

# SEVEN DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## Water Perils Inmates at Kankakee

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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**Contaminated water endangering the health and lives of 4,000 helpless patients at the Kankakee State Hospital for the Insane!**

**Open reservoirs, traps for dust and bacteria and refuse; breeding grounds for potential epidemics of typhoid, dysentery.**

**Open reservoirs—swimming holes for rats!**

**Lady Luck, or an ever-watchful Guardian Angel, has saved the madhouse from the ravages of deadly epidemics. Saved it thus far, that is. Warded off the threatening charge of the Pale Horseman of the Apocalypse.**

**But Lady Luck is fickle, and even Angels nod.**

Insanitary water supplies, which have consistently failed to meet the approval of the state department of public health threaten not only the insane patients but attendants and doctors and nurses as well.

In the meantime the state health authorities make periodical analyses of drinking water, which lies exposed for an average of four days before being given to inmates; advise the welfare authorities of their findings of colon bacteria, point out dangers and suggest remedies.

So what happens? So this happens—Lady Luck gets an encouraging pat on the back; the Guardian Angel gets the wink to stall off the Apocalyptic jockey a while longer.

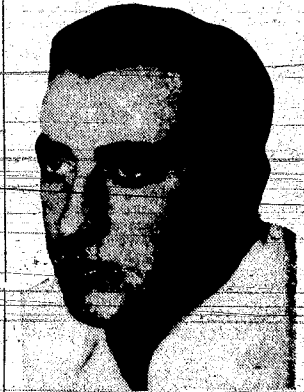
### Drinking Cups Break State's Regulations

Disease-carrying common drinking cups, contrary to state law for the past 24 years. Fire-trap buildings, poor fire-fighting facilities, despite years of orders and recommendations and pleas by the state fire marshal's office. Dirty raw river water for bathing, unfiltered, unsterilized. Contaminated drinking water, despite continuous warnings by the state health department.

When the boss suggested my trip to the madhouse to investigate reported abuses and insanitary conditions he painted the picture with pastel shades:

"The rest will do you good. Lying around in the sun, building up on good, wholesome food—regular hours, good country air. You ought to come back a new man."

I reviewed those parting words often as I sat in the toilet-smoker puffing on a cigaret. "Mel" would probably be there, or come in before I left. "Mel" is a professional man who never got completely weaned from the bottle. Dignified, cultured, the place was more repugnant to him than it was to me. Committed



Frank Smith

as an alcoholic with deterioration, he claimed he was railroaded by a brother.

Investigation proves his story a bit exaggerated. But he suffers there just the same. We suffered together.

### Drinking After Tony Dangerous

We were finishing a smoke one day when Tony came in. Poor Tony—every one had a soft spot for him. An ugly, malignant growth had eaten away part of his tongue. Tony would show it to you. He couldn't swallow solid food. He could scarcely talk.

Tony took up one of the two com-

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# 7 DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## GERM-INFESTED WATER PERILS STATE'S INSANE

## OPEN RESERVOIR JUST A CATCH-BASIN FOR DIRT



Drinking water for inmates at state hospital for insane at Kankakee stands in this open reservoir for average of four days before use, being exposed meanwhile to bacteria-laden dust. TIMES Reporter Frank Smith, who spent "Seven Days in the Madhouse," reveals that dead birds and rats were found in reservoir.

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mon drinking cups and began to gargle his diseased throat. A moment before another inmate had washed his false teeth in the other cup. Tony slobbered when he gargled. He couldn't help it. But we had to drink out of the same cups. Mel looked at me disgustedly. We walked out. He turned to me as we passed the door. "And they send guys here just for drinking nice, sterile whisky."

I had to smile. A laugh wasn't possible by that time. "Well," I contributed. "I suppose we should be thankful we have nice filtered well water to scoop up with our hands, anyway."

"Oh yeah!" came the answer. "Do you think it's filtered?" "Filtered or sterilized or something," was my thought. "Just you ask somebody that knows," I was advised.

### Water Is Collected in Open Reservoir

Investigation disclosed the whole sorry situation. The water used for cooking and drinking at the madhouse is obtained from two deep wells. It is good water, at the start, when it is discharged from the wells. But after that it is subject to contamination from a number of sources.

The well water is collected in an open concrete reservoir of two million gallons capacity at the well site. This reservoir, looking like an ideal swimming pool, is close to the Kankakee river. A wire fence surrounds the pool to exclude inquisitive inmates. It fails in its purpose. It offers no protection against animals, dust or dirt.

As early as 1927 the department of public health, following extensive inspection of the water supply, warned the hospital and the department of public welfare of the dangerous condition and recommended improvements.

Regularly since then it has been reporting the presence of bacillus coli, a bacteria of intestinal origin. At least since 1932 it has recommended that the reservoir be covered and made watertight.

In June, last year, analysis of the water showed such a dangerous condition that instead of mailing the report of its findings the health officers wired a warning to the hospital.

### Water Is Reported as Contaminated

In a subsequent report to A. L. Bowen, director of the department of public welfare, in charge of all state hospitals and penal institutions, the health officials designated the Kankakee State hospital water supply "Contaminated." The report tells of the finding of a dead rat, two dead birds and rubbish in one section of the reservoir.

"With these conditions existing," reads the report, "we believe the institution has been fortunate in not experiencing a water-borne epidemic. The present conditions constitute a potential danger to the health of the inmates. It is recommended that immediate action be taken to correct conditions at this institution and follow all recommendations given above."

The recommendations were:

1. The covering of the open reservoir with a watertight top.

2. The immediate breaking of a dangerous cross connection between the river supply and the well water, which, due to possible leaky valves, constituted a danger of epidemic.

(The report mentions a somewhat similar condition in a manufacturing plant which resulted in several hundred dysentery cases, over 200 typhoid cases, and 15 deaths.)

3. Adequate and continuous chlorination of the drinking water until the reservoir is covered.

4. Rearrangement of waste water flume so that suction lines from service pumps will not pass through waste water.

It seems the recommendations fell upon deaf ears. Lady Luck still holds the bag. The Guardian Angel may feel wilted, but hangs on nonetheless.

### Houdini Fails to Get Magic Key

Mr. Houdini was transferred finally before he had obtained for me the master key which would open any door in the institution. The price was to be a dollar. Later I learned that Mr. Houdini had trifled, perhaps unknowingly, with the truth. Old-timers told me, certainly; there was probably a contraband key in every ward. But they wouldn't open every door in the asylum. That is, not quite every door. The hospital ward, for instance.

Before he left Ward A-1 Houdini took me aside and gave me some older brother advice.

"Watch out for these damned stool-pigeons. They'll suck you in and sell you out for lousy little privileges."

"If you decide to make a break for it watch your step. Take your time. Do anything they ask you. After about three or four weeks you'll be transferred to a work ward. They might put you on the coal pile, you're big enough. That's O. K. with you. It gives you a chance to look around."

"When you do beat it," continued Houdini, "hide out till after dark. They'll toot the whistle as soon as they miss you, but if you're smart you can make the I. C. freight tracks before you're caught."

### 'Just a Champ,' Houdini Confesses

I was interested in knowing how he happened to be brought back, since he knew all the angles.

"Just a Champ," he admitted. "I let two other guys out with me. One of 'em got lonesome and was back for breakfast. The other bird goes right down into Kankakee, loads up on yulki dok, and gets

thrown in the can. He was back here for dinner. I didn't get caught for two weeks. Drunk."

We parted sadly. A few days later, while I was taking my second walk with the exercise crew from Ward A-1, Houdini pounded on the window of another building, a barred window. He waved to me in greeting, made a motion simulating the turning of a key, and shrugged his shoulders disconsolately. I wondered later what his commission would have been on that dollar sale had he got me the key.

### Women Patients Go Through Antics

The promise of a movie show lightened for a whole day the drabness of pacing back and forth the long prison hallway. A movie was a high point in the week of a nut-house inmate, to be approached expectantly, squeezing out every drop of anticipatory joy.

Will Rogers playing in "The County Chairman" was the attraction offered us at the theater above

the dance hall in the assembly building.

That is, Will Rogers was the attraction for the others. For me the big show was the audience itself.

We were seated toward the rear on the right hand side. The left section was occupied by women. Directly behind us, with a vacant row of seats separating us—just in case—were about 100 epileptics.

As the women began streaming in I turned in my seat to watch their entrance. They came in orderly, closely supervised by their attendants, filed down the aisle and took their seats.

One woman coming down the aisle went through all the motions of a breast stroke swimmer, except the leg kick. She was swimming to her entertainment. Another clutched to her bosom an odd assortment of boxes. Probably her treasures. Another entered smoothing her bobbed hair. A few steps further on she grasped the hair with both hands, tearing out listful. But before she was seated she was again smoothing it, using her fingers as a comb.

Friendly banter passed between the men's and women's sections. "Yoo hoo, darling." "That's my baby there." "Hello, Charlie."

The picture began to the prolonged applause and shouting of the women and men. Shouts of "whee" and "whoopie" greeted a favorite actor or a touching love scene. The latter seemed to affect the women particularly. Encouragement and warnings were given the silver screen actors, when danger threatened, or cupid lagged in his work.

### Keeps Up Clapping Through Picture

The section behind us was having a good time. I had noticed particularly two young lads sitting side by side. They didn't seem to talk, but grinned at one another continually. When the picture began to unroll one of them gazed with open mouth at the moving drama. The other lowered his head, kept his eyes glued to the floor, but began a clapping which lasted throughout the picture. The attendant made a few futile attempts to silence this annoying applause but finally gave up impatiently. You get used to that sort of thing in the nuthouse.

Returning to our ward after the picture, I learned that my "brother Eddie" was coming to visit me the following day. That was good news. I'd tell him to start the machinery working to get me out of the mad hole, or take the consequences upon himself. I was beginning to feel that with a few more days I couldn't, in good conscience, ask to be released as a sane man. The place was getting on my nerves.

I was beginning to fear I'd become a real "candidate for Bedlam."

"Johnny Ford" in his next article tells how he put in his "three-day notice" and was released from the Kankakee hospital, even though the director was reluctant to allow him his freedom.

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