

# Oakdale, Reformatory for Women, Living Symbol of Feminine Idea.



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The realization of an idea  
Conceived by the Women of Illinois  
Who, disregarding differences of  
Race, Creed, and Political Preference,  
United to materialize a vision of  
Education and Correction for  
Women convicted of offenses against  
The law and, heretofore, confined in  
County and city jails without hope  
Or possibility of rehabilitation.

A woman, who has a hobby, the carrying out of which tends toward the reformation of erring life, is the exception rather than the rule. In the institution west of Dwight, Oakdale, the managing officer for which is now and has been since it was opened here in 1930, Miss Helen Hazard, is such a woman, and in the

carrying out of the ideal of several women of the state a service to humanity in general is being given that is not measurable. The high plane upon which this institution is managed; the many improvements and innovations that have been introduced; the daily routine approaching normal home life; the trades and

professions being taught to the unfortunate, all tend toward a happy existence, and a desire on the part of most to return to a better civil life in their own or other communities.

That the theory has worked out in practice figures in the following article will prove to a large degree. The people of this community have, on numerous occasions, had opportunity to get acquainted with the personnel, and observe the work in various stages of its progression. They have become interested in both the work and those who are carrying it on. Such an institution, and the work that it carries on is a credit to this great state, and a credit to those who conceived and are following on with the ideal.

The article that follows was prepared and forwarded to us by Miss Hazard, the managing officer.



MISS HELEN HAZARD  
Managing Officer



THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

The bill establishing the State Reformatory for Women was passed in 1927. However, no action was taken on the part of the women until 1929 when the late Governor Emmerson took office. One of the first acts of the Advisory Board appointed by Governor Emmerson was the selection of a suitable location. Many pieces of property were examined but for one reason or another they could not meet the requirements. However, in the early Spring of 1929 the present site, consisting of one hundred sixty acres, located two miles west of Dwight, was purchased.

The actual construction work was started on July 5, 1929, and on November 24, 1930, the institution received its first commitments. Miss Hazard and Miss Eyer reported for duty April 10, 1930. Through the courtesy of Colonel Frank L. Smith we were given an office in the First National Bank, remaining there until adequate space could be made for us on the institution grounds. Our population at first grew very slowly, so slowly in fact there were times when we wondered if the courts were really going to accept us. We had supposed there would be a great

influx of guests, but alas, by June 30th, the end of our first fiscal year, our group numbered only fifty-six.

Someone has said the first five years are the determining years in the life of any institution. Certainly they are very crucial and important for it is during this time morale is established and standards are set. Too much cannot be said for the staff during our first years. A small number came who could not adjust. These dropped out and all of the group who remained were fired with enthusiasm for the new project. Because the population was small, one staff member would be obliged to perform many duties. There were amazingly few complaints, however, and we turned out en masse to all meetings.

There have been few changes in our original plan of operation which was instituted the first week except for adjustments which were necessary due to increases in population. The women who worked for the establishment of the Institution were determined to have a program based on individualization of treatment. This can best be accomplished by a classification system which focuses attention on the need of the individual.

The provisions in our law which had to do with commitments were of course vitally important. From November 24, 1930, all women over the age of eighteen, who were committed for more than six months, had to be sentenced to the State Reformatory for Women. The population of the Women's Prison in August, 1930, numbered about one hundred and twenty-five. The Legislature of 1931 made provision for the transfer of certain women from that Institution to Oakdale, but early in 1932 there was considerable talk about transferring the entire population to Dwight. This was in reality quite an undertaking. The two institutions were based on opposing ideologies and to consider taking seventy-five or one hundred women from an institution, such as the Women's Prison, and transferring them to a minimum security institution, such as Dwight, involved of course great risks. That we were able to do this without a single major catastrophe is a tribute to the work which had been done, not only by the staff, but by the women who were first committed to us. All of these trips were made without any publicity which perhaps accounts for the fact the citizens of Illinois were

slow in realizing the Women's Prison had been closed. It is not uncommon, even today, to have people from the State ask about the prison population of the Women's Prison.

A reformatory serves a dual purpose to society. In the first place, it must keep the women sentenced to it until such time as they have received a legal discharge. A second function is one of rehabilitation. When one realizes only two per cent of any prison population die in prisons, the treatment of this group assumes tremendous importance. From the minute a woman is received, our entire program centers about the fact she is some day to be released, and we want if it is at all possible to return her to her community social asset. So far as statistics records go, the Institution has made a very enviable record. Out of our total number of commitments [1905] we have paroled two hundred and eighty-seven; of that number forty-one have been returned as violators; fifty-three have escaped, only three of whom are unaccounted for; and one hundred and twenty to date have been returned for more than one commitment, third and fourth sentences included. Our population as of May 1, 1943, numbered two hundred and eleven.

It is doubtful if any Institution has made a more propitious record. Certainly we have been afforded every opportunity to do good work. In the first place we have been most fortunate in having the women's organizations in the State interested in us. In our existence of thirteen years there have only been two Advisory Boards. The late Mrs. John T. Mason of Aurora was Chairman of our first Advisory Board from the beginning until her death in November, 1941. Mrs. Frank P. Hixon of Lake Forest, appointed in May, 1942, is our present Chairman. Mrs. A. P. Middleton of Pontiac has been a member of the Board for more than twelve years. Their direction and assistance have been and are of invaluable help. Officials in every Administration have believed in us and only through their help has any success we may have achieved been possible. The cordiality and courtesies which the townspeople have shown to us have been deeply appreciated. We trust we may continue to merit their good wishes. We too are very proud of the Dwight community and are grateful to be considered a part of it.