Chapter XV

MEETING THE PUBLIC WELFARE NEEDS OF POLK COUNTY

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As a preface to the report on Public Welfare work in Polk County, it is fitting to say that the State of Minnesota, has through its hundred years of history, been in the forefront among the states in its public welfare programs. Minnesota, as a state, has been one of the leaders in vocational rehabilitation in its penal and corrective institutions. Vocational guidance and rehabilitation have always been outstanding features of the training given in our state schools for the deaf, dumb, blind and other physically handicapped and in the Schools of Correction of youthful criminals. A significant step in progress in dealing with juvenile delinquency problems during the past decade has been the creation of the Youth Conservation Commission. This Commission is charged with the responsibility of rehabilitation of youthful offenders of the law, outside the walls of the State Institution. Another step in progress in public welfare has been the removal of all physical restraints in our State Mental Institutions and the adoption of modern methods of diagnosis and treatment of mental patients.

Dependent and neglected children were provided for by the building of a State Public School in 1885. A Children’s Code Commission was created which was responsible for several laws, pertaining to children, which were enacted by the 1917 session of the Minnesota Legislature.

Public relief needs, prior to 1932, were met by the communities and townships. In 1932, the relief needs were so great, during the depression, that the Federal Government made funds available for relief through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. These funds were disbursed in Minnesota through an emergency state organization. In 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created and a similar state organization was formed in Minnesota. Through this state organization, funds were distributed as direct relief or as work relief. The necessary staff of workers for the administration of the relief work was hired and paid from Federal funds. This staff in Polk County worked with the Board of County Commissioners and a Child Welfare Board. The Child Welfare Board worked with the welfare of children did not get authority to give funds.

The Minnesota Legislature, in 1937, passed one of the most important pieces of Welfare Legislation which created a County Welfare Board in each county of the state. The law charged these Boards with the duties of administering all forms of public assistance and welfare to both children and adults. These Boards were given also, responsibility for enforcement of all laws for the protection of defective, illegitimate, dependent, neglected and