earned the contract for the plumbing and heating. Additional expenses for a "light plant" and a well on the property raised doubts about the economy of the plan. In 1924 a new machine shed and a new \$5,468 barn and silo soon graced the place. Indeed, welfare spending for the year of 1923-1924 came to the grand total of \$48,760, which more than doubled the figures from 1921. The county board members apparently hoped that the farm might become self-sufficient and therefore reduce poor relief payments in the long-term picture.⁶

Quarterly inspections of the poor farm by a Board of Visitors, instituted in 1926, regularly found the farm to be operated in an "admirable manner." August and Anna Sveund of Towner, hired as superintendent and matron, reportedly conducted the institution on a "business like basis." The Board of Visitors observed the relationship between the Sveunds and the residents and gave the supervisors a "fine" rating.⁷

Once the initial investments were complete, the expenses of the poor farm settled down to a reasonable level of \$5,000 per year. Yet, in 1928, the county reaped a harvest of public protest from citizens over the purchase of electrical power for the poor farm. The visiting committee, concerned over the strain placed upon Matron Anna Sveund in caring for inmates, had been constantly recommending the installation of various household electrical appliances at the poorhouse. The county board authorized the installation of an electrical high line to the farm. The cost of installing a line to the remote location totalled \$2,500. Farmers, most of whom could not afford to put in a high line to their own farms, grew irate over the prospect of the poor enjoying more conveniences than the farmers could procure through honest labor. The fact that the county had also purchased another forty acres for the poor farm for \$800 along with "silos and machinery" totalling \$1,306 produced an organized protest. The commissioners made a weak defense for the expenditures by noting that the farm had contributed \$517 to the county coffers from sale of produce and inmates had paid \$928 toward their own upkeep.⁸

The poor farm management struggled to gain a favorable attitude from the public. In 1930 the Sveunds encountered further difficulties regarding irregularities in their conduct of poor farm affairs. Mr. Sveund received direction to desist from lending tools to neighboring farmers and to

refrain from paying bills directly from cash sales of crops. The county commissioners finally required that the poor farm superintendent be legally bonded, a prerequisite for the job in all the other counties in North Dakota. To clear the air over the questionable practices, the minutes of the board contained a detailed listing of receipts and expenditures of the poor farm in 1930.⁹

A close examination of the 1930 annual report showed that the farm's income from the sale of crops and animals could not even equal the typical expenses of seed, tilling and hired labor. The poorhouse brought in some funds from boarding the paupers of neighboring counties in the sum of \$1,273, but it, too, could not cover the expenses of caring for the inmates of the county farm. Observers could justify the purchase of rudimentary food, clothing and shelter for the poor, but some might begrudge spending \$116 to support the residents' tobacco habits. When poor farm buildings looked to be in better condition than those of the average farmer, public concerns about the thriftiness of the poor farm activities seemed deserved.¹⁰

The onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s intensified the matters of poor relief in McHenry County. Increased demands for county assistance forced the county board to examine requests for aid quite intensely. In 1931, the commissioners decreed that Mothers' Pensions or poor relief would not be given to "any person who owns or

operates an automobile." The county refused to buy "high priced articles of food" for aid recipients. The list of banned goods included "fresh fruits and canned goods, also tobacco, snuff and candy." The poor were to purchase staple goods such as rice, beans, bulk oatmeal, salt and pepper, baking soda or powder, potatoes and lard. Only invalids and children could buy milk. Any meat bought by the poor must cost less than ten cents per pound, and dried fruits could be purchased, but in limited quantities. County officials sought to conserve county relief funds due to the "present economical condition existing in McHenry County."¹¹

In 1932 conditions reached frightful proportions. The northern half of the county had "practically no crop at all," with some farmers reaping "no small grain what so ever." The southern part of the county stood "but very little better." Drought, combined with grasshoppers, had devastated the harvest. The county reduced spending and the poor farm operations faced funding cuts across the board. The salary of superintendent Sveund dropped from \$1,200 in 1930 to \$960 in 1933. The county cut the total poor farm funding from \$4,965 in 1930 to \$3,535 by 1933.¹²

The introduction of Old Age Assistance to the elderly poor and other New Deal programs partially alleviated the desolate plight of the McHenry County unfortunates. However, the county officials were conservative with relief dollars. An aged resident of the poor farm suffered

rejection of his 1934 application for Old Age Assistance because as an inmate of the county home, he was already receiving relief benefits. Increased pressures led to conflict between some residents, as well. The visiting board investigated troubles emanating from one inmate whose "vile language" and "malicious slander" fomented "discontent among the others." The visitors suggested that this "constant source of worry and trouble" be transferred to "some other institution."¹³

The Sveunds managed the poor farm until 1936, when August's health conditions mandated a return to their farm near Towner. During their tenure, the couple "usually had about 25 residents" under their supervision. The inmates helped with the farm work to whatever extent they were capable. Farm hands labored during the busy planting and harvesting seasons, along with occasional trustworthy county prisoners. Still, milking the large herd of dairy cows involved long hours of work for Sveund. Mrs. Sveund canned 200 to 220 quarts of garden produce from the big truck garden near the poorhouse. The cooking, cleaning and washing required hired women from the surrounding area.¹⁴

McHenry County reached its Depression-era depth of despair in 1937. Relief from federal, state and county funds totalled \$87,648 (compared to \$32,234 in 1933-1934). The burden to the county itself diminished, however, due to federal involvement. The expenses of the poor farm hovered

around the \$5,000 to \$6,000 level during the latter years of the 1930s helping to relieve suffering, but not contributing to the reforms of the New Deal. The county had managed to survive the hard times with the aid of the "old style" poor farm combined with new federal programs, but the cost in human suffering had been high. The population of McHenry County had reached a peak of 17,627 in 1910 and then fell to 15,544 in 1920; to 15,439 in 1930; and then to a 30-year low figure of 14,034. The Dust Bowl winds had taken away not only topsoil but also people.¹⁵

By 1941 the poor farm became known as the "County Home." In that year, the county advertised for a new superintendent and matron for the institution. Despite the more modern-sounding name, the main qualification for the applicants remained "experience in farm management." The work required a "married couple" who were familiar with "all phases of farm and dairy work." "Considerate and proper care of aged inmates" continued to be a secondary consideration of the county commissioners.¹⁶

Operation of the county poor farm ended abruptly in 1946. A fire burned the wooden poor farm dwelling on the Fourth of July. None of the residents suffered serious injury from the blaze, and all of them were taken to private homes and institutions. Rather than rebuild the residence building at a great cost, the county commissioners decided

to "discontinue the asylum for the poor" in McHenry County.¹⁷

The accumulated property of the poor farm, amounting to 834.31 acres, was sold in 1955 to Frederick Wolhowe of Verendrye for \$15,200. The original 480 acres had cost \$18,000 in 1923. The county remained responsible for the maintenance of the poor farm cemetery on the property.¹⁸

McHenry County, a predominantly-rural county with scattered small towns, utilized the poor-farm approach to poor relief when its population grew too great for the productive capacity of the land. The leaders in county government appeared to be influenced by the actions of its neighboring county to the west, Ward County, which established a poor farm by 1909. Even though Ward County had the relatively-large city of Minot within its boundaries, the two counties relied on the poor farm for some measure of aid during the Depression, but then both counties discontinued operation of the poorhouses by 1946. Poor farms did not satisfy the needs of county government in the north central portion of North Dakota.

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8. C.C., vol. 5, 12 July 1927, 426; 4 October 1927, 438; 16 March 1928, 451; 7 July 1928, 458; protest in 1 August 1928, 463.

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13. C.C., vol. 6, 5 June 1934, 249; 8 April 1932, 135.

14. "County Old Folks Home," The Commoner, 11 December 1984, 1, contains the recollections of John Sveund, son of August and Anna Sveund.

15.C.C., vol. 6, 13 July 1937, 470; 9 July 1934, 266.
Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census, Abstract, 44;
Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States:
1940, Population (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1942), vol. I, 794.

16.C.C., vol. 7, 7 March 1941, 91.

17.C.C., vol. 7, 10 July 1947, 381; and The Commoner,
11 December 1984, 2.

18.Deed Record, McHenry County, Volume 140, #193980, 14
February 1955, 318. Deed Record, McHenry County, Volume 74,
#126998, 30 June 1923, 532.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CONCLUSION: THE COLD CHARITY OF THE POORHOUSE

North Dakota had few poor farms. Only thirteen of the fifty-three counties used a poorhouse or a poor farm throughout the history of the state. John M. Gillette, eminent University of North Dakota sociologist, believed that North Dakota was fortunate to only have eight county poorhouses in operation in 1910. He concluded that a poor farm was but a "miserable makeshift" sort of an institution that should be discarded in favor of a "comparatively modern institution."¹

Poor farms existed in the more populous counties of the state. Since population in North Dakota was concentrated in the Red River Valley and along the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroad lines, it is no surprise that these areas had poorhouses. The first set of poorhouses and county hospitals in the 1870s and 1880s were located along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad and in the Red River Valley. After the Great Northern Railroad opened up the northern section of the state, Ward and McHenry County initiated poor farms. When population grew rapidly in a county, the local officials groped for a solution to growing

numbers of relief applications. The poor farm proved to be an imperfect solution to a permanent problem.

A newspaper editor in Pembina, an opponent of a proposed county poor farm, stated that "thickly settled communities in the older states" needed a poor farm because such cities contained lazy people and others with "disgusting and foul diseases." Pembina County, by contrast, had a population "so purely rural" that few paupers would ever emerge. Pembina county was the only county in the Red River Valley that did not procure a full-fledged poor farm. Counties of an overwhelmingly rural character cared for paupers in private homes. Some people even went so far as to say that "able bodied pauper[s]" could not exist in rural North Dakota because even a poor man could make a living from the soil.²

If the modern reader wants to know the nature of poorhouse inmates, he or she needs only to visit the sitting room of a local nursing home. The elderly residents of "old folks homes" are much like the almshouse inmates. Many were physically or mentally incapacitated by disease, old age or Alzheimer's disease. Gillette referred to poor farm inmates as the "usual nondescript and paralytic class," or as "old derelicts."³ A more accurate portrait of poorhouse paupers may be gained by a study of federal census data on poorhouses and the people who lived there. The most typical

poor farm inmate was elderly immigrant male who was incapable of performing physical labor.

1910 statistics on North Dakota's almshouses reveal that the six poorhouses had a total of eighty-one residents. The large majority of the eighty-one total inmates were men (fifty-nine males, twenty-two females), which reflected the national trend of a preponderance of males in poorhouses. Elderly women had more private charitable institutions available for their care. Most of the paupers were foreign-born, with a total of fifty-one immigrants on the almshouse rolls. When immigrants grew elderly, they did not have the same opportunities for care by relatives or friends that would have been available in the old homeland.⁴

Only two of the seventy-five paupers over ten years of age in the almshouses of North Dakota were considered to be able-bodied and capable of regular work tasks. Thirty-five others were able to do "light work." The great majority were incapacitated by old age, paralysis, or physical handicaps.⁵

Some comparison is possible between poorhouses in South Dakota and North Dakota because of both had overwhelmingly rural populations in about the same numbers. However, any further comparison is flawed because the longer growing season in South Dakota made corn cultivation and more diversified farming possible. South Dakota had twenty-six almshouses to North Dakota's six almshouses in 1910. South

Dakota had an inmate population totalling 145 to North Dakota's eighty-one.⁶

In 1923 the Census Bureau issued a booklet entitled Paupers In Almshouses which provides insight into the poorhouses in North Dakota in that year. The eight poorhouses existing in the state (Cass, Barnes, Grand Forks, Richland, Ward, Stutsman, and McHenry counties) had a total of 120 inmates--the second smallest number of poorhouse inmates of any state in the U.S. Wyoming had but sixty-two poorhouse inmates. South Dakota had a total of 171 inmates. Sixty-one of North Dakota's 120 inmates were termed "defective," with the largest number listed as "crippled." Twenty others were "feebleminded," five were deaf-mutes, five were blind, and one was listed as insane.⁷

Of the 112 almshouse inmates over ten years old, only seven were "able-bodied" and capable of a normal physical workload. Thirty-two men and fifteen women were judged to be able to do "light work" tasks. Fifty-six of the men and women were incapacitated and could do no work. Nationally, only 7.1 percent of poorhouse inmates were able-bodied.⁸

The poorhouse residents reflected North Dakota's ethnic mix. Fifty-nine of the 120 total inmates had been born on foreign soil, and twenty-four of them were born in Norway. Germans (fifteen), Canadians (five), Irish (five), Swedish (four), and Russians (three) made up the bulk of the other foreign-born paupers. In addition two each from Italy,

Finland, Austria, Poland, Denmark; and one each from England, Wales, Belgium, and Switzerland had ended up on the poor farms of North Dakota. Two blacks were admitted to one of the county hospitals or poor farms during 1923.⁹

Twelve of North Dakota's poorhouse paupers died during the year, compared to twenty-eight in South Dakota. One died of cancer; one from a disease of the nervous system; one from "acute and chronic nephritis;" three from senility; and five from unknown or other causes. Almost all of the deceased were elderly, for eleven of the twelve who died were over age fifty-five. Nationally, the largest number of deaths among almshouse residents (17.3 percent) came from heart disease, an expected occurrence among the elderly population of these institutions. Because Grand Forks, Cass, and Barnes counties all operated poorhouses combined with hospitals, the numbers of paupers who died as hospital patients or poorhouse residents can not be determined from these figures.¹⁰

Due to its rural, agricultural character, North Dakota had relatively few paupers in poorhouses in 1923. The number admitted per 100,000 people stood at 12.9, the lowest figure among the West North Central States (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas). This ratio represented the lowest such figure among the whole northern half of the United States. By comparison, South Dakota had 21.2 paupers in almshouses per 100,000

population, while the figure for Wyoming was 21.3. Some southern states had lower rates than did North Dakota due to the milder climate found there and overwhelmingly rural populations. The Census Bureau presumed that "a long cold winter produces more paupers than a short, mild one."¹¹

Few blacks lived in North Dakota, and few pauper cases involving blacks are listed in the public records. Native Americans did not participate in poor relief as administered by the counties, and were not admitted in North Dakota's poorhouses. Relief for the tribes came from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and was considered a federal matter.¹²

Historian Michael Katz has identified several major principles involved in the American poor relief system. First he differentiates between public assistance and social insurance. In the United States assistance was granted grudgingly and acceptance of the assistance marked one who did not fit into the rest of the self-reliant society. The German system, instituted in the 1880s, worked on the basis that the poor were entitled to have the basic necessities of life. The social insurance system made inroads in the United States fifty years after the German entitlement program began. The stigma of the North Dakota poor farms proved so overpowering that requiring a pauper to live there could in itself make the individual abandon his or her relief request.¹³

A second major characteristic of American poorhouses was local variation. Almshouses had been administered by local governments since colonial times and did not give up this function until the 1970s in North Dakota. During the nineteenth century North Dakota state government gained some control over certain members of the pauper population--the blind, the deaf, the retarded and the mentally ill--by establishing state institutions for their care. The local poorhouses, however, still contained mentally ill and mentally handicapped individuals long after the state facilities were in operation. In 1904 the residents of poorhouses in North Dakota consisted chiefly of ill, elderly, or physically handicapped people, in fact, 130 of 189 inmates fit such categories. However, thirty-two mentally retarded, twenty-one insane, five blind, and one deaf-mute person were in county poorhouses. All of these individuals should have been in special state institutions.¹⁴ But mentally ill or mentally handicapped paupers would be kept at a poorhouse because care there was less expensive than at a state institution.¹⁵

States would care for war veterans and disaster victims, but the common poor people remained the responsibility of local governments. Even when the federal government assumed poor-relief duties after the New Deal, some counties in North Dakota refused to close local poorhouses.¹⁶

A third principal fact in American poor relief was that governments allowed and encouraged the care of paupers by private agencies. Rather than build a poorhouse, most North Dakota counties would farm out the poor to various private homes or boarding houses. North Dakota's state government welcomed the private orphanages and hospitals that began to operate in the state in the 1890s because the burden of caring for orphans and sick people never came into the state's jurisdiction.¹⁷

The poorhouse system in North Dakota shared features of the almshouses of the eastern states but had its own minor variations which worked well in a sparsely-populated region. Sociologist John M. Gillette believed that North Dakota had "accepted its regulations of pauperism and crime from the older states somewhat uncritically."¹⁸ Gillette's criticism is true but the adaptations of the poorhouse concept worked well in some areas of North Dakota. The agricultural poor farm fit North Dakota quite well because open productive prairie land lay readily available in the counties of the Red River Valley. There the poor farms continued for many decades. The plains near Bismarck and Mandan were not quite as suitable and, subsequently, the poor farms were soon discontinued. The county hospitals were quite well suited to North Dakota because such medical facilities were desperately needed in the early days of settlement.

The poorhouse or agricultural poor farm was a symbol of failure and frustration within the American system, a place to help the poor yet keep them out of sight.

The fear of going to the poor farm hovered over North Dakotans during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. As a part of an American work ethic, the poorhouse served as a morality lesson for the majority of United States citizens. If a person worked hard, he or she could become a success in this great nation. Conversely, if one did not labor mightily, the specter of the poorhouse loomed in the future. To be poor was not only considered un-American, it was a shameful disgrace.

The poor farms in North Dakota and the many others throughout the United States were considered to be a necessary concession to the weakness of the human spirit. To many people, the paupers on the poor farm were merely "inmates," faceless anonymous individuals who had little to do with respectable society and who were expected to quietly die in a place conveniently distant from the public eye. But to certain caring and concerned individuals, the inmates were called "residents" of the county farm; they were simply people who were down on their luck or who were elderly and had no relatives to care for them. Some felt that fate could have made anyone end up in the poorhouse, to linger until one would die ignominiously.

The general opinion was that poor farms were a sad reality of an industrial age. Author Helen Hunt Jackson wrote that "every one of the United States has in nearly every county an almshouse, in which . . . a class of worthless and disabled persons will be found" who constitute a "burden . . . on the taxpayers of State and county."¹⁹ Sympathetic individuals felt that the poor farm should be an "asylum, or refuge" for an unfortunate class of society. Professor Gillette believed that only the "aged, infirm, and the disabled" should reside on poor farms.²⁰ Able-bodied individuals, according to most people, would be ashamed to spend their days among the "halt, maimed, blind, idiotic, demented and poverty-stricken who have incurable maladies" which forced them to become county charges.²¹

The Grand Forks County Poor Farm was at times the largest of the thirteen poorhouses that existed at various times in North Dakota, and as such, served as a barometer of poor relief efforts in the state. In the early years, the institution symbolized the bright hopes of a new state to properly care for its unfortunate residents. The abuses of the inmates in the early years of the century paralleled the rising frustration of the state in dealing with the problems of a changing society, much as the International Workers of the World were pummelled, so too were the poor farm inmates. The trauma of the Depression brought great numbers of people into the poor farm and dramatized the need for a new welfare

system to replace the Elizabethan system then in place. The change to a "County Home," brought the poorhouse to its final, fitting end during the reign of the Welfare State.

The poor farm was merely a grasping effort to provide a modicum of support for those who could not help themselves. It served as a storehouse for disabled and elderly people before the advent of modern social welfare agencies. Most often the only remaining vestige of the old almshouse is a neglected Potters Field or burial ground. Within the American culture, the fear of spending one's last days at the poor farm has been replaced with little jokes about "going to the poorhouse." Nevertheless, it is important to remember the poor, the elderly and the fatherless who formed a portion of the history of North Dakota's first century.

ENDNOTES

1. Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails," 120, 121.
2. "Tom Clover On The Stand," Pembina Pioneer Express, 21 June 1901, 1. "A Poor Farm," Pembina Pioneer Express, 10 May 1901, 1.
3. Gillette, "Poor Relief and Jails," 122, 124.
4. Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 15, 18, 70,
5. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses, 1910, 110, 114.
6. Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses, 1910 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 74-75.
7. Bureau of the Census, Paupers In Almshouses: 1923 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1925), 52, 68.
8. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses: 1923, 66, 36.
9. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses: 1923, 54-55, 53.
10. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses: 1923, 72-73, 74, 39.
11. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses: 1923, 8, 9, winters on page 5.
12. In 1902, Cass County became responsible for the care of one abandoned black child, a female, in C.C., Cass County, vol. G, 7 January 1903, 189. Numbers of blacks present on poor farms is included in the individual county poor farm histories in this paper.
13. Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, ix. Also Brown, Public Relief, 1929-1939, 3.
14. Census Bureau, Paupers In Almshouses, 1904, 190.
15. "State Hospital for Insane," Jamestown Weekly Alert, 7 January 1909, 3. Also, "North Dakota," Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1890 (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1890), 348-349; and Mrs. J.G. Hamilton, "North Dakota," Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1896 (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1896), 81, 82. Further information in John M.

Gillette, "Poor Relief and Jails in North Dakota," The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota 3, no. 2, (January 1913), 117.

16.Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, x.

17.Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, x.

18.Gillette, "Poor-Relief and Jails," 99, 120, 121.

19.Helen Hunt Jackson, A Century of Dishonor (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), 245.

20.Gillette Papers, 47.

21."Knox County Poor Asylum," The (Knoxville, TE) Daily Journal and Tribune, 23 May 1909, B:5.

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