

**Annual report of the trustees of the New-York State Asylum for Idiots :
transmitted to the Legislature, February 9, 1852.**

Contributors

New York State Asylum for Idiots.
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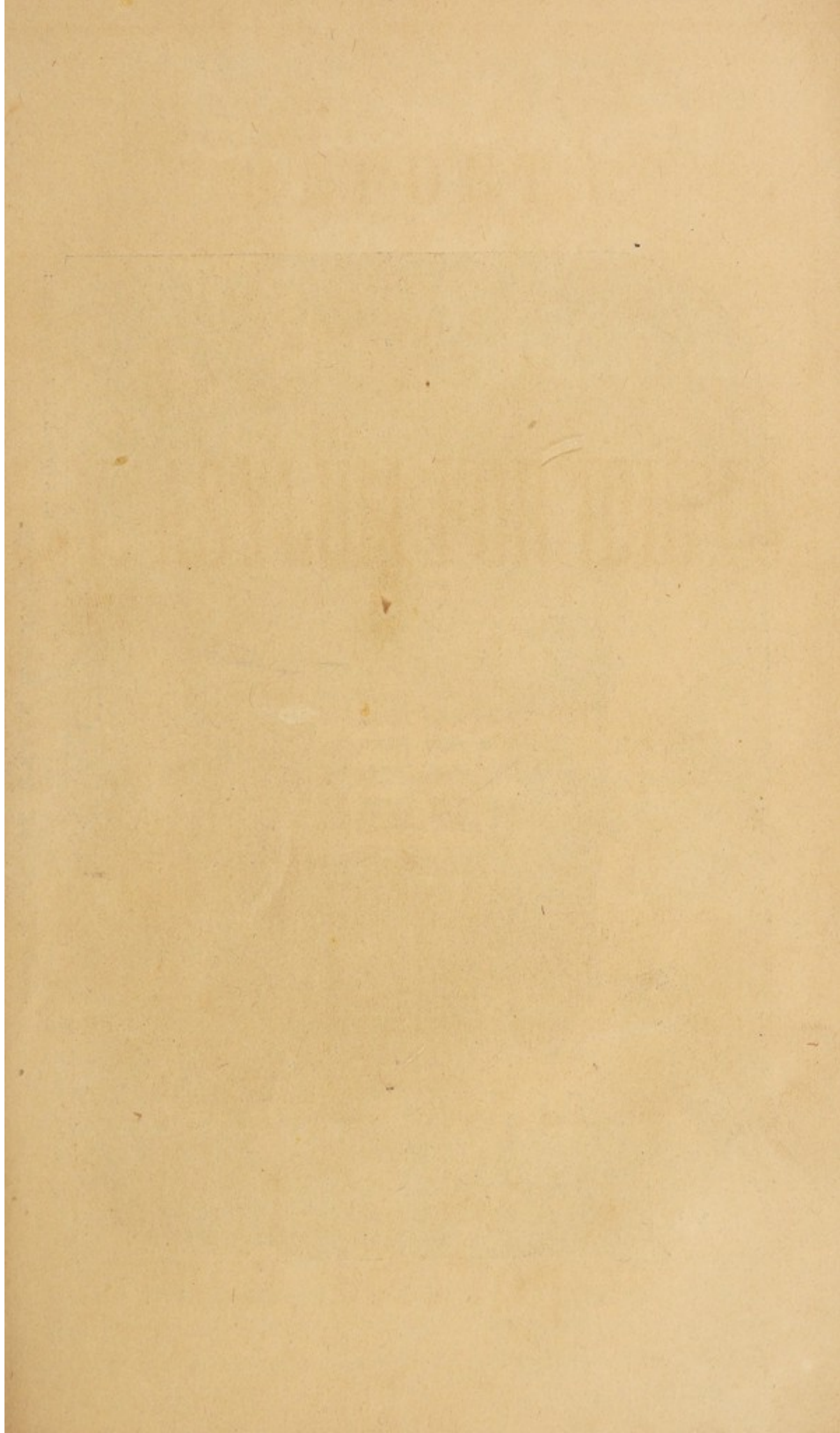
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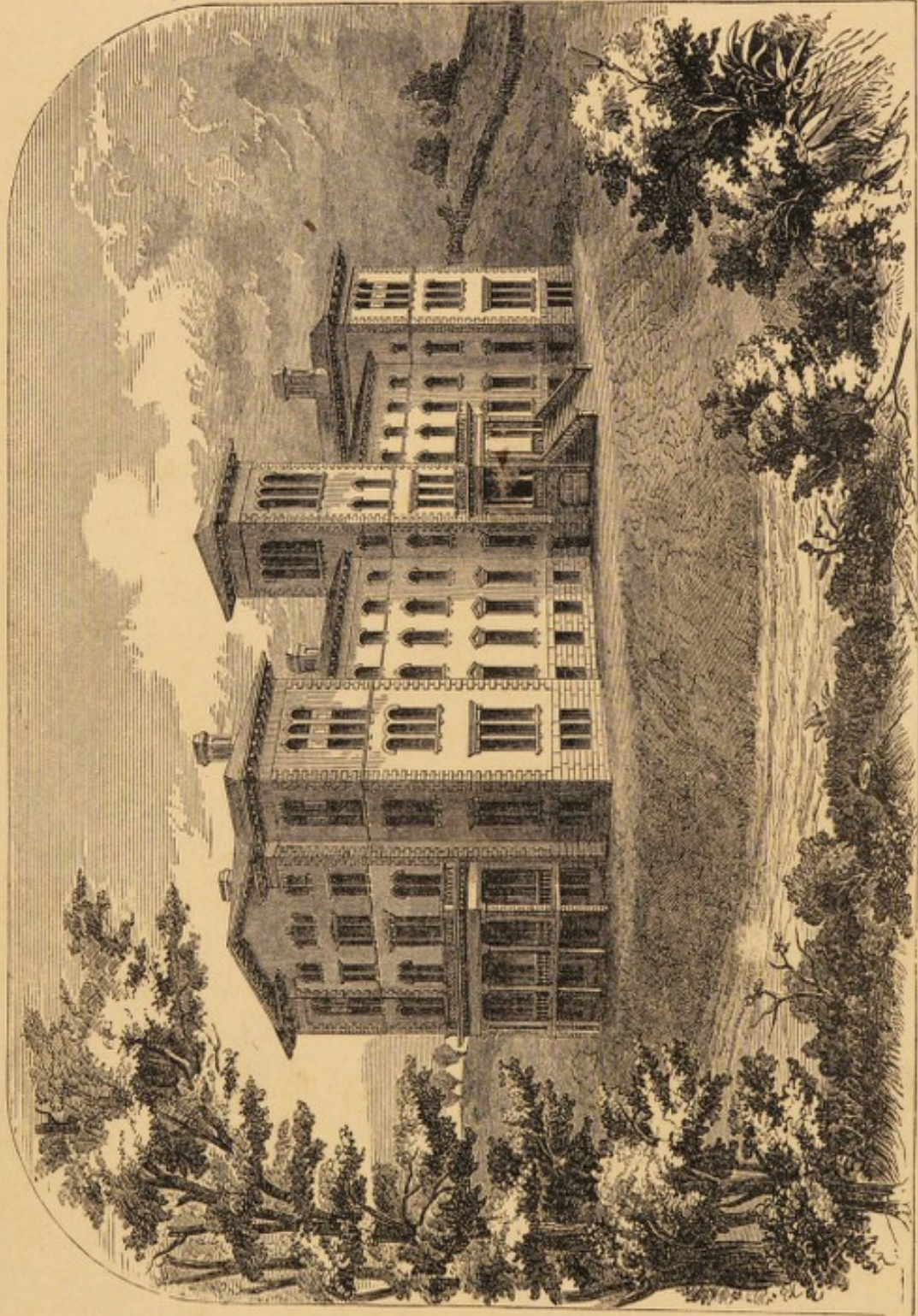
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W. L. WOOLLETT, Jr., Architect.

ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS.

State of New-York.

No. 30.

IN SENATE, FEB. 9, 1852.

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

Of the Trustees of the New-York State Asylum for Idiots.

To the Legislature of the State of New-York:

In compliance with the act passed July 10th, 1851, entitled, "An act to establish an asylum for Idiots, and making an appropriation therefor," the subscribers, trustees of the said institution, respectfully submit this their first

REPORT.

The Board of Trustees met and organised in July last, and appointed committees to look out for a proper building in some desirable locality, and also to select a competent superintendent teacher. As all the trustees but one were residents of the city of Albany, it seemed to the board indispensable, in order to secure the necessary supervision, that the institution should be so near that city as to permit the trustees and their committees to visit it frequently. Four of the trustees being State officers, would be wholly unable to perform this duty, at any considerable distance from their offices. And as the enterprise was experimental, there seemed great propriety in its being conducted so near the capital, that the members of the Legislature might from time to time examine it and become acquainted with its nature

and success. It was believed also, that a suitable location could be found in the vicinity of the State capital, on terms as favorable, as at any other part of the State, and that the expense of its maintenance there, would be no greater. These views and expectations have been verified by the results. After having spent some time in searching for such a building as was required and in such a place as should be adapted to the peculiar necessities of the institution, the committee recommended and the board adopted the large, spacious, airy, well arranged building on the Troy road, about two miles from the capitol, belonging to Stephen Van Rensselaer, Esq., who with great liberality agreed to lease it to the State for two years at a rent, not more probably than one-half the actual annual value. The building required very little repair; but some alterations were necessary to adapt it to our purpose, and it was deemed indispensable to supply it with pure water, in large quantity for the laundry, and for bathing. These occasioned some expenses. We think, however, that no one can visit the establishment without being struck with the fitness of all its arrangements, and the supply of every thing required for the health, comfort, and convenience of the inmates, and for the course of training to which the system of education subjects them.

A part of the committee appointed to select a superintendent teacher, repaired to Barre, in Massachusetts, where a private school for the training and instruction of idiots had been maintained for more than three years, by Dr. Hervey B. Wilbur. Their object was to become acquainted with a subject so novel to us, in order to qualify them to decide on the qualifications necessary for the principal teacher. They found the school in such admirable condition, they had such evidence of the great capacity of Dr. Wilbur, of his devotedness to a wearisome and trying labor, from which most men of education and refinement would recoil, and of his great success, that they determined on an effort to induce him to leave his very profitable school, and take charge of the proposed asylum for this State. Personal interviews between him and the other trustees, induced the latter to concur heartily in the views of their committee. After some negotiation, a proposition, intended to be liberal, was made to Dr. Wilbur

for the services of himself and his family, including his medical care of the pupils, and accepted by him. With his advice the building was selected, and by his assistance and direction it was put in order, the necessary furniture and school apparatus provided, and the asylum opened for the admission of pupils in the month of October last.

The act establishing the asylum limited the number of State pupils to twenty, to be selected from those whose parents or guardians are unable to provide for their support, some of them from each of the judicial districts of the State.

Considering the nature of the enterprise as experimental, it was deemed by the trustees of importance that the selection of pupils should be made with the greatest care, so as to secure those who were proper subjects, who were of an age to be moulded and trained, and who should exhibit a fair average of the great varieties of idiocy. The board determined to select two from each judicial district in which proper subjects could be found, and to distribute the remaining four according to the number of applications throughout the State at large. A judicial district was assigned to each trustee, (excepting the Governor) who dispatched circulars to gentlemen in each county of his district, requesting them to seek out idiot children under 12 years old, in the condition required by the law and possessing the requisites specified in the circulars. These were extensively circulated, with others sent out by the Governor generally. From the returns made, and from applications made by individuals, selections have been made from time to time, of which a list is appended. There are now sixteen State pupils in the institution, two selected, but who have not arrived, one application that will be granted and one vacancy, and seven pupils whose parents or friends pay different sums, according to circumstances, for their support.

The trustees have adopted a series of regulations for the government of the asylum, and for a strict accountability for all moneys received, and for all property in charge of its officers. They have appointed an executive committee of three of their number to take immediate charge of the institution, visit it and draw all moneys for its expenditures.

The expenses incurred in what may be called the capital of the asylum, the preparation of the building, of the introduction of water, and for furniture and apparatus, and such articles as are not in the class of annual expenses, have been about \$3,500. The current expenses for subsistence, salaries, fuel, labor, &c., already incurred, are about \$1,725; many of these are on hand for future consumption. The balance of the appropriation of \$6,000 for the current year, with the amount received and to be received from pay pupils, amounting to about \$1,500, will probably defray all the expenses of the year. Should there be any deficiency, the surplus of the appropriation for the next year will be more than sufficient to meet it, and unless the Legislature direct that a larger number of State pupils shall be received, the balance of the appropriation for the next year will be abundant for all its expenses, as the expenditures for permanent purposes will have been made. Ten additional State pupils, however, may be accommodated in the present building, which will not increase the annual expense more than \$1,500. A greater number could not be received without excluding pay pupils who contribute very much to the support of the asylum, and whose claims upon our sympathies are as strong as those of the other class, and for whose education no other similar institution exists in our State.

So far as the trustees have had the opportunity of forming an opinion from the information they have acquired on the subject, generally, and particularly from their observation of the pupils in the asylum during the time they have been there, they entertain no doubt that in a large majority of cases, idiots may be so trained and instructed as to render them useful to themselves and fitted to learn some of the ordinary trades, or to engage in agriculture. Their minds and souls can be developed, so that they may become responsible beings, and be made acquainted with their relations to a Creator and a future state; and in all cases, almost without exception, they can be made cleanly and neat in their personal habits, and enjoy many of the comforts of life, while they will cease to be regarded as incumbrances and annoyances to the families in which they reside. The report of the Superintendent, Dr. Wilbur, to the trustees, which accompanies this communication, presents such full, clear and able views of

the condition of idiots and their capability of improvement, as to supersede the necessity of any further observations by us. Those who are desirous of information on the subject will find in that report the results of thorough scientific investigations and of practical experience. And the trustees cannot forbear to remark, that they regard the State and the cause of idiots, as having been exceedingly fortunate in our having such a Superintendent, who engages in this irksome charity from the highest principles of Christian benevolence.

We do not understand his recommendations for an enlargement of the capacity of the institution, as being intended for immediate action. At all events, the trustees are of the opinion that for the term of two years originally contemplated, the school should not exceed forty pupils. And they are of opinion that more than 150 pupils cannot be properly attended to by one Superintendent, however numerous his assistants. Each case of idiocy is peculiar and unlike any other, and requires peculiar treatment. Hence the pupils cannot be arranged in classes, at least for a long time, and when in classes the training and education of each must be guided by an experienced and steady hand. The oversight of many assistants is calculated to distract the attention of the principal and divert him from his appropriate duties.

The idea is entertained by some, that to make such schools available to a large number, they should be multiplied and established in the different localities where they can receive pupils from a district of country surrounding them, while they could in time be furnished with practiced teachers, trained and prepared at the State institution. It is not improbable that some such plan will be found necessary. But we are yet without the means of arriving at any safe conclusion. The number of idiots or imbeciles in the State, and their residences, are unknown. The census returns included idiots and lunatics in the same class. It will be necessary to obtain accurate information on these points, before definite action can be had. And we would respectfully submit to the Legislature the propriety of requiring the assessors of the towns and wards and cities, to ascertain the number, age, sex

and condition in respect to health, of all idiots within their assessment districts; and of requiring the superintendents of alms houses, county and town poor houses to make similar returns of the idiots under their charge. With such information before the Legislature, and with the benefits of the experiment making at the State asylum, for the ensuing year, as well as other information to be obtained from Europe and our sister States, plans can be matured which will command the confidence of all. In the mean time public attention will be awakened to the subject, the sympathy of our fellow citizens will be roused, and public sentiment enlightened by discussion and experience, will be prepared to sustain the Legislature in any judicious measures for an object so benevolent.

With these views we would not recommend the erection of a larger building at present. It would not be prudent to make additions to the present building, without a previous purchase or an agreement to pay for them—which is not probable. If authority be given to receive ten additional pay pupils, and a corresponding appropriation be made, all will be done that seems now advisable.

Appended, is an abstract of receipts and expenditures, in which the latter are classed [as either for permanent objects, or for current support, a list of the State pupils and the teachers.

JOHN C. SPENCER,
 W. L. MARCY,
 JAMES H. TITUS,
 FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,
 WILLIAM I. KIP,
 WASHINGTON HUNT,
 SANFORD E. CHURCH,
 HENRY S. RANDALL,
 J. C. WRIGHT.

January 28, 1852.

TEACHERS IN THE ASYLUM

RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURES

Of the N. Y. State Idiot Asylum to January 1, 1852.

There has been drawn from the State Treasury for the use of the Idiot Asylum, on various warrants, the sum of \$4,595 22

Of this sum was expended in fitting up the buiding	
and in the introduction of water,.....	\$964 00
For furniture and apparatus, about.....	1,706 00
For salaries, wages and labor,.....	732 78
Stable, stock, &c,.....	289 00
For annual supplies,.....	207 00
Subsistence bills,.....	427 17
Sundries,.....	269 27
	\$4,595 22
	\$4,595 22

There still remains an out standing account that will swell the account of repairs by the addition of \$350. Additional furniture and apparatus, say \$150.

TEACHERS IN THE ASYLUM.

HERVEY B. WILBUR, M. D., *Superintendent.*

MISS ADELINE E. COLEY, *Assistant.*

“ FRANCES H. CLARK, “

LIST OF STATE PUPILS IN THE ASYLUM.

- Dist. No. 1. N. M., W. McC., J. M., city of New-York.
do. 2. H. H., A. P., Brooklyn, Kings co.
do. 3. E. D., Ulster co., C. A., Columbia co., C. L., Albany co.
do. 4. A. M., St. Lawrence co., H. G., Washington co., (C., Franklin co., selected, not arrived.)
do. 5. S. F., Jefferson co., (G. W., from Oneida co., selected, not arrived.)
do. 6. O. B., Madison co., J. C., Otsego co. (There are two pending applications from this district, one of which will be granted.)
do. 7. W. C., Ontario co., M. S., Seneca co.
do. 8. E. A. C., Cattaraugus co.

SUMMARY.

State pupils in the Asylum,.....	16
do. selected but not arrived,.....	2
Applications pending,.....	1
Vacancy 8th district,.....	1
	—
Whole number allowed by law,.....	20
	==

[Regard for the future interests of the pupils and for the feelings of their relatives, has induced the substitution of the initial letters of their names instead of giving them at length. They will be furnished, however, to any member of the Legislature, on application to the Executive Committee or to the Superintendent.]

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT.

NEW-YORK IDIOT ASYLUM, }
January 23d, 1852. }

To the Trustees of the New-York Asylum for Idiots :

Gentlemen—Brief as has been the period since the passage of the act of the Legislature establishing an asylum for idiots in the State of New-York, through your prompt and efficient action in the preliminary measures for carrying the provisions of that act into effect, those preliminary measures may now be regarded as nearly completed.

Certain essential requisites for the complete fulfilment of the design of this public charity seemed almost providentially furnished to our wants. A large and commodious building, ample grounds, a good supply of pure water, a location presumed to be healthy, retired but yet accessible—all desirable external appliances were early supplied. While within, competent and faithful assistants and servants and a great variety of pupils, selected as equitably as possibly from the several judicial districts, leave nothing wanting that the most ardent friends of the present measure could desire. The present legislation upon the subject was temporary and somewhat experimental in its character. Still, with the well-attested facts accumulated at other and kindred institutions, with the language of the bill before me, and with what I know to have been the intention of the framers of it, I am warranted in saying that the experiment could have relation only to the circumstances of future State endowments. It was to furnish facts as to the number of persons for whom such special care and instruction was needed, as to the best modes of management and instruction, and also more intelligible motives for still larger appropriations from the State treasury. It would have been a

narrow-minded legislation that, shutting its eyes to the triumphant success of public experiments, in parallel circumstances, as to the practicability of educating idiots, should demand a new trial of that question when the friends of degraded and miserable human beings were pleading for their elevation, education and relief.

At this stage of our history as an asylum, an exhibit of the results of our efforts will not be looked for in the report of the Superintendent. Yet certain proper materials for a report to the Trustees and to the Legislature, even at this time, are not wanting.

A brief history of the earliest attempts at legislation in this country in behalf of idiots seems not out of place, and such history will enable me to accord a just tribute of acknowledgment to the disinterested zeal and philanthropy of those gentlemen who may be called the pioneers in such benevolent efforts in this country.

Only a week after the meeting of the Legislature of New-York in the winter of 1845 & 6, the Hon. Frederick Backus of Rochester, then a member of the Senate, made the first step towards any legislation in this country in behalf of idiots, by moving that that portion of the last previous State census relating to the number and condition of idiots be referred to the committee on medical societies of which he was chairman. On the following day he made a lengthy and able report containing a statement of the probable number of idiots in the State; a brief history of the European schools for idiots; the proofs of the very favorable and practical results of those schools, furnished by the testimony of scientific gentlemen of extensive reputation both in Europe and this country, and in addition the opinions of well known superintendents of insane asylums in this country: that asylums for idiots were a want of the age, from their number, present condition, and undoubted susceptibility of instruction. Among other evidence he introduced a letter from the late Dr. Woodward of Massachusetts, which from its date indicated that Dr. Backus had prepared his materials for a report before the commencement of the session and that he had regarded it as the object of all others to be promoted by his membership.

At the proper time, he introduced a bill for the establishment of an asylum for idiots, and which finally passed the Senate by a vote of 11 to 10. This bill, at first concurred in by the Assembly, was finally rejected by a vote of 58 to 47. During the same session, the late Dr. Brigham, in the annual report of the State Lunatic Asylum, dated Nov. 30th, 1845, gave a synoptical statement of the number of insane and idiotic persons in the State. He reported the success of the European institutions for idiots, and ended by expressing the hope that New-York would sooner or later provide an asylum for their special improvement.

During the interval, between the session of '45 and '46 and the succeeding one, Dr. Backus pushed his labors with indefatigable zeal. He collected additional testimony upon the subject. He put himself in communication with M. Saegert, Instructor of the Royal Deaf and Dumb Asylum at Berlin, who had organized a school for idiots, and translated portions of his reports to be embodied in his second one to the Legislature. At his suggestion, also, memorials were presented from several societies for the same end.

In this second year of Dr. Backus' connection with the Senate, a bill establishing an asylum for idiots passed that body by a vote of 17 to 7. This was finally defeated in the House, by the want of time at the close of the adjourned session.

Unsuccessful as was the result of this attempt at legislation for so worthy an object, it was not labor entirely thrown away. The impulse was felt in Massachusetts, for in the April following this public effort in New-York, a resolution was passed by the Massachusetts Legislature appointing commissioners to make inquiries as to the number and condition of idiots in Massachusetts, and report at their next annual meeting. These commissioners were two years in preparing their final report, which resulted in an appropriation for an experimental school for idiots in that State.

To continue the history in our own State, I will mention that Governor Fish recommended the subject to the consideration of the Legislature in both of his annual messages.

But as there was no one in either branch who felt any particular interest in the subject, and who would continually urge it upon their attention, no action resulted from the recommendation.

The history of the legislation to establish our asylum is well known to you. The present Governor not only recommended the measure in his first message, but brought his personal influence with the members of both houses to secure the passage of the bill which founded it.

Now while the friends and supporters of this latter legislative action were entirely satisfied, as I have before intimated, of the practicability, expediency, and duty of educating idiots; and, consequently, of a permanent State provision for the object they were yet not unwilling to commence on a limited scale; in some degree commensurate with the public faith and sense of duty upon the subject; and also that the enterprise should, on the face of it, have something of an experimental character. Nor were even they aware, probably, of the great number of young idiots for whose necessities relief was to be provided. Now were our asylum to be regarded only in the light of a custodial institution, we should have reason to be satisfied with its practical and favorable operation. I rejoice to say, in general terms, what you have had abundant opportunity of verifying in your character as trustees, that it has already brought relief, from support, much care and anxiety to families where such support and care were particularly burdensome, from their very moderate pecuniary means.

But our asylum is not to be regarded in such a light. It is an establishment for the management and education of young idiots. It is an extension of the blessings of education of an appropriate character, to a class of persons of a teachable age—not deaf mutes or blind—whose faculties are not susceptible of development under the customary conditions and facilities of a common education.

I beg leave, therefore, to call your particular attention to the condition of our pupils when they were received. They were

selected by yourselves from every portion of the State, with only written descriptions to guide you, with no restrictions as to the degree of idiocy, and subject only to a few necessary conditions. I was furnished in every case with a certificate, filled out by an intelligent physician acquainted with the pupil, in answer to a series of questions designed to elicit a brief history and description that should throw light upon the general subject of idiocy, as well as furnish hints to guide us in our efforts for their education. From the descriptions given by these certificates, and from additional information furnished by the parents or parties sending, and which, I may say, are confirmed by your own observation, I give the following summary statements.

Of the 25 pupils that we have received at our asylum, 12 could not speak a single word. Of these 12 who were speechless, 6 had no idea of language, could not comprehend a single word or command addressed to them. Of those who are not dumb, 3 say but a few words and those indistinctly; and still 2 others who did not speak till nine years of age, and now but indistinctly, and with a very limited number of words.

Seven walked imperfectly, 3 were subject to partial paralysis, 11 had been subject to convulsions, 8 were subject to excessive flow of saliva, 7 were utterly inattentive to the calls of nature, and several others required constant watching to preserve cleanliness, and 5 were described as very irritable. A greater portion were unable to dress or undress themselves, and but four of the whole number could feed themselves with propriety. None of them could read or write, or count, or distinguish colors by name.

The range of development is from one who is but little below the lower grades of ordinary human intelligence, and who could not be taught to read, or write, or count, by the ordinary educational efforts for that purpose, down to one who cannot walk, nor stand, nor even sit alone; who cannot feed herself, has no idea of language, no fear of falling, faint perceptions of the objects of sight, and who would have starved to death with food within her reach and before her eyes.

Taken as a whole, they are unquestionably below the mass of idiots in the State in point of intelligence, and for the obvious

reason that those parents whose children were among the most marked cases of idiocy, would be the first to avail themselves of the State charity.

One fact with reference to them should be borne in mind, however. These are young idiots and, therefore, of the most teachable age, the proper school-attending age of ordinary childhood. As such, they are free from the confirmed habits which constitute, in the main, the disagreeable or repugnant features of the common appreciation of idiocy. Their whole organization is more flexible, more susceptible of development. The physical defects or infirmities with which the idiocy is connected, or upon which it is dependent, are more amenable to proper rules of diet, regimen or medicine. And to prevent any misapprehension of my meaning in this report, when speaking of idiocy, I will venture to define the term even at peril of adding one more to the number of definitions that have been successively declared imperfect or erroneous.

Idiocy is the want of a natural or harmonious development of the mental, active and moral powers of a human being, and usually dependent upon some defect or infirmity of his nervous organization.

I use the word *idiot*, too, in a generic sense and with similar latitude, sanctioned as such usage is by the derivation of the word, by the custom of the most approved writers upon the subject, and still again by the popular idea of the word, as evinced by the variety of subjects for whom applications for admission have been received at our institution.

Now in visiting our asylum and observing the pupils gathered there, or in reading the summary statement I have already given of their present peculiarities, you may notice the usual phenomena of idiocy. Here you will see manifested in almost every case the evidences of imperfect physical organization, though you will not see, except in two or three cases, any very noticeable deviations from a regular form of head or face; and in these few cases the comparative deviation is no criterion of the extent of the idiocy. Here are exhibited a variety of *physiological* symptoms. These constitute the prominent features in the

popular observation and idea of idiocy. Absolute muteness or imperfect speech, the wandering gaze or fixed and vacant stare, imperfect hearing, defective or excessive sensation generally, excessive restlessness or inertia, certain mechanical motions always done in any assemblage of idiots. Nor will a variety of disorders of function of the various organs be unnoticed.

Finally, one may witness in all cases a deficiency in the great exciting and regulating principle of human thought and human action—the *human will*. It is this peculiarity that seems to underlie all the other constant symptoms of idiocy. Now it is exhibited in a pupil whose mental faculties seem adequate for any ordinary intellectual operations, and yet they wander vaguely uncontrolled, without collecting food to nourish or invigorate them. Now, still more prominently, in a subject, with adequate muscular power, with intelligence sufficient to direct that muscular ability, with appetite craving, and yet a want of power of *will* to extend the hand for food.

In general terms our pupils may be described as affectionate, mild and obedient and easily amused or rendered happy. Still their pleasure and happiness is derived, not from the impressions resulting from sensation generally, but from the continued repetition of a limited number of impressions. And it should be observed as having an important bearing upon the duty we owe them of education, that left to themselves, the range of these sensations rather diminishes with increasing age and feeble sources of pleasure as they may now seem, they will yet pall under the ceaseless repetition.

Regarding, then, these pupils at our asylum as representatives of the whole class of idiots in the State, I will notice, briefly, the immediate objects and ends of any rational efforts for their relief and education.

We do not propose to create or supply faculties absolutely wanting; nor to bring all grades of idiocy to the same standard of development or discipline; nor to make them all capable of sustaining, creditably, all the relations of a social and moral life; but rather to give to dormant faculties the greatest practicable development, and to apply those awakened faculties to a useful

purpose under the control of an aroused and disciplined will. At the basis of all our efforts lies the principle that the human attributes of intelligence, sensitivity and will are not absolutely wanting in an idiot, but dormant and undeveloped.

Gross misconceptions I know prevail upon the true nature of idiocy that produce a want of faith in the teachableness of idiots. These arise partly from the crude and hasty observation of a limited number of cases and are confirmed by the common expressions one meets with so frequently whenever the subject is written about or spoken of. Even the witnessed or well authenticated results of efforts for their education are regarded as if they were the performances of trained animals; as if because their animal nature is developed, somewhat at the expense of the spiritual, they were endowed with instinct, instead of reason, by the Creator. But it should be remembered that they have a human origin; that however they may differ in physical, mental or moral organization they are yet human beings.; that their degradation in the scale of humanity, however it may modify, constitutes no absolute release or outlawry from the duties or rights which belong to them as human beings, and finally, that they have a human soul, a human destiny. It should be remembered (to borrow the forcible language of another applied to a very different subject,) "that the difference between the dying and the undying—between the spirit of the brute that goeth downward and the spirit of the man that goeth upward, is not a difference infinitesimally or even atomically small. It possesses all the breadth of the eternity to come, and is an infinitely great difference. It cannot, if I may so express myself, be shaded off by infinitesimals or atoms; for it is a difference which, as there can be no class of beings intermediate in their nature between the dying and undying, admits not of gradation at all." Now while this principle of the existence of the germs of all the immaterial faculties, powers and capabilities, no matter how defective or feeble the material organization, may seem difficult of application in certain cases within the range of our conceptions; yet it should be remembered that this creature of abstractions is not the creature of reality. As you descend in the scale of human degradation the numbers diminish. The greater the exception to the ordinary and natural conditions of humanity, the rarer is the case. As a matter of

practice we have to deal mainly with those, where we can, with but a superficial observation detect the rudiments and germs of proper physical, mental and moral endowments. Let me present briefly to your attention some of the special means for awakening the dormant powers and faculties of our own pupils: In the first place where the idiocy is dependent upon a very marked physical imperfection or infirmity, and these of a curable character under the application of proper remedial means, as in the case of Cretins in the Alpine valleys, of course suitable moral training conjoined with proper remedial measures will result in the complete removal of the idiocy. A multitude of well authenticated cases of complete restoration from the lowest grades of idiocy connected with Cretinism, to a well developed and disciplined intelligence sufficiently attest this opinion. Such cases of extreme physical depravation and at the same time so yielding to proper restorative agencies will constitute the exceptions in idiot asylums in this country. Still the physical causes and symptoms will always be so prominent as to direct the first efforts of the teacher towards the physical training of the idiot. These physical exercises will have the object of establishing the control of the will over the muscular system, cultivating the imitative faculty and fixing the attention of the pupil.

Then we have recourse to what may be more strictly regarded as educational means.* These means, compared with the exercises in the ordinary educational systems, are as much more varied and comprehensive as the peculiarities and obstacles in the way of instruction, are greater in the one case than in the other. In the case of ordinary children, all the natural channels of communication between the mind and the external world are open. In addition, the mind sits alive and awake to receive and appropriate to itself the facts and phenomena communicated through those senses. Sensation is a law of their being; perception is the next natural step from sensation; and memory, com-

* To Dr. Edward Seguin, the pupil and friend of Itard and Esquirol, is due the credit of first systematising the educational means in the case of idiots. To his very able works upon the subject, I beg leave to make this public acknowledgment of my continued indebtedness from the very outset of my labors in the same cause. Well deserved tributes to his great excellence as a teacher and philanthropist, may be found in the contributions of Dr. Conolly to the British and foreign Medical Review, and in the very interesting letter of Mr. George Sumner, which constitutes the greater portion of the first report of the Mass. commission on the subject.

parison and judgment as naturally follow. Educated by these simple intellectual operations, their minds turn inwardly, and with the exercise of consciousness, become capable of comprehending the laws of mind. Their wills undergo a simultaneous development, through the reciprocating influences of intelligence and will. In the case of our pupils, as we have seen, these natural avenues between the mind and the world of relation are more or less obstructed; and not only so, but the mind itself, inert and feeble, sleeps while the dull sensations are calling faintly for entrance. Their sensations are imperfect; they awaken no perceptions, or if any, but indistinct and limited, and consequently faint and feeble will be, if any, the mental operations that follow. To obviate these conditions, we educate the senses till they perform their office with correctness, precision and celerity; we increase the faculty of imitation; we awaken the perceptions, securing correct notions of surrounding and familiar objects; we excite a healthy curiosity; we cultivate the memory and comparison; we arouse the will by appropriate stimuli, producing activity, spontaneousness and self-reliance; we nourish the feeble flame of emotions, desires, affections, and a proper sense of right. During all this course, our ceaseless effort will be to reform improper habits and teach the proprieties of life.

Now it must be obvious to you, gentlemen, that many of the principles adopted in any judicious course of instruction for ordinary children will be equally applicable to our pupils.

I will not occupy any space in enumerating the details of modes and appliances adopted at our asylum. You have witnessed some of them in your periodical visits to the asylum, and the institution is opened by your regulations at stated periods for the inspection of all interested; nor shall I object to any still more general visiting compatible with the *interests of the pupils*.

Having thus described the immediate objects of our special system of education, I am led to the question, which is the practical one, in any wise and thoughtful consideration of the subject: What is the ultimate object and end of the education of idiots? What is to be the effect of this education upon their future life, both with respect to themselves and to society? I answer them in general terms. Education is a means, not an end. That it is

a well established principle, that a proper education gives increased capacity for usefulness; increased understanding of and subserviency to social and moral obligations, and increased capacity for happiness.

But great as are the benefits of education in ordinary cases, its achievements are still greater when, instead of increasing the capacities of the pupils, it substitutes capacities for incapacities; when it restotes a class of human beings, now a burden to community, destitute of intelligence, degraded and miserable, to their friends and to society, more capable of development, under the ordinary circumstances of human development; nearer the common standard of humanity, in all respects; more capable of understanding and obeying human laws; of perceiving and yielding to moral obligations; more capable of self-assistance, of self-support, of self-respect, and of obtaining the greatest degree of comfort and happiness with their small means. And will not this be the effect of the system of management and education for idiots, which I have imperfectly described. Which confirms their health; which educates their various muscles till they are possessed of dexterity; which teaches them *to observe* of themselves, the objects, facts and phenomena by which they are surrounded; which teaches them to *compare* these phenomena one with another, and to *reason* upon these observations and comparisons; no matter how simple, at the outset, are these exercises of *observation*, of *comparison*, and of *judgment*, if they are only spontaneous, if they are only accomplished by the pupils themselves, they will necessarily be the stepping-stones to higher mental operations of the same character. Will not this be the effect of a system of instruction, which stimulates the curiosity of the pupil; which cultivates and disciplines his *will*, by the natural processes by which the will is developed and strengthened, through the instinct of self-preservation, through the desire of gratification of the appetites, the senses and an awakened curiosity, through motives of an intellectual character, and finally through the influence of moral considerations.

Now, I will venture to add, in speaking of the ultimate results, that the intrinsic usefulness, comfort and happiness of the subject of the special education is as much promoted in the case of

the idiot asin that of the deaf, mute or the blind ; that the comfort and happiness of the friends is in still greater measure promoted by such education in the case of the idiot than in the subject of other kindred charities.

But I may say, more specifically, that the ultimate results of our instruction will be of this character.

In the first place, there are cases which may be called cases of *simulative* idiocy. These are children whose development has been retarded from congenital or other causes of a physical nature ; and where these causes have been removed by the recuperative effort of nature, but the subjects are left bound down by the strong force of improper habits, which can be overcome only by the judicious labors of a suitable instruction. In these cases the result can be predicted with the utmost certainty. It will be the complete preparation for all the ordinary duties and enjoyments of humanity. Another class, embracing what may be called the higher grades of idiocy, will be fitted at our asylum for entering common schools, to continue their education there with the same ends and objects as the other pupils ; to be qualified like them for civil usefulness and social happiness.

But the lowest class of our pupils will receive here corresponding benefits, and comparatively, perhaps, equal improvement, for the lower the pupil in point of intelligence, the more practical will be the instruction. Even those will be rendered decent in their habits, more obedient, furnished with more extended means of happiness, educated in some simple occupations and industry, capable of self-support under judicious management in their own families, or in well-conducted public industrial institutions for adult idiots.

With this confident assertion of the general ultimate and practical good results of a proper educational course for idiots, I am yet ready to admit the existence of exceptional cases which may be called incurable ; I say incurable rather than insusceptible—because this incapacity for development resides not in any peculiarity of size or quality or even function in the brain—but is always,

in my opinion, the result of disease involving an actual disorganization of the nervous centres, the brain or spinal cord.

Oftentimes this diseased condition cannot be predicated in a given case, and we are authorized to form such an opinion only after a faithful trial of suitable remedial and educational means.

But the good results of such benevolent institutions as our own will not be confined to the idiots within their walls, as may be plainly seen in the history of all other public charitable institutions. They will affect favorably the condition of every idiot in the State.

I have attempted to set forth in this report the leading characteristics and phenomena of idiocy, the deviations, as I regard them from the natural standard of humanity; I have given an imperfect exposition of the principles and modes of a system of management and education designed for the relief and elevation of idiots; I have stated what, it would seem to me, to be the obvious results of such adapted measures, as a matter of theory. It only remains to add, that just such measures, in several countries, and under a variety of circumstances, have entirely satisfied the reasonable expectations and hopes of the friends of humanity in their behalf.

Institutions exist in France, in Switzerland, in Wurtemberg, in Prussia and in Saxony, and they have been crowned with abundant success as is confirmed by a multitude of authorities who have been eye witnesses. Four years have now elapsed since the establishment by private endowments of the English asylum for idiots, and complete realization of the hopes and wishes of its founders, is the only inference from the fact, that in the three first years of its history the number of its pupils had increased from 15 to 156, and the means for their support had been proportionately increased. But the successive reports of that institution contain positive testimony of an unquestionable character, of the practical benefits already obtained by their own pupils.

Two schools in Mass., now in the fourth year of their existence, have by corresponding results confirmed the experience of European philanthropy, that the education of idiots is both practicable and expedient. Furthermore, I think I might with safety appeal to your own observations to sustain me, when I say that

even in the short period since our asylum was organized, some improvement has been witnessed within its walls. You will confirm my testimony when I say that the observation of a single day in our asylum, of the habits of order, of regularity and obedience, and of manifest interest on the part of the pupils, in the various exercises of the school-room; of increased capacity for self-assistance in all personal duties; of the access of some degree of propriety of behavior at the table, and of the substitution of occupations and amusements for disagreeable habits, would alone convince of the entire practicability of the scheme for the amelioration of the condition of idiots.

In conclusion, gentlemen, while I can congratulate you on the favorable auspices that have attended the opening of the institution over which you have the general supervision—while I can congratulate you on the relief it has already furnished to the parties sending pupils, and the high hopes of ultimate benefit it holds out to those pupils, I could not do justice to my own feelings without calling your attention to the inadequacy of the present State provision for the education of idiots.

The appropriation is inadequate because it only makes provision for 20 or 30 pupils when there are hundreds of idiots of a school-attending age in the State; inadequate, because with suitable buildings a moderate increase of the annual appropriation would extend the blessings of appropriate education to a quadruple number of State beneficiaries; inadequate, because the enlarged number would secure the advantages of classification, both with reference to the instruction and the association of pupils; inadequate, because a State provision of a more permanent character would constitute a nucleus around which would cluster the spontaneous offerings of private philanthropy, in behalf of a charity so novel and so delightful in its results; and inadequate, *comparatively*, because while substantial and commodious buildings and liberal annual appropriations are provided for the insane, for the deaf-mute and the blind, multitudes of idiots equally susceptible of improvement in capacity for usefulness and happiness, (the directors of those same charitable institutions themselves being judges,) are passing, for want of similar facilities for education and elevation, beyond the period of their existence when

susceptibility to improvement gives place to confirmed and degrading habits.

The post of superintendent of such an institution as ours, is one of no ordinary responsibilities. To preserve and confirm the health of pupils entrusted to my care—many of them of imperfect bodily organization, to train and teach them in a manner best adapted to the peculiarities of each individual case, to supervise all those domestic arrangements equally essential to the best interests of the pupils and to the economical administration of the State charity, to keep the parents and friends of the pupils informed from time to time of their welfare and improvement, and finally to labor for the extension of correct ideas in the community of the objects and promise of our institution—all these duties will press with exceeding weight upon any single individual. Trusting, however, to your continued intelligent and hearty cooperation, and relying constantly upon the Divine blessing upon the labors of my assistants and myself, I shall hope in meeting those responsibilities to prove myself not unworthy of your kind selection and approbation.

H. B. WILBUR,
Supt. N. Y. Asylum for Idiots.

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