

# MOTHERS' PENSIONS

(Report of Mothers' Pension Department for Multnomah County, directed under the administration of County Judge T. J. Cleeton, from the time the law went into effect, June, 1913, to January, 1916, inclusive.)

The Mothers' Pension Law of Oregon, was passed by the Legislative Assembly of 1913, and became effective in June, 1913. The Mothers' Congress was sponsor for the bill, and was very active in having the law passed, as also were other persons and organizations of influence. The bill was drafted by Judge Lionel R. Webster, and was among the first acts of the kind in the United States.

Immediately thereafter, the Judge of the Juvenile Court, under the law a. it was framed, organized and began the work of the Pension Department. To facilitate the work, the Judge appointed a Case Committee, which was composed of a number of women who were volunteer workers, without compensation, presided over by the Chief Probation Officer, with a paid assistant. This Board worked in conjunction with the Judge, and all matters of importance were discussed and passed on by the Board.

The following, in brief, is the law as now amended:

Each mother, who has one or more children under the age of sixteen years, dependent wholly or partly on her labor for support, and whose husband is either dead or an inmate of some state institution, or is wholly incapacitated for work, is entitled to receive from the public moneys of the county in which she and her children reside, the sum of \$10.00 per month, for one child, and \$7.50 per month for each additional child, said amount not to exceed in any one case, \$40.00 per month.

This insurance or pension is granted on certain conditions, among which are, that a child for whose benefit insurance is granted, must be living with the mother, and it must be for the child's welfare that it remain with the mother. The insurance is granted only when it will enable the mother to remain in the home with her children, except during working hours prescribed by the Court. The mother must be a suitable person to bring up the child, and if she is extravagant or negligent in the spending of the money, the same may be paid to some other person for the use and support of the child or children, under the direction and supervision of the Court.

The mother must have resided in the county one year, and in the state three years before making an application. When the presence of an incapacitated husband in the family is a menace to the welfare of the mother and children, the Judge of the County Court may require him to be removed from the home and cared for elsewhere. The provisions of the act do not apply to any child which has property sufficient for its support, and the relief granted must be necessary to save the child from neglect.

Judge Cleeton's policy in administering the law, is to observe as nearly as possible the spirit of the law, which is "To do justice before dispensing charity," and the effort of his administration is along the lines of helpfulness to those who are in need, but do not come under the Pension Law, and those who do not receive adequate sums therefrom to enable them to properly keep, and nourish their families. Their effort is supplemented by finding employment for them and enlisting in their behalf social agencies, who place them upon the road of self-help, thus stimulating their energies, bringing them encouragement and thereby a saving in funds to the taxpayers of many hundreds of dollars.

The law has fully justified the hopes of its most ardent devotees, and is really one of the great pieces of constructive legislation of the last decade. Its benefit to society directly is very great, but indirectly it is immeasurable.

The greatest opportunity is offered for constructive and educational work in the home where the mother is receiving a pension, and it is the duty of the Pension Department, together with the Juvenile Court, to use every effort along social and educational lines, to better and stimulate the home life.

Table No. 1: Following is the number and disposition of applications received from the taking effect of the act, June, 1913, up to January, 1916:

Applications rejected	271
Applications granted	279
Applications pending	9
Total applications received	559
Benefiting 751 children under 16 years of age.	

Table No. 2: Of the beneficiaries shows: 200 widows; 22 wives of insane husbands; 23 wives of hus-

bands, incapacitated by tuberculosis; 17 wives of disabled husbands; 67 wives, whose husbands are in the state prison; 6 deserted wives for more than seven years, whose husbands' whereabouts are unknown and who are legally dead.

While the mother is allowed to supplement her income by working outside of her home, provisions must be made satisfactory to the Department for the care of her children during her absence.

Fifty-eight pensions supplemented by earnings of the mothers at home, at the following occupations: Dress-making, sewing, renting rooms, keeping boarders, washing and ironing, candy store, care of poultry, etc., and their average earnings for the years have been approximately \$8.25 per month.

Forty-two pensions supplemented by earnings of the mothers away from home, at the following occupations: Teaching, janitress, sewing, music, work by the hour, waitress, store work, etc., and their average earnings for the year are approximately \$12.50 per month—work irregular.

Seventy-three families—children very small—need all their attention. Relatives assist occasionally where we can prevail upon them to do so. A total of 173.

Where it is possible, we have them rent a house in the suburbs, where they can have a little garden in which to raise vegetables, that will assist in reducing the cost of living expenses.

Table No. 3: By closely perusing the following table, you will note that the mother must be economical and resourceful, as the amount allowed her children is an average of approximately 22 cents per day per child, or \$6.65 per month per child, for which she must clothe, pay rent, etc., and at the same time live off of the above amount, or supplement her income by her own efforts outside the home. The amount allowed by law is very close, and will not allow of any luxuries:

Families	Pensions Allowed Per Month	Total per Month	Number of Children	Average per Child Per Month	Per Day
2	20.00	40.00	51	8.431	.281
42	10.00	420.00	148	7.327	.244
12	17.50	210.00	46	5.652	.188
63	20.00	1,260.00	123	6.750	.225
18	25.00	450.00	115	6.739	.224
31	30.00	930.00	22	6.818	.227
5	30.00	150.00	48	6.750	.225
10	32.50	325.00	12	5.833	.194
2	35.00	70.00	9	4.444	.148
1	40.00	40.00			
Total		\$2,255.00	468		.22
General average per day					\$6.65

Table No. 4: Status of citizenship of mother.

Citizens by birth	166
Of foreign birth (facts as to naturalization not ascertained)	65
Foreign birth and not naturalized	30
Had taken out their first papers	15
Total	279

Table No. 5: Cause of death or disability of father.

Industrial accidents, directly or indirectly	43
Tuberculosis	36
Disease of the heart	26
Insanity	22
Pneumonia	22
Suicide	12
Cancer	15
Murdered	4
Drain	3
Desertion	6
Rheumatism	6
Imprisonment	7
Occupational disease	7
Miscellaneous diseases and unknown causes	76
Total	279

Average age of husbands: The youngest father was 22 years of age; the oldest father was 79 years of age; the average age was 41.71 years.

Low wages, non-employment and sickness were the main factors in preventing the majority of these families in building up a reserve.

There is a vast difference between the salaries paid the applicants who received the pension and those who were rejected or disqualified, showing that the disqualified ones had received a much higher salary or wage, enabling them to accumulate property which kept them from dependency.

Provision made by fathers as to insurance or property left to their families: 15 own their own homes, clear of debt; 21 have homes slightly in debt; 11 have homes heavily mortgaged; 7 received insurance which they invested in a home; 5 have an equity in a home; 2 had homes donated to them; 218 unprovided for by any insurance or property.

In all cases of pensions granted to persons owning their homes, or having equities in homes, the homes are of small value, and are necessary for the support of the family, and deductions of reasonable rentals are made from pensions granted by reason of having said homes.

Table No. 7: Occupation of father before disease, disablement or confinement in state institutions:

Timber industry and sawmill employees	27
Building industry and laborers	24
Clerks, Bookkeepers, etc.	21
Agricultural pursuits	11
Real estate	11
Brewing industry	2
Printing industry	2
School teachers	2
Civil employees	4
Merchants	4

Railroad employees	3
Architects and surveyors	3
Mining	3
Preachers	3
Editors, jewelers, photographers, attorneys	4
Engineers, watchmen, janitors, leather-workers, tailors, teamsters, butchers, stevedores, cooks	28
Total	143
Cases, information not recorded	136
Total	279

Table No. 8: Length of time after father's death before the mother applied for pension: Less than one month, 39; Less than four months, 15; less than one year, 35; less than two years, 21; less than five years, 19; less than ten years, 27; less than fifteen years, five. Cases, information not on record, 118. Total, 279.

Table No. 9: Ages of mothers at time of application: Between 19 and 29 years, 59; between 30 and 40 years, 104; between 40 and 50 years, 78; between 50 and 60 years, 14; between 61 and 66 years, three; no record, 1; total, 279.

The youngest mother was 19 years, and the oldest was 66 years. Average age, 35.33 years.

Table No. 10: Ages of mothers at time of marriage: Between 15 and 17 years, 28; between 18 and 20 years, 36; between 20 and 22 years, 46; between 23 and 25 years, 32; between 26 and 38 years, 26; cases, information not on record, 111; total, 279.

Table No. 11: Years lived in Oregon: Less than three years, 66; between four and seven years, 59; between eight and eleven years, 27; between 12 and 15 years, 20; between 20 and 25 years, 14; 30 years, one; 40 years, one; cases, information not on record, 71; total, 279.

Table No. 12: Applications cancelled. These were dropped from the list for the following reasons:

Property too valuable	4
Discharged from state institution	12
Married	18
Children arriving at age limit	6
Irresponsible mothers	3
Changes from husbands deaths	3
Moved away from Multnomah County	29
Readjustment of living conditions	17
Did not comply with the law	2
Mothers died leaving children with relatives	2
Employment of servant to do housework	1
Not entitled to pension under the law	3
No cause given	11
Total	106

Table No. 13: Number of children in families, old enough to contribute:

18 were 17 years of age; 13 were over 18 years of age; 67 were over 20 years of age; total, 98.
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It is pertinent to observe that if the state may assume the parental relation toward the dependent families, it may properly consider the causes which lead to dependency.

It is as legitimate a function of the state to seek to prevent it as to attempt to deal with it after it becomes a dangerous and incurable disease.

Knowing the causes of premature and abnormal widowhood and disability, leaves only one step to be taken towards prevention, and then we shall have instead of pensions for widows, longer lives for fathers.

To correct a false notion that seems to be somewhat prevalent among those who apply for pensions, it is well to state Judge Cleeton's interpretation of the pension law, and that is, that in a majority of the cases that come before the Court, where the applicant is entitled to a pension, the amount fixed by the law does not necessarily mean that that amount should be granted to the pensioner, for the pension is a matter of necessity and not a matter of right. It is meant to be an aid to the support of the family, rather than for the support of the family.

The reasons, however, for many applications being rejected, are as follows:

Investigation brings to light sufficient income.

Misunderstanding of the purpose of the Mothers' Pension on part of applicant, so that many mothers with satisfactory living conditions are lead to apply.

Voluntary withdrawals when the act is explained to them.

The family has wage earners in sufficient numbers.

Doubtful character of the applicant.

Divorced mothers do not come under the act, nor deserted mothers for less than seven years.

Recommendations.

We recommend that the act be broadened to include a number of children whose mothers are now disqualified under the act.

Divorced mothers who receive alimony and the husband dies and leaves no income for the children.

Deserted mothers where circumstances assure permanence of com-

dition, allowed pension after three years, same as other applicants.

Bigamy, where the father committed bigamy and the second mother was innocent of the fact. When the father is either imprisoned or absconded, she shall be included under the act.

In cases where the mother has two or three children who are under school age, and a nursing baby or children who are in delicate health, it is impossible for her to leave them to supplement her income, and as her children's pension is not sufficient for all, she should get a mother's pension until such time as the children get well, or she is able to supplement her income and re-adjust her family conditions.

Statistics have proven that even a second-class home is considered far better than institutional care. Very recently an evening paper published the cost of taking care of babies in one of the institutions established for that purpose in Portland, and their report placed the cost at \$17 per month per child, even when they do it on a large scale.

It is true that there are many needy, deserving mothers, eligible under this law, who are timid and shrink from the odium and publicity associated in the minds of many with public aid. The name of applicants are not published in the daily papers, as previous to June, 1915. We believe that a private investigation as to whether the family comes within the law, is the better way, as it prevents the neighborhood gossip from getting active in her particular line. A death certificate, or a certificate from a physician is demanded in all granted cases, and Judge Cleeton instructs the attending physician to thoroughly investigate and see if the children have contracted the parent's malarial, and give strict instructions to see that the proper precautions are taken to check same and work to the end of a permanent cure, and where there is property involved, an appraisers' valuation is also secured.

The state has established a certain standard of child welfare by laws compelling school attendance and regulating child labor. The dependent mother often feels the burden and not the advantage of these laws, for hunger will drive her at times to put her children to any kind of work which will bring in the merest pittance, and may lead to deception if the laws seem to oppose her interests in this respect.

It must be remembered that the assumption of any function by the state, like that of compulsory public education, must be based upon different, perhaps higher grounds than that of compassion.

The state does not give education to the poor and propertyless. It pays a portion of its obligation to them in this form, not only as a matter of justice to them, but for the common weal, even for its own salvation.

A competent child-trainer is of greater value to a community than a woman wage earner; in many respects this plan, although of great merit, is a very poor substitute for the loss of a father, who is something more than a wage-earning piece of machinery in a family organization. While his loss demands a substitute for the provision of an income, it also demands no less a substitute for his judgment, affection and discipline.

The production of useful citizens is mainly the purpose of creating a mother's pension fund. The law requires that mothers shall be competent to serve the community successfully as its agent, in charge of young families.

Industrial accidents and preventable diseases outnumber all causes of dependency on our list. Proper safe-guarding by the different industries would have prevented a number of these families from becoming dependent on the community, and the enacting of new laws or enforcement of the old laws by the state, would have prevented a number of industries from wastefully using up the human material, and throwing the wreck aside as remorselessly as though it were inanimate machinery, leaving society to furnish the reserve while they shirk their just responsibility.

Proper sanitary surroundings will prevent industrial health hazards, such as dust and chemical irritants, the trade poisons, and micro-organisms, such as anthrax casso diseases, etc., which are directly disseminated through industry.

There are also certain diseases, of which tuberculosis and rheumatism are examples, wherein the occupation itself is not so important, as the conditions under which it is conducted—dampness, darkness, divalized air, physical inactivity and fatigue are illustrations of such conditions.

An adequate pension will forestall diseases originating from an impoverished condition, due to improper and poor nourishment, tuber-

culosis, pneumonia, intestinal diseases, rickets and cardiac exhaustion.

## Budget.

The budget for 1916 for Mothers' Pensions was set at \$37,500.

I dare say it would not be extravagant to place the cost today in Multnomah County for the support of dependents, at \$400,000.00. These figures represent only a fraction of the real direct cost of maintaining all kinds of dependents—the multiform expenditures of private charity, the endowments of hospitals and homes for the poor, the infirm, the sick, the aged; funds dispensed through the agency of churches, salvation armies, Boys' and Girls' Aid Societies, Men's Resorts, Industrial Homes and semi-benevolent societies, contributions made at street corners and in response to solicitations from door to door, promiscuous giving everywhere, without investigation or system.

We ought to look for some disposition of the burden, less odious to the recipient, less onerous to the community who have a problem of great importance it must solve with reference to all of its phases, economic, industrial and ethical.

## Disbursements for 1915.

Per Auditor's Report.

Six months ending June 30	\$18,490.59
Six months ending December 31	19,421.55
Money fraudulently drawn and warrants cancelled and returned to County Commissioners	749.39
Total disbursements for six months ending Dec. 31, 1915	18,672.16
Total disbursements for 1915	37,162.66
Allowed by the Budget Committee for the year 1916, for salaries and running expenses of the department	2,000.00

We wish to express our thanks for the unselfish and effective assistance given the Department by the volunteer workers, composing the Case Committee, and also the volunteer workers from various organizations throughout the city, particularly to the physicians, Visiting Nurse Association and many individuals who have assisted in this great work and aided the Pension Department so much, both for the pensioners and those who have been denied pensions.

The Case Committee is at present composed of the director of the Pension Department, Mesdames Bonduant, Kahn, Hyatt, Borthwick, McComber, Hayhurst, Cannon, Bonham, Wagner, Miss Murphy Jessie B. Versteeg secretary, and Dr. Cora Talbot, attending physician.

NOTE—We are under obligations to Mr. Harry Wembridge, of Reed College, for assistance in collecting information furnished in the different tables, however, when the act

first went into effect, applications were so numerous, and the law being new, and in the hurry to dispose of the cases, many important questions were omitted which were necessary in making a survey.

JAMES F. CASSIDY

Director of Mothers' Pensions

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