

"Spent Almost Two Years In The Insane Asylum"

During the War years
my husband [redacted] and younger
son [redacted], were farming forty
acres which was not much for
time with a tractor. After considering
and debating he decided he
would sub-rent the forty and
get a job in war plant. He worked
first in powder plant then
he secured a job in a plane
factory. He seemed quite satisfied
at first with the high wages
and was saving a hundred dollars
each month. After he put in his
time at the factory he worked
evenings at a filling station.
However I thought that too much
work. He wished to continue and
did. The older boy [redacted] was in
the Pacific on a heavy cruiser
which had been badly damaged
by a torpedo with the ship's
bow gone they made it to
Pearl Harbor.
He was given a thirty day leave

"I Spent Almost Two Years in the Insane Asylum"

An Anonymous Kansan Speaks Out

edited and prefaced by Robert A. McInnes

At the end of World War II the Kansas economy was booming and many Kansans were enjoying the good life, the likes of which had not been seen since before the Great Depression. Perhaps that is why, when confronted with newspaper reports of abuse and neglect at the Topeka State Hospital, they demanded action. The correspondence files of Kansas governor Frank Carlson, who orchestrated the long overdue reforms that ensued, reveal much with regard to public concern over this issue.

One such piece of correspondence, a twenty-seven page handwritten memoir composed by a Kansas woman who revealed only her first name, surfaced in the Kansas State Historical Society's records of the governor's office (Frank Carlson administration) in the spring of 1994. This former inmate, who entitled her essay "I Spent Almost Two Years in the Insane Asylum," wrote of her admission to and "treatment" in the Topeka State Hospital during the early 1940s in hopes of encouraging the governor to take remedial action.¹ The document, presented here in its entirety, raises many questions about the state of mental health care in Kansas. Among them, how did this deplorable situation evolve, and what resulted from the fevered protests of the late 1940s?

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1. Mental Institutions—Legislation and Reform, 1948, Correspondence, Frank Carlson Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, hereafter referred to as Governor's Records.

Interestingly, reform initiatives and innovation in this area have a long and important history in the Sunflower State. When the first mental hospital in Kansas was established at Osawatomie during the early 1860s, "moral treatment" was the norm. Moral treatment, developed by the Quakers with the open-



The first signs that state mental reform was imminent came in February 1947, after the inauguration of Governor Frank Carlson.

ing of the York Retreat mental asylum in England in 1796, was basically the "humanization" of an institution.² It meant treating patients with kindness, patience, and respect and held the expectation that mentally ill patients were treatable and could reenter society after a few months of institutionalization.

When the Osawatomie State Hospital opened in 1862, a year after Kansas entered the Union, the board of directors and the superintendent made the firm decision that only those prospective patients who had a realistic hope of improving after treatment would be admitted. Chronic and hopeless cases would not be admitted.³ Unfortunately, subsequent decades saw mental health administration decline at an alarming rate.

This late-nineteenth-century deterioration in the treatment of the mentally unsound resulted from politics, budget cutbacks, and changing theories in medicine and mental hygiene. As mental health treatment entered the twentieth century, patients faced dismal prospects. The mental institutions in Kansas (at Osawatomie, Topeka, and Larned) always were overcrowded, and often patients who needed treatment could not get it. The facilities were entirely inadequate as public funding fell far short of the need to replace worn out buildings, appliances, furniture, and equipment. Most importantly, the moral sense of hope, kindness, and patience in helping the mentally unsound had seemingly vanished.⁴

By World War II little real therapy was administered. Rather than being treated, patients were controlled with restraints, drugs, electric shocks, malnutrition, and fear. Basic sanitary conditions were abysmally poor, and mental hospitals were grossly understaffed with trained psychologists. In 1948 the Topeka State Hospital reportedly housed 1,850 patients; the facility was designed to hold 1,055, and it was staffed by only two doctors, one, according to William C. Menninger, who was "a chronic alcoholic and the other really had no training."⁵ The majority of state mental hospital employees, who routinely worked as many as seventy-two hours a week, were so undereducated and untrained that they were un-

2. Ann Braden Johnson, *Out of Bedlam: The Truth About Deinstitutionalization* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 6–10; Lowell Gish, *The First Hundred Years: A History of Osawatomie State Hospital* (Osawatomie, Kans.: Osawatomie State Hospital, 1966), 15; Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 27–28, 45, 64–71, 91.

3. Lowell Gish, *Reform at Osawatomie State Hospital: Treatment of the Mentally Ill, 1866–1970* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1972), 31.

4. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

5. William C. Menninger, "Address Before a Joint Convention of the Michigan Legislature, January 26, 1956," Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

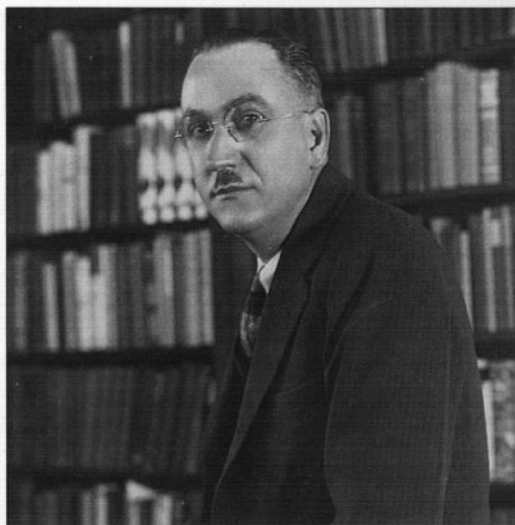
employable elsewhere. According to Lowell Gish, the author of *Reform at the Osawatomie State Hospital*, ward attendants at these institutions typically were short-tempered and abusive toward their patients; tragically, they occupied positions in which they could mistreat inmates without fear of retribution. Registered nurses avoided employment at mental hospitals, thinking the work experience would damage their careers.⁶

As the end of World War II approached, hope reemerged for the mentally ill. Governor Andrew Schoepel brought their case to the attention of the state legislature, and an investigation commenced. "There are several thousand of our unfortunate people who must spend the remaining days of their lives in charitable institutions," said the governor. "They have no organization to press for consideration of the conditions under which they live."⁷

But the first tangible signs that reform was imminent came in February 1947, just weeks after the inauguration of Frank Carlson. State Senator Paul Wunsch of Kingman led a tour of the Topeka State Hospital for the members of the house and senate social welfare committees to show them the conditions at that hospital. On February 13, 1947, the *Topeka Daily Capital* reported:

Shocking conditions that prevail in the five state mental institutions were revealed Wednesday night in a joint meeting of the House and Senate committees on Social Welfare. Meeting to discuss the need for advancement and changes in the plants at Winfield, Osawatomie, Parsons, Larned and Topeka, the legislators learned that conditions in some instances are in a deplorable condition. . . . Committee members who were not aware of the conditions in the state mental institutions were invited by Senator Paul Wunsch . . . to visit the Topeka State Hospital and "have their eyes opened."⁸

Media attention increased, and by the summer of 1948 the public not only was aware of but increasingly disgusted by the deplorable conditions existing at the state mental hospitals. Between October 16 and 26, 1948, the *Wichita Eagle* ran a series of articles on the state mental hospital situation, and letters



Dr. Karl Menninger, who was aware of state mental hospital conditions, wrote, "The situation in our state hospitals is acute—I might even say desperate."

from concerned Kansas citizens flooded the governor's office.⁹

Dr. Karl M. Menninger of Topeka's internationally known Menninger Clinic also wrote to Governor Carlson to lobby for improvements and increased state spending. Dr. Menninger, who was already aware of state mental hospital conditions, wrote in a letter dated August 30, 1948, "The situation in our state hospitals is acute—I might even say desper-

6. Gish, *Reform at Osawatomie State Hospital*, 170–85.

7. *Senate and House Journals*, 1945 (Topeka: State Printing Plant, 1945), 41.

8. *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 13, 1947.

9. At least forty-six letters were sent to Governor Carlson concerning conditions at the state hospitals. See *Mental Institutions—Legislation and Reform*, 1948, Governor's Records.

ate—and the needs are extensive. I don't . . . know when the Republican convention is being held, but I wish this matter might receive consideration as one of the important planks in the platform." Carlson responded, "Your letter was not only timely, but met with my complete approval."¹⁰

The governor paid heed to the many petitions, and mental health became a vital part of his administration's legacy. Governor Carlson addressed the issue in his 1949 message to the state legislature and, armed with a detailed report and recommendation from his advisory committee on state hospitals, convinced lawmakers to establish the Division of Institutional Management. Its duty was to oversee and supervise the state's mental hospitals. Dr. Erland Carlsson, the division's first director, issued a proposal on January 27, 1949, suggesting changes designed to improve efficiency of the state's eleemosynary institutions. Dr. Carlsson wanted the division to be replaced with a full-fledged department of institutional management and a significantly enlarged staff and budget. The legislature did increase the budget, although not to the extent of his request.¹¹ Other reforms, including laws guaranteeing patients' civil rights, actually did not come to fruition until 1966.¹²

By the end of Governor Carlson's term in office, he was able to boast that

Kansas jumped from fortieth place to eleventh in nation-wide ratings on money now available for the care and treatment of its mentally ill. . . .

The new building program, adequate staffing and adoption of modern psychiatric methods have placed Kansas in 11th position in a twelve month period.

10. Karl Menninger to Frank Carlson, August 30, 1948, and Carlson to Menninger, September 1, 1948, Menninger Clinic, 1947–1948, Governor's Records.

11. Erland Carlsson to Frank Carlson, January 27, 1949, and enclosed report, State Agencies, Social Welfare, Division of Institutional Management, Governor's Records.

12. *The Statesman* (Topeka), February 1966.

Every Kansan should be pleased at the splendid progress we are making in the care and treatment and improvement of our mentally ill patients. A large number of patients have already been returned to their homes and communities as cured or conditionally paroled. The credit for this splendid treatment and improvement in these hospitals must be given to the Superintendent and the personnel of the hospitals. . . .

Recently Dr. L.P. Ristine, Superintendent of the Topeka State Hospital, stated that in the new hospital program there is complete elimination of all abuse of patients; rehabilitation of some 85 to 90 secluded and restrained patients; doubling of the capacity to receive new patients through expansion of shock treatment facilities; an increase of 80 per cent in the discharge of patients as cured, and the inauguration of a regular program of brain surgery to improve mental disorders.¹³

In 1991 mental health historian Gerald Grob confirmed this progress when he wrote: "In 1945 Kansas ranked forty-third in terms of its patient-employee ratio (10.1:1); five years later it ranked fifth with a 3.5:1 ratio; and in 1955 it led the nation."¹⁴

The manuscript that follows was discovered in a folder entitled "Correspondence—Anonymous." The author mentioned only her first name and the first names of her family members (names that have been changed to maintain confidentiality). There is no surviving cover letter or any indication that the governor replied. In fact, it is not known definitively that the essay was originally intended for the governor since the author writes to the "reader" and not to the governor.

The document is presented with minimal editorial intrusion; no effort has been made to flag the numerous misspellings or other grammatical errors. The few editorial changes that have been made to enhance the essay's readability have been clearly noted.

13. Carlson radio address, July 9, 1950, Mental Institutions—Legislation and Reform, 1949, Governor's Records.

14. Gerald Grob, *From Asylum to Community: Mental Health Policy in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 162.

In addition to the essay printed here, the records of the Carlson administration contain much additional material on mental health in Kansas in the 1940s, including accounts written by other mental patients, relatives of patients, and by state officials and employees.¹⁵ Not all of it is negative. The mem-

true for the period under consideration. Unfortunately most if not all of the author's experiences probably were *typical*. It also should be emphasized that the testimony given here is inherently subjective, and it gives only one side of the story. Our opinion of this woman, her family, or even the mental



The Topeka State Hospital was one of five state mental institutions in Kansas, and its facilities always were overcrowded. Often patients who needed treatment could not be admitted.

oirs of doctors, nurses, and staff who worked at other institutions indicate that they felt conscientious about their duties.¹⁶

Although the following account may shock the late-twentieth-century reader, much of it rings quite

health workers might be different if we were able to journey back in time and see for ourselves the two years from the time prior to her admission to the time of her release and reentry into "the world." Also, we might think differently of her if we had more information on her diagnosis and commitment. While reading this woman's claim of her sanity, the nagging question remains—was she or was she not at least somewhat mentally unsound? We can never know, but like any historical document interpreted carefully, "I Spent Almost Two Years In the Insane Asylum" can help us illuminate an important although somewhat neglected field of study. It also is our hope that this particular document's publication will stimulate further scholarly research.

15. Fourteen letters written by either former patients of Kansas state mental hospitals or friends or relatives writing on behalf of those who were patients can be found in State Agencies, [Insane] Hospital—Larned/Osawatomie/Topeka, Governor's Records, and in Mental Health, *ibid*.

16. Milton and Marge Lozoff, Palo Alto, Calif., to Connie Menninger, Topeka, Kans., March 20, 1994, private collection. According to Dr. Milton Lozoff, who worked at the Osawatomie State Hospital during the 1940s (an institution sharing the same kinds of problems as other state mental hospitals in Kansas), "the staff was small, creative and very enthusiastic about their clinical work and about the exciting seminars and theoretical discussions."

"I Spent Almost Two Years in the Insane Asylum"

During the War years My husband [Rick] and younger Son [David], were farming forty acres which was not much for two with a tractor. After considering and debating he decided he would sub rent the forty and get a job in war plant. He worked first in powder plant then he secured a job in a plane factory. He seemed quite satisfied at first with the high wages and was saving a hundred dollars each month. After he put in his time at the factory he worked evenings at a filling station[.] However I thought that to much work. He wished to continue and did. The older boy [Ronald] was in the Pacific on a heavy cruiser which had been badly damaged by a torpedo with the ships bow gone they made it to pearl Harbor.

He was given a thirty day leave and came home, Spending most of the time traveling the distance.

We continued to live on the forty and had a flock of chickens. It was a misty rainy Thanksgiving Day. [David] and [Rick] shucked corn until dark. After a good fried chicken supper I was walking from the house to the well on a slanting and slippery walk when I fell and fractured my right wrist. It was night and I knew the doctors were not at their office and if we called one he would say to go to the hospital, so I went there first[.] The nurses didn't seem to know any doctors to call. and it made no difference to me which one[;] any way she called several. None seemed to want the call. The Doctors told the nurse to call someone else. They evidently wished not to be disturbed from their "Turkey Supper." Finally she got a doctor to half way promise he would come to the hospital.

We waited quite a while and he actually made it. Them nurses were irritated and cross! "Ye Gods" I never imagined a nurse being like that, and their attitude toward a broken wrist. The nurses were provoked at the doctors and took it out on me.

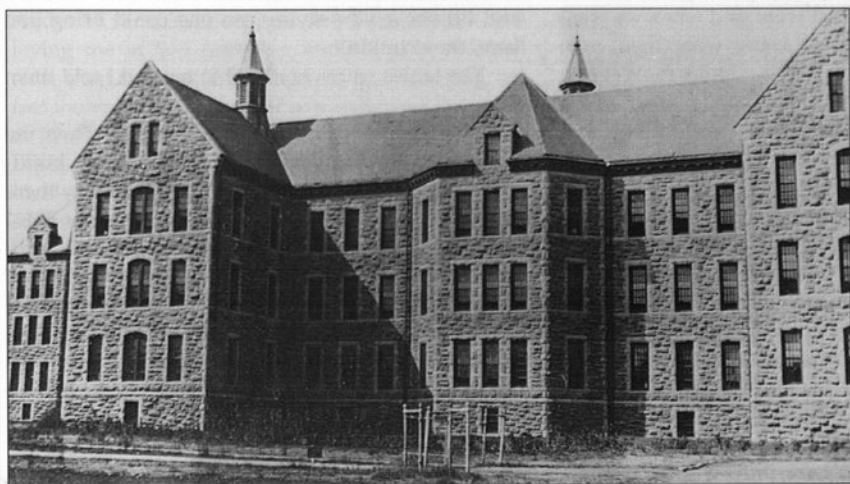
Anyway I learned to do things with my left hand. Sure wrote some fancy letters to the sailor. [David] was called to leave the day after Christmas. His choice was to serve in the Navy and was excepted. When he left I was still carrying arm in a rag hanging from my neck. My husband begin coming home once a month instead of every two weeks. The money [April] and I lived on was the income from the flock of chickens. I told him when the hens stopped laying I would need some money but not right then. [Rick] began to complain about his job. I suggested he quit but he continued.

[O]ne night when I was alone I decided I would call [Rick] and ask him if he was coming home, on second thought I knew he might think it bad news, any way I'd tell him everything was O.K. He hesitated, said he didn't know, he may. When he got there he was provoked and said, Don't call me anymore do you know what I thought that one of the boys was killed. I never called him again.

The next time he came home was the beginning of almost two years in the Insane Asylum for me. How Did it begin. "With a quarrel[.]" It was in the Autum the chickens were on their molting strike. [April] and I were no longer receiving sufficient income. I knew I must ask [Rick] for money. [April] needed money to go to school. He pulled out fifty cents and offered it to me. It sure provoked me then he pulled out a five dollar bill and said I suppose you want this. I said ["]that is just what I want." He hesitated but did give it to me. Then he held up a ten dollar bill and said you would want this[.] I said yes, and demanded it. [H]e was furious because he thought I would say know. I was plenty aggravated fighting over money. I handed the ten Dollar bill to my daughter and said get rid of it. Now he began to argue and quarrel. I wondered what was the matter with him. He said you think

your God Almighty. He kept up the jamboree, saying pretty soon you'll be seeing things in the corn field. [D]idn't I tell you it started with a quarrel. He said you are crazy I am going to get the Sheriff. We never hit each other or threatened too. I didn't believe him. But he sure did[.]

[April] and I were walking along the road and here comes a car driving slow. They were talking to each other. I said [April] that's them [Jones] brother doctors. What are they gawking about. [A]ny way they turned around in the road and went back to town.



"Old Stone," the women's ward on the west side of the hospital's administration building, likely was one of the facilities in which the memoir's author was housed.

The next morning he was gone quite early. [April] was nervous about it. I said don't think about it. He told me latter he went to the local hospital[.] and they had no room, suggested he take me to "The Topeka State Hospital[.]" So he went through the necessary proceedure to get me there.¹⁷ Implicating Doctors, Lawyers and the judge.

After while here they come Doctor, Lawyer and Sheriff.

[April] said loud. Gee this is pretty good get into a fight and go get the sheriff. [S]he really rolled it in. They got mad and said "Young Lady be still, don't want to hear another word out of you.["] [E]very time she started to say anything they shut her up hollering. heh.

17. According to Dale Bruce and Willard C. Hetzel, *Kansas: Mental Health Laws in Brief* (Philadelphia: National Mental Health Foundation, 1946), 10–14, mental patients who were not voluntarily admitted to a mental hospital were admitted on the order of the judge of the county probate court. Normally a patient had to be brought to the court for a hearing and an examination by a licensed doctor, psychiatrist, or staff member of the psychiatric receiving ward of the University of Kansas School of Medicine or by a staff member of one of the state's mental hospitals "unless the condition of the patient is such as to make it 'manifestly improper' to bring him to the court." It seems that this statute was administered with a certain amount of laxness and flexibility. In this instance the author was admitted on the affidavit of two doctors and a sheriff, the affidavit being submitted to the probate court without her making a personal appearance. Probate judges also could assign cus-

tody of a mental patient to anyone of their choosing (usually a relative) for any particular length of time once the patient had been released. Civil rights were routinely suspended during the custodial duration. Today it is more difficult to admit someone involuntarily to a mental hospital. Measures have been taken to ensure that personal civil rights are not violated, and people are not admitted to mental hospitals simply to remove someone from his or her family. Today an examination must be made to determine whether an alleged mentally ill person is potentially harmful to himself/herself or others. After that determination has been made by a medical doctor or psychiatrist, the mentally ill person can be involuntarily admitted. See *In Your Best Interests: A Handbook on the Rights of Persons in Psychiatric Facilities* (Topeka, Kans.: Legal Aid Society of Topeka, 1977), 10–12.

Anyway they begin to think up something to write down, [Rick] didn't seem to know what words to say. Doc got sort of peeved and said. We just cant say that she is sick we have to write some words down for the judge after all he has to sign it. I never told them we quarreled. Rick sure never told them. When they had written what they thought would do it including the words that were said when we were argueing. etc. etc. I didn't know what they were doing I thought they were trying to get me to go to the local hospital.

Well any way when they got enough written and their faces plenty red they said you are insane we are taking you to Topeka. I said insane. I am not and I am not going. They coaxed, the lawyer said my wife has a nice dinner fixed for me and, here you are keeping me.

They got stern and said if you don't come on we are going to put the hand cuffs on you. [T]hat scared me I knew I was done. I said to [April] you have to go with me and she did. When we had gotten about half way we had a flat tire and did not have any spares so deputy went to the nearest house and called the sheriff who took me the rest of the miles to the stone walls and stacked bricks.¹⁸

I said to the sheriff and you think I am crazy. [H]e never said a word patted the steering wheel and gazed down the road.

When we got there the Sheriff said this is it isn't it and turned into a drive. There along was a number of brick and Stone buildings. He stopped in front of one and I had a sinking feeling when I got out of that car to go in there. I said and I am supposed to go in here. We walked into The building. There was a very unpleasant looking woman behind the desk. She spoke first saying, Who is she? [W]hat is her name? They didn't speak right up so she talked louder. What are the charges? By that time here

came a nurse and took me to a room in that building. She said I guess I had better shut the door. She shut it also turned the key. Late the next morning she unlocked the door saying we almost forgot you. You haven't had a thing to eat and I don't know if they will leave you here. I asked some ladies if they knew where the water was. She said come with me and I'll show you saying, no one could bring you here, they couldn't.

The ladies were very kind to me and I told them so.

We want you to stay here, we like you, Then the nurse came saying you are going to another building. A Lady said she would ask if I could stay there but they refused. Those ladies worried about me. I said promise me you wont worry. [O]ne lady threw up he hands saying, She doesn't know. She doesn't know and went into her room.

We started walking to this Other building. The nurse saying Oh this is awful I don't see why they didn't leave you there. I said I guess it don't help to worry.

She took me back into a building called the extension.¹⁹ Windows with bars on them, doors keyed. I can hear them dangling them keys now. There are plenty keys swinging around an insane asylum and unjustly so.

The nurse said this is your bed, undress. I said I am not sick, she said Undress, I was scared and I did. They brought me liquid medicine in a small glass on a tray, awful tasting it was, and there I remained in bed. [S]he would not permit me to get up but brought me the bed pan.

There was no way of calling her only hollering when I wanted it and time and time she never heard me all day. Maybe you think them nurses werent peeved after I held it as long as I could and did it in bed. They kept doping and doping me. I made up

18. "Stone walls and stacked bricks" may have referred to a building known as "Old Stone," a women's ward on the west side of the administration building. See Barbara Hauschild, *On the Avenue of Approach* (n.p.: 1979), 43.

19. According to the testimony of an anonymous inmate at the Topeka State Hospital, submitted by Olive B. Fisher on January 29, 1947, "the Extension is the place where the ladies are so sick that they must be strapped to the bed, or are in straight jackets." See State Agencies, [Insane] Hospital, Topeka, Governor's Records.

my mind I wasn't going to take any more of that medicine. So when they brought the medicine I refused to take it. I said I don't need it and I am not taking it, I spilled the stuff. She said "I'll call The Men[.]" I said "call them." And she did. In a few seconds in came three husky men. They had hand cuffs. I put out my hands saying I'd rather be me as you. And with the same deep red faces they placed them laying me in bed fastening each hand to the bed side, they also put ankle cuffs on me fastening my feet to the foot of the bed. It was terrifying. Yes reader I took the medicine. [D]ays and days I lay there the bed wet with perspiration and from turning my head which was all I could turn my hair became a solid matt. It was never combed. If I could have moved my hands an inch it would have been wonderful. A woman feed me with a spoon. I begged the nurse for Water and she would not give me any. My lips were cracked the cuffs were wearing places on my wrists and ankles. The food was terrible bloody liver boiled and thickened. Some kind of pudding with a peculiar, medicated tast. I refused to eat, and them feeding it to me with a spoon.

In the evening in came a doctor with some nurses stuck tube down me and poured milk in me. [O]ne nurse pulled on my hair the others put their weight on my arms that were fastened to each side of the bed.

Yes reader I ate after that. I latter became very hungry.

Would have been most happy to eat the hardest, stalest, piece of bread or anything. But they refused saying whats on the tray is all which was a very small portion. They probably fed me tonic which caused me to be extremely hungry. It was hell. Death would have been a glorious thing. one day While I was still shackled hands and feet there stood [April] my daughter. I said [April] how did you get back here she said the gate was open and I just walked in here. She was shocked. I said [April] you know they have a humane Society. She said those cuffs are wearing your wrist and ankles. I

said please get me a drink of water she asked the nurse. But the nurse would not let her give me any water. [O]ne night lightning struck the tile roofing on the dining hall. [I]ts alright for nurses to rave, be mean impatient but the prisoners know better then to do that[.]

high
 ● I stepped on a stool, layed
 on a bed with rollers on. They
 put the sheets over me all but
 my head. Then they stuck a
 needle in my right arm at my
 elbow. The fellow at the head
 was spanging my temples
 with a solution. Then he
 adjusted something on my head
 which felt like a iron guard.
 In a few seconds my eyes
 felt like heavy balls rolling.
 ● the heart beats were louder
 and louder into a pound
 a fellow counts they he snaps
 something and thats all. Then
 I was wheeled out and some
 men lay me on a bed the reason
 I know this is because I watched
 at there later. Anyway approximately
 a half hour I woke up feeling
 I was going and with a
 terrible headache. after supper
 my headache seemed better.
 ● I was given these treatments
 twice each week. Now
 I don't know how many times
 I was knocked out. but it was

The author recorded her frightening experience with electroshock therapy, which most likely was applied to make her more docile.

[April] told relatives It would be better if I was dead after she seen me shackled hand and feet. They thought she was awful to say the truth. The nurse one morning brought in a big shears. I said what are you going to do. Cut your hair off she said. Now my hair had never been cut at any time. I begged her to let me comb it because I had lots and lots of time. She said no and whacked it off.

The nurse excited came in saying your husband is here to see you. She got me out of bed leaving the hand cuffs on me. She took me to a room up in front of the building. When she first said he was there, I asked her If I had to see him. I didn't want to. She said yes. Oh I thought when he sees these cuffs he will think I am violently insane. He put his hand on the cuff. I said don't think any thing about it. He said "Well if you don't Care, [" I said lets talk about something else. In a very few minutes the nurse came and got me I was glad indeed. I don't know the number of days it was before I was completely unshackled first they let my hands loose and latter my feet. Then I was allowed to sit in the hall along the wall, sit and sit nothing to do. My Sister came to see me then they evidently allowed her back there or else she just walked in behind someone. [I]t was at noon time. They told her to get out it was dinner time and she must leave. She said she was staying until after meal time and did. They give me a tray, she said now be sure and eat. I said you taste it. So she did and said it was horrible. I'm going to get you out of here, but she never got it done. I said to her there is just one thing now tell me how do I seem to you. What do you think, do you think I am crazy. She said no you are alright.

Oh its awful. Latter she came back and said they are going to give you treatments[.] I said what are they going to do. [S]he said she didn't know, but, she was going to stay there and watch them.

The nurses proceeded to get me prepared for the treatment gave me a bath. Oh no I couldn't wash myself they must do it, slop soap in eyes. I said I can do it. She said no, washing my hair rough as heck. She put shaving soap lather on each sides of my temple and with a safety razor shaved off the hair. Then she put a slip on me and I sat along the wall in the hall until the nurse said you are next. She tried to assist me walking. I said "I can walk". I went into a room in the front hall. There they were two or three Doctors and assistance and nurses[.]

I stepped on a high stool, layed on a bed with rollers on. [T]hey put the sheets over me all but my head. Then they stuck a needle in my right arm at my elbow. The fellow at the head was sponging my temples with a liquid solution then he ajusted something on my head which felt like a iron guard. In a few seconds my eyes felt like heavy balls rolling, the heart beats were louder and louder into a pound. [A] fellow counts then he snaps something and thats all. Then I was wheeled out and some men lay me on a bed the reason I know this is because I watched others latter.²⁰ Anyway approximately in a half hour I woke up feeling like I was froze and with a terrific headache. After supper my head ache seemed some better.

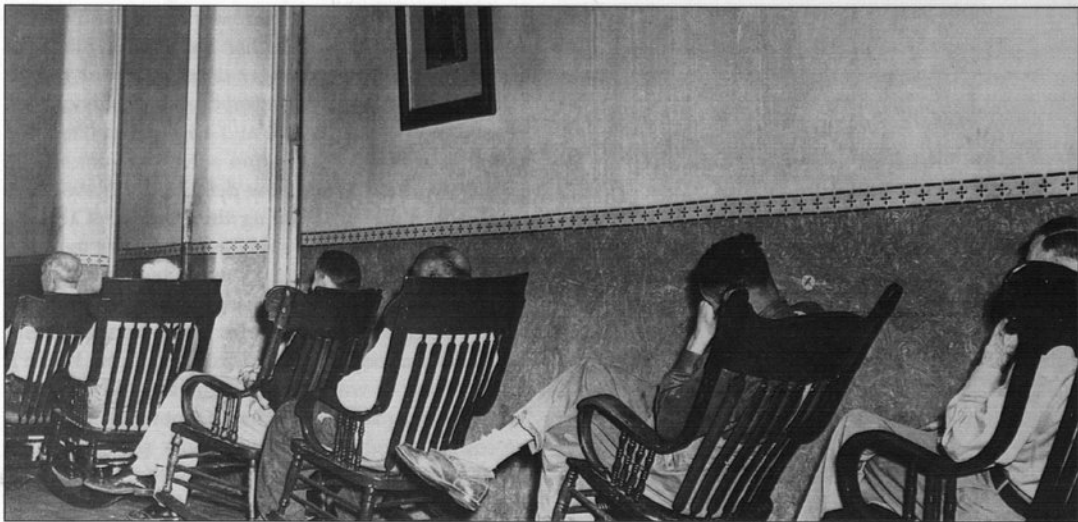
They gave these treatments twice each week. Now I don't know how many times I was knocked Out, but it was a number of them, Electric Shocks[.] I sat on the Stock fenced back porch and embroidered most all the time when I wasn't sweeping or scrubbing.

Thoose buildings are rock of Ages. I sure had plenty of time for concentration and observation. Thoose Sane people dumped, rejected and oppressed[.] It takes a good mind to take it. I would leave my embroidery piece lay on a vacant chair next thing it was gone. [T]he nurse took it wouldnt give it to me for days. I thought it was in the way so

20. Electroshock therapy, or electric convulsive therapy (ECT), is a means of producing therapeutic convulsions used as a substitute for insulin coma or mitrazol convulsive therapy. Originally it was used as a treatment for schizophrenics and severely depressed or suicidal patients. The procedure requires using an anesthetic (usually a barbiturate) and muscle relaxants, such as curare or succinylcholine, although barbiturates were not used during the 1940s. Electrodes would be placed on the patient's temples and brief charges of electrical currents of up to half a second would induce the convulsions. The drugs used in the procedure would cause short-term memory loss. Although ECT does have some short-term benefits for depressed patients, the long-term effects provided almost nothing beneficial. That electroshock therapy was used on depressed patients provides a clue as to the possible mental disorders of the author. However, it seems that in this case ECT was used to make her more docile and cooperative with the nurses and ward attendants, or as a form of punishment, rather than as treatment for depression or schizophrenia. See Harold Rosen, "Electroshock Therapy," *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 10 (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Incorporated, 1980), 198.

I stuck it under the chair she still fussed about it. I finally got the point she was afraid someone would steal it. So latter on I left money in the showers just to see, they never took it, or any thing. There was no toilet papers only on rare occasion, or toilet soap of course it was war time shortage on things I suppose.

sweet" you belong to us I sure didn't know what she was trying to say but figured it out latter. They took me to another building called it a cottage.²¹ The floor was tile. It could have been silver or gold for all I cared. The beds were in a large dormitory. We went up sort of an encline to the dinner tables. It remind-



Patients in the state hospital who did not need to be restrained often were allowed to sit in chairs in the hallways. As the author explains, these patients were not permitted to perform any activity: "I was allowed to sit in the hall along the wall, sit and sit nothing to do."

Sitting on that porch was a small lady who had been very severely burned. [S]he would cry and cry for her two twin boys and ask me to rub her legs. Grand Mothers pushed around. Fear is the ruling force. I always said the greatest enemy was fear.

Yes Reader they bring them there on stretchers now swallow that one.

[O]n Sunday the Superintendent would walk through with his hat in his hands in front of him and Say how do you do[.] I'd say, "How Do You Do." [S]ome Doctors would go tho and thow up their hands and say "don't ask me[.]" The Woman Doctor did the same. She did say to me "[Pearl] you are so

ed me of a hog shoot. There I saw a few persons with the mentality they were born with, their people tired of them and dumped them. Then I learned the woman doctor was in charge of this building who said I was so sweet. She should have stayed for dinner sometime or any of the meals. A few very small portions of food was slopped into individual dinner plates, and set on long tables. [D]eplorable conditions.

21. "The cottage" may have been Cottage B, C, or D, all of which were women's dormitories in the 1940s. See Hauschild, *On the Avenue of Approach*, 46-48.

The woman attendant was not physically, or mentally capable of her job. [A]ll she wanted to do was give them hell. For instance she would show them how to scrub and they did it just the way she said. She would begin having verbal fits. [T]hose poor people[.] She never liked me you know that.

Well they would all be lined up to take a bath. [A]ll stripped waiting for them to cut each ones finger and toe nails. Nurses hollering and yelling for no reasons. The Showers hot water or icy water any thing.

There was a plump blond nurse at the desk one day I noticed there were several patients about her I wondered what they were doing. Pretty soon I heard some one call my name. Now those treatments had caused me to be hard of hearing, anyway I did hear her call so I went over to the desk. This nurse had a large scissors in her hand she opened them raised them at me and said in a furious voice I could stick these clear through you. I stuck out my chest and said Go ahead. She settled in her chair then, and proceeded asking them if they wanted to go to the dentist. That was that. Latter I was passing the woman doctor she paused and said What is this I am hearing about you[?] I looked at her she said "oh I am so sorry." I said, "And You believed it." She said ["What am I to believe" I never said anything else. Remember I had learned to be a prisoner and they don't talk, because they are always wrong I knew that.

Soon the nurses were getting my belongings together things I had never even seen. Two young men escorted me back to the building I had previously been in. I thought the jig is up its shots for me again. When I got back there they never questioned me or anything. However it was some time before I convinced my self they were not going to knock me out with electric shocks. I was permitted to wash dishes and scrub floors and always embroidering all the spare time. Then I got news David my boy was coming home from the Navy. [H]e came to see me. He wanted to see my room so we walked to

it just a short way he sat on the bed to see how comfortable it was. [T]hen we went back towards the visiting room he saw the piano he went over to it and played with one finger the "Marine Song". The nurse bawled us out and said get back into the visiting room. We did. She never did like me after that. Waited her chance to say something. So she walked by my room I had my embroidery piece and skeins of floss on the bed, which I had neatly made as usual. She said provokingly don't put your things on your bed. You are not supposed too. She walked passed many times before and all she said "You are busy" or Hello.

The ladies told me how delighted they were to see David and him playing the piano and things, Gee it was grand. He said he was going to get a house and take me home. I knew it would be.

In the meantime they slung my clothes together and I was changed to up stairs. This was very much better fewer people. I was there two weeks. When I was starting to wash dishes someone said come on get ready you are going home. Dont finish the dishes come on right now. The put my stuff on top a large carton. I boosted it upon my hip and started down the stairs.

I looked down and there [Rick] was doing business transactions at the office. I said hello he looked up and continued.

I got down the steps with my heavy load I should have given the box a shove with my feet[.] Out would have flown leaves I had gathered from the trees on rare occasions while we walked in formation on the cement walk.

How I would like to have left there on my own Merit, but accordin to rules I was under his guardianship.²²

We came to Wichita. His attitude toward me was awful. Now I knew he had another woman before we had the quarrel and he got me put in the Asylum I asked him about it. He said maybe he did have another woman.

22. Bruce and Hetzel, *Kansas: Mental Health Laws in Brief*, 12-14.

He never gave me any money for clothing for a year. Then he gave our daughter ten dollars and said for her to buy me some cotton house dresses. She took the money and promptly gave it to me. And I bought the dresses.

I washed clothes on the board for one year and we had a Washing Machine in Emporia he could have gotten.

I was sewing by hand I suggested he get our sewing machine. It would easily go in the back of the car. His reply was his mother might want to use it. Its still in Emporia.

He took two trips out of the State this summer and never took me. It was months I had never been inside Our car. We never went anywhere together not even the grocery store

Labor day he said he was working straight through, I knew he wasn't[.] I got on the bus went to the station and it was all closed. Our daughter sternly told him about another woman but he never denied it.

Anyway after a year I obtained my civil rights, and I promptly sued for divorce, which was indeed a great privilege. I am now looking for a job. [A]nd if them closed gates open to those people It will all have been for a great purpose tho tragic.

[KH]



In the late 1940s demands for reform in state mental hospitals resulted in gradually improved conditions and care for the patients.