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F. Kuhlmann

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DISTRIBUTION OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED IN SOCIETY.

F. KUHLMANN,¹

The object of this paper is, first, to discuss the relative number of the existing feeble-minded that are at present found in (a) the institutions for the feeble-minded, (b) the reformatories, (c) the poor houses, (d) the public schools, and (e) that are at large and unaccounted for. A second effort will be to show how the distribution among these several institutions is affected by (a) the grade of feeble-mindedness, (b) age, (c) sex, and (d) legislation. It will be necessary to deal with estimations more than with actual enumerations in the different cases, either because exact enumeration is impossible, or because the enumerations that have been made are known to be affected by certain factors for which the numbers enumerated have to be corrected by estimates. This, however, will not detract in the least from the validity of certain conclusions that are to follow, because the latter will still hold true when a very wide margin of error is allowed for the estimates.

A. Frequency in the General Population.

As preliminary to this discussion it will be necessary to take account first of the frequency of feeble-mindedness in the general population, irrespective of where in society it is found. This may be very brief, but will be needed as a basis for some of the estimates to be made later. Attempts to decide this question have been more or less frequent. The more important sources of information are the following. (1) General U. S. Census Reports of 1880 and 1890; (2) Report of the Massachusetts Commission to investigate the question of the increase of criminals, mental defectives, epileptics and degenerates, made in 1911; (3) Report of The Royal Commission of England on the care and control of the feeble-minded, made in 1908; (4) Report of a special survey of Lapeer County, Michigan, in 1913.

Expressed in terms of numbers of persons in the general population for every one feeble-minded, we have the following figures, according to these several reports:

¹Director of Research, Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded, Fairbault, Minn.

TABLE I.

Showing the Ratio of Feeble-Minded to General Population.

	F. M.	Per Gen. Pop.
General U. S. Census.....	1	652
Mass. Report	1	500
English Report.....	1	305
Michigan Report	1	171

These figures are based on actual enumeration of cases found in surveys of communities, excepting those of the Massachusetts Report, which is a minimum estimate. The sources are arranged in the order of thoroughness with which the surveys were made, which accounts, possibly entirely, for the variation in the figures. Since it is impossible to submit every possibly feeble-minded individual in a given community to an actual examination, the enumerations in such surveys must necessarily always be incomplete. The highest grade cases tend to be overlooked, and according to a well known law of frequency of different grades of intelligence, the more nearly normal the grade of intelligence, the more numerous are the individuals that belong to these higher grades. This fact increases the number that are likely to be overlooked in such surveys. I shall regard it as a very conservative estimate to place the relative frequency of feeble-mindedness at 1 per 200 in the general population. This ratio will be used as a basis for later estimates.

B. Distribution in Society.

1. *Percentage in Special Institutions for the Feeble-minded.*—

The relative number of the feeble-minded cared for in special institutions varies widely in the different states. It is affected by legislation, by the personnel and policies of the different institutions, and undoubtedly by a number of other factors. This relative number must be estimated on the basis of the estimated number in the general population. Harris, in the special U. S. census of the feeble-minded in institutions of 1910, states that not over 10 per cent of the feeble-minded in the United States as a whole are in special institutions. This estimate allows one feeble-minded to every five hundred of the general population. This special census is the latest and most complete on the number of feeble-minded in special institutions. According to it there were 20,731 feeble-minded in special institutions in continental United States in 1910. Allowing one feeble-minded to every two hundred in the general population, which is the ratio accepted

above, gives only 4.5 per cent of the feeble-minded cared for in special institutions. This percentage varies in the different states from zero in few states, where there are no special institutions, to 12 per cent. The following gives the percentages for the ten leading states. These are computed on the basis of the special census report on the feeble-minded in institutions just referred to, and the ratio of one feeble-minded to every two hundred of the general population.

TABLE II.

Showing the Per Cent of Feeble-minded in Institutions in Various States.

	Per Cent.
Minnesota	12
Iowa	11
Massachusetts	9
Wisconsin	9
Indiana	8
New York	8
Pennsylvania	7
Michigan	6
Ohio	6
Illinois	5
United States	4.5

In general, the middle Western states lead. The larger states of the East come next, with the Southern states and the newer states of the West last.

For those who advocate that the only or best method of solving the many problems connected with the feeble-minded is to have them all segregated in special institutions these figures cannot be very encouraging. They will become less so when considered in connection with the character of the institution inmates as compared with the feeble-minded not in special institutions. This will be taken up later.

2. *Percentage in the Reformatories.*—The percentage of reformatory inmates that are feeble-minded has lately been a subject of much discussion and considerable investigation. Opinions and estimates vary from only a few per cent to over seventy-five per cent. Undoubtedly different reformatories vary, as determined especially by locality and methods of the courts in making commitments. The most reliable evidence of the percentage that is feeble-minded is given by the results of complete surveys, in which every inmate of a re-

formatory has been given a careful mental examination. This has been done at the Minnesota State Reformatory at St. Cloud in 1913,² and at the Whittier State School of California in 1915.³ In the results of the former it appears that at least twenty-five per cent, possibly thirty-five per cent, of the 370 cases examined were definitely feeble-minded, with another fifteen to twenty per cent only just above this level of intelligence.⁴ For the Whittier school twenty-eight per cent are reported as definitely feeble-minded, and twenty-five per cent as borderline. If these two reformatories were taken as representing average conditions the percentage of all existing feeble-minded found in reformatories could be computed directly from the reformatory population. Such computation gives considerably less than two per cent for the states in which reformatories exist. But many states have as yet no reformatories, and a number have reformatories only for boys and not for girls. When this is taken into account the percentage for the United States as a whole falls to a fraction of one per cent. We may call it, very roughly, one per cent.

3. *The Percentage in the Poor Houses.*—The available statistics on the percentage of feeble-minded in poor houses are the least reliable of all, and the subject has received but little attention. The U. S. Census reports on pauperism give 16,551 feeble-minded in the poor houses in 1904, and 13,238 in 1910. This shows a considerable decrease during this period, which is undoubtedly the general tendency. Taking the 1910 report as correct, gives 2.9 per cent of all existing feeble-minded in the United States as inmates of poor houses for that year. This is more than half the percentage estimated for the special institutions for the feeble-minded. In the 1904 reports the total number of feeble-minded enumerated for the poor houses is larger than that for the special institutions for the feeble-minded, being 16,551 for the poor houses as compared with 14,347 for the special institutions.

4. *Percentage in Public Schools.*—The percentage of the feeble-minded that are in the public schools may be estimated from the percentage of the public school children that are feeble-minded. The lat-

²Green, E. F. *The Defective Delinquent*. Reformatory Press, 1913.

³Williams, J. H. *A Study of 150 Delinquent Boys*. Bull. No. 1. Research Laboratory of the Buckel Foundation. Department of Education, Stanford University, 1915.

⁴Fractions in the mental ages are not given, so that this percentage can be stated only approximately from the figures. All but one case were sixteen years or older, and of these thirty-five per cent had a mental age of ten or less; sixteen per cent had a mental age of eleven, and twenty per cent a mental age of twelve.

ter is at present also a much discussed question. A few surveys of different school systems have been made. The relative number of feeble-minded enumerated or estimated varies from about a half of one per cent to over two per cent. Most of this variation seems to result from differences in methods of making the surveys. Where the enumeration has been based on the teachers' or medical inspectors' reports the percentage is usually below one. Inquiries made by a Ministerial Commission in France in 1896 found a little less than one per cent of the school children feeble-minded.⁵ Of a total school enrollment of 436,833 in England and Wales medical inspectors reported 0.59 per cent feeble-minded.⁶ In Australia the school teachers, under direction of a special committee appointed to determine the number of feeble-minded in the State schools, reported 0.42 per cent feeble-minded in a total enrollment of 175,000, in 1912.⁷ Similar surveys in the United States have given similar results.

There can be hardly any question but that enumerations made in this manner are incomplete. The correct percentage is undoubtedly somewhat higher. Recently the results of examining school children with the Binet-Simon tests have led Goddard to conclude that at least two per cent are feeble-minded. With this high figure a number of observers seem to agree. Published accounts of the results of complete or partial surveys of school systems with the Binet-Simon tests do not, in the writer's judgment, justify placing the percentage much, if any, above one per cent. The classification of a child as feeble-minded even on the basis of a Binet-Simon examination is largely a matter of definition and interpretation. If the line between feeble-minded and normal is drawn very high, two per cent of the school children may very easily fall in the feeble-minded group. But limiting the term feeble-minded to the grade of intelligence now usually found in special institutions for the feeble-minded, I shall place the figure roughly at one per cent. The total enrollment in the elementary schools of the United States in 1910, as given in the Report of the Commission of Education, was 18,339,828. One per cent of this is 183,398. This is forty per cent of the estimated total number of feeble-minded in the United States in 1910. That is, forty per cent

⁵Quoted by Binet and Simon in "Mentally Defective Children." Trans. by W. B. Drummond, N. Y., 1914.

⁶Report of Royal Commission on Care and Control of Feeble-Minded. 1908, p. 91.

⁷Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the year 1911-12. Melbourne, 1913, p. 140.

of all feeble-minded in the United States in 1910 were in the public schools for normal children.

5. *Percentage Unaccounted For.*—Summing Up these several percentages shows that 51.6 per cent are left unaccounted for; are not in any institution or in the schools. The figures may be brought together now for easy comparison.

TABLE III.

Showing the Per Cent of Feeble-minded in all Institutions and Unaccounted for.

Per Cent in Inst. for Feeble-minded.....	4.5
Per Cent in Reformatories.....	1.0
Per Cent in Poor Houses.....	2.9
Per Cent in Public Schools.....	40.0
Per Cent Unaccounted for.....	51.6

Of the 51.6 per cent unaccounted for it may be noted that a very small number are in state prisons and jails. This number is considerably less than for the reformatories, and must therefore be only a small fraction of one per cent of the total number. Others still are in insane asylums. But the number here is undoubtedly rapidly decreasing as special provisions in schools and homes for the feeble-minded are increased in the various states, and as our methods of diagnosis and commitment are improved.

6. *Effect of Error in the Various Estimates.*—Before leaving these figures the effect of possible errors in the estimates should be considered. The percentages are in the first place all based on the estimated total number of feeble-minded in the general population, which is placed at 0.5 per cent. This may be too high or too low, but it will be noted that since the other percentages are all based on this, their relative magnitudes are not thereby affected. The percentages in the institutions for the feeble-minded, the reformatories, and poor houses are all quite small. If the individual estimates for each were only half of what it should be, or were twice what it should be, the general status of the distribution of the feeble-minded in society, from the standpoint of the feeble-minded themselves at least, would still not be materially affected. Whether 2.3 per cent of 4.5 per cent of 9 per cent of the feeble-minded are in special institutions for the feeble-minded, for example, would make a big difference to these institutions, but not to the large body of existing feeble-minded and not to society on the whole. The same is true of the percentages in the reforma-

tories and poor houses. But the 40 per cent in the public schools is also based on the estimated 1 per cent of the school children being feeble-minded. If this 1 per cent were only 0.5 per cent it would change the 40 per cent to 20, and the 51.6 per cent unaccounted for to 71.6 per cent. If the 1 per cent were 2 per cent it would change the 50 per cent to 80, and the 51.6 to 11.6. The important question that these estimates leaves undecided, therefore, is as to the relative numbers that are in the public schools, and that are unaccounted for. Leaving this undecided, it remains obvious still that we have as yet hardly made more than a beginning towards making special provision for all the feeble-minded existing in society.

We may now pass on to consider how the character of this distribution is further affected by the various factors that were mentioned at the outset.

C. Factors Influencing the Distribution.

The social importance of whether a feeble-minded person is specially provided for depends on the grade of feeble-mindedness, age, sex, and a miscellaneous group of physical and mental peculiarities too varied to be considered here. It will be important, therefore, to consider next the grade, age, and sex of the feeble-minded in the special institutions, in the reformatories, in the public schools, and in the homes, the unaccounted for.

1. *Grade of Feeble-Mindedness.*—a. *Relative frequency of the three grades.*—According to general theory the individuals of any class are the more numerous the closer that class is to the average of the whole group. This holds true of grades of intelligence, and means that the higher the grade of feeble-mindedness the more individuals there will be belonging to that grade. There are more morons than there are imbeciles, and more imbeciles than idiots. The exact relative frequency of these three grades is still not known. The Report of the Royal Commission of England on the results of the English survey gives roughly the following numerical relations, figured in terms of per cent:

Idiots	Imbeciles	Morons
5	20	75

Since the higher rather than the lower grades escape detection in such a survey, this is undoubtedly a little too low for the imbeciles, and much more too low for the morons.

b. *Grades in institutions for the feeble-minded.*—Society should be more interested in providing for the higher grades of feeble-

minded than for the lower grades. In the first place, it is from the higher grades that pauperism, delinquency and crime are recruited, not from the lower. In the second place, the higher grade feeble-minded are responsible for the great majority of feeble-minded children in the next generation. Thirdly, the higher grades alone can be trained to useful activities. To provide for the lower grades only does little more than relieve the individual homes from which they come, which, though it means much to these homes, does but relatively little that is of interest to society in general. If we turn now to the grades of the feeble-minded as found in the institutions, it is learned that the higher grades constitute an almost insignificant minority, as compared with the total number of these higher grade cases that exist. At the beginning of 1915 the writer sent out a questionnaire to the different institutions for the feeble-minded in the United States asking among other things, for a statement of the number of idiots, imbeciles, and morons in each institution. From the returns we may select five representative states, namely, California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Wisconsin, to show the relative number of idiots, imbeciles, and morons that are being sent to institutions. The state institutions for feeble-minded of these five states had a total of 5,085 inmates on January 1st, 1915. The following table shows how very few morons these institutions have received:

- TABLE IV.

Showing the Number of Idiots, Imbeciles and Morons Respectively in Institutions in Five States.

	Idiots.	Imbeciles.	Morons.
Relative per cent existing for each grade...	5	20	75
Total number existing in five states.....	3686	14742	55281
Number in institutions in five states.....	1360	2674	1051
Per cent in institutions in five states.....	27	53	21
Per cent in institutions of existing number...	37	18	2

In the first line of this table are given the relative percentages of idiots, imbeciles, and morons as based on the findings of the English survey. That is, according to this survey, 5 per cent of all existing feeble-minded are idiots, 20 per cent are imbeciles and 75 per cent are morons. The "Total number existing" is based on the total general population of the five states in question in 1910, and assumed that 0.5 per cent of the general population is feeble-minded. The total number of feeble-minded being thus computed, the relative number

of idiots, imbeciles, and morons are then figured on the basis of the percentages given in the first line of the table. The "Number in institutions" gives the actual numbers as enumerated by the institutions of these five states. The last line of the table gives the percentages of the total existing number of idiots, imbeciles, and morons that are found in these institutions by actual count. It is thus seen that the institutions get only 2 per cent of the morons, as against 17 per cent of the idiots.

c. *Grades in the reformatories.*—It is to be expected that most of the feeble-minded in reformatories are high grade. Their passing through the courts eliminates the lower grades. The lowest grades are, moreover, not intelligent enough to be engaged in activities that are likely to bring them into conflict with the laws. Probably about the same holds true of the feeble-minded in the poor houses. Among the 150 reformatory inmates of California no feeble-minded other than morons were found. Dividing the morons found into three grades gives 14.5 per cent high grade morons, 11.3 per cent middle grade, and 2.0 per cent low grade. The survey of the 370 inmates of the St. Cloud, Minnesota, reformatory gives the following:

Mental age	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. cases	1	3	6	8	32	81

This indicates 10 cases of imbecile grade, and 121 of moron grade.

d. *Grades in the public schools.*—The public schools also eliminate the lower grades. The general rule is that none of the idiot grade ever enter the schools, a considerable number of the imbeciles do and drop out after a few years of complete failure. The morons enter and remain for a number of years, occasionally being pushed to the seventh and eighth grade, though never doing better than about average fourth grade work. This elimination from the schools, through failure to do the school work, presupposes, of course, that the school attendance laws are not being enforced, which they rarely are. If these attendance laws were rigidly enforced even the feeble-minded child of low grade would be obliged to remain in the public schools or be committed to a special institution. Statistics to show what grades of feeble-minded are found in the public schools, their relative frequency, and at what age each grade is most likely to drop out of school would be very instructive and valuable. None are yet at hand to decide the question definitely and in detail. The Australian survey, already mentioned, reported 732 school children

feeble-minded. Of these 2 per cent were reported as idiots, 16 per cent as imbecile, and 82 per cent as morons. Last year the writer found 126 feeble-minded among 167 in a public school system reported by the teachers as among the poorest. Of these 126 none were idiots, 15 per cent were imbeciles, and 85 per cent were morons, when intelligence quotients of 0 to .24 were allowed for idiots, .25 to .49 for imbeciles, and .50 to .74 for morons.⁸ The examinations included all, or nearly all, the lowest grade cases, but not a large number of the higher grades. A complete survey would therefore have increased the relative number of morons. In the Australian survey the relative number of morons is low because the teachers' methods of diagnosis allowed the higher grade cases to escape more frequently than the lower.

a. *Grades of those unaccounted for.*—We can only guess at the grade of intelligence most frequent with the feeble-minded that are not found in any institutions or in the public schools. Their number is probably very largely made up of the very highest grade, the older children who have finally been forced out of the schools, the adults whom parents keep in the home, and those who, because of some chance favorable circumstance, are just able for the time being to "float" in society.

2. *Distribution as Affected by Age.*—The age of the feeble-minded in the institutions for the feeble-minded alone will be considered. The age of the feeble-minded in the reformatories is obvious, as the age of commitment to reformatories is fixed by law. The age of the feeble-minded in the poor houses is in general also obvious, circumstances limiting it mostly to adults, and further to the older men and women rather than to the younger. It would be interesting to know the ages of those in the public schools and those unaccounted for, but no statistics are available, and circumstances here are too complex to make deductions worth while.

Two age considerations for inmates of institutions for the feeble-minded are important. First, age with reference to training capacities, and second, age with reference to delinquency and reproductive capacity. In regard to the former it is important to have the feeble-minded committed while they are young, varying with the grade of intelligence. To obtain the best results that are at present practicable to attempt, children should be committed by the time a mental age of three years has been attained.

⁸Intelligence quotient equals mental age divided by age.

The age of the inmates of the schools for feeble-minded in the United States at the time of admission is given in the special census report for 1910. This gives the relative numbers admitted during the one year—1910, for the age periods of 0 to 4 years, 5 to 9, and so on, in five-year periods. The questionnaire sent out by the writer last year called for the age at admission of all inmates in the institutions on January 1st, 1915. Among the institutions from which returns were received there were six in whose states the laws did not limit admission to any age.⁹ The results from these two sources are given in the following table:

TABLE V.

Showing Age at Admission to Institutions in the U. S.

	No.	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-25	26-30 ¹⁰	Over 30
U. S. 1910 Report..	3825	4	21	28	21	8	5	13
1915 Ques.....	6239	2	20	33	24	9	5	10

These figures give the percentages of the total number for each age period. The 4 under 1-4, for example, means that 4 per cent of the 3825 cases were admitted when 1-4 years old. It is seen that the results from the two sources agree quite closely throughout, showing a larger number admitted for the age period 10-14 than for any other. Roughly taken, only a few per cent are admitted before the age of 5; 50 per cent before the age of 15; and 75 per cent before the age of 20. It would be hazardous to attempt to explain these figures in much detail. Some factors undoubtedly present may be suggested. In the first place, it will be remembered from the previous table that 80 per cent of these inmates are of idiot or imbecile grade, 27 per cent idiots and 53 per cent imbeciles. Idiots hardly ever enter the public schools, and practically all imbeciles entering are eliminated through failure before they are fifteen years old. A large number of morons also drop out through failure. The exact age at which they drop out depends directly on their grade. Failure in the public schools is the main source of convincing evidence that parents receive to prove the mental deficiency of their children. Hence, the majority of children sent to schools for the feeble-minded are of school age, 5 to 15, or a little over. The motive is usually that they may receive

⁹These institutions were the following: California, Illinois, Kansas, New Jersey, Polk, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

¹⁰In this age period the years were 25 to 29 instead of 26 to 30 for the U. S. report.

a special training to make them more nearly normal, the parents but little comprehending the possibilities in the case.

The important features about these facts are, first, that, from the standpoint of special training, these children are sent to the special institutions from one to ten years later than they should be. The years they spend in the public schools are under present conditions nearly always more or less completely wasted. Secondly, the social dangers resulting from non-segregation, namely, delinquency, crime, and illegitimacy, are not met for a large percentage of the total admissions, those admitted at the age of 15 and over.

3. *Distribution as Affected by Sex.*—We may again limit the discussion to the institutions for the feeble-minded. There are undoubtedly more male feeble-minded than female in reformatories, because there are more reformatories for boys than for girls. There are probably more male than female feeble-minded in the poor houses because there are probably more men than women attempting to make an independent living and failing. There is no obvious reason why there should be any important difference in the relative number of feeble-minded boys and girls in the public schools. These questions, however, have never been investigated. The institution statistics, on the other hand, show clearly that there is a sex influence in regard to the relative number of males and females that are sent to institutions for the feeble-minded. The general statistics on this are given in the next table.

Table VI.

Showing Sex Influence Upon Distribution of Feeble-minded.

	Male		Female	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
1915 Questionnaire	3349	53.7	2890	46.3
U. S. 1910 Report.....	11015	53.8	9716	46.2

The figures for the "1915 Questionnaire" are for the inmates of the six institutions on January, 1915, already mentioned. Those for the "U. S. Report" give the total number of inmates in all institutions enumerated in 1910. They show a distinct preponderance of males over females in the institutions. Three possible or partial explanations for this difference may be considered. (1) Vital statistics usually show that there are slightly more boys born than girls. The numerical difference between the sexes in the general population is, however, not

nearly as large as it is for the inmates of the institutions for feeble-minded. (2) The tendency towards feeble-mindedness may be more marked with males than with females. It has been held that the individual females of any race vary less in any trait from their average than do males. Consequently, as applied to intelligence, there would be fewer feeble-minded and fewer geniuses among women than among men. (3) There may be some factor causing a higher percentage of the existing feeble-minded boys than of girls to be sent to institutions. That this is in a considerable measure true may be shown by the change in the relative number of males and females sent to institutions with increasing age. Although on the whole more males than females are sent to institutions, this does not hold true for all ages. Up to about 15 years of age relatively more boys than girls are sent. After this age relatively more girls are sent. The next table shows this in more detail.

TABLE VII.

Showing Distribution of Males and Females in Institutions by Ages.

	Age 1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-25	26-30	Over 30
1915 Questionnaire							
Male	2.3	22.5	37.3	23.3	7.1	2.7	4.9
Female	2.1	17.4	28.8	25.4	11.3	4.4	10.5
U. S. 1910 Report							
Male	3.9	24.0	32.0	20.7	6.8	4.4	10.0
Female	3.4	17.4	26.5	23.0	10.3	6.0	13.4

The sources of the data in this table are the same as in the preceding. The figures for the 1915 Questionnaire are for all cases in six institutions on January first, 1915. The figures for the U. S. 1910 Report are for all cases admitted to all institutions in 1910. The 2.3 under age 1-4, for example, means that the cases admitted when 1-4 years old constituted 2.3 per cent of the total number of males in six institutions on January 1, 1915. What the true explanation of these figures may be is again uncertain. Sex offenses on the part of females, or fear on the part of parents that such may be committed after this age, may be a factor. But this being also about the age when most children leave the public schools, other considerations may also have to be taken into account. It is possible that parents in general lay more stress on the early and special, institutional training of boys than they do on that of girls.

4. *Distribution as Affected by Legislation.*—Legislation in the different states interferes with the free and unlimited commitment and detention of feeble-minded in institutions in several ways.¹¹

(1) By failing to establish special institutions altogether. In 1914 thirteen states, including the District of Columbia, had no special institution for the feeble-minded. (2) By limiting admission to certain ages. Fifteen states that have institutions do not at present admit feeble-minded of all ages. (3) By requiring the consent of parent or guardian in order to commit. This is true of twenty-four states. (4) By permitting parents or guardians to take cases out of institutions after they were once committed. Twenty-five states have no detention laws.

¹¹See "A summary of the laws of the several states governing: I. Marriage and divorce of the feeble-minded, the epileptic and the insane; II. Asexualization; III. Institutional commitment and discharge of the feeble-minded and the epileptic. By S. Smith, Madge W. Wilkinson, and Lovisa C. Wagoner. The Bailey and Babette Gatzert Foundation for Child Welfare, 1914.