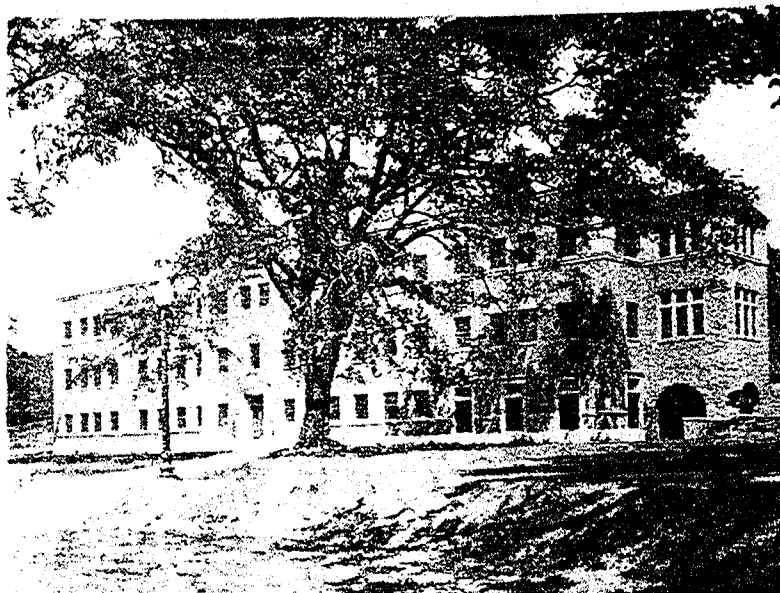


"TO CORRECT AND REMOVE THOSE EVIL TENDANCIES": WISCONSIN REFORMERS AND

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF THE *WISCONSIN INDUSTRIAL HOME FOR WOMEN*



Industrial Home for Women—Taycheedah, Wis.

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The photo on the cover page was taken from Odegard and Keith's A History of the State Board of Control of Wisconsin and the State Institutions: 1849-1939. Madison, WI.: State Board of Control, 1939, 228.

## TO THE READER

**Prison.** The word brings to mind images of imposing concrete fortresses, barred windows and barbed wire fencing. Surrounding this desolate looking structure is barren, parched land against a backdrop of somber gray skies. Echoing hollow corridors lined with society's delinquents in striped uniforms, and solemn-faced guards defending solid steel gates, are its only signs of life.

At any given moment in history, one may examine a penal system and find reflected in its architecture a society's morals, values, and beliefs. Within the United States, research into the history of the American penal system has been quite extensive, and volumes may be found on the topic in any local or school library. One topic within penology, however, which has not been adequately addressed, and which is only now coming to the forefront in penal studies, is the relationship between women and prison.

Until recently, research in Wisconsin on the relationship between women and the state's penal system was almost nonexistent. Most researchers concentrated upon the history of men in Wisconsin and their relationship to Wisconsin's penal system. Then, quite suddenly, several researchers became all excited about women in Wisconsin prisons. There is much to be learned from the research and interest in the relationship between women and prisons in Wisconsin--such as Wisconsin's attitudes toward female delinquents over the years. Therefore, an examination of one penal institution in Wisconsin, the *Wisconsin Industrial*

*Home for Women*, which was in operation from 1921 to 1945, illustrates Wisconsin's attitudes toward female delinquents during the twentieth century.

Initially, then, this paper will review the Progressive Movement and its sub-movements in order to explain the social ideology concerning the "undesirables of society" of both the nation and Wisconsin during the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Next, I intend to argue that a sub-movement of Progressivism, the *Prison Reform Movement*, gave rise to the *Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women*, and that this home was fundamentally different from the model it was based on because of Wisconsin's preoccupation with the testing and curing of venereal diseases. This difference would create a medical rather than social institution. Also, I intend to argue that there are at least four possible reasons as to why the *Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women* fell into disuse in 1945. Finally, I intend to show that, although the *Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women* existed for a brief twenty-four years, it significantly influenced—under the leadership of Mrs. Marcia Simpson—Wisconsin's prison for women.

## ***Progressivism in America and Wisconsin***

The Progressive Movement, roughly spanning the years from the turn of the century to the mid-1900s, was a time of great reform, spanning several different aspects of American life. In order to understand why the *Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women* became a reality in 1921, we need to review the elements of Progressivism, the entrance of Progressivism into Wisconsin politics, and the sub-movements within Progressivism. From there, an examination can proceed of one aspect of life that was undergoing a transformation: female life within prison.

What then, was the Progressive Movement? As Noble sees it:

The Progressive movement was a great social reaction against the preceding age...compounded of moral, political, economic, and intellectual revolts, it was not restricted to one party but ran through the entire gamut of political organizations. Nor was it a product of a single economic class. Farmers and laborers were at its core, but they were soon joined by multitudes from the white collar and small business classes and even by some of the very rich.... (3)

Nicole Rafter, another historian, added to Noble's ideas about the American farmers, laborers, and white and blue collar workers being at the "core" of American Progressivism. Rafter believed that the Progressive Movement emerged to tackle such other problems as corruption within local, state, and federal governments, prison conditions, woman's suffrage, public health, and the conditions of slum neighborhoods (53).

From historian Estelle Freedman's perspective, the Progressive Movement was a movement which hoped, through the process of social reform, to "uplift" America from its fallen morals and values (146).

As Progressivism swept across the nation, it affected each state somewhat differently. The financial depression in Wisconsin, during 1893-1897, heralded the beginning of Progressivism in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's conservative banking strategy, attempting to "fill the need for capital in the state's rapidly expanding economy," collapsed in 1893 (Thelen 57). As economists, politicians, and bankers attempted to revive the economy, they discovered grave problems within the industrial and social structures of Wisconsin. In order to correct these problems, Wisconsin's citizens turned to Progressivism and its reforms in the hope of bridging the gap between Wisconsin's rich and poor populations and in the hope of eradicating economic, political, and social problems. In effect, Wisconsin's first generation of reformers was born.

The Wisconsin reformers born of this depression decided to tackle Wisconsin's gap between the rich and the poor, along with other social ills they perceived through the use of "civic consciousness" (Thelen 71). Because the depression caused many people to become destitute or financially "strapped," they were forced into closer contact with classes of people who had been financially burdened before the depression. Such contacts "led them to emerge from the comfort of their homes, values, associations, and traditions, and to modify their class assumptions" (Thelen 89). One result of this was a blossoming of women's groups, such as Superior's East End Women's Relief Corps, Madison's

Benevolent Society, Milwaukee's West Side Catholic Relief Corps, and the Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association (Thelen 89). Thelen also claims that, in 1893, thirty-seven of sixty-nine women's clubs were formed (89).

Because Wisconsin had the beginnings of a reform movement, reformers needed to learn how to promote their new ideas and how to get those new ideas accepted and acted upon. Thelen believes that these would-be reformers soon discovered that the Wisconsin legislature held the key to their success. They also discovered that it was *one* thing to arouse ferment over a local problem, and it was *quite another* to arouse ferment over broader issues that involved the state as a whole. Finally, the would-be reformers learned that the legislature met for very brief and intense periods: if reforms were to be passed, the reformers would have to campaign vigorously prior to and during the meeting of the State Assembly and State Senate (Thelen 156).

Entwined with the Progressive Movement was a series of other sub-movements which, to varying degrees, influenced Progressivism. These included the *Social Purity Movement*, the *Eugenics Movement*, the *Defective-Delinquent Movement*, and the *Prison Reform Movement*, or *New Penology Movement* (Rafter 46, 67, 69, 61; Freedman 110). I intend to show how each of these movements, in some way, contributed to the way in which Wisconsin reformers perceived the purpose of the women's reformatory.

The *Social Purity Movement* as defined by Nicole Rafter, was a "national campaign to clean out saloons, stamp out vice, raise standards of sexual morality, and strengthen the American home" (46-47). Rafter claims that this movement

began with the idea of eradicating prostitution, and ballooned into a movement "supporting temperance, moral education, sex education, and municipal government reform, and opposing gambling, immoral literature, and venereal disease" (47). This movement, with its emphasis on sex education and venereal disease, had a direct bearing on Wisconsin's Progressive Reforms. Its influence was first felt in 1913 when Wisconsin's legislature began passing laws that dealt with the eradication of venereal disease for the general public. Later, in 1919, the movement's ideas were applied through the medical reformation of female prisoners in the *WIHW*. It should be noted that, although Wisconsin was very involved in eradicating prostitution and venereal diseases, the Social Purity Movement was not overly strong in Wisconsin when it came to temperance: Wisconsin, except for the White Ribbon League, was generally anti-prohibition.

The *Eugenics Movement*, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, negatively influenced the treatment of female prisoners. Eugenics is the belief that lower classes and minorities are inherently inferior (Rafter 47). The feeling was that low class and race predisposed most women to "feeble-mindedness" and therefore resulted in criminal tendencies (Rafter 54). Once identified, the state would remove them from society so they could no longer propagate (Rafter 54). This belief led to a feeling of separation and isolation between matrons and prisoners of the late 1800s, because the matrons felt that these fallen women were below their class and that reform measures would not help them (Rafter 67). However, by the early 1900s, Eugenics began to fall into disfavor as social scientists sought to prove the

correctness of the Defective-Delinquent Movement

The *Defective-Delinquent Movement*, strong in the eastern portions of America, had as its fundamental belief the idea that women who were criminals committed their crimes because of mental deficiencies. This differed from Eugenics because, in this case, social class had no bearing on which women were mentally deficient. This belief, supported by many categories of scientists using various classification and mental testing devices (which were for the most part not proven to be effective or were geared, as Alfred Binet's intelligence test was, to people other than prisoners), led the public into believing that criminality was caused by a defective mind because "large numbers of lawbreakers were mentally subnormal," according to the testing devices (Rafter 68, 69). This movement emerged in Wisconsin, when the state legislature made provisions for a psychological testing ward at the *MHHW*, in 1919, for the purpose of learning the cause of criminality in women. The defective-delinquent ideology did not begin to disappear until the mid 1920s, when women researchers such as Frances Keller, Bedford Hills' employees, and Mary Conyington proposed other theories as to the origins of female criminality.

Finally, there is the sub-movement of *Prison Reform*. Its effect on America was immense and created the reformatory, which led to changes in types of offenses for which prisoners could be sentenced, and led to totally different matron and prisoner populations. This, however, will be covered in the following chapter.

The Progressive Movement was a movement which was made up of many factors: reactions against social, economic, and

political problems such as prostitution, alcohol consumption, vagrancy, venereal disease, and depression, and abuses by local, state, and federal governments due to industrialization. This movement swept the nation, and passed over Wisconsin in 1893, giving rise to Wisconsin reformers and Wisconsin's own application of Progressivism. I have shown that a variety of other sub-movements within the Progressive Movement influenced Wisconsin's eventual construction of the *MIHM*: the Social Purity Movement, the Eugenics Movement, and the Defective-Delinquent Movement. In the following chapter, I will examine the effects of Prison Reform on the United States from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

## ***The Prison Reform Movement: Influencing American Penology***

In the late 1800s, a "comprehensive reform movement was set in motion, one that in time challenged nearly every assumption of the penitentiary tradition" (Rafter 23). As a result of this movement, a new type of penal institution for women was created that was strikingly different from a prison: the women's reformatory. Whereas a prison was a "fortress-like institution designed to subject prisoners to total control...[and]...separated convicts into individual cells [where] speech and even eye contact were forbidden," a reformatory was an institution built to take first-time offenders and rehabilitate them so that they could return to society as responsible citizens (Rafter 3). As Rafter states:

The heart of the women's reformatory model lay in its assumptions about commitment. The nineteenth-century northeastern reformatories developed commitment policies that differed greatly from earlier prison practice. They extended the power of state punishment to a population of offenders who previously had been sent to local jails, if incarcerated at all. They instituted indeterminate sentencing schemes that made it possible for states to imprison female misdemeanants and even lesser offenders for periods of years, and they created a category of female state prisoners that had no male counterpart. (35)

Rafter, then, tells us that reformatories in the nineteenth century changed their commitment policies from those associated with prisons, and this had three major implications. First, the reformatory was initially created for women misdemeanants only. Although there were men who

committed some of the same misdemeanor crimes as the reformatory women, they were not allowed to be incarcerated within a reformatory setting; rather, they were sent to a prison for male felons (Rafter 35). Second, pregnancy, adultery, and infectious venereal diseases became offenses for which women could be incarcerated. The reformatory also initiated the indeterminate sentence, allowing the state to incarcerate women for an unspecified time period, usually not less than one year and no longer than five years. Finally, the reformatory accepted women who normally had spent time in county jails or who had never before been arrested--this was because the reformatory allowed state governments to create new categories of crimes for which women could be sentenced. Therefore, the women who were sent to the reformatory were in a prisoner category all by themselves.

Michigan, under the direction of Mr. Brockley and Emma Hall, added a separate section to their women's prison in the late 1860s and created the "prototype of the women's reformatory" (Rafter 24). Named the *House of Shelter*, it created America's first indeterminate sentence--whereby women could be held indefinitely up to three years (Rafter 24). Not long after the Michigan reformatory opened, "the country's leading penologists gathered in Cincinnati for a historic convention at which they established the ideological platform on which the reformatory movement would be built" (Rafter 24). These penologists created within the broader *Prison Reform Movement*, a sub-movement to create the women's reformatory. Its philosophy was the "rehabilitation or treatment" of women rather than the punishment of prisoners

(Rafter 28). Many of its rehabilitation practices were modeled after "a system of incentives and rewards pioneered in Ireland at mid-century" (Rafter 28). When the House of Shelter closed in 1874, it left behind a basis upon which reformers on the eastern seaboard could model their own reformatories.

Although reformers first attempted to build reformatories in the Midwestern states, the "thrust of the movement shifted eastward" (Rafter 33). One of the first reformatories was built in Albion, New York in 1893, and was called the *House of Refuge for Women* (See Figure 1 for location). Although it was the model reformatory for nineteenth century reformers, twentieth century reformers would look for leadership to the women's [reformatory] at Bedford, New York" (Rafter 235n).

The nineteenth century reformers were women and men, led by people such as Mr. Brockley and Emma Hall in Michigan, and Katherine Davis in New York, who were "educated and experienced, confident of their professional ability to run an institution" (Rafter 65). Their roots in reform were grounded in "volunteer work... with a strong sense of religious obligation," believed in social feminism, "with its strict demarcation of men's and women's spheres," and kept their distance from prisoners, who were beneath their own social class (Rafter 65). Most came from the social middle-class, and were not bothered by women's secondary role in society at that time. An impact of this belief in separate gender spheres was their "faith in the intrinsically moral, nurturing, and domestic nature of woman...[which] predisposed them to feminize the architecture and routines of

COUNTY MAP FOR THE STATE OF NEW YORK

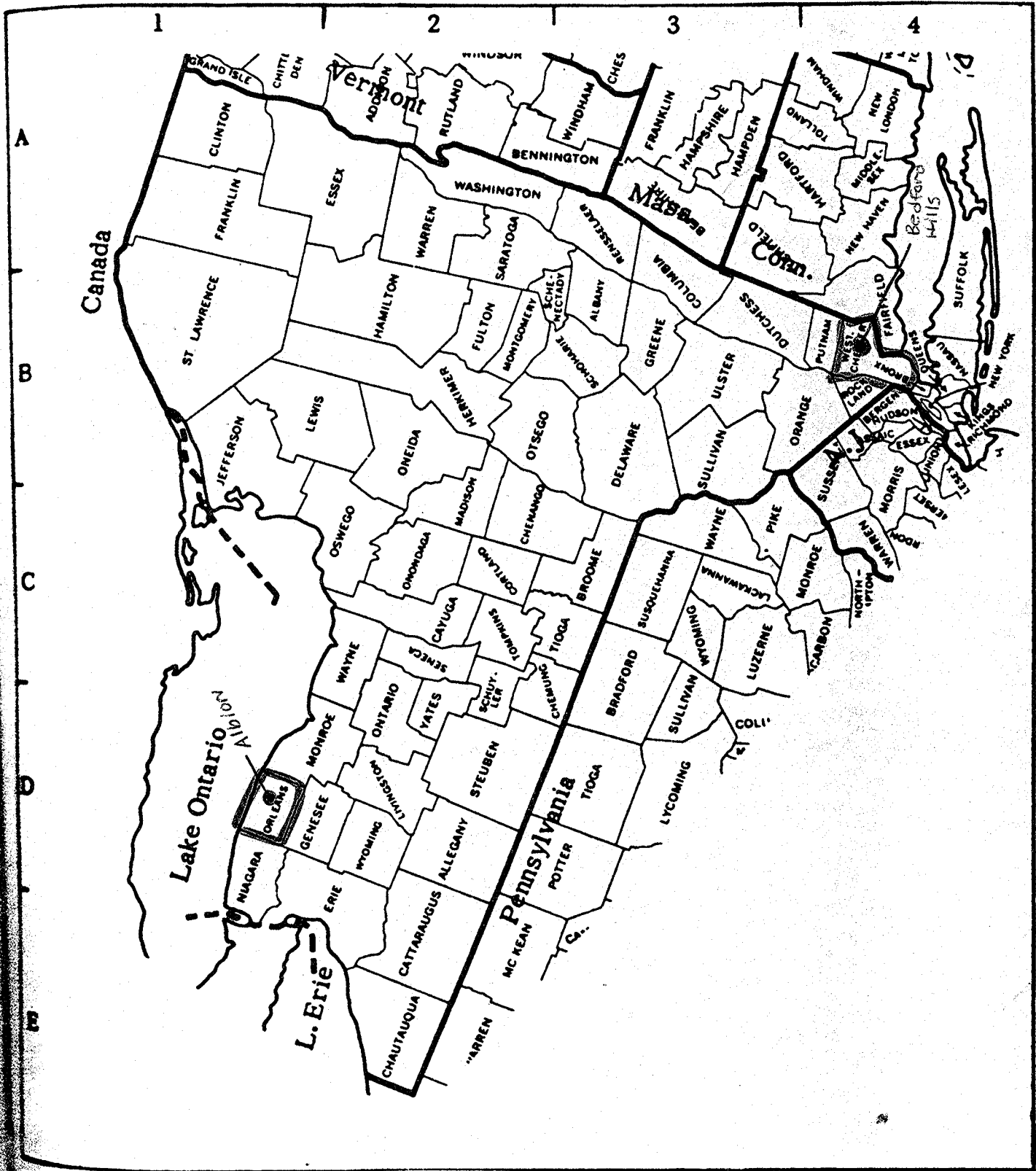


Fig. 1. Map of New York state illustrating the locations of both Albion and the Bedford Hills reformatories, in George Everton's The Handy Book for Genealogists, Logan, Utah: Everton Publishing, Inc., 1981, 207.

institutions that they brought under their control" (Rafter 46). One special note of interest is that nineteenth century reformers still called women within the reformatory "prisoners," despite the fact that they were not kept in a prison and were not just being "punished."

Within nineteenth century reformers, there were three distinguishable groups of people who promoted the reformatory: the women who became the matrons and superintendents, women and men on "prison and welfare boards," and individuals in organizations who promoted the reformatory to state government bodies (Rafter 41). With their influence, reformatories such as Albion's House of Refuge for Women were built.

What then, was Albion, New York's House of Refuge like? As a reformatory, its construction and formation came under the leadership of Katherine Davis. She instituted a policy whereby only women who had committed petit larceny, "habitual drunkenness, and prostitution," were allowed as inmates (Rafter 36). It contained a maternity ward so that inmates who gave birth could keep their children with them for a brief period of time—usually up to three months before the children were taken to the women's family or were put up for adoption—and attempted to create grounds covered with flowers and trees for a relaxed atmosphere. As Rafter goes on to explain:

Records of the Albion reformatory indicate that in terms of social control, the institution served two primary functions: sexual and vocational regulation. It attempted the first by training 'loose' young women to accept a standard of propriety that dictated chastity until marriage and fidelity thereafter. It tried to achieve the second by training charges in homemaking, a competency they were to utilize either as dutiful daughters or wives.... If incarceration and training [in Albion] did not teach the prisoner to reform, the reformatory employed another means: parole revocation. (159,161)

Therefore, as a reformatory during the nineteenth century, Albion attempted to reform incarcerated women into socially acceptable women in society by teaching them about proper sexual behavior before and during marriage, as well as by teaching them the idea of social feminism's sphere of work. Matrons and superintendents perceived that their own lifestyle was the most correct way for women during that time period to live, and that is how they instructed their charges.

Albion and other nineteenth century reformatories became noted for their lack of supervision and discipline, as well as their increased interest in aesthetics and the total care of the woman—physically, mentally, and socially. Unfortunately, one aspect of society that reformers did not attempt to change was racism. Reformatories generally excluded black women from their institutions. Rafter states that this practice occurred because of the eugenics influence: reformers viewed non-caucasian women as being of a lower class, as inferior, and as unworthy of and unresponsive to reform (37).

As the twentieth century dawned, the reformatory continued to evolve into an institution which contrasted with nineteenth century prisons. Much of this occurred because the types of people who became reformers changed. Reformers of this century were more "flexible" about the roles that women could handle, and left social feminism behind, believing that women could and should handle many of the same jobs as men. Estelle Freedman believes that this change came about because the reform movement of the nineteenth century

had "stagnated" (109). Along with Rafter, Freedman believes that the reformers of the twentieth century were increasingly better educated, of the middle to upper-middle class, and were venturing out into the work force (109). They were more often than not "single, divorced, or separated. Like their generation as a whole, those who did marry had fewer children..., they were highly educated... [and] actively supported the suffrage movement" (Freedman 110). Rafter even goes so far as to say that the twentieth century reformers were "more apt to adopt mannish clothing and hair styles and to enter previously restricted areas of activity" (65).

Religion now became less of a motive to reform women, as reformers turned to the "more important" task of protecting society from the ills of fallen women as well as protecting the fallen women from themselves. Through reform methods, fallen women would regain the social values and morals of the twentieth century, middle-class, reformers and would then be accepted back into society. As Freedman and Rafter agree, the reformer's education in law, medicine, and the social sciences caused them to view their female inmates more analytically (Freedman 110; Rafter 66). This extended training changed their perspective on the inmates. In order to rid the inmates and themselves of the "prisoner" stigma, they called their inmates "clients" rather than "prisoners" (Rafter 66)

How, then, did twentieth century reformers change the reformatory? As Freedman states, "they instituted preventive social services, probation, and specialized courts for juveniles and women. To inform their work, many [reformers] called for scientific investigations of the causes of crime"

(110). Freedman emphasizes, however, that this second generation of reformers did not accept "their predecessor's sexual ideology or penal methods" (109). Debates ensued over whether or not crime was hereditary or environmentally influenced, and "criminal anthropologists carefully measured prisoners' bodies, psychologists tested mental skills, and sociologists studied criminals' backgrounds" in an attempt to pinpoint the reason women fell into criminal behavior (Freedman 110). And, adds Rafter, prisons and reformatories began to set up clinics to "classify offenders scientifically" (67).

A special phenomena of twentieth century reform was the sudden boom of interest in venereal diseases and the use of medicine in penal institutions. Much of the sudden fear caused by venereal diseases can be attributed to the "white slave trade" (Brandt 33). Commissions in the early nineteen hundreds "examined the reasons why women became prostitutes. Some suggested that they were either enticed or forced into commercialized prostitution through... 'white slave trade'...." (Brandt 33). They believed that prostitution conformed to "victorian notions of feminine purity which held that no woman would enter such a life except under bondage" (33). In order to save women from falling or reform women who fell into a life of disease and degradation, reformers attempted to instill programs within reformatories that would convince women that prostitution was wrong. These programs also administered venereal disease tests, such as the Wasserman (geared to detecting syphilis), and attempted to treat the women afflicted with venereal diseases. However, says Rothman:

Some specialized to such an extent that venereal disease cases and their cure became the center of institutional life. The reformatories of Kansas [the *State Industrial Farm for Women*, 1917], Nebraska [the *State Reformatory for Women*, 1920], and Wisconsin, in particular [the *Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women*, 1921], concentrated on the care of the venereally diseased. One Wisconsin report observed that prisoners often arrived with impaired health, 'brought on principally by their own indiscreet, immoral actions,' and vaginal examinations constituted not only the main form of that reformatory's admission tests but also, apparently, a regular part of the institutional program. (49-50)

Such specialization in the testing and curing of venereal diseases by certain reformatories caused them to be seen as and evolve into medical model reformatories. They, unlike most other reformatories, which emphasized social reform, emphasized medicine and its application to prisoners.

Thus, the emerging medical model pressured reformatories to establish various committees that would spend their time examining, studying, and classifying women prisoners, testing and measuring their mental abilities (Rafter 68). Although today there is an understanding that Alfred Binet's intelligence test is not a completely accurate test of intelligence, the reformers in the early 1900s enthusiastically applied the test to all types of female prisoners. As stated by Rafter:

Not surprisingly, in view of the primitive nature of the tests and the slipshod methods with which they were administered, groups proved to be feeble-minded. Reports of their findings flooded the professional and popular literary markets just after 1910, persuading the public of the scientific accuracy of the defective-delinquency theory. (68)

Therefore, as medical model reformatories tested women, their often inaccurate results caused the general public to believe

that all women who committed a crime did so because they were mentally deficient.

After the 1920s, the interest in the *Defective-Delinquency Movement* began to dissipate. This was due, in large part, to three studies done by female researchers. One study, headed by Frances Keller, supported the environment-criminal theory by attacking Cesare Lombroso's "concept of the physiological criminal type" (Freedman 111). Keller believed that women became criminals solely because of the environments which they grew up in as children. Between 1910-1920, women in New York's Bedford Hills "grappled with the relationship of mental ability to crime," which pointed to a person's hereditary background as the source for criminal behavior (Freedman 111). Their quantitative analysis studies, conducted between 1910-1920, purported an "economic interpretation of crime" (Freedman, 111), which showed that women who came from poorer means were forced into criminal actions in order to sustain themselves. Finally, Mary Conyington, after finishing her studies in female criminology, supported a compromise thesis by suggesting that "hereditary handicaps, lack of early training and poor environment" made women become criminals (Freedman 122).

Thus, between the late 1800s and the 1920s, Prison Reform made great advances in creating a radically different penal institution for women. These changes were brought about by two generations of reformers--the late nineteenth century reformers who modeled their reformatory after the Albion model, and the early to mid-twentieth century reformers, who modeled their reformatory after the Bedford model. Both generations had different goals and personal backgrounds.

Hence, the twentieth century reformatory was a product of the nineteenth century reformatory as well as several different movements. These movements include the Progressive Movement, with its ideas of general reform of society, the Social Purity Movement, with its hope of reforming the vices of America, the Eugenics Movement, with its attempts at classifying women as criminals because of their social class and race, and the Defective-Delinquent Movement, with its ideas about women being predisposed to crime because of feeble-mindedness.

Therefore, the second generation of Wisconsin reformers in 1913 pushed strongly for and succeeded in achieving legislative approval to build a women's reformatory--based not on the Albion model but on the Bedford model. Over time, however, the *WIHW* became a reformatory that specialized in the medical reform of women, not in Bedford's social reform of women. Who were the key people behind the push for the passage of the Wisconsin reformatory? Why did they feel it was necessary for Wisconsin to have such an institution? What was the reaction of the Wisconsin government to such a proposal? What types of women were incarcerated within its walls? More importantly, why did Wisconsin's reformatory deviate from the Bedford model after which it was initially designed and pursue such a fastidious course in the testing and curing of venereal disease? In effect, how did social change bring about the creation of a new penal institution and population in Wisconsin? The answers to these questions will lead to a better understanding of what the Wisconsin reformatory was all about.

### ***A Bill to Establish a Home***

As early as 1911, reformers in Wisconsin pushed the Wisconsin legislature to pass a bill that would allow for the creation of a reformatory for women. Mrs. Katherine Van Wyck reported to the *Conference on Social Legislation* on October 8, 1912, that statistics, county arrest records, and laws in Wisconsin and other states concerning the imprisonment of women were submitted to the Wisconsin state legislature in 1911. These statistics were collected by "writing either to the sheriffs or the women's clubs of the various towns of the state, asking for information as to the number of women arrested and confined or otherwise disposed of..." (Van Wyck 94). According to Van Wyck, the statistics showed a marked increase in the number of women being arrested from 1910 to 1911 (94). Specifically, Van Wyck discussed statistics from three anonymous counties—she noted an increase in women arrested from 15 to 88 in the first county, 5 to 10 in the second county, and 10 to 55 the third county (94). By giving these statistics to the legislature, Van Wyck hoped to illustrate Wisconsin's need for a reformatory for women because the incidence of female criminality was on the rise. The legislature, according to one observer, however, claimed that such a bill could not be passed because it was "very crude;...very hastily drawn" (Van Wyck 96). As a result of such attitudes in the legislature of 1911, the bill to create the reformatory was voted down.

With this failure, the *Central Council of Philanthropies* in Wisconsin sent off a visiting delegation to America's model reformatory in 1912: Bedford Hills, New York (See Figure 1). Their job was to examine its physical structure, as well as the types of inmates who were there, how they dressed, what they did, what type of sentences were used to incarcerate them, and so on. Katherine R. Williams, a Wisconsinite, on that trip; she later spoke to the *Committee on Social Legislation* and argued that Wisconsin needed a reformatory because of the statistics presented by Van Wyck. Williams contended that there was a female population in Wisconsin capable of being reformed, because other reformatories--such as those in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Indiana--were successful (Williams 99, 102). Williams continued by describing the facilities at Bedford to members of the *Committee on Social Legislation* in this manner:

The group of buildings, lying in and about the foot of the Bedford Hills, resemble somewhat the ordinary college campus and unless one looks sharply there is nothing suggestive of confinement or restraint of liberty. No wall surrounds the site..., the lawns, and flower beds suggest wholesome exercise and plenty of outdoor occupation. The cottage group plan has been followed in developing this institution.... Each of these cottages is designed to give a home atmosphere and to be a training school in the different departments of home activities.... Two cottages stand out from the rest. In one, the maternity cottage, are those unfortunate women, whose maternity has been the reason for their being sent to Bedford. Here they care for their babies under the influences of the home life.... The other cottage...is the honor cottage. The women here have established records of highest achievement in the work of the school....

The school work is very practical and based on the every day life of the pupils....Care is taken to build up the physical system. Gymnasium work is a part of the school tasks...[and] work on the farm, in the garden, laying out of recreation grounds,... gives outdoor employment....

There is nothing suggestive of prison uniforms worn by the women. They wear dresses made of material closely resembling...nurses' gowns. The management is carried

on almost entirely by women and the work is done almost exclusively by women. (199-102)

Her description of the Bedford Hills reformatory indicates that clients lived in a fairly free, open, and homey environment. The physical and mental well-being of the clients was to be stressed, and the "prisoner" mentality was to be de-emphasized, especially because they did not have to live within barred rooms or dress in prison garb. Evidently, because it was a women's institution, women managed and ran the reformatory. This would allow those in supervising positions to be more sensitive to the needs of the clients.

Ralph E. Smith, Chairman of the conference and member of the State Board of Control in 1912, had this to say about the possibility of a reformatory in Wisconsin on October 8, 1912:

I think that Wisconsin justly lays claim to being a progressive state, progressive in more ways than one. But, progressive as Wisconsin is, I doubt if there is anyone in Wisconsin that can tell the Board of Control or can tell any court in the state what to do and do properly with a delinquent woman.... At the last session of the legislature, a bill making provision for a woman's reformatory failed of passage... and the reason why provision was not made for a woman's reformatory was not because they didn't want it, but because of the demands upon the state treasury. (Van Wyck 92-93)

Smith's statement indicates that he and possibly other members of the Wisconsin State Board of Control resented the idea that reformers felt their failure to pass the first reformatory bill in 1911 meant that they were unprogressive in spirit—hence, his speech attempted to justify the legislature's voting action by stating that there were no funds available.

Finally, Katherine Van Wyck rose to speak at the *Committee on Social Legislation* in favor of the building of a reformatory. Mrs. Van Wyck was originally from Kenosha, and, after marrying Howard Van Wyck on January 24, 1882, became increasingly active in social welfare (Simonsen 1). She served as General Secretary of the Central Council of Social Agencies in Milwaukee, and, after she moved to Los Angeles in 1923, became a director of social welfare (Woehrmann 1). Aside from her statistical report, she stated that, as of 1912 in Wisconsin, there were no institutions or provisions made for first-time female offenders over the age of eighteen except for the cramped and crowded facilities at the Wisconsin State Prison in Waupun, which was technically supposed to be a facility that only held male inmates (93). Apparently, because there was no other place to incarcerate felonious women, they had to be kept at Waupun. Van Wyck continued by saying that Wisconsin also needed a reformatory to aid sheriffs who were not arresting female criminals because they knew they did not have adequate facilities to contain them in (95). In conclusion, Van Wyck also pointed out that female criminals were a danger to decent Wisconsin families "physically and morally" (96).

Ultimately, Van Wyck hoped that the reformatory would be used to incarcerate first-time offenders, to reform instead of punish, and to protect society from all female offenders. The reformatory would utilize the indeterminate sentence, which allowed the court to place women in custody for an indeterminate length of time—not less than one year and not more than five years (94-96).

Although Van Wyck and Katherine Williams presented their

views very clearly on why the reformatory was necessary, they failed to mention in their speeches a key point. Although the 1911 Wisconsin legislature did not pass a bill allowing for the reformatory's construction, it *did* pass a bill which allowed the State Board of Control to do the following action:

To secure options for the purchase of sites, suitable for the purpose of erecting and establishing thereon a reformatory, to which certain female offenders may be committed or sentenced for their protection and reformation, and the said board is further authorized... to investigate... the probable cost of establishing and equipping such an institution....

(Wisconsin Session Laws, Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials, 1911, 749)

The bill, number 609, was passed unanimously on June 14, 1911, in the State Senate and unanimously on June 27, 1911, in the State Assembly (Wisconsin State Senate, 1911, 1000; Wisconsin State Assembly, 1911, 1552).

Therefore, although reformers in 1911 had apparently already attempted to secure legislative approval for the building of a reformatory, they had failed. This was what Ralph Smith was referring to when he stated that the legislature was not unprogressive—it simply did not have the money, in 1911, to build a reformatory. In an attempt to pacify reformers with some type of legislation for their reformatory, they granted the Board of Control the ability to go out and purchase land on which to build the reformatory. In effect, the legislature foreshadowed their eventual acceptance of a reformatory for women. Such an act by the legislature signaled to Van Wyck, and other reformers, that continued perseverance in their struggle would eventually

lead to the construction of a women's reformatory in Wisconsin.

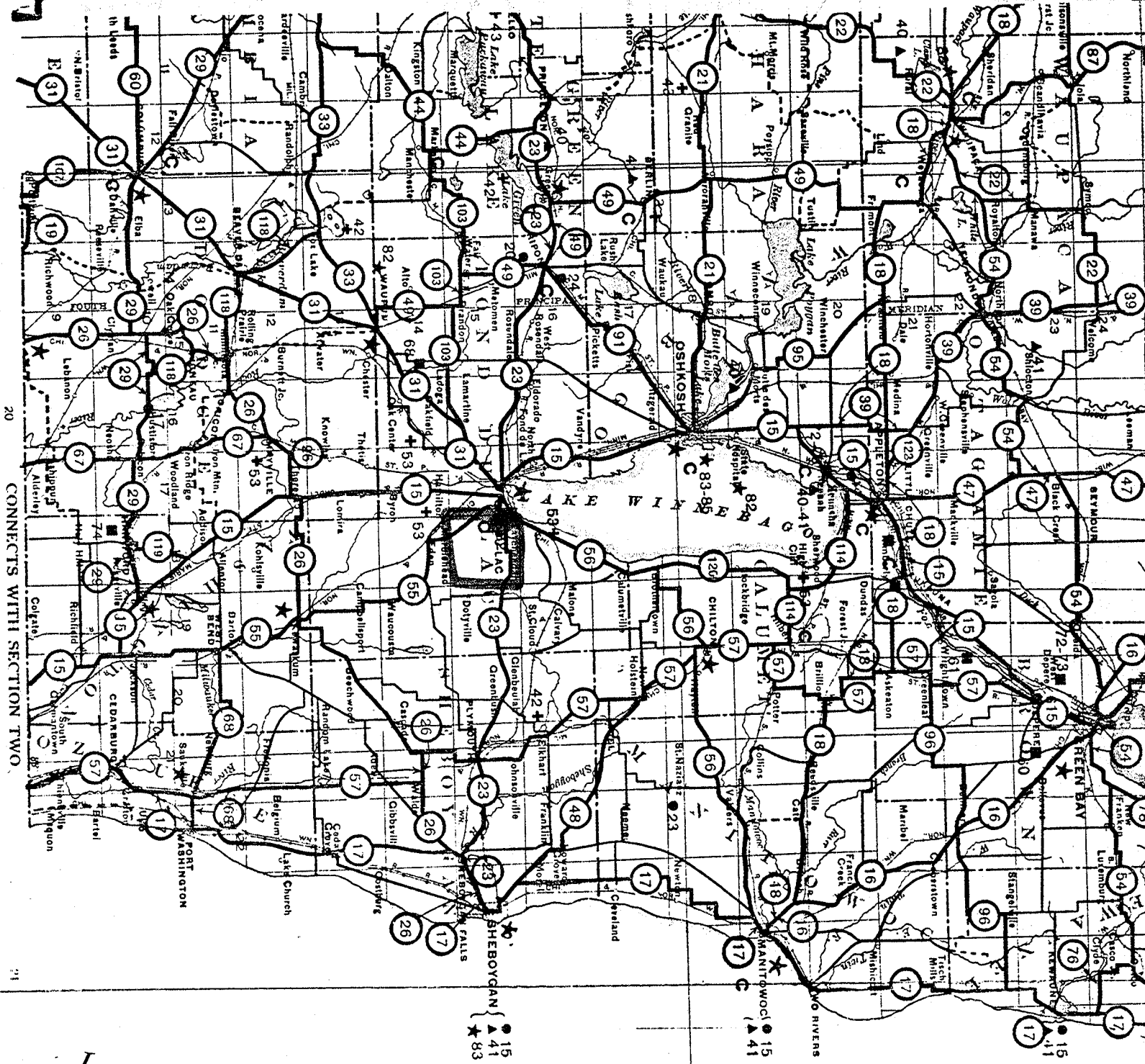
Between 1912 and before the legislature met again in 1913, the reformers busied themselves drumming up support for the reformatory. Meanwhile, the members of the State Board of Control began to comb Wisconsin for a site upon which to build a reformatory. In February, 1913, the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate received a report from the State Board of Control. After having "advertised for and secured options on" several possible sites for the reformatory, the Board of Control decided that the best possible site for the reformatory would be on a tract of land in Fond du Lac county (Wisconsin State Assembly, 1913, 250). The land, a total of 242 1/2 acres, was purchased for \$31,600.00 (Wisconsin State Assembly, 1913, 250). As described by the State Board of Control:

This tract is admirably located between three and four miles from the city of Fond du Lac, about onehalf [sic] mile from the village of Taycheedah and within a quarter of a mile of the Chicago & Northwestern railroad. Excellent building sites are afforded. Building material for stone and concrete work is abundant. The soil for agricultural purposes is very good. The tract is sufficiently large to accommodate the increase in growth of the institution and to prevent encroachment upon the institution by the location of houses and dwellings around its border. (Wisconsin State Assembly, 1913, 250-251)

After reading such a glowing report, the Wisconsin State Senate, on July 10, 1913, voted on the following bill, numbered 606: "a bill...to establish a home for the custody, protection, training and reformation of certain female offenders, and making an appropriation therefore..." (Wisconsin State Senate, 1913, 1135). The result was a



Figure 3. Highway map of eastern Wisconsin focusing on the Fond du Lac and Taycheedah area, in the Wisconsin Highway Commission's Wisconsin, Madison, WI.: 1921, 21.



L A K E M I C H I G A N

*Women*, and would attempt to reform women from the age of sixteen to thirty. The women had to belong to at least one of three categories of "criminals" and could not have committed murder "in the first, second, or third degree" (1012). "Class One" criminals included women convicted of first-time felonies; "Class Two" criminals included women convicted of misdemeanors; and "Class Three" criminals included women convicted of vagrancy, drunkenness, prostitution, and drug addiction (1012). The women sentenced could be released from their sentence by being paroled, discharged, or pardoned (1013).

Therefore, after failing to get the legislature to pass a bill to create the reformatory in 1911, reformers such as Katherine Van Wyck and Katherine Williams—through visits and inspections to Bedford Hills in New York, speeches to the Conference on Social Legislation, collections of statistics, and increased use of philanthropist and other organizations open to progressive reform—managed to gain passage of a bill in 1913 that created Wisconsin's first women's reformatory. In the following chapter, I will examine the way in which the *WIHM* was operated, the facilities of the *WIHM*, and the types of women incarcerated there.

## *She Has Such a Good Girl*

The *WIHW* was now a reality, although it did not open until Christmas Eve, 1921. What should people today know about the operation of the home and about the clients who "did time" there in order to better understand the reality of the home? Women were arrested and committed there for crimes that Wisconsin deemed worthy of rehabilitation. Was the reformatory worthy of the praise the Progressive reformers were so willing to give it?

The legislature gave authority to the State Board of Control to appoint a woman as the institution's superintendent. She would be allowed, with approval from the State Board of Control, to hire any employees needed to run the institution (Wisconsin Session Laws, Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials, 1913, 1014). Another important aspect of the reformatory was the State's ability to transfer women from other Wisconsin institutions to the reformatory.



Fig. 4. Inmate with child in unknown article, in the Wisconsin Home for Women Corrections Scrapbook, Series 1389, Reel #1, 1928-1951.

This provision was made for the girls and women who became pregnant in other institutions (the Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls and the Waupun State Prison) which did not have maternity wards. (See Figure 4). The ability to transfer was also to be used to lessen overcrowding in other facilities by removing women who would have been sent to the reformatory if it had been in existence at the time of their sentencing (1015-1016).

Whenever women entered the reformatory, personal information such as age, race, nationality, home county, occupation, parentage, marital status, and education status were to be recorded (Wisconsin Session Laws, Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials, 1913, 1015). These records can be found in duplicate in both the *Wisconsin Home for Women: Inmate Case History Books, 1921-1925* as well as in the *Wisconsin Home for Women--Records of Inmate, 1922-1927*. (See Appendix for Figures 14 and 15, 16 and 17.)

The WIHW's initial stages of construction and operation were like reformatories modeled after Bedford Hills. Inmates were to live in cottages--this was supposed to provide them with a homelike atmosphere and was to help them feel less like inmates (See Figure 5).



—Journal Staff

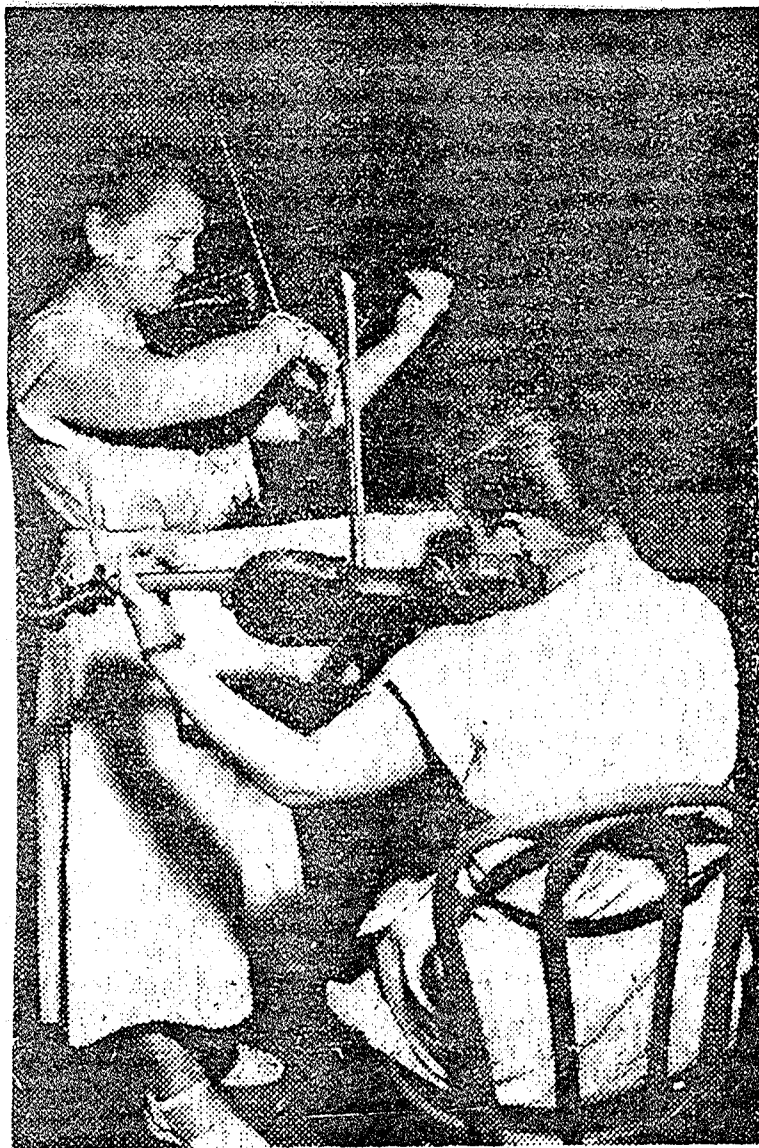
A typical room of an inmate at the Wisconsin home for women at Taycheedah, which has been made homelike, is shown.

Fig. 5. Wisconsin Home for Women, Corrections  
Scrapbooks, Series 1389, Reel #1, 1928-1951.

Many reformers hoped that their inmates would learn the arts of home decorating and upkeep by living in a more natural setting. A dairy, poultry, and general farm for the inmates to work was also provided, as well as flower and vegetable gardens. Inmates spent time learning to be gardeners, and much of what they planted and harvested was also prepared for meals by those inmates currently studying in the kitchen courses. Trades such as cooking and laundering were taught in the reformatory's own kitchen and laundry rooms with the hope of preparing the inmates for respectable female employment once they were returned to the outside world.

If these occupations did not interest the inmates, they

were more than welcome to study in the classroom in order to better their reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Music lessons were also available and many clients took up piano and string lessons (See Figure 6 below). Also, every effort



seems to have been made to accommodate the various religions of the inmates by having regular "Sunday...services conducted by the ministers of the leading churches in the nearest town" (365). Finally, a maternity ward, venereal testing ward, and psychological testing ward were present. This was an important aspect of reformatory life for Wisconsin inmates because the presence of such wards proclaimed the state's confidence in the *Defective-Delinquent Movement*.

Fig. 6. Women practicing their violins within the reformatory, Wisconsin Home for Women, Corrections Scrapbooks, Series 1389, Reel #1, 1928-1951.

Reformers hoped to scientifically determine, through a series of tests on the inmates, the cause of female criminality. (State Board of Control, 1924, 365-69).

The women who became inmates at the *WIHW*, based on the information recorded in the *Wisconsin Home for Women: Inmate Case History Books*, can be evaluated statistically. After examining the first five years of the home's existence, I studied the first 245 inmates. For each inmate, I recorded and coded the following information: age, nationality, race, home county, level of education, occupation, religion, marital status, number of illegitimate children, parental status, whether or not they were a carrier of a venereal disease, the year during which they were committed to the home, their offense, and the length of the sentence to serve, and their release record. (In order to see the percentages and frequencies for each table, refer to the tables numbered in the Appendix.)

In Table No. 1, I present information on the ages of the clients. It appears that most inmates (48 out of 245) were nineteen years of age. It should be noted, however, that the age range for clients extended from thirteen years old (pregnant girls transferred from the Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls for pregnancy) to 38 years old.

In Table No. 2, I have illustrated the nationalities of the clients. Although the nationalities range from native Americans to Scandinavian mixes of Norwegian and German, most women came from either an American background (51 out of 245) or a German background (54 out of 245).

In Table No. 3, I examined the racial statistics of each inmate. Not surprisingly, most of the inmates were caucasian

during its early years of operation (223 out of 245 clients). Although Wisconsin did not have a large Negroid population, early reformers, due to the Eugenics influence, had discounted most Negroes from reform measures. It also should be noted that 11 of the 245 inmates were Native Americans: why the Eugenics influence was not extended to them is not clear, but there were Indian reservations and this is where most of these women came from.

In Table No. 4, I present the counties from which the women came from prior to their arrest and sentencing to the *WIHW*. Because Brown, Dane, and Milwaukee Counties encompassed larger cities, with more numerous populations, it would make sense that a greater portion of the women sentenced to the reformatory would come from these three counties. And, in fact, that is exactly what the statistics show. Brown County accounted for 24 of the 245 women, Dane County accounted for 27 of the 245 women, and Milwaukee County accounted for 44 of the 245 women. All in all, 45 counties were represented at the *WIHW* during the first five years of its operation.

In Table No. 5, I examined the educational backgrounds of the women. Although their school experiences ranged from none to the completion of high school, most of the women had completed an eight grade education --65 out of 245 women.

In Table No. 6, information appears on the types of jobs the women held prior to their sentencing to the *WIHW*. Most reported that they had never held a job (117 out of 245 women); however, there were three top jobs that women worked in--factory worker (35 out of 245 women), household worker (28 of out 245 women), and waitress (19 out of 245 women).

Others, although there were fewer of them, held more skilled positions such as nurses, telephone operators, and secretaries. One would assume that the types of women who were incarcerated were more likely to be madames and prostitutes. This was not the case as the statistics show. Only 3 women out the 245 were reported to be madames, and only 8 were known prostitutes. A question arises then: if women who held respectable positions were being arrested more often than madames and prostitutes, what types of offenses were they committing and were they the types of offenses that could justifiably place women in a reformatory?

In Table No. 7, I present information on the religious backgrounds of the clients. Most state that they were raised with variants of the Catholic faith (2 were Roman Catholic, 90 were labeled as plain Catholics, and 1 was listed as Greek Catholic). After that, 52 of the women were reported to be Lutheran, and 37 were of the Methodist faith. From there, the religious backgrounds varied. Some were Baptists, Episcopalians, or Seventh Day Adventists, while others were Later Day Saints, Congregationalists, or Christian Science believers. Only 2 women stated they had no faith, and 13 of the women's religions were unrecorded.

In Table No. 8, the statistics illustrate the marital standing of the women upon entering the reformatory. Although 9 of the 245 women got married during their sentencing (often to bring about an early parole, since reformers believed marriage to be a steadying influence on a woman), most were single (144 of 245 women). The rest of the women were either divorced (16 of 245 women) or had husbands who had abandoned them (8 of 245 women) or who they

themselves had abandoned (8 of 245 women).

In Table No. 9, I examined the number of illegitimate children the inmates had upon entrance. Of the 245 women, 155 had had no illegitimate children, while 80 of the women admitted to having had at least one and 7 claimed they had had at least two. Only one woman claimed to have had 3 and another claimed to have had four. Therefore, most of these women were not mothers, although not bearing children is no indication of their sexual experiences.

In Table 10, I present information on the client's parental status. Surprisingly, most of the women (121 out of 245 women) came from a home where both parents were present. One would assume that women who were criminals might be more likely to come from broken homes--in this case, the majority did not. For 38 of the women, their mothers were deceased and for another 29 women, their fathers were deceased. It is possible that their home lives were not the most loving and supportive, and, for those without a parent or without both parents (21 women out of 245), it is possible they were without adequate parental guidance that might have kept them on "the straight and narrow."

In Table No. 11, I present information on the women's venereal disease status. Although Wisconsin tested each inmate upon entrance, throughout their stay, and prior to leaving, most were not inflicted with either syphilis or gonorrhoea. Of the 245 women present during the first five years the reformatory was in operation, 55 had a venereal disease--189 were "clean."

In Table No. 12, I examined the years during which the women were sentenced in order to discover the more active

years of sentencing. During 1921, only 4 inmates were admitted. This was due, however, to the fact that the reformatory was opened on Dec. 24, 1921, and was in operation less than a month during that year. In 1922, 53 inmates were admitted, while, in 1923, the number of inmates sentenced rose to 59. In 1924, the reformatory experienced its greatest influx of inmates during the first five years of its existence: 78. Finally, in 1925, the number of women sentenced to the reformatory fell to 50.

In Table No. 13, the types of offenses committed by the women appear. On the whole, women were most often arrested for committing what the reformers termed as "sexual offenses." Pregnancy (45 of 245 women), bearing a venereal disease (35 of 245 women), adultery (31 of 245 women), and fornication (23 of 245 women) account for more than half of the "crimes" committed by the women. It is at this point that we must ask ourselves: were the reformers, with their middle-class values, doing these women a service by incarcerating them for their intimate sexual behaviors? Was it moral to place a pregnant woman in the reformatory, even though a family member had raped her? Was it moral to look down upon women for sleeping with men who were not their husbands? Was it really any of the reformers' business to pry into the private sexual lives of Wisconsin women? It should be noted that husbands or parents of women, who believed that their wives or daughters were misbehaving sexually, could and did cause these women to be arrested and sent to the reformatory. How many of the women who were incarcerated for carrying a venereal disease contracted that disease from their own husbands, who may have been having