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State Inst-Fairbank-PIC

# THIRD BIENNIAL REPORT

OF THE

SUPERINTENDENT

OF

# PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

State of Minnesota,

FOR THE

YEARS ENDING AUGUST 31, 1883 AND 1884.

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TWENTY-SECOND REPORT IN THE SERIES.

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PRESENTED TO THE LEGISLATURE OF THE THIRD BIENNIAL SESSION.  
1885.

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## REPORT

OF THE

## Superintendent of School for Idiots and Imbeciles.

*To the Hon. D. L. Kiehle, Superintendent of Public Instruction:*

I herewith submit the third biennial report of the Minnesota Training School for Idiots and Imbeciles. Seventy-five children have been connected with the institution during the past two years. The present number is sixty. The health of our children has been very good, but we have had more than our usual amount of sickness among the boys, due largely, I am convinced, to the overcrowded condition of their dormitories and sitting rooms, which was unavoidable, owing to the fact that the boys outnumber the girls nearly three to one. In the two years there have been five deaths.

- One (1) from chronic bronchitis.
- One (1) from galloping consumption.
- One (1) from pneumonia.
- One (1) from epileptic convulsions.
- One (1) from specific disease.

The subject of the last mentioned cause was a little boy ten years of age, who came to us thoroughly diseased, and lived but a month after being received into the institution.

The progress of our children in school work has been exceedingly gratifying, and has realized our highest expectations. The record of the school-room work is as follows:

Nineteen (19) read cards.  
 Sixteen (16) read in the Primer.  
 One (1) reads in the Second Reader.  
 Six (6) read in the Third Reader.  
 Seven (7) learn spelling lessons.  
 Ten (10) write fairly well.  
 Fifteen (15) learn writing.  
 Thirteen (13) count ten.  
 Eight (8) count one hundred.  
 Eleven (11) learn simple rules on the numeral frame.  
 Two (2) learn from Colburn's First Lessons.  
 Three (3) learn written arithmetic.  
 Seven (7) learn geography from books.  
 Thirteen (13) learn geography orally.  
 Five (5) do plain sewing.  
 Five (5) outline Kensington.  
 Five (5) embroider on canvas.  
 Two (2) knit.  
 Two (2) crochet.  
 Eleven (11) weave mats.  
 Fifteen (15) weave kindergarten slats.  
 One (1) hammers brass.  
 Nineteen (19) learn drawing.  
 Eighteen (18) sing.  
 Twenty (20) dance.  
 Seven (7) do housework.  
 Fourteen (14) are mutes.  
 Five (5) are semi-mutes.

We have done our best for a feeble-minded person when we have made him self-respecting and self-supporting. Toward that end all our training, in school and out, tends. We do not expect our children to become students. Our "higher education" for this class is reached when they can put the lessons of application, attention, obedience and industry which they have learned in the

schoolroom into practical use in the industrial arts, which must follow if we secure all the benefits possible to this class. When we can show fairly good carpenters, shoe makers, broom, brush and mattress makers, farm laborers, seamstresses, laundresses and chamber-maids, from among these children, we show one of the strongest arguments in favor of caring for imbeciles, even at what, to those who think of this class as simply "cumberers of the earth," looks like a large outlay of public moneys. That we can show such workmen and women, is abundantly proved in the older institutions, and, even in our own small family, after but five years of training, for those who have been here the longest, and beginning as we did, with so low a grade of imbecility as found its most fitting home in an insane asylum, we can show a good year's work.

Our five girls who can sew, have pieced and quilted four bed quilts as plain sewing, and have also done a variety of plain and fancy needle-work, which will compare favorably with that of any five normal children of the same age, with a similar amount of instruction. Our boys have learned the rudiments of mattress making, and the twenty-seven mattresses which they made, as lessons, are very creditable work. Besides this they have dug a sewer ditch from the bluff to the river, a distance of forty rods, and they have moved on wheelbarrows between three and four hundred wagon loads of earth to fill up a ravine which was widening too near our buildings. They have also done good service in the work of grading and sodding about the house. Two years ago in my report of this school, I urged upon you the necessity of taking some action in the matter of providing suitable shops for our older boys. What was a growing need *then*, is an imperative necessity *now*. Our boys have reached the age when they can best be taught manual labor, and lacking such teaching they will contract habits of idleness which it will be hard to counteract. Our winters are long, and outdoor work is impossible for the majority of them, so that after school hours they have, practically, nothing to occupy their time and attention.

When our new building, which is nearly ready for occupancy, is completed, we shall have at least thirty new boys, some of whom will be capable of doing some kind of useful labor, and I feel that I cannot urge too strongly the necessity of taking immediate steps toward furnishing us with the proper materials for beginning our industrial training at once. As I have said before, nothing so promotes the feeling of self-respect and real happiness

among imbeciles as the fact that they are useful. Work is our most powerful agent in their improvement, and setting aside all humane considerations, that they can be taught to do something is one of the most convincing arguments that can be used in behalf of their care and education by the State.

Notwithstanding the fact that the legislature most generously responded to our appeal for more room, made two years ago, we must still cry "more," for our want of additional buildings has at no time been greater than it is at present. There is no need of argument in favor of supplying this lack. Our State has fully recognized the necessity of caring for the feeble minded, as shown by the immediate response to our former appeals. It is enough to state that our new building will accommodate fifty children. Our admitted applications over and above this number are thirty-five. But there is one grade of imbeciles for whom I wish to make an especial appeal. It is the class who have become of feeble mind because of epilepsy. They cannot with justice to other grades, as well as to themselves, be put with other children. The effects upon a nervous child, even of feeble-mind, of daily contact with convulsions, cannot be dwelt upon here; it is a proper subject for a medical paper, but the injurious effects, to my mind, cannot be calculated, nor is a building fitted for the needs of ordinary imbecility suitable in any way for the epileptic. They *must* be cared for by themselves, as I have stated to you once before.

It has been an open question for years whether the epileptic should be admitted into institutions for the feeble-minded, and in some States there is a law shutting out all such; and yet the fact that, by judicious medical treatment, and the strict attention to hygiene which can be compelled in an institution, a physician's efforts to alleviate the sufferings of these unfortunates is sometimes crowned with such success that a patient is cured, is a strong argument in favor of leaving no means untried to help those whose lives are of all others surely the saddest among God's creatures. As was well said in a recent discussion upon this subject: "When we make institutions for the feeble-minded simply custodial and educational, and refuse all cases which demand skillful scientific treatment, their management can be handed over to care-takers and teachers, and need no longer be under the charge of medical and scientific men." In our own institution, though all of this class have been helped by constant medical care, there has been but one cure; and yet, that

there should have been one human being rescued from a state of loathsome, helpless and apparently hopeless imbecility, and sent to his home a bright, handsome, strong young man, with his intellect restored, and his health so firm that he is earning his own living, is surely worth *all* that Minnesota has done for the care of imbeciles during the past five years. Therefore, I wish most especially to urge the needs of this class. The imbecile will be taken care of. Public opinion, which realizes that like produces like, and that imbeciles, if left to themselves, give rein to all the baser passions and reproduce their kind; specialists in this work, who from pathological study show that there is a marked similarity between the brains of criminals and imbeciles, and who know that the criminal class is largely recruited from the ranks of the feeble-minded;—all show that the interests of the State are best met when this class is cared for so completely that the number of imbeciles and criminals shall not be augmented from among themselves. But the helpless idiot and epileptic needs the especial effort of the humanitarian, not to be overlooked. Our department for the care of these is already overcrowded. No matter how urgent the case, admission *must* be refused until further accommodations are furnished by the State. In making this especial appeal I do not mean to put the claims of epileptic above those of the imbecile. Of the two, the bright imbecile at large is by far more dangerous to the community than the epileptic who, in many instances, is simply a hospital case; and if but one class could be helped it should be, in every instance, the imbecile.

I simply wish to impress upon you the urgent need of more room for both classes, and that immediately. The claims of the imbecile who is capable of improvement—and under favorable influences, perhaps, self-support, or lacking these, further degradation,—come first. But second comes the epileptic, who, in the interests of ordinary humanity, is entitled to his one chance in a thousand of being restored to such a condition of health as shall make of him a rational, responsible human being.

Respectfully submitted,

G. H. KNIGHT, Superintendent.