

# McLaughlin Investigation Archive 1909

## Primary Source Newspaper Transcriptions

*The following pages contain transcriptions of newspaper clippings related to the 1909 investigation of Superintendent J. D. McLaughlin of the South Dakota School for the Deaf. Original wording, spelling, punctuation, and newspaper style have been preserved where possible. Bracketed notes such as [unclear] may be used where original text cannot be confidently read.*

*Transcription prepared for readability so readers do not have to struggle with blurred or damaged newspaper scans.*

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### **September 27, 1909 - SUPERINTENDENT IN TROUBLE**

#### **Superintendent of Deaf Mute School Comes Near to Getting Into Police Court**

For some time current rumors have been afloat respecting the conduct of James McLaughlin, superintendent of the school for the deaf in this city. The Argus-Leader has heard the various charges from three different sources but it has not given them publicity because so far as known no complaint had been made to the board of charities and corrections, and so far as this newspaper knows, the board is not advised of the situation.

Mr. McLaughlin was appointed to the place at the special request of Governor Vessey, and of course, this means that Governor Vessey is responsible for whatever complaint there is about the management of that institution.

It is charged against the superintendent that he is a man of violent temper and that he has been known to throw knives and dishes across the room in his rage. On Saturday a warrant was sworn out for his arrest by Miss Laura Johnson, who is connected with the school, because the superintendent used some obscene and vile language to her. Things were fixed up in court and the case was not showed. Mr. McLaughlin still holds his place and will probably still continue to hold it. The board of charities and corrections may, however, now that the matter has become public, see fit to take some action.

### **September 30, 1909 – [Untitled editorial Clipping)**

In the printed matter of the Commercial club the Children's home of Sioux Falls is listed as a "state institution." This is just exactly what it is not. The Children's home is maintained by private subscription, and no one who knows about the Home wants to have it made a state institution.

The present undesirable situation in the school for the deaf mutes, and the refusal of Governor Vessey to do anything to remedy the trouble ought to be a final argument against any proposition to allow the Children's home to get under state control. It would be a fine thing to have in charge of dependent children a man who is accused of a vile temper and of using obscene and vile language towards those attached to the work.

It would be better for the home to have it quit its work than to have the management made the result of politics. The Argus-Leader has a promise out to resist state control of the Children's home, and it proposes to keep the promise made many years ago to a man who is now old and about to retire.

The school for the deaf mutes must suffer until Governor Vessey is defeated, but the Children's home is so far free from partisan politics and must be kept there.

## **September 30, 1909 – [Untitled editorial Clipping)**

We suspect that there will be no investigation of conditions at the deaf mute school and that there will be nothing done until the state gets a new governor. Then the change will be made so quickly that the distressed parents will be glad.

To put in the charge of such a place a man who was arrested for using obscene and vile language to a woman in charge of the work, and to refuse to investigate the charges made long ago is getting very close to the limit.

The matter was long ago submitted to Governor Vessey and he refused to do anything because the superintendent was supposed to have some political influence in Codington county. Governor Vessey is certainly piling up things against himself for the day of wrath.

## **October 9, 1909 - [Untitled clipping]**

As the result of charges made against him, Superintendent McLaughlin of the deaf mute school has asked for an investigation of his course at the hands of the state board of charities and corrections. This is the proper course to pursue. The board should see to it that all the facts are brought out for the matter is most important to the patrons of this school.

## **October 13, 1909 - [Untitled clipping]**

Tomorrow (Thursday) is the date set by the board of charities and corrections for the investigation into the grave charges made against Superintendent McLaughlin of the deaf mute school. The investigation will take place at the school.

## **October 15, 1909 – COURT OF INQUIRY**

State Board of Charities and Corrections Makes an Investigation Into the Charges of Misconduct Against Superintendent McLaughlin

William M. Powers, of Yankton, president of the state board of charities and corrections and D. C. Thomas of Watertown, S. H. Bakewell of Plankinton, H. P. Packard of Redfield and W. H. King of Parker, constituting that board, held an inquisitorial session at the state school for the deaf mutes in Sioux Falls yesterday, for the purpose of investigating the charges of improper conduct which had been preferred against J. D. McLaughlin, superintendent of the institution.

It was at the urgent demand of the Argus-Leader that the state board decided to investigate these charges and it is with solid satisfaction that the Argus-Leader expresses the utmost confidence that the investigation was a complete vindication of Supt. McLaughlin and that the board, before its present session closes, pass a resolution which will exonerate the superintendent and prove his worthiness for the position which he holds.

Miss Laura Johnson, a young woman who was formerly employed in the culinary department of the institution was the person who made the accusations against the superintendent, upon which charges the Argus-Leader based the news items which appeared in these columns and which resulted in the investigation.

The board of charities went thoroughly into this investigation, summoning Miss Johnson, the complaining witness and Charles M. Day, editor of the Argus-Leader, and a number of other witnesses before it and seeking in every possible way to get at the facts.

### **C. M. DAY TESTIFIES.**

Mr. Day, when he was invited into the room where the board sat, asked that Supt. McLaughlin be allowed to be present during the presentation of the evidence, so that he might hear all that was stated and know exactly what the accusations were.

The board looked at the proposition in the same way and Mr. McLaughlin was invited into the room, where he sat throughout the investigation.

Mr. Bakewell of the board acted as the interrogator for the board and asked the questions.

Mr. Day was the first witness called and he gave the board the names of the people who had made verbal complaints and statements concerning the conduct of Supt. McLaughlin and also left with the board some letters which he had received from persons who desired that their complaints should find their way into the newspapers.

Mr. Day stated to the board that he had heard so many complaints and received so many letters that he had finally decided that it was his duty, as a citizen and a taxpayer of the state of South Dakota, to make an effort to have the conditions at the deaf mute school investigated and for that reason he had insisted in the Argus-Leader that the charges against Mr. McLaughlin be looked into.

Mr. Day also stated, very positively, that he bore not the slightest ill will nor grudge against Mr. McLaughlin and that he had no doubt that the accused man would be fully vindicated as a result of the investigation.

Mr. Day said that he knew nothing of his own knowledge of mismanagement or misconduct on the part of Supt. McLaughlin and that the allusions to the school which had appeared in his newspaper were based wholly upon what had been told him.

Mr. Day also left a list of the names of people who he thought should be summoned before the board and asked to tell what they knew, which list included a man named Richardson, the Misses McKinley, who are employed at the institution, Mr. Collins, the engineer at the institution, Mrs. McMath, one of whose children is a pupil at the school; Dr. E. Klaveness, who was at one time school physician and Miss Florence Clement, who was at one time employed there.

The board then called Mr. Day's attention to a communication from a man named Wade, which had appeared in the Argus-Leader, which communication was a criticism of the state board of charities and asked Mr. Day if he knew Mr. Wade, personally.

Mr. Day said that he did not know Mr. Wade and that he had published that communication simply as a part of the news current upon the day of its receipt. Mr. Day emphasized the statement that he had given publicity to that and other statements, solely for the good of the institutions of the state.

### **MISS LAURA JOHNSON.**

Miss Laura Johnson, the young woman who was the principal accuser of Supt. McLaughlin, and whose accusations had brought about the investigation, was the next witness.

Miss Johnson has auburn hair and was very positive in her statements. She said that it was on the morning of September 19th last, in the kitchen of the deaf mute school that the trouble occurred which had led her to leave the employment of the state and make the accusations against Mr. McLaughlin.

On that occasion, she stated, the ashes had not been taken out of the kitchen range and she had complained of it. The superintendent and she became involved in a discussion as to who was to blame for the presence of those ashes in the range and the superintendent had applied a vile epithet to her and raised his hand in a menacing way.

She said that he had not uttered the words of which she complained in a loud tone, but rather under his breath. She stated that Miss Anna Wright, another young woman who was employed at the school

at that time, could testify to the incident and that the only other witness was Mrs. Hunt, a deaf mute, who saw what had occurred but who could not hear what was said.

Mr. Collins also told of an instance when he had seen Mrs. Sarah Polson take a butcher knife and make some threatening motions toward Miss Laura Johnson, which caused the board to smile, when it was recalled that Miss Johnson weighs about 115 and Miss Polson about 185.

Miss Laws, one of the teachers was called and she testified that so far as she had observed and knew from personal experience, the conduct of the superintendent had always been most gentlemanly and considerate toward the employees of the institution, as well as toward the pupils.

Mrs. McLaughlin testified that she had never heard her husband use profane language. She had heard the conversation between Mr. McLaughlin and Miss Johnson and that Mr. McLaughlin did not call Miss Johnson any vile names. That she had lived with Mr. McLaughlin for seventeen years and had never heard him use the word which Miss Johnson says he used.

Supt. McLaughlin was then called and denied point blank that he ever in his life had used the language which Miss Johnson attributed to him. He related the trouble with Miss Johnson and said that she had withdrawn the case which had been started against him in the police court and that he had not sought to have it settled out of court.

Mr. McLaughlin frankly stated that he had trouble with Richardson, Miss Clement, Laura Johnson and a Mr. Le Serte, who was at one time employed at the institution.

## **OTHER WITNESSES**

Following Miss Johnson, the board called as a witness Miss Frances McKinley, one of the corps of teachers who was not inclined to answer the general question put to her as to the conduct of the superintendent and wanted specific interrogation. It was made plain to her that the board could not ask her to testify as to specific instances of misconduct on the part of the superintendent. She was asked what she knew of instances where the superintendent had used profane or obscene language and she knew nothing of any such incidents.

Miss May McKinley was asked as to Mr. McLaughlin's conduct since she had been at the school, with reference to his deportment and she responded by saying that Mr. McLaughlin had done things which she would not do, but he is running the school according to his ideas and she felt that she had no right to make suggestions or give advice.

L. M. Hunt, supervisor of the boys' department testified that he knew of instances where the superintendent had shown temper.

Mrs. W. J. McMath said that she had no personal knowledge of trouble at the school and only knew what Miss Clement, who was her friend, had told her. That Miss Clement had told her that the superintendent had frequently grown angry and said unkind and cutting things, to her, Miss Clement.

Miss Sarah Polson, the baker at the school said she knew Miss Laura Johnson and had once had a big fight with that girl in the bakery.

Mr. Collins, also an employe, said that he had heard the superintendent swear. He cited an instance when he had heard the superintendent use profanity in connection with something which had happened on wash day, when the work was delayed.

The board then adjourned for supper and after that repast A. T. Richardson, once an employe of the institution was called. His testimony was to the effect that he had no ill will against Mr. McLaughlin, but that Mr. McLaughlin did not always act like a man around the institution. He said he had once, through a window, seen the superintendent and a man named Poole, Mrs. McLaughlin and Mrs. McLaughlin's sister who was visiting at the institution, in the kitchen drinking something which looked

like beer from bottles. That the superintendent had used profanity on one occasion a year ago last winter. That he, Richardson, had left the institution a year ago last winter, because he had been discharged. That he, Richardson, had written anonymous letters to the Messrs. Powers, Tipton and Thomas of the board, calling attention to the unfitness of the sister of Mrs. McLaughlin for a position at the institution.

It should be stated that the members of the board present at the inquiry, Thomas and Powers, denied having received any such letters.

Dr. Klaveness, who was at one time physician at the deaf mute school was next called and in response to questions, said that he had never heard the superintendent use any profane language or in any way conduct himself otherwise than as a gentleman, while he was making professional visits to the institution and that he had no knowledge of any objectionable conduct on the part of the superintendent at any other time.

That concluded the taking of testimony and Mr. Thomas of the board, announced for the edification of the reporters who were present that before Mrs. McLaughlin's sister came to the institution, for a visit, the board had issued an order, that no relatives of any of the heads of the state institutions, would be employed in those institutions and that Supt. McLaughlin had observed that order, in not giving his wife's relative employment.

Supt. McLaughlin then took the stand and admitted that on one occasion he did take a drink of beer in the kitchen with the persons mentioned by Richardson and that the beer had been brought to the kitchen by a man named Poole.

Mr. Thomas of the board stated that during three years of the existence of the board which had preceded the present board, Richardson, at nearly every meeting, accosted some member of the board and asked for a raise in his salary. This closed the investigation.

Mr. Richardson asks the Argus-Leader to say that the statement in the morning paper, that he had asked the board of charities for a raise in salary, during the McLaughlin administration, was not true. That the requests he made for an advance were made before McLaughlin took charge of the school.

It is expected that the board of charities will issue a statement of its findings in connection with this investigation sometime during the present monthly session.

## **October 16, 1909 - THE DEAF MUTE SCHOOL**

The board of charities and corrections has made an investigation of the management of the school for the deaf, and while the board has not yet announced its decision, the impression is general that Superintendent McLaughlin will be exonerated. It was thought to have a hearing from which reporters and the accused superintendent were excluded but on the advice of the editor of the Argus-Leader, it was decided to open the gates and make the hearing a public one.

The Argus-Leader is fair enough to say that in its judgment, no case was made against Superintendent McLaughlin as to result in his removal. The investigation was the result of a demand for it made by the Argus-Leader, and insisted upon by the superintendent. Now that the investigation has been made and it was fair and complete, things at the school are likely to run along smoothly. So far as the Argus-Leader is concerned, it is quite satisfied and it will have no adverse comments to make if the board should exonerate Mr. McLaughlin, which we expect it to do.