

**[Fifth annual] report of the trustees of the State Idiot Asylum : Feb 11, 1856
/ New York State Asylum for Idiots.**

Contributors

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Titus, James H.
Wilbur, H. B. 1820-1883.
Leavenworth, Elias W. 1803-1887.

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183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

State of New-York.

No. 99.

IN ASSEMBLY, FEB 11, 1856.

REPORT

Of the Trustees of the State Idiot Asylum.

To the Hon. the Legislature of the State of New-York :

In conformity with the law establishing an Asylum for Idiots, the undersigned trustees of said institution respectfully

REPORT :

That the institution which has been entrusted to their care and supervision, still continues to be prospered in the increase of its numbers, the health of its inmates, and the confidence it has inspired in the public mind.

The report of the Superintendent herewith transmitted, presents the main facts in the history of the institution during the past year; the removal to the new buildings at Syracuse, the increase in the number of pupils, the mode in which persons interested may avail themselves of its benefits, and the general objects and ends of the institution; and also makes a suggestion as to the prospective growth of the institution.

Since that report was written, an abstract of the census furnishing the number of idiots in the State under 14 years of age has been received by the trustees. The number thus rendered is 296. This does not include the number already at the Asylum. It is imperfect to the knowledge of the officers of the institution,

because not including quite a number for whose admission to the Asylum application has already been made.

Now making all allowance for those who are confirmed epileptics, for those who are so feeble in point of health as to debar them from coming to the Asylum, and for those whose parents would be unwilling to send their children to the Asylum, and it will be seen that there are yet subjects enough to fill the institution to its utmost capacity.

It would not be desirable in the estimation of the board of trustees, to receive at once, all the pupils who might present themselves, even if they were supplied with an abundance of pecuniary means. The true policy is manifestly to increase in accordance only with the public appreciation of the necessity of such an institution, and a public disposition to contribute to its support. While the results of the system of instruction at the Asylum continue to develop themselves so satisfactorily to those most interested in the subject, the trustees feel an entire confidence that the public need of such an asylum will be more and more felt as a public want, and the public provision for its support will be commensurate with such apprehension of its wants.

During the last fiscal year there has been drawn from the treasury of the State, for the proper current expenses of the Asylum, the sum of \$8,710.20, the sum of \$1,529.00 has been received from pay pupils, \$68.72, contingent fund on hand, Oct. 1st, 1854, total \$10,307.92.

This has been expended in the following manner :

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Provisions and supplies | \$2,487 81 |
| Bread | 371 45 |
| Meat and fish bills | 814 32 |
| Furniture and furnishing..... | 406 09 |
| Fixtures and repairs..... | 257 67 |
| Stable stock, &c..... | 534 22 |
| Salaries, wages and labor..... | 4,005 17 |
| Fuel and lights | 794 76 |
| Stationery and school books, &c..... | 47 86 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Postage | \$20 57 |
| Expenses in sending children home | 14 00 |
| do in sending pupils to Insane asylum | 10 99 |
| Rent | 400 00 |
| Funeral expenses of child | 8 50 |
| Sundries | 134 51 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$10,307 92 |

Since the last annual report, the new building then in process of erection for the use of the asylum, has been completed and is now occupied.

This has been accomplished very nearly in accordance with the plans submitted by the trustees to the Legislature of last year. By a reference to the legislation of last year, it will be seen, that an appropriation was made of forty thousand dollars, based upon the estimates then presented by the trustees of the asylum. It remains, therefore, at this time, for the trustees only to present such facts and figures as will show that the expenditure of the appropriation has been in accordance with the plans submitted to and sanctioned by the action of the last Legislature. In the report of last year were submitted tabular statements showing the mode of expenditure of the first thirty thousand dollars, and also of the proposed disposition of the additional forty thousand dollars then asked for.

The whole subject, however, will be better understood by a statement at this time, of the whole expenditure from the beginning.

| | |
|--|------------|
| Land purchased at Albany | \$6,810 00 |
| Grading and drains for the same | 179 00 |
| Fences for same | 57 70 |
| Recording deed | 1 05 |
| John Bridgford, contractor for mason work and cut stone | 25,841 64 |
| James Christie, contractor for carpenter work on buildings and out-buildings | 22,035 87 |
| David Wilcox, mason and sub-contractor for extra work in buildings and out buildings | 2,496 26 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Sam'l. Hurst for excavation and grading | \$2,545 62 |
| George Grattan, plumber | 2,627 00 |
| Norton & Bradley | 423 27 |
| Wm. L. Woollett, architect | 1,388 79 |
| G. L. Rowe for services as sup't of building and in- cidentals | 829 30 |
| Pierce & Marsh, gas pipe | 486 49 |
| Wands, Warren & Brower for furnaces, &c. | 2,268 37 |
| Tuttle & Bailey, registers | 343 09 |
| Perhyn Marble Co., slate, mantle and blackboards | 225 00 |
| Sidney Stanton, marble slab | 60 50 |
| Coal for warming building while being erected | 209 41 |
| Printing | 167 24 |
| Freight bills | 51 87 |
| Brower & Agar, speaking tubes | 31 90 |
| Interest on land | 196 00 |
| Wills & Dudley for plans of build'g in part adopted | 150 00 |
| Labor in grading | 94 00 |
| Lightning rods | 106 26 |
| Jas. E. Jarvis, carpenter | 46 88 |
| Contingent expenses | 484 13 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$70,156 64 |
| | <hr/> |

There are due to various individuals on contract and other-
wise the following sums:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| John Bridgford | \$1,828 15 |
| James Christie | 1,598 92 |
| G. & C. M. Woodward | 323 00 |
| Brown and Pomroy * | 255 00 |
| Wm. L. Woollett | 112 00 |
| Hatch & Burt | 252 00 |
| Hall & Hopkins | 44 88 |
| Land | 2,800 00 |
| Agar | 52 00 |
| A. Featherly | 166 02 |
| Pruyn & Lansing | 190 00 |
| | <hr/> |
| Amounting in the aggregate to | \$7,621 92 |

To meet this indebtedness, the trustees still have the land purchased in the vicinity of Albany, where it was first proposed to locate the asylum. That cost \$7,047.75, and was regarded by the trustees, at the date of the last report, as being available for that amount. A favorable opportunity for its sale has not occurred since then. But it is the design to offer this lot at public auction at an early date. Its very favorable position as a site for residences; the increased value of real estate in the vicinity of Albany, and the favorable terms upon which the property can be sold by the Commissioners of the Land-office, inspire a confidence that very little sacrifice, if any, need be made in the sale of it.

| | |
|---|------------|
| There is now in the hands of the State Comptroller, to the credit of the building fund of the Asylum, .. | \$293 91 |
| To this should be added the excess of estimates submitted last year, over the appropriation, | 332 44 |
| Value of land above stated, | 7,047 75 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$7,374 10 |
| | <hr/> |
| Total indebtedness of building fund, | \$7,621 97 |
| Amount of resources, brought down, | 7,374 10 |
| | <hr/> |
| Excess of expenditures of the trustees, in building, over their estimates submitted last year, | \$247 87 |
| | <hr/> |

The trustees cannot but feel a very great degree of satisfaction in presenting a statement of appropriation and expenditure so nearly balanced as they are now enabled to. And it should be observed that the contracts have all been adjusted and settled to the satisfaction of all parties; that all the bills against the building fund have been rendered and stated in the above schedule, with the exception of a sum claimed by the architect for services and not allowed by the trustees.

The building has now been occupied by the institution about five months; and it will be seen by the report of the superintendent, and it is confirmed by our own observation, that it proves to be in all respects all that was expected of it.

At the last session of the Legislature, the sum of \$15,000 was inserted in the Supply Bill, by the committee of ways and means, as reported by them to the Legislature. Of this sum, \$12,000 was designed for the current expenses of the present fiscal year, and the remaining portion, \$3,000, was designed for the purchase of new furniture and the expenses of removal. That section of the supply bill passed both houses. No motion to reduce it was made by any member of either House, as will be seen by the journals of the Senate and Assembly. On the adjournment of the Legislature, the appropriation was found to be \$13,000 instead of \$15,000. Whether this happened through a clerical error, or otherwise, the board of trustees have no means of knowing.

The result, however, has been that the cost of new furniture and the expenses of removal, amounting in the aggregate to about \$4,500, has had to be taken from the \$13,000, the greater portion of which was necessary to meet the current expenses of the present fiscal year.

The board of trustees would therefore respectfully suggest to the Legislature that provision to the amount of \$5,000 be made to meet the deficiency in our means of support.

JAMES H. TITUS,
HENRY N. POHLMAN,
FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,

F. F. BACKUS,
HIRAM PUTNAM,

H. WHITE,
LYMAN CLACY,
ALLEN MUNROE,

Trustees.

MYRON H. CLARK,
HENRY J. RAYMOND,
JAMES M. COOK,
E. W. LEAVENWORTH,

Ex officio Trustees.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT.

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

GENTLEMEN—Since my last annual report to the board, important changes have taken place in the affairs of the Institution.

These changes relate to the constitution of the Board of Trustees, to the removal to the new buildings we now occupy, and the consequent increase in the number of pupils, and in the family of assistants, attendants, &c., in charge.

I will notice these in order.

By the legislative enactment of last winter, three additional trustees were appointed, from the city of Syracuse, as members of your Board. This was desired to secure a suitable oversight of the Asylum by the Board of Trustees.

Since then, one of your number—the late John C. Spencer—has been removed by death (see Appendix A). Such were my relations to him, during the period that intervened between the opening of our Asylum and his death, that I cannot forbear from expressing at this time my humble tribute to his services as a member of your Board. He was one of the original members of the Board, and, till his death, held the office of chairman of the executive committee.

Much of the preliminary labor in organising the experimental school devolved upon him. This was performed with his usual industry, sagacity and promptness—as was evidenced by the fact that the new Asylum was actually receiving pupils in less than three months from the passage of the act establishing it. Professing some doubts, at the outset, of the practicability of the objects for which the Asylum was founded, he was yet determined that the experiment should be fairly tested.

He observed carefully the character and features of idiocy. He justly apprehended the true principles that should pertain to any system of education designed to obviate it. He was interested in the investigation of those physiological laws that would enlighten the public mind as to its causes and prevention; and those psychological laws, that were to guide in the selection of the proper objects and in the arrangement of the proper order of such instruction.

He was deeply impressed with the results of the experiment, as they were, from time to time, developed. And when the aggregate of these results had at last secured his faith, he lost no time in proclaiming his conviction of the entire practicability of the plan for educating idiots; he neglected no opportunity of enforcing the claims of the unfortunate class who were the subjects of it to public sympathy and public charity.

He brought to the duties of his office all the caution and sagacity of age, united with an energy and cheering hopefulness and confidence, under all the discouragements attending a new enterprise, usually confined in their exhibition to early manhood.

I had frequent occasion to consult him in the details of the management and superintendence of the Institution—as, also, in the planning of our new building, with its special requirements and adaptations. He was a man always under a severe pressure of varied duties and labors; and yet I never found him too busy to listen to any statement of the affairs of the Asylum, or too fatigued to devote himself at once to any business connected with it.

It will be regarded by you as no exaggerated tribute to his services, when I say, that to his great personal influence we are now indebted, in a great measure, to the favorable position we have so soon obtained among the charitable institutions of the State.

In his last days, he seemed to feel no small degree of satisfaction that this influence had been so freely and disinterestedly given, and that success in all respects had attended his labors to promote the objects of the Institution.

In accordance with the wish expressed in the report of last year, an appropriation was made by the Legislature that enabled us to complete our new buildings here.

It will be recollected that at the date of the last annual report the institution numbered some 50 pupils. Since that period no sickness or untoward event has occurred to disturb its prosperity.

A reasonable degree of success has attended the ordinary labors of management and instruction, and a manifest satisfaction and gratitude has been generally felt by those who have had children in the Asylum.

The removal of the Asylum from Albany to the new structure designed for its use, and located just without the bounds of the city of Syracuse, was accomplished with safety to the pupils and without serious inconvenience to any concerned.

Just before the time approached for the completion of our new building, a vacation was appointed, and a majority of the pupils were removed by their parents or friends, to be returned here at the close of the vacation. The remainder of the pupils, with the various employees of the institution, came to Syracuse about the 10th of August last. Permission was given to the others to be presented on the 15th of the same month.

But a portion of the building was then ready for occupation, and it was not entirely completed till some six weeks later.

Application had been received for the admission of many pupils into the Asylum during the last two years. The limited capacity of our former and temporary quarters at Albany had compelled us to refuse the most of these. But the promise was held out to the persons interested, of their being favorably acted upon, when enlarged accommodations should render it possible.

Accordingly, some 40 new pupils have been added to our former number, and a few more are daily expected.

The current expenses of the Asylum for the present fiscal year, with this number, will doubtless exhaust the appropriation of the last Legislature for that purpose.

Quite a number of applications are now on file at the institution, to be acted upon by the trustees whenever increased annual appropriations will allow of favorable action upon them.

The increase in the number of pupils involves a corresponding increase in the number of assistants, attendants, &c., of the institution, and a re-organization of the system of management pursued. This has been accomplished with as little delay as possible. Some little time will doubtless elapse before all will go as smoothly in the affairs of the Asylum as before the change of location.

The comparatively rapid growth of our Asylum, and its present position as a permanent institution, to be henceforward fostered and sustained by the State, is to be ascribed mainly to two causes.

The first of these was the fact, that successive legislative enactments for a long series of years, had established the principle, that any physical infirmity, with its consequent mental or moral characteristics, in the case of any children of the State, constituted no bar to their enjoyment of the public provision for education whenever the education was practicable.

The acknowledgment of this principle in this manner was due mainly to the efforts of those interested in the education of deaf mutes and of the blind.

It remained only then for those who were the advocates of the extension of the principle to one more unfortunate class, to convince the Legislature of the susceptibility of the class of idiots in the matter of education, and with a reasonable expenditure of the public money.

The fortunate mode of accomplishing this constituted the second cause I have referred to. The first step was to found an experimental school under the supervision of gentlemen of well-known practical judgment and philanthropy, and, in a measure, under the eye of the Legislature. This was done.

The location selected for the school was a fortunate one. It was opened in a building just without the limits of the city of

Albany, and within easy visiting distance for the members during the session. The school was organized, and pupils of a great variety of mental deficiency were received from all parts of the State. During the four years of the continuance of the Asylum at Albany, a majority of the Members of each Legislature actually visited it, and usually in so small parties that they could witness the details of the system of instruction and its results, without disturbing the routine of occupations and exercises of the pupils.

The results elicited were more valuable than any reasoning upon the subject, and the evidence of the practical conviction of the members has been seen, as I have before intimated, in our rapid growth and present position.

There are now between eighty and ninety pupils connected with the Asylum. There are at least thirty more children for whose admission to the Asylum applications have already been made to its officers.

Some of these are of a very pressing character, I would therefore suggest the enlargement of the number of pupils another year, at least to the extent of one hundred State pupils. The material items of expenditure for the Asylum would not need to be much increased by such enlargement.

To meet the current expenses of the establishment, with the number I have mentioned, for another year, will require an appropriation from the Legislature at its next session, of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000).

It will be remembered that the purchase money of the furniture necessary for the new building, and our present number of pupils, and also the expense of removal from Albany to this place, was obtained by borrowing from the amount appropriated for the annual expenses of the Asylum during the present year, with the exception of a thousand dollars. This all amounts to some four thousand five hundred dollars.

To enable us to get comfortably through the present fiscal year with the multitude of little expenses likely to occur, that ought

still to be charged to construction and furnishing account, we shall therefore need a special grant of five thousand dollars more.

When the very high prices of provisions and supplies for the two last years are taken into consideration, and also the fact that all the furniture and apparatus and stable stock of the Asylum, that has cost in the aggregate near \$12,000, has been purchased from time to time from moneys appropriated only for current expenses I think that it will be conceded that the institution has been managed with a satisfactory degree of prudence and economy.

In the appendix to this report will be found some extracts from your by-laws, explaining the objects of the Asylum, and indicating the mode in which persons interested may avail themselves of its benefits.

The short experience we have had in our new location confirms the anticipation expressed a year ago. It is manifestly very accessible from all parts of the State. A strong local interest will undoubtedly be felt in its prosperity and success. The necessary supplies can here be obtained upon very favorable terms.

The buildings have been completed very nearly in accordance with the plans submitted a year ago, and which were then minutely described. The convenience, comfort and safety of the pupils are apparently well provided for in our new quarters.

The apparatus for warming and ventilation has thus far operated very well. The supply of water is now ample for all domestic uses, all purposes of cleanliness and security against fire.

We anticipate soon being supplied with gas from the city gas works.

The school rooms are hardly surpassed in convenience of arrangement by any in the State, and a large gymnasium affords all necessary facilities for that physical training that underlies our whole system of instruction.

I ought to add my testimony to the fidelity of the contractors who were engaged upon the building, who have seemed disposed

to execute not only the letter but the spirit of their contracts, by thorough workmanship and promptness in the execution of it.

I close with an acknowledgment of the hearty co-operation that has been extended to me by all employed in any manner in the Asylum in all its varied duties, and labors; with an expression of gratitude to you, gentlemen, who have sustained me in my post of duty by your constant counsel and approbation, and with an humble recognition of that superintending Providence that has so kindly watched over all the interests of the new Asylum.

H. B. WILBUR,
Superintendent.

Syracuse, Dec. 8, 1855.

OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

Superintendent,

HERVEY B. WILBUR, M. D.

Teachers,

MISS FRANCES H. CLARK,

MISS SARAH P. YOUNG,

MISS ELIZA A. LORING,

MISS ALVIRA WOOD,

MISS ANNA B. ALCOTT.

Steward,

J. MARSHALL WASHBURN.

Matron,

Mrs. ANN KINCAID.

APPENDIX A.

At a meeting of the trustees of the State Asylum for Idiots, held at the Asylum on the 17th day of October, 1855—present, Messrs. Pohlman, Townsend, Titus, Backus, Clary, Munroe, White, Putnam and Leavenworth—the following resolutions were unanimously adopted,

On motion of Mr. Titus :

Whereas, since the last meeting of this board, one of the links which bound us together has been broken, in the removal of one who, from the first organization of this institution, was most elevated in position, most efficient in action, and most judicious in counsel, of all our number—now, therefore, we, his surviving associates in the board, do

Resolve, That in the death of John C. Spencer, we not only feel in common with the whole community that a great light has been extinguished in our land, but more deeply realize our loss from an accustomed reliance on his superior judgment and wise counsels. His self-sacrificing devotion to his duties as a member of this board are fondly remembered, and we shall ever cherish his memory as a shining example of a man who faithfully improved the ten talents entrusted to his charge by his Divine Master; and who was alike eminent, whether engaged in the walks of literature or the exposition and practical application of the science of jurisprudence, the discharge of the high and responsible duties of public office, or in the deliberations and councils of statesmen, in the work of public education, or the efforts of philanthropy to meliorate the condition of suffering humanity.

Resolved, That we sincerely sympathise in the bereavement which the widow and family of our deceased associate have sus-

tained in this afflicting dispensation of Divine Providence, and that the superintendent of the Asylum be instructed to forward a copy of these resolutions to the family.

(A copy.)

E. W. LEAVENWORTH,

Secretary.

APPENDIX B.

The following extracts from the by-laws of the asylum will show its aims, and the condition upon which pupils are received:

“The design and object of the asylum, as established by the action of the Legislature, are not of a custodial character, but to furnish the means of education to that portion of the youth of the State, not provided for in any of its other educational institutions. Those only will, therefore, be received into the asylum who are of a proper school-attending age, and for such periods of time as shall in the estimation of the board of trustees, suffice to impart all the education practicable in each particular case; and in conformity with the regulations hereinafter specified.

“Children between the ages of seven and fourteen who are idiotic, or so deficient in intelligence as to be incapable of being educated at any ordinary school, and who *are not epileptic, insane or greatly deformed*, may be admitted by the superintendent, with the advice and counsel of the executive committee. Applications in behalf of others shall be referred to the action of the board of trustees.

“The parents or next friends of those in whose behalf applications are made for admission as pupils, shall make answer in writing to such questions as the superintendent may prescribe.

“They shall, moreover, if of sufficient ability, engage to pay such reasonable sum for the education and support of the pupils, and to furnish them with such proper clothing while in the institution as shall be stipulated by the superintendent, and they shall in all cases be bound to receive them back, when required, free of expense to the asylum.

"The State pupils in the asylum will be selected in equal numbers, as far as may be, from each judicial district, from those whose parents or guardians are unable to provide for their support therein.

"The State pupils will be expected to come to the asylum, provided with a supply of neat and substantial clothing adequate for the first six months; after which period, their clothing will be furnished by the asylum at the expense of the respective counties of which they are residents, as in the case of the deaf and dumb, and blind asylums of the State. A bond will be required in all cases to ensure the removal of the pupil, when required by the superintendent, free of expense to the institution.

All pupils will be received upon trial for one month, at the end of which time, a report upon the case will be made to the parents or parties sending them.

"The education furnished by the institution will include not only the simpler elements of instruction usually taught in common schools, where that is practicable, but will embrace a course of training in the practical matters of every day life: the cultivation of habits of decency, propriety, self-management, and self-reliance, and the development and enlargement of a capacity for useful occupation.

"There shall be a vacation during the whole month of August, unless otherwise directed by the board, at which period all pupils must be removed from the asylum by the parents or guardians, if required by the superintendent."

Applications for admission to the asylum must be made to the superintendent.

H. B. WILBUR, M. D.

Syracuse, N. Y.