

## CHAPTER THREE

### 1879-1887 – Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children

A little-known and curious fact is that, in 1879, an asylum for feeble-minded children was created in conjunction with our Home. The State had been without an institution devoted only to feeble-minded children' apparently, they had been housed with lunatics in the insane hospitals. It became clear people who might be helped did not benefit from such an arrangement, nor did it lend improvement to the incurable. Therefore, a new law abolished the Board of Trustees of the Orphans' Home and put Trustees of the Asylum in charge of the Home. Its name was changed to "The Indiana Soldiers' Orphans Home and Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children." Twenty-two girls and forty boys were admitted to this new branch of the institution. Quite an interesting and colorful period in our history.

On July 21, 1886 an "unexpected" calamity befell our Home-the burning of the Main Building. Should we infer, dear friends, that the then establishment sometimes *expected* burnings? In any event, the north wing of the Main Building was ablaze. Now, I'm not kidding you here; it was duly reported that, "hand grenades were thrown upon the burning part without the slightest effect." In view of that act, it is not surprising that it was also reported that efforts by The Hook and Ladder Company of Knightstown were to no avail. The Home was almost completely destroyed. We can only be grateful for the news that no one was injured. Reduced to sleeping on the floor on straw ticks, the children ate in the open air for about two weeks. Luckily, it was summertime, so they may just have had a great time.

Now, you may not be surprised to learn that there was some difficulty in collecting all of the insurance carried on the destroyed property. As the story goes, the Board of Directors had insured the building for \$25,000, but \$5,000 of it was placed with the Home Insurance Company of New York. The premium was paid into the hands of the agent, who never transmitted it to the company-so the policy was cancelled. The Times, they are a-changin', but not all that much. A footnote to this tale is that the beautiful fountain in front of the Main Building was unveiled on June 29, a few weeks before the fire. Perhaps its water would have been more useful than the hand grenades.

Noon hour on November 17, 1886 saw the cornerstone of the new building laid in place in inclement weather. What else in November? Amid the bustle of all this activity, members of the Old Soldiers and the Ladies of the W.R.C. protested against housing the orphans with the feeble-minded, as well as inclusion of the word, "Asylum" in the name of the institution. Such was the strength of their influence that the State Legislature proposed an act which completely separated the two groups. The act was approved on February 15, 1887, leaving the orphans on the campus and housing the feeble-minded elsewhere. We then became known as The Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphans' Home. We were getting closer.

Until next time.  
Pat Smith Towne