

D. The Operation of the Enston Home:

As noted above, since 1882, the government of the Enston Home has been in the hands of a self-perpetuating, twelve-member board of trustees. Though independent, the board reports annually to the city council, and includes as an ex-officio thirteenth member the mayor of Charleston. New trustees, nominated by the board itself, must be residents of Charleston County. Members rotate between various standing committees, including the executive committee and those dealing with finances, applications, buildings and grounds, and rules and by-laws. Officers are elected once a year; meetings are held once each month at Memorial Hall (though in the nineteenth century, the board met twice each month). While there have as yet been no female trustees, the current board is considering women candidates for its upcoming positions.

Since its opening in 1888, day-to-day management of the Home has been the responsibility of a paid, live-in superintendent. The superintendent makes monthly reports to the board on the health of the inmates (as they are sometimes still called), the condition of the property, and the repairs and supplies needed. Thomas Bonnell was the first superintendent. He was followed by "Miss Lula Bonnell" (his sister?). Since that time, most superintendents have been women. Past superintendents include Matilda H. Westmoreland (1901-1913), M. Caroline Robertson (1910s), O. H. Clarke (1930s), and A. C. Grooms (1960s). Along with his or her other duties, the superintendent oversees the staff, which currently consists of two groundskeepers. In the past, the Home also employed a resident doctor (who lived in one of the cottages), a nurse, and security guard (at the turn of the century this position was filled by a Charleston city police officer).

In 1884 the board published what appears to be its first "Rules of the Board of Trustees and Roles of Officers and Committees." An 1889 edition of this was expanded to include rules concerning the superintendent's duties, as well as the admission and conduct of inmates. Here it was stated that the superintendent would live on-site, keep regular office hours at Memorial Hall (and be available "to answer telephone calls"), inspect every cottage at least every two days, report monthly to the board on the condition of the property, report immediately any inmate complaints, and be paid \$40 per month. While his predecessors were assigned one of the cottage units, current superintendent Paul Helton is the first to live in the former Infirmary.

Though neither William nor Hannah Enston left any record of their views on the subject, their grand-niece, Jessie Butler (who lived at the Home from 1956 until her death in 1975) did provide her criteria for the ideal superintendent. In a letter to board member James Howe, dated February 3, 1969, Butler wrote: "A superintendent should be a lady or a gentleman, educated, with an understanding of and sympathy for elderly people. She should play no favorites, be kind but firm." It was Butler's opinion that of all the superintendents she had known -- and she claimed to have known them all -- Lula Bonnell was the one most suited for the job.

Superintendent Westmoreland's monthly reports, dating from between 1901 and 1906, are preserved among the records at Memorial Hall, and together they provide an vivid picture

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of the Home's day-to-day operations in its early years. Most of these reports were taken up with information on the inmates' health, their deaths and departures, vacancies, the condition of buildings and grounds, and requests for wood, oil, and repairs. Sometimes, however, Westmoreland's letters adopted a surprisingly personal tone. Her devotion to the Home and the inmates came through at these moments, and while she generally found the place in good order and the inmates in good health, her words could betray the stress of the job. Indeed, caring for such a large facility and so many elderly and infirm people must often have been a difficult task, especially with the small staff the Home maintained. "I am very anxious for the Trustees to give us a Physician for the Home," Westmoreland wrote on September 23, 1902, "as I have upon several occasions seen the ladies very much neglected in sickness, and often it is hard to get a doctor here when needed." On February 26, 1906, she wrote that "our nurse . . . has really broken down from hard work." In July 1906, when Westmoreland went on vacation, her sister, S. R. Kinlock, filled in for her. In her report for July 6, Kinlock concluded by saying, "I will try not to worry, but go on and do my best, until I turn the duties over to my sister, which will be very soon now, and I am sure it will be a relief to me — for it is not a very enviable position to fill."

The terms of admission contained in the 1889 "Rules of the Board" were virtually identical with those specified in Enston's will (i.e., that inmates be "old and infirm, in poverty, of good, honest character, and decent, over the age of forty-five years, . . . no(t) lunatic(s), . . . (and) residents of the city of Charleston"). The earliest applications for admission to the Home included an extract from Enston's will, and a statement regarding the benefits offered. Applicants were asked to provide their names, current address, address for the past ten years, age, place of birth, marital status, names of close relatives, means of support and other financial resources, and three local references. (Current application forms are nearly identical to these originals.) Several early applications are preserved among the board's records at Memorial Hall. A fairly typical example, dated April 24, 1889, is that of Isabella E. Taylor. On her form, Taylor wrote that she was 69 years of age, a widow, with "no settled home, and . . . entirely destitute." She claimed that her income was derived from "what I can earn by sewing . . . My son helps to support me, but he is abroad, at present in Arizona." Her application was accepted. By February 1889 the Home's nineteen cottages were already full, housing about sixty inmates.

Benefits for successful applicants included lodging, fuel for cooking and heating, water, and lights — all provided free of charge. These benefits are still provided, though since July 1980, a \$20 — now \$40 — monthly operational fee has been charged to offset the increased cost of utilities. Residents pay an additional \$120 per annum for optional air conditioning. Then as now, inmates were expected to have enough regular income — usually derived from a pension or savings, or sometimes provided by a sponsor — to pay for their own clothing, food, and major medical expenses. The *News and Courier* for February 23, 1889, reported that the Home employed a resident physician "who occupies one of the cottages, and attends to the inmates" (8). (Westmoreland's September 23, 1906, report, cited above, indicated that this doctor was no longer in attendance.) In 1933 the Infirmary was added to provide care for minor medical conditions and a place for convalescence. A rule book issued in 1938 stated that inmates using the infirmary were to be charged \$15 per month to cover the cost of meals. Medicines and surgical dressings

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were not covered, and no acutely or chronically ill inmates, those whose sickness required bed treatment, were to be admitted.

Rules for inmates in 1889 were simple and brief. It was demanded only that they share common spaces in the cottages, keep the facilities clean and free of damage (taking special care with the water closet and bath), notify the superintendent when planning to be absent overnight, and have no pets apart from cats or caged birds. Amendments and additions to these rules were published or noted periodically, and these became increasing complicated.

Following the renovations of 1927, notices were passed out to the inmates pertaining to the exact type and quantity of furniture they were allowed to have in the cottages. A note posted in all the cottages, dated May 8, 1928, limited inmate furniture to the following items: bedrooms – 1 bed, 1 bureau, 1 wardrobe, 1 washstand, 1 table, 2 chairs, 1 rocker; kitchens – 1 table, 2 chairs, and necessary cooking utensils; halls – 1 small table, and 2 chairs for each occupant. No papers were to be accumulated anywhere in the cottages and no nails were to be driven in the walls. The 1938 rule book stated that in addition to being over 45, applicants must now be under 75 and have sufficient furniture and enough assured income to provide their own food and clothing (though trustee notes on applications indicate that this last part was an unwritten rule almost from the beginning). The list of forbidden items in 1938 included musical instruments, radios (unless approved by all cottage inmates), and kerosene or gas heating stoves. No electric outlets or sockets were to be used for "fans, electric irons, or motors." By 1955, board meeting minutes record that "no one receiving help from the Welfare Department may be admitted to the Home" (though by the mid 1970s, if not sooner, some inmates were receiving welfare payments and food stamps). In 1956 "it was decided that inmates be not allowed to keep automobiles in the grounds."

In 1987, twenty-two-year resident Mary Jurs recounted how when she had first visited the Home several years previously, she found the rules too strict. Since that time, according to Jurs, "they relaxed the rules . . . I like to be independent. I'm content here" (*Evening Post*, March 10, 1987, 1-A). Residents may now park their cars in front of their homes and use all variety of electric appliances. A memo dated June 21, 1966, stated that in addition to the gas cooking stove and living room space heater provided by the Home, inmates were now allowed to have a refrigerator, television, radio, fan, toaster, coffee pot, iron, mixer, and sewing machine. Washing machines, air conditioners, and electric frying pans were still forbidden at that time, though at present, several residents do have air-conditioning units.

One fairly recent provision of the Enston Home is its Golden Age Club, which operated throughout the 1960s. Organized in 1959 by the local Benefactors' Club, the Golden Age Club was described in a letter of May 14, 1966. In essence, it was designed to provide Home inmates with such entertainments as slide shows, craft classes, religious programs, and musical and theatrical events. Golden Age Club members were also invited to participate in community service projects, such as marching in a cancer walkathon and making and mending clothes and blankets for various area homes and hospitals.

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In 1957, the Home's seventy-fifth anniversary year, resident Hortense Fitzgerald wrote a brief profile of the Home, in which she stated that "there may never be more than 20 residents of any one denomination." It is not known just when this policy was first put in place. Though Enston himself imposed no racial or sectarian restrictions on the Home's population, it must be recalled that he was writing before Emancipation, and may never have considered it likely that anyone but Caucasians would apply. During the twentieth century, racial restrictions may – and probably were – in effect, but there is nothing in the documents surveyed for this report which mentions them by name. In the board's minutes for October 1974, it was recorded that the president was contacted by an agent from the F.B.I., "because of a complaint prompted by a statement in a United Fund publication that the Home was restricted to white residents." The record went on to say that the United Fund was immediately contacted in order to have "this erroneous statement deleted from the publication." One board member, however, has recently stated that the first African-American inmates were admitted sometime within the last ten years, possibly owing to the fact that none had previously applied.

It was suggested earlier that William Enston conceived of the Home as a benevolent alternative to the city almshouse. One measure of the Home's success comes from speaking with current residents or reading the letters of their predecessors. While complaints about maintenance or neighbors pepper the record, as they would with any place housing nearly one hundred people, residents over the years have generally been quite satisfied with their accommodations, and the waiting list of applicants has sometimes been several years long. One grateful resident was Ida Kampaux. In November 1913, Kampaux wrote to the trustees to inform them of her intention to leave the Home in order to go care for her ill sister. She said that she was "leaving with deep regret," and thanked the board for "the many kind privelges (sic) and indulgences permitted" her, and asked that if she "ever need(ed) a home again that you will not refuse to make 'Old Age Comfortable.'"

In September 1991, it was announced that the board was negotiating the sale of the King Street property to the Charleston Housing Authority. This transaction has yet to be completed, but the Housing Authority is making plans to renovate existing structures and build thirteen new cottages with the same massing, footprint, and scale as the original cottages. The revitalized site will continue to provide low-income rental housing, plus low-cost homes for first-time buyers, transitional housing for the homeless, and permanent housing for the handicapped and mentally ill. Usage will be mixed and the land will not be subdivided. The area between the Infirmary and the Memorial Hall will remain open and undeveloped, preserving the open, rural feel of the site. Among other options, the Enston board is considering purchasing property nearby on which to construct a new facility for the community they have always served. Enston Home residents (currently numbering thirty-four, down from a capacity crowd of nearly one hundred in the early 1980s) would have the option of staying on at the remodeled King Street site or moving to the new Home.