

THIRD REPORT

OF THE

VISITING COMMITTEE

TO VISIT THE

HOSPITALS FOR THE INSANE.

1879.

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SEC. 1425. The Board of Trustees shall order the discharge or removal from the hospital of incurable and harmless patients, whenever it is necessary to make room for recent cases. * *

In accordance with this section the board of trustees of the Mt. Pleasant asylum, at its meeting in June, 1878, ordered the return to the counties of a considerable number of the class named; and their removal relieved the overcrowded condition of the hospital for the time being. But the asylum is again filling up, and contained, in October, four hundred and eighty patients; and the time is not far distant when it will be as much over-crowded as ever, unless some plan is devised for relief.

Much complaint was made by many of the counties which were thus required to care for their own insane. In order to ascertain the general feeling on this subject, and also as to the facilities of the counties for properly caring for this class of persons, your committee addressed a circular to the county auditor of each county in the state propounding the following questions:

1st. How many insane are cared for in your county by your county authorities?

2d. Have any of them formerly been inmates of either of the State asylums?

3d. What is the condition of such patients, harmless or otherwise?

4th. Are your arrangements such that they can have proper care and attention?

5th. Would your authorities return them to the asylum if proper room was prepared for them, or would they prefer keeping them at your own institution?

6th. What is the cost per head per week for taking care of them, as near as you can ascertain?

Answers were received from eighty-five counties; of these, forty-nine counties report three hundred and thirty-five patients kept within the counties; thirty-six counties report no patients kept within the counties, and no accommodations for keeping any. Nearly all kept by counties have formerly been inmates of one of the State asylums. Most of them are termed harmless, though a few are reported violent at times.

But three or four counties report suitable arrangements for caring for them. Most of them are kept at county poor-houses. Twenty-four counties report that they prefer keeping them within their own counties; twenty-five report in favor of returning to the asylum. The highest cost is reported at \$7 per week, and the lowest at sixty-six cents,

the average being \$2.50. The counties reporting in favor of keeping them in their own counties, do so on the ground of saving expense.

From the character of the reports, your committee conclude that the facilities for keeping insane patients, outside of the hospitals, are very inadequate for their proper accommodation. Many, who are ordinarily quiet and harmless, are subject to become suddenly violent and destructive for a time. Our opinion, therefore, after mature deliberation, and viewing the question in all its various lights, is that it is the duty of the State, and for the best interest of all, that a building be at once erected for the accommodation of that class of insane of which we have been speaking; a building to which those kept in counties where the accommodations are inadequate, can be removed; and to which those kept in asylums when they reach an incurable stage, and are comparatively harmless, can be sent. While the question of the cost of keeping the insane is one of importance to the tax-payers of the State, yet it should by no means be the controlling one. Humanity requires that this unfortunate class should have all the care and attention requisite to render them as comfortable as such unfortunate creatures can be made.

We are of the opinion that such patients can be maintained as cheaply at a properly constructed State institution as they can by the counties in their isolated capacity. It is but reasonable to suppose that many of the counties reporting their patients taken care of for so small a sum as sixty-six cents to one dollar per week, draw their support largely from a farm connected with the institution, and have reported only the cash outlay. This is at least the charitable view of the case, as it is evident to all that one dollar per week would be a very inadequate allowance for care, board, etc., of patients, if that sum covered all expenses.

As to the kind of building to be erected, and where located, your committee can only suggest that a few necessary essentials should be observed. In the first place, the building should be a good substantial, one, erected for comfort and convenience, and not for show. It may be well to erect a few of our public buildings with a fine exterior, that adds nothing to the durability or utility of the building, in order that we may keep up a reputation for taste and enterprise; but we are of the opinion that for most of our public buildings the people would be better satisfied if less money were expended for that purpose.

In locating a building for the purpose named, the first object should be to secure a tract of good land, of at least 320 acres, situated some-

where central in the state, and easy of access from all parts of the state by rail, convenient to fuel and building material. The State pays too much for transporting these articles to our State institutions. A never-failing supply of pure water is of prime necessity. Too little attention has been paid to this important matter heretofore. Building material, fuel, and other supplies can be transported, the only objection being the cost; but provision must be made on the ground for a supply of that necessary article.

As to the cost of a building, purchase of a site, etc., we have made no estimate, as much, of course, would depend on its extent. It would not be necessary to erect at once a building of sufficient capacity to accommodate all of the class of persons for whom it would be intended, as many counties would no doubt keep for a time those they have, but the building should be so constructed that additions could be made from time to time, as necessity required. Perhaps \$100,000 would be sufficient for the first appropriation, conditioned that it should be so expended as to be available, and not in laying the foundation for a vast structure requiring the expenditure of several more thousands before it could be utilized.

The practice of removing the criminals who become insane from our penitentiaries, to the asylums, has been treated of in our former reports, and we have nothing new to add on that subject.

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Committee.