This is Merrill Palmer School of Child Guidance

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This is Merrill Palmer

School of Child Guidance

Marjorie Osenbrug, Iowa State representative last quarter, pictures Merrill Palmer School

If you accidentally found Ferry Avenue in Detroit, you would see a row of old houses on either side of the street one block from the city art museum and library. This is the Merrill Palmer School. In one house, once an art gallery, is the nursery school for children from 2 to 5. In another is the recreational club with its arts, crafts and game rooms. Across the street is a house that once held many of the famous James Whistler's paintings, and where now 10 of the 50 students live. All up and down this street the houses have been remodeled inside for class and recreational rooms. In one house is a small browsing library keyed to the students' individual interests. The other houses are homes for the students who plan the meals, cook them on the cook's day off and help take care of the house.

Each quarter two senior women are sent from Iowa State and other colleges from all over the country to spend one quarter in Detroit. Priscilla Maxon and Ruth Moody from Iowa State are now substituting three months at Merrill Palmer for their regular spring quarter's work. Before the war men who were future dentists, doctors and psychologists were beginning to attend. The school itself grants no degrees but works in cooperation with many other colleges. It was founded under the will of Lizzie Merrill Palmer in 1920 and has been growing in its service and size since then. It also has received sponsorship for child development and parent education through the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund.

Merrill Palmer is a leader in the broadened concept of general education which now not only includes intellectual and vocational instruction, but also gives young people and adults a better understanding of human relationships, especially in the home and family.

The courses are arranged so that students may work with older children from 6 to 12 years or with nursery school children. Practical experience, observation and intensive study are all a part of the plan followed. One course which all students are required to take meets twice a week and covers all aspects of a child's development from prenatal to adulthood. Class discussions and student participation is constantly encouraged as well as individual digressions, under guidance, from some of the subjects studied. There are also classes in music, literature and crafts for children. When someone visits the school who has something special to offer all classes are dismissed to hear the speaker.

One popular course studies older children. In it the instructors review for the class an intensive case study of children that the school has followed from prenatal life to adulthood so that the students see the child and his development as an integrated whole. They cover physical, mental, social and emotional growth and development. The influence of the home, friends and school is carefully studied and the teachers interpret and point out significant signs of development. To the student who hears it, it is an unfolding of human life and through it she learns how to interpret better the feelings and actions of others.

Classes are held in the afternoon, with mornings free, but no one spends the morning sleeping. In the community agencies course students travel all over the city to see housing projects, juvenile courts, nursery schools, prenatal clinics, hospitals and many other institutions serving the community. Other mornings are spent teaching in the Merrill Palmer nursery school. In the time that is left students can go to the library and select a book or magazine to read. For the first time since entering college many students find themselves left on their own, to study and to learn what they want about things in which they are most interested. Many of them realize for the first time that studying is fun and has a more important goal than cramming for an exam.

In the afternoon, besides classes which meet in each subject about once a week, some students do settlement school work. This usually means being in charge of a recreational group or leading informal club meetings of children from 5 to 12 years.

In the evenings free tickets admit students to the Detroit Symphony concerts, and most attend stage shows and other concerts as well. On special occasions each woman is given a dollar and they all go to find interesting places at which to eat. Russian, Hungarian, Greek, French, Chinese and many other of the picturesque restaurants in Detroit have served meals to Merrill Palmer students which they have never forgotten.

From a student's viewpoint of what makes a good teacher the women at Merrill Palmer agree that the staff there has 30 of the best teachers in the country. Child development and foods majors, nurses and missionaries have classes, conferences and parties with people of whom they have heard and read in their field. Every teacher is different, but one quality they have in common is their ability to inspire students.

"We run a three ring circus," said a teacher of community education. That is what the teachers do as they teach classes, counsel with parents and students, carry on research and community-wide conferences, write books and pamphlets and above all take a personal interest in everyone they meet.