

FEATURE--HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Mettray

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In 1840, near Tours, France, jurist Frederick Auguste Demetz founded Mettray, a family substitute institution for juveniles. Before opening Mettray, “Demetz trained 27 assistants for. . .seven months.” (Eriksson, T. [1976]. *The Reformers: An Historical Survey of Pioneer Experiments in the Treatment of Criminals*. New York: Elsevier, 1976, p. 102). The institution was known as a school and employed teachers. Its curriculum consisted of “religion, philosophy, physics, chemistry, mathematics, French, Latin, Greek, German, English, writing, book-keeping, drawing, and music. . .” (Eriksson, 1976, p. 122). Mettray students were “from more or less wealthy social backgrounds,” and they “left it reformed” (Eriksson, 1976, p. 123). In France, reforms in juvenile facilities took center stage around 1900. By that time, Mettray:

had become almost military. . .the institutional population consisted of 325 boys sentenced for crimes, 99 who had been remanded for reformatory Treatment (correction paternelle), and 25 who had been handed over . . . by affluent parents. . . Each week the ‘families’ [groups of prisoners were assigned to a housing unit with a teacher(s) and called a family] had a good conduct competition, the winner being the one with the fewest penalties. The reward was an extra meal with meat and the best placing at institutional festivities. Fourteen different trades could be practiced, but the majority of pupils (a total of 253) did farm work. (Eriksson, 1976, p. 123).

Mettray closed in 1937. During its early years it had been the innovative French juvenile institution. Later Mettray had become “the focus of increasingly bitter public criticism.” (Eriksson, 1976, p. 128).

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