

THE PITTSBURGH WORKSHOP FOR THE BLIND, 1910-1939:

A Case Study of the Blinded System in America

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UNTIL the late nineteenth century, Americans generally took one of two attitudes toward the unpleasant subject of blindness. Those responsible for blind people concealed them from the world; those without ties to them neither thought nor cared much. Out of the growth of concern for the blind in the late nineteenth century came new perceptions of their needs and their capabilities. And out of these perceptions came schools and workshops to replace concealment and apathy.¹

What reasons can account for the new and different concern for blind people? Why did it occur when it did? What leaders helped to promote this change? Using the Pittsburgh Association for the Blind as a case study, this article will examine the forces involved in the rationalization, organization, and professionalization of the first place of employment of blind adults in Western Pennsylvania.

Before the mid-1800s, most families in America cared for their blind members at home, often carefully hiding them in an effort to bring as little attention to them as possible. Unlike Europe, there were few blind beggars on the streets, and blind people were not considered a threat to the stability of the community. The situation changed rapidly in the late nineteenth century. The number of blind people increased as the overall population grew; by 1910, Pittsburgh, for example, had a population of about 300 blind people, with a significant number wandering the streets.² During this period other

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1 For a detailed narrative of work concerning the blind, see Frances A. Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in the United States* (New York, 1976); Hector Chevigny and Sydel Braverman, *The Adjustment of the Blind* (New Haven, 1950), 72-80; Paul A. Zahl, ed., *Blindness: Modern Approaches to the Unseen Environment* (New York, 1963), 1-9; and American Association of Instructors of the Blind, *Twentieth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Little Rock, 1910), 59-62 (hereafter cited as AAIB).

2 David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1971), xii-xv; Walter A. Friedlander, *Introduction to Social Welfare* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), 78-80; also Henry R. Latimer, *Report of the Commission to Study Conditions Relating to Blind Persons in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1925).

cities experienced a similar phenomenon as their blind populations became more noticeable to the sighted. The blind suddenly had become a "social problem" for which at least some sighted felt obliged to find a solution.

The history of the blind workshop movement in America can be best understood as one aspect of a larger general reform movement which developed during the late nineteenth century. As the idea of rugged individualism began to permeate the society, the crusade to make all people self-supporting became the paramount objective of many philanthropic reformers. These reformers believed that even defective people — the blind, the criminal, the insane, the deaf and dumb, and the poor — could "get ahead" or "get along" with assistance from "normal" individuals able to give of their time and money. Many of these ideas were rooted in the Social Gospel movement and in the emerging Progressive movement that carried over into the early twentieth century. Many middle-class Americans who were sensitive to the turmoil linked to industrialization believed that humanitarian and philanthropic efforts aimed at the defective population would maintain needed social stability in their local communities as well as in larger cities.³

The movement to school the blind began in Europe in the late eighteenth century. France, Scotland, and Germany were among the first countries to organize schools to educate the blind. Teachers were trained in various teaching methods to encourage students to learn. They designed materials to facilitate student learning and for job training. Teachers taught students how to read with their hands, how to speak, how to recite, and how to count money. Students, for instance, were required to make a chair, a basket, or a table as part of their classroom requirements.⁴

As the sighted became more aware of the blind in the larger American cities, movements took place to assist as well as to control the blind in Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. In 1826, Dr. John D. Fisher of Boston, an ophthalmologist, learned from European schools the practical approach to the care and education of the blind. He taught students how to perform various tasks with their hands, how to recite information, and how to deal psychological-

3 C. K. McFarland, ed., *Readings in Intellectual History* (New York, 1970), 308-30; Friedlander, *Social Welfare*, 37-81.

4 Henry R. Latimer, *Glimpse into the Conquest of Blindness in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1943), 37-40; Friedlander, *Social Welfare*, 78; Harry Best, *Blindness and the Blind in the United States* (New York, 1934), 306-33.

ly with their blindness in an effort to become self-supporting citizens. At the same time, other concerned citizens were initiating programs to assist other "defective" groups: for example, the lower-class poor and the deaf and dumb in other Atlantic seaboard states.⁵

Fisher organized in 1828 the New England Asylum for the Blind, the first such institution in America. Although his school dealt primarily with teaching children how to care for themselves, Fisher and other Boston citizens were also concerned with keeping the blind off the city's streets. Thus one basic function of the New England Asylum, like other institutions developing in the United States, was to provide a place of refuge for those individuals not cared for by families. Because of other pressures and poor health, Fisher abandoned his work for the blind. Samuel Gridley Howe, a New England philanthropist, replaced Fisher in 1831 when he could no longer efficiently run the asylum.⁶

Howe journeyed to France to learn new techniques since Americans considered Europeans more advanced in the teaching of the blind. He attended several schools but became disappointed with European methods of teaching the blind. Howe, a rugged individualist, believed these schools prepared students "to do tricks," with very little emphasis on self-sufficiency. European schools, he noticed, encouraged their students to memorize a certain song or speech in order to amuse the public. Instead, Howe wanted to teach students those techniques which would enable them to be self-supporting after graduation. With Howe in the forefront, American schools developed the idea of educating the blind for long-term employment.⁷

The schools that various philanthropists established in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Cleveland, were small, very poorly financed, and limited to teaching children from ages five to twenty. These schools were primarily — and poorly — financed by contributions collected in the community. The lack of funds decreased the amount of training each student received. Despite the goal of preparing students for self-support, most people felt the blind were not adequately trained for industrial jobs. Blind graduates either remained

⁵ Zahl, *Blindness*, 15-25; Thomas Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society* (New York, 1955), 45-59; Jacobus Ten Broek and Floyd W. Matson, *Hope Deferred: Public Welfare and the Blind* (Berkeley, 1959), 262-74.

⁶ Henry R. Latimer, *The Conquest of Blindness: An Autobiographical Review of the Life and Work of Henry R. Latimer* (New York, 1937), 154; Zahl, *Blindness*, 69-78.

⁷ Richard French, *From Homer to Helen Keller* (New York, 1932), 107; Cutsforth, *Blind in School*, 45-85; Laura E. Richards, *Samuel Gridley Howe* (New York, 1935), 71-87; Zahl, *Blindness*, 4-12.

idle or wandered the streets of large cities.⁸

As more and more blind teenage students graduated from various schools in the United States, it became evident to concerned citizens that some type of employment for them would be desirable. These leaders of the blind wanted to demonstrate to the public that the blind could in fact be self-supporting. Public opinion, unfortunately, did not seem to coincide with their ideas. Since few employers believed blind graduates were adequately trained for industrial work, the concept of the "sheltered workshop," a form of segregated employment, developed to ease the problem of what to do with the educated blind worker.⁹

In 1840, Howe combined the first school and workshop for the blind in this country. His workshop attempted to demonstrate what the blind could actually do; here students made chairs, tables, and other similar products. Public interest grew, and the school received a special appropriation from the state of Massachusetts three years later for a separate workshop. The Boston workshop pioneered the image that the blind could produce goods effectively.¹⁰

Schools in New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland added workshops for high school students and adults during the late nineteenth century. However, the schools in Maryland and New York soon discontinued sponsoring workshops because many adult workers preferred the independence that begging gave them. In fact, some adults influenced children to quit school and take to the streets. It became evident to the sighted leadership that workshops had to be separated from schools in order to teach children successfully. More carefully organized independent workshops appeared in the mid-1890s, and by 1915, Pennsylvania, New York, California, Ohio, New Hampshire, Illinois, and New Jersey had independent workshops.¹¹

In Western Pennsylvania, local philanthropists organized a school for the blind in 1888. As students graduated, it became evident that many would not be employed in the various Pittsburgh industries.

8 See, for example, John Faricy, "A Study of Blind Mendicants in Pittsburgh" (M.A. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1930); Richards, *Howe*, 87-101; Cutsforth, *Blind in School*, 56-85; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 8-9.

9 Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 158-65; AAIB, *Twenty-Ninth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Faribault, 1928), 363-68.

10 Zahl, *Blindness*, 200; Ten Broek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 257-61; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 154-59; AAIB, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Austin, 1922), 64-65.

11 Best, *The Blind*, 496-507; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 154-57.

In 1903, Thomas McAloney, superintendent of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, suggested a study be conducted to determine the number of employable blind in Western Pennsylvania and in the entire state. With assistance from the Pittsburgh branch of the Council of Jewish Women, an organization which primarily functioned to help the poor, a joint survey was made which revealed that many adult blind were "idle." Pittsburgh's concerned citizens clearly were not to be passive bystanders while blind beggars indulged themselves in stealing, fighting, and an assortment of other antisocial activities on their streets.¹²

A workshop for the blind in Pittsburgh was largely a result of the efforts of one woman, Mrs. Phoebe Ruslander. She was born in Spittle, Poland, on March 19, 1858. Ruslander spent her early life in Titusville, Pennsylvania, where she graduated from the local high school and then became a teacher. What were her motives? Blind beggars, including graduates from the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, could be found on the streets of Pittsburgh. Being a religious woman, Ruslander believed God had placed more fortunate people on earth to assist those in need. Ruslander felt, like many middle-class reformers, that most people could be self-supporting. She dedicated her life, therefore, to correcting social ills by working with such organizations as the Council of Jewish Women and the Committee for the Blind. Ruslander also initiated penal work among Jewish prisoners in various institutions across the state. In addition, she had a deeply personal motive for her interest in the blind; both her niece and nephew were blind and neither could find employment in Western Pennsylvania. Ruslander thought a workshop would train those who were physically blind but who were also mentally "capable" of being self-supporting, thus emptying the streets of the blind beggars Pittsburghers were no longer willing to tolerate.¹³

12 Pennsylvania Association for the Blind, Pittsburgh Branch, *First Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1910), 6-7 (hereafter cited as PAB, PB); Ten Broek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 257-61; *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Feb. 19, 1910; French, *Homer to Helen Keller*, 100-2; Chevigny and Braverman, *Adjustment*, 104-5; Thomas McAloney, "Some suggestions as to methods for a systematic, organized, and sustained effort to remove the blind mendicant from our village and city streets," *Proceedings of the Third Pennsylvania Conference of Charities and Correction* 3 (Nov. 1911): 130-36.

13 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 238-39; Faricy, "Study of Blind Mendicants in Pittsburgh," 10-25; Ten Broek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 251; Marcella Goldberg, interview, Oct. 17, 1974. Ms. Goldberg, executive director of the Pittsburgh Workshop for the Blind, provided insight into the origins of the Pittsburgh Workshop. See also, Roy Lubove, *The Professional*

Members of the board of directors at the Western Pennsylvania School shared Ruslander's concern. McAloney assisted Ruslander in the formation of the workshop. Many prominent board officials, most of them businessmen, believed that domestic order and the opportunity for all people to find some type of meaningful employment were essential to the continued progress of Pittsburgh as an industrial city.¹⁴

The Pittsburgh Workshop opened its doors for blind workers in 1910. Like most workshops in the United States, it trained and simultaneously employed the blind in some trade or trades, hopefully for future entry into industry. Blind workers made a variety of products, such as mops, mattresses, brooms, baskets, and chairs. They were also taught how to prepare for interviews with prospective employers.¹⁵

As in other states, many Pittsburghers feared the blind could not do the same type or quality of work as did their sighted counterparts. Instead of the workshop being a temporary place for job training of the majority of blind workers, it became a permanent place of employment. Many other workshops in Iowa, Connecticut, New York, Missouri, California, and Chicago experienced similar problems.¹⁶

Since most of the funds came from the sales of blind-made products, the office staff, who were sighted, were responsible for finding a market for these products. Because of difficulties in selling blind-made products, frequent changes occurred in the organizational structure of the Pittsburgh Workshop during the first decade. As in other workshops around the country, officials were constantly being replaced. The Pittsburgh Workshop, for example, had four executive heads and four executive secretaries during the first ten years of its existence.¹⁷

The executive head in theory functioned as the superintendent of the workshop. His responsibilities encompassed finding jobs for trained workers, meeting with the board of directors, and contacting charitable organizations and philanthropic individuals for funds to

Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 2-5.

14 Goldberg interview, Oct. 17, 1974; see also, Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1908).

15 PAB, PB, *First Annual Report*, 3-12.

16 AAIB, *Twenty-Seventh Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Nashville, 1924), 290-97; Best, *The Blind*, 496-507.

17 See for example, PAB, PB, *First-Tenth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1910-1920), *passim*; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 232-35.

keep the workshop operating. The executive head, who usually was a businessman who donated his time, had no expertise in training the blind nor the time to learn. Actually the executive secretary, as the chief salaried official, assumed most of the decision-making responsibilities at the workshop. In 1910, Charles Campbell, the first semi-professional administrator and the most influential executive secretary during this period, came to organize the training of the blind at the workshop at the request of Mrs. Ruslander. Campbell had twenty years of experience working with the blind in Ohio at the time of his appointment. While working in Ohio, Campbell had formed a basic attitude about the capabilities of the blind; he profoundly believed there were some blind people who could partially support themselves, while others were doomed to complete dependency. He also reflected the attitudes of many of his colleagues at the Ohio, Philadelphia, and Boston workshops for the blind, who believed that only the "best" blind adults should be in workshops. This resulted in a workshop of capable blind adults while, unfortunately, leaving a significant portion of a city's blind population on the streets to beg. Campbell showed little faith that the Pittsburgh Workshop would succeed, and in 1912 he resigned to take a more stable and lucrative position with the Ohio Commission for the Blind.¹⁸

Over the following six years, two executive secretaries tried to breathe life into the workshop. Hugh Arthur, a young, energetic newspaper salesman, became the executive secretary after 1912. Although the board of directors selected Arthur for his abilities as a salesman, the annual sales did not significantly increase from the year before. At the end of the year, the board of directors asked for his letter of resignation.¹⁹ Walter Stamm, a newspaper reporter, became the third executive secretary of the workshop. The board of directors selected Stamm with one purpose in mind — to elicit more financial aid for the workshop by publishing progress reports in the local newspapers, thereby convincing local citizens and civic organizations that the workshop had a definite purpose and was a worthwhile venture to support. Unfortunately, Stamm's appeals had little impact, for the local citizens and civic organizations showed no real interest in subsidizing such a shaky operation. At the end of 1917, Stamm eagerly entered

18 PAB, PB, *Second Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1911), 6-7.

19 PAB, PB, *Fourth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1913), 7-17; Charles Campbell, "Executive Secretary Hugh Arthur," *Outlook for the Blind* 6 (Autumn 1912), 47.

the armed forces to work among the war blind in France.²⁰

In 1918, the organizational structure of the Pittsburgh Workshop began to change. Hamilton Long became the first blind person to be employed as a temporary executive secretary of the workshop. Prior to this time, all officials were sighted, and all three executive secretaries acknowledged that blind workers could not assume high official position in the workshop. The blind could not adequately lead the blind. Long, one of the first graduates of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, afterwards learned to tune pianos at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind in Philadelphia.²¹

Before offering his services to the workshop, Long had tuned pianos successfully in his own small shop. In an attempt to professionalize the various departments of the workshop, he assumed the position of director of the piano and mop department, training students to tune pianos and thus bringing the first form of expertise to the institution. Long succeeded in convincing five music companies to hire blind tuners from the workshop. These individuals became the first to be employed outside the workshop. Long asserted that once hard-working blind people were trained in a certain occupation they could do that job proficiently. He had, nevertheless, ambivalent feelings about the capabilities of the blind. The blind, he let it be known, because of their handicaps and lack of mobility, could not compete with sighted piano tuners.²²

Long asserted that in order for the blind to compete even in a limited way with the sighted and for the workshop to expand, there must be more money to hire well-trained staff members. There was not even a paid ophthalmologist on the staff, though Dr. W. W. Blair, who was connected with the University of Pittsburgh, gave his services when he had the free time. The workshop's prevention department, for instance, relied on older sighted volunteer women in its attempt to provide the public with medical knowledge on the prevention of blindness. In fact, the department did little besides assisting during various special events and holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. In some instances, these volunteers wrote

20 PAB, PB, *Ninth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1918), 8-9.

21 PAB, PB, *Seventh Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1916), 3-12; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 248-50; Charles Campbell, "Pittsburgh Workshop," *Outlook for the Blind* 5 (Summer 1911), 51; Charles Campbell, "Pittsburgh Workshop," *ibid.* 5 (Autumn 1911), 55.

22 See for example, PAB, PB, *Ninth-Twelfth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1918-1921), *passim*.

articles in local newspapers in an effort to keep the public aware of the plight of the blind in the city, but there was little else they seemed able to do.²³

Meanwhile, there were continued attempts to professionalize the staff. Minnie E. Pfordt, a practical nurse, initiated a well-planned program in social services. From 1915 to 1925, she attempted to attract professional people such as doctors, social workers, and lawyers to offer their services to the workshop. Though the board of directors considered Pfordt one of the hardest working staff members they had, she, nevertheless, failed to build a professional staff.²⁴

The lack of such a staff, however, did not prevent a sudden and dramatic rise in the sale of blind-made products in 1918. American entrance into World War I did what the workshop leadership could not by stimulating demand for all products including those made by the blind. As a result of various government contracts during the war, production accelerated; the work force also increased from forty-three workers in 1917 to fifty-one a year later. Employees produced more towels, brooms, chairs, and mops than ever recorded in the workshop to that date. In fact, sales jumped from over \$38,000 in 1917 to almost \$57,000 in 1918. In 1919, Long asserted that a larger building would be desirable to maintain or even expand production. With assistance from the board of directors and the advisory board, a new building was secured at 434 Second Avenue in the downtown area of the city. Unfortunately, Long suffered a heart attack and died in 1921, while in the process of relocating and expanding the new workshop.²⁵

Phoebe Ruslander continued her commitment to a professional staff; she influenced the board of directors to hire Henry R. Latimer as executive secretary in 1921. Whereas Long had been hired on a temporary basis, the board gave Latimer a permanent appointment. Like Long, the new secretary was blind. Suffering from very poor vision from birth, Latimer went completely blind at the age of seven after bouts with pneumonia and typhoid fever. As a child he had many doubts concerning his ability to manage his own life. His parents encouraged him to attend the Maryland School for the Blind,

23 *Ibid.*

24 See PAB, PB, *Sixth-Sixteenth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1916-1925), *passim*; Charles Campbell, "Association for the Blind," *Outlook for the Blind* 10 (Autumn 1916), 98.

25 See PAB, PB, *Tenth-Twelfth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1919-1921), *passim*; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 248-49.

where he continued to have problems adjusting to his blindness. At first, Latimer built a dependency on his "Aunt June or brother Hugh," and later wrote "[I] found myself in a dilemma when they were not assisting me."²⁶ His parents, however, constantly reinforced his sense of self by emphasizing his ability to succeed. Latimer gradually gained confidence in his abilities. In fact, he assumed leadership status at school when his teacher asked him to "help students" who had problems completing assignments and adjusting to their blindness. Latimer graduated in 1890 and became a faculty member. He taught at the Maryland School for thirty years, and many leaders of the blind considered him an unusually gifted educator.²⁷

Much of Latimer's thinking on education for the blind drew on the ideas of Edward Allen, superintendent and teacher at Perkins Institution for the Blind. Allen had come to be considered the leading innovator of his era in the teaching of the blind. For a number of summers from 1890 to 1920, Allen taught summer courses at Harvard University in which he spread his message among a generation of teachers of the blind. He firmly believed such teachers should be properly trained and advocated, therefore, a highly skilled professional corps of teachers who knew thoroughly not only the physiology of blindness, but above all the psychology of the blind. Teachers, he noted, instructed more effectively when prepared to deal with various psychological problems of students. Allen profoundly believed teachers should take the education of the blind as seriously as the education of the sighted.²⁸

Latimer attended summer seminars for seven consecutive years before receiving a Bachelor of Philosophy degree from Illinois Wesleyan University. The following year, Latimer took a summer course at Harvard and earned a certificate in Theory and History Education. Latimer felt he had achieved a goal only a few blind people could reach. In 1920, he, like other teachers of the blind, argued that only the "physically and mentally" capable blind should be trained for jobs in industry and prepared for entry to college.²⁹ If blind per-

²⁶ PAB, PB, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1921), 12-13; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 35.

²⁷ Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 55-63; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 18-19.

²⁸ Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 313-17; Latimer, *Glimpse*, 13-18; AAIB, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Convention*, 51-56; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 424-25.

²⁹ Latimer, *Glimpse*, xvii-xxvii; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 155-56, 208; AAIB, *Twenty-Eighth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Nashville, 1926), 284-87; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 19.



Pennsylvania Association for the Blind, Pittsburgh Branch, 1932-1976



Employees of the Pittsburgh Workshop for the Blind

sons had any other handicap which interfered with their remaining four senses of smell, touch, hearing, and taste, he argued, they would have an extremely difficult time supporting themselves in college or industry. Latimer, in fact, recommended that only three of his former students attend college. He cautiously lectured that: "just as the blind teacher must limit his activities to such spheres of instruction as draw their symbols and imagery from the field of his four senses, so must the blind students elect a profession or phase there of which falls not only within the range of his natural talents but also within that of his remaining four senses."³⁰ In professions where sight was of paramount importance, the law and medicine, for example, Latimer doubted blind people could be effective.

Blind young adults might have to limit their goals, but they still needed teachers. In other parts of the United States, the crusade continued toward training teachers, all but a few of whom were sighted, in an effort to professionalize work connected with blindness. A close friend of Latimer, Olin H. Burritt, principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind, maintained that all instructors of the blind should have "special preparation for teaching" the blind.³¹ Edward Allen maintained that better qualified teachers of the blind, whether blind or sighted, should be solicited.³² Many leaders believed college teachers had to replace religious teachers of the blind. Allen, in particular, strongly criticized clergymen for linking their work for the blind to charity.

Latimer agreed with his peers that well-trained teachers would ensure that work with the blind more closely approached true professional standards. The movement toward college-trained social workers greatly influenced him. Like other educators during the 1920s and 1930s, he thought work for the blind should model itself on the professionalization of social work taking place in various parts of the country. These educators of the blind also felt certain criteria should be met, including required courses in methods and materials, educational psychology, and other courses involved in teacher certification. By setting certain standards, many believed their work with the blind would quickly be defined as a profession.³³

30 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 205.

31 AAIB, *Twenty-Seventh Biennial Convention*, 213.

32 AAIB, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Convention*, 50-56.

33 See for example, Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 1-54; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 191-212.

As executive secretary, Latimer continually sought college-trained individuals in an effort to make the Pittsburgh Workshop a genuine professional organization.³⁴ Latimer expanded the education and organizational structure of the workshop within three years of his arrival. First, he strongly suggested that the workshop be moved to a larger building. The workshop, however, was not moved until 1932 from its downtown location to a larger building at 308 South Craig Street in the Oakland section of the city. Second, Latimer physically separated each department in order to help workers develop expertise in a specialized job. The mop, broom, chair, and piano section, for example, now had separate rooms. Finally, Latimer assumed direct responsibility, supervising each department from 1924 to 1927.³⁵

Prevailing social attitudes and low salaries combined to frustrate Latimer's efforts. After several sustained attempts to hire college-trained people to supervise each department, Latimer gave up and decided to select employees already at the workshop. By developing a close contact with his workers, he felt he could determine not only their training but whether they were physically and mentally up to assuming responsible positions. Latimer committed himself to this semiprofessional approach when he selected what he called his "three musketeers" to assist in expanding the training program and the production of the workshop.³⁶

Latimer chose Henry L. Glickson as his first musketeer. Glickson, a partially blind Russian Jewish immigrant, had worked since 1913 at the workshop. Two of Latimer's three musketeers were partially or wholly blind. Since Latimer could not afford to hire professional staff personnel, he preferred partially sighted individuals. After close association, Latimer felt Glickson had the experience and the mental and physical ability to supervise the broom department as well as to train other workers to operate machines. Glickson later noted that Latimer expected this move would emphasize the continuance of "quality products."³⁷

Latimer also hoped to get the public interested in the ability of the blind by displaying the quality of their products. He thus worked

34 See PAB, PB, *Fourteenth-Sixteenth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1924-1927), *passim*.

35 See PAB, PB, *Fifteenth-Sixteenth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1924-1925), *passim*; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 249-54; Cutsforth, *The Blind*, 199.

36 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 250-54; Latimer, *Glimpse*, 33.

37 PAB, PB, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1923), 5; Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 252-54.

along with the volunteer women's auxiliary to initiate the first exhibition of blind-made products — the "First Pittsburgh Week for the Blind."³⁸ Many Pittsburghers, he believed, would then purchase blind-made products and remain aware of the presence of blind people in Western Pennsylvania. Latimer, nevertheless, did not increase the number of employees; he felt it unwise to add any additional employees until the professional staff had more college-trained workers and the public was more receptive to products made at the workshop.³⁹

Guy H. Nickeson became the director of the placement department in 1926. Nickeson, the second musketeer, graduated from high school and had worked at the shop for eleven years. According to Latimer, it was Nickeson's duty to find jobs alongside the sighted for capable blind workers.⁴⁰ Latimer had confidence in Nickeson's ability to place workers because, even though he was entirely blind, he had worked in an outside industry for several years during World War I. Nickeson had very little success, however, in placing workers in industry until the eve of World War II. When Nickeson did place workshop employees in various industries in Pittsburgh, it was not his ability to persuade employers to hire the blind but the extreme wartime shortage of sighted men. Like other workshop staff, Nickeson found it difficult to gain the confidence of the public. Nevertheless, Nickeson did encourage a few small Pittsburgh industries, such as Federal Enameling and Stamping Company, the Equitable Meter Works, the Robertshaw-Thermostat Works, and the Pittsburgh Meter Works, to allow blind workers to operate vending stands.⁴¹

Latimer, in 1927, hired Eugene Morgret, a trained salesman, to head the sales department. He was the third musketeer, and the only one who was fully sighted. Sales, in fact, generally averaged about \$80,000 per year from 1924 to 1931. Sales remained stable during the early years of the depression as a result of Morgret's growing ability to get civic and religious organizations to buy blind-made products. This accomplishment made by Morgret helped stabilize sales during a

38 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 233-38; PAB, PB, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1924), 8.

39 For the average number of blind employees at the workshop during Latimer's tenure as executive secretary, see PAB, PB, *Fifteenth-Thirtieth Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1924-1939), *passim*; Goldberg interview, Oct. 17, 1974.

40 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 250; PAB, PB, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1925), 6.

41 PAB, PB, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1935), 17-20.

very critical period in the workshop's history.⁴²

Further dramatic increases in the sales of the workshop, however, depended on outside stimuli; New Deal legislation required federal departments to purchase blind-made products and to provide concession stands for blind operators. The Randolph-Sheppard Act, in 1936, required federal departments to allow blind workers to operate vending stands in government buildings. The Wagner-O'Day Act, moreover, in 1938 required federal departments to provide nonprofit workshops with contracts for brooms, mops, brushes, and other commodities. Despite the depression, sales rose in 1935 to over \$138,000 and continued to increase so that the workshop sold almost \$175,000 worth of goods in 1939. During the "Boom Years," Latimer did not emphasize getting more college-trained workers to head the original departments. Instead, he maintained that the Pittsburgh Workshop "can scarcely consider its work at the moment in the light of a profession."⁴³ Latimer finally admitted that it was difficult to "convince boards of control and executives to hire well trained personnel."⁴⁴

Latimer did not give up his fight for well-trained staff members, although as late as 1935 the workshop had not moved toward the type of staff he desired. He made some improvements, however, in the prevention department. In 1932, Mrs. Annabel C. Davis, herself blind and a trained social worker, replaced the volunteer workers. Her duties included counseling employees at the workshop, attending various city meetings on care and treatment of the blind, as well as assisting Latimer in various other capacities.⁴⁵

By 1939, Latimer felt he could go no further with improving the Pittsburgh Workshop. He eagerly accepted the offer of interested citizens to organize a state-wide association for the blind with headquarters in Harrisburg during the latter part of 1939. Nickeson, Latimer's closest colleague, replaced him as executive secretary, and he continued to promote many of Latimer's ideas. Latimer died five years later at the age of seventy-one, while still serving the blind.

The general crusade during the Progressive Era to help less fortunate people help themselves influenced the ideas and actions of such people as Latimer, Ruslander, and other officials both at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind and at the Pittsburgh

42 See for example, PAB, PB, *Fifteenth-Twenty-Second Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind* (Pittsburgh, 1924-1931), *passim*.

43 Latimer, *Conquest of Blindness*, 317.

44 *Ibid.*, 316.

45 PAB, PB, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report*, 8.

Workshop. This movement resulted in Latimer establishing the type of atmosphere in which the fifty-one workers comfortably performed their assigned tasks in a decent environment. For eighteen years, he led in the attempt to establish an organizational structure based on the professionalization of social work, so as to care for a proportion of Pittsburgh's blind. Though he failed fully to professionalize the staff, Latimer succeeded in a limited way in replacing volunteers and nonprofessionals with paid semiprofessional people; Latimer gave a measure of authority to Nickeson, Glickson, and Morgret — men who had experience and knowledge concerning the workshop and its operations.

The workshop was designed to provide limited service for those people who had only the single handicap of blindness. Although there was a small turnover in employees at the workshop, these were simply replaced until the set number of about fifty-one had been reached. Instead of families isolating their blind within the home, they were now being isolated in the sheltered workshop. Like heads of other workshops around the country, Latimer could not significantly change the attitudes of most Americans toward the blind at the workshop or elsewhere. Many remained skeptical of the capabilities of the blind to compete with sighted individuals. This skepticism resulted in the lack of social and economic support given to the workshop.

Certain changes did occur that increased the sales of goods produced at the workshop. This came about partially through the efforts of the workshop leadership, but more importantly from such external forces as World Wars I and II. Other changes which affected the operations of the workshop came through New Deal legislation, particularly the Wagner-O'Day Act, which required the federal government to purchase blind-made products, the Social Security Act, which provided a minimum protective income for the blind, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act, which gave the blind first preference in operating vending stands in various federal buildings. These federal actions had a greater impact on Pittsburgh's blind than the activities the workshop could develop and carry out alone. Like other workshops in the United States, the Pittsburgh Workshop took advantage of federal moneys to give some blind workers an opportunity to develop a trade in which they could become self-sufficient while remaining sheltered from the continuing combination of pity and hostility which greeted them in the larger society.

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