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Community efforts toward the negro blind and the development of the metropolitan Atlanta association for the colored blind

Blanche Florine Smith

*Atlanta University*

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COMMUNITY EFFORTS TOWARD THE NEGRO BLIND AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE METROPOLITAN ATLANTA ASSOCIATION FOR THE COLORED BLIND

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL
WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
BLANCHE FLORINE SMITH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1945
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Blindness often means a life of peculiar hardship, creating frustrations, anxieties, and conflicts in the individual. It means that he has to be assisted by a person with sight. He often feels useless and thinks of living a life of dependency. This attitude, perhaps, is even more prevalent among blind persons belonging to the Negro group, because of their low economic status.

Much has been written about the blind because blindness has always stimulated curiosity and sentiment. The misfortunes as well as the achievements of blind people have been noted, but until recent years very little scientific study has been done. The attitude of society toward the blind prior to the passage of the Social Security Act was to educate the blind child, and to offer alms or similar contributions to adults. It was also felt that the blind should have special advantages and should be permitted to live together in special institutions.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold: to present a brief history of the community efforts toward the Negro blind in Atlanta; to analyze and evaluate the objectives and development of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, noting the need and extent of service; and to help compile and assemble the material and records of the Association.

The study is submitted with the hope that it will be helpful to the
Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind since no such study has been made.

Scope

This study has been limited to the Negro blind in Atlanta and to the development of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind. A brief history of the efforts toward the Negro blind in the United States will provide the background.

Method of Securing Data

The acting director of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind was interviewed and the possibility for making a study of this type was discussed. She felt that the Association would be benefited by the study. She also felt that the necessary material for the study could be made available.

Documentary material was gathered from library sources. The records and material of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind were used. A schedule was prepared to secure additional information. The acting director of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, and the supervisor of the Association were consulted.
CHAPTER II

CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

Definitions of Blindness

Blindness may be defined from many different points of view. There is economic blindness, educational blindness, medical blindness, a social worker's definition and the most commonly accepted definition. The term blindness is usually interpreted to refer to "economic blindness", which is sufficient visual handicap to require reliance on the other senses for the ordinary activities of life.¹ The social worker thinks of blindness as a restriction which keeps one from developing to his fullest capacity and prevents normal participation in the employment, education and recreation of the community. If a child has less than one tenth vision or if there is an eye condition which would become more serious if his study were continued, he is said to be educationally blind. The physician defines blindness as a condition of the eyes characterized by the absence of sight.² According to the definition most commonly accepted, a blind person is one who, with eye-glass correction, has central visual acuity of 20/200 or less and an equivalent handicap due to limitation of peripheral vision usually to a diameter of 20 percent or less.³

A person with normal vision can see ten times the distance of a person


²Statement, Dr. E. R. Carter, Instructor, Atlanta University School of Social Work, Atlanta, Georgia, lecture, "Causes and Prevention of Blindness", November 12, 1944.

³Ibid.
on the borderline of blindness. When the defect lies in the peripheral vision, the entire field of vision in the better eye is less than the size of an ordinary page of a book at the correct distance for reading.

Prevalence of Blindness

The 1940 United States Census figures for the number of blind are not yet available. However, the best estimate to date places the number of blind in the United States somewhere between 200,000 and 250,000 or approximately 1.5 to 2 per 1,000 population. Differences in the degrees of blindness according to the age and economic level are quite noticeable. Enumerators for the 1930 census, latest available figures, were instructed as follows:

Include as "blind" any person who can not see well enough to read, even with the help of glasses. The test in case of infants must be whether they can apparently distinguish forms and objects; and in the case of older persons who are illiterate whether they presumably can see well enough to read if they know how to read. Do not include any person who is blind in one eye only.

A large degree of personal element probably went into the judgment of the enumerators as to whether a given individual should be reported as blind. Inconsistencies may also have resulted from the varying degrees of intelligence, and persistence of the enumerators. Then too, there is a tendency on the part of relatives to conceal the presence of blind persons in their families, especially when these are children.

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3 Joseph R. Houchins, op. cit.

4 Ibid.
Causes

Much thought has been given to the causes which produce blindness and which show some possibility of prevention. Causes may vary according to the geographical area, sex, race, maturity, and age at occurrence of blindness. The two major causes of blindness among Negroes are syphilis and accidents.\(^1\) Contributory causes of the high rate of blindness among Negroes are the inadequacy of medical care and the low economic level of living.\(^2\) It is generally accepted that much of the blindness from both major and minor causes can be prevented through prompt and continued treatment by an oculist.

The committee on Statistics of the Blind of the Social Security Board initiated a series of studies in which data were presented in a cross classification to show the etiological factors and the type of eye affection.\(^3\) Among the wide variety of factors in blindness were found to be heredity, accident and poisonings, certain etiological factors such as ophthalmia, neoplasma, syphilis, general systemic diseases and deficiency diseases.\(^4\)

Little is known of the exact nature of the origin of hereditary factors causing blindness. Accidents and poisonings may well be combined causes. The proportion of accidents affecting the eye directly is 8.8 percent as compared with the 1.4 percent affecting it indirectly.\(^5\) The

\(^1\) Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.
\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^3\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^4\) Harry Best, \textit{Blindness and Blind in the United States} (New York, 1943), pp. 5 - 7.
\(^5\) \textit{Ibid.}
leading single means of accidental damage to the eye is explosions, for
the most part of dynamite and gun powder, occurring in mines, quarries, in
construction work, or from bursting shells. The use of explosive flying
objects and cutting or piercing instruments produces a great deal of
accidental blindness. Blows on the head, burns, electricity, operations,
and injuries from machines and animals are other causes.

Age at Onset of Blindness

The age at losing sight is an important consideration in the re-
habilitation of the blind and determines the method of approach to the
client. In the case of a child, it immediately suggests the types of train-
ing which may be needed. The majority of blind people, however, lose their
sight after school age has been passed. The prevalence of blindness in the
group between five and twenty years is probably more completely reported
than any other because children in the residential schools for the blind
are early located by enumerators.\(^1\) It is very difficult to find a blind
child under 5 years of age because of the method of determining their de-
gree of blindness. The largest number of blind are past 50 years of age,
this proportion being over 60 percent.\(^2\) In considering the age at which
the lost of sight occurs and the part of the eye which is affected, it
seems that when the disorder is connected with the conjuncteria, cornea or
iris, and when cancer or other neoplasm is involved blindness is likely to

\(^1\) Leonard Outhwaite, "The Physically Handicapped in the War and Postwar
Period", Proceedings of National Social Work Conference (New York, 1942),
p. 496.

\(^2\) Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, op. cit., p. 21.
result often in early life.\(^1\) When the disorder has resulted from conditions of the lens, the retina, or when glaucoma is involved, blindness is likely to come more frequently in later life.\(^2\)

Prevention

There are a variety of methods in the prevention of blindness. A program of prevention would involve the controlling of accidents, a good public health program, and efficient prenatal care. Such an effort would depend largely upon the cooperative planning of many agencies and professional groups. Some of the measures that are now being undertaken are the control of communicable diseases, and the development of a program for safety education to prevent injuries to the eyes. Safety engineers in industry and elsewhere are primarily interested in this type of program.

In the past this was quite prevalent among school children. The movement for the prevention of blindness may be said to have been centered around this disease.\(^2\) Initial action was taken by the New York Medical Society in 1887. A committee was appointed to investigate the question of blindness due to opthalmia neonatorum and to make a report of the findings. This organization led the way for other organizations in the prevention of blindness.

Syphilis is the cause of practically all congenital blindness. Since syphilis is a contagious disease, the disease presents a social problem as well as a medical one, its prevention is a job for the social worker as well as the physician. The social worker may be instrumental in the education and rehabilitation phase

\(^1\)Harry Best, op. cit., p. 32.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 156
of the program against syphilis. She may also help in the finding of the cases. The physician is interested in the diagnosis, treatment and cure.

In a program of prevention, the causes of blindness should be well understood. As a result of the interest of physicians in 1908 there was established a committee in New York for the Prevention of Blindness.\(^1\) In 1911 the American Association for the Conservation of Vision was organized. Because of the need of a body which could serve the country as a whole the two organizations consolidated in 1915. In 1928 a group known as the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness was created for dealing with the prevention of Blindness on a nationwide scale. This society carries on an extensive range of activities for the preservation of sight. It serves as a bureau of information; renders expert advice as may be called for; publishes and distributes literature of various kinds; conducts lectures and exhibits; initiates and fosters sight saving classes in different parts of the country, promotes to some degree the training of medical social workers; and cooperates with various national, state, and local organizations in promoting measures for the prevention of blindness.\(^2\)

Treatment

The greatest threat to the blind person is the feeling that he is not useful. The application of the treatment at this stage is dependent upon the physician or the social worker who is cognizant of the factors involved and who has gained the confidence and respect of the affected individuals.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 157.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 158.
Statutory provisions affecting the blind may be grouped in four parts. The first has reference to the instruction of the blind, especially for the blind child. The second is a development of recent years, the creation of special public commissions or agencies for the general welfare of the blind. In the third division are the several forms of relief for the blind who dependent upon the community. The last section embraces all other laws relating to the benefit or protection of the blind.

1Ibid., p. 259.
CHAPTER III

EARLY EFFORTS FOR THE BLIND IN THE UNITED STATES

There is very little documentary material concerning efforts toward helping the Negro blind in the United States as a special group. The subject of the blind is treated by interested agencies as a whole regardless of race or other factors. The Negro is an integral part of the community and has needs which are virtually the same as other blind persons.

Need for Community Efforts

The need for the community efforts toward the blind is of a socio-economic nature. It may be noted that many blind adults would be too handicapped by sickness, age, or both to be able to support themselves, if they could see. Through the case work approach, the public is beginning to distinguish between these adults and the young capable blind who ask only for an opportunity to prove themselves capable of living a normal existence. One of the results of the loss of sight among the blind, especially those becoming blind in later life, is the development of timidity. The problem of arousing ambition is presented. This involves emotional, mental and physical problems. The mind needs to be orientated in both the world of thought and the world of objective reality. The blind person needs to make a contribution so he will feel that he is a member of society and is useful.

The chief needs of a program for the blind are: prevention, safe-guards to conserve remaining vision, and the selection of vacations to promote the
development of the individual and to help him find his place in the community. These of course, should be suited to the nature and degree of the handicap of the individual.

The visual handicap from which a blind person suffers is usually accompanied by economic, social, psychological or psychiatric problems that must be overcome. The social results of blindness are not so much the outgrowth of the condition itself as of the attitude of the families of the blind persons and of society. A positive attitude of society, recognizing the blind person as an individual who requires correct and adequate treatment as well as education to meet his special vocational needs, would play an important part in helping the blind person to be useful.

Development of Work for the Blind

As early as 1682 people of the United States were concerned about the blind. The early work for the blind centered around alms giving and education for the blind child. One of the earliest references to the blind at this time was a petition by a blind man for exemption from taxation, which was granted.

Education: During the eighteenth century an interest developed concerning the possibilities of education for the blind. In the 19th century this idea took on a more practical character. It seemed expedient that public inquiry should be made to determine the number of blind. An enumeration was authorized in New Hampshire in 1819, in Pennsylvania in

1Leonard Outhwaite, op. cit., p. 496.
3Harry Best, op. cit., p. 306.
1821, and in Vermont in 1825. This was the first real legislative recognition of the blind in the United States. Several years later enumeration was authorized in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Partially as a result of the investigations of the blind, interest was awakened which resolved itself into the establishment of schools for the blind. Among the first schools for the blind were the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, Perkins Institution and the Massachusetts School for the Blind, organized during the year of 1832; and the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind, established in 1833. These were under private management, but, almost from the start, received state support. In later years the state increased its support. The first state school for the blind was established by Ohio in 1837. The idea of state schools grew rapidly and today there is educational service for blind children in schools in all of the states. With the establishment of state schools came the idea of home teachers for the blind, sponsored by public and private agencies. Most of the teachers were blind, and the needs of the blind were not met because of the lack of education of the teachers.

In 1871 the American Association of Instructors of the Blind discussed the establishment of a National College for the blind, but this did not materialize. However, New York in 1907 offered the first scholarships to the blind for further study in colleges and universities. Other states have now adopted this plan. The educators and friends of the blind felt

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1Ibid.
2C, Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, op. cit., p. 43
3Harry Best, op. cit., p. 346.
4Ibid., p. 307
an early need of a general printing plant for the publication of literature for the blind. A few schools had commenced the operation of a printing house on a small scale, but the material and literature for the blind was limited. In 1853 at the first meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, the issue of a printing establishment was discussed and efforts were put forth for its creation.1

In 1855 an organization was started in Kentucky known as the Kentucky Printing House for the Blind. In 1858 this was incorporated by the legislature of the state under the name of the American Printing House for the Blind to print and distribute material for the blind. It was felt that this was of national concern and, as a result of action taken by the state and the Association of Instructors of the blind, in 1879 Congress made appropriation for the benefit of the printing house.

**Periodicals:** There are over 40 periodicals in raised print for the blind, many of which have started since the beginning of the twentieth century. The periodicals are mostly monthly publications varying in size from a pamphlet of a few pages to a volume of considerable size. The one with the widest circulation is the Matilda Ziegles Magazine for the Blind, established in New York in 1907. Another well known periodical is the Outlook for the Blind, founded by the American Foundation for the Blind in 1930. Among the other periodicals are to be found some published by denominational bodies.

**Libraries:** Special library work for the blind was started in Boston

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in 1886. A separate section of the library was used for the blind. This action was followed by other cities. In 1896, New York established the first state library for the blind. The National library for the blind, which is a division of the Library of Congress, was established in 1897. The service of this library was on a local basis. Later it rendered a national service. The Library of Congress has received funds for the publication of raised print literature for the blind since 1931. This was the result of the passage of the Pratt-Smart Law. This literature is distributed to 27 regional libraries, one of which is located in Atlanta, Georgia.

Agencies: The National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, a voluntary, national agency organized in 1915, has done more work for the blind than perhaps any other agency. It is the purpose of this agency to give guidance to all groups working toward the prevention of blindness and the conservation of vision. The National Safety Council, the United States Public Health Service and the Social Security Board are cooperating agencies.

The United States Public Health Service cooperates with the states in a prevention program. It has established measures to fight contagious diseases and has maintained quarantine service to exclude immigrants afflicted with hereditary diseases. Studies and laboratory research have

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1 Ibid., p. 446.
2 C. Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, op. cit., p. 95.
3 Ibid.
4 Harry Best, op. cit., p. 55.
been made in an attempt to discover and publicize facts about venereal
diseases as a cause of blindness.

The American Foundation for the Blind is an agency whose interest is
centered around the collection and distribution of information regarding
work for the blind. It also cooperates with the federal and state govern-
ments in developing service for the blind.\(^1\) This agency developed the
"Talking Book Reproducer", a phonograph which satisfactorily plays records
of educational interest for those persons who are unable to learn by the
touch system.

Another agency interested in the prevention for blindness is the
American Association of Institutes of the Blind. It fosters and promotes
all movements having for their aim the improvement of the means of edu-
cation and gives assistance to the promotion of other phases of the work.\(^2\)

There is a place in the community for both the official agencies of
the federal and local government, and volunteer organizations. The re-
sponsibility of the federal agency is limited by the budget under which
it operates.

Legislation:— One of the most important measures broadening the
scope of employment for the blind was the law passed by Congress in 1932,
requiring the executive department of the government to purchase its
brooms and mops from workshops for the blind.\(^3\)

During the period of the decline in industry, it was difficult for a

\(^1\) Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 48.

\(^2\) Helge Lende, \textit{Directory of Activities for the Blind in the United States
and Canada.} (New York, 1983), p. 3.

\(^3\) Edith Kerby and Evelyn C. McKay, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 31.
blind person to secure employment because of the keen competition with those who were not handicapped. However, with the passage of the Randolph–Sheppard Act in 1935, blind persons were allowed to operate vending stands.¹

This act also provided for the establishment of a federal – state vocational rehabilitation program under the joint supervision of the Vocational Division of the United States Office of Education, the several state departments for the blind, and the state departments of vocational rehabilitation.² The passage of this law led to the establishment of similar state and local laws.

The Social Security Act, passed in 1935 and amended in 1939, helps the states to provide assistance for the needy blind. The purpose of this plan is to provide for blind people in their own homes. Allowances toward which the federal government contributes may not be given to those living in public institutions. Aid to the blind is administered by the states with the cooperation of the federal government. Forty-five state plans for aid to the blind, including those of the District of Columbia and Hawaii, are in operation under the Act.³ To all states with approved plans for aid to the blind, the federal government makes grants to match state expenditure up to a total of forty dollars a month for each recipient.⁴

¹Ibid.
²Ibid.
³Helga Lende, op. cit., p. 3
⁴Ibid.
Attention was given by the writer to the Social Security Act with reference to the Negro. In order to accurately appraise the program of aid to the blind with reference to the Negro, it would be necessary to know the number of blind Negroes in the United States, but accurate statistics on this subject are not available. A study made by the American Foundation for the Blind during 1939 indicated that Negroes accounted for 19.9 percent of all recipients of aid to the Blind in states under Social Security Act. From the above information it seems that because of greater need among Negroes a higher proportion receive this aid than do white persons. In 1939 under the Division of Adult Education and Recreation of the Work Progress Administration, the home teacher service for the blind was extended by the use of W. P. A. Teachers. Training courses in instruction of the blind were established for all interested individuals and the qualifications for the teachers were raised. Among other state legislative measures for the blind are compulsory education, exemption from the poll tax, and voting privileges.

Current Trends And The Effect Of The War

This century has brought a recognition that blind people are normal men and women. Treatment is being based on individual assets instead of liabilities. It is realized that although the blind have lost their physical vision, they have retained their abilities, personalities, interests and individuality.

The primary aim of modern work with the blind has been to help each

1Ibid.

individual to lead a healthy, normal life as nearly as possible like the life he would have lived if he could see. The current tendency in both public and private agencies is to use the case work approach in dealing with the blind.

The war has brought about many advantages as well as disadvantages for the blind. It has increased blindness from accidents in war plants and injuries sustained on the battlefield. The need for the rehabilitation of soldiers in the present war has led to the appointment of the American Committee on War Blind. The war has opened new areas of service to the blind but the number of persons working with the blind has diminished.
CHAPTER IV

THE NEGRO BLIND IN ATLANTA

How many Negro blind are there in Atlanta? Are the sighted citizens interested in Negro blind? What has been done for the blind? Do the blind cooperate with agencies and interested individuals when plans are formulated? Where do the blind live? Are their needs being met? What has grown out of the efforts of the community to help Negro blind? The above questions will be considered in the following discussion.

Number and Location

According to a recent survey conducted by the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind through the Atlanta Negro public schools there were approximately 300 Negro blind in Atlanta,\(^1\) out of a total Negro population of 129,457. Most of the blind were adults ranging from the ages of 19 to 103 years of age.\(^2\)

The blind population in Atlanta is widely scattered. Out of the total number, as recorded by the Association, there have been 132 visits or contacts made. Out of the total number of contacts, there were 49 living in the Westside area, 38 were living in the South Atlanta area and 45 were in the Fourth Ward and Summerhill area. Since complete records of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association are not available, it is not possible

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\(^1\) Statement by P. J. Woods, Supervisor, Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, Atlanta, Georgia, interviewed February 15, 1945.

\(^2\) Ibid
to analyze the case histories of the Negro blind in Atlanta.

Public Agency Service

State Agencies: -- Prior to September 1944, there was no public agency in Atlanta that attempted to rehabilitate the blind. Since that time, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Department has attempted to rehabilitate the blind by helping them to find suitable vocations. The State Department of Health offers health education in connection with the care of the eyes through clinics. This department is especially interested in people in industries, and sponsors a class and issues literature. The Aid to the Blind program under the Social Security Act is administered by the Department of Public Welfare. Free eye examination is also given by the Department of Public Welfare.

The Georgia State Academy for the Blind, a public institution, under the direction of the State Department of Education, offers training for Negro blind through the Junior High School level. The program here is not adequate and the building is over crowded.1

City of Atlanta: -- Much preventive work has been done by the Municipal Board of Health in connection with the school system in providing medical examination of the eyes of school children. Grady Hospital provides medical examination and care of the eyes for those unable to secure private care.

There is a set standard for accepting patients based on the economic status and on the establishment on legal residence in the city. In the

Atlanta Public Schools there are classes for white blind pupils under a blind instructor with special facilities provided. This service is not extended to Negro blind in the public schools.¹

Services of Carnegie Library: — — A small number of Negroes make use of the Kriegshaber Branch Library for the Blind, a branch of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta. This is also a regional branch of the national library for the blind which is a department of the Library of Congress. It is a distributing agent of the Talking Book Machines in Georgia, Alabama and Florida for the federal government. Records of the library as of February, 1945 show a total membership of ten Negro blind men and women.²

In September 1943, the Carnegie Library's Auburn Avenue Branch for Negroes initiated a program for the blind.³ The main objectives of this program for the blind were: to enlighten as well as to arouse new hope and courage in the blind by helping him to fit into society; to create new trends of thought through familiarity with books and their authors; to assist the blind in making social and personal contacts with the blind and the seeing; and, through discussions, to give the blind some insight as to what was taking place in the community.

Further objectives are: to provide cultural growth by hearing book reviews and current topics discussed by representatives from various institutions and walks of life; to create greater interest

¹Helga Lende, Directory of Activities for the Blind in The United States and Canada (New York, 1943), p. 32.

²Statement by Ike Katz, Librarian, Kriegshaber Branch Library, Atlanta, Georgia, interviewed, February 24, 1945.

in and knowledge of books and authors, especially those books and materials designed for the blind, (Braille books and talking books may be borrowed directly from the Kriegshaber Branch Library for the blind, a branch of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta); to develop a well informed group along public opinion and affairs; to provide counseling which will also be concerned with plans for postwar needs; to contribute to recreational enjoyment by personal contacts, and to give them renewed strength in their struggles against the dark backwash of tyranny.  

Two main features of the program are the "Book Reviews", and the "Listening In Time". The time devoted to these two features is for fifteen minutes to an hour. This is a monthly program and has become a definite part of the program of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for Colored Blind. The library also provided a meeting place for the Association of Adult Blind, organized in September 1943.

Private Agency Services

Case Work Agencies:— Case work services seek to prevent blindness by helping the client to recognize his need for treatment for the eyes and to secure the proper treatment available through the Family Welfare Society, the Child Welfare Association, the Travelers Aid Society, the Red Cross and the Fulton County Department of Public Welfare.

It has been only in the last few years that seeing Negro citizens in Atlanta have made any attempt at doing constructive work that would help the blind.

Committee for the Blind Formed:— In February 1943, a group of interested citizens formed a committee led by Mrs. C. Yates, a civic worker, Rev. W.H.

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1 Ibid.
2 Ernestine McGill, op. cit.
Borders, a Baptist minister, and Mr. William Smith, a blind business man, and initiated plans to make a study of Negro blind in Atlanta. The purpose of this committee was to develop a program to meet the needs of the blind. The committee held several conferences and consulted the Social Planning Council for advice as to services already available to the Negro blind in Atlanta. However, no further work for the blind was done at that time.

Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind: Largely through efforts of an experienced worker with the blind, the Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind was organized in September 1943. The group of blind citizens who formed the Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind were called together through an announcement that appeared in a local newspaper. There were thirty blind and three sighted persons present at the first meeting. It was decided that the Association should meet twice a month at the same centrally located place. Officers were elected. One of the present teachers of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind was elected president. The Association was merely a social group having as its aim the establishment of a workshop and training school for the blind. Out of the efforts of the Association, grew the program for the blind of the Auburn Avenue Branch of the Carnegie Library.

By February 1944, the membership had increased from 30 to 63.

1Statement by Clara Yates, Civic Worker, Atlanta, Georgia, personal interview, February 24, 1945.
2Ibid.
3Annie L. W. McPheeters, op. cit.
4Statement by P. J. Wood, Supervisor, Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, Atlanta, Georgia, personal interview, February 15, 1945.
Through the efforts of the organizer plans for the group to attend church service were carried out. This alleviated the fear on the part of many of the blind of attending church. Since that time many have attended church regularly.
CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE METROPOLITAN ATLANTA ASSOCIATION FOR THE COLORED BLIND

In April 1944, members of the board of the Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind decided to work toward the expansion of a program for the blind. The field agent for the American Foundation for the Blind was invited in to comment on and evaluate the program of the Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind. A new program was then set up under the direction of the American Foundation for the Blind to be conducted by the new organization, the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind. Plans for incorporation were considered. Before these were formulated, the Atlanta Association for the Adult Blind merged with the new Association. The board, which now consisted of twenty sighted members and three blind members, named their chairman director of the new association.

Purpose

The purpose of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind is as follows:

1. Statement by Mrs. R. T. Jackson, Acting Director, Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, Atlanta, Georgia, personal interview, February 24, 1945.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Constitution and By-Laws of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind. (Mimeoographed)
To maintain a complete register of the blind and near blind; to promote their welfare through training, education, social adjustment, recreation, sight conservation and in the restoration of sight; and to prevent unnecessary blindness.

Program

The program conducted by the Association is divided into four parts.¹

The first part of the program is concerned with the educational and vocational training. There are some clients who have never attended school and need some practical work in grammar, reading, and writing.

Some have had formal education, but are interested in receiving further education. Opportunity is offered to both of these groups. There is still another group which is interested in being trained for a vocation, and this training is also offered.

In the following table the number of pupils, the name of the teacher and the place and day of meeting for the different classes listed in the educational and vocational training phase are given.

¹ P. J. Woods, op. cit.
### TABLE I

CLASSES LISTED UNDER PART A OF THE PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSES</th>
<th>MEETING PLACE</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>PUPILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industrial &amp; Domestic</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Miss Games</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Miss Carrie</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Education</td>
<td>Carnegie Library</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. A. L. McPheeters</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral Work</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. M. Elkins</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education</td>
<td>Home for the Aged</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Miss Carrie Enger</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Grammar and Spelling</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. D. Brooks</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. W. Lawrence</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second part of the program is concerned with recreational and cultural programs. Most of this part of the program is carried on at the Carnegie Library. The recreational and cultural phase of the program gives the blind a chance to come in contact with sighted individuals. The guest speakers are usually sighted persons. This phase of the program has also been discussed in the previous chapter in connection with the Carnegie Library. Educational games are conducted at the Center.

1. Many students attended several classes.

2. The Center is located at 105 Courtland Street N. E., the ground floor of the First Congregation Church.
In the following table is given the attendance in the classes listed under the recreational and cultural phase of the program with the names of the teachers, and the place and day of class meeting.

**TABLE 2**

**CLASSES LISTED UNDER PART B OF THE PROGRAM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSES</th>
<th>MEETING PLACE</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>PUPILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Histories</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. A. L. McPheeters</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums and Discussion</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Mr. P. J. Woods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Review</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Mrs. A. L. McPheeters</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Games</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Miss Harvey</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Many students attended several classes.

In the Home Work and Leisure Time Occupations, the third part of the program, there is a total enrollment of twelve. This part of the program includes braille reading and writing, industrial and domestic arts, home industries and religious education. These classes are conducted on Thursdays and Fridays in the various homes of the blind who are physically unable to attend the central classes.

The last phase of the program concerns itself with student organizations. There are two major organizations among the students. One includes all members of the Association and the other includes the first
members of the Association. These organizations attempt to give the clients a chance to plan for themselves and execute their plans. The name of the latter organization is the "Birth of Perry Memorial Club", with a membership of 31. The purpose of this organization is to maintain an emergency fund for the blind. This club meets at the Auburn Avenue Branch, Carnegie Library on the third Tuesday in each month. The meetings are conducted in the manner of regular social clubs. Occasionally there are guest speakers at the meetings.

Sources Of Finance

Like other associations organized under similar conditions this Association found itself in need of finance so as to maintain a staff, to secure material and to meet expenses. In an effort to secure finance, an approach was made to the Atlanta Community Fund. The result was that the Association was advised to make a request to the Fund after having operated for a year, because nothing definite was known about its work. The board sent a representative to the Social Planning Council in May 1944 to ask for an endorsement of the work done by the Association. It was agreed that a study would be made during the following fall. The study was made, but at the time of writing, the committee of the Social Planning Council, appointed to evaluate the study, had not completed its plans.

During the late summer of 1944 a membership drive to secure funds was conducted. The Finance Committee of the Association was divided

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1Ibid.

2Mrs. R. T. Jackson, op. cit.
into three sub-committees; one worked with the membership, the second received the contributions from clubs, churches and organizations, and the third made an attempt to secure special grants from private and public funds.

Since the charter was granted, a marked progress in regard to the membership may be seen in the growth of the board and the organization of committees. Other agencies have been more interested and cooperative planning in the program has resulted. The clientele has also increased from 63 in March 1944 to 118 in March 1945.

Location

As the Association is yet in its initial stage, there is no central place where all activities are carried on. The ground floor of the First Congregational Church, 105 Courtland Street N. E. is used for central classes, interviews of the blind and for the delivery of mail. The Church has granted the Association the use of its telephone. The secretary of the church receives calls for the Association. The records of the Association are being kept at the home of the acting director. The part-time clerical worker, also performs her duties at the home of the acting director.

The Auburn Branch Carnegie Library furnishes a place on its ground floor for meetings for the Association once each month. Both the library and the church are centrally located and are accessible to the blind. There are classes held in the South Atlanta and Fourthward communities in an effort to carry the program to the blind. One of these is held at a church and the other is held at a home for the aged.
Facilities and Supplies

The Association has practically no facilities of its own. The Congregational Church, the center where most of the activities and business are conducted, is rent free. The Association has the use of a rented typing machine. It also has the use of a Talking Book machine. Hand looms for weaving purposes, stools for practice, Braille alphabet cards, and Braille readers are all the property of the Association. The Association has the necessary printed forms and supplies for office and classroom use.

Staff

The staff is composed of an acting director who works on a volunteer basis. Her duties are: to supervise and manage the executive officers of the Association, to conduct the fiscal affairs and direct subordinate employees, to develop friendly relations with all agencies and organizations that can be of service to the Association, and to carry out a program for the blind and for the prevention of blindness. The supervisor of the Association supervises the activities of the teachers and students and carries out plans designated by the acting director.

Clientele

The Metropolitan Atlanta Association has a clientele of 118 who are either enrolled in the central classes, the library program or who are home students. There are fourteen new clients who as yet, have not been
classified. A copy of the Case History Card, used by the Association for
determining the classification of the client will be found in the appendix.

Records concerning the organization and progress of the Association,
as previously stated, are incomplete. Therefore an analysis of cases
which would give a clearer picture of the clientele cannot be included in
this study. Of the total number registered with the Association, many
have been blind since birth, others since childhood, and the remaining
few have been recent victims of the handicap. A number of blind have had
the opportunity to compete with the seeing in the different grade schools,
colleges and universities. Others among this number have graduated from
the State Academy of the Blind and several have taken correspondence
courses.

Among the blind population as among the seeing population are to be
found some who are self-supporting and others who are not. Some of the
blind are able to support themselves because of their knowledge of handi-
crafts, masonry, and mechanics. Others are qualified instructors of
Braille and music. Many, however, may be seen on the streets soliciting
alms. Through these various ways which their environment affords, they
are attempting to meet their physical, mental and emotional needs, which
are fundamentally the same as other individuals.

Most of the clients were referred to the Association by the Atlanta
Public School pupils in May 1944. There were 140 names submitted at that
time. Other clients have made personal application and some have been
referred by different agencies.

Adjustment Made By Clients

Through the treatment received, the majority of the clients of the
Association have become able to make social and vocational adjustments.

One of the clients, a woman of 34 years, was presented to the writer by the supervisor of the Association. Before Mrs. X arrived the supervisor told of trying to get this particular client to become interested in the Association. He also told of his attempt to keep her from soliciting alms on the street corners. Finally he found an incentive to which she responded and he is proud of her progress. Mrs. X, was of medium height, and fairly neat in appearance. She began by saying, "Yes, one day I remember when I tried to knock Mr. Y in the face with my cane when he told me about the Association and asked me to come in and join them. Now I think I would hit him in the face with my cane if he would not allow me to attend classes." Over and over she mentioned the fact that her attitude and feelings about being blind had changed since she has been with the Association. She also said that she had learned to make a livelihood for herself. This client is an officer of the student organization and is respected by the students.

Here is an example of social adjustment. The client, after having attended classes for a period of time, seems to have a better understanding of people. This may be noted by her acceptance in the group as one of its leaders. The client also feels more secure, after having learned to make articles which are placed for sale.

The following is a case concerning the vocational adjustment made by a client of the association.

As the acting director waited to catch a streetcar, she stopped a student who recently was employed by a local business enterprise. She walked over and made herself known. He apologized for having not called to thank the Association for recommending him for a job. He said, "I owe my success to the Association because had I not learned to gain confidence in myself from attending the classes, I never would have thought that I could trust myself to go to and fro from my job. I do hope more fellows will take a chance." 1

Participation of Atlantans

In The Work of the Association

1Ibid.
The extent to which Atlantans participate in the Association may be seen in the membership. To date the Association has a total membership of approximately 500.1 There are different classes of memberships. Active members pay a dollar per year, contributing members pay five dollars, sustaining members pay ten dollars a year and patron members pay twenty-five dollars a year.2

Agencies in the community have offered their services to the Association and the churches have indorsed the program. Since it is the purpose of the Association not to duplicate programs of other agencies, cooperative planning has resulted. The Atlanta City Council has made a contribution. The Y. M. C. A. is playing a very vital part in helping to build and promote activities. The Fulton County Department of Welfare refers its clients to the Association, thus helping in the program of finding the blind. The Atlanta Public School system has helped by allowing the Association to take a census of the blind through the schools. The American Foundation for the Blind offered to help raise funds by sending Miss Helen Keller to Atlanta to make a personal appeal. The Social Planning Council is making a study of the Association so as to evaluate the program.

1Ibid.

2Report of Progress and Recommendations to the Board of Directors, Mrs. R. T. Jackson, acting Director, Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind, August 1944-November 1944 (Mimeographed).
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Variety in definitions of blindness along with other involved factors causes the case finding aspect of the program for the blind to be a difficult one. The best estimates today place the number of the blind in the United States at 200,000 or 250,000, or approximately 1.5 to 2 per 1,000 of the general population.

Although information regarding the causative factors of blindness is lacking in many instances, diseases and accidents are two of the major factors. The age at which the loss of sight occurs is determined by the part of eye that is affected. The trend in work for the blind is centered around prevention and the conservation of sight. Both public and private agencies are cooperating in this phase of work for the blind and all gradually adopting the case work approach.

In the early history of work for the blind, it was found that people were only interested in alms giving. But during the course of time individuals became more and more interested in attempting to help the blind make adjustments into society. Agencies for the blind were founded and work for the blind was expanded.

Laws were passed affecting the blind which made for further advancement. State schools were established for the education of the blind. Literature was published for educational purposes and leisure time reading. The invention of the Talking Book Machine was of great importance. This is a phonograph which plays long records and is very effective for teaching the blind who are unable to learn by other methods. The
passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 was an advance in work for the blind. Beside offering economic security to the needy blind, it made the public more conscious of the need of work for the blind. In spite of the large number of war blind, the war has broadened employment opportunities for the blind and there has been the development of committees and new agencies for the care of the blind.

The Blind In Atlanta

According to census report of the Metropolitan Association for the Colored Blind, there are approximately 300 Negro Blind in Atlanta. The largest number lives in the Westside Area. The blind in Atlanta are on different economic and educational levels.

Prior to the organization of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Blind, there was available limited case work service for the blind in Atlanta. The Department of Public Welfare administers Aid to the Blind under the Social Security Act. The only forms of recreational or cultural programs were offered by the Auburn Avenue Branch Library once each month.

The Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind

The Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind was organized in April 1944 by a lay person, and chartered in December 1944. It has been found that the new Association has explored phases of work for the Negro blind that have not been touched by other agencies. The organization is an incentive for the community. Many individuals have become members, and agencies are cooperating. This may be seen in the increased membership, and the cooperation which the Association is receiving
from other community agencies.

Summary and Prospect

In speaking of the blind there has long been the need for social action in program planning for this group. Few Atlantans saw this need prior to the organization of the Association and a program planned for the blind could only succeed when the seeing assumed their responsibility. Atlanta has arrived at a point where the necessity for blindness is being questioned. This is especially true because so many infectious diseases are under control due to the rapid progress in the medical science. Increasing emphasis in Atlanta also is placed upon the prevention of blindness rather than the attempt to cure the disease. The movement in medical research and social investigation is one of prophylaxis. Thus the issue of prevention has perhaps become fundamental in regard to the blind. Information regarding causative factors is lacking in a very large portion of the blind. It is quite obvious that there is a need for further research in the field of prevention of blindness.

The blind have come to be accepted as an integral part of the community and planning with them for them has resulted. The writer feels that at least one more teacher, a trained social worker and a physician should be added to the staff of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind. There is great need of a central place where all activities and business may be conducted. There is also need for the

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1 Harry Best, op. cit.
development of the preventive phase of the purpose of the Association.

For the most part the blind are more happy than before and their happiness adds to the sum total of the general welfare. Through the efforts of the Association they have improved physically, intellectually, socially, economically, and morally.¹

The start of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind is one step forward in the work for the blind, but it is felt that the work done by the Association needs to be expanded for greater service.

¹Ibid.
APPENDIX

A COPY OF THE SCHEDULE USED TO SECURE INFORMATION CONCERNING

CLIENTELE OF THE ASSOCIATION

SCHEDULE USED IN SECURING INFORMATION CONCERNING THE CLIENTELE

I. Source of Referral
   A. Personal Application
   B. Interested Person
   C. Social Agency
   D. Other

II. Geographical Location

III. Age Distribution At Onset of Blindness

IV. Causes of Blindness
   A. Heredity
   B. Congenital
   C. Accidents
   D. Diseases

V. Degree of Blindness
   A. Totally Blind
   B. Partially Blind
   C. Other

VI. Marital Status
VII. Sex

VIII. Other Handicaps

IX. Family Situation
   A. Member of Family Group
   B. Alone
   C. Other

X. Source of Income
   A. Employment
   B. Relatives
   C. Public Relief
   D. Other Agency

XI. Income Status

XII. Increase in Enrollment

XIII. Adjustment of Clients
   A. Employment Results
   B. General Improvement
   C. No Effect
   D. Bad Effect
   E. Comments
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>ADULT AGE</th>
<th>CHILD AGE</th>
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SCHOOL

TEACHER

GRADE

Date ________________
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<tr>
<th><strong>HISTORY CARD</strong></th>
<th><strong>METROPOLITAN ATLANTA ASSOCIATION FOR COLORED BLIND</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONFIDENTIAL</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NAME:</strong></td>
<td>(Surname) (Given Name) SEX AGE BIRTH: (Date) (Place)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADDRESS:</strong></td>
<td>(Number-Street or R. F. D.) (City Town or Village)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARITAL STATUS:</strong></td>
<td>SINGLE MARRIED WIDOWED DIVORCED LEGALLY SEPARATED AGES OF CHILDREN UNDER 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEGREE OF BLINDNESS:</strong></td>
<td>TOTALLY BLIND PARTIALLY LIGHT PERCEPTION ONLY BLIND PERCEPTION BUT UNABLE TO READ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE AT LOSS OF SIGHT:</strong></td>
<td>STATE ANY OTHER</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION:</strong></td>
<td>ATTENDED SCHOOL FOR SEEING (Specify) (Place)</td>
<td>ATTENDED SCHOOL FOR BLIND HANDICAP</td>
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<td><strong>CAN READ:</strong></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>BRaille</td>
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<td><strong>RAISED TYPE:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HOW SUPPORTED:</strong></td>
<td>BY OWN</td>
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<td><strong>PRESENT:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>KIND OF WORK OR TRAINING:</strong></td>
<td>Would like to pursue</td>
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<td><strong>NAME OF PHYSICIAN:</strong></td>
<td>(Eye or Medical) (Address) (City or Town)</td>
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<td><strong>AFFILIATIONS:</strong></td>
<td>RELIGIOUS FRATERNAL HOW MANY DEPENDENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REMARKS:</strong></td>
<td>(Date of First Interview) (Subsequent Interview) (Other Information)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported By:</strong></td>
<td>Name ADDRESS PHONE</td>
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# A CLASS ATTENDANCE REPORT FORM

Date: 

MONTHLY

Subject: 

Teacher: 

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<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Times Present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>20.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL**
REFERRAL BLANK

Date

Client's name____________________________________ Age______________

Address_________________________________________ Phone_____________

Marital Status____________________________________ No. Dependents_____

Guardian__________________________________________

Service requested________________________________

Remarks___________________________________________

A FORM FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING

AND PLACEMENT SERVICE

Student's name____________________________________

Address__________________________________________

Type of training________________________ Rate per hour__________

Time reported to work________________________ Hours worked________

Time reported for work________________________ (date)________ (time)________

Was job completed?________________________ Date to return__________

Quality of work________________________ Is improvement seen?________

Remarks________________________________________

Signed_________ (Supervisor)________________________

Date______________
REQUEST FOR SERVICE FORM

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<th>For Whom</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Type Of Service needed</th>
<th>How Made</th>
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