

THE REFORM IMAGINATION:
GENDER, EUGENICS, AND THE WELFARE STATE IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1900-1940

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ABSTRACT

Anna L. Krome-Lukens: *The Reform Imagination: Gender, Eugenics, and the Welfare State in North Carolina, 1900-1940*
(Under the direction of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall)

This dissertation provides a grassroots social and intellectual history of how a modern social welfare state emerged in tandem with a southern eugenics movement in the early twentieth century. In so doing, it demonstrates the lasting influence of eugenics in shaping welfare policies: by dividing the “fit” from the “unfit,” eugenics ideology helped rationalize decisions about who deserves the full benefits of the welfare state and whose reproduction must be regulated to protect the greater good. North Carolina stands out for its social welfare innovation and its long history of eugenic sterilization. Examining its eugenics and social welfare programs side by side reveals overlaps in personnel, assumptions, methods, and goals. A coalition of powerful, white, Progressive reformers (including clubwomen, doctors, middle-class businessmen, and social welfare professionals) embedded principles of eugenics in the welfare programs they built on local and state levels before the New Deal. Although eugenics never became the coalition’s primary focus, many of these reformers embraced eugenics as a tool of social policy, shaped by and shaping their other strategies for social change.

Reformers at the vanguard encountered eugenics ideology in the first decade of the twentieth century as they sought ways to improve the state’s social welfare programs. Through efforts to create a school for the “feeble-minded,” they spread knowledge about eugenics to a wider circle of Progressives. When reformers succeeded in restructuring the state’s welfare bureaucracy, a new corps of social workers, mostly women, learned eugenics principles as part

of their professional training. Throughout their campaigns, reformers' gender and professional status shaped their understanding of and strategies for promoting welfare and eugenics. The passage of a series of sterilization laws from 1919 to 1933 reflected the success of earlier educational campaigns as well as the fact that many North Carolinians saw eugenics initiatives as efficient, affordable strategies in a state woefully lacking in meaningful social services. In linking eugenics and welfare, this dissertation offers new ways to think about southern Progressivism, gendered reform strategies, and the politics of state-building.

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INTRODUCTION

As I write, North Carolina is beginning to compensate victims of its eugenic sterilization program. In the many years leading up to this moment, journalists have told and retold the essentials of the state's forty-year history of sterilizing people. The standard story runs like this: "North Carolina began sterilizing men and women in 1929 after social workers, county health departments and eventually a state board deemed them too poor, mentally disabled or otherwise unfit to raise children. The 7,600 victims of the program, which was dissolved in 1977, were largely women and disproportionately members of minorities."¹ The basics of the story, here taken from the *New York Times*, vary remarkably little, and most accounts are reasonably accurate. But the public discussions about eugenics have done little to address the deeper moral and policy questions at hand. The problem stems in large part from a failure of historical imagination—in particular, a failure to look back far enough to understand the roots of the state's eugenics programs, which encompassed much more than sterilization.

In *The Reform Imagination*, I redress that failure by excavating the history of North Carolina's intertwined eugenics and welfare programs leading up to the advent of the sterilization program. More than two decades before the state ordered the first person sterilized, white Progressive reformers were honing their ideas about eugenic fitness and the need to preserve the Anglo-Saxon race. At the same time, these women and men were building a statewide social welfare apparatus that became the foundation for relief efforts during and after

¹ Kim Severson, "Payments for Victims of Eugenics are Shelved," *New York Times*, 20 June 2012.

the New Deal. The same reformers championed both of these projects, and the institutions they built also bound eugenics and social welfare together in a Gordian knot. Many of the key historical moments in this dissertation revolve around the legislative sessions of 1917 and 1919, when reformers pushed through great swaths of Progressive policies, including the “county unit” welfare system and the state’s first sterilization law. Such moments reveal reformers’ belief that eugenics and welfare programs were connected and mutually reinforcing. From its creation in 1933, the Eugenics Board was housed with the state welfare board, thanks to longstanding intellectual links between eugenics and social welfare programs as well as welfare officials’ regular attempts to stake out eugenics terrain for themselves.

I integrate analyses of the development of North Carolina’s eugenics and welfare programs in order to more fully understand the principles that undergirded both and continue to shape today’s policies regarding welfare and social citizenship.² Scholars have dedicated many volumes to histories of welfare and eugenics in the United States, but rarely in tandem. The particularly close institutional relationships between North Carolina’s eugenics and welfare programs make the overlap hard to ignore, but a similar analysis in other states would be equally fruitful. My analysis shows the lasting influence of eugenics in shaping welfare policies: by dividing the “fit” from the “unfit,” eugenics ideology helped rationalize decisions about who deserves the full benefits of the welfare state and whose reproduction must be regulated to protect the greater good.

To address larger questions of the relationship of welfare and eugenics, I pursue key interrelated themes throughout this dissertation: women’s social reform efforts; the spread of

² I am drawing from Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon’s concept of social citizenship as the idea (not necessarily a reality in the United States) that “in a welfare state citizenship includes an entitlement to social provision,” which makes welfare provision a “social right” rather than a “handout.” Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “Contract versus Charity: Why Is There No Social Citizenship in the United States?” *Socialist Review* 22 (1992): 45-68.

eugenics ideology through reform channels; the professionalization and gendering of social work; the interaction of eugenics with white supremacist racial ideologies; the importance of regional and local particularities in shaping Progressive thought; and the consequences for the welfare state of eugenic assumptions. In each case, I trace the development of Progressive ideals through a network of key white reformers, highlighting the gendered differences between men and women's rhetoric and reasons for activism. The lives and stories of these forgotten but influential social reformers ground my analysis, serving as the substrate for this grassroots intellectual history. These reformers and their complex, shifting beliefs offer a constant reminder that although ideologies sometimes seem to take on a life of their own, they are human creations—no more and no less.

North Carolina faced daunting challenges in the late nineteenth century. The railroads and factories of the New South brought economic and social change to many areas, and the creed of the New South penetrated all but the most isolated hamlets. But the economic windfall—the product of exploiting the South's human and natural resources—accrued to only a few. Sharecroppers, factory workers, and other common laborers lived a tenuous existence, with only one failed crop or bout of illness spelling debt, hunger, or worse. African American farmers and laborers faced additional perils, including racial prejudice, legalized racial discrimination, and extralegal violence, all of which restricted their economic opportunities and punished them for challenging social and economic hierarchies.³

³ The classic statement of the New South's political economy is C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). Scholars have attested to its continuing influence in John B. Boles, Bethany L. Johnson, eds. *Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later: The Continuing Influence of a Historical Classic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003). For a more recent synthesis, informed by nuanced scholarship on racism and race relations, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). For a very readable synthesis, see Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992). A

The state Board of Public Charities, created by the Reconstruction-era state constitution of 1868, lacked two components necessary to tackle anything but the worst local problems: adequate staff and a political mandate. The state board made only feeble attempts to regulate local efforts at public charity. In the absence of state oversight, local officials were left to supply services as they saw fit to the poor, elderly, and disabled, handing out whatever stopgap assistance they judged they could spare from precious tax revenues. Most counties had a poor house, often a miserable place where people turned only when all else failed. Some counties also distributed “outdoor relief,” or payments to families living on their own. In towns and cities, private charity supplemented these public efforts but operated with no oversight or coordination, as did paternalistic corporate welfare programs in mill villages. Often denied even these resources, black communities organized their own support systems through churches, women’s clubs, or fraternal organizations, with women playing key roles.⁴

In the early twentieth century, a phalanx of Progressive men and women set about addressing the state’s social problems. Linked through the North Carolina Conference for Social

growing literature on the New South explores its “newness,” or the tension between tradition and modernization. See, for example, Clifford Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta’s Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴ For useful, if dry, histories of North Carolina’s welfare bureaucracy, see A. Laurance Aydlett, “The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, Volume 24, number 1, Jan 1947, pp. 1-33; Andrew Dobelstein, “Public Welfare in the American System: The North Carolina Experience” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1973); and John L. Saxon, *Social Services in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC School of Government, 2008). Roy M. Brown’s *Public Poor Relief in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928) provides greater detail, if little analysis. On mill villages, see Jacquelyn D. Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987). On African American efforts, see Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. 147-175; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement of the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Joan Marie Johnson, “The Colors of Social Welfare in the New South: Black and White Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1900-1930,” in Elna Green, ed., *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 160-80; and Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

Service, a statewide network of reformers pushed for a full slate of measures to improve the standards of living for North Carolinians, particularly for the neediest whites. Their reforms helped North Carolina become known as the “Wisconsin of the South” for its advances in education, public health, and social welfare. The Conference for Social Service was instrumental in reorganizing the state’s welfare system in the late 1910s into a model of coordination and efficiency for other rural states. Many Conference members were also members of women’s clubs who brought social concerns to their club meetings across the state and helped tie other women into an expanding reform network. In the 1920s, Howard Odum and his colleagues at the University of North Carolina’s Institute for Research in Social Science further burnished the state’s reputation as a cradle of forward-thinking analysts of the region’s race relations and political economy. State officials and academics, particularly at UNC, worked side by side to develop a corps of social workers trained in rural social welfare, an innovative divergence from the prevailing professional model of urban social work.⁵

Although the state’s welfare system in the 1920s was far from perfect, Progressive reformers framed the essential skeleton of programs that coordinated state and local efforts and reached into the most isolated corners of the state. The bulk of state funding went to programs

⁵ For histories of North Carolina’s Progressives, see Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); and Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*. On the North Carolina Conference for Social Service, see Virginia Frances Wooten Gullede, *The North Carolina for Social Service: A Study of its Development and Methods* (Chapel Hill: The North Carolina Conference for Social Service, 1942). On Odum and the IRSS, see Guy Benton Johnson and Guion Griffis Johnson, *Research in Service to Society: The First Fifty Years of the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). On models of social work, see Frank J. Bruno, *Trends in Social Work, 1874-1956: A History Based on the Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957); Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley, ed., *Pioneer Efforts in Rural Social Welfare: Firsthand Views since 1908* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980); Judith Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); and Daniel Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999).

for whites, but North Carolina broke new ground in the South by creating a Division of Work among Negroes to train black social workers and coordinate local (usually private) welfare efforts for African Americans. By the time the New Deal infused federal funds into social welfare work, North Carolina had built a surprisingly effective, homegrown network of welfare offices filled with trained social workers, many of them women.

North Carolina reformers' early embrace of eugenics fit neatly with their eager exploration of policy tools that might mitigate poverty, crime, and mental illness, since experts throughout the nation marketed eugenics as a solution to social problems. Prominent thinkers brought eugenics ideas from their birthplace in Britain to the United States shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. They argued that principles of animal breeding could be applied to the human race to produce stronger, more intelligent, even more moral human beings. Eugenicists' tools fell into two categories: positive eugenics approaches encouraged the reproduction of desirable or "fit" people, and negative eugenics mechanisms discouraged or prohibited the reproduction of "unfit" people. Positive eugenics efforts tended to be less coercive: they sought to persuade people with social and political capital to have more children. Negative eugenics focused on populations that were almost always poor, immigrants, or otherwise socially and politically disadvantaged. The principal tactics were sexual sterilization operations and "segregation," or the physical sequestration of target populations in sex-segregated institutions during years of reproductive potential. Some states also passed marriage laws intended to prevent people with mental illness, venereal disease, or other undesirable traits from marrying each other, seeking to prevent those marriages where a "fit" person might unknowingly wed and procreate with an "unfit" person. Some eugenicists added immigration restrictions to their list of

desirable policies. Later, German fascists took negative eugenics to what they saw as the logical extreme, exterminating Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and other populations of the “unfit.”⁶

Eugenicists argued that by selectively promoting or opposing the reproduction of various groups, they could eradicate poverty, crime, mental illness, and other social problems. Their rudimentary understanding of genetics combined with their zeal for social engineering to produce a belief that a whole host of traits were heritable. In addition to attributes that modern science has confirmed as having some hereditary component, such as vision, eugenicists fixated on character traits such as laziness and criminality, or on mental or temperamental qualities such as “constructive imagination” and “prevailing mood.”⁷ Their most common concern was “feeble-mindedness,” a condition defined as much by social class and sexual behavior as by measurable intelligence.⁸ According to the accepted knowledge of the day, feeble-minded parents were almost certain to have “defective offspring.” Long-term solutions thus hinged on preventing the feeble-minded from having children. Eugenicists claimed that sufficient dedication to eugenic principles would result in the eradication of a range of undesirable traits within some period of years or decades. Despite the now-apparent scientific futility of their

⁶ The classic texts on the American eugenics movement are Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); and Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). For a more recent synopsis, see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For a representative selection of recent scholarship, see Paul A. Lombardo, ed., *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). For an analysis of American advocates of euthanasia, see Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷ For examples, see the Individual Analysis Cards in the files of the Eugenics Record Office, such as “Crane, H. W. – Pedigree of Harry Wolven Crane taken by K. M. Cowdery, 1915,” Eugenics Record Office Records (Mss.Ms.Coll.77, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; hereafter, ERO Records), Series VI, card file.

⁸ Although the term “feeble-minded” strikes many modern readers as offensive, I use it because there is no precise modern equivalent. See James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5.

project, eugenicists believed that their failures were due simply to insufficient dedication to eugenic principles: if feeble-mindedness still existed, it was only because society did not go far enough in realizing negative eugenic principles.

Eugenics ideology was an explosive mixture of perverted scientific principles and pre-ordained social conclusions. As eugenics ideology developed and spread, tensions grew between the more ‘scientific’ eugenicists, who attempted to break down the process of heredity into its genetic and environmental components, and the less trained but no less ardent lay eugenicists.⁹ Scientifically minded eugenicists believed that character traits could be separated into component, genetically traceable traits. Lay advocates adopted the idea in a corrupted form. They assumed that character traits in their entirety were passed on, and they believed that poverty and other social problems were hereditary. Given the notion that many desirable and undesirable traits were inherited wholesale, it required little imagination to justify racial and ethnic hierarchies. This rationalization of the status quo increased the appeal of eugenics to elite and middle-class white Americans. Its very malleability is what made eugenics so popular. Its claims to being scientific lent it credibility, but it rested equally on unscientific assumptions that anyone could adopt and manipulate. Eugenics was the ultimate pseudoscience.¹⁰

Progressive-Era proponents of eugenics formed elaborate institutions and networks to promote its spread.¹¹ These organizations were centered in the Northeast and Midwest, but

⁹ The more “scientific” eugenicists had a proprietary concern about their “pure” form of eugenics being corrupted by popular interpretations. Although they admitted the usefulness of having unofficial advocates spread the word, they were also afraid of a blurring of finer scientific or technical distinctions.

¹⁰ For interesting analysis of the boundaries between science and pseudoscience, see Michael D. Gordin, “Separating the Pseudo from the Science,” *Chronicle Review*, 17 Sept. 2012.

¹¹ Most notable was the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, funded by wealthy heiress Mary Harriman. Founded in 1903 and led by biologist Charles Davenport, the Eugenics Record Office researched eugenic principles, trained field workers, and attempted to coordinate state-level efforts to pass eugenics laws. The American Breeders Association, also established in 1903, was not solely devoted to eugenics, but its Section on Eugenics lent

people across the nation formed their own opinions as they read their publications or other books about eugenics, such as Arthur Estabrook's influential family study, *The Jukes in 1915*.¹² For people tied in to social reform networks, exposure to eugenics principles was almost inevitable. The general public learned about eugenics as its promoters spread the gospel in newspapers and periodicals. Although scholars have noted that "the American eugenics movement never attracted a broad following," its principles were nonetheless common intellectual currency in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹³ Eugenics appealed to some middle-class white Americans with no expert knowledge because it offered a hint of personal control or validation: by choosing the proper spouse you could equip your children with a better inheritance and thus a brighter future.¹⁴

Although some eugenics discourses circulated on a national and even international level, policy in the United States took shape at the state level.¹⁵ For that reason, eugenics programs varied considerably by state. Regional patterns also emerged. Scholars have agreed that the Northeast, Midwest, and West were the earliest to adopt eugenics programs, with Indiana passing

important scientific credibility to the growing eugenics movement. The Race Betterment Foundation, founded in 1911 in Battle Creek, Michigan, sponsored three conferences on race betterment.

¹² For the classic discussion of the nationwide appeal of eugenics, see Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*. *The Jukes in 1915* was a revision of Richard L. Dugdale's study of the same family. See Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 19-20.

¹³ Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 30.

¹⁴ Class privilege, however, dictated that while middle-class people had the option to choose positive eugenics, lower-class people had no such choices. Instead, officials and promoters of eugenics chose negative eugenics principles for them.

¹⁵ The lack of federal policies was related to the general weakness of the U.S. federal government in the early twentieth century, a contrast to industrialized European nations, where powerful centralized governments enabled the creation of strong social safety nets but also made possible coordinated, nationwide eugenics programs. For analyses of the relationship between welfare and eugenics in Scandinavian countries, see Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen, eds., *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996).

the first sterilization law in 1907 and eighteen other states following suit by 1922.¹⁶ Southern states passed sterilization laws slightly later. In addition to chronological differences, states' programs varied in emphasis. Indigenous concerns determined the shape of programs in every locale that toyed with eugenics. In Virginia, for example, eugenicists were concerned with maintaining the "integrity" of the white race; in Vermont they were driven by pride in self-reliance; and in California they focused on regulating female sexuality and morality. In northeastern cities, the explosion of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe lent urgency to policing immigration and the meaning of whiteness. In the Jim Crow South, immigration was not a significant concern, but racial segregation and discrimination framed conversations about fitness and feeble-mindedness.¹⁷

In North Carolina, discussions about the need for negative eugenics programs, particularly segregation of feeble-minded people, began in the 1900s, with welfare and medical officials among the most outspoken proponents of eugenics from the first. An institution for the white feeble-minded opened its doors to the first inmates in 1914, nestled chronologically between the opening of two similar Progressive institutions, a school for delinquent white boys in 1907 and its counterpart for white girls in 1917. Even as they launched a school for the feeble-minded, reformers and welfare officials began discussing sterilization as a more efficacious alternative to institutional segregation. In the 1910s, doctors, professional social

¹⁶ Reilly, *Surgical Solution*, 45.

¹⁷ On Virginia, see Gregory Michael Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); on Vermont, see Wendy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), esp. 42-70; on California, see Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), esp. 32-60. On racial dynamics in the South, see also Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia's Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 143-66; and Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 1, 39, 89-103.

workers, and reformers spread the word about eugenics as a solution to poverty and limited resources for social welfare programs—problems native but certainly not unique to North Carolina. Their educational campaigns and lobbying efforts paid off in 1919, with the passage of the South’s first sterilization law.¹⁸ The 1919 law, however, imposed bureaucratic limitations that many welfare officials and reformers saw as onerous, such as requiring the governor’s approval of each case. No conclusive evidence remains that officials sterilized anyone under this law. Throughout the 1920s, reformers persisted in attempts to pass a “workable sterilization law,” finally succeeding in 1929. The state supreme court overturned this law in 1932 because it lacked due process provisions. The legal challenge was apparently the work of Raleigh insiders whose goal was to pass a more robust law, which they succeeded in doing in 1933.

The 1933 sterilization act became the hallmark of North Carolina’s eugenics efforts. From 1933 into the 1970s, the five-member Eugenics Board, headed by the Commissioner of Public Welfare, met monthly to review petitions. In almost every case, they ordered sterilization or asexualization operations.¹⁹ In the program’s first decades, officials focused on poor white women as the symbolic border guards of racial purity, targeting young women whose behavior flaunted white, middle-class norms of sexual propriety. Poor white women, with fewer resources to resist authorities, were also the easiest marks. After World War II, officials increasingly focused on poor black women, as the breakdown of Jim Crow made some social services available to African Americans but racial prejudice continued to taint distribution of welfare benefits. While many states curbed or halted sterilization efforts in the wake of revelations about

¹⁸ For a list of sterilization laws by state, see Jacob Henry Landman, *Human Sterilization: The History of the Sexual Sterilization Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1932): 291-93.

¹⁹ The law allowed sterilization operations, including vasectomy for males and salpingectomy (tubal ligation) for females, as well as asexualization operations, which meant castration for males and ovariectomy for females. Asexualization, particularly for men, was far more often approved for blacks than whites.

Nazi eugenics programs in the late 1940s, North Carolina continued its programs, as did Virginia and Georgia. In fact, the pace of sterilizations increased in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Opposition to the program from both civil rights activists and state officials grew in the 1960s and led in 1973 to the disbanding of the Eugenics Board, although the sterilization law remained on the books.²⁰

In the 1960s historians began to grapple with the legacy of eugenics and its significance as a national phenomenon, spurred by the disability rights movement, the civil rights movement, and other social movements of the era. This generation of historians focused on national organizations and the male experts who ran these organizations, in particular the Eugenics Record Office and the Human Betterment Foundation. Viewing the eugenics movement from a national perspective allowed scholars to sketch its ideological foundations and understand the broad outlines of eugenics policies, from the Immigration Act of 1924, to the influence of eugenics on the birth control movement, to the sterilization laws passed in thirty states by 1929. But this national focus also obscured the nuances of eugenics policies in individual states, where the bulk of eugenics policies took shape. Moreover, this perspective led scholars to focus on the Northeast, the geographic center of the primary eugenics organizations.²¹

Since the 1990s, scholars have broadened their focus beyond the experts at the forefront of the movement. Driven partly by renewed debates about reproductive rights and the rapid advance of genetic technology, historians have examined the influence of race, class, and ethnic

²⁰ For a full account of North Carolina's sterilization programs in the context of other public health and social welfare policies, see Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²¹ For key 1960s and 1970s studies, see Haller, *Eugenics*; Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968); and Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Genetics and American Society: An Historical Appraisal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972). In this vein of classic studies of national figures or organizations, see also Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*; and Reilly, *Surgical Solution*.

biases on persistent strains of hereditarian thought.²² They have explored the damage that eugenics policies inflicted on various groups; the links between American and Nazi eugenics programs; the regional variations in American eugenics policies; the prevalence of eugenics rhetoric; and the importance of sexuality in shaping eugenics programs.²³ Literary scholars and cultural historians have analyzed the ways in which hereditarian ideas permeated the American zeitgeist of the early twentieth century.²⁴ Their work demonstrates that discourses of fitness and racial inheritance resonated deeply with many native-born Americans, both black and white, particularly those in the middle and upper classes.²⁵ What these studies gain in explanations of the widespread diffusion of ideas, however, they lose in particularity.

²² Particularly influential has been Carl Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revivalism of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); see also Diane Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995).

²³ For an overview of eugenics scholarship, see David Cullen, "Back to the Future: Eugenics—A Bibliographic Essay," *Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 163-175. On sexuality and gender (mostly in terms of application of policy, not gender of policymakers), see Kline, *Building a Better Race*; Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U. S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States," *Social Politics* 4 (1997): 136-53.

²⁴ For example, see Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork*; Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).; Allison Berg, *Mothering the Race: Women's Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche, eds., *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940: Essays on Ideological Conflict and Complicity* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003); Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006). One exciting development in this scholarship of late is the focus on links between Christianity and eugenics. Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Amy Laura Hall, *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

²⁵ Michelle Mitchell's *Righteous Propagation* is a fascinating glimpse of the ways that some African American leaders used eugenics ideology's focus on racial destiny to shape their social prescriptions. Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). See also Gregory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere Quantity, Counts': Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests," in *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era*, ed. Paul A. Lombardo, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 68-92. More work should be done on the important question of African Americans' views of eugenics, with attention to regional variations. Since eugenics programs commonly targeted immigrants and the poor, it stands to

My approach to the history of eugenics and welfare builds on but diverges from this scholarship. As my study demonstrates, to truly understand the ways in which eugenics ideology shaped a variety of policies at state and local levels, we need grassroots intellectual histories of the eugenics movement. That is, we need histories that combine intellectual analysis with the study of social activism and integrate institutional history with careful analysis of policy.²⁶ By examining eugenics and welfare programs within the framework of grassroots intellectual history, I join discussions about Southern eugenics and Progressivism, women's political activism, and the history and theory of the state-building.

A grassroots intellectual history requires treating ideologies as malleable social creations that people deploy to make sense of their worlds, not as rigid doctrines that define experience. In privileging the ideas of eugenicists at the helm of nationally recognized organizations, most scholars of the eugenics movement treat shared ideology as the defining feature of the movement's membership. Yet pro-eugenics activists beyond the circle of national Eugenics Records Office and Human Betterment Foundation had varying degrees of exposure to these organizations' semi-official statements of eugenics principles. Ideological unity among supporters of eugenics is elusive, beyond a basic belief in the ability of humans to improve the race by conscious selection of inheritable traits.

Eugenics programs reflect not just eugenics thought, but also myriad other ideas, concerns, and constraints. Viewing eugenics through the lens of the welfare state is particularly revealing: it presents eugenics as a package of policies and practices that local reformers chose

reason that these groups found little to like. (To my knowledge, however, no scholar has explored the general attitudes of poor and immigrant groups about hereditarian ideas more generally.)

²⁶ The best examples of this kind of history are Nancy Gallagher's *Breeding Better Vermonters*; and Molly Ladd-Taylor's "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers," which analyzes the "'welfare' function" of sterilization. (quote, 136)

for pragmatic reasons. Reformers and social workers who established eugenics programs did not necessarily see themselves as participating in a eugenics movement. Instead, eugenics was one among their many concerns. As reformers learned about eugenics through publications or professional gatherings, they drew selectively on its principles, incorporating those that meshed with their worldview.

In order to reveal this process at work, I use life stories of key reformers and social workers to analyze the translation of ideology into policy, focusing on the ways that ideology is transformed even as it informs individual actions and state policies. By focusing on grass-roots administrators of eugenics programs, we see how ideas were put into practice as they interacted with other strands of thought. Some of the best recent scholarship on eugenics has moved toward examining a wider range of activists, but we still know little about the individual policymakers who were crucial mediators between ideology and practice. As Molly Ladd-Taylor has summed up the situation, “The history of eugenics remains organized around scientific research and the reading of texts; the role of welfare agencies, state institutions, and local politics remains obscure.”²⁷ Even the best local studies focus on the highest level of decision-makers, almost always men, who left the clearest fingerprints on eugenics programs.²⁸ Examining the

²⁷ Molly Ladd-Taylor, review of Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters*, *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 714. This statement, though now more than a decade old, is still an apt description of the literature.

²⁸ In California, which sterilized far more people than any other state, Wendy Kline and Alexandra Minna Stern focused on Paul Popenoe, his Human Betterment Foundation, and institutions such as the Sonoma State Home for the Feeble-Minded. Likewise, Paul Lombardo has worked extensively on the handful of men behind Virginia’s sterilization law and the test case that led to *Buck v. Bell*, the 1927 Supreme Court decision affirming the constitutionality of sterilization. Greg Dorr provides an intellectual history of the emergence of eugenics in the context of Virginia’s veneration of Anglo-Saxon roots, focusing on figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Harvey Earnest Jordan (Dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Virginia), and Ivey Foreman Lewis (Chair of the Biology Department at UVA). Nancy Gallagher focuses mainly on Henry F. Perkins, although she provides some sense of his network of allies and his female colleagues in the Eugenic Survey of Vermont. See Kline, *Building a Better Race*; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; Paul Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science*, Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters*. Another excellent state study is Alexandra Minna Stern, “We

broad network of reformers who would go on to create both eugenics and welfare programs gives us a nuanced view of the nexus between ideology and policy.

This network of social reformers and welfare officials, who adapted eugenics principles to their own purposes and created policies based on these principles, stand at the heart of my story. Some of these figures parallel California's Paul Popenoe or Virginia's Albert Priddy for the roles they played within their state, but few rose to national prominence at the time, and none have penetrated modern historians' consciousness. Many of these reformers or social workers played only a small part in establishing the state's eugenics programs. Most, in fact, would not have considered themselves eugenicists, in that their pro-eugenics activism was driven more by personal or political motivations than by dedication to any particular scientific theories. This is precisely why I find them fascinating: they embody the widespread internalization of eugenics ideology among the middle class, beyond a general tolerance for watered-down messages circulating in mass media about finding a proper mate or reducing the immigration of "unfit" foreigners. For most of North Carolina's social workers, eugenics functioned less as a coherent scientific ideology and more as a source of politically viable policy solutions, to be plucked at will and reshaped to fit their own context. Although few were trained biologists or psychologists, they felt capable of applying the criteria espoused by those professions to their clients in order to determine who should be institutionalized or sterilized.

My work follows recent studies of eugenics programs in specific states and regions, which have proven especially fruitful in explaining the causes and effects of eugenics ideology. Edward J. Larson's *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* was one of the earliest attempts to revise assumptions about the parameters, participants, and chronology of the national

Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear': Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 1 (Mar. 2007): 3-38.

movement. Larson's analysis of why eugenics initiatives met with comparative failure in the South complicates the debate about the decline and survival of the national eugenics movement.²⁹ Subsequent historians have followed his lead, producing a host of studies that demonstrate the importance of studying eugenics in relation to local social, racial, political, and economic circumstances.³⁰

Although the South has received a share of attention, we still have a great deal to learn about how local circumstances shaped southern eugenics ideologies.³¹ As it stands, the narrative assumes that Progressive reformers in the South embraced eugenics ideology more slowly than did their northern counterparts. Scholars have been too quick to characterize the southern eugenics movement—and southern Progressivism more generally—as a strange offshoot of the national movement. It is true that in the South, sterilization programs took off only in the 1930s, as they were declining in many other states. To some scholars, this delay seems to be evidence of southern backwardness: reformers were slow to adopt the latest science produced in northern

²⁹ Analyzing six states in the Deep South, Larson sees the late start of eugenics and the lack of marriage and immigration restrictions as a failure for the eugenics movement. He argues that the reasons were the weakness of southern Progressivism, religious traditions, and antagonism to strong central government. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*.

³⁰ Recent state studies include *Breeding Better Vermonters*; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; Kline, *Building a Better Race*; Schoen, *Choice and Coercion*; Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles*; G. Dorr, *Segregation's Science*; and Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). In addition to these monographs, there are a number of articles, the best of which are Molly Ladd-Taylor, "The 'Sociological Advantages' of Sterilization: Fiscal Policies and Feeble-Minded Women in Interwar Minnesota," in *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader*, ed. Steven Noll and James W. Trent Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Mark A. Largent, "'The Greatest Curse of the Race': Eugenic Sterilization in Oregon, 1909-1983," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (2002): 188-209; Alexandra Minna Stern, "Making Better Babies: Public Health and Race Betterment in Indiana, 1920-1935," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (2002): 742-52.

³¹ The key works on the South, in addition to Larson's *Sex, Race, and Science*, are Schoen's *Choice and Coercion*, Lombardo's *Three Generations, No Imbeciles*, G. Dorr's *Segregation's Science*, and Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). While all of these studies are valuable correctives to the tendency to use California or the Northeast as a stand-in for the national movement, we still have a great deal to learn about eugenics ideology became policy in each state in the region.

urban centers.³² Similarly, they read the other end of the timeline as evidence of delayed enlightenment about the evils of sterilization: sterilization programs in Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina continued into the 1970s, many years after sterilization had fallen into disfavor in the rest of the country because of the South's peculiar racism.

My research paints a different picture, one in which the South exhibited regional variation but was nevertheless very much in the mainstream of the national story. I show that in North Carolina, reformers considered eugenics ideology earlier than scholars have recognized.³³ In particular, I highlight the early interest in eugenics among North Carolina's reformers in the 1900s and 1910s. I also propose different reasons for the disparity in timing. By viewing eugenics in the context of welfare, I show that the slow process of creating eugenics laws was a product of economics rather than a lack of intellectual sophistication: the growth of both eugenics and welfare programs was consistently retarded by economic concerns. Even as New South industrialists lauded the region's potential, the southern economy remained an agrarian system dependent on northern capital with high rates of poverty and markedly unequal distribution of wealth. Moreover, southern elites held fast to a low-tax, low-expenditure model of economic development. Reformers succeeded in expanding eugenics and social programs only after they convinced voters and politicians that small investments in these programs would reap large rewards by preventing future poverty and crime.

³² For example, Larson attributes the slow adoption of eugenics in the Deep South to the dearth of research universities and other educational institutions, as well as to strong religious and family traditions. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 40-42. Greg Dorr draws somewhat different conclusions, noting that Virginians "used eugenics to navigate between the extremes of New South 'modernism' and Old South 'traditionalism.'" G. Dorr, *Segregation's Science*, 7.

³³ At the later end of the timeline, we now understand that hereditarian ideas circulated widely throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. In this light, long-lasting sterilization programs in southern states are no less appalling, but more understandable. Indeed, this may be an instance of the South serving as a scapegoat for a national problem. See Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 310-349; and Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1996).

I identify my subjects as Progressives, by which I mean that they were engaged in social, economic, and political reform efforts that championed democracy, efficiency, and government use of expert knowledge for the public good. In using this term, I wade into a murky historiographical swamp. For decades, scholars have struggled to define the Progressive movement. One historian has argued that the “the term ‘progressive’ defies clear definition and should by all rights be banished from the lexicon of politics and philosophy.”³⁴ Another has claimed that “the ‘progressive movement’ never existed” and that historians “are struggling desperately to fit their concept onto data that stubbornly spill over the edges of that concept.”³⁵ Yet most historians continue to view the idea of a “Progressive impulse” as a useful way to frame political and social activism in the early twentieth century, while acknowledging that the movement included shifting and sometimes conflicting elements.³⁶

In studying North Carolina’s reformers, I demonstrate that southern Progressive reformers matched their counterparts elsewhere in sophistication and resolve but faced greater political obstacles.³⁷ Many debates about the nature of southern Progressivism can be distilled

³⁴ Jack Temple Kirby argues that it is most useful to think of “progressivism” as a “device for self-identity.” Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 2, 3.

³⁵ Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for ‘The Progressive Movement,’” *American Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1970): 32.

³⁶ Richard Hofstadter argued that the “impulse toward criticism and change” was central to the Progressive movement, which he acknowledged was “not altogether cohesive or consistent.” Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 5. Other important works on Progressivism include Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (Dec. 1982), 113-132; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983); and Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁷ Arthur S. Link, who first directed the study of American Progressivism toward the South, saw southern Progressivism as a rural, agrarian movement with aims were similar to those of the Populists. C. Vann Woodward’s stress on the urban, middle-class roots of reform has been more influential. Arthur S. Link, “The Progressive Movement in the South, 1870-1914,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 23, no. 1 (Apr. 1946): 172-95; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*.

into the question of how progressive the Progressives really were, in the context of a tendency to see the South as retrograde. The answers depend largely on scholars' selection of subjects. Focusing only on the white businessmen whose ties to industry restricted their social vision, for example, produces a circumscribed view of Progressivism.³⁸ Of particular concern to scholars has been racial segregation, which remains at the heart of the paradox of southern Progressivism.³⁹ I build on recent scholarship that looks beyond white, middle-class men to produce more complex views of southern reform in which humanitarian concerns stand alongside racial segregation, "capitalist agendas," and other anti-democratic tendencies. Some scholarship in this vein has focused on the importance of Progressive reforms to other social movements, such as women's political activism and black campaigns for respectability and self-determination.⁴⁰

Many of the Progressive reformers in this study were women, and gender shaped their responses to eugenics ideology. While scholars have underscored the importance of gender and

³⁸ George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

³⁹ Since C. Vann Woodward's acknowledgement of the shortcomings of white Progressives for whom disfranchisement and segregation were key "reforms," historians have argued that racial institutions were among the strongest forces constraining fundamental social change. J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning*; Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). See also William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

⁴⁰ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Anne Firor Scott, "Women in the South," in John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 492 n68 (quote); James L. Leloudis II, "School Reform in the New South: The Woman's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902-1919," *Journal of American History* 69 (Mar. 1983): 886-909; Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism and Reform in the Urban South," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 166-98; Sims, *Power of Femininity*; Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

sexuality in structuring eugenic policies and practices, they have analyzed women's relationship to the eugenics movement primarily as targets of coercive sterilization.⁴¹ As a result, we know far too little about the ways in which women understood and acted on eugenics ideology.

Extrapolating from the writings of prominent male eugenicists, scholars have often argued that eugenicists were motivated by racism, sexism, or, more charitably, by misplaced faith in hereditarian principles. Historians' neglect of the gender dimensions of the eugenics movement has obscured the myriad motives of eugenics advocates. A few historians have pointed out that women were involved as trained field workers or as public supporters of eugenics legislation.⁴²

Edward Larson in particular has explored the contributions of southern women to the movement, arguing that the support of women's clubs was critical in the fight for eugenics legislation in six

⁴¹ Wendy Kline summarizes the essence of the scholarship on gender and eugenics: "Gender was ... central to eugenics because the movement called for a new approach to understanding sexuality, reproduction, and the role of men and women in society." Her work underscores the ways in which the hereditarian thought underlying the eugenics movement had a long life, particularly as eugenicists appropriated family planning efforts after World War II and as the concern with positive eugenics was transformed into postwar pronatalism and conservative concerns about family values. See Kline, *Building a Better Race*, quote on p. 5; see also Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Alex Stern has also shown how eugenicists' initial interest in biological differences among races was transposed to a concern with difference between the sexes. Stern, *Eugenic Nation*. In *Choice and Coercion*, Johanna Schoen redirects the debate to issues of women's reproductive autonomy, arguing that reproductive technologies are a double-edged sword: they can grant reproductive control to women, or they can be used to control women's reproduction.

⁴² Based on her research on the Eugenics Records Office, Amy Sue Bix argues that "the ERO's female students and field-workers did not express any special concern with 'women's issues,'" instead approaching "eugenics work from the perspective of scientific researchers, stressing their interest and experience in biology and medicine." Bix maintains that while male eugenics researchers such as Charles Davenport defined certain kinds of eugenics research as suitable for women, "female field-workers did not indicate any desire to confine their efforts to a 'separate sphere' of gender-stereotyped research" (637). Bix's findings are fascinating but may not be applicable to women beyond the ERO's training programs, where few women hailed from the South. Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: 'Women's Work' in Biology," *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 4 (Aug., 1997): 625-668. See also Daylanne K. English, "New White Women: The U. S. Eugenic Family Studies Field Workers, 1910-1918," in *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). One promising study is Sara Vogt, "Bodies of Surveillance: Disability, Femininity, and the Keepers of the Gene Pool, 1910-1925" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012).

states of the Deep South.⁴³ Larson's analysis, however, is limited by his failure to look beyond women's clubs for female eugenics activism. Although clubwomen were indeed important supporters of some eugenic policies and female reformers were united by common bonds of race, class, and belief, I find crucial differences between the actions of clubwomen and those of female social work professionals.

Thanks to the work of women's historians, we have excellent foundations for understanding eugenics activism as part of a broader spectrum of women's political activism during the Progressive era. Scholars of women and the welfare state have demonstrated that during the early twentieth century women seized an opportunity to construct a female form of state power, placing political power in the hands of white women reformers and prioritizing concerns specific to women.⁴⁴ Eugenics policies were yet another arena of state power, one in which gendered roles of officials and their targets stand out dramatically. An analysis of the eugenics movement that places women's eugenics activities in the context of their other public and private actions expands our understanding of the eugenics movement and deepens our understanding of women's social reform efforts and political activity. Eugenics in North Carolina was one element of women's bid for power in the construction of the modern welfare state.

⁴³ Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*; and Larson, "'In the Finest, Most Womanly Way': Women in the Southern Eugenics Movement," *American Journal of Legal History* 39 (April 1995): 119-47.

⁴⁴ See Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Mothers and Soldiers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era"; and Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Glenda Gilmore, Anastasia Sims, and others have demonstrated how southern women manipulated southern ideals of femininity to further their political or social goals.⁴⁵ I explore similar phenomena in the realm of women's eugenics activism, analyzing femininity as both a prescribed role and an assumed identity. The women and men involved in the administration of the eugenics programs publicly performed gender roles that were congruent with their visions of themselves as progressive reformers.⁴⁶ Through their choice of who should be institutionalized or sterilized and their public and private discussions surrounding these decisions, they enacted their vision of appropriate gender roles for other, less privileged citizens, both white and black. The citizens targeted by eugenics programs had their own notions of gender roles. The eugenics programs can thus be seen as a battleground where classed and raced visions of gender met and fought for legitimacy.

A substantial body of scholarship on women's reform efforts has demonstrated that reformers were motivated by a wide range of concerns, depending on their race, class, location, and life experience. I bring this scholarship to bear on the eugenics movement, revealing the diversity and complexity of motives for political and social action. I show how reformers' identities shaped their forays into eugenics and progressivism and ask how women mobilized their particular power as caretakers of dependent classes, placing their decisions in the context of male-dominated state politics. Most of the women involved in North Carolina's eugenics programs were white and came from upper- or middle-class families. I analyze how these

⁴⁵ Anastasia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South*; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

⁴⁶ On gender as performance, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

women's race and class identities interacted with their visions of femininity to create their particular brand of activism. I also draw on studies of gender and professionalization.⁴⁷

In linking eugenics and welfare, I look to research on and theories of the welfare state. With an eye to improving the efficacy and coverage of current social welfare policies, scholars have analyzed the U.S. welfare state from many theoretical and historical angles. Although scholars debate the meaning of the term, there is a general consensus that the "welfare state" refers to a society in which the government assumes some collective responsibility for its citizens' well-being. The modern American welfare state is the product of more than a century of policy debates, grassroots campaigns, and economic imperatives. Many scholars assume a restrictive definition of welfare in which New Deal legislation, namely the Social Security Act of 1935, overshadows all other programs. I diverge from them both topically and chronologically. First, I take a broader view of the welfare state, considering "defeated alternatives" as an important part of our history.⁴⁸ From this perspective, the welfare state includes not only policies that became the foundation of New Deal legislation but also initiatives such as federal

⁴⁷ Daniel J. Walkowitz, "The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity: Social Workers in the 1920s," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (Oct. 1990): 1051-75; Clarke A. Chambers, "Women in the Creation of the Profession of Social Work," *Social Service Review* 60, no. 1 (Mar. 1986): 1-33; Amy E. Wells, "Considering Her Influence: Sydnor H. Walker and Rockefeller Support for Social Work, Social Scientists, and Universities in the South," in *Women and Philanthropy in Education*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 127-47; Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); John H. Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

⁴⁸ I draw on analysis by Linda Gordon and Mary Poole. Gordon writes that "defeated alternatives illuminate the choices historical actors made... Thinking about past alternatives reminds us ... that the particular shape of our welfare state was not inevitable." Poole describes more radical alternatives to the Social Security Act as she explores how the U.S. federal welfare system has carried a racialized stigma since the beginning. Poole makes an excellent case for looking beyond policymakers' intent to locate the roots of discrimination in the historical process of the formation of welfare policy. Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 3; Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

health insurance and centralized public assistance programs. Eugenics programs, I argue, have been forgotten or ignored in welfare history, but they belong in the category of alternatives that shaped the modern welfare state. Second, I focus on the first decades of the twentieth century, the moments where state and local governments built the foundations of the modern welfare system. Because New Deal programs used existing bureaucratic channels for training workers and distributing aid, the local welfare programs that grew in the 1910s and 1920s shaped later federal programs for years to come.

I draw on feminist scholarship that explains why some citizens reap greater benefits from the welfare state than others. Historians of women and gender have explored women's ongoing roles in shaping the welfare state as well as the ways in which the intellectual foundations of the welfare state are influenced by particular notions of gender and race.⁴⁹ The most compelling models underscore the long history of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, descended from English Poor Laws, coupled with analysis of how race and gender disparities came to be embedded in welfare policies. To these analyses, I add an understanding of how eugenics entrenched race, class, and gender prejudice in the welfare state under the guise of providing professional social work with a basis in science. Pro-eugenics reformers did not invent these prejudices, but they helped reinforce them at a critical historical moment. Eugenics became the modern, “scientific” mantle for the timeworn myth of the deserving and undeserving poor.

⁴⁹ For important works on women and the welfare state, see Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sister's Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Gwendolyn Mink, *Wages of Motherhood*; and Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*. One recent trend is to explore the ways that recipients of welfare have shaped the welfare state through their activism and demands; see Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); and Jessica Wilkerson, “Where Movements Meet: From the War on Poverty to Grassroots Feminism in the Appalachian South,” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014).

Moreover, eugenicists wrapped race and gender prejudice in the same neat bundle, thanks to their scrutiny of the reproductive process, particularly of women's bodies and behaviors, and their firm belief in inheritance of "dysgenic" traits. In the atmosphere of Progressive reliance on scientific and professional expertise, this new packaging proved a powerful shield.

Linking eugenics and welfare also sheds light on the history and theory of citizenship. For eugenicists, the terms "fit" and "unfit" meant (un)fitness to reproduce, to carry the human race into the future. As the history of eugenics attests, many Americans leapt easily to the conclusion that reproductive unfitness translated into other kinds of unfitness. In particular, they transposed a lack of fitness for carrying the human race into the future into a lack of fitness for current membership in society. They equated a lack of eugenic "fitness" with dependency and assumed that dependency, too, was heritable. In short, the "unfit" were not suited for full citizenship. The logic grew from the framework of civil citizenship, or citizenship based on one's duties to society, in which the feeble-minded or mentally ill seemed poorly equipped to participate as informed citizens of a republic and thus failed to meet a benchmark for citizenship.⁵⁰ There was also a gendered path for this logic: If a mother was unfit to pass on her genes to her children, she was also probably unfit to raise them. And if she was unfit to raise children, she was not fulfilling her duties in the social contract. Eugenics buttressed a model of welfare in which discourses about fitness determine which people deserve the full rights of social

⁵⁰ Fraser and Gordon argue that the discourse of civil citizenship is pervasive in the U.S. In this framework, "the connotations of citizenship are positive, powerful, and proud, while those of "welfare" are so negative, weak, and degraded that 'social citizenship' here sounds almost oxymoronic." Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Contract versus Charity: Why Is There No Social Citizenship in the United States?" *Socialist Review* 22 (1992): 46. The notion of fitness for citizenship has almost always been invoked when the boundaries of citizenship threaten to expand: Opponents of voting rights for freedmen after Emancipation and opponents of female suffrage argued that African Americans and women were not prepared for the responsibilities of full citizenship. Current debates over amnesty for illegal immigrants sometimes take a similar tack.

citizenship. Eugenics thus undermines the idea that social welfare provisions are a basic right attendant on membership in society.

As this discussion of social citizenship indicates, my goal is not to attack the intrinsic worth of the modern welfare state. Rather, I hope to recognize the ways that early twentieth-century reformers imbued the emerging welfare state with definitions of fitness (for parenthood and for citizenship) that were utterly dependent on class and race biases, reinforcing longstanding prejudices about the deserving and undeserving poor. Rather than support a reasonable standard of living for all, they postulated that some people were undeserving of the full benefits of the welfare state. In viewing the neediest as fundamentally flawed because of something rooted deep within their character and heredity, they blamed the poor and dependent for their situation.⁵¹ I offer my critique as a foundation for policy change that embraces a more hopeful view of human potential. Only by uncovering the deep roots of injustice in the design and administration of welfare programs can we hope to build a welfare state that offers true social citizenship.

I begin my narrative in the early twentieth century, when southern white women used a variety of strategies to insert themselves into discussions about welfare. In Chapter One I offer Daisy Denson, Secretary of the Board of Public Charities from 1903 to 1917, as an example of her generation of white social reformers. These reformers melded race and religion into a powerful social vision, arguing that the state should play a role in perfecting the social order. Key components of Denson's vision of social service included Christian charity, the kingdom of God on earth, racial segregation, and Anglo-Saxon heritage. Denson and her clubwomen allies

⁵¹ See Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 309-36.

claimed a space for themselves as mothers, but their motivations and strategies also transcended maternalism. They used women's clubs as forums to educate themselves about Progressive ideas of efficiency and prevention. In the process, they developed a broad understanding of welfare that stretched from traditional charitable efforts to include public health and education. Moreover, they claimed a large part of the responsibility for the public welfare, and they realized key components of their vision by mobilizing the political influence they gained through connections with male relatives.

Chapter Two describes the growing interest in eugenics in North Carolina from the turn of the century through the end of the 1910s, focusing on the appeal and spread of eugenic knowledge within white Progressive networks. Eugenic segregation and sterilization appealed to white, urban elites for religious and social reasons. Medical and social welfare professionals were the first to explore eugenic principles, and they disseminated this knowledge first to other Progressives and then to the public, drawing on the rhetoric of the social gospel and issuing increasingly dire warnings about the dangers of the unfit. Discussions of eugenics and mental hygiene fit neatly within contemporaneous conversations about the larger welfare state. Reformers' efforts to provide state institutions for the segregation of the "unfit" were linked to their desire to provide social welfare solutions and to a widespread public interest in improving the human race. Women, in particular, focused on the potential of eugenic segregation to protect Anglo-Saxon civilization and the purity of the white race. As the decade drew to a close, some white Progressives began to discuss eugenic sterilization as the logical solution to shortcomings of the state's institutional segregation program.

In 1917, a campaign to reorganize the state's welfare bureaucracy pushed North Carolina into the national spotlight as the first adopter of the "county unit" plan. Chapter Three examines

the genesis of the 1917 welfare law, the brainchild of businessman-turned-reformer Alexander W. McAlister. While North Carolina's reformers were swayed by national currents, the welfare system that McAlister envisioned and other Progressives embraced was not merely derivative: North Carolina's reformers also forged ahead with a new kind of rural social welfare.

Clubwomen ardently supported the reorganization plan, which echoed their understanding of the state's vital role in establishing comprehensive, wide-ranging welfare programs. More critical backing, however, came from a few key male leaders in the state's Progressive network, demonstrating the continued necessity for women to cultivate relationships with men with access to political power. These same male reformers resisted female leadership on the new Board of Charities and Public Welfare, although women later assumed positions of authority. McAlister's well-organized campaign for a new welfare bureaucracy drew attention to social problems and created momentum for further changes that cascaded from the state capital outwards. The new welfare law also signaled seismic shifts in ideas about how the state should interact with its citizens, about the place of philanthropy and charity in society, and about the potential of experts and science to solve social problems.

In the 1920s, welfare professionals and their allies created a modern welfare system particularly suited to rural North Carolina. I frame Chapter Four around the social workers who staffed the budding programs at both state and local levels. This trained corps of social workers depended on the cooperative efforts of the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare, the University of North Carolina, and northern philanthropists. Professional training in social work shaped the identities and strategies of a new generation of social reformers, many of whom were women. I analyze the gender politics of professionalism by using aggregate data on welfare officials, rounded out with stories of several paradigmatic individuals, and through the

contrapuntal example of public health nursing. As North Carolina's welfare leaders trained social workers to fill positions within a statewide network, they also created the first prototype of rural social welfare, making the "county unit system" a reality. The "North Carolina plan" reverberated far beyond state and even regional lines.

As North Carolina's welfare state emerged in the 1920s, its development was shaped by the theory and practice of eugenics. As I show in Chapter Five, the Bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene, created in 1921 as part of the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare, stood at the center of a network of professionals who rallied around eugenics in the 1920s. In state training programs, new social workers learned to think along eugenic lines and to consult with psychiatrists for mental tests of their clients. Likewise, lay reformers continued to be interested in eugenics but ceded ground to experts. Eugenics-based programs thus contributed to the professionalization and centralization of the welfare state. Through their research in eugenics and mental hygiene, welfare and medical professionals educated the public about the deep-seated links between mental defects and social problems. As public support for eugenic segregation and sterilization solidified in the 1920s, the popular understanding of these links brought eugenics programs under the aegis of the welfare bureaucracy rather than the public health system.

Chapter Six describes the passage of North Carolina's eugenic sterilization laws as the product of Progressive reformers' earlier success in spreading awareness of eugenics principles. The first sterilization law, passed in 1919, played out in the context of a series of fires at the state institution for the feeble-minded that focused public attention on the school's crowded conditions and the danger that the feeble-minded posed to society. In the 1920s reformers of many stripes called for a new, "more workable" sterilization law, culminating in the passage of a 1929 bill, a

legal challenge in 1932, and the creation of the Eugenics Board in 1933. In passing these sterilization laws, lawmakers responded to what they saw as real social threats and the limitations, from a eugenics perspective, of institutional segregation. The debates in Raleigh about each law indicate that although eugenic sterilization attracted more opposition than eugenic segregation, defenders of eugenics did not often have to step in: Progressives had already fostered a firm consensus among the policymaking class that the state's pressing social problems required eugenic solutions. The robust ties between the Eugenics Board and the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare built on connections that welfare officials had developed over the previous dozen years.

The Epilogue explains the impact of the Depression and the New Deal on North Carolina's eugenics and welfare programs, focusing on the politics of relief and the roles women played in the day-to-day functioning of the Eugenics Board, most frequently as social workers who mediated between the state and clients. Using statistical evidence on the frequency of completed sterilization cases in different areas of the state, I explore the meaning and purpose of eugenics programs from the perspective of social workers and welfare officials. I underscore links between eugenics programs and the state's financial needs, and I argue that welfare officials relied on eugenics as a powerful tool of social policy, both in their interactions with clients and in their depictions of the welfare state to the wider public.

The foundational scholarship on eugenics focused narrowly on its leading intellectual champions, while more recently, too many studies give only a cursory glance at the development of ideology before starting the story in earnest with the passage of eugenic sterilization legislation. Few scholars have asked how reformers understood eugenics, promoted its principles, and transformed abstract ideology into concrete practice, from the moment of contact

with the idea through the messy and difficult work of mobilizing a coalition and implementing policy changes. Only a grassroots history, which entails taking eugenics seriously as more than an oddity among Progressives' array of reforms, elucidates the heart of the Progressive legacy: the urge to social transformation, encumbered by blindness to existing prejudice.

By returning to the early twentieth century and the roots of North Carolina's eugenics programs, we can begin to grapple with their legacy in a more comprehensive way. The costs of the programs go beyond the significant toll of sterilization on individuals and families; they also include the durable strands of racist and classist assumptions that Progressive reformers wove into the fabric of the modern welfare state. Examining eugenics and welfare in tandem, we see that eugenics programs were one product of a deeply undemocratic political system in which "experts" overrode the concerns of the disfranchised masses, both black and white, who had little say in shaping policy. The question of how to design equitable and effective social welfare systems when the majority of clients lack a political voice bedevils us as much today as it did a century ago.

CHAPTER 1: "THE NEW FORCE IN MODERN CIVILIZATION":
WOMEN AND SOCIAL REFORM, 1900-1917

On a Sunday afternoon in January 1917, a crowd of Progressive reformers from around the state of North Carolina gathered in downtown Raleigh. Filling the auditorium of the First Baptist Church to overflowing, they waited to hear an out-of-state luminary.¹ The speaker was Kate Barnard, known around the country for her work in Oklahoma against child labor and for compulsory education and prison reform. Barnard had also served as Oklahoma's welfare commissioner, after leading a campaign to create that department in the state constitution of 1907.² Governor Thomas Bickett congratulated the audience on having the opportunity to hear Barnard speak, telling them that "her work for the unfortunate has been a dazzling illustration of the beauty of a life that passionately accepts the principle" of Christian charity.³ Raleigh newspapers described her as "slender, graceful, petite, with dark hair and skin and flashing eyes."⁴

¹ Barnard's talk was well publicized in advance, with the *Raleigh News and Observer* encouraging people to come hear the "eloquent and convincing" speaker. "Social Service Work," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 Jan. 1917; "Miss Kate Barnard to Speak Sunday," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 Jan. 1917; and "Oklahoma Leader Will Be Speaker in Raleigh Today," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 Jan. 1917.

² Barnard was Oklahoma's first Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, elected in 1907 and serving until poor health forced her to retire in 1915. She had also been a frequent speaker at professional meetings such as the National Conference of Charities and Correction. In 1917, she was working as a juvenile court case worker in Denver, Colorado. John A. Conley, "Kate Barnard," in *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America*, ed. Walter I. Trattner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 56-59.

³ Bickett's full quote was "her work for the unfortunate has been a dazzling illustration of the beauty of a life that passionately accepts the principle voiced by the Master when he said 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto these little ones ye have done it unto me.'" "State Conference on Social Service Has First Session," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 22 Jan. 1917.

⁴ "Miss Kate Barnard to Speak Sunday," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 Jan. 1917.

Although Barnard may have played up her striking looks and feminine grace, she drove home her message with the authority of professional social service training, not a plea to sentimentality or motherly duty. Wearing a dark brown suit and projecting an alert intelligence, she spoke with “a rapid fire articulation that is the despair of reporters.” And she lectured for ninety minutes not about child labor, prison reform, or juvenile delinquency—quintessential women’s issues of her day—but about “diseased brains” and preventing mental illness. She cited statistics about the pervasiveness of insanity and the degree to which various factors were responsible, then advocated advanced hospital care, including the latest scientific treatment, expert nursing care, and “machinery for necessary recreation.”⁵ Even as newspaper reporters and other onlookers noted Barnard’s reassuringly feminine manners, she drew her authority from her status as a social welfare professional.⁶

Barnard’s address on that Sunday afternoon was the opening salvo in the annual meeting of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service, the leading forum for Progressive social thinkers in the state. Her audience was mostly white middle-class men and women who cultivated an interest in social reform but had no professional training. Although Barnard was a nationally known reformer with no ties to North Carolina, her interests, mode of address, and reception echo those of her assembled lay audience. Like Barnard, North Carolina’s female Progressive reformers tackled a range of topics beyond those that supposedly appealed naturally

⁵ “Miss Kate Barnard to Speak Sunday,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 Jan. 1917; “State Conference on Social Service Has First Session,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 22 Jan. 1917.

⁶ For discussions of the particular constraints and opportunities that women faced in the emerging professions of the early twentieth century, see Daniel Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

to their feminine nature. Although women's political strategies often relied on male assumptions that their motives stemmed from maternal concerns, their choices of reforms depended upon their growing knowledge of experts' recommendations about prevention and efficiency.⁷ They used their knowledge of Progressive principles to enhance but also reshape their image as society's caregivers. Southern white women's concern for society's dependents was also inflected with their racial beliefs and a sense of religious duty, linked to but transcending gender.

A generation of white, middle-class women that came of age in the New South fashioned a vision of the state's responsibility for its citizens and at the same time claimed a place within the expanding bureaucracy. In their campaigns to establish adequate welfare programs, North Carolina's reform-minded women repeatedly confronted and challenged ideas about women's capabilities and proper gender roles. As they drew on their gender and moral authority to justify their actions, they simultaneously expanded the bounds of acceptable female behavior.⁸ Still, their sex restricted their political options. Not yet enfranchised, these crusaders had limited influence within the state. It was only with the support of like-minded male activists, legislators,

⁷ Much of the scholarship on southern women's political activism places clubwomen's social reform work within the tradition of maternalism. For examples of studies that focus on women's maternalist rhetoric and the closely related idea of "public housekeeping" in political organizing, see Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Nancy S. Dye, "Introduction," and Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Molly Ladd-Taylor, Hull House Goes to Washington: Women and the Children's Bureau," in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds. *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); and Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, "From Clubs to Parties: North Carolina Women in the Advancement of the New Deal," *North Carolina Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1991): 320-39. Some recent studies have also offered important contextual additions to maternalism. Joan Marie Johnson focuses on clubwomen's southern identity in *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004). In *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, Regina Kunzel discusses the importance of professionalism in reshaping women's aims during the transition of authority from evangelical women reformers and female social workers.

⁸ See Anastatia Sims, *Power of Femininity in the New South* and Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

and officials that North Carolina's women accomplished their goals. Organized white laywomen had male counterparts, businessmen or ministers, who devoted themselves to social reform with similar vigor and expansive vision. In fact, some male reformers' sympathy with the notion that social issues were inextricably linked made them important allies, particularly when these men also had positions of authority and political connections. Most of the state's prominent male reformers, however, devoted themselves to one or two primary issues. Many clubwomen maintained a wider variety of social interests, refreshing the sense of interconnectedness that fed their vision of social reform.

Daisy Denson, Kate Barnard's counterpart in North Carolina, stands out as an example of this generation of social reformers. The oldest child of a privileged Southern family, Denson was the first woman in North Carolina to hold an executive position at the state level and the first female state welfare executive in the nation.⁹ She used her position to promote her vision of public welfare, which grew from her concern for Christian charity and the state's Anglo-Saxon heritage. Denson's genuine concern for "the unfortunate and the weak," rooted in her religious beliefs, merged with her developing awareness of new social welfare methods. The result was a concept of society in which white women could exercise their power as guardians of the Anglo-Saxon race through social welfare activities.¹⁰ Denson's experience as a woman and her alliances with other women shaped her welfare priorities and allowed her to mobilize a state-wide network of female activists. Through Denson's career and connections, we witness the development of the state's systems of social welfare from the turn of the century through the

⁹ "Resignation of Miss Denson: First Woman to Hold an Executive Position in North Carolina," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 July 1921; and Mrs. Al Fairbrother, "Miss Daisy Denson," *Everything Weekly* (Greensboro, NC), 24 Jan. 1914.

¹⁰ *Annual Report of the Board of Public Charities, 1912* (hereafter *BPC Report, 1912*), 12.

First World War and the importance of a generation of female reformers who claimed responsibility for the public welfare.

Daisy Denson and the Legacy of Christian Charity

Daisy Denson was born on December 1, 1863, in the midst of the Civil War. Her father Claude Denson served as a Captain in the Confederate Army, and her mother Margaret Matilda Cowan Denson came from a family of prosperous North Carolina slaveowners. After the war, the Densons established a comfortably middle-class life in Pittsboro. Claude opened the Pittsboro Scientific Academy in 1866, and Mary Matilda looked after their growing family.¹¹ Daisy was the oldest of seven surviving children.¹² The family had means enough to send her to the Leache-Wood School for Young Ladies, in Norfolk, Virginia, where she received a satisfactory, if unusual, education: among other courses, the school offered instruction in accounting and office management.¹³ In her early twenties she returned to Pittsboro to teach with her father. Three decades later, she recalled that “when I grew up Southern girls were just beginning to venture out into the great world of business—teaching was about the only so-called ‘respectable’ opening for them.”¹⁴

Claude Denson became increasingly well known in the state, serving in turn as secretary and treasurer of the North Carolina Agricultural Society, which organized the annual state fair to

¹¹ R. Beverly Raney, Jr., “Denson, Claudius Baker,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 2, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Federal Population Census Schedule for Chatham County, Center Twp, North Carolina.

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 Federal Population Census Schedule for Chatham County, Center Twp, North Carolina; and Claudius Ashborn Denson’s gravestone at St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church, Pittsboro, North Carolina.

¹³ Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, “Women and the Transformation of American Politics: North Carolina, 1898-1940” (PhD diss., UNC-Chapel Hill, 1995), 120.

¹⁴ Fairbrother, “Miss Daisy Denson.”

educate farmers about “scientific” farming methods. He helped found the North Carolina Teacher’s Assembly in 1884. He was also the secretary of the North Carolina Confederate Veterans’ Association and commissioner-in-chief of the Southern Inter-State Immigration Society’s Educational Department.¹⁵ In 1887 he became the co-principal of Raleigh Male Academy, and the family moved to Raleigh.¹⁶ There, the Densons quickly became a leading force in the white community.

Reverence for the Anglo-Saxon race and the myth of the Lost Cause were crucial parts of Daisy Denson’s upbringing, as for many white women of her class and generation.¹⁷ In 1892 Claude was a member of the organizing board of Raleigh’s centennial celebration, and the newspaper reports of the celebration demonstrate the dominant politics of white supremacy and nativism: “With pure English blood on both sides in our veins, and with an ancestry which, for a hundred years have known no home but North Carolina, we did feel a pride in the scope and character of the celebration of the hundredth birth-day of the Anglo-Saxon city. And so long as Anglo-Saxon pride and spirit remain with our people, there will be no backward step in the grand

¹⁵ Denson served for as Secretary and Executive Manager of the NC Agricultural Society from 1876 to 1880, and as Treasurer and Assistant Secretary for almost twenty-five years. Kemp Plummer Battle, *The Early History of Raleigh, the Capital City of North Carolina; and An Account of the Centennial Celebration, Prepared by the Chairman of the Publication Committee, at the Request of the Board of Managers* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1893); Raney, “Denson,” in *North Carolina Dictionary of Biography*; and Claude Denson to Matilda Denson, Raleigh, 30 Sept. 1893, Denson Family Papers (PC #1230 at State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh; hereafter Denson Papers), Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1850-1944.

¹⁶ Raleigh Male Academy catalog, 1892-93, Denson Papers, Box 2, Folder: Raleigh Male Academy; and Edward McCrady and Samuel A’Court Ashe, *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas of the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, WI: Brant & Fuller, 1902), 420. Charles Lee Smith claims that Denson took over upon the founder’s death in December, 1884. Smith, *The History of Education in North Carolina*, Vol. 3 in *Contributions to American Educational History* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888).

¹⁷ A fascination with the “Anglo-Saxon race” was common among white southern elites, although the phenomenon was not confined to the South or elites. Facing an influx of “new immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe, many whites sought to define Americanness culturally, linguistically, and physically in terms of descent from Anglo-Saxon forebears. The South attracted few immigrants, but many white southerners picked up on widespread fascination with the Anglo-Saxon heritage and used Anglo-Saxon descent as a vehicle for messages about whites’ supposed racial purity and superiority over blacks.

march of progress.”¹⁸ The implicit theme of the week-long event was reverence of the city’s “Anglo-Saxon forefathers” and celebration of a mythic past in which white supremacy went unchallenged. On Tuesday, October 18, 1892, Claude Denson served as a Field Marshal in the huge centennial parade (“a grand allegorical and trades procession”), leading a division of 125 Raleigh Male Academy students wearing the city colors who marched four abreast and shouted the school’s slogan. Marching ahead of the students were eight Confederate veterans dressed in grey, whom the crowds “saluted with reverence as they passed by.”

That evening, Claude Denson took the stage in the city’s Stronach Auditorium before an audience of hundreds to read a poem celebrating the city’s progress and enlightenment. The next night, ten thousand Raleighites turned out to watch a fireworks display. On Thursday evening the captain’s younger two daughters Kate and Mary were among the happy revelers at a more exclusive event, the Centennial Ball, billed as the “most magnificent social event of the season.” Along with their brothers Thomas and Eugene and about one hundred of Raleigh’s elite white youth, they danced while “dressed in the quaint costumes of ‘ye olden time.’” Hundreds of less privileged spectators looked on “from outside of the ball netting.”¹⁹

Daisy Denson did not join her siblings on the ballroom floor during the centennial celebration, probably because by this time she was thirty years old. She still lived at home with her parents, presumably out of necessity as well as propriety. She filled some of her time with club and association work, a suitable occupation for a single southern woman of means. When the family moved to Raleigh, Daisy joined the Monday Evening Club. The mixed-sex club was

¹⁸ Battle, *Early History of Raleigh*, 5; *State Chronicle*, 19 Oct. 1893, quoted in Battle, *Early History of Raleigh*, 131.

¹⁹ Battle, *Early History of Raleigh*, 106-127, 131-3. The population at the time was only around thirteen thousand. See “North Carolina Cities Population Changes in 1800s, accessed 18 Aug. 2013, <http://historync.org/NCCityPopulations1800s.htm>.

a literary group whose intellectual discussions, according to a newspaper profile of Denson, “satisfied, in a measure, the intellectual cravings of the active brain which, with the vigor and zest of youth, longed to do more than was expected of the well bred Southern girl of that period.” She also served as secretary for the Wake County Memorial Association and was for years an active member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She had her first experience with “organized altruistic work” as a member of the Ministering Circle of the King’s Daughters.²⁰

Denson’s impulse for altruistic work derived partly from her sense that social work was a Christian calling. The Densons attended Christ Church, Raleigh’s oldest Protestant Episcopal church, where women worked on charitable efforts through various guilds, the Woman’s Auxiliary to the Board of Missions, and St. Mildred’s chapter of the Daughters of the King.²¹ Because of her faith in an almighty Christian God, Denson believed there was no realm that social service could not reach. Moreover, Denson’s conception of social service was firmly rooted in religion. As she wrote to Dr. William L. Poteat, a Baptist and President of Wake Forest College, in December 1912, she was convinced that “There would be no social work but for the life of Jesus and the influence of the church.”²²

Denson, Poteat, and many of their fellow reformers were part of a social movement with religious underpinnings called social Christianity or the social gospel.²³ Although the social

²⁰ Fairbrother, “Miss Daisy Denson.” The Order of King’s Daughters was a nondenominational Christian organization, with circles formed in North Carolina cities in the 1880s. Because members were often from elite families, the circles often had greater political influence than their small numbers would suggest. Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 45-46.

²¹ Davyd Foard Hood, *To The Glory of God: Christ Church, 1821-1996* (Raleigh: Marblehead Publishing for Christ Church, 1997), 49-50.

²² Daisy Denson to Dr. W. L. Poteat, 2 Dec. 1912, Records of the State Board of Public Welfare (State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh; hereafter, BPW Records), Commissioner’s Office: General Correspondence of the Board, 1891-1922 (hereafter General Corr. of the Board), Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912.

²³ Following Henry May and then Robert T. Handy, scholars have categorized three types or forms of Social Christianity: conservatives, who favored mild reforms; radicals, sometimes called Christian socialists, who wanted

gospel had many variants, some core beliefs united its followers. These liberal Protestants believed that the moral teachings of Jesus called Christians to social service and reform.²⁴ The central concept of the social gospel, as imagined by one of its foremost theologians, Walter Rauschenbusch, was the kingdom of God on earth. As Robert T. Handy writes, Rauschenbusch's "doctrine of the kingdom was both a religious and social one... It was 'humanity organized according to the will of God' ... The kingdom was not a utopia— Rauschenbusch insisted that there could be no perfection on earth, but only a continual growth toward perfection."²⁵ Scholars have noted that the social gospel was in many ways the religious analog of the secular Progressive movement, in that both movements embraced the potential of science to address the inequities of industrial society.²⁶ Scholarly opinion on the extent and influence of the social gospel in the South is somewhat divided. Still, it is safe to say that although social Christianity had less influence in the South than in some other regions, a number of religious leaders nevertheless embraced its message.²⁷ The social gospel was a critical

to overthrow the existing system of inequality; and, in the middle, advocates of "Progressive Social Christianity," or the "social gospel." These supporters of the social gospel were in favor of social change through Progressive-style reforms that preserved elements of individual rights and responsibilities. Robert T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 5-6.

²⁴ For the central tenets of the social gospel, see Handy, *Social Gospel in America*, 10-11.

²⁵ Handy, *Social Gospel in America*, 256-7, quoting from Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," in *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 131-45.

²⁶ Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), xviii; and Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15-16.

²⁷ Earlier scholars such as Samuel S. Hill, Jr. and Rufus Spain found little evidence of the social gospel in the South, and this strain of thought has persisted, particularly in the notion that the southern social gospel was a "mild regional variant" of the northern type. See John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of An American Region*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Upper Saddle River, NJ: PearsonPrentice Hall, 2004), 446. Other historians have gone farther, concluding that particular southern denominations were antagonistic to the social gospel. See, for example, James J. Thompson, Jr.'s *Tried as by Fire: Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982). These scholars cast all tendencies toward social Christianity as merely benevolence or charity rather than sustained social critique or reform. Other scholars argue that too much of the debate has been framed around the reductionist question of "did the South have as much of a social gospel movement as the North?"

inspiration for many Progressive reformers. In the South, women in particular drew on the religious justifications for their social service and reforming activities.²⁸

Claude Denson and the Board of Public Charities

In 1889, Claude Denson assumed a new set of duties, as the first Secretary of the Board of Public Charities. The Board of Public Charities had been established as a result of North Carolina's Reconstruction-era Constitution. "Beneficent provisions for the poor, the unfortunate and orphan, being one of the first duties of a civilized and christian State," the legislature entrusted to the Board "the management of all charitable and penal State institutions."²⁹ The Board's mandate was broad; it was charged with investigating and supervising all institutions, which included state-run mental hospitals, homes for veterans, and orphanages; county homes

and that this question is not actually helpful. Keith Harper argues that we should instead ask what forms social Christianity took in the South. He critiques earlier scholars for their assumption that because the Social Gospel was a product of urbanization and industrialization and these processes were slow to arrive in the South, the South never experienced a marked movement for social Christianity. Harper and others, including Wayne Flynt, John Patrick McDowell, and Paul Harvey, have found evidence of social Christianity in a variety of southern denominations, including Southern Baptists and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. See Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Wayne Flynt, "'Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted': The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Social Gospel, 1900-1920," in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 83-137; John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); and Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). The best historiographical overview of religion in the postbellum South is Paul Harvey's "Religion in the American South Since the Civil War," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed. John B. Boles (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 387-406. In addition, recent studies of leading intellectuals with social christianity tendencies are instructive, including Randal L. Hall's *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) and Mark R. Wilson's *William Owen Carver's Controversies in the Baptist South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010).

²⁸ Many women's historians (although not intending to tackle directly the question of the social gospel in the South) have found that church women's missionary and social work activities provide strong evidence of reform tendencies that align with the tenets of the social gospel. For example, see Anastasia Sims, *Power of Femininity in the New South*; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); John Patrick McDowell, *Social Gospel in the South*.

²⁹ North Carolina Constitution of 1868, Article XI, Section 7.

and jails; and dozens of private institutions. It was also instructed to study social problems and recommend changes to the legislature.³⁰ Hindered by a lack of funding and legislative interest in its early years, however, the Board was “practically inactive.” The Board received a new jolt of life only when a state investigation of the State Hospital at Raleigh in the late 1880s made the governor aware of the stagnant Board.³¹ In 1889, the newly appointed five-member Board elected Claude Denson as secretary, and in 1891 the Board began to receive some state funding.³²

The Board’s purview did not extend to providing services or financial relief to the state’s indigent population. That task fell mostly to individual counties, where boards of supervisors dedicated some portion of local tax revenues to supporting the white and black poor. Although counties generally allocated ten percent of revenues for the poor, disparities between counties’ provisions for the poor were marked.³³ Most counties had a poor home or work house, usually for the aged or infirm, where conditions were often far from desirable. Residents of the county

³⁰ The law chartering the board stated that “they shall investigate and supervise the whole system of the charitable and penal institutions of the State, and shall recommend such changes and additional provisions as they may deem needful for their economical and efficient administration” (Section 2). The law also stated that “the general condition of the State as effected by crimes, vagrancy, and pauperism, shall also come under the view of the Board” and that the Board was charged with recommending the erection of “reformatory institutions” provided for in the state constitution (Section 3). The board’s mandate including studying “the causes of insanity, defect or loss of the several senses, idiocy, and the deformity and infirmity of the physical organization” and reporting on these matters to the General Assembly and the public (Section 4). North Carolina Public Law 1868-69, ch. 170.

³¹ A. Laurance Aydlett, “The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1947), 7, 8.

³² C. B. Denson had been part of a commission that recommended changes to the state’s institution for the insane in the 1870s, leading to the construction of a second institution for the white insane in Morganton. Denson to Miss W. A. White, 21 Mar. 1917, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: 1917. On funding of the board: NC Public Law 1891, ch. 491 provided that the board would receive compensation for actual expenses, allowing more than one meeting per year, and the state would pay office and printing expenses. See Aydlett, “The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare,” 9.

³³ In 1902, for example, the neighboring counties of Chowan and Wilson made very different provisions. Chowan housed 5 people in its county home and gave outdoor relief to another 5, while Wilson had 32 people in its home and 113 receiving relief. *BPC Report, 1902*, 44-45.

homes lived under the watchful eye of superintendents, who might “confine” or punish them for “disobedience,” and the able-bodied inmates were usually required to labor on county-owned farms in order to make the homes reasonably self-sustaining.³⁴ Despite these limitations, county homes served a vital function by providing shelter and sustenance to the most desperately poverty-stricken people. According to estimates from 1896 to 1901, the county homes supported an average each year of 1,300 people, both black and white.³⁵

County supervisors helped support other poor families through “outdoor relief,” small monthly payments to help them purchase essentials while living on their own. Here, too, provisions varied drastically; in 1903, while the commissioners of mountainous Transylvania County gave \$6 per month to 10 families on outdoor relief, Iredell County, in the Piedmont, distributed \$1 per month to 75 families, and Guilford and Mecklenberg Counties, home to Greensboro and Charlotte, distributed no outdoor relief at all. Most counties’ spending fell between these extremes, with the average monthly payment in 1903 at \$2.08.³⁶ The Board estimated that 3,918 people received public funds each year between 1896 and 1901. The number of people receiving outdoor relief thus far exceeded the number residing in poor homes, perhaps because they preferred to maintain their independence or because of space limits in county homes. Local officials, however, probably agreed with Claude Denson that distributing poor funds without the supervision afforded by residence at poor homes could “encourage idleness and degeneracy.”³⁷

³⁴ See, for example, the report on the Alamance County Home, *BPC Report, 1902*, 57; on expenditures for the poor, see *BPC Report, 1902*, 43.

³⁵ *BPC report, 1902*, 43-44.

³⁶ *BPC Report, 1903*, 140.

³⁷ *BPC Report, 1902*, 44.

In addition to county funds, North Carolinians relied on private charities for social services. Private charities were particularly important in urban areas in filling the gaps between what people needed and what few services local governments provided. Associated Charities funded some rudimentary social services and provided food and clothing for the poor. Private groups, often with religious affiliations, ran orphanages. Other groups ran hospitals and sanitariums, some of which cared for the poor.

The state board was charged with overseeing all of these institutions, including private institutions and county poor homes. But the state board had little power to sanction institutions for mismanagement, and its funding was restricted to office expenses and members' travel to meetings. Notably, the state did not provide funds for board members' travel to inspect any of the institutions they purportedly managed. Perhaps in response to this quandary, the board developed the idea of three-member county boards of visitors who would file reports with Denson about conditions in local institutions, including county poorhouses and jails. This informal arrangement helped the board fulfill its obligation to report on conditions in institutions around the state. By 1896, the board claimed that the county boards were helping to improve conditions in county homes and jails.³⁸

Still, conditions in county homes were grim. In mountainous Cherokee County, in western North Carolina, one visitor in 1902 described the county home as "truly a 'poor house.' I am 70 years old and I never saw a place so utterly destitute of all means of comfort. The houses are old log structures, and the logs are rotten... There is not a shade tree in 100 yards, and it is one of the most horrid places I ever saw used for the purpose. It will be impossible to live

³⁸ Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 12.

comfortably in the house in the winter.”³⁹ The condition of the county home in Cherokee was “bad,” according to the board’s official categorization, but the Cherokee poor home was not alone; the board designated more than a quarter of county homes that year as less than “good.” In addition, the management of county homes was sometimes inadequate. Claude Denson was well aware of these problems. He wrote in 1901 that “the provision for the poor does not equal that for the criminal, although there is no jail that is too well cared for.” The best solution at his disposal, however, was to ask the board to spark interest among “men and women of character” in examining the homes and pushing county commissioners to improve them.⁴⁰

As secretary, Claude Denson worked from the family’s home in downtown Raleigh while still teaching at the Raleigh Male Academy. He regularly corresponded with the five commissioners on the board, attempting to establish some modicum of supervision over the state’s institutions. When Claude traveled on other business, he would write to Daisy with instructions.⁴¹ Claude’s health began to decline as early as 1898, but he continued his work as secretary, with Daisy’s help. As he lay critically ill in the weeks before his death on January 15, 1903, the *Raleigh News and Observer* praised his work over the last ten years: “Capt. C. B. Denson, has wrought with intelligent zeal, patriotic love of his State, and Christian sympathy with all of God’s afflicted. The State holds him and his abundant labors in grateful esteem.”⁴²

He worked until a few weeks before his death on January 15, 1903, survived by his widow and

³⁹ The conditions at Cherokee’s poor home were “bad,” according to the Board’s official categorization, but six other counties fell into the same category, and altogether more than a quarter of the county homes were less than “good.” *BPC Report, 1902*, 40-41, 67.

⁴⁰ *BPC Report, 1901*, 181-182 (quote 181).

⁴¹ See, for example, Claude Denson to Daisy Denson, 1 Nov. 1897, Denson Papers, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1850-1944.

⁴² “Our State Charities – the Great Advance from 1892 to 1902,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 31 Dec. 1902; and “In and about the City” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 Jan. 1903.

several adult children.⁴³ After he died, members of the Board of Public Charities praised him one of the state's "most distinguished and useful citizens ... who exalted the work of the Board in a most conspicuous way; whose heart and mind were enlisted in its work."⁴⁴

"An Old Scholar of the New York School": Denson as a Social Welfare Professional

Daisy Denson assumed her father's responsibilities upon his death. At first she worked in an unofficial capacity, uncertain whether the governor would accept her as a replacement for her father. From the beginning of her tenure, however, Daisy Denson had the support of the board, especially of Dr. Charles Duffy and William A. Blair. Blair, a prominent banker and lawyer in Winston-Salem, was chair of the Board from 1904 until his death in 1948.⁴⁵ He offered Daisy unwavering support and frequently corresponded with her about matters of the Board. Charles Duffy also supported Daisy during her first few months in his capacity as chair, before resigning from the board in July 1904. Duffy wrote to Daisy as Claude lay on his deathbed, giving her the somewhat mixed message that he felt "assured you will come as near as any one else to filling your father's place. Do not be disturbed if you do not entirely fill it; that, in my opinion, cannot be done." He wrote her again ten days after Claude's death, supporting her right to equal pay and expressing his hope that her work as interim secretary would convince the Board that she should be hired permanently.⁴⁶ Charles Duffy and Daisy Denson maintained a

⁴³ Diary of the Secretary, 1898-1904, 38-39, BPW Records; Raney, "Denson," in *North Carolina Dictionary of Biography*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Population Census Schedule for Wake County, Wake Twp, North Carolina.

⁴⁴ *BPC Report, 1903*, 1.

⁴⁵ Thomas S. Morgan, "Blair, William Allen," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

⁴⁶ Duffy told Denson, "There is no reason why you should receive less pay for doing the same work your father did." Charles Duffy to Daisy Denson, 9 Jan. 1903; and Charles Duffy to Daisy Denson, 25 Jan. 1903, BPW Records, Commissioner's Office: State Board Correspondence, 1897-1947 (hereafter State Board Corr.), Box 2, Folder Correspondence of Dr. Charles Duffy, Chairman of Board, 1897-1908.

warm rapport until his death in 1909.⁴⁷ In these relationships, as in her relationships with other board officials, Daisy benefited from her father's reputation as a dedicated worker and caring man. Without her father's recommendation, Daisy's sex would have prevented her from even being considered for the position of secretary.⁴⁸

Miss Daisy, as her colleagues called her, was adept at maneuvering in the capital's political currents, but from her earliest days with the Board she was hindered by men's assumptions about the capabilities of women. The extent of outright discrimination she encountered suggests that even more unspoken prejudice lurked beneath the surface of other interactions. Some of these attitudes, of course, were written into state law. In 1903, state law restricted eligibility for public offices to voting citizens, which automatically excluded all women and most blacks. Luckily for Denson, no one cited this law in objection to her filling the position of Secretary of the Board of Public Charities.⁴⁹ Denson received word in July 1903 that Governor Aycock had approved her appointment as Secretary. This decision made her the first woman appointed to public office in North Carolina.⁵⁰

There were, however, objections to her general suitability for the job. Even Charles Duffy had his doubts. He wrote to Daisy a few weeks after her father's death, "My only misgiving as to your fitness for the whole work is whether you can get along with the inspections of the public institutions."⁵¹ As he had never expressed a concern about Claude Denson's

⁴⁷ See correspondence in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: Correspondence of Dr. Charles Duffy, Chairman of Board, 1897-1908.

⁴⁸ See also Wilkerson-Freeman, "Women and the Transformation of American Politics," 126.

⁴⁹ On this topic, see Wilkerson-Freeman, "Women and the Transformation of American Politics," 126.

⁵⁰ "Resignation of Miss Denson," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 July 1921.

⁵¹ Charles Duffy to Daisy Denson, 30 Jan. 1903, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: Correspondence of Dr. Charles Duffy, Chairman of Board, 1897-1908.

“fitness” in this regard, he must have wondered whether her sex would be an impediment. Blair sounded a similar note a few years later as he informed Daisy of a visit from a George W. Crabtree, who came to explain his interest in welfare work. According to Blair, Crabtree “says he gets hold of information which would not be given to you because you are a lady.”⁵² Crabtree apparently believed that institutional staff would be shy about disclosing graphic or unpleasant details to Denson because of her sex. The staff might have feared upsetting a woman’s supposedly delicate sensibilities.

By February 1904, Denson had persuaded the governor to give her office space in the west corner of the Senate gallery. She moved all “the papers and valuable books of the Board” to her new office and “systematically arranged” them.⁵³ From her new perch near the center of power, she was able personally to lobby Senators and meet with other officials near their places of business.⁵⁴ She gradually systematized both her work and the state’s procedures, fixing regular office hours and purchasing a typewriter for her correspondence.⁵⁵

On a daily basis, Denson ran the office as she pleased. The board members, the men with whom she worked most closely, trusted her. Charles Duffy told her early on that “As to my giving you instruction[s], that seems to be unnecessary as you seem to have no difficulty in carrying your end of the load.”⁵⁶ Although she was not the sole authority, in practice Denson

⁵² William Blair to Daisy Denson, 1 Oct. 1913, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, W. A. Blair, 1913.

⁵³ After the governor granted Denson’s request in January 1904, the office opened to the public on February 9, 1904. “Board of Public Charities Secretary’s Quarterly Report – January to April, 1904,” published as part of *BPC Report, 1904*, 306.

⁵⁴ Wilkerson-Freeman, “Women and the Transformation of American Politics,” 130-131, and 162, n. 36.

⁵⁵ “Quarterly Report, January to April, 1904,” and “Quarterly Report, July 1 to October 1, 1904,” printed with *BPC Report, 1904*, 306, 313.

⁵⁶ Duffy to Denson, 30 May 1903, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: Correspondence of Dr. Charles Duffy, Chairman of Board, 1897-1908.

wielded considerable power. As she pointed out in 1912, she was the “only paid employee except the office janitor.”⁵⁷ She sent monthly reports on her work, including copies of her daily work diary, to Chairman William Blair. She also submitted more formal reports to all five members of the board at their quarterly meetings. From time to time she consulted with Carey J. Hunter, the lone member of the board who lived in Raleigh, or wrote to Blair about a particularly urgent issue. For the most part, she worked independent of their oversight.

One of Denson’s earliest initiatives was to improve her professional credentials, the importance of which quickly became clear to her. During the early twentieth century, charity workers nationwide began to receive professional training as social workers. These new professionals sought to differentiate themselves from members of benevolent organizations and to claim control over growing welfare programs on the state and national level.⁵⁸ In the capital’s male-dominated political world, professional credentials were one way for Denson to shore up her authority. To enhance both her credibility and her effectiveness, she maintained connections with national social work organizations. Of primary importance was the National Conference of Charities and Correction (NCCC), founded in 1874. Upon her father’s death Denson took over as state corresponding secretary and faithfully attended the annual conferences to present North’s Carolina report, even though she had to take unpaid leave and cover her own travel expenses.⁵⁹ She also served on the NCCC’s Committee on Public and Private Charities, on the Committee on

⁵⁷ *BPC Report, 1912, 9.*

⁵⁸ In her examination of the administration of maternity homes, Regina Kunzel argues that the transition from benevolent reform to professional casework was also a shift from female evangelicalism to a supposedly gender-neutral and rational approach to social work. Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls.*

⁵⁹ On unpaid leave, see *BPC Report, 1908, 27.*

Organization, and for multiple years on the Committee on Reports from States.⁶⁰ When Denson was not able to attend the national conference, she would have received a bound copy of the proceedings and could read reports of the latest discussions of social welfare issues. She maintained an active correspondence with her counterparts in other states, further enriching her professional knowledge of the latest social service developments.⁶¹ Denson also sought out training at the Summer School of Philanthropy in New York, which she attended in July 1905, again taking unpaid leave. The summer school program included visits to model institutions and discussions with experts about the most current social welfare approaches.⁶² Denson made the most of her training, trading on the school's cachet to gain respect in relationships with other professionals. In 1910, writing to an official at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, she referred to herself as "an old scholar of the New York school, summer, 1905," stretching the truth to her advantage.⁶³ She also kept in touch with her classmates, many of whom held "very respectable positions," even ten years later.⁶⁴

Denson's reports, correspondence, and work logs all reflect her professional training. Her daily diary entries were terse accounts of paperwork, details, and fact-finding. In her correspondence with her colleagues in other states (mostly men), she discussed issues and expert opinions and demanded respect for her knowledge and position. When she wrote to friends or

⁶⁰ *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1903-1915* (Various printers; available online at quod.lib.umich.edu/n/ncosw/).

⁶¹ Denson wrote in her 1908 report that in addition to the regular office correspondence, there was "a constant call from all parts of the United States for information respecting our laws regarding institutions and sociological questions. This exchange of information from other States is a source of much help in arriving at proper and modern standards of care. Such inquiries are promptly answered." *BPC Report, 1908*, 26.

⁶² *BPC Report, 1905*, 15.

⁶³ Denson to Secretary, Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 8 Apr. 1910, General Corr. of the Board, Box 2, Folder: Jan.-July 1910

⁶⁴ Denson to Mr. M. E. Robinson, 3 May 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

acquaintances, more often women, she betrayed more of her sensibilities: she feared for white girls' virtue and she showed genuine concern for the plight of the poor. To both men and women she described the duties of Christian charity. If she lapsed into sentimentality, it was in language that might as easily been that of an Episcopalian bishop.

As secretary, Denson's responsibilities included recruiting the several hundred men and women who served on county boards of visitors, as well as collecting reports about their inspections of county homes and jails. As during her father's years, these boards were strictly voluntary, often filled with ministers or other citizens with an interest in charity. It was critical, however, for these boards to be filled, since the state did not provide funds for the secretary and board members to travel on inspection trips. Board members occasionally inspected institutions close to their own homes, at their own expense. But for reports on conditions in the vast majority of the state, Denson had to rely on the informal county boards of visitors.

The legislature began to subsidize travel for on-site inspections in 1909.⁶⁵ Denson's workload ballooned as a result, and she recommended that the legislature allow the board to hire someone to help her with the inspections of county institutions.⁶⁶ In the absence of additional staff, Denson or other members of the board personally visited state institutions—the state hospitals for the insane, for example—and filed reports on the patients' environment and treatment. The board also attempted to respond to reports in the press of poor conditions or abuse at both state-run and private institutions.

Because most of Denson's day-to-day work concerned the details of institutional conditions, she was acutely aware of the state's need for additional institutions or for

⁶⁵ North Carolina Public Law 1909, ch. 899; and Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 15.

⁶⁶ *BPC Report, 1909*, 21; *BPC Report, 1910*, 6. See also Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 15.

improvements to the physical plant of existing institutions. One problem she tackled was the housing of mentally ill patients in county jails, for lack of better facilities. Denson argued that the state needed more space in its mental hospitals, where patients stood a chance of being cured.⁶⁷ Again and again, Denson clamored for increased state appropriations to existing institutions or made the case that, in her professional opinion, the state needed new institutions in order to serve various “defective” populations.

Denson’s ability to improve living conditions at various institutions was hampered by her lack of regulatory or punitive power. Although the state considered it a misdemeanor for institutional officials to fail to report on conditions at the institutions, there was no such sanction for tolerating poor conditions. In 1903, for example, Denson described her attempts to improve conditions at county institutions: “The Secretary has communicated with the commissioners of those counties in which the homes and jails were not reported as satisfactory. The boards of [twelve] counties have been addressed, with the request that they cooperate with the Board of Public Charities in effecting the desired improvement... Replies have been received from four of these counties expressing an intention to comply with the request of the Board of Charities”—leaving, of course, eight delinquent counties who apparently ignored Denson’s chiding, with no consequence.⁶⁸ Publishing the names of the delinquent counties, as Denson did in this 1903 report, was Denson’s only real recourse. Her annual reports included statistical and narrative descriptions of the conditions in state and local institutions, but the effect of these illustrations on the public was probably negligible.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ 1903 report to NCCC, reprinted in *BPC Report, 1903*, 160.

⁶⁸ Quarterly report, July-Oct. 1903, printed with *BPC Report, 1903*, 162-3.

⁶⁹ Conditions did, however, improve over time. In 1916, Denson provided a retrospective view of the past decade, including her opinion that “There has ... been a rise in the standard of care of unfortunates in the county institutions,

The state board did have the power to license one category of private institutions, hospitals caring for “inebriates,” “drug habitués,” or other mental patients. This category formed a small percentage of the state’s many privately-run institutions, which included orphanages, maternity homes, homes for Confederate veterans and widows, reformatories, and sanatoria. Denson apparently viewed child-caring institutions, or orphanages, as the most problematic, since children were “helpless” and since these institutions were the most likely to be privately run. She repeatedly recommended that the state give her the power to license child-caring institutions, and, she implied, to shut them down.⁷⁰ Denson was adamant in her 1911 report: “From time to time we learn of so-called orphanages run by individuals with no financial backing to insure proper care of children. It is to be feared that some of these are being exploited for private gain. We repeat the recommendation made for several years past, viz: CHILD-CARING INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE CERTIFIED BY THE BOARD OF PUBLIC CHARITIES BEFORE BEING ALLOWED TO RECEIVE CHILDREN.”⁷¹ In 1914, she appealed to legislators, “It is entirely in line with progressive business methods for the State to require proper persons for this work and to prohibit the exploiting of the children.”⁷² Although Denson focused on child-caring institutions as a point of particular concern, she spoke of the situation as a professional rather than a woman with maternal compassion. She marshaled principles of business and management to her side, perhaps seeking to appeal to legislators’ business experience.

much improvement in sanitary and heating equipment, and better housing facilities. Compulsory bath and clean clothing are required in a number of jails.” *BPC Report, 1916*, 6.

⁷⁰ See call in *BPC Report, 1909*, 17, 21; *BPC Report, 1910*, 6; *BPC Report, 1911*, 17; *BPC Report, 1912*, 11; *BPC Report, 1913*, 13; and *BPC Report, 1914*, 14.

⁷¹ *BPC Report, 1911*, 16-17; capitalization in original. See also *BPC Report, 1908*, 16.

⁷² *BPC Report, 1914*, 14.

Denson's description of the circumstances at many private orphanages highlights the tension between her reliance on private organizations and her belief that amateur charity workers were not always suited for the work. She wrote in 1909 that "there is a multitude of so-called charity workers who are conscientious men and women, but who have mistaken ideas of what is really needed to better the condition of the unfortunates around them. They rush into charity work with the most noble impulses, but with a very superficial knowledge of the work to be done and the manner in which it should be done."⁷³

Although Denson was convinced that professional training produced superior social workers, the reality was that she was the state's sole welfare professional. In order to accomplish her job of overseeing the state's institutions, she made full use of her connections with all sorts of people, including medical doctors interested in Christian charity, ministers who headed orphanages, and untrained members of the county boards of visitors. Her contacts shared her sensibilities of Christian social service and a Progressive faith in preventive measures. They also shared similar social positions as members of the state's white, urban elite. Denson's male allies were crucial. Her supporters on the Board of Public Charities lacked professional training but could bring her proposals directly to friends in the legislature. Male members of the county boards were in a similar position with regard to local politicians. In addition to fostering connections with powerful men, Denson took advantage of her connections with her fellow clubwomen.

Organized Women and Social Service

Women's clubs in early twentieth-century North Carolina were leaders of progressive reform in their own right. Historians have revealed a long and robust tradition of women's

⁷³ *BPC Report, 1909*, 16-17.

political activism before the Nineteenth Amendment, across the nation. In the South, women's Progressive-era reforms built on decades of work in missionary societies, temperance societies, and other charitable work. For black women, organizing in clubs was an important means of providing for the community. For white women, too, clubs provided a political outlet.

Progressive-era women tackled a multitude of social ills, with one white leader billing "educated, christianized, organized womanhood" as "the new force present in modern civilization," recently awakened to the consciousness of their "power for good."⁷⁴ Even without the vote, women drew on their influence as mothers and moral guardians to push Progressive reforms through the legislature. Many of their civic improvement campaigns fell under the rubric of "public housekeeping." Other concerns, such as education, child welfare, prison reform, and public health, built on their status as caregivers. Their collective efforts expanded the state's conception of its responsibility for community welfare. Their work was critical in placing North Carolina at the forefront of Progressivism in the New South.⁷⁵

By the turn of the century, black and white clubwomen's reform efforts were almost entirely segregated. Although North Carolina had many types of women's clubs, the (white) Federation of Women's Clubs and the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were the central arenas for white and black women's social welfare work. After its organization in 1902, the white federation grew quickly in size and influence. The black federation, founded in 1909, was a smaller group with considerably less influence with white power brokers; nevertheless, it served an important role as a meeting ground and network for middle-class African American

⁷⁴ Mrs. R. R. Cotten, address, 6 May 1913, *North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook, 1913-1914* (hereafter *FWC Yearbook*), 25-26, North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs Records (Federation headquarters, Raleigh, NC; hereafter *FWC Records*).

⁷⁵ Anastatia Sims describes the reform tradition among North Carolina's women's clubs. She also acknowledges the limitations of women's independent power, noting that women's authority was enabled by their agreement with men about social work priorities. Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 109-127, 3-4, 82.

women.⁷⁶ Other club networks also took on philanthropic projects, including the white United Daughters of the Confederacy and white and black members of the Kings' Daughters and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.⁷⁷

Many clubs coordinated their social welfare activities in departments of social service or civics, but the variety of department names indicates the breadth of their efforts. From 1902 to 1914, the roster of Federation of Women's Clubs departments involved in some aspect of social welfare included Village Improvement, Civics, State Charities, Child Study, Health, Civil Service, Constructive Philanthropy, and Social Service.⁷⁸ Local clubs, too, organized charity work under multiple headings. In 1915, Clara S. Lingle, the head of the Federation's social service department, reported that "Very few of our clubs have social service departments, but many of them do a similar line of work through the civic departments." Many clubs' social service work focused on "practical things," such as "clothing school children and providing books and pictures, selling Red Cross seals [for tuberculosis], supporting visiting nurses, teaching in night schools, conducting betterment societies among mill operatives, and civic leagues among colored women, providing 'travelers' aid' at railroad stations, and supplying clothing and necessities to needy families especially at Christmas time."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 43-46, and Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*. On the differences between black and white women's welfare activism, see Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (Sept. 1991): 559-590.

⁷⁷ Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 114-115, 119-120. Sims notes that black women had their own parallel branches of the WCTU and the King's Daughters. The WCTU was the site of early attempts at racial cooperation in the 1880s and early 1890s, but the racist politics of the late 1890s killed these efforts. Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 24, 40-41, 46.

⁷⁸ Some of these departments were short-lived, others permanent. See *FWC Yearbooks*.

⁷⁹ *FWC Yearbook, 1915-1916*, 56.

In addition to their philanthropic efforts, some clubs sought reforms at the local or state level. Scholars have demonstrated that in many cases, women's desire for substantive reform grew out of their philanthropic experiences, as they became aware of social problems and pushed their local and state governments to do something about them. Clubwomen who visited county homes and were distressed to find decrepit facilities and infrequent religious services might leverage their clout within the community and push county commissioners towards providing more funding or new management for the homes. Women who wanted to protect their families from contracting diseases such as tuberculosis led city clean-up campaigns and hired public health nurses, then convinced municipal governments to take over the programs. In North Carolina, women concerned about state's abysmal illiteracy rates and about children laboring in textile mills pushed legislators to pass compulsory school attendance laws and require longer school terms.⁸⁰

Leaders of the white Federation of Women's Clubs encouraged these reform efforts. Self-education was an important part of their strategy. Annual federation yearbooks included accounts of the past year's work by member clubs, and other clubs could draw information or inspiration from these accounts as they applied themselves to similar efforts. The Reciprocity Department, later the Bureau of Information, also served as a clearinghouse for clubwomen's knowledge. This department collected papers written by women for their own clubs on a variety

⁸⁰ For the most comprehensive account of North Carolina clubwomen's reform activities on all fronts, see Sims, *Power of Femininity*, especially Chapter 3, "'A Power for Good': The Progressive Impulse." For similar information about South Carolina, see Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, especially Chapter 5, "Reluctant Reformers, Resistant Legislators: White Clubwomen and Social Reform." Of course, some of clubwomen's philanthropic efforts, such as education of mill operatives, highlighted the shortcomings of the New South economy. Sims and Johnson argue, however, that southern white clubwomen's personal and economic ties to that economic system, as well as their faith in the race and class distinctions embedded in the New South's hierarchy, led them to abstain from real critique. Instead, Sims writes, "White clubwomen attempted to alleviate the problems economic growth created, but most of them did not challenge the fundamental premises of the New South creed, or question the inequities of the new order." Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 82-83). See also Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, especially 130-132, 152-154.

of subjects and loaned them out to “any club studying the respective subjects.” Although many of the papers were on literary, historical, or cultural topics, others tackled areas such as the “feeding of infants” and “the development of brain cells.”⁸¹ Sallie Southall Cotten, a founder of the federation and its honorary president, recalled that “Nothing was so occult as to intimidate the women of that day and they studied that which they attempted. Club work has been an university to many women, who have learned that self-culture is the surest and best culture.”⁸²

In addition to disseminating information to knowledge-hungry members who took the initiative within their own clubs, federation leaders coordinated statewide reform drives. Recognizing the power of unified action, they recommended projects for local clubs to tackle across the state. Mrs. W. N. Hutt, chair of the health department, noted in 1911 that one of her goals was “to encourage clubs to not scatter effort on several lines of work, but to concentrate on one definite line until results are reached.”⁸³ The education department urged clubs to cooperate in its drive to establish county high schools by “creating a sentiment in favor of this much needed opportunity,” and in 1909 the chair of the department asked clubs to help lobby for a compulsory attendance law.⁸⁴ Clubwomen’s lobbying efforts included sending letters and petitions to legislators or voicing their opinions in person. They often relied on men sympathetic to their causes to speak on their behalf.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Sallie Southall Cotten, *History of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1901-1925* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1925), 57.

⁸² Cotten, *History*, 57.

⁸³ *FWC Yearbook, 1911-1912*, 48.

⁸⁴ *FWC Yearbook, 1907-1908*, 7-8; and Betty Evans Weathers, *A Century to Celebrate: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1902-1988, and GFWC of North Carolina, 1998-2002* (Oxford, N.C.: School of Graphic Arts, The Masonic Home for Children, 2003), 18-19.

⁸⁵ Martha K. Shaw, “The Development of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs: As Reflected in its Activities from 1902 until 1915,” 28 Nov. 1962, copy in FWC Records, Folder: 2708-2, History of Some Things Accomplished by the Federation.

One of the earliest social welfare reforms that united white women from across the state was the drive to establish a training school for delinquent white boys, as an alternative to sending them to jails and prisons. Clubwomen were not alone in their desire for such an institution. Claude Denson had long made it a priority. Standard practice was to house all types and ages and criminals together, so that boys arrested for petty crimes were jailed with adults or even sentenced to the chain gang. Claude's daughter, honoring his memory, also called for a reformatory. Like other supporters of the project, Daisy Denson emphasized the need to isolate merely delinquent boys from hardened adult criminals. Led by the King's Daughters, women achieved their goal in 1907 with the creation of Stonewall Jackson Training School. The legislature and governor recognized the importance of women's contributions by appointing nine women to Jackson's fifteen-member Board of Trustees—the first time women were appointed to such a state institution board.⁸⁶ In later years, the clubs continued to support the training school. In 1910, the industrial and child labor departments of the Federation directed their efforts toward building another cottage at Jackson, in cooperation with the King's Daughters.⁸⁷ By the next year, they had raised \$1,000 for the cottage.⁸⁸

With Jackson established, white clubwomen began to work on a similar institution for girls. What became known as Samarcand Manor was once more the product of a long, cooperative crusade. Early lobbyists included the Woman's Club of Raleigh, the King's Daughters of Durham, various benevolent societies, and "some ladies from Greensboro."⁸⁹ The

⁸⁶ Sims argues that "the decision to include women on the board was ... indicative of a government that was expanding to include 'feminine' duties of nurturance and moral instruction as well as 'masculine' obligations of protection and discipline." Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 119-122.

⁸⁷ *FWC Yearbook, 1910-1911*, 36-37.

⁸⁸ Cotten, *History*, 41-42; and *FWC Yearbook, 1912-1913*, 30.

⁸⁹ Denson to White, 21 Mar. 1917, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: 1917.

Federation of Women's Clubs joined the campaign by 1915.⁹⁰ In 1917, a legislature that would become known as "the most liberal-minded body" in recent memory created an institution to house and reform young white prostitutes, drunkards, vagrants, or other petty criminals.⁹¹

White clubwomen's effort to create Samarcand and other institutions for the state's "dependent, defective, and delinquent" population" reflected Progressive beliefs and emerging trends in the field of social work. Professional social workers, like other Progressives, emphasized efficiency and training. They argued that charity was not sufficient; in fact, charity might even be counterproductive. Instead, they emphasized preventive measures that could stem social problems of poverty, insanity, or deviance before they fully took hold. Progressive wisdom held that with proper care or training, delinquents might be reformed, mental patients healed, and the blind become self-supporting. Many preventive measures focused on children, since social workers believed that by providing moral instruction, health care, and education, they could make the next generation stronger, more productive, and less deviant.⁹² Clubwomen developed an optimistic vision of society in which feeble-minded, insane, or criminal people could be secluded in institutions until they could become useful members of society, allowing the rest of the populace to achieve new levels of prosperity and happiness.

Clubwomen developed this vision with the help of experts from the emerging social welfare profession, who analyzed social problems and offered reform-based solutions. At the

⁹⁰ Cotten, *History*, 83, 108-109.

⁹¹ Mrs. J. R. Chamberlain, "Samarcand Manor," *Board of Charities and Public Welfare Bulletin* (hereafter *BCPW Bulletin*) 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1918), 5, 7.

⁹² On the importance of white girls to the race, see Lee S. Polansky, "I Certainly Hope That You Will Be Able to Train Her: Reformers and The Georgia Training School for Girls," in *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*, ed. Elna Green (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 138-59; on female teenage delinquency more generally, see Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

annual conventions of the Federation of Women's Clubs, state officers arranged for experts to address their common concerns. Experts' talks sometimes influenced the direction of federation activity. At the 1909 convention, Dr. C. W. Stiles, an expert on hookworm, addressed the convention. The next year, C. Routzahn spoke about tuberculosis, and Dr. Watson Smith Rankin, the head of the state board of health, also made a "stirring address."⁹³ After hearing these public health experts speak at the 1910 convention, delegates inaugurated a federation department of health and elected Mrs. W. N. Hutt as its chair.

Hutt's work for the federation's new health department in 1910 and 1911 is indicative of the ways the state Federation of Women's Clubs spread information about social problems. Her first task was to send information about "health subjects" to all the clubs, asking that club members read them at meetings. Next, she had every clubwoman in the state—and there were hundreds—added to the mailing list of the state Board of Health, "so that each one receives a monthly bulletin on health subjects." That year Hutt gave almost two hundred lectures about health topics under the aegis of the Farmers' Institutes and the Board of Agriculture, targeting farm women who "need a knowledge of how to promote health in the home and in the locality." She also organized a statewide essay contest on topics of tuberculosis, hookworm, and general sanitation. While many of Hutt's initiatives reached beyond the circle of women's clubs, her zeal for distributing information no doubt meant that many clubwomen were well versed in public health measures. Indeed, clubwomen's record of achievement in public health supports a similar conclusion. Hutt reported that local clubs had organized for food safety, educated other women about disease prevention and pest control, and were "instrumental ... in the passing and enforcement of effective rules for town sanitation." She recommended that women work with

⁹³ Scrapbook 3, Cotten Collection, and coverage of Stiles' speech in *News and Observer*, 7 May 1909, cited in Martha K. Shaw, "The Development of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs."

local health authorities and ask for help as needed from the state Board of Health and its staff.⁹⁴ In 1912, forty-three of the state's eighty-seven clubs reported doing active health work.⁹⁵

The state federation also gave white clubwomen resources to make presentations about health topics in their local communities. In 1912, the civics department, in cooperation with several member clubs, provided a "stereopticon with many slides" and an accompanying lecture "for use in promoting the interest of the clubs in Civics and Health, which are so closely allied." Clubs who borrowed this set of materials could read the prepackaged lecture while showing the slides for an effective public presentation. The joint activities of the civic and health departments, especially under Hutt's energetic and able leadership, and the reports of work by local clubs, indicate that the federation was an effective network for connecting clubwomen with the latest expert knowledge about social problems and giving them skills and strategies for spearheading reforms in their local communities.

Although public health was a leading concern for the white state federation, its members also studied social welfare topics, inviting experts and national leaders in social welfare to their annual conventions. In 1913, Julia Lathrop, the head of the Children's Bureau, spoke for thirty minutes, explaining "in a concise and illuminating way the methods of work and sphere of usefulness" of the Bureau.⁹⁶ The *Greensboro Daily News* reported that "the audience was spellbound with the wonderful flow of oratory with which she is possessed and the convincing manner in which she puts facts before her hearers. Her address was thoroughly enjoyed and proved instructive as well as interesting."⁹⁷ In 1917, one of the convention's featured speakers

⁹⁴ "Health," report of Mrs. W. N. Hutt, *FWC Yearbook, 1911-1912*, 48-50.

⁹⁵ *FWC yearbook, 1912-1913*, 33-34.

⁹⁶ Cotten, *History*, 59.

⁹⁷ "North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs Now in Session," *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 May 1913.

was Howard L. Baldensperger, then secretary of the committee on capital punishment with the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor. Baldensperger, who had both an MA in economics and a year of experience as a research fellow with the New York School of Philanthropy, spoke about the “Economic Basis of Self-Government in Prisons.”⁹⁸ Two years later, Dr. Rachele S. Yarros, a pioneer in birth control and sex education, addressed the convention’s closing session. Yarros, who lived with her husband at Jane Addams’s Hull House for twenty years, helped found the American Social Hygiene Association. In 1922 she would open the first birth control clinic in Chicago.⁹⁹ North Carolina’s clubwomen may have known her through the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, for which she served as the first chair of the social hygiene department.¹⁰⁰ At the 1919 convention, Yarros spoke in her role as Director of Social Hygiene at the Illinois State Department of Public Health.¹⁰¹

If nationally known experts and reform leaders were occasional treats, state officials and experts were regular fare for women’s clubs. Some were frequent speakers, such as Jane McKimmon, the head of home demonstration work for North Carolina. At the 1916 convention she led an hour-long discussion on Rural Club organization, and she spoke again in 1919.¹⁰²

Another guest in 1919 was Kate Brew Vaughn. Although Vaughn was trained as a dietician and

⁹⁸ Baldensperger’s address was on May 10, 1917. “State Federation at Durham,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 4 May 1917. On Baldensperger’s training, see “Among the Alumni,” *Old Penn* (weekly magazine of the University of Pennsylvania) 14, no. 28 (8 April 1916), 915.

⁹⁹ Finding Aid to Rachele and Victor Yarros Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago, accessed 7 Apr. 2014, <http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll/services/rjd/findingaids/RVYarrosb.html>; and Patricia Spain Ward, “Rachele Slobodinsky Yarros,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America*, ed. Walter I. Trattner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 813-16.

¹⁰⁰ “Y.W.C.A. Notes,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 20 May 1918. The state board of health also helped arrange for her visit; see “Annual Convention of State Federation of Women’s Clubs,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 May 1919.

¹⁰¹ 1919 convention minutes, FWC Records, Convention minutes (bound volume), 83.

¹⁰² Cotten, *History*, 95; and “Annual Convention of State Federation of Women’s Clubs,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 May 1919.

specialist in home and economics and her current position was in the state health board's Bureau of Infant Hygiene director of the state bureau of infant hygiene, she spoke about the new juvenile court system and county welfare work.¹⁰³

“Most Valuable in Formulating Our Line of Work”: Denson’s Female Network

Daisy Denson was one of the experts to whom clubwomen turned when they wanted answers, and she played a special role among reform-minded clubwomen through the first two decades of the twentieth century. For Denson, work with clubwomen served her own professional ends, since women's recognized role in social reform had its political uses.

Denson's social and professional home was in Raleigh, but she confronted problems of social welfare that extended across the state and were rooted in local communities. To tackle these problems, Denson helped to weave a web of reformers. Her friends and contacts among the white clubwomen of the state were critical in extending her reach.

Many clubwomen already knew Denson from her own club career. In 1904 she and her sister Mary became founding members of the Woman's Club of Raleigh, which quickly became one of the largest member clubs in the state Federation of Women's Clubs. Daisy's influence on the Raleigh club's work is apparent in its first few years, when she served as chairman of the Social Service Department. Her projects for the club in its inaugural year included a study of “child-saving” that examined the role of industrial schools and a discussion of “private charitable forces and public relief forces.”¹⁰⁴ The next year, she declared that the club would “labor for the

¹⁰³ Vaughn described the development of state officials' welfare work in counties after the passage of important welfare legislation in 1917 and 1919. “Annual Convention of State Federation of Women's Clubs,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 May 1919; J. W. Roy Norton and Benjamin Drake, “History of Public Health in North Carolina,” in *Medicine in North Carolina: Essays in the History of Medical Science and Medical Service, 1524-1960*, vol. 2, ed. Dorothy Long, (Raleigh: The North Carolina Medical Society, 1972), 596; and 1919 convention minutes, FWC Records, Convention Minutes (bound volume), 74.

¹⁰⁴ Raleigh Woman's Club *Yearbook*, 1904-1905, 17-18, Denson Papers, Box 2, Folder: Yearbooks.

establishment” of a juvenile court system, a reform school for delinquent boys, a “School for the Feeble Minded Children,” and “State care for all the Insane.”¹⁰⁵

Because of her work with the state federation and her membership in one of the state’s largest and most powerful women’s clubs, Denson knew dozens of club leaders.¹⁰⁶ When the state’s leading white clubwomen turned to her for help—as did the chair of the federation’s social service committee in 1913, writing that Denson’s experience made her suggestions “most valuable in formulating our line of work”—she worked closely with them to shape their reform platforms and their opinions.¹⁰⁷ Denson strove to involve clubwomen with her work for the Board of Public Charities, recommending projects for them to support or suggesting additional ways for the clubwomen to learn more about social work. She prompted some women to attend large gatherings of social work professionals such as the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, paving the way for their involvement by having the governor name them as official state delegates.¹⁰⁸ In other cases she tried to recruit leading clubwomen for social welfare organizations, as she did in 1912 with Clara Cox and the Southern Sociological Congress or in 1913 with Margaret Burgwyn and the North Carolina Conference for Social Service.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Raleigh Woman’s Club *Yearbook*, 1905-1906, 16, Denson Papers, Box 2, Folder: Yearbooks. Denson was a member, although not the chair, of the Social Service Department in 1907-08, and after that was not a member of the Department. Perhaps she became too busy with her work at the Board to continue her club commitment as well.

¹⁰⁶ On Denson’s work with the state federation, see *FWC Yearbooks*, 1907-1914.

¹⁰⁷ Mrs. Isaac M Taylor (S. E. Taylor), Chairman of Social Service Committee of North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, to Denson, 16 Dec. 1913, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1913.

¹⁰⁸ Denson suggested that Clara Cox attend the NCCC in Boston in June, 1911, telling her that Mrs. A. C. Coble of Statesville was planning to do so. At Denson’s recommendation, the governor made Cox a state delgate, but Cox was unable to go. Denson to Clara Cox, 22 May 1911; and Clara Cox to Denson, 27 June 1911, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Jan.-July 1911.

¹⁰⁹ Denson to Clara Cox, 22 July 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912; Burgwyn to Denson, 11 Sept. 1913, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1913.

Other women wrote with queries and Denson responded with extensive information.¹¹⁰ In 1912, Mrs. B. A. Hocutt wrote to Denson on behalf of her club, which was taking up the study of insanity. Denson sent her the latest report of the Board of Public Charities, which included a tally of the insane in state hospitals, and lent her copies of two bulletins from the Indiana board of charities. She also described at length the state's current facilities, the latest developments in treatment of insanity, and her hopes for legislative appropriations for a psychopathic ward at the state hospital at Morganton. Throughout her missive, she emphasized the importance of professional training in preventing and treating insanity, telling Hocutt that "You will see that on this subject, Insanity, as upon so many other subjects for social study and betterment[,] prevention is looming larger daily. Social workers have not until the last few years worked much on the causes and prevention of insanity but now we think that is where we must concentrate." With professional training, she contended, even "re-education of the insane" was possible: "Special teachers are now trained in the Chicago School of Philanthropy for this work, to show the insane how to work and to play."¹¹¹ This focus on prevention of all kinds of social problems was a theme in much of Denson's correspondence with clubwomen. She seemed determined to spread at least that lesson of her professional training with the clubwomen who took up social service.¹¹² Many clubwomen were familiar with the importance of prevention in

¹¹⁰ For other examples, see Mrs. J.H. Reid to Denson, 23 Apr. 1903, General Corr. of the Board, Box 1, Folder: Jan.-July. 1903; Mrs. C. E. Craven to Claude Denson, 15 Jan. 1903, General Corr. of the Board, Box 1, Folder: Jan.-July 1903; Mrs. J. Will Patterson to Denson, n.d., General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: 1917; Denson to Cox, 22 July 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912; Denson to Mrs. Goodno, 5 Sept. 1914, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1914; Denson to Clara Cox, 30 Sept. 1911, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1911.

¹¹¹ Daisy Denson to Mrs. B. A. Hocutt, 30 Sept. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912.

¹¹² See, for example, Denson to Mrs. T. R. Garner, 31 Aug. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1916; Denson to Miss W. A. White, 21 Mar. 1917, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: 1917; Denson to Mrs. Thomas, 25 Nov. 1912, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912.

public health work, and the concept would have transferred easily to work in the closely related field of welfare.

One of Denson's most successful measures was her campaign encouraging clubwomen to take on official oversight roles as county welfare board members. As late as 1894, there were no women on the county boards of visitors, although both Charles Duffy and Claude Denson thought female involvement would be helpful.¹¹³ By the time Daisy Denson took office in 1903, many county boards had at least one woman in addition to three male members. Claude Denson noted the interest of the "ladies" "with pleasure," but the women were clearly second-class participants.¹¹⁴ The state board's annual reports listed the women separately from the men, as "Auxiliary Visitors."¹¹⁵ Moreover, Claude Denson often had trouble appointing a full slate of three visitors and receiving reports from every county.

Within months of becoming Secretary, Denson reorganized the county boards, sending a circular letter that urged women to become involved as members of the Auxiliary Board of County Visitors.¹¹⁶ Denson continued for years to press individual women to join county boards and worked with state federation leaders to increase women's involvement in inspecting local jails and poor homes.¹¹⁷ Under her watch, women went from being auxiliary members to being strongly represented. In 1908, she began to list women's names with the men's, as regular

¹¹³ Charles Duffy to C. B. Denson, 1 Mar. 1894, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: Correspondence of Dr. Charles Duffy, Chairman of Board, 1897-1908.

¹¹⁴ *BPC Report, 1901*, 181.

¹¹⁵ See *BPC Report, 1899-1900*.

¹¹⁶ Denson intended for each board to have three male and two female (auxiliary) members. Report of the Secretary, July 1 to October 1, 1903, in *BPC Report, 1903*, 162-165.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Denson to Miss Clara I. Cox, 25 June 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 2, Folder: Jan.-June 1912.

members of the county boards. By 1909, 43 of the 93 functioning county boards had least one woman among their members.¹¹⁸

William Blair, the chair of the Board, praised this “move in the right direction,” adding that women’s social service efforts needed greater focus. Working with the Board to inspect local institutions, “they can do very much more good along this line than they can in working in their clubs, WCTU’s, etc. Too often they shoot at nothing definite, but if they could become aroused along these practical lines, they could accomplish great good.” As Blair’s comment indicates, part of Denson’s purpose was to involve women in formal roles in the state’s work, which would afford her greater influence over their work and better insight into local institutions. It was all very well to have interested women visit local jails and report the worst abuses to county commissioners, but if Denson was to achieve more sweeping statewide reforms, she needed to gather more information about conditions at all the county institutions through her networks of county visitors. Throughout the 1910s, the federation’s social service chairs pushed clubwomen to inspect local institutions and to join the official county Boards of Visitors.¹¹⁹

A few key players helped champion Denson’s message among clubwomen. Clara Souther Lingle was one of the state federation’s most dedicated advocates of social welfare and reform. Lingle’s husband Thomas was a history professor at Davidson College who supported her reforming activities. Clara Lingle was a member and officer of the small Davidson Book Lovers’ Club, but her interests went far beyond literature.¹²⁰ She served in a number of roles for the Federation of Women’s Clubs, including president, chair of the civics department, and chair

¹¹⁸ *BPC Report, 1909*, 48-54.

¹¹⁹ See *FWC Yearbook, 1912-1913*, 40-41; *FWC Yearbook, 1914-1915*, 45; *FWC Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 59.

¹²⁰ In 1912, the club had 18 members and its only department was Literature. Club Directory, *FWC Yearbook, 1912-1913*, 57.

of the social service department. She also was a delegate to the biennial convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.¹²¹ Outside of her work with the state federation, she was an advocate of woman suffrage.¹²²

Lingle consistently pushed the state federation to be more involved in social service. As chair of the civics department, she focused on educating clubwomen about social issues. She reported that one of her primary goals was "To keep in touch with national and world-wide civic topics through the press and every possible avenue, and to adapt and transmit the matters of local value to our leagues and clubs." Under her leadership, clubs passed public health laws, established public playgrounds and libraries, and hosted speakers.¹²³ Lingle pressed similar issues as chair of the social service department and during her presidency, when she stressed "community upbuilding."¹²⁴

Clubwomen like Lingle learned through their club work about how experts conceived of social problems. Their experience in organizing public health campaigns, inspecting sanitary conditions in county jails, or fighting for the reformatory for delinquent white boys reinforced the Progressive principles of prevention and efficiency that experts described. White clubwomen also received a political education in the course of their social service work, learning the difficulties of accomplishing meaningful change within stagnant local political economies. In the face of entrenched political power, as non-voters, women learned the importance of uniting

¹²¹ See multiple mentions of Lingle's roles in Cotten, *History* and *FWC Yearbooks*. Lingle also served briefly as North Carolina's representative on the General Federation's Board of Directors, but resigned, probably because she was serving simultaneously as President of the state Federation. Cotten, *History*, 107.

¹²² Wayne Flynt, "Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted," 125.

¹²³ *FWC Yearbook, 1913-1914*, 34-35.

¹²⁴ Cotten, *History*, 91.

around compelling issues, mobilizing their male allies, and pressing for change on the basis both of their maternal authority and the recommendations of experts.

Through their experience and club-based education, the state-wide network of white clubwomen developed a common social vision that recognized the connections between efforts for public health, education, civic betterment, juvenile reforms, and libraries. This sense was reflected in statements such as the civics department's passing note in 1912 that civics and health are "so closely allied," as well as in clubs' reports to the civics department of extensive social service efforts. The constant parade of names for social welfare activities—from Village Improvement, to Constructive Philanthropy, to Social Service—is another indication. Cotten wrote in 1912 that the department was "with each new christening getting a better name for the same work."¹²⁵

Although clubwomen absorbed information from professionals in the fields of medicine, education, or prison reform, they lacked ties to any one field. A club could take up the study of insanity one month and Elizabeth Browning's poetry the next, and follow it with an exploration of environmental conservation. Resources on any of these topics were available through the federation's Reciprocity department, supplemented by many clubwomen's links to other national or regional Progressive organizations. As women's lobbying power became clear, public health and welfare officials turned to them more frequently, and state officials were always happy to address women's clubs on current policy or practice. The result of clubs' wide-ranging interest in social problems was a conception of social welfare that integrated not only the traditional areas of organized philanthropy or prison reform, but also education, public health, and good government. Their sense of "social service" ignored the lines between emerging professions of

¹²⁵ Cotten, *History*, 53.

social work and public health and the more established profession of education. This social vision aligned with their position as local reformers involved with a variety of charitable efforts, rather than leaders at the helm of state bureaucracies charged with overseeing budgets and personnel.

Despite clubwomen's forward-thinking treatment of the connections between different branches of social welfare work, in other ways their social vision was limited. Committed to maintain the social order, they built their social reforms around middle-class ideals and gender roles. White clubwomen's ideal society was a well-ordered, racially segregated society operating under Christian principles. In this ideal vision, a well-regulated network of county and state institutions provide a clean, orderly, Christian environment in order to care for any person who could not care for herself. Girls would learn homemaking skills, and boys would contribute manual labor to the institution. Underlying this vision were assumptions about the immutability of gender roles and the impropriety of sexual activity outside marriage. White clubwomen saw themselves leading the way to a better society through "sisterly helpfulness and ... motherly watchfulness."¹²⁶

The Conference for Social Service

The North Carolina Conference for Social Service, founded in 1912, was an important forum for clubwomen to learn about the latest developments in social service. Because of the organization's importance for women and among the state's Progressive reformers, the Conference for Social Service is ideal for an analysis of the gendered politics of southern welfare reform. Daisy Denson had long been convinced that North Carolina, like other states, needed a state conference of reformers to discuss Progressive ideas and push legislative action. She knew

¹²⁶ Clara Lingle, President's message, *FWC Yearbook, 1915-1916*, 17.

the importance of professional training for herself and lamented the lack of training among other social work professionals, but she also valued the political power of untrained philanthropists.¹²⁷ She called for such a conference as early as 1904, writing, “The spirit of altruism is aroused. The time is ripe for the crystallization of the scattered strength of these influences for good into a force which may move mountains.” She hoped to unite philanthropic forces into a “State Conference of Charities, meeting annually to discuss these vital questions, forwarding all movements for the benefit of the weak and unfortunate, learning each other’s experience and educating the masses to see these questions aright.”¹²⁸

Denson could not create such an organization single-handedly. As she told one fellow reformer, “I have often thought of a State Conference of Charities and Corrections... but it takes a good deal of time and some means to get it under way.”¹²⁹ Not until 1912 did the North Carolina Conference for Social Service emerge. The conference’s historians credited its formation to a new sense of purpose among several of North Carolina’s Progressive thinkers after several leading reformers attended the Southern Sociological Congress in Tennessee in the May 1912. Denson was ill and did not attend the initial gathering of the region-wide congress, but soon afterwards she became the corresponding secretary for North Carolina.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ For one such lament about the lack of trained professionals, see Denson to Mrs. E.W. Cole, 14 June 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 2, Folder: Jan.-June 1912

¹²⁸ Quarterly Report April to July, 1904, printed in *BPC Report, 1904*, 310. Blair agreed that “The time is almost ripe, it seems to me, for a State conference of charities.” Blair to Denson, 23 Sept, 1904, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1903-1904.

¹²⁹ Daisy Denson to Mr. L. B. Myers, 27 Aug. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912.

¹³⁰ See Lyda Gordon Shivers, “The Social Welfare Movement in the South: A Study in Regional Culture and Social Organization” (PhD diss., UNC-Chapel Hill, 1935), 51-62; *Public Welfare Progress*, Vol. 3 No 1, 1 Jan 1923; and Secretary’s Diaries and Reports, May 1912, BPW Records; Denson to J.E. McCulloch, 9 May 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 2, Folder: Jan.-June 1912.

On September 17, 1912, four months after the Southern Sociological Congress met, seven influential North Carolinians convened at the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce to discuss the creation of a statewide social services conference: Daisy Denson; Dr. Watson Smith Rankin, the head of the state board of health; *Progressive Farmer* editor Clarence Poe; Dr. Louis Burgin McBrayer, superintendent of the State Tuberculosis Sanatorium; Wiley Hampton Swift, former superintendent of Greensboro schools and a legal advisor of the National Child Labor Committee; Reverend M. L. Kesler, head of the Baptist Orphanage at Thomasville; and Dr. James Yadkin Joyner, state Superintendent of Public Instruction.¹³¹ After their meeting, they issued a call to “all social workers and all persons interested in the general uplift and betterment of the State ” to attend a conference in January 1913.¹³² Denson exulted to Rankin that “This is the greatest step taken for uplift in our history. It will flood the dark places with light and I predict that none of us now dreams of the glorious results which are sure to follow this awakening of the [moral] consciousness of the citizens.”¹³³ Over three hundred people attended the first annual meeting in January, 1913, demonstrating the widespread interest in social reform among North Carolinians.¹³⁴

The conference linked social service advocates from around the state through its publications and in person at its annual convention. To maximize its impact, the group met in

¹³¹ On the history of the Conference, see Ella Waddill’s “President’s Report,” 1932, North Carolina Conference for Social Service Records (ORG.100, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh; hereafter CSS Papers), 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical – President’s Report – 1932 – Mrs. W.B. Waddill; and Virginia Gullledge, *The North Carolina Conference for Social Service: A Study of its Development and Methods* (The Conference, 1942), especially 12-13.

¹³² *BPC Report, 1912*, 23.

¹³³ Denson to Dr. W. S. Rankin, 16 Oct. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912.

¹³⁴ Three months later membership had increased to 542. Gullledge, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service*, 15.

the state capitol in alternating years, during the legislative session, and in other cities around the state during off-years. Annual conventions, which drew hundreds of attendees, invariably received extensive newspaper coverage not only in the host city but in other major cities, including Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte, and Winston-Salem. Each year's gathering centered on a new theme, but attendees could also expect some regular program features: music, prayers, updates from the standing committees, and visitors from national organizations.

From its inception, the North Carolina Conference for Social Service reflected the symbiotic ties between private citizens and official government agencies. Rankin and Denson, as the heads of tiny state agencies for health and welfare, relied on the material help and support of sympathetic groups and individuals. Denson, for example, marshaled volunteers on county boards of visitors to help her with inspections of county homes and prisons. Moreover, dozens of private orphanages, old-age homes, and sanatoria fell beyond the board's purview but served as essential, if unofficial, parts of the state's social service system. Far more than stopgap or supplemental measures, these private institutions were the right arm of the social service system.

The membership rolls of the Conference for Social Service reflected this public-private partnership. In the early twentieth century, the line between professional social workers and lay people interested in social reform was blurred. Trained social workers were a minority in the conference's early years. Most of the organization's "professionals" served as officers or committee chairs, but officership was by no means restricted to social service professionals. In fact, the number of full-time "professionals" in the state was so small that such a categorization seems almost meaningless. In the conference's early years, almost all its members were laypeople with a personal interest in social reform or social service.

Many of these lay members were drawn to the task of improving society for personal or religious reasons. Conference members typified their generation of social reformers: they were solidly middle-class whites—ministers, businessmen, or clubwomen—whose primary occupation usually reflected some interest in improving society. They had the financial means to pay dues and to afford travel to conferences, and they had the political connections that opened the door to the possibility of legislative influence. Although these reformers lacked professional training, they educated themselves on the newest techniques of social science by reading publications and attending lectures and conferences.

Women played a notable role in the Conference for Social Service, as they did in other Progressive organizations in the state. In special six-page section of the conference's quarterly journal in its early years, four women explored the rationales behind women's involvement in organizations dedicated to social service. Sallie Southall Cotten, one of the matriarchs of the white Federation of Women's Clubs, defended the principle most eloquently in her contribution to the section. Social service, she argued, was "primarily and ultimately ... work for women. As the givers of life, as the mothers of humanity, their activities must be unremitting in the effort to promote the welfare of humanity." The conference's mission, particularly its focus on children, naturally called to "every woman's heart." The difficulty lay in turning natural sympathy into action, in "reaching women and arousing them to the consciousness of their power and the need for their assistance." Cotten hoped the Conference for Social Service would awaken women across the state and give them many opportunities to educate themselves.¹³⁵

Although Cotten's main goal was spurring women to take up the call of social service, she also carefully addressed the conference's male members, sharing with them her hopes for

¹³⁵ Sallie Southall (Mrs. R. R.) Cotten, "Women and Social Service," *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 101.

cooperation in fields beyond traditional, child-centered feminine roles. She reeled off other fields—public health, eugenics, the study of country life—and wrote, perhaps willing it to be true, that “in all social, civic, and economic problems men need and welcome the help of women.” She continued, “Neither can accomplish much *alone*; together they must strive and overcome, together they must win or lose.” While men might sometimes lapse in their commitment to the social welfare, women must not, and would not. For Cotten, women deserved a place within the Conference for Social Service not only because they naturally wanted to mold their children’s world, but also because they were stalwart and useful allies.¹³⁶ As another clubwoman wrote in the *Social Service Quarterly* the following year, “The Conference needs the Federation and the Federation needs the Conference.”¹³⁷

For women whose hearts “overflowed with a great yearning to make this earth better,” the conference was arguably the most exciting place to be. Its annual conventions offered reform-minded women from even the most isolated corners of the state chances to immerse themselves in discussions of social welfare from morning until late at night for three or more days. Within the conference’s first five years, attendees absorbed addresses from droves of state and national experts who included such women as the president of the National Congress of Mothers; the chair of the Kentucky commission on illiteracy; the executive secretary of the National Organization for Public Health Nursing; Julia Lathrop, the director of the U.S. Children’s Bureau; and, of course, Kate Barnard of Oklahoma fame. Male experts too came from across the country: the warden of Sing-Sing prison; a specialist on rural education from the U.S. Bureau of Education; and the head of the National Committee on Provision for the Feeble-

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Sally S. Kirby, “The Part of Club Women in Social Service: Outline of Work for 1915-1916,” *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec. 1915): 82.

Minded.¹³⁸ The conference exposed women to professional social work not only through these experts' formal addresses but also through the dozens of informal conversations with other social workers that took place at lunch tables and after committee meetings. As a conduit for information about Progressive beliefs and contemporary innovations in public health and welfare, the Conference for Social Service doubtless influenced the thinking of dozens of reform-minded women.

A close reading of the conference's 1914 membership rolls reveals some interesting patterns. In 1914, women constituted a quarter of the 726 conference members. Members were expected to choose one of the conference's committees to join, depending on their personal interests. About half of the members, however, had not chosen a committee at the time the list was printed in the conference's quarterly journal. It stands to reason that members who had selected a committee were more likely to be active participants in the Conference for Social Service. Using this metric, married women were active participants at about the same rate as men. Unmarried women, however, were more likely than married women to be active. Some of these women, such as Daisy Denson, worked in the field of social welfare or public health. The only group more likely to be active were male ministers and rabbis.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Margaret Clark Neal, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service: The Record of Twenty-Five Years, 1912-1937* (typed manuscript, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 10; W. T. Bost, "Raleigh Postoffice Fight is Interesting; Social Service Program," *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 Jan. 1915; "Program of the Fourth Annual Session," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1916): 3-7; "State Conference on Social Service Has First Session," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 22 Jan. 1917.

¹³⁹ I base my calculations of "active" rates on a membership list published in early 1914. I separated male Conference members into groups based on professional titles, including ministers and rabbis; legislators; doctors; professors; and men with no title. It is entirely possible that some other professional group, such as newspaper editors or bankers, might be unidentifiable by this method. Percentage of each group that was active (with number of members in that group in parentheses): married women (110), 49.1%; unmarried women (64), 60.9%; ministers and rabbis (62), 67.7%; legislators (16), 50.0%; doctors (76), 42.1%; professors (18), 33.3%; other men (380), 47.6%. "Who's Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service," *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 106-111.

On the committee level, other patterns emerge. On the conference's twelve committees, almost all the leadership positions were held by men, as were positions on the executive board.¹⁴⁰ Most committees' membership was about a quarter female, in the same proportion as the larger body. There were a few deviations, however. The committee on industrial conditions and child labor had only two women among its seventeen members—surprising, given scholars' usual understanding that child labor was a particular concern of women. On the other hand, and less surprisingly, women made up a disproportionately large number of the committee on temperance and moral conditions. They also constituted over half of the committee on insanity, eugenics, and mental hygiene. Two committees were completely sex-segregated: while only women belonged to the committee on women and social service, the committee on the “negro problem” included only men.¹⁴¹

This snapshot of activity from 1914 suggests that men led the conference, but that certain issues were more likely to appeal to women. Moreover, it helps explain the context in which Cotten felt obliged to vindicate women's presence. The inclusion of women in the conference may have been a recognition of women's political capital; one of the first standing committees focused on women and social service.¹⁴² Yet we might also see this women's committee as a form of compartmentalization.¹⁴³ Witness a 1915 comment, presumably by then-president

¹⁴⁰ Twelve committees were listed, each with a chair and a vice-chair. All but two chairs and two vice-chairs were men, and two of the women in leadership positions chaired the committee on women and social service. Calculations based on “Who's Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service.”

¹⁴¹ This last committee (on the “negro problem”) was also the Conference's smallest, with only eight members. Calculations based on “Who's Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service.”

¹⁴² Gullledge, *The North Carolina Conference for Social Service*, 14.

¹⁴³ Women did not have a place on the first conference program. For several years after that, addresses by women or issues of interest to them were consolidated into one afternoon session. See conference programs for 1914, 1916, and 1917 in Margaret Clark Neal, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service: The Record of Twenty-Five Years, 1912-1937*, 10, 20-24, 29.

Alexander Worth McAlister, reacting to Clara Lingle's appeal for clubwomen to join the conference: the appeal was "keenly appreciated" since "no greater force is at work in North Carolina and no part of our active Social Service forces will be more welcome to become active helpers with us in the particular work of the Conference." McAlister hoped that a hundred women would join the list of "active supporters." Perhaps McAlister was thinking mostly in monetary terms of membership dues, but his condescending choice of the words "helpers" and "supporters" seems to betray his feeling that women were not equal partners in social welfare work.¹⁴⁴

Surely conference leaders, whether male or female, appreciated the power of female moral suasion. The conference's annual programs and its bulletin often included discussions along the lines of "what women can do for social service"—the same sorts of discussions that women's clubs themselves were having. The rhetoric of these discussions implied that women should use their moral force and their maternal power in areas especially suited for women, such as child welfare and prison reform. The leadership of the conference and its committees, however, remained overwhelmingly male. Not until 1932 did a woman serve as president.¹⁴⁵ Within the conference, as in many other arenas of early twentieth-century North Carolina, women had certain forms of power, but the acknowledgement of their powers also was a restrictive embrace.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ "Editorial," *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec. 1915): 68.

¹⁴⁵ On Ella P. Waddill's presidency, see Alexander W. McAlister Papers (collection #4318, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; hereafter, McAlister Papers), Folder 282: Conference for Social Service, other materials.

¹⁴⁶ I take a slightly different tack from Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, who argues that "the establishment of the NCCSS was a conscious effort to form a political interest group across gender lines. It represented a clear recognition of women's political influence." Wilkerson-Freeman, "Women and the Transformation of American Politics," 176-77. Anastatia Sims, too, focuses on the integration of women's groups into the conference and the alignment of their goals. Sims, *The Power of Femininity*, 115-16.

At the same time, the Conference for Social Service often directed its amassed Progressive forces toward goals that had grown out of women's organizations. These cooperative campaigns reveal women's need for and concerted appropriation of male political power, women's vision and leadership within Progressive organizations, and the importance of supposedly feminine concerns to a broader audience. Take, for example, the creation of Samarcand Manor, the home for delinquent white girls. Multiple women's organizations, including the Federation of Women's Clubs, had pressed the issue for several years leading up to 1917 but had made little impression on lawmakers.¹⁴⁷ Beginning in 1915, the Conference for Social Service threw its weight behind the idea, and in 1917 Alfred M. Scales, a conference member and experienced state senator, helped draft and pass the legislation.¹⁴⁸ Without aid from male allies, women's groups would have faced a much more protracted struggle.¹⁴⁹

“Educated, Christianized, Organized Womanhood”¹⁵⁰

In the two decades leading up to World War I, a generation of white North Carolina women sought to educate themselves about Progressive social reform through both observation and participation. They asked trained professionals to address their women's clubs, they followed expert opinions in publications, and they sought information or clarification from other women. They also gained skills and experience through their work as volunteers, on institutional boards or directing local philanthropic efforts. In the process, they imbibed the language and

¹⁴⁷ Cotten, *History*, 108.

¹⁴⁸ “History of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1916): 113-118; Cotten, *History*, 108-109.

¹⁴⁹ Anastatia Sims identifies a similar pattern in women's education reform efforts. In their attempts to place women on school boards, women learned that “the South's much touted feminine ‘influence’ was no match for entrenched political power.” Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 163.

¹⁵⁰ Mrs. R. R. Cotten, address, 6 May 1913, in New Bern, *FWC Yearbook, 1913-1914*, 25-6.

principles of Progressive reforms everywhere: the importance of efficiency, prevention, and expert knowledge. As they educated themselves about Progressive ideas of efficiency, expertise, and prevention, these ideas came to define their social vision.

Still, most Progressive women reformers remained in the role of outsiders, without professional training or political clout. This position lent them certain perspectival advantages. In the women's reforming tradition of "do everything,"¹⁵¹ organized women tackled a broader range of problems than many of their male counterparts. Although many women had an area of concern or "phase" of social work that particularly intrigued them, their lack of a professional home freed them to consider an array of social issues simultaneously and as a whole. While the trained male professionals who headed the state's education and public health bureaucracies tackled specific categories of problems, defined by their expertise and occupational boundaries, untrained women reformers pondered social problems without regard to professional conventions. The result was an understanding among organized women that tackling social problems required exploring the common causes of various problems and coordinating efforts to address multiple issues at once. In short, organized women articulated an expansive vision of welfare that shaped the state's future path.

As the nation entered World War I in April, 1917, Denson and her clubwoman allies could reflect with pride on their accomplishments over the last decade. By serving as county visitors, lobbying the legislature, and championing institutions for delinquent white children, white reforming women established themselves as stakeholders in society—in particular, by extending their roles as caregivers and maternalist reformers to the Progressive realm of

¹⁵¹ WCTU president Frances Willard urged club members to "do everything"—that is, to treat a range social reforms as interconnected and not to limit themselves strictly to stopping the use of alcohol and drugs. See Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies*, 96-7. On the WCTU in North Carolina, see Sims, *Power of Femininity in the New South*, 24.

prevention and efficiency. At the same time that club women were learning about prevention and efficiency, some North Carolinians were beginning to discuss eugenics, and women too were drawn into these discussions.

CHAPTER 2: “THE NEWEST SCIENCE”:
THE APPEAL OF EUGENICS TO PROGRESSIVE MEN AND WOMEN

One Friday in the spring of 1911, the North Carolina House of Representatives met far into the night. For nearly two hours, the Speaker of the House argued against a bill to establish an institution for the state’s “feeble-minded,” doggedly questioning its supporters, probably out of concern for the cost or the belief that the feeble-minded could be housed at an existing insane asylum. Finally, at 10:20 pm, the delegates took a roll-call vote. Although Speaker Dowd “alone spoke openly in opposition” to the bill, nineteen representatives voted against it. But seventy-six members voted to pass the bill, concurring with the Senate’s action the week before. As the *Raleigh News and Observer* reported, there was “loud and prolonged applause from the crowded lobbies and galleries. The bill had evidently benefited from the lobbying efforts of an immense number of disinterested but sympathetic men and women” who believed that the state should provide institutional care for the “feeble-minded”—a term with no precise modern equivalent, understood at the time as a catch-all category for people suffering from mental retardation, which was generally thought to be hereditary.¹ Three years later, the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, later known as Caswell Training School, opened its doors to fifteen “higher grade girls.” Soon there were over a hundred inmates, while dozens of other families placed their children on a waiting list.²

¹ “School for feeble minded passes,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 Mar. 1911; “Feeble minded are provided for,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 26 Feb. 1911; “Bills pour in,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 26 Feb. 1911.

² “Report of Superintendent, December 16, 1914,” in *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, 1913-1914*, 14-15.

The establishment of Caswell demonstrates the growing appeal of eugenics ideology to influential white reformers and policymakers in North Carolina during the first decades of the twentieth century. The civic-minded men and women who filled the House galleries that Friday night in 1911 were part of a state-wide network of reformers who fought for a variety of Progressive causes. For some proponents, the most important justification for the school's establishment was simply that the state had a duty to provide for its less fortunate white citizens. That assumption reflected a larger pattern of expanding the institutional arm of government-run social programs. States across the country built new institutions for the mentally ill, veterans, orphans, the poor, and delinquent youth.³ Policymakers and the public generally agreed that, as North Carolina's constitution stated, it was the duty of a civilized and Christian society to provide for the needy. Progressive reformers built on ideas of Christian charity to elicit pity for children, veterans, or the poor. Yet the mentally ill, delinquent youth, and the feeble-minded evoked not only pity but also fear that, if left unattended, they would upset the social and racial order.⁴ In this context, many North Carolina reformers found the logic of eugenics to make perfect sense. Many of Caswell's supporters, for example, lauded the school's potential to care

³ The school for the feeble-minded was created soon after the establishment of the Stonewall Jackson Training School for delinquent white boys, established in 1907.

⁴ For a good discussion of the perceived threat of feeble-mindedness in the South, see Steven Noll, "A Far Greater Menace: Feeble-minded Females in the South, 1900-1940," in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, edited by Virginia Bernhard et al., 31-51 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994) and Noll, *Feeble-Minded in our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). On the threat of delinquency and the 'girl problem,' see Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Tanya Smith Brice, "Undermining Progress in Early 20th Century North Carolina: General Attitudes towards Delinquent African American Girls," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 34 (March 2007): 131-53; Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Lee S. Polansky, "I Certainly Hope That You Will Be Able to Train Her: Reformers and The Georgia Training School for Girls," in Elna Green, ed. *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999); and Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

for and train feeble-minded children while simultaneously embracing its role in preventing feeble-minded teenagers and women from procreating.

In the 1900s and 1920s, a network of white reformers discovered and developed ideas about eugenics, fostering the growth of pro-eugenics sentiment in North Carolina and generating enthusiasm for eugenic segregation in particular.⁵ The establishment of Caswell was part of a string of events that demonstrate the growing appeal of eugenics ideology to an influential group of policymakers. As information about eugenics spread throughout the state in the first two decades of the twentieth century, reformers added its principles to their own catalogs of reform measures, and some called for explicitly eugenic programs. Eugenics appealed to North Carolina's white reformers because of four intertwined beliefs: their passion for Progressive principles of efficiency and prevention; the potential meshing of eugenics with social Christianity; the belief that well-designed eugenics programs would save the state money; and ubiquitous concern with preserving the Anglo-Saxon race. For these same reasons, calls for eugenics elicited little opposition from those in power. The growth of eugenics sentiment eventually led to the passage of eugenic sterilization laws in 1919, 1929, and 1933. Moreover, reformers' embrace of eugenics ideology reshaped the public's thinking about the relationship of the state to its least powerful citizens. Similar patterns played out in many other states across the country, as well as internationally.⁶

⁵ I focus in particular on white reformers because whites held the reins of power and were the most outspoken proponents of various eugenic measures. The scholarship on African Americans' views of eugenics is quite limited. The best works are Michelle Mitchell's *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Gregory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere Quantity, Counts': Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests," in Paul A. Lombardo, ed., *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 68-92.

⁶ For an overview of the eugenics movement from an international perspective, see Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

At the vanguard of eugenics thought in North Carolina stood medical and social welfare professionals.⁷ Their work brought them into the earliest contact with eugenics ideology, and through their professional and reform networks, they disseminated these ideas to a wider circle of Progressives. These first-wave eugenics advocates were mostly men (with the notable exception of Daisy Denson), and they described the need for eugenic measures in ‘scientific’ terms that would appeal to their colleagues and mesh with the Progressive desire for expert knowledge. As lay reformers became interested in eugenics and related subjects, they sought expert opinions, conveyed their findings to the general public, and sought to influence legislators through an upwelling of popular support.⁸ Politically active women began to include eugenics among their reform priorities. They promoted eugenics measures in multidimensional ways, particularly as an extension of their responsibility to care for disabled children and other helpless groups and as a way to protect their own families from society’s undesirable elements.⁹

Although the vast majority of these reformers were not professionally trained in the “science” of eugenics or any other science, they felt empowered by their interest in social reform and their

⁷ Johanna Schoen has pointed out that despite physicians’ early support for eugenic sterilization, “physicians and psychiatrists were also among the first to challenge the program,” with notable reduction in their support by the early 1950s. Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 100, 117-20, 136.

⁸ Ed Larson has traced similar patterns in the Deep South, arguing that physicians and state medical associations were key players in making the case for eugenic segregation between 1910 and 1920, but noting that “a broader coalition of forces was required to embed [these concepts] into public policy.” Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 62. Larson’s model, however, pays little attention to social welfare professionals. See also Noll, *Feeble-Minded in our Midst*.

⁹ Scholars have offered tantalizing hints but few answers to the question of how and why a broad swath of white middle-class women were attracted to eugenics or how such an attraction influenced their worldviews. See Allison Berg, *Mothering the Race: Women’s Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States,” *Social Politics* 4 (Spring 1997): 136-53; Laura L. Lovett, “Fitter Families for Future Firesides”: Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics,” *Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 69-85; Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Edward J. Larson, “‘In the Finest, Most Womanly Way’: Women in the Southern Eugenics Movement,” *American Journal of Legal History* 39, no. 2 (Apr. 1995): 119-47.

position in society to ponder its tenets and embrace some of them. The principles of eugenics helped them frame their beliefs about the lower classes. In educating themselves and spreading the word about eugenics, they also shaped the history of the national eugenics movement.¹⁰

Daisy Denson and the Appeal of Eugenic Segregation in Southern Context

Scholars have generally agreed that eugenics first found a ready American audience in the Northeast, Midwest, and West, and that the South lagged behind other regions in instituting eugenics principles. Yet long before North Carolina passed its first sterilization law in 1919 (making it the fifteenth state in the nation to do so), reformers there were attuned to eugenics principles. Far from merely copying other states' legislation, they debated the uses of eugenics in their own social context and contributed to national discussions about eugenics' goals and methods. The result was a travesty of human rights, with shadows reaching to the present day. But early engagement of North Carolina's social reformers with eugenics ideology also indicates that they drew on the expertise of national movements and organizations to create programs that seemed to address their state's particular needs, marking them as innovative social thinkers, albeit shaped by the race and class prejudices of their day.¹¹

Although all eugenics programs shared underlying principles, they also reflected local concerns—in particular, the racial and ethnic fears of their white middle-class creators. In North Carolina, Jim Crow shaped white reformers' approaches to social welfare broadly and eugenics

¹⁰ The first landmark studies of eugenics, such as Mark Haller's *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963) and Daniel Kevles's *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), were sweeping studies of key national leaders and organizations. More recently, scholars' fascination with the eugenics movement has produced several excellent studies that examine various states' eugenics programs. Because eugenics programs were enacted at the state level, these studies are critical to understanding the causes and effects of eugenics ideology. In addition to focusing on one state's programs, I also explore the networks that linked all kinds of social reformers to national organizations.

¹¹ For a study of parallel processes in the Deep South, see Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*; for an excellent study of Virginia, see Greg Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

in particular. The very term “segregation,” widely used in the eugenics movement to denote the separation of feeble-minded or insane people from the rest of society and from members of the opposite sex, had a special resonance in the Jim Crow South. White North Carolinians were raised believing that racial segregation was natural and necessary. It was but a small step to apply similar logic to other types of supposedly inferior beings, especially lower-class whites, who were more likely to be labeled feeble-minded. For southern whites with an interest in eugenics, the “fitness” of African Americans was an afterthought to their primary concern with the fitness of the white race. Thus eugenics programs disproportionately targeted poor whites until the 1950s, serving the double purpose of eliminating the weakest elements of the white race and reinforcing the color line.¹² The hereditarian thinking that undergirded eugenics reinforced the racist logic of Jim Crow.¹³

Daisy Denson, the Secretary of the state Board of Public Charities, was one of the first vocal supporters of eugenics in North Carolina. She shared with her late father Claude a fear that feeble-minded children and adults were languishing, neglected, in dismal circumstances across the state. Claude called in 1898 for a home for the state’s feeble-minded children, along with his calls for a training school for delinquent boys.¹⁴ Daisy, too, made these institutions one of her

¹² As Greg Dorr has shown in the case of Virginia, poor whites’ very existence threatened the logic of white supremacy, but of particular concern was their greater tolerance for interracial sex and marriage. To some reformers, a failure to adhere to Jim Crow’s racial etiquette was clear evidence of feeble-mindedness. G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science*, 11.

¹³ North Carolinians’ emphasis on genealogy and lineage underscored their belief in their own racial purity and fed fears of other whites’ degeneracy. In *Segregation’s Science*, Dorr writes that “Eugenics provided educated Virginians with a modern solution for traditional southern social problems—dispensing with poor white trash and the ‘Negro question’—while ushering in ‘modern’ liberal-industrial society in one motion.” G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science*, 11. Ed Larson takes a slightly different angle, arguing that the Southern traditions of extended kin and a brotherhood of Christian believers produced a public reticence towards eugenics, since proposals to segregate or sterilize “defective” whites came up against strong beliefs in kinship or religious fraternity. He says that “Southern eugenicists appealed to this sense of heredity, but always confronted southerners’ regional pride in their own heritage.” Larson, *Sex Race, and Science*, 8-14.

¹⁴ *BPC Report, 1899-1900*, 68-69.

first priorities, along with improved provisions for the insane. In May 1903, when she had only been in office a few months, she attended the annual meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction in Atlanta and reported to delegates that her goals in her new position included establishing a boys' reformatory and a school for the feeble-minded.¹⁵

From social welfare professionals in other states, Denson learned that feeble-mindedness was a hereditary problem that could best be attacked with principles of eugenics. At this same 1903 meeting, one panel discussion focused on "The Segregation of Defectives." Alexander Johnson, the superintendent of Indiana's school for the feeble-minded, asserted that states should "separate all the true degenerates from society and keep them in carefully classified groups, under circumstances which shall insure that they shall do as little harm to themselves and their fellows as possible and that they shall not entail upon the next generation the burden which the present one has borne."¹⁶

Denson's annual report to the legislature a few months later echoed similar conclusions about the potential of segregation for "preventing the transmission of hereditary taint." Although she lamented the current condition of the feeble-minded, who "sit in utter neglect upon the doorsteps" of county poor-houses, she was just as concerned that outside a proper institution, they might be "the progenitors of future generations who will successively sit in mental darkness." She called for a school for the feeble-minded, in part to care for and train them. But her desire for a school went beyond her concern for their individual well-being. She believed that institutional segregation would also "appreciably decrease" disease, crime, and poverty.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Report of the State of North Carolina to the National Conference of Charities and Correction, May, 1903," reprinted in *BPC Report, 1903*, 152-155.

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1903*, 247-248, 250. Four years later, Indiana became the first state to pass a eugenic sterilization law.

¹⁷ *BPC Report, 1903*, 10, 11

Eugenic strategies resonated with Denson partly because they promised financial savings in a state whose stingy appropriations, based on low-tax policies, provided little relief for most citizens. In making the case for a school for the feeble-minded, she argued that “the cost would be little more than the sum expended for their care by the counties.”¹⁸

In order to ascertain the scope of the task she and other reformers faced, Denson turned to a quintessentially Progressive tool of social policy: the survey. She attempted to conduct a “census of the insane and defectives of the State for the information of the next General Assembly and the people, preliminary to asking for a full discussion of this question and a change for the better.” Denson’s legal power to conduct such a census was limited to her ability to require each Board of County Commissioners to respond to her mailed inquiries.¹⁹ Still, most counties responded, and Denson used their estimates to appeal in her 1904 report for relief of the insane, in particular the white insane.²⁰ That report also noted that the state had 64 “idiots, imbeciles, and epileptics” in county homes in 1903, although apparently this number grew to 428 “feeble-minded” by 1905, likely reflecting a change in the term’s application rather than any real increase.²¹ The information Denson gathered convinced her of the dire need for more hospital beds for the insane and contributed to a sense of crisis in the state about the growing population of feeble-minded people.

¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹ “Report of the Secretary, July 1 to October 1, 1903,” in *BPC Report, 1903*, 164.

²⁰ Denson wrote, “if the exchequer of the State will not permit the relief of the insane of both races, it is recommended that the increase in accommodation be made for whites only at this time. Insanity is increasing the negro race, and undoubtedly there is need for more room at the Goldsboro Hospital, but heretofore more whites than negroes have been excluded from hospital care in proportion to the insane of each race.” This imbalance is unlikely, since in June 1904 Denson reported to the NCCC that the state hospitals currently had 1,344 white patients and 507 colored patients, and blacks made up about a third of the population in the state. *BPC Report, 1904*, 179-180, 323.

²¹ *BPC Report, 1904*, 178.

Denson continued to study and advocate eugenic solutions throughout her next decade and a half as Secretary of the Board of Public Charities. She called for a school for the feeble-minded in each annual report, although she placed higher priority on providing for adequate hospital space for “the insane,” another group that she believed might pass their condition on to their offspring. She conducted a “census of the insane and defectives,” hoping to underscore the need for more institutional space for both populations. In 1908 she endorsed another common eugenic strategy: “stricter marriage laws” intended to prevent “imbeciles and epileptics” and “the congenital deaf” from reproducing, at least within the bonds of matrimony.²²

Denson was driven in part by religious beliefs. She adapted the familiar language of Christian charity to promote eugenics, often explicitly tying the prevention of feeble-mindedness and other supposedly hereditary disorders to Christian impulses.²³ But for Denson, Christian charity—even organized according to the best principles of prevention—was insufficient to address the problem of the “unfit.” She argued, “We must have a high ideal for the human race, and not be content with allowing evils and then expending our strength in trying to house and feed the thousands of unhappy beings whose lives have been blighted by those evils.” Previous attempts at charity had demonstrated their ultimate futility; “the newest science, eugenics, alone holds out positive promise of any material decrease in the burden the stronger half of the race is staggering under at the present time.”

²² *BPC Report, 1908*, 5-6. Larson notes that restrictive marriage laws “represented a first step in eugenics reform,” but that many states “skipped over” them as they explored other eugenics-driven policy options. But the “long tradition of state oversight of marriage” did lend some weight to reformers’ arguments. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 22.

²³ Like other adherents of the social gospel, Denson celebrated science and social science as divine gifts that could help reformers as they sought to create God’s kingdom on earth. ²³ In 1907, Denson apparently drew inspiration from a sermon at the meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, which she quoted in her report the following year. In the sermon, Archbishop John Ireland of Minnesota argued that “we must take advantage of all the discoveries in sociology and in industry. Those are two gifts of the Almighty to humanity, and we are serving the Almighty when we make use of those gifts.” John Ireland, “The Conference Sermon,” in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1903*, 11-17 (quote on 16), quoted in *BPC Report, 1908*, 8.

Above all, Denson believed “there is no higher earthly aim than the bettering and strengthening of the human race for its God-given mission,” to “shape the human race for ‘the kingdom upon earth.’”²⁴ She reminded lawmakers to “above all, remember that the lawbreakers have been handicapped by heredity, by environment, and must be *lifted up!*” And she believed that “handicapped children bear the sins of their forefathers, a vicarious sacrifice,” referring indirectly to Exodus 20:5, which proclaims that God will visit “the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me.”²⁵ One could interpret this passage to mean that it is God’s will that feeble-minded children suffer because previous generations were sinners. Yet Denson instead used the language of sacrifice to make the children the objects of pity, appealing to emerging sentimental ideals of childhood.²⁶ Denson also used the Progressive concern for children to create sympathy for feeble-minded adults, describing men and women adults as “unfortunates” who “never ‘grow up.’”²⁷

Denson’s language about feeble-mindedness and eugenics was tinged with her racial beliefs, typical of a white Southerner of her generation. Raised to revere her Anglo-Saxon ancestors and the Lost Cause, she believed that the racial inheritance of North Carolina’s white citizens was one of its great strengths. Her paeans to the state sometimes simply ignored the presence of African Americans, as when she wrote, “North Carolina is four hundred miles in length from east to West and its people are of the best Anglo-Saxon stock.” Her faith in the

²⁴ *BPC Report, 1912*, 10-11; and *BPC Report, 1916*, 7.

²⁵ *BPC Report, 1916*, 7; Exodus 20:5 (American King James Version).

²⁶ Children occupied a central place among Progressive concerns, as middle-class Americans increasingly tried to protect and nurture children of all classes. On the history of childhood, see Vivian Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); and Anthony Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

²⁷ *BPC Report, 1913*, 10.

vitality of the white lineage crossed class lines and led her to proclaim, “The submerged whites in this State are easily brought to a level with their kin who have been more fortunately situated as to transportation and intercourse with their kind.” She even praised the inhabitants of the much-maligned western region of the state, writing that “the mountain section has some of the finest men in American to its credit.”²⁸

While Denson saw even poor whites as redeemable, her beliefs about African Americans stand in stark contrast. Take, for example, her attitudes about mental illness among African Americans. Like many white Southerners, she accepted the myth that insanity had increased among African Americans after emancipation. She pinned the blame for this increase squarely on African Americans’ “lives of sin” rather than on larger structural problems, while exonerating white feeble-minded women and children of any culpability for their mental state.²⁹

Like many whites in the Jim Crow South, Denson vehemently opposed racial mixing. In 1915 she went so far as to withdraw her membership and resign from her position as state corresponding secretary for the Southern Sociological Congress because it admitted black members.³⁰ Her fear of miscegenation also permeated her discussion of feeble-mindedness, in which one of her aims in protecting feeble-minded women was to mitigate such threats. Denson told a correspondent that one example of the need for an institution for “weak-minded women” was that “at one of our County Homes a feeble-minded white woman sought refuge for the birth

²⁸ Daisy Denson to Mr. S. D. Love, 27 Mar. 1911, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Jan.-July 1911. See also Dorr, *Segregation's Science*.

²⁹ Daisy Denson to Dr. Hubert Work, 26 Jan. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Jan.-July 1912.

³⁰ James E. McCulloch to Daisy Denson, 15 Mar. 1915, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1915; *Battling for Social Betterment*, Proceedings of the Southern Sociological Congress, May 6-10, 1914, ed. James E. McCulloch (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1914), 195; and *The New Chivalry – Health*, Proceedings of the Southern Sociological Congress, May 8-11, 1915, ed. James E. McCulloch (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1915), 528, 545-545.

of her second negro child.” Denson found this story “so horrible that I would not like to be quoted as repeating it.”³¹ In this context, one can read Denson’s argument that feeble-minded women of reproductive age should be institutionalized “for their own protection, for the protection of the race” as concern about miscegenation.³²

White women who crossed racial lines, especially those who bore children, threatened white supremacy, the foundation of Southern society. The problem of feeble-minded girls and women was also part of the larger problem of working-class female sexuality, which prompted a moral panic around the turn of the century as the New South created opportunities for young women’s greater independence. In this atmosphere, adolescent girls took on enormous symbolism.³³ Reformers tackled this problem from multiple angles: they established juvenile courts, reformatories for delinquent girls, and maternity homes to redeem fallen girls. Feeble-minded women and girls were seen as particularly dangerous not only because they could pass on their mental defects to their children, but also because middle-class reformers understood them (as members of the lower class) to be more sexually excitable than themselves. Such women, they feared, lacked the intelligence to understand the consequences of their sexual urges, even when their sexuality blurred racial lines and challenged social norms. They advocated racially segregated custodial institutions to contain deviant women, deter inter-racial sexual relationships, and allow middle-class whites to cling to Victorian notions of morality.³⁴

³¹ Daisy Denson to Charles L. Coon, 2 Jan. 1911, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Jan.-July 1911.

³² *BPC Report, 1913*, 10.

³³ As Susan Cahn writes, the “very sexual activity [of working-class white girls] suggested an inversion of the ideology of white female purity. They exposed the southern myth of virtuous white womanhood, toppling a longstanding pillar in the defense of white privilege and racial segregation.” Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 160.

³⁴ See also Noll, “A Far Greater Menace.”

Ira Hardy and the Campaign for a School for Feeble-Minded Children

As the sole social welfare ‘professional’ in the state, Denson enjoyed early exposure to cutting-edge principles of social welfare through her activity with national organizations. But other North Carolina reformers also began exploring eugenics principles in the first decade of the twentieth century. One of their earliest efforts focused on creating an institution for feeble-minded children, later called Caswell. The critical player in founding the institution was Dr. Ira M. Hardy, a young physician from Lenoir County, North Carolina.³⁵ Hardy’s painful experience with his eldest daughter Hattie, who was disabled and died at age seven, persuaded him to investigate the possibilities for care for the feebleminded.³⁶

Around 1906 Hardy visited New Jersey’s Vineland Training School, which was emerging as the foremost center of research on feeble-mindedness.³⁷ There he likely met Henry H. Goddard, who directed psychological research for the school and would soon bring the Binet-Simon method of intelligence testing to the U.S., and heard about Vineland’s eugenic-tinged research program.³⁸ Four years later, inspired by this visit, Hardy began a campaign to create a similar institution in North Carolina.³⁹

³⁵ In 1910, Hardy was 33 and lived with his wife and five children in the coastal town of Washington, North Carolina, in Beaufort County. The *Kinston Free Press* referred to him as “an old Lenoir county boy.” “What It Costs,” *Kinston Free Press*, 10 Dec. 1912.

³⁶ Elizabeth M. Brown and Sarah Shaw Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse: A History of Caswell Center, Kinston, North Carolina, 1911-1964* (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), 26. Noll reports that Hardy’s daughter died in December, 1910, at the age of ten, but the census of 1910 indicates that Hardy’s daughter Hattie was seven. See Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst*, 21; Ira M. Hardy in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Population Census Schedule for Beaufort County, Washington Twp, North Carolina.

³⁷ Ira M. Hardy, “What It Costs,” 8 Dec. 1910, copy in unprocessed records, Caswell Center (Kinston, NC; hereafter Caswell Records).

³⁸ James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 155-7; and Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Hebert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61-62 and 65-68.

³⁹ Hardy, “What It Costs,” 2.

Hardy was a member of the Seaboard Medical Society, an association of physicians in eastern North Carolina and Virginia. In December, 1910, the group met in Kinston, North Carolina, a tobacco and cotton trading center about fifty miles from Hardy's home. Like many small towns in North Carolina, Kinston sought ways to promote itself, and the town's boosterism was reflected in its treatment of its medical guests, which included a welcome from the mayor and "an elaborate social program for the entertainment of the visitors." One highlight of the gathering was the discussion of the Rockefeller Foundation's anti-hookworm campaign, which was open to the public. The society's meeting also provided the impetus for a public reception and ball attended by almost 500 people, described by the newspaper as "probably the biggest social event, and certainly one of the most brilliant, that has ever been witnessed by this city." Attendance at the society's regular sessions, on the other hand, was restricted to "members of the medical profession." The one hundred doctors present read and discussed over forty papers.⁴⁰

On Thursday, December 8, 1910, Hardy took the podium before the assembled doctors and presented a paper entitled "What It Costs." In his paper, Hardy argued that while the state had made provisions for the "insane, deaf, dumb, blind, and ... epileptics," North Carolina had neglected its duty to the feeble-minded. He proposed the creation of training school "for the care of our Feeble-Minded children, where they can be trained to do such work as will at least serve to keep them employed, if not to a large degree self-sustaining." In keeping with the theme of "what it costs," Hardy argued that North Carolina's lack of such institutions had significant social, individual, and financial costs. He spoke of the feeble-minded in compassionate terms, but he also forecast peril. Although feeble-minded children were looked on "as harmless and

⁴⁰ "Medicoes Gathering for Annual Meeting," *Kinston Free Press*, 6 Dec. 1910; "Seaboard Convention Drawing to a Close," *Kinston Free Press*, 8 Dec. 1910; "Seaboard Medical Convention Closes," *Kinston Free Press*, 9 Dec. 1910; and "Brilliant eception at Mayor Laroque's," *Kinston Free Press*, 9 Dec. 1910.

inoffensive creatures,” he warned, “the danger from them is greater because often unnoticed. As these children grow up, the sexual instinct uncontrolled by will and reason, they become parents, in or out of wedlock, and their children are almost certain to be mentally defective.” Outside of institutions, he stated, feeble-mindedness could lead to pauperism, crime, even murder.⁴¹

A central goal of Hardy’s plan was to prevent the feeble-minded from having children. He reminded his audience, “Feeble minds cannot beget strong minds.” Perhaps because he himself had begotten a disabled child, Hardy also argued that the causes of feeble-mindedness were not always hereditary, attributing some of the problem to childhood diseases. He called for greater public health efforts to prevent the development of feeble-mindedness as a result of disease. But regardless of how the condition developed, Hardy believed that feeble-mindedness must be prevented from spreading by controlling the reproductive capabilities of individuals. Like many eugenicists, Hardy applied the rhetoric of animal breeding to humans. He envisioned that “the Home for the feeble-minded would prevent procreation of its kind. We surely must take some action or see a steady decline in intellect and power of the human race. If this system is applicable to the hog, cow and horse family, why not to the man family.”⁴²

Hardy’s rhetoric focused on protecting children, even from conception and birth, but he did not limit his institution to housing children, since the threat of reproduction came from an older population. He was clear: no matter how much the institution improved the lives of children (or protected unborn children from disaster), its main purpose was to protect society from the menace of the feeble-minded. He described “the class of unfortunates”—“these idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, insane, inebriates, thieves, adulterous, murderous, and all classes of

⁴¹ Hardy, “What It Costs,” 3-4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5-8.

criminals”—as a “vast army.” The feeble-minded were in this sense an enemy or a foreign invader. Hardy’s notions, in particular the idea that an institution could serve a prophylactic purpose, meshed readily with accepted Progressive schemes of prevention and efficiency.⁴³

The *Kinston Free Press* reported that Hardy’s paper “produced a sort of mild sensation in the meeting.” The members of the Seaboard Medical Society readily endorsed Hardy’s idea, voted to work with the incoming legislature to establish such an institution, and printed three thousand copies of his paper.⁴⁴ The public reaction to Hardy’s paper was also swift and positive. The *Kinston* paper printed a laudatory editorial that picked up on Hardy’s assertion that feeble-mindedness could strike anywhere, offering this as a reason that every citizen had an interest in creating an institution to care for “imperfect children,” thus “lift[ing] great burdens off numerous households.”⁴⁵

Hardy’s address also received attention from newspapers around the state, all of which discussed his idea favorably. Like the *Kinston Free Press*, these newspapers focused on the possibilities of the institution to care for children, rather than adults. The *Charlotte Observer* urged all readers to consider Hardy’s proposition, mostly for humanitarian reasons, arguing that it would benefit not only deviant children but also “embiciles” and “out-and-out idiots.” The needs of the feeble-minded, the editors continued, constituted a “pathetic appeal to general sympathy” and an institution for them “should receive the hearty co-operation of the great masses who have been blessed with normal brains.”⁴⁶ Only the *Raleigh News and Observer* reiterated Hardy’s points about “their especial danger to society when grown up.” The *News and*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ “Seaboard Medical Convention Closes,” *Kinston Free Press*, 9 Dec. 1910.

⁴⁵ “What It Costs,” *Kinston Free Press*, 10 Dec. 1910.

⁴⁶ “A Neglected Obligation,” *Charlotte Observer*, 14 Dec. 1910.

Observer also pointed to economic reasons, as well as humanitarian reasons, for supporting the idea.⁴⁷

Denson chimed in, too; in her December 1910 report to the legislature she reminded legislators of the state's commitment to care for "all mental defectives" and emphasized the public's desire for a school. Her argument highlighted the state's financial concerns as well as the possibility of sexual abuse that feeble-minded women faced. She pleaded with legislators to help protect feeble-minded women "against the unmentionable horrors which some have undergone, entailing money loss to the counties and suffering and weakness to their unfortunate progeny who can not hope to be anything but feeble-minded and dependent upon the counties for support."⁴⁸

Hardy and the Seaboard Medical Society took advantage of this surge of favorable public opinion and asked Raleigh insiders, Beaufort County Representative W. A. Thompson and Governor William Kitchin, to draft legislation for a school for the feeble-minded, which found supporters in both the House and the Senate.⁴⁹ The bill passed on the night of March 3, 1911, with supporters gathered out to hear the debate and roll-call vote in the crowded House chambers. The legislature made an initial appropriation of \$60,000 to establish the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded. The governor rewarded supporters of the bill by naming them to the board of trustees. The first trustees were all either medical professionals, including

⁴⁷ "The State's Duty to Feeble-Minded," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Dec. 1910.

⁴⁸ *BPC Report, 1910*, 7.

⁴⁹ The bill found support in the House from Dr. A. A. Kent, Hon. E. M. Koonce, Hon. Mark Mijette and others. The Senate bill was introduced by Dr. R. V. Cartwright, after private discussion with Dr. Hardy. He was helped by Hon. Baggett, Hon. Martin, and Dr. Sykes. Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 27.

members of the Seaboard Medical Society, or legislators who had advocated the establishment of the school.⁵⁰

The \$60,000 appropriation was a notable sum in 1911, when North Carolina, like other southern states, struggled with meager revenue sources. Moreover, the school's establishment and funding preceded the bulk of Progressive spending by several years. Both state revenue and spending rose drastically between the mid-1910s and 1930, but in 1911 the legislature was still quite stingy.⁵¹ Previous legislatures had provided for groups that most obviously required public support, in the context of post-Reconstruction North Carolina: Confederate veterans and widows, the mentally ill, some orphans, and deaf and blind children. Counties provided for the poor through county homes and outdoor relief. All of these groups could elicit nearly unalloyed pity from the public. In the institutions chartered after the turn of the century, a new thread was visible: these institutions cared for *and* contained populations that were not only pitiable but also in some way frightening or a threat to the social order. North Carolinians were more open to reforms that benefited a population that was both pitiable and possibly a menace to society—such as the mentally ill, the feeble-minded, or deviant children. In each of these cases, supporters could play on two sides of public sentiment, pity and fear.

Perhaps the heightened concern about deviant populations was also linked to white southerners' attempts to shore up racial barriers. The school was created for *white* children and

⁵⁰ “An act to establish the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded,” North Carolina Public Law 1911, ch. 87. One source says that the board of trustees included six members of the Seaboard Medical Society. See Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 28.

⁵¹ According to George Tindall, Governor Thomas W. Bickett oversaw the beginning of this expansion in 1917 and the real explosion took place under Governor Cameron Morrison. Tindall writes, “Between 1913 and 1930, taxes in NC rose by 554 per cent, a rate of increase exceeded only by Delaware. Between 1915 and 1925 state expenditures grew by 847 per cent, a rate of increase greater than any other state's, nearly thrice the national average.” And between 1920 and 1930, the state bond debt went from around \$13 million to almost \$180 million. George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press University, 1967), 225.

women only. This fact was rarely mentioned in public discussions of plans for the school. In fact, the school's charter mandated that "all such feeble-minded persons" who "are capable of being benefitted by school instruction shall be committed to this institution," making no mention of the race of such people.⁵² But this language may indicate a reason for the exclusion of black children, apart from white southerners' general tendency to ignore the needs of African Americans for basic, let alone equal, social services. Assumptions about black inferiority dictated that feeble-minded black children were less capable of "being benefitted by school instruction."⁵³ Most white North Carolinians, however, would not even have bothered to ponder the suitability of the institution for black children. The school's perpetual lack of space meant that there would never be a building to spare for black children, and even the thought of black children sharing the same institution with white children would have horrified some whites in a state where schools and hospitals were rigidly divided along racial lines.⁵⁴ Thus the state's feeble-minded African Americans were left in the care of their families, or worse, left to languish in jails or insane asylums. Reformers aimed to provide special care for the white feeble-minded but also to make sure that these people would no longer threaten society with their offspring or their transgressions of the racial order.

⁵² North Carolina Public Law 1911, ch. 87, section 1.

⁵³ On the question of race and education, see James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), especially chapter 6.

⁵⁴ Noll attributes the lack of institutional facilities for separate races in the South both to blinding prejudice and to imitation of northern models, where the population was more homogenous. He writes that "southern institutions for the mentally handicapped simply did not account for race in the planning, organization, and implementation of these facilities." Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst*, 93.

As plans for the school developed, the founders looked north for models.⁵⁵ The trustees sent four of their members to other states' schools for the feeble-minded to gather "thorough information as to how they are built, equipped and managed."⁵⁶ In April 1911, they spent several days traveling by rail to private and public institutions in the Northeast, including training schools in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. At each institution, they met with the superintendent, toured the grounds, and made notes about the physical labor done by the inmates. They spent the most time at Vineland and left impressed with the staff and particularly enamored of the research laboratory, which they deemed "of inestimable value to society." Judging by the committee's report to the rest of the trustees, however, they spent most of their trip preoccupied with details of institutions' physical plant, comparing various models to their own budget. Based on their inspections, they recommended that North Carolina's school be built on a large tract of land, with a central group of buildings like Maryland's but cheaper.⁵⁷

With this information in mind, the trustees met in Raleigh in June, 1911, to select a site for the school. In response to a newspaper ad, four towns submitted bids. One of these was Kinston, where community leaders had been following the fate of the proposed school since Hardy's presentation. A group of thirty of Kinston's citizens, mostly doctors, businessmen, and their wives, organized quickly to energize local residents and to make their case to the state.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Noll argues that the institutions that sprouted in south between 1914 and 1923 attempted to copy northern models, with unclear objectives, and for these reasons did not offer the services needed. Noll, *Feeble-minded in our Midst*.

⁵⁶ Minutes, Board of Trustees of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-minded, 6 Apr. 1911, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume), 6.

⁵⁷ "Report of Committee of Visitation," *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, 1911-1912*, 9-17.

⁵⁸ The group of Kinston residents was split by sex. The "committee of seventeen" that managed Kinston's campaign to host the school was all men. The fifteen members of the "ladies' advisory committee" were asked to "assist in executing whatever plans may be adopted." "Committee of Seventeen," *Kinston Free Press*, 17 May 1911. Later, during the school's construction, the ladies' committee planted a number of shrubs and flowers at the school. Executive Committee report to Trustees, in Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 6-7 Dec. 1912; and Minutes,

When the executive committee visited to inspect the prospective site, Kinston's residents met them at the train station, hoping to "show them the interest in the proposition that is popularly felt in this community."⁵⁹ Kinston's trump card was offering five years of electrical service and nine hundred acres of land to the state, free of charge. The land alone was worth almost \$24,000. Predictably, the trustees chose Kinston as the site.⁶⁰

Kinston's interest in hosting the school probably had little to do with its purpose and more to do with economics. Although Kinston's taxpayers had to service the bond that paid for their donation of agricultural land for the institution, Kinston's businessmen hoped to benefit from the proximity of the school, and some residents could anticipate finding employment at the school as housekeepers, laundry workers, or farm workers. When the town turned out for the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone on May 6, 1912, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, according to one school employee, "emphasized the advantage the school would be to the community."⁶¹

These responses of Kinston citizens were typical of North Carolina's middle class: their primary interest in the school was *not* eugenics; rather, the custodial goals of the institution suited their economic motives and their social assumptions. Similarly, families who sought to place a child at the school were driven by their own concerns about the inadequacy or expense of

Caswell Board of Trustees, 26 June 1911, both in Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

⁵⁹ *Kinston Daily Free Press*, 19 June 1911, quoted in Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 30.

⁶⁰ Executive Committee report to Trustees, in Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 6-7 Dec. 1912; and Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 26 June 1911, both in Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

⁶¹ Executive Committee report to Trustees, in Minutes, Board of Trustees, 6-7 Dec. 1912, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume); Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 31; and "Masonic Ceremonies – Cornerstone Placed," *Kinston Daily Free Press*, 6 May 1912.

in-home care or by fears about their child's uncontrolled sexual urges. Probably none of them congratulated themselves for helping to stamp out feeble-mindedness through eugenic segregation. Nevertheless, the lack of sustained opposition to the institution's publicly stated eugenic goals demonstrates that neither parents of inmates nor the general public found these goals unreasonable, irrelevant, or repugnant.

A Site for Eugenic Research

Caswell's contributions to the spread of eugenics ideology in the state were multiplied many-fold by the trained fieldworker, Sybil Hyatt, who helped lay the foundation for eugenics research there. Ira Hardy, elected as superintendent of the fledgling institution, arranged for Hyatt at least partly with the intent of spreading the word about the school to families of potential students. But the employment of a eugenics fieldworker had multiple benefits. A eugenics fieldworker could help satisfy the Trustees' desire to estimate the number of feeble-minded children in the state.⁶² Moreover, playing host to eugenics research might enhance the scientific reputation of the school among its peer institutions in other states.⁶³ In this area, Hardy's goals were aligned with those of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), the primary national eugenics research organization. As he wrote to Charles Davenport, the ERO director, "My heart is with you in the work and will do anything assigned me... Inestimable good is sure to be the result of this humanitarian cause."⁶⁴ Although it is not clear how Hardy first became

⁶² Caswell Trustee Minutes, 6 Apr. 1911, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

⁶³ Noll does not address this topic directly, but he implies that Sybil Hyatt's work was part of the South's participation in a "broad, nationwide attempt to cure social ills by segregating feeble-minded individuals" and he stresses southern reformers' acute awareness of national, professional standards of care. Noll, *Feeble-Minded in our Midst*, 25.

⁶⁴ Telegram from Hardy to Davenport, n.d. [1913], Charles B. Davenport Papers (Mss.B.D27, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; hereafter Davenport Papers), Series I, Subseries B, Box 116, Folder: ERO Field Workers Conference, Correspondence, 1913 (Folder 1).

acquainted with Davenport, he used their mutual interest to secure a fieldworker for six months' work in North Carolina.

Sybil Hyatt, a native of Kinston, was for many years the state's only ERO-trained field worker. Sybil was born in 1877, the daughter of Dr. Henry Otis Hyatt, a physician, and Sybil Henry Miller, both with North Carolina roots. While Sybil's younger brother Anderson followed in the professional footsteps of his father, Sybil's education equipped her to be a school teacher.⁶⁵ It was in the midst of her teaching career that she was exposed to principles of eugenics. Although it is unclear when Hyatt's interest in eugenics developed, the ideology probably appealed to her because of her own family history. Surrounded in her family by medical men, Hyatt may have seen training in eugenics as a way to achieve her own professional distinction. Explorations of biological inheritance of traits may have also appealed to her because of her long-running interest in genealogy. Both she and her sister Delia were members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and like many other North Carolinians of means, they placed great stock in their lineage. It is likely that Hardy knew her (after all, Hardy and Hyatt's father both practiced medicine in the same small town), and perhaps he hand-picked her as the best local candidate for ERO training. In the summer of 1912, when she was thirty-five years old, Hyatt traveled north to attend the ERO's fieldworker training on Long Island.

The ERO's fieldworker training was one of the organization's more notable programs. Davenport created the program in 1910, the ERO's first year, in order to advance eugenics research as well as spread the gospel of eugenics. He hoped to create a positive feedback loop in

⁶⁵ After receiving a Mistress of Liberal Arts at the Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies of Notre Dame in Baltimore, Maryland, she attended a six-week summer training program for teachers at the University of North Carolina in 1896, and she later attended similar programs at the University of Virginia and Columbia University. Although the years between 1896 and 1908 are unaccounted for, she taught school between 1908 and 1912. Historical Note, Finding aid of Delia Hyatt Papers, North Carolina State Archives, accessed 7 Apr. 2014, http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/pc_hyatt_delia.xml.

which the availability of trained eugenics field-workers would spark interest in eugenics research, which would in turn fuel the desire for more field-workers.⁶⁶ During each summer throughout the 1910s, Davenport and his deputy Harry Laughlin trained about twenty students. The vast majority—eight-five percent—of the field-workers were women, and most of these were unmarried, recent college graduates with some training in biology or other sciences. In the six-week course, students learned about heredity, psychology, physical anthropology, and statistics.⁶⁷ They also practiced skills of collecting information on heredity by interviewing each other and filling out “pedigree” cards that described personal and family history as well as physical, mental, and temperamental traits.⁶⁸ To understand their future role as researchers embedded with institutions, they took field trips to nearby institutions for the feeble-minded.⁶⁹

Although Davenport hired some of the summer course graduates for work at the ERO, the more common practice was for the ERO and some other institution or organization to jointly fund a field-worker’s research elsewhere, in hopes that the outside organization would see the value of the work and assume full financial responsibility after a year.⁷⁰ In the 1910s, ERO-trained fieldworkers did research and submitted reports on communities or institutions in twenty-

⁶⁶ Amy Sue Bix writes, “In this manner, Davenport envisioned swift expansion of summer classes through a self-reinforcing circle of supply and demand: availability of his trained field-workers would help convince state legislatures and institutions of the value of eugenics research, while increasing popularity of eugenic thinking would further intensify demand for ERO graduates ... The field-workers thus came to represent Davenport’s eugenics programme to the outside world, and the ERO touted the availability of its researchers as demonstrating both the progress and promise of eugenic work.” Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: ‘Women’s Work’ in Biology,” *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 3 (Aug. 1997): 629, 632.

⁶⁷ Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers,” 625, 633, 637-8, 642.

⁶⁸ See, for example, “Crane, H. W. – Pedigree of Harry Wolven Crane taken by K. M. Cowdery, 1915,” ERO Records), Series VI, card file.

⁶⁹ Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers,” 638.

⁷⁰ Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers,” 629. Between 1910 and 1916, the ERO “paid the salaries of 40 women and 4 men who have been assigned among 43 different institutions.” *Eugenical News* 2, no. 6 (June 1917): 44.

eight locations, including Bermuda, Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and numerous states. Some focused their research on a specific topic, such as Huntington's Chorea, feeble-mindedness, or insanity, tracing patterns of heredity on "pedigree charts" and explaining their findings in dozens of pages of descriptions.⁷¹ Davenport solicited donations from private philanthropies to pay the salaries of these field workers, while the institutions, and ultimately state legislatures, paid for field expenses.⁷² Hyatt's work was funded by the Carnegie Institute in Washington, thanks to Dr. Hardy's mediating efforts.⁷³

Sybil Hyatt was one of the few ERO fieldworkers stationed in the South. Indeed, Davenport had viewed Hardy's request for a trained fieldworker as an "opportunity to open the work in the south."⁷⁴ Her research specialty, according to ERO records, was "cacogenic families and feeble-mindedness."⁷⁵ After receiving her training at the ERO in the summer of 1912, Hyatt traveled throughout North Carolina from October 1912 to June 1913, completing at least 27

⁷¹ See card file of field workers, ERO Papers, Series VII: Field Worker Files.

⁷² The ERO acquired other funding from the Rockefeller Foundation under John D. Rockefeller, which in 1914 donated \$5,400 to the ERO for six field workers, paid a monthly salary of \$75. Davenport told a Rockefeller Foundation official that "Wherever these field workers go, they serve to bring home to the State the importance of the investigation of its problems relating to the feeble minded, the insane and others and to lead the state to take more vigorous steps to diminish the number of them who are reproduced thru bad heredity." Charles B. Davenport to Jermone D. Greene, 12 May 1914, Rockefeller Foundation Records (Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY; hereafter RF Records), RG 1.1, Series 1 (Projects), Subseries 200, Box 18, Folder 204: Eugenics Investigators, 1914-1915.

⁷³ Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 32.

⁷⁴ Brown and Genheimer write that Hyatt's job was to "travel throughout the state and study the social background of children who needed to be in such a school." Hyatt, "who was well trained in social work ... was the first person in the south to be engaged in work of this nature." Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 32. Card files in the ERO records indicate that most fieldworkers did work in the northeast (New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania), the midwest (Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota), and California. See card file of field workers, ERO Records, Series VII, Box 2. For quote about Davenport, see "Field Worker Makes an Interesting Report," *Kinston Free Press*, 9 Dec, 1912, clipping in Sybil Hyatt Papers (MC #778, East Carolina University Special Collections, Greenville, NC), Box 2, Folder A: Education

⁷⁵ Card file of field workers, ERO Records, Series VII, Box 2

family pedigrees and over 200 pages of description, which she dutifully copied and forwarded to Davenport and ERO officials.⁷⁶

Shortly after she began her research, Hyatt made a presentation to the school trustees about her study of North Carolina's feeble-minded families, and her report was subsequently picked up by newspapers.⁷⁷ Her report echoed standard eugenicists' refrains about the "alarming increase in the number of defective children." She implicitly emphasized her training and credentials, citing academics from New York University and Columbia University on the significance of the problem. She also explained her understanding of the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness, which appeared when "two affected strains have crossed each other." And she reminded readers of the eugenic nature of the school's mission: "The ultimate aim of the school is the elimination of feeble mindedness from the race by the segregation of the individuals and the education by field workers of every family that has produced a case."⁷⁸

Although one must read her report with a critical eye, Hyatt did offer some evidence that families of feeble-minded children welcomed the relief the school provided. One mother told Hyatt that she was unable to care for her other children properly because of the burden of taking care of her twelve-year-old, whom Hyatt described as a "slobbering idiot." But Hyatt took a hard line with parents who were reluctant to send their children to the school. She believed that mothers became too attached to their feeble-minded children and that they should be "separated

⁷⁶ Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 7 Dec. 1912, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume); Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 32; and card file of field workers, ERO Records, Series VII, Box 2.

⁷⁷ Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 7 Dec. 1912, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume); "Field Worker Makes an Interesting Report;" "Feeble-Minded: Report of Field Worker for North Carolina Institution," *Charlotte Observer*, 14 Dec. 1912. Hyatt's report was also reprinted as part of the school's report for 1911-1912: "Field Worker's Report From Oct. 20 to Dec. 1, 1912," *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, 1911-1912*, 44-45.

⁷⁸ "Field Worker's Report From Oct. 20 to Dec. 1, 1912."

early and forcibly, if necessary.”⁷⁹ Although such sentiments may have alienated some families, Hyatt succeeded in spreading the word about the new institution. One of the school’s staff later described her as crucial in increasing the number of applications the school received from parents of feeble-minded children: “As a result of Miss Hyatt’s efforts, the number of applications increased so rapidly that buildings designed to hold 130 pupils were soon much too small; applications continued to pour in.”⁸⁰

Like many other ERO graduates, Sybil Hyatt stayed in touch with the organization for several years after her summer training course. In June 1913 the staff invited both Ira Hardy and Sybil Hyatt to attend the Second Annual Field Workers’ Conference at Cold Spring Harbor in June 1913; Hardy could not attend, but Hyatt went. There, fieldworkers presented papers on their findings, discussed research techniques, and compared their experiences as fieldworkers and as women.⁸¹ Hyatt gave a talk on the last day “at an experience meeting.”⁸² Hyatt also maintained ties through the ERO’s monthly *Eugenical News*, an alumni bulletin of sorts; fieldworkers submitted updates about their research, their careers, and their personal lives.⁸³ Through the publication, Hyatt’s fellow graduates would have learned that, perhaps inspired by

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Brown and Genheimer write that in addition to her study of “the social backgrounds of children who needed to be in such a school... it was also her duty to actually secure pupils.” Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 32.

⁸¹ Bix argues that the 1913 conference provides evidence that fieldworkers, rather than fitting some scholars’ description as “uncritical, unscientific drones,” “took research seriously” and “some women field-workers voiced concern over ERO methodology, hoping to correct such problems and place eugenic research on a more scientifically and ethically responsible basis.” Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field Workers,” 625, 658. Hyatt may have been aware of such conversations, but did not herself join the conversations about method at the 1913 gathering. Transcript of the ERO Eugenics Conference, 20-21 June 1913, Davenport Papers, File: ‘ERO Field-Workers’ Conference 1913,’ Folder 3: Proceedings. Hyatt attended another ERO fieldworkers’ conference in July, 1916. “Eugenics Conference,” *Eugenical News* 1, no. 7 (July 1916): 49.

⁸² “Child Rescued from Vicious Bull Dog [Kinston news],” *Greensboro Daily News*, 18 June 1913.

⁸³ See Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field Workers,” 652. *Eugenical News* also contained summaries of the latest eugenics research or legal changes in various states.

her fieldwork experience, Hyatt moved to New York and in 1915 completed a master's degree in psychology at Columbia University.⁸⁴ She also conducted genealogical research, which she saw as linked with her interest in eugenics; she submitted a brief notice to *Eugenical News* that she had recently authored a genealogical paper in a DAR publication.⁸⁵ Yet she seems to have had trouble finding employment that made use of her new training. In 1916 Hyatt returned to Kinston, where she apparently provoked controversy by her unsuccessful attempts to “force educational reforms in the Lenoir County school system.”⁸⁶

Hyatt remained unmarried until her death in 1951 and continued to nurture her interest in ancestry, conducting a great deal of genealogical research and becoming somewhat of an expert. There is no indication that her explicit interest in eugenics continued after 1916. Her last submission to *Eugenical News* indicated that in 1919 she worked in Washington, D.C., as a claim tax examiner for the Department of the Treasury.⁸⁷ Although she saw genealogy and eugenics as linked, her genealogical research did not make use of the techniques she had learned from Davenport.⁸⁸ Yet even her brief foray into eugenics research left a mark on the state. Hyatt's research introduced dozens of North Carolina families to the principles of eugenics. She conducted the state's first systematic study of feeble-mindedness from a hereditarian perspective. And she shared her new expertise and her opinions about some of the state's feeble-minded families with the institution's trustees and the state's legislators, introducing them to the latest

⁸⁴ “Eugenics Field Workers,” *Eugenical News* 1, no. 2 (Feb. 1916): 9.

⁸⁵ *Eugenical News* 1, no. 11 (Nov. 1916).

⁸⁶ Historical Note, Finding aid of Delia Hyatt Papers, North Carolina State Archives, accessed 7 Apr. 2014, http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/pc_hyatt_delia.xml.

⁸⁷ “Alumni Roster, Eugenics Course,” *Eugenical News* 4, no. 3 (Mar. 1919): 23.

⁸⁸ A local newspaper also paired Hyatt's interest “in eugenic and genealogical work” in describing the beginning of her long crusade for a monument to her ancestors. “Monument to the Palatines,” *New Bern Journal*, 11 Jan. 1914.

eugenics principles and perhaps reshaping the ideological framework with which they confronted the problem of the state's feeble-minded youth.

Defining the Role of a Custodial Institution

The trustees' vision for the School for the Feeble-Minded reflected the interplay between eugenic principles and the very real need for improved care for feeble-minded youth. Beyond the trustees, many of North Carolina's Progressive reformers saw the school's purpose in both eugenic and caring terms—and to them, these goals were complementary. Daisy Denson described the school as “an institution whose chief end and aim will be the ultimate decrease of the class for whom it is designed.”⁸⁹ As she wrote in 1912 to a fellow member of the National Conference on Charities and Correction, “We intend to take into this institution not only children but adult women under forty-five and we expect to keep them all their lives if we can. We believe that is the way to limit feeble-mindedness, at least one way, by segregation.”⁹⁰ Yet Denson also saw the school's inmates as needing protection. She described them as “always children... Here long enough to impress upon normal men by their mute suffering the necessity for guarding and preparing for the coming into this world of the new-born soul so that its wings may cleave the skies and not trail in the dust of the earth weighted by physical and mental infirmities.”⁹¹

The school was slow to open, and the delays, which prompted a legislative inquiry, were probably the reason for Hardy's resignation in 1913. Under a new superintendent, Dr. C. Banks McNairy, the school's staff went on a train trip to New Jersey and Maryland, where they visited

⁸⁹ *BPC Report, 1912*, 11.

⁹⁰ Daisy Denson to Dr. Hubert Work, 26 Jan. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: Jan.-June 1912.

⁹¹ *BPC Report, 1913*, 10.

similar institutions in preparation for opening the school. Sallie Shaw, one of the original staff, recalled that “Dr. McNairy planned to give his staff a chance to study a phase of education which we had only touched on in our classes at college... The Vineland Training School in New Jersey was our first stop, and the main school we planned to study. We were eager to see, hear and obtain all the information we could. Each department head was taken to the branch of the school she wished to observe.” They also spent time with Henry Goddard at his research center and watched him give a Binet-Simon test to a young boy.⁹²

Armed with this experience, the staff opened the school June, 1914. The trustees instructed the staff to begin by admitting a few of the “higher grade girls,” reflecting the widespread concern with the of seduction posed by charming, feeble-minded girls as well as the greater difficulties of caring for and training more severely disabled children. In its first year the staff of 15 provided care for 122 pupils.⁹³ Dozens more were on waiting lists, and Denson and the school trustees made regular pleas for appropriations that would allow them to expand the school’s capacity. Throughout the first year, the staff made a concerted effort to build public trust, especially since parents were reluctant to leave their children in the care of strangers, no matter how much training those strangers had. A staff member at the time remembered that their public relations efforts included “giving dinners, inviting many interested and potentially interested key people from the town and throughout the state. Our Sunday School and Sunday afternoons were kept open to visitors.”⁹⁴

⁹² Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 36.

⁹³ *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble Minded, 1913-1914*, 15.

⁹⁴ Brown and Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse*, 42-43.

As applications flooded in, the trustees grappled with their multiple motives—budgetary restrictions, theories of eugenic segregation, the public desire to aid parents in caring for “defective” children—in their decisions about who to admit to the school and how to care for them. The institution was built to house about 130 residents, but the initial application count surpassed that number by at least a hundred, and applications kept coming. In addition, the staff quickly found themselves almost overwhelmed by their “herculean task in governing, providing food, clothing, etc.” They had hoped to administer mental tests to each new inmate, but the more pressing demands of basic care superseded their research agenda.⁹⁵

Further complicating the school’s mission was the legislature’s shifting stance on whom the institution should serve. The law chartering the school said that all feeble-minded persons over six years of age “capable of being benefitted by school instruction” should be committed to the institution. But McNairy and the trustees believed there were thousands of such people in the state, so they had to set priorities. Their initial policy was to take women of child-bearing age, as well as girls over ten years old. They also planned to admit boys, “as the labor from the males would be, in a measure, profitable to the school.”⁹⁶ They had to revise their plans when, in late 1913, the legislature limited admission to youth under the age of 21. Denson immediately attacked this policy, writing that “It is to be regretted that the age limit of admission was made ‘between six and twenty-one,’ for the unfortunates never ‘grow up,’ they are always children.”⁹⁷ After McNairy, too, recommended that the age limit be changed to allow residents up to age 30, the legislature revised its policy in 1915, capping the age of residents at 21 for men and 30 for

⁹⁵ “Report of Superintendent, December 16, 1914,” *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, 1913-1914*, 14-15.

⁹⁶ Minutes, Caswell Board of Trustees, 30 Sept. 1913, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

⁹⁷ *BPC Report, 1913*, 10.

women. At the same time, they changed the name of the school to Caswell Training School, following McNairy's suggestion "that the name of our institution be changed to something more euphonious and not so odious."⁹⁸ But the struggle over whom to admit would continue in later years, as the legislature pushed to prioritize trainable children and Caswell's Superintendent and state welfare officials made the case that women of reproductive age were the biggest danger to society.⁹⁹ Denson and her successors continued to push lawmakers for funding that would allow an increase in Caswell's population and a concomitant ability to keep women as inmates for more of their reproductive lives.

The Conference for Social Service Tackles "The Problem of Feeble-mindedness and Eugenics"

In the course of the drive to open Caswell, knowledge about eugenics principles spread from medical and social welfare professionals like Ira Hardy and Daisy Denson to lay reformers. The chartering of the school in 1911 shortly preceded the founding of the Conference for Social Service in late 1912, and as Progressive reformers were drawn into the continuing battle to build and open the school, a growing number of people were exposed to the precepts of eugenics. The Conference for Social Service served as an incubator for eugenic ideas, as it did for other Progressive social reforms; it was the forum in which most of the state's Progressive ideas were aired, ripped apart and re-sewn, and embroidered for public approval.

The "problem of feeble-mindedness and eugenics" was an early concern of the Conference for Social Service; one of its original fifteen committees addressed the topic. When the Conference first met, in 1913, attendees heard a series of three-minute talks on "ten vital

⁹⁸ "Report of Superintendent, December 16, 1914," *Biennial Report of the North Carolina School for the Feeble-Minded, 1913-1914*, 17-18; and North Carolina Public Law 1915, ch. 266, section 2.

⁹⁹ The legislature lifted the age restriction in 1923 after years of urging from Caswell and members of the Board of Public Welfare. See North Carolina Public Law 1923, ch. 34.

subjects,” including a presentation by physician Louis Burgin McBrayer on “The Problem of Feeble-mindedness and Eugenics.”¹⁰⁰ A physician from Asheville and one of the original seven founders of the Conference, McBrayer also taught Sunday school at his Baptist church, was a member of several fraternal organizations, and served in multiple professional roles. McBrayer’s primary professional interest was in tuberculosis—in 1914 he became the superintendent of the state sanatorium and chief of the Bureau of Tuberculosis of the state board of health—but he also manifested an interest in eugenics.¹⁰¹

In 1911 McBrayer was appointed as one of the original members of the Board of Trustees for the School for Feeble-Minded Children, probably because he was a well-known doctor around the state. When several of the trustees toured northern institutions for the feeble-minded in the spring of 1911, McBrayer was among them. This trip may have been McBrayer’s first exposure to principles of eugenic segregation and expert opinions on feeble-mindedness. But his amateur interest in genealogy and his own pride in his Scotch-Irish descent perhaps predisposed him to explore eugenics principles.¹⁰² McBrayer became a devoted member of the Board of Trustees, rarely missing a meeting despite the long train trip from Asheville to Kinston.

In his statement at the inaugural Conference meeting, reprinted in the Conference’s quarterly journal, McBrayer offered six recommendations that centered around the needs of the

¹⁰⁰ 1913 Program, North Carolina Conference for Social Service, CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical Material, Dr. Poe.

¹⁰¹ Apparently well regarded by his fellow medical men, he was elected to the presidency of the State Medical Society, the State Board of Medical Examiners, and the State Health Officers Association. “Dr. Lewis Burgin McBrayer; A Big Man and His Big Work,” *Charlotte Observer*, 27 Sept. 1914; and Paul M. McCain, “McBrayer, Louis Burgin,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 4, ed. William S. Powell, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 121.

¹⁰² Like Sybil Hyatt, McBrayer was an amateur genealogist; he published *McBrayer Genealogy* in 1926. One newspaper profile of him began by noting his Scotch-Irish descent. “Dr. Lewis Burgin McBrayer; A Big Man and His Big Work,” *Charlotte Observer*, 27 Sept. 1914; and Paul M. McCain, “McBrayer, Louis Burgin,” *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*.

state School for the Feeble-Minded. First and foremost, he called for sufficient state funding to finish and enlarge the school. He also proposed a plan to produce “a nearly perfect census of the feeble-minded in our State, outside our institutions,” which the trustees of the School for the Feeble-Minded had made an early priority but which had proved difficult to accomplish.¹⁰³ In addition, he called on college faculty across the state to “infuse an interest [in this work] into their student body.” As future policymakers, doctors, and lawyers, the college students were a critical audience for outreach efforts.

The resolutions passed at the first meeting of the Conference in 1913 reflected the breadth of their social goals. Conference members endorsed legislation for public health and education; they recognized the need for more space in orphanages; they favored prison reforms, including probation and parole; and they called for a better child labor law. These wide-ranging social goals framed their first expressions of concern about feeble-mindedness, which echoed all of McBrayer’s suggestions. Attendees saw feeble-mindedness as a pressing problem for the state, with psychological testing as a way to determine the true extent of the problem and to separate the normal from the abnormal.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the Conference’s resolution on “improvement of country life” reveals their assumptions about racial character. They echoed the conclusions of a three-minute talk by Clarence Poe, editor of the *Progressive Farmer*, who bemoaned the racial demographics in the rural parts of the state: “there are too many negroes in the country, and farmers frequently find that there are not enough white people for their wives

¹⁰³ McBrayer’s other suggestions included testing criminals for mental defects before sentencing them. He also proposed that teachers inspect children for physical defects that might be the cause of their low performance and refer these students to local health officers for treatment. Dr. L. B. McBrayer, “The Problem of Feeble-Mindedness and Eugenics—Six Recommendations,” in *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 16-17. On the trustees’ desire for a complete census of the state’s feeble-minded, see Minutes, Caswell Board Trustees, 6 Apr. 1911, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

¹⁰⁴ “Resolutions adopted by the state conference, Raleigh, North Carolina, Feb 11, 12, 1913,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 20-22.

and daughters to associate with.” But Poe did not stop at calling for a greater proportion of white farmers; he dreamed of the state attracting a particular kind of white family: “the thrifty Northern and Western white farmers.”¹⁰⁵

As the elite reformers who frequented Conference gatherings considered the intertwined questions of feeble-mindedness, insanity, and eugenics throughout the 1910s, religious rhetoric served as a primary avenue for their calls to establish eugenics programs. For these reformers, social Christianity aligned neatly with Progressive reform, and eugenics might be a means for creating an ideal society, one step on the path towards the kingdom of God. Along with Denson, these advocates of eugenics hoped to gain the support of other Progressive-minded social reformers by mobilizing a particular religious discourse. Social Christianity provided a common language for a range of reform efforts and a framework in which reformers shared understandings of their goals and means.¹⁰⁶

Pro-eugenics adherents of the social gospel explained the process of heredity through an agricultural analogy in which humans were God’s farmers, breeding the human race on His behalf. McBrayer wrote that humans were “in partnership with God in the creation of human beings.” He argued that the farmers of North Carolina knew how to breed animals but were failing to apply this understanding to a more important animal: “Our state has awakened to the

¹⁰⁵ Clarence Poe, “What We Need for the Improvement of Rural Life,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 18-19.

¹⁰⁶ As the social gospel was the religious analog of the Progressive movement, eugenics appealed to both Progressives and social gospellers. Christine Rosen has demonstrated that some religious leaders embraced eugenics as a social solution that was congruent with both modern science and biblical ideas of heredity. She writes that “the liberals and modernists in their respective faiths—those who challenged their churches to conform to modern circumstances—became the eugenics movement’s most enthusiastic supporters.” Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184.

meaning of [the law of heredity] so far as the lower animals are concerned... In fact everything about the place is thoroughbred and pedigreed except [the farmer's] children."¹⁰⁷

McBrayer sidestepped the question of evolution, asserting that natural selection and divine creation were compatible; natural selection, or human selection, took place only after the creation of the human species. "The Good Book says that God created men in His own image out of the dust of the earth. But he is not populating the earth in that way now. He is not doing that stunt any more. He has turned that job over to us. We are, then, working together with God in the creation of those who are to follow us." McBrayer even recast "the Mendelian law of heredity" as "the law of God." Still, McBrayer must have shocked Christian fundamentalists when he claimed that "The Divine force works through us... it is we who are, more immediately, the creators of men. We generate the race; we alone can regenerate it."¹⁰⁸

As head of the Conference's committee on eugenics, McBrayer encouraged Conference members to spread the word about eugenics. In his estimation, "The people generally throughout the State are taking an interest in this subject, are studying it, are asking questions, are reading everything that is printed about it." He wrote in 1914 that "during the year the newspapers have paid particular attention to this phase of social service in our State, and have been of invaluable aid in bringing the subject to the attention of our people. Some have indulged in unfriendly criticism, but for the most part the discussion in the newspapers has been along the right lines, and some editorials have been of extraordinary value." McBrayer believed that North Carolinians would, "if given the proper information, form proper conclusions." The

¹⁰⁷ These analogies were surely calculated to appeal to North Carolina's rural farming population, they may have missed their mark, since rural farmers tended to be more conservative, evangelical, and fundamentalist in their religious beliefs. Dr. L. B. McBrayer, "Importance of Giving More Attention to Eugenics," *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 6-8.

¹⁰⁸ McBrayer, "Importance of Giving More Attention to Eugenics," 7.

Conference's role, he argued, was "to see that they get the proper information." He suggested that Conference members send clipped articles from "a newspaper, magazine, medical journal, or what not" to newspaper editors, who would "be glad to use it because their readers are interested in it."¹⁰⁹

In 1915, Dr. C. Banks McNairy, the Superintendent of Caswell, took the reins of committee leadership from McBrayer. He, too, drew on biblical references in his appeals for eugenics. Arguing that reformers should be concerned with the heredity of all members of society, not merely the feeble-minded, he made a plea for reformers themselves to guard their own heredity: "We who believe in eugenics and heredity are first to hand down to our posterity as far as is possible with us an untarnished inheritance, so that they may lay nothing at our door by which they may condemn us to that class of which it is said, 'I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generations of them that hate me.'" Under McNairy's leadership, the Conference for Social Service continued to consider eugenics throughout the decade, with its activities centered around its standing committee. McNairy called for legislative changes that would benefit Caswell, but he also advocated other eugenic measures in his reports both to the Conference and to the Caswell trustees and legislature. In 1915, he called for three tiers of action: segregation where possible, eugenic marriage laws, and, where both failed, sterilization of "lower types."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ "Report of Committee Chairman, Mental Hygiene, Feeble-Mindedness, Insanity, and Eugenics," *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1914), 15.

¹¹⁰ C. Banks McNairy, "Reports of Committee Chairmen: Committee on Feeble-Mindedness, Insanity, and Eugenics," *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1915): 17-18.

“The Mother-Heart of the World Responds”

White clubwomen were an important and sympathetic audience for the state’s experts on eugenics. Already well organized and committed to a broad vision of social reform, they became increasingly interested in principles of eugenics through their participation in the Conference for Social Service, their contacts with female social welfare professionals, and their social service efforts within their local women’s clubs. Moreover, some women also became “experts” on the subject and functioned as interpreters of eugenics ideology for the public.

Among Conference members, women showed particular interest in eugenics principles. Only about a quarter of the Conference membership was female, but women constituted almost half of the members of the committee on feeble-mindedness and eugenics.¹¹¹ The “women’s sessions” of the Conference sometimes took on the topic of eugenics in ways that reveal Conference members’ conceptions of their roles both as women and as reformers. At the 1917 Conference meeting, a session on “Organized Womanhood and Social Welfare in North Carolina” addressed the question of eugenics. One of the speakers, Mattie Parrott of Kinston, took her audience on an imaginary field trip to Caswell, encouraging them to venture there and witness in person the efforts “to help those unfortunate human beings,” “the ‘least of these’ for whom we must care, if we hope to merit our Savior’s commendation.”¹¹²

Parrott’s invented narrative drew on tropes of motherly caring, good housekeeping, and Christian charity to elicit both sympathy and fear in her audience. She began by setting a bucolic scene, praising the school’s “simple” but “dignified” architecture. Upon the group’s arrival, they would visit Superintendent C. B. McNairy, “hear a brief lecture on eugenics, and learn that three-

¹¹¹ “Who’s Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 106-110.

¹¹² “Social Service Sessions Close,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917; and Mrs. J. F. Parrott, “A Visit to Caswell Training School,” *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1915): 24-27.

fourths of the children are here because of hereditary influences.” From there, the tour proceeded to dormitories for “the lowest type of girls.” Parrott assured her listeners that although they might “recoil” at the prospect, “there is nothing repulsive here.” Instead, “there are twenty-two little white beds, each immaculate.” These girls cannot speak and they “hold out their arms to be caressed just as our babies do.” Moving downstairs, they visited “the imbecile girls,” whose speech was “foolish” and appearance “repulsive... [F]ew besides a mother have any forbearance with them.” When the children assembled for Sunday school, their hymn-singing and happiness “inspires faith in our own hearts that the noble work shall be carried on to a larger development.” Parrott drew lines of common cause between the assembled women and the mothers of the children at Caswell, who despaired for their “hopeless offspring.”

Yet Parrott ended her presentation with dire warnings about the dangers of “allowing the high-grade defectives to mingle, unrestricted, in society.” Shifting her tone, she declared, “It is estimated that about two per cent of the school population are feeble-minded. Your children, mothers, and mine, sit beside them in the schoolroom, and converse with them daily... Are you willing that a mind capable only of distorted views shall influence your child in his tender years? No!” To Parrott, the “lowest grade” feeble-minded children deserved sympathy, care, and protection, and all women could pity the mothers of such children. But when supposedly feeble-minded children, souls already “blackened by sin,” strayed into the sanctified territory of normal childhood, their feeble-mindedness became a “crime.” Parrott shrank from the possibility that her own three children, ages eight through thirteen,¹¹³ might be exposed to the supposed depravity of “high-grade defectives.” Although she framed her emotional reactions to feeble-minded children in terms of her role as a mother, she proposed solutions that drew on the

¹¹³ Jack F. Parrott in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule for Lenoir County, Kinston Twp, North Carolina.

authority of scientific experts. She called for “McNairy and his assistants” to undertake “further study of the prevalence and effects of these conditions from a scientific standpoint, in order that correct facts may be widely disseminated,” and she hoped that the public might gain a greater understanding of the dangers of feeble-mindedness and “a knowledge of its prevention.”¹¹⁴

Many clubwomen saw themselves as playing a critical role in saving civilization and the race through their role as mothers. Sallie Southall Cotten, an influential founder of the state Federation of Women’s Clubs, declared in her 1913 presidential address that “educated, christianized, organized womanhood” would “put a soul into” modern civilization “and thus give it continued life.” Cotten continued, “To-day the world is calling her—and she is responding... The welfare of future generations calls to her and the mother-heart of the world responds. The law of evolution needs her co-operation to the end that a better race may bless the earth, and only through her can man be won to his part of co-operation with this law.”¹¹⁵ For Cotten, women were essential partners in improving the race and elevating civilization to new ethical heights, and those projects were intertwined.

Clubwomen’s interest in the problem of feeblemindedness stemmed in part from their general concern about children. The Raleigh Woman’s Club, for example, asked Dr. H. W. Chase, a psychologist and later the president of UNC, to lecture them on “the subnormal child.” They then had Raleigh schoolchildren “examined for defective mentality.” Urging other clubs to follow their lead, the club president reported in 1915 that “we sent a teacher to Vineland for

¹¹⁴ Mrs. J. F. Parrott, “A Visit to Caswell Training School,” *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1915), 24-27. According to the 1910 and 1920 census, Mattie Parrott was married to James F. Parrot, who in 1910 was the postmaster and in 1920 was an insurance agent and had three children. In 1917 she would have been either 33 or 35. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Population Census Schedule for Lenoir County, Kinston Twp, North Carolina; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule for Lenoir County, Kinston Twp, North Carolina.

¹¹⁵ Mrs. R. R. Cotten, address, May 6, 1913, in New Bern, *FWC Yearbook, 1913-1914*, 25-6.

special training, and fitted up a room for the subnormal children, and now they are being taught, apart from the other children, by a teacher who knows their needs.”¹¹⁶ Raleigh’s clubwomen were thus at the vanguard of providing specialized education for children in need, and the funds they provided for a classroom and a trained educator were no doubt instrumental in improving the lives of some children.

Yet many of these same women blurred the lines between caring for children and protecting society from them. Part of “caring” was eliminating the possibility that future children could be feeble-minded. Housing the feeble-minded, delinquent, or insane in sex- and race-segregated institutions simultaneously served two purposes. In many cases, these institutions were able to provide better care than families could, although at the expense of inmates’ freedom of movement and connections with family and friends. Through their lobbying and educational efforts, women played a part in improving material circumstances for feeble-minded children. In creating and maintaining custodial institutions, however, women were also protecting the children who were closest to their hearts: their own.

Beyond the Conference, clubwomen studied eugenics as part of their efforts to improve their knowledge about the world around them. Some clubs “appointed one of their members to prepare an essay on the subject, while some other member would respond to the essay, perhaps taking the opposite views.” Others brought visiting lecturers.¹¹⁷ In the process of becoming politically active reformers, clubwomen turned to the experts among them for information on eugenics, feeble-mindedness, and mental illness. At clubwomen’s requests, Daisy Denson was a

¹¹⁶ Delia Dixon Carroll, “What Can our Women’s Clubs do in the State’s Upbuilding,” *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1915): 111.

¹¹⁷ L. B. McBrayer, “Report of committee chairman, Mental Hygiene, Feeble-Mindedness, Insanity, and Eugenics,” presented in Raleigh, Feb 13-15, 1914, and reprinted in *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1914): 16.

willing resources. She wrote long letters describing the latest research or recommending speakers on feeble-mindedness. Denson told her that “on this subject, Insanity... prevention is looming larger daily.” In 1916 Denson responded to a query from a woman in Salisbury, North Carolina, who was curious about the state’s provision for the feeble-minded by explaining the hereditary nature of the condition, quoting Charles Davenport, and recommending that the woman get C. Banks McNairy to come talk to her society.¹¹⁸

Another expert on the overlap between social welfare and eugenics was Mary Schwarberg, a social worker and teacher in her twenties. Schwarberg was first exposed to the problem of feeble-mindedness when she attended lectures in 1914 at Chautauqua, where she was “gripped with the fact that there were 500,000 mental defectives in the United States and soon we would be spending more money on them than on our normal children.” When she encountered several feeble-minded children in her work in the North Carolina mountains, she “determined to find out if there was a school for mental defectives in the State and to do what I could to stop this class from increasing our population.”¹¹⁹

As Schwarberg described her concerns at the 1915 convention of the Federation of Women’s Clubs, the problem with the “care of the Feeble-Minded Girl” was that “care” was not a sufficient remedy; solutions needed to go beyond care to prevention. She recommended segregation to stem “the increase of this class of the population endangering the life of our Nation,” and save counties money. Her overwhelming stress, however, was on the female duty to protect helpless girls whose virtue might be in danger. She called for “every woman here

¹¹⁸ Denson to Lucille Ellington (Mrs. B. A.) Hocutt, 30 Sept. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912; and Denson to Mrs. T. R. Garner, 31 Aug. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1916.

¹¹⁹ Mary Schwarberg, “A Woman’s Work for Defectives,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 Feb. 1919.

today ... to care for and protect the feeble-minded girl” by discovering whether such girls lived in their communities and trying to get them admitted to Caswell. Moreover, she encouraged clubwomen to appeal to legislators for additional funding for the school to “make it possible for every feeble-minded girl in North Carolina to be cared for so that she may not become a mother.” Her final questions to the clubwomen were, “Is the care of these little ones not worthy of the work of the clubs of this Federation? Shall not each woman here decide to do something for the 7,000 helpless ones of NC who need our help?”¹²⁰

In the spring of 1918 Mary Schwarberg became the principal at Caswell. The tone of her descriptions of the feeble-minded shifted thereafter, probably as a result of her increased exposure to the ideology of eugenics through Superintendent McNairy. Although she still spoke of the feeble-minded as needing and deserving care, her emphasis was now on the “scientific” aspects of eugenic prevention. When she addressed a group of women’s clubs in Southern Pines in March 1920, she reeled off statistics: “80 per cent of all persons in our alms houses are feeble-minded” and “there are 5,000 mental defectives” in the state. She quoted national experts, including Henry Goddard, as she detailed the differences between idiots, imbeciles, and morons. She described the need for greater state appropriations in terms of human needs, but downplayed these needs in favor of describing Caswell’s “economical value” and the need for sterilization and segregation to stop “this muddy and murky stream” of mental defect. Her suggestions for clubwomen’s involvement reveal the mix in her own work of expert authority and feminine compassion. Clubwomen, she said, should educate the public about causes of mental deficiency “by distributing proper literature and giving correct scientific instruction as to [feeble-minded people’s] training and care and impressing upon the community that they owe this to God’s most

¹²⁰ Mary Schwarberg, “The Care of the Feeble-Minded” (address delivered at Goldsboro meeting), *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec. 1915): 75-76.

unfortunates.” Her final suggestion was that clubwomen pressure the legislature for appropriations for a psychological clinic at Caswell, where she and other professionals could study the feeble-minded.¹²¹

Denson, Schwarberg, and other social welfare professionals tackled the problem of feeble-mindedness and social deviance differently from women whose primary avenues of concern were their club service and their position as mothers.¹²² Their training, like that of male experts, prompted them to address social problems in a systematized way. They saw patterns in the distribution of “mental defectives” that seemed to require large-scale strategies of segregation or sterilization. At the same time, when they spoke of individual cases, they described the emotions that wrung their hearts. They situated themselves as women whose natural instinct was to care for the helpless, even though they themselves were not mothers caring for their own children. Raised to revere maternal compassion, childless social service professionals such as Hyatt, Denson, and Schwarberg were inspired by concern for both poor, feeble-minded children and children *like* the ones they never had—that is, upper-middle class, white, “normal” children. But they also framed their appeals to male and female progressives in terms of prevention and efficiency, bolstering their claims by citing statistics, referring to experts, and offering testimonials to their own expert training.

¹²¹ Mary Schwarberg, “Some Impressions from Study of Feeble-Minded in Our State” (paper read at meeting of Women’s Clubs of the Sandhills, Southern Pines, 11 Mar. 1920), *Greensboro Daily Record*, 14 Mar. 1920. Note that “A Woman’s Work for Defectives,” which Schwarberg wrote for the *Raleigh News and Observer* in 1919, is similarly focused on the costs of allowing the feeble-minded to reproduce.

¹²² On divides between women reformers and professionals, see Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Same Logic, New Measures: Marriage Restrictions and Sterilizations

By 1917, knowledge about eugenics had spread sufficiently through reformers' circles to stimulate a new sort of eugenics activism. No longer were Progressive leaders satisfied with the prospect of increasing the capacity of Caswell. Having learned from medical and social welfare experts about the assumed heritability of mental defects and the corollary possibility of preventing these problems through segregation, North Carolina's social thinkers extended the logic to other eugenic measures, including marriage restrictions and sterilization. In the discussions that followed, reformers trod familiar paths. Medical doctors pushed new policy measures, and female reformers joined their campaigns, focusing their arguments on children as both victims and offenders.

Reformers' first step was to advocate marriage restrictions, which several other states had passed. North Carolina's Mental Hygiene Association had called for such a law as early as 1914, recommending restricting marriage for defectives "to reach the goal of having a people well born."¹²³ In 1916, the Conference for Social Service charged a committee with studying legislation that would prevent "feeble-mindedness, insanity, and crime." The next year they invited other social service groups to join them "in the investigation of the subject of a eugenic marriage law, with a view to presenting to the General Assembly of 1919 a sane, scientifically based eugenic marriage law for North Carolina, believing that such a law will tend to prevent many of the social ills for whose correction this Conference is striving."¹²⁴ Such a law aimed to

¹²³ Dr. Albert Anderson, "For Our Insane – Recommendations of the Society for Mental Hygiene," *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1915): 25. Other recommendations in this report included more modern facilities, a survey of institutions in other states, and educating the public about mental hygiene in order to prevent insanity.

¹²⁴ "Resolutions Adopted at the Different Sessions of the Charlotte Conference," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916): 52; and "Resolutions," *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1917): 5.

prevent the marriage and thus the reproduction of defectives, with specific requirements including a clean bill of health, both mental and physical, before issuance of a marriage license.

Clubwomen followed their lead. After the 1916 Conference for Social Service, Clara Lingle, the president of the Federation of Women's Clubs, declared that the "child's right to be well born" was an integral part of child welfare. On behalf of clubwomen, she wrote in the Conference's journal that "there would be fewer child problems if there were fewer human wrecks among parents... Almost we are ready to say fewer children if need be, but better children for North Carolina. Children that will start life with better health, better moral instincts, better mentality will give us the class of citizens the State needs."¹²⁵ The next year, the Executive Council of the Federation of Women's Clubs met in Winston-Salem. On the afternoon of October 24, 1917, as they gathered in the hall of the YWCA building, Clara Lingle recommended "that the Legislative Committee cooperate with other organizations in framing a safe, sane eugenics law." The council members present approved the motion, and the meeting went on.¹²⁶ Given the similarity in phrasing, the executive council was likely responding to the Conference's call in January, 1917, for a "sane, scientifically based eugenic marriage law."

Although North Carolina's reformers readily embraced segregation and marriage laws, they only gradually accepted sterilization after years of exposure, conversation, and advocacy by enthusiasts. Focused on improving the state's existing program of institutional segregation, they perhaps were worried that introducing a program of sterilization would detract from the needs of Caswell and its inmates. Perhaps they feared other political backlash, including from

¹²⁵ Clara (Mrs. T. W.) Lingle, "Club Women and the Social Service Conference," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916): 60-61.

¹²⁶ Although the motion did not specifically refer to marriage restrictions, that was arguably its intent. In 1917 the state already had institutions to segregate "defectives" from the population at large. Council Minutes, 24 Oct. 1917, FWC Records, "Convention Minutes, 1915-1920, Council Minutes 1915-1921, Bd. of Directors 1915-1922" (bound volume), 114.

traditionalists who deemed open discussion of reproductive matters to be obscene. Or perhaps they simply did not believe sterilization would be a good solution to the multi-faceted problem of feeble-mindedness and mental hygiene.

The eventual acceptance of sterilization is an example of how ideas from which people recoil can become normalized. Some reformers had long been aware of sterilization as an alternative touted by eugenicists as more effective and less costly than institutionalization. The most ardent leaders witnessed in-depth discussions about eugenic sterilization, among other social policies, at national conventions. Every year, the governor delegated a handful of reformers to attend the National Conference of Charities and Correction or the Southern Sociological Conference, and sterilization frequently came up at these gatherings.¹²⁷

Caswell superintendent C. Banks McNairy was one of the earliest proponents. To members of the Conference for Social Service, he advocated sterilization as a solution for feeble-mindedness where other eugenic measures failed.¹²⁸ As he told a gathering of doctors in 1916, McNairy believed that the onus was on possible opponents of sterilization to propose other “efficacious” remedies.¹²⁹ In his report to the legislature in 1916, he highlighted the “alarming

¹²⁷ *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1903*, 253-4. *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1907*, 10. Sterilization was a topic of discussion at several other NCCC conventions, including those of 1906, 1909, and 1910. See *Proceedings* from 1906 (280 and 468), 1909 (420), 1910 (37). For some discussion of sterilization in a southern context, see John H. De Witt, “Present charitable needs of the south,” *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1914*, 427-434. For some examples of discussion of sterilization at the Southern Sociological Congress, see William Francis Drewry, MD, “Mental Defectives and the Insane,” in James E. McCulloch, ed., *The Call of the New South: Addresses delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress, Nashville, Tennessee, May 7-10, 1912* (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1912), 153-168; and Carolyn Geisel, “Alcohol’s Health Toll,” 297-305, esp. 303, in James E. McCulloch, ed., *Democracy in Earnest: Southern Sociological Congress, 1916-1918* (Washington: Southern Sociological Congress, 1918).

¹²⁸ C. Banks McNairy, “Reports of Committee Chairmen: Committee on Feeble-Mindedness, Insanity, and Eugenics,” *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1915): 17-18.

¹²⁹ C. Banks McNairy, “Eugenics” (reprint of address before Onslow County Medical Society in Jacksonville in January), *Greensboro Daily News*, 6 Feb. 1916.

situation” the state faced: that every year, another “350 or 400 mentally defective children” were born in North Carolina, while Caswell could only house around 200 people. He called for more buildings to increase the institution’s capacity, but he also pushed new measures: with a thorough sterilization program and marriage restrictions added to segregation efforts, he claimed that the state might eliminate feeble-mindedness in one hundred years. According to McNairy, “We have no moral nor legal right to allow the defects of this generation to be stamped upon the children of coming generations when we have the power to prohibit and control. Has the time not come in progressive old North Carolina when we should enact laws along eugenic lines—conservative, of course—looking to the prevention of marriage of the higher grade mental defectives, and the sterilization of the lower grades?”¹³⁰

A bizarre fracas at the 1917 Conference for Social Service in Raleigh indicates the ways that Progressive reformers’ support for McNairy’s pro-sterilization arguments, and some degree of support even for more extreme measures, followed principles cemented by earlier discussions about eugenic segregation. Superintendent McNairy came from Kinston to join an afternoon panel on “the care of the dependent child” that also included a visiting guest of honor, Alexander Johnson, now field secretary of the Philadelphia-based National Committee on Provision for the Feeble-Minded.¹³¹ McNairy argued that “in the case of “unfortunate” or “afflicted” humans,

¹³⁰ *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1915-1916*, 14.

¹³¹ Alexander Johnson had been the head of the Indiana school for the feeble-minded in 1903 when Denson heard him speak at the National Conference of Charities and Correction. Johnson’s career had also included work at the New York School of Philanthropy and several years as the secretary of the National Conference of Charities and Correction. After his wife died in 1911, his brother-in-law, the principal of Vineland Training School in New Jersey, asked him to create an extension program that became the Committee on Provision for the Feeble-Minded, for which Johnson served as field secretary from 1915 to 1918. Johnson co-authored *The Menace of the Mentally Defective* in 1916. See Fred M. Cox, “Alexander Johnson,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America*, ed. Walter I. Trattner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 424-426. On Johnson at the 1917 CSS gathering, see Margaret Clark Neal, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service: The Record of Twenty-Five Years, 1912-1937* (typed manuscript, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 27.

society should “apply the most modern scientific methods for that specific case—medicine, surgery, environment, segregation, [a]sexualization, and castration.” Judging from the lack of debate these principles generated, most of the audience agreed.¹³²

McNairy’s next proposal was more shocking: He “told how wild geese, migrating from North to South, bear above them the injured members of the flock, and how, when this is impossible, they administer a deadly narcotic.” Rats, he said, exhibited similar behaviors. McNairy suggested that humans should be at least as “wise” as animals in nature. He asked, “May I be permitted to suggest that in extreme cases of abnormal human animals in body, and mind, where there is no ray of hope or escape, that society should be as broad, as tender and as merciful as the fowls or the rat to their own, to permit his taking the narcotic that would produce the sleep of eternal peace?” McNairy’s propositions, including the suggestion that society kill the most hopeless “abnormal human animals” out of mercy, at first drew applause from the audience. When Alexander Johnson took the podium, however, he “expressed regret” that the audience applauded McNairy’s proposal and told them, “We are a thousand miles away from that principle today and besides there is nobody who would take the job.”¹³³

There followed a “stiff debate” about McNairy’s paper, with some members of the conference objecting to what they understood as a suggestion to euthanize defectives, presumably by chloroforming them. In response, McNairy at first “explained that he had been asked by fathers of these human defectives to do what he had suggested legally.” Carey Hunter, a longtime member of the Board of Public Charities, jumped in and said, “I think we will have to take all this with a grain of salt. . . I never expected to hear a speaker make this recommendation.

¹³² “Open formula is strongly favored by social workers,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 Jan. 1917.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

I would regard myself as a criminal to support it and I can't do it." Alexander Johnson explained that although he and McNairy were "essentially agreed" about the necessity of most measures, including sterilization, he did not support the idea of killing defectives. Still concerned about the proposed chloroforming, Alexander W. McAlister, one of the most esteemed members of the Conference, proposed a resolution "putting the conference on record against putting defectives out of the way." McNairy finally backtracked, saying "God knows I had no such intention as that" and "insisting he had been misunderstood" and that he merely meant to raise the "question of its preference." McAlister withdrew the resolution, apparently satisfied by McNairy's explanation.¹³⁴

This brief discussion on a January afternoon in 1917, the same day that McAlister unveiled his plan for a Board of Public Welfare, seems to be the only occasion on which North Carolina's reformers publicly debated euthanasia. Attendees at the Conference for Social Service meeting stopped short of condoning such a measure, but apparently only after some prompting from several leaders. At the same time, their ultimately negative reaction to McNairy's extreme idea forced him to claim that he had been misunderstood and possibly curbed his desire to explore the possibilities of euthanasia. But none of those in attendance took issue with McNairy's suggestion of sterilization. Two days later, the Conference's closing session on "race betterment" carried a similar tone. The newspaper reported a "slashing denunciation" of "the mating of defectives," with panelists discussing the problem of "bad stock," the breeding of humans, and restrictions on marriage. One former state senator, J. R. Badgett, advocated giving

¹³⁴ Ibid.

heads of penal or charitable institutions the authority to sterilize inmates when in their “wisdom” it was “necessary to protect society from an increase of defectives.”¹³⁵

Despite the lack of any recorded objections to the principle of sterilization, the Conference chose in 1917 to focus their lobbying efforts going forward on “a sane, scientifically based eugenic marriage law,” probably following the advice of the committee that had studied the issue.¹³⁶ Their choice of language—a “sane, scientifically based” law—indicates their awareness of potential opposition to such a measure or their own worries about the slippery slope leading from sterilization towards more sweeping measures.

Conclusion

The campaigns for marriage laws and eugenic sterilization were the product of developments earlier in the 1910s, notably the growing appeal of eugenics to a circle of influential North Carolinians. These white, educated, upper-middle-class North Carolinians brought their own experiences to their understanding of eugenics. Medical and welfare professionals were the first to encounter and embrace the logic of eugenics. In their efforts to create the first eugenically driven institution, they reached out to networks of Progressive reformers interested in both providing better social services and preventing future social problems. Aware of calls across the nation for institutional segregation, marriage laws, immigration restrictions, and sterilization, North Carolina’s reformers found the place for eugenics within their own state’s traditions. Progressive principles, Christian charity, racial segregation, and celebration of the state’s Anglo-Saxon heritage laid the foundation for the acceptance of eugenics. Women had additional motives for learning about “the newest science.”

¹³⁵ “Social Service Sessions close,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917.

¹³⁶ Resolutions of 1917 Conference, Neal, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service*, 31.

Some women supported eugenic segregation and even sterilization because of their interest in protecting children and society. Others women, exposed to eugenics in their professional lives, interpreted the preventive possibilities for laywomen in terms that appealed to traditional gender roles and simultaneously highlighted their own professional credentials.

As Americans prepared to join the Allied forces in the Great War in Europe, worries about the nation's fitness intensified. The *Charlotte Observer* ran a special feature proclaiming that "too many" men had been rejected from the armed forces in South Carolina for being feeble-minded—and that North Carolina's rejection rate was higher than South Carolina's, at 16.5 men per thousand.¹³⁷ As the nation confronted its fears about its preparedness and the strength of American civilization, North Carolina pondered the same questions in the context of rural poverty and racial divides. The next chapter turns to the story of reformers' attempts to build a modern welfare system equipped to handle North Carolina's problems.

¹³⁷ "Feeble Minded Men Too Many," *Charlotte Observer*, 4 Jan. 1918.

CHAPTER 3: THE “FATHER OF PUBLIC WELFARE”:
ALEXANDER MCALISTER AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL REFORM

In April of 1912, Alexander Worth McAlister, the middle-aged president of a life insurance company in Greensboro, traveled to New York City. His purpose was not business; rather, he went to attend the five-day Christian Conversion Congress in Carnegie Hall, a gathering of the interdenominational Men and Religion Forward movement.¹ This short-lived but potent nationwide group, which sought to revitalize Christian churches by evangelizing among men and boys, was an important part of the social gospel movement.² Of particular significance for the movement, and of special interest to McAlister, was the group’s focus on social service. Members were brought together by their awareness of the power of “applied religion,” of “Christianity applied to the vital problems of today.”³ The movement inspired social reform and charitable work in communities across the nation. In New York, over 1300 men thronged the convention halls, but McAlister stood out. He entered a nationwide contest for

¹ The Congress drew 1,338 attendees from 37 states and 9 countries. *Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement*, vol. 1: Congress Addresses (New York: Funk and Wagnalls for the International Committee of the Young Men’s Christian Associations, 1912).

² Robert Handy has described the Men and Religion Forward movement as “a highly organized crusade to win men and boys for Christ and the church.” Robert T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 12; see also Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 155-63. Men and Religion Forward also claimed the social gospel movement, previously the domain of women, for men. For a gender analysis of the movement, see Gail Bederman, “‘The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Long Enough’: The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Sept. 1989): 432-465.

³ James G. Cannon (Chairman, Committee of Ninety-seven), “Welcome Address,” in *Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement*, 5.

“the best 150-word statement of the significance of the Congress,” and carried away the \$50 prize.⁴

McAlister had long attended a Presbyterian church, but his devotion to the Men and Religion Forward movement reflected the zeal of a new convert to the doctrine of social service. His father was a member of the Board of Public Charities for a decade, and McAlister remembered him as “the most community-minded man that I ever knew.” In contrast, McAlister spent his prime adult years “engrossed in building a business” rather than being “a responsible social unit in the community.” Yet in retrospect, he believed that “community-mindedness was in my blood even if it was dormant years after I became a man.” With his induction into the Men and Religion Forward movement, McAlister took up his father’s mantle and began an amateur career in social service that came to define the last three decades of his life.⁵

McAlister applied his interest in social service to several projects in Greensboro and surrounding Guilford County. In the long run, however, his most important contribution to the state was his plan for a state board of public welfare, for which he hoped to be remembered as the “father of public welfare in North Carolina.”⁶ With the support of the Conference for Social Service and other Progressive reformers, in 1917 McAlister succeeded in pushing the legislature to pass a bill that transformed the small and underfunded Board of Public Charities into the far better equipped Board of Charities and Public Welfare.

⁴ A. W. McAlister to Roland F. Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, in McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

⁵ Ibid. See also Thomas S. Morgan, “Alexander Worth McAlister,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 4, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁶ Virginia Wooten Gullede, *The North Carolina Conference for Social Service: A Study of Its Development and Methods* (Chapel Hill: The North Carolina Conference for Social Service, 1942), 18. McAlister also referred to himself this way; he called himself the “Father of North Carolina’s County Unit System of Public Welfare” in a biographical entry he wrote at age 80. Biographical entry, McAlister Papers, Folder 245.

As Progressive activists prepared to reorganize the state's social welfare bureaucracy, they discussed both theoretical and practical aspects of social welfare systems, in particular the roles of public and private charity. Progressive reformers had long championed a variety of reforms. But as their knowledge of social and political conditions grew, they began to see the need for a thorough restructuring of the state's welfare laws and bureaucracy. They moved from working towards a number of individual reforms to championing an underlying change in the system. In the end, however, the success of the model of social welfare services that prevailed had less to do with its intrinsic value than with the political influence of its advocates. Although white clubwomen supported the reorganization plan and a few white women were important players, more critical backing came from a few male leaders in the state's Progressive network. Women's organizations helped spur North Carolina to become a southern leader in Progressive reform and would soon come to hold positions of authority on the Board of Charities and Public Welfare. In 1917, however, women did not yet have the ability to create or control a welfare bureaucracy. Male reformers' resistance to female leadership demonstrates the continued necessity for women of cultivating relationships with men with access to political power.

Influenced by the Progressive mood of the mid-1910s and the governor's Progressive leadership, legislators fashioned a welfare bureaucracy capable of pursuing reform on multiple fronts. Although immediate structural changes were modest, legislation in 1917 and 1919 laid the groundwork for more sweeping changes to come. The new Board of Charities and Public Welfare eventually became a clearinghouse for discussions about and experiments in mother's aid, outdoor relief, mental hygiene, compulsory education, and more. Moreover, the reorganization of the board placed North Carolina in a national spotlight as the first adopter of

the “county unit” plan. At the same time, constant pushback and skepticism from more conservative corners checked the board’s reach and effectiveness.

By studying the reorganization of the state’s welfare bureaucracy in 1917, a key moment of transformation, we can discern the assumptions and principles that underlay the growth of the welfare state more generally. The discussion that surrounded the advent of the Board of Charities and Public Welfare reveals ideas in flux: ideas about how the state should interact with its citizens, about the place of philanthropy and charity in society, and about the potential of experts and science to solve social problems. The resulting framework set store by comprehensive, preventive interventions led by professional public servants. This vision of the welfare state succeeded at the expense of other ideas. By championing professional training, the legal mandate for the new board implicitly acknowledged the moral authority of lay social service volunteers but gave greater sanction to the work of trained social workers. Likewise, the law accorded a continuing role to private charities but increased the government’s power to regulate their actions. Perhaps most importantly, in espousing this new board of public welfare, North Carolina’s lawmakers and reformers signaled their optimism. They shared a belief that through research and centralized planning, they could stem many social problems at the root. In the words of Alexander McAlister, “the end will be the stamping out of such social diseases as poverty and crime, with the inspiring spectacle of deserted almshouses and empty jails.”⁷ The fact that these Progressive reformers fell short of their utopian ideals should not detract from the originality of their ideas or obscure the widespread sense that well-constructed public policy was an unparalleled avenue to social change.

⁷ McAlister continued, “this is no mere dreaming of dreams, nor does it require any stretch of the imagination to compass it. It is very practical and altogether possible.” “A State Board of Public Welfare,” *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1916): 108-112, quote 112.

The Limits of Piecemeal Reform

Surveying local welfare efforts at the turn of the twentieth century, Daisy Denson frequently felt overwhelmed. Welfare funds came from county tax revenues, and the state Board of Public Charities had a broad mandate but narrow means.⁸ Denson relied on her partnerships with many private citizens and lay reformers—clubwomen, county boards of visitors, and members of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service—to piece together a rudimentary system to oversee penal and charitable institutions. She deserves a great deal of credit for her creative use of human resources and for her tireless dedication to the welfare of the state's citizens.

From her attendance at meetings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and her regular correspondence with welfare officials in other states, Denson was familiar with other states' innovations. She knew about the best practices for institutions and for coordination of charitable relief. This knowledge alone, however, was not sufficient to create change; in order to tackle the state's problems, she needed more money. Meager financial resources, the most persistent issue plaguing Denson, circumscribed the board's ability to improve circumstances both inside and outside penal and charitable institutions. The state did no more than pay Denson's modest salary, cover office and printing expenses of the board, and after 1909 reimburse travel for inspection visits. The lack of additional staff—Denson conducted the board's business without even secretarial or clerical assistance—severely limited her ability to

⁸ Expenditure for the poor, including outlays for inmates of county homes and for recipients of outdoor relief, amounted to about ten percent of county tax revenues. *BPC Report, 1901-1902*, 43. See also Roy M. Brown, *Public Poor Relief in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928). On the state of welfare provisions in the South more generally, see Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Elna Green, ed. *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999); Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, rev. ed., (New York: Basic Books, 1996); and James Leiby, *A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the United States, 1815-1972* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

keep up with her rounds of inspections and reports. In addition, the lack of funding precluded meaningful research aimed at long-term reform. Although the board's constitutional mandate called for the study of problems and recommendations for legislative solutions, in practice researching social problems was impossible for a staff of one, burdened with inspection and reporting deadlines. Yet state appropriations remained low. On a local level, county commissioners, often local businessmen, faced reprisal if they raised taxes or appropriated resources toward poor relief. State politicians, too, were wary of measures that would increase taxes or address the needs of the poor, because they feared creating a pauper class and viewed helping the poor as the domain of churches and charities.

Denson used several interlocking tactics to lobby for change. First and most visibly, she tried to arouse public sympathy or outrage about conditions in institutions. Although she had no power to close county poor houses or jails, she could attempt to shame county commissioners into improving poor conditions by publishing accounts of them in her annual reports. Similarly, she included in her annual reports descriptions of the state's lack of space for mental patients. Her annual reports primarily addressed lawmakers, but the major state newspapers usually printed some synopsis of her comments and recommendations, bringing her opinions to a wider audience of influential middle-class readers.⁹

Much of Denson's rhetoric was aimed at expanding the state's matrix of institutions. When she took office, the state ran several racially segregated institutions, including mental hospitals and schools for deaf and blind children. Using the reports of current institutional officials to make her case, Denson asked legislators to create other institutions to serve different

⁹ See, for example, "Charity Board's Report," *Charlotte Observer*, 4 Aug. 1908; "More buildings needed says Board of Charities," *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 Jan. 1910; "Condemn State Prison Camps," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 Jan. 1917.

populations; her campaign to establish Caswell Training School is a case in point. Yet the existing institutions struggled to operate within their limited budgets, and institutional staff often turned people away for lack of beds. Denson routinely called for increased appropriations to state institutions and for investments in their physical plants. Only with better facilities, more beds, and more staff could the state properly serve the different types of dependent or “defective” populations who might otherwise be languishing in county poor homes or jails.

Denson’s approach to institutions is consistent with one of her more general strategies: she addressed the task of improving the state’s welfare system in a piecemeal way, seeking incremental changes in whatever area seemed most pressing, then moving on to the next campaign. Each year’s report carried a number of recommendations, sometimes laid out in a numbered list of legislative requests. If the legislature failed to heed her admonitions, Denson repeated her requests, year after year. The legislature eventually took note of some recommendations, but on other issues Denson never made headway.

Intertwined with these strategies was another underlying principle: Denson valued the contributions of private charities. Her own conceptions of social service were rooted in ideas of scientific charity. Scientific charity, epitomized by the Charity Organization Society movement, came to the South in the 1880s and 1890s. Advocates of this approach attacked traditional benevolence as irrational and sentimental, arguing that unscientific poor relief would create a permanently dependent pauper class.¹⁰ Scientific charity did not necessarily entail government

¹⁰ Elna Green argues that “this reform carried an implicit indictment of nineteenth-century female benevolency, as ‘sentimentality’ was one of the quintessentially female characteristics of the Victorian era and of the benevolency that women exercised in the period.” She also argues that that the charity organization movement was congruent with both traditional southern beliefs in white supremacy and paternalism and the New South’s emphasis on industrial growth. Like nineteenth-century philanthropy, scientific charity addressed the symptoms of poverty but did not mount a sustained social critique of structural problems. Elna Green, “National Trends, Regional Differences, Local Circumstances: Social Welfare in New Orleans, 1870s-1920s,” in *Before the New Deal*, ed. Elna Green, 86.

intervention; the goal was merely to improve from within the systems that private charities used to dispense aid. Denson was an active member of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, the primary national organization of COS adherents. For reformers of Denson's generation, the title of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections spoke to the underlying conviction that private charity should have a major place in providing for the social welfare.¹¹ In the nineteenth century, private charity was all many citizens could expect, supplemented by a rudimentary system of county poor houses. In the early twentieth century, the "Progressive cause"¹² was beginning to shift this division of labor towards publicly funded social services. Still, private charity was absolutely essential in filling the gap between services needed and services provided.

Despite the growing Progressive tendency to increase the state's commitment to various classes of needy citizens, reformers encountered reluctance to change. In the early twentieth century, North Carolina's economy was fundamentally agricultural. Small businesses and the growing middle class still had economic and cultural ties to the agrarian economy. Individualism, the one-party system, and a strong sense of local identity defined local and state politics. For many "business progressives," government intervention into the free market made sense insofar as it protected the agrarian economy from the intrusion of big corporations, but they believed the government's role did not extend to social problems of poverty, race relations, or child labor. This group of Progressives sought government intervention to promote economic

¹¹ The name of the National Conference of Charities and Correction reflected its domination by COS supporters and representatives of other private charitable groups from its founding in 1884 through the early twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, settlement house workers and other advocates of preventive social work were the major players. In 1917, reflecting a takeover by professional social workers, the group became the National Conference of Social Work. See Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed (New York: Free Press, 1999) 236.

¹² George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 6.

growth, and they believed social welfare legislation would have the opposite effect.¹³ Moreover, businessmen, especially heads of textile mills or other manufacturing corporations, resented investigations into their labor practices or into the well-being of their workers.¹⁴

In this context, Denson's plodding, incremental approach made a certain amount of sense. Her experience taught her that trying to achieve basic goals—establishing a parole system, a juvenile court system, or child welfare protections—involved struggle and sometimes utter failure. She knew that the state's political leaders often resisted change. Local officials in particular opposed efforts that might restrict their autonomy in favor of centralization, such as state rules that might force them to spend more money on poor relief or improving county homes. As Denson wrote in her first report as Secretary, "Our State is extremely conservative and jealous of change in the prerogatives of any branch of its government."¹⁵ Although parts of North Carolina and the rest of the South began to embrace Progressive causes by the mid-1910s, it was still unfamiliar and uncomfortable terrain for many local politicians.¹⁶ Indeed, across the South, welfare systems were underfunded and decentralized.¹⁷ At the beginning of World War I, only six Southern states had welfare boards, and the existing boards had limited authority.¹⁸

Alexander Worth McAlister and Theories of Social Welfare

¹³ Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 5-7.

¹⁴ See also William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (New York: Norton, 1987), 56-60, 114-140.

¹⁵ *BPC Report, 1903*, 154-55.

¹⁶ Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 30-32.

¹⁷ Elna Green links the South's welfare trajectory to its "unique political economy, the impact of slavery and racism on social institutions, and the region's experience of war and reconstruction. Elna Green, "Introduction," in *Before the New Deal*, ed. Elna Green, xx.

¹⁸ Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*, 116.

While Denson was locked into patterns of incremental change and reliance on private charity, other reformers were thinking along different lines. The 1910s were a decade of social ferment, and the state Conference for Social Service provided a forum for discussions about alternative reform strategies. Denson was a founding member of the conference and used it as a platform to generate public support for her work, but she was far from dominating the agenda of its annual meetings or monopolizing the space in its quarterly journal. Conference members brought political and professional expertise from a number of fields, and some read widely about many aspects of social service theory and practice.

Although not a founding member of the Conference for Social Service, Alexander Worth McAlister of Greensboro quickly became a powerful figure among its devotees. Like many other conference members, McAlister was not a social service “professional,” but he was conversant with the latest discussions about social workers’ goals and techniques. McAlister’s original impulse for social service grew out of his religious beliefs, awakened by the Men and Religion Forward movement. After his exposure to Men and Religion Forward, McAlister expressed great faith in the power of interdenominational Christian activity to bring about social change.¹⁹ His initial forays into social service were in local organizations. The Greensboro Inter-Church Association, founded in 1912, was the first project in which McAlister attempted to apply the principles of organized Christian charity. The group grew out of the efforts of one

¹⁹ Although to some adherents of the social gospel, interdenominational cooperation was both necessary to bring about social change and in line with Jesus’ most basic teachings about Christian unity, many denominational bodies, particularly in the South, resisted ecumenical efforts as dilutions of their denomination’s teachings. See Wayne Flynt, “‘Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted’: The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Social Gospel, 1900-1920,” in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985): 83-137, esp. 133; James J. Thompson, Jr., *Tried As By Fire: Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982); Paul Harvey *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Potteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 132.

hundred “Christian men” to “survey the city”²⁰—a clear outgrowth of the Men and Religion Forward movement’s charge to organize committees of that number in major cities.²¹ The men spent one afternoon early in 1912 canvassing the city, then produced charts full of information about church membership, morality of public entertainment, death rates, and “a variety of other subjects relating to the church, the public health[,] and the social welfare.” Taking the survey as their starting point, the leaders of several white Protestant churches soon launched the Inter-Church Association to coordinate their social service efforts and function as a sort of associated charities for the city.²²

Spurred by his local successes, McAlister began to explore possibilities for action beyond the city boundaries. News of the Conference for Social Service reached him soon after its formation, and in February 1913 he presented his \$1.00 membership dues to president Clarence Poe. He told Poe about the Greensboro Inter-Church Association and pronounced himself to be “very much interested in this matter [of social service], especially in a local way.” Already in this exchange with Poe, the first of their acquaintance, McAlister marked himself as an energetic leader and well-versed social reformer.²³ Although a newcomer to the organization, McAlister

²⁰ Alexander W. McAlister, “Interdenominational Christian Co-Operation: A North Carolina Example” (address at Conference in Raleigh, 14, Feb. 1914), *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1914): 36.

²¹ James G. Cannon, Chairman, “Report of the Committee of Ninety-Seven of the Men and Religion Forward Movement,” in *Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement*, 25.

²² McAlister, “Interdenominational Christian Co-Operation: A North Carolina Example,” 36-37 (quote 36). The Men and Religion Forward movement had clearly gendered goals of reclaiming male influence within Christian denominations, and the Greensboro men’s survey may have had similar goals, given its all-male membership. The gender dynamics were less explicit in the Inter-Church Association, but the organization nevertheless seemed to be a male organization that espoused the idea that social welfare was “a man’s job.” See A. W. McAlister, “The Social Welfare—A Man’s Job and a Job for Every Man” (address delivered at annual meeting of Greensboro Social Welfare League, 8 Jan., 1915), *Social Welfare Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Feb-Mar. 1915), clipping; and list of officers and directors in pamphlet, “The Social Welfare League of Greensboro,” n.d., both in CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical Material – Dr. Poe.

²³ McAlister recalled, “It was about this time that I saw a newspaper announcement of the charter meeting and plans and purposes of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. I wrote at once to Dr. Clarence Poe, whom I had never met up to that time, expressing my thrilled interested and satisfaction and enlisting my services in the work of

had the moxie to suggest that the conference lobby to create House and Senate committees on social welfare, pointing to Massachusetts as a prototype.²⁴ McAlister soon became one of the most active members of the Conference for Social Service. His interest in organized Christian charity led him naturally to join the conference's largest committee, on church and social service, and in 1915 he assumed leadership of the committee.²⁵ That year McAlister also accepted an appointment to the conference's executive council, indicating his growing commitment to social service as well as his increasing influence within the state's white Progressive network.²⁶

As McAlister steeped himself in social service principles, his experiences precipitated a gradual transformation of his ideas about the ideal organization of various public and private forces to effect social change. The Christian church was his gateway to social service work, and in his early years of activism he believed that the church must stand at the center of community projects. In 1914, he described the work of the Greensboro Inter-Church Association at the annual meeting of the Conference for Social Service, and he stressed the need for Christians to unify around the project of social service, regardless of denominational boundaries. Not only did individual Christians have a responsibility to their brethren, the church as a social body also had an obligation to lead the way to "a stronger race and a better world." The church should take on "the colossal tasks which man's concern for the social welfare has brought to our hand."

Moreover, if Christians were to bring about God's kingdom on earth, "the enlisted men" must

the Conference. I remember the cordial encouragement which his letter in reply expressed." A. W. McAlister to Roland F. Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

²⁴ Alexander W. McAlister to Clarence Poe, 14 Feb. 1913; Poe to McAlister, 15 Feb. 1913; and McAlister to Poe, 17 Feb. 1913, in McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

²⁵ On committee membership, see *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-March 1914): 106; on leadership of committee, see *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1915): 9.

²⁶ Poe appointed McAlister to the executive committee; *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June, 1914): 5.

unite and “advance as a triumphant host instead of skirmishing in detached, disconnected regiments.” If the church of Christ failed to unify for social action, “she would lose her pace with the progress of the world.” Although McAlister’s convention address focused mainly on the need for Christians to look beyond doctrinal differences, at the heart of his message was the idea that Christ’s teachings were a call to social service and that Christ’s church must therefore lead the way and “enter courageously upon the warfare against vice and corruption and oppression and ignorance and poverty.”²⁷

A year later, however, McAlister’s faith in the church as the primary vehicle for social service had been shaken. Reporting as the chair of the Committee on the Church and Social Service, he stressed not a social service committee for every church, but “a social welfare citizenship league for every town.”²⁸ He began by describing his intellectual departure from his address the previous year. A year ago, he told his audience in Raleigh, “it was my belief ... that the social welfare of any community could be best promoted through the organized co-operation of the churches of that community. This faith was based upon the conception that the social welfare, in every aspect of it, is a community matter, and that the church is the one community agency which, over and above every other, should give itself unsparingly to community service.” But he continued, “While I am convinced that the church, through organized co-operation, is the proper agency for doing the tasks which the social service program presents, I am also convinced, from more than two years’ experience and observation, that the church, in its present status of competitive every-man-for-himself way of doing things, is unequal to the undertaking, and cannot bring to successful accomplishment community tasks which demand first of all

²⁷ McAlister, “Interdenominational Christian Co-Operation: A North Carolina Example,” 35.

²⁸ A. W. McAlister, “A Social Welfare League for Every Town” (report as chair of committee on Church and Social Service), *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1915): 10.

community co-operation and solidarity. It requires team work to bring things to pass for the social welfare, and the church has not yet learned how to do real team work... we must look elsewhere for efficient, successful achievement in the prosecution of the social service program.” In practical terms, he believed that private citizens united in community social welfare leagues would be more effective.²⁹

Over the next several months, McAlister considered other possible systems for organizing social welfare. By late 1915, McAlister came to believe that North Carolina needed a larger, more centralized system of social service administration. At the same time, McAlister had assumed new duties as the president of the Conference for Social Service, following his election at the February 1915 gathering.³⁰ McAlister planned to use the 1916 convention to advance his developing philosophy of social welfare. He and the executive committee chose as the annual theme “The Welfare of the Child expressed in the terms of Community Service.” For McAlister, this theme unified numerous strands of the conference’s work; he explained in the fall 1915 issue of the conference’s journal that “nearly all Social Service endeavor has to do directly or remotely with the great fundamental desideratum of the Welfare of the Child.” McAlister also seemed to believe that the breadth of this theme lent itself to a consideration of comprehensive reforms of the state’s social welfare apparatus. McAlister hoped and predicted that the “concluding session of the Conference will reach a sort of climax and will constitute a sort of organization of society and the State for the welfare of the child.... with this purpose in view the

²⁹ McAlister, “A Social Welfare League for Every Town,” 9-10.

³⁰ Clarence Poe, one of the founders of the Conference, had served as President since 1912, so McAlister became only the second leader of the Conference—a position that conferred no little responsibility for determining the organization’s course. Poe applauded his election and according to newspaper reports described McAlister as “the one man who more than any other had shown the most interest and had rendered him the greatest help.” “Mr. McAlister Heads Social Service Work,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 31 Jan. 1915.

culmination of the concluding session will be the projection of the idea of a State Board of Public Welfare.”³¹

McAlister’s initial notion of a state board of public welfare undoubtedly developed in response to his experiences in Greensboro. Those experiences had taught him that Christian churches, even those that heeded Jesus’ summons to social service, were ill-prepared to sacrifice denominational distinctions for the sake of unified action. McAlister also embraced the Progressive dictum that government should serve social needs and believed that government, as “the public business,”³² was better positioned for the task than any “voluntary organization or unofficial bureau.”³³

An equally significant factor in McAlister’s idea for a board of public welfare was his education in social service principles. McAlister read the *Proceedings* of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, where social service workers from around the nation assembled to discuss their latest experiments.³⁴ At the NCCC and other professional gatherings, a consensus emerged among leading reformers that certain organizational principles were *de rigueur*. These thinkers favored centralized programs that oversaw as many branches of welfare activities as possible—prisons and correctional facilities, mental hospitals, reformatories, almshouses—and that attempted some degree of coordination between branches. They bemoaned the lack of trained social workers, the lack of government interest in hiring social

³¹ “President McAlister’s Forecast for Our 1916 Conference,” *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec. 1915): 79.

³² A. W. McAlister, “A State Board of Public Welfare - Scope, Duties, Equipment and Support” (address at 1916 conference), *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (April-June 1916): 42.

³³ McAlister, “A State Board of Public Welfare,” 43.

³⁴ In the 1910s, the NCCC was in the midst of a transition from advocating private charity to becoming more oriented toward public welfare. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 236.

work professionals, and the unsavory whiff of politics in the appointment of untrained welfare officials. Despite this consensus about the need for trained workers, greater funding, and coordinated government programs, social work professionals disagreed about the appropriate role of the state in supervising private charities and the most efficient means of organizing charitable efforts.³⁵ In the years leading up to 1916, for example, reformers at NCCC conventions debated the best ways for municipal governments to supervise the activities of local relief charities. Should charities be required to seek charters from a governmental board? Should public funds be distributed to private charities? How could professional social workers ensure that voluntary workers in charities distributed relief in ways that accorded with professional goals of prevention and efficiency?

McAlister's ideas, and his choice of the term "public welfare," reflected theories circulating among those at the vanguard. In the first decade of the twentieth century, social reformers used the term "public welfare" to signify the commonweal or the public good. In the *Proceedings* of the National Conference on Charities and Corrections, "public welfare" took on another meaning only after 1909, when reformers in Kansas City, Missouri, created the nation's first municipal board of public welfare.³⁶ In this sense, "public welfare" connoted a broader vision of welfare, one that encompassed not only philanthropy and aid to the poor, but also preventive measures, a focus on child welfare, the necessity of professional training in social service, and an emphasis on scientific research and efficiency. Public welfare left a space for

³⁵ See, for example, Robert W. Kelso, "State Supervision by a Board of State Charities," *Proceedings of the National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1911*, 31-35; and George S. Wilson, "Superivison of Private Charities from the View Point of an Official Board," *Proceedings of the National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1911*, 35-41.

³⁶ After the Kansas City Board was created, other cities followed, including Duluth, Seattle, and Cincinnati. Leroy Halbert, "A Plan for Co-ordinating State Public Welfare Work," *Survey* 28, no. 21 (24 Aug. 1912): 660. In the *Proceedings*, the first use of "public welfare" in this new sense was a report on Kansas City's effort; "Reports from States: Missouri," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1910*, 590.

private charities as laboratories for new social welfare methods but emphasized the “correlation” of private efforts into the larger aims of the governmental welfare board. The term “public welfare” came into vogue with the professionalization of social work, and in particular as social welfare professionals dissected and mimicked the Kansas City plan. McAlister’s use of “public welfare” in his proposal was thus part of a national trend among Progressive reformers.³⁷

McAlister probably encountered the term “public welfare” in the NCCC *Proceedings*. Perhaps he came across the term as he was preparing his presidential address for the 1916 Conference for Social Service, on “the welfare of the child.” The NCCC’s 1915 report on various problems relating to children suggested county boards of public welfare as an organizational scheme that was pleasing in theory, if rarely tested in practice. The report cited Kansas City, Missouri, as an example of a functioning board of public welfare, albeit in a city rather than county setting. Regardless of what he had read, it seems that as 1915 drew to a close, McAlister had only a surface knowledge of “public welfare” and lacked acquaintance with the theories undergirding it. Still, he knew enough and was sufficiently passionate about the need for reform to make a plea for a state-wide board of public welfare before his fellow Progressive reformers.

McAlister and the County-Unit Plan

The Conference for Social Service met in Charlotte in late January 1916. The opening session, on “The Church and Social Service,” drew almost 3,000 eager listeners to the city auditorium.³⁸ Other sessions focused on “the school and social welfare,” “current examples of

³⁷ See Michael B. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 2. See also Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*; and Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*.

³⁸ “Social Service Meeting Begins,” *Charlotte Observer*, 24 Jan. 1916.

social progress in North Carolina,” and “organized womanhood and the social welfare.” McAlister’s brief presidential address on the evening of Monday, January 24, took up the conference’s theme of “The Welfare of the Child.” McAlister posed the question “Is the Child Safe?” and answered in the negative, arguing that “the child is not safe until society has accepted him as her responsibility nor until government has acknowledge him as her obligation and rejoices in him as her privilege. In a word, the child is not safe, until he has become the chief business of the citizen, of the church, of society, and of the State.”³⁹ Like Denson and other Progressive reformers, McAlister believed quite literally that children were the future of society. Children’s plasticity, he held, offered reformers an opportunity to remake the world. Most children were clay waiting to be molded. With proper direction, children would become upstanding citizens who embraced hard work and eschewed drink and immoral excess. But left to be reared in poverty, illiteracy, and immorality, children would become delinquent, deprived, and dependent adults.⁴⁰

McAlister’s presidential address argued that the current system—the network of public and private charities—failed to protect and mold children. The following afternoon he introduced his solution: government action, in the form of a state board of public welfare. His presentation came during a session on “the State, the County, and the Municipality and the Social Welfare.” Governor Locke Craig, with whom McAlister had conferred about his plans, spoke first. Craig argued for the state to pass stricter child labor laws, partly in order to weaken the appeal of federal child labor laws.⁴¹ Other speakers addressed “The County and Social

³⁹ A. W. McAlister, “Is the Child Safe” (presidential address at 1916 conference), *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916): 28-33 (quote on 33).

⁴⁰ McAlister, “Is the Child Safe,” 29.

⁴¹ Locke Craig, “A Word of Preface,” *Social Service Quarterly*, 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916): 33-36.

Welfare” and “The Municipality and Social Welfare,” and then McAlister stepped to the podium.⁴²

For fifteen minutes, he made a convincing case for the need for a “State Board of Public Welfare.” As the *Charlotte Observer* glossed his argument for a state board, “The theory is that the child must be the chief concern of society and the State and in order to secure the best results from that idea there must be created this board.”⁴³ He argued that North Carolina needed a state welfare board for the same reasons it had a department of health: its functions should go beyond supervising state institutions to “constructive study and application of the proper remedies to the conditions of life and society” at the root of crime, mental illness, and poverty. Like the state health department, it “would be a laboratory of study, research and practical application in the realm of social welfare and community service.” Expecting pushback from those opposed to government intervention in private lives, McAlister argued that even a doctrine of “minimum law” required the law “to keep sound the society it serves” and ridiculed people who clung to “the ancient prejudice of interference with ‘personal liberty,’ that old humbug.” He also anticipated arguments of fiscal conservatives, countering that a board focused on intelligent, “efficient study” and prevention “would not only not cost the State anything, but would in time” save the state and county governments money by reducing the burden on the criminal system, alms houses, and asylums.⁴⁴

In one area, McAlister remained circumspect. Child labor remained a tricky subject in a state so beholden to textile mill owners. Although one of the selling points of his plan was the

⁴² Program of the Fourth Annual Session of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service, Charlotte, January 23-26, 1916, CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical Material – Dr. Poe.

⁴³ “Propose Board Public Welfare,” *Charlotte Observer*, 30 Jan. 1916.

⁴⁴ McAlister, “A State Board of Public Welfare,” 42-43.

ability of a centralized state agency to tackle various problems related to children's wellbeing, McAlister knew that child labor was a potential political pitfall. Linking his plans for the board to child labor restrictions was a sure way to draw the ire of powerful industrialists. McAlister carefully avoided the topic even before the sympathetic audience at the conference. In his presidential address on "Is the Child Safe" he condemned many parts of society for failing to make the child their chief business, but he did not single out child labor as a distinct danger. In fact, he almost trivialized the subject, asking in the same breath, "is the child of the factory, the library, the moving picture show, the theatre, safe?" His prescriptions for protecting children were lofty ideals of social regeneration, religious and community service, and moral education.⁴⁵ He offered a more pragmatic solution in his plan for a reorganized board of public welfare, emphasizing the need for a centralized government program to tackle all aspects of child welfare. But he made no mention of child labor laws among his litany of reforms.⁴⁶

McAlister's plan, vague though it was, met with approval among conference members.

Among other resolutions, the members at the Charlotte convention declared that they "favor[ed]"

⁴⁵ McAlister, "Is the Child Safe," 29.

⁴⁶ The closest McAlister came to acknowledging the plight of working children was mentioning "neglected" children in addition to "dependent" and "delinquent" children. The other areas he laid out for the board were prison reform, constructive charity, regulation of public entertainment, and anti-prostitution measures. McAlister continued his opposition to involving the board in child labor after it was founded. In 1919, as anti-child labor activists, including members of the Conference for Social Service, published a study of conditions in the state, McAlister was adamant that "we do not want by any possibility the enemies of Child Labor Reform to get the idea that we are coupled up with or a prospective agency for the Child Labor Committee." Although McAlister was "in thorough sympathy with advanced Child Labor Legislation," he told Clara Lingle that "I don't think our Board wants to touch it. We will have plenty to do without this." To Beasley, who was inclined to bring up the matter in his reports to the legislature, McAlister pressed the point: "while our work is in its infancy it will be hampered if it has to carry the prejudices that exist against the Child Labor program." In the future, when the Board's place and funding were more secure, McAlister said, "I would be in favor of our meeting this question with all possible directness and courage." But in the meantime, he saw the function of a children's bureau as mainly placing children who were being corrupted by their present environment. He believed that this work would "popularize the Board" with legislators. McAlister, "A State Board of Public Welfare"; and McAlister to Roland Beasley, 1 Jan. 1919; McAlister to Clara Lingle, 24 Feb. 1919; McAlister to Beasley, 3 Feb. 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 7: 1919; and McAlister to Beasley, 9 Dec. 1918, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 6: 1916-1918. For more on the subject of child labor, see McAlister to Beasley, 12 Feb. 1919; and McAlister to Beasley, 24 Feb. 1919, both in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 7: 1919.

either the establishment of a State Board of Public Welfare or such enlargement of the State Board of Charities as to make it co-ordinate in scope, equipment, support and usefulness with such other departments of our State government as the State Board of Health.”⁴⁷ The conference also appointed a small committee to investigate McAlister’s plan.⁴⁸ McAlister was pleased by the convention’s response. The week after the gathering he wrote in a spirit of self-congratulation to Clarence Poe that his plan for a state board was “the thing which the convention manifested a greater interest in and a stronger conviction on than anything else discussed... I feel quite sure that with the right sort of support from the leaders of our Conference we can bring this thing to pass when the next legislature meets.”⁴⁹ The public, at least in Charlotte, seemed interested, if somewhat confused; the week after the conference, the *Charlotte Observer* ran the full text of McAlister’s speech, explaining that they did so to clear up “the hazy ideas entertained by most people as to the functions of the proposed Board of Public Welfare.”⁵⁰ With initial encouragement from the Conference for Social Service, McAlister set out to refine his ideas for presentation to the investigative committee.

McAlister’s research soon led him to the Kansas City plan and its potential for rural areas. The creator of the Kansas City plan, Leroy A. Halbert, stood at the center of discussions of public welfare. In social welfare circles, at least, Halbert was becoming a figure of national renown for his theoretical and practical expertise in creating efficient, centralized welfare boards that would coordinate public and private activities at a municipal level. In August 1912, the *Survey* published a brief address, “A Plan for Co-ordinating State Public Welfare Work,” that

⁴⁷ “Resolutions,” *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (April-June 1916): 51.

⁴⁸ McAlister to Roland Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

⁴⁹ McAlister to Clarence H. Poe, 3 Feb. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

⁵⁰ “Propose board public welfare,” *Charlotte Observer*, 30 Jan. 1916.

Halbert gave in Topeka, Kansas, urging the application of the Kansas City board's work elsewhere. Halbert outlined the "county unit" plan, in which a welfare board in each county would control distribution of relief, oversee delinquent children, enforce public health measures, and coordinate other agencies that administered to the sick, poor, and delinquents. In this system, trained employees would be appointed through a civil service merit system and "a highly trained field secretary of the state commission should have general supervision of the whole scheme of county boards and standardize the work as far as possible."⁵¹ The county-unit plan was particularly suited to rural environments, where poverty and other social problems extended beyond municipal boundaries. Missouri considered this proposal, but failed to create a statewide system. Undaunted, Halbert and his staff continued their work in Kansas City and continued to write and speak about their innovations.⁵²

Halbert set his ideas before a wider, more influential audience at the 1913 meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in Seattle, where he spoke on "Boards of Public Welfare and Good City Government." This address was published in the NCCC's *Proceedings* and was subsequently available as a reprint.⁵³ Here, Halbert used his experience with the Kansas City Board of Public Welfare to define a set of best practices for similar boards.

⁵¹ Leroy Halbert, "A Plan for Co-ordinating State Welfare Work." Other articles about Kansas City's board included Fred R. Johnson, "The Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City," *Survey* (16 Dec. 1911): 1363-1365 and Fred R. Johnson, "Public Welfare: Functions and Services," *Survey* (7 Aug. 1912). John E. Hansan's articles on Leroy Halbert and the Kansas City board were very useful in leading me to these sources; Hansan, "Origins of the Nation's First Department of Public Welfare Established April 14, 1910," on the Social Welfare History Project website, accessed 17 Dec. 2012, <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/public-welfare-the-first-department-of-public-welfare/>; and John E. Hansan, "Leroy Allen Halbert (1875-1958) – Pioneer Social Worker, Director of the Nation's First Department of Public Welfare, Advocate for the Unemployed, Social Reformer and Author," on the Social Welfare History Project website, accessed 8 Nov. 2012, <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/people/halbert-leroy-allen/>.

⁵² Hansan, "Leroy Allen Halbert."

⁵³ Leroy Halbert, "Boards of Public Welfare and Good City Government," *Proceedings of the National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1913*, 212-221. For reprint, see entry in WorldCat, accession number 41093126.

He began by noting that the movement for boards of “public welfare” was very young, and the term was not well understood nor precisely defined. He hoped to standardize the use of “public welfare” by defining the principles of boards of public welfare. He named four: “government care for the unfortunate classes; government control of the conditions of living; the centralization of all the government’s social agencies into one system; [and] the establishment of social action on a scientific basis.”⁵⁴ He described each principle at length, offering examples from Kansas City, and emphasized that the third principle, “the *comprehensiveness* of the work,” was “the most marked characteristic about the whole scheme.”⁵⁵

Years later McAlister recalled that sometime in 1916 he came across a pamphlet by Halbert that “advocated the county-unit system.”⁵⁶ In fact, McAlister probably read Halbert’s articles in both the *Survey* and the *NCCC Proceedings*, since elements of both seem to have informed the development of his plans in 1916. McAlister also corresponded with him about the situation in North Carolina, asking for his suggestions; Halbert later remembered helping North Carolina establish its public welfare law by outlining “a correlated state and county public welfare plan” for McAlister.⁵⁷ Halbert’s county-unit plan resonated with McAlister, in part

⁵⁴ Halbert, “Boards of Public Welfare and Good City Government,” 212, 213.

⁵⁵ Halbert, “Boards of Public Welfare and Good City Government,” 218, italics in original.

⁵⁶ McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

⁵⁷ See discussion of Halbert in McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31. Unfortunately, McAlister’s papers do not contain copies of his correspondence with Halbert. Halbert recalled, “This Department of Public Welfare attracted a good deal of attention and the idea spread to other cities and was later applied to County and State organizations. I recommended to North Carolina the outline of its system of County Departments of Public Welfare.” Leroy Halbert to Guy Moffett, 20 July 1931, quoted in John E. Hansan, “Leroy Allen Halbert.” Halbert also recalled that “soon after” a colleague published a description of their work in the *Survey* in August 1912, Halbert “got a letter from A. W. McAlester [sic], a member of the state board of Charities of North Carolina, saying that he was working on a plan for the reorganization of the charitable and correctional work of the state and asking me for my suggestions. I outlined for him a correlated state and county public welfare plan which was later enacted into law in that state in almost the form which I submitted. This was the first county public welfare law.” L. A. Halbert to Stuart A. Queen, 15 Nov. 1936, quoted in Hansan, “Origins of the Nation’s First Department of Public Welfare.” For quote “a correlated...” see Halbert to Queen, 15 Nov. 1936, quoted in Hansan, “Origins of the Nation’s First Department of Public Welfare.”

because other state-level departments in North Carolina were based on the county as a unit. McAlister noted that similar plans already existed in North Carolina's state boards of health and education, which replaced local or municipal control with county-wide control. These county-unit plans allowed state officials to keep track of a smaller number of school systems or public health offices, thus increasing the possibilities for state oversight.⁵⁸

Despite the promise of such a plan for administering rural areas, by 1916 no state had adopted it. A few cities had created comprehensive boards of public welfare, but outside city lines the situation resembled that in North Carolina: private charities supplemented the relief provided by local and county governments, with some state oversight of institutions.⁵⁹ Rural areas were in particular need of social welfare services. If North Carolina created a state board of public welfare organized around county units, as McAlister hoped, it would be the first state to do so.

McAlister and the Politics of Coalition-Building

When McAlister began to build public support for a reorganized state board of public welfare, Daisy Denson was one of the first people he approached. They were acquainted through their work with the Conference for Social Service, as they served together on the Executive Committee in 1914-1915,⁶⁰ and at Clarence Poe's request, Denson had advised McAlister about

⁵⁸ McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

⁵⁹ Although in the late nineteenth century most states had instituted boards of charities and correction to supervise private philanthropy, in 1916 no state in the nation had a state-wide board of public welfare. Several cities, including Halbert's Kansas City, had adopted the term "public welfare" for their local boards. Leroy Halbert, "A Plan for Co-ordinating State Welfare Work," *Survey* 28, no. 21 (24 Aug. 1912), 660.

⁶⁰ "Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting," *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1914): 5.

possible speakers for the conference's annual convention in January 1916.⁶¹ A week before the convention, McAlister wrote to her once more, this time about the topic of his upcoming address on a board of public welfare. He noted that "I believe you will endorse the idea. At any rate, I shall be glad if you can be present and hear what is said and take part in the discussion."⁶²

McAlister, then, seems to have realized that Denson's support, or at least her tacit acquiescence, was important to the success of his plan. In addition, Denson was an invaluable resource for McAlister in his search for information about the state's current social welfare systems. She answered his queries about the functions of the current Board of Public Charities and supplied him with copies of all the laws relating to the board.⁶³

There was actually significant overlap between the two reformers' ideas, based in widely held Progressive principles. Both Denson and McAlister saw the need for a stronger central authority to license private institutions such as orphanages and to regulate public institutions such as reformatories. Both emphasized the importance of preventive, rather than palliative, measures. Denson valued social service training for herself and for others; she often played up her training at the New York School of Philanthropy, and she believed that for volunteers such as

⁶¹ McAlister selected one of her recommendations, Bishop Thomas C. Darst of Wilmington, as a speaker. Daisy Denson to A. W. McAlister, 22 Dec. 1915; and Thomas C. Darst to Denson, 28 Dec. 1915, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug-Dec. 1915.

⁶² Alexander W. McAlister to Daisy Denson, 17 Jan. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

⁶³ When McAlister began his research, he first turned to Watson S. Rankin, the head of the state board of health, with whom he and Denson had served on the Conference's Executive Committee in 1914-1915. Rankin, however, redirected McAlister's queries about the functions of the current Board of Public Charities to Denson. List of officers, *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916); Rankin to McAlister, 28 Feb. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916. Denson wrote to McAlister on March 7 and March 16, 1916; see Secretary's Diary, Mar. 1916, BPW Records, Commissioner's Office, Diaries 1905-1917; see also McAlister to Denson, 14 Mar. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

members of the county boards of visitors, a little training went a long way.⁶⁴ Moreover, as McAlister was doubtless aware, Denson's system of county welfare boards embodied the basic element of a county-unit system, albeit informally. Above all, like other Progressives, both crusaders believed that the government had the right, even the duty, to intervene in citizens' lives for the public good.

But McAlister's plan diverged from Denson's approach in its more robust role for the government. Although Denson wanted the power to license some private institutions, she took for granted private charities' pivotal role in providing for the commonweal and was convinced that it was the duty of the Christian church and its members to care for the less fortunate. In North Carolina, these private charities included the Association of Orphanages, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the King's Daughters, the Children's Home Society, and the Prisoner's Aid Society, and "the great benevolent orders and our churches." These groups ran orphanages, hospitals, sanitariums, maternity homes, and more.⁶⁵ In every major urban area in the state, Associated Charities organized distribution of relief to the poor to supplement the counties' paltry outdoor relief.⁶⁶ In Denson's opinion, such community efforts not only filled the gap between the shallow public coffers and the deep need for assistance, but they also served important social functions. Widespread social service efforts through churches and community organizations kept the untrained public engaged with Denson's work and encouraged "the

⁶⁴ Denson wrote that most of the county board members "want to do right; the trouble with them is they do not know very well what is the right way, and do not always recognize the necessity for being 'always on the job' in fighting dirt etc." Daisy Denson to Mrs. A. W. Taylor, 18 Aug. 1916, in General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1916.

⁶⁵ *BPC Report, 1914*, 15.

⁶⁶ In 1910, for example, there were Associated Charities organizations in Asheville, Durham, Charlotte, Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh, Statesville, Wilmington, Winston-Salem, and Salisbury, as well as a Ladies' Benevolent Society in Goldsboro.

beautiful spirit of altruism” and “the growth of the consciousness of the brotherhood of man.”⁶⁷ She believed that as unpaid, untrained nonpartisan citizens working only for the public good, amateur social service workers such as members of the county boards carried a moral authority that no professional social worker could hope to muster. Ever mindful of her audience, Denson believed that “their ‘moral suasion’ can go a long way, especially as we have the public to appeal to in the end.”⁶⁸

McAlister, on the other hand, advanced a system in which government employees researched social problems and attacked them methodically via synchronized government agencies. Only through such coordination, he believed, could reformers hope to tackle poverty and crime. He never relinquished his hope that Christians could lead the moral crusade for social progress, but he came to believe that trained professionals were better suited to lead practical efforts. For McAlister, all community social service efforts should be coordinated by and answer to trained government officials. This division between Denson and McAlister reflected a split in the broader community of Progressive reformers, evident in the NCCC’s discussions during the 1910s about the proper role of private charities.

McAlister’s more sweeping plan highlights the limits of Denson’s willingness for change in a system that she thought was basically sound. Denson’s calls for additional board powers in January 1916, shortly before the Conference for Social Service met, demarcate the edges of her thinking. She wanted to have the authority that her colleagues in Virginia and South Carolina had been granted in their boards’ charters—specifically, funds to pay for an inspector for municipal and private institutions; the power to approve building plans for county homes and

⁶⁷ *BPC Report, 1913*, 7.

⁶⁸ Denson to Mrs. A. W. Taylor, 18 Aug. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1916.

jails; and the power to summon witnesses under oath as part of investigations.⁶⁹ All of these suggestions made their way into McAlister's plan, but none of them was particularly groundbreaking, since Denson asked merely to bring North Carolina up to the standards of her neighbors. Even after McAlister proposed his new scheme, Denson's wish-list of changes remained less grandiose than his. Instead of recommending a superintendent of welfare in each county, she suggested hiring an inspector who could visit "every county regularly." She wanted funding to hire a state agent for "the work with children," but mentioned no other state employees.⁷⁰ McAlister's plan eventually gave the board the power to employ a trained Commissioner as well as "such other inspectors, officers, and agents as it may deem needful in the discharge of its duties," which included studying "unemployment, poverty, vagrancy, housing conditions, crime, public amusement, care and treatment of prisoners, divorce and wife desertion, the social evil, and kindred subjects and their causes, treatment and prevention"—a task that would require a small army.⁷¹

Despite these differences, Denson's reaction to the plan appears to have been based on matters less of ideology and more of personality and politics. Her initial response at the 1916 convention is not recorded,⁷² but her subsequent reactions ranged from polite skepticism to outright fear that the new plan would undercut her power or embroil her in politics. Over the

⁶⁹ *BPC Report, 1915*, 6.

⁷⁰ Denson to Mr. M. E. Robinson, 3 May 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

⁷¹ North Carolina Public Law 1917, ch. 170, sections 3914g and 3914b.

⁷² Denson did pen a brief summary of the 1916 Conference session for the *Survey* several days after her trip to Charlotte, on January 29. The account was published in the February 12 issue among other reports on state conferences. In her report of several paragraphs, she described the proposed board only briefly, in noncommittal terms: "The conference advocated a state board of public welfare or a development through which the State Board of Public Charities would add work for children and other preventive social service to its present duties." Secretary's Diary, 29 Jan. 1916, in BPW Records, Commissioner's Office, Diaries 1905-1917; and "Conferences," *Survey* 35, no. 2 (12 Feb. 1916): 591.

next several months, Denson exchanged many letters about McAlister's plan with the chair of the Board of Public Charities, William Blair, a prominent banker and lawyer in Winston-Salem. Blair, too, was wary of McAlister, mostly because he felt that McAlister lacked the experience and knowledge to formulate a wise plan. In March 1916, he wrote to Denson that "I wish some of us could have a good talk with Mr. McAlister so he will not in his enthusiasm do any thing he ought not to do. I think he means well but he might do harm."⁷³ Blair worried that McAlister would create a new structure for the board rather than extending the current board's powers and scope. In fact, McAlister was fuzzy on this issue. In his earliest statements, he conceded that "it may be that an enlargement of the State Board of Charities will serve this purpose,"⁷⁴ and his first letter to Denson indicated that he would advocate an enlargement of the current board "so as to make it such a State Board of Public Welfare as that contemplated."⁷⁵ Yet the Conference for Social Service's resolution on the subject directed McAlister and the investigative committee to determine whether an enlargement of the current board or the establishment of a new Board of Public Welfare would be preferable,⁷⁶ and McAlister refused to commit immediately to either option.

Apparently Denson communicated some of her concerns to McAlister, who responded in a placatory but unsatisfying manner: "I do not know just what plan we will determine upon as the wisest for carrying out the purpose contemplated, but it will certainly not be anything that

⁷³ Blair continued, "I think he could get at his idea better if he would join us in getting more power and wider opportunity for our Board." William Blair to Daisy Denson, 2 Mar. 1916, State Board Corr. Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1916.

⁷⁴ Alexander W. McAlister, "President McAlister's Forecast for our 1916 Conference," *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec.1915): 79.

⁷⁵ McAlister to Denson, 17 Jan. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

⁷⁶ "Resolutions adopted at Fourth Annual Session, North Carolina Conference for Social Service, Charlotte, January 23-26," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1916): 1.

will in any way affect your Board without consultation with you and your board. If we decide that the work can be best done by your Board, we will submit to you and them our plan as suggested above and will take no step in reference to it without your approval and consent.”⁷⁷

Although McAlister acknowledged the necessity of bringing the current Board of Public Charities into discussions about its future, he clearly believed that the idea of a Board of Public Welfare had originated with him and the Conference for Social Service, and the conference had the prerogative to pass judgment on the plan. Still, Blair held out hope that McAlister “may be helpful if he is guided right instead of hurtful.”⁷⁸

Meanwhile, McAlister tried to drum up support among his network of friends and other Progressive allies. Although the Conference for Social Service convention had given his ideas a boost, he needed to produce unwavering support among the conference officers and executive committee, who had been assigned to investigate the prospects of a state board. This group comprised powerful figures from across the state, including Clarence Poe; Watson S. Rankin, head of the state board of health; Edward Kidder Graham, President of the University of North Carolina; William Louis Poteat, president of Wake Forest College; and Clara Lingle of Davidson, president of the state Federation of Women’s Clubs.⁷⁹ McAlister busied himself with mobilizing his closest allies, Rankin, Poteat, and Poe. In mid-April, he sent each of them a copy of an address by Leroy Halbert, telling them that he had read it “with much profit” and had

⁷⁷ McAlister to Denson, 14 Mar. 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan.-July 1916.

⁷⁸ Blair to Denson, 20 Mar. 1916, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1916.

⁷⁹ Other committee members included Reverend M. L. Kesler of Thomasville, Superintendent of the Baptist Orphanage; Charles Tillet, a lawyer from Charlotte; C. Almon Upchurch, from Oxford, North Carolina, and a Mrs. Adams, probably the wife of Reverend W. Hooper Adams, a resident of Charlotte and a member of the Conference’s Executive Committee. On committee membership, see McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31; McAlister to William L. Poteat, 26 May 1916, and McAlister to W. L. Poteat, 4 May 1916, both in McAlister Papers, Folder 395.

“taken the liberty of marking certain paragraphs.”⁸⁰ He followed up with a more complete “study” and hounded Rankin and Poe to attend the upcoming committee meeting.⁸¹

On May 1, 1916, Edward K. Graham, the new president of the Conference for Social Service, summoned the executive committee to the Greensboro Country Club, where McAlister hosted them as his guests for an all-day meeting.⁸² McAlister presented “the results of the investigations”⁸³ he had made and recommended that “we seek to accomplish what we want through the State Board of Public Charities.”⁸⁴ Despite the absence of McAlister’s allies Poe, Poteat, and Rankin, the committee approved his plan “unanimously and apparently enthusiastically.”⁸⁵ His thorough research and precise outline of the functions of the proposed board seem to have won them over.⁸⁶

Next, McAlister arranged with William Blair, chair of the Board of Public Charities, to have conference representatives meet with the board at its regular quarterly meeting on the

⁸⁰ McAlister to Poe, 18 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376; McAlister to Poteat, 19 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 395; and McAlister to Rankin, 18 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407.

⁸¹ On the study, see McAlister to Poe, 27 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376. See also McAlister to Poe, 25 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376. McAlister desperately wanted to produce a unified front. He pleaded with Poe that he was “very anxious” for him to be there; “If we decide favorably on the Board of Public Welfare matter, it will be one of the most important things we have ever done and if we decide unfavorably, we ought to have the combined judgment of the committee on the question... I am afraid that the very fact of your absence will be construed as a lack of interest in the subject.” If Poe was absolutely unable to attend, McAlister asked him to send some written comments to share with the group. McAlister to Poe, 27 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

⁸² McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

⁸³ McAlister to Poteat, 4 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 395.

⁸⁴ McAlister to Poe, 27 Apr. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

⁸⁵ McAlister to Rankin, 4 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407. Poe sent written comments in favor of McAlister’s findings, but Poteat and Rankin proved “a serious disappointment” in their failure to appear. McAlister to Rankin, 4 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407 (quote). Members present were Graham, Lingle, Adams, Tillett, Kesler, Upchurch, and McAlister. McAlister to Poteat, 4 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 395.

⁸⁶ McAlister to Rankin, 4 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407.

afternoon of July 11.⁸⁷ Once more, McAlister carefully marshaled his forces, arranging to meet with Graham an hour before the larger meeting.⁸⁸ In Denson's office above the Senate gallery, the board members listened as McAlister and Graham explained their plan and "offered to aid in obtaining an extension of the duties and powers of the Board of Public Charities." The board "gratefully accepted" the offer. Together, they formed a joint committee whose first task would be to survey the laws of other states.⁸⁹ The group agreed to ask Alfred Moore Scales, a Senator from Guilford County, to formulate the bill and introduce it in the legislative session that would begin in January 1917. From the beginning, Scales had been McAlister's pick for a legislative sponsor, as he was a close friend and business partner. Scales was also a member of the Conference for Social Service and had a long-standing interest in social reform.⁹⁰ McAlister left the meeting elated and reckoned that the board "met our suggestion not only enthusiastically, but gratefully."⁹¹ He told Poe and Rankin that "we could not have asked for a more hospitable

⁸⁷ The group appointed a smaller committee to confer with the Board of Public Charities about the next steps toward passing legislation. Members of this smaller committee were McAlister, Poe, Rankin, and Graham. McAlister to Poteat, 26 May 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 395.

⁸⁸ McAlister to Rankin, 5 July 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407; and McAlister to Poe, 5 July 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Board, 11 July 1916, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

⁹⁰ On McAlister's connections with Scales, see McAlister to Scales, 23 Jan. 1913, Alfred Moore Scales Papers (collection #4037, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; hereafter, Scales Papers), Folder 4; on church connections, see McAlister to Scales, 7 Sept. 1916, Scales Papers, Folder 13; and circular letter, committee members to members of First Presbyterian Church of Greensboro, n.d. [March 1917], Scales Papers, Folder 14. For his roles within the Presbyterian church, see Wayne Flynt, "Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Broken Hearted," 113. Scales also served as an officer in the Conference for Social Service; see *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (May-June 1913). Scales's history of attempts at reform included introducing a bill that would have established reformatories or industrial schools for both blacks and whites. The bill died in committee. *BPC Report, 1903-1905*, 331. For a brief biography of Scales, see R. D. W. Connor, ed., *North Carolina Manual, Published by the North Carolina Historical Commission, for the use of the General Assembly, Session of 1919* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton for the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1918), 420.

⁹¹ McAlister to Clinton Rogers Woodruff, 14 Sept. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 284.

attitude towards our plan.”⁹² He immediately sent Scales a copy of the approved plan and asked him to begin thinking about how to frame the bill.⁹³

Blair and Denson, too, were cautiously optimistic. That evening, after the joint meeting, Blair “had another long talk with McAlister.” He reported to Denson the next day that McAlister “is thoroughly converted. His organization will move for us in trying to get an ideal arrangement for our Board ... They agree not to disturb us or our work but to try to secure everything we ought to have. We must be careful but use them, is my judgment.” Blair also planned to “see Scales personally and try to keep him right.”⁹⁴ Denson seemed reassured by the latest plans, writing to McAlister that “We being in perfect accord as to the results we want to achieve, I am sure that we can find the means to bring about the desired end.”⁹⁵ She began her research on welfare laws in other states, including Indiana, South Carolina, and Illinois, and sent materials on Indiana’s work to McAlister and the other Conference for Social Service representatives.⁹⁶

McAlister undertook his own research and publicity efforts. Shortly after the July 11 meeting, McAlister sent a copy of the plan to Eugene C. Branson, a UNC professor of rural sociology, who praised him for “giving heart, conscience, and understanding to the general public welfare.”⁹⁷ Branson provided McAlister with materials about the Wisconsin State Board

⁹² McAlister to Rankin, 12 July 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 407; and McAlister to Poe, 12 July 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 376.

⁹³ McAlister to Scales, 14 July 1916, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

⁹⁴ Blair to Denson, 13 July 1916, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1916.

⁹⁵ Denson to McAlister, 14 July 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan-July 1916. Denson noted in her daily diary that at the meeting, the Board “agreed to enlargement.” Secretary’s Diary, July 1916, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Diaries 1905-1917.

⁹⁶ Denson to McAlister, 14 July 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Jan-July 1916; Secretary’s Diary, 20 and 21 July 1916, 26 July 1916, 18 Sept. 1916, 20 Oct. 1916, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Diaries 1905-1917.

⁹⁷ Branson to McAlister, 20 July 1916, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

of Public Affairs, and McAlister pondered the possibility of having experts from the University of Wisconsin review the North Carolina plan.⁹⁸ More importantly, McAlister wrote to Leroy Halbert requesting a copy of Missouri's failed 1915 bill, which would have established a county unit system. Halbert "was very cooperative" and sent a copy of the bill, which Scales and McAlister "followed" as they drafted the North Carolina bill.⁹⁹

Sensitive to the political milieu into which their bill would be born, McAlister and Scales pored over every detail. They contemplated the duties and qualifications of the state commissioner and county superintendents and whether superintendents should be subject to dismissal by county commissioners.¹⁰⁰ Although McAlister later recalled that the North Carolina bill was "an adaption of the Missouri Bill to North Carolina conditions with some important changes,"¹⁰¹ many elements of the North Carolina plan went beyond the scope of the Missouri bill. The Missouri bill focused on county welfare systems, specifying the duties of five-member county boards and merely suggesting that boards might employ an executive officer to help carry out their duties.¹⁰² The North Carolina plan set forth an interlocking system of state and county bureaucracies, delineating the division of responsibilities between various levels and officers.

⁹⁸ Branson to McAlister, 15 July 1916; McAlister to Branson, 18 July 1916; and McAlister to Branson, 21 July 1916, all in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

⁹⁹ The timing of McAlister's correspondence with Halbert is uncertain, but McAlister had received a copy of the Missouri bill at least by the time he and Scales set to work seriously. McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

¹⁰⁰ McAlister to Scales, 29 Sept. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 453.

¹⁰¹ McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

¹⁰² The Missouri bill dealt only with county welfare systems, building on the existing state board structure, which at the time was quite similar to North Carolina's Board of Public Charities. Missouri Senate, 1915 session, Bill no. 294, "An Act to establish County Boards of Public Welfare and to repeal certain Sections, relating to Board of County Visitors; also certain sections relating to the support of County Poor; etc.," copy obtained from [Missouri state archive; and Chapter 19, Articles I-V of *The Revised Statutes of the State of Missouri, 1909*, vol. 1 (Jefferson City, Mo., Hugh Stephens Printing Co., 1909), accessed 1 Aug. 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=LypGAQAIAAJ>.

McAlister and Scales followed the Missouri bill in making optional the appointment of a county welfare officer, but they also took care to list the duties of superintendents as distinct from welfare boards.¹⁰³ This decision was an outgrowth of their larger tactic in framing the bill: above all, they pragmatically sought to write a bill that could pass. A bill that required each county to pay a trained welfare worker or threw up other stringent requirements was likely to antagonize fiscal conservatives or local politicians. McAlister's long-term strategy was to "start with a few definite purposes that will appeal to the average Legislator, and to ask for a financial support sufficient to warrant the employment of an Expert Sociologist [to head the state board], and then add on other things from time to time by [a] developing process."¹⁰⁴

In the late summer and early fall, McAlister traveled the state to build "public sentiment for the plan." He spoke before conventions and conferences, asking each group to endorse the bill. The fruits of his efforts were statements of support from the Sunday School Association, the Teachers' Assembly, the Orphanage Association, and the major denominational organizations—Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian. In fact, McAlister reported that the plan was endorsed "by every such State organization that has had an opportunity to pass judgment on it."¹⁰⁵

The clubwomen of the state also showed an interest in the bill, partly due to the influence of Clara Lingle, who was first vice-president of the Conference for Social Service as well as the

¹⁰³ Curiously, McAlister later pinpointed the question of requiring county superintendents as critical in his refinement of the Missouri bill. As he recalled somewhat incorrectly a quarter century later, "the most important change [was] that the North Carolina bill made the appointment of County Superintendents of Public Welfare permissive, whereas the Missouri bill had made it mandatory. It would have defeated the North Carolina bill to have made it mandatory, and this was probably what defeated the Missouri bill." McAlister may have been recalling a slightly different divergence in the two bills: the Missouri bill required each county to appoint a welfare board, while the 1917 North Carolina law made boards optional. McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

¹⁰⁴ McAlister to E. C. Branson, 18 July 1916, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

¹⁰⁵ McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31; and "Editorial," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1916): 106.

president of the state Federation of Women's Clubs. The day after she endorsed McAlister's plan at the Greensboro Country Club, she went to the federation's annual convention in nearby High Point, where the delegates resolved to support the Conference for Social Service's work.¹⁰⁶ In November Lingle pushed McAlister's and Scales's draft bill at the federation's executive council meeting, and the twenty-four women present gave it their "most hearty endorsement and approval."¹⁰⁷ The federation appointed two clubwomen to work on the bill and that year's other legislative concern, the reformatory for white girls.¹⁰⁸

Aware that his most likely sympathizers were already assembled in the ranks of the Conference of Social Service, McAlister used the fall issue of the conference's journal to lay out his plan in full. His thinking had come a long way since January. The precision of his plan now owed much to his reading of Halbert's 1913 paper on "Boards of Public Welfare and Good City Government," from which he quoted the four defining principles of boards of public welfare: "government care for the unfortunate classes; government control of the conditions of living; the centralization of all government's social agencies into one system; and the establishment of social action on a scientific basis." McAlister expounded on each of these principles in turn as leading to one of the board's functions.¹⁰⁹ Next, he explained provisions of the draft bill and the proposed duties of county superintendents. Above all, his plan emphasized "constructive

¹⁰⁶ *FWC Yearbook, 1916-1917*, 68; and McAlister to Scales, 14 July 1916, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

¹⁰⁷ The resolution read, "moved and carried that the Council give its most hearty endorsement and approval to the bill proposed by the Social Service Conference concerning the establishment of a State Board of Public Welfare and that we do our utmost for its enactment." Council Minutes, 16 Nov. 1916, FWC Records, "Convention Minutes, 1915-1920, Council Minutes 1915-1921, Bd. of Directors 1915-1922" (bound volume), 106.

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Committee on Legislation, *FWC Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 83-84.

¹⁰⁹ McAlister, "A State Board of Public Welfare," *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1916), 108-112.

prevention and remediation.”¹¹⁰ After the conference’s executive committee endorsed the proposed bill at its October meeting, they printed pamphlets with a brief introduction to the rationales for a board of public welfare, the bill’s proposed text, and a list of organizations that had endorsed the plan.¹¹¹

Denson, however, was alarmed by the proposed bill that McAlister presented. Reading it closely, she realized that it eliminated any provision for her position.¹¹² She wrote to Blair, “In the matter of the McAlister law you know that making a direct appropriation would nullify the clause under which as an office expense I serve as Secretary. That is why that matter should be straightened out and put in the new law. As worded we would only have the Commissioner of Public Welfare (a pretty big office and name and his assistants.) I am sure you see.” Several members of the Board of Public Charities also still had reservations, yet the board endorsed the bill when they met in Greensboro on December 28.¹¹³ At the same meeting they nominated McAlister to succeed his late father on the board.¹¹⁴ Blair was of the opinion that McAlister’s membership on the board meant that “he will now be a help from the inside view point.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ McAlister, “A State Board of Public Welfare,” 111.

¹¹¹ On Executive Committee endorsement, see McAlister to Scales, 4 Oct. 1916, McAlister Papers, Folder 453; pamphlet, “A Bill for the Enlargement of the State Board of Public Charities into a State Board of Public Welfare, submitted for criticism and discussion by the State Board of Public Charities and the North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” copies in McAlister Papers, Folder 285 and CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical Material – Dr. Poe.

¹¹² Denson to Blair, 3 Oct 1916, General Corr. of the Board, Box 4, Folder: Aug.-Dec. 1916.

¹¹³ Minutes of the Board, 28 Dec. 1916, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹¹⁴ Alexander C. McAlister had recently died. Minutes of the Board, 28 Dec. 1916, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹¹⁵ Blair to Denson, 2 Jan. 1917, BPW Records, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1917.

Nevertheless, he was still wary, writing to Denson that “the bill still troubles me a little” and that “I am glad we have some strong men in Raleigh. We need to watch most carefully.”¹¹⁶

By the time the legislative session opened in January 1917, McAlister exuded confidence. Backed by his collection of endorsements, he told conference members that “a very strong public sentiment is forming throughout the State for the carrying out of this plan.”¹¹⁷ Luckily for McAlister and his bill, the legislative session of 1917 was one of the most progressive in North Carolina’s history.¹¹⁸ Under the new governor, Thomas W. Bickett, legislators began a period of expansion of public services that would place the state at the forefront of southern Progressivism.¹¹⁹ Bickett had long since established his bona fides as a Progressive. As the state Attorney General, he had been concerned about prison reform, and he joined the young Conference for Social Service and co-chaired the committee on prisons and judicial reform with Daisy Denson.¹²⁰

In his inaugural address on January 11, 1917 before a standing-room-only crowd of nearly 10,000 people in the Raleigh auditorium, Bickett called for constructive, progressive

¹¹⁶ Blair to Denson, 1 Jan. 1917; and Blair to Denson, 2 Jan. 1917, both in State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1917.

¹¹⁷ “Editorial,” *Social Service Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1916): 106.

¹¹⁸ Legislators debated a reformatory for delinquent white girls, improved roads, the Australian ballot, and woman suffrage. The assembly also appropriated \$3,273,500 for charitable and philanthropic purposes. By the end of the session, Clara Lingle was able to write to Denson, rejoicing that “all of our social legislation got through.” Claire Hodges to McAlister, 25 June 1931, McAlister Papers, Folder 294; and Lingle to Denson, 15 Mar. 1917, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

¹¹⁹ Historian George Tindall argues that this huge expansion in state spending was one element of “business progressivism,” in which governments sought to modernize the New South through both public spending and increased efficiency. Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*.

¹²⁰ Bickett served as Attorney General from 1909 until 1917; see Nathaniel F. Magruder, “Bickett, Thomas Walter,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 149-151. On Bickett’s activities with prison reform and the Conference, see Denson to Hon T. W. Bickett, 16 Nov. 1912, General Corr. of the Board, Box 3, Folder: July-Dec. 1912; and “Who’s Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 108.

legislation that would benefit all people of the state. “Speaking in distinct, measured and forceful tones,” Bickett laid out a legislative agenda for the next four years that included longer school terms, tax reform, health and safety regulations in manufacturing, greater funding for the state board of health, and prison reforms.¹²¹ With this program, he told his rapt audience, North Carolina “will assume her rightful place in the march of civilization, and from the blue of the mountains to the blue of the sea there will spring up a hardier, holier race, not unlike the giants that walked the earth when the sons of God mated with the daughters of men.”¹²² His words elicited “outbursts of thunderous applause as he proclaimed one and another of the great developments that he proposes for the whole people of the state.”¹²³

In this atmosphere, Senator Scales’s bill to create a Board of Charities and Public Welfare met with little opposition when he introduced it four days later, in the midst of a severe winter storm.¹²⁴ In addition, an ongoing scandal over abuses in the prison system, which had preoccupied Denson for the past several months, may have heightened the public awareness of the need for reform and government oversight in general. The chair of the Federation of Women’s Clubs’ legislative committee reported that the bill “seems to have been well recommended for passage from the first” and that “I feel that I needed to add little to its

¹²¹ “Inauguration of Thomas W. Bickett as governor is attended by brilliant ceremony,” 12 Jan. 1917, *Charlotte Observer*; and “Inaugural address of T. W. Bickett, Governor of North Carolina,” *Public Documents, Session 1917* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 3-19.

¹²² “Inaugural address,” *Public Documents, Session 1917*, 19.

¹²³ “Inauguration of Thomas W. Bickett as governor is attended by brilliant ceremony,” 12 Jan. 1917, *Charlotte Observer*.

¹²⁴ On the introduction of bills (SB 541 and SB 543, introduced 15 Jan. 1917), see *Senate Journal, 1917*, 183; “Welfare Measure Is Introduced in Senate by Scales,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 Jan. 1917; “South is Coated by Snow and Ice” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 Jan. 1917.

momentum.”¹²⁵ The bill’s success was no doubt helped by the simultaneous meeting of the Conference for Social Service in the state capitol; one evening during the convention, McAlister once again “eloquently championed” an enlarged board, according to one Progressive newspaperman.¹²⁶ Two days later, McAlister and his allies, including Edward Kidder Graham, Carey Hunter, Reverend M. L. Kessler, Clarence Poe, James Y. Joyner, and Clara Lingle appeared before the joint appropriations committee, which voted favorably on the bill.¹²⁷ The bill was ratified on March 6, 1917, as part of the end-of-session rush.¹²⁸

From Theory to Practice, Part I: The Search for a Commissioner

Some of the potential benefits of the bill were diminished in practice. In an apparent oversight, the 1917 legislature failed to appropriate funds for the new board, and the board had to borrow money for the first two years’ operating expenses. The maneuvering involved in securing first temporary funding and then permanent funding in 1919 is another testament to McAlister’s and Scales’s political acumen.¹²⁹

The selection of the new commissioner of public welfare was an equally pressing quandary. The new board delegated the selection of a commissioner to Blair and Hunter, both

¹²⁵ Report of the Committee on Legislation, *FWC Yearbook, 1917-1918*, 83-84. See also coverage in the *Raleigh News and Observer* in January and February 1917, including “State welfare bill is favored,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917.

¹²⁶ W. T. Bost, “Conference of Social Service Comes to End,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 Jan. 1917.

¹²⁷ “Open formula is strongly favored by social workers,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 Jan. 1917; “State welfare bill is favored,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917.

¹²⁸ North Carolina Public Laws 1917, ch. 170. Judging by the reports in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, legislators were far more interested in their investigation into prison abuses, the uproar surrounding a fake bill to repeal the state primary law, and their end-of-session celebrations. See “Primary Law of State Repealed through Trickery,” 6 Mar. 1917; “Handsome Silver Service Gift to Lt-Gov Gardner,” 7 Mar. 1917; “Tender Scenes Enacted During Closing Moments,” 7 Mar. 1917; “Both Gavels Fall Simultaneously and Session Ends,” 8 Mar. 1917; and “It Was Progressive,” 8 Mar. 1917, all in the *Raleigh News and Observer*.

¹²⁹ “No Appropriation to Welfare Board,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 Mar. 1917; and Minutes of the Board, 2 Apr. 1917, 30 May 1917, 14 Sept. 1917, 8 Oct. 1917, and 23 Apr. 1918, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

longtime members of the Board of Public Charities, and McAlister. The new law explicitly stated that the commissioner should be “a trained investigator of social service problems,”¹³⁰ and the committee’s first choice for commissioner was none other than Leroy A. Halbert of Kansas City, Missouri. Perhaps Halbert had been in the back of McAlister’s mind all along, while he pondered the wording of the new law and wrote to Scales that the commissioner “should be a trained sociological investigator and should be director of social research.” After all, McAlister drew heavily from Halbert’s theories, his model law, and his experience as he drafted North Carolina’s legislation. Who better to head the new agency?

McAlister and the board arranged for Halbert to make the long trip by train for an interview at the board’s meeting on May 30, 1917. Halbert “failed to arrive, having been delayed en route,” but appeared the following day and met with Denson and Hunter, then traveled to Greensboro to meet with Blair and McAlister.¹³¹ Suitably impressed, the board offered him the job in July 1917, intending also to hire Mabel Howell, a social worker from New York, whom Halbert recommended to start a division of the board for work with children.¹³² But Halbert “decided not to leave Missouri.”¹³³ He must have wavered between the prospect of heading a genuinely groundbreaking social welfare agency and the hope that he could finally create a similar agency in Missouri, building on his years of work there. Family and other personal considerations may have also played a role in his decision.

¹³⁰ North Carolina Public Laws 1917, ch. 170, section 3914g.

¹³¹ Minutes of the Board, 30 May 1917 and 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1; Secretary’s Diary, 30-31 May 1917, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Diaries 1905-1917.

¹³² Minutes of the Board, 3 July 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹³³ Minutes of the Board, 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

Hopes dashed, the board members fiddled around somewhat aimlessly. They received at least one inquiry from afar: James B. Williams, the director of county charities in Los Angeles, California, applied for the position in July. Blair and Denson investigated his qualifications through both formal and informal channels.¹³⁴ At the same time, Blair was apparently wracking his brain for local candidates who were known quantities. He asked Denson and Hunter to look into Eugene C. Branson, a professor of rural sociology at UNC who been a helpful resource during the board reorganization.¹³⁵ When neither Williams nor Branson panned out, Blair confessed to Denson that he was becoming “somewhat restless about the semi-organized condition of the Board, and if we are to have a Commissioner, I do wish we could get the right man at once.”¹³⁶

Even as the board ran out of options, they failed to consider Daisy Denson—who doggedly continued her work as secretary—for the position of commissioner. Denson had several marks against her. Her age was probably one factor; by 1917, Denson was fifty-three years old, not likely to be a leading force for change. With age came old eyes. Denson’s eyesight had been poor for years, to the point that when she broke her glasses she was unable to work until a specialist in Philadelphia sent her a new pair.¹³⁷ But above all, her sex was against her. McAlister and his compatriots in passing the law had always assumed that a man would fill the executive position of the new board. The board apparently did not consider hiring other North Carolina women with some social welfare training or experience. McAlister and his colleagues also overlooked Blanche Carr, whom McAlister knew from her excellent work

¹³⁴ Blair to Denson, 18 July 1917, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1917.

¹³⁵ Blair to Denson, 25 July 1917, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1917.

¹³⁶ Blair to Denson, 28 July 1917, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1917.

¹³⁷ Secretary’s Diary, 9 Aug. 1916, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Diaries 1905-1917.

singlehandedly running the Greensboro Board of Public Welfare, the descendant of McAlister's Inter-Church Association. And Clara Lingle surely knew of Mary Schwarburg—who was trained as a teacher, had done “community work” in the North Carolina mountains, and in 1918 became the principal of Caswell—but the board never considered her as a candidate.¹³⁸ Ruling out women meant ruling out many of the state's most qualified candidates for commissioner.

McAlister repeatedly demonstrated that he regarded women chiefly as political tools, useful for bolstering public support but not capable of much else. For example, his plan eliminated Denson's practice of requiring each county welfare board have at least one female member. In addition, his proposal required only one female member among the seven board members, although Blair and others pushed for more.¹³⁹ Despite his assurances to Denson during their work together in 1916 and 1917 that the new law would change nothing about her status, after the board reorganization he argued that Denson was “employed by the Board only temporarily and not in any official capacity,” ignoring her years of service.¹⁴⁰ Long aware of the bias against women meddling in politics, Denson understood the board's decision to hire a male commissioner, but she became increasingly discouraged by her low salary and lack of authority.

In these circumstances, Blair was relieved to get a letter in September from Roland F. Beasley, a newspaper editor from Monroe, North Carolina, who had served in the 1917 session of the legislature. Beasley professed himself to be “so much interested in this work that he will

¹³⁸ In addition to being a woman, Schwarburg had another mark against her: she was not a native of North Carolina, which she referred to as “my adopted state.” Mary Schwarberg, “A Woman's Work for Defectives,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 Feb. 1919. Of course, Leroy Halbert was not a North Carolinian either.

¹³⁹ North Carolina Public Laws, 1917, ch. 170, sections 3913, 3915, and 3921; and McAlister to Scales, 1 Mar. 1917, McAlister Papers, Folder 453. McAlister would reveal more of his attitudes toward women in his initial interactions with Kate Burr Johnson, the Commissioner from 1921 to 1930.

¹⁴⁰ McAlister to Beasley, 1 Jan. 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

be willing to give up his business and go into it.”¹⁴¹ Blair jumped on the possibility, seeking assurance from other social service leaders that Beasley “will fill the bill all right.”¹⁴² By the time the board convened in Raleigh barely two weeks later to discuss Beasley’s candidacy, his election was certain enough that they had asked him to be present, and they made him an offer on the spot.¹⁴³

Most likely Blair, McAlister, and the rest of the board chose Beasley partly out of a sense of desperation. But Beasley did have some vital qualifications. He shared the board’s amateur passion for social service and he had experience navigating the straits of Raleigh politics. Beasley had done some work with Conference for Social Service in its early years, including chairing the committee on poverty and charity. He wrote articles for the *Social Service Quarterly* on the need for “preventive” rather than “remedial” charity and on tax policy and tenancy.¹⁴⁴ He was practiced in the art of public persuasion, having written “wise philosophical editorials on a wide variety of topics.”¹⁴⁵ Moreover, as a member of the 1917 legislature, Beasley had distinguished himself with an investigation into prison conditions, sponsoring legislation intended to remedy some of the worst conditions. His recent prison reform work proved not only that his heart was in the right place, but also that his years as a journalist had given him useful political connections that he was willing to use for Progressive ends. In fact,

¹⁴¹ Blair to Denson, Sept. 2 1917, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1916.

¹⁴² For Blair’s description of his correspondence with M. L. Kesler about Beasley, see Blair to Denson, Sept. 8 1917, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1916.

¹⁴³ Minutes of the Board, 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹⁴⁴ R. F. Beasley, “Poverty and Charity,” *Social Service Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Apr.-June 1914): 19-22; R. F. Beasley, “The Palace and the Hovel,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 94-95; and R. F. Beasley, “The Problem of Tenancy,” *Social Service Quarterly* 3, no.1 (Apr.-June 1915): 15-16.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, Roy Melton, “The Growth of a State Program of Public Welfare,” n.d. [c. 1950], unpublished manuscript, North Carolina Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

his participation in the recent prison investigation may have granted him increased political currency with other reform-minded legislators and Raleigh insiders. An article in the *Social Service Quarterly* about Beasley's recent appointment, probably penned by Clara Lingle, echoed these sentiments: "Mr. Beasley's active participation in the state assembly and his firm attitude on the side of progress and justice in all social legislation have stamped him as a safe and sane leader of public thought as well as an able and enlightened executive."¹⁴⁶

Despite these practical qualifications, Beasley was a strange choice, given the new law's explicit statement that the commissioner should be "a trained investigator of social service problems." Beasley's appointment demonstrates McAlister's willingness to sacrifice an essential principle of his welfare plan—a trained professional staff—in order to maintain political connections and his internal power on the board. In this sense, the same political connections that helped guarantee the passage of McAlister and Scales's welfare law undermined the potential of the new board. The board members' willingness to prioritize sex, an unstated criterion, over the professional training that was at the heart of their new concept of public welfare makes it hard to take them seriously. To its credit, the board sent Beasley to Indiana to learn about that state's "progressive, yet sane and constructive" welfare work before they allowed him to "outline the plans and policies" of his embryonic agency.¹⁴⁷

From Theory to Practice, Part II: Local Welfare Officials

There was one final episode in the story of the 1917 law, and it too stemmed from some unexpected results of putting the law's theory into practice. McAlister and Scales had

¹⁴⁶ "Mr. Roland F. Beasley, Commissioner of Public Welfare," *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 2-4 (Apr.-Oct. 1917): 54-55.

¹⁴⁷ Beasley also attended meetings of the National Prison Association in New Orleans and the National Conference for Social Work in Kansas City, Missouri. Minutes of the Board, 8 Oct. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1; "The Enlarged Sphere of the Board of Charities and Public Welfare," *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 2-4 (Apr.-Oct. 1917): 57-59; *BCPW Report, 1917-1918*, 2, 8.

purposefully written the 1917 law so as not to provoke the ire of tightfisted legislators or tradition-bound local officials. Although their work wrought fundamental changes in the state's welfare systems, they attempted to smooth the path for these changes by first laying the legal foundations for expansive welfare work and only later, as the new welfare board proved its worth, building up all the services they dreamed of. Part of this strategy included conceding to local officials the power to appoint their own welfare officials. These decisions, which McAlister later said were "for strategic reasons alone," grew out their belief that requiring either county boards or superintendents would doom the bill.¹⁴⁸

The 1917 law included two kinds of local welfare officials: boards of public welfare, composed of unpaid volunteers, who would serve merely as advisors; and superintendents of public welfare, who should be professionals trained to carry out both state and county plans. The 1917 welfare law created the position of county welfare superintendents, outlining their responsibilities as the primary conduits of state welfare policy in each county. Yet, in keeping with McAlister's political tactics, the law merely recommended that counties hire superintendents; it did not require them to do so, nor did it commit the state to funding any of their salary, which was left up to the counties. In addition, in crafting the 1917 law, McAlister transformed Denson's informal network of boards of visitors into official boards of public welfare. But McAlister and Scales chose to make these boards optional. In addition, whereas Denson had appointed volunteer board members herself, McAlister and Scales gave appointing power to local officials and retained the board's authority only to give a nod to appointees. Denson's approach—reaching through her own networks to find people with the right politics—ensured that she had some sympathetic contacts in every county. Although the new law was in

¹⁴⁸ McAlister to Beasley, 11. Feb. 1938, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

principle based on the county as the basic unit for delivering welfare services, this provision nearly destroyed the existing network of county officials.

Once the bill had passed, McAlister and the rest of the board had to work within strictures of their own design. Shortly after the 1917 welfare bill was ratified, the nation was swept up in World War I, and creating welfare bureaucracy plummeted down the list of officials' priorities. The commissioners in almost every county, given the power to appoint both county boards and superintendents of public welfare, failed to appoint either. The county commissioners, as one observer noted, "were somewhat slower than 'the leading social thinkers throughout the country' in realizing the worth of the county unit organization for public welfare."¹⁴⁹ Why would they spend money on a superintendent's salary when they could chose not to, and use the money elsewhere in the county budget?¹⁵⁰ By May 1918, a year after the new law took effect, only Forsyth County had chosen its board. It, of course, was home to Winston-Salem and, not coincidentally, to William A. Blair, the venerable chairman of the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare.¹⁵¹ Thanks to his maneuvering, in July the county also became the first to appoint a superintendent of public welfare.¹⁵²

Commissioner Beasley was somewhat taken aback by local officials' spectacular inaction, lamenting that "I had no idea it would be so difficult to get county boards."¹⁵³ Beasley

¹⁴⁹ Roy Melton Brown, "The Growth of a State Program of Public Welfare," ch. 1, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Swift noted in the NCLC study that counties would never chose to spend funds if they were not required to do so. W. H. Swift, ed., *Child Welfare in North Carolina: An inquiry by the National Child Labor Committee for the North Carolina Conference for Social Service* (New York City: National Child Labor Committee, 1918).

¹⁵¹ Swift, ed., *Child Welfare in North Carolina*, 20. Blair reported that the election of members to the Forsyth county welfare board took place sometime after July. Blair to Denson, 10 July 1918, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

¹⁵² Blair to Denson, 10 July 1918, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

¹⁵³ Beasley to McAlister, 19 Mar. 1918, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

and his advisers settled for a stopgap plan. They would push commissioners to appoint county boards—since, after all, these volunteer boards required no funding—and rely on these boards to oversee basic welfare functions. At the same time, they hoped that county board members would become enlightened to the necessity of a paid official and would push for superintendents in their communities.¹⁵⁴ Beasley and the board suspected that county commissioners would respond with less animosity to local pressures than to a dictate from on high. Still, this approach required extensive work in many locations. Even Alexander McAlister and his well-organized network of Progressives in Greensboro struggled in their attempt to create a Guilford County board of public welfare and hire a superintendent. By September 1918, after more than a year of organized lobbying, the Guilford County commissioners were still “giv[ing] trouble,” and McAlister knew that commissioners in other counties were putting up similar resistance.¹⁵⁵

By the fall of 1918, McAlister and other reformers who had supported the 1917 bill began to consider ways of amending the law. Beasley’s draft bill returned the power of appointing county welfare boards to the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare and made welfare superintendents a requirement for larger counties, while smaller counties could appoint one person to serve as both welfare officer and school attendance officer.¹⁵⁶ In what McAlister later called “a masterly stroke of legislative legerdemain,”¹⁵⁷ Beasley piggybacked their aims on

¹⁵⁴ See Beasley to McAlister, 19 Mar. 1918, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918; and Minutes of the Board, 23 Apr. 1918, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹⁵⁵ McAlister to Beasley, 10 Sept. 1918, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918. In Guilford County, McAlister’s old allies in the Greensboro Board of Public Welfare (formerly the Greensboro Inter-Church Association) spearheaded a campaign to create a county welfare apparatus. See McAlister Papers, Folders 172-175.

¹⁵⁶ The 1919 legislation specified that county superintendents would be appointed and paid jointly by the county commissioners and the county board of education. North Carolina Public Laws, 1919, ch. 46. On the process of drafting the bill, see Beasley to McAlister, 13 Dec. 1918; McAlister to Beasley, 20 Dec. 1918; and Beasley to McAlister, 31 Dec. 1918, all in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1916-1918.

¹⁵⁷ McAlister to Beasley, 11 Feb. 1938, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

another Progressive bill up that year, the establishment of a juvenile court system.¹⁵⁸ His amendments to the welfare law decreed that public welfare superintendents would also serve as probation officers for the juvenile court system, thereby making the superintendents seem necessary and ensuring the “correlation” of various welfare services that was part of the intent of public welfare.¹⁵⁹ During the 1919 legislative session, Alfred Scales once again shepherded their bills, along with an appropriations bill for the Board of Charities and Public Welfare. Both measures met less opposition than expected, thanks to Beasley’s careful construction, Scales’s connections in the statehouse, and widespread public support for the proposed child-placing work of the growing state board.¹⁶⁰ Beasley’s success in getting the amendments through, especially “without any opposition,” is a testament to his political acuity.¹⁶¹

The 1919 amendment gave teeth to the spirit of the 1917 law. In McAlister’s view, it completed their triumph. He crowed to Beasley that “This will give North Carolina the best and most complete machinery for social welfare undertakings of any state in the country.”¹⁶² With the 1919 amendment and a promise of at least two years’ funding, Beasley could get down to business. The board made a round of appointments to county boards, keeping members chosen

¹⁵⁸ The juvenile court law passed and became North Carolina Public Law 1919, ch. 97.

¹⁵⁹ McAlister remembered that Beasley “saw his opportunity in the agitation for a juvenile court law before the legislature of 1919. He pointed out that county probation officers would be necessary, that the Public Welfare Law of 1917 already provided that county superintendents of welfare should serve as probation officers, and that all that was necessary for securing the probation officers needed under the juvenile court bill, was to amend the public welfare law by making the employment of superintendents of welfare compulsory. This was a masterly stroke of legislative legerdemain, and was one of the most valuable contributions ever made to the North Carolina Public Welfare Law.” McAlister to Beasley, 11 Feb. 1938, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

¹⁶⁰ The amendments passed as North Carolina Public Law, 1919, ch. 46. On the passage of the bill, see McAlister to Beasley, 1 Jan. 1919; McAlister to Beasley, 3 Feb. 1919; McAlister to Beasley, 12 Feb. 1919; Beasley to McAlister, 15 Feb. 1919; and McAlister to Beasley, 17 Feb. 1919, all in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

¹⁶¹ McAlister to Beasley, 17 Feb. 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

since 1917 but installing a slate of members that diverged almost entirely from those who had been part of the unofficial system before 1917.¹⁶³ By the spring of 1920, Beasley reported to his colleagues around the nation that all but five counties had superintendents of public welfare,¹⁶⁴ although other reports indicated that in the fall of 1920 many counties had only part-time superintendents, almost a dozen counties still had no superintendent whatsoever, and an equal number lacked full welfare boards.¹⁶⁵ Despite these hitches, Beasley announced that under the current arrangement, “North Carolina has a social welfare administrative fabric which needs only time, wisdom and development to make it the model one of the United States.”¹⁶⁶

Retrospect and Prospect

Years later, McAlister remembered his plan as “a revolutionary idea in a way and a rather appalling undertaking,” perhaps referring to the careful political mobilization necessary to bring it to fruition.¹⁶⁷ McAlister gave himself too much credit; his plan, while transformative, was not “revolutionary.” The state’s existing law gave the Board of Public Charities many powers, including the duty to inspect institutions and the charge to research social problems and make recommendations to the legislature. The basic outlines of McAlister’s plans were not radically different from Denson’s, despite being couched in a new language of public welfare and professional social work. The more serious difficulty with the pre-1917 situation was a lack of

¹⁶³ After the 1919 legislation, the Board did make it a “policy” to appoint at one woman and two men to each county’s board, although the law said nothing of gender. Pamphlet, “The Organization and Principles of Public Welfare Work In North Carolina,” (Raleigh: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1919), at the North Carolina Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC).

¹⁶⁴ Appendix to E. C. Lindeman, “Organization and Technique for Rural Recreation,” *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, 1920*, 325.

¹⁶⁵ List of superintendents, *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 65-67. Four counties lacked boards altogether; *ibid.*, 70-75.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6

¹⁶⁷ McAlister to Beasley, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

funding. Alfred Scales's bill confirmed and codified into law many things that were current practice, and by doing so gave the board a stronger case for requesting funds. For example, Denson wanted to publish a quarterly bulletin describing the state's welfare work, but because the board's existing charter did not spell out its duty to create such a publication, she made little headway in her pursuit of printing funds. By enumerating a number of similar board duties, the Scales welfare law forced the state to provide at least nominal funding for a variety of projects.

McAlister's plan also proposed some novel elements. Most obvious was his use of the term "public welfare." McAlister's efforts made North Carolina the first state to establish a state board of public welfare.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, no other state had adopted a county-unit plan state-wide. Models for social welfare administration took for granted an urban base. North Carolina was in an uncommon position: it was a mostly rural state that had enough Progressive tendencies to embrace a comprehensive, state-wide public welfare system. The result was that in rural social work, North Carolina was at the fore of innovation.

In the short run, the effects of McAlister's publicity campaign were almost as important as his creation of a new framework for social welfare. In his travels around the state during the fall of 1916, McAlister created new networks among Progressive allies. With the strength of his endorsements, he drew legislative attention to the work of the old Board of Public Charities as well as to the potential of an enlarged board. His publicity efforts helped lay a foundation for a legislative mandate on trickier issues that the board might tackle in the future, including research on child welfare, poverty, and unemployment. McAlister's steady campaign for the bill made its success seem self-evident to lawmakers and warmed the halls of power for future funding appeals.

¹⁶⁸ Leroy Halbert, "A Plan for Co-ordinating State Welfare Work."

In many ways, the Board of Charities and Public Welfare fulfilled McAlister's vision. McAlister's political connections and publicity campaigns had enabled him to give legislative authority to the foundations that Denson had already laid, while looking ahead to deeper changes that echoed the latest ideas about public welfare.¹⁶⁹ The reorganized board offered a framework for further action. The law provided for a larger staff and a mandate for serious research of social problems. The county-unit system offered potential for a network of local and state officials who could coordinate their plans statewide and hope to reach even the most secluded parts of the rural countryside. Yet difficulties remained. Professional training was a key to the success of the model of public welfare, but, as signaled in the scramble to find a qualified Commissioner, the board struggled to find sufficient trained personnel to staff its new bureaucracy. The challenge for the next decade would be to fill the ranks of a willing army of public servants.

¹⁶⁹ Denson surely would have wished for this authority, had she had the political capital to achieve it. McAlister, however, was eager to claim credit for creating the Board of Public Welfare, and always discounted the significant contributions of Denson, Blair, and other members of the old Board. He wrote later to Beasley, "history will be falsely written unless the Conference is recorded as the unaided creator of our public welfare system as outlined in the legislation of 1917. Neither Colonel Blair nor the old State Board of Charities had anything to do with this other than passive acquiescence in a plan which was initiated and executed by the Conference alone. Not a member of the old Board of Charities was a member of the Conference during those eventful years. It is true that Miss Daisy Denson, Secretary of the State Board of Charities, was a charter member of the Conference, but this seems to have been the only connection between the two bodies up to 1917." McAlister to Blair, 8 Dec. 1943, McAlister Papers, Folder 31.

CHAPTER 4: A DECADE OF SOCIAL PROGRESS: ESTABLISHING A MODERN WELFARE STATE, 1919-1930

Her social science courses at the University of North Carolina could not have prepared Elizabeth Smith for plowing fields, killing rattlesnakes, or riding for miles on muleback. Yet after she graduated with her master's degree, Smith needed all her resources and skills, including things she had not learned in the classroom. Her assignment: go to Cherokee County, at the westernmost tip of North Carolina, and start a one-woman department of welfare. From 1925 to 1928, Smith served as Cherokee's Superintendent of Public Welfare, part of an exploratory "demonstration" of welfare work funded by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial foundation and overseen jointly by the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare and the School of Public Welfare at the state university in Chapel Hill.

In Cherokee, Smith found that many roads were "impassable from November to May. Parts of the northern section are approachable during this time only on horseback or muleback. Even in summer it is often necessary to walk six or seven miles up a mountain trail to make a family visit... Little log cabins and weathered frame cabins follow along the lines of the creeks and tiny farms are almost perpendicular on the hillsides... Families are large and it is not uncommon to find from thirteen to eighteen children." Smith managed to oversee eighty-five cases at once, although with no stenographic help, her case records were restricted to the basics. Transportation difficulties were a constant impediment to her work; in one case, she drove seventeen miles, walked ten, and found help to carry a crippled boy eight miles on a stretcher so

he could see a doctor.¹ Yet Cherokee's geographical distance from centers of public welfare administration in Raleigh and Chapel Hill did not mean that its residents were disconnected from modern ideas. Despite Cherokee's poverty and its relative inexperience with the forces of industrialization sweeping the New South, local officials were eager to join the trend of building a modern welfare system. They had volunteered to join the welfare demonstration program. When Smith left in 1928, county officials agreed to find funds to pay a permanent welfare superintendent.

As Elizabeth Smith's story reveals, North Carolina's welfare system by the late 1920s was crude but effective, and, by all accounts, it was far better than the system of the 1910s. A new brand of worker staffed the growing social welfare network at the state level: professionals who hammered out policies in Raleigh and attempted to provide training and direction for the nascent state-wide system of social service professionals. These officials often floundered as they tried to create a functional bureaucracy based on the 1917 welfare law's noble but often vague model for rural welfare administration. County-based social workers knew better than anyone that state policy did not easily translate into local practice. These welfare workers faced the challenge of administering state policies while traveling long hours over miles of rutted lanes, at times desperately aware of their lack of training, often entangled in small-town political skirmishes, and always fettered by their lack of resources. Welfare officials experimented throughout the 1920s with ways to secure more funding, improve training for social workers, and break down resistance to welfare work.

¹ Marjorie Bell, "A Brief Study of Social Work in Rural North Carolina," 20-21, 23-26, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund Papers (Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York; hereafter LSRM Papers), Series 3: Appropriations, Box 62, Folder 661.

Like Smith, many of these new professional social workers were women. They carved niches for themselves within the growing welfare bureaucracy and simultaneously within a new model of southern social work. Building on Southern traditions of female benevolence and on professional models of casework, women became the face of the state's welfare programs. These women traveled paths worn smooth by the decades-long tradition of organized women's benevolence and corollary ideas about women's natural affinity for caregiving. As welfare officials, women also had the advantage of being seen as less tainted by politics than men, continuing and building on pre-suffrage Progressive traditions of women advocating clean government. But female social workers also cultivated a new role: the professional southern woman with political savvy. Although men continued to play important leadership roles in social service, the state's reliance on trained female social workers meant that women gained jobs and crucial expertise in the state's welfare bureaucracy at a time when they had few other professional options. In North Carolina, as in other parts of the nation, women were the footsoldiers of professional social work. At the same time, these women's embrace of professional standards distanced them from female social reformers who carried on more traditional voluntarism.

North Carolina's transition to requiring professional training for its social workers aligned the state with national trends during the 1920s. North Carolina's welfare officials and their academic allies operated with great political acumen to create a distinctive form of professional social work that drew on national models but addressed problems such as rural poverty that were endemic to the South. The state's network of trained social workers grew out of the cooperative efforts of the state Board, the state university, and northern philanthropists.

The increasing number of stakeholders complicated the ongoing debate about the role of private charity in public welfare.

Scholars have noted that the South's traditions of minimal state power, racial and class hierarchies, and a slow-changing agricultural economy affected the goals and strategies of Southern Progressives.² This is the case for Southern social work, too. In North Carolina, an alliance of academics and professionals fashioned principles of social work that suited the Southern situation, at least as they understood it. Rather than being an aberrant deviation from a national pattern of professionalization, their strategies were at the forefront of innovation in the social sciences. Their work on rural social welfare became a model for rural areas beyond the South.

Kate Ancrum Burr Johnson: Clubwoman and Social Reformer

In the wake of McAlister and Scales's landmark welfare legislation in 1917 and 1919, the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare Board grew, at first haltingly but then by leaps and bounds. In Roland F. Beasley's first eighteen months as Commissioner, the legislature's accidental failure to fund the Board severely restricted his options. After the legislative session of 1919, the outlook was more promising, with more sufficient funding and a mandate to appoint county welfare superintendents. In keeping with McAlister's vision of the reorganized Board—an agency dedicated to carrying out the government's duty to protect children and thereby regenerate society—Beasley and the Board first focused their efforts on establishing the Division of Child Welfare. To direct the fledgling division, they chose Kate Burr Johnson.

Kate Ancrum Burr was born in 1881 in Morganton, North Carolina, to parents with deep political and economic ties to the state. Her father, who worked for the railroad, died when she

² William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

was young. Kate and her two sisters were raised by their mother, whose antebellum ancestors included planters in the Morganton area. Kate later carried her with strong emotional ties to the western, mountainous part of the state. After education at a private school in Morganton and at Georgetown High School, she spent two years at Presbyterian Female College in Charlotte (later Queens University). In 1903 she married Clarence A. Johnson, a North Carolina native four years her senior. They moved to Raleigh, where Clarence owned an ice company. They had two sons, born in 1905 and 1907, and shared the house with two other relatives. Kate ran the house and raised the children with the help of two servants, young African American women who lived with the family.³

Johnson exercised her considerable energies in improving her city and state. Although she was a member of the Episcopal church, most of her social service was with other groups. One biographical sketch noted that she “began her public career” as president of the Raleigh Women’s Club.⁴ This women’s club was one of the largest and most powerful in the state, so it was natural that Johnson would be drawn into a leadership role in the state federation. In 1915, clubwomen elected her to serve a two-year term under Clara Lingle as the first vice-president of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs. In 1917, Johnson became president and guided the clubs’ work through the upheaval of the war and the influenza epidemic that broke out in the wake of the war. At her urging, the Federation endorsed woman suffrage at its 1918

³ “Kate Burr Johnson,” in *Prominent Families of New Jersey*, vol 1., ed. William Starr Myers (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2000), 575; Clarence Johnson in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 and 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule for Wake County, Raleigh Twp, North Carolina; *Hill Director Co.’s (Incorporated) Raleigh, NC City Directory [1921-1922]* (Richmond, Virginia: Hill Directory Co., 1921), 313; Mollie C. Davis, “Kate Ancrum Burr Johnson,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 3, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Kate Burr Johnson to J. B. Buell, 30 Oct. 1922, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office: Correspondence with Associations and Committees, 1918-58 (hereafter Corr. with Associations), Box 25, Folder: American Association of Social Workers, 1922-1924.

⁴ “Mrs. Kate Burr Johnson,” *North Carolina Clubwoman* (Apr. 1935): 7, copy in FWC Records, Presidential Files, “Kate Burr Johnson (Mrs. Clarence A.).”

convention, and as she finished her presidential term at the June 1919 convention, news arrived that Congress had passed the 19th amendment, granting suffrage rights to women.⁵ Her high-profile wartime leadership in the Federation also brought her an appointment on the state's Central Liberty Loan Committee.⁶

Johnson showed an early interest in social welfare. During the war she encouraged clubwomen to continue their work in public health, education, and child welfare, arguing that this work built morale and contributed to the war effort.⁷ She paired her activities in women's organizations with membership in the Conference for Social Service, which she joined by 1914. She served first as a member of the committee on dependent and delinquent children, and by 1918 she was elected first vice-president of the Conference.⁸ Johnson's friendship with Lingle probably fed her interest and knowledge in social service. Lingle's influence in both the Conference and the Federation had been critical in the clubwomen's decision to endorse McAlister's plan for a board of public welfare, and in mid-1917, as Lingle handed off leadership of the Federation to Johnson, Lingle became the second woman appointed to the reorganized Board of Charities and Public Welfare.⁹

⁵ Betty Evans Weathers, *A Century to Celebrate: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, 1902-1988, and GFWC of North Carolina, 1998-2002* (Oxford, NC: School of Graphic Arts, The Masonic Home for Children, 2003), 26; Convention Minutes, 2-4 June 1919, in FWC Records, "Convention Minutes, 1915-1920, Council Minutes 1915-1921, Bd. of Directors 1915-1922" (bound volume), 72; *FWC Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 45.

⁶ "Message from the President," *FWC Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 18.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Who's Who in the North Carolina Conference for Social Service," *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Jan.-Mar. 1914): 107; "Message from the President," *FWC Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 18.

⁹ Minutes of the Board, 2 Apr. 1917 and 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

When first laying plans for the new bureau of child welfare in 1918, the Board had considered hiring a New York-based social worker recommended by Leroy Halbert,¹⁰ but their correspondence with her came to nothing.¹¹ Instead of pursuing other trained outsiders, Beasley hired Johnson in June 1919 to head the Bureau of Child Welfare. Johnson's experiences organizing clubwomen, encouraging social service efforts, and promoting the sale of Liberty Bonds rendered her, in Roland Beasley's eyes, "a most influential and capable woman." Johnson's appointment also garnered support from Sallie Southall Cotten, matriarch of the white Federation of Women's Clubs, who implied to Beasley that Johnson had both the necessary connections with clubwomen and some traits usually seen as more masculine; Johnson was "sane and efficient, and while deeply interested in Welfare Work would not reduce it to mere sentimentality, being very level-headed."¹² Of course, Johnson did not meet the Board's professional standards (Beasley had hoped to hire a "man trained in juvenile court work")—but neither did anybody else in the state.¹³

To equip Johnson for the job, Beasley arranged for her to do about six weeks of "special studying ... before starting the active work" at the New York School of Social Work.¹⁴ At the beginning of July, 1919, Johnson traveled to New York City, where she lodged with an old

¹⁰ Minutes of the Board, 3 July 1916 and 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹¹ Minutes of the Board, 22 Jan. 1918, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1.

¹² Sallie S. (Mrs. Robert R.) Cotten to Beasley, 16 June 1919, unprocessed Board of Charities and Public Welfare papers (MARS ID 97.101, Old Records Center, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC; hereafter Unprocessed BPW Records), Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹³ Minutes of the Board, 22 March 1919, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

¹⁴ Beasley to Kesler, 21 June 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 7: 1919 (quote); Untitled press release, n.d. [June 1919]; and Beasley to NY School of Social Service, 28 June 1919, both in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

friend about ten blocks from the school. At first she was “not quite satisfied with what I am getting and I feel that they require me to spend too much time in reading and writing reviews of books which is something I can do at home.”¹⁵ But she worked with the instructors to “outline a course that gives me the things I especially need and I feel that I am getting invaluable information. I am really getting a little impatient to get back and begin trying some of it out.”¹⁶ She particularly relished her observations of social welfare machinery at work, such as the day she spent in the Children’s Court learning about probation and her trip to a state orphanage at Hastings. School officials also arranged for her to meet with notables such as Dr. Hastings Hart of the Russell Sage Foundation.¹⁷

With that, Johnson returned to North Carolina and jumped in. In her first sixteen months of work, Johnson visited orphanages and rescue homes and granted them licenses; she inspected maternity homes and state-run institutions; she worked closely with juvenile courts officers; she helped county officials place 217 children into institutions or orphanages; and she wrote articles and distributed information about child welfare principles, presenting an exhibit at each year’s state fair. She began to work out a record-keeping system with the help of a trained social worker at the New York School of Social Work. She soon developed quite definite opinions about what the state needed, including a new age of consent law, a mothers’ aid program, a

¹⁵ Johnson to Beasley, 10 July 1919, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹⁶ Johnson to Beasley, 26 July 1919, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹⁷ Johnson to Beasley, 10 July 1919; and Johnson to Beasley, 26 July 1919, both in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

training school for delinquent black boys, and a facility to care for feeble-minded black children.¹⁸

The Changing of the Guard

In March, 1921, three and a half years after becoming Commissioner, Roland F. Beasley decided to resign in order to “return to private life.”¹⁹ He first intimated his decision to Alexander W. McAlister, his closest friend on the Board, so that McAlister could begin a quiet search for a new Commissioner. Beasley felt that he had done his duty to the state; as he explained to McAlister, “I have always had in mind that the when work should be firmly established in the popular mind and in the law of the land that I should have contributed my most valuable service. . . I feel that this work is now firmly established in the state and on the proper constructive lines.”²⁰ Although he had shepherded the Board of Charities and Public Welfare through the bumpy first years, his interest in social welfare was not deep enough to make him stay in the field as a professional. Beasley immediately went to work for a Texas oil company, leaving Carey J. Hunter, a Raleigh-based businessman and member of the Board, as acting Commissioner.

As the Board began to search for Beasley’s replacement, they once again insisted on hiring a man. Beasley himself recommended that they take time “to look around and find a strong man.”²¹ At an “elegant” lunch meeting at McAlister’s home in Greensboro, the Board

¹⁸ “Work of the Division of Child Welfare,” *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 13-21.

¹⁹ Beasley to Blair, 7 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

²⁰ Beasley to McAlister, 1 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: General Correspondence, 1920-1921.

²¹ Memorandum to be handed to the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, n.d., State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923. Beasley also told Chase, “I am sure that a suitable man will be found to carry on the public welfare work.” Beasley to Chase, 23 Mar. 1921, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office: Correspondence with State Agencies, Boards, and Commissions (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC; hereafter, Corr. with State Agencies), Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

appointed a committee to search for Beasley's successor,²² then advertised the position in North Carolina newspapers. They got half a dozen responses, the applicants ranging from an Elon professor of sociology and economics to a land appraiser.²³ A favorite quickly emerged: Dr. J. Henry Highsmith, a state public education official. He led the field in qualifications, a fact that perhaps highlights the poor quality of the other applicants, since Highsmith had no training as a social worker. Highsmith, however, had Beasley's support, and by late March, 1921, there was "quite a drive being organized in Raleigh" to secure the job for Highsmith.²⁴

But if forces were amassing behind Highsmith, there were also opponents blocking the way. Kate Burr Johnson stepped in at this critical juncture and professed her opposition in gendered terms. Johnson told McAlister that Highsmith was "not pleasant," an "impression" confirmed by women who had worked with him in the state education department. Johnson described him as "an egotistical, unapproachable person, with little charm or graciousness of manner... When I heard that he was being considered for Commissioner, my reaction was that he will never do. Although he may be a very able man, his unpleasant personality, it seems to me, would be much against the work." Johnson implied that personality as well as some softer, more

²² The committee comprised Blair, McAlister, Hunter, and Lingle. The Greensboro paper reported that "it is understood that [Hunter] already has a good man in mind." "Mr. Beasley resigns position as chief of the state's welfare," *Greensboro Daily News*, 18 Mar. 1921, 1. On "elegant" meeting, see Minutes of the Board, 17 March 1921, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

²³ Carey J. Hunter to McAlister, 21 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921; W. C. Hammond to Roland F. Beasley, 22 Mar. 1921, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 8: SBCPW, 1919-1928.

²⁴ On Beasley's support: Carey J. Hunter to McAlister, 21 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 8: 1920-1921. On drive in Raleigh: Johnson to McAlister, 26 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 8: 1920-1921. For biographical information on Highsmith, see Katherine Highsmith Holoman, "Highsmith, John Henry," in *North Carolina Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 130-131.

feminine charm were requisite for welfare work, as much as training.²⁵ Unswayed, McAlister simply thanked Johnson for expressing her concerns and continued to pursue Highsmith.²⁶

By mid-May, Hunter and McAlister offered the job to Highsmith, who refused.²⁷

Although Kate Burr Johnson apparently believed that if all else were equal, a man would make a better Commissioner, she suggested that the Board consider hiring her as Commissioner.²⁸

McAlister dismissed her arguments in condescending tones, addressing her incorrectly as “Clara” and insisting that the Board was grateful for her service but was set on having a male Commissioner.²⁹

But Johnson persisted, quietly drumming up support. Johnson’s friends began to make her case, both publicly and privately. The directors of the Federation of Women’s Clubs met at Wrightsville Beach in early June and resolved that “Whereas, the Public Welfare is near to the hearts of all women; and whereas, we believe there are women in North Carolina fully capable of rendering efficient public service,” they endorsed Johnson and asked the Board to make her Commissioner.³⁰ The *Greensboro Daily News* reported favorably on their actions in an editorial entitled “Woman on a Woman’s Job.”³¹ The state federation of business and professional

²⁵ Johnson to McAlister, 31 Mar. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

²⁶ McAlister to Johnson, 4 Apr. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

²⁷ Carey J. Hunter to [McAlister], 14 May 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

²⁸ Blair to Johnson, 27 June 1921; and Johnson to Blair, 27 May 1921, both in State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

²⁹ McAlister to Mrs. “Clara” A. Johnson, 1 June 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

³⁰ Minutes, Directors Meeting, 7 June 1921, in FWC Records, “Convention Minutes, 1915-1920, Council Minutes 1915-1921, Bd. of Directors 1915-1922” (bound volume), 184-86.

³¹ “Woman on a Woman’s Job,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 15 June 1921; and clipping enclosed in Branson to Johnson, 20 June 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

women's clubs, to which both Johnson and Daisy Denson belonged, also endorsed Johnson.³²

The head of the state health department, Dr. Watson S. Rankin, wrote a personal letter to McAlister supporting Johnson's candidacy. Rankin pointed out that as a woman, Johnson, might be immune to some of the political pressures in the capital. He also hoped she would "solidify and organize and direct the feminine voters' interests."³³

By mid-June, two other men had turned the job down.³⁴ It was becoming clear that qualified men were in short supply. Desperate to fill the position, now vacant for three months, William A. Blair became more receptive to Johnson's appeal.³⁵ On July 6, 1921, the Board met in Greensboro and, following a motion by board member Mattie Hadley Woodard, unanimously elected Johnson as Commissioner at Beasley's salary level. Still, McAlister was unwilling to grant Johnson unsupervised authority. At his suggestion, that same day the Board elected UNC sociologist Howard Odum "Consulting Expert to the Board."³⁶ McAlister's advice to Johnson the day after her appointment reflected his limited faith in her executive ability. The best policy, he said, was "staying in the background and speaking and doing... through other people. It is just the advice that I would want to give to my own daughter if she were entering upon such grave responsibilities as have been placed upon you."³⁷

³² "Miss Elsie Riddick is Again Elected as Federation President," *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 June 1921.

³³ Rankin, State Health Officer, to McAlister, 15 June 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

³⁴ Carey J. Hunter to [McAlister], 14 May 1921; and Rankin to McAlister, 15 June 1921, both in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

³⁵ Seeking clarity, Blair wrote "hastily but frankly" to Johnson, asking for her opinion about what was best for the Board: did she still believe that finding "the strongest man we can get" was best, or did Johnson want the appointment for herself? Johnson must have replied in favor of the latter option. Blair to Johnson, 27 June 1921, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

³⁶ Minutes of the Board, 6 July 1921, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

³⁷ McAlister to Johnson, 7 July 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

From other quarters came more explicit praise. Clara Lingle, who had missed the meeting in Greensboro,³⁸ teased Johnson that “I am sure you are the best prepared man in the state for the work.” On a more serious note, she continued, “We were not looking for a woman, we were not trying to satisfy the women of the state or the people in state offices, we were looking for the person best qualified for the difficult and important duties of our commissioner.”³⁹ In Lingle’s eyes, Kate Burr Johnson was the most qualified man *or* woman for the job. Johnson was grateful for Clara Lingle’s vote of confidence, which she believed was unconnected to “any consideration of personal friendship or question of sex.” She particularly valued Lingle’s judgment, who she said had “probably studied the entire field of social service more thoroughly than any other citizen of the state.”⁴⁰

Daisy Denson, however, was thoroughly displeased with Johnson’s election. Since the reorganization of the board in 1917, she had grown increasingly frustrated with her position. When Beasley was hired as her superior, she trained him in the work she had done for almost fifteen years, chafing at the differences in salary and her lack of job security. Denson was employed “temporarily” at \$100 monthly, while Beasley’s starting salary was \$250 per month despite his lack of experience.⁴¹ She recalled later that she helped him “through the first year and a half of his work.”⁴²

³⁸ Attendance list, Minutes of the Board, 6 July 1921, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

³⁹ Lingle to Johnson, 10 July 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921, underlining in original.

⁴⁰ Johnson to Lingle, 18 July 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁴¹ On Beasley’s election, see Minutes of the Board, 2 Apr. 1917 and 14 Sept. 1917, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1889-1918, Volume 1; Denson to Blair, 15 Mar. 1918, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

⁴² [Daisy Denson] to Mrs. J. W. Pless, 21 June 1921, Denson Papers Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1850-1944.

Aware that Denson's experience was critical to his own success, Beasley supported her request in 1919 for a salary increase (from \$1200 to \$1800 a year) and suggested that she be called "Assistant Commissioner." The Board disagreed. They noted their appreciation of her "faithful work of the past" but gave her the title of "Secretary to the Commissioner" and increased her salary only to \$1500.⁴³ While Denson was willing to accept the smaller raise, she was not satisfied with her title. As Beasley explained to Blair, Denson "thinks that the word secretary is confusing and without significance. She is willing to be known as Assistant to the Commissioner. She feels that the interest and influence of the women generally in the work of the board and her own standing among the women and clubs of the State would warrant this recognition."⁴⁴ Despite Beasley's support, when Denson tried to reopen the matter later that year, the Board put her down with unusual force, noting in the minutes that they had already come a decision and "prefer[red] not to re-open" the question of her title.⁴⁵ In an added insult, six months later, they gave Beasley another raise.⁴⁶

In the meantime, the Board hired Kate Burr Johnson as director of the division of child welfare at an annual salary of around \$2000.⁴⁷ In fact, Johnson's hiring seems to have spurred much of Denson's defensiveness, since Denson wanted to make sure that she had a firm hold on her number-two rank in the office hierarchy. From the first Johnson drew a higher salary and

⁴³ Minutes of the Board, Executive Session, 24 Mar. 1919, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

⁴⁴ Beasley to Blair, 1 Apr. 1919, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Board, 28 Sept. 1919, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

⁴⁶ Beasley's salary was increased to \$3600 per year. Minutes of the Board, 24 Mar. 1920, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Board, 24 Mar. 1920, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2.

had a more authoritative title, but Denson remembered helping Johnson “every day just as I helped Mr. Beasley.”⁴⁸

Daisy Denson was shocked, then, when Johnson made a move for the Commissioner’s job. In June 1921, as Johnson rallied her forces, Denson poured her anguish into a long letter to Annie Ellis Pless, one of her friends on the Board. “Imagine my surprise when I find Mrs. Johnson trying to be made Commissioner, knowing my position, knowing the work I did and knowing everything, I had trusted her as a friend.” Johnson, she told Pless, “came to my desk and sat down saying she believed that she would apply for the place. I replied [‘]Well, if the Board should put you in the place I would not stay a day. The Board put me out to put a man in the place and I certainly do not believe that they would put a woman in the place.[’] But this had no effect.”⁴⁹

Denson firmly believed that “there should be a man, a strong man who will be the real head,” her comment reflecting deeply ingrained gender roles of her generation. But if the Board was willing to appoint a woman, it should be her. In her view, “to discredit my past work by placing a woman in now would be a humiliation which I should not have to bear. It was hard enough to give up to the man.” Moreover, she felt betrayed by her clubwomen friends. She told Pless, “I do not think our women understand the situation. I have friends but I have thought that this matter of the Commissionership was wholly the Board’s affair and there should be silence on my part.” She saw Johnson’s maneuvering to secure an endorsement from the Federation of Women’s Clubs as “agitation” in which she would have no part.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Denson felt that “I should be at least in the second place and so recognized.” [Daisy Denson] to Mrs. J. W. Pless, 21 June 1921, Denson Papers, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1850-1944.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Unfortunately for Denson, Johnson's "agitation" got her the job. Denson stood by her declaration that "I could not serve under [Johnson]" and resigned the instant the Board elected Johnson, ending her long career with the Board.⁵¹ In addition to caring for her mother—who celebrated her eighty-sixth birthday in 1922 with her large family—Daisy continued to have an active social life. She continued her longstanding work with the Raleigh Women's Clubs and her more recent association with the Raleigh Business and Professional Women's Club.⁵² She also filled some of her time with the Tuesday Afternoon Book Club, where she exhibited a brief interest in Japan.⁵³ She obtained a law license in 1923, at age sixty, although it is unclear that she ever practiced law.⁵⁴ Still, she may have needed income to support her mother and her sister Mary. She died in July 1952, survived only by her sister Mary and her brother Claude.⁵⁵

Expanding the Work of the Board

Under Kate Burr Johnson, the Board grew quickly. When Johnson had joined the Board as head of child welfare in 1919, she was only the board's third staff member. As the new Commissioner in July 1921, she inherited building blocks of a state welfare system that had a frustrating propensity to tumble down. The shifting group of county superintendents were yet untrained, and turnover was high. In the spring of 1921, Beasley and the Board narrowly averted an attack that would have made county welfare superintendents optional, shattering the gains of

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mrs. W.T. Bost, "Teachers Entertained by Club Women," *Greensboro Daily News*, 16 Oct. 1921.

⁵³ "Weddings—Announcements: Raleigh," 22 Jan. 1928, *Greensboro Daily News*, 23; "State Social Events," *Greensboro Daily News*, 29 Mar. 1931; "State Social Events," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Apr. 1932.

⁵⁴ "Eighty-Two Get Law License for State Practice," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 25 Aug. 1923.

⁵⁵ "Funeral planned for Mrs. Raney," *Greensboro Daily News*, 8 Mar. 1952; and "St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church," accessed 6 June 2013, <http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/chat/cem281.htm>.

1919.⁵⁶ The Board's enemies instead pushed through a law that required county superintendents to be re-elected every two years, opening numerous possibilities for continued debate about the welfare system in every county.⁵⁷

On a more promising note, Beasley wrangled enough funding from the 1921 General Assembly to fund several more divisions within the state Board's work, and Commissioner Johnson made these new divisions her first priority.⁵⁸ The divisions were bare-bones, each at first comprising only the director and some part-time clerical help. She first solidified the work of the division of County Organization, which Beasley had created in early 1920 with temporary funding from the Red Cross.⁵⁹ The division's first director worked for the Board for only a few months before transferring his services to the joint Red Cross-Board program at UNC's School of Public Welfare.⁶⁰ In the spring of 1921, Johnson hired a replacement field agent whose responsibilities were to meet with county superintendents *in situ* to advise them and educate them about their duties.⁶¹ Johnson also hired two women to replace her as joint directors of the child welfare division, thus expanding the Board's work in child welfare and signaling the

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Board, 18 Jan. 1921, BPW Records, Minutes of State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1917-1921, Volume 2; Beasley to McAlister, 29 Jan. 1921; Beasley to McAlister, 9 Feb. 1921; and other correspondence in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁵⁷ "Rulings of the Attorney-General on Election of Superintendents of Public Welfare," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1921): 8-10.

⁵⁸ "Explanation" [n.d., probably early 1921], in BPW Records, microfilmed minutes of State Board of Public Charities, Reel 1; *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 12.

⁵⁹ "Explanation" [n.d., probably early 1921], in BPW Records, microfilmed minutes of State Board of Public Charities, Reel 1.

⁶⁰ UNC Trustees minutes (Executive Committee), 10 Sept. 1920, in the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina Records (collection #40001, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC; hereafter UNC Trustees Minutes), Series 1, Volume 12, 247-9.

⁶¹ This field agent, Roy M. Brown, may have actually been hired by Beasley. The earliest mention of him working for the Board was in May 1921.

continued centrality of children to the Board's plans and political appeals.⁶² In September, 1921, she created a third division, in Mental Health and Hygiene, employing a psychologist from UNC to work part-time with the Board.⁶³ The following spring she created a division of Promotion and Education and a division of Institutional Supervision. By the time of her first report to the legislature in June, 1922, Johnson had assembled a full staff and moved to new office space, with five rooms.⁶⁴

Johnson focused much of her staff's energy in a new direction: producing studies of the state's social conditions in order to convince a reluctant public of the state's dire problems and the need for increased funding to tackle those problems. Before Johnson took the reins in 1921, the Board had relied on outside organizations to produce any research of note, such as the child welfare study conducted in 1918 by National Child Labor Committee at the behest of the Conference for Social Service.⁶⁵ With an enlarged staff and growing connections with the University, Johnson began to take the problem of "study" quite seriously. Within the first eighteen months of taking office, she had led her staff in studies of poor relief, penal institutions, child-caring institutions, feeble-mindedness, and delinquent and neglected children.⁶⁶

Johnson and the Board relied heavily on the expertise of UNC scholars to help conduct these studies. The most prominent was Howard W. Odum, who arrived at UNC in 1920 to oversee the creation of a department of sociology and a school of public welfare. A native of

⁶² *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁴ Lingle to Johnson, 19 Dec. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921; *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 10-12; *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 8.

⁶⁵ W. H. Swift, ed., *Child Welfare in North Carolina: An Inquiry by the National Child Labor Committee for the North Carolina Conference for Social Service* (New York City: National Child Labor Committee, 1918).

⁶⁶ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 11.

Georgia, Odum had completed doctoral degrees in social psychology and sociology, then returned to the South as a professor at Emory. Odum had seemingly endless energy and a penchant for grand plans.⁶⁷ From the beginning of his tenure in Chapel Hill, Odum fostered a community of like-minded social scientists who were dedicated to addressing regional conditions. Eugene Branson's North Carolina Club, which predated Odum's arrival, also served as a vital forum for discussing the state from economic and sociological perspectives. Graduate students in rural economics, sociology, psychology, and related fields produced a steady stream of papers and theses that analyzed North Carolina's populace from both theoretical and practical angles. Some of these students worked for the Board directly; others were not associated with the state but nevertheless produced studies of interest to Johnson and her staff.⁶⁸

The pace of UNC's research on the South picked up as the decade progressed, especially after 1924. In the spring of that year, Odum approached Beardsley Ruml, the director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), with the idea of creating a new center of social science research dedicated to solving the South's problems of rural poverty and economic stagnation. The result was the Institute for Research in Social Science, which served as a forum where an interdisciplinary team of scholars could bring their theoretical expertise to bear on the social problems of the region. Funding from the LSRM and the Rockefeller Foundation was crucial to the existence of the Institute for its first two decades.⁶⁹ Even with the strong support of

⁶⁷ For wonderful descriptions of Odum, see Guy Benton Johnson and Guion Griffis Johnson, *Research in Service to Society: The First Fifty Years of the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), especially 3-27.

⁶⁸ See studies in Board files: McGill thesis, 1925, in Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931; Mabel Boysworth to S. E. Leonard, 16 Apr. 1925; and Sam Leonard to Mabel Boysworth, 24 Apr. 1925; both in Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC, 1923-1940.

⁶⁹ For each fiscal year of Odum's tenure as director, the Institute received more of its funds from foundations than from the University. Between 1924 and 1940 the Institute received a total of \$502,500 in Rockefeller funds. It was

UNC President Harry Woodburn Chase, Odum's friend from graduate school, Odum constantly struggled to find state money for the Institute. North Carolinians, including many faculty at the University, were suspicious of "sociology," readily equating it with "socialism" or other radicalism.⁷⁰ Under Odum's direction, the IRSS published dozens of studies and monographs, as well as the journal *Social Forces*. The IRSS brought acclaim, along with its share of controversy, to the University of North Carolina, launching UNC as a center of social science research.⁷¹ Amy Wells, a scholar of higher education, has pointed out that the IRSS grants and similar grants to the Universities of Virginia and Texas "brought momentum to these state universities precisely when they need it to bolster their research efforts."⁷²

As the man at the center of a southern network of researchers and reformers, Odum envisioned himself and his colleagues as publicly engaged intellectuals who would help chart the future course of the state and the region. In Odum's plans, UNC's social science program would help change social attitudes of southern leaders as well as southern commoners.⁷³ Odum unquestionably saw himself as the coordinator of all these efforts. Although he worked closely with state officials and served as a consultant to the state Board, he did not see himself as beholden to their desires. Odum had his own ideas about what the region needed. At the same time, he and the Institute served as mediators between the public and philanthropic foundations.

not until 1929 that the University made a regular budget appropriation to the Institute, and then it was only \$4,500. Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, 105.

⁷⁰ Branson to John Sprunt Hill, 9 Sept. 1919, Eugene Cunningham Branson Papers, UNC, quoted in Wayne D. Brazil, *Howard W. Odum: The Building Years, 1884-1930* (New York: Garland, 1988), 369. Also see *ibid.*, 357.

⁷¹ The biggest controversy involved the Institute's research into conditions in North Carolina's textile industry.

⁷² Amy E. Wells, "Considering Her Influence: Sydnor H. Walker and Rockefeller Support for Social Work, Social Scientists, and Universities in the South," in *Women and Philanthropy in Education*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 136.

⁷³ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, 355.

They brought together all parties in ways that served their disparate but mutually reinforcing needs. The LSRM and the Rockefeller Foundation were interested in promoting cutting-edge social science research, but were equipped only to provide money to other parties. North Carolina's state welfare officials knew they had problems, but had neither the personnel nor the financial resources to experiment with solutions. Odum was the missing link. He put state officials and Rockefeller staff in touch, and he organized the academics and professionals to propose and research solutions. Nevertheless, tensions simmered between UNC's academic research aims and the Board's practical needs.

Portraits of Welfare Professionals: Mary G. Shotwell and Wiley B. Sanders

During the 1920s, Johnson oversaw a staff that included, on average, nine "executive" members (including two part-time staff) and three clerical employees. The staff grew nearly continually throughout the decade, from four full-time executive staff and three clerical staff in September, 1921, to nine full-time executive staff and four clerical staff in June, 1930. During those years, thirty-one people worked for the Board, some part-time for a short period, others full-time for several years. Apart from the clerical staff of nine women, twenty-two people worked for Board at some point during the 1920s, including ten men and twelve women. Men and women tended to work in different types of jobs, although there was some overlap, as well as a gradual feminization of the staff.⁷⁴ Brief biographical sketches of two representative employees, Mary G. Shotwell and Wiley B. Sanders, illuminate differences between male and female staff and suggest the range of experiences and training that new employees brought to the Board, as well as the diverging career paths they followed when they left the Board's employ.

⁷⁴ These generalizations are made from staff lists in board Reports, 1921-1930, board bulletins, and Johnson's reports to the board, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

One of Johnson's first hires was a new head of the child welfare division. For several months during the summer of 1921, the Child Welfare League of America had lent the services of Grace Reeder, whose time as Assistant Superintendent of the New York Orphanage made her a valuable resource for a special study the Board conducted.⁷⁵ Johnson hoped to hire Reeder permanently, but in the fall of 1921 she left to take a job in New Jersey.⁷⁶ As Johnson searched for a replacement, she weighed two alternatives: should she prioritize training and experience and hire a social worker like Reeder, or should she find a local, but untrained, social worker? There was little chance of finding someone who was both local and experienced.

Johnson's instinct was to choose a known quantity, someone within state lines: Mary G. Shotwell, a native of Oxford, North Carolina, and a 1906 graduate of Trinity College who had risen through the ranks of the state's educators to become a supervisor of rural schools, then an assistant superintendent.⁷⁷ During the war, Shotwell jumped into war work, first as head of the Lenoir County woman's committee of the Council on National Defense and then as the field director for the federal government's war loan organization. In the war's aftermath, she advanced to a position with Fifth Federal Reserve District in Richmond, Virginia.⁷⁸ Johnson

⁷⁵ Reeder's father was the superintendent of the Hastings orphanage, but her position there was not mere nepotism; she had a degree in sociology from Columbia. Johnson to McAlister, 23 Apr. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921; Johnson to Mr. J. P. Cook [Jackson training school], 12 June 1922, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1922-1923.

⁷⁶ Kesler to Johnson, 19 Aug. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁷⁷ "Trinity," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 Oct. 1906; "Child Welfare Director Named," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 25 Sept. 1921.

⁷⁸ "Thrift Workers Meet Hearty Reception," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 17 Aug. 1919; "Miss Mary G. Shotwell Takes up Her New Work," *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 Jan. 1920.

probably knew Shotwell because of her own work with Liberty Loans and through Shotwell's occasional appearances at the state Conference for Social Service.⁷⁹

Johnson reached out to her advisors on the Board for opinions about whether she should hire Shotwell for child welfare work. She explained her dilemma: "to get a trained person, so far as I have been able to find, we would have to go outside the State," and there would follow six months or year of "experiment" while the person made local contacts, became "acquainted with local conditions," and proved "adaptable to North Carolina plans and conditions." The heads of other state agencies advised Johnson that "they have found it better to take local people who are capable and tactful and gradually train them to do their jobs rather than to experiment with outsiders." Johnson concluded that "in looking over the field of material available in North Carolina I think probably Miss Shotwell is as good a person as we could get for this position." Shotwell could start by helping with county organization work, and spend some time "studying child welfare and getting the technical knowledge that she needs."⁸⁰

Members of the Board agreed. Lingle, who had known Shotwell for years, praised her and remarked that "while in some accounts it would be well to have an older woman, in other accounts it is better to have one young enough to learn."⁸¹ McAlister "heartily" concurred "with the general policy of employing local people, even if they do not have the necessary experience, for if they have the qualifications the experience will come."⁸² In Kesler's view, "it is much

⁷⁹ Shotwell presented about rural schools at the 1916 and 1918 CSS conventions; 1916 and 1918 conference programs in 1918 conference in CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical Material – Dr. Poe; and "Social events in North Carolina – Kinston," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Mar. 1918.

⁸⁰ Johnson to McAlister, 8 Sept. 1921 (copy of this letter sent to each member of the board), State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁸¹ Lingle to Johnson, undated [Sept. 1921], State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁸² McAlister to Johnson, 9 Sept. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

better to put in the field a good woman with good sense and culture and love of the work and let her learn it on her own soil and among the people she knows than to import even a trained worker who may spend many months before she is even acquainted with our situation.”⁸³ When Johnson announced the news of Shotwell’s appointment, the public reaction was favorable. Shotwell’s name was familiar to people around the state because of her war work. One paper noted the similarity of child welfare work to the educational field, in which “Miss Shotwell's experience and ability are generally recognized.”⁸⁴

By all accounts, Shotwell did succeed. Her main duties were to license, inspect, and advise orphanages and other child-caring institutions. Her talent for and experience in teaching, administration, and public speaking served her well. There is no record of her leaving the state for additional training, as Johnson had done when she joined the Board. Presumably Shotwell was able to draw directly from Johnson’s experience and familiarity with the field for the necessary “technical knowledge.” Her recommendations to orphanages in her 1922 report reflected best practices at the time, including supervising organized playtime, hiring trained instructors of home economics, and adopting the “cottage system” (housing children in numerous smaller units rather than a single massive building).⁸⁵ In fact, Shotwell’s success may have convinced Commissioner Johnson that her hunch was correct—untrained local people were a safer bet than trained outsiders.⁸⁶

⁸³ Kesler to Johnson, 9 Sept. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921. For the other Board members, see Blair to Johnson, 9 Sept. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923; and Mrs. Walter F. Woodard to Johnson, 11 Sept. 1921, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1920-1921.

⁸⁴ Child Welfare Director Named,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 25 Sept. 1921.

⁸⁵ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 26-27.

⁸⁶ Many of the staff Johnson hired after Shotwell were insiders, although some had more relevant training and experience than Shotwell.

Shotwell embraced social welfare causes during the years she worked for the Board. In Oxford, she had enjoyed active membership in a woman's club, and after her move to the capital city she joined the Raleigh Woman's Club. She quickly became chair of its Social Service Department. By 1922, the Raleigh Woman's Club had over five hundred members, and the social service department alone had eleven committees, so Shotwell was well connected to a bustling network of reform-minded women. As chair, she coordinated the efforts of committees and helped organize public lectures on social hygiene and "the state's duty to her mental defectives."⁸⁷ She also worked with the other leading clubwomen to improve privacy and sanitation for women at the city jail.⁸⁸

In September, 1925, Shotwell moved to New York to study for a year at Columbia University, then officially resigned from the North Carolina Board in July 1926 to take a job as a counselor with the child welfare department of the Public Education Association of New York.⁸⁹ She later joined the staff of the National Youth Administration and in 1941 was named its southern regional director, overseeing programs and activities for girls in eleven southern states.⁹⁰ In the early 1950s she retired and returned to Oxford, North Carolina, where she remained an active member of the Federation of Women's Clubs for the next decade.⁹¹

⁸⁷ On the latter subject, Harry W. Crane was the speaker. *Raleigh Woman's Club yearbook, 1922-1923*, 22, in Denson Papers, Box 2, Folder: Yearbooks, Programs, By laws.

⁸⁸ Minutes, 6 Mar. 1924, in Woman's Club of Raleigh Records (State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC; hereafter WCR Records), Box 2, Folder: General Meeting Minutes, 1923-1924.

⁸⁹ "Miss Shotwell Has Resigned," *Greensboro Record*, 22 June 1926; McAlister to Johnson, 14 May 1925, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 10: 1924-1926; Commissioner's report to Board, July 1925, for fiscal year ending June 30, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

⁹⁰ "Miss Shotwell Named NYA Regional Director," *Greensboro Daily News*, 15 Mar. 1941, 3.

⁹¹ "Conference scheduled at UNC," *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 Jan. 1953; "State News in Brief – Women to Organize," *Greensboro Record*, 7 Jan. 1964.

Shotwell's career illustrates several characteristics of the Board's dozen female "executives" during its first decade. Only three of them were married. Many of them probably worked because they needed money to support themselves. As a group, these women had little prior experience as social welfare professionals, but instead were native North Carolinians who brought strong local networks and experiences as educators or, through women's clubs, as social service volunteers and administrators. War work had exposed some of them to wider public roles. They continued their volunteer social service efforts after they began their professional careers, using their new networks to bring projects and speakers to their club colleagues.

They went through varying degrees of in-service training after joining the state Board staff. Some, like Shotwell, absorbed social work techniques from their colleagues. Others went to New York for training, such as Katherine Holding, who joined the Board as a stenographer in 1921, then got a scholarship to take a course in child welfare at Columbia University before taking on mother's aid work in 1924.⁹² Many of the staff members joined UNC faculty as instructors during summer public welfare institutes, but only one female staff member had an advanced degree: Emeth Tuttle, Director of Mother's Aid and Case Work beginning in 1921, had a master's degree from Columbia.⁹³

Although most women stayed with the Board only a few years, when they left it was to take other positions in the field of social welfare. Emeth Tuttle resigned in 1927, at age 42, to marry newspaperman George F. Cochran, but she taught case work in colleges wherever they moved across the South—in Virginia, Florida, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina.⁹⁴ Lucy

⁹² *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 8. Mary Frances Camp took six weeks of training at New York School of Social Work in her move from superintendent of Harnett county to director of county organization. "Miss Camp Joins Staff of Board of Public Welfare," *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 6 (June 1925): 1.

⁹³ Johnson to McAlister, 1 Sept. 1926, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1924-1926.

⁹⁴ "Mrs. Emeth Cochran Passes at Asheboro," *Greensboro Daily News*, 22 Dec. 1940.

F. Lay, who became the Board's publicity director in 1925 as a young graduate of UNC's journalism program, went on in 1928 to become Director of Publicity for the National Conference of Social Work.⁹⁵ For many women, the exposure to professional social work on the Board redefined their lives and careers.

The Board's male employees during the 1920s were a rather different lot, as the case of Wiley Benton Sanders illustrates. Born in 1898, Sanders was raised in a series of small towns in piedmont Georgia, with a minister for a father.⁹⁶ By 1920, he had moved to Chapel Hill to complete a master's degree in sociology, studying "mal-adaptation to environment" and focusing first on poor relief in North Carolina.⁹⁷ Perhaps as an extension of his research, he was appointed part-time Superintendent of Public Welfare for Orange County, surrounding Chapel Hill.⁹⁸ In the spring of 1921, he also began doing some work for the state Board. Some of his research, including a study of children at Jackson Training School, was published as part of a special bulletin on child welfare in December 1921, but he also served as a general "inspector."⁹⁹ His duties included acting as the Board's "special representative" on a two-week fact-finding

⁹⁵ *BPCW Report, 1926-1928*, 16.

⁹⁶ Atticus B. Sanders in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 Federal Population Census Schedule for Fulton County, Buckhead District, Georgia, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Population Census Schedule for Wilkes County, 164-Militia District, Georgia; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 Federal Population Census Schedule for Hancock County, Sparta Twp, Georgia.

⁹⁷ *University of North Carolina Record, No. 188 (August 1921): Research in Progress, July 1920-July 1921*, 52-53, accessed 27 Feb. 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=sg8YAQAIAAJ>.

⁹⁸ "List of County Superintendents of Public Welfare as of November 30, 1920," *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 65; Johnson to Sanders, 21 April 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

⁹⁹ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 11. On Sanders's participation in study of Jackson, see Johnson to Mr. J. P. Cook [Jackson training school], 12 June 1922, State Board Corr, Box 2, Folder: 1922-1923.

mission to several mountain counties during which he investigated institutional conditions and met with local officials about their juvenile courts and welfare programs—or lack thereof.¹⁰⁰

Although Wiley Sanders was already deep into his work for a masters' degree in sociology, Johnson deemed it worthwhile for him to have additional training in public welfare administration. The Board paid for Sanders to take three quarters of coursework and fieldwork at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Social Service Administration, intending for him to bring his new expert knowledge back to benefit the state. Sanders enjoyed his time in Chicago, apparently working hard at his courses and doing more fieldwork than required. He took courses in "social pathology," "social origins," and the "history of sociology" in his first term, telling Johnson that they were "interesting, but I am primarily concerned with the practical aspects of social work, as you know."¹⁰¹ His next term was more satisfying, as it included "advanced case work," "public welfare administration," and "the child and the state." The latter two courses he took with Sophonisba Breckinridge, a founder of the school and a luminary of the settlement house movement and the Progressive movement generally.¹⁰² Johnson encouraged Sanders and was pleased by his "interesting work" in Chicago, but betrayed fears of inadequacy when she joked, "Please don't learn too much while you are out there in Chicago. We will all be

¹⁰⁰ See Johnson to Sanders, n.d. [early June 1921]; Sanders to Johnson, 14 Aug. 1921; Sanders to Johnson, 19 Aug. 1921; and Sanders to Johnson, 22 Aug. 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

¹⁰¹ Sanders to Johnson, 11 Dec. 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

¹⁰² Sanders to Johnson, 19 Feb. 1922, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

so overawed by your superior knowledge and advantages when you come back that we may not be able to keep up with you.”¹⁰³

Every chance he had, Sanders visited institutions and observed the municipal court system at work. He was fascinated by the urban environment and the corollary complexities of Chicago’s social service agencies, and he tried to absorb every aspect of urban social work. On one memorable night, he accompanied an officer from the city’s Social Hygiene Board on a visit to two cabarets, where they “obtained first hand evidence” of “immoral dancing” and “got a pint of whisky” as proof of illegal liquor sales. He told Johnson that “The trip gave me an insight into life in the underworld in Chicago and showed me quite convincingly where the immoral girl gets her first start.”¹⁰⁴ At the same time, he longed for North Carolina. He believed that “Social work in a city with its multitude of social agencies is much easier on the whole than in the rural counties, but for myself I had much rather work in a rural state like NC than to hold any kind of position in a great city like Chicago.”¹⁰⁵

Sanders returned South in July 1922 to head the state board’s work in county organization but was already thinking of how his research there might count toward a PhD degree.¹⁰⁶ He took on other part-time work as the executive secretary of the state Conference for Social Service, and with their backing began a study of prison conditions and juvenile courts in

¹⁰³ Johnson to Sanders, 15 Dec. 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders to Johnson, 19 May 1922, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

¹⁰⁵ Sanders to Johnson, 11 Dec. 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

¹⁰⁶ On work in county organization, see notice of his resignation: Commissioner’s report to Board, 9 Oct. 1923, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925; on desire for work to count towards PhD, see Sanders to Johnson, 19 Feb. 1922, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

North Carolina.¹⁰⁷ His work with the Conference occupied so much of his time that Johnson asked McAlister whether the Conference could pay the bulk of his \$2,000 salary.¹⁰⁸ After receiving his master's degree, Sanders struck Johnson a greater blow in June 1923 by joining the faculty of UNC as an assistant professor of sociology, with teaching duties in the School of Public Welfare.¹⁰⁹ Knowing that Sanders's ultimate intention was to go to the University of Chicago to complete the work for his PhD, Johnson remained hopeful that Sanders could "be connected with the Board after he finishes his training."¹¹⁰ Unfortunately for the Board, Sanders never returned. With the exception of a year's study at Chicago to work towards his PhD, Sanders taught sociology, public administration, and social work at UNC until his retirement in 1963.¹¹¹

Sanders's career was in many ways typical for a male member of the Board's staff. To begin with, the Board seemed to have trouble recruiting "men social workers."¹¹² Several of the men associated with the Board worked only part-time or as advisors. They tended to have more education upon entering the Board's employment than the women. In fact, many of them came from academic backgrounds, and in particular from UNC. Under Odum, the sociology

¹⁰⁷ "Hold Social Service Conference Raleigh," *Charlotte Observer*, 20 Dec. 1922; *University of North Carolina Record*, No. 196 (July 1922): *Research in Progress, July 1921-July 1922*, 65-66, accessed 27 Feb. 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=sg8YAQAIAAJ>.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson to McAlister, 5 July 1922, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1922-1923.

¹⁰⁹ "Carolina Alumni Parade Campus," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 13 June 1923; *University of North Carolina Alumni Review* 11, no. 9 (June 1923), 248, accessed 3 Mar. 2013, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/alumnireview.html>; "Leonard Joins Charities Staff," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 10 Sept. 1923.

¹¹⁰ Commissioner's report to Board, 9 Oct 1923, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹¹¹ "Dr. Sanders, UNC Author, Dies at 75," *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 Aug. 1973; Register of the Officers and Faculty of the University of North Carolina 1795-1945, compiled by the staff of the North Carolina Collection, accessed 4 Mar. 2013, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/unc/faculty.html>.

¹¹² Leonard to Harper, 19 Dec. 1924, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 8: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1919-1928.

department invested considerable time, energy, and intellectual firepower in studying conditions in North Carolina. Moreover, the academic side of the sociology program and the practical realm of training social workers often overlapped. Several prominent UNC faculty members and their graduate students, including J. F. Steiner, Eugene C. Branson, and Roy M. Brown, as well as Odum and Sanders, combined theory, practice, and political advocacy in their scholarship. Finally, when male staff members left the Board, they moved into the academic world or other positions of greater authority. Roy M. Brown, a field agent from 1921 to 1925, resigned to take a position with the new Institute for Research in Social Science at UNC. Sam Leonard, who replaced Sanders as the director of county organization, left after two years when the East Carolina Training School recruited him as a new head. R. Eugene Brown, a graduate of the School of Public Welfare, joined the Board in 1925 and stayed longer than any other male employee, rising to become Assistant to the Commissioner in 1930.

The rapid departures of both Sanders and Shotwell were symptomatic of a larger problem for Johnson: she would hire untrained workers, spend months or years educating them about rural social welfare practices, sometimes with formal training, and lose the workers to other states. Part of the problem was that North Carolina could not—or would not—provide competitive salaries. In September 1926, shortly after Shotwell resigned, Johnson pointed out that the Wage and Salary Commission's decisions that spring had left her with a staff that was paid less than counterparts at other agencies. The commission, for example, capped the annual salary of Emeth Tuttle, Director of Mothers' Aid and Case-Work, at \$2400. Tuttle had a masters' degree from Columbia but drew no more pay than "some clerks" in other state departments, and women in "subordinate positions" in the department of education made as much as \$3000. Out of loyalty to the state, Tuttle had recently turned down an offer from

Pennsylvania's department of public welfare. But other staff, like Shotwell, did leave. Johnson fumed to McAlister, "I do not see why among other duties we should be expected to act as a training school for other departments and institutions that have the means of providing better salaries."¹¹³

Superintendents of Public Welfare: The Heart of the County-Unit Plan

While Johnson struggled with staff shortages and low salaries in Raleigh, she also had to consider the network of county welfare officials who were the real heart of the state's growing welfare system, the fundamental building block of the new "county unit" welfare plan. If Johnson had a problem retaining staff in the state office, the problem was far worse in the counties, which were plagued by near-constant turnover. And finding qualified workers for the state's one hundred counties was nearly impossible. State officials decided early on that hiring and training native workers familiar with North Carolina's customs was preferable to importing trained outsiders, but ensuring adequate training was a challenge from the start.

The 1919 revision to the state's welfare law required larger counties to employ a full-time county superintendent of public welfare. In other counties, the superintendent of schools was required to serve the legal function of superintendent of public welfare.¹¹⁴ According to the law, the state Board had only the power to approve the appointments of superintendents; the initial choice rested in the hands of county commissioners and boards of education. This change left Commissioner Beasley and the state Board with dozens of possibly unwilling students.

¹¹³ Johnson to McAlister, 1 Sept. 1926, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1924-1926.

¹¹⁴ Initially, counties with a population of 25,000 or more required to have a full-time superintendent; this figure was later increased to 32,000, probably as an attempt by reactionary legislators to limit the number of counties required to hire full-time workers.

Beasley and the state Board printed a small pamphlet to help explain the requirements of the new law to county officials who were charged with selecting and paying a welfare superintendent. It described the duties of county superintendents and boards of public welfare and also included a brief article by UNC professor Eugene C. Branson about the meaning of public welfare. In a section entitled “general considerations,” Beasley reminded county officials that they were responsible for leading “intelligent public sentiment” about local social problems. He focused on local action and perhaps tried to allay fears of increased government power: “It is not the intention of the State Board to try to force the counties in any way. While the State Board will lend all the assistance and advice it can, the fact remains that every community must work out its own salvation and meet its own peculiar difficulties.”¹¹⁵ In describing superintendents’ qualifications, Beasley and his staff emphasized common sense and basic competence rather than training. They told county officials, “When trained men cannot be secured, a suitable young man of energy and good judgment who can and will quickly learn should be secured. Natural talent and capacity are more [important] than minute training just at this time.”¹¹⁶

Indeed, the first superintendents appointed must have been hired more for their sex and their common sense than for their training. Only two of the superintendents appointed in 1919 and 1920 had served on their county welfare boards before the reorganization in 1917, and these two—F.M. Eason of Camden County and F.A. Edmonson of Avery County—served in both capacities because of their jobs as superintendents of schools.¹¹⁷ Some of the superintendents

¹¹⁵ Pamphlet, “The Organization and Principles of Public Welfare Work In North Carolina,” (Raleigh: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, n.d. [1919]), at the North Carolina Collection, 11-12.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁷ This calculation is based on my database of lists of county superintendents and county welfare boards, with data pulled from the following places (*BCPW Report, 1915* (118-123), *BCPW Report, 1916* (108-111), and *BCPW*

had a long-standing interest in social service. Six were ministers, and many had prior experience with the Red Cross, the YMCA, Kiwanis Clubs, and other community service organizations.¹¹⁸ Others had no clear connection to social welfare beyond an interest in education. Lucius Ranson, for example, was a graduate of the University of North Carolina who taught at the Horner Military Academy in Charlotte before he became the superintendent of Mecklenburg County around 1919.¹¹⁹ Another telling portrait comes courtesy of Margaret Brietz, who spent five years working in Winston-Salem as a probation officer for Forsyth County. She described Joseph L. Rodwell, the superintendent appointed in 1920, as a “retired hardware dealer with a High School education. . . He was a general, patient, kindly soul, who literally worked himself to death doing isolated case investigations. He worked tirelessly and patiently, many hours each day, but the cases never seemed to get anywhere. His frail health sapped his initiative, and [he] had no conception of organization in the field of social work. Although interested, he never seemed to grasp the heart of the problem, or to have the office under organized direction.”¹²⁰ Like

Report, 1920 (65-67); *Public Welfare Progress* 2, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1919): 28-29; and *Public Welfare Progress* 2, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1919): 45-46.

¹¹⁸ “County Superintendents of Public Welfare, December 1, 1919,” *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1919): 45-46; and typed tally sheet, n.d. [1922], Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 2, Folder 15: Tabulation of Questionnaires.

¹¹⁹ On teaching at Horner, see William May Hunter, *The Hunter Family: The Generation of Henry Hunter* (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1920), excerpted at Roots Web, accessed 5 Feb. 2013, <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=3257731&id=I151493>.

¹²⁰ Margaret C. Brietz, “Case Studies of Delinquent Girls in North Carolina” (MA thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1927). Margaret Brietz was a UNC sociology student who was observing the workings of the welfare department as part of her masters’ thesis. Brietz did not indicate which city she was describing, naming it only as an industrial city in the foothills of the mountains with a population around 77,000 in 1926. Winston-Salem matches these characteristics, and her description of staff turnover matches BCPW records for Forsyth. Rodwell also matches her description of the unnamed superintendent. See Rodwell, Joseph L., U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910 and 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule for Forsyth County, Winston Twp, North Carolina; also *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 65, and *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 97.

Rodwell, many superintendents had little training or education; in 1922, seven superintendents had only an elementary school education, and only sixteen had a college degree.¹²¹

Almost as soon as the state board began certifying county superintendents, the question arose of whether a woman could be appointed to the position. In 1919, women did not have the vote, nor the ability to hold public office in North Carolina, except as members of local school boards. In the area of county boards, Beasley and the state Board were clear; they wrote in the 1919 pamphlet that despite the lack of legal requirement for women to serve on county boards of public welfare, their policy was to appoint one woman and two men to each board. On the gender of superintendents they made no statements. The pamphlet's language, however, indicates that the Board assumed superintendents would be male. Within the same paragraph, they wrote, "Women are now leading in everything in the nature of community progress, and not only should they be represented on the board, but should have a leading influence in all measures designed for the public welfare and improvement"; then, "with a suitable *man* for county superintendent, and with a devoted county board of charities and public welfare, a county will be able to take care of its social problems in a constructive and efficient way Board policy."¹²² The Board's language seems almost to open the way for a marriage of sorts, with superintendent as husband and the county board as devoted wife. Similarly, UNC professor Eugene C. Branson called for women to lead the way in the great campaign to educate the public about public welfare—"because public welfare work is social housekeeping and men lack the housekeeping instincts"—but assumed that county welfare agents would be men.¹²³

¹²¹ Typed tally sheet, n.d. [1922], Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 2, Folder 15: Tabulation of Questionnaires.

¹²² "The Organization and Principles of Public Welfare Work In North Carolina," 5 (my emphasis).

¹²³ E. C. Branson, "County Responsibility for Public Welfare," *BCPW Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (Apr.-June, 1918): 11.

Despite the state Board's assumptions, officials in several counties named women as their superintendents. In mid-summer 1919 several Board members discussed the situation with Beasley. Clara Lingle wrote in June that "Several people want to know if women may serve as county superintendent of public welfare. I understand they can not, which is a pity because we could get better women than men for the purpose, especially where we have to take untrained ones."¹²⁴ A few weeks later Alexander W. McAlister told Beasley that Guilford County officials had selected Mrs. Blanche Carr as superintendent. McAlister had thought the Board would select a man, but he was delighted, since he knew Carr well from her work as the secretary of Greensboro's major social service organization, the (private) Board of Public Welfare.¹²⁵ Beasley responded that the only position the Board could take was to "endorse or reject the qualifications of a woman just as if she were a man," and see if anyone objected.¹²⁶ By the end of the year, Rowan, Craven, Camden, and Edgecombe counties had also elected female superintendents.¹²⁷

County officials probably appointed these five women to official positions for a variety of reasons. On one hand, the complete lack of trained social workers meant that everyone was equally unqualified for the position. On the other hand, many women had been involved in benevolent work through women's clubs, churches, or civic associations, in some cases making careers of their volunteer work and wartime activities. If the standard was common sense and social service experience, some women beat their male counterparts.

¹²⁴ Lingle to Beasley, 5 June 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

¹²⁵ McAlister to Beasley, 14 July 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

¹²⁶ Beasley to McAlister, 15 July 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1919.

¹²⁷ *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 65-67.

“The Good Heart Needs a Trained Head”: Social Work Training and the School of Public Welfare¹²⁸

By November 1920, thirty counties had appointed a full-time superintendent. Nineteen counties employed only part-time superintendents. Twenty-three other counties directed their superintendent of schools to take control of the poor funds and probation work, as the law dictated.¹²⁹ Beasley and his small staff struggled with ways to educate their new colleagues about the work to be done. In addition to the small pamphlet the Board circulated to the public at large, Beasley wrote a forty-one page manual for new superintendents that described the basic elements of case work, specified proper record-keeping procedures, and provided sample case files.¹³⁰ He sent new superintendents copies of recent Board reports to give them a sense of the work.¹³¹ Beasley, and Johnson after him, also used the quarterly *Bulletin* to refine and publicize their ideas of superintendents’ duties and to educate superintendents about best practices in other states.¹³² In one case, they used the example of a model official, A. S. McFarlane of Forsyth County, to educate and perhaps inspire other officials.¹³³ In another issue, Beasley laid out

¹²⁸ “Correspondence Course,” n.d., Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): Correspondence Course in Family Problems, 1922-1924.

¹²⁹ The biennial report of 1918-1920 gave numbers that conflicted with the list of superintendents in the same publication. The numbers cited above implied that thirty counties had no superintendent whatsoever, and a list of superintendents in each county indicated that about a dozen counties had no superintendent. *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 12 and 65-67.

¹³⁰ Roland F. Beasley, *Program of Work for County Superintendents of Public Welfare, including Instructions in Method and Procedure of Keeping Records* (Raleigh: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1919), accessed 5 Feb. 2013, <https://archive.org/details/programofworkfor00nort>.

¹³¹ Blair to Denson, 10 July 1918, State Board Corr., Box 1, Folder: W. A. Blair, 1918-1923.

¹³² For example, see “Mrs. Johnson to County Superintendents of Public Welfare,” *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1919): 18-20. Every issue of the bulletin was relevant to county superintendents, but some issues focused particularly on educating them about the basics. See *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (Jan.-Apr. 1919) and *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1919): 2-6.

¹³³ “Year’s Work done by County Superintendent of Public Welfare in Forsyth,” *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1919): 5-7.

fifteen case studies of neglected children and analyzed officials' responses.¹³⁴ Case work was the basis for professional social work, and case studies were often the foundation of classroom instruction in social work, as a precursor to supervised fieldwork experiences. To supplement these written materials, Beasley also invited superintendents to attend the annual meeting of the state Conference for Social Service in March 1920, although he had no funds to encourage them to come.¹³⁵ There, they had the chance to hear the usual mix of local and national speakers, including Edward T. Devine, the editor of the *Survey*. Beasley presided over the superintendents as they shared their “experiences in this new work” with the convention attendees, and he also asked them to stay in Goldsboro after the convention for a day-long session.¹³⁶ He followed up with a series of circular letters and sample forms instructing superintendents in the details of record-keeping and other procedures.¹³⁷

Still, circular letters, quarterly bulletins, and one-day workshops did not produce expert social workers. And although the law specified no qualifications for county superintendents, the essence of the new “public welfare” was to employ trained workers. Because the Board had the authority to certify superintendents—or deny them certification—Beasley and Johnson hoped to work gradually toward a more highly trained corps of workers. Even before the new law took effect, Board members were contemplating ways to train county workers and bring them in line

¹³⁴ “‘Delinquent and Neglected’ – Whose Fault?” *BCPW Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1919): 10-15.

¹³⁵ Beasley to county superintendents, 11 Mar. 1920, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

¹³⁶ Clara Lingle, “Eighth Annual Meeting of North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” *BCPW Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1920): 3-5; 1920 conference program, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Subject File: Conference for Social Service, Box 169, Folder: n.d., 1913-1933, NC CSS.

¹³⁷ Beasley to county superintendents, 9 Apr. 1920; Beasley to county superintendents, 28 Apr. 1920; and Beasley to superintendents, 4 Nov. 1920, all in BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

with the state's desires and standards. While they paid lip service to the need for local autonomy and understood the pull of local politics, they also needed county superintendents to function as part of a coordinated statewide effort. Increasing the standards for superintendents would have the salutary effect, they hoped, of improving their performance, which in turn would help prove the worth—in literal terms—of welfare agents.

North Carolina's desire for trained social workers reflected a national trend but also highlighted shortcomings in existing social work models. In the 1920s and 1930s, government agencies began to require professional training in "social work." Schools of social work sprang up to serve the swelling ranks of would-be social workers who hoped to establish their credentials. In 1919, seventeen schools of social work were affiliated with the Association of Professional Schools of Social Work (later renamed the American Association of Schools of Social Work), which served as an accrediting agency. For residents of North Carolina, however, few options were readily available. Most of these schools were in the Northeast and Midwest, and only two were in the South.¹³⁸

Moreover, the field of professional social work was born in an urban environment, and most social work training was based on urban case work. Although North Carolina had a few

¹³⁸ Lyda Gordon Shivers, "The Social Welfare movement in the South: A Study in Regional Culture and Social Organization" (PhD diss., UNC-Chapel Hill, 1935), 207-209. The Southern School of Social Sciences and Public Service in New Orleans was the first social work training program in the South. It was formally organized in 1917, with limited course offerings. Not until 1921 was the program formally established as a one-year training program at Tulane. Tulane later developed a Masters program with Rockefeller funding. See Nili Tannenbaum and Michael Reisch, "From Charitable Volunteers to Architects of Social Welfare: A Brief History of Social Work," *Ongoing Magazine* (Fall 2001) <<http://www.ssw.umich.edu/ongoing/fall2001/briefhistory.html>> (8 Mar. 2013); and John A. Kayser, "The Early History of Racially Segregated, Southern Schools of Social Work Requesting or Receiving Funds from the Rockefeller Philanthropies and the Responses of Social Work Educators to Racial Discrimination," Grant-in-Aid Report to the Rockefeller Archive Center, 2005, accessed 8 Mar. 2013, www.rockarch.org/publications/resrep/kayser.pdf. In addition to these schools, the Richmond School of Social Work and Public Health opened in 1917 as "the first of its kind in the South," but it seems not to have been accredited and focused in its early years more on training public health nurses and Red Cross workers. Henry Horace Hibbs, *A History of the Richmond Professional Institute* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet and Shepperson for the RPI Foundation, 1973), 13-25 (quote 25), accessed 8 Mar. 2013, <http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/rpi/id/167>.

cities with typical urban social problems, many of its citizens lived in rural poverty. North Carolina, and the rest of the rural South, needed social workers trained specifically for work in rural areas.¹³⁹ Beyond knowing the basics of case work, social workers in rural counties needed a distinct set of skills to navigate local customs and combat rural poverty. Kate Burr Johnson argued that “to take a highly trained worker, accustomed to city work, where adequate facilities are available to handle practically any social problem, and put him in a small town or a rural community where the worker has not only to solve the problems, but be ingenious enough to make the facilities, is exceedingly discouraging to the worker.”¹⁴⁰ Of course, much of the training they desired was rather common-sense, such as teaching them to investigate cases on the poor rolls or making them aware of resources available in the state to help with crippled children.

The first attempt to offer in-depth education for social workers actually went far beyond the training of county welfare superintendents. In the September 1919, the University of North Carolina hosted a week-long “State and County Council” in Chapel Hill, the brainchild of Eugene C. Branson.¹⁴¹ For Branson, the Council was a natural outgrowth of his interest in rural social welfare and the “North Carolina Club,” which he had organized to study economic and social conditions in the state.¹⁴² For the Council, he brought together some of his Club stalwarts with scores of politicians and policymakers from around the state. The goal was to chart a new plan for the state’s public welfare, in the broadest sense of the term. Beasley and Branson sent

¹³⁹ *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 15.

¹⁴¹ Branson to Beasley, 23 May 1919; and Beasley to Branson, 26 May 1919, both in Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

¹⁴² In 1918, Branson’s *North Carolina Club News Letter* had a weekly circulation of 15,000. UNC Trustees minutes 22 Jan. 1918, Series 1, volume 12, 68

1800 invitations, including to all of the county welfare superintendents.¹⁴³ Almost three hundred “enthusiastic” people attended, from seventy-four counties.¹⁴⁴

Perhaps the most significant result of the Council was that several groups of people became interested in establishing a more permanent welfare training program. The State and County Council brought UNC to the attention of the Red Cross. In search of a new base for their regional summer training program, southeastern Red Cross officials approached the university in November 1919.¹⁴⁵ They offered to provide some staff salaries if the university would provide a director for courses in social work.¹⁴⁶ The new university president Harry Woodburn Chase, who was appointed in June 1919, had a background in educational psychology, and he envisioned a strong social science program as part of his larger plans for the expansion of the University.¹⁴⁷ With his leadership, UNC decided to offer “definite short courses of instruction” for “those concerned with the cause of public welfare in the State.”¹⁴⁸

The result was the School of Public Welfare, a cooperative venture founded in 1920. The Red Cross provided part of the salaries for two faculty members and a staff member for the first

¹⁴³ Branson to Beasley, 4 Sept. 1919; and Beasley to LR Wilson, 19 Aug. 1919, both in BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 10/36A, “Commissioner’s Office: Correspondence with State Agencies, Boards, and Commissions,” Folder 5: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

¹⁴⁴ Branson to Beasley, 19 Sept. 1919, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

¹⁴⁵ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, 346-350. Red Cross officials were dissatisfied with their current program at Emory and reportedly described UNC as “by far the most forward-looking institution in the South along these lines.” Beasley to Branson, 24 Nov. 1919, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

¹⁴⁶ Beasley to Branson, 24 Nov. 1919, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): General Correspondence, 1917-1922.

¹⁴⁷ Louis Round Wilson, “Harry Woodburn Chase,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William Stevens Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, 10-13.

¹⁴⁸ Chase’s report to trustees, UNC Trustees minutes, 27 Jan. 1920, Series 1, Vol. 12, 189-193.

three years as an incentive. Under Odum's direction, the School of Public Welfare drew its faculty from the departments of sociology, psychology, and economics to create a curriculum in rural social work. Odum and his UNC colleagues fashioned training from their own theoretical expertise and the experiences of North Carolina's welfare officials, who, along with other social welfare experts, gave guest lectures.¹⁴⁹ UNC intended to support the growth of public welfare by satisfying the need for workers trained in solving rural social problems.¹⁵⁰

Beginning in the fall of 1920, Odum planned to offer several programs of varying lengths and purposes. After a one-year course of "professional training," open only to college graduates, students would receive a certificate. A four-year baccalaureate course in social sciences was "especially adapted to those who wish to prepare for special leadership in educational and administrative work in this field." For "county superintendents who wish to work out their problems of study during a relatively short period," the School would arrange special courses only lasting a quarter. Courses were organized in broad fields such as "Industry," "Fieldwork," "The Family and the Individual," and "Methods of Organization and Administration," and all aimed for the "ideal of all-round and comprehensive preparation" for professional training.¹⁵¹ The University's extension bureau also offered correspondence courses and materials for workers who could not afford the trip to Chapel Hill.¹⁵² At least one such course, on family problems, was a joint effort between the Board and UNC. Board staff asked UNC's extension bureau to advertise the course to county superintendents and members of the Conference for

¹⁴⁹ UNC Trustees minutes, 15 June 1920, Series 1, Vol. 12, 232. See also Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, 14; Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, 352-3, 360.

¹⁵⁰ On Odum's vision for the School's public role, see Odum, "University Cooperation in Public Welfare," *BCPW Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (July-Sept 1920): 38-43.

¹⁵¹ Odum, "University Cooperation in Public Welfare."

¹⁵² Bell, "Social Work in Rural North Carolina," 10.

Social Service—the latter in hopes of drumming up enough participants to make the course worthwhile.¹⁵³

The School's most important contribution to the Board's training programs was its "summer institutes" for county superintendents of public welfare. For the first summer institute in 1920, twenty-two county workers attended the full six-weeks, and another ten dropped in for some part of the course.¹⁵⁴ This turnout was the result of weeks of publicity and pleading on Beasley's part. Many superintendents, already paying work-related expenses out of their salaries, could not afford to come, even though there was no tuition charge for the program. Beasley wrote to all of the county commissioners and boards of education, imploring them to provide their superintendent with \$75 to cover estimated travel and living expenses for the six-week program. He emphasized the practical benefits of the course and called the outlay an "investment" on behalf of the people.¹⁵⁵ To the superintendents, Beasley also underscored the possibility of forming new acquaintances. "It will be a tremendous help to you," he wrote one superintendent in May. "You really cannot afford not to go."¹⁵⁶ Some superintendents decided

¹⁵³ BPW Records, Commissioner's Office, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC (Chapel Hill): Correspondence Course in Family Problems, 1922-1924.

¹⁵⁴ Howard Odum, "University Cooperation in Public Welfare," 43. The course was also open to Red Cross workers and other social workers, such as secretaries of Associated Charities, but admission standards for non-superintendents were higher, with a college degree or equivalent experience required. Many superintendents did not have a college degree; they were admitted to the course by virtue of their office. Printed "preliminary announcement" for summer public welfare institutes, n.d. [1920], Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

¹⁵⁵ Circular letter from Beasley, 13 Apr. 1920, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

¹⁵⁶ Beasley to W.G. Penland, 20 May 1920, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

the program was worth paying their own way; one wrote to Beasley that “If I have to go at my own personal expense, I am determined to become efficient in serving the people.”¹⁵⁷

The students who converged on Chapel Hill in June were treated to lecturers from leading social work schools from across the country, including Columbia, Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, as well as UNC faculty and regional Red Cross officials.¹⁵⁸ Classes ran each day from 8 am to 4:30 pm, with a taxing schedule of six 50-minute lectures each morning and round table sessions in the afternoon. Morning lectures covered theories of rural sociology, family case work, rural economic, social problems, public health, and child welfare, while afternoon sessions tended to be focused on more practical matters such as superintendents’ duties, case work, and record-keeping.¹⁵⁹ The institutes also offered chances for the welfare workers to mingle and socialize, as during a swimming party and picnic at the 1923 institute.¹⁶⁰

These summer Institutes of Public Welfare were a mainstay of the state’s training program for its county workers.¹⁶¹ More county workers participated in subsequent years, especially as the duration of the program was reduced. By the third summer, welfare officials cut the sessions to two weeks, which allowed more students to attend.¹⁶² In 1924, the shorter two-week sessions drew forty county superintendents, plus another thirty-five attendees—

¹⁵⁷ F.L. Wilson to Beasley, 6 May 1920, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

¹⁵⁸ Printed “preliminary announcement” for summer public welfare institutes, n.d. [1920], Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

¹⁵⁹ Daily schedule of classes, 1920 summer school, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931.

¹⁶⁰ “Welfare Board to Hold School,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 15 July 1923.

¹⁶¹ On the importance of institute training and details of the 1922 program, see Kate Burr Johnson, “Institutes for Public Welfare,” *Journal of Social Forces* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1922): 28-30.

¹⁶² Johnson to Mr. J. P. Cook, 12 June 1922, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1922-1923.

probation officers, juvenile court judges, teachers, representatives of private agencies, and others.¹⁶³ By 1927, the institute was only a week long, and 150 social workers attended.¹⁶⁴ In 1926, UNC also began offering a correspondence course to continue the discussions that took place in person at the institutes. After Odum promoted the course during the summer institute, thirty county superintendents signed up for it in 1927-28.¹⁶⁵

By unwritten rule, only white social workers could attend the annual summer institutes. Courses were held on the racially segregated campus of the University of North Carolina, and at least one newspaper remarked with surprise when in 1925 a black man addressed the crowd in Gerrard Hall about “the negro in the state welfare program.”¹⁶⁶ More to the point, however, the goal of the institutes was to train county welfare officials, almost all of whom were white.¹⁶⁷ Beginning in 1925, the state held separate (and shorter) public welfare institutes for black social workers at black colleges. Although the institutes covered similar materials, they seemed to stress the need for ingenuity and resourcefulness among black social workers. The three-day institute in January 1927 brought over one hundred social workers to Winston-Salem Teachers’ College, and similar numbers attended the 1928 session at the North College for Negroes in Durham. These sessions, growing out of Jim Crow segregation, offer interesting moments of racial mixing. The “faculty” of the schools was nearly the same as at the white institutes, including most of the Board staff, Odum and other UNC faculty. The instructors also included

¹⁶³ “Mr. Cline Studied at Welfare School,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 22 July 1924. The Board reported slightly lower numbers for 1924, at 56 attendees. This may have been the number of students who completed the course or the end-of-course examination. *BCPW Report, 1924-1925*, 99.

¹⁶⁴ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 77.

¹⁶⁵ *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 79; and *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 78, 79.

¹⁶⁶ “Director Tells of Mothers Aid,” *Greensboro Record*, 26 July 1925.

¹⁶⁷ A few counties with urban areas also employed black social workers.

guests such as white female representatives of the North Carolina Interracial Commission, an associate justice of the state supreme court, and a lecturer from the American Social Hygiene Association.¹⁶⁸

As Johnson and her staff offered more training, they gradually codified and heightened standards for the quantity and quality of superintendents' social service training. A movement began at the 1921 summer institute to list general qualifications for superintendents, and the Conference for Social Service quickly endorsed this idea.¹⁶⁹ For Johnson, creating guidelines for certifying superintendents was another way to help battle local patronage politics. Johnson began working on a set of standards, but quickly ran up against the problem that some of the best superintendents would not qualify for the highest grade of certification because they lacked education.¹⁷⁰ Even worse, formal education seemed to her not to produce the best workers. One of the three PhD-holding superintendents in the state was incompetent and hostile to both record-keeping and letter-writing. On the other hand, another superintendent who had "less than sixteen months of school during his whole life" did "a very good piece of work in his county" and wrote excellent reports. Johnson lamented, "What are you going to do about standards when such a situation as this exists?"¹⁷¹ She was torn between the need for trained workers who understood

¹⁶⁸ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 105-107.

¹⁶⁹ Report of Special Institutes of Public Welfare, July 11-22 [1921], reprinted from North Carolina Club *News Letter*, 10, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: University of NC (CH): School of Public Administration, 1919-1931; *Public Welfare Progress* 2, no. 4 (Apr. 1922). The Board's charter gave the Board the right to approve (or veto) the appointments of welfare superintendents, but laying out clear standards allowed the Board to be more adamant about their decisions, as well as to educate county officials about their expectations.

¹⁷⁰ The first set of standards, the product of meetings with committees of superintendents and university officials, required four years of practical experience plus one to three quarters of training at an accredited professional social work school for a "Grade A" certificate. S. E. Leonard, "Certification of Superintendents of Public Welfare," *Social Forces* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1922): 30-31.

¹⁷¹ Johnson to J. B. Buell, 23 Aug. 1922, Corr. with Associations, Box 25, Folder: American Association of Social Workers, 1922-1924.

bureaucratic systems and her desire to find devoted workers willing to make sacrifices for the work, people “who heard a voice that said, ‘Even as you do it unto the least of these.’”¹⁷²

Johnson also had to consider emerging national standards for professional social workers. In 1922, the New-York-based American Association of Social Workers had only eight members in North Carolina, with no local chapter.¹⁷³ Johnson was simultaneously embarrassed and amused by the fact that she herself seemed not to qualify for membership, based on her limited experience and her brief education—in addition to her two years of college, she had taken only two summer courses, one in New York and one at UNC’s School of Public Welfare.¹⁷⁴ Association officials approved her membership application, however, probably anxious to have an organizer on the ground in North Carolina. They also seemed willing to bend the membership rules for other North Carolina social workers, recognizing that the circumstances in North Carolina differed greatly from those in the urban north. Johnson sent in her \$5 dues for the year and tried to recruit some of the eligible county workers as members.¹⁷⁵

Trying to walk the line between the ideal and the practical, Johnson and her staff settled on a flexible list of minimum requirements. In September 1923, they published a list of these qualifications in their monthly newsletter, *Public Welfare Progress*. In addition to tact, sympathy, good moral character, and good physical condition, new superintendents had to have a high school education, and preferably some college work. They also had to have shown a past

¹⁷² *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 15-16 (quote on 16). Johnson’s phrase was a reference to Matthew 25:31-46.

¹⁷³ J. B. Buell to Johnson, 24 Oct. 1922, Corr. with Associations, Box 25, Folder: American Association of Social Workers, 1922-1924.

¹⁷⁴ Johnson to Mr. Buell, 30 Oct. 1922, Corr. with Associations, Box 25, Folder: American Association of Social Workers, 1922-1924.

¹⁷⁵ Harry L. Hopkins to Johnson, 18 Oct. 1922; J. B. Buell to Johnson, 24 Oct. 1922; Johnson to Buell, 10 Nov 1922; Johnson to Buell, 12 Dec 1922, all in Corr. with Associations, Box 25, Folder: American Association of Social Workers, 1922-1924

interest in social work and be willing to come to summer training courses.¹⁷⁶ Within a month, Johnson had refused the appointments of four superintendents as unqualified: one for “immorality,” one for having been a “habitual drunkard” in the past (although apparently he was now reformed), and two who were “obviously” political appointments.¹⁷⁷ Surely some of the current superintendents did not qualify, but Johnson probably grandfathered them in. She had enough of a fight on her hands dealing with blowback from vetoing new appointments.¹⁷⁸ Over the next few years, state officials made minor adjustments to the qualifications. They began issuing certificates to superintendents who passed an exam at the end of the summer institutes,¹⁷⁹ and by May 1929 they upped the education requirement to “two years of college or its equivalent.”¹⁸⁰

The cumulative effect of the Board’s training programs and requirements is hard to judge. They certainly increased awareness about the importance of professional training for social workers. Newspapers reported on the summer institutes and the topics they covered, and Johnson regularly enclosed copies of minimum qualifications for superintendents in her circular letters to county officials.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, dozens of counties remained without welfare officers. In other counties, superintendents were unequal to the task. Recall Margaret Brietz’s description

¹⁷⁶ “Establish Standards,” *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 5 (Sept 1923): 1.

¹⁷⁷ Commissioner’s report to Board, 9 Oct. 1923, 5, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹⁷⁸ At least two newspapers demanded that the Board’s approval power be revoked, and Johnson feared a fight in the legislature. Commissioner’s report to Board, 9 Oct. 1923, 5, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹⁷⁹ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 8

¹⁸⁰ Johnson to [county commissioners and education boards], May 1929, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

¹⁸¹ See examples BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

of retired hardware dealer Joseph Rodwell, who served as Forsyth County superintendent until he died in 1924. His replacement was little better. A. W. Cline was a newspaper reporter with “neither training nor experience in social work.” Brietz reported that although Cline established a “much-needed filing system” and tried to cooperate with the state board, he had poor judgment, “poor insight into individual case problems,” and “does not understand child life... His program includes only the doing of isolated case investigations, of the deepest significance of which he is only partly aware, due to his utter lack of training in social theory.”¹⁸² If this was the situation in Forsyth County, home to Winston-Salem, the situation must have been worse in counties with fewer resources and less pressure from Progressive reformers.

Still, many superintendents, whose training helped get them started and make their work more efficient, took to their duties with vigor and passion. In one ten-month period, county workers from around the state reported doing a monumental amount of work. In total, they made 17,606 home visits, received 26,314 office visits, and traveled 263,660 miles as they made their rounds.¹⁸³ Their training taught them how to keep records of all this work and helped them understand the resources the state or private agencies could offer for a difficult case. Their new background in case work might help them quickly glean the essentials of a family’s situation before they had to jump back into their Ford to see the next client. Of less concrete value but no less importance, their training gave them a theoretical understanding of social problems as intertwined but preventable and shifted their mindset from charity to analysis.

¹⁸² Brietz, “Case Studies of Delinquent Girls,” 28-29.

¹⁸³ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 127.

Women on the Front Lines

The board's training standards, created to lift welfare appointments above local politics, had an unintended effect: they increased opportunities for women. Kate Burr Johnson was convinced that women were more effective social workers in some cases. When it came to dealing with delinquent girls, she thought the work should *only* be done by a woman.¹⁸⁴ The Board's qualifications left plenty of room for her to approve women as superintendents. Many female superintendents came from a teaching background, which many people saw as a complementary skill set, particularly since county superintendents were responsible for juvenile court work and enforcing school attendance. The Board also required an interest in social service activities that were often the domain of women including activities with the Red Cross, churches, and private charities. Women with a background in teaching and some history of volunteer work thus had an advantage over men with more business-oriented careers.

As professional standards increased, newly-trained women replaced older, untrained male welfare officers. In the state offices, women were a slim majority of the staff, and the Board even had "trouble in getting in touch with men social workers," as one staff member wrote in 1924; they had spent "two or three months in finding a man" during one recent search.¹⁸⁵ The Commissioners, the executives of the state's welfare programs, were women from 1921 through the 1960s. When the county-level system was put in place, men at first vastly outnumbered women. Of the eighty-nine county superintendents in November, 1920, only five were women.

¹⁸⁴ "Women's Clubs to Aid Child Welfare," 4 Sept. 1920, clipping [from *Raleigh News and Observer*?] in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

¹⁸⁵ Sam Leonard to Dr. W.A. Harper, 19 Dec. 1924, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 8: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1919-1928. In this case, however, the Board eventually turned down the applicant, S. M. Smith. Johnson told him it was because of possible budget cuts, but she also seemed to doubt his credentials, and almost immediately she hired two other people to fill positions in the divisions of county organizing and institutional inspections. See Johnson to W. A. Harper, 15 Apr. 1925; Harper to Johnson, 17 Apr. 1925, and Johnson to S.M. Smith, 15 May 1925, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 8; and Commissioner's report to Board, July 1925, for fiscal year ending June 30, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, folder 4.

As the Board increased its professional standards, more women found appointments. Less than a year after the Board published its set of standards in September 1923, there was a jump in the number of female superintendents: twenty women served as superintendent in June 1926, including two women who did so in their roles as superintendents of schools in Dare and Currituck counties. Even more striking, among the fifty full-time welfare superintendents, more than a third were women.¹⁸⁶ By 1932, fully half of the state's sixty county superintendents of public welfare were women, and by 1944, that number had reached sixty-four percent.¹⁸⁷ Women became even more dominant in the rank-and-file. By 1926, most of the counties with urban areas employed multiple workers: assistant superintendents, probation officers, or "colored workers." That year, about three-quarters of these other workers were women.¹⁸⁸ By 1941, ninety percent of the caseworkers were women, most of them white.¹⁸⁹

The professional opportunities for women in local and state welfare offices stand in contrast to the state's public health programs, which developed in parallel. In both fields, women faced tension between feminine and professional authority. But as a newer professional field, public welfare offered women greater chances to control the administration of programs at

¹⁸⁶ *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 82-84.

¹⁸⁷ *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 59-61; and *BCPW Report, 1942-1944*, 112-14.

¹⁸⁸ Of the nineteen workers, fourteen were women. Seven of these nineteen workers were black, six women and one man. *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 82-84.

¹⁸⁹ In a 1941 thesis, UNC sociology student Anne Tillinghast analyzed the backgrounds of the state's 447 county social workers, including local superintendents of public welfare, child welfare workers, caseworkers, and case work aides. Approximately four hundred other social workers were employed in the state's welfare offices in Raleigh, at state institutions, as parole officers, or in private social work agencies such as the Red Cross or the YWCA. The caseworkers were overwhelmingly middle-class. The average caseworker in 1941 made \$1210 to \$1360 a year, solidly within the range of the average income nationwide. Most held a college degree and many had previous experience as teachers or clerical workers. Anne Williams Tillinghast, "A Statistical Study of The Social Work Personnel in the North Carolina County Departments of Public Welfare, November 1941" (MA Thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1943), 41, Table 22, "Distribution of Social Workers in NC County Departments of Public Welfare, by Class of Positions and Salary, November 1941."

all bureaucratic levels. By contrast, public health, with its roots in the medical profession, offered female staff less autonomy. The male-dominated medical profession controlled the State Board of Health from its inception. Only in 1949 was a female doctor named to the board.¹⁹⁰ Male doctors directed the development of the state public health system, and the resulting bureaucracy reflected their understanding of the gendered division of labor between doctors and nurses. Discouraged from becoming doctors, women with an interest in public health were confined to public health nursing, which grew out of hospital nursing and assumed the same position subordinate to the medical profession. The first public health nurses in the state were employed by private or philanthropic organizations in urban areas.¹⁹¹ As government public health efforts expanded, nurses found employment in new county health departments and in certain divisions of the state health department in Raleigh.¹⁹²

The first state division to hire nurses was the Bureau of Medical Inspection of Schools, which in 1919 hired six women to conduct physical examinations of the state's children. For

¹⁹⁰ Moreover, between 1949 and 1970, only two other women served. Through 1973, the only non-physicians appointed to the board were a handful of civil engineers (for their expertise in sanitary engineering), dentists, pharmacists, chemists, and a veterinarian. In contrast, the Board of Public Welfare comprised lay men and women selected for their interest and civic-mindedness, with women holding at least two of the seven positions by legislative mandate after 1917. J. W. Roy Norton and Benjamin Drake, "History of Public Health in North Carolina," in *Medicine in North Carolina: Essays in the History of Medical Science and Medical Service, 1924-1960*, vol. 2, ed. Dorothy Long (Raleigh: The North Carolina Medical Society, 1972), 617-21.

¹⁹¹ In 1904, the port city of Wilmington hired a nurse to visit the sick, with her salary paid entirely from charitable contributions, making her the first public health nurse in the state. Mary Lewis Wyche, *The History of Nursing in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 121. Rural public health nursing developed more slowly, and only with the influence of outside groups, namely the Red Cross, which established nationwide nursing services for rural areas in 1912 and supervised 52 nurses in North Carolina over the next two decades. The Red Cross covered administrative and supervisory costs while counties provided the nurse's salary. Jane Abernethy Plyler, "Public Health Nursing in North Carolina: Oral Histories of Earlier Years" (MA thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1980), 108.

¹⁹² The Progressive legislature of 1917 created several new divisions in the state health department. These new divisions in 1917 were followed by continued growth of the state board of health in 1919, which David Cockrell argues was spurred by the 1918-19 epidemic of Spanish influenza and the widespread realization that the state's public health apparatus was insufficient for real public health emergencies. David L. Cockrell, "'A Blessing in Disguise': The Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and North Carolina's Medical and Public Health Communities," *North Carolina Historical Review* 73, no. 3 (July 1996): 309-327.

over eighteen years these same six nurses traveled the state, examining tens of thousands of school children every year and arranged further medical or dental treatment when necessary.¹⁹³ These nurses were highly experienced, but they always worked under the supervision of a male doctor, either a local physician or their supervisor in Raleigh, Dr. George Cooper. The nurses were known, in fact, as “Dr. Cooper’s Nurses,” although their work in the field was often conducted beyond Cooper’s direct oversight.

In 1919, the state established a bureau of public health nursing. For three years, a female nurse led a staff in tackling a broad range of public health nursing activities. Ironically, the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act in 1921 cut short this female-led activity. The Sheppard-Towner Act, a significant achievement for maternalist reformers, made available new federal funds for work in maternal and child health.¹⁹⁴ This funding bonanza also precipitated a change in the bureau’s leadership, allowing the board to hire a “director who is a medical man; the limited budget of the preceding Bureau made this impossible.” Not until 1952 did the state board once more appoint a nurse or a woman to a supervisory position.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the federal funding came with limitations. The Bureau of Maternity and Infancy was “restricted entirely to a

¹⁹³ Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 109-110; *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Health, 1920-1922*, 35; *Bulletin of the North Carolina State Board of Health* 37, no. 4 (Apr. 1922).

¹⁹⁴ On the concept of maternalism and its effect on women’s social reforms, see Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers’ League, Women’s Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, “Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920,” *American Historical Review* 95 (Oct. 1990), 1079; and Koven and Michel, introduction to *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Koven and Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁹⁵ In 1952, the Board appointed Amy Louise Fisher as chief of the new Public Health Nursing Section. Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 112.

program dealing with the promotion of the welfare of maternity and infancy,” forcing nurses employed by the state office into a distinctly female-gendered realm of activity.¹⁹⁶

In county health departments, nurses usually worked as part of a small team that also included a physician and a sanitarian, almost certain to be men, and a clerk, possibly a woman.¹⁹⁷ This staff tackled a range of problems from sanitation to visiting nursing services, with specific duties divided along gendered professional lines. Doctors focused on epidemiology, diagnosis, and medical treatment. Nurses visited sick families, supervised tuberculosis and syphilis treatments, and ran immunization clinics. In homes, they distributed literature, inspected children, and talked to mothers. Above all, they served as intermediaries between doctors and patients and interpreted the state’s educational messages to the public.¹⁹⁸ Black public health nurses’ work comprised an even broader range of activities than white nurses, since there were fewer of them, fewer black physicians, and fewer available social and medical services in general. But black public health nurses reported to white public health authorities, and they enjoyed even less than professional authority than their white counterparts.

Many public health nurses’ experiences were shaped by their subordinate relationship with doctors. One nurse recalled, “On the whole, [doctors] don’t care for public health nurses that much... Some of the doctors refused to accept the fact that public health was a real

¹⁹⁶ *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Health, 1920-1922*, 50.

¹⁹⁷ Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 109.

¹⁹⁸ *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Health, 1924-1926*, 55. These nurses were astoundingly busy. In the 1924-1926 biennium, county public health nurses held over 50,000 home conferences with mothers. The number of office visits, where women were more likely to meet with a doctor, was considerably lower, around 6,000, perhaps indicating the difficulty of travel, as well as women’s reluctance to see a male physician in a strange, sterile new environment when they were used to having a midwife visit their homes. *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Health, 1924-1926*, 58.

profession.”¹⁹⁹ While nurses took courses in casework and saw cultivating personal connections with families as a critical part of their job, doctors may have dismissed these activities as non-medical and thus non-professional.²⁰⁰ Still, some nurses believed that public health nursing conferred more independence and community recognition than hospital nursing.²⁰¹

Gendered assumptions about the role of public health nurses were also reflected in the fact that most public health nurses were unmarried. One nurse noted that in the 1930s, “the girls who accepted the public health scholarships signed an agreement to work in the state for four years and not marry without permission.” Indeed, public health nurses were likely to be unmarried women, partly because married women were not accepted to nursing school.²⁰² Over time, county health officials realized that marriage did not cause nurses to neglect their work, and marriage became a more acceptable option for public health nurses. Nurses who did marry sometimes left the profession upon having children. Social workers, on the other hand, were always slightly more likely to be married and to have children.²⁰³

In the field of public health, women’s specialization in women’s and children’s wellbeing was not entirely of their own choosing. The fields of medicine and civil engineering held

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Rubye Bowles Bryson, in Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 36.

²⁰⁰ On the importance of personal connections, see interview with Edith MacNeil Holmes, Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 60. A Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored study of public health nursing courses in 1920 found that “methods of social case work” was one of only two subjects common to all public health nursing curricula. See *Nursing and Nursing Education in the United States*, Report of the Committee for the Study of Nursing Education and Report of a Survey by Josephine Goldmark (New York: MacMillan, 1923), cited in Elizabeth Dianne Greenhill, “A History of the Department of Public Health Nursing, University of North Carolina School of Public Health, 1941-1950” (MA thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1965).

²⁰¹ Interviews with Mary King Kneedler and Anne Eliza Lamb in Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 77, 91.

²⁰² Interview with Amy Louise Fisher in Plyler, “Public Health Nursing in North Carolina,” 47.

²⁰³ I base these generalizations on lists of names of public health nurses and county and state welfare staff in biennial reports and bulletins from each agency.

ultimate professional authority in public health, and, barred from these professions, women were shut out from much of the field. As public health nurses, they were expected to fill certain roles, always working in tandem with a supervising doctor. Yet their roles were among the most important. They worked with the public, providing care for both sick and healthy patients, and they interpreted the educational messages of the state health board for their patients. In the process, both white and black nurses helped shape the standards of one form of professional femininity. In public health, professional pressures created tensions for women. Even as doctors relied upon nurses to perform critical aspects of public health work, they upheld scientific and medical knowledge as the core of professional authority and denigrated nurses' qualifications to work independently.

Women in welfare offices faced fewer intra-professional pressures and, apart from a few flash points, enjoyed relative independence in running their programs. Except for a few positions in the Raleigh offices, the roles of welfare officials were not divided along lines of sex. By the mid-1920s, women controlled key administrative positions at the state level, and women also claimed numerous positions in county offices. In control of the direction of the state's welfare programs, women built on the broad-based reforming traditions of their predecessors and used casework to tackle a range of problems that they saw as interconnected. The trickier challenges were political. Every county official, male or female, faced regular assaults on welfare funding. The situation in Alexander County in 1921 was probably not unique. The welfare superintendent had no salary because the Board of Education was Democratic, while the county commissioners were Republican, and "each is trying to lay the expenses of county government on the other party, while taking unto itself the credit for cutting expenses."²⁰⁴ The

²⁰⁴ Sanders to Johnson, 14 Aug. 1921, Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC – School of Public Welfare and Social Work, 1921-1940.

state board faced similar challenges, complicated by other political agendas. Even after Kate Burr Johnson had proved her abilities in office, tricky political moments revived gender-based attacks on her. In 1926, her tangle with other state officials over a long-awaited survey of women in industry produced charges that Johnson was an “unmanageable official” and a “great clamor ‘for a man’ at the head of the [welfare] office.”²⁰⁵

Social Workers and Clubwomen

Female welfare officials relied on white clubwomen to spread the Board’s messages. Johnson, Mary Shotwell, Emeth Tuttle, Nell Battle Lewis, and other key women functioned as intermediaries between clubwomen and the state. Johnson, for example, was a past president of the state Federation of Women’s Clubs, and Shotwell served as chair of the Raleigh club’s social service department while she worked for the state board. Like Denson before her, Johnson encouraged clubwomen’s social reform projects and depended on their support for her programs. Many clubwomen believed that social service work was the “most important work” organized women could do, and they sought out the help and advice of the new professional women who worked in the state’s welfare offices²⁰⁶ They inquired about what kinds of information they should distribute to clubs or if they should stress anything in their bulletins, and the state welfare staff responded with concrete suggestions and offers to provide informative material or statistics for the club’s bulletin.²⁰⁷ Clubwomen willingly accommodated welfare officials’ requests to push a specific program.

²⁰⁵ “Will Mrs. Johnson Be Able to Hold Office in Face of attacks?” *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 July 1926; McAlister to Johnson, 19 July 1926, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1924-1926.

²⁰⁶ Willie May (Mrs. W. T.) Shore to Johnson, 29 Mar. 1925, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1918-1925.

²⁰⁷ For example, see Johnson to Annie Quinlan, 1 February 1922, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1918-1925; and Johnson to Mary Avery, 14 Mar. 1927; Johnson to Mrs. Anna Fenner or Mrs. White (unclear), 2 Jan. 1929; Shore to Johnson, 11 Feb. 1926; and L. F. L., on behalf of Johnson, to

Johnson and her staff relied on personal relationships to spread the Board's messages. With the help of friends in local clubs, they arranged to speak at monthly meetings or at the larger annual Federation gatherings.²⁰⁸ In 1926-27 the FWC went so far as to pass a resolution applauding Johnson's work and pledging support and loyalty to the Board of Charities and Public Welfare.²⁰⁹ Perhaps most indicative of Johnson's relationship with clubwomen is the way they signed their letters: "Love," "With love and best wishes," or "With much love, Affectionately."²¹⁰ Kate Burr Johnson's correspondents in the Federation were more than business contacts or casual acquaintances. They were close friends with whom she shared personal news, club affiliations, and political awareness.

Johnson also continued Denson's custom of drawing clubwomen into official or semi-official positions within the state bureaucracy, at the institutional level as well as at the county level. The 1923 Chairman of the Federation's Social Service Department, Gladys Sitterson, asked Johnson if there was any phase of welfare work that Johnson would like Sitterson to stress in her plan for the next year. Johnson suggested that the clubwomen visit jails, county homes, and other county institutions to inspect the conditions and make sure the inmates received humane treatment. In addition, she recommended that clubs create a committee to cooperate

Shore, 23 Feb. 1926, all in Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1926-1947.

²⁰⁸ Gertrude McKee (Mrs. E. L. McKee) to Johnson, n.d.; and Johnson to McKee, 21 Apr. 1927, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1926-1947; Willie May (Mrs. W. T.) Shore to Johnson, 29 Mar. 1925, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1918-1925; General Meeting Minutes, 2 Oct. 1924, WCR Records, Box 2, Folder: General Meeting Minutes, 1923-1924.

²⁰⁹ List of FWC's legislative priorities, [n.d. and no title; probably 1932], Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1926-1947.

²¹⁰ Johnson to Mary Avery, 14 Mar. 1927; Avery to Johnson, 21 Jan. 1927; and Johnson to McKee, 21 Apr. 1927, all in Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1926-1947; Shore to Johnson, 29 Mar. 1925, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1918-1925.

with local public welfare officials.²¹¹ On another occasion, Johnson asked Gertrude McKee, president of the Federation, to write to the Governor and push him to announce his appointments for the Board of the Farm Colony for Women—appointments that Johnson assumed would include women.²¹² For Johnson, reform-minded women were a vital and integral part of the state’s system of public welfare. They extended her reach and oversight and allowed her to make the most of her limited resources.

At the same time, while some welfare workers retained ties to women’s clubs, there was a clear professional and social divide between clubwomen and female social workers. Professional social workers worked for the county, state, or for some private charity, and they had training commensurate with their duties. Above all, they were women dedicated to their careers as well as their families and children. Likely many of them depended on the income from their work to support themselves or their families. Even Kate Burr Johnson fell into this category; in September, 1922, her husband Clarence suddenly died from “a stroke of paralysis,” leaving her to raise two teenage sons alone.²¹³

For white clubwomen, social welfare was part of their general ethos of service and reform rather than a career. They might sit quietly in a lecture hall to hear Harry Crane or Emeth Tuttle, then pepper the speaker with questions as they enjoyed elegant refreshments.²¹⁴ From their exposure to social welfare experts, they understood the professional landscape—for example, the Raleigh Woman’s Club changed the name of its Department of Social Service to

²¹¹ Gladys W. Sitterson (Mrs. S. C. Sitterson) to Johnson, 24 Mar. 1923; and Johnson to Sitterson, 27 Mar. 1923, both in Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1918-1925.

²¹² Johnson to McKee, 21 Apr. 1927, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1926-1947.

²¹³ “Clarence Johnson of Raleigh is Dead,” *Charlotte News*, 10 Sept. 1922.

²¹⁴ “Crane Attacks County Homes,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 Oct. 1922.

the Department of Public Welfare—but they made no attempt to become professionals themselves. Rather, they lent their moral, political, and financial support to the cause. They might be members of county welfare boards, dropping in on the county home once or twice a year to make sure prisoners were well fed and clothed. They might, as the Raleigh Women’s Club did in December 1922, send the girls at Samarcand Manor Christmas cards and decadent layer cakes in packages beautifully decorated with red ribbon and holly.²¹⁵ They were happy to crowd the galleries in the capitol building when social welfare bills might benefit from their feminine presence. And the Federation established a scholarship to be granted each year to a North Carolina woman training for professional social work.²¹⁶ But these women devoted themselves to social *service*, on their own terms, as benefactresses. They left paid labor and the drudgery of casework to professional social workers.

The Conference for Social Service, the primary mixed-sex forum for Progressive social reformers, also began to bear witness to the growing divide between professional social workers and other reformers. Professional social workers attended the annual convention, and the association of county welfare superintendents often held their annual meeting at the same time. But the Conference became a forum less for innovative welfare thinking, as it had been in the 1910s, and more of a clearinghouse for progressive lobbying. The Conference continued to host state and national welfare experts who pushed various policy changes. But, as Johnson told the Conference’s executive board in 1925, “social workers felt they did not get enough out of the

²¹⁵ Raleigh Women’s Club, Department of Social Services Annual Report, undated [1922-23], WCR Records, Box 3, Folder: Reports 1923-1924.

²¹⁶ Howard W. Odum, *Systems of Public Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925), 206.

Conference.”²¹⁷ Its sessions were oriented less toward technical training or theoretical discussions and more toward broad surveys of social conditions in the state.

The Four-County Demonstration and Public-Private Cooperation

After an initial burst in the number of counties that hired full-time welfare superintendents, state officials struggled to increase their numbers. Around the time Johnson took office in 1921, there were fifty-two counties with full-time superintendents of public welfare, including twenty-five counties that were required to because of their larger population and another twenty-seven that voluntarily hired an official. Three years later, in June 1924, Johnson had succeeded in increasing the total by five more counties.²¹⁸ In the long run, Johnson believed that the only way local officials would understand the worth of a trained superintendent was to give them a living, breathing example of what a trained worker could do. The problem was securing funding to pay for the training and salary of such a person, since the state Board had no wiggle room in its budget and counties were not volunteering funds. McAlister suggested as early as 1922 that Johnson request money for a demonstration project from the Garland Fund, which sought to fund “experiments” in public welfare. Johnson refused because of the political leanings of the Garland Fund’s Board of Directors, which included the NAACP’s James Weldon Johnson, Scott Hearing of the Rand School, and Harry Ward of the Union Theological Seminary. Their “socialist” views and “open fighting” for “social equality” of the races would, she believed, taint her own work in the minds of many North Carolinians.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ “The Board of Directors of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service met at the Jefferson Standard Cafe in Greensboro on November 3, 1925,” CSS Papers, 1st Accession, Box 1, Folder: Reports, Minutes, Resolutions, 1925-1926.

²¹⁸ The NC Plan of Public Welfare, n.d. [1921], typed manuscript, Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 1: Development of Public Welfare; *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 115.

²¹⁹ McAlister to Johnson, 27 July, 1922; and Johnson to McAlister, 31 July 1922, both in State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder: 1922-1923

A more promising option emerged in 1924, when the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial granted money to a joint project of the School of Public Welfare and the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare that intended to prove the efficacy of employing trained social workers. The Four-County Demonstration, as the project came to be known, seems to have been instigated by Odum and one of his colleagues, Jessie Steiner, with Commissioner of Public Welfare Kate Burr Johnson's approval and President Chase's support.²²⁰ Odum's connections with the LSRM—which was the primary backer of his new Institute for Research in Social Science—were critical in mediating between the needs of all parties involved.

The project proposal, submitted to the LSRM in May 1924, demonstrates the potential synergy of cooperative efforts involving the LSRM, the University, and the Board. The Board could demonstrate to the legislature and to county officials the efficacy of welfare programs: “not only will evidence be gathered for presenting to the proper authorities to show the best ways of strengthening the work, but the demonstration itself will be available for training present superintendents and their assistants and for popularizing certain aspects of the work.” Indeed, the LSRM saw this “popularizing” effect as critical to advancing its mission. The LSRM hoped to foster the growth of the social sciences and professional social work training, and they knew that philanthropic organizations would have to lay the foundation for this growth. As Sydnor Walker wrote in her study of schools of social work, “One of the most important functions of the privately supported agency is to set standards for tax-supported welfare activities... [T]he state tends to be more conservative and less flexible than private organizations in its methods.” She

²²⁰ Odum to Ruml, 15 May 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC- State Board of Charities 1924-26.

explained that the state restricted its interests to the maintenance of established services, and that “private philanthropy still must point the way in meeting new situations.”²²¹

For the School of Public Welfare’s first four years, the faculty hired a graduate student “to coordinate, in so far as possible, the field work of students with actual conditions in Orange County,” where the University was located. This plan had some shortcomings, including “lack of continuity” from year to year, “insufficient time on the part of this person whose principal objective was the pursuance of graduate studies,” and “the absence of any work in the three summer months which to a considerable extent offset any progress attained during the regular college year.”²²² Odum was well aware of the deficiencies of the fieldwork program, writing in the memorandum that the School, “while it has provided ample theoretic instruction and correlated work in the social sciences, must needs have some intensive field work if it is to train social workers in the larger sense of the word and if it is contribute something of the sum total of knowledge and method in such training.”²²³

Both Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson and Odum hoped that the demonstration would spur the state to increase its financial investment in their programs. The Board hoped “to show such results of the program put on in these counties as will be the means of stabilizing and strengthening the public welfare work generally throughout the State.”²²⁴ Odum wrote to Ruml

²²¹ Sydnor H. Walker, *Social Work and the Training of Social Workers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 43-44, 178. Amy Wells cites some of these passages and makes similar arguments in her excellent biographical article on Sydnor Walker, “Considering Her Influence”; see especially 133.

²²² “Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations of Public Welfare Conducted Jointly by the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare and the School of Public Welfare of the University of North Carolina, July 1924 to January 1927,” n.d., 13-14, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC–State Board of Charities 1927-28.

²²³ Memorandum, “A Four-County Demonstration in Public Welfare,” n.d. [May, 1924], LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26.

²²⁴ Copy of Resolutions of the Board, enclosed in Col. William A. Blair to Ruml, 9 Sept. 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26.

that “The more I think of this project the more promising it seems as a clear cut piece of demonstration work invaluable to the State Department and to the School of Public Welfare, both of which give every promise of being able to absorb these things at the end of the period.”²²⁵ Of course, Odum’s assurance that the state and university would eventually assume the cost of the program were an important part of his fundraising strategy, since the LSRM was always concerned that its pilot programs would founder after the initial grant expired.

Officials at the LSRM were wary of working directly with a government agency, perhaps because of International Health Board experience in funding public health projects in the South. Before Ruml agreed to present the idea to the LSRM’s Executive Committee, he pressed Johnson to elicit “an opinion as to whether the Department of Public Welfare could receive funds from an outside source for this purpose.”²²⁶ Ruml and his colleagues had reason to be nervous about committing funds to a state agency, since North Carolina’s political climate in the 1920s was somewhat hostile to social welfare efforts. One scholar points out that “public welfare represented an accretion of power by government, an extension of its tentacles into a sphere that private efforts had dominated.”²²⁷ Luckily, Governor Cameron Morrison was reasonably progressive and gave the project his full endorsement: “I believe that this will be an excellent use of funds, and I understand that Dr. Rankin, Secretary of the State Board of Health, has utilized some of the funds to good advantage.”²²⁸ The previous Rockefeller involvement in the state

²²⁵ Odum to Ruml, 15 May 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26.

²²⁶ Ruml to Odum, 15 May 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26.

²²⁷ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, 358-9, 369.

²²⁸ Gov. Cameron Morrison to Johnson, 16 July 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26. Despite his opposition to women’s suffrage, his mobilization of white supremacist politics, and his identification with the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, once in office Governor

clearly laid the groundwork for the Governor's ready acceptance of this scheme, as the Governor referred to the State Department of Public Health's existing cooperation with Rockefeller.

The LSRM funded the proposal in the full amount requested, granting the Board and the School each \$10,000 for three years, for a total of \$60,000. Johnson's response to the news of the grant indicates the difficulties of Board's situation. She told Ruml that "This information could not have come in better time. We are having a special session of the legislature, and a bill had been introduced which would have crippled the powers of this Board. I think we had the bill defeated without a doubt, but our being able to announce this grant from the LSRM had much to do with our winning an overwhelming victory."²²⁹

The project began in the summer of 1924. Although the Board and the School were in theory cooperating to demonstrate public welfare work in four counties, each entity took responsibility for two counties. The School took charge of Orange and Chatham. The Board oversaw Wake, the home of the state capital, and Cherokee, a mountain county in the far southwest corner of the state. A staff member of the state Board supervised the field of work of the students from the School, who worked in all three local counties. Because the populations of Orange and Chatham were too sparse to require a full-time welfare superintendent, a member of the School's staff served during the demonstration as a part-time superintendent for both counties. Although this faculty member was technically an assistant to the superintendent of schools, he was for all practical purposes in charge of each county's welfare system—an

Morrison promoted several measures important to business progressives, including a modern highway system and increased funding for education. Nathaniel F. Magruder, "Cameron Morrison," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* vol. 4, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 328-330.

²²⁹ Johnson to Ruml, 20 Aug. 1924, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC—State Board of Charities 1924-26.

arrangement that blurred the lines between public and private responsibilities but was nevertheless effective.²³⁰

The School's preliminary report on its activities gives some sense of the challenges of improving North Carolina's public welfare system. Both Orange and Chatham, for example, were "often referred to as "pauper counties." A few cotton mills and other small factories dotted the mostly rural landscape, where farmers struggled to "make a poor living on poor soil, utilizing poor methods and poor equipment... Poor schools and churches, too much farm tenancy, bad roads, unrepaired and unpainted buildings—these factors add to the portrayal of a situation which is indeed distressing." Moreover, the students involved in the demonstration faced such basic problems as the complete lack of usable maps to use in their fieldwork. In what must have been a massive undertaking, the demonstration workers made their own maps: In Orange County, "the entire county was then actually covered by teams of two persons who revised the old [1919 soil survey] map and made important additions. By means of Fords equipped with speedometers reasonably accurate measurements of distances were secured and recorded... True, there were many portions of the county where the lack of passable roads, or for that matter, the lack of any roads at all in some sections, made it impossible to plot the desired information." They repeated the process in Chatham, "although under greater difficulties than encountered in Orange because of the lack of any county map to begin with."²³¹

The School's leaders also concluded that at this stage in the development of public welfare, coordination with local volunteers and non-governmental organizations was absolutely

²³⁰ "Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations of Public Welfare Conducted Jointly by the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare and the School of Public Welfare of the University of North Carolina, July 1924 to January 1927," n.d. 2, 15, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC–State Board of Charities 1927-28.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 8-10, 18.

necessary to reach basic levels of service and coverage. During the Demonstration, workers even created other organizations where necessary. There was no active Red Cross Chapter in Orange or Chatham to deal with veterans' cases, so one of the project staff was appointed "Home Service Chairman of the Chapel Hill Chapter of the Red Cross" as well as "Service Officer of the local America Legion Post." In both counties, workers tried "to stimulate interest in general welfare work by the organization of small local groups" or "welfare committees." These informal groups of citizens built on community traditions of church- or school-based welfare work, but the creation of new groups allowed Demonstration workers to promote their own welfare goals. The School's preliminary report on the Demonstration listed as one of its major findings the importance of fostering informal local committees, especially by using schools, which were often the only county-wide organizations of any kind. In Orange, for example, workers appointed "an influential resident" in each school district "who can be consulted in regard to cases in his jurisdiction and whose aid can be secured in handling emergency situations."²³² The report highlighted this call for the use of local volunteers as one of the ways case work techniques had to be modified to suit rural situations. While urban case work supervisors could afford to rely on a fully professional staff, rural welfare superintendents did not have this luxury.

The Demonstration produced some of its intended results, at least in the counties overseen by the Board. Smith's work under the LSRM grant proved the usefulness of public welfare work to county officials, who agreed to continue the work done under the Demonstration after Smith left.²³³ In Wake County, the county assumed the financial cost of public welfare

²³² Ibid., 27, 44, 52, 57.

²³³ Memorandum of interview, Walker with Johnson, 8 Nov. 1927, Raleigh, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

work. In addition, Walker noted that “there is evidence that the State is looking to it as a center of information upon county welfare administration. There are constant calls for information and requests that representatives should come for conferences to various parts of the state.”²³⁴ The School was less successful in prompting Orange and Chatham counties to absorb the expenses of welfare workers, but remained “hopeful” that they had at least laid a foundation.²³⁵

Expanding the Boundaries of Public Welfare: School Attendance and the Division of Work Among Negroes

The state Board took advantage of the Demonstration results to request further funding from the LSRM for projects in school attendance and social work among African Americans. In their final report to the LSRM, Johnson and her staff signaled their desire to take on the problem of school attendance, which grew out of Elizabeth Smith’s work in Cherokee County. Despite the poor conditions of roads and schools, Smith managed to increase school attendance by forty-two per cent.²³⁶ Johnson believed that Smith’s innovative work in enforcing the state’s compulsory school attendance law could be replicated elsewhere in the state.

In the process of deciding whether the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial would fund the study, LSRM officials made judgments about the boundaries of “public welfare.” Johnson believed that improving school attendance “is now the greatest need in rounding out our social program,” but LSRM officials questioned whether enforcement of the school attendance law was more appropriately an issue for education officials and philanthropies such as the General Education Board. Odum supported Johnson’s plea, writing to Walker that “you will recall that

²³⁴ Memorandum of interview with SHW and LO, with Mrs. Johnson, Miss Mitchell, Lieut. Oxley, Raleigh, 7 Mar. 1927, subject: NC State Dept of Public Welfare, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC–State Board of Charities 1927-28.

²³⁵ “Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations,” 30, 54-55.

²³⁶ Johnson to Ruml, 4 Jan. 1928, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

the assignment of this function to the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare constituted one of the distinctive features of the North Carolina plan. It seems to me that the distinction which was made, namely that this was a matter of public welfare and not of education, was a good one.”²³⁷ The Superintendent of Public Instruction, at the LSRM’s request, threw his support behind the project as well.²³⁸ Johnson’s arguments and the acquiescence of the relevant North Carolina officials convinced Walker and Ruml that school attendance work was in fact relevant to public welfare.

The LSRM granted the Board \$11,475 for the study, to cover part of the salary and expenses of a director and a secretary. The Board agreed to furnish from state funds the remaining \$6,240 necessary.²³⁹ Later records indicate that the school attendance project, like many of North Carolina’s public welfare efforts, was fraught with difficulty. The legislature never set aside funds for the study. Moreover, as Johnson wrote to Walker, the onset of the Depression meant that “In addition to not receiving an increase in appropriation by the last Legislature we, along with other state departments and agencies, have had the appropriation that was given us cut from ten to fifteen percent.” Using the LSRM grant, the study’s single staff member collected and published statistics about school attendance in six representative counties. Despite the financial difficulties that plagued the Board during the late 1920s and early 1930s, then, the study provided the first comprehensive view of school attendance problems and suggested “methods to make enforcement adequate.” Although North Carolina lacked the funds

²³⁷ Odum to Walker, 16 Jan. 16, 1928, and Odum to Walker, Jan 18, 1928, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

²³⁸ Walker to Johnson, 20 Jan. 1928; Johnson to Walker, 23 Jan. 1928; and A. T. Allen to Walker, 23 Jan. 1928, all in LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

²³⁹ “Proposed Funding of Program,” n.d. [Jan. 1928] and Ruml to Johnson, 14 Feb. 1928, Odum to Walker, 16 Jan. 1928, and Odum to Walker, 18 Jan. 1928, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

to act immediately on the study's findings, the new welfare commissioner, Annie Kizer Bost, justified the study in terms of its value to other states.²⁴⁰

The LSRM's funding for the Division of Work among Negroes had a more lasting effect. The first funding came as part of the four-county demonstration project, with part of the grant set aside for the salary of a black member of the state staff. The need for social services among the state's African American population was great, and the project took off accordingly: "In the beginning it was planned that there was to be a Negro Worker who should devote his time to work among the negroes in the four chosen counties. But soon there was such a demand for his services in other counties that necessarily his field broadened to the state with the rapid growth of a new division in the State Board." Thanks to the work of the Demonstration, by 1927 the state legislature had recognized the need for increased social services for African Americans, and legislators appropriated funds for two additional staff members in the new Division of Work among Negroes.²⁴¹ In addition, by 1926, individual counties and cities began making appropriations or raising private funds for "Negro Public Welfare." To be sure, most of these funds came from "Negroes," presumably individual citizens or black religious and civic organizations.²⁴² Nevertheless, the LSRM's original grant clearly marked the beginning of a shift in the state's attitude about social services for African Americans.

Given this promising start, Johnson requested additional funds in February 1927, as the Demonstration came to a close. Maintaining that North Carolina had done "pioneer work,

²⁴⁰ Bost to Ruml, 24 July 1931, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 106, Folder 1076: NC State Board of Charities – School Attendance, 1927-31.

²⁴¹ Final Report of Board on Demonstration under Grant, enclosed with Johnson to Ruml, 20 Sept. 1927, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC – State Board of Charities 1927-28.

²⁴² Odum to Leonard Outhwaite, 22 May 1926, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 786: UNC–State Board of Charities 1924-26.

certainly so far as the south is concerned,” she requested \$27,000 to be spread out over five years.²⁴³ Johnson argued to Walker that “the negro work” was the Board’s most pressing concern at the moment. The LSRM continued to fund the Division of Work among Negroes as a stand-alone project until 1931, when the legislature took over financial responsibility for it. The same year, the legislature enlarged two other pieces of the Board, the Division of Mental Health and Hygiene and the Division of Institutions. All three changes increased the state’s investment in solving social problems exacerbated by the Depression; the Board’s report pointed out that “financial losses, of mental and physical suffering” had been “disproportionately shared” by African Americans. Still, state officials would doubtless have been reluctant to devote precious tax dollars to solving the problems of the state’s black citizens unless the program was proven to be effective. Moreover, the investment required by the state was relatively small because of the structure of the program. The Division of Work among Negroes was mostly focused on organizing existing “social forces in Negro communities” and “the stimulating of self-help activities among Negroes.”²⁴⁴ The LSRM-funded program demonstrated that, even with minimum financial resources, a trained state staff could tackle social problems among blacks. In this sense, the Division’s structure was an excellent compromise between conservative legislators and more liberal reformers.

Conclusion

In May 1923, Kate Burr Johnson and her publicity officer Nell Battle Lewis published a short article in Howard Odum’s *Journal of Social Forces*. North Carolina, they wrote, had just

²⁴³ Johnson to Ruml, 18 Feb. 1927; and memorandum of interview with SHW and LO, with Mrs. Johnson, Miss Mitchell, Lieut. Oxley, Raleigh, 7 Mar. 1927, subject: NC State Dept of Public Welfare, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC–State Board of Charities 1927-28.

²⁴⁴ *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 10, 96-97.

witnessed a “decade of social progress.” The state had “moved forward with such results that the spirit of this state has attracted attention all over the country.” In the last ten years, reformers had founded Conference for Social Service; women had become a political force to be reckoned with; and many other groups had united in the “quickenning of social consciousness” that led to the creation of a host of institutions and welfare programs.²⁴⁵

The years that followed Johnson and Lewis’s article marked the 1920s as another notable “decade of social progress.” During the 1920s, North Carolina’s welfare professionals and social reformers created a welfare system that realized many of the ideals of McAlister’s 1917 legislation. Their network of Raleigh-based experts, trained county superintendents, and stakeholders on county welfare boards began to tackle the state’s social problems. They even chipped away at the effects of Jim Crow. Their work was plagued with political difficulties and a constant fight for adequate funding, but coalitions and partnerships of powerful locals as well as affluent outsiders sheltered the state’s new welfare programs from worst ravages.

Partnerships were key in their success. Cooperative projects with UNC and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial were critical steps toward the growth of a public welfare program equipped to tackle pressing social problems. North Carolina’s legislators were reluctant to fund programs whose worth had not been established. Philanthropic funding that supported public welfare demonstrations was thus critical in speeding state take-over of social service programs. In addition, the establishment of North Carolina’s Division of Work among Negroes, which was a direct outgrowth of a LSRM-funded demonstration, highlights the role of private agencies in sparking real social change in the segregated South. In the process of funding exploratory public welfare efforts in North Carolina, Rockefeller officials helped to define the

²⁴⁵ Kate Burr Johnson and Nell Battle Lewis, “A Decade of Social Progress in North Carolina,” *Journal of Social Forces* 1, no. 4 (May 1923): 400-403.

future shape and meaning of public welfare across the region and the nation. Through their funding decisions, Rockefeller officials supported native Southern progressive efforts to realize a broad vision of public welfare.

If networks of supporters offered a shield against politics, the Board's most powerful offensive weapons were emerging standards of professionalization. Through the new field of professional social work, Johnson and her staff found ways to extend their policies and programs into local communities and cut through pernicious politics. For the people who joined the state's emerging corps of welfare professionals, exposure to social work and professional training reshaped their lives and opened new avenues—a trend particularly important for young women with limited career options. At the same time, increasing professional standards drew lines between experts and volunteers dedicated to social service. Even as a new generation of professional social workers became the principal actors in the fight for adequate social services, clubwomen remained a powerful lobbying force in favor of a broad vision of social welfare. Thanks in part to the last two decades of organized women's activism, the new state board's policies, addressed social problems of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, delinquency, and mental defect as necessarily intertwined.

In bringing McAlister's "county unit model" to fruition, Kate Burr Johnson, her staff, and her allies at UNC and elsewhere created a model of rural social work that reverberated beyond the bounds of the South. Odum had set out to train workers in a distinctly southern style of social work at his School of Public Welfare. The School struggled even to fulfill its basic mission of training county welfare workers²⁴⁶ and many years passed before the School began to

²⁴⁶ See correspondence among Johnson, Odum, and Walker in 1927 and 1928, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC—State Board of Charities 1927-28.

resemble Odum's dreams.²⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Odum and Johnson pioneered and refined training programs in rural casework with the benefit of practical experience and became recognized as experts in rural social welfare. Officials from other states asked for advice about creating similar systems.²⁴⁸

Scholars today are still familiar with Odum's eminence, but Johnson too achieved national recognition and had the chance to influence national policy. In 1929, she accepted an invitation to serve on the White House committee on child health and protection.²⁴⁹ According to a proud report in the *North Carolina Clubwoman*, "She was one of three women in the United States, and the only woman from the South, who was asked to head an important section in the White House Conference."²⁵⁰ Johnson even had a chance to describe the "North Carolina Plan" to the nation's chief executive when she sat next to President Hoover during lunch at the White House in early November 1929. Although Hoover must have been preoccupied with the October 29 stock market crash and the looming financial crisis, he asked her many questions and "knew

²⁴⁷ Without private funding, the School was slow to grow. Walker noted during a visit in 1927 that only seven students were enrolled in "the professional course." In 1931, the Association of Schools of Professional Social Work asked Odum to have the School resign from membership in the Association. It was not until 1937 that the School once again became "a full-fledged member of the American Association of Schools of Social Work." Memorandum of interview, BR and SHW with Odum, subject SPW, 7-11 Nov. 1927, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 74, Folder 785: UNC-School of Public Welfare 1927-28; Walter W. Pettit to Odum, 20 Feb. 1931; Pettit to Odum, 5 Mar. 1931; Odum to Pettit, 18 Mar. 1931; and Odum to Walker, 22 Mar. 1931, all in RF Records, RG 1.1, Series 236S, Box 12, Folder 146: UNC IRSS, May-September 1929; Odum to Walker, 27 Oct. 1937, RF Records, RG 1.1, Series 236S, Box 11, Folder 130: UNC ISRR, 1937-1938.

²⁴⁸ For example, other states adopted North Carolina's reporting forms, and Mary Camp Sprinkle met with Tennessee officials in 1926 to discuss their desire to copy North Carolina's system. Commissioner's report to Board, March [1922], Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925; and "Tennessee Working to Establish State System," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1926): 3.

²⁴⁹ Johnson to Crowell, 14 Aug. 1929, State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1927-1929.

²⁵⁰ "Mrs. Kate Burr Johnson," *North Carolina Clubwoman* (Apr. 1935), 7, copy FWC Records, Presidential Files, "Kate Burr Johnson (Mrs. Clarence A.)."

more about our program of public welfare in this State than many a citizen.”²⁵¹ In addition, Johnson helped to prepare guidelines for the White House commission about the proper division and relationship between the fields of public health, public welfare, and public education—an issue with which she had first-hand experience in North Carolina.²⁵² A Rockefeller Foundation official passed on to President Hoover her recommendations for distinct but cooperating federal government departments.²⁵³

While news of North Carolina’s welfare programs traveled far beyond the state, the programs’ greatest impact was doubtless at home in the Old North State. With advice from experts in Raleigh, local officials helped provide education, financial support, institutional homes, and much more to the state’s neediest whites. Although welfare programs for African Americans were by no means equivalent to those for whites, North Carolina became the first state in the South to extend some modicum of official support to black-run social welfare efforts. By the end of the 1920s, welfare officials and social reformers had accomplished impressive victories.

²⁵¹ Johnson to Mrs. Herbert F. Seawell (Mrs. Ella Mc.A. Seawell), 8 Nov. 1929, State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1927-1929.

²⁵² John A. Ferrell to Johnson, 27 Jan. 1930; and Johnson to Ferrell, 29 Jan. 1930, both in RF Records, RG 2, Series 236, Box 38, Folder 314: NC, A-Z, 1930.

²⁵³ John A. Ferrell to Johnson, 3. Feb 1930, RF Records, RG 2, Series 236, Box 38, Folder 314: NC, A-Z, 1930.

CHAPTER 5: PROFESSIONALIZING EUGENICS:
THE DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE AND EUGENICS IN THE 1920S

Wiley Sanders tried to look older than his twenty-three years as he forced a stern gaze on “Willie Williams” in an improvised courtroom in Gerrard Hall, stuffy with midsummer heat. Recently returned from a year’s study in Chicago, Sanders had joined the other staff of the state welfare board to lead the 1922 institute for white social workers in Chapel Hill. Today’s event, midway through the two-week institute, was a mock juvenile court trial that the students would later dissect for proper and improper procedure. The audience seated around the room tittered at the sight of heavysset, middle-aged W. M. Seaford, the superintendent of Davie County, playing Willie, an “under-nourished” boy accused of stealing a pistol.¹ Playing a generic welfare superintendent was Sam Leonard, the superintendent of Wilson County who would later become a member of the state board staff and then the head of the East Carolina Training School for delinquent boys. Other superintendents testified as “witnesses” and took on the roles of Willie’s father and “holy roller” stepmother, but Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson stole the show with her unexpected flair for comedy. She became “the clown of the piece” as she improvised the lines of the Williams’s chatterbox neighbor, dishing on the family’s domestic relations.²

Sanders next called state psychopathologist Dr. Harry W. Crane to the stand. Dark-haired, blue-eyed Crane began questioning Willie in his “clear, strong, pleasant voice.” Although the thirty-seven-year old psychology professor loved humor and satire, Crane must

¹ By 1924, Seaford had become the juvenile court judge for Davie County. See *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 96.

² “Sample Court Trial for Culprit Juveniles,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 July 1922.

have felt a professional obligation to conduct this mock mental examination with an air of decorum.³ Giving mental exams and testifying in juvenile court proceedings fell under his regular duties as head of the state welfare board's new Bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene. Crane and the board believed that examinations of juvenile delinquents were of paramount importance, since, as they claimed, "One of the most important contributory causes of delinquency is mental deficiency." In a special bulletin on child welfare published in December 1921, they had estimated that less than a quarter of delinquent boys had average or above average intelligence. The rest were "morons" or "borderline."⁴ When Crane wrapped up his questioning, he declared Willie to be a "high-grade imbecile." Judge Sanders would have liked to send Willie to Caswell Training School, but in this hypothetical situation, Caswell was full. Instead, Sanders rebuked Willie's "father" for his son's thievery and entrusted Willie's six-month parole to his parents. The court adjourned, the students and teachers dropped their assumed personas, and everyone chattered and laughed about the performance.⁵

Beyond testifying to Johnson's dramatic skills and welfare officials' sense of humor, these moments of amateur theater reveal a critical process at work: the training of social workers about the state's mental hygiene program. In the 1920s, North Carolinians persisted in their fascination with eugenics. As during the previous decade, doctors and professional social workers guided the diffusion of knowledge about eugenics, and Christianity continued to be an important interpretative mechanism for some proponents. But strategies for promoting eugenics were also affected by the creation of an institutional home for mental hygiene programs in the

³ Biographical information on Crane is compiled from "Crane, H. W. – Pedigree of Harry Wolven Crane taken by K. M. Cowdery, 1915," ERO Records, Series VI, card file.

⁴ "Juvenile Court Cases," *BCPW* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 12.

⁵ "Sample Court Trial for Culprit Juveniles," *Charlotte Observer*, Monday, 17 July 1922.

state welfare department, which trained new male and female professionals across the state in comprehensive, preventive social work methods for rural areas.

The state Board of Charities and Public Welfare's new Division of Mental Health and Hygiene coordinated mental testing and conducted research that reinforced arguments about the pervasive problem of feeble-mindedness and mental defects. At the same time, the field of mental hygiene was terrain for contests among different factions in the state, with other state agencies and private groups also staking a claim to expertise on mental hygiene. The welfare board, however, had a strong historical precedent for keeping the official responsibility for addressing problems of mental hygiene. Two other factors amplified this precedent: white Progressive reformers' activism and the welfare department's success in educating the public about feeble-mindedness as a serious social problem.

Supporters increasingly spoke about the need for eugenics in the language of professional social work and agreed that decisions about handling the feeble-minded and other mental defective persons should be left to trained professionals. As a new generation came to the fore of social welfare reform, its members moved away from the religious rhetoric that had pervaded past calls for eugenics and toward the language of efficiency and scientific authority that had hovered in the background of earlier pleas. Above all, they emphasized the importance of trained professionals in administering eugenics and mental hygiene programs.

Eugenics campaigns of the 1920s also shaped the policies of a maturing social welfare bureaucracy. State officials' interest in eugenics trickled down to the network of fieldworkers in each county. Although they were appointed by local officials, county welfare officers received their training and direction almost exclusively from state officials or from the closely allied School of Public Welfare at UNC. As part of their professional training, which became

increasingly important over the course of the decade, social workers learned that mental defects were the root of other social problems: feeble-mindedness led to crime, poverty, and immorality and sapped state finances. Psychological experts and state-level officials impressed upon them the importance of mental testing, although they also learned to recognize and diagnose feeble-mindedness on their own, in their casework with families in the field. They learned that the best way to deal with feeble-minded people was to shut them in institutions or to deny them a marriage license. They encountered eugenic sterilization as another possible solution. Above all, social workers learned that some people were born to be a burden on the rest.

The Nucleus of the Eugenics Project in the 1920s: The Division of Mental Health and Hygiene

In the early 1920s an inter-institutional network developed among social workers, medical professionals, and academics focused on the problems of feeble-mindedness and mental hygiene. Although members of this group shared many goals and moved in the same spheres, their interactions were not without tensions. The network's center of gravity was the bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene, part of the Board of Charities and Public Welfare. Psychologists, sociologists, and other academics, sometimes loosely affiliated with the Bureau, tackled mental health and hygiene from a variety of angles. Heads of Caswell and the state mental hospitals had their own goals of managing institutional populations, maintaining institutional autonomy, and securing adequate funding. Likewise, physicians were often most concerned with reinforcing the professional image of the state's medical corps. For county welfare officials, the bureau was a resource but conditions on the ground dictated their primary goals. The state Mental Hygiene society and the Conference for Social Service were meeting grounds for these various groups and forums where lay reformers added their own opinions to the mix. Together, members of this network fostered public support for eugenics.

The creation of the division of Mental Health and Hygiene in September 1921 capped a sustained effort by welfare officials. Commissioner Roland Beasley had called for funds for the Board to “maintain a psychiatric bureau with a competent specialist” who could handle individual cases and conduct a statewide educational campaign.⁶ Beasley pointed out that the Board charter compelled it to “investigate and report causes of insanity and feeble-mindedness and kindred subjects,” and they could not properly study these subjects without a trained expert.⁷ Beasley made a clear case that insanity, feeble-mindedness, and mental hygiene in general were the bailiwick of the welfare board. As usual, lack of money was the major impediment. Before he left in the spring of 1921, he suggested that a yearly appropriation of \$25,000 would allow them to do the work. The legislature of 1921 did increase the Board’s annual appropriation from \$15,000 to \$20,000, but they failed to meet Beasley’s request.⁸

Shortly after Kate Burr Johnson became Commissioner in the summer of 1921, she created the division of Mental Health and Hygiene as the third division in the new state welfare bureaucracy. Johnson’s breakthrough was to recruit a psychologist from UNC to work part-time for the Board, thus establishing the division with minimal expense to her budget.⁹ The mental hygiene group was part of the general expansion of the state welfare bureaucracy at the beginning of the 1920s, and the cooperative work between UNC faculty and Board staff was part of a larger pattern that began with summer institutes of public welfare and Odum’s School of Public Welfare.

⁶ *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 8.

⁷ This mandate went back to the Board’s original charter. North Carolina Public Law 1868-1869, ch. 170, section 4.

⁸ The legislature of 1919 gave the Board \$15,000 a year, and the 1921 legislature allotted them \$20,000. “Explanation” [n.d., probably early 1921], in BPW Records, microfilmed minutes of State Board of Public Charities, Reel 1. On the 1921-1922 appropriation, see North Carolina Public Law 1921, ch. 86, section 23.

⁹ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 40.

Despite the Board's mandate to study mental defects, it was not a foregone conclusion that such a research bureau would find its institutional home there. McNairy had for years called for the establishment of a psychological clinic at Caswell, including a pointed comment in 1918 that such a clinic would fulfill the "spirit and intention" of the welfare board's charter.¹⁰ After a series of fires at Caswell in 1919, lawmakers had revised Caswell's charter to include studying feeble-mindedness and running a psychological clinic and an outreach bureau, but they failed to provide additional funding for this work.¹¹ The state department of health could also have contended for leadership of bureau of mental health and hygiene. Although the welfare board had legal oversight of all state institutions, including insane asylums, health officials had expressed an interest in mental hygiene, particularly since syphilis was responsible for many cases of insanity. Charles O'Hagan Laughinghouse, the head of the state health department, attempted in 1929 to consolidate the bureau of mental health and hygiene under his own health department bureaucracy.¹²

Part of the reason for debate was the expansiveness of the term 'mental hygiene.' Clifford Beers, the father of the mental hygiene movement, had a personal interest in mental illness, but the term also encompassed prevention of feeble-mindedness, nervous disorders, even anxiety and depression. As the breadth of the term indicates, medical and welfare professionals saw all these mental disorders as interrelated in cause and cure. Naturally, state officials from different bureaus and institutions claimed leading authority over the entire field of mental

¹⁰ McNairy's comment was timely, since the legislature's 1917 revision of the welfare law renewed its emphasis on studying the case and prevention of mental disease. *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1916-1918*, 6.

¹¹ McNairy hired a medical director, Dr. W. A. Newbold, in April 1922, and finally began systematized psychological studies. *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1920-1922*, 7; Elizabeth M. Brown and Sarah Shaw Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse: A History of Caswell Center, Kinston, North Carolina, 1911-1964* (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), 109.

¹² See State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1927-1929.

hygiene. Thanks to Johnson's savvy budgeting and the mandate to study insanity and mental defects, which dated back to the welfare board's creation in 1869, the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare became the official center of mental hygiene work.

To head the new division, Johnson hired Harry Wolven Crane. Born in Michigan in 1885 to a middle-class family, Crane took degrees in psychology at the University of Michigan, including his PhD in 1913. After graduating he found a job as the chief investigator with the Michigan Eugenics Commission, for which he researched and cataloged the extent of insanity, epilepsy, feeble-mindedness, and other mental defects in the state, and eventually submitted a report to the legislature.¹³ In 1915, Crane went to New York to formalize his training as a eugenics fieldworker, becoming one of the few men at the Eugenics Record Office's summer training program.¹⁴ Although he began a professorial job at Ohio State University in the fall of 1915, Crane's doctorate in psychology made him one of the ERO's most valuable eugenics fieldworkers, and the organization soon called him back into service.¹⁵ In January 1916 he took a leave of absence from Ohio State and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he worked under ERO auspices for the Arkansas Commission for the Feeble-minded. From his work there he submitted voluminous records to the ERO archive, including information about over one

¹³ Crane's biographical details are compiled from "Crane, H. W. – Pedigree of Harry Wolven Crane taken by K. M. Cowdery, 1915," ERO Records, Series VI, card file; and Charles Horton Cooley, "The Development of Sociology at Michigan," in *Sociological Theory and Social Research: Being Selected Papers of Charles Horton Cooley*, 12, accessed 5 June 2013, http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Cooley/Cooley_1930.html.

¹⁴ Amy Sue Bix notes that from 1910-1924, there were 39 male students at the ERO's fieldworker training. Eleven subsequently taught at universities; some went to medical school; and at least six became psychological examiners during World War I. Bix writes, "It appears that only two men remained in eugenics work for a significant time after completing ERO classes": Karl Cowdery (in California) and Arthur Estabrook. Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: 'Women's Work' in Biology," *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 3 (Aug 1997): 655. Crane falls into the category of university teachers, but his subsequent academic research and applied work for the North Carolina Board of Charities and Public Welfare also qualify him as a long-time eugenics worker.

¹⁵ "Crane, H. W. – Pedigree of Harry Wolven Crane taken by K. M. Cowdery, 1915," ERO Records, Series VI, card file

thousand Arkansans.¹⁶ As a result of his efforts, the state established a school for the feeble-minded the following year.¹⁷ Crane also took on two other postings for the ERO in 1916, in the Psychopathic Laboratory of the New York City Police Department and as the fieldwork director of a eugenic survey of Nassau County, New York.¹⁸ Following his leave of absence, he returned to Ohio State and taught psychology, reporting to other ERO fieldwork alums that his course in criminal psychology made “considerable use” of “eugenical material.”¹⁹

In 1920, the University of North Carolina formally established its department of psychology. Crane was hired the following year as an associate professor of psychology, adding “clinical perspectives” to the curriculum.²⁰ The state welfare board could not afford to hire a psychologist full-time, but Kate Burr Johnson arranged for Crane to be jointly employed, one-third of his time belonging to the Board. Crane became the director of the new division of Mental Health and Hygiene, remaining in that position until 1939.²¹ In fact, Crane was the only permanent employee in the division during the 1920s. Other staff, including UNC researchers, came and went.

¹⁶ *Eugenical News* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1916): 2, 3; and *Eugenical News*, 1, no. 5 (May 1916): 33.

¹⁷ *Eugenical News*, 2, no. 4 (Apr. 1917): 29.

¹⁸ *Eugenical News*, 2, no. 3 (Mar. 1917): 21; *Eugenical News*, 1, no. 6 (June 1916): 40; *Eugenical News*, 1, no. 8 (Aug. 1916): 58.

¹⁹ *Eugenical News*, 2, no. 9 (Sept. 1917): 71.

²⁰ Staff of the North Carolina Collection, *Register of the Officers and Faculty of the University of North Carolina 1795–1945* (1954), accessed 5 Mar. 2013, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/unc/faculty.html>; and “Historical information,” Finding aid for Department of Psychology of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records, 1951-1963 (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), accessed 5 June 2013, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/uars/ead/40085.html>.

²¹ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 12; *Eugenical News*, 3, no. 2 (Feb. 1922): 13; Dr. Richard F. Richie, “Summary of Mental Hygiene Development in North Carolina,” a talk given at a meeting of the Charlotte Mental Hygiene Clinic Board on 16 Oct. 1940, in BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Subject File: Conference for Social Service, Box 169, Folder: n.d., 1913-1933, NC CSS.

Testing and Research

Harry Crane's work for the division of mental health and hygiene had three components: testing, research, and education. Testing was the core of the division's day-to-day activities. Although many social workers believed they could identify the feeble-minded by sight or common sense, psychological exams lent the imprimatur of science to their convictions and helped smooth the admission of a child to Caswell. But few families lived close enough to Kinston to have their child tested at Caswell's psychological clinic. Crane faced a backlog of cases when he first started work in 1921. In addition, the Conference for Social Service and other reformers had for several years wanted a way to evaluate the mental capacity of defendants in the court system, and the state welfare board pushed the court system to use Crane's psychological testing services.²²

Because testing had multiple uses, the Board tested a rather extraordinary number of people, usually individually but also in group settings. In the first eight months, Crane and his assistants carried out 575 mental examinations and reported that they did not have time to test even all of the "urgent cases."²³ In the following two-year period, they examined 847 people and *still* felt that they had not been able to follow through on all the requests for tests.²⁴ Of course, the number of people they tested was dwarfed by the number of feeble-minded people they believed lived in North Carolina: by McNairy's estimate, six to ten thousand children, not to mention adults.²⁵ Others offered totals in the range of fifty to fifty-five thousand.²⁶

²² Kate Burr Johnson to [solicitors in each of 20 districts], 5 Nov 1921, in BPW Records, Commissioner's Office, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

²³ Of the 575 people tested during this period, 170 were in a group setting. *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 40-41, 49.

²⁴ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 128, 144-145.

²⁵ "The Defective Child," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 20-21.

Extensive psychological testing served the bureau's research goals. Throughout the 1920s, state welfare officials used widespread psychological testing to produce what they believed were more accurate estimates of the number of feeble-minded, insane, and epileptic people in the state. These estimates shaped their priorities and served as evidence in funding requests. Upon Crane's arrival, one pressing concern for the Board was the prevalence of feeble-mindedness in the county homes spread across the state. Daisy Denson had made early, mostly futile attempts to survey the extent of feeble-mindedness in the state by having local officials fill out surveys. In 1921, the problem had once more come to the forefront because county commissioners statewide were disturbed by the number of illegitimate children born to mothers in county homes. Johnson directed Crane to study and "classify" the inmates in county homes in order to provide county commissioners with more information.²⁷ Crane examined over one hundred inmates from eight representative county homes and found that eighty-four per cent of the inmates were abnormal in some way. These findings led to his recommendations, which included expanding Caswell capacity to over a thousand inmates, allowing inmates of any age, and actively studying feeble-minded people to determine who should be institutionalized. To demonstrate the "economic inefficiency" of the state's current methods, he described "a feeble-minded woman, who has been a resident of a county home for fifty-one years, having given birth while at the county home to ten children."²⁸

²⁶ These estimates were often based on the commonly accepted principle that two per cent of the population was feeble-minded. For an estimate by Crane, see "The Feeble-Minded and the Law," *Charlotte Observer*, 16 July 1922; for an estimate by Johnson, see "Mrs. Johnson's Clarion Call" (reprinted from the *Asheville Citizen*, 2 Oct. 1927), *Public Welfare Progress* 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1927): 2; for an official committee's estimate and discussion of how to determine the number of feeble-minded, see *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School in its Relation to the Problem of the Feeble-minded of the State of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1926), 12.

²⁷ Kate Burr Johnson, "Report to the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare," 6 Dec. 1921, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 8: SBCPW, 1919-1928.

²⁸ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 43-46.

Another byproduct of the Board's extensive testing was an enormous registry of all of the state's known feeble-minded people. As Crane and his staff examined people, they carefully entered information about each person on a white, 3x5 index card. They also produced pink cards with information about any known relatives who might be mentally defective, even though often their only information was hearsay. They even gathered information about suspected cases from newspaper articles, entering this second-hand information on buff-colored cards.²⁹ The intent was to allow for systematized study of the transmission of mental defects; the Eugenics Record Office where Crane had trained used a similar system.³⁰ Each case was cross-referenced with county and institutional indexes. The volume of index cards mounted quickly, and each year Crane proudly reported new additions to the collection. Between 1922 and 1924, for example, they made 6,281 cards about individuals they had examined and 7,737 cards about their relatives.³¹ By the end of the decade, their files contained at least 30,000 entries, each representing an individual suspected of being mentally defective. They willingly shared this information with other social welfare officials, both public and private.³²

The Board's research agenda overlapped with but also diverged from the research goals of UNC faculty. As Crane surveyed and classified inmates in county homes and child-caring institutions in 1922, he also pursued a scholarly angle on group intelligence testing. While the Board was interested merely in quantifying the extent of feeble-mindedness, Crane and W. D. Glenn, a UNC graduate student in educational psychology, were interested in group intelligence

²⁹ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 138-139.

³⁰ For the ERO's system, see Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers," especially 643-44.

³¹ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 139.

³² In the next several biennia, they added 5,726 cards, 4,910 cards, and 6,650 cards. *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 89; *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 86-87; *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 82. On information sharing, see *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 139.

testing and the correlations between those tests and individual intelligence exams.³³ The following year, Glenn researched “the inheritance of intelligence in a cacogenic family” for the Board, administering intelligence tests to several dozen living members of the family and finding “various evidences” of intelligence levels for almost two hundred other living and dead relatives.³⁴ Research at UNC not conducted at the behest of the state welfare board often also contributed to the board’s goals of advancing knowledge of mental deficiency. With the head of the psychology department, Glenn co-authored a study of uses of intelligence and manual performance tests, finding that researchers should always adapt “the type of test to the previous environment of the individual.”³⁵ He also worked on a three-year longitudinal study of the effects of environmental factors on mental and physical development of children in a mill village.³⁶

The Board’s research included at least two eugenic “family studies” conducted along the lines of famous models like *The Jukes* and *The Kallikaks*.³⁷ Crane was surely familiar with family studies from his training at the Eugenics Record Office, and through the process of creating these studies, other staff became well versed in eugenics research techniques. In 1922, Board staff spent six months studying “Joe and Mary Wake” and their descendants, a family “known extensively for its immorality, drunkenness, and filth.” Joe was “undoubtedly born

³³ UNC Record No. 196 (July 1922), “Research in Progress, July 1921- July 1922,” 60.

³⁴ UNC Record No. 204 (July 1923), “Research in Progress, July 1922 - July 1923,” 57.

³⁵ UNC Record No. 226 (July 1, 1925), “Research in Progress, July 1924 - July 1925,” 67; J. F. Dashiell and W. D. Glenn, “A Re-examination of a Socially Composite Group with Binet and with Performance Tests,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 16, no. 5 (May 1925): 335-340. John F. Dashiell was a professor of psychology at UNC.

³⁶ UNC Record No. 236 (July 1, 1926), “Research in Progress, July 1925 - July 1926,” 28.

³⁷ Family studies, the most famous of which were studies of the Kallikaks and the Jukes, were a common means by which eugenicists traced the transmission of dysgenic traits from one generation to the next.

feeble-minded” and was suffering from general paresis, which the staff assumed was a result of his advanced syphilis. According to the Board’s report, “absolutely no contribution has he made to civilization *except the repairing* of a few shoe soles.” Joe’s wife Mary was “dope fiend” who allowed her children to play “in the green slime in the nearby ditch.” The couple had eight children, two of whom had died. The children had been arrested for petty theft, sent to reformatories, or taken in by foster parents.³⁸

The staff concluded that had the couple been refused a marriage license “on the ground of feeble-mindedness—as is done in a number of states—and sent to an institution, the State would have been spared much expense and trouble.” They also suggested that “had they been rendered incapable of having children they could not have been more diseased than they are, and still society would have been spared a second generation of their kind.” Johnson devoted six pages of the Board’s 1922 report to their findings, including a chart that summarized the family’s transgressions and their cost to taxpayers (Figure 1).³⁹ Her staff argued that their annual appropriation of \$20,000, which funded preventive work, put taxpayer money to more constructive use than the approximately \$20,000 that the state had “heedlessly poured out on this family.”⁴⁰

³⁸ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 99-102.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

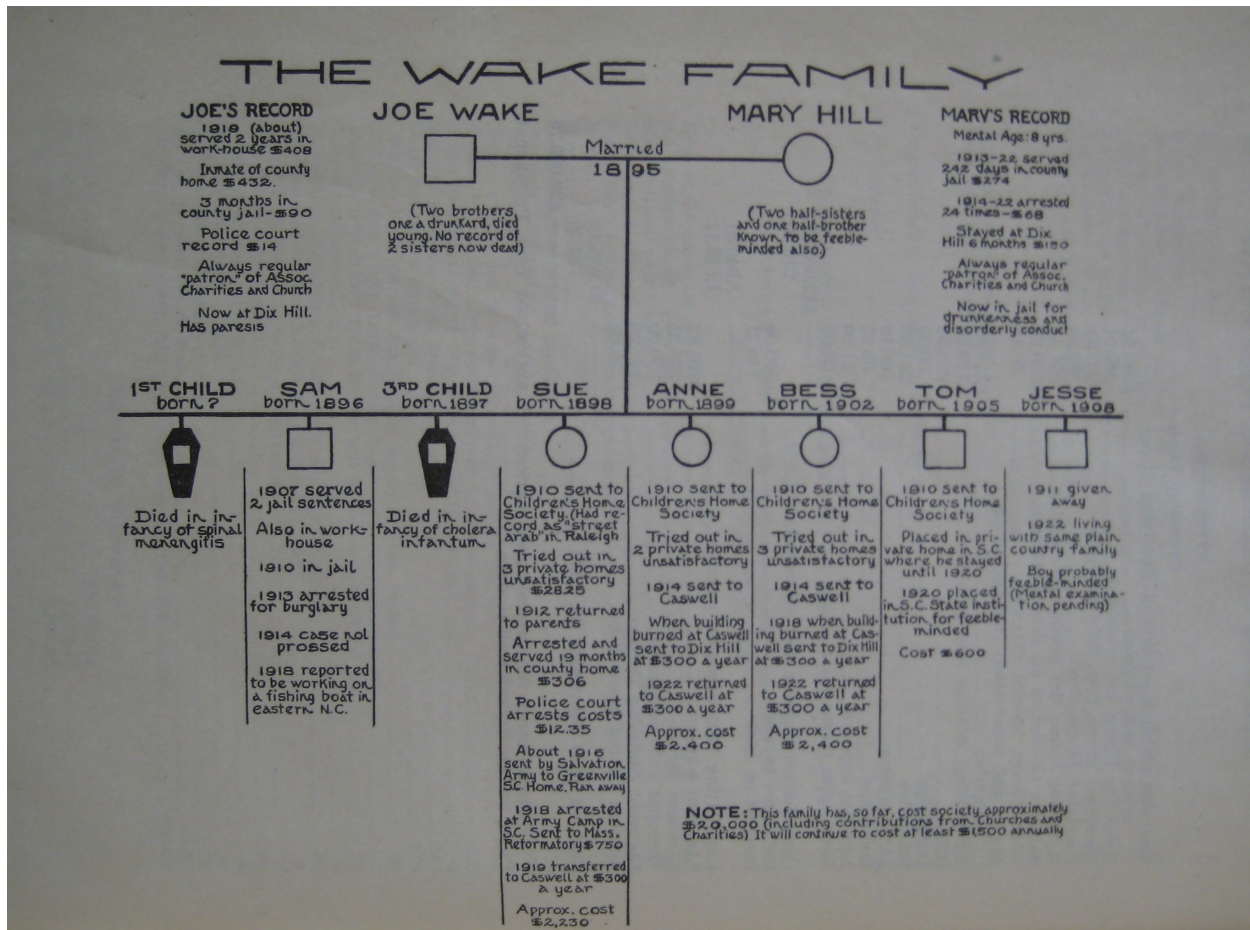


Figure 1: The Wake Family

In 1923 and 1924, UNC graduate student W. D. Glenn and other members of Johnson's staff studied the "Fehler" family—given that sobriquet in reference to the German word for "defect." Their goal was to show "the importance of control of cacogenic [undesirable] strains," and Glenn's report laid out "in forceful manner the necessity for preventing propagation in such families."⁴¹ Glenn traced the family's line as far back as 1815 and described it as rife with illegitimate children, racial mixing, bad tempers, prostitution, murder, cruelty, "immorality," "depravity," and "general social crimes." In his tests, he found nobody over the mental age of

⁴¹ Ibid., 135.

eleven.⁴² While the burden of Glenn's argument was the cost of the anti-social behavior of the family's 260 direct descendants, his report also beat readers over the head with the family's "sordid histories." Red Fehler "roved the woods and climbed trees from which he yelled for hours like an animal," and once cut off all his toes with an axe. Lizzie Fehler was convicted of the murder of three of her step-children and bore two illegitimate children of her own. Gerty Fehler "was as mean and low as a dog. She was a regular terror after men," and had two illegitimate children fathered by black men. Nancy Fehler prostituted herself for a can of snuff. "And so the murky details go in case after case," as Glenn concluded his list. The nearly two-page litany of the family's misdeeds was intended to elicit moral outrage, if the appeal to finances failed.⁴³

Education in Print: *Public Welfare Progress*

While testing led to research, research led to education. The Board sought to educate the public about the dangers of feeble-mindedness and promote principles of eugenics as a possible solution. In 1923, the Board declared that its "prime object" was "to reduce the social liabilities of the State, chief among which are delinquency, crime, dependency and mental defectiveness." One critical component of their program was to "acquaint the public with the extent of mental defectiveness in NC; its menace as a factor in race deterioration, and the imperative necessity for its control."⁴⁴ In its education programs, the Board emphasized preventive action, aimed to

⁴² *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 135-8. Glenn used the Stanford revision of the Binet-Simon test for 75 living family members but also gathered "various evidences of the degree of adjusting capacity" for a total of 360 individuals, suggesting that much of his evidence was hearsay. UNC Record No. 204 (July 1923), "Research in Progress, July 1922 - July 1923," 57.

⁴³ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 135-8.

⁴⁴ *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 1 (May 1923): 1.

foster political support for eugenics programs, and pushed individual North Carolinians to practice positive eugenics by carefully selecting their mates.⁴⁵

The Board's biennial reports served as one educational forum. They included statistical summaries, lengthy descriptions of research, and weighty calls for consideration of mental hygiene. Each legislator received a copy, and major newspapers spread the word further. To reach a broader audience, the Board also published a four-page monthly newsletter, *Public Welfare Progress*. *Progress* broadcast news about the state's eugenics initiatives and innovations in other states; nearly every issue contained some item about eugenics or mental hygiene.⁴⁶ By 1926 its circulation exceeded six thousand.⁴⁷

If it accomplished nothing else, *Public Welfare Progress* familiarized social workers and other readers with current professional ideas and practices about feeble-mindedness, mental illness, and eugenics. Articles that described Crane's work examining people across the state functioned as implicit advertisements for his services.⁴⁸ Readers were routinely updated about goings-on at Caswell, including the latest training methods there as well as fluff pieces about

⁴⁵ The Board also saw individual mental examinations as contributing to educational efforts. See *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 135.

⁴⁶ As the inaugural issue in October 1921 stated, the publication's purpose was not theoretical discussions of social welfare problems but rather items that would be of interest to the state's many types of social workers. It was "frankly designed to elicit public attention." *Public Welfare Progress* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1921). On occasion, the Board produced special 8-page issues of *Progress* on a particular topic. The first several issues of *Public Welfare Progress* were single-page mimeographed broadsides. The standard printed four-page format began in May 1923, at which point the Board stopped producing its quarterly *Bulletin*, which had run since 1918 (and which also had featured articles about eugenics and the menace of the feeble-minded). For examples of articles about eugenics in the *Bulletin*, see "A Comprehensive Idea of Child Welfare," *BCPW Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1920): 10-14; C. B. McNairy, "Feeble-Mindedness a Community as well as a State Problem," *BCPW Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1920): 37; "The Defective Child," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 20-21.

⁴⁷ "Five Years Ago," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 10 (Oct. 1926): 2.

⁴⁸ See, for example, "What the Superintendents are Doing," *Public Welfare Progress* 2, no. 3 (Mar. 1922).

field day events.⁴⁹ Guest articles by heads of the state's institutions advocated sterilization, outlined the mental hygiene movement, or described how mentally defective children were "clogging" the public school system.⁵⁰ Other articles reported the content of addresses by local leaders at medical meetings or social welfare conferences. When Kate Burr Johnson lectured on the importance of preventive measures at the National Conference of Social Work in 1924, *Progress* editor Nell Battle Lewis reported on her speech. Apparently Lewis so liked Johnson's phrase about "the purification of our blood stream" through "segregation and prevention of increase of the mental defective" that she repeated it several months later in a special issue distributed at the state fair.⁵¹

The newsletter also included a good deal of material from national leaders. The editor often summarized new publications or developments elsewhere or threw in pithy quotes by leading thinkers, visually highlighted in stand-alone boxes. In 1924 Lewis published a quote under the heading, "Parenthood a vocation not a right, says Barr," presumably from Dr. Martin Barr, who condemned the birth of "mental or moral cripples" and hoped for "the day when men and women shall realize that parenthood is not a right, but a vocation to which all are not called; and that the grasping of it by the victims, the diseased and the defective is practically the crime of touching the sacred Ark of the Covenant, for which the penalty was death."⁵² These short

⁴⁹ "Dr. Dixon Outlines Methods of Training Used at Caswell," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 12 (Dec. 1926): 1; "Results of Training Shown at Field Day," *Public Welfare Progress* 8, no. 6 (June 1927).

⁵⁰ Albert Anderson, "Movement for Mental Hygiene Preventive," *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 8 (Dec. 1923): 1, 4; W. H. Dixon, "Some Suggestions in Regard to State's Mental Defectives," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 1-2; W. H. Dixon, "Census Shows Large Number Mental Defectives Clogging School System," *Public Welfare Progress* 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1927): 1-2.

⁵¹ "A Common-Sense Measure," *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 8 (Aug. 1924): 4; "The governor Says" and "The Sommissioner Says" boxes, *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 10 (Oct. 1924): 4. For other examples, see "What'll You do about it? Asks Dr. J K Hall," *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 5 (May 1924): 3; and Julian M. Baker, "Dr. Baker Addresses Welfare Conference," *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no.s 10-11 (Oct.-Nov. 1928): 1-2.

⁵² "Parenthood a Vocation Not a Right, Says Barr," *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 3 (July 1923): 3.

quotes—almost all of which addressed some aspect of eugenics or mental hygiene—must have been intended to catch the reader’s eye and force her into reflection. Other articles or highlighted features encapsulated key principles for the uninformed reader, such as “Reproduction of Unfit Costly,” which cited research on the Jukes family.⁵³ Similarly, in 1926 the newsletter used material from the National Committee for Mental Hygiene to clarify the differences between feeble-mindedness and insanity, although its own articles often blurred the distinctions in practice.⁵⁴

Some articles seem intended merely to feed fears about the menace of the feeble-minded. In 1923 the editor noted that the legislative aims of the national Eugenics Committee included segregation and sterilization, warning that without action, in another four generations the “lower mental and physical types” could constitute ninety percent of the population.⁵⁵ Even stranger is a brief piece from 1924, entitled “Suppos’n.” Suppose, it posited, two couples of different intelligence levels married and reproduced. After five generations, the prolific feeble-minded couple would have produced 1,024 offspring, while the “honor graduate of Harvard” and “honor graduate of Bryn Mawr” would have produced 32 people with “superior intelligence.” The article ended, “Query: 32 is to 1,024 as civilization is to what? This is a little joke at which people of the twenty-first century will probably laugh heartily.”⁵⁶ Perhaps the newsletter editor assumed that by the twenty-first century, eugenics programs would have had such complete

⁵³ “Reproduction of Unfit Costly,” *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 1 (May 1923): 4

⁵⁴ “Confusion of Terms,” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1926): 2

⁵⁵ “Eugenics Committee States Its Program,” *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 6 (Oct. 1923): 4.

⁵⁶ “Suppos’n,” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 4 (Apr. 1924): 2. See also “Many Feeble-Minded Wait for Admission,” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1924): 7.

success in improving the quality of the population and of civilization itself that denizen of the future would find humor in the specter of disaster averted.

Other pieces, more along the lines of editorial commentary, aimed to build political support for the Board's goals, particularly for expanding space at Caswell or exploring other avenues to limit the reproduction of the feeble-minded. Many items circled a familiar theme, telling the pitiful story of some feeble-minded young woman, describing her offspring—or future offspring—then asking what might be done to prevent the spread of her condition. In October 1923, a front-page feature described a nameless, hypothetical feeble-minded woman “wandering from place to place” with her three “mentally defective” children. She was pregnant, and her fourth child stood little hope of being “mentally normal.” As the article outlined the way she “[bred] defectives” who “sap[ped] the health of State’s population,” an almost chant-like refrain punctuated each paragraph: “And there is no room at the Caswell Training School!” The article concluded hyperbolically, “It is a fact, a *fact*, a FACT that the mentally inferior are reproducing themselves five times more swiftly at present than the superior,” and ended with one last chorus of its lament.⁵⁷

In some cases, Johnson and her publicity staff clearly intended to open up the question of what could be done when segregation efforts fell short.⁵⁸ In a brief piece in 1926, editor Lucy F. Lay reprinted the text of two letters that had arrived in the same morning’s mail, both about feeble-minded women who had “presented puzzling problems” to social workers. Both women

⁵⁷ “What is the State’s Answer to This Fact?” *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 6 (Oct. 1923): 1. For similar articles, see “‘What Can We Do with Defectives’ is Question,” in which Kate Burr Johnson told multiple stories of feeble-minded children and young women and, as in the article several months earlier, repeated a refrain: “The Caswell Training School is full.” “What can we do with Defectives’ is question,” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 6 (June 1924): 3.

⁵⁸ For another example, see “Equality,” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 5 (May 1924): 2, where the editor called for adequate segregation at Caswell but also argued that “when real civilization is a little nearer, there will be general recognition of the fact that segregation alone can never solve the problem of mental deficiency.”

had multiple children and were reportedly incompetent to raise them. Both had some past history with a county home or other institution, and in each case the institution seemed like an insufficient solution. Editor Lay commented that these women's cases indicated "only a small part of the difficulties in handling those who are mentally deficient" and concluded by saying, "Just two letters out of one day's mail. What would you suggest as a solution?"⁵⁹ Her rhetorical question highlights the very real complexity of dealing with cases where poverty, mental problems, and extramarital sex were intertwined and, perhaps, reveals some of the Board's frustration with similar cases. Lay's prompt also laid the burden of solving the problem on her readers. As they considered these two cases, they might also consider the larger problem. On the very same page they might find a solution: an article by W. H. Dixon, the new superintendent of Caswell, offered "Some suggestions in regard to state's mental defectives." Dixon advocated marriage restrictions and sterilization as preventive measures.⁶⁰

Education in Person: The Wake Family Exhibit

Each day during the state fair of 1922, crowds tramped through the dusty grounds, scrutinizing prize-winning cattle, reliving the excitement of the day's races, and waiting for the grand display of fireworks that careened crazily upwards each evening. The fairgoers who wandered towards the clump of booths for various state agencies would have seen staff from the state welfare board—perhaps Nell Battle Lewis, the board's brand-new publicist, young, energetic Wiley Sanders, or even Dr. Harry Crane—ready to explain a series of large posters they had set up. On one poster was a photograph of the "Wake family," the villains of the

⁵⁹ "What Would You Suggest?" *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 2

⁶⁰ W. H. Dixon, "Some Suggestions In Regard To State's Mental Defectives," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 1-2.

Board's recent biennial report.⁶¹ Emeth Tuttle had also prepared "striking posters depicting the costly, criminal and disorderly history" of the family. Although the staff had also brought placards about Mothers' Aid, a census of physical defects, and prison reforms, the Wake posters were the "most prominent feature" of the exhibit.⁶² Before the fair even opened, one reporter predicted that the welfare department booth would be "of special interest," and their display "attracted wide attention."⁶³ After the fair *Charity and Children*, the newspaper of the Baptist Orphanage in Thomasville, commented on the exhibit's effectiveness in dispelling "prejudice" against the welfare board's work by showing that the Wake family had cost the state the equivalent of the board's annual appropriation.⁶⁴

Such traveling exhibits served as engaging supplements to the Board's usual print media and complemented Crane's numerous public addresses about his work.⁶⁵ Tuttle developed the Wake family exhibit for use in other places as well, presumably without permission from the beleaguered Wakes, whose remaining shreds of anonymity were destroyed as staff added pictures of "disgraceful episodes" in the family's history as well as charts showing the expense to the state of the family's offspring.⁶⁶ The exhibit was quite popular over the next several years,

⁶¹ "State Fair to be Opened to Public on Tuesday," *Charlotte Observer*, 15 Oct. 1922; "Current Observations by the Newspapers: 'Dispelling Prejudice' (From *Charity and Children*)," *Charlotte Observer*, 27 Oct. 1922.

⁶² *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 53. On Tuttle's work, see *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 98.

⁶³ "State Fair to be Opened to Public on Tuesday," *Charlotte Observer*, 15 Oct. 1922; *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 53.

⁶⁴ "Current Observations by the Newspapers: 'Dispelling Prejudice' (From *Charity and Children*)," *Charlotte Observer*, 27 Oct. 1922. Eugenic-themed exhibits were popular at state and county fairs across the country. See Laura L. Lovett, "'Fitter Families for Future Firesides': Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics," *Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 69-85. On the relationship between "fitter family" and "better baby" contests, see Molly Ladd Taylor, "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States," *Social Politics* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 139-140.

⁶⁵ See, for example, *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 134.

⁶⁶ "Chicago Will See Exhibit Defective 'Wake' Family," *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 6 (Oct. 1923): 3.

being “in almost constant use.”⁶⁷ Staff took it to meetings of women’s clubs and the Conference for Social Service, and parts of it were published in the *Survey*, after which requests came to borrow the exhibit from as far away as Chicago, Minnesota, and Iowa.⁶⁸ In 1924 the board used *Public Welfare Progress* to spread the word about their new projection equipment, “an entertaining little machine” that could be used to show pictures and charts from the Wake family project, enhancing the exhibit’s appeal.⁶⁹ The materials continued to be of interest as late as 1927, when three college classes, including a class in social pathology from the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro, came to the Board’s Raleigh offices to see the charts.⁷⁰

Another eugenics-themed exhibit, first used at the Conference for Social Service in March, 1926, took the form of a contest. Staff of the division of mental health and hygiene selected photographs of five girls from one institution (probably Samarcond) whom Harry Crane had tested for intelligence.⁷¹ He decided that two were normal and three were feeble-minded and assigned IQs to each. The staff presented each picture on a large piece of cardboard and asked conference attendees to rank the children “from brightest to dullest,” based simply on their appearance. The point was to discredit “an idea that is still somewhat prevalent—that it is possible to ‘pick out’ a feeble-minded child by looking at him.” The Board urged social workers not to “guess” about mentality, but to have a mental exam done by a trained professional. This

⁶⁷ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 16.

⁶⁸ “Chicago Will See Exhibit Defective ‘Wake’ Family,” *Public Welfare Progress* 4, no. 6 (Oct. 1923): 3; “Durham Woman’s Club Studying Feeble-minded,” *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1925), 4; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 87-88; “Wake Family Charts are Pursuing Useful Career,” *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 10 (Oct. 1925): 4.

⁶⁹ “Feeble-Minded on the Screen,” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 5 (May 1924): 3.

⁷⁰ “Student Groups See Wake County Charts,” *Public Welfare Progress* 8, no. 12 (Dec. 1927): 4.

⁷¹ Crane conducted a special study of girls at Samarcond from 1922 to 1924. He was unable to conduct any such studies between 1924 and 1926, so he probably drew his examples from his previous work at Samarcond. *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 135; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 87.

point may have been lost on the two dozen conference attendees who submitted answers to the “guessing contest,” since the staff shared the answers only in *Public Welfare Progress* four months later.⁷² At that point, they reprinted the five photographs, giving readers a chance to play at home. This time, they did a better job of driving home the message that social workers should “have a mental exam made” (see figure 2).⁷³ This print “exhibit” was later reproduced in *The Nation’s Health*, indicating its popularity among readers.⁷⁴

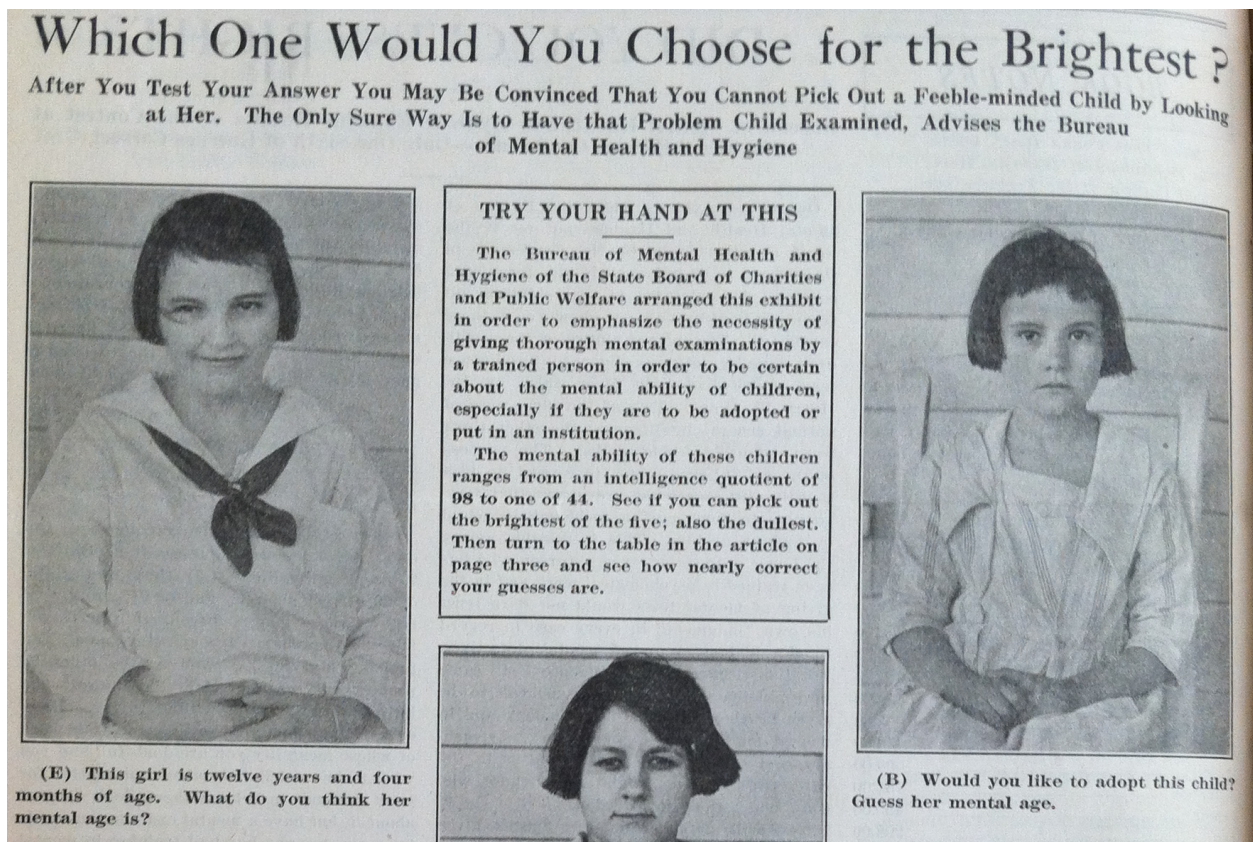


Figure 2: Which One Would You Choose for the Brightest?

⁷² “Did You Guess Right?” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 3.

⁷³ “Which One Would You Choose for the Brightest?” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 4.

⁷⁴ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 14.

Academics in the Pro-Eugenics Network

The state welfare board's division of mental health and hygiene was a center of research and education that tied together people with an interest in these topics, but several groups beyond the board also continued to champion eugenics initiatives, as they had done in the 1910s. Physicians, academics, and lay reformers kept up a low-key conversation about eugenics, ensuring that the broader public stayed informed about the latest professional opinions. Although their ardor for legislative action waned, their basic support did not waver.

One outspoken academic advocate of eugenics was North Carolina native William Louis Poteat, the President of Wake Forest College and an important public intellectual. He waxed lyrical (and evangelical) about eugenics—particularly positive eugenics—in lecture halls, behind pulpits, and on picnic grounds. Born in 1856 to slaveholding parents and raised in a strict Southern Baptist household, Poteat was part of an older generation than the social workers who crowded Chapel Hill for training each summer. Although he was a professor of biology and sometimes offered his audience scientific explanations, he viewed eugenics from a moral rather than a scientific standpoint.⁷⁵ He never bothered to discuss the niceties of professional practice. For him, eugenics turned on the question of social regeneration, a topic about which he spoke and wrote often from the 1880s through the 1930s.⁷⁶ His talks on eugenics and social rebirth

⁷⁵ Poteat was a self-trained biologist, but despite his lack of formal training he taught the subject at Wake Forest for years and achieved some measure of professional regard. Poteat was also the only person in the first half of the twentieth century to serve as president both of the Baptist State Convention and the North Carolina Academy of Science. William B. Gatewood, Jr., *Preachers, Pedagogues, and Politicians: The Evolution Controversy in North Carolina, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 60. Poteat's biographer, Randal L. Hall, argues that "Poteat's prolific writing reflects his struggle to accept a liberal theology that could reconcile his scientific understanding with the Southern Baptist mores that formed him." Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 1. Wendy Kline writes about eugenics as an "appealing solution to the problem of moral disorder," evoking support from middle-class whites because it linked race and gender. Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

⁷⁶ Hall writes, "Even at age twenty-five the young professor had developed the sense of social crisis that would follow him throughout his life... In Poteat's opinion society faced decline if citizens lacked reverence for older

took a variety of forms: lectures at a picnic in Montgomery County, at a formal dinner in Greensboro, and before the Conference for Social Service; addresses to Baptist organizations around the South; a presidential address to the state Mental Hygiene Society in Raleigh, and so on.⁷⁷ As a well-known public speaker, a professional scientist, and a Baptist, Poteat could command attention on the subject of eugenics and lend it legitimacy, especially among churchgoers inclined towards the Social Gospel.

Poteat believed that human civilization was in decline but had potential for a rebirth. Although the problem of degeneration was at the level of society, the solution was to be found only through regeneration of individuals. By 1912, Poteat's ideas began to lean in the direction of eugenics, laced with evangelical themes, as a possible solution. He refined and amplified his ideas about eugenics partly as a result of his own voracious reading, which included not only the latest scientific papers but also literature and philosophy.⁷⁸ He latched onto Mendelian genetics by 1903 and was one of the South's earliest defenders of evolution, and these interests clearly fed his curiosity about eugenics; he often explained basic principles of inheritance to his

religious attachments and a deferential respect for traditional values with their attendant stability and order. When political and economic turmoil created social unrest in the 1890s, Poteat began to show even more fear, but as of the mid-1880s he believed that refined, elevated learning could check the degeneration that he described." Hall, *William Louis Poteat*, 46.

⁷⁷ See William L. Poteat, "Address at Reunion and Picnic on Lawn of Dr. Oscar Haywood, Montgomery County," 17 Aug. 1912; Poteat, "Mental Hygiene Society," Raleigh, 8 Jan. 1915; Poteat, "The wealth of North Carolina," Asheville, 20 Oct. 1916, all in William Louis Poteat Papers (MS 91, Smith Reynolds Library Special Collections and Archives, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC; hereafter Poteat Papers), Writings and Speeches, Box 12, Folder 1245; Poteat, "The conservation of the resources of North Carolina," Conservation dinner, Greensboro, 7 Sept. 1916, Reprinted in *Bulletin of Wake Forest College*, n.d., Poteat Papers, Box 7, Folder 832; Poteat, "Address for North Carolina Society for Mental Hygiene," 1917, Poteat Papers, Box 9, Folder 949; Poteat, "The old method for the new world," address at North Carolina Social [Service] Conference, Greensboro, 1920, reprinted in *BCPW Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1920): 6-11, Poteat Papers, Box 9, Folder 982; Poteat, "The Standard Man," presidential address to the Southern Baptist Education Association, Birmingham, Alabama, 3-5 Dec. 1921, reprinted in *Baptist Education Bulletin*, Poteat Papers, Box 9, Folder 1085; Poteat, "Social Significance of Heredity," Presidential address to Southern Baptist Education Association, Memphis, 21 Feb. 1923, Poteat Papers, Box 9, Folder 1078.

⁷⁸ Hall, *William Louis Poteat*, 22.

audiences.⁷⁹ Involved with the Conference from its very first annual meeting, Poteat may have also refined his understanding of eugenics based on what he learned from Louis Burgin McBrayer, C. Banks McNairy, and other members of its committee on eugenics.

Poteat saw eugenics programs as part of a group of measures that could slow the “degeneracy which is spreading everywhere” and which was “an economic and moral burden on our back.”⁸⁰ Public health programs could decrease “preventable deaths and illnesses” and improve the quality of life, while eugenics programs could improve the human “stock” and prevent some degeneracy. Some of his messages rang of positive eugenic principles: he told audiences that North Carolina’s “best crop” was children, noting that the state had many children “of a vigorous strain, now pure-bred and native.”⁸¹ In 1914 he praised the “North Carolina type,” the product of the blending of various immigrant groups, which he claimed was “sterling, self-reliant, frank, [and] conservatively progressive.” Like many other pro-eugenics reformers, Poteat believed that character was part of a “racial inheritance” and warned of the “peril of the ultimate decay of the race.”⁸²

He also supported marriage restrictions as early as 1912, with his speeches on this matter gradually becoming more explicitly eugenic. At first he exhorted his listeners to “fight together against disease” and “form [a] conscience on marriage.” By 1916 he called outright for marriage restrictions and for candid discussion of reproduction, telling a Greensboro audience that “Every

⁷⁹ Hall, *William Louis Poteat*, 36-7.

⁸⁰ Poteat, “The conservation of the resources of North Carolina,” 1916.

⁸¹ This language of children as a crop also surfaces in other rural states. For similar language in Kansas, see Laura Lovett, “Fitter Families for Future Firesides.”

⁸² Poteat, “At Concord,” Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Association, 12 Sept, 1912, Poteat Papers, Box 12, Folder 1245; and Poteat, “The New Fates and the Web of Destiny,” high school commencement, 3 Apr. 1914, Poteat Papers, Folder 969, quoted in Hall, *William Louis Poteat*, 99-100.

North Carolina child has the right to be well born. I make no apology for speaking of this fundamental matter. Such a discussion has been lately branded as a fad and a foul vulgarity. It is precisely such an uninformed hush-mouth policy which has brought us into our present peril. Under this cover of silence the rot in the roots of humanity spreads.”⁸³

Ultimately, Poteat hoped that eugenics programs would result in “the standard man,” who would be “well born, well conditioned, well trained, but also born again.”⁸⁴ By 1920 he had developed a formula that he continued to use for years: “The ideal citizen, the ideal social unit and, by implication, the ideal society, depend upon Euthenics, the science of being well-conditioned, Eugenics, the science of being well born, and, if I may coin a new word, Anagenics, the science of being born again, these three, and the greatest of these is Anagenics.”⁸⁵

Although many Progressives called for government to play an active role in social change, Poteat’s ideas on the subject were somewhat complicated by his religious beliefs. His notes for a series of sermons in 1924 on “The Kingdom of God” indicated that the proper method of creating the kingdom of God was “not legislation to scheme for His ideal state,” but rather “winning the individual” through evangelism. Converted individuals—“new people”—were the nexus of social change. Indeed, social regeneration was “quite beyond [the] reach of legislation,” since for Poteat most social problems were in fact moral problems and must be addressed in moral or religious terms.⁸⁶

⁸³ Poteat, “The conservation of the resources of North Carolina,” 1916.

⁸⁴ Poteat, “The Standard Man,” 1921, Poteat Papers, Folder 1085.

⁸⁵ Poteat, “The Old Method for the New World,” 1920.

⁸⁶ Poteat’s faith in the moral vigor of the church was in some tension with his sympathy for Progressive methods of social reform. To him, government action had a place when it expressed Christian morality. See “The Kingdom of God” (notebook), 1923, Poteat Papers, Box 8, Folder 914. See also Randal Hall’s excellent descriptions of Poteat’s lifelong struggle to reconcile his faith in traditional Victorian mores with modern principles in Hall, *William Louis Poteat*.

In this sense, Poteat was unconcerned with the nitty-gritty details of how to run eugenics programs. For him, social workers may have played the same role as any other Christian bent on evangelism. This stance did not diminish his effectiveness as a speaker and a supporter of eugenics. The public did not care that his faith in eugenics came more from his religious zeal than from his scientific training. And social workers, who looked to psychologists rather than to biologists for practical information about eugenics, may have found Poteat's addresses inspirational.

Academics of a slightly younger generation and in other fields saw in eugenics an arena for research rather than moralizing. In the state's public and private universities, eugenics found particular support among psychologists and sociologists, and in some cases their research fed back into the training of social workers. In 1927 Duke University gained noted pro-eugenics psychologist Dr. William McDougall, formerly of Harvard. McDougall's 1921 book, *Is America Safe for Democracy*, made the case for eugenics from a psychological and historical perspective.⁸⁷ Nell Battle Lewis trumpeted his arrival and his ideas with the headline, "Rapid Increase of Unfit Great American Menace" and noted his interest in North Carolina's provisions for segregation and sterilization.⁸⁸ At UNC, several scholars connected with the School of Public Welfare accepted eugenics as a legitimate part of social science and taught from eugenics-based texts and case studies in their courses. The *Journal of Social Forces*, which Howard

⁸⁷ William McDougall, *Is America Safe for Democracy? Six Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute of Boston, under the Title "Anthropology and History, or the Influence of Anthropologic Constitution on the Destinies of Nations"* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), accessed 1 May 2013, <http://archive.org/details/isamericasafefo00mcdogoog>.

⁸⁸ Nell Battle Lewis, "Rapid Increase of Unfit Great American Menace," [*News and Observer*, 1927], clipping in Nell Battle Lewis Papers (PC 255, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC), Social Welfare 1922-1938, Folder: Lewis, Nell Battle, Collection, Mental Hygiene.

Odum edited, reviewed books with eugenics themes, and contributors occasionally mentioned eugenics as a solution to social problems, in the pattern of many social theorists at the time.⁸⁹

Graduate students' research papers are the most interesting remaining indication of attitudes towards eugenics among the youngest members of the academy.⁹⁰ Margaret Brietz, a masters student in sociology who worked with Wiley B. Sanders at UNC, is a case in point. Brietz arrived at UNC in 1926 after five years as a probation officer for delinquent girls in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.⁹¹ She hoped to gain training in social work, and with Kate Burr Johnson's help she secured a fellowship from the state Federation of Women's Clubs for a year's study in sociology.⁹² Before this, her social work training was limited to in-service training and principles of professional social work she picked up from the Board's outreach efforts; perhaps she read *Public Welfare Progress* or attended one of the Board's summer workshops at UNC. Her 1927 master's thesis interpreted her work as a probation officer

⁸⁹ See, for example, V. V. Anderson, "The State Program for Mental Hygiene," *Social Forces* 1, no. 2 (Jan. 1923): 92-100; Mildred Dennett Mudgett, "The Use of Advanced Students in Field Work," *Social Forces* 1, no. 4 (May 1923): 395-399; J. L. Gillin, "Pauperism and Crime in Wisconsin," *Social Forces* 2, no. 1 (Nov 1923): 73-76; F. H. Hankins, review of *Population Problems* by Edward B. Reuter and *Population* by Harold Wright, *Social Forces* 2, no. 4 (May 1924): 591-592; Ernest R. Groves, "The Family in Paper Cover," review of Paul Popenoe, *Eugenic Sterilization in California*, *Social Forces* 7, no. 4 (June 1929): 612-14; Benjamin Malzberg, "Notes on Sterilization and Social Control," *Social Forces* 8, no. 3 (Mar. 1930): 398-401.

⁹⁰ Another graduate student, George H. Lawrence (later a professor of social work at UNC, after finishing his PhD in 1928) was reportedly working on "The Rochell Family: A Study in Feeble-Mindedness" and "A Ten Years Study of the Boys of Jackson Training School" in 1923-1924. UNC Record No. 212 (July, 1924) - July 1923 - July 1924, 90; UNC faculty register.

⁹¹ Susan Cahn has analyzed Brietz's work in terms of problems of modernity and delinquency. Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007). For a discussion of Brietz's reliance on eugenic literatures, see also Susan Cahn, "Spirited Youth or Fiends Incarnate: The Samarcand Arson Case and Female Adolescence in the American South," in *Other Souths: Diversity and Difference in the U.S. South, Reconstruction to Present*, ed. Pippa Holloway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 208-234, especially 217-218, 221.

⁹² Margaret Brietz to Kate Burr Johnson, 24 Aug. 1936, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women's Clubs, 1926-1947.

primarily through the lens of her education at UNC.⁹³ She described the “complete life-setting” of eighteen “delinquent girls” committed to Samarcand with whom she had worked from 1921 to 1925.⁹⁴ Brietz organized their cases into four categories of her own invention that reflected her desire to disentangle environmental and hereditary causes of delinquency: adolescent delinquency (three girls); delinquency and bad surroundings (six girls); delinquency and homelessness (two girls); and delinquency and mental defectiveness (seven girls).

Brietz’s comments are rife with tensions and contradictions. She advocated mental testing, using the results of mental examinations administered at Samarcand as a basis for her analysis and noting that “the mental defective is not to be labeled at a casual glance, as in accordance with the old idea.”⁹⁵ But she also wrote that Mandy Shivvers (whose case she entitled, “A Defective Delinquent Showing Back-Mountain Degeneracy”) “appeared distinctly feeble-minded” before a mental exam had been made, with this label perhaps linked to her appraisal of Mandy as “poor white trash.”⁹⁶ Even as Brietz tried to tackle her case studies scientifically, she wandered into speculation and conjecture that elided environmental and hereditary causes. Carmine James, “A Defective Delinquent with Personality Charm,” “might easily have floated in a much higher strata of society, and might have married into stock much superior to her own... Whether this mixture of bad with good ‘blood’ could have assured us a higher mental level in Carmine’s children and children’s children, is not definitely known.” But because she worked in a mill, “it is probable that she will marry a poor man in her own social

⁹³ Margaret C. Brietz, “Case Studies of Delinquent Girls in North Carolina” (MA thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1927). Thanks to Karin Zipf for bringing this thesis to my attention.

⁹⁴ Brietz, “Case Studies of Delinquent Girls,” 1-4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 169

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182. On “poor white trash,” see Nicole Hahn Rafter, introduction to Rafter, ed., *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

status, who will possibly be as defective as Carmine herself... Provided such a husband would be defective mentally, their children and children's children would most probably start a family of future liabilities to the State in defectiveness and crime."⁹⁷

Brietz invoked eugenic principles in her analysis of several cases, although she failed even here to heed distinctions between environment and heredity. Describing Vivian Hart ("A Defective Delinquent with Special Abilities"), Brietz wrote, "The problem of eugenics seems involved. By marrying sound stock, her abilities might have made her promising material, individually and socially. But she has apparently chosen unsound stock. Therefore, her future successful adjustment will depend largely upon her environment, which always has a strong influence in stabilizing or breaking down character. It is highly probably that Society will be the winner if the McLures [Hart and her husband] remain a family of two."⁹⁸ She concluded her commentary on Mandy Shivers by saying,

One can but wonder at the enormity of Society's problem in the proper care of such a family. Shall the solution lie in Segregation, Sterilization, or in Eugenics and better Marriage Laws? In North Carolina, this problem is still but feebly answered. Even the wisest care of social workers cannot insure useful social adjustment for those born mentally deficient, and each year adds its new toll of feeble-minded babies.... mental defectiveness cannot be cured, but may be transmitted to future generations. And the adjustment which Mandy has made has involved motherhood, children! What a price! In settling one account, Society deals in 'futures' with more than one. How long it will be before Society comes to do the only reasonable thing in such cases of definite feeble-mindedness—the prevention of procreation—is a matter of conjecture.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Brietz, "Case Studies of Delinquent Girls," 170.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

Brietz's conclusions, as historian Susan Cahn has noted, reflect tensions about the place of adolescent girls in the context of racial segregation and growing industrialization.¹⁰⁰ But Brietz's thesis also reveals eugenics standing at the intersection of academic sociology and social work practice.

Medical Perspectives on Mental Hygiene

Physicians had led the push to establish Caswell Training School in the early 1910s, and during the 1920s they continued to be outspoken advocates of eugenic segregation and other eugenics measures, often to medical audiences. In 1924 Dr. J. K. Hall of Richmond, Virginia, addressed the North Carolina Medical Society about mental deficiency, offering Virginia's new eugenic sterilization statute as an example to follow.¹⁰¹ In addition, medical gatherings hosted social work professionals such as Kate Burr Johnson. In September 1927, she spoke to a district medical society about the centrality of mental health and hygiene to the prevention of crime, describing the Board's work and urging doctors to educate their patients about mental hygiene. The Tri-State Medical Association reprinted her address for distribution to all of its members.¹⁰²

Led by its medical staff, Caswell continued to be a hub of pro-eugenics activity. Superintendent McNairy conducted his own research and writing on eugenics, including the publication of a treatise on eugenics and incest in 1919.¹⁰³ He also lectured around the state

¹⁰⁰ Cahn points out that "Margaret Brietz's claim that Samarcan inmates were 'sisters under the skin' is revealing. It simultaneously portrays poor white girls as of another race—presumed to have a different skin—and as members of a white sisterhood whose physical and moral health held the key to the future of the state." Cahn thus suggests that to Brietz, these girls seemingly betray their duty to the white race with their delinquency. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 66, 54.

¹⁰¹ "What'll You Do About It? Asks Dr. J K Hall," *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 5 (May 1924): 3. See also Julian M. Baker, "Dr. Baker Addresses Welfare Conference," *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no.s 10-11 (Oct.-Nov. 1928): 1-2.

¹⁰² Kate Burr Johnson, "State Welfare Program as it Relates to Mental Diseases and Crime," *Southern Medicine and Surgery* 89 no. 11 (Nov. 1927): 771-776.

¹⁰³ "Dr. Banks McNairy Issues New Treatise on 'Eugenics'," *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 Feb. 1919.

about mental deficiency.¹⁰⁴ McNairy was an active member of the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded; in 1922 he became the first southerner to be elected president of the organization.¹⁰⁵ His successor W. H. Dixon was also active in the AASFM and kept up an active publicity campaign, frequently publishing articles about feeble-mindedness in *Public Welfare Progress*.¹⁰⁶ When the AASFM held its national convention in Raleigh in May, 1925, the medical director William A. Newbold gave a paper on endocrinology and blood chemistry that used cases from Caswell.¹⁰⁷

Despite the public activities of its superintendents, Caswell's mental testing programs remained small. After repeated calls for a psychological bureau at Caswell, Newbold became the first medical director in April 1922. For three years, Newbold tested a few dozen people each year for mental deficiency, both Caswell inmates and patients brought in to his clinic.¹⁰⁸ But Newbold left in 1925, and by 1927 the school's medical director was unfamiliar with mental tests. Harry Crane and UNC grad student John Holman McFadden helped Caswell conduct tests, in addition to their regular duties.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ "Dr. M'Nairy Discusses Feeble-minded People," *Greensboro Daily News*, 16 June 1923.

¹⁰⁵ McNairy joined the organization in 1917 and became an officer in 1920. He frequently attended the meetings. *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* 22 (1917-1918): 53; *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* 25 (1920-1921): 184; *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* 28 (June 1922-June 1923): 94; "Dr. M'Nairy Discusses Feeble-Minded People," *Greensboro Daily News*, 16 June 1923; and Steven Noll, *Feeble-minded in our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 53, 181n63.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, W. H. Dixon, "Some Suggestions in Regard to State's Mental Defectives," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 1-2; "Dr. Dixon Outlines Methods of Training Used at Caswell," *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 12 (Dec. 1926): 1; W. H. Dixon, "Census Shows Large Number Mental Defectives Clogging School System," *Public Welfare Progress* 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1927): 1-2; W. H. Dixon, "Dr. Dixon Recommends Parole of Feeble-Minded," *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no.s 10-11 (Oct.-Nov. 1929): 1, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* 29 (1925): 287-292.

¹⁰⁸ In his first two years at Caswell, Newbold gave mental tests to 70 Caswell residents and 57 non-institutional residents. *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1922-1924*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Both Newbold and McNairy were forced out in mid-1925. For a brief period, the psychiatrist and medical director was Dr. J. T. Wright, who made 55 psychometric examinations during his first year; see *Biennial Report of*

Although the medical establishment and welfare officers often agreed on policy measures and drew on the others' professional expertise to bolster their own arguments, they also engaged in quiet power struggles. Many leaders in the mental hygiene movement were physicians or psychiatrists, including the heads of the state's mental hospitals and of Caswell. The law required them to submit to regular inspections by welfare officials, who were charged with ensuring the well-being of inmates' bodies and souls. These inspections were a sore point that complicated welfare and medical officials' shared agenda.

On a more theoretical level, doctors, social workers, and reformers disagreed (even amongst themselves) about which aspects of mental hygiene were most pressing. They were divided, too, about the best solutions. In 1925, for example, Dr. Albert Anderson, the long-time head of the Raleigh hospital for the white insane, suggested that the incurably insane should be cared for in county homes rather than mental hospitals, which Kate Burr Johnson saw as a "dangerous policy" and part of "a movement in the State to undo now a large part of the humane work that the Board of Charities and Public Welfare has been trying to do for eighteen or twenty years in the way of getting insane and feeble-minded out of county homes, where they were frequently found living under indescribably cruel conditions."¹¹⁰

Occasionally, these tensions came to a head, creating bad blood between officials who were supposed to cooperate to create public health and welfare policies. The Board spent

the Caswell Training School, 1924-1926, 28. But by 1927, the new medical director did not have psychological experience; see *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1926-1928*, 17, 19. McFadden had training in psychological testing and continued graduate work in the field, probably basing some of his PhD dissertation on his work at Caswell. John Holman McFadden, "Racial Differences Measured by the Downey-Will Temperament Test" (MA Thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1922); and McFadden, "Differential Responses of Normal and Feebleminded Subjects of Equal Mental Age, on the Kent-Rosanoff Free Association Test and the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test" (PhD diss., UNC-Chapel Hill, 1930).

¹¹⁰ Kate Burr Johnson to Mr. F. P. Spruill, outgoing officer of State Organization of County Commissioners, 5 Sept. 1925, Corr. with Associations, Box 25B, Folder: Assoc. of County Commissioners, 1921-1954.

hundreds of hours from 1922 to 1926 investigating Dr. Robert S. Carroll, who ran a private mental hospital in Asheville, for having sex with his patients. As a result of their charges, his medical license was revoked.¹¹¹ The Board met with less success in a 1928 case against Dr. Albert Anderson, whom the state charged with multiple counts of embezzlement and malfeasance in office.¹¹² Both Johnson and Crane testified against Anderson, a move that Anderson's allies saw as purely political.¹¹³

Johnson believed that the state had excellent evidence against Anderson.¹¹⁴ But Anderson apparently had the sympathy of important people, including the governor and Raleigh newspaperman Josephus Daniels.¹¹⁵ Several medical experts testified on his behalf: William McDougall and William C. Davidson of Duke, Thurman Kitchin of Wake Forest, and current and former health officials Watson Smith Rankin and Charles O'Hagan Laughinghouse.¹¹⁶ Although Anderson was convicted of two counts of making patients work on his own property, he was acquitted of charges of cruelty and got off lightly with a \$500 fine. Even worse, from Johnson's perspective, the hospital's board of directors decided to retain Anderson as

¹¹¹ "Commissioner's report to Board," 27 Mar. 1926, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 88-89.

¹¹² "File Charges against Dr. Albert Anderson," *Greensboro Daily News*, 12 Oct. 1928.

¹¹³ "Dr. Albert Anderson Victim of Politics, Doctor States," *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 Jan. 1929; on the prosecution of Dr. Albert Anderson and Johnson and Crane's role for the prosecution, see James K. Hall, "An Outrage," *Southern Medicine and Surgery* 90, no. 12 (Dec. 1928): 830-31.

¹¹⁴ From Johnson's perspective, "If Dr. Anderson gets off with all they have against him it will be hopeless to try to do anything with any of the State institutions so long as the superintendent is a good politician." Kate Burr Johnson to Alexander W. McAlister, 15 Oct. 1928, State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1927-1929.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "Dr. Albert Anderson is Approved by Board," *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 Dec. 1928.

superintendent, and the supreme court later overturned his conviction and waived the fine.¹¹⁷

The state medical society also passed a resolution condemning the prosecution of Anderson as a departure from “established and orderly processes of government.” Rather than take such cases to the courts, the society said, state officials should simply present the matter to boards of directors and let them solve the problems internally. The medical society’s resolution omitted names in order to “avoid personalities,” but everyone present knew that it was a condemnation of Johnson and the prosecutor in Anderson’s case.¹¹⁸

The results of these power struggles were all too clear to Kate Burr Johnson when she butted heads with state health officer Charles O’Hagan Laughinghouse, who had testified for Anderson in his 1928 trial. Johnson believed that Laughinghouse was behind several bills in 1929 that would have transferred essential powers of the welfare board to the state health board. One measure would have given the power to inspect Caswell and mental hospitals to the state board of health; another would have made the state health board responsible for the study of mental hygiene. Each bill attacked core functions set forth in the Board of Charities and Public Welfare’s charter. The second measure received a nod from the Senate but died in the House committee on insane asylums, ensuring that the welfare board’s division of mental health and

¹¹⁷ “Dr. Anderson is Found Guilty on Two Counts of Working Patients,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 21 Nov. 1928; “Board to discuss Anderson’s fitness,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 5 Dec. 1928, 18; “Dr. Albert Anderson is Relieved by Court of Paying \$500 Fine,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 28 Mar. 1929. After Anderson’s supreme court victory, the state brought additional indictments against him, including charges that he illegally gave medical whiskey to a private patient. “Anderson Faces Whiskey Charge,” *Greensboro Record*, 11 Apr. 1929.

¹¹⁸ “Dr. L. A. Crowell is Elected Medical Society President,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 18 Apr. 1929.

hygiene would continue as the state's official research and education bureau.¹¹⁹ Johnson remained wary of Laughinghouse, believing that he had "tried to cripple" the welfare board.¹²⁰

Lessons for Social Workers

While various experts researched and debated the most effective ways to combat mental defects, county welfare officials faced practical challenges every day that required them to interpret theories of eugenics. For county superintendents and their assistants, the question of mental defect underlay cases of boys like "Willie Williams" or farmers' daughters who seemed feeble-minded. Theories of eugenics or mental hygiene, however, did not necessarily provide clear directions for casework. In training programs, state officials and their allied experts tried to bridge this gap.

The state's social workers absorbed many of the same messages about eugenics and feeble-mindedness as the wider public. But they received more training in how to recognize feeble-mindedness, how to adjust their casework practices for feeble-minded families, and the dangers of leaving mentally defective people to their own devices. County welfare superintendents and other social workers would have read *Public Welfare Progress* with an eye toward what tidbits they could apply to their own communities. Articles such as Lucy Lay's "What would you suggest," which put before readers the troubling cases of two feeble-minded women with illegitimate children, aimed directly at professional social workers and used casework-based situations as teaching tools.¹²¹ Even illustrated features such as the "guessing

¹¹⁹ The bills were introduced by Senator Laughlin Blue. On SB 594, see *Senate Journal*, 1929, 187, 246; on SB 817, see *Senate Journal*, 1929, 250; and *House Journal*, 1929, 674.

¹²⁰ Kate Burr Johnson to Alexander W. McAlister, 4 June 1929, State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1927-1929.

¹²¹ "What Would You Suggest?" *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 2.

contest” of 1926 must have had a deeper resonance for professional social workers who faced daily decisions about how to categorize and treat their clients.

In addition to the information about eugenics that floated around the state, available for widespread public consumption, county superintendents and other social workers partook in specialized training sessions at district conferences and UNC’s summer institutes. Crane always spoke about some aspect of mental hygiene at the summer institutes for white social workers. In 1922, he told social workers that there were fifty thousand feeble-minded people in the state and suggested that sterilization was the “only safeguard” against the danger of reproduction.¹²² In 1923, the state board made his class one of two required of all superintendents attending the two-week summer institute (the other course dealt with county organization). The two required classes met daily, in between guest lectures and round table discussions, and a two-hour exam based mainly on material from the courses “the basis for certification of these officers.”¹²³ Crane also spoke about mental hygiene at the institutes for black social workers.¹²⁴

Apart from his mental exam of “Willie Williams” in 1922, it is difficult to know the specifics of Crane’s messages to his audience. Given his background as a professor, a social psychologist, and a eugenics researcher, he likely tried to give them practical as well as theoretical tools for their work, including an overview of mental hygiene principles, an outline of the goals of his Bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene, signs by which social workers could

¹²² “The Feeble-Minded and the Law,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 July 1922.

¹²³ “Welfare Board to Hold School,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 15 July 1923. For other years, see printed “preliminary announcement” for public welfare summer institutes [1920], Corr. with State Agencies, Box 10, Folder: UNC School of Public Administration, 1919-1931; “Mr. Cline Studied at Welfare School,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 22 July 1924; and “Condensed Program of the Public Welfare Institute,” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 6 (June 1926): 3.

¹²⁴ “Third Negro Institute Reflects Much Interest,” *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no. 3 (March 1928): 1; “Special Institute for Negro Welfare Workers,” *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1925): 1.

recognize feeble-mindedness, and information about how to arrange for a mental examination and how to admit someone to a state mental institution. As much as social workers craved—and received—practical advice to help navigate their daily rounds of casework, the underlying lesson of their training was far deeper: to ignore feeble-mindedness and mental defect was to place society in peril.

The Root of Social Problems

In March 1924, *Public Welfare Progress* editor Nell Battle Lewis prefaced an article about an “imbecile white girl” with a note: “Readers of *Public Welfare Progress* may, perhaps[,] wonder why so many stories about the feeble-minded appear in this sheet when the subject is such a disagreeable one. The answer is that the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare believes that mental defectiveness in greater or less degree is to a very large extent responsible for delinquency, dependency and immorality; that in public welfare work nothing is more important than to acquaint the people of this State with its menace; and that no social problem which North Carolina has to face is so grave as that which is presented by unrestricted increase of mental deficiency in the population.”¹²⁵

As Battle indicated, Johnson and her staff on the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare saw the problem of feeble-mindedness and other mental defects as central to the rest of their work. Indeed, mental defect was to them “the root of most of the social problems” the state faced.¹²⁶ They hoped to prevent social problems, to cut them off at the root, so feeble-mindedness and other mental problems became a primary target. This pattern is unmistakable in

¹²⁵ “If This Girl Has Children Will They Help This Land?” *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 3 (Mar. 1924): 4.

¹²⁶ Johnson continued, “Case after case of social maladjustment can be traced back to defect or aberration of mind. Crime, immorality, dependency, in a large proportion of cases, go back not to ‘sin,’ but to sickness or deficiency in the brain.” *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 11.

the Board's 1922 report, the first under Johnson's leadership. "The problem of the delinquent, the defective, and the dependent elements of population," she wrote, "affects the very mainspring of a commonwealth, the quality of its human material."¹²⁷ The health of society, in turn, "depends on whether these inferior and unfortunate elements are allowed to increase without restriction, immeasurably to weaken and undermine the quality of the foundation of the social and political structure." It was the responsibility of the welfare department, she said, to treat problems "in the scientific spirit and with common sense as well as with all kindness" and to take steps "to prevent their future promiscuous spread."¹²⁸ She drew parallels between the goals of welfare and public health, maintaining that social workers prevented "social sickness such as crime, immorality, and poverty" in future generations.¹²⁹

One effect of this mindset was on display in a set of two photographs in a Board *Bulletin* from December 1921. Two family portraits, side by side, depicted different sorts of families (figure 3). On the left, a mother stands with one child in her arms and five others lined up in stairstep fashion around her, neatly dressed in light-colored clothing. Though the backdrop is merely empty fields and a distant tree line, the photograph conveys a sense of cleanliness and order. In the photograph on the right, five members of a family, including two small children, crowd under what seems to be a ramshackle shed or porch. The diagonal jut of the roofline lends the image a haphazard feel, as does the tilt of the photographer's lens, which sets both the horizon line and the shed's support beams at a discomfiting angle. Through the shadows, one woman's face seems to reveal darker skin.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 7.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁹ *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 9-10.

¹³⁰ *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 24.



THIS MOTHER IS BEING ASSISTED IN KEEPING HER CHILDREN BY A SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE WHO BELIEVES IN SEPARATION ONLY AS A LAST RESORT.



A FAMILY OF WHICH EVERY MEMBER IS MENTALLY DEFECTIVE. NOT ONLY IS SUCH A FAMILY AN INCREASING EXPENSE TO THE STATE EACH YEAR, BUT A SOURCE OF VICE AND CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY.

Figure 3: Two Families, 1921

In the photographs' captions, readers found a moral tale. The mother on the left, they learned, was keeping her children together with the help of a county welfare superintendent. The state had no official mother's aid program yet,¹³¹ so she probably received outdoor relief from the county's poor fund. The family on the left, however, was "mentally defective" and "a source of vice and crime in the community."¹³² State board staff made no mention of attempts to help the family, despite their apparent poverty. There was no discussion of the possibility of training the family's two mentally defective children at Caswell or of the family's likely economic straits as poor sharecroppers. Instead, welfare officials implied that their mental defects consigned them to the category of hopeless cases. The best outcome for society was to somehow control the amount of money spent on the family and to mitigate the effects of their vice and

¹³¹ The mother's aid program was created and funded in 1923. See John L. Saxon, *Social Services in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC School of Government, 2008), 14; and North Carolina Public Law 1923, ch. 260.

¹³² *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 24.

crime. The juxtaposition of these two groups suggested that there were two types of families in North Carolina: those who might be helped by welfare professionals' careful assistance, and those whose mental defects made them unfit for such help.

In Jim Crow North Carolina, racial segregation and discrimination framed conversations about feeble-mindedness.¹³³ Johnson's staff were almost exclusively concerned with treating and controlling feeble-minded whites. Crane's mental testing paralleled this understanding: of the 1,489 people he tested between June 1922 and June 1928, only 66, or about 4 per cent, were African Americans.¹³⁴ Crane's work, which often drew from racially segregated institutional populations, both reflected and extended the logic of racial discrimination, in which the state's welfare offices provided few services to African Americans.¹³⁵ But racial conceptions of feeble-mindedness also reflected deeper ideologies. One historian of eugenics in the deep South has hypothesized that white Progressives saw African Americans, as a race, as beyond hope; feeble-mindedness and immorality were, they believed, naturally part of the black germplasm.¹³⁶ In contrast, whites' position as the superior race must be maintained. The Anglo-Saxon race, in particular, was the hope of human civilization, and for the welfare of the state, the nation, and the world, its racial fitness must be maximized.

¹³³ For the best outlines of the racial dynamics of eugenics in the South, see Noll, *Feeble-Minded in our Midst*; Gregory Michael Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2008); and Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia's Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 143-66.

¹³⁴ Curiously, only five of the African Americans he tested were female; the other sixty-one were male. Of all the tests Crane and his staff conducted in this period (on blacks and whites combined), 787 (52.8 per cent) were of males and 702 (47.1 per cent) were of females. *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 146; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 94-95; and *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 93-94.

¹³⁵ County welfare offices provided a few more services to the most destitute African Americans by allowing them space in county homes.

¹³⁶ Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

Along these lines, Johnson and her staff embraced principles of positive eugenics for whites. They claimed with pride that North Carolina's "native stock is the purest Anglo-Saxon of all the States in the Union," and noted that "the problem, therefore, is not one of assimilating foreign stocks, but of conserving native population—the sturdy, independent descendants of the hardy English, Scotch-Irish, and German settlers."¹³⁷ A photograph at the beginning of the 1922 report, entitled "North Carolina's best crop -- her children," showed rows of white boys at one of the state's institutions (figure 4). Although the text accompanying the photograph focused mostly on juvenile delinquency and environmental influences, the photograph's title left little doubt that the best kind of child was white and male and that children, like cotton or tobacco, should be grown from the finest seed.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ "Our Child Problem in North Carolina," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1921): 4.

¹³⁸ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 6a.



Figure 4: North Carolina's Best Crop—Her Children

North Carolinians also heard these pronatalist messages, aimed at certain types of whites, from powerful figures such as governor Locke Craig. In his parting address in 1917, Craig praised North Carolina's white babies: "North Carolina has the largest birthrate as to white children of any State in the Union... This 'infant industry' deserves and demands protection. They are the most desirable emigrants, thoroughbred from Norman and Saxon sires."¹³⁹ Another staunch supporter of this notion was William Louis Poteat. Like many other pro-eugenics reformers, Poteat believed that character was part of a "racial inheritance." He praised the

¹³⁹ "Governor Delivers His Annual Message," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 5 Jan. 1917.

“North Carolina type,” the product of the blending of various immigrant groups, which he claimed was “sterling, self-reliant, frank, [and] conservatively progressive.”¹⁴⁰

The Board’s argument that feeble-mindedness led to racial mixing played to the anxieties of white conservatives and lent urgency to their attack on feeblemindedness. The Board’s descriptions of feeble-minded whites, particularly feeble-minded women, routinely noted their racially mixed children. Recognizing the power of photographs, Johnson’s staff embedded a series of telling images in the 1922 report. One photograph, the product of Roy M. Brown’s survey of county homes, offered a visual representation of feeble-minded women (figure 5).



Figure 5: County Homes Breeding Places for the Feebleminded

The caption gave no further reason for the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness except her poverty and the description of her offspring: she lived in a county poor house, and “she gave birth to a

¹⁴⁰ Poteat, “At Concord,” Sept. 12, 1912; and Poteat, “The New Fates and the Web of Destiny,” 1914.

child whose features suggest a negro father.” Perhaps the unidentified woman in this picture had mental disabilities. We have no way of knowing. What matters is that the board chose this image, of a white woman with a dark-skinned child, to make its argument that county homes were “breeding places for the feebleminded.”¹⁴¹

White welfare officials and other Progressives held complicated attitudes about the Bureau’s relationship with the state’s many black residents. Welfare officials were almost certainly less concerned about providing mental testing services for them, judging by the miniscule numbers of African Americans that Crane tested. On one hand, if feeble-mindedness led to crime and poverty among whites, it would do the same among blacks. On the other hand, for many white officials, black criminality, mental illness, and the like fell in line with their racial prejudices, while the same phenomena among whites threatened to undermine notions of white superiority. White officials made their bet that eugenics-based programs could wreak real change in the prevalence of white feeble-mindedness. They had less incentive to stake their money on a similar bet about African Americans.

At the same time, southern white liberals of the 1910s and 1920s, such as those of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, held that the fate of the two races was tied together. They believed that to achieve real southern progress, they had to improve the black race along with the white.¹⁴² These sentiments combined with fears of uncontrolled feeble-minded black men—almost all of the blacks that Crane tested were men—to produce Progressive entreaties for an institution for the black feeble-minded. McNairy called for an institution in his 1917-1918

¹⁴¹ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 54a.

¹⁴² See, for example, Gilbert T. Stephenson, “We Must lift the Negro Up Or He Will Drag Us Down,” *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 17-18; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 16. For corresponding attitudes among northern Christian reformers, see Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

report and the Board made similar requests repeatedly in the 1920s, although these appeals never made any headway in the legislature.¹⁴³ In addition, the Board made sure that black social workers had some training in mental hygiene principles. When the Division of Work among Negroes began offering institutes for black social workers, Crane gave lectures on mental hygiene that were probably condensed versions of his courses for white social workers.¹⁴⁴

Black social workers' attitudes toward this training in mental hygiene are difficult to discern. Apart from the comparative numbers of blacks and whites given mental examinations, we have little evidence, and it is difficult to parse.¹⁴⁵ The black community was less exposed to the ideas of welfare professionals trained by the state, since case work almost always split along racial lines and fewer black than white social workers were employed as public welfare officials. In 1926, only 7 of the 120 workers employed in county welfare departments were black. Most black social workers instead worked for private agencies. In addition, African American social workers may have been less likely to request Crane's services because of suspicions of white officials' motives or simply because they were used to operating social service programs for black communities independent of white support. Perhaps Crane and other white officials discouraged them from using the scarce time and resources of mental health experts.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance to black leaders of concepts of racial destiny. Michelle Mitchell has argued that black leaders' sense of responsibility for the fate of

¹⁴³ *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1916-1918*, 36-37; *BCPW Report, 1919-1920*, 18; *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 39; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 124; *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 22-23; *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 17.

¹⁴⁴ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 106-7; "Special institute for Negro welfare workers," *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1925): 1; "Third Negro Institute Reflects Much Interest," *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no. 3 (Mar. 1928): 1.

¹⁴⁵ The board's reports usually listed sources of referrals for mental exams, but the charts do not indicate race of either client or worker. They simply indicate that those making referrals included county superintendents, institutional heads, teachers, and other social workers. *BCPW Report, 1922-1924*, 142-46; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 92-95; *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 90-94; *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 86-89.

the race as a whole led to the politicization of many areas of blacks' private lives, including reproduction.¹⁴⁶ Like many white North Carolinians, black North Carolinians were invested in racial improvement. Some black social workers may have shared the opinions of Lieutenant Lawrence A. Oxley, director of the Board's Division of Work among Negroes, about their poor, uneducated clients. Oxley saw the "masses of Negroes" in urban areas as "hotbeds of disease, crime, and mental defectiveness that must be cleaned up if both races are not to suffer from the effect of these social ills." Oxley believed that many lower-class blacks chose to live in poverty-ridden slums because "a slothfulness, an ignorance, and a dreadful carelessness." Echoing W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of the talented tenth and the philosophy of racial uplift, Oxley wrote that social welfare for blacks "must come about through education and the efforts of the trained leaders of the race for their poorer and less intelligent fellows." For Oxley, feeble-mindedness was "the most menacing of all social dangers."¹⁴⁷ Not only did feeble-minded African Americans endanger "law-abiding citizens' life and property," the constant menace they presented also soured race relations and impeded "racial adjustments in rural communities."¹⁴⁸ Black social workers, most of whom probably came from middle-class backgrounds, likely shared at least some of Oxley's prejudices and concerns and would have found mental hygiene training to be a valuable part of their project of racial uplift. The idea that feeble-mindedness was a pressing social problem may have had no less resonance for them than for their white peers.

¹⁴⁶ Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). See also Gergory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere Quantity, Counts': Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests," in Paul A. Lombardo, ed., *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 68-92.

¹⁴⁷ *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 101-103.

¹⁴⁸ Lawrence Oxley, "Report of Bureau of Work Among Negroes (Six Months)," in Commissioner's report to Board, July 1925, for fiscal year ending June 30, in Unprocessed BPW Records, Box 1, Folder 4: Reports of the State Board, 1919-1925.

Eugenics thus permeated the very core of the state's welfare programs. State officials tended to focus on hereditarian explanations for social problems. In 1921 they cited the Eugenics Record Office to argue that "feeble-mindedness is inherited, and . . . if criminal traits are not transmitted from one generation to another, criminal tendencies are."¹⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1928 they reported matter-of-factly that when Mothers' Aid failed to draw a family out of poverty, there was usually "a weak spot somewhere in the past history of the family."¹⁵⁰ The state board's policies, in turn, were built around separating the "unfit" from the rest of the population. In orphanages, for example, welfare officials believed that the very presence of feeble-minded children in cottages or on playgrounds interfered with the development of normal children.¹⁵¹ As Commissioner Johnson wrote, "unless the State's public welfare program is such as to segregate this defective and thus prevent his promiscuous breeding, society will be increasingly weakened by the perpetuation of the mentally defective."¹⁵² This eugenics-based mindset produced a welfare system in which white social workers saw feeble-mindedness everywhere and seemed to always be on the lookout for the wrong kind of whites. The reliance on eugenics principles further blurred the line between caring and controlling.

Conclusion

While academics and medical professionals continued to discuss eugenics throughout the 1920s as a theoretical or practical solution to social problems, lay reformers became a more passive audience than they had been in the late 1910s. They continued to hear from experts, but

¹⁴⁹ "The Delinquent Child," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1921): 15.

¹⁵⁰ *BCPW Report, 1926-1928*, 35.

¹⁵¹ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 48.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

seemed less driven to demand legislative change. The Conference for Social Service continued to hear updates from Dr. Harry Crane about his work with the division of mental health and hygiene, and the Board brought exhibits to Conference gatherings, including the Wake Family exhibit and the “guessing contest” in 1926.¹⁵³ Conference members apparently did not question the prevailing wisdom that feeble-mindedness lay behind many social problems that they sought to remedy. But for several years, the Conference’s resolutions focused elsewhere, on movie censorship, lynching, child labor, mothers’ aid, and reforms of the prison and court systems. In 1926, 1927, and 1928 Conference members did pass resolutions in favor of “adequate appropriations to provide for the mentally defective.”¹⁵⁴ In 1927 and 1928 they also urged a law that would require two weeks’ notice before granting of a marriage license, which would allow time to enforce existing bans against marriages between people with venereal disease or mental defects.¹⁵⁵ In these areas, however, the Conference was following the lead of the state’s social work and medical professionals, rather than staking out a position of its own. Moreover, the Conference did not echo the more radical suggestions of McNairy, Johnson, and others to beef up the sterilization law that had passed in 1919.

The state’s organized white women took slightly more aggressive positions than the Conference for Social Service, but they, too, devoted most of their attention to other areas. Like Conference members, white clubwomen probably retained their late 1910s ideas. As one Federation leader said in 1918, they must handle “disagreeable truths” such as “preventing of the

¹⁵³ On Crane at CSS gatherings, see Margaret Clark Neal, “North Carolina Conference for Social Service: The Record of Twenty-Five Years, 1912-1937,” typed manuscript at North Carolina Collection (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 55 (1922), 79 (1924), 92 (1926), 114 (1929). On exhibits at CSS conference, see *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 98; and “Did You Guess Right?” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 7 (July 1926): 3.

¹⁵⁴ Neal, “North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” 94 (1926), 101-102 (1927), 108-109 (1928).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 101-102 (1927), 108-109 (1928). On the logic behind delays, see Kate Burr Johnson, “Law Requiring Notice of Intention to Marry Will Be Asked of Assembly,” *Public Welfare Progress* 9, no. 9 (Sept 1928): 1.

multiplication of undesirable elements of the population ... in the spirit of justice to the coming race.”¹⁵⁶ Like Conference members, they welcomed Crane and other speakers on mental hygiene and mental defect,¹⁵⁷ and ideas about feeble-mindedness, racial fitness, and mental hygiene surely informed clubwomen’s social service work in other areas. But organized white women voiced political opinions about eugenic sterilization only twice during the 1920s, according to extant records: the Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1924 and the League of Women Voters in 1925. These two resolutions mesh with clubwomen’s longstanding concern with caring for the feeble-minded, but they stand alone, more aberrations than core initiatives.

Reformers, then, continued their patterns of lobbying legislatures for money for institutions. But the model that academics, physicians, and state welfare officials urged on the state left little room for lay reformers to participate in the professional practices of eugenics. Like the state’s county officials, they learned that they should not try to recognize feeble-mindedness by sight alone, but should entrust such decisions to authorities like Harry Crane or William Newbold.

At the same time, the clearest message coming from medical and welfare experts was that anyone with common sense could see how harmful “degenerates” were to society. Eager to create a large base of public support for their programs, proponents of mental hygiene and eugenics staked out their message in the most accessible terms: it did not require professional training to understand the harmful effects of the feeble-minded on the social order. The network of experts connected through the state Bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene put things in terms

¹⁵⁶ Mrs. J. R. Chamberlain, Chair of legislative committee, report, *FWC Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 91.

¹⁵⁷ “Crane Attacks County Homes; Says They are Breeding Places for Feeble Minded and are Costly,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 Oct. 1922; Kate Burr Johnson to Mrs. W. T. Shore, 1 Sept. 1925, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1918-1925; “Durham Woman’s Club Studying Feeble-minded,” *Public Welfare Progress* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1925): 4; *BCPW Report, 1924-1926*, 98.

that resonated with white North Carolinians' biases and beliefs: feeble-minded women observed no racial lines; feeble-minded boys were headed for a life of crime; curtailing social decay required a combination of better breeding and evangelical fervor. Among African Americans, too, similar messages played on notions of racial uplift and respectability. Ongoing research and advocacy in the state's pro-eugenics network, disseminated through the welfare board's educational campaigns, fostered widespread appreciation of the basic tenets of eugenics among North Carolina's citizens. The power of these messages about the centrality of mental defect as the origin of most social problems was manifest in contemporary debates about sterilization laws, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 6: LEGISLATING EUGENICS

On the night of January 7, 1919, four girls “with matches and a craving for excitement” snuck quietly out of their rooms at Caswell Training School. They stuffed rags into an elevator chute and lit them with matches stolen from the school’s foundry. As the flames surged through the building and lit the night sky, the school’s staff evacuated the dorm’s 124 residents and dragged furniture out onto the lawn. Fire trucks raced toward the school at sixty miles per hour, but the school’s water supply was too low to stop the fire, and even with the firemen’s help, the building was destroyed. Officials estimated the damage at \$25,000. Luckily, no lives were lost.¹

This conflagration was the second in a series of arsons at Caswell that left dozens of inmates without a place to sleep. Almost exactly a month earlier, on December 8, 1918, a fire broke out just before lunch, destroying the old girls’ dormitory. The prime suspect in this first fire was seventeen-year-old Lydia Spruill, who had been sent to Caswell in 1916 after she ran away from several foster families and was declared “incorrigible” and a “moron.”² In July, 1918, Spruill escaped and, through sympathizers in Durham, publicly accused Caswell officials of neglect and abuse, including whippings. Although state officials immediately and convincingly refuted her charges, she stirred up a public outcry. She became the “most talked about young woman in North Carolina,” with observers commenting that she “chews gum like a

¹ “Four Girls Started Caswell School Fire,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 9 Jan. 1919. Although the Governor’s legislative address dated the fire at January 5, 1919, newspaper reports reported that it was January 7, 1919. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of North Carolina, Session 1919* (hereafter *House Journal*), 20-21.

² Spruill’s encounter with state officials began when a judge determined that her parents were not caring for her and committed her to the care of the North Carolina Children’s Home Society, which later applied for her admission to Caswell. “Public Pulse: Dr. Joyner in re: Lydia Spruill,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 27 July 1918.

movie actor, dotes on pretty clothes and talks at an alarming rate.”³ Spruill was re-committed to Caswell in the fall and immediately started talking about burning down the dorm. Two weeks after the fire, on Christmas Eve of 1918, she made another sensational escape from a locked, second-story room. Newspapers reported her “human fly stunt,” in which she broke the window pane and jumped from her window ledge to the ledge outside a friend’s room.⁴

When the second dorm went up in flames, Spruill was still missing from Caswell. The state’s deputy insurance commissioner wanted to speak to her, viewing her as a prime suspect in the first fire. With the aid of the local sheriff and Caswell superintendent C. Banks McNairy, he managed to track her down almost twenty miles away and capture her “after a lively chase.”⁵ Although Spruill had nothing to do with the second fire—and, it turned out, nothing to do with the first—she was among the inmates whom Caswell superintendent C. Banks McNairy escorted to a new institutional home at the state mental hospital in Raleigh in order to ease Caswell’s space problem and head off further trouble.⁶

After the fire at Caswell on January 7, 1919, the plight of the children sleeping on floors in classrooms and in “spare corners” drew the attention of the state legislature.⁷ A special

³ “Lydia Spruill Again at Large, Kinston Hears,” *Charlotte Observer*, 14 Jan. 1920.

⁴ “Sпруill Girl Escapes from Training School,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 25 Dec. 1919.

⁵ Deputy Insurance Commissioner [initials RMC] to Hon. James R. Young Insurance Commissioner, 10 Jan. 1919, Papers of Gov. Thomas Walter Bickett (State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh; hereafter, Bickett Papers), Box GP 380, Folder: Corr., Jan. 1-31, 1919.

⁶ Little evidence at the time directly linked Spruill to the fires; the state investigation found that although she had boasted about starting the first fire, another girl had confessed. Still, people suspected her then and continued to suspect her for some time. The 1922 Board of Charities and Public Welfare report identified her as “Lyda [sic] Spruill, who set fire to the Caswell building,” and newspaper reports later listed the series of Caswell fires as among Spruill’s other “escapades.” Spruill remained at Dix Hill through January 1920, when she once again escaped from state custody and sought refuge with her stepfather’s family near Kinston. *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 101 (quote); “Lydia Spruill Again at Large, Kinston Hears,” *Charlotte Observer*, 14 Jan. 1920; “Lydia Spruill Stirs Interest in Kinston,” 26 July 1920, *Charlotte Observer*.

⁷ “Refuse to Allow M’Nairy to Quit,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Jan. 1919.

committee began to investigate Caswell's needs in the wake of the fires, and Spruill became part of their evidence. In late January, state officials asked an outside expert to examine the girl and confirm a diagnosis of feeble-mindedness.⁸ Dr. Martin W. Barr, an eminent psychologist and superintendent of a Pennsylvania institution for the feeble-minded, spent a week in North Carolina as an advisor to the legislative committee.⁹ The day after his testimony in the capitol building, Barr completed a "painstaking examination" of Spruill in front of several institutional officials. He also examined Sally Bryson, a seventeen-year-old girl accused of killing her mother.¹⁰ He found both to be feeble-minded.

Barr's examination process merits as much attention as his verdict. His scrutiny of the girls, which was covered by the local paper, exposed their minds and bodies to public inspection. Barr reported finding physical "marks which he considers unmistakable evidence of imbecility," including the shape of their ears, faces, and even the inside of their mouths. Although the newspaper mentioned that Barr conducted "various mental tests," it focused on his physical findings, tacitly suggesting that the feeble-minded were identifiable by sight alone. Barr also commented on the girls' lack of a "sense of moral responsibility," and noted that "in such cases the sex impulse frequently appears to be irresistible."¹¹

Barr's inspection had the feel of a show trial. Barr's verdict seemed calculated to undercut Spruill's legitimacy and counter attacks on Caswell: how could a feeble-minded young

⁸ At stake was not only whether Spruill was feeble-minded or not, but also whether she was insane and thus should be sent to a mental hospital rather than Caswell. "Nash County Man will battle Alexander for Presidency of Union; Miss Lydia in Custody," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 11 Dec. 1918.

⁹ "The Capital Punishment Bill is Amended but Not Finally Passed," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Jan. 1919; "Are not in favor of moving school," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan, 1919.

¹⁰ G. G. Dickson, "Lydia Spruill and Sally Bryson Are Pronounced Imbeciles after Examination by Expert Authority," *Greensboro Daily News*, 26 Jan. 1919.

¹¹ G. G. Dickson, "Lydia Spruill and Sally Bryson Are Pronounced Imbeciles."

girl with no moral compass be an accurate and trustworthy judge of institutional conditions?¹² For a decade, reformers had been spreading awareness about the social problem of feeble-mindedness and building public support for taking more drastic action than institutional segregation. Barr's focus on links between feeble-mindedness and delinquency rehashed welfare officials' claims that antisocial behavior was often rooted in mental deficiency. Spruill's obduracy and irrepressibility called attention to the limits of institutional solutions for complex, intertwined social and mental problems. Her case also re-opened a question that had shadowed Caswell from the beginning: what kinds and ages of people should the school house and train? The evidence suggested that people like Spruill simply could not be contained in institutions. The flurry of events surrounding the fires at Caswell heightened many of their concerns and pointed toward another possible solution: sterilization.

Almost three decades of sustained research and public discussion preceded the creation of the Eugenics Board in 1933, when the state's sterilization program reached its full institutional form. Earlier campaigns set the stage for the public acceptance of the Eugenics Board's work by educating the public about the presumed necessity of eugenic interventions and the efficacy of sterilization. The turn toward sterilization, first as a legitimate alternative to institutionalization and eventually as the state's primary eugenics program, followed the same pattern as the spread of eugenics ideas more generally. Doctors and social work professionals were the first to advocate sterilization, and their ideas spread through a network of Progressive reformers and clubwomen. Eventually the general public, including lawmakers, accepted the principles. Beginning in 1919, reformers transformed support for eugenics principles in the abstract into

¹² On prior criticism of Caswell's management, see "Schools appeal for State Funding," *Charlotte Observer*, 5 Feb. 1919.

laws that allowed the state to restrict marriages and surgically sterilize some people.¹³ Sterilization provoked more opposition than institutionalization, but its advocates prevailed because they linked the goals of sterilization to ideas that already had broad support—humanitarian and religious concerns, racial purity, scientific efficiency, and a focus on children as the future of the race—while downplaying the expansion of state power their new programs entailed.

As with the case of Caswell’s creation several years earlier, supporters of sterilization bills responded to what they saw as real social threats. Caswell had been their first attempt to solve those problems with a eugenic approach, but the Spruill case and constant overcrowding at Caswell indicated the limits of strategy based on institutional segregation. The move toward sterilization was another attempt to control the entwined problems of crime, poverty, and mental defects. The evidence, clear in hindsight, that reformers’ tools were poorly fitted to this work highlights the poignancy of their failure to find policy solutions that worked to mitigate poverty and crime *and* were politically feasible.

A Turn toward Sterilization

By 1917, most Progressive reformers seem to have accepted sterilization as a legitimate eugenics strategy, even if it was not always their first choice. Several interrelated developments in the eighteen months after the Caswell fires would bring sterilization to the top of the agenda.

¹³ Historians have generally dismissed the 1919 sterilization law as unimportant since there is no evidence that it led to any sterilizations. Its very existence, however, signals that North Carolina’s reformers were interested in eugenics—and had built sufficient public support to pass a law—earlier than the standard narrative of eugenics in the South would lead us to believe. Similarly, although the campaigns for sterilization laws in 1923 and 1925 ultimately failed, the surrounding debates are interesting gauges of developing public opinions. To my knowledge, no historian has mentioned the 1923 law. One scholar mentioned the 1925 law in passing, but without exploring its content or significance. On the 1919 law, see Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 66; and Kathleen E. Hoke, “The Politics of Fertility: Coercive Sterilization and Public Health Birth Control in North Carolina, 1929-1960” (MA Thesis, UNC-Greensboro, 1991), 34n18. On the 1925 law, see Hoke, “Politics of Fertility,” 8.

Demand increased for Caswell's limited space and fed the debate over whether officials should prioritize admitting high-grade women, low-grade boys, and so on.

Caswell's lack of space had been a point of contention from the first, with calls from many quarters to increase the institution's capacity. In 1917 Caswell's trustees requested a quarter of a million dollars to build another dorm and improve the current infrastructure, looking to increase its present capacity of 190 inmates by 50 or more in the next two years. Even adding fifty more beds would fall far short of meeting the needs of the state's feeble-minded population, which McNairy and others projected to be in the thousands.¹⁴ That spring Caswell's staff hosted two dozen members of a special legislative committee who visited to investigate the school's needs.¹⁵ But Caswell did not receive its quarter million dollars that year, instead getting funds that allowed only a small addition to the girls' building and the construction of dining and storage rooms.¹⁶

The lack of space exacerbated disagreements over who should be given priority for admission. One historian has noted that Caswell was plagued by its "vague and undelineated function" and that questions about the institution's purpose played out in battles over its admission policy. Voicing their constituents' concerns, legislators pushed Caswell officials to take the lowest-grade feeble-minded children ("imbeciles"), whose families were often unable or unwilling to care for them. McNairy and his staff felt these children received little benefit from the specialized training they could offer, preferring instead to admit higher-grade "morons" who

¹⁴ "The Defective Child," *BCPW Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1921): 20.

¹⁵ "Committee Visits Training School," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 Feb. 1917.

¹⁶ In 1917, Caswell received an annual appropriation of \$45,000 for maintenance, plus another \$75,000 for permanent improvements. *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1917-1918*, 9-10.

stood a chance of becoming self-supporting.¹⁷ Opinion about the appropriate age limit was also divided. Caswell's staff argued that women of child-bearing age were the most dangerous to themselves and to society. In 1915 the legislature acquiesced to Caswell authorities' insistence that they should admit men and women up to age thirty, but did not go so far as to allow them to stay for all of "their natural lives," as Daisy Denson suggested.¹⁸

With World War I came social changes that intensified demands on space at Caswell and other state institutions. When Commissioner of Public Welfare Roland F. Beasley spoke at Caswell in the summer of 1918, he reported that the U.S. Justice Department had asked the institution to take on feeble-minded young women arrested for prostitution near military bases.¹⁹ Venereal disease was a very real threat to public health during the war, and officials cracked down on prostitution. Prostitution, in turn, was associated with feeble-mindedness, particularly for white women; genteel constructions of white womanhood left no room for "normal" white women to be sexually active outside of marriage, much less to engage in prostitution. Increased extramarital sexual activity around army camps brought reformers' attention to the presumed underlying problem of female feeble-mindedness.²⁰ This pattern is evident in addresses by Governor Thomas W. Bickett before the Federation of Women's Clubs and the Conference for Social Service in the spring of 1918. Bickett began by talking about venereal disease and wound

¹⁷ Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst*, 56-57, quote 57.

¹⁸ North Carolina Public Law 1915, ch. 266; *BPC Report, 1913*, 10.

¹⁹ R.F. Beasley, "Save the Feeble-Minded Girl," *BCPW Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1918): 12-15.

²⁰ Susan Cahn also points to the creation of Samarcand in 1917 as a result of increased wartime concern about female "sex delinquents." Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 46-47. On federal anti-prostitution efforts, see Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). On the links between prostitution and feeble-mindedness, see Noll, "A Far Greater Menace: Feeble-minded Females in the South, 1900-1940," in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, ed. Virginia Bernhard et al. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 42, 45-47.

up advocating sterilization of mental defectives, whether produced by venereal disease or other causes.²¹

The war's horrors also put indirect but significant pressure on the capacities of mental hospitals, adding to a sense of looming crisis. As troops demobilized, federal officials in the Bureau of War Risk Insurance asked state officials to prepare to house veterans whose sanity had been shaken by wartime trauma. Even with the governor pressuring institutional heads directly, solutions were piecemeal at best. The head of the Raleigh hospital for the white insane agreed to "take twenty-five,"²² while the head of the Goldsboro hospital for the black insane had room for only ten returning veterans. The superintendent of the Morganton asylum voiced the crux of the problem: admissions of "mental cases discharged from the Army" would "be at the expense of the civil [civilian] population, since at present we are unable to accommodate all applicants for admission."²³

More broadly, the Great War intensified fears about the mental preparedness of the nation. The Army's program of administering psychological tests to recruits gave psychologists a chance to prove the worth of intelligence tests to the public at large, but the test results raised an alarming specter of national decline. Biased toward men with formal education, the tests produced distressingly low scores among native-born white men, particularly in the South. The average mental age of the white draftees was 13.08 years, barely higher than the benchmark for feeble-mindedness. Rather than question their testing protocols and definitions of feeble-

²¹ For the Conference convention, March 5-6, 1918, see "State and National Efficiency," *BCPW Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1918), 4-5; for Bickett's address at the Federation of Women's Clubs on May 30, 1918, see "Social Purity," in *Public Letters and Papers of Thomas Walter Bickett*, 170-172.

²² Bickett's Private Secretary to W. W. Faison, 11 Jan. 1919, Bickett Papers, Box GP 380, Folder: Corr., Jan. 1-31, 1919.

²³ John McCampbell to Col. Santford Martin, 18 Jan. 1919, Bickett Papers, Box GP 380, Folder: Corr., Jan. 1-31, 1919.

mindedness, some psychologists concluded that feeble-mindedness was far more pervasive than they had believed. Critics took the results of the Army's extensive testing program and ran with them, expounding on the "masses" of "morons" who imperiled American democracy.²⁴

"A Step in the Right Direction": Institutional Pressures and the Sterilization Law of 1919

If wartime concerns added tinder to mounting concerns about feeble-mindedness and insanity, the spark that set it all off was more than metaphorical. It was against the backdrop of the war that inmates at Caswell started two major fires and burned down dorms.²⁵ The fires at Caswell and the work of the special investigative committee forced Caswell and the problem of feeble-mindedness into the public view at the beginning of the legislative session. Suddenly half of Caswell's residents had no institutional home. Superintendent McNairy found room for some displaced Caswell residents, including all of the "firebirds," at state-run institutions in Raleigh, but this solution was at best temporary.²⁶ Governor Bickett urged the legislature as its session began to make an emergency appropriation of \$75,000 to replace the buildings destroyed in the fires.²⁷ Groups from around the state joined the appeal, including Rotary Clubs.²⁸ Never excited

²⁴ Daniel J. Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I," *Journal of American History* 55, no. 3 (Dec. 1968): 565-81; Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 288-89, 293-94, 302, 311-19; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. ed (New York: Norton, 1996), 222-63.

²⁵ Elizabeth M. Brown and Sarah Shaw Genheimer, *Haven on the Neuse: A History of Caswell Center, Kinston, North Carolina, 1911-1964* (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), 53-54; "Another Dormitory at Caswell School Burned," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Jan. 1919; Insurance Department Fire Investigation, No. 1908, 10 Jan. 1919, Bickett Papers, Box GP 380, Folder: Corr., Jan. 1-31, 1919.

²⁶ Some legislators proposed emergency orders to bring the displaced Caswell residents to Raleigh more permanently, but others feared the temporary change might become permanent. "Refuse to Allow M'Nairy to Quit," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Jan. 1919; "Shepherd Authors New Building Bill," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 Jan. 1919; "Senate Pays Tribute Martin Stacy Dean of State University," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 22 Jan. 1919; "The Capital Punishment Bill is Amended But Not Finally Passed," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Jan. 1919; "Are Not in Favor of Moving School," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1919; "Part of M'Nairy's Outfit Moves to Raleigh for Time," n.d. [Jan. or Feb. 1919], copy in Caswell Records, newsclippings volume, 37; *Senate Journal, 1919*, 74, 590; "Transfer of Training School Improbable," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 26 Jan. 1919.

²⁷ "Budget Bill Goes into the Hopper," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 Jan. 1919; "Alexander's Hand is Seen in House," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 Jan. 1919.

about spending money, legislators declined to make an emergency appropriation, but they did appoint a special joint committee to consider the needs of Caswell.

The committee's primary response to their investigation of the situation at Caswell in the aftermath of the fires was to call for more beds. But the fires also led to calls for other things McNairy and some other reformers had long desired. In a letter to the editor in the *Charlotte Observer*, a lawyer who was also a member of the Caswell board encouraged readers to write their representatives in favor of an emergency appropriation to Caswell; he also asked his readers to consider McNairy's idea for a statute prohibiting the "intermarriage of feebleminded persons."²⁹ The joint committee on Caswell, too, favored establishing an outreach bureau and studying feeble-mindedness.³⁰

The committee's reaction to the Caswell fires led to the introduction of a eugenic sterilization bill within a month of the second blaze. As part of its deliberations about Caswell's needs in the wake of the fires, the committee had solicited advice from Dr. Martin W. Barr, the head of the Pennsylvania school for the feebleminded.³¹ After his visit to Caswell in late January, when he scrutinized Lydia Spruill, he left convinced that sterilization would be appropriate for some inmates there and at other state-run institutions.³² When the committee reconvened in Raleigh, Barr made this recommendation in what newspapers reported was an

²⁸ "Tells How Army Aviators Learn," *Charlotte Observer*, 15 Jan. 1919; "Rotarians Join in Tax Protest; Caswell School Indorsed," *Charlotte Observer*, 29 Jan. 1919; "Caswell Training School: A Charlotte Lawyer Makes Relation in Behalf of that Institution," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 Feb. 1919.

²⁹ "Caswell Training School," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 Feb. 1919.

³⁰ "Capital Punishment Bill is Amended But Not Finally Passed," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Jan. 1919; G. G. Dickson, "Lydia Spruill and Sally Bryson are Pronounced Imbeciles," *Greensboro Daily News*, 26 Jan. 1919.

³¹ "Capital Punishment Bill is Amended," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Jan. 1919.

³² Members of the subcommittee that visited Caswell included Dr. Mitchell, Rep. Bryant, Rep. Wilkins, and Commissioner Roland Beasley. "Are Not in Favor of Moving School," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1919; "Speaker Sponsors Governor's Plan," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 Feb. 1919.

informal conversation with the committee “largely devoted to answering questions as to the methods employed in dealing with imbeciles, idiots and moral imbeciles.”³³ At least one newspaper linked his study of Spruill to the committee’s recommendations and carried the headline, “examination shows need of legislation to protect feeble-minded and society.”³⁴

The following week, Speaker of the House Dennis G. Brummitt introduced a bill that would put into effect Barr’s suggestions for sterilization of inmates.³⁵ Brummitt, a native of Granville County and graduate of Wake Forest, was a lawyer and leader of the state Democratic Party who would become state Attorney General in 1925. The *News and Observer*’s editorial board called him “progressive without being radical” and noted that he supported measures “calculated to set the State forward morally and educationally.”³⁶ Brummitt saw the sterilization bill as falling into this category. The bill he introduced on February 1, 1919—after several boys at Caswell started a *third* dormitory fire (with much less damage this time)³⁷—was entitled, “An act to benefit the moral, mental, and physical condition of inmates of penal and charitable institutions.” The title of the bill gave little indication of its purpose, and the text merely instructed institutional officials to perform “any surgical operation” that would “be for the

³³ The subcommittee’s report about their visit did not include Barr’s recommendation to sterilize inmates. Rather, they focused on doubling Caswell’s current capacity, providing some institutional home for feeble-minded black children, and creating an outreach bureau. “Are Not in Favor of Moving School,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1919.

³⁴ G. G. Dickson, “Lydia Spruill and Sally Bryson are Pronounced Imbeciles,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 26 Jan. 1919.

³⁵ “Speaker Sponsors Governor’s Plan,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 Feb. 1919.

³⁶ “A Good Man for Speaker,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Jan. 1919.

³⁷ “Pyromania Spreads to Boys Caswell Training School,” *Kinston Free Press*, 29 Jan. 1919, copy in Caswell Records, newsclippings volume, 34.

improvement of the mental, moral or physical condition of such inmate.” Still, newspaper headlines, such as “will permit sterilization,” left little doubt of the bill’s real goal.³⁸

In introducing the bill, Brummitt responded not only to Barr’s suggestions but also to a homegrown political initiative. Governor Thomas W. Bickett, in his biennial message to the legislature on January 9, 1919, had declared that “the State is party to an awful crime against childhood when it permits idiots and imbeciles to perpetuate their species. . . . The State should take steps to render it impossible for any person adjudged by a competent board to be an incurable mental defective to transmit that infirmity to generations unborn; such a law would be the essence of humanity and common sense.”³⁹ The governor, who had also urged the Conference for Social Service and the Federation of Women’s Clubs to study sterilization,⁴⁰ may well have asked Speaker Brummitt to introduce a sterilization bill. The headline in the *News and Observer* read, “Speaker sponsors governor’s plan,” and the paper judged that the bill “would partly translate into law the Chief Executive’s declaration that ‘every child has a natural right to a fair start.’”⁴¹

³⁸ “Speaker Sponsors Governor’s Plan,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 Feb. 1919. Roy Melton Brown, an employee of the Board of Charities and Public Welfare from 1921 to 1925, wrote in the 1950s in an unpublished history of welfare in North Carolina that “Apparently there was careful avoidance [in the 1919 law] of any specific mention directly or indirectly of sterilization.” Brown’s analysis appears to have been based only the text of the law (which did indeed avoid mention of sterilization), but it is possible that his interpretation was also based on transmitted knowledge from his colleagues at the Board. Roy Melton Brown, “The Growth of a State Program of Public Welfare,” n.d. [c. 1950], unpublished manuscript, North Carolina Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Chapter 17, 26.

³⁹ The governor’s message as a whole had been met with an “enthusiastic hearing,” with a “hearty reception” of his proposals for welfare measures. “Enthusiastic hearing of Governor’s Message Given in Joint Session,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 Jan. 1919; “Governor’s Recommendations to General Assembly of 1919,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 Jan. 1919.

⁴⁰ T. W. Bickett, “State and National Efficiency,” reprint of address at CSS conference, March 5-6, 1918, *BCPW Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1918): 4-5; “Social Purity,” in *Public Letters and Papers of Thomas Walter Bickett*, 170-172.

⁴¹ “Speaker Sponsors Governor’s Plan,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 Feb 1919.

The legislature was, in general, open to Progressive ideas. By the end of the 1919 session, the focus on Caswell had produced several other bills in addition to Brummitt's sterilization bill. Lawmakers appropriated \$300,000 to Caswell for permanent improvements.⁴² They also revised Caswell's charter to emphasize its role in segregating the feeble-minded from society in order to prevent them from reproducing.⁴³ These new laws joined a host of other progressive legislation, such as funding for road construction and public health measures. Even in this atmosphere, any bill could become stuck in the legislative quagmire. Several weeks after the sterilization bill was introduced, it was re-committed to the Committee on Health, probably in attempt to kill it.⁴⁴

With the bill caught in committee, the governor stepped in. Aware that after he proposed sterilization in his biennial message in January, some lawmakers were "aghast at the thought of any such legislation," he worked behind the scenes to persuade them of its merit. He "called those members down into my office, and put the question squarely to them, man to man and face to face, as to whether or not the State of North Carolina could justify its position in refusing to issue a marriage license to an incurable mental defective and, at the same time, permit the unlimited and lawful perpetuation of these infirmities." His arguments behind closed doors apparently won over some of these reluctant legislators, while others might have owed the governor their vote as a political favor. Bickett saw the sterilization bill as the "most important"

⁴² "The Senate Is Asked to Consider Resolution Authorizing General Assembly to Hold 10 Days Longer," *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 Mar. 1919; *Senate Journal*, 1919, 514, 520, 572, 601; *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1919-1920*, 94.

⁴³ North Carolina Public Law 1919, ch. 224. For legislative passage of SB 1250 and HB 1484, see *Senate Journal*, 1919, 494, 511, 595; and *House Journal*, 1919, 630, 644, 681, 700.

⁴⁴ *House Journal*, 1919, 117, 214, 329.

of the session's public health or medical measures and was probably willing to expend some of his hard-won political capital to see it pass.⁴⁵

Bickett also made public appeals to the legislature, seeking to focus public opinion and use it as additional leverage. On the morning of March 7, after the Committee on Health unanimously approved the bill for a second time,⁴⁶ a special message from the governor interrupted the afternoon session.⁴⁷ Addressing both houses, Bickett quoted his January speech and begged lawmakers to pass Brummitt's sterilization bill. Interestingly, he claimed that the Conference for Social Service and the Federation of Women's Clubs supported the principle he described, although both groups had resolved only to support a "eugenics law" or "eugenic marriage law." Bickett, at least, seemed to assume that consonance of goals was more important than the means used to achieve them. And reformers did agree that, as Bickett said, "It is not punishment. It is mercy to make provisions of this kind."⁴⁸

After receiving the governor's message, the House brought the bill up for a vote. Several members supported its passage, including the chair of the Health committee and a legislator who

⁴⁵ The lawmakers who were "aghast" may have been so because they associated sterilization with castration as a punishment for criminals. T. W. Bickett, "Address by his Excellency, T.W Bickett, Governor of North Carolina," 15 Apr. 1919, reprinted in *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of North Carolina, Sixty-Sixth Annual Meeting, Pinehurst, NC, April 15, 16, 17, 1919* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1919), 268-73, accessed 30 Aug. 2013, <http://archive.org/details/transactionsofme66medi>.

⁴⁶ The committee approved the bill on February 15, but nine days later, on February 24, legislators returned it to the committee. *House Journal, 1919*, 214, 329. The *News and Observer's* legislative coverage does not indicate why the bill was sent back to committee on February 24. On unanimous favorable report, see "Brummit Bill Passes in House," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919. Of the fourteen members of the House Committee on Health, six were also members of the special joint committee on Caswell, so they were certainly familiar with the situation. *House Journal, 1919*, 22.

⁴⁷ *House Journal, 1919*, 620.

⁴⁸ W. J. Martin, "Neal Child Bill Passes Senate – Bickett Sends Message," *Charlotte Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919, 1; *Senate Journal, 1919*, 544.

was also a physician.⁴⁹ The *Raleigh News and Observer* noted that the bill had been “characterized as the most humane piece of legislation offered to the General Assembly.”⁵⁰ Representative Julius Brown of Greenville, however, vehemently opposed the measure, calling it “barbarous and cruel, and made in Germany.”⁵¹ Apparently his primary objection was to its procedure; he thought a jury rather than a board of specialists should judge individual cases.⁵² Although Brown “was alone in his opposition[,] which ran to insistency,” he forced a roll-call vote, and the bill passed 67 to 25. The House vote was split along partisan lines, with Democrats more favorably disposed than the chamber’s few Republicans.⁵³

The next morning, a Saturday, the Senate heard the governor’s message urging passage of the bill.⁵⁴ They placed the bill on the calendar for Monday, despite attempts to table the bill on the grounds that “it was not the sort of document that should be read in the senate,” presumably because it referred to matters of sex and reproduction.⁵⁵ Newspapers forecast

⁴⁹ Supporters included “Stanley Winborne of Hertford, chairman of the health committee, Dr. Wilkins, a practitioner and a member of the committee, and Holton of Pamlico.” “Brummit Bill Passes in House,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁵⁰ “Brummit Bill Passes in House,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁵¹ W. J. Martin, “Neal Child Bill Passes Senate – Bickett Sends Message,” *Charlotte Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919. Brown’s comments about the bill being “made in Germany” are puzzling. In 1919, Germany had no sterilization program, nor was it fascist. There were some Germans calling for racial hygiene at the time, but certainly no more than in the U.S. See Paul Weindling, “German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Allison Bashford and Phillipa Levine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵² “Brummit Bill Passes in House,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁵³ Of Republicans, 10 were absent, 11 voted no, and 6 voted yes. Of Democrats, 17 were absent, 14 voted no, and 60 voted yes. *House Journal, 1919*, 649-50; “Brummit Bill Passes in House,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁵⁴ *Senate Journal, 1919*, 544.

⁵⁵ Senator Connor attempted to table the bill on these grounds, and Senator Teague also wanted to table it. “Clash over Bill for Welcome of Soldiers,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 9 Mar. 1919; “State Holidays Remain the Same; Senate Inclined to Kill Brummitt Bill,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 Mar. 1919. Connor eventually agreed to let bill come up with a “full attendance” of senators. “Expect to Finish up Work Tonight,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 Mar. 1919.

“spirited debate,”⁵⁶ since “vigorous opposition is developing,”⁵⁷ but anyone who crept into the Senate gallery in hopes of witnessing fireworks would have been disappointed. When the Senate debated the bill on Monday, March 10, the last full day of the biennial session, several people spoke in its favor for both medical and economic reasons. Supporters included a senator who was also a medical doctor and, via letter, Watson S. Rankin, the head of the state board of health. In order to “remove objections” to the bill, Senator Dorman Thompson of Statesville, a member of the joint committee on Caswell, offered an amendment to require approval of the governor and head of state board of health before institutional authorities could sterilize inmates. The amended bill then passed “without a dissenting vote.”⁵⁸ The next day, legislators wrapped up their business and scattered.⁵⁹

Throughout the legislative fight, outside groups remained relatively quiet. Social welfare reformers and clubwomen had backed eugenics measures in the past, but in this case, they left the fight to politicians. Medical men, including the head of the state’s health board, played key roles in pushing the bill through. In contrast, Roland Beasley and welfare officials paid relatively little attention to the prospective sterilization law. They certainly had enough to demand their attention elsewhere, with the pending passage of amendments to the 1917 welfare law and a contentious debate over child labor.⁶⁰ The Conference for Social Service, which met

⁵⁶ “Expect to Finish up Work Tonight,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 Mar. 1919.

⁵⁷ “Legislators in Hurry to Leave and Quorum May not be secured,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 Mar. 1919.

⁵⁸ *Senate Journal*, 1919, 585; “Act for Purification passed by the House by Senate Kill it,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 11 Mar. 1919; “State Highway Bill Meeting all Demands is Finally Ddopted,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 11 Mar. 1919; W. J. Martin, “Number of Acts Ratified 1, 130,” *Charlotte Observer*, 12 Mar. 1919; “‘Solicitous’ for Chairman Warren,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Mar. 1919.s

⁵⁹ *Senate Journal*, 1919, 603; *House Journal*, 1919, 692, 710-711

⁶⁰ One bit of evidence for their lack of interest in the sterilization bill is a letter Board member Carey J. Hunter wrote to Beasley three days after the passage of the bill, in which he congratulated him on recent legislative victories and failed to include the bill in his list. Carey J. Hunter to Beasley, 14 Mar. 1919, State Board Corr., Box 2, Folder 7:

in Raleigh in the middle of February, kept quiet about the sterilization bill, although they endorsed several other bills, including a compulsory attendance law, and passed a vague resolution endorsing “all the principles of child welfare and social progress with which the General Assembly is concerning itself, and to the measures now before the Legislature designed to give them effect.”⁶¹ Clubwomen, whom Bickett had asked to consider supporting a sterilization bill, likewise stayed out the fray.⁶² These outside groups had already laid the foundation, with years of discussion about eugenics imperatives, but perhaps their silence at this critical moment indicates some uneasiness with the results of their labor.

In contrast, many physicians were vocal supporters of the sterilization bill and lauded its passage. A psychiatrist stationed at Camp Greene wrote that the sterilization law was “far in advance of almost any of the eastern or southern states.”⁶³ Shortly after the bill passed in 1919, several medical organizations coordinated their annual gatherings so that the state medical association, the health officers’ association, and the new hospital association met over the course of a week at Pinehurst, a resort in the sandhills of Moore County. The medical society meeting alone drew over 250 physicians and their wives, with other physicians and public health nurses

Corr. w board members, 1919. Meanwhile, two child labor bills came up in the 1919 session, and one key difference between them was whether they gave enforcement powers to welfare officials or labor officials.

⁶¹ One newspaper reported that Josephus Daniels and the Conference endorsed the sterilization bill, but the Conference’s records do not include an explicit endorsement of the bill. “Resolutions,” 1919, in Margaret Clark Neal, *North Carolina Conference for Social Service: The Record of Twenty-Five Years, 1912-1937*, 41, typed manuscript, North Carolina Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill); “Brummit Bill Passes in House,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Mar. 1919.

⁶² At the 1918 convention, the white Federation of Women’s Clubs passed their annual resolutions on the afternoon of May 30, only hours after Bickett spoke to them. Their resolutions did not include support of a sterilization bill. By the time they met again in the summer of 1919, the sterilization law had already passed. *FWC Yearbook, 1918-1919*, 34, 37, 43-45; 1919 convention minutes, FWC Records, Convention minutes (bound volume).

⁶³ Harry Stich, Letter to Editor, “The Open Forum: Legislation Commended,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 Mar. 1919.

attending for the health officers' meeting.⁶⁴ The crowds of medical men were reminded about the new sterilization law by at least two prominent speakers. Contending that "the menace of mental deficiency is one of the burning questions of the day," the president of the state Health Officers' Association praised the new law as "a step in the right direction." He told his audience that the state needed "further legislation" to deal with the non-institutional population, "the vast majority of this class who are allowed to go free and propagate their species unmolested." A combined program of segregation and sterilization, he argued, would decrease feeble-mindedness and crime within "a few decades."⁶⁵

The next evening, Governor Bickett was the guest of honor at medical convention. He listed notable legislation of the last two years affecting medical practitioners. The most important law of 1919, in his opinion, was "the act that makes it impossible for any incurable mental defectives to perpetuate their own species." He argued that "We cannot build houses fast enough ... to take care of these unfortunate victims, and the only way in which we can hope to arrest the alarming increase is to stop this muddy and murky current at its source."⁶⁶

The support of leading physicians and politicians for the bill did not, however, translate into action. The main barrier was bureaucratic: the sterilization law required that the Governor approve each operation, in addition to the approval of a "board of consultation" comprising

⁶⁴ "257 NC Physicians at Pinehurst Sessions," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 16 Apr. 1919.

⁶⁵ "President's address at ninth annual meeting of NC Health Officers' association, Pinehurst, April 14, 1919," reprinted as J. R. M'Cracken, MD, "What is North Carolina Doing for Her Unfortunates" *Charlotte Observer*, 25 May 1919.

⁶⁶ T. W. Bickett, "Address by his Excellency, T.W Bickett, Governor of North Carolina," 15 Apr. 1919, reprinted in *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of North Carolina, Sixty-Sixth Annual Meeting, Pinehurst, NC, April 15, 16, 17, 1919* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1919), 271, 272, accessed 30 Aug. 2013, <http://archive.org/details/transactionsofme66medi>.

heads of state institutions.⁶⁷ Once the law was passed, however, the legislature took no further steps to set up a board. Caswell superintendent C. B. McNairy, stepping into the vacuum, tried to organize a state board of mental hygiene. Members of the Conference for Social Service's eugenics committee had long called for the creation of a such a board, partly in order for physicians to help courts rule on mental competence in criminal trials.⁶⁸ In September, 1919, McNairy gathered the heads of other institutions in Raleigh, and at least for a short time succeeded in creating what he believed to be the official body to "confer and act" on sterilization cases before passing them on to the governor.⁶⁹ There is no evidence, however, that either this board or the governor's office officially approved any cases.⁷⁰

Even so, there is reason to believe that some physicians took the mere passage of the law as license enough to perform sterilization operations on their patients or inmates.⁷¹ In the fall of 1919, J. R. McCracken, the Haywood county health officer, tried to obtain approval to castrate two troublesome teenage boys at the county home. McCracken had praised the sterilization law that spring when he addressed the North Carolina Health Officers' Association as its president,

⁶⁷ North Carolina Public Law 1919, ch. 281, section 2.

⁶⁸ Dr. L. B. McBrayer, "The Problem of Feeble-mindedness and Eugenics—Six Recommendations," *Social Service Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (May-June 1913): 16-17; "Resolutions," *Social Service Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1917): 4-7. "Social Service Sessions Close," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917.

⁶⁹ C. Banks McNairy to [heads of institutions], 1 Sept. 1919; untitled motion, n.d.; and McNairy to Dr. J. R. McCracken, 29 Sept. 1919, all in North Carolina Mental Health Association (NC Mental Hygiene Society, 1913-55) Records (Org. 117, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; hereafter, Mental Hygiene Society Records), Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1919.

⁷⁰ Indeed, there is no evidence that the board met more than twice. McNairy called their first meeting for September 16, 1919, with a second "regular meeting" to be held on October 10, 1919. Unfortunately, no other records remain from this board. C. Banks McNairy to [heads of institutions], 1 Sept. 1919; and McNairy to Dr. J. R. McCracken, 29 Sept. 1919, both in Mental Hygiene Society Records, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1919.

⁷¹ John Kirby has claimed that "between 1919 and 1933, sterilizations were extremely common—in particular in the Raleigh area." He wrote a master's thesis at Duke about surgical procedures on the mentally ill, but his thesis is not open to the public and I have not been able to obtain his permission to access it and examine his evidence. John Kirby, Letter to the Editor, "Re: Eugenics," *Indy Week*, 15 June 2011.

calling for “more stringent” marriage restrictions and active segregation and sterilization programs.⁷² In his September 1919 letter about the two boys, he tried to get the state health officer and the governor to sign off on the castration.⁷³ His letter ended up in the hands of McNairy, who was heading the semi-official state board of mental hygiene. Even though the boys were not at one of the state institutions authorized to perform sterilizations, McNairy offered to have the board consider the case of the two boys. He also proposed another solution: “It strikes me that it would be possible, at least in extreme cases where there is an urgent necessity for immediate action, that all such persons who are a menace to society should be received as inmates at one of the state’s charitable or penal institutions long enough for such treatment as may be deemed advisable.” He advised McCracken to try to get the boys admitted to Caswell or Dix Hill.⁷⁴

Although the law made no allowances for non-institutional sterilizations, McNairy seemed to be comfortable with playing fast and loose with its provisions in order to admit people to institutions temporarily for surgery. No record exists concerning the fate of these two Haywood County boys. It seems likely that, facing substantial bureaucratic hurdles, McCracken dropped his efforts to castrate them. But he may also have taken McNairy’s willingness to bend other parts of the law as a wink and a nod towards extralegal action.

“A Workable Sterilization Law”: Baggett’s 1923 Bill

Social workers around the state recognized that the 1919 sterilization law set up too many bureaucratic barriers—including the requirement that the Governor approve each operation—to

⁷² J. R. McCracken, “What is North Carolina Doing for Her Unfortunates” *Charlotte Observer*, 25 May 1919.

⁷³ J. R. McCracken to Dr. Rankin, 23 Sept 1919, Mental Hygiene Society Records, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1919.

⁷⁴ McNairy to J. R. McCracken, 29 Sept. 1919, Mental Hygiene Society Records, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1919.

allow institutional heads to operate on any patients, and they soon called for a more “workable sterilization law.” Almost as soon as the 1919 law was passed, officials at Caswell and at the central welfare office in Raleigh called for its strictures to be loosened. McNairy made a case before the newly consolidated state hospital Board in April 1920 that Caswell was currently unable to segregate all of the state’s feeble-minded, and would never be able to do so. He asked them to grant Caswell’s three-member executive committee the authority to approve his requests for sterilization. The hospital board stopped short of this policy, which would have flouted the safeguards of the 1919 law, but they did urge all institutional heads to sterilize inmates after seeking full authorization.⁷⁵ In his 1922 report to the legislature, McNairy suggested another variation on the law that would have given him as superintendent sole discretion in deciding when to sterilize an inmate.⁷⁶ The Board of Charities and Public Welfare reprinted McNairy’s suggestion in their report, but proposed an alternate plan that would “provide a safeguard” to both institutions and inmates. The Board’s plan required the approval of two other physicians, cutting the Governor and other high-level officials out of the picture and substantially reducing red tape.⁷⁷

In early 1923, one long-time supporter of Caswell tried to put these plans into action. John R. Baggett, a state senator from the small piedmont town of Lillington, on the Cape Fear River, had been a trustee of Caswell since its founding in 1911. In his work with Hardy, McNairy, and the other trustees, Baggett had been party to many conversations about Caswell’s purpose, the state’s needs, and how eugenic principles could prevent future generations of

⁷⁵ Minutes from meeting of Board of Directors of the State Hospitals, 13 Apr. 1920, Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume), 220-223.

⁷⁶ *Biennial Report of the Caswell Training School, 1920-1922*, 9-10.

⁷⁷ *BCPW Report, 1920-1922*, 44-46.

children like Caswell's inmates.⁷⁸ He believed firmly enough in these principles that he joined a panel on "race betterment" at the 1917 meeting of the Conference for Social Service, where he declared that if the state "had spent as much money in teaching people how to breed humans as it has spent in teaching them how to breed cows, pigs, potatoes and corn, we would have today a million dollars more of resources to be used in developing rather than in care-taking."⁷⁹

On January 17, 1923, Baggett introduced two bills in the Senate. The first, which passed into law, eliminated the age limit at Caswell so that people over thirty could be admitted.⁸⁰ The second would have amended the 1919 law to leave decisions about sterilization to superintendents, trustees, and physicians of institutions, eliminating the requirement for approval of higher authorities. The Senate passed Baggett's bill and sent it to the House, where the Committee on Penal Institutions gave it a favorable report. On February 26, however, "in a tabling mood, the House killed" the sterilization bill along with several others, all "by sweeping majorities." The motion to table came from William H. S. Burgwyn, a lawyer, bank president, and veteran politician.⁸¹ Burgwyn's politics tended toward the Progressive but were not uniformly so; he supported "unmasking" the Klan, argued against eliminating corporal punishment in prisons, and opposed allowing divorce in cases of insanity on grounds that it would hurt women more than men. He may have moved to table the bill as a matter of procedural efficiency or because he objected to its failure to require consent of inmates'

⁷⁸ Caswell Records, Executive Committee Reports, 1911-1932 (bound volume).

⁷⁹ "Social Service Sessions Close," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 Jan. 1917.

⁸⁰ North Carolina Public Law 1923, ch. 34; on its passage as SB 69 and HB 239, see *Senate Journal*, 1923, 44, 70, 75; and *House Journal*, 1923, 102, 275, 424.

⁸¹ "Say Sanitarium Kitchen Was Filthy," *Greensboro Record*, 26 Feb. 1923; "The Day in the Legislature," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 27 Feb. 1923; and on SB 70 and HB 290, see *Senate Journal*, 1923, 44, 70, 75; and *House Journal*, 1923, 102, 329, 523.

families.⁸² The divergent outcomes of Baggett's two bills indicate that support for custodial institutions outstripped support for sterilization, although Caswell's small appropriation for 1923 also signals the limits of legislators' concern about feeble-mindedness, at least when their purse strings were involved. The committee report on Caswell called for an appropriation of over \$300,000 to expand the school's capacity to 1,000 inmates, but the budget committee allotted the school only \$500 for permanent improvements.⁸³ It was far easier for lawmakers to lift the school's age limit than to pay for the buildings to house those additional inmates.

Undeterred by the failure of Baggett's 1923 sterilization bill, other reformers joined the chorus of state officials calling for a revised sterilization law. In his 1924 report for the Bureau of Mental Health and Hygiene, state psychologist Harry Crane asked the legislature to modify the 1919 sterilization law "to make it really an effective instrument for the preventing of the continuation of defective mental strains."⁸⁴ *Public Welfare Progress* reprinted several articles, mostly from physicians, along these lines.⁸⁵ In 1924, the Federation of Women's Clubs went "on record as approving a workable sterilization law."⁸⁶ Several months later, the state League of Women Voters passed a similar resolution at its annual convention in Raleigh, arguing that the "increase of the mentally unfit" was a "serious menace." Institutional segregation, they believed,

⁸² Juanita Ann Sheppard, "Burgwyn, William Hyslop Sumner, 1886-1977," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 279; "Turner bill on Prison System," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 Mar. 1917.

⁸³ "Find Caswell School in First Class Shape," *Greensboro Daily News*, 24 Feb. 1923; "Refuse to Vote Money to Build Medical School," *Greensboro Record*, 27 Feb. 1923.

⁸⁴ *BCPW report, 1922-1924*, 140; "Would Make Ku Klux Klan Publish List of Members," *Charlotte Observer*, 28 Dec. 1922, 6; "Divorce Cannot Be Obtained for Insanity Pleas," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 28 Feb. 1923; "Say Sanitarium Kitchen was Filthy," *Greensboro Record*, 26 Feb. 1923.

⁸⁵ For example, see "What'll You do about it? Asks Dr. J. K. Hall," *Public Welfare Progress* 5, no. 5 (May 1924): 3.

⁸⁶ *FWC Yearbook, 1924-1925*, 130-31, cited in Sims, *Power of Femininity*, 117, and 234n94.

could never be adequate to “segregate and train this class of people,” and they went “on record as approving a workable sterilization law.”⁸⁷

Clubwomen’s interest in sterilization may have been influenced by developments just to the north. On a single day in March 1924, Virginia passed two related laws, the Racial Integrity Act and the Eugenic Sterilization Act. The state’s Anglo-Saxon Clubs lobbied for both, as did a small group of doctors and lawyers.⁸⁸ The sterilization law, based on Harry Laughlin’s “Model Eugenic Sterilization Law,” would be upheld by the Supreme Court in *Buck v. Bell* in 1927 (the racial integrity act would not be the object of judicial scrutiny until the 1967 case *Loving v. Virginia*). In 1924, North Carolina’s reformers knew only that Virginia had passed a law more likely than North Carolina’s to be “workable,” since it placed sole responsibility for decisions about individual cases in the hands of special boards at each institution, with a nominal appeals process.⁸⁹

Although these official calls for sterilization from organized white women stand out from other reformers’ silence—the Conference for Social Service, for example, was mum on the subject by 1924—the context of clubwomen’s calls also indicates that sterilization was not of overwhelming concern for white women. Throughout the 1920s, the League was most concerned with promoting citizenship education and increasing welfare programs, in line with maternalist rhetoric familiar to historians. Even as the League passed their resolution about eugenic sterilization, they were already focusing their legislative efforts on a different set of

⁸⁷ “Resolutions adopted at state convention,” League of Women Voters *Monthly News* 2, no. 15 (Apr. 1925).

⁸⁸ Lisa Lindquist Dorr, “Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia’s Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 143-66; G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 143-52.

⁸⁹ G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science*, 127-28; Jacob Henry Landman, *Human Sterilization: The History of the Sexual Sterilization Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1932): 83-84; and Laws of Virginia, 1924, ch. 394.

measures: the five-plank program of the Legislative Council of North Carolina Women, a coalition of white women's groups that sought to unify women's political voices around key bills.⁹⁰ The chair of the social hygiene committee told women at the national League convention a few months later that the North Carolina League intended to study "the problem of sterilization of the unfit," but apparently these plans never came to anything.⁹¹ In March, 1926, when the League held its next statewide meeting, members elected a new chair of social hygiene who focused on the sexual double standard and venereal disease.⁹² The League made no further public resolutions about sterilization during the decade.⁹³

Braswell's "Horrible" Bill and the Limits of Anti-evolution Fervor

Three weeks after the League of Women Voters met in Raleigh in February 1925, Democratic Representative James Cornelius Braswell introduced a bill in the House to modify the 1919 sterilization law. Braswell was a physician and farmer, having completed his medical training at the University of Maryland decades earlier. He was a member of the Nash County health board, and he had represented his county in the legislature in two prior terms.⁹⁴ It is unclear why Braswell sponsored a sterilization bill. He said that he introduced all of his bills "by

⁹⁰ The 1925 Council program called for the Australian ballot, an 8-hour day for child workers, a two-week posting of marriage banns, state funding for the school for delinquent black girls, and the establishment of a farm colony for women criminals. As the League of Women Voters met in Raleigh, the legislative session was underway, and League members focused on the measures endorsed in the Council's platform. "Final program of legislative council," League of Women Voters *Monthly News* 2, no. 8 (Dec. 1924); "Resolutions Adopted at State Convention of North Carolina League of Women Voters," League of Women Voters *Monthly News* 2, no. 15 (Apr. 1925).

⁹¹ Mrs. C. R. Emry, "Reports of Delegates to the National Convention: Social Hygiene," League of Women Voters *Monthly News* 3, no. 1 (May 1925).

⁹² "Program of Work Adopted by Convention," League of Women Voters *Monthly News* 4, no. 12 (Apr. 1926).

⁹³ See League of Women Voters *Monthly News*.

⁹⁴ *North Carolina Manual, 1925* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, for the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1925), accessed 29 Apr. 2013, <http://archive.org/details/northcarolinaman1925nort>.

request,” but from whom the request came, we may never know.⁹⁵ His bill allowed heads of institutions to perform sterilizations with approval from only their boards of trustees, similar to C. Banks McNairy’s 1920 proposal and John Baggett’s 1923 bill.⁹⁶ Promoting the measure, Braswell told his colleagues that “if there is one immutable law of nature, it is that life begets life” and that “if some curb is not placed by the State we will have a multiplication of what we have at the school for the feeble-minded.”⁹⁷ Only four days after the bill was introduced, the House passed it and sent it to the Senate, where the public health committee quickly returned it with a favorable report.⁹⁸

Then, however, Braswell’s bill was stymied by the end-of-session rush. It sat on the calendar for almost a week while the legislature ploughed through its final business. On the last day of the session, after the House had wrapped up, “the Senate devoted its afternoon session to a swift movement through the public calendar, passing bills with little debate, killing them outright by direct vote or motion to table, and killing by the indirect route of postponing action or referring them again to some committee.”⁹⁹ This was the fate of Braswell’s sterilization bill, which was tabled on a motion from Democrat Frank L. Dunlap of Wadesboro.¹⁰⁰ Thus the 1925 sterilization bill followed the inverse path of the 1923 bill, which had passed in the Senate but was tabled in the House.

⁹⁵ “Braswell Measure Draws Session’s Largest Crowd,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 Feb. 1925.

⁹⁶ Unfortunately, the specifics of the bill (1925 SB 1098, HB 1070) are unknown, since no copy remains in legislative records at the state archive. See Session Records, North Carolina Senate and House of Representatives, 1925 (State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh).

⁹⁷ “House pushes along Governor McLean’s consolidation program; Braswell bill passes,” *News and Observer*, 1 Mar. 1925.

⁹⁸ *House Journal*, 1925, 400, 450, 501, 530; *Senate Journal*, 1925, 408, 441.

⁹⁹ “Legislature now thing of history,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Mar. 1925.

¹⁰⁰ *Senate Journal*, 1925, 617.

Even given more time, the Senate may have killed the bill. Under the headline “senators horrified,” one newspaper reported after the bill’s demise that “the senate would have none of it.”¹⁰¹ Ashley Aaron Flowers Seawell “declared that the bill was the ‘most horrible’ presented at the session.”¹⁰² One clue stands out as to why senators were opposed to the bill. Looking back four years later, Democratic Senator Thomas Lester Johnson remembered his opposition to the 1925 bill as stemming from his belief that the sterilization operation would deprive its targets of sexual pleasure.¹⁰³ This belief was not uncommon, especially since sterilization programs in some states arose from experimental programs in castrating criminals. On this topic, medical and welfare professionals often went on the offensive, arguing that sterilization operations in no way harmed patients. But as a banker and farmer, Johnson probably was removed from circles where this argument was made.¹⁰⁴

Curiously, absent from reactions to Braswell’s sterilization bill was any mention of evolution or religion. Less than a week before Braswell introduced his bill, the state was engulfed in political and religious turmoil over a bill that would have banned the teaching of evolution in public schools. North Carolina’s battle over the “Poole bill” prefigured the Scopes trial in Tennessee a few months later. According to one historian, the controversy over the bill was a battle between fundamentalists and modernists over the very heart and soul of Christianity. Debaters fell roughly along sectarian lines, with Presbyterians more disposed to ban the teaching of evolution, Baptists and Methodists somewhere in the middle, and Episcopalians strongly

¹⁰¹ “Senators Horrified,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 14 Mar. 1925.

¹⁰² “Legislature now thing of history,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 Mar. 1925.

¹⁰³ See Hoke, “Politics of Fertility,” 8. In discussions about sexual pleasure, Johnson and others were probably pondering sterilization for males rather than females.

¹⁰⁴ On Johnson’s occupation, see *North Carolina Manual, 1925*, 533-534.

opposed to what they saw as an attack on academic freedom.¹⁰⁵ Although the Poole bill failed in the House, the debate around it unleashed a firestorm of concern about Darwinism and, more generally, about what fundamentalists saw as secular modernism.

Even fundamentalists who feared the corrupting influences of evolutionary theories apparently were unfazed by eugenics, despite its roots in bastardized Darwinian theories. The House of Representatives, which had a knock-down, drag-out fight about the teaching of evolution, easily passed Braswell's sterilization bill, which would have allowed institutional officials to sterilize inmates with little oversight. And Braswell himself had voted *for* the Poole bill, thus supporting calls to end the teaching of evolution.¹⁰⁶

Why, then, did the mid-1920s religious furor over evolution apparently ignore eugenics? Perhaps this lack of concern was due to how North Carolina's reformers discussed the topic: in their depiction, eugenics depended not on a Darwinian belief in evolution but only on a belief in Mendelian processes of breeding, or even Lamarckian ideas of modification. Over the previous decade, pleas for eugenics had taken the form of religious or moral admonishments more often than scientific screeds. William Louis Poteat, a target of fundamentalist attacks because of his teachings about evolution, often described eugenics as the "projection of Golden Rule down the stream of protoplasm," or as part of the project of creating the ideal citizen "for the work of the Kingdom" of God.¹⁰⁷ In any case, the swing toward fundamentalism in the 1920s did not dampen reformers' enthusiasm for eugenics.

¹⁰⁵ Willard B. Gatewood, *Preachers, Pedagogues, and Politicians: The Evolution Controversy in North Carolina, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

¹⁰⁶ *House Journal*, 1925, 291.

¹⁰⁷ William Louis Poteat, "The population and its prospects," 1924, William Louis Poteat Papers (Wake Forest Special Collections, Winston-Salem; hereafter, Poteat Papers), Box 9, Folder 1008; Poteat, "The Old Method for the New World," 1920, Poteat Papers, Box 9, Folder 982.

Caswell and “Its Relation to the Problem of the Feeble-minded”

Although the legislature had tabled the 1925 sterilization bill in its race to end the session, many state leaders still felt that North Carolina was not dealing adequately with the problem of the feeble-minded. As in 1919, Caswell Training School was a prism for officials’ concern. In 1925, the Caswell board fired superintendent C. Banks McNairy amidst charges of abuse and mismanagement.¹⁰⁸ The firing drew attention to questions of institutional management, and the Caswell board felt forced to reconsider the fundamental purpose of Caswell. Noting that Caswell’s “scope” had always been in question, with disagreement about what types and ages of feeble-minded people the school should admit, Governor A. W. MacLean appointed outgoing state health officer Watson Smith Rankin to head a committee to study Caswell and “its relation to the problem of the feeble-minded.”¹⁰⁹ The committee included two other doctors, the state superintendent of public instruction, and business and professional leaders.¹¹⁰

The committee studied the issue for almost a year. Rankin assigned them over one hundred hours of reading—their final report included a bibliography—and members met with welfare officials Kate Burr Johnson, Harry Crane, and Emeth Tuttle to hear their expert opinions.¹¹¹ The committee also consulted with specialists outside the state, including several

¹⁰⁸ Noll talks about McNairy’s dismissal as indicative about “inherent problems of southern institutions in general,” being caught between lack of funding and lack of political power. Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst*, 56.

¹⁰⁹ *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School in Its Relation to the Problem of the Feeble-Minded of the State of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1926). “Dr. Rankin to Help in Caswell Survey,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 23 June 1925; Gov. McLean to H. Galt Braxton, 1 Aug. 1925, Tapp-Jenkins Papers (Manuscript Collection #312, East Carolina Special Collections, Greenville, NC), Folder 312.1e.

¹¹⁰ “Forming Caswell Advisory Board,” *Greensboro Record*, 30 July 1925; “Hospital is given a clean bill after a board quiz,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 23 July 1926.

¹¹¹ “Growing Interest in Feeble-Minded,” *Public Welfare Progress* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1926): 1, 4

authorities from New York.¹¹² The final report, released to the public in September 1926, surveyed “the latest findings” about feeble-mindedness and treatment approaches.¹¹³ Rankin seems to have written the main body of the report, with Hon. J. O. Carr of Wilmington contributing a section on existing legal provisions for “dealing with the feebleminded in North Carolina.”¹¹⁴ The committee made seven policy recommendations, including increasing Caswell’s capacity to 2,000 and creating special classes within the public school system for children who were slightly “retarded in mental development,” which might ease the pressure on Caswell.¹¹⁵ According to the *Greensboro Record*, “legislation permitting sterilization in certain cases ... is perhaps the major recommendation.”¹¹⁶ Like McNairy and the Board of Charities and Public Welfare, the committee recommended loosening the restrictions on sterilization set forth in the 1919 law: institutional heads would need approval from the heads of the state health and welfare boards, but not the governor.

At the same time, the committee argued that “sterilization cannot be considered as of any value as a *general* remedy for the problem of feeblemindedness,” although it was valuable “as a special remedy for certain individual cases.”¹¹⁷ This new note of caution was the product of recent studies that questioned assumptions about the heritability of feeble-mindedness. The committee pinpointed a shift in expert opinion around 1920, after which some specialists argued

¹¹² *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School in Its Relation to the Problem of the Feeble-Minded of the State of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1926), 36-37.

¹¹³ “Plan to Abate Feeble Minds,” *Greensboro Record*, 21 Sept. 1926.

¹¹⁴ *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School*, 31.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 (quote), 35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

that feeble-mindedness was a product of heredity only half the time, compared to earlier estimates of around ninety per cent.¹¹⁸ Moreover, experts began to regard feeble-mindedness not as a single, inheritable trait with a biological definition, but as a legal or sociological term that could encompass multiple combinations of traits and a variety of conditions.¹¹⁹ Rankin recognized that “the problem is a vastly more complex one than the popular heredity chart of not long ago made it.”¹²⁰ North Carolina’s committee concluded not only that it would be impossible and unreasonable to sterilize everyone who exhibited signs of feeble-mindedness, but also that this plan would fail to stem feeble-mindedness. To them, large-scale sterilization efforts were not the solution.

Despite revising their ideas about the causes of feeble-mindedness, the committee followed national leaders in continuing to fear the unrestricted reproduction of feeble-minded people, whatever the genesis of their condition. While the issue was far more complicated than black and white boxes on a family chart, the crux of the problem remained selecting people whose sterilization would have the greatest impact. The committee estimated that 2 per cent of the population, or 55,000 people in North Carolina, were feeble-minded. They commented sardonically that most of these people “blended with [the population] so completely that it would be most enlightening if those who prescribe sterilization would accompany their prescriptions,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 20. The report also noted that sociological definitions of feeble-mindedness produced lower estimates than psychological definitions, and that until the last four or five years, the practice was to use estimates based on psychological definitions. Ibid., 11-12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 21, 23.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 22, quoting Stanely Powell Davies, *Social Control of the Feeble-minded: A Study of Social Programs and Attitudes in Relation to the Problems of Mental Deficiency* (New York: The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, 1923).

like a careful and wise physician, with directions for taking.”¹²¹ That is, how were state officials to determine who should be sterilized?

The committee’s policy recommendations indicate that they believed heads of the state’s prisons, hospitals, and Caswell were the best judges of candidates of sterilization. Despite their reservations about the value of sterilization as a “general remedy,” their plan would have cleared legal and logistical barriers between institutional heads and quick sterilizations. Their guideline was that the decision to sterilize should be “in the interest of the general welfare,” language that actually eliminated the 1919 law’s insistence that sterilization be for the mental, moral, or physical improvement of the patient.¹²²

This discrepancy between theory and policy marks a transitional moment. By 1926, some medical professionals questioned the scientific legitimacy and efficacy of eugenic sterilization, but the wider public, including many doctors, continued to see sterilization and other eugenic measures as useful tools of social policy, thanks in part to the success of welfare officials in painting mental defect as a social problem and eugenics as the solution. The committee’s report itself mirrors this divide between theory and policy. The main body of the report, probably written by W. S. Rankin, grappled with new views of medical professionals, but J. O. Carr’s contributions on the “relation of the problem of feeble-mindedness to the courts” focused on the phrase in Caswell’s charter about its duty to work toward the “ultimate eradication” of mental deficiency. For Carr, “no responsibility resting on the school is greater than this.” The problem was complicated, he argued, by the fact that some training was a dangerous thing; when Caswell students with some training were turned “out on society,” “we

¹²¹ *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School*, 23.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 35; and North Carolina Public Laws, 1919, ch. 281.

are sending out into the world a somewhat improved human being, whose power and tendency to reproduce his kind is as great, if not even greater, than if he had never been admitted to these institutions.” Carr believed the state needed “more drastic methods than any now proposed by the law” in order to eradicate feeble-mindedness.¹²³ Carr and other members of this committee, fully exposed to up-to-date medical views that were skeptical of sterilization as a fix-all solution for feeble-mindedness, were also immersed in social views that, in the end, trumped scientific caution.

The 1927 Supreme Court decision in *Buck v. Bell* signaled the triumph of this line of thought. The court’s decision affirmed the legality of Virginia’s 1924 sterilization statute, with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’s now infamous declaration that “three generations of imbeciles are enough.” The nation took note. Virginia’s law had been based on the Eugenics Record Office’s model statute, which in turn was designed to pass tests of constitutionality. *Buck v. Bell* lighted a clear path forward through the maze of legal questions, and a resurgent interest in passing state sterilization laws, already growing in the mid-1920s, reached new heights.¹²⁴ In North Carolina, Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson called the decision “most significant,” contrasting Virginia’s statute with North’s Carolina’s law, which “is not workable,” and

¹²³ *Report of the Committee on Caswell Training School*, 33.

¹²⁴ Reilly charts 1913 as an early peak in eugenic sterilization legislation activity, followed by a trough from 1918 to 1922. Things picked up again in 1923, and in 1925 “the legislative floodgates opened.” By the end of that year, 17 states had sterilization laws. *Buck v. Bell* increased this activity. Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 67-68, 84-88 (quote on 84). See also Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 110-112; G. Dorr, *Segregation’s Science*, 127-128; and for the national reaction to *Buck v. Bell*, Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 174-77.

lamenting the futility of the welfare board's repeated efforts to get the legislature to "untie some of this red tape."¹²⁵

Legislative Success: Millner's 1929 Bill

Continued calls for a "more workable sterilization law" finally came to fruition in 1929. Although various groups had lobbied intermittently during most of the 1920s, none of these groups ended up playing a decisive role in the passage of the 1929 law. The proximate cause was neither the Conference for Social Service, the Federation of Women's Clubs, nor a medical society. Still, their years of lobbying laid the groundwork for the easy passage of the bill. The influence of this network of pro-eugenics activists is manifest in the discussion of the bill as well as the career of the legislator who sponsored it.

Republican Henry L. Millner was a New York native and a first-time senator in 1929. His long career as a civil engineer had taken him to Europe and Australia, but by 1917 he had settled in Morganton. There he ran an electrical company, attended a Methodist church, and became involved in local politics. He served variously as an alderman, a county commissioner, and chair of the Burke County public welfare board.¹²⁶ Millner's long tenure on the county welfare board indicates more than a passing interest in welfare. In his years on the board from 1919 to 1933, he had the opportunity to learn a great deal about state officials' theories and blueprints. He would have received every issue of *Public Welfare Progress*, and he may have corresponded with state officials or attended a summer welfare institute at UNC. In addition,

¹²⁵ Kate Burr Johnson before medical society, 29 Sept. 1927, reprinted as Johnson "State Welfare Program as it Relates to Mental Diseases and Crime," *Southern Medicine and Surgery* 89, no. 11 (Nov. 1927): 771-776 (quotes on 774), online at <http://archive.org/details/southernmedicine891927char>.

¹²⁶ A. R. Newsome, ed., *North Carolina Manual, 1929* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), 565, accessed 8 May 2013, <http://archive.org/details/northcarolinaman1929nort>.

Millner may have had a personal connection with Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson, since Johnson had deep family ties to Morganton.¹²⁷

On January 21, 1929, Millner introduced a bill “to provide for the sterilization of the mentally defective and feeble-minded inmates of charitable and penal institutions of the State of North Carolina.”¹²⁸ The basic intent of the bill was the same as the 1919 law: to sterilize “mentally defective” or “feeble-minded” people for their “mental, moral or physical improvement” or “for the public good.”¹²⁹ Millner’s bill, however, granted the leeway to institutional heads that they and welfare officials had requested in the past. Sterilizations would require signatures from the Commissioner of Public Welfare, the Secretary of the State Board of Health, and the chief medical officers of two institutions for the feeble-minded or insane. In addition, the bill specified that no one could be held criminally or civilly liable for performing sterilizations in accordance with the law.¹³⁰ Finally, Millner’s plans opened an entirely new realm to sterilization: the world outside of institutions. When relatives or legal guardians petitioned for the sterilization of feeble-minded or mentally defective people who were *not* institutionalized, and the panel of four reviewers signed off on the case, county commissioners

¹²⁷ Johnson was born and raised in Morganton, and her mother’s family had built two magnificent antebellum houses there. Although her widowed mother died in 1905, she had at least one cousin who remained in Morganton: Mary Avery, a clubwoman who chaired the Federation of Women’s Club’s public welfare department in 1927. Years later after her retirement, Johnson lived with Avery in Raleigh. “Kate Burr Johnson,” in *Prominent Families of New Jersey*, Vol 1., ed. William Starr Myers (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2000), 575; Mary Avery to Johnson, 21 Jan. 1927, Corr. with Associations, Box 28C, Folder: NC Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1926-1947; Dotty Cameron, “New W. C. Honorary Degree First College Sheepskin for Pioneer Office Holder,” *Raleigh News and Observer* 29 May 1951; Mollie C. Davis, “Johnson, Kate Ancrum Burr,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 3, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 295-96.

¹²⁸ *Senate Journal*, 1929, 43.

¹²⁹ The 1929 bill allowed sterilization or “asexualization,” meaning that castration or ovariectomy was also an option. In naming these two types of operation, the 1929 bill was more explicit than the 1919 law, which used the looser phrasing “any surgical operation.”

¹³⁰ North Carolina Public Law 1929, ch. 34, sections 3 and 5.

would be required to pay for the operation.¹³¹ In making the case for the bill, Millner pointed to other states with “successful” sterilization laws, including California, Delaware, and Pennsylvania.¹³² The Supreme Court decision in *Buck v. Bell*, handed down since the legislature’s last regular session, probably also influenced the bill’s reception, although Millner’s bill did not appear to be based on Virginia’s statute.¹³³

The Senate debate and eventual unanimous approval demonstrate the success of reformers’ campaigns to educate the public about eugenics.¹³⁴ The Senate committee on public welfare, of which Millner was a member, delivered a favorable report on the bill, amended to include further “safeguards.”¹³⁵ In the subsequent debate, the almost singular voice of opposition belonged to Democratic senator Thomas Coleman Galloway, a lawyer and Baptist from Brevard. Galloway believed the bill allowed “a practice that had been tried and proven false by Asiatics in the days of eunuchs.” Thomas Lester Johnson, who had opposed the 1925 sterilization bill, stepped in to defend the bill, explaining that based on his conversations with “doctors and welfare experts,” he understood that “the bill would not deprive the sterilized

¹³¹ North Carolina Public Law 1929, ch. 34, section 2. In theory, this proviso left the decision about sterilization to families of non-institutional residents. In practice, through institutional commitment laws and control over the approval process, state officials retained tools that left them with the final say in the matter.

¹³² “State Adopts Usable Law for Sterilization of Defectives,” *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 3 (Mar. 1929): 1.

¹³³ Millner’s bill did not provide for notification or a hearing process for inmates, which Oliver Wendell Holmes had named as key procedural elements in his majority opinion in *Buck v. Bell*. Millner’s bill also went beyond the scope of the Virginia law, and most other sterilization laws, by allowing the sterilization of people who lived outside of state institutions. Curiously, one of the arguments against the Virginia law was on the grounds of equal protection, that because the bill applied only to people in institutions it did not pass the equal protection test—an argument that Holmes acknowledged in his *Buck v. Bell* ruling but ultimately rejected. In that sense, Millner’s farther-reaching bill may have satisfied some critics of the Virginia law.

¹³⁴ On its final passage in the Senate, see “Sterilizing bill passes in Senate,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 Feb. 1929; and “Senate Tables Police Pension Bill By 24 to 20,” *Greensboro Record*, 8 Feb 1929.

¹³⁵ *Senate Journal*, 1929, 93; “Senate Favors Sterilization,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Feb. 1929.

person of sex life, only stopping possible propagation.”¹³⁶ The only other objection reported in the *News and Observer* came from William Grimes Clark of Edgecombe. Clark, perhaps concerned about abuse of the bill’s provisions, moved to send it to the committee on public health for further review. He withdrew his motion when he learned that state health officials had already approved of the bill in an appearance before the public welfare committee.”¹³⁷

A far larger number of senators took the floor to urge passage of the bill, without reservations. Millner spoke first. As one paper reported, “Reminding the Senators of Governor Gardner’s plea for pure bred seed and pure bred stock in this State, [Millner] said North Carolina also needed better bred people.” Other supporters’ backgrounds reaffirm the influence of medical and welfare professionals in directly or indirectly assuring the bill’s success. The Senate’s only physician, Henry B. Ivey, emphasized the difference between sterilization and castration and argued that sterilization was a safe, simple operation with no effects on “natural desires.” Other vocal proponents included Democrats John T. Alderman of Vance County, Lloyd L. Gravely of Nash County, and Marvin K. Blount of Pitt County, all three members of the committee on public welfare that had reported favorably on the bill.¹³⁸ Their committee assignment meant they had heard the testimony of state health officer Charles Laughinghouse and perhaps read recent publications of the state welfare.

¹³⁶ “Sterilization of Defectives Urged in bill,” *Greensboro Record*, 7 Feb. 1929; “Senate Favors Sterilization,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Feb. 1929.

¹³⁷ Charles O’Hagan Laughinghouse, the state health officer, and Dr. Campbell, head of the State Hospital for the Insane at Morganton, had appeared before the Committee on Public Welfare. “Senate Favors Sterilization,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Feb. 1929.

¹³⁸ “Senate Favors Sterilization,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 Feb 1929; *Senate Journal*, 1929, 93; and A. R. Newsome, ed., *North Carolina Manual, 1929* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), 33, accessed 8 May 2013, <http://archive.org/details/northcarolinaman1929nort>.

Just as the House took up the bill, a veteran of the state's welfare office intervened to denounce the whole affair in the *Raleigh News and Observer*. According to former Commissioner Roland F. Beasley, who had returned to his North Carolina newspaper career after his petroleum-publicity sojourns in Texas, the bill was "foolish" and "not worth the paper that it is written on." The 1919 sterilization was useless, he charged, and a new law would be no better, serving only to "further clutter up the statute books." People already segregated in institutions would not reproduce, and so many thousands of feeble-minded people lived outside institutions that authorities could never hope to sterilize them all. Moreover, Beasley quoted psychologist Dr. William A. White, superintendent of the nation's largest mental institution, to argue that caring for "dependents" was a social responsibility whose fulfillment resulted in "a better and more human society." According to this logic, eliminating the feeble-minded, criminals, or the insane would deprive society of an opportunity for humanitarianism and moral development. Beasley thus objected to sterilization on both scientific and moral grounds, but his most damning conclusion was simply that the magnitude of the problem of feeblemindedness made sterilization futile.¹³⁹

Beasley's objections made no impression in the House. After a favorable report from the committee on public welfare and explanations of the bill's "safeguards," there was no real opposition. The assembly suspended the rules to push the bill through almost immediately on Saturday, February 16, with the only protests (from Republican representatives James Raynor and John McKay Byrd) focused on procedural matters, not the bill's substance. Newspapers

¹³⁹ Beasley Opposes Sterilizing Bill," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 Feb. 1929. On Beasley's post-welfare board career, first doing publicity with the International Petroleum Company of San Antonio and then as editor of the *Monroe Journal*, see Kate Burr Johnson to Miss Emma O. Lundberg, 12 May 1921, BPW Records, Commissioner's Office: Correspondence with Children's Bureau, Folder 6: Correspondence, 1919-1923, 1926-1930; and Beasley to McAlister, 10 May 1932, McAlister Papers, Folder 31: Roland F Beasley.

reported that the bill for “cutting off racial defectives before their conception” “had a walk-over and nobody thought to take a record vote.” The tone of that day’s proceedings were decidedly indecorous, even playful, as legislators “made mighty merry over the bill.” With low attendance and empty lobbies, “middle-aged solons took the fiercest joy in razzing each other.” The next items on the agenda was debate about a federal highway system, during which the House adopted a satirical amendment that “the U.S. government shall in conjunction with the celestial powers construct a system of highways connecting the sun and planets, and all the stars of the universe.”¹⁴⁰

Sterilization and Public Welfare

Despite this easy sailing, one section in the 1929 sterilization law did become entangled in a conflict that had quietly seethed throughout the decade: the tension between medical and welfare officials about who should oversee the state’s mental hygiene and eugenics efforts. Millner’s new sterilization law gave added weight to the welfare board’s claim to oversee mental hygiene efforts. In each sterilization case, the law required institutional officials or county commissioners to file a “family history” with the Board of Charities and Public Welfare. Presumably welfare officials Kate Burr Johnson and Harry Crane stood behind this particular feature, which reflected and reinforced the board’s interest in eugenics research.¹⁴¹ Because Laughinghouse failed during the 1929 legislature to shift responsibility for mental hygiene to health officials, the welfare board emerged from the 1929 session with a new power: requiring officials from around the state to help build their ever-growing catalogue of feeble-minded families. This arrangement was a major victory for Johnson and the welfare board, who also

¹⁴⁰ “Millner Sterilizing Act Passed by House on its Final Reading” *Greensboro Daily News*, 17 Feb. 1929; “Curb on Mental Defectives Now Provided by Law,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 Feb. 1929.

¹⁴¹ Public Law 1929, ch. 34, section 4.

fended off Laughinghouse's 1929 attack on the board's power to inspect Caswell and the state's mental hospitals.¹⁴²

State officials tried to spread awareness about the new law. The front of the very next issue of *Public Welfare Progress* proclaimed "State Adopts Usable Law for Sterilization of Defectives." The bulletin included the full text of the law, some notes about its passage, and statements such as "Sterilization of defectives is looked to as one of the 'preventive' measures that will lighten the burden of the socially useless that future generations must care for."¹⁴³ A special issue of *Public Welfare Progress* focused on mental hygiene, with an update from R. Eugene Brown, a state welfare official, the headline proclaiming, "Sterilization law is being used." A box nearby highlighted seven salient points about feeble-mindedness, including the fact that it "cannot be cured" and "does not mean that the individual is unteachable." Another box spoke directly to social workers, quoting well-known eugenicist Frank Lorimer on the importance of "eugenical social work" to "any adequate program of social reform." This issue drew praise from the National Committee for Mental Hygiene for its "excellence and instructiveness."¹⁴⁴

Johnson's staff also reached out to welfare workers. In June 1929 she wrote to the heads of all the state institutions with instructions about how to request approval for sterilizations,

¹⁴² Laughinghouse's attack on the welfare board, particularly his attempt to wrest control of asylum inspection powers, may have been a retaliatory measure after Johnson testified against Dr. Albert Anderson, head of the Raleigh hospital for the white insane. On Senate Bill 594, see *Senate Journal, 1929*, 187, 246; on Senate Bill 817, see *Senate Journal, 1929*, 250; and *House Journal, 1929*, 674.

¹⁴³ "State adopts usable law for sterilization of defectives," *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 3 (Mar. 1929): 1.

¹⁴⁴ R. Eugene Brown, "Sterilization Law is Being Used"; "Feeble-mindedness"; and "Eugenics and Social Work," *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 4 (Apr. 1930), 5, 6; *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 19.

including the minutiae of how to request blank case forms.¹⁴⁵ Her staff also arranged to have a Raleigh surgeon discuss “the practical application of the law” at the summer public welfare institute, responding to multiple requests for information from county superintendents and other welfare workers “as to how the law may be carried out.”¹⁴⁶ During his presentation, surgeon Hubert Royster told welfare workers that “The problem is to eradicate poor inheritance to start with. We must not breed from our worst.” Aware that sterilization was not universally accepted, he defended the practice on several counts. It was not a radical new practice, he argued, and over half of the states in the country had sterilization laws, with challenges coming only on the basis of “wording” rather than “intent.” He also defended sterilization as a better alternative than institutional segregation, arguing that segregation “seems a more serious deprivation of individual rights than the destruction of reproductive powers.” The Board summarized the points of his presentation in a subsequent bulletin, so they reached all of the state’s welfare workers, as well as several thousand other subscribers.¹⁴⁷

On a national level, one aspect of North Carolina’s new law drew particular attention. Sterilization laws in other states allowed institutional officials to operate on their inmates. North Carolina’s law went further in allowing non-institutional residents to be sterilized. The Eugenics Record Office’s *Eugenical News* praised this “unique feature” of allowing operations on non-inmates as one that must be developed in other states if sterilization was truly to really work. The Eugenics Record Office also printed the law’s full text along with a lengthy evaluation of its

¹⁴⁵ Johnson to heads of institutions, 22 June 1929, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office: Circular Letters, Box 173, Folder: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1933.

¹⁴⁶ “Dr. Royster to Talk on Sterilization,” *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 6 (June 1929): 1.

¹⁴⁷ “Sterilization is way of guiding evolution,” *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 7 (July 1929): 3. In June of 1930 the circulation of *Public Welfare Progress* was 4,000, with special issues sent to 4,500. *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 19. During the 1929 welfare institute, workers spent half a week learning about juvenile courts and half a week learning about mental hygiene. *BCPW Report 1928-1930*, 46.

merits and shortcomings. According to Harry Crane, the law did not place enough emphasis on the family history of the patient, allowing for sterilizations beyond those “quite clearly established to be hereditary in type.” Eugene Brown wondered whether the law’s lack of provision for a hearing or appeal left it open to legal challenges. Ultimately, however, the editors of *Eugenical News* framed North Carolina’s law as part of the “gradual [improvement] in the newer sterilization statutes.”¹⁴⁸

In the next four years, North Carolina’s sterilization efforts proceeded in a rather piecemeal fashion. Lacking a separate agency to administer sterilization requests, Harry Crane and his staff at the welfare board’s Division of Mental Health and Hygiene took on the responsibility of facilitating the process. They collected petitions and distributed them to the proper authorities, attempting to keep a log as they went of key statistics about the cases.¹⁴⁹ Spotty surviving records make it difficult to trace particulars about the people they sterilized, with published statistics providing the best information.

The number of parties involved in administering cases produced a backlog between cases approved and operations performed. Crane and the board received the first sterilization case in August 1929.¹⁵⁰ By December officials had received and approved five more cases, but they had not gotten confirmation that any of the operations had actually taken place.¹⁵¹ Later reports indicate that during 1929, only three people were sterilized: one man, living outside an institution, who was given a vasectomy; another man, the resident of a county poor house, who was castrated; and a woman, also the resident of a county home, whose ovaries were removed.

¹⁴⁸ “The North Carolina Sterilization Law,” *Eugenical News* 15, no. 4 (Apr. 1930): 57-59.

¹⁴⁹ *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 76

¹⁵⁰ R. Eugene Brown, “Sterilization Law is Being Used,” *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 4 (April 1930): 5.

¹⁵¹ “Welfare Workers Consider Sterilization of Patients,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 Dec. 1929.

Similarly, one year after the law was passed, twenty-one cases had been approved but only fourteen sterilizations performed.¹⁵²

The state's method of reporting aggregate statistics makes it difficult to know much about the race, age, diagnosis, or location of these early victims of the state's eugenic sterilization programs. One article in *Public Welfare Progress* noted that of the first twenty-one cases approved, about three-quarters were women and three-quarters were white. About half were inmates in state or county institutions. Four of the women and one of the men were married, and at least eight of the women were already mothers. The article also mentioned that in one case, "a white woman gave birth to a child whose father was a Negro." All but three of people were diagnosed as feeble-minded, and all twenty-one were "sexually promiscuous."¹⁵³

Other statistics indicate that through the end of 1932, the state sterilized forty-nine people, about three-quarters of them women. Officials approved a handful of operations that were not performed, and they declined to sanction at least sixteen operations. Of those sterilized, just over half were residents of state institutions, and the rest were about evenly split between residing in county homes and on their own. At least six were black men or boys who were castrated at the state mental hospital for African Americans at Goldsboro. Most of the rest were women, the majority of whom were probably white. Some were probably teenagers, as young as 14, and at least one girl who had her ovaries removed lived in an orphanage (See Table 1).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² R. Eugene Brown, "Sterilization Law is Being Used," *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 4 (April 1930): 5.

¹⁵³ The group included five men and sixteen women, with fifteen whites and six blacks. R. Eugene Brown, "Sterilization Law is Being Used," *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 4 (April 1930): 5.

¹⁵⁴ Analysis based on data in R. Eugene Brown, *First Biennial Report of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina, July 1, 1934 to June 30, 1936*, 13-14; *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 76; and R. Eugene Brown, "Sterilization Law is Being Used," *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 4 (April 1930): 5. Table based on data in Brown, *First Biennial Report*.

Table 1: Sterilization by year, location, and type of operation

year	location	Male (vasectomy)	Male (castration)	Female (salpingectomy)	Female (ovariectomy)	total
1929	state institution					3
	county home		1		1	
	non-institutional	1				
1930	state institution		1	4	4	17
	county home		1	2		
	non-institutional			4	1	
1931	state institution			3		11
	county home			3	1	
	non-institutional			4		
1932	state institution		9	5	1	18
	county home					
	non-institutional			2	1	
total		1	12	27	9	49

One early case drew attention from the press and allows a fuller picture, although key information is still missing. First reported in *Public Welfare Progress* in November 1929 under the heading “Let’s Use the Law” and picked up by the *Winston-Salem Journal*, the story functioned as a cautionary tale and highlighted what state officials saw as an opportunity to redress past failures. At the center of the story were a husband and wife, both reportedly feeble-minded. They were “public charges” and lived in a “little mountain hovel” with their four children. The husband had been an inmate at the Macon county home before he had run away to marry his wife, who was several decades his junior. The family lived in dire poverty in their one-room cabin. The father could not find work at the local saw mill, and when a field agent from the state board found them, all six were “huddled in rags” in a “room indescribably filthy,” two corners occupied by “broken down beds with filthy bedclothes.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ “Welfare Workers Consider Sterilization of Patients,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 Dec. 1929; “Let’s Use the Law,” *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 11 (Nov. 1929): 1.

Lois Doshier, the field agent, tried to convince the county commissioners to have the couple sterilized, and the *Winston-Salem Journal* reported that “the first sterilization under the Millner sterilization law ... will take place soon” if they accepted her recommendation. In addition to sterilizing both of the parents “so that they cannot bring any more useless progeny into the world,” Doshier proposed sending two of the children to Caswell and the oldest, only eight years old, to the ward for epileptics at the state hospital for the insane in Raleigh. *Public Welfare Progress* quoted Doshier as saying, “cases like this show that North Carolina was wise in passing the Millner sterilization law. No effort to put this law into effect should be spared if it means that this low grade of human stock will not be allowed to multiple.”¹⁵⁶

Another case featured in *Public Welfare Progress* suggests that the immediate cost of the sterilization operation was one reason local officials were reluctant to use the new law. Editor Lisbeth Parrott used the case of a woman, complete with a photograph, who was “feeble-minded, a pauper, an inmate of a county home” and “abnormally sexed, practicing incest and miscegenation.” Welfare officials had long made the case that eugenics programs would ultimately save money by preventing the birth of “additional defective offspring [who] would be burdens to the state ... and would carry the defective strain into the bloodstreams of the future.” Parrott used a similar logic as she ridiculed any county official who would refuse to come up with the funds for a sterilization operation in a case like this. In a tone more suited to one of the new advertising firms springing up around the country than to a professional social worker,

¹⁵⁶ “Welfare Workers Consider Sterilization of Patients,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 Dec. 1929; “Let’s Use the Law,” *Public Welfare Progress* 10, no. 11 (Nov. 1929): 1. No record exists of whether this couple were sterilized or their children removed from their custody. Sometime between 1929 and 1932 one woman from Buncombe county and one woman from the Rutherford county home were sterilized. There was also a sterilization operation approved but not reported as complete for a person from Burke county. The husband or wife in Doshier’s case may have been among these three cases from mountain counties. *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 76.

Parrott's headline argued for "\$100 Now Vs. Thousands for Future Care!," a message that she repeated at the end of the article (see Figure 6).¹⁵⁷

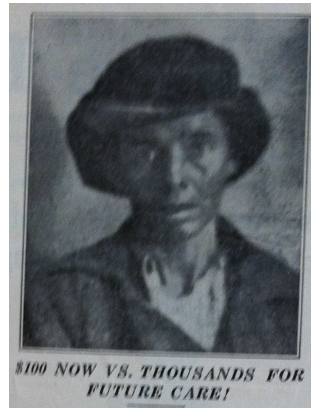


Figure 6: \$100 Now vs. Thousands for Future Care

Legal Refinements: John S. Bradway and *Brewer v. Valk*

The story of Mary Brewer, who ultimately became the center of a lawsuit that overturned the 1929 sterilization law, provides a rare glimpse into the local social and political dynamics of sterilization proceedings. In 1920, fifteen-year-old Mary lived with her parents in Broadbay, a small township a few miles away from Winston-Salem. Mary's father Webster Oldham was a machinist at a chair factory, and their neighbors were workers at the tobacco and furniture factories that punctuated the rural piedmont landscape. The family seemed to make ends meet, a distinct improvement over their situation a few years earlier, when Webster's job as a painter at a wagon factory brought in less money. By 1920, Webster and his wife Lucy were able to buy a home for their quickly growing family. Their eldest child, Laura, had died of meningitis, but they still had nine children, spaced in regular two-year stairsteps, with more on the way. The oldest children attended school and could read and write. As in many other working families,

¹⁵⁷ "\$100 now vs. Thousands for Future Care!" *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 1 (Jan. 1930): 2. On the reluctance of county commissioners to pay for operations, see also "The North Carolina Sterilization Law," *Eugenical News* 15, no. 4 (Apr. 1930): 57-59 .

however, the older children also worked. By fifteen, Mary had joined her parents as one of the family's providers, earning wages in a knitting mill as a "seamstress machinist." She may have started working as early as the age of ten, with experience in a hosiery mill and a cigarette factory.¹⁵⁸

At age fifteen, Mary left her parents and married June Brewer, perhaps feeling a sense of relief as she left her family's crowded house. Although some onlookers later said that she had "run away" to get married, her parents likely understood her decision, since her mother had married when she was sixteen. She and her new husband June Brewer, less than a year her senior, did not move far, staying in Broadbay. As Lucy Oldham had the last of her twelve children, Mary began to have children of her own, first Robert in 1921, then Margaret in 1923. Three more children followed, in the same stairstep intervals. But life was hard for Mary and June Brewer. Overwhelmed with child-rearing responsibilities, Mary could no longer work. June's job as a painter helped pay their \$12 rent each month, but he drank and gambled away much of his earnings, winding up in municipal court at least once for not supporting his family.¹⁵⁹

The Brewer family's poverty attracted the attention of local officials and charitable groups. Soon after their first child was born, they began to receive help, probably in the form of food and clothing, from the city's Associated Charities, which entailed ongoing contact with social worker Mary Chalmers.¹⁶⁰ Chalmers and other welfare workers who visited the family

¹⁵⁸ W. E. Oldham in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920 Federal Population Census Schedule for Forsyth County, Broadbay Twp, North Carolina; and *Brewer v. Valk* records, N.C. Supreme Court Records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC), 33S-363 (hereafter *Brewer v. Valk* records).

¹⁵⁹ W. E. Oldham, 1920 Census; and case file of Mrs. W. H. Kimball, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶⁰ Testimony of Mary Chalmers in Record of Hearing, Forsyth County Superior Court, 29 Apr. 1933, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

noted that they were “often hungry,” and they “tried to reinstate the family and tried to get Mr. Brewer to work,” apparently to no avail.¹⁶¹ The Brewers also had run-ins with authorities because of a “neighborhood disturbance” and reports that the Brewers let their children play near the highway.¹⁶² Their oldest daughter Margaret also drew attention; when she began school she was immediately marked as a “problem child” for her tardiness and irregular attendance. When she took other children’s lunches, the school investigated the Brewers’ home and, “finding an acute situation there, gave her free lunches.”¹⁶³ Early in 1930, the Brewers moved into Winston-Salem and school officials lost track of them.

Life in the city was no easier. Even on cold, rainy days, Mary took her children through the streets to beg for scraps or spare change. Her daughter Margaret “had a habit of going up and down the road, fishing into garbage cans for anything she could find.”¹⁶⁴ One snowy day in the fall of 1930, Mary was out begging with her baby Sadie in her arms, and she wandered into a neighborhood filled with the spacious dwellings of industrialists. One of these was the home of Lucy Hodgins Hanes Chatham and her husband Thurmond, a textile manufacturing magnate.¹⁶⁵ The Chathams or one of their neighbors, probably upset that Mary had disturbed the quiet peace of their wealthy sanctuary, reported her to the city welfare department. Welfare officials once

¹⁶¹ *Brewer v. Valk*, 204 NC 378 (1932).

¹⁶² Testimony of A. W. Cline in Record of Hearing, Forsyth County Superior Court, 29 Apr. 1933, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶³ case file of Mrs. W. H. Kimball, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶⁴ Testimony of Mary Chalmers and A. W. Cline in Record of Hearing, Forsyth County Superior Court, 29 Apr. 1933, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶⁵ Case file of Mrs. W. H. Kimball, *Brewer v. Valk* records; and Julian M. Pleasants, “Richard Thurmond Chatham,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

again visited the family, promised that Associated Charities would provide aid, and warned them not to beg.¹⁶⁶

From there, the family's situation spiraled downward. In early 1931, the police repeatedly hauled home eight-year-old Margaret, who spent nights away from home begging and sleeping in cars or in a bathroom at nearby Salem College. One night the police found her in Waughtown, two miles from home. After a failed attempt to send Margaret to a foster home, officials arranged for a "physical and psychiatric examination" of Margaret and also of her mother Mary. In March 1931, a psychology professor at Salem College declared Mary "feeble-minded"; although she had "no evidence of disorder or derangement," she had an IQ of only 51.¹⁶⁷ Margaret was sent to Samarcand for delinquency. Soon Mary and June's other children were taken away from them: two children were shipped off a juvenile relief home and the other two were sent to live with their grandparents. Repeated childbirth had taken a toll on Mary's health, and in July 1931 she had an abortion because she was too "frail" to carry the pregnancy to term. She may have also contracted tuberculosis.¹⁶⁸

By 1932, when Mary was 28 years old, local officials decided that she should be sterilized. Although Mary's diagnosis of feeble-mindedness sufficed as a legal basis for sterilization, social workers' consistent concern about her mothering may have also been a reason, in their minds, to sterilize her. Without exception, social workers commented on how the Brewers' home "was dirty, unkempt, the children in bad condition, undernourished." Their neighbor Letha Brown noted that the children rarely wore clean clothes and remarked, "I did not

¹⁶⁶ Case file of Mrs. W. H. Kimball, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶⁷ Psychological Record, in Record of Hearing, Forsyth County Superior Court, 29 Apr. 1933, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁶⁸ Brief of Appellants, 8, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

think she was keeping a home like a mother should.” Onlookers also condemned Mary’s behavior, noting her “dirty language” and her “horrible temper tantrums.” Mary Chalmers, the Associated Charities worker, testified that “I do not think she shows the proper attitude toward her children.”¹⁶⁹ Mary Brewer’s situation was, of course, complicated by her poverty and her inability to provide for her family. Tied to home by her young children’s needs and married to a man who seemed unable or unwilling to work to feed his children, Mary had few options. Taking her children begging on the streets gave her some control over her income, even if it was not a steady source of funds. From the perspective of welfare officials, however, Mary Brewer was ungrateful and obstreperous.

The preliminary legal moves toward sterilization began on April 29, 1932, when a jury in the Superior Court in Forsyth County judged Mary Brewer “incompetent to manage her affairs,” despite Brewer’s absence from the hearing. They appointed William T. Wilson, a notable Winston-Salem lawyer who was probably a stranger to Brewer, as her legal guardian.¹⁷⁰ That same day, Wilson requested that the Forsyth County commissioners authorize her sterilization, and the commissioners soon complied.¹⁷¹

Brewer objected to the commissioners’ decision, although it is difficult to know exactly what form her resistance took. The legal battles over Brewer’s potential sterilization render her opinions invisible even as they offer most of the evidence that remains about her life and her family. The legal record informs us that Brewer sought a restraining order against both William

¹⁶⁹ Record of Hearing, Forsyth County Superior Court, 29 Apr. 1933, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

¹⁷⁰ On W. T. Wilson, see “William Thomas Wilson,” in *History of North Carolina, Vol 5: North Carolina Biography* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1919), 22. Wilson went on to serve as mayor of Winston-Salem from 1935 to 1939. Forsyth County Historical Association, “Winston Mayor’s Biographies,” accessed 24 Nov. 2013, <http://www.forsythnchistory.com/winstonleaders.html>.

¹⁷¹ *Brewer v. Valk*.

Wilson and Dr. A. DeT. Valk, the doctor slated to perform the operation. Since the court had ruled that Brewer was not competent to represent herself, Lucy Oldham represented her “incompetent” daughter, a matter of some irony, since Mary Brewer had at least some schooling and could read and write, while Lucy Oldham was illiterate.

Perhaps more to the point, by May of 1932, Brewer and her mother had a lawyer. Like much of Brewer’s legal battle, the reasons for Attorney-at-Law Hanselle L. Hester’s involvement in the case remain a mystery. “Jerry” Hester, vivacious and bright, had graduated recently from Duke’s law school and established a practice in Winston-Salem.¹⁷² Did Hester hear of their case through the city’s network of welfare workers and social reformers, and take it on *pro bono*? Did Brewer and her mother seek someone like him, with legal knowledge to make the case, as they did in October 1932, that the state’s sterilization law was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause? Did Mary Brewer celebrate when the Honorable A. M. Stack signed a temporary injunction restraining Wilson and Valk from sterilizing her, or was she more concerned with her ongoing penury and regaining custody of her five children?¹⁷³

Almost as soon as the judge signed an injunction, lawyers for both sides filed briefs with the Supreme Court.¹⁷⁴ It is possible that Wilson and Valk decided that the Supreme Court would be more amenable to their plea and submitted their appeal, hoping to overturn the injunction and bring Mary Brewer to the operating room. Far more likely, however, is a scenario with

¹⁷² *The Chanticleer*, 1928, 54, accessed 25 Nov. 2013, <https://archive.org/details/chanticleerseria1928duke>.

¹⁷³ Judge A. M. Stack signed a temporary injunction on October 6, 2013. *Brewer v. Valk*.

¹⁷⁴ Lawyers for both sides had filed briefs with the state supreme court within two weeks after the injunction. After the injunction was issued on October 6, 1932, the defendants waived their right to a ten-day period in which they could show cause why the restraining order should not become permanent and voluntarily appeared for a hearing on the morning of October 8, 1932. At that hearing, the injunction was made permanent and the defendants were “forever enjoined from sterilizing the said Mary Brewer” or performing “any operation . . . which might impair her procreative organs.” Lawyers for the Wilson and Valk filed their intent to appeal with the Supreme Court only two days later, on October 10, and filed their brief on October 14. Lawyers for the appellee filed their brief on October 19, 1932. *Brewer v. Valk* (quotes); Brief of Appellee and Brief of Appellants, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

overtones of conspiracy: the lawyers on both sides of the case worked together almost from the beginning to make sure that Brewer won, with the express purpose of overturning a part of the sterilization law that they saw as vulnerable without exposing its fundamental principles to possible attack.

At the center of this action stood John S. Bradway, the head of Duke's new Legal Aid Clinic and an avid social reformer with links to the Conference for Social Service.¹⁷⁵ Bradway often got word of potential legal aid cases through his contacts, and his clinic handled around thirty cases in 1932-1933.¹⁷⁶ Somehow, it seems, Brewer's case came to his attention. Although Bradway had arrived in North Carolina only recently, in the fall of 1931, his long experience with social reform probably made his antenna exceptionally receptive to discussions surrounding sterilization. He came to North Carolina from California, which led the nation in sterilization and was the home of the Human Betterment Foundation, an influential eugenics organization founded in 1928. One of the Human Better Foundation's trustees was Bradway's colleague Justin Miller, the dean of the law school at the University of Southern California, who came to Duke at the same time as Bradway.¹⁷⁷

Although it is unclear when Bradway first became aware of Brewer's case, he probably immediately understood its potential as an excellent test of the law. In the minds of professional social workers as well as the wider public, Mary Brewer was a clear example of a feeble-minded woman who was not fit to be a mother and who had likely passed on her feeble-mindedness to

¹⁷⁵ On Bradway, see finding aid for John S. Bradway Papers (Duke University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; hereafter Bradway Papers), accessed 4 Sept. 2013, <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/uabradjs/>.

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum [from Bradway] to Dean Miller, 27 Sept. 1933; and Memorandum [from Bradway] to Dean Miller, 17 Jan. 1934, both in Bradway Papers, Box 32, Folder: Memos to Dean Miller.

¹⁷⁷ For Bradway's civic memberships, see Memorandum [from Bradway] to Dean Miller, 22 Sept. 1933, Bradway Papers, Box 32, Folder: Memos to Dean Miller.

her children. Moreover, Brewer's initial plea was shaped to question only a narrow sliver of the sterilization law: the right to a hearing, based on due process.¹⁷⁸ Bradway may have helped shape Brewer's initial plea with the subsequent case in mind, or he may have heard about the case in mid-1932 and jumped at the chance to shepherd a case through the courts that did not contest medical or social arguments for sterilization.¹⁷⁹

Brewer v. Valk inverted the path of *Buck v. Bell* in Virginia, where from the beginning a small group of elite white men planned an ideal test case to affirm Virginia's sterilization law. They selected their plaintiff with care, represented both Carrie Buck and the doctors who wished to sterilize her, and shepherded the case through to the Supreme Court, which affirmed the constitutionality of the law.¹⁸⁰ In *Brewer v. Valk*, Bradway and his allies, aware that North Carolina's law lacked necessary provisions for consent and hearing and was thus vulnerable to challenge, may have set up an ideal scenario in which to strike down problematic sections of the law while leaving its fundamental principles untouched.

The extensive coordination of all the lawyers involved in the case makes this scenario plausible. The first curious detail was Wilson and Valk's decision not to protest the judge's injunction in October 1932. Instead, they allowed it to become permanent but almost immediately appealed the entire case to the Supreme Court, suggesting that they were privy to larger plans in the making. When the case was filed with the state Supreme Court, the array of

¹⁷⁸ See *Brewer v. Valk*. In this sense, Brewer's plea challenged procedural due process rather than substantive due process. Thanks to Jedediah Purdy for alerting me to this distinction.

¹⁷⁹ Bradway may have also been involved in contemporary legal efforts, led by the ACLU and the NAACP, to challenge narrow readings of the Fourteenth Amendment and extend the federal bill of rights to local and state cases. Brewer's initial plea and the Supreme Court decision cited both the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Section 1, Article 17, of the North Carolina Constitution. Thanks to Laura F. Edwards for making me aware of this context. *Brewer v. Valk*.

¹⁸⁰ On *Buck v. Bell* as an inside job, see Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles*.

lawyers was suspiciously linked. The defense team was headed by Fred S. Hutchins, a well-established Winston-Salem lawyer who was probably serving in his role as public attorney.¹⁸¹ Hutchins had been involved in Winston-Salem's efforts in 1929 to establish a legal aid clinic there, and probably knew John Bradway from those efforts.¹⁸² Indeed, he may have brought the case to Bradway's attention in early 1932. Apart from Hutchins, who had attended Wake Forest, the lawyers on both sides of the case had ties to Duke University and to each other. Hutchins's partners on the defense team were Edward C. Bryson and T. Spruill Thornton. In the spring of 1933, Thornton was a third-year law student at Duke University and was required to participate in Bradway's legal aid clinic. Bryson, who also enrolled as a law student, had helped run the clinic since 1931. All three of the lawyers for the plaintiff had similar connections to Duke. Brewer's lead attorney, Hanselle Hester, had been president of his class when he graduated from Duke's Trinity College in 1928, and he was a 1931 graduate of the law school. Gordon E. Dean had taken his J.D. in California but earned his LL.B. from Duke in 1932, and in the spring of 1933, he taught in the law school there. William C. Lassiter, the final member of the plaintiff's team, was a third-year law student at Duke, making him the classmate of his counterparts on the defense team.¹⁸³ Bryson and Hester, representing the two sides, even filed a joint brief arguing that Oldham had standing to file a suit on Brewer's behalf against Wilson, the court-appointed guardian.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ On Hutchins as Forsyth County attorney in 1932, see "Secret Inquest Gets Approval from Judge" *Greensboro Daily News*, 9 July 1932. On Hutchins's career, see J. H. Hubbell, *Hubbell's Legal Directory for Lawyers and Businessmen* (Concord, NH: Rumford Press, 1922), 369, accessed 26 Nov. 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=L9w7AQAIAAJ>.

¹⁸² C. A. Walker to Bradway, 12 Nov. 1929, Bradway Papers, Red Volume 42, Section 3.

¹⁸³ *Bulletins of Duke University School of Law, 1930-1936*, accessed 25 Nov. 2013, <http://archive.org/search.php?query=collection%3Adulua%20%22bulletin%20of%20duke%20university%22>.

¹⁸⁴ Supplemental Brief joined in by counsel for appelle and counsel for appellant, *Brewer v. Valk* records.

On February 8, 1933, the state supreme court upheld the lower court's decision, rejecting the defendants' arguments that the state's police powers justified their intervention. Rather, they ruled that the state sterilization law violated the Fourteenth Amendment and similar clauses in the state constitution. In doing so, they referred to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Buck v. Bell*, which rested in part on Virginia's "very careful provisions" to protect "the patients from possible abuse," and judged that North Carolina's law fell short in this regard since it "makes no provision for notice and hearing."¹⁸⁵

With the February 8 decision, the court threw out North Carolina's sterilization law, less than four years old. But thanks to the nature of Brewer's legal challenge, the fundamental principles at the core of the sterilization program remained untouched. In their decision, the seven justices took no issue with the idea of sterilization, noting that "the record discloses harrowing things in regard to this woman" and that "we always have had and always will have people of low mentality without normal intelligence. It has been since the beginning of time." Since they believed that the causes of mental defects included "heredity" and "the sins of the fathers," they hinted that sterilization was an apt solution for these problems, although they left decisions about "the dangerous and seriousness of an operation of this kind" to physicians.¹⁸⁶ Almost immediately, advocates of sterilization began to draft a new law.

Plugging the Holes: Thompson's 1933 Sterilization Bill and the Eugenics Board

Bradway and his students were among the first to try to "plug the hole which our case punched in [the sterilization law]," perhaps at the invitation of the state welfare board or perhaps

¹⁸⁵ *Brewer v. Valk*.

¹⁸⁶ The court sided with the defendants in saying that sterilization fell within the realm of police powers of the state, rather than the plaintiff's claim (made almost in passing) that sterilization would cause "irreparable physical and mental hurt and loss." Thus, the decision supported the defendants' argument that the law did not violate substantive due process, while ruling with the plaintiff that the law was unconstitutional on procedural due process grounds. *Brewer v. Valk*.

of their own volition.¹⁸⁷ Only three days after the Supreme Court decision, Bradway had drafted a new sterilization bill based on Virginia's and California's statutes. On February 11, 1933, he gathered the students who had worked on the case. Edward Bryson, Gordon Dean, William Lassiter, and T. Spruill Thornton—two lawyers from each side of the Supreme Court arguments—spent a long Saturday together working through the various sections of Bradway's draft.¹⁸⁸ They suggested creating a “central board for the state” modeled after Idaho's “State Board of Eugenics,” which would travel around the state to hear both institutional and non-institutional cases.¹⁸⁹ Bradway forwarded their suggestions to Robert Wettach, a law professor at the University of North Carolina, and the group continued to work on the bill.

In the meantime, other efforts were afoot. A sub-committee from the North Carolina Conference of Social Service headed by Harry W. Crane, the UNC psychology professor who served as the director of mental hygiene for the state welfare board, drafted a list of recommendations for amending the bill. They included a provision for thirty days' notice but also eased some of the law's restrictions, such as lowering the number of case reviewers from four to three.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, Representative William A. Thompson, who two decades before had introduced the bill to create Caswell and was a longtime member of the Caswell board of directors, was working on his own version of the bill, perhaps in correspondence with

¹⁸⁷ Bradway mentioned “Mr. Brown's invitation” to “prepare an amendment and urge it upon the committee,” presumably referring to R. Eugene Brown, the Assistant to the Commissioner of Public Welfare and the Director of the Divisions of Institutions. Brown would go on to be Secretary of the Eugenics Board. John S. Bradway to Robert H. Wettach, 24 Feb. 1933, in “Documents concerning amendments of N.C. Public Laws of 1929, Chapter 34: Sterilization of Persons Mentally Defective” (Law Library Rare Books, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

¹⁸⁸ Bradway to Wettach, 13 Feb 1933, “Documents concerning amendments.”

¹⁸⁹ “Suggestions in Re Sterilization Bill,” “Documents concerning amendments.”

¹⁹⁰ “Report of Sub-committee No. 4 of Mental Examinations and Sterilization of the Social Code Committee of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service,” [n.d.], “Documents concerning amendments.”

Caswell superintendent W. H. Dixon. Thompson's proposal, the simplest and least patient-friendly of the alternatives, merely added a clause to the 1929 law that required five days' notice to the next of kin or legal guardian and provided for the right of appeal through the court system, presumably during that five-day window, without offering a chance for a hearing.¹⁹¹

John Bradway was aware that Thompson introduced his bill to the House on February 22, but he pressed on. He believed that the draft bill he and his students had prepared "clarifi[ed] the situation considerably," and would cost no more than the current system.¹⁹² He worked through at least six revisions of his bill, honing the ideas and language to be legally unassailable.¹⁹³ Bradway had the help not only of Wettach, but also of state welfare board staff R. Eugene Brown and Harry Crane.¹⁹⁴

On March 20, 1933, Representative Thompson introduced a second sterilization bill to the House, this one based word for word on the text that Bradway and his group had produced.¹⁹⁵ Although Thompson's first bill had been quickly sent to the Senate, the Senate tabled it when he introduced the second bill, perhaps at his request.¹⁹⁶ The new Bradway version moved as quickly as possible through the legislative machinery, with final passage by the Senate just two weeks after Thompson introduced it in the House. The "act to amend chapter 34 of the Public

¹⁹¹ 1933 HB 675, Session Records, 1933; copy of HB 675 in John S. Bradway to Robert H. Wettach, 24 Feb. 1933, "Documents concerning amendments;" *House Journal*, 1933, 258.

¹⁹² John S. Bradway to Robert H. Wettach, 24 Feb. 1933, "Documents concerning amendments."

¹⁹³ See drafts in "Documents concerning amendments."

¹⁹⁴ R. Eugene Brown, "Eugenical Sterilization in North Carolina: A Brief Survey of the Growth of Eugenical Sterilization and a Report of the Work of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina through June 30, 1935" (Raleigh: Eugenics Board of North Carolina, 1935), 8.

¹⁹⁵ H. B. 1013, Session Records, 1933. The text is virtually identical to the edited sixth revision of Bradway's bill in "Documents concerning amendments."

¹⁹⁶ *House Journal*, 1933, 274, 295; *Senate Journal*, 1933, 228, 370, 384.

Laws of 1929 of North Carolina, relating to the sterilization of persons mentally defective” was ratified on April 5, 1933.¹⁹⁷

While the 1929 sterilization law had been short and somewhat lacking in specifics, the 1933 law went to the other extreme, with instructions for what seems like every possible scenario filling ten typed pages. Beyond its comprehensiveness, its principle innovation was to create a permanent Eugenics Board that would hear all sterilization petitions based on feeble-mindedness, mental disease, or epilepsy, regardless of whether the petitions came from institutional heads, welfare workers, or relatives. The 1929 law had required that four reviewers sign off on sterilizations but had not required that the reviewers meet to discuss the case or hold a hearing. The Eugenics Board included these four members—the heads of the state welfare and health boards, the chief medical officers of two of the state’s institutions for the feeble-minded or mentally ill—as well as the attorney general, for good measure.

Although the new law gave its targets the protection of a fifteen days’ notice, a hearing, and a clear appeals process, it also expanded the rationales for sterilization in order to widen the umbrella of legal protection for state officials and doctors. The new law retained two of the prior tests for sterilization: when the operation was for the “public good” or would be in the “best interest of the mental, moral, or physical improvement of the patient.” It added several other scenarios, such as cases in which doctors believed the patient “would be likely, unless operated upon, to procreate a child or children who would have a tendency to serious physical, mental, or nervous disease or deficiency.” Moreover, the law required institutional heads to consider every patient for sterilization before being discharged or paroled.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ *House Journal, 1933*, 446, 494, 513, 580; *Senate Journal, 1933*, 405, 427, 446, 459.

¹⁹⁸ North Carolina Public Law, ch. 224, especially section 4 and section 20.

R. Eugene Brown wrote two years later that North Carolina's sterilization law was based on "considerably study" of the model statutes prepared by the Eugenics Record Office.¹⁹⁹ Although Brown, Bradway, and others may have considered the legal principles of the ERO's model laws, they used markedly different language. A comparison of the North Carolina law with the ERO's "model statute" for "voluntary sexual sterilization of certain natural classes" reveals the divergence between "pure" eugenic principles and their interpretation by social workers and lawyers. The ERO's law was littered with eugenics-laden terms such as "cacogenic" and "human pedigree analysis" that might have seemed like unnecessary jargon to Bradway and company. None of the extant drafts of the North Carolina contain such terms. Instead, the lawyers and social workers who drafted the bill translated these specialists' terms into phrases more familiar to the average ear. "A tendency to serious physical, mental, or nervous disease or deficiency" replaced "cacogenic," and "a complete medical history [and] an adequate social case history" stood in for "human pedigree analysis."²⁰⁰ This language also reflected social workers' focus on solving real problems rather than debating academic points about eugenic theories. The only appearance of the word "eugenics" was in the name of the board. On one hand, the phrasing of North Carolina's law might indicate that Bradway and company believed that North Carolina's lawmakers or the public at large were unfamiliar with more arcane eugenic terminology. On the other hand, the lawyers' easy use of the phrase

¹⁹⁹ R. Eugene Brown, "Eugenical Sterilization in North Carolina," 1935, 8.

²⁰⁰ See "Voluntary Eugenical Sterilization: A Draft of a Model Statute for Regulating the Voluntary Sexual Sterilization of Certain Natural Classes," *Eugenical News* 16, no. 4 (Apr. 1931): 54-56. Greg Dorr notes similar patterns in Virginia's 1924 sterilization law, designed by Aubrey Strode, which "allowed lawmakers to act on the commonsense wisdom of the stockyard and the ledger book, as well as the esoteric laws of the genetics laboratory. Strode's language familiarized lay legislators with the normal science of the day." G. Dorr, *Segregation's Science*, 128.

“Eugenics Board,” with no further explanation, shows that North Carolinians grasped the essentials.

Bradway was not content to let the 1933 sterilization law rest. He helped draft the forms that the Eugenics Boards used for its petitions and hearings.²⁰¹ To make sure the Eugenics Board’s procedures would pass muster, he wrote to officials with experience in running eugenics programs in other states, including E. S. Gosney of California’s Human Betterment Foundation, for their recommendations about the mechanics of their hearings. As he told a Michigan official, “I feel certain that somebody is going to attack the Board because the findings are insufficient and I would like to advise them in advance how they can spare themselves in this embarrassment.” He passed this information on to the Eugenics Board’s secretary, Eugene R. Brown. He also pestered Brown about finding a case “we could use ... to test out the constitutionality of the act, as lawyers in Virginia had done with Carrie Buck, although Brown seems to have ignored his pleas.”²⁰²

Conclusion

The passage of a robust sterilization law in 1933 marked an end and a beginning. The law capped more than a decade of lobbying and education aimed at adding sterilization as a potential weapon among social workers’ arsenal against the purported spread of feeble-mindedness. It also built on reformers’ success in building a welfare apparatus. Unlike the debates surrounding sterilization proposals in 1919, 1923, 1925, and 1929, the push for the 1933 sterilization law faced no resistance. It was the logical, although not necessary, outcome of a

²⁰¹ R. Eugene Brown to Bradway, 25 July 1933, Bradway Papers, Box 34, Folder: Misc. 1933-1935.

²⁰² Bradway to R. Eugene Brown, 20 Sept. 1933; Bradway to Brown, 22 Sept. 1933, both in Bradway Papers, Box 34, Folder: Misc. 1933-1935; Bradway to E. S. Gosney, 23 Oct 1933; Bradway to Paul N. [Popenoe], 12 Oct. 1933; Bradway to Brown, 4 Dec. 1933; and Bradway to Brown, 13 Jan. 1934, all in Bradway Papers, Box 34, Folder: Sterilization Law, 1933.

campaign that had begun three decades before when medical and social welfare professionals sought to interest reformers in principles of eugenics. This campaign continued with reformers' and social workers' efforts to educate the public at state fairs, in classes, and in club meetings. Throughout the 1920s, reform-minded legislators broke down the remaining opposition among their colleagues through exposure to the gospel of eugenics, appeals to Christian charity, or analyses of the costs of social problems. The little opposition that surfaced came from lawmakers to whom the issue seemed repulsive but not worth fighting over.

By the time Mary Brewer challenged the law in 1932, eugenic sterilization was more firmly entrenched than ever. Her lawsuit, apparently engineered in backroom deals, opened the door for a settlement of the remaining legal questions. Indeed, by the time the General Assembly met in the spring of 1933, the questions that remained about eugenic sterilization were purely legal. The passage of the law opened new possibilities for policymakers and welfare officials. As economic depression simultaneously burdened and invigorated the state's welfare system, the state began an active sterilization program, reinforced by research and training that continued to assert the legitimacy of eugenics principles for social welfare work.

EPILOGUE: EUGENICS AND WELFARE IN THE NEW DEAL AND BEYOND

With the creation of the Eugenics Board in 1933, North Carolina began a program that led to over 7,600 sterilizations. The groundwork for these sterilizations lay in the previous three decades of pro-eugenics activism that embedded doctrines of eugenic fitness in the state's nascent welfare programs. From 1917 onward, as North Carolina developed its own standards for professional social work in rural locations, eugenics became an integral component of training. During the 1930s, welfare programs underwent a major shift with the injection of federal funds, but eugenics remained an important part of the state's welfare programs and professional training for social workers.

At the beginning of the decade, the welfare department gained a new leader. Kate Burr Johnson left North Carolina in 1930 to become the head of New Jersey's State Home for Delinquent Girls in Trenton, where she remained for nineteen years. Her successor as Commissioner of Public Welfare was Annie Kizer Bost, who was also a dedicated clubwoman and reformer. Born in 1883, Bost grew up in Rowan County, North Carolina, graduated from the State Normal School at Greensboro, then taught school for six years. She married newspaperman W. Thomas Bost in 1909, had two sons, and moved to Raleigh. There she became a fixture in the community, involved in many community organizations. She also served as president of the Raleigh Woman's Club, and for three years she was the executive secretary of the state Federation of Women's Clubs. Before she became Commissioner, however, she had no notable social work training. Rather, her appointment was likely due more to her husband's friendship

with Governor O. Max Gardner. Nevertheless, once in office Bost proved an effective administrator.¹

Despite Bost's able leadership, the Depression strained the capabilities of North Carolina's welfare programs. The state's oversight of social services had improved significantly after 1917, but the Board of Charities and Public Welfare still provided little in the way of direct assistance to the indigent and unemployed. Throughout the 1920s, the Board had battled to maintain its meager funding levels, but most of its funds went to staff salaries and travel, with a small portion to research. Even if the legislature had allocated greater funds, the Board's charter did not include direct distribution of relief. Outdoor relief remained the domain of local welfare boards, aided by private charities. The state provided direct assistance only to a select few through the Mother's Aid program, which attempted to support "worthy" mothers, with states and participating counties splitting the costs equally.² Although funding and administrative

¹ Bost's roles included president of a Parent-Teacher Association, trustee of the North Carolina College for Women, and membership on executive councils of the League of Women Voters and the Raleigh Community Chest. She also fostered connections with state and national social work organizations. Bost's professional memberships included the National Conference for Social Work, the American Public Welfare Association (for which she served on the board of directors), the State Commission for the Blind, the North Carolina Mental Hygiene Society, the Inter-racial Commission, and the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. Nell Battle Lewis, "Incidentally," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 June 1951; Harriette Hammer Walker, "Mrs. Bost filling Important Post in State's Improvement," *Charlotte Observer*, 12 Oct. 1930; Margarette Wood Smethurst, "Carolina Cavalcade," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 Aug. 1954; "Mrs. W. T. Bost is Elected to Succeed Mrs. Johnson," *Public Welfare Progress* 11, no. 3 (Mar. 1930), 1, 5; "Mrs. W. T. Bost," *Charlotte Observer*, 23 July 1939; "Welfare Board to Tackle Job of Picking New Chief," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 Feb. 1944; "We're Sorry, Mrs. B., Good Work!" *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 Feb. 1944; Thomas S. Morgan, "Annie Kizer Bost," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 195-96; and A.M. Burns, "William Thomas ('Tom') Bost," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1979), 196-97.

² The other major state-funded assistance took the form of institutions such as Caswell and mental hospitals. In addition, the legislature of 1929 created an emergency fund for relief work among needy families of prisoners. *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 9. North Carolina's mother's aid program, established in 1923, provided financial assistance to certain mothers with children under the age of fourteen. Although a trained social worker supervised the program from Raleigh, county workers administered benefits. The program was optional, but by 1930, 87 counties applied to participate. That year, the legislature appropriated \$50,000 annually for mother's aid, a sum that exceeded the appropriation for the rest of the state's welfare work. This amount supported only about 400 families at a time. See John L. Saxon, *Social Services in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC School of Government, 2008), 14; A. Laurance Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," *North Carolina Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1947), 22; *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 13, 24-25, 40. On welfare programs for single mothers, see

control were to some extent distinct matters, North Carolina's system also left administration of social services to local governments, with the state board providing training and supervision.³

The reliance on county units of social welfare was an important innovation that allowed a limited number of trained workers to cover vast rural territories with efficiency. Leaving welfare administration to county officials also removed state officials from the worst local political imbroglios, albeit at the cost of occasional defeat by local officials who saw little need for public welfare and cut funds for welfare work.⁴

Although North Carolina's county-unit system was a considerable accomplishment for its time, it was no match for the Great Depression, which revealed the weakness inherent in a decentralized system: responses to widespread economic ravages were in the hands of local officials who relied on small revenues to fund county welfare programs. Coming after a series of agricultural crises, the Depression had particularly crippling effects for the South's farmers and rural areas, although North Carolina fared better than some states.⁵ In the South, as across the

Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

³ Beginning in 1931, as part of the state assuming some responsibility for a six-month school term, the state gave money to counties for school attendance work. Since in many counties the school attendance officer also served as superintendent of public welfare, welfare officials viewed this new funding as "a state subsidy for county welfare work," a first in the state's history. *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 8-9.

⁴ My approach here differs somewhat from that of John L. Saxon, who sees North Carolina's "county-administered and state-supervised" as less desirable than the more common arrangement of state-funded and state-administered social service programs. As a modern arrangement, North Carolina's decentralized system certainly leaves something to be desired, but North Carolina's county-unit system made a great deal of sense for the rural context in which it was created. See John L. Saxon, *Social Services in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC School of Government, 2008), 5.

⁵ North Carolina was spared weather-related catastrophes, and its light industry (particularly tobacco and cigarette manufacturing) mitigated some of the shocks that befell states more purely reliant on commodity agriculture. Anthony Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1981), 1; Douglas Carl Abrams, *Conservative Constraints: North Carolina and the New Deal* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 4-5.

nation, local relief budgets were quickly exhausted.⁶ At the state level, too, dwindling revenues spelled cuts for welfare programs. The state welfare department's allocation for the year leading up to June 1929, before the full force of the economic crisis took hold, was \$41,699.72. The following two years saw significant drops, to \$33,631.10 and \$30,513.50. There was a slight uptick in 1931-1932, as the state fulfilled its promise to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial to take over funding of the Division of Work among Negroes, but in January 1933 the severity of the crisis meant that the state budget bureau faced shortfalls and had to recalculate all state appropriations mid-year. Funds from philanthropic groups, namely the Rosenwald Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, also fell. By June 1933, the combined appropriations and donations for the state welfare board and the mother's aid program were less than sixty percent of the pre-crisis amount.⁷

When federal funds arrived several years into the worsening economic crisis, they were welcome showers on a parched landscape. To administer federal grants for direct aid payments, Governor John Ehringhaus established the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration (NC ERA). In two years, the ERA distributed \$40.8 million in relief payments, with an average of more than 300,000 recipients each month. The ERA also oversaw the assignment of Civil Works Administration jobs.⁸ When the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was replaced by the Works Progress Administration in 1935, the state's ERA was liquidated. In an

⁶ George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 354-90, 473-91.

⁷ The total for 1932-1933 was \$60,898.60, compared to a total of \$102,247.46 for 1928-1929. *BCPW Report, 1928-1930*, 16-17; *BCPW Report, 1930-1932*, 10, 13-14; *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 15, 20. Andrew Dobelstein also describes an attempt in March 1933 to cut the board's appropriation to only \$4250 and completely eliminate Mother's Aid. In this context, the \$27,170.40 appropriation they got for 1933-1934 was a victory. Andrew Dobelstein, "Public Welfare in the American System: The North Carolina Experience" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1973); *BCPW Report, 1933-1934*, 15.

⁸ Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 473; Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal*, 40-41.

attempt to ease the transition, the federal government gave the North Carolina welfare board an 18-month, \$225,000 grant to assume some of the ERA's functions. This grant supported the work of the Division of Field Social Work, which became responsible for administering all federal benefits through county welfare offices.⁹

The Social Security Act of 1935 brought even greater changes. Although the state refused to match federal funds for some programs, the Board of Charities and Public Welfare was able to take immediate advantage of programs that did not require state funding, such as Child Welfare Services.¹⁰ Eventually North Carolina restructured the state's welfare organization to meet federal requirements, primarily the centralization of some functions at the state level. In 1937 the legislature made the state welfare board responsible for old age assistance and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), bringing state policies into line with federal requirements for administering the various arms of Social Security. That year they appropriated \$1 million for old-age assistance and half a million for dependent children.¹¹

These funding changes had tangible results for North Carolina's welfare officials, who rejoiced in 1934 that "There has never been a time when the social worker has been as much a part of government and social welfare as at the present time."¹² With the infusion of federal funds directly to the state board beginning in January 1936, the staff more than doubled, and new

⁹ *BCPW Report, 1934-1936*, 8-9, 19, 115-16; Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 26.

¹⁰ Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 26.

¹¹ North Carolina's payments under these social security programs were relatively low; in OAA payments, North Carolina ranked thirty-ninth among other states, and on ADC payments, forty-third. Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 27-28; Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 156.

¹² *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 7.

field work supervisors provided greater oversight of local programs.¹³ New state-trained social workers were placed in every county, and in the first eight months of 1936, twenty-five counties organized welfare departments, bringing the total to seventy-five.¹⁴ To administer Social Security programs, every county needed a full-time welfare department, and thirty-one counties replaced their part-time superintendents of public welfare with a full-time social worker.¹⁵ The number of social workers grew rapidly, and more experienced workers were catapulted into new roles. Women who had gotten their feet wet in social work in the 1920s found themselves in charge of large staffs and budgets. Lois Doshier, whose comments recommending the sterilization of a poor mountain family in 1929 appeared in the *Winston-Salem Journal*, had first entered social work as a student at the University of North Carolina School of Public Welfare in the 1920s.¹⁶ In July 1927, she joined the state board as field agent for Mother's Aid.¹⁷ By 1932, she directed the Division of County Organization.¹⁸ When the state began relief programs under FERA, she became a District Relief Supervisor.¹⁹

The clear losers in the transition from the 1920s to the 1930s were the state's African Americans. North Carolina had staked new territory with its Division of Work among Negroes,

¹³ Until this point, federal funds and the responsibility of supervising local work had gone to the state ERA, which at its peak had 220 employees in the state office and around 2,000 county-level assistants (many of whom were also workers in county public welfare units). Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 117.

¹⁴ Bost to McAlister, 29 Aug. 1936, State Board Corr., Box 3, Folder: 1932-1936; *BPCW Report, 1934-1936*, 7-9, 12, 19.

¹⁵ Aydlett, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 28.

¹⁶ Kate Burr Johnson to Howard Odum, 22 Mar. 1928, LSRM Papers, Series 3, Box 75, Folder 787: UNC-State Board of Charities 1927-1928.

¹⁷ BCPW Report, 1926-1928, 16

¹⁸ BCPW Report, 1930-1932, 4.

¹⁹ *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 14. Doshier seems to have left the Board of Charities and Public Welfare when she got married. The 1936 report said that "Mrs. W. B. Aycock succeeded Mrs. Lois Doshier Durham as Director of County Organization." *BCPW Report, 1934-1936*, 12.

which trained black social workers and coordinated their public and private efforts. Raleigh was home to the Bishop Tuttle School, one of the South's two programs for black social workers, and through the early years of the Depression these newly minted professionals had no problem finding jobs. In 1932, twenty-six trained black workers were employed in public and private agencies, and by 1934 that number had jumped to eighty-two.²⁰ When the ERA was replaced by the WPA, county welfare departments lost funding, and black social workers were the first to lose their jobs. By June 1936, only eight or nine remained employed with county welfare boards.²¹ By 1940, only two of the state board's eighty-one staff members worked in the Division of Work among Negroes, "consulting" with other divisions "whenever problems arise affecting the life of the Negro citizenry," helping to place black social workers, and providing the annual public welfare institute for black welfare workers.²² In addition, African Americans received less aid than whites; in 1937-38, only twenty-two percent of ADC payments went to blacks.²³ The mass dismissal of black social workers because of shifts in federal funding and the clear bias in ADC payments fit neatly within the context of New Deal programs, which did little to protect the rights of minorities and women.²⁴

It has long been clear to historians that the funding and requirements of New Deal programs wrought momentous changes in southern state government. Across the South, federal money expanded public welfare spending dramatically. In 1929, southern states spent \$21

²⁰ BCPW Report, 1928-1930, 93-94; BCPW Report, 1930-1932, 98; BCPW Report, 1932-1934, 87.

²¹ BCPW Report, 1934-36, 27.

²² Federal fund went directly to child welfare, the division of mental hygiene, and the division of institutions and corrections. *BCPW Report, 1938-1940*, 20, 173, 179-81.

²³ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 156-57.

²⁴ On the adverse effects of the New Deal for African Americans in North Carolina, see Douglas Carl Abrams, "The Irony of Reform for Blacks," in *Conservative Constraints*, 161-189.

million on welfare. By 1937-38, they spent more than \$74 million.²⁵ Similarly, the growth of relief programs created new functions for state government, continuing Progressive trends of expanding state services. In the two decades after 1929, state expenditures in the South increased 316 percent, mirroring the growth in welfare spending.²⁶

Less obvious have been the ways that federal programs drew from and reinforced extant state-level programs. Most importantly, established welfare programs allowed state officials to move rapidly to enact New Deal measures. Even the state Emergency Relief Administration, created as a separate organization, drew extensively from the expertise of welfare officials. Roy M. Brown, a UNC professor and former welfare official, directed the ERA's Social Service Division, with Annie Kizer Bost as his chief assistant. Until the fall of 1934, the ERA's relief program was administered by county superintendents of public welfare, and other ERA workers took courses at UNC that had been designed for the Board of Charities and Public Welfare.²⁷ During the window between the end of FERA and North Carolina's adoption of Social Security, welfare staff provided essential transition services. And Social Security funding provided the boost that "complete[d] the pattern conceived at the time of the 1917 reorganization with a strong welfare program in each county of the state and an enlarged state office supervising the work in the counties."²⁸

²⁵ Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 488

²⁶ In 1929, total state expenditures were \$555 million; in 1942 they were \$1.1 billion; and in 1948 they were \$2.3 billion. Revenues came from federal contributions but also from increased taxes, particularly state sales taxes on commodities. Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 490.

²⁷ Brown, Roy Melton, "The Growth of a State Program of Public Welfare," n.d. [c. 1950], unpublished manuscript, North Carolina Collection (Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), chapter 17, 5; Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 116; *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 13.

²⁸ Aydlott, "The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare," 27.

At least one historian has seen the persistence of North Carolina's county-based welfare programs during the New Deal as part of its "backwardness," its stubborn resistance to modernization.²⁹ Local politicians could indeed be pigheaded in their refusal to raise taxes or adequately fund welfare services. Some historians have condemned state welfare officials, too, for refusing to cede distribution of federal relief to the ERA, which Washington officials (backed by some state ERA officials) believed should be given permanent control of all relief and welfare programs in the state.³⁰ But viewing North Carolina's politics from the perspective of frustrated Washington New Dealers risks overlooking two important historical patterns: first, the increasing strength of North Carolina's centralized welfare board and the professional acumen of its staff; and second, the benefits of working within an established framework, in which welfare officials' personal relationships and intimate knowledge of local practices could smooth the transition to more expansive, federally funded welfare programs. North Carolina's dedication to localism had benefits, as well as drawbacks.

By characterizing the New Deal as a radical departure from North Carolina's retrograde past, we miss important continuities, including those involving the state's professional training

²⁹ Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal*, esp. 47-49

³⁰ Several historians have chronicled the tension between welfare officials and the state ERA during its tenure from 1933 to 1935. Anthony Badger has argued that ERA head Annie Land O'Berry disliked having existing county welfare officials run the relief programs. According to Badger, O'Berry and officials in Washington "believed that the welfare system should be consolidated and reorganized and that the NCERA should become a permanent organization, taking over all the relief and welfare functions in the state." State welfare officials and their allies, of course, resisted this push, and when the ERA was dissolved, the welfare board took over relief functions. In many respects, welfare officials were better suited to run the state's relief programs. Although O'Berry proved to be a competent administrator who resisted political pressures, she had less training and experience than some of the state welfare board staff. In Andrew Dobelstein's estimation, the O'Berry-Bost conflict was part of a larger struggle over political control of relief programs. He argues that the Governor's creation of the ERA and attempts to undercut the welfare board were retaliations in response to welfare officials' longstanding attempts to keep the Board of Charities and Public Welfare free from party politics. See Andrew Dobelstein, "Public Welfare in the American System," 136-43; and Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal*, 47-48; for a similar analysis, see Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*; for analysis of O'Berry's tenure as an example of the ways that the "political style of women's clubs permeated government programs," see Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, "From Clubs to Parties: North Carolina Women in the Advancement of the New Deal," *North Carolina Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1991): 320-39.

programs for social workers. Programs established in the 1920s continued in the 1930s as the primary mechanism for training workers for expanded relief programs. Thus workers administering federal programs were trained with the priorities of the North Carolina's welfare program in mind. Even before the New Deal, state welfare officials faced an explosion of interest in social welfare training. In 1930, 347 social workers and reformers attended district welfare conferences. In 1931, 518 people came, and in 1933, attendance reached 800.³¹ The advent of federal programs brought the need for legions of trained social workers to administer aid and relief. The state welfare board responded by increasing opportunities for training. In June of 1933, shortly after the creation of FERA, the board held its annual summer public welfare institute at UNC but increased the duration from one week of training to four.³²

Although some workers came from outside the state, many others who ran new Social Security-funded programs were native North Carolinians who learned techniques of rural social casework from homegrown instructors. The majority of North Carolina's social workers were trained in-state. According to a 1941 study analyzing the backgrounds of the state's 447 county social workers (including superintendents, child welfare workers, case workers, and aides), 61 percent of county social workers were trained at UNC's School of Public Welfare. Most of the others received training at a corresponding institution in the southeast, such as Tulane University or the Atlanta University School of Social Work. Only fifteen caseworkers in the entire state had attended programs outside of the region.³³ A substantial number of junior caseworkers had no

³¹ BCPW report, 1930-1932, 57; BCPW report, 1932-1934, 49.

³² "Over Hundred at Welfare School," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 22 June 1933. In 1934, the institute apparently returned to its former length. *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 12-13.

³³ Calculations here are based on Anne Williams Tillinghast, "A Statistical Study of The Social Work Personnel in the North Carolina County Departments of Public Welfare, November 1941" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1943), 29, Table 15, "Distribution of Social Workers in NC County Departments of Public Welfare, by Class of Positions and School of Social Work Attended, November 1941."

training at all, but on average junior and senior caseworkers had, respectively, over fifteen and over thirty semester hours of social work training.³⁴

Over ninety percent of North Carolina's caseworkers were women, with an average age around 35, many of whom embraced the feminized field of social work as an opportunity for both employment and personal fulfillment. Almost all were white, and they were overwhelmingly middle-class. Most held a college degree and many had previous experience as teachers or clerical workers. The average caseworker in 1941 made \$1210 to \$1360 a year, solidly within the range of the average income nationwide.³⁵ This salary alone would have set them apart from their clients, especially during the Depression, which struck North Carolina's agricultural economy especially hard.³⁶

As in the 1920s, training in eugenics ideology continued to be a part of the state board's standard instruction, with Commissioner Bost an avid supporter. At the public welfare institutes of 1934 and 1935, for example, students heard presentations from Eugene R. Brown, the Executive Secretary of the newly formed Eugenics Board. Welfare officials' partners at UNC also taught eugenics. During the regular academic year, UNC provided courses on topics such as Social Work Administration, Parole, Social Laws, and Medical Information for Social Workers. W. B. Sanders's 1938 course "Introduction to Social Work" began by surveying the "major

³⁴ Tillinghast, "A Statistical Study," 24, Table 12, "Mean Number of Semester Hours of Social Work Training for Social Workers in North Carolina County Departments of Public Welfare, by Class of Positions, November 1941," and 25, Table 13, "Distribution of Social Workers in North Carolina County Departments of Public Welfare for Each Class of Positions, by Amount of Social Work Training, November, 1941."

³⁵ Tillinghast, "A Statistical Study," 41, Table 22, "Distribution of Social Workers in NC County Departments of Public Welfare, by Class of Positions and Salary, November 1941."

³⁶ Walkowitz describes social workers' struggle to maintain a middle-class lifestyle on a small salary in an increasingly expensive and consumer-focused northern urban environment. His analysis of images is especially interesting. The majority of North Carolina's social workers, however, were not residents of big cities, so his conclusions about social workers' economic insecurity may not be applicable. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

problems attacked by social work,” including poverty, mental deficiency, and mental diseases. It then moved on to public welfare systems and administration, followed by professional standards and training. According to syllabi collected by program director Roy M. Brown, nearly all courses contained substantial sections on eugenics, feeble-mindedness, intelligence testing, and sterilization. Professors routinely assigned standard eugenics texts: family studies such as *The Jukes* and *The Kallikak Family*, as well as theoretical treatises such as Guyer’s *Being Well Born*, Goddard’s *Sterilization and Segregation*, and Landman’s *Human Sterilization*. Brown’s own course on Social Laws dealt with three topics under “care of the feebleminded:” “Caswell Training School,” “sterilization,” and “birth control.”³⁷ Any student who took a course at UNC’s School of Public Welfare, then, would have likely encountered the basic principles of eugenics and been taught that such principles were integral to the “care” of certain groups of people.

Social workers would have also seen the recommendations of the state Commission for the Study of the Care of the Insane and Mental Defectives, which was appointed by the governor and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. After an eighteen-month survey, the commission released a 377-page report in December 1936. Its sixteen recommendations for action received attention from newspapers and social work publications and were likely familiar to county social workers. The seventh advised that “The sterilization program of the Eugenics Board should be continued on the same basis but on a larger scale.” Moreover, in the body of the report the commission identified “a greater need for sterilization of certain people who never become inmates of institutions... [S]terilization is often indicated long before institutional placement comes about.” The commission also believed that “milder borderline cases” should be sterilized,

³⁷ Course titles and information are taken from syllabi in Roy M. Brown Papers, 1924-1956 (Collection #3883, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Folder 8. Brown headed UNC’s public welfare program from 1936 to 1945.

and regretted that many of these cases “come to the attention of the county welfare units, but sterilization may be postponed or not considered because of the cost.” The commission claimed that there were, by conservative estimates, 27,734 mentally defective white children in the state, and recommended institutionalization and sterilization as a solution to the state’s apparently rampant problem of feeble-mindedness and mental illness. The commission also recommended that UNC’s programs be supported, noting that “although the social work training cannot be expected to qualify people as specialists in psychiatric social work, the mental hygiene principles that pervade all social work should not be neglected in the general training.”³⁸

A few months after the Commission’s report was published, Mrs. W. B. Aycock, the state Board’s Director of County Organizations, sent county superintendents of public welfare a bulletin to guide their budget preparation. Among other things, she urged them to request funds for sterilization operations, echoing the logic of the Commission and state welfare officials: “Every Superintendent of Public Welfare in the State knows of many cases where a few dollars for sterilization (either on mental or physical grounds) would constitute an excellent preventive measure. Failure to provide funds for this purpose will tremendously increase our public burden in the future.”³⁹

Social workers received ongoing exposure to principles of eugenics through unofficial channels as well. According to the state, county welfare officials were regular readers of the *Survey*, the leading national social welfare publication, which often published material on

³⁸ North Carolina Commission for the Study of the Care of the Insane and Mental Defectives, *A Study of Mental Health in North Carolina: Report to the North Carolina Legislature* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1937), 300-302, 363-365.

³⁹ She stressed to them, “We are depending on you to convince your commissioners of the need for an adequate budget. We cannot place too much emphasis on the importance of this.” Mrs. W. B. Aycock to Superintendents of Public Welfare, May 21, 1937, BPW Records, Commissioner’s Office, Box 173: Circular Letters, n.d., 1913-1946, Folder: Circular letters, 1933-1939.

eugenics. In addition, most of the state's social workers were members of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service, which continued to promote eugenics. In 1932 the Conference elected its first female president, Ella Waddill, who had been superintendent of public welfare in Vance County for ten years and whose skills had made her a candidate for the state board staff.⁴⁰ Annie Kizer Bost sent a special invitation to the state's social workers to attend the annual conference gathering.⁴¹ There, Waddill spent much of her hour-long speech discussing the need for stronger eugenics programs, arguing that "we have been so busy trying to provide care for those [children] already born, that I fear we have not stressed enough the importance of working for a better born child, or a better average child, which should be after all our most fundamental objective... [T]here is a constant stream of physically and mentally unfit pouring into our population, and we can make no real progress ... until this condition is corrected. Our only way to attack this problem is through a study of Eugenics, a stricter marriage law prohibiting the marriage of the unfit, and a wider use of our sterilization law for the low grade type."⁴²

Waddill's speech covered all the essential tenets of eugenic arguments, including the claims that "feeble-mindedness is inherited to an enormous extent"⁴³ and that the feeble-minded were especially fertile, and the argument that custodial institutions were overwhelmed. Waddill spoke to social workers with the authority of one who had experience in the trenches, acknowledging that "the demand upon the time of Social Workers is enormous in trying to

⁴⁰ In 1925 Kate Burr Johnson had tried to entice Waddill to join the state staff as head of county organizing. Waddill wanted to take the job but felt that her "home and family responsibilities" precluded taking the job. Johnson to Waddill, 22 May 1925; Waddill to Johnson, 29 May 1925, both in Unprocessed BPW files, Box 1, Folder 8: State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1919-1928.

⁴¹ Annie Kizer Bost, circular letter, 12 Apr. 1932, in CSS Papers, 1st Accession, Box 13, Folder: [no title]

⁴² Ella (Mrs. W. B.)Waddill, President's Report to CSS, 1932, CSS Papers, 2nd Accession, Box 1, Folder: Historical – President's Report – 1932 – Mrs. W. B. Waddill.

⁴³ Waddill, President's Report, 13

adjust” feeble-minded families to their communities. “How much greater the accomplishment if the same amount of time and talent could be spent upon preventive and real constructive work!”⁴⁴ She also told “a true story of a family in a nearby county,” perhaps her home of Vance County: a family rife with poverty, illegitimate children, and children institutionalized. She calculated the cost to the county of each family member over the years as “easily” \$50,000 “in the span of one generation”—a number surely intended to strike a chord with social workers familiar with budget constraints.⁴⁵

After the passage of the 1933 sterilization law, North Carolina’s social workers received instruction about the workings of the Eugenics Board. The Eugenics Board was headed by the Commissioner of Public Welfare, with other members being the Attorney General, two heads of state mental hospitals, and the state health officer. Beginning in October 1933 and continuing for four decades, the Board met monthly to review cases and order sterilizations. By the time Bost resigned in 1944, it had approved sterilization for 1729 people. A majority of these people were, at the time of their sterilization, residents of state-run mental hospitals, centers for delinquent teenagers, or the training school for feeble-minded children. These individuals were referred by the heads of institutions. But, unlike other state laws, North Carolina’s law also allowed county welfare officials to submit petitions to have people in their communities sterilized.

North Carolina’s unique program of non-institutional sterilization provides us with a rare chance to explore ways in which social work professionals responded to eugenics program. Between 1933 and 1944 thirty-five percent of sterilization petitions, or 525 petitions, originated

⁴⁴ Waddill, President’s Report, 14

⁴⁵ Waddill, President’s Report, 16-17

outside institutions. These petitions were concentrated in a few counties, demonstrating the eagerness with which certain social workers and county welfare superintendents embraced eugenic sterilization as a pragmatic solution to widespread poverty in the context of underfunded welfare departments. Social workers were mostly natives of the state whose training in casework and professional social work provided them with a new perspective on their communities. Eugenic-derived messages about “fit” and “unfit” people permeated their landscape. In addressing local problems, they drew on theoretical models from their training that prompted them to view the state’s social problems as residing in individuals and families rather than in the larger economic, education, or class systems.

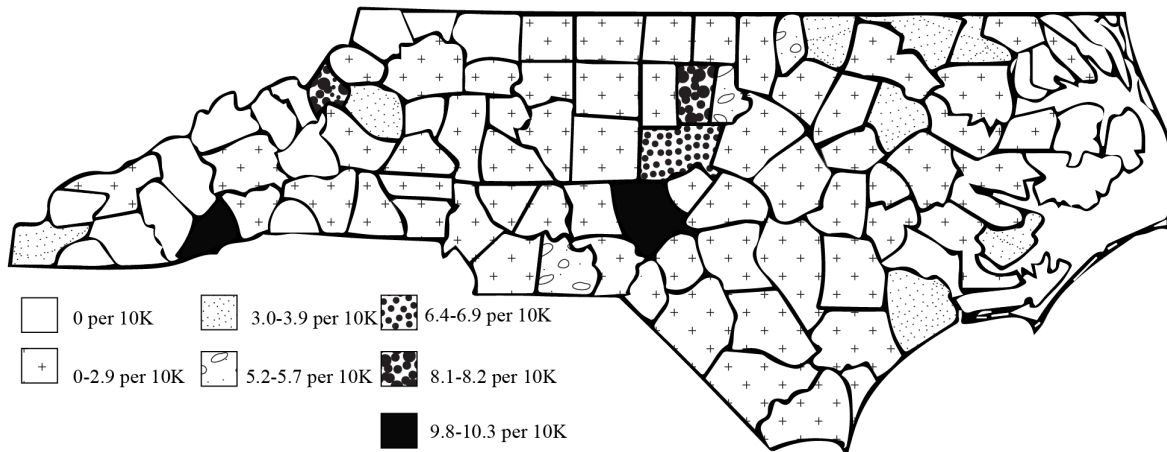
A brief examination of eugenic sterilization patterns during Bost’s tenure illuminates the ways in which social workers responded to eugenics as they negotiated the divide between urban and rural areas and between their own middle-class background and communities of poor, often illiterate people. Sterilization rates varied markedly by county. Predictably, counties with the highest numbers of sterilizations contained urban centers: Mecklenburg (Charlotte), Wake (Raleigh), Forsyth (Winston-Salem), Guilford (Greensboro), and Durham (Durham). But these figures look different if they are adjusted for population size. Between 1936 and 1945, the statewide sterilization rate was 1.725 per 10,000 persons. Several counties significantly exceeded this average (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sterilization rates in selected North Carolina counties, 1936-1945 (counties with highest per-capital sterilization rates)

County	Petitions submitted	Population in 1940	Population density in 1940 (people per square mile)	Sterilizations per 10,000 people
Moore	32	30,969	44.4	10.3329
Transylvania	12	12,241	32.4	9.8031
Orange	19	23,072	57.7	8.2351
Avery	11	13,561	54.9	8.1115
Chatham	17	24,726	36.2	6.8754
Lee	12	18,743	72.9	6.4024
Vance	17	29,961	118.2	5.6740
Anson	15	28,443	53.5	5.2737
Durham	42	80,244	276.4	5.2340
Onslow	7	17,939	23.4	3.90
Cherokee	7	18,813	41.3	3.72
Caldwell	13	35,795	75.9	3.63
Northampton	10	28,299	52.7	3.53
Edgecombe	17	49,162	97.3	3.46
Warren	8	23,145	54.0	3.46
Hertford	6	19,352	54.8	3.10
Pamlico	3	9,706	28.8	3.09

Most of these counties share two qualities: first, they are rural; their population densities fall below the state’s average population density of 73 persons per square mile. Second, many of these counties are close to the state capital in Raleigh, the headquarters of the state Board of Public Welfare, and to the state university at Chapel Hill (see Figure 7). All of the counties that participated in the four-county welfare demonstration in the 1920s (Chatham, Cherokee, Durham, and Orange) had high rates. Tellingly, all twenty-three counties that submitted zero petitions between 1936 and 1944 were on the far east and west edges of the state, the farthest from the capital and the university.

Figure 7: Non-institutional sterilization rates by county per 10,000 occupants (in 1940 census) in North Carolina, 1933-1945



Proximity, in fact, was key. In the 1930s, North Carolina’s roads were abysmal, and train travel was expensive on a social worker’s salary. Although state field work supervisors visited each county office two to three times per month, county case workers’ ability to travel was restricted during the Depression (by county travel budgets) and during the subsequent war (by gasoline rationing and tire shortages).¹ Travel difficulties hampered rural social workers’ ability not only to deal with their case loads, but also to attend UNC’s programs. Repeated exposure to training at UNC’s School of Public Welfare or the summer Institutes of Public Welfare was more feasible for social workers who worked close to Raleigh, and this training was one of the factors that led social workers to submit sterilization petitions at higher rates.

We have invaluable evidence from one of these counties with a high sterilization rate—Orange County, the home of the University of North Carolina. J. McLean Benson, a Sociology student at UNC, wrote a masters’ thesis in 1936 on sterilization in Orange County. After praising Germany’s sterilization program as “so outstanding in recent months,” Benson noted

¹ *BCPW Report*, 1936-1938, 20.

that Orange County's social workers had been "active and have accomplished a great deal." He wrote that Orange County "has been fortunate in having a public welfare department that is greatly interested in securing a better generation, both mentally and physically. Not that other welfare departments in other counties are not interested in securing the same results, but the personnel of the department in Orange County have stepped forward with a quicker pace than have the others."²

Benson argued that counties needed to educate the public about the need for sterilization and to change "the idea that sterilization is a punishment to the true fact that it is not a punishment but a protective measure instead." The state law mandated that counties had to assume the costs of the operation, but in 1936, no county board of commissioners had allocated funds for sterilizations. Benson believed that with public education, counties would be more willing to set aside funds for sterilization.³ To proponents of sterilization, this money was well spent, since each operation would prevent the perpetuation of mental defects that led to poverty and delinquency. Each operation cost the county around \$30, and in 1934 the state's average monthly allowance from federal relief funds was \$4.84 per person. The cost of a sterilization operation was thus equivalent to the cost of only six months of public assistance.⁴

Benson examined twenty-one non-institutional cases submitted by the Orange County superintendent of public welfare. His case studies provide insight into the thought processes of

² J. McLean Benson, "Sterilization, with Special Reference to Orange County, North Carolina" (MA Thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1936), 17, 24-25. Benson conducted his thesis under the direction of Ernest R. Groves, who suggested the topic. At the time, Groves was a member of the Commission that surveyed mental health conditions in the state.

³ Benson, "Sterilization," 25.

⁴ Eleanor Palmer Welborn, a social work student, reported that from 1933 to 1939, the average cost was \$21.40 and the most frequent cost was \$30. Benson reported that one salpingectomy cited cost \$31.65; the hospital bill included room, operating room, board, and incidentals. Eleanor Palmer Welborn, "Eugenical Sterilization in the United States, with Particular Attention to a Follow-Up Study of Non-Institutional Sterilization Cases in North Carolina, April 5, 1933 to January 1, 1939" (MS Thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1940), 137; Benson, "Sterilization," 33-4. For average relief costs, see *BCPW Report, 1932-1934*, 51.

the social workers who oversaw the cases, suggesting that social workers saw eugenic sterilization as a solution to social problems in more circumstances than the law permitted. Although the state law provided for sterilization of individuals with mental illness, epilepsy, or feeble-mindedness, the individuals selected for sterilization came to the attention of Orange County officials because of criminal activity, alcohol use, sex delinquency, or, most frequently, family poverty.⁵ Benson, in fact, proposed that people on public assistance or in institutions were natural candidates for sterilization. Since the public already bore the cost of their maintenance, he wrote, “the public in turn has a right to demand some protectionary measures against the possibilities of an increase in the future.”⁶ Another study of non-institutional sterilizations across the state from 1933 to 1939 showed that in thirteen percent of cases, the main “defect” was being a “pauper.”⁷

One case is illustrative: One day in the mid-1930s, George H. Lawrence and his staff at the Orange County welfare department received a call from Mrs. Oscar Chambers of Hillsborough.⁸ Chambers had taken in a young white girl named Pearl because of her troubled past: two years earlier, when she lived with her sister, Pearl had borne a child out of wedlock.

⁵ Welborn, too, observed that 46.2 percent of clients in non-institutional sterilization cases had been in court for at least one offence prior to their sterilization, indicating that criminal offenses were one factor that may have led to sterilization. In addition, she noted that 55.5 percent had been confined to an institution at least once before sterilization; most of these commitments were to Samarcand, the state training school for delinquent white girls. Eleven percent were to maternity homes. And 24 percent of the women sterilized had at least one illegitimate child, while none of the men sterilized had illegitimate children recorded. Welborn also argued that sterilization reduced the incidence of sex delinquency. This information supports Johanna Schoen’s argument that sexual misbehavior was a frequent reason for female sterilization. Interestingly, only three cases had been confined to Caswell, the state’s only facility for the feeble-minded, and three cases to the state’s hospitals for the insane. It should be noted that Welborn based her research on questionnaires voluntarily returned by county welfare offices, and she did not receive completed questionnaires for 20.1 percent of the non-institutional cases that occurred during her period of study (she received completed questionnaires for 183 of the 229 cases). Welborn, “Eugenical Sterilization in the United States,” 110-112, 116, 119, 129.

⁶ Benson, “Sterilization,” 70.

⁷ Welborn, “Eugenical Sterilization in the United States,” 102.

⁸ Chambers is a pseudonym.

The father was a mill hand named Tink, probably one of the many young men who worked at the cotton mill outside the town. Pearl had no money, and her brother-in-law forced her to leave. Although Chambers was apparently not related to the teenage girl, she took in Pearl and her toddler Peggy, paying her \$2.00 a week as a housekeeper, and presumably intending to keep her busy enough to stay away from men. But now, on the phone with the case worker from the Orange County welfare department, Chambers asked for a private interview and said that Pearl was “in trouble” again, pregnant this time from an affair with an older man who had promised to marry her and then disappeared. At first, Chambers wanted to keep Peggy but send Pearl away, but when welfare workers pointed out that no one else would be likely to take in a pregnant sixteen-year-old, Chambers relented. Welfare officials suggested, instead, that they seek an abortion and sterilization for Pearl. They gave her a mental test that indicated her IQ was 35, which was sufficient grounds for sterilization. Later, doctors recommended an abortion on physical grounds after an examination at Duke Hospital showed her to be anemic and “physically unfit for childbirth.” Probably accompanied by welfare officials, Pearl was taken to Duke Hospital, where doctors performed an abortion. At the same time, she was sterilized.⁹ Pearl’s case is one of a handful for which we have any details, but in many respects her case mirrors the profile of dozens of others in the 1930s.

Even in the midst of the Depression, then, as families across the country were struggling to make ends meet, North Carolina county officials considered poverty grounds for sterilization. Their training predisposed them to make this decision; in their coursework, the social problems of poverty, delinquency, and feeble-mindedness were linked in numerous ways, and instructors

⁹ Case 19, in Benson, “Sterilization,” 47-49. Benson used case records of Orange County welfare officials to describe twenty-one sterilization cases, some involving entire families. He does not give dates for Pearl’s case, but the cases for which he provides details took place between 1933 and 1936.

posited that all these conditions were hereditary. In addition, one of the basic principles of casework was regular and repeated contact with clients in order to reshape their behavior. Caseworkers who had average loads of twenty to thirty cases at a time were stretched thin, especially with limited travel budgets and many miles to cover between their rural clients. For particularly intransigent cases, where repeated visits produced few improvements, social workers may have seen sterilization as the most expedient solution.

Eugenics as an ideology and practice was an integral part of North Carolina's social work model in the 1930s. Social workers, whose mandate included both caring for clients and stretching welfare budgets as far as possible, were routinely caught in policies that pulled them in two different directions. Social workers came to their clients under the guise of providing aid, but the solutions they offered for poverty and mental disease were often driven more by the state's financial constraints than by the clients' wishes. Focusing on the training that social workers received reminds us of a persistent strain of American thought: the assumption that poverty is pathological or a result of immorality. During the Depression (when, after all, many people suffered from poverty and mental distress), the state labeled some poor, uneducated people as "feeble-minded" and treated them as incapable or unworthy of raising children. Even as New Dealers challenged the stigmatization of poverty and celebrated the right of every person to live above certain minimum standards, many Americans believed some people were an undue burden on the rest, products of an abnormal type of poverty that would continue despite economic cycles. As long as government programs fell short of addressing the fundamental inequities of the southern political economy, the persistence of the most abject poverty allowed people to continue believing that some people's poverty was beyond the reach of normal social

programs. State legislators increasingly devoted resources to eugenics and mental hygiene programs, as the most effective way for dealing with abnormal poverty.

Under Bost's successor, Commissioner Ellen Winston, the state's sterilization program grew further. After taking office in 1944, Winston pushed to professionalize the public welfare staff and expand welfare services to both white and black recipients. Thanks in part to Winston's advocacy, the number of sterilizations grew. Moreover, social workers' active use of the sterilization law resulted in a notable increase in the number of non-institutional sterilizations. Before 1950, non-institutional sterilizations constituted forty percent of sterilizations, but between 1950 and 1966, they were over seventy percent of sterilizations.¹⁰ Winston also mounted a campaign to expand the programs as part of the fight against poverty. The Eugenics Board's justification shifted away from hereditary theories and toward "culture of poverty" rhetoric that posited the transmission of undesirable traits through socialization. At the same time, the extension of welfare benefits to African Americans, fears about black women's fertility, and concern about rising welfare costs led to a "significant shift in the racial composition" of the program. Whereas African Americans had been sterilized at lower rates than whites in the early years of the program, by the mid-1950s, they were sterilized at higher rates, with black women targeted in particular. From 1957 onward, the majority of people sterilized were African Americans.¹¹

North Carolina's eugenic sterilization program continued until the early 1970s, by which time around 7,600 people, mostly women, had been sterilized. Many targets of sterilization received some kind of welfare benefits. Social workers, as one scholar has argued, "conflated

¹⁰ Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 100.

¹¹ Schoen, *Choice and Coercion*, 105-11.

welfare dependency with feeble-mindedness.”¹² If we look back earlier, before sterilization programs started, we gain a deeper understanding of the reasons social workers made these calculations. Moreover, a deep history of eugenics in North Carolina illuminates the persistence of the model of the “worthy” and “unworthy” poor. Eugenics ideology was a conduit for those aged ideas to pass to the modern era.

¹² Of those sterilized, 84 percent were women; 73 percent were unmarried or separated; and 63 percent received some welfare benefit. Schoen, *Choice and Coercion*, 89-90, 95.

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