

# **Third annual report of the trustees of the New-York State Asylum for Idiots.**

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New York State Asylum for Idiots.  
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IN ASSEMBLY, FEB. 1, 1854.

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### THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

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

*To the Legislature of the State of New-York:*

In obedience to the provisions of the act passed July 10, 1851, to establish an asylum for idiots, the undersigned trustees of the institution respectfully submit this their third annual

### REPORT.

The asylum was opened for the admission of pupils in the month of October, 1851, and at the time of the annual report in January, 1852, eighteen children had been received; at the time of the second annual report, January, 1853, the whole number of State pupils allowed by law, thirty, were in the institution, and also twelve, whose parents or friends contributed wholly or in part to their support. There are now forty State pupils and ten pay pupils. What was deemed an experiment has therefore been fully tested by more than two years' experience, and those of the undersigned who have had an opportunity of comparing the present condition of those children with that which they exhibited at the time of their admission, do not hesitate in expressing our thorough conviction that the experiment has been entirely successful. Those of us who, from the recent assumption of our duties as trustees, have not had such opportunity, are satisfied of the same result from the information we have received.



It is not to be expected that those members of the present Legislature, whose attention has not been particularly called to the subject, should be acquainted with the history of the asylum, or with its peculiar objects and system. To enable them to form an intelligent judgment of its merits, and of the urgent considerations for its permanence, the undersigned will present a brief narrative of its establishment and progress, and an account of its purposes and the modes adopted to accomplish them.

Although a few schools for the training of imbeciles had been established in Europe, they were unknown or unnoticed in this country until in January, 1846, a member of the Senate of this State, in a report from a committee to which the subject had been referred, furnished full, authentic, and most interesting information of what had already been done, and invoked the action of our Legislature to follow the noble example. During that session a bill for that purpose passed the Senate, but failed in the Assembly. In 1847 the effort was renewed by the same member, when the bill again passed the Senate by a very large majority, but failed in the Assembly, mainly from the want of time for its consideration, and perhaps from other temporary causes. Governor Fish warmly recommended the measure in both of his annual messages in 1849 and in 1850. In 1851 Governor Hunt, in his message, specially and emphatically called the attention of the Legislature to the necessity of some provision on the subject, and by his recommendations, officially and personally, the act already mentioned was passed in July, 1851. By that act, six thousand dollars annually, for two years, were appropriated to establish an asylum for idiots; five trustees were directed to be appointed by the Governor and Senate, and the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, Secretary of State, and Comptroller were declared ex-officio trustees. The board was authorised to select twenty pupils from each of the judicial districts of the State, and to receive such additional number as could be accommodated, on the payment of such sums as the trustees should deem just.

The board of trustees organised in July of the same year, and immediately sent a committee to examine a private school of the like character with that contemplated, which was in operation at



Barre, in Massachusetts. The principal of that school, Dr. Harvey B. Wilbur, was ultimately selected as superintendent of the asylum. He soon repaired to this city, and with his advice and assistance a building well adapted to the peculiar necessities of the institution was temporarily engaged at a very moderate rent, and was fitted up for use. Circulars were distributed to gentlemen in every part of the State, who were likely to take an interest in the subject, requesting them to seek out idiot children and communicate their names to the trustees. From the information thus obtained, selections were made upon a rule adopted by the board, of taking two pupils from each judicial district, and the remaining four from the State at large. The institution opened in October, 1851, with sixteen State pupils and seven pay pupils.

The trustees 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 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.

In their report of 1852, the trustees advised that the experiment should be continued for the two years, with only a limited number of pupils, not exceeding forty, in order to subject the plan to the test of experience, before involving a large expenditure; and they recommended an appropriation of \$1,500 for ten additional State pupils, making the whole number thirty. They also suggested the propriety of measures being taken to ascertain the number of idiots in the State. A law for that purpose was passed. In their report of 1853, the trustees stated the imperfections of the returns received under the act thus passed; but from the materials furnished, and by comparing them with the State census in 1825, in 1835, and in 1845, and with the United States census in 1850, and the returns in England, they were of the opinion that there was in the State one idiot to every 1,070 inhabitants; that the number of that class was then about 2,800, and that of these, one-fourth, (700) were under the age of fourteen years, and capable of being trained and instructed.



The following extract from that report, gives such a full account of the views entertained by the trustees, of the principles which have guided them, and of the results of their observations, that we can not substitute any thing which would be equally useful in imparting the necessary information on the subject, and we therefore repeat it.

“A recurrence to our first report will show with what caution, not to say doubt, the trustees entered upon the discharge of their duties. The popular and current opinion that this class of afflicted humanity were incapable of any essential improvement, had not been entirely changed by the imperfect information we possessed of the efforts made in other countries. Still, enough had been ascertained to justify an experiment on a moderate scale. It had been discovered that the term “idiot” very inaccurately described the different conditions of imbecility of intellect; that there were grades and degrees at great distances from each other; that the effects of bodily injuries had been confounded with original organization; that ill-treatment and neglect had obscured minds naturally healthy, and finally that by proper discrimination and training, adapted to each case, in many instances the intellect had been aroused or developed, and new creatures born into the world. Fearing to trust too much to the sympathies and glowing hopes which such facts were calculated to excite, the trustees determined to test the experiment which the Legislature had authorised, by the same rigid rule which they would apply to any new theory in physics, viz: to see for themselves how it worked; to compare the condition of the pupils when admitted, with their condition at subsequent periods.

“They have done so; and they now say, as the results of their observations, of their comparisons, and of their deliberate convictions, that the experiment has entirely and fully succeeded. *All* the pupils have improved, some in a greater and others in a less degree. But the single fact of some improvement settles the question; for all experience shows that if a lodgment in the mind can once be made, it furnishes a foundation upon which further ideas, facts and combinations may be erected. This first lodgment is the turning point, and when it is accomplished, every



thing follows with more or less rapidity, according to circumstances. We have witnessed this rapidity in some instances with surprise, not to say astonishment. The process is as curious as it is interesting, and the manner of it, by commencing with efforts to teach what many animals are capable of learning and advancing gradually and carefully, from step to step in the scale of intelligence, is admirably described in the appendix to the report of the superintendent which accompanies this paper, and which will be found exceedingly interesting.

“The trustees therefore repeat and confirm absolutely what they intimated as their belief in their first report; that in almost all cases, and with very few, if any exceptions, those usually called idiots, under the age of 12 or 15, 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, acquainted with their relations to their Creator and a future state, and their obligations to obey the laws and respect the rights of their fellow citizens. In all cases, we believe, for we have seen what has been accomplished in apparently desperate cases, they can be made cleanly and neat in their personal habits, and enabled to enjoy the bounties of Providence and the comforts of life, and to cease being incumbrances and annoyances to the families in which they reside.

“All the pupils to be supported by the State, will be, from the pecuniary condition of their friends, proper subjects for public beneficence, and of those from whom compensation for board and tuition is received, many will be charged with small sums, adapted to the ability of their parents. Such is the plan of the asylum, which, from its nature, must be beyond the scope of individual enterprize. In this respect it differs from ordinary schools, and is like the institutions for the deaf mutes and the blind.

“It should be understood therefore, distinctly, that the institution is not designed for the wealthy, unless in a few cases where ample equivalent compensation is required for the benefit of the establishment; but that it is designed for the poor and needy, who



are also idiotic, and who can not be redeemed from that sad condition without the aid of the government. This is the simple and single proposition. The character of the State of New-York for its noble charities, continued for many years under all circumstances, in providing for similar, but none more severe cases of affliction, such as the blind, the deaf and dumb and the insane, and for its munificence in furnishing education to all its children, who have capacity to acquire it, shows that the people of the State have sanctioned and approved the enlightened policy of their Legislatures, and are ready to sustain other Legislatures in judicious and economical appropriations to continue and perpetuate the same policy; and the great interest taken by our fellow citizens in this asylum for Idiots, evinces their appreciation of its peculiar blessings.

“Assuming then, that this enterprise is not to be abandoned, the next inquiry should be, to what extent shall provisions be made for its continuance? Various causes conspire to render a change of the present location of the asylum indispensable. It is found to be too much exposed to a great thoroughfare constantly crowded. Two railroads are proposed, and one in the course of construction, passing in the immediate vicinity of the present building, and exposing the helpless and imbecile children to constant danger, however great may be the watchfulness exercised. The title of the property is such that it cannot be purchased, and any additions must be made to the house at the risk of losing them.

“In any event, we should recommend the procuring another location. It is very improbable that any suitable house can be hired, and if it be now determined that the institution shall be continued, its best interests will be promoted and true economy observed, by the erection of a plain building adapted in all respects to the purpose.

“The size of the building and its consequent expense, will depend upon the number of pupils to be received. This number must have reference to the probable extent of the demand for such provision, and to the capacity of one institution to meet it.”

The report then proceeded to state the probable number of idiotic children under 14 who would require and whose age would



admit of their receiving instruction at 700, as above-mentioned, and it continued :

“ This number is far too large for one school. In our report of last year, we expressed the opinion that more than 150 pupils can not be properly attended to by one superintendent. We are disposed now even to reduce that number. From the peculiarity of each case, the pupils cannot be arranged in classes embracing large numbers ; and when in classes, the training and education of each must be guided by an experienced and steady hand ; assistants require constant oversight, and too many of them would divert the attention of the superintendent from his appropriate duties.

“ A building that would accommodate about 100 pupils, with the necessary teachers, servants, &c., would enable us to receive eight pupils from each judicial district, making 64, and leave room for 36 pay pupils, a number which would soon be filled.

“ There should be room for pay pupils, to afford an opportunity to those who are able and anxious to pay for that kind of training and instruction of their children, which can be obtained nowhere else in the State, and also materially aid the revenues of the institution.

“ Some enquiries have been made, and it is believed that sufficient land can be procured in an eligible situation, and a plain substantial building, with all necessary out-houses, can be erected, at an expense not exceeding twenty thousand dollars for the whole.”

In pursuance of this suggestion, chapter 159 was passed on the 11th of April, 1853, by which the sum of twenty thousand dollars was appropriated for the purchase of grounds and the erection thereon of buildings, for the reception of pupils of the State asylum for idiots.

The attention of the trustees was immediately directed to the selection of a proper site for the contemplated building. The action of the Legislature had already indicated its expectation, that the institution should be so near the capitol, as to be accessible to the four State officers, who were appointed its trustees ; and to the members of the Legislature, that they might become personally acquainted with the system and its results.



The enquiries for a proper site were therefore confined to the environs of the city of Albany. Various places were visited and examined, and considerable difficulty was experienced in arriving at a decision. The principles, which all the trustees agreed should govern in the selection, were the following. That the building should be so retired as to secure the necessary privacy for the pupils, and yet in such a public position as to afford to them the opportunity of observing the movements of the world around them, and to see those objects calculated to awaken thought. Our superintendent very justly remarks, that education is commenced and carried on, very much through the medium of the eye. The remark is peculiarly applicable to the class of children under our care, whose dormant faculties require every stimulant to excite them to action.

Another important consideration for a conspicuous position was, that a subject like this, entirely new to our citizens, should be so prominently presented as to secure public attention and provoke enquiry into its merits; that thus the current prepossessions against this hapless class might be converted into sympathy and beneficence.

Salubrity of position was regarded as indispensable, and, in connexion with this, an abundant supply of water, became a prime necessity.

Economy and convenience in obtaining the necessary supplies for such a large family, were also prominent objects to be attained. The relative apparent cheapness of a site, which would involve the continual and heavy expenses of carriage of these supplies, would very soon prove to be the most expensive, as had already been ascertained by our experience. Vicinity to places of public worship, at which the elder and more advanced pupils might attend, was also deemed important.

Sites in obscure suburbs of the city, were visited and their prices obtained. Independent of other objections to them, their deficiency in a supply of water, and their being difficult of access and shut out from sight and observation, were deemed insuperable. Attention was then directed to



the great thoroughfare between this city and the city of Troy, and it was hoped a position might be obtained, that would meet all the exigencies of the case. Land, less than three miles from the city hall, was offered at \$200, per acre, by Mr. Richard H. Pease. It answered to some extent the requirement of conspicuousness, being on the range of hills, west of the Troy turnpike; but a supply of water could be obtained only at a heavy expense; and the distance was such as to encounter the objection already stated, in reference to the carriage of supplies to the institution, and it would also preclude in a great degree the attendance of any pupils at public worship.

Clarkson F. Crosby, Esq., residing in West Troy, and owning a farm there, about five miles distant from the city hall of Albany, also invited the attention of the trustees to some situations on his farm. These were represented by him as being but a few rods from a station on the Albany northern rail road, and midway between it and the McAdam road. The superintendent of the asylum was requested to visit the premises and report to the executive committee; it not being then convenient for the members of that committee to do so. The superintendent made a full examination of the ground and had an interview with Mr. Crosby. The price asked was \$500, per acre, as the actual value of the land, and worth the difference between that sum and the price of Mr. Pease's lot. The superintendent reported, that the ground was not so eligible for our purposes, as that offered by Mr. Pease; that it was low, and wanted the desired elevation; that it was liable to the weighty objection against our present temporary building, of being exposed to the casualties of a rail road, so dangerous to children, and especially such as would be in the asylum; that the distance from the source of supplies was too great, and that a large expenditure much be incurred in furnishing water. The committee, who had a personal knowledge of the locality, from having frequently passed it, were so entirely satisfied with the result of the superintendent's observations, that no further effort was made for negotiation with Mr. Crosby.

It was ascertained that a site could probably be procured of Stephen Clark, Esq., who had purchased a tract of land on the



west side of the Troy road, distant less than a quarter of a mile from the residence of Stephen Van Rensselaer, Esq. This was repeatedly examined by the members of the committee and other trustees, and all its features thoroughly canvassed. They were assisted by Mr. Woollett, an architect of great judgment and taste, and the advice of members of both houses of the Legislature in session here, was solicited. Many of them, particularly those who had evinced the most active interest in the asylum, visited the grounds, and all were more or less acquainted with them. After careful and great deliberation, it was the unanimous opinion of all the trustees, of the superintendent, the architect, and the members of the Legislature who were consulted, that the south part of Mr. Clark's tract met all the requirements of the case, and presented advantages altogether superior to those of any other locality in or about the city of Albany. In front is a space of three hundred feet in width, gently rising above the level of the turnpike, very suitable for a lawn, when a commanding hill commences, and presents a site for a building that overlooks an extensive range of country and the Hudson River, for miles below and above. The prospect from this point is probably unrivalled in this vicinity. An edifice erected there would be visible at great distances from the north, east and south, and would arrest the attention of all passing up or down the river, or on the turnpike, or on the railroads connecting with the city. The great purposes of conspicuousness could be no better attained in any spot. The experience of two years had shown that the vicinity was healthy, and the salubrity of such an elevated site was beyond dispute. Within a short walk from the city, it contained the requisite of being easily and cheaply accessible, and with a building on the hill some six hundred feet from the road, would possess all the desired privacy and all the desired opportunity for observation by the children. One of the main pipes for supplying the city with water, runs directly in front and only a few feet distant from the point where the building would be situated, thus affording an inexhaustible supply of the very best water at a trifling expense. In short, without entering into further details, it was the unanimous and decided conviction of all the trustees and persons before mentioned, that this spot was



the only one in or about the city of Albany, adapted to the purposes of the institution. On applying to Mr. Clark, he was found willing but not desirous, to sell the quantity required. It was well known that the land was very valuable; not only from its being all lying north of the city, that could for a long time be sold absolutely; but in consequence of the drainings and other judicious improvements made by Mr. Clark, which had brought the property into notice and demand.

Mr. Clark demanded six thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars for four acres and one half of an acre; being the south part of his tract, two hundred and nine feet six inches on the Troy road, and nine hundred and fifty two feet in depth on the south side, and nine hundred and two feet on the north side; and for an assignment of a lease for twelve years, held by him, for land in the rear, of the same width, running to the plank road, containing about four acres, at the yearly rent of two dollars and twenty-five cents per acre. This price was at the rate of \$1,500 per acre for the four acres and a half. Mr. Clark assured the committee that he could sell the land at the price specified, at any time, a fact found, upon inquiry, to be correct; and that he could not abate from what he regarded its true value. This price was greater than had been anticipated, and caused the trustees to hesitate. It was the subject of anxious consideration, by them, for some time. Finally, in view of all the circumstances, and under the conviction that the property was really worth the sum demanded, and that no other spot could be found to be compared with it in point of eligibility for all the purposes of the institution, the trustees came to the unanimous conclusion that there was no alternative left but to accept Mr. Clark's terms. In this conclusion, the superintendent, the architect, the Members of the Legislature who were consulted, and some of the most respectable citizens, concurred.

The apparent difference of a few thousand dollars between the price of this land and that of the other proposed sites, they were satisfied would be more than compensated by savings in the expense of supplying water, and in the carriage of articles for the use of the asylum. And they were of opinion that an economy



which selected a site merely for its cheapness, which was unsuitable and disadvantageous, would be false and deceptive, and would ultimately destroy the institution, or involve immense expenditures to correct the mistake. The trustees felt that in the discharge of a delicate trust, which none of them had coveted, they were bound to assume the responsibility of such a determination as their judgments approved, and their consciences dictated to be the best for the State and the institution. The undersigned regret the necessity of so much particularity on this subject; but it seems called for by a resolution of the Senate, offered by Mr. Crosby, and laid before this board by the Governor. The same explanations would have been given on application to any one of the executive committee.

Of course, the facts and circumstances herein stated in relation to the purchase of the site for the new building, could not be within the knowledge of those trustees of the asylum who have become such since the purchase was effected. But they take the occasion to say, from the information now given, and some of them from their personal knowledge of the different locations that were presented, that they entirely approve the course adopted; that in their judgment it was wise, judicious, and for the best interests of the institution, and in all probability more economical in the result than any other; that the site selected is altogether preferable to that offered by Mr. Pease; that the one so offered by him, was not only more than fifty per cent. cheaper than that proposed by Mr. Crosby, but far more eligible, and better adapted to the required purposes, and that they are wholly at a loss to perceive any public reason whatever for purchasing the situations offered by the latter.

In pursuance of the directions of the trustees, the purchase of the above land belonging to Mr. Clark, was effected. The purchase money has been paid to him, and he and his wife have executed and delivered a conveyance of the same, with full covenants, to the State.

Some expenditures have been made in completing the drainings commenced by Mr. Clark, and in grading the grounds.



Mr. Clark also assigned to the State, the lease before mentioned, of the land in the rear of that conveyed by him. Adjoining this land, there are at least forty acres, in the same condition of being incapable of alienation in fee for some time to come. The agent of the proprietor of the life interest in this land, has engaged to lease to the State, for the use of the asylum, any part of it the trustees may desire. Thus all the ground that may be wanted for the recreation or exercise of the pupils, or for pasturage of animals that must be kept, or for any other use, may be had on very reasonable terms. When the absolute title becomes so vested that a sale in fee can be made, there will be no difficulty in purchasing at very moderate prices whatever may be required.

Immediate measures were taken to procure designs and plans for the contemplated building. It will have been seen that a large number of pupils, varying from one hundred to one hundred and fifty, were to be provided for. It was found upon more careful enquiry, that the expense of a building of sufficient size for so many pupils, their necessary instructors, attendants and servants, with the essential accommodations for heating it and supplying it with water, would much exceed the estimate of twenty thousand dollars, submitted to the Legislature in the last annual report. We were not sufficiently informed of the price of suitable land, and the price of labor and materials had greatly risen since the first rude estimates were made.

The trustees, however, conceived that they would not be dealing in good faith with the Legislature, if they should contract for a building at an expense beyond the sum which had been appropriated. They therefore determined to suspend any definitive contract for that purpose until the sanction of the Legislature should be given, by an appropriation. And in order to avoid the chance of error in under estimates or over estimates, and to ascertain with the utmost certainty the necessary amount, they invited proposals for the mason and carpenter work, and for cut stone, and have accordingly received offers from some of the most respectable and reliable mechanics of the city of Albany.



The lowest and best offer for the mason work was,	\$15,320 00
For cut stone for window and door dressings, if, upon enquiry, that material should be found as cheap as cast iron,.....	4,500 00
The lowest and best bid for the carpenter work was,.....	19,396 00
It is ascertained that the facing of the basement will cost,.....	1,000 00
The furnaces, pipes, &c., for heating will cost,....	1,000 00
The plumbing for water works, closets, baths, &c., will cost,.....	1,350 00
The grading, fencing, and necessary out-houses,..	5,000 00
For casualties and contingencies,.....	5,000 00
	<hr/>
	\$52,566 00
Remaining on land of the existing appropriation, about.....	13,000 00
	<hr/>
Amount necessary to be appropriated,.....	\$39,566 00
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Contracts for the mason work and carpenter's work, at the above offers, have been made, conditionally, subject to an appropriation by the Legislature. The contract for the cut stone is suspended until its relative cost to cast iron can be ascertained.

The design and plans for the building are as plain as they well could be, consistent with a respectable appearance. The nature and character of the institution should not be degraded in the public estimation, by a structure that would inspire contempt; nor should the noble charity of the State be belittled by one that was not commensurate with its means; and yet we do not recommend any gaudiness or superfluous ornaments beyond what would be required by a rigid taste. The buildings for charitable institutions of a similar character, such as for the deaf and dumb, for the blind, the insane and for juvenile delinquents, have all far exceeded in cost the amount now recommended for the Idiot Asylum; indeed many of them cost three fold that amount. We find that in England and other European countries structures for the same benevolent purpose have been recently erected at an



expense equal to that lavished upon palaces. While we have availed ourselves of all the information to be derived from their plans, we have felt it a duty to avoid extravagance, and to conform to the severest economy when it could be done, without defeating or impairing the essential objects of the institution. Having no possible interest in the expenditure, we can have no other motive or object than to fulfil the trust committed to us judiciously and faithfully.

The sums received from the treasury in each former year have been accounted for in the previous annual reports.

During the last fiscal year, ending 1st October, 1853,

the amount drawn was.....	\$5,736 73
There was received on acc't of pay pupils,.....	2,192 96
	<hr/>
	\$7,929 69

There has been expended during the year:

For provisions and supplies,.....	\$1,767 21	
Furniture and furnishing,.....	576 53	
Fixtures and repairs,.....	244 64	
Meat and fish bills,.....	523 47	
Fuel and lights,.....	183 94	
Stable and cows and horses, .....	226 70	
Rent,.....	275 00	
Salaries, wages and labor,.....	3,373 00	
Sundries,.....	360 81	
	<hr/>	7,631 30

Leaving on hand received on acc't of pay pupils,.. \$298 39  
which has been expended since October 1, 1853.

For all the expenditures accounts are rendered, which are audited by the executive committee and by the Comptroller, and with the vouchers are filed with that officer.

The whole amount received on account of pay pupils since the opening of the asylum is \$3,702.96.

By chap. 219 of the laws of 1853, there was appropriated for the support of the asylum, during the fiscal year ending October



1, 1854, \$10,000, in expectation that the new building might be in use a part of the time. As this will not be the case, there will be required for the support of forty pupils, during the current fiscal year, only \$7,500. And in the appropriation bill for the fiscal year ending 1st October, 1855, the amount may be reduced to \$7,500.

The teachers and instructors in the asylum are :

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

MISS FRANCES H. CLARK, *Assistant Teacher*.

MISS ELIZA A. LORING, do.

MISS SARAH P. YOUNG, do.

MISS ALVIRA WOOD superintends the children out of school hours.

Applications for admission are constantly made, but are necessarily rejected, from the want of room, there being now in the asylum ten more pupils than were contemplated by the existing laws. By great effort, accommodations have been provided for them, and the additional expense of their support has been defrayed without exceeding the appropriation for a less number.

A regard to the feelings of their parents and the future interests of the children, has induced us not to report the names of the pupils. An accurate list of them and their residences will be exhibited to any member of the Legislature on application to either of the trustees or the superintendent.

The trustees earnestly invite the members of the Senate and Assembly, all public officers, and all citizens to visit the institution and satisfy themselves, by personal examination, of the results of this long-needed charity. They will experience feelings of joy and hope at beholding how successful has been the application of the means devised by science in alleviating calamities that were, until lately, supposed to be beyond the reach of human aid ; and they will rejoice in belonging to a State whose honored representatives and rulers have so well understood and so justly expressed the sentiments of the people, in making such a provision for these children of misfortune.



The same devotion of all the officers and teachers of the asylum to their painful duties, which has been noticed in our former reports, has been unremittingly continued during the past year. The best evidence of their assiduity and fidelity is furnished in the remarkable and almost total exemption of the pupils from disease, there having been but one case of sickness among them, during the year. This is the more extraordinary when we recollect their natural physical and mental debility, and their comparative incapacity to take that care of themselves which is expected from ordinary children. The system must be good, and must be faithfully executed, that produces such results.

The great success of the institution is mainly owing to the remarkable qualifications and unremitted services of the superintendent, Dr. Wilbur. Never was the State more fortunate in the selection of an officer of that description than in this case. His report is transmitted herewith, and is well deserving an attentive perusal.

The destiny of a charity upon which the fate of so many hapless beings depends, and which has roused the attention and excited the admiration of the humane and the intelligent throughout our whole country, now rests with the Legislature.

JOHN C. SPENCER,  
JAMES H. TITUS,  
FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,  
HENRY N. POHLMAN,  
FREDERICK F. BACKUS,  
*Trustees.*

HORATIO SEYMOUR,  
S. E. CHURCH,  
E. W. LEAVENWORTH,  
JAS. M. COOK,  
*Ex-officio Trustees.*

*Albany, January 19, 1854.*



## REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT.

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*To the Trustees of the N. Y. Asylum for Idiots:*

GENTLEMEN—The third annual report of the institution under my charge, according to custom, is herewith respectfully submitted. The close of the year finds all connected with the asylum in the enjoyment of good health; nor have we had, during the year that is past, but a single case of sickness of any severity, and that terminated favorably.

The same pupils reported at the asylum a year ago, (forty in number) with two or three exceptions, are with us at the present time. Each judicial district in the State has furnished its quota of pupils.

The income from legislative appropriation and from pay pupils, has been adequate to meet the expenses of the establishment.

All who have visited the asylum during the year past, have apparently carried away with them the conviction that the system of management, training and instruction pursued is, in the main, judicious and practicable.

But the most satisfactory evidence of the good results already in progress of accomplishment at the asylum, has been furnished by the expressed opinions of the parents and friends of the pupils. The value of their testimony will be appreciated when it is understood that most of the children entrusted to our charge have been, by reason of their infirmities, objects of a very strong affection. No place, therefore, away from home, no matter if conducted with the utmost reference to the comfort and happiness of the inmates, would be regarded as a fitting one for their children, as a mere



asylum for custodial purposes. They expect an educational system suited to the capacities and necessities of their children, and they look for the evidence of a positive progress in development, to compensate for the trials of separation.

Moreover with a class of pupils like ours, so diverse in their endowments, habits and character, the results of education can only be appreciated, or even approximately estimated, by a comparison, the materials for which will be possessed by those alone who know what was the actual condition of the pupil when received, as well as the manifested acquirements.

That some such basis of comparison might exist beyond the limited circle of the friends, acquaintance and teachers of the pupils in the asylum, provision was made, you will recollect, at the very outset of your labors.

The chairman of your executive committee prepared a circular to be sent to the family physician in the case of every child whose friends made application for his admission into the asylum. These circulars contained questions, the answer to which furnished information as to the history of the case: whether resulting from any known predisposing causes in the condition or habits of ancestors, or produced by disease or accident in infancy. These answers gave particulars as to bodily health and condition, mental characteristics and capacities, disposition, peculiar habits, &c., &c. These facts, with such additional ones as may be derived from the parents and friends, are embodied in a register in which are recorded all the names of the pupils received.

Besides this tabular statement of the condition of the pupils admitted, a description of each child is prepared, giving more details, illustrating their peculiarities.

These, conjoined with the exhibition of our pupils, in school and out of school, will furnish the means of testing the benefits of our Asylum.

I venture, then, with such facts before me, together with the results of daily observation on my own part and that of my assistants, to affirm briefly of the pupils that have been with us for a



year past, that there has been a marked improvement in the physical condition of all the members of the school.

That there has been, in the case of pupils of the lowest grade, a great improvement in the habits, in ability to feed themselves, to dress themselves, and take care of themselves in other ways ; in the use of their senses ; in their observation of what is going on around them ; in their disposition and in their willingness to be controlled.

That, in the pupils of a higher grade, with a pleasing improvement in manners and deportment, there has been an increasing command of language ; a willingness and capability for simple industrial occupations ; actual progress and acquirement in proper school studies or exercises, beside the additional power of attention and mental discipline acquired in such exercises ; but, above all, the exhibition of greater self-control and an increased perception of social and moral obligation ; more evident recognition of the distinction between right and wrong and of the duty of obedience.

That in a few cases, the results already have been of such a character as to warrant the expectation that they will eventually become capable of sustaining ordinary social relations, with credit to themselves ; that they will actually emerge from a condition of social disability to which they would have been hopelessly doomed, had it not have been for the special advantages of education this institution has afforded them.

These last, I beg you will observe, are the exceptional cases, and the results anticipated but incidental ones. The aim and scope of our educational system is to secure to the class of idiots the highest degree of usefulness, comfort, and happiness attainable with their limited natural endowments.

I shall content myself, at this time, with this brief general statement of what has been accomplished at this institution during the short period of its existence. Adequate notions of the actual and achievable benefits of a school like ours, can only be obtained by a personal examination. Such examinations are a part of the



duties of the board of trustees, and I trust that the members of the Legislature, who are in some sense, *ex officio*, the guardians of the Asylum, will inspect for themselves its condition and results.

I should not omit to express my complete satisfaction with those engaged with me in the various duties of instruction, management and training. Industry, fidelity, and a spirit of kindness, have prevailed with all. This assurance will be needed by those only who have not visited the asylum.

It will be remembered that the last Legislature acted favorably upon the expressed wish of the superintendent and the recommendation of the board of trustees, by granting a sum of money for new buildings for the use of the asylum.

As we were not able to avail ourselves of that provision as soon as was anticipated; as we were crowded with applications for admissions to the asylum, of the most pressing character; from a misapprehension in the public mind of the nature of the previous legislative action; and as a gradual growth in point of numbers would least disturb our general system of management, some alterations were made in our present quarters that enabled us to accommodate ten additional pupils. We have now, therefore, fifty pupils.

While I confess to some degree of disappointment, that the walls of a new building for our use are not yet up, some of the causes of delay are as obvious as they were unavoidable. No buildings constructed with reference to the education of idiots had ever been erected in this country; principles, therefore, to guide in the proper locations, the general character and the internal arrangements of the building had both to be discussed and decided upon.

Of the principles which have guided you in the preliminary steps already taken, and in the progress already made towards the carrying out of the design of the legislative act of 1853, it is not my province to speak.

As superintendent of the asylum I have, however, been consulted from time to time by the board of trustees; so far, therefore, as my opinions are the result of experience in that official



character, it will not be regarded as improper if I give expression to them in this report.

I remark, then, as the result of my conversations with individuals from all sections of the State, members of the Legislature and others, that there was an entire unity of opinion that the new institution should be located in the vicinity of Albany.

The legislation of last winter was an extension of an acknowledged principle of State charity to a class very generally regarded as beyond the reach of any practical philanthropy; to turn this current of a confirmed public opinion, it is of vital importance that the institution should be so situated as not only to challenge public attention, but also where the good results anticipated in its establishment could be seen and tested by the public at large, and especially by those who were to provide the means for its support and continuance; this could be only accomplished in the immediate vicinity of the capitol.

It has been the avowed policy of the trustees and friends of the asylum from the outset, based upon the unfortunate experience of some other State institutions of a kindred character, not to build up a large central institution in the State, but that the extension of this charity, to meet the increasing demands of the public, should be by the establishment of new institutions in other parts of the State, so that this, which at the outset might be the State asylum for idiots, would in time become a sectional one. Here, then, in its first office, it could best give the legislators of the State, by its yearly manifestations of results, more enlarged views of the expediency and duty of providing the means of education for every idiot in the State.

I have reflected much upon a consideration suggested by one of your number, and with an increasing view of its importance—I refer to a certain outward conspicuousness that should attract the attention of the casual passer-by, thus suggesting inquiry and thought upon the subject.

The new institution should be very accessible, not only with reference to the public thoroughfares of the State, over which the



pupils are to be brought and visited, but also in relation to the city from which all its daily supplies are to come, and with which that easy communication may be held, very necessary for the convenience of so large a family of teachers, attendants, and servants, as will always be connected with the asylum. This convenience and facility for procuring the daily and other supplies of a large institution, is of more importance than it may seem at first thought, for a slight difference in this respect will produce a very wide one in the current expenses of such an establishment.

To these advantages of proximity to the city should be added the facilities it affords for accustoming the older and more advanced pupils to the common sights and opportunities for instruction and amusement the city presents. Their education is commenced and carried on very much through the medium of the eye.

I need not speak of the absolute necessity for a copious supply of pure water, of undoubted healthiness in the site, and that the surroundings should be of a very pleasing character. These are the common wants of all public institutions for kindred purposes. We need, in addition, as a physical training is the basis of all our educational labors, the special requisites of opportunities for exercise in the open air, by ample grounds and accessibility to pleasant walks.

As to the building itself, it should be commodious, thoroughly provided with the means of ventilation, warming, and drainage. It should be built of such materials as to furnish security against fire, and supplied with tanks of water and ample staircases for any such emergency. The heating apparatus should be beyond the control of the pupils. It should be provided with abundant conveniences for bathing. We need a series of small school-rooms rather than large single rooms. We need separate suites of rooms for the different sexes, and for the different grades of each sex. All these wants, and numerous others of a minor character, I think, are well provided for in the plan which has been submitted to you by your architect, and which has met your approval. In addition, it seems desirable, so far as compatible with a reasonable expenditure of the State's money, that attention should be paid to a pleasing exterior. This is desirable, not mere-



ly for the impression it will make upon the pupils and the friends of the pupils, but for its effect upon the public mind. The class of idiots for whom it is designed, has been so long borne down by degrading associations, whether in the family or in the public alms-house, that nothing short of superior accommodations furnished by those engaged in their elevation in the scale of being, will restore them to their legitimate position in the public estimation, as objects of pity and not of disgust. It must be seen that we have all confidence in the success of our measures for their relief, by the respect we show them in planning the necessary appliances to secure that end. The history of the modern efforts in behalf of the insane, furnishes a worthy example for our imitation, and reflects great credit upon the judgment of the pioneers in that cause.

Having thus expressed my views in relation to matters pertaining to our proposed new buildings, I have only to remark in conclusion, that I have been sustained and encouraged in my labors by the evidence on your part of a deep conviction of the public need of such an institution as our own, and by your constant co-operation in carrying out its designs.

H. B. WILBUR, *Superintendent.*

*Asylum for Idiots, January 17th, 1854.*