

HISTORY OF THE LAURELTON STATE VILLAGE

by

DR. MARY VANUXEM*

, 1938

About 1910, Dr. Charles B. Davenport of Cold Spring Harbor, N. Y. and Dr. Henry H. Goddard of the Vineland (N. J.) Training School promulgated the theory that mental deficiency was a unit characteristic and as such was transmitted from one generation to another. As a result of this idea, various socially minded women in Pennsylvania, especially members of the Federation of Women's Clubs, became aroused and began to investigate the situation in this State. The Public Charities Association of Pennsylvania made several scientific studies and ascertained that feeble-mindedness was widespread. Meetings were held in various sections of the State in order that the general public might realize that the only method whereby this menace could be checked would be the segregation of childbearing feeble-minded women. The women's clubs backed by the Public Charities Association of Pennsylvania worked to have a bill introduced into the Legislature for the segregation of mentally defective women during the childbearing period.

In 1913 such a bill was passed by the Legislature and on July 25, 1913 Governor John K. Tener signed Act #817 establishing the Pennsylvania Village for Feeble-minded Women of Child-bearing age.

Governor Tener appointed the following Board of Managers for the institution:

Hon. Edward W. Biddle, Carlisle	Mrs. George H. Earle, Jr., Bryn Mawr
Dr. E. B. Howarth, Pittsburgh	Mr. John K. Johnston, Tyrone
Mrs. Andrew Loughlin, Pittsburgh	Rabbi J. Leonard Levy, Pittsburgh
Mr. William T. Tilden, Philadelphia	Col. Frank M. Vandling, Scranton
Dr. Mary M. Wolfe, Lewisburg	

Mrs. Earle is the only member of the original Board who has served continuously since her appointment in 1913.

*Dr. Mary Vanuxem was Laurelton State Village's psychologist from 1920 to 1940. With Dr. Mary Wolfe, Superintendent, she made extensive studies — the first of their kind — of mental retardation, or as it was starkly called in those days — feeble-mindedness.

The first meeting of the Board of Managers was held in the Executive Chamber, Harrisburg, on February 12, 1914. At that meeting the following officers were elected:

President — Judge Edward W. Biddle

Secretary — Dr. Mary M. Wolfe

The Act establishing the Village required that a Superintendent be elected before a suitable site could be chosen. As a result, Dr. Wolfe "whose efficiency and enthusiasm" had contributed greatly toward the starting of the institution was elected Superintendent July 15, 1914. This election necessitated her resigning from the Board of Managers.

One of the stipulations in this Enabling Act was that the institution must be located on the State Forest Reserve. Two tracts were offered, one in Cumberland County, the other in Union County. As the land in the first tract was considered inadequate and inaccessible, the second offer was held under advisement. The great difficulty was that the tillable area was too small. Miss Nona P. Brown, the second Secretary of the Board in a published article, dated August 15, 1915, told how an increase in acreage was acquired. "Almost the first episode in the history of the new institution was an experience unique in the history of the State. The Board acquired a particularly suitable site without any expense to the Commonwealth. Under the Act creating the Village, the site was to be taken out of the State Forest Reserve and this, of course, entailed no purchase cost, but the Board also received a voluntary gift of about 230 acres adjoining the site so selected, consisting of land under cultivation or capable with little expense of being made ready for cultivation. This additional benefaction was made possible by a private subscription fund of \$3,000 raised by residents in the vicinity." It should be stated that Dr. O. W. H. Glover and the Hon. D. R. Pursely were outstanding in their efforts to secure the additional land and funds. On August 5, 1914, the Board selected the site in Hartley Township, Union County.

Included in the Enabling Act was an appropriation of \$40,000 for the drawing of plans, the making of surveys and the erection of buildings. With the money appropriated a plot plan was drawn, irregular corners were straightened, current expenses paid; Cottage No. 1 erected at a cost of \$28,508.09 and a small

expended balance returned to the State Treasury. Surely the first Board of Managers deserved great commendation for the careful and wise use made of the first meager appropriation.

Lean years now followed for the infant Village. The Legislature of 1915 made no appropriation.

The Legislature of 1917 made an appropriation of \$100,000. Of this sum, \$92,000 was for the erection of two additional cottages (Cottages Nos. 2 and 3). The balance of the appropriation was for grading and the purchase of land.

The Legislature of 1919 appropriated \$80,000 for buildings and equipment. Of this sum, \$47,000 was used for building and equipping a laundry and \$33,000 for furnishing Cottages Nos. 1, 2 and 3 and preparing them for occupancy.

The Legislature of 1921 appropriated the following amounts:

Cottage for girls (Cot. #4)	\$45,000
Cottage for Employees	\$20,000
Sewage Disposal Plant	\$20,000
Water Storage Reservoir	\$10,000
Dairy Barn	\$12,000

The amount appropriated for the two cottages — the one for girls and the other for employees — was sufficient to construct only the shells of these two buildings. The interiors had to be left unfinished. The other projects were completed.

The Legislature of 1925 made an appropriation of \$66,000 for buildings, etc. Of this amount, \$55,000 was for the completion and equipment of Cottage #4 and the Building for Employees; \$6,000 for remodeling the Fees Farm for a Farm Colony and \$5,000 for farm improvements.

In 1925 the Legislature appropriated \$500,000 for the erection and equipment of additional units to increase the capacity of the institution. This appropriation was used for the erection and furnishing of three large buildings for girls (Cottages #5, 6 and 7), the Superintendent's Residence and the building of the Heat plant and steam distribution lines.

The Legislature of 1927 made an appropriation of \$500,000. From this sum two large cottages for troublesome girls were constructed and furnished (Cottages #9 and #10); an impound-

ing dam for water storage and a sewage disposal unit were built; a large laundry was erected and partly equipped and over seven hundred acres of farm land were added to the lands of the institution.

In 1929 the Legislature appropriated \$150,000 for construction. Of this sum \$149,884.94 was used for a building to house the general kitchen, dining-room, bakery, ice plant, store rooms, etc.

In 1931 the Legislature appropriated \$423,000 for construction. Due to the serious business depression which required state monies to be used for relief; Governor Pinchot ordered the state institution construction program, as provided for by the Legislature, discontinued. As a consequence, no buildings were erected from that appropriation.

The Legislatures of 1933, 1935 and 1937 made no appropriations for construction.

In 1937 the General State Authority in cooperation with the Federal Government, allocated \$1,225,000 for the construction of the following units:

- Administration Building
- 2 Cottages for Girls
- Hospital
- Recreation Building
- Addition to Heat Plant
- Addition to Steam Tunnels
- Addition to Sewage Disposal Plant

The present area of the Village is approximately 1413 acres. The value of the grounds and buildings as of May 31, 1938 is \$1,862,784.30. This amount is exclusive of the allocation granted by the General State Authority for its Construction Program.

During the period from 1913-1919 many people in the State thought that the idea of segregating feeble-minded girls and women was chimerical and could not be carried into execution. This attitude of mind was reflected in the actions of the Legislature. It was not until 1919 that any money was appropriated for maintenance. At that time \$80,000 was granted to the institution for that purpose.

On December 5, 1919, the institution was formally declared open for the admission of mentally defective girls and women. The first girl was admitted January 2, 1920. At first admissions were few and far between. When the first fiscal year closed May 31, 1920 there were only 36 girls in residence. By December 1921, however, the Superintendent found it necessary to notify all Courts that the institution was full and that no commitments could be made until new buildings were erected. Since the opening of the institution 1108 girls have been admitted. On May 31, 1938 there were 710 girls in residence, 110 on parole and an active waiting list of over 600 cases.

When the Pennsylvania Village was established in 1913 the general idea was that the institution should be practically a custodial one. In fact, the Enabling Act very definitely stated "that this institution shall be entirely and specially devoted to the reception, segregation, detention, care and training of feeble-minded women of childbearing age" and "it is specially determined that the processes of an agricultural training shall be primarily considered in the educational department; and that the employment of the inmates in the care and raising of stock and the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, roots, et cetera, shall be made tributary to the maintenance of the institution."

During the spring and summer of 1920 the procedure as set forth in the Enabling Act was carried out very faithfully, but it seemed to lead to a dead end and to gain no hope of future development. Accordingly in June 1920, the Superintendent secured the services of a Psychologist who studied the girls from various angles.

These studies were carried on for four years and, at the end of that period, were published under the title of "The Education of Feeble-minded Women." From these studies and from the change in opinion relative to the care and training of mental defectives, it was found necessary to rearrange and readjust the educational program in accordance with these changes. In addition, it was deemed advisable to prepare a curriculum in which all could participate, even if only to a limited degree.

In order to provide for everyone, the girls were divided into two groups, first, those who must remain in the Village as institutional cases — those individuals who either were of low mentality or of such anti-social tendencies that they were either a

burden or a menace to the community; second, those who (a) had a sufficiently high mentality to profit still more by further instruction, (b) showed only slight anti-social tendencies which could be eradicated by training; (c) gave every evidence of being able to live in the outside world.

In planning any curriculum for these two groups the training had to be viewed from three angles; academic, industrial and social. Where the emphasis should be placed and the amount depended upon the group which was under consideration. If the institutional group were under advisement it was the policy to place the emphasis upon the industrial and moral (used in the broad sense) training with special weight upon the latter, for without moral training little could be accomplished industrially. If these who were the possible or probably candidates for extra-mural life were being considered all three types of training had to receive the proper emphasis in order that the girls might become well-rounded women.

To provide for the academic education a school was opened January 2, 1923 in the dining room in Cottage #3. Classes could only be held between meals. Girls with various mental ages were sent to school. With some of the low grades an experiment was made to ascertain their educability. As was anticipated, with a majority of them, their academic limit was soon reached. With those of higher mentality, however, the process of education continued. Every grade from pre-first to the eighth grade inclusive has been represented in the schools. In the past fifteen years over fifty have completed the eighth grade. Several years ago departmental work was introduced for the afternoon classes. This method has proved to be very successful. At the present time four teachers are employed and 144 girls attend school.

In the field of industrial training the studies made to ascertain the minimal mental ages at which girls and women could learn to perform certain tasks revealed very interesting results. These results not only had a scientific, but also a practical value; for it has been possible to assign girls to their work without having to waste time endeavoring to teach them tasks for which they were totally unfitted. In connection with these studies it was interesting to observe the influence of personality and worldly experience upon the industrial efficiency of the girls.

The last and probably the most important branch of education that has been emphasized at the Village is that of social training. In the early days of the institution a modified system of self-government was inaugurated. This was quite successful and brought the following results: (1) the system aided materially in solving the disciplinary problems of the institution; (2) it proved to be a valuable asset in the care of the delinquent defective in that it helped to bridge the gap between the outside world where she was more or less independent and the institution where her liberty was necessarily curtailed; (3) it afforded an opportunity for self-control; (4) it provided an opportunity for group consciousness and a sense of responsibility. At times where there have been epidemics, illness, shortage of attendance and other emergencies, the girls have stepped into the breach and proved to be a tremendous help; (5) the system enabled the girl to grasp a more impersonal idea of administering justice. Unfortunately as the institution has grown larger and the delinquent defective group has increased materially it has been found necessary to modify the self-government system. It still functions, however, in a rather limited way.

When the Village was first started no thought of parole was considered. The only method whereby an inmate could leave the Village prior to the end of the childbearing period was for the Board to recommend "the discharge of any inmate" to the committing Court, stating that "the mental condition had so improved that her release will be beneficial to such inmate and not incompatible with the welfare of society" — and "said court may, in its discretion — discharge said inmate". A cottage was opened and, in a comparatively short time, was filled. According to the Enabling Act the inmates would, in general, spend the major portions of their lives in the institution. The girls and women knew this fact and, at first, became resentful, later on, more hopeless. Realizing the unfortunate situation, Dr. Wolfe discussed the matter with the Department of Welfare and asked permission to parole the girls. In 1923 the Legislature passed the Mental Health Act which provided for the paroling of all mental defectives.

Prior to the passage of this Act the educational aim at the Village had been to prepare as many girls as possible to lead supervised extra-institutional lives. For this purpose the candidates must have attained the following standards before being considered suitable for supervised outside life.

First, the academic training must be of such character as to provide both self-protection and recreation. Every girl who leaves the institution must be able to read and interpret notices, warnings, etc. which she meets in her industrial life. She must be able to write a fairly legible hand in order to sign papers, payrolls, etc. She must have a sufficiently wide acquaintance with numbers to safeguard her wages and to prevent her from being imposed upon when she makes her purchases. In addition to the foregoing, she should be able to amuse herself by spending part of her leisure time in reading. This will lessen the likelihood of her seeking other entertainments such as poor theatres and "movies" or spending time unwisely on the streets.

Second, her vocational training must be of a practical nature. She must have at least two trades, preferably not seasonal ones. She is not permitted to leave the institution until she is capable of being self-supporting. It is not just to ask any community to maintain an individual who runs the risk of an early discharge when work is slack. This vocational training should also furnish recreation. There are many ways in which she can employ her hands when not at work, e.g. crocheting, embroidering, dressmaking, etc. afford opportunities for exercising her talents as well as lowering the cost of her self-support.

Third, she must acquire social adaptability. Unless she learns self-control, including ability to adapt herself to normal moral standards, she will be unable to live outside and cope with the many vexing and intricate problems of everyday life. Even though she possesses the necessary requisites in academic and vocational education and lacks the vital moral qualifications, she is not permitted to leave the parent institution.

One might enumerate indefinitely many moral qualifications which a parolee should possess; but it must be remembered that since many so-called normal persons lack certain moral tendencies, it is not just to expect the mental defectives to reach standards higher than those of the average normal person. The girls at the Village have never been asked to do the impossible.

On December 19, 1925 the first girl was paroled from the Village. Since that date approximately three hundred girls have gone out under careful supervision. At the present time 110 are on parole. As was to be expected failures have occurred. The number, however, is surprisingly small. During a period of about

hirteen years, less than fifteen per cent have failed and over eighty-five per cent have been successful. Tangible and intangible results have followed. From a material standpoint the financial return has been appreciable; from a spiritual standpoint it is no slight task to change economic liabilities into economic assets and to bring happiness and joy into the lives of others. All those who work with the parolees are more than repaid for all the efforts expended.

Originally the institution was planned to care for the mild types of mental defectives. The pressure for places became so great that more and more delinquents were admitted. At present over 90% of the girls are delinquent defectives. As a result of this group the mental ages are, in general, higher than those found in either Polk or Pennhurst. The I. Q.'s range from 7-86 with a median I. Q. of 53. The girls are classified as follows:

Morons and borderline cases	544
Imbeciles	139
Idiots	27

Since this is a training school it follows that the greater proportion of the girls must belong to the upper levels. It is not just to the girl, to the institution nor to the community to parole a girl too low grade to be capable of self-support.

It will be recalled that when the institution was established the legal name was Pennsylvania Village for Feeble-minded Women of Childbearing Age. The title was later shortened to Pennsylvania Village for Feeble-minded Women. In 1923 the Department of Welfare began to standardize the names of the state institutions. As a result, by Act #414 the name was changed to Laurelton State Village.

No history of the Village would be complete without mentioning the work done by the Board of Managers who under the Mental Health Act of 1923 to become the Board of Trustees. The loyalty, faithfulness and cooperation of the various members have aided materially in the growth and development of the institution. They have given unstintingly of their time and efforts. In a period of almost twenty-five years, there have been but four presidents of the Board. The list is as follows:

Hon. Edward W. Biddle	2/12/14—6/19/16
Miss Nona P. Brown	1/5/17—6/—/21
Mrs. George E. Earle, Jr.	7/8/22—6/ 3/32
Dr. O. W. H. Glover	6/3/32—

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

It will be noted that interims occurred when there were no presidents. At those times the Vice President took the Chair.

The present members of the Board of Trustees of the Laurelton State Village are:

Mrs. George H. Earle, Jr., Philadelphia
 Dr. O. W. H. Glover, Laurelton
 Mrs. R. Allison Miller, Huntingdon
 Miss Agnes Selin Schoch, Selinsgrove
 Miss Mary V. Reimensnyder, Milton
 Mr. B. Stiles Duncan, Duncannon
 Mr. Merrill W. Linn, Lewisburg
 Hon. John M. Gundy, Lewisburg
 Dr. Catherine Johnston, New Bloomfield

The officers of the Board for 1937-38 are:

President — Dr. O. W. H. Glover
 Vice President — Mr. B. Stiles Duncan
 Treasurer — Mrs. R. Allison Miller
 Secretary (not a Board Member) Dr. Mary Vanuxem

In the past eighteen years the staff has grown from one to ten and the employees from eight to one hundred and twenty-two.

The present staff is as follows:

Mary M. Wolfe, A.B., A.M., M.D., Sc.D. — Superintendent
 Mary Vanuxem, B.S., A.M., Ph.D. — Assistant Superintendent
 Charles M. Showalter — Steward
 Effie C. Ireland, B.S., M.D. — Sr. Asst. Physician
 Ruth E. Duffy, B.S., M.D. — Assistant Physician A
 Dorothy W. Buchan, A.B., A.M. — Psychologist
 Valentina R. Schney, D.D.S. — Dentist
 Hilda M. Jolly — Sr. Investigator
 Katherine V. Moore — Supervisor
 William A. Schooley — Supt. of Grounds & Buildings

In perspective a quarter of a century seems a long period; in retrospect, a short one. The Village has gone through "gray days and gold" ones; but in the main has made satisfactory progress and given a good account of itself.

June 3, 1938.

DR. MARY VANUXEM
Secretary of the Board of Trustees.