

# SEVEN DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## Freedom! Reporter Leaves Kankakee

Frank Smith today concludes the story of his experiences in the State Hospital for the Insane at Kankakee. Mr. Smith was committed as an alcoholic, spent a week in the hospital and has reported conditions at this state institution as he observed them.

By Frank Smith

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The heart throbs of a new grad leaving the hallowed halls of his alma mater were strangely absent when I became an alumnus of Kankakee state hospital for the insane.

Maybe my feelings of escape were not so strange after all, in view of the seven days I had spent in the bizarre, barred confines of fire-trap halls; drinking contaminated water from repugnant common drinking cups, bathing in unsterilized mud wash from the turbid Kankakee river.

"Johnny Ford, there's a visitor to see you."

Attendant "Denny" Dennison's voice awakened me from my melancholy reveries. I hurried to the visitor's room and found Willis O'Rourke, DAILY TIMES reporter, my quondam brother, "Edward C. Ford," awaiting me in the doorway.

"Hello, Johnny," he greeted me. Then after we were alone, he looked at my sagging waistline and whistled. "What the hell are you doing, dieting?" (I lost eight pounds during my week in the madhouse.)

"Yes," I answered him. "I'm saving up for the juiciest steak I can order, chargeable to the expense account. How about getting me out of this joint?"

### Plans Balked in Prison-Like Ward

I explained to him that it might be a month before I would be transferred to a ward, or allowed to come and go about the grounds at will. Had there been any prospect of getting about, I was prepared to spend a couple of weeks, but locked up in the prison-like Ward A1, I was not advancing my plans to inspect thoroughly the whole institution.

"You can leave today—if you can get out," he consoled me.

He inspected my healing hand, which had become infected during my 15-hour "sedative" bath in the murky river water. He looked at the scars on my two arms and examined the black and blue bruises below my shoulders—relics of my struggle with attendants when I entered the madhouse as a depressed alcoholic.

"Those," I told him, "are only marks of attendant efficiency. I have no kick coming. I guess I deserved them. I had to be violent to get into the hydro department."

We discussed the steps necessary for my release. I had entered the madhouse as a voluntary patient, in accordance with a section of the Illinois lunacy laws, (chapter 85, section 37), adopted June 21, 1893, providing that any person in the early stages of insanity, desiring treatment, may enter a state hospital through the county court, and is eligible to leave on three days' notice.

### Decide to Ask for Outside Work

The three-day notice clause was inserted to afford ample time in which to commit a patient through the county court. It is deemed inadvisable to release him. The thought frightened me—maybe they'd decide I shouldn't be turned loose on an unsuspecting world.

We decided that as Willis left he should see Dr. Sullivan and ask him if I couldn't be put at some outside job where I'd have the benefits of fresh air and sunlight. If this request was refused I was to put in my notice that evening.

As I was bidding my "brother Eddie" farewell, Mrs. Ray came up to bid him goodnight.

"Mrs. Ray," I interposed, "I'm putting in my notice to leave."

She flashed me with a quizzical look. "What do you mean, Ford, you're not thinking of leaving us so soon? You needn't worry about 'putting in a notice' for a couple of

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# 7 DAYS IN THE MADHOUSE

## FREE AT LAST! REPORTER ENDS ASYLUM STAY

### OUT OF THE MADHOUSE



TIMES Reporter Frank Smith, with his "brother," Willis O'Rourke, leaves state hospital for insane at Kankakee, ending "Seven Days in the Madhouse."

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months yet. You've been committed here."

"I haven't been committed," I argued, looking to "Eddie" for confirmation. My heart sank. Suppose the papers had been mixed up, and I really was committed!

"I'm a voluntary," I insisted. "I can put in my three days notice whenever I want."

Mrs. Ray looked to "Eddie," a bit surprised. She accepted his explanation that I was a voluntary patient, but doubted that I'd be permitted to leave on such short notice.

"I'm sure Dr. Sullivan won't want you to be discharged so soon. You have only been here a few days."

### Three-Day Notice Is Duly Filed

Eddie left, and before long I had the news of his talk with Dr. Sullivan. He told the doctor that I wanted to go to work.

The doc's reply confirmed my fears. "What, he wants to get out to work? I know these fellows. He's just about got the alcohol out of his system and he thinks he's well. The first thing you know, he'll be putting in his three-day notice to leave. He hasn't been here long enough yet."

My next act was to put in my three-day notice.

I met him coming down the hallway. "Say, Doc, may I have a word with you?" I asked.

He stopped to hear me. "I suppose you're feeling fine and want to go home? Not yet. You'd better stay here for awhile."

"That's just what I want to do, Doc. I feel fine. I'm off the 'hard stuff' for life, and I want to put in my notice, as provided in the Illinois statutes."

"Ford, you're not in a fit condition to leave, now. You've got the booze out of you, and you think

you're ready for another drink. You take my advice and stay here for a while.

As Doc walked away, I went into the clothesroom, and asked Johnny N. to get me a "three-day" form. I filled it out in the proper form, and gave it to an attendant with instructions to send it to Dr. Sullivan.

I wasn't quite sure what action would be taken, but I was determined that if I wasn't released by Saturday, I'd resort to violence, tubs or no tubs.

### Wardmates Discount Chance of Release

My ward mates, naturally were interested in the outcome of my request. Those who had not listened to my talk with the doctor had been informed by eye-witnesses.

All of them wished me well, but few held out any encouragement. "You'll never make it," I was told. "You'll serve your minimum three months like any other alcoholic."

I was disconsolate at the prospect of something happening to keep me longer than I had intended to stay. I went into the lavatory-smoker to soothe my troubled mind with a cigaret. A giant of a man, a Polish blacksmith, was giving Rolls Royces away.

"Sure," he was saying, "I got plenty cars. I got dozen cars. I got six Rolls Royce. You can have a Rolls Royce, and you too. I don't need so many cars. I got too many flat building, too. I got twenty-six flat building. Everybody here can have flat building. No rent."

That night, the philanthropic smithy tried to grab Johnny N.'s bed. He took a liking to the bed, and probably would have traded in a string of flat buildings and a whole fleet of Rolls-Royces for it.

But Johnny wanted the bed himself. He pushed the smithy out of the two-bed room. The smithy drew back his fist to deliver a haymaker.

Little Bill, one of the kitchen boys, stepped in and drove a sharp right to the smithy's jaw, setting him on his haunches. The smithy picked himself up and walked away.

Later during the evening, he became unmanageable, and was carried off to the hydro, for a setto of tubbing.

### Strange Method of Washing Dishes

Following the evening meal of macaroni, unflavored milk, tea and bread, I made a scouting visit to the kitchen. The boys were washing dishes in the strangest fashion I had ever seen. No soap was used. The dishes were held under the hot water faucet, until it looked like the debris from the meal was washed off. Then they were given to the dish dryer.

I was a little surprised. The department of agriculture of the state of Illinois has some very excellent regulations for the proper washing of dishes. It requires the use of soap or inorganic cleansing agents, and provides fines ranging from \$10 to \$50 for any violation.

into the hospital?

A.—Well, Doc, I was feeling happy that day. There wouldn't have been any trouble if somebody hadn't crossed me and torn the buttons off my shirt.

He should remember I was a happy drunk when I entered his office, slapping him on the back and offering him a drink.

A few more questions followed by my promise to conduct myself in such a manner that Kankakee state hospital would never again be bothered with me, and I was practically free.

"I suppose I can leave now?" I asked.

### Day of Deliverance Far Off for Some

"You'd better wait for your brother to come, if he will come. I hope he comes soon, as long as this is over. I notified him you had put in your three-day notice."

I went out into the ward, and envisioned that juicy steak I would soon eat. I would be out of the madhouse before the day was over.

The boys were waiting to hear the outcome of my inquisition. I didn't have to tell them. They could read my face. Some of them offered congratulations. Some of them walked away a little down-hearted.

Their day of deliverance was a long way off, if it ever arrived.

"Eddie" arrived shortly after noon. I was hurried into the barber room, where a week before my "violence" had begun. A quick shave removed the bristles.

My bag was brought out and my clothes tumbled into it. I signed a receipt for everything returned to me. The unopened bottle of whisky which I had brought into the hospital was missing. But I didn't stop to argue.

I bade everyone farewell and told Mrs. Ray I hoped I'd never see her again. She got a laugh out of that. But she didn't share my optimism.

"Ford," she said, "I'll bet you're rot out of here two hours before you have a drink."

Smart woman. But poor guess work. It took us at least ten minutes to reach the nearest tavern.

"Set 'em up," I ordered, and I leave the bottle uncorked. I'm celebrating.

Turning to "Eddie," I remarked, "This is probably one of those red letter days you read about. Boy, you haven't any appreciation of what it means to get out of a madhouse. Never again." My first drink in seven days was downed with dispatch.

"Here's to good old Kankakee," I said. "And may I never see the inside of its ivy'd walls again."

viction of violators.

Of course these regulations apply to establishments having food and drink for sale, and are not enforceable in mere state hospitals serving insane persons.

At last the seventh day rolled around. I had heard no more about my three-day notice except that it had been delivered. Still, I was not surprised when one of the attendants called me and said I was to report to Dr. Sullivan in the staff room.

I went into the room a little scared. Maybe I wouldn't be able to pass the examination. Maybe they'd find I really belonged in the nut-house.

Dr. Sullivan greeted me, motioned me to a chair. The staff secretary, Miss Dorraine Kane, nodded pleasantly.

### Doctor Begins Mentality Quiz

"You may put down at the start, Doc directed the secretary, "that he was neat and clean when he came into the room."

Followed a brief questioning on my history. "Where was I born? What relatives had I? Where had I attended school? Etc.

Q.—"Now Ford, do you know where you are?" A.—Yes sir, I'm in the Kankakee nuthouse.

Q.—Do you know how you got here? A.—I've been drinking too much, and my brother thought my mind was slipping. I agreed to come down here for a rest, but I expected to be outside.

The questioning followed the same trend used a few days before when the doctor talked to me in the ward infirmary. Then he switched to general alertness questions:

Q.—Who is the vice president of the U. S.? A.—John Nance Garner.

Q.—Who was the former vice president? A.—Charles Curtis.

Q.—How much is 8 times 10? A.—Eighty.

Q.—Then how much is 10 times 12? A.—120.

Q.—All right, now 12 times 11? A.—132.

Q.—And the capital of Illinois is? A.—Springfield.

I was a little sorry good. Driven on some hard questions.

Q.—Now, Ford, do you ever have any violent spells while you are drinking? Ever get into any fights? A.—No sir, I'm usually a happy, care-free drinker.

Q.—What about the day you came