

**Ferdie J. Deering**

## **Staying in School Could Be First Step to Staying Out of Penitentiary**

**E**IGHTY per cent of the Granite reformatory inmates coming before the State Pardon and Parole Board have not finished high school, says the Rev. Littleton Fowler, board member from Hugo.

Might it not also be true that 80 per cent of those individuals who finish high school never become prison inmates?

The figures may not be precise, but there is an apparent correlation between education and juvenile crime.

Our educational system begins at home, extends into the neighborhood, public schools, the community and the business world. Each of these areas is under stresses that may discourage youngsters from staying all the way through.

More than six million juveniles are arrested each year in the United States and some officials say that they commit from 50 to 80 per cent of all crimes. Others say the proportion is lower, using a national figure of 46 per cent and reports showing only 36 per cent for Oklahoma City.

Many teen-agers drop out of school because they failed to acquire adequate skills in reading, writing and problem solving in lower grades. As they grow older, catching up is difficult. They become discouraged and turn to other interests.

Unfortunately, many such youngsters have inadequate disciplinary supervision, along with other shortcomings at home and at school. It is no wonder that they become disoriented as they try to figure where they fit into a world that extends from the fantasy of Donald Duck to

exploration of the planets!

When they drop out of school, they find good job opportunities are few and limited, because they have no skills, they may be too young under child labor laws and employers might not want to hire them because their production won't justify minimum wage rates they are required to pay.

"I quit!" has become a common attitude among both adults and juveniles who are easily displeased, readily discouraged, or who dislike working. Unemployment compensation keeps adults in funds, but idle juveniles are easy marks for crime.

Teaching dropouts to read, write and do arithmetic will help them to hold jobs, but it won't solve all problems. As uneducated juveniles, they may steal merchandise from a store counter. As educated young adults, they may try to steal the entire store, unless they are taught acceptable moral standards and realize that each person has a responsibility in society.

Finally, youngsters need help in establishing desirable objectives in life. Motivation must begin early. If career ambitions require college education, children can't wait until high school to begin preparation. Fundamentals must be learned before they become teen-agers.

By that time, realization that they have missed essential learning may result in an "I quit!" attitude toward school, toward work, toward society, and toward life.

Such youngsters may become dropouts, and dropouts are the most likely prospects to become inmates!