

Hadley School for Blind Gains National Attention

American Magazine Contains Glowing Article Setting Forth History of School

EDITOR'S NOTE:—In the July issue of the American Magazine appears an article by Neil M. Clark on William A. Hadley of Winnetka, founder and head of what is probably the only correspondent school for the blind. In this article, one of a series entitled "Interesting People," Mr. Clark tells of the circumstances preceding and causing Mr. Hadley's blindness. The remainder of the article is an account, in Mr. Hadley's own words, of the events that led up to the founding of this remarkable school for the blind.

Mr. Hadley tells of his first pupil, a blind woman living in Wichita, Kas., while teaching whom he gradually conceived and elaborated plans for an extension of the school and an enriching of its curriculum. With his wife he attended a convention for the blind in Iowa, where he presented his plans and received a most cordial endorsement. From that time on the enterprise has steadily grown until now its influence has spread even into China and India, and the number of pupils and courses has rapidly increased.

The article as it appears in the American Magazine, follows:

During the Christmas holidays, nine years ago, a teacher in one of the Chicago high schools had a severe attack of the grip and was compelled to lie abed for several days. He had not entirely recovered when school reopened; but he obstinately insisted upon rising and resuming his duties.

A tragedy was the result. This teacher, William A. Hadley, had been troubled with his eyes before. Now the condition was aggravated. Within a few weeks of his premature "recovery" he became totally blind!

Opportunity, it seems, can choose strange disguises; for this great misfortune turned out to be Mr. Hadley's chance for service in a broader field than had ever before come his way: As a direct result of his blindness, he has undertaken a work that already has carried his name to tens of thousands of people in every state in the United States, and even abroad.

It was a strange institution he founded, possibly the only one of its kind—a correspondence school for the blind.

"My blindness," he says, "was a misfortune in more senses than one. I was far from wealthy; and when I lost my sight and my accustomed means of earning a livelihood, the burden of support fell heavily on my family. In addition I had to struggle against the feeling that I was no longer of any use in the world. As I became adjusted to my situation, I tutored a few students privately, but only a few; and there were five long years of idleness when I fought to believe that somehow, somewhere, there must come again an opportunity to use the abilities I had spent the better part of a lifetime cultivating."

Mr. Hadley, he it said possessed degrees from two universities, and had studied at two others. His teaching experience had been varied and thorough.

"The opportunity I wanted," he continued, "finally came in a curious way: the Rev. L. B. Plumar, a minister from the East, called at our house, and happened to notice a book in Braille on the porch. Braille, you know, is the raised type used in printing for the blind. I mastered it soon after I lost my sight.

"This minister mentioned a blind woman, a member of his congregation, who had few interests. Then he asked this casual question:

"Could she learn Braille by correspondence?"

"The idea of correspondence courses for the blind had never occurred to me, and neither then nor later did I discover anybody else who had thought of it. But instantly it suggested to me a work, a service, an opportunity, such as I had long looked for in vain.

"I knew that the vast majority of the blind were poorly educated and hopelessly shut out from normal intellectual activity. I believed I saw a chance to do something worth-while to change that condition. Indeed, I immediately began writing to the superintendents of institutions for the blind in various states. In my enthusiasm I even made tentative outlines of courses.

"The first tangible result was a letter that reached me in 1920. A blind woman in Wichita, Kansas, wrote to ask if I could give her some instruction by mail. She had heard of me through the superintendent of the school for the blind in her state. I replied, saying that what I had in mind was experimental, but that if she was willing to try to learn, I was willing to try to teach her. So she became my first pupil.

"For her I worked up a great deal of material, sent her books to study, assigned lessons, had her prepare replies to questions and send them on to be graded and returned. In short, I went ahead on the plan used in correspondence instruction everywhere. When she had learned to read the Braille, I pointed out how she might continue her studies, and I eagerly turned to securing other students.

"I had no means to carry on anything extensive. I soon discovered,

however, that a worthy task finds willing hands to help. Some neighbors became interested and helped to interest others. Funds were provided to send Mrs. Hadley and me to a meeting of workers for the blind held in Iowa. There I told what I had in mind and had already done, and the convention endorsed my plan.

"From then the school has grown steadily. The raised-type magazines circulating among the blind mentioned the work, and the resulting demand for courses renewed the interest of my friends, who made themselves responsible for organizing and incorporating a school under state laws. A budget was raised which enabled us to secure printing machines to emboss and print the books needed for the work, to meet the expenses of an office, and to pay me a salary, as well as to pay others employed to help me.

"Applications for courses soon came faster than we could handle them. At first, I had been doing the work in our home. Soon, however, we rented offices over a store, where we still are.

"In 1922, the first full year of operation, we had 261 students. As students completed their studies, many dropped out, of course. The present enrollment is 350. Students are enrolled from 44 states and from Canada, China, India, Australia, and the Philippines.

"We have embossed nine books, and printed many copies of these on machines operated by our own hands. Among other tasks, we had to find time to write five special textbooks, in addition to the standard texts used. Our courses range from one on the ap-

"There are 20 courses at present, and we add others as students want them in sufficient numbers to justify the expense. Just now we have a waiting list of 21 students who want a course in life insurance salesmanship. Besides the courses, we maintain a circulating library, from which we send out books to every part of the country.

"There is no charge for instruction. As I told you, the blind are mostly very

poor. We have had prospective students who said they could not take courses because they lacked the money for stamps and for paper on which to write!

"Our students are very diversified in talent, age, occupation, and location. We limit instructions to adults, and have a few who are more than 70 years old! My last letter was to a young woman student in Montana. The one before that was to a blind colored minister in Florida, also a student. This man, by the way, is most enthusiastic, and wants every course we offer; he has just started psychology.

"In some cases, we seem to have enabled students to increase their earning capacity. For instance, a blind young man in Montreal was making brooms, but earned very little. He took our course in salesmanship, and with our help persuaded his father to let him try selling brooms. We have had many enthusiastic letters from him since. In the last one he said he was netting \$36 a week.

"There have been other cases of modest but substantial economic success following the studies, but I think our greatest service is that we give the blind—who would otherwise have to spend most of their time in idle darkness—useful mental occupation. We enable them to enter into the life of the world, and to feel that they too can do and live.

"That is what the blind want most. When we were starting, I remember suggesting to a woman that if she could not read Braille, she might have regular texts read to her by others.

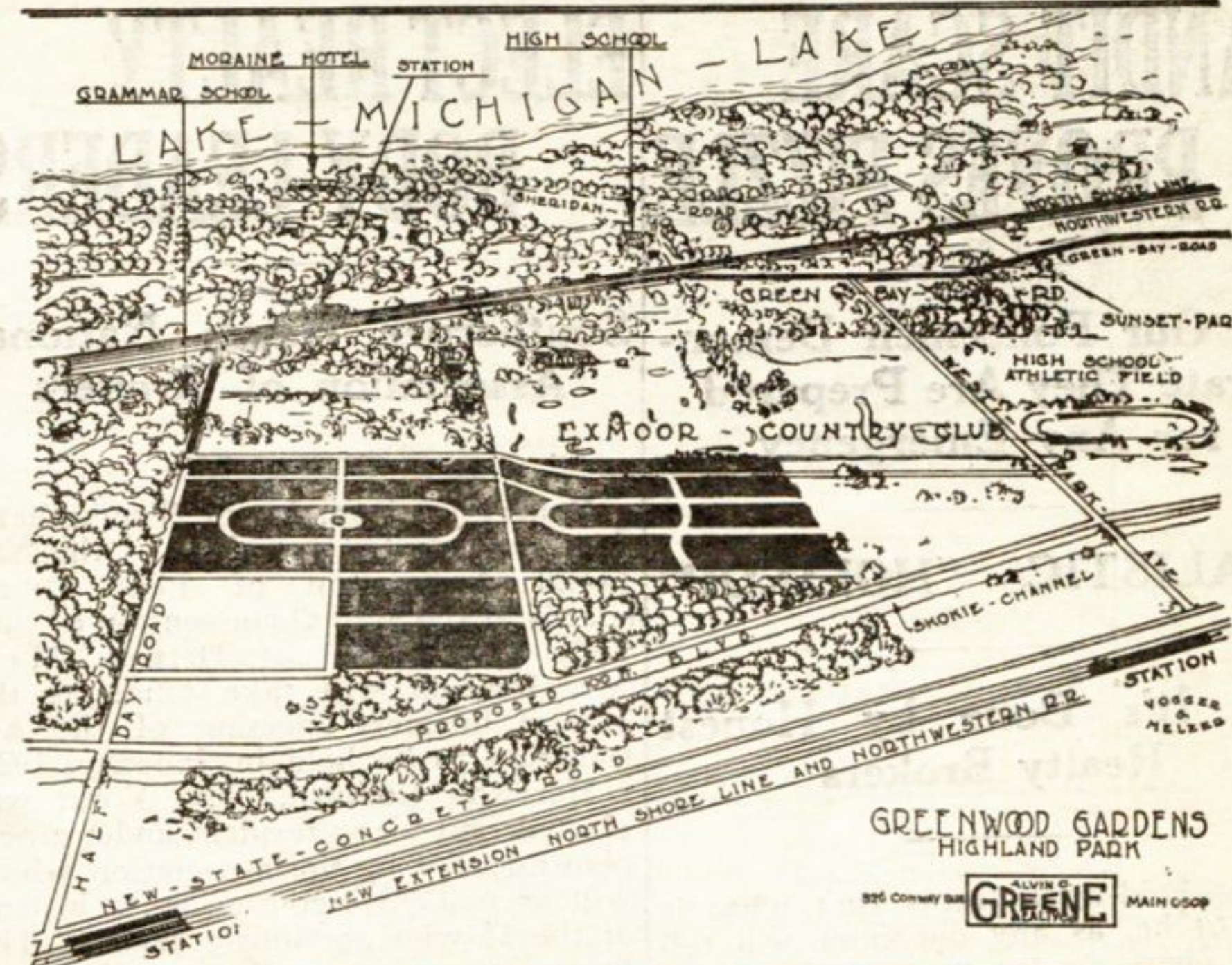
"But that is not the same thing!" she protested. "It means so much to do it yourself!"

"And that is true. Unfortunately, most people, when they do anything for the blind, give them what the blind do not want—pity. The blind want opportunity."

Mr. and Mrs. Orval Simpson of Tower road, left last Thursday to motor with a party of friends to Minocqua, Wis., to remain a week. Their son is at camp there for eight weeks.

Mr. and Mrs. Philemon B. Kohlsaatt, accompanied by Mrs. Robert McMinn of Milwaukee, motored to Dixon and Rockford last week-end.

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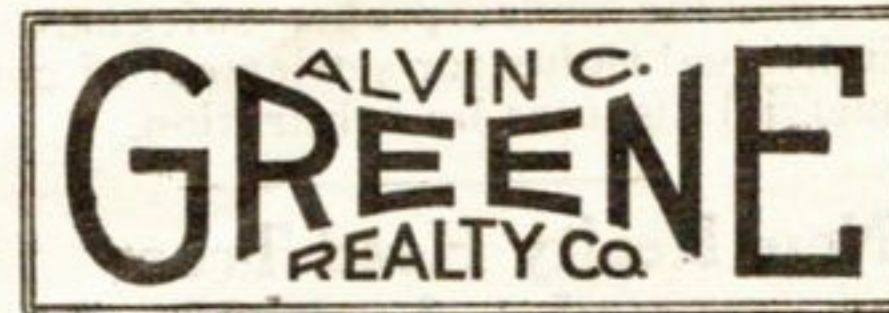
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