

Saint Paul Minn:

Nov: 28 / 79

Governor John S. Pillsbury –

Sir –

In accordance with the terms of the Act creating our Commission we made our second semi-annual visit to the Hospital for the Insane at Saint Peter on the 13th of this month.

As regards the management and discipline of the institution we have nothing to report: in these respects we believe that no exception can be taken.

The sanitary condition of the hospital is, however, in one respect open to criticism: we refer to overcrowding. A few figures will make this more clear than a mere statement can do.

The upper or main building can accommodate comfortably five hundred inmates; two hundred and fifty in each wing; there are now in the wards five hundred and sixty-four: of these, three hundred and fourteen are women; sixty-four more than can properly be cared for; and the result is that these supernumeraries are compelled to sleep upon improvised beds upon the floor. The same condition, though not to the same extent, obtains at the lower house: in rooms 12 x 18', and having ceilings only of ordinary height, are as many as four beds, and that without any adequate system of ventilation.

As new patients are committed faster than the old ones can be discharged, and as more than a year must elapse before the new wing at Rochester can be completed, it will be seen that measures for relief may soon be imperatively demanded.

The only remedy which occurs to us is that to which attention has been already called, and which we would again respectfully urge: viz. that the various counties be required to withdraw from the institution that considerable number of inmates who are fit subjects for almshouses, and not for a hospital, or who can be cared for by friends or relatives: such inmates are those suffering from incurable forms of insanity or who are incapable of committing violence or of doing mischief. At the present rate of increase their presence will soon become a prejudice to those whose condition demands active treatment or who are susceptible of improvement.

The sanitary condition of the old or lower building has been improved as to ventilation by the introduction of ducts between the water closets and chimneys; but the construction of a proper drain in connection with the city sewer is still greatly needed.

We find no cases of harsh treatment or of punishment or of unnecessary restraint since our visit in April last, and no inmates who are improperly detained.

These have eloped since last April --

William Aurlly	Dakota Co.	June 26
Frank Ellis	Dodge Co.	July 7
Georgia McArdle	Anoka Co.	Sept. 15

Of those who have the liberty of the grounds or are employed at various kinds of work these have strayed away -

Victor Thompson		Aug. 25
William Wall	Stearns Co.	Sept. 12

The list of deaths during the same period is as follows:

Martha Erdahl	Faribault Co.	Apr. 22
Catherine Groff	Ramsey Co.	May 10
Georgette Doty	Stearns Co.	May 12
Joseph Horan	Ramsey Co.	June 4
Nicholas Debuer	Washington Co.	June 10
James Wiley	Hennepin Co.	July 12
Caroline Kubsch	St Louis Co.	July 18
Mary Stokes	Stearns Co.	Aug. 17
Elinora Jack	Dodge Co.	Aug. 25
Geo. McDonough	Watonwan Co.	Sept. 12
Marietta Leonard	Otter Tail Co.	Sept. 13
Barthold Vennewite	Todd Co.	Sept. 16
Catharine Simpkins	Scott Co.	Oct. 18
Christine McIntire	Otter Tail Co.	Oct. 31
John McNeuirey	Martin Co.	Nov. 11

We directed the children named in the following list to be sent tthe School for Imbeciles at Faribault.

Hans J. Johnson	Hennepin Co.
August Johnson	Hennepin Co.
Bernard Thirlwall	Martin Co.

Matilda Bauer	Ramsey Co.
Maxime Cole	Hennepin Co.
Phoebe E. Masters	Blue Earth Co.
Mary Jackson	Nobles Co.

On Thursday, Nov. 20th, we visited the Rochester Asylum, and take pleasure in reporting that its management and sanitary conditions are excellent. Among its inmates is one, Martin Gustavison, of Freeborn Co. who is not a fit subject for the hospital, and we are of the opinion that he should be removed and cared for by Authorities of the County whence he came. Gustavison is an idiot without a spark of intelligence, and is to all intents a mere animal, he can neither speak nor understand when spoken to, and is wholly insusceptible of improvement. He is filthy and so destructive in his habits that his hands must be constantly confined in a muff. No treatment can alleviate his condition, and he is only taking the place of someone who might be benefitted or permanently relieved by commitment to the hospital. The institution has its full complement of inmates -- seventy-seven -- and can receive others only by resorting to temporary makeshifts.

We noticed with pleasure the marked improvement in the hospital grounds since our visit last Spring. Winding roads have been constructed, many trees planted, and tasteful flower-beds laid out; all having been done under the direction of Dr. Bowers, the Superintendent, by the inmates of the hospital. Such employment not only adds to the attractiveness and value of the property of the State, but is a useful therapeutic measure in dealing with those for whose benefit the institution exists.

There has been one elopement since last April: that of Geo. R. Lewis -- Mower Co. Oct. 17. But one death has occurred -- Simon Resch -- Winona Co. Oct. 24.

We are glad to be able to offer a report in this connection of a visit to the School for Imbeciles at Faribault, made on our return from Rochester, on Thursday, Nov. 20th.

The institution is under the general management of Prof. J. L. Noyes and the directors of the Deaf and Dumb and Blind Asylums. Its superintendent is Dr. Knight, assisted by Miss Hale as teacher, Miss Anderson, Supervisor, and Mr. Massey, attendant.

Great credit is due to Prof. Noyes for the judgment exhibited in the selection of these ladies and gentlemen, whose qualifications for their arduous duties cannot be too warmly commended. They exhibit in a marked degree the tact and patience and tenderness so essential in dealing with the little unfortunates committed to their care, whose evident contentment no less than their mental improvement bears witness to the efficiency of their instructions.

It might savor somewhat of extravagance if we were to attempt to express our surprise and gratification at the progress which has been made in about four months in the awakening and development of the faculties which had lain dormant since these little ones first saw the light.

The school room, presided over by Miss Hale, resembles those in one of the primary grades of our public schools. The children are seated at desks, where those who are not for the time being under the hands of the teacher busy themselves with blocks of various shapes and in fitting together simple puzzles: the object being to arrest and fix the attention and to encourage the association of ideas.

The first lesson consists in the exhibition of small cards on which are printed in bold type the names of familiar objects. This is done before any letters are taught or known, and of course before the ability to read is acquired. One of these cards is persistently shown to a child; who is told what it represents, until it at last comes to associate its general appearance with the object named upon it and can mention that object at once on seeing the card. A second is then shown with like result, and so by degrees quite a vocabulary is learned. But few mistakes were made by those to whom we saw the test applied, and who pronounced a number of words correctly and promptly. Such a process demands an extraordinary amount of patience and tact and fidelity on the part of the teacher, and these qualities are most happily combined in the present instructor, Miss Hale.

Writing is then taught, and at the same time a familiarity with the alphabet is acquired, by the use of copy-books in which the letters being faintly printed are traced with a pencil. After a time they are written without this assistance, being simply copied. Some of the writing we saw would do credit to children in full possession of their faculties. One little one, seeing us examine the writing of others, called Miss Hale and asked that hers be shown to us too: indicating that the spirit of emulation had been awakened and that she was capable of taking an honest pride in her work.

Some of the children went thro' a very satisfactory exercise with dumb-bells, keeping time with each other and with the piano accompaniment; and two boys sang several songs; the words and tunes being accurately rendered and the time well observed.

It must be borne in mind that when these children came to the school, they were incapable of doing any of the things here mentioned: some of them, indeed, were unable even to feed themselves. They had received no instruction, and were, for the most part, in the condition of more or less docile animals. They are now, even after a very brief period of training, tractable and obedient, and give evidence of the possession of traits and faculties – still rudimentary, it is true, -- whose further development by careful culture will remove them eventually from the condition of helplessness in which so lately they seemed doomed to remain, and will make them to some extent at least self-supporting, and even producers instead of consumers only. They will then be no longer pitiable objects of charity; life-long inmates of an asylum or burdens upon the kindness and sympathy of friends, but will be able in some degree to assume the responsibilities of life and to aid in the discharge of its duties. Such a prospect must not only commend the enterprise upon grounds of Christian philanthropy, but is in accord with sound principles of social and political economy.

It would be interesting, if time permitted, to mention somewhat in detail what has been done and what is being done by similar institutions in other states as an evidence that our confidence as to what may be accomplished by such a school is not without foundation: but should any skepticism on this point exist, personal inspection may safely be relied upon to dispel all doubt. We are most decidedly of the opinion that if the citizens of our State had any adequate idea of the work there in progress, our next legislature would receive ample instruction and authority to adopt such measures as should result in the same generous support as is extended to our other State Charitable institutions: and this, we doubt not, will be done.

There are now sixteen children in the school, their ages ranging from seven to sixteen. Three of these are hopelessly idiotic, (one of them being paralysed as well) and we have in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 5 of the Act recommended the directors to return them to their homes or to the proper authorities. Their names are

Stella Silsbee - Olmsted Co.

Pauline Torn - Nicollet Co.

August Malmberg – Carver Co.

As the institution is not a hospital but a school, these children cannot be maintained there without exacting an amount of care and attention which works an injustice to the others; and their presence limits the space, already too small, which should be devoted exclusively to the class for which the school is intended. Indeed, they must be sent away in order to make room for those whom we recently directed to be transferred from Saint Peter to the school, and whose names will be found in the accompanying report of our visit to the hospital at that place. The children in question are not susceptible of improvement, and it is probable that their presence would operate as a drawback to the advancement of their fellows.

In conclusion, we desire to commend the good order and discipline and general efficiency which are manifest in all the departments of the school, and which promise to make it at an early day the equal of similar institutions in older states which enjoy a high reputation for success and usefulness.

Very respectfully

Your Obedient Servants

G. Weston Wood MD

W. H. Leonard M.D.

C. H. Boardman, M.D.

Commissioners.