

# SEVEN DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## Attempted Suicide at Kankakee Hospital

The ever-increasing problem of caring for the unfortunate insane as wards of the state of Illinois is little known to the public. To ascertain conditions, Frank Smith, TIMES reporter, former college football player and life guard who tips the scale at 200 pounds, was asked to do this series of articles. In addition to interviewing officials and other persons interested in the problem, he undertook to spend a week as an inmate of the state hospital at Kankakee.

The story of his experiences and the statistics and other data he has secured should prove of interest to every citizen in the state as it is unfolded day by day during the next few weeks in the DAILY TIMES.

—THE EDITORS.

By Frank Smith

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**Attempted suicide in the madhouse!**

A clatter of broken glass. A soul-piercing scream.

Mr. M— was trying the "easiest way" out of his delusions. He was sawing his neck with a piece of window pane!

This was one of my most blood-curdling experiences during seven days as an inmate of the Kankakee State Hospital for the Insane.

"Staff" meetings held every few days in Ward A-1. Patients are brought from other buildings to appear before almost a score of doctors and social service workers, who, by questioning and consultation of records, determine what progress the troubled mind is making toward readjustment.

During "staff" meets, most of the A-1 inmates are herded into the hydro department, to enable the board of inquisition to carry on with a minimum distraction.

On one such occasion I became acquainted with Mr. M—, a 65-year-old suicidal parrotic. At least,

that was his claim, although no one seemed sure of his classification.



Frank Smith

(Continued on page 4, col. 1)

# 7 DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## INMATE TRIES TO SLAY SELF AT KANKAKEE

(Continued from page 3)  
 However, it was common knowledge that he had been an inmate of Kankakee for about nine years.  
**Getting the Booze Boiled Out**

I was sent into the hydrotherapy treatment room to get a cabinet bath. They were definitely determined to boil the booze out of my system. The cabinet bath should have done it, for it certainly boiled. Seated within this machine, I was given the full benefit of the 48 electric bulbs, which produced an effect comparable to a nice, leisurely swim in a vat of boiling oil.

I enjoyed the treatment for the exhilarating effect it induced when followed by the soothing splashing of hot and cold water alternately. There is one grievance I wish to register, however, and that is against the unnecessary economy of the attendant in the use of towels. Twice, while stripping for the cabinet, I saw him turn over the towel used by the preceding patient, and then replace it on the stool for me.

Following my treatment, I wandered into the room where the rest of A1's boys were waiting for the staff to finish its deliberations. I joined several of my roommates who were gazing intently through a heavily-screened door to the "tubroom," where I had been subjected to a 15-hour soaking in dirty river water.

I scarcely had reached the door when an irate attendant on the inside shouted at us: "Get the hell away from that door, youse guys, unless you want to be dipped in here."

No one who had even heard of the "tubroom" wanted to be "dipped." And everyone, apparently, had heard of it. We scattered, asking each other as we fled what it was we weren't supposed to see.

**'I'll Kill You, You Damned Witch'**  
 About the room, sitting on wooden chairs, squatting on the wall benches or roaming about muttering to themselves, was a group of inmates I had never seen before. All of them seemed of the so-called disturbed type. A bulky Frenchman, clutching a pink paper candy box close to his ill-fitting pajamas, dashed about seeking a friendly ear.

"I was the manager of the 'wholesale-retail' for 20 years. They finally got me though. But I've got all the patents for making soap. They can't take them away from me. I've got them in this box. And it's funny about this box. You couldn't open it with dynamite. That's one of my patents too."

In a corner of the room a Negro sat on a bench, clasping a damp sheet to his shivering body. He looked as though he had just come out of the "tub." Suddenly his head began to sway to a crazy rhythmic formula which he babbled over and over again. Faster and faster became his bobbing motion and the weird tempo increased until it seemed his tongue must be convulsed and his head fly off into space.

"You damned witch, I'll kill you," he chanted. "I'll kill you, I'll kill you. You damned witch, I'll kill you. I'll kill you, you witch, I'll kill you. I'll kill you, you witch, I'll kill you."

## PRIVATE SWIM POOL—NO, KANKAKEE RESERVOIR



(TIMES Photo)  
 TIMES Reporter Frank Smith, who spent "Seven Days in the Madhouse," pauses before open reservoir while wandering about grounds of state hospital for insane at Kankakee. This reservoir is source of hospital's drinking water.

you, you witch. You damned witch, I'll kill you!"  
 An attendant, passing with an armful of towels, temporarily broke the spell. The threat: "Shut up, Rastus, or you'll go back to the bull pen."  
 Rastus thereafter whispered his warning to the "damned witch."

### Scarred Mr. M Enters the Room

A young fellow, dressed drug-store-cowboy fashion with a fireman's blue shirt and a yellow tie, bummed me for a smoke. He did so in the sign language. His hushed voice produced indistinguishable sounds instead of words. While we smoked in the lavatory he tried his best to impress his thoughts upon me with word and gesture.

Falling to arouse my sympathy, he began working involved mathematical problems on the wall, using his finger for a pencil. Four columns of unseen figures he jotted on the wall, multiplied and divided, added and subtracted, turning to me for confirmation of his results. I agreed with all his computations, assuming him to be a genius.

Somebody shoved Mr. M into the room, and he at once captured my interest. His temples were scarred and his neck all across the back was scored with slashes, freshly painted with mercurochrome. Louie L., the "tub" room trusty, greeted me from the door, and explained about Mr. M.

"He's nuts," said Louie. "He's got bad blood, and he tried to kill himself with a piece of window pane. Don't pay no attention to him. Say I've got some swell socks, brand new. I'll sell 'em cheap to you, cause you're my pal."

I wasn't interested in socks at the time. Not with Mr. M willing to tell me about his suicide attempt.

### \$3,000 Food Bill Urges Suicide

Why had he tried it? Mr. M had reasons.  
 "Oh, sir," he related, "it's just terrible. That's the only way out for me. You see, they don't want me around here any more. I owe them too much."  
 "You owe? Whom do you owe so much?"

"The different wards. I've been here for years and years, and yesterday they told me I'd have to getle up or they'd put me out on the street. My bill for food is \$3,000 now. It's growing bigger every day. And I can't pay. I simply can't pay. Nobody wants me in their ward after my bill runs up so high."

I tried to reassure him. "You don't owe anybody for your food. This is a state hospital. The taxpayers pay for you here."  
 "Oh, no, sir," he insisted. "I certainly owe them. And what have I to look forward to?—His eyes bulged with fear and his arms stretched out to ward off some danger he alone could see.  
 "If you could only see what I see," he told me. "I can see into

eternity. That's where I'm going. And they don't want me there if I can't pay my way. Just think! Oh God, just think! Here I'm going into eternity and I can't pay my way. That's why I kicked that window out today."  
 "They stopped me before I could finish. They stopped me because they want to put me out on the street. If only the glass had been a little sharper. If only I had a sharp butcher knife. What a beautiful job I could do."

### Light-Fingered Louis Peddles His Socks

I chuckled and reached for another cigarette, offering one to Mr. M. He refused me.  
 "Thank you, sir, I don't use the weed. I've been wicked enough in my day. That's why I'm here. You see, sir, I have bad blood. That's from my transgressing when I was young. Oh, sir, I tell you it's terrible."

Mr. M snook his head sadly, hoping for a time when he would find a nice sharp butcher knife. Louie L., beckoned me from the door.  
 "Come here, sport," he called, and led the way into an adjoining alcove where he slept. A bag hung at the head of his bed. The bag itself bulged suspiciously.  
 "Pal," he said, "I've got some swell socks here. I'll give 'em to you for whatever you offer. Nobody can say Louie ever beat a pal out a dime."

He held up for examination a pair of white cotton socks. They were heavy, but indignantly new. I had noticed the hint of a new hole in the pair of black silk socks I was wearing. I had some more in my bag in the clothes room. But the cotton socks seemed desirable.

"I'll trade you the ones I'm wearing," I bargained.  
 Louie stooped to examine the texture of my socks. He was satisfied. "I'll wash 'em out and sell them to somebody. I won't lose on the deal. But you're sure gettin' a bargain."  
 I pulled my socks off and put on the new pair. Mr. Houdini, my other pal, came around the corner expectantly. "Louie, ain't he making you for anything is he?"

I expressed my satisfaction with the deal, and Louie, somewhat abashed, launched into a personal conversation with Houdini. The latter poked around Louie's bed, knowingly.

### Three-Edged File for Making Keys

Later when we were alone, he told me the socks I had got were regular. "Oh, no, sir," he insisted. "I certainly owe them. And what have I to look forward to?—His eyes bulged with fear and his arms stretched out to ward off some danger he alone could see.  
 "If you could only see what I see," he told me. "I can see into

lar state issue, and I could ask for them in my own ward and get them for nothing.

"Don't let that guy sell you anything. He peddled three watches the other day. Dollar watches, but Louie sold them for a quarter on commission for some bug who wanted tobacco money. One of them had a minute hand, and another had no hands at all, but they ticked, and some nuts with a quarter got something to amuse them."

Houdini looked around to see that no one was within hearing.  
 "I just saw something that I'd like to lay my hands on. A swell little three-eyed file."  
 I saw, or thought I saw, the significance of his desire. "But," I protested, "a file like that wouldn't do any good on these window bars."  
 "No, of course not," he replied. "But it's just what I need to make keys out of spoon handles."

Back in A-1, Mrs. Ray called to me. Dr. Sullivan wanted to see me. I followed her into the infirmary. "Hello, Doc," I greeted Sullivan.  
 "How are you feeling, Ford?" he asked.  
 "Pretty good. Still a little jittery. I could stand a very little shot without any danger."  
 "Do you know where you are?"  
 "Sure. In a nut house."  
 "Do you know why you're here?"  
 "Yeah. I guess I've been drinking a little too much lately. I've been bothering my brother, Eddie, for money, and he began to worry about my mind. He talked me into coming down here for a rest. I'm feeling swell now."

### Reveals Toils of Demon Rum

Dr. Sullivan watched me with searching eyes. Mrs. Ray silently stood by during the interview.  
 "Tell me, Ford, how long have you been drinking?"  
 "You mean this time, Doc? Maybe a couple of weeks."  
 "No, I mean when did you start?"  
 "Oh, that's hard to say. I suppose I've been drinking off and on for years, like most young fellows."  
 "That's a fact, Ford. But you

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been drinking since you left school. Isn't it a fact you can't leave the stuff alone?"

Boy, oh, boy! What a swell send-off my "brother" had given me. "You realize what it's doing to you, Ford? Your mind will deteriorate. You'll get the booze out of your system and leave here, and then before long you'll be back to stay for good."

He dismissed me with a nod, and Mrs. Ray looked on sadly, as if to say, "Yes, it's a shame, but that's just what's going to happen."

As I left them I was almost convinced that I ought to consecrate my remaining life to spreading the gospel of the W. C. T. U. white lapel ribbon among the members of the Fourth Estate, my poor, misguided newspaper friends. I'd show them. I'd prove to them the folly of it all. If only I had a little shot to stir up my enthusiasm, I'd compose a lasting blast against the demon rum.

Before another day had fairly begun, I felt the need for a couple of good shots.  
 Mr. M had been sent into ward A-1 to spend the night while they figured out a nice place to put him where his neck would be safe from the temptation of jagged window glass. He was assigned to two-bed room on the west side of the hall and retired early.

### Epileptic Grabs Suicidal Maniac

Morning dawned dully, with prospects of another sumptuous spread of rotted wheat and bughouse coffee to widen for me the growing void between Chicago's palatable breakfasts and Kankakee's State Hospital for the Insane.

I was swinging into the hallway, intent on getting to a wash bowl before too thick a scum had formed, and having another douse of iodine on my left hand, which was infected from a dirt soaked for 15 hours during the curly "water cure."  
 A clatter of broken glass attracted my attention, but occupied with personal needs, my mind failed to register the sound until a piercing scream stopped me dead in my tracks.

A few feet in front of me, Charlie X, an epileptic, emerged from a room pulling Mr. M. by the arm. Mr. M. clutched a piece of window pane. I hurried past, snatched the glass from his extended hand, and asked Charlie what had happened.  
 "He kicked the window out with his shoe," Charlie related, "and was picking out a place to lie on the bed so the blood would drip on the carpet."

I don't know which frightened me most—Mr. M.'s attempted suicide or the prospect of Charlie's passing into a fit. I decided then, that even with inspiration, I couldn't in good conscience try to convert my friends to the cause of temperance.  
 Mr. M. moaned loudly to me: "You see, they won't give me a chance. They want to throw me out on the street. If I only had a nice butcher knife."

In his article Thursday Frank Smith describes how the Kankakee State Hospital for the Insane disregards recommendations of state health authorities that its drinking water supply be purified to prevent disease.

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