

Dec. 19, 1921.

Dr. Lee K. Frankel,
New York City.

Dear Dr. Frankel:-

I have just gotten back from Thetford Mines and hasten to submit a brief report on my visit there. Probably more detailed information might be developed later, if you feel that it is essential.

You will find enclosed:

1. A memorandum with reference to my observations in Thetford Mines, covering also my conversations with the provincial officials in Montreal.

2. An expense account covering part of this trip.

I discussed the matter of expenses with Dr. Hatfield, who felt that the Demonstration might legitimately meet certainly a portion of the trip. Consequently, I am planning to charge the Demonstration with the "going" expenses, and I enclose an account covering disbursements on the return trip.

Sincerely yours,

Executive Officer.

DBA:AEL

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VISIT TO MATERNITY CENTER AND CHILD HEALTH STATION IN THETFORD MINES, QUEBEC.

By Dr. D. B. Armstrong

Preliminary to this visit considerable correspondence had taken place with Miss Ahearn. Numerous questions had been submitted with reference to population, death rates, sanitary conditions, etc., most of which had been answered. Inquiries not already covered by correspondence were fully discussed at the time of the visit.

This was the first opportunity the writer had had to meet Miss Ahearn, and he was very favorably impressed with her personality and adaptability for this work. She apparently visualizes the program in a broad and far-reaching way, and evidently has an unusual amount of tact, as well as exceptional professional and social training. It is evident that she has made an excellent impression, and it is also evident that she has organized the work in an efficient manner.

Other individuals who were met in Thetford Mines included the Mayor, the Metropolitan superintendent, one of the leading priests, an influential notary, the head of the local Knights of Columbus, and other private citizens. An excellent opportunity was provided to discuss matters with the Mayor. He is very much in favor of the work, and is desirous of helping in every way. Miss Ahearn apparently has the backing of the priests, the leading women of the community, and part though not all of the medical profession. It was the Mayor's feeling that gradually all agencies, including the public at large, would line up in back of the project and that eventually and before a great while all of the doctors would have to come in. He seemed to feel that this method of engulfing was superior to any other form of "attack", and that it was progressing successfully.

The general appearance of the Child Welfare Station itself is quite attractive. While it is in a basement off the main street, it is centrally located and certainly accessible to the greater portion of the population. The interior is attractively and advantageously arranged and equipped. The chief thing that seems to be needed is more health literature in French. Very few of the people read English or speak English. Such French literature as she has is very poorly translated, including the Metropolitan bulletins (according to Miss Ahearn). Some excellent material has been supplied by the government in Ottawa.

Through the kindness of the Metropolitan superintendent, an opportunity was provided to visit practically all sections of the town by automobile. The community is crude though not particularly unhygienic in appearance. There is very little over building and lot congestion, though apparently considerable house and room congestion. This would be expected in any case in view of the extremely large families. The town is scattered over a wide area and the parts are relatively inaccessible. There is one long main street with cross streets reaching out into the country. One has to come back to the main street each time in order to go in a different direction. Incidentally, this makes it very difficult for Miss Ahearn to cover the town with her staff. Consequently, she is extremely desirous of securing an automobile if possible.

The community is very badly off for general health work. There is no other health work of any kind, no medical school inspection, no correction of physical defects, and no medical or nursing work in the mines. The schools are, of course, under Catholic Church control. Miss Ahearn is hopeful of inducing the priests to see the desirability of at least a minimum amount of school nursing later on. The situation is hopeful in this regard, as the church leaders are apparently quite aware of the value of the child health work being carried out.

The hospital facilities are grossly inadequate, in particular there being no provision for maternity service. There is a hospital run by nuns to whom a maternity case is anathema.

General sanitary conditions in certain respects are good. The milk supply apparently is well protected, so far as tuberculosis is concerned at least, as all milk is said to be tuberculin tested; also a small amount is pasteurized.

Not only is there no public health nursing in the community, but there is no private nursing. Such a thing as a private nurse does not exist in Thetford Mines, although they can be imported from Quebec and are in rare instances.

Certain minor observations, in addition to the foregoing might be itemized as follows:

1. Owing to the fact that the asbestos mines are now practically closed down, the population is decreasing. This decrease has amounted to about one thousand people in the last year. Extensive unemployment exists and considerable unrest, a riot recently having taken place, in connection with which the Mayor acquired some unpopularity, which may affect his ability favorably to influence the development of the health work.

2. Apparently the Station as organized at present, measured on the prenatal basis, is covering about half of the problem. Miss Ahearn supplied the writer with accurate and up-to-date statistics for 1919, 1920, and 1921 for the two parishes, indicating births and deaths, infant and total, for the town and the suburbs. Incidentally, also, a distribution of population by religion and race was given for each parish.

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These figures indicate an average of about 420 births a year, or a birth rate of about 46 per thousand. Four hundred and twenty births a year indicate that there should be under observation at least 200 prenatal cases. At the present time the Station is reaching 120 mothers, 80 of which are prenatal.

These come from the main center of the town. An automobile would help reach those

in the outlying districts.

3. The present year is apparently showing a ^{fairly} ~~very~~ favorable tendency in infant mortality. On a basis of the figures supplied by Miss Ahearn and secured from the priests' records (which incidentally seemed to be much more reliable than the official records at Montreal), it is indicated that the infant mortality rate for the last three years is as follows:

1919	--	254.	Per Thousand Born
1920	--	326.1	" " "
1921	--	219.5	" " "

The decline in 1921 is incident to a saving in mortality from diarrheal disease and pneumonia.

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The chief difficulties in the situation seem to be as follows:

1. The medical profession is extremely crude and anti-social. The doctors fear that any development of public health work will interfere with their income, and do not see the advantages that would accrue to them from medical examination work, hygienic education among the people, etc. However, two or three of ^{have become} the doctors ~~are~~ tolerant if not cooperative, and it is hoped that the others may soon be brought to see the advantages of cooperation.

2. Some arrangement ought to be made for medical supervision at the clinic. Two of the doctors are willing to undertake this at present, though the others threaten dire results if any one of them is selected. The Mayor could probably force the municipal doctor to undertake the work, but he is said to be extremely lazy and uninterested, as well as ignorant on infant hygiene. Consequently, this does not seem to be a very desirable solution.

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The best physician in town, the man with the widest practice

and most influence, is apparently beginning to see the advantages of having the work carried out there. He is using the nurses on his private cases, and is less antagonistic than previously. It was the hope of the Mayor that he could shortly be further interested, and perhaps induced to take part in the clinic work.

3. Of course high mortality rates are characteristic of French Canadian populations. Just how much this is due to ignorance and environmental conditions, and how much it is due to race stock, it is difficult to say. Of course the latter factor would be hard to influence.

4. So far as infant mortality is concerned, the extremely high birth rate presents an obstacle of considerable importance. The married women have babies yearly and almost automatically. A typical family seems to be 10 or 15 such children. Under/difficult economic conditions as prevail at present, this means ^{some of} that the mothers prefer to have their children die than live. Where birth control is unmentionable and where to some degree at least "death control" is consciously even though passively substituted, the difficulties in the way of lowering the infant mortality rate are considerable.

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The recommendations which one might submit for consideration are as follows:

1. That an automobile for transportation be provided, if possible. It is probable that the nurses could cover three times as much territory, and meet the prenatal and infant needs of the situation. Certain difficulties of course present themselves in this connection. For three or four months of the year the operation of automobiles, except on the Main Street, is said to be impossible.

2. While some form of medical supervision for the child health clinics should be arranged for as soon as possible, it seems advisable to continue on the

present basis for a few weeks at least, pending certain other developments that may have an influence upon local medical opinion.

3. In conversation with the Mayor and Miss Ahearn, a tentative suggestion was made that an effort be undertaken to organize some form of local committee, to be responsible for certain aspects of the health program. The Mayor expressed his willingness to call together representatives of the leading agencies in the community, including the medical profession, the church, ^{the mines,} the mens' and the women's organizations, etc. An effort will be made at this time to get a clear picture of what is being planned before this representative group, and to encourage their interest in and support of the work.

4. It was felt that this might lead to the development of a greater feeling of local responsibility and autonomy. This might involve to some degree a gradual withdrawal of the Metropolitan label on record forms, etc., so that eventually the Station might come to be recognized by the people in Thetford Mines, as the Thetford Mines Maternity Center, or Child Health Station. Such a development would certainly encourage local interest and support.

It was also suggested that in addition to a very simply organized group of community leaders to act at least as an advisory council for the Maternity Center, it might also be possible to get together informally a group of mothers who had benefited by the work, and who were enthusiastic regarding it. Such a group might constitute a sort of neighborhood committee, who could be loosely organized for the promotion of the propaganda in their sections. Both the Mayor and Miss Ahearn were favorably inclined toward an attempt of this sort.

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Dr. Pelletier, the Secretary of the Superior Provincial Board of Health, at Montreal, was very enthusiastic over Miss Ahearn. He felt that she had made an excellent start and that the situation was promising except for the

medical men. He believed in the development of a local committee, upon which the medical men should be invited to be represented.

He felt, however, that the medical situation was extremely difficult and that it might eventually turn out to be necessary to take another community. He suggested Three Rivers, though he said the Health Officer was of a very poor type in this community. He also spoke in favor of Shawanigan Falls, and urged that if a change was made or a second station started, the proposition be put up to the town first, in order to enlist their initial interest and to tie them up to an agreement with reference to certain types of support and aid.

It is the feeling of the writer that Dr. Pelletier might be ^{more} somewhat/optimistic. Certainly a very promising start has been made in view of the short period of time covered. While the medical ^{the} ~~man~~ ^{ance} are recalcitrant and present/chief difficulties, many of the important factors in the community are behind the demonstration. If another community were selected, and the doctors were aggressively in favor of the project (which would seem to be extremely unlikely anywhere), it is probable that the priests would be against it. Consequently, it would seem desirable to make every effort to capitalize to a more extensive degree the excellent start that has now been made, in Thetford Mines.

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