

# School in Vermont Helps Rehabilitate Youth Delinquents

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Vermont's only institution for the correcting and rehabilitating of juvenile delinquents is the Weeks School at Vergennes.

The school is out of the ordinary in that it takes both boys and girls, who, though they live in separate dormitories, study together both on the campus of the Weeks School and at the nearby Vergennes High School. Weeks School is what is known as an "open institution" without walls.

The population at present is 186—the largest in its history. Not all of the students are delinquent. Some have been sent there because they have been neglected by their parents and must be taken care of by the state.

## All Start From Scratch

All commitments to Weeks School are from the courts and are for an indefinite period. The boy or girl can be released whenever it is decided the training period has been sufficient, or when a good home has been

found in which to place him. The young person may be kept at Weeks School until the age of 21.

Harrison C. Greenleaf, superintendent of Weeks School, sees many needed improvements, but on the whole he believes his school has the right approach to the youth problem. What a child has done to bring him to Weeks School is of small consequence, he says. No statistics are kept, therefore, of the types of offenses committed by the students. And no segregation is attempted in relation to the type of offense. "We start from scratch," says Mr. Greenleaf, "with each child. We make it plain that he begins his life here with a clean slate."

The current heavy enrollment at Weeks School is attributed by authorities in the child-welfare field as due to a slight increase in youth offenses and to a more widespread utilization of the courts as a means of curbing youth crime. The present population there, however, seriously overcrowds the school.

Standing in one of the boys' dormitory bedrooms, Mr. Greenleaf said, "As you can see, our cots are not more than six inches apart. And we have had to install several doubledeck bunks. The possibilities frighten me. It seems to me that if there is a danger spot in our setup here, this is it. I would sleep sounder at night if this overcrowding could be alleviated."

However, the Vermont Legislature moves slowly on such projects. Vermont is not rich in terms of money. And a juvenile training school takes money to run properly. Weeks' budget is just over \$300,000 a year.

## Superintendent Acclaimed

With the tools given him, Mr. Greenleaf is widely acknowledged to be doing an outstanding job. One of the assistant commissioners of institutions, assessing the effectiveness of the Weeks School, said, "We are just plain lucky to have him. He is the best superintendent we have ever had down there."

Judge Edward J. Costello of Burlington Municipal Court told me, "The results shown by the Weeks School are amazing. Frankly, I have sent many a boy down there with deep misgivings. I have had strong doubts that Weeks School could do anything with them, and yet I didn't want to send them to the House of Correction.

"But Greenleaf has succeeded in cases where I thought failure almost inevitable. I can't praise him too highly."

## New Institution Needed

Nevertheless, there is a need for some institution for the care of juvenile delinquents in Vermont that is more secure than Weeks School but not as severely penal as the State Prison and House of Correction at Windsor or the Women's Reformatory at Rutland. It appears likely that the Legislature this year may vote into existence a forestry camp which will answer part of the need.

The average cost of keeping a child at Weeks School for a year is \$2,162.85, according to 1956 figures.

Judge Costello comments, "A lot of the boys and girls over 16 who come before my court—and other Vermont courts like mine—should not be sent to the Weeks School, nor, on the other hand, should they go to the House of Correction where no segregation is possible between hardened criminals and young first-offenders. We shall soon be able to commit to the forestry camps, and that will help.

"But all judges, I am sure, have found themselves putting young offenders on probation against their better judgment, simply because the boy was too serious a problem for Weeks School but not a fit prospect for prison. We definitely need another facility."

Judge John Wackerman at Montpelier expressed a like concern over the lack of "tools" for dealing with juvenile delinquents.