

## REPORT.

[1876]

*To the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly:*

The joint committee appointed to visit the Reform School have performed that duty, and ask leave to report as follows :

The money appropriated by the last general assembly for the purchase of more land, we believe, has been judiciously invested. The farm now contains 760 acres, of which 500 acres are under cultivation. About two miles of fence are required to enclose the whole. The wood and coal house, ice house and barn, and family building No. 3, have been completed within the past two years. The barn will meet all the requirements of the farm for many years to come. In size and plan the family building is like the others. They are designed to furnish school room and sleeping apartments for fifty boys each, with wash rooms, etc., in the basement.

Inasmuch as this institution is a reformatory, and not a prison ; as its purpose is to provide for the boys what most of them did not have — a good home, we are not quite satisfied that the plan of putting so many into one family is the best that can be adopted. It is quite impossible to make their surroundings very home-like. These buildings are faulty in that they provide no means of ventilation, except through the windows. Two of the buildings are heated only by a single stove in the school room, on the first floor. In the winter the boys have to leave most of their clothing in the school room when they go to bed, go up one or two flights of stairs, and traverse a bare, oiled floor that is often so cold that water will instantly freeze on it. Last winter it was impossible to wash the floor for weeks together on this account. We therefore earnestly recommend the appropriation asked for to heat these buildings.

We think separate bathing rooms, with tubs, should be provided, which can be done at trifling expense ; also earth-closets in the sleeping rooms, instead of tubs as at present.

The beds and pillows used by the boys are filled with straw, which

we consider very much inferior to husks or moss, and would recommend that a sufficient quantity of husks be gathered in the fall to make mattresses, and that the pillows be made of moss.

The building designed for shops should be used for that purpose at the earliest possible moment. It is perhaps the most important part of the work of this school to form habits of industry in the boys; this cannot be done until they can all find employment the year round. This building is now the residence of the officers; it contains the chapel, dining-room, etc., and in the basement the kitchen, laundry, bake-shop, and store room for all the supplies. The cooking and washing arrangements are very defective. One stove, such as is found in many country hotels, is the only means of doing all the cooking except baking. The boys do the washing over a common washboard. We think a sufficient appropriation should be made to supply the needful facilities for doing this work.

Your committee are of the opinion that the main building contemplated in the original plan should be commenced and pushed to completion as fast as the finances of the state will allow. The lease of the farm at Salem will expire before the next session of the General Assembly, and provision should now be made for the girls. When permanently located they should be out of sight and hearing of the boys, and without possible communication with them. We are inclined to the opinion that a building for them can be erected on the farm at Eldora that will meet all the requirements. They might be kept in the main building, when completed, until permanent provision is made for them; but we think it better if a place can be provided for them elsewhere. If the lease of the farm at Salem can be extended, we are in favor of it until the question of their location is finally settled.

A part of your committee visited the girls' school at Salem, and found it in excellent condition. In view of the probable change in this department, it is not deemed advisable to go to any further expense there.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewelling—Assistant Superintendent and Matron—are enthusiastic in their work, and have great faith in the thorough reformation of most of the girls, and we trust their faith is well founded; but we cannot but think, however, that the attempt to reform a large class of the girls is an experiment, but one which the state can well afford to thoroughly try. There would, no doubt, be fewer failures if we, as a Christian people, were as charitable toward a fallen woman as the Master whom we profess to follow.

The subsequent history of the boys who have left this school is not fully known, but it is believed that in a majority of cases they are saved to society. Statistics in other states indicate that three-fourths of the boys in these schools become respectable citizens; this is certainly a good showing, and should encourage our people to persevere in this noble work. The younger inmates are the hope of the school. The larger boys are usually confirmed in their habits, and do not remain long enough to be much benefitted; and it is the opinion of your committee that the board of trustees should have authority to remove any boy over sixteen years of age who continues to exert a malign influence over the rest.

We listened to several recitations and examined the school work, and found text books and methods much of the same as in other schools. We think too much time is given to arithmetic, grammar and geography. We are confident that better results can be obtained by the study—even by the youngest boys—of the physical sciences; that the interest of the child will be more surely awakened and more useful information imparted. We, therefore, recommend that \$500 be appropriated for the purchase of text-books on the physical sciences and some apparatus.

The present superintendent, Mr. Johnson, took charge of the school but a few months since, and he found affairs in much disorder, arising from the investigation of last summer; but he seems to have brought order out of chaos and we think the general management of the establishment is good. The law of kindness prevails, and punishment is resorted to only when all other means fail to secure obedience to the rules; and we are glad to believe that this is not often. We talked freely with the boys and we found no one who had any complaint to make; but all spoke of their treatment, living and care as being much better now than at any time heretofore.

They are comfortably clothed and sufficiently fed with plain but wholesome food. Though many of them were raised in squalid poverty and were abused by drunken fathers, yet there is a very general desire to leave the school and "go home." It is, perhaps, impossible to entirely remove this feeling of discontent, but much can be done in this direction, and we have no doubt of the desire and the ability of the Board of Trustees to do it if the necessary means shall be provided.

Touching the late unfortunate controversy over this institution, we have nothing to say except to express regret for it, and sincerely hope that the facts developed at the recent investigation will prove beneficial

and have a salutary influence upon the future management of the institution.

We simply endeavored to see the school as it is to the end that the General Assembly may have a correct idea of its present condition and future wants. Considering the short period of time since the school was established at Eldora, very much has been accomplished; much more remains to be done, and we are sure it is wisdom on the part of the State to continue a liberal policy toward it. Under its new management, it gives promise of good results far more than commensurate with the expense. We hope that it may receive in its labor of love the hearty sympathy and co-operation of the community in whose midst it is located and of the people of the State.

Respectfully submitted,

E. G. MILLER,  
*Of the Senate.*

JOHN McCARTNEY,  
WM. H. REED,  
*Of the House.*