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Queering Rhetorics of Insanity:

An Exploration of The Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic

By:
Zachary Peterson

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of

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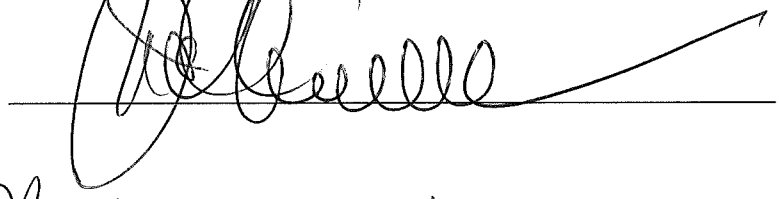

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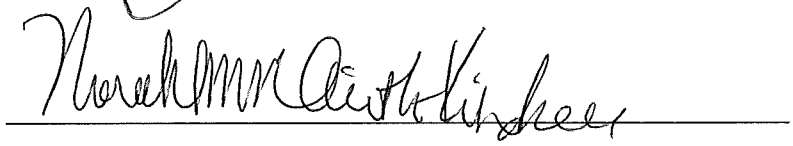

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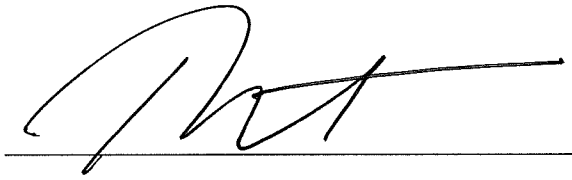
APPROVED:  Dean of Graduate Studies

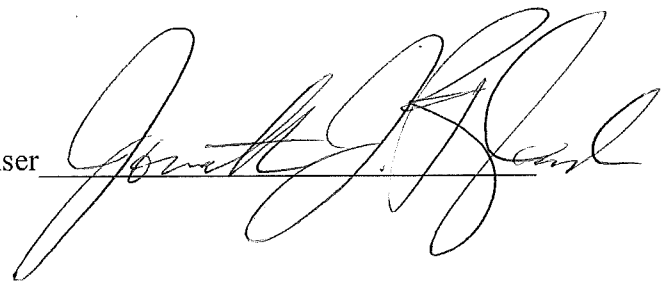
Queering Rhetorics of Insanity:
An Exploration of the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic

By

Zachary Peterson

The University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire, 2019
Under the Supervision of Dr. Jonathan Rylander

This project discusses the institutional, historical, and cultural narratives surrounding the Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled—originally known as the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic. It remembers the Asylum Era as the period in which there was the highest number of mental health institutions is the U.S.—approximately 1850 to 1950—and applies Queer Phenomenology, as developed by theorist Sarah Ahmed, to voice the stories of residents within the home's institutional narrative. To compliment historical and archival analysis, the project additionally weaves in its author's owns embodied experiences to reclaim the physicality of structures left behind by the site itself, to complicate the linearity of the happiness scripts of the institution.

Thesis Adviser  Date 5-11-2019

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Breaking Definition

Time has ways of leaving its marks. Like stress lines in foundations, cracks in plaster and scuffs in wood floors, buildings have ways of showing their age. Standing as testaments to time moving by, they don't see the need to lie to themselves. Built, repurposed, remodeled, demolished, their shown faults are there for the world to see. The past lives of them come spilling out through their natural decomposing facades, leaving them raw and unsheltered to the elements for scrutinization. Society isn't like that, and neither are our communities. We can learn something from them. Openness in discussing the pasts of ourselves and our communities through our built environments could lead to a more equitable discussion of our iniquities. This will be a story of a little Midwestern city that has a piece of its past it has never properly grappled with. I will, along the way, tell my own story as someone who grew up in this same community, one that leaves me still contemplating remnants of time and place that have long past. Here, I study the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and the Epileptic to trouble its institutional, historical, and cultural narratives. I apply queer phenomenology to voice the stories of residents within the home's institutional narrative, to speak of my embodied experience, and to reclaim the physicality of structures left behind by the site itself. Nestled along the banks of the Chippewa River just outside of downtown Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, lie remnants of the "home," known today as the *Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled,* first established in 1895. Today, the majority of the grounds remain vacant yet still masked in a sense of manufactured tranquillity, that begin to bring the past to light, morphing into a rhetorically useful text. In short, the grounds themselves allow us to open a new, more complex narrative.

In the earlier half of the twentieth century, people were put into asylums otherwise known as "homes," even if they weren't mentally ill. They were put in for illnesses that at the time were incurable, such as epilepsy. If I had been born at the turn of the century, I would have become a "resident" of the state. The terms "ward," "inmate" and "patient" were all used throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The word "resident" simply softens these darker terms, reminding us of the real bodies—real people. It is the purpose and journey of my research to begin to locate and discuss the marks they left behind to get at these people's stories. It is my choice to keep with the word "resident" to describe the people at the institution, as it is my way to begin to give them back agency. To show in every use of the word that, yes, they did reside there and yes, they did have lives. They still have stories to be told. Those amenities being complex facades built to hold up institutions, to bring them stature and to get them residents that never had the ability to leave. It's all about the interpretation of words—what we do with them and how they affect what we do in our daily lives. We should be asking how such institutions could ever have been called a "home," being touted as places that have every amenity of being one's place of acceptance and comfort.

Home, defined in Merriam- Webster Dictionary is

1. *One's place of residence.*
2. *The social unit formed by a family living together.*
3. *A familiar or usual setting: congenial environment.*
4. *A place of origin.*
5. *An establishment providing residence and care for people with special needs.*
6. *The object in various games.*[1]

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[1] Merriam-Webster Dictionary

When the term "home" is brought into physical manifestation all of the above definitions intertwine together, no singular one disconnected from the next. What does it mean to be or not be without one? Can individuals be without a home or do individual interpretations of the word leave that up to debate? What does or does not count as one? As a complex and malleable term that can define many different situations within an individual's life, not all insinuating warmth or attachment to a nuclear family, "home" has a foundation of underlying meaning. Displacing "home" from its stereotypical lens, opens its untold narratives into a rightful place of discussion. Stories that are difficult to voice and hear get hidden amongst the noise of continually stagnated narratives. The stories that get lost are the ones most misunderstood and mistreated at one point or another, those of individuals of different skin tones, backgrounds, genders, sexualities and of course disabilities.

History of the Wisconsin Home and the Asylum Era

The development of the institution began with a decree from the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1895 that there be a "*magnificent estate, dedicated to that special class of unfortunates, known as the feeble minded*".[2] This would become the first state mental health institution in Wisconsin and become one of the most renowned of its kind in the United States. Even before the first bricks were laid on the grounds of the institution, metaphorical ground was being broken, putting facades into place that would create a public narrative of mental health comfortable to all senses at the time. In searching for a place for the new institution the priority became beauty above all else. The competing communities rigorously fought for the "home" and the narrative that came along with it. Those in North Central Wisconsin that were competing to house the

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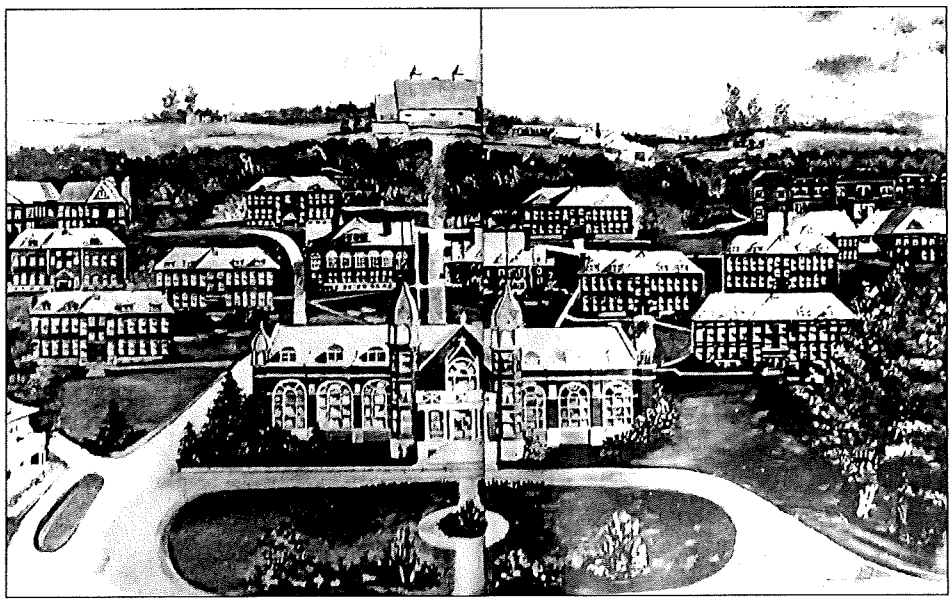
[2] 1903 Investigation Reports, 4, Wisconsin Historical Society.

"home" were Chippewa Falls, Ripon, Black River Falls, Portage, Marinette and Wausau .[3] Met with the exuberance of the city's mayor and other local officials, the Chippewa Falls property was chosen as the location of the home purely for the quality of its soil on September 27, 1895.[4] The land itself is what drew lawmakers to build the institution in Chippewa Falls, and I'll be the first to say it's what drew me to it. In the same way these grounds have been built upon, so too have these grounds resonated with my own struggles to understand myself as a marginalized individual.



Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic

Touted as a jewel of Northwestern Wisconsin, doors opened on June 11th 1897, accepting the first residents and beginning its over century-long service for the city, county and state.[5] It was established to impress, carved from 675 "tillable" acres along the banks of the Chippewa River.[6]

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[3] Goc, 16.

[4] Goc, 17.

[5] Past and Present, 290.

[6] Intensive Survey Report, 214.

It was conceived as a living, breathing, working institution, where the "residents" not only received care, but also basic life skills. According to the profile written for the 1913 publication *Past and Present: Chippewa County,* the "residents" at the institution were provided a beautiful place to live where they were to develop into the best version of themselves that they could be.[7] Development was done through learning basic "tools of the trade" for Northwestern Wisconsin farming, and keeping a home—cooking, cleaning and sewing.[8] Dr. Alfred A. Wilmarth, Superintendent of the institution in and around 1913 stated for the publication, "It gives the inalienable right of every child the opportunity of an education to the highest available point, thus adding much happiness through the one available source, usefulness.".[9] From 1895, the home's narrative brought forth a story of exceptional care in which each individual gained a sense of autonomy through the eyes of the staff by being trained to become useful members of society.

The original plan for the "home," conceived by renowned Chicago landscape architect, E. G. Nelson, created the institution's beating heart.[10] His cottage plan, otherwise known as the segregate system, broke from the dominant 19th century asylum plan where all of the structures were attached in a linear fashion, like the *New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum.* [11] The cottage system was to give the allusion of a home life, rejecting intimidating institutional elements of the previous architectural form. The original plan, which drew inspiration from architect John Charles of Menominee, Wisconsin, was carried on by Van Ryn and De Gelleke of Milwaukee

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[7] Past and Present, 290.

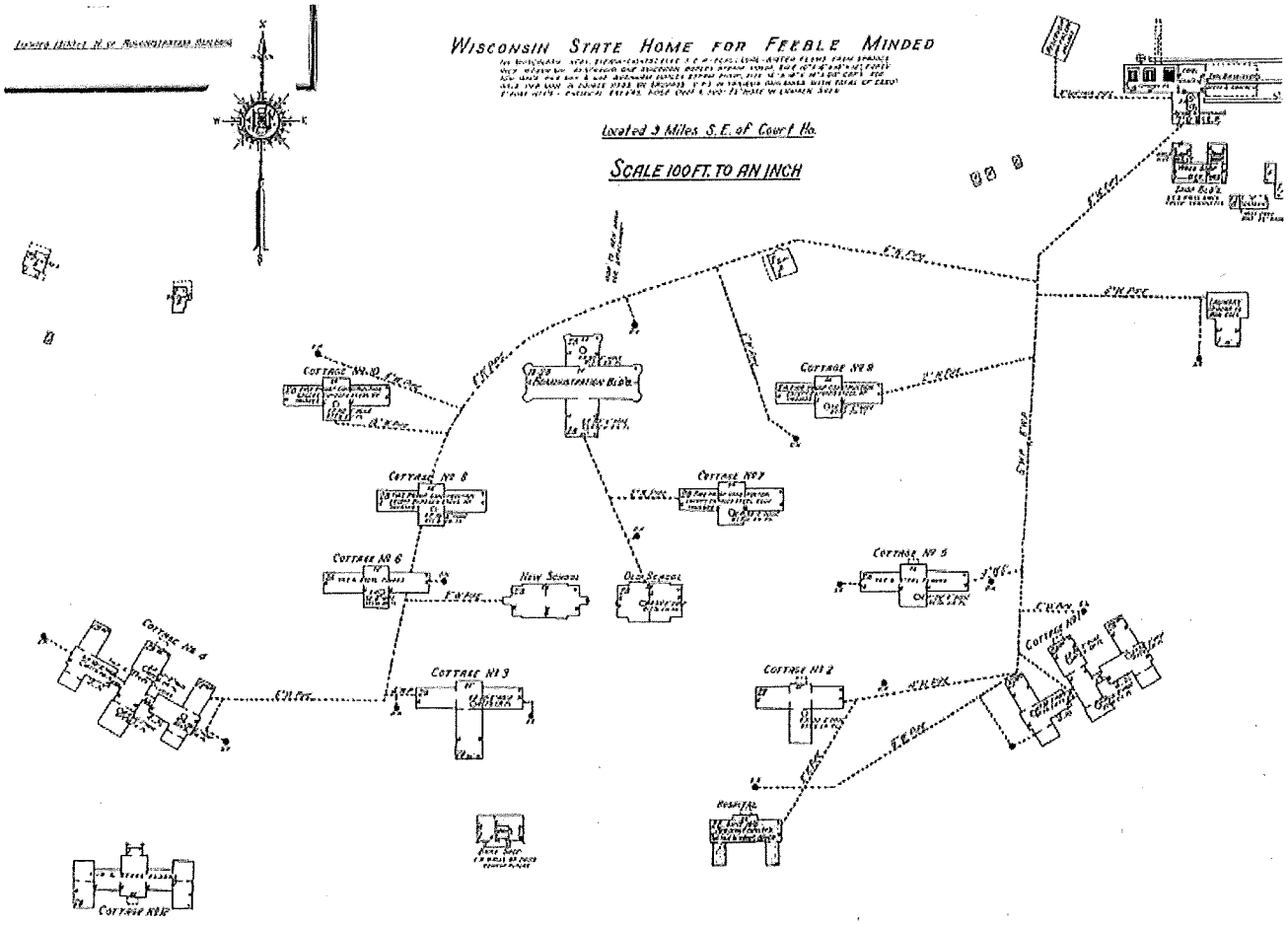
[8] Ibid.

[9] Past and Present, 289.

[10] Intensive Survey Report, 271.

[11] Yanni, 79.

Wisconsin.[12] State approval allowed for the construction of 14 buildings as a part of the "home's" original layout, including 10 cottages, an employee's residence, a maintenance build-



EARLY SANDBORN INSURANCE MAP INCLUDING THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT BLUE PRINT FOR THE NORTHERN WISCONSIN HOME FOR THE FEEBLE MINDED AND EPILEPTIC CREATED BY CHICAGO LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT E. G. NELSON.

ing, a barn and an administration building.[13] Although architects were brought in from all over the state, when it came to building the structures, the local economy was boosted. Contractors in

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[12] Intensive Survey Report, 213.

[13] Intensive Survey Report, 272

and around Chippewa Falls were hired by the state to build the structures and almost all local materials were used, except for one in particular, the Administration Building, constructed in 1907.[14] The Administration building would become the show place, built in a Renaissance Revival style of red brick and limestone, in the shape of a Greek cross, flanked with three octagonal towers, sitting on the highest point of the property, acting as the gate to the "home."

Of course, this history is all part of the the Asylum Era —1850 to 1950, a period in which there was the highest number of mental health institutions in the United States. The formation of psychiatric institutions can be traced back to the colonial era, first in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1773; however, they did not gain mass institutional traction until the mid-19th century.[15] Early institutions focused on therapeutic care, [16]which led to the growth of the construction of large-scale complexes, usually situated outside of heavily populated areas— city centers of the industrial revolution era, providing beauty appealing both architecturally and naturally. In fact, providing such beauty was a main purpose of these institutions, including the one I discuss here. In part because of their sheer beauty, the institutions and those within them became the subject of the public's curiosity. Struck by their beauty, prominent community members flocked to them for outings and special events as places that held a unique stature. Yet, while they did want to get away to enjoy the peacefulness of its beauty, they also came to gawk at the people that society had marked as peculiarities, individuals to dehumanize, objectify and all and all institutionalize. That narrative present at the core of the Asylum Era, spawned the dissemination of other widely

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[14] Intensive Survey Report, 206.

[15] Shorter, 15.

[16] Shorter, 45.

accepted public narratives of these institutions as they began to dismantle and become part of the past.

The 1940's, specifically the United States' entrance into World War II, had lasting effects with the institutionalization of mental health. The war created an epidemic of maltreatment through the institutional system.[17] The maltreatment began to show the endemic issues that plagued the American mental health system. An increase in maltreatment meant that there was a growing distrust in the current institutional system. As Grob notes, "A new vision emphasized the integration of psychiatry into medicine in ways that called into doubt the caring function that had defined the initial generation" through use of space and place as a peaceful grounding for healing. [18] Institutionalized mental health, moved in a favoring of getting patients out of their walls and back out in to the communities, as rehabilitate and not long term permeant care centers. A then "rapid introduction of experimental therapies," which pushed the boundaries of ethical medical practices during the war led to the decline of the longevity of patient lives.[19] Paired with the fact that more than half of the medical professionals were pulled from the institutions to serve as a part of the war effort, the experimental medical treatments made the dilapidating and overcrowded institutional systems fail quickly.[20] In the early 1950's the number of patients within mass institutionalized facilities began to decrease significantly. Along with the deinstitutionalization of the mental health system came the decline of the physical locations themselves. Pa-

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[17] Felix 27.

[18] Grob, *The Mad Among Us* 164.

[19] Grob 165.

[20] Grob 183.

tients began to be disbursed out into group homes in residential neighborhoods in the surrounding communities and onto the streets as many institutional doors literally slammed and locked behind them.

The 1980's finished the deinstitutionalization of the Asylum Era by the continual fallout of a failed Federal Mental Health Program[21], that was short lived, active only from 1964 until 1970. [22] Out of the federalization of mental health came the crippling public stigmas that have haunted a more honest conversation of experiences within the physical locations of institutions themselves where the story of mental health first began in the United States. Funds to the short lived program continued to be blocked until 1981, which gave the state mental health institutions incentives to close in favor of shifting the responsibility onto the federal government[23]. What grew out of the federal government taking responsibility for the mentally ill after they had already failed, was that they provided the states with enough funding to provide them with medication that temporarily improved their conditions enough to get them discharged but without a sustainable treatment plan that would enable them to care for themselves.[24] By the 1990's, a growing number of the homeless population in the United States had untreated mental health issues. The individuals simply couldn't get the help they needed.[25] The reform made the emptied institutions a leper of the United States consciousness, something to be forgotten in truth and ridiculed

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[21] A part of the Federal Mental Health Program which officially ended in 1981 was the Federal Community Mental Health Centers Program (Torrey 93).

[22] Torrey 61.

[23] Torrey 93.

[24] Torrey 93.

[25] Torrey 102.

in fiction. They were no longer seen with a naive love but a discontent. Today, public imagination sees these institutions in two polarizing ways. First, a celebratory narrative sees them as places that did wonderful things for "sick" people. Second, a ghoulish narrative depicting these residents as dangerous menaces of society, brought on by the mass commercialization of Halloween and the horror film industry.[26] Of course, such narratives mask the truth behind extreme happiness and horror, the truth being the real scare.

Toward A Script Narrative for the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic

To queer a place what does that mean and how theory come into place? What is queer phenomenology? Defined by Sarah Ahmed in her book *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others* is,

> How bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space, as an extension that differentiates between 'left' and 'right', 'front' and 'behind', 'up' and 'down' as well as 'near' and 'far.' [27]

To break down Ahmed's ideas in working with institutional mental health narratives, we must try to think how mentality can extend into spaces like gender, sexuality and race as an Other—spaces shaped by other spaces such landscapes, buildings, and the objects within them at the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and the Epileptic. When narratively conversing with the past it should be sticky, messy and obstructive, as seen in the work done through a queer phenomenological lens. Objects as simple as a chair hold narratives of discrimination, oppression and sexism. Such a chair can hold weight as a tool conscripted not only to gender roles, but to

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[26] Cooke, Anthony Carlton. "Deinstitutionalization of the Mentally Ill, Shame, and the Rise of the 'Slasher' Trope in Halloween." *American Shame: Stigma and the Body Politic*, Indiana University Press, 2016, pp. 208–229.

[27] Ahmed, Sara. Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others. Duke University Press, 2006. pg 5.

rhetorics of incarceration (picture a chair situated in a room meant for solitary confinement). Looking at these items in such a way can break down institutional happiness scripts. According to Sara Ahmed, the notion of a "happiness script" operates as a critical modality useful for examining how "happiness" is used to instill social norms that desensitize unsavory bits around us in the past, present, and future.[28] Ahmed states,

> If injustice is not simply about feeling bad, then justice is not simply a matter of feeling: it is not about the overcoming of pain or the achievement of happiness.[29]

Happiness shouldn't be a tool of masquerade, but rather a mixture of emotions including sadness, that brings forth meaningful discussion.

As you might expect, then, a happiness script of the Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and the Epileptic emerged over the years, a script that continues to mask over a much deeper and voiceless past. The climax of this happiness script is its celebratory narrative in the form the Centennial Celebration. The de-institiutonalization of mental health in not just Wisconsin but the United States in the second half of the 20th Century, gradually led to a decrease in its resident population after its height of 2,264 residents in 1952[30]. As the numbers continued to dwindle, so too did the face of the institution itself. What the institution had once represented began to physically crumble once there was no longer anything to hold it up to. Beginning in 1972 the original cottages began to be phased out, some boarded up and others relinquishing themselves to the wrecking ball. Those that ran the institution began to lose grasp on its so called "happiness script" and needed to gain it back before they no longer could. A celebration of the

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[28] Ahmed,196.

[29] Ibid

[30] Population Statistics- Data from Biennial/ Annual Report NWCDD.

centennial of the institution was the perfect opportunity to do so. For Superintendent Barbra Sandholm, the purpose of the 1997 celebration was to build legacy , build up the institution to give thanks to the employees that had made the place it had become.

The centennial did just that, bringing forth a happiness script that centered around legacy building for the institution, those who worked there, and the community. Yet, it sanitized the personal stories of residents, denying them agency and giving it to the employees. A Wisconsin State Historical Site Marker put up as part of the development of the celebratory centennial narrative served as an emblem of the happiness script developed by the administration.

"Before the 19th-century social reform movement, developmentally disabled people were relegated to almshouses and county poor farms where the "indigent, insane, epileptic and "idiotic" were housed together without regard to individual condition. Reformists advocated for more humane treatment of the socially-dependent and by the mid-19th century had demonstrated the educability of the "mentally deficient" and opened homes for their care and training. In 1895, Wisconsin allocated $100,000 for the establishment of its first institution for the developmentally disabled. Located in Chippewa Falls on 600 acres of land offered by the city, the "Wisconsin Home for the Feebleminded" opened June 17, 1897. The home, renamed the "Northern Wisconsin Colony and Training School" in 1923, provided care for children and adults and taught skills in self-care, farming, housekeeping, arts and crafts, and academics. In the 1970s, a new emphasis was placed on community care of the developmentally disabled, and the Northern Wisconsin

Center for the Developmentally Disabled, renamed in 1976, which began providing outreach services to individuals and communities."[31]

This short narrative represents what the superintendent wanted portrayed, a story steeped in institutional speak, dry, straight and linear, outlining the point of view of the institution itself and those who ran it, not the residents. Recorded history looks back at this institution as a place that subdued and reformed the unsavory into model members of society. This history looked only to what the institution had done to change them and how they exhibited "model" behavior, accustomed to the living standards. There was no and never was to be and examination of who the residents were as individuals. Further, it looked only to the accolades of the staff and not to their critiques.

As a part of the centennial celebration, Barbra Sandholm developed and led an oral history project to gain stories from members of the institution's community —including retirees, a child of retiree, a parent of a former resident, and two former residents. The 24 oral history interviews were conducted from 1993-96 in anticipation of the anniversary in 1997. Twenty-three of the twenty-four were conducted by Sandholm (the 24th was her own interview). A variety of staff were chosen, as well as four non-staff, which gave an allusion of a balanced and well-rounded narrative of the institution. The 20 interviewed staff, both female and male, were juxtaposed against four non- staff members. Using just four non-staff members in the group of oral histories didn't balance the narrative, it worked to ultimately narrow it. This act of narrowing is seen

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31 Wisconsin State Historic Marker, 1996.

through further through the 2 to 22 differential split when it comes to resident verses non resident split in the interviews.

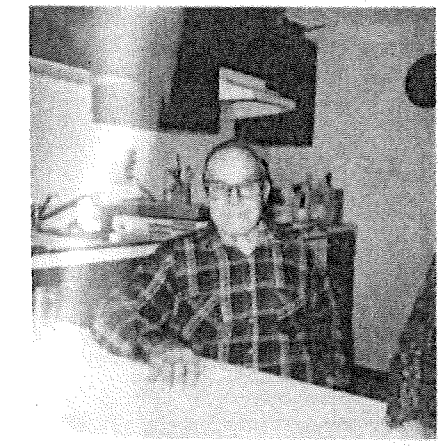
NWCDD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS CONDUCT ED FROM 1993-96.

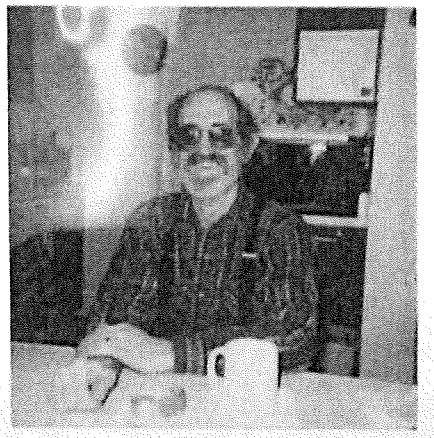
Worker	Tilte
Sylvia Baier	Registered Nurse
Ardyce Bakken	Purchasing Agent
Idell Bakken	Fiscal Clerk
Mary Jane Clark	Social Services Supervisor
Letha Gaier	Sewing Room Coordinator
August Grunewald	Maintenance Supervisor
Cecil Hanson	Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds
Russell Horn	Director
David Jankoski	Social Services Director
Gordon Johnson	Resident
John Johnson	Resident
Prescott Johnson	Volunteer Coordinator
Douglas Knight	Institution Unit Supervisor
Greta Lamb	Teacher
Claudia Maves	Psychologist
Dorthy McNamara	Institution Aid

Ernest Nelson	Doctor
Camille Olsen	Mother of Client
Howard Polzin	Laundry Services Supervisor
Pat Proulx Bodine	Daughter of Staff Member
Isabel Ruf	Food Services Worker
Barbra Sandholm	Director
Helen Schmidt	Therapy Assistant
Maribelle Smith	Director's Secretary

Dissecting the differentiating numbers in the oral histories within itself reveals a deep-rooted institutionalized power structure beneath the past of the *Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled*. Just the differentiation in the numbers of the interviews themselves and how each number shows how the institutional happiness script of the institution devalued the agency of the residents, reveals this structure. Interviewed staff were given candor and permission through the style of question to speak of every-day runnings of the institution, as if it was them who personally went through it all. The two interviews of the residents were cog in the happiness script of the institution, to filling in the blanks of the of the staff, validating their views on the lives of the residents.

Two past residents by the names of Gordon and John Johnson were interviewed for the project. Polaroid snapshots of each of them marked the occasion with coffee and cookies in hand, as if conversing with an old pal. Both of these men were residents beginning in the 1930's and were both put there because of lack of stable family conditions. The questioning of both was





THESE POLAROID PHOTOGRAPHS OF GORDON JOHNSON (LEFT) AND JOHN JOHNSON (RIGHT) WERE TAKEN DURING THEIR INTERVIEWS IN 1995.

BOTH PHOTOS ARE COURTESY OF WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

regimented in a particular way. Their early lives, including family histories, were glossed over in comparison to how staff were questioned. In the lead to discussing questions their work at the institution they were asked about such things as where they grew and specific details about their family. It may be noted that in some cases that for residents in the 1930's they may have have had unstable family conditions and possible their family but the questions were not even brought forth. The interviewees as a whole where not treated the same and a common data set was not achievable unbalanced questioned from the staffs to residents. John Johnson was asked the question, "Do you have some bad memories of being at the Northern Colony?" The questions, as you might expect, were met with the answers they wanted.[32] He couldn't recollect any bad memories of the place as a whole or individually, seeming just to make jokes over casual candor. Gordon Johnson was asked, "Was number six the cottage for the bad boys?".[33] When Sandholm stated her next question to him "What did you do for fun?", it completely derailed the conversa-

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[32] NWCDD Oral History Interview, John Johnson, January, 25, 1995, WHS.

[33] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Gordon Johnson, January, 25, 1995, WHS.

tion[34]. Whenever the two residents discussed the tough times at the center, which rarely happened during the interview process, Sandholm, cut them off quickly.[35] At a particular point, the interviewees did challenge pre-conceived happiness scripts before she would again change the subject. In the interview with Gordon Johnson, the following question and response occurred during the conversation:

Question: What did you do for fun?
Response: Ah no, I never had fun. All I can think is going down to the play area and play. And down on the other fence, and God, pretty soon somebody lit a match and set that whole field on fire. Way down on the other end we had gunnie sacks we sewed together and made a tent so we could go in there and play, and then when that fire started, boy did we ever run.[36]

For Johnson, playtime wasn't even playtime. I sense that, for him, it was a tactic for survival while living at the home. An event that was used for him to attempt to go against the institutional happiness script. The interviews didn't take place in a sort of safe space; rather, they were surrounded by power and memories. The power seen through structure of the interviews and how they were delivered.

The inclusion of these two residents in the oral history wasn't purposefully attempting to put the voices of the residents back into the narrative at its centennial: it was to showcase them in a way that the institution and it's happiness script had always sought to do so as individuals whose lives were changed for the better by being at the home. Their lives matter to the affect of how they lived out their days there and not who they were as individuals outside of their identity

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[34] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Gordon Johnson, January, 25, 1995, WHS.

[35] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Gordon Johnson, January, 25, 1995, WHS.

[36] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Gordon Johnson, January, 25, 1995, WHS.

as a resident. The interviews of employees went past their identities that he had at their work into they personal lives. The employees interviewed were past and present supervisors of a variety of departments to show diversity of their stories. Sandholm asked about their childhood, how they came to work at the home, what their fondest memories were of the place, what their joys were in life and what they felt about their own and the accomplishments of the home as a whole. They were celebratory coffee chats that didn't reach the depth that conversations surrounding the first mental health institution in the State of Wisconsin should have. Such conversation illuminated a sheer physical emotional beauty of the home, including a false emotional being in its residents. They all saw it as a place of refuge for the residents that a century of staff had saved.

Another resident — by the name of Anna Lenz was mentioned in the oral history interviews just by name, she was not there to give her own story. As of 1982 she had turned ninety years old and had been a resident of the home for fifty-nine years.[37] In an article by the *Chippewa Herald Telegram* celebrating her milestone, the staff reporters go into detail about her years at the home, providing examples of what she had done over the years, which included cooking, cleaning, grounds work, and laundry.[38] As a young adult, she was dropped off at the home by her family for unspecified reasons. It's unknown if she had a mental illness or not. She knew no other life, she had no childhood, no family life. She was valued as an obedient entity that could work. Many of the staff interviewed stated how great it was to work with Lenz. Taken from the interview with Sylvia Baier, a retiree, is the following excerpt:

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[37] *Anna Lenz Observes Milestone with Friends, November 1,1982,* Chippewa Herald Telegram, Chip. Fls, WI.

[38] *Anna Lenz Observes Milestone with Friends, November 1,1982,* Chippewa Herald Telegram, Chip. Fls, WI.

Question: Did you know Anna Lenz?
Response: I knew Anna very, very well. .... She was one that should have never been there. She worked at cottage 1 and she had the small babies, and oh she was good. There was a girl who had dark hair and long braids, she smiled, she didn't cry. Anna kept this little girls dressed so nicely, and she didn't want her clothes to go to the laundry because it was harsh laundry. So Anna washed and ironed the child's clothing.[39]

Baier saw Lenz as a resident who shouldn't have been there. Like many others, her memories of her were glowing, but it only came to her work because all she had was her work.[40] The staff over the years had begun to fall into the institutional happiness narrative of the home, not seeing anything wrong with it because most of them did see what they were doing as the best they could possibly do. They knew no other way but to value the residents and see them as people that needed care. Years and years of following the institutional happiness narrative that seemed harmless to the staff, was in effect erasing the very stories of the residents that they cared for. It was in effect doing this because their agency was being strip away by the institution.

The Tipping Point: The Relevance of Michael J. Goc and His Yearbook Narrative

The culminating moment of the centennial celebration occurred in 1997, with the publishing of Michael J. Goc's *Island of Refuge*. Happiness was at its greatest in this text. Yet, the account assembled by Goc failed to go beyond the happiness script that was set by the ruling structure of the institution for a century. His work gave the established narrative a sort of final stability; a straightforward, dry, linear quality, to shelve in with other historical interpretations of institutional mental health. To forget. It allowed further erasure of the lives and identities of the

[39] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Sylvia Baier, April, 21, 1995, WHS.

[40] NWCDD Oral History Interview, Sylvia Baier, April, 21, 1995, WHS.

residents whom lived there. It was taken straight from the accounts of the state, the institution and its workers. The raw, sticky and non-linear voices of those who lived out there were cut out of the narrative as soon as he began his research for the *Island of Refuge: Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled 1897-1997*, what I coin the "yearbook narrative."

As a researcher, Goc clearly dug into the history of the institution, but I sense he did so as if being guided by a predisposed narrative before he even started. A December 18, 1995 memo titled *Northern Wisconsin Center Centennial History Project* details the questions and points that he wanted to keep in mind throughout the process of writing the book[41]. There was a total of nine points on the memo, the first few pertaining to what type of residents were admitted, their minority backgrounds, information on their disorders and what the roles and rights of the parents and guardians were.[42] It seems at the beginning of the memo that he is looking to figure what the resident population looked like as a whole, disregarding individual agency of the residents. As the memo continues it tends to focus more on the management of the institution itself, the workers and the lived experiences of residents from the viewpoints of workers and the institution, not from that of residents. Point seven states,

> *"keep track of noteworthy events: new buildings and development of physical plant, fires, accidents, crimes, visits by the famous and infamous, scientific studies conducted here; also celebrations, accomplishments, other positive happenings".*[43]

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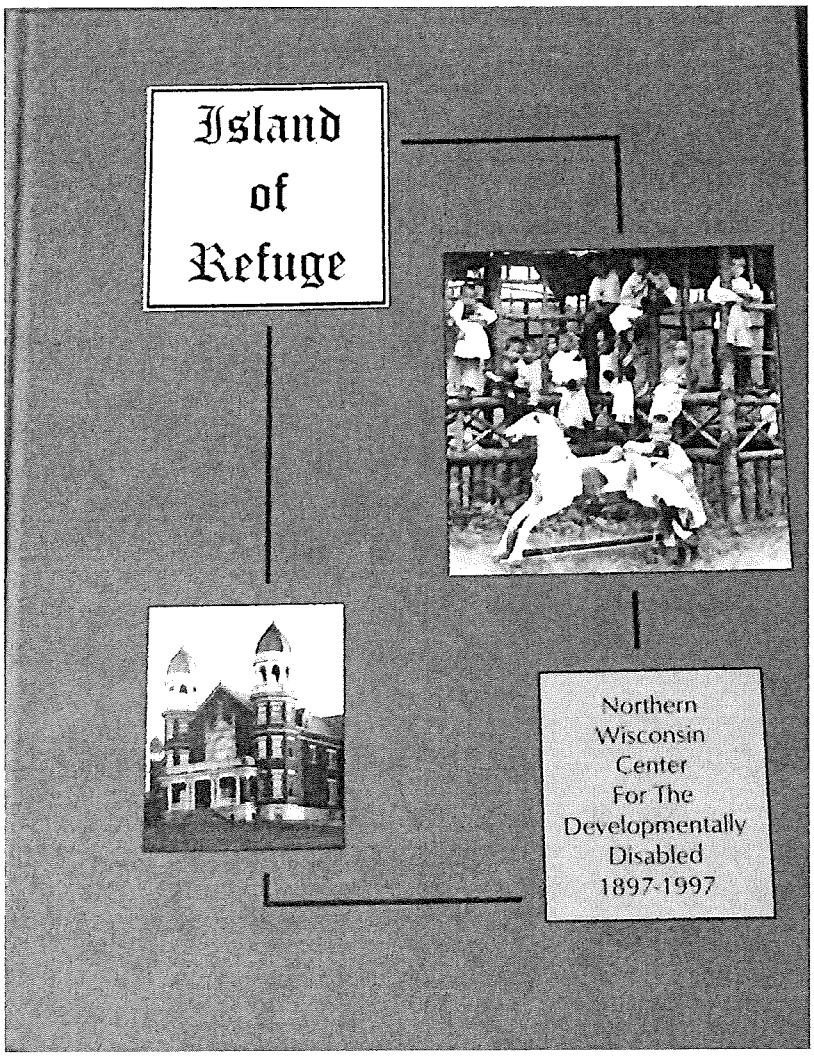
41 Goc Papers, Chippewa Valley Museum.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid

Here, he made it clear what the narrative of the book would be and what his main objective was. It wasn't going to challenge the happiness narrative of the institution: it was going to give it traditional ink and paper backing. His book would be a showcase of the institution's beauty and power, and how that became a "refuge" to the unfortunate.

Before even cracking it open, the visual rhetoric of the cover itself sends a clear message—a purposeful dissemination of a dry, straight and linear happiness narrative reminiscent of a typical "yearbook." Beneath a vibrant cherry red hard cover, its noticeably glossy pages, cling together with an inky smell that resonates the most on pages with black and white photos. Choosing the color red as the back drop of the cover wraps the narrative in power, in a way that brings readers towards strict traditional power structure. This basic choice sets the grounds for developing the way in which Goc and his supporters wanted to affect the "mind space" of readers in terms of the way in which they interpret the narrative of *Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled.* Set on top of the colored background are a set of rectangular panels anchored by a simplistic rectangular outline in a turn-of-the-century design. The title of the book, "Island of Refuge," stands out in a white background with demanding gothic font, which immediately draws the eye to the upper left-hand corner of the cover. Naturally following the line of the boarder leads the eyes to a photograph of the administration building built on the grounds of the home in 1907, which was the "symbol" of the institution and of its power and prestige. Leading past the block of the text, *Northern Wisconsin Center for The Developmentally Disabled, 1897-1997,* the picture in the upper right hand corner is what brings it all together. The photo is of a group of children at the home, at an unspecified period of time at the turn of the century, playing on a playground of natural wood. Juxtaposing this against the stately title and the photo-



COVER OF THE ISLAND OF REFUGE BOOK PUBLISHED BY MICHAEL G. GOC IN 1997. THE COVER IN TRUE FORM IS GLOSSY WITH CHERRY RED FINISH.

graph of the physical architecturally grounding symbol of the "home," brings forth the institutional happiness script argued in the book, that it was a place of refuge for the unfortunate, where nothing unfortunate could ever occur.

The act of putting the book in "yearbook" format further bleeds the purpose of its script. Yearbook, defined in Merrianm- Webster Dictionary is

1. a book published yearly as a report or a summary of statistics or facts

2. a school publication that is compiled usually by a graduating class that serves as record of the years activities

For the purpose it can be termed a "centennial book" but the definition still applies. This book merely showcases a timeline of handpicked events that Goc and previous institutional power structures have set as the home's achievements. His research files weren't evidence of a historical researcher. They were records of a data analyst and compiler. There was rarely a point in his work where he attempted to get underneath the surface of the information. He merely compiled a list of important facts in timeline fashion broken with periodical synopses of the founding of the "home," biographical information on the superintendents and other memorable moments in its history. Amongst his papers there is a document that is called *Highlights from Annual Reports,* which looks at highlights from the home's report files from 1898- 1937 and notes that there are no reports of altercations, abuse, misconduct, which there would have been in the 1934 state investigation into abuse.[44] These incidents were all wiped cleaned from the highlights, as if they had never existed, to keep the institutional happiness narrative in check. Were they erased by the time Goc got to them or had he himself omitted them from the record? He took the institutional narrative and gave it more standing, gave more voice to the staff, stripping past residents of what little identity and autonomy they ever had while being there. He reinforced that they were objects to be taken care of and that the state and its employees had to be admired for their work. What the institution and its staff did wasn't always correct or humane for that matter, but many of them did believe that they were doing what was best for the residents at the time. I wonder: Did Goc believe this, too?

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[44] Goc Papers, Chippewa Valley Museum

A final point about Michael Goc. In the process of writing this essay in 2018, I was intrigued to find out that Goc publicly released his research files to the local museum just months before I requested to see any files they had in to the institution. The book was written in 1997, over twenty years ago. What is remarkable to me is that every photo copy, every note, every scrap was in these files. Something kept him holding on to his research for that amount of time. Did he feel that he may have been a part of something that begged for further investigation? While I do not know the answer to why Goc dropped off these files, I sympathize with what I perceive as a struggle in him to tell the truth. In my own research, uncovering the details of the 1934 investigation into the abuse and maltreatment of the residents at the "home" was a task within itself. The only minuscule mention of this investigation in Goc's *Island of Refuge* is reframed by the author to focus on the rights of the staff and not the abuse of the residents.[45] The description Goc gives to the article states, "a newspaper report on a state investigation describes working conditions in the early 1930's".[46]The article stated that " paddling and spanking of unruly boys was justified," alluding to the frame of the story that the attendants were over worked and corporal punishment, was simply ok because of that.[47] He gave no other commentary on this investigation or other incidents of abuse at the home in the book, providing only one narrative that erodes the autonomy and identities of the residents who lived at the home by invalidating them. What Goc chose invalidated individuals and lifted up the institution and its happiness narrative. He celebrated the institution for the work of its staff and its unique place in state and national history as the first mental health institution in the state of Wisconsin. In short, the narrative

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[45] Goc, 75.

[46] Goc, 75.

[47] Chippewa Herald Telegram, May, 7, 1934, Chippewa Falls, WI

Boys Claim Mistreatment At Chippewa Falls Training School

By W. J. BOLLENBECK

Chippewa Falls, Wis., (Special) —Testimony that one matron and five female attendants engaged in ill treatment of boys at the Northern Colony and Training school was given to the legislative and governor's investigating committees today when the probe was resumed.

A fly swatter, counter brush, paddle, broomstick, shoe tree and strap were used to hit the boys, they informed the joint committee. The punishment was administered, they said, by Mrs. Minnie Duffenbach, matron in cottage eight, and by Bessie Swisher, Eleanor Wermund and Florence Asher, attendants in that same cottage, and by Stella Brandes and Verna Schoolcraft, attendants in cottage three.

The accusations involving these women were made by 24 boys who are housed in those two cottages. The various witnesses said that they liked the institution and attendants except those mentioned, and that the latter were "mean" to the inmates.

One of the lads showed the committee a blackened finger nail which he claimed he received from having been hit over the hands with a counter brush, and another insisted that an inmate received a discolored eye on another occasion.

Complaint By Boys

The boys all like their school teachers here they said, and their only complaints were confined to these six, with Mrs. Duffenbach and the Misses Swisher, Wermund and Asher figuring in the testimony.

Regarding Miss Wermund, one of the boys said that "she grabs them by the hair, pulls their ears and hits them with a counter brush." Another told the committee that he liked the institution but that several of the attendants mistreated the boys occasionally.

(Continued on Page 2)

EXCERPT TAKEN FROM THE MAY 4TH 1934 EDITION OF THE SHEBOYGAN PRESS IN SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN. THE STORY ALSO HAS A CONTINUATION THAT IS NOT INCLUDED HERE. THE INVESTIGATION REACHED STATEWIDE ATTENTION, OTHER ARTICLES ALSO FOUND TO BE PUBLISHED IN OTHER PAPER ACROSS THE STATE INCLUDE THE OSHKOSH DAILY NORTHWESTERN IN OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN.

took away the chance to begin to open up the emotionality, individuality, and physicality of the stories from the past of the "home."

Searching beyond Goc's book, I dug into online newspaper databases finding scores of articles from around the state from the turn of the century up until the nineteen nineties alleging abuse. An article in the May 4th, 1934, edition of the *Sheboygan Press,* titled "Boys Claim Mis-

treatment at Chippewa Falls Training School," allowed me to figure out that it was the Wisconsin Governor that asked for the investigation into abuse and maltreatment. From there I went to the Wisconsin Historical Society online database and discovered they had transcripts from all governor's office investigations from the mid nineteenth to mid twentieth century. I sent in my request, asking for any investigation reports pertaining to the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and the Epileptic, not knowing if I was going to receive a van load of boxes, having to go through all of the files. A few weeks later, three boxes containing transcripts to three different investigations in the institution by the Governor's office arrived, along with other fascinating investigations that I couldn't give my attention.

The set of documents that I had stumbled across contained 144 pages of typed testimony by Pat Howlett, Reporter on May 3rd and 4th of 1934. The document's title states that it is "In the Matter of the Investigation of the Affairs of the Northern Colony and Training School at Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, by the interim Committee on Prison Labor, of the Wisconsin Legislature and the Governor's Citizens Committee, acting Jointly in Making Said Investigation".[48] The committee on those two days in 1934 made its way up to Chippewa Falls, to interview the alleged abused inmates, who were all children, and the staff responsible. The hearings occurred in the main hall of the Administration Building the building sits there dilapidating, as a reminder of the power that institution had over all who were put there. It was built to act as a pillar of stature for the institution. In those two days the investigation threatened to bring down the power and stature the institution had built up. As individuals hold scars, so do structures.

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[48] Northern Colony and Training School Investigation Transcripts, 1934, WHS.

Stories are told for and with a purpose. I believe the 1934 investigation was trying to tell a story. With this essay, I am also trying to tell a story—a story for the communities of individuals that have had their voices cut out. As queer theories tell us, stories can keep the pasts of under-represented minority groups in the present, alive and active. There is an understanding among minority groups that they are responsible for re-framing and telling their stories as their autonomy with the rest of the public's past has been torn away from them. Even in the world today, it is understood that as a gay man I still have to have ownership over my own story to bring personal depth to the narrative of the LGBTQ Community. As an individual who has a complex personal narrative, my story would have been sterilized if I would have been born at the turn of the century. Discussing it would have been a threat to the state institution and its security net. I had been, and still am, in some ways as a Gay Man, A Stutterer and A Survivor of Sexual Assault, a threat to the linear cohesive happiness that guides society and its institutions. Performing my complex identity under "care" of a "home" like this would have been impossible. These individual stories that get left out of narratives create societal holes that become burdensome, burdensome because they lack understanding of unsavory bits of the past.

Cross Phenomenological Queering of the "Home" and Self

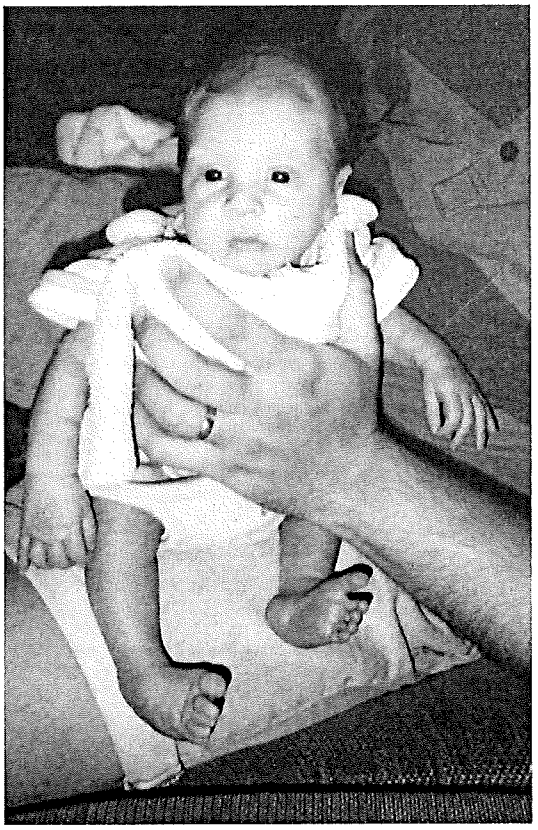
In this queer exploration, stories come to life through their orientations to space and place, enabling us to queer and entangle them with what makes the past and its stories sticky. Sticky in an obtrusive sort of way. I was taught that theory is just another way to tell a story—stories that are hard to contextualize in a linear fashion. Ever since I was a child, I remember visiting the grounds of the home on "photography runs" with my mother. It mesmerized me. Spending summers with my paternal grandparents, my grandmother always recounted a much more

colorful history as a retired nurse from the home. This intrigued me, but it also left me perplexed. I wondered: how would I fit in that place? Despite my theoretical ponderings here, the narrative remains limited to a linear form that has no room for complexity, and therefore no room for individual voices to be voiced. Thus, the form of the narrative—my own and that of the Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic—begs for disorientation. To disorient it, I apply queer phenomenology as an attempt to grapple with the problematic narratives of institutional mental health in the asylum era and my personal story (today) within it.

How do identity labels assigned to those with physical and mental disabilities give and deny them agency? Disabled: To be disabled or to be a person with a disability, a denunciation that holds weight, meaning and history. I have issues with the word "the disabled", using it as a catch all term for whatever happens to medically ail a person. However, I take even greater issue with seeing my disabilities as something that can be separated from me, that somehow did not come along with me. They are a part of who I am and have shaped my life's triumphs and hardships just as the other pieces of my identity have. My disabilities, physical and mental, have affected the very core of who I am, and therefore shouldn't be seen as something that can be detached from my person and others.

If I had lived these grounds, how would that have worked. In short, my embodied experiences, my childhood, my memories—they made me all the more aware of my own marginality. So, too, did the narratives of my education. I had my troubles with being born premature, and with medical operations due to being born with a severe case of club feet, two cancer scares, one as a young child and one right before I started college, my bout with chronic lymes disease, my stutter, my experience as a rape victim as a child and explorations of my sexuality as a gay man.

Such a story never fit available narratives around me. Today, it still doesn't quite fit. When you bring yourself into subjects you study they gain weight. They become murky and the barriers come down, as you are no longer protected by the silences that you've kept. You open yourself up to criticism in order to find a sordid absolution within it all. An absolution that doesn't let you forget even if it lets you move forward. By putting myself into this thesis, I am thus opening wounds that I am only beginning to heal, but it allows be to connect in a way that I would otherwise be unable to do.



ME AT 3 MONTHS BEFORE I BEGAN TO HAVE THE MANY OPERATIONS ON MY SEVERE CLUB FEET THAT HAVE ALLOWED ME TO BE ABLE TO WALK AND NOT BE WHEELCHAIR BOUND.

I was raped between the ages of six and seven by an individual that was trusted by my parents. I did not tell anyone what happened for over a decade. I kept it bottled up. Kept it secret, to the point that for years I thought nothing bad had ever happened. My freshman year of college came around and all of sudden I started to have flash backs. This is where I truly began to deal with my past. I told my parents, who were in total disbelief. Things like this just can't happen. But they do. It happened to me. The appointments. The uncontrollable crying that would send me throwing up in the bathroom. Passing out from emotional and physical exhaustion. My spring semester freshman year of college was a blur. All I did was my school work, which is what got me through the worst of it. I buried myself in my books. In the semesters to come during my undergrad it became clear to me that in order for me to heal I

had to be willing to be open to what happened to me. So, in certain circumstances, I would talk about it and why these stories are important. The more I talked, the more I was surprised by the reactions of the others. Some are sympathetic, others are angry for you—that it happened to you —and some so nervous that they just push it off and ignore the discussions. The ones who always get me are the one that say, "How could that have happened to you? I would have never suspected?" As if insinuated there is a type of individual that it happens to. Through the last few years, I have become more vocal in my writing. In posting blog stories to my social media, I got overwhelming supportive feedback, but "I can't believers" remain. Such ignorance shelters people from histories—histories such as the asylums in the United States, like the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic. We could not have had an institution like that, that performed now unethical and illegal medical practices in our communities? Could we? A lot of communities did, like Chippewa Falls. No one wants own up to it, because they cannot believe it. They cannot believe it because these institutions were seen as pillars of the communities, and so to discuss their short comings and history, would damage not only their legacy but also the legacies of communities. Opening up the broken pasts of these institutions brings into question the very meaning of community. These institutions trigger communities. I still have my own triggers. The triggers are tangible memories in my mind that I grasp. These memories still hurt, and I carry them with me every day. Nevertheless, communities need to carry with them such memories . They need to mull them over. And over again.

Filling in the Gaps: The Rhetoricity of Architecture that Remains

To resist a sterilization of the Wisconsin Home, I conclude by looking to physical pieces left behind—to the ways in which they tell stories of otherwise silenced residents. I do so to seek

a more honest history of the institution and rhetorics untold. The bricks and mortar of this institution, which are being lost to dilapidation and demolition, hold links to the narrative that can't be found anywhere else. Critically and rhetorically analyzing the structures and their pasts at the home begins to unlock the stories and the identities of the residents who have been lost through the telling of a linear happiness script. They hold the final connection to individuals, stories and their identities. If identity can be defined as an entity coming to terms with itself and its surroundings, the context of surroundings needs definition. Similar to identity, it can be difficult to define surroundings. An object of any size or physical make up strewn about places and communities are tangled up in identity, being a part of one and having one themselves. These objects trigger intangible entities that affect connections to a sense of self. They trigger emotions. Emotions that formulate belonging, contemplation and memory. These non tangible entities themselves affect the contemplation of self-identities. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen get at the American consciousness through an oral history survey presented in *The Presence of the Past.* They explore how Americans see their surrounding as the attachment to movements, moments and the less tangible, as symbols of identity and memory. The authors state, "The Americans we talked with described they had experienced, the ways they had touched and been touched by the passages through life".[49] In other words, these participants discussed how the combinations of history, time, places and objects have affected who they are. From a social historiographical perspective, Rosenzweig and Thelen look at identity always as an entity in a perpetual cycle of continual negotiation with one's self. The constant flow of emotions, objects, other less tangible en-

[49] Rosenzweig & Thelen, 61.

tities (such as sight, sound and smell) and space make for complex identity negotiations. Objects themselves have identities, which attach to communities and the individuals.

On a mid-afternoon spring day this past year, I drove through the grounds—as I've done so many times before—weaving my way past abandoned buildings intricately placed among paved streets. As I approached the administration building, perched on the highest point of the property, I pulled over and parked to take a long look at the structure. The structure that in some respects had become a piece of my own identity. Feeling connected to the children that were ushered through those doors, I envision a younger me that in a different time might have been right along with them. Walking up the worn marble steps, the once beautifully carved and leaded glass windows now boarded and covered in peeling paint. Yet, even in the state it is today, crumbling as it is, the administration building at the home exudes a power and extravagance. Still today, the structural representation of the institution's happiness narrative looms. Yet, I suggest the physicality of these buildings is perhaps our greatest key to opening the narrative to stories sterilized and forgotten. Analyzing the buildings that are left, pieced together with other documentary historical evidence, allows me to begin to put together the stories of the residents who lived there.

If you could walk the grounds with me today, you'd see remnants of the original 1897 plan. Winding up at the high point of the grounds you'll find open expanses of manicured lawns where red bricked cottages used to occupy the landscape, dotted with identical cottages that remain. When they were shut down in the later half of the twentieth century, they were locked away with their contents. You'd see curtains opened as if someone is about to look out at you. Beyond the curtains, you find a rusted chrome and sun worn plastic seated chair looking out of a

half shattered double pain window. Remnants. Remnants that give voice to those who lived there, most of whom died without being able to tell their stories—without being able to gain a sense of self. In amongst the cottages you'll also find the remains of the school building where residents were taught, taught the skills to live to their best capacities within the confines of the grounds of the home. They of course were shut out from the rest of the world, put away as menaces to society. If these systems of the present hadn't existed in the past, how could we expect those before us to act upon them? The past was in a different time, a different space, a different place— so how can we? There is a sense that the past can be judged and scrutinized as an indefensible relic. A relic that should have known better and never gotten itself into the situations it did in the first place. You are your own worst enemy, which further goes individually for the different parts that make up a society. Society judges the individual entity-the people, the institutions, the objects man-made and not and the beliefs that bind them. Within societies it breaks down even further to the entities within the individual groups of people that make them up, their interactions together and the individuals themselves, leaving the memories of it to disintegrate over time. The people within the community refusing to believe that it had ever happened. Not being able to reconcile with themselves what their community had once been open and willing in support of. Living in an open sense of denial.

To Chippewa Falls, the home was, and still is, seen as a historic pillar of the community. Its breathtaking landscape, and the ornately planned architectural grounds, was built up around the institutional happiness narrative that subdued personal individuality and grew "institutional happiness." The residents became the individuals the "home" wanted them to be, forced to leave behind their own identities. In front of the remaining cottages and school building returning to

the top of the hill sits that administration building, completed in 1907 in the renaissance revival style, perched overlooking the rest of the property. Yet, stripped of its cupolas and other delicate ornamentation by the test of time, the red bricked Greek star-shaped building holds the past of the "home" and those who became institutionalized there. As the "face" of the "home", it not only acted as the physical representation of the institution over the years, but as the first point of contact the residents had with the "home", and where they interacted with officials of the home, other residents and members of the public. The uncovering of the official transcripts from hearings held in the administration building at the home in 1934 for abuse and maltreatment of residents (all children) by State of Wisconsin Governors' Office, contradict the official narrative and give voice to the inmates. The building stands as a point to where you can begin to uncover the identities and stories of residents sanitized through a continual push and pull against an institutional happiness script, tearing away at it as I hope I've done in these pages. Over the years, people have mulled over the past of this place, in a too often unhealthy neurotic sort of way, looking inward, instead of outward. We must no longer mull over it get into discussion with it.

PHOTO OF THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING AT THE HOME SHORTLY AFTER IT WAS BUILT IN 1907 ON THE GROUNDS.

Afterward

The process of writing this piece has been a journey all its own. A journey that has led to self-contemplation and discovery in a queer sort of way that has allowed me to unravel and disrupt pieces of my identity and its sordid past against the context of this research. Growing as a queer theorist, what I write is just as much an exploration of the inner depths of myself as the research I am undertaking. As a theorist in the field you use yourself as a lens to get a better and deeper understanding of how the research and topic has, does, and will affect society. As a gay stutterer that is a survivor of sexual assault and that has dealt with a variety of physical and mental health issues throughout his life so far, I see this research as an opening—an opening of complex individual narratives that make up the history of institutional mental health that we need to continue exploring. Having had the experiences I have had and having them as part of my personal identity, I feel it is an obligation of mine to push these conversations forward. To push them past the forgotten, the stigmatized and medical heavy academic narratives into a public narrative of advocacy that can be used not only to educate and discuss the history of institutional mental health in the United States, but also to create a platform for critical mental health debate in our country.

The physical manifestations of the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and the Epileptic that I have encountered, discovered and pondered along the way have led me to posing questions that can only begin to be answered through more honest and uncensored discourse of its past. Mental health as a critical lens has been taken up mainly by academics within sociological and psychological based fields that could do more to reach outside these of complex medical studies to better reach other groups of people, including the public. On the contrary,

what would it mean to create a discourse that is rooted in academic theory but is meant to be an interaction between both the academy and the public communities that surround it?

In a short time through this piece, I have laid the ground work for what needs to begin to build and grow these discourses. I have opened up wounds that have been masked and hidden within the narratives of institutional mental health and pondered and explored new ways we can think of further opening up the untold narratives inside these wounds. For the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic, I have disrupted its institutional happiness narrative that was created to shroud the institution in a facade that protected it from its sticky past. I exposed the glorification practices they undertook of stripping the residents of their stories and identities even when in came to reflecting on it. They had an image to protect. The lengths that I had to take to track the existence of the 144 page Governor's report into abuse and maltreatment of residents at the home in 1934, exposes these practices. Interview after interview of the children explaining how they were hit and beaten and how they deserved it.[50] The Superintendent admitted that the caretakers at the home used corporal punishment as a way to keep them in line being against state regulation he would just never follow up with what was going on in the individual cottages when it had to do with punishment.[51] If he did not, nothing was going on, as if it never happened. [52] With this thesis, I thus have hoped to create a snapshot into how the history of institutional mental health is told—and not told—today. It's a divisive issue that prevents honest discussions of mental health. Now, the law makers and towns people associated with the Home may have been doing what they thought was best in some circumstances. We cannot judge

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[50] Northern Colony and Training School Investigation Transcripts, 1934, WHS, 22-139.

[51] Northern Colony and Training School Investigation Transcripts, 1934, WHS, 10.

[52] Northern Colony and Training School Investigation Transcripts, 1934, WHS, 10.

the past on current cultural standards, but we can rectify what was lost along the way through opening up the tough stories no one wants to talk about, how this Institution was one of the first in the country to be authorized to perform sterilization procedures as a part of early eugenics discussions in the United States. We need to educate about early medical procedures and treatments in these homes, so that we can give agency to residents at such places at these.

Amongst the many issues within the institution of mental health, there are many individuals who have chosen to go against the grain. As an actor in the network around her, Dona Peterson, a veteran Registered Nurse who worked at The Northern Wisconsin Home for the Developmentally Disabled for 22 years, used her years of experience and her drive to improve the system, to use what she had around her to make ground breaking changes that would put cracks in the institutional facade.[53] If you were to ask her about the institution, she would tell you that everyone, including herself, were just do-

DONA PETERSON ON THE LAST DAY OF HER ROUNDS AT THE NORTHERN WISCONSIN CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED IN 1995.

[53] The actor network referenced here is relation to Actor- Network Theory, as take up by Bruno LaTour in Reassembling the Social. The basis for my inclusion of this theory in this context is Dona's role an Actor in network and how she uses the objects around her as "conduits" (LaTour, 5) of social change.

ing their jobs—a plain and straight forward answer from my grandmother. She is the one that I heard the stories from as a little kid. She always did what she thought was best, putting her ahead of the curve of many others. She graduated from the Luther Hospital School of Nursing in 1954 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She trained as a surgical nurse, served in the United States Air Force in Alaska during the Cold War Era and held nursing licenses in three other states before returning to the Midwest. After holding a few different positions, she raised her three children while working at the Northern Wisconsin Home for the Developmentally Disabled the work place where she moved forward social change at whether she thought or knew it. Through the submission of many suggestions of how they could improve care at the "home" from pill management to building improvement, she was awarded a certificate of commendation by the state for her efforts. It is sad that these efforts and the efforts of others seeing change did not make it into the happiness script of the institution—until now. My grandmother went against her institution's actor network, the actor being the happiness narrative and network being everything that kept it in place. On her retirement in 1995, she said that she would still come back to volunteer, showing her commitment to those at the center, not to the happiness script of the institution. She cared and still cares about those with different identities that have needed an extra hand. She helped take care of one of her developmentally disabled cousins, who always called her his "Guardian Angel." And as the first female church council president of a local congregation in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in the early 1980's, she defended the rights of their minister when it was found out that he was gay. It is going to take people like Dona Peterson to keep standing up for what they believe, so that we can further break down these happiness scripts and let the real—and queered—conversations begin.

Appendix

Dona Peterson Documents, 40-46

I. Certificate of Commendation, 1981.

II. Merit Award Suggestion, 1982.

III. Merit Award Suggestion, 1982.

IV. Certificate of Award, 1983.

V. Merit Award Suggestion, 1990.

VI. Merit Award Suggestion, 1990.

VII. Notice of Retirement

The State of Wisconsin

MERIT AWARD BOARD

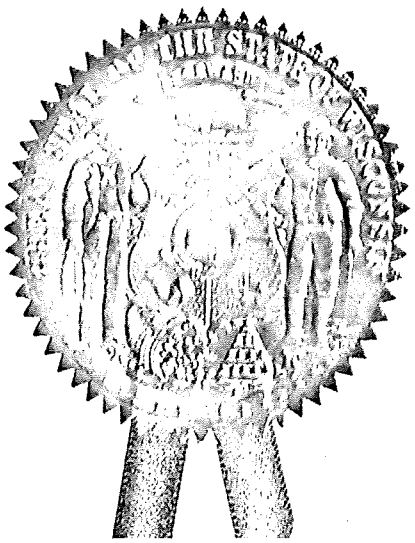
CERTIFICATE of COMMENDATION

This Certificate is awarded to

Dona J. Peterson

as official recognition and appreciation for individual initiative and resourcefulness while employed by the State of Wisconsin in making a valuable contribution to the improvement of the operation of State government.

Dated this 17th day of June 1981



Governor

Chairman, State Merit Award Board

Department Head

THIS ACCOMMODATION WAS RECEIVED AFTER DONA PETERSON'S ISSUING OF A SUBMISSION TO PUT COTTON DIVIDERS TO BETTER PROTECT THE MEDICATIONS IN TRANSPORT TO THE RESIDENTS.

State of Wisconsin 82-35
[ME]RIT AWARD SUGGESTION
[..]1.1 (Rev. 6/77)

[An]y state employe (LTE, part time, fulltime, classified, unclassified) can get recognition for his/her suggestions for improvement in [an]y area of state government operations as long as the ideas are not considered a part of the regular work assignment.

[Subm]it your idea on this form to the Merit Award Chairperson of your agency to receive a cash award or a certificate of [comm]endation in recognition of your ingenuity. If you do not know the name of your chairperson, contact your Personnel Officer. [If] you do not want your name known, for information on how to proceed contact the Merit Award Coordinator at (608) 266-2164.

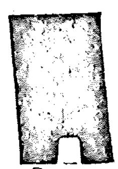
Agency No.

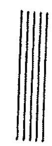
MAB No.

[Name] and Work Address of Suggester (Print or Type): DONA J. PETERSON (Crestview) Box 34C Chippewa Falls, Wi. 54729	Department: Health and Social Services Division, Institution or Employing Unit: Northern Center
Service Title: Registered Nurse 2	Name and Work Address of Supervisor: Dorothy Oliver Box 34C Chippewa Falls, Wi. 54729 (Parkview)

Problem – If more space is needed, use reverse side or attach separate sheet.
Plastic medication markers (flags) that require frequent replacement due to breaking or falling out of Umedex for MAR's. They are used for every resident who receives medication to mark the next time medication is due.

[Solut]ion – attach drawings, charts, etc., if needed
Cut flags from disposable covers from Coffee Cans, hot Chocolate, Peanuts, etc. (May be Cut any Size or Shape) flags from recycled Covers being used as a trial period on MAR Medex at Crestview.





[F]lag from recycled plastic cover. Present Purchased Product

[Adv]antages of Change – describe dollar savings if known, as well as improvements pertaining to safety, morale, service to state or public, conditions for patients, or improvements or increases in productivity.
Use of recycled plastic covers eliminates need to purchase product. Easier to grip with fingers. Larger (May be Cut any size) Covers come in various Colors. Cutting flags from the Covers can be done with Safety (blunt) scissors and could be a workshop project for residents. Plastic from covers is flexible - does not break easily)

[T]HE USE BY THE STATE OF WISCONSIN OF MY SUGGESTION SHALL NOT FORM THE BASIS OF A CLAIM AGAINST THE STATE OF WISCONSIN [B]Y ME, MY HEIRS OR ASSIGNS.

[Sugg]ester's Signature	Date	Business Phone – Area Code & Number	Social Security Number
Dona J Peterson Rn	12/16/82	715-723-5542 Ext 577	397-34-8856

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

[Ref]erred for evaluation to	Date	Committee Recommendation	Date	MAB Action	Date
		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate	

THIS SUBMISSION GOT DONA PETERSON A STATE AWARD IN 1983, SHOWN BELOW. SHE WAS FINDING THAT THE MEDICATION FLAGS THAT WERE ORIGINALLY ATTACHED WERE EASILY BREAKING OFF SO SHE CAME UP WITH A NEW TECHNIQUE USING RECYCLED PLASTIC TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY WERE DURABLE ENOUGH SO THAT THEY DIDN'T FALL OF AND CAUSE CONFUSION IN THE MEDICATION PASSING PROCESS.

State of Wisconsin
MERIT AWARD SUGGESTION
MAB 14 (Rev. 8-77)

Any state employe (LTE, part time, fulltime, classified, unclassified) can get recognition for his/her suggestions for improvement in any area of state government operations as long as the ideas are not considered a part of the regular work assignment.

Submit your idea on this form to the Merit Award Chairperson of your agency to receive a cash award or a certificate of commendation in recognition of your ingenuity. If you do not know the name of your chairperson, contact your Personnel Officer. If you do not want your name known, for information on how to proceed contact the Merit Award Coordinator at (608) 266-2164.

Agency No.

MAB No.

Name and Work Address of Suggester (Print or Type)	Department
Dupais Linda LPN Crestview Peterson, Dona RN Northern Wis. Center Chaudhri, Saleem MD	Health and Social Services
Civil Service Title	Division, Institution or Employing Unit Northern Division Center for DD
LPN - RN - MD	Name and Work Address of Supervisor DONNA CAMPBELL CRESTVIEW - NWCDD

State Problem – If more space is needed, use reverse side or attach separate sheet.

Residents Vocational work positions do not have scheduled vacation or earned personal holidays. If they feel they need a day off from work they seem to think it necessary to act sick or even injure themselves to receive a day of rest. They usually work five days a week.

Solution – attach drawings, charts, etc., if needed

Vocational work programs for residents should include earned personal holidays or vacation days according to the number of hours they work. The resident would be able to ask for a personal holiday or vacation day when he felt he needed a day off. The vocational supervisor could determine a reasonable system for caring out this plan with each work area.

Advantages of Change – describe dollar savings if known, as well as improvements pertaining to safety, morale, service to state or public, conditions for patients, or improvements or increases in productivity.

Residents would be more willing to work and would not feel it necessary to Self Inflict wounds to have an additional day off

THE USE BY THE STATE OF WISCONSIN OF MY SUGGESTION SHALL NOT FORM THE BASIS OF A CLAIM AGAINST THE STATE OF WISCONSIN BY ME, MY HEIRS OR ASSIGNS.

Suggester's Signature	Date	Business Phone – Area Code & Number	Social Security Number
Dona J. Peterson	5/24/82	715-723-5542 EXT 518	Dupais - Peterson - 397-34-[illegible] Chaudhri -

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Referred for evaluation to	Date	Committee Recommendation	Date	MAB Action	Date
		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award - $		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award $	

THIS SUBMISSION DETAILED DONA PETERSON'S IDEA TO GIVE THE PATIENTS MORE RIGHTS, AS TO PERSONAL HOLIDAYS. SHE ARGUED THAT THIS WOULD WOULD HELP IMPROVE THEIR WELL BEING AND DECREASE SELF HARM.

The State of Wisconsin

MERIT AWARD BOARD

CERTIFICATE of AWARD

This Certificate is awarded to

Dona J. Peterson

as official recognition and appreciation for individual initiative and resourcefulness while employed by the State of Wisconsin in making a valuable contribution to the improvement of the operation of State government.

Dated this 30th day of Sept. 1983

Governor

Chair, State Merit Award Board

Department Head

I suggested Robert Meyer Submit this but he did not. I would like him to receive any recognition if there is any to be Given.

State of Wisconsin
MERIT AWARD SUGGESTION
MAB-14 (Rev. 8/77)

Any state employe (LTE, part time, fulltime, classified, unclassified) can get recognition for his/her suggestions for improvement in any area of state government operations as long as the ideas are not considered a part of the regular work assignment.

Submit your idea on this form to the Merit Award Chairperson of your agency to receive a cash award or a certificate of commendation in recognition of your ingenuity. If you do not know the name of your chairperson, contact your Personnel Officer. If you do not want your name known, for information on how to proceed contact the Merit Award Coordinator at (608) 266-2164.

Agency No.

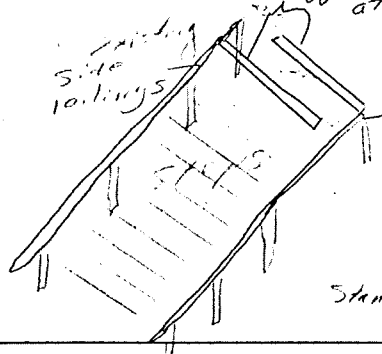
MAB No.

Name and Work Address of Suggester (Print or Type)	Department
Dona J. Peterson This idea was thought of by Robert Meyer DRCT	DHSS
	Division, Institution or Employing Unit NWCDD – Crestview
Civil Service Title RN 3	Name and Work Address of Supervisor Geraldine Oswald Crestview NWCDD

State Problem – If more space is needed, use reverse side or attach separate sheet.

Crestview steps have been considered unsafe because of the location from the Crestview front door and the slope of the sidewalk and a client fell down them - Wheel Chair Client, sight loss persons are in real danger, also client unaware of danger.

Solution – attach drawings, charts, etc., if needed



Advantages of Change – describe dollar savings if known, as well as improvements pertaining to safety, morale, service to state or public, conditions for patients, or improvements or increases in productivity.

Safety factor. Same type of railings at the Top as on the Sides would look nice. No expense to move steps, only need to make holes in Cement to put in 2 railings

THE USE BY THE STATE OF WISCONSIN OF MY SUGGESTION SHALL NOT FORM THE BASIS OF A CLAIM AGAINST THE STATE OF WISCONSIN Y ME, MY HEIRS OR ASSIGNS.

ter's Signature / Date	Business Phone – Area Code & Number	Social Security Number
Dona Peterson 6/27/90	715-723-5542 Ext 22	397-34-8876

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

evaluation to / Date	Committee Recommendation / Date	MAB Action / Date
	☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award–$	☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award–$

THIS SUBMISSION DETAILED DONA PETERSON'S IDEA TO MAKE AN INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGE TO ONE OF THE BUILDINGS. PUTTING, WHAT WOULD NOW BE KNOWN AS A ADA ACCESSIBLE RAMP TO MAKE IT SAFER FOR RESIDENTS TO ENTER THE BUILDING.

State of Wisconsin
MERIT AWARD SUGGESTION
MAB-14 (Rev. 8/77)

Any state employe (LTE, part time, fulltime, classified, unclassified) can get recognition for his/her suggestions for improvement in any area of state government operations as long as the ideas are not considered a part of the regular work assignment.

Submit your idea on this form to the Merit Award Chairperson of your agency to receive a cash award or a certificate of commendation in recognition of your ingenuity. If you do not know the name of your chairperson, contact your Personnel Officer. If you do not want your name known, for information on how to proceed contact the Merit Award Coordinator at (608) 266-2164.

Agency No.

MAB No.

Name and Work Address of Suggester (Print or Type): DONA J. PETERSON, [illegible] Box 340 Chippewa Falls, NWCDD	Department: DHSS
	Division, Institution or Employing Unit: NWCDD
Civil Service Title: RN 3	Name and Work Address of Supervisor: Gerald O'Neill [illegible] Chippewa Falls

State Problem — If more space is needed, use reverse side or attach separate sheet.

Seizure clients receive injuries to head, face during seizure activity. The helmets presently stocked at General Store are soft shell helmets that do not fit well, are very warm, have poor chin guards and are not attractive in appearance.

Solution — attach drawings, charts, etc., if needed

Suggest stock be replaced with adapta-helmet from Danmar Products, Inc. 2390 Winewood, Ann Arbor, Mi. 48[illegible] Catalogs with this product described, and a picture of the same available at purchasing, Highview.

Advantages of Change — describe dollar savings if known, as well as improvements pertaining to safety, morale, service to state or public, conditions for patients, or improvements or increases in productivity.

Better protection due to better adjustment capability for proper fit of helmet and chinguard. Better ventilation, cooler, attractive, more acceptable design. One size - adjusts to fit all. A helmet of this kind purchased for Laurie [illegible]

THE USE BY THE STATE OF WISCONSIN OF MY SUGGESTION SHALL NOT FORM THE BASIS OF A CLAIM AGAINST THE STATE OF WISCONSIN BY ME, MY HEIRS OR ASSIGNS.

Suggester's Signature	Date	Business Phone — Area Code & Number	Social Security Number
Dona Peterson R.N.	7/1/90	715-723-5542 Ext. [illegible]	397-24-88[illegible]6

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Sent for evaluation to	Date	Committee Recommendation	Date	MAB Action	Date
		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award—$		☐ Reject ☐ Certificate ☐ Award—$	

THIS SUBMISSION DETAILED DONA PETERSON'S IDEA TO IMPROVE HELMETS WORN BY RESIDENTS WITH EPILEPSY. SHE ARGUED THAT THE CURRENT DESIGN STILL HARMED RESIDENTS HEAVILY WHILE HAVING SEIZURES AND THAT THE PADDING NEEDED TO BE IMPROVED.

October 31, 1994
578 Vance Road
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Barbara Sandholm
Director; Northern Wisconsin Center
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Dear Mrs. Sandholm,

I have submitted my application for retirement from Wisconsin State Service as a Nurse Clinician. My last day on duty will be January 6, 1995.

I have applied to be a volunteer to help the receptionist at Crestview at least one morning a week when I am retired.

Sincerely

Dona J. Peterson NC 2

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