

Thirteenth annual report of the New York Asylum for Idiots : transmitted to the Legislature, January 28, 1864 / New York State Asylum for Idiots.

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THIRTEENTH

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

NEW YORK ASYLUM

FOR

IDIOTS.

TRANSMITTED TO THE LEGISLATURE, JANUARY 23, 1864.

ALBANY :
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1864.

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TRUSTEES.

JAMES H. TITUS,
HENRY N. POHLMAN,
ALLEN MUNROE,
HIRAM PUTNAM,

FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,
HAMILTON WHITE,
LYMAN CLARY,
SANFORD E. CHURCH.

State officers—ex-officio Trustees.

HORATIO SEYMOUR,
CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW,

D. R. FLOYD JONES,
LUCIUS ROBINSON,

VICTOR M. RICE.

Permanent Chairman,

HENRY N. POHLMAN.

Secretary,

ALLEN MUNROE.

Treasurer,

HAMILTON WHITE.

Executive Committee,

HIRAM PUTNAM,

JAMES H. TITUS,

ALLEN MUNROE.

OFFICERS.

Superintendent,

HARVEY B. WILBUR, M. D.

Matron,

MISS ALVIRA WOOD,

Teachers,

MISS S. P. YOUNG,

MISS SARAH S. WELD,

MISS MARY F. WALTON,

MISS CHRISTINA ERLUND,

MISS MARY L. PATRICK.

Steward,

R. FRISSELLE.

State of New York.

No. 194.

IN ASSEMBLY,

January 28, 1864.

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS.

To the Legislature of the State of New York:

In compliance with the act establishing the New York Asylum for Idiots, the subscribers, trustees of the institution, respectfully submit this their

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT :

The total cash receipts and expenditures for the fiscal year, commencing October 1st, 1862, and ending September 30th, 1863, as stated in the treasurer's report, herewith annexed, are as follows, viz :

RECEIPTS.

From the State Treasury, annual appropriation.....	\$18,000 00
From counties for clothing of State pupils.....	1,154 05
From friends of pay-pupils for board, clothing, &c..	3,416 53
	<hr/>
	\$22,570 58
	<hr/>

EXPENDITURES.

Provisions and supplies of all kinds.....	\$6,539 29
Repairs and improvements.....	1,696 01
Farm, garden, stable and stable stock.....	685 62
Furniture and furnishing articles.....	917 23
Salaries of officers and teachers.....	3,434 22
Wages of attendants and servants, and extra labor,	3,451 46
Clothing for children.....	1,425 21
Fuel.....	872 20
Gas.....	689 09

School books, stationery, apparatus, &c.....	\$117 84
Rent of land.....	246 71
Insurance	150 25
Freight and express.....	40 49
Savings bank interest.....	105 30
Postage	35 13
Printing	23 36
Expenses in sending children home.....	88 66
Traveling expenses of trustees and superintendent..	97 03
Miscellaneous bills paid by steward.....	165 29
	<hr/>
	\$20,780 39
Over draft, October 1st, 1862.....	80 74
	<hr/>
	\$20,861 13
Balance in treasury.....	1,709 45
	<hr/>
	\$22,570 58
	<hr/> <hr/>

Outstanding debts October 1st, 1863.

Bill of groceries due D. & J. Leslie	\$462 36
Bill of groceries due Thos. Rice.....	172 63
Bill of gas for quarter ending September 1, 1863....	101 47
Salaries for quarter ending October 1, 1863.....	1,193 25
Balance of loan from savings bank.....	1,500 00
	<hr/>
	\$3,429 71
	<hr/> <hr/>

Cash Assets October 1, 1863.

Balance in hands of treasurer.....	\$1,709 45
Due from counties for clothing.....	155 52
Due from pay-pupils for clothing.....	200 00
Due from pay-pupils for board, &c.....	1,548 43
	<hr/>
	\$3,613 40
	<hr/> <hr/>

Showing a balance of cash assets over all indebtedness, October 1, 1863, of \$183.69. In addition to this, there is on hand farm and garden products, household supplies and clothing for children amounting in value, according to the steward's estimate, to \$2,768.15, which will be available for the present year's expenses. It thus appears that the institution continued in effect free of debt at the close of its fiscal year. The trustees, however, fear

such will not be the case at the close of the current year, unless an additional appropriation is made by the Legislature to meet the great increase in the prices of the leading articles of consumption, as has been specially noticed by the superintendent. They therefore are constrained to ask for the present year an addition of \$3,000 to their regular annual appropriation.

From the annual report of the superintendent to the board, hereunto attached, it appears the average number of pupils during the last year has been 140; of which number 120 have been State pupils; that there has been no prevailing sickness, and but one death. As in almost all of their previous reports, the trustees again have the grateful privilege of noticing the extraordinary prevalence of health throughout the entire household—a circumstance peculiarly fortunate in view of the character and condition of the pupils. The trustees consider this blessing, under Providence, is secured to the Asylum from the skillful attention of the superintendent, the watchful care of his subordinates, and the healthful location of the institution.

The trustees in former reports have fully expressed their conviction of the need and usefulness of institutions for the training and education of idiots, and have at the same time shown, from their observation and experience, how feasible in practice and how useful in results to the beneficiaries this Asylum has proved, they therefore will not now enlarge on this head but will refer to their former reports, and especially to those parts of the same embraced in the annual reports of the superintendent.

The domestic concerns and operations of the Asylum have been conducted for the past year, as heretofore, to the entire satisfaction of the trustees; and they again have the satisfaction of speaking in praise of the faithful performance of duties by the superintendent and all his subordinates.

V. M. RICE,
HORATIO SEYMOUR,
D. R. FLOYD JONES,
CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW,
L. ROBINSON.

HENRY N. POHLMAN,
JAMES H. TITUS,
FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,
ALLEN MUNROE,
HAMILTON WHITE,
GEO. H. MIDDLETON,
HIRAM PUTNAM,
LYMAN CLARY.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT.

To the Trustees of the New York Asylum for Idiots:

Gentlemen—The thirteenth annual report of the institution of which I have the immediate charge is hereby respectfully submitted.

We have had on our list of pupils during the past year one hundred and fifty-two. The average attendance for the school year was one hundred and thirty-eight. These may be classified as to their mode of support in the asylum as follows: Eighteen were pay-pupils; the remainder were beneficiaries of the State.

The entire revenue of the institution, applicable to the board and instruction of the pupils for the year, was \$20,993.35. The average per capita cost of board and instruction was therefore \$152.12. This is exclusive of clothing, but inclusive of all sums expended for repairs and improvement of building and grounds.

Only the strictest economy in our management, and the fact that a large portion of the supplies for the year were bought at an early day, enables us to make a showing thus favorable. We have bought nothing but what was absolutely necessary for the support of the institution, and great pains have been taken by the officers to make everything last as long as possible. This effort at economizing, on the part of the officers, has been cordially seconded by the assistants of every grade.

But there is a limit to the possibilities of even the severest economy. In our case this was reached in making the usual legislative appropriation meet the increased expenditures of last year, arising from the high prices of all articles of household supplies. With the greatly enhanced price of these same articles of consumption the present year as compared with the last, it is simply impossible to carry on the asylum without expending more money than was appropriated by the last Legislature. And in saying this, the superintendent would remark, that there has been no increase of salaries or wages of any connected with the institution for years, nor is such increase desired or anticipated

for the future. It is only suggested that it will be absolutely necessary for the trustees to provide some means to meet the increased cost of our necessary supplies—the coal, the flour, the groceries, the household linen and the clothing. These in the aggregate amounted during the last year to some \$10,366.29.

Since the last annual report, twenty-three pupils have been removed or dismissed from the asylum, and one has died. Five of these were epileptics; three were in such feeble health that the friends thought it best to remove them; one was dismissed as unimprovable; one removed by parents leaving the country; the remainder were dismissed in an improved condition, after remaining in the asylum for the term of years contemplated in our by-laws.

It would occupy too much time, besides involving the risk of conveying erroneous impressions, to attempt to give in detail the history of these cases.

The vacancies made by the pupils thus removed or dismissed have been filled by the selection of an equal number from the several districts of the State.

These are the material facts that deserve record in the annual report of the superintendent to the board of trustees of the asylum. They represent its actual condition at the present time. They furnish materials which added to the accumulation of past and successive experiences will by and by permit generalizations, which may be of service in two ways, viz: in calling attention to some of the causes of idiocy that may be guarded against, and in suggesting the best means of ameliorating the condition of idiots.

The fact at the base of the modern efforts in behalf of idiots was their existence as a large class in every civilized community, of all ages and social conditions, and at the same time differing widely in the degree or extent of that mental deficiency which separated them from the general type of humanity. Society has always been blind to the existence of social evils till their magnitude made a failure to perceive no longer possible, and as a consequence, till the work of remedying them must commence by steps partial, indirect and slow.

In the case before us, the very extent and magnitude of the evil precluded anything but partial means for obviating it. In grappling with it as it exists, there were two directions that charity might take. The first one that would suggest itself

would be a plan for the proper custodial management of idiots, receiving every variety of subject, just as far as the public might supply the means for such care. This would simply look to surrounding them with the highest degree of comfort which they could appreciate, and yet leaving them supplied only with those conditions essential to a lower form of organic life, viz : warmth, light, nourishment and routine. A mode of life unlike that of the higher animals, inasmuch as the wants of the whole nature are not provided for ; a life resembling that of animals, in that the actions are guided by something less than reason, viz : habit.

Another mode that offered, would be to meet the cases as they rose from year to year in any community, and by well-directed efforts at their education lift them above the severer penalties of their lot. This presupposed a susceptibility to instruction which had not previously been imputed to them as a class. This necessarily excluded all cases not of a teachable character, from disease or other cause.

There is another still more radical way, that is, the prevention of idiocy by securing a proper observance of natural laws. This last is impracticable in the imperfect state of our highest forms of civilization. Still something may be accomplished indirectly by enlightening the public mind as to the more common causes which produce idiocy.

The first method was based upon an erroneous idea of the duty of society in the case of idiots. As has been mentioned, public attention had been forced in that direction by the very magnitude of the evil, as seen in the great and increasing number of idiots in the community, and in their deplorable condition in many instances. In this, as in other cases, the public mind is apt to look upon the extreme cases and regard them as types of the whole class. It was seen that these were exposed to outrageous neglect or extreme indulgence, and in the absence of any very marked mental manifestations, regard was had almost exclusively to the unfavorable physical conditions by which they were surrounded. It was seen that they were suffering perhaps from confinement and severity, hunger and cold, uncleanness and disease, or other forms of physical discomfort. While this was seen, the worst features of what had grown into a systematic degradation were overlooked. The idiot had been left without provision for his mental and moral nature. And though it was well to say to him in this condition, " Be ye warm, be ye fed, be ye

clean and be ye comfortable," it was conferring less than half the blessing his nature was capable of.

A more intelligent examination of the evil suggested the other course I have referred to. This was based upon a recognition of the idiot's humanity; that he had a physical system to be exercised to some definite purpose; that he had germs of intelligence to be awakened and developed to some useful end; that he had affections to be warmed into life, to respond to words and acts of kindness by feelings of affection and gratitude.

Our institution was founded and has been managed with just this view; and in looking back upon the experiences of the twelve years of its history, there can be no occasion to regret that an appropriate education was made the basis of the State's charity in this direction.

It may be repeated here, what has appeared in former reports, that exceptional cases do exist where all efforts at education fail of their purpose. Setting aside such exceptional cases—a small percentage of the whole number—there can be no doubt that the institution has accomplished the end for which it was designed. The beneficiaries of the asylum have been improved by training and instruction to the full extent anticipated by the men who were instrumental in founding it. Each year sees some leaving the institution so changed by the management and teaching as to be new beings, if tried by the test of a capacity for usefulness and rational enjoyment.

The education of idiots, however, from the very nature of idiocy, requires laborious and long-continued efforts; efforts not encouraging the teacher by rapid progress or kindly reception. Unimprovable cases accumulate in the asylum through the kind-heartedness of those who have the charge of selecting and dismissing the pupils. It is seen that even in these cases there is a great betterment of condition in the change from home, or other public institutions, to the asylum, from various causes. Thus there are to be found in an establishment for idiots special arrangements and appliances to meet their peculiar wants, aside from those of a positively educational character. There are ruts in which they are impelled to move by influences which they scarcely feel and yet cannot resist; and these routine movements glide into habits which they have no disposition to resist; and conformity to habit, in the absence of the pleasure derived from determinate actions in the line of the higher instincts, produces

a negative enjoyment. As a general rule, those who send pupils to the institution appreciate this improvement of condition, and when they do not quite meet one's expectations in that respect, they are still quite unwilling to remove them, even when requested to do so.

It will not be wondered then that these circumstances have a tendency to make those in charge of an institution like ours too readily satisfied if it fulfills this last and lowest function that belongs to it, viz: the proper custody of the idiot.

Again, the relation of the public generally to our State charitable institutions is not the most fortunate one that could be devised to secure the fullest accomplishment of the purposes for which they were founded. The relation is a remote one, both as to the means of support furnished and the results accomplished; so remote as not to be duly felt, and in general to preclude much individual sympathy or co-operation. The immediate agents of the various charities are thus left without the highest stimulus to the faithful performance of their various duties. I might add, that it thus occurs quite unavoidably that the relation is too exclusively a fiscal one. Given so much money and so much to be accomplished numerically and in relation to the design for which the appropriation is made. The money can be estimated and so also the number of beneficiaries; but whether or not the other condition is properly fulfilled can only be assured by a widely and deeply felt public interest. But the public, or the legislators who represent the public, feel—with the necessary grant of pecuniary means—that their whole duty is fulfilled toward the classes to be cared for.

Nevertheless, with all these obstacles, general and special, to the complete accomplishment of the design of this institution, it may be said that it has, in the main, achieved the purpose for which it was established. Education, here as elsewhere, has conferred a lasting blessing upon its recipients. It has elevated them in the scale of being. It has enlarged the scale of their enjoyment. It has been applied to meet the varying conditions of their peculiar infirmity, so that they have become more self-conscious, more awake to the circumstances by which they are surrounded, more intelligent, more capable of usefulness and of taking care of themselves, more correct in habits, and more obedient and affectionate. All this has been done by stimulating a growth from within, so that one might predict, what experience

has placed beyond question, that, in the future of the pupils, progress would be continuous in the same direction.

The asylum has now been long enough in operation to furnish ample proof of the above statement. Those connected with the institution have been able to learn, in some instances, the further history of pupils after leaving it. The record has been a pleasing one. It is hardly possible to give in a report illustrations upon this point without danger of conveying false impressions. The pupils who have thus graduated differ so much from each other in natural endowment, that it would be difficult to convey an idea of their continued improvement to persons who did not realise the exact nature of their peculiarities when received and without instruction.

When the public mind is absorbed with the momentous topics of the present time, it is not desirable to make many suggestions in relation to the policy of a single institution. I will offer but a single one. There are in the State at all times more idiots of a suitable age and a teachable condition than can be accommodated, with the means at present provided by the State. It seems to me very desirable that all those of the present number in this asylum who have proved to be unteachable, or who have made all the improvement that can reasonably be anticipated in their case, should be at once dismissed, and, for the future, that whenever, after a fair trial, a pupil is found, from disease or otherwise, insusceptible of improvement, he should be removed to make room for better subjects.

It is my good fortune to say in this, as in the previous reports made by me as superintendent, that my assistants of every grade have faithfully and cheerfully performed their several duties, and that harmony and confidence have pervaded the whole institution.

With a grateful acknowledgment of the Divine favor that has apparently attended our labors, and renewing my thanks for the confidence and kindness you have vouchsafed to me personally, I again commend the interests of the institution to your continued good-will and co-operation, with the assurance that its benefits are gratefully appreciated by those who have committed their children to its fostering care.

H. B. WILBUR,
Superintendent.

SYRACUSE, January 1st, 1864.

TREASURER'S ACCOUNT.

HAMILTON WHITE, *treasurer N. Y. Asylum for Idiots, in account current with the State of New York for cash received and expended for the general supplies and the salaries and wages of officers, teachers, attendants and servants of said asylum, during the year ending September 30th, 1863.*

1862.		Dr.	
October 1.	To cash from State Treasurer.....	\$4,500	00
Nov. 29.	do do	4,500	00
1863.			
March 12.	do do	4,500	00
June 9.	do do	4,500	00
	To cash from county treasurers for cloth-		
	ing State pupils.....	1,154	05
	To cash from various parties for board,		
	instruction and clothing pay-pupils,		
	sale of fruit, &c.....	3,416	53
		<u>\$22,570</u>	<u>58</u>
1862.		Cr.	
October 1.	By overdraft.....	\$80	74
1863.			
Jan'y 1.	By cash paid on bills audited by executive		
	committee during quarter ending Dec.		
	31st, 1862.....	5,019	27
April 1.	By cash paid on bills audited by execu-		
	tive committee during quarter ending		
	March 31st, 1863.....	5,144	37
July 1.	By cash paid on bills audited by execu-		
	tive committee during quarter ending		
	June 30th, 1863.....	4,625	25
Sept. 30.	By cash paid on bills audited by execu-		
	tive committee during quarter ending		
	September 30th, 1863.....	5,991	45
	By balance in treasury.....	1,709	50
		<u>\$22,570</u>	<u>58</u>