

MEMORIAL

SOLICITING A

STATE HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE,

SUBMITTED TO THE

LEGISLATURE OF NEW JERSEY,

JANUARY 23, 1845.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE LEGISLATURE OF NEW JERSEY.

SECOND EDITION.

TRENTON:

1845.

MEMORIAL.

*To the Honorable the Senate and General Assembly of the State of
New Jersey.*

GENTLEMEN :

I come to solicit your attention to the condition and necessities of Idiots, Epileptics, and the Insane Poor, in the State of New Jersey.

I ask your consideration of the *claims* of this large and much neglected class of sufferers, and such effective legislative action as shall check that tide of misery, the destroying force of which, each year witnesses the increase. I do not come here to quicken your generous impulses, and move you to emotion, by showing the existence of terrible abuses, revealing scenes of almost incredible sufferings. I come to ask *justice* of the Legislature of New Jersey, for those who, in the providence of God, are incapable of pleading their own cause, and of claiming redress for their own grievances. Be patient with me—it is for your own citizens I plead ; it is for helpless, friendless men and women, in your very midst, I ask succour—into whose broken minds hope and consolation find no entrance—the foul air of whose dreary cells still oppresses my breath—the clanking of whose heavy chains still sounds upon my ear. Have pity upon them ! have pity upon them ! “for their light is hid in darkness, and trouble is their portion ;”—have pity upon them ! their grievous, forlorn estate may be shared by yourselves or your children. A solemn responsibility is intrusted to you : it is for you to put a termination to evils and miseries which may yet be remedied or alleviated ;—it is for you to surround these unfortunate beings with such protecting influences, as their incapacity for self-care demands, and to guard against the aggravation of like evils and miseries for the future.

Within the last few months, I have traversed a considerable portion of your state, and have found, in jails and poor-houses, and wandering at will over the country, large numbers of insane and idiotic persons,

whose irresponsibility and imbecility render them objects of deep commiseration. These, whether the subjects of public bounty or of private charity, are inappropriately treated for recovery, or injudiciously managed, through ignorance or limitation of suitable means; thus they are left to exposures and sufferings, at once pitiable and revolting, and however in detail strongly represented, incapable of being exaggerated. I appeal to the public to sustain this strong assertion, and I appeal to medical men, whose professional duties conduct them amidst every form of painful disease, to unite their testimony with mine, and to aid in showing how great is the need, how important the demand, for a State Asylum for Insane Persons.

It is my duty to speak explicitly upon this subject. I shall be sorry to wound the feelings of any individual; I disclaim all personality—calling attention to defective systems, not to those who are officially appointed to carry them out. I shall not attempt to detail full histories, nor to refer directly to all cases embraced in the class of insane and idiots; but shall confine myself chiefly, to *facts* at present existing, and scenes to which I lately have been witness.

Allow me, first, to refer you to the able report of your commissioners, who, in 1839-40, made to the Governor, by a joint resolution of the Council and Assembly, a statement of the condition of the insane, and represented the pressing want of a State Hospital—urging that “*the Legislature of New Jersey will not be wanting in its duty to her people, nor behind the age in which we live. She will follow the example of her sister states, in alleviating the sufferings of humanity.*” Four years have passed, the duty is *unfulfilled*—and New Jersey has been suffered to remain *behind* the age in this humane work.

The documents above referred to, prepared with care from statistics laboriously collected, exhibit plainly your need. Dating four years back, it was found, according to the lowest computation, that there were in New Jersey *two hundred and fifty-two insane males; one hundred and sixty-three insane females; and of idiots, ninety-three males, and one hundred and three females.* It will be found that this large number, allowed to be *below the probable amount*, is much increased, not lessened. Numbers are added to those who class as incurables, and recent cases are, for want of appropriate remedial care, fast falling into the same deplorable condition.

It was my design to have laid before you the present numerical amount; but it appeared not important to the cause advocated to do this, when a cursory survey of the state has exhibited so many patients distributed in the state prison, the county jails, the poor-houses, and also in the hospitals of the two adjacent states of New York and Pennsylvania, as to prove that your pecuniary interest is united with the plea of humanity, to urge you to immediate action on the subject. The hospitals above referred to contain unitedly, above sixty patients from this state; but while neither New York nor Pennsylvania reject your insane, it should be remembered that the whole public and private provision in both these states, is far short of meeting the wants of those who are fit subjects for hospital care, and that *many hundreds* are needing the places which your patients occupy. It is certainly difficult to comprehend why New Jersey, with ample means, unembarrassed by state debts, and prosperous in all her public relations, and more private channels of business, should fail to take an honorable and an honored position in the establishment of such state institutions as the wants of her citizens require. On this subject, through the length and breadth of New Jersey, I have heard but one and the same opinion and wish:—“*We need a hospital; we desire its immediate establishment.*”

I proceed to show the actual condition of those jails and poor-houses which I have visited.

SALEM COUNTY JAIL, at *Salem*, is an old building, very inconveniently constructed, but kept remarkably clean: there were here three prisoners in November: the supply of food by the jailor, I learned, was sufficient in quantity, and of good quality: twenty cents per day is allowed by the county for board; *but no beds of any kind* are provided or required by law: there were no insane in the prison at the time of my visit.

The COUNTY POOR-HOUSE is several miles from *Salem*, near *Sharptown*: attached is a well managed farm, and the cost for each individual averages about eighty cents per week. The establishment seemed, in general, very well conducted: the inmates, who in November numbered eighty, were comfortably and decently clad, and the food, as far as I could learn, was well prepared and of good quality. It is the custom to bind out the children at a very early age, therefore no school is provided. Religious meetings are seldom holden, and

religious counsel or consolation rarely imparted by visitors. There are here, beside several epileptics and persons of infirm minds, eight insane. One woman of middle age has been crazy seventeen years. Two of the patients were in chains; one man, very crazy for nearly thirty years, has been out of his small apartment but "ten times for more than nineteen years." He is considered very dangerous, and is so. No appropriate care can be rendered here to lessen his frenzied excitement, or diminish the terrible horrors of madness. The master said, if he could "take him out daily for exercise in the open air, it would do him good; but with the care of a farm, which he is expected and required to keep under profitable cultivation, with a family of paupers—often exceeding one hundred—to manage and provide for, he has not time to nurse madmen, or to give them in any degree the care they need." The propensities of this poor wretch are homicidal: he is dreaded by all save the master of the house, whose only safety, as he thinks, consists in governing him through the *principle of fear*. In illustration of this, I give his own account of the manner by which this influence is gained, and, utterly horrible and revolting as it is, I believe it only justice to the keeper to add, that *in his circumstances*, with his *limited means*, he does not what he approves and wishes, but that to which he considers himself compelled. "Going to his room one day, not long since," said the keeper, "in order to shave him, my hands both being full, as I came near, he suddenly sprang upon me, and dealt a violent blow at my chest; his being chained, alone prevented his killing me. I knew I must master him now or never: I threw down the shaving tools, caught a stick of wood from the entry, and laid upon him until he cried for quarter: I beat him long enough to make him know I was his master, and now he is too much afraid of a thrashing to attack me; but you had better stand off, ma'am, for he won't fear you." Brute force is the cruel alternative left for those who are compelled to a charge for which they lack both time, and means, and knowledge. A letter, some time since, reached me from a stranger, relating to this very madman, round whose limbs these, so many long and sorrowful years, have weighed the heavy chain and fetters! "There are many," says my correspondent, "whose sufferings are greatly augmented for want of proper treatment and attention. In our poor-house is a man who has been *chained by the leg* for more than twenty years; and the only warmth which can be introduced into his cell, is from a small stove-pipe, which passes

through one corner of it!" This history neither needs, nor will bear comment.

In one apartment I found an epileptic, bleeding from fresh wounds inflicted by falling, in a fit; his mental faculties much impaired, and his condition very sad. He was placed on the floor for safety, having already fallen from a raised bed. This class of patients are often peculiarly dangerous; as the fit passes off, becoming highly excited, often malicious and disposed to violence: this terrible and unmanageable disease, so warps the natural dispositions, that, from being mild and gentle, they become highly irritable and furious.

On a level with the cellar, in a basement room, which was tolerably decent, but bare enough of comforts, lay, upon a small bed, a feeble aged man, whose few gray locks fell tangled about his pillow. As we entered, he addressed one present, saying, "I am all broken up, all broken up!" "Do you feel much weaker, then *Judge*?" "*The mind*, the mind is going—almost gone," responded he, in tones of touching sadness: "Yes," he continued, murmuring to himself, "the mind is going." This feeble, depressed old man—a pauper, helpless, lonely, and yet conscious of surrounding circumstances, and not now wholly oblivious of the past—this feeble old man—who was he? I answer as I was answered;—but he is not unknown to many of you. In his young and vigorous years he filled various places of honor and trust among you: his ability as a lawyer, raised him to the bench. As a jurist, he was distinguished for uprightness, clearness, and impartiality: he also was judge of the orphans' court. He was for many years a member of the Legislature. His habits were correct, and I could learn, from those who had known him for many years, nothing to his discredit, but much that commends men to honor and respect. The meridian of an active and useful life was passed; the property, honestly acquired, on which he relied for comfortable support during his declining years, was lost through some of those fluctuations which so often produce reverses for thousands. He became insane, and his insanity assumed the form of frenzy; he was chained "for safety:" in fine, he was committed to the county jail for greater security! Time wore away, excitement gave place to a more quiet, but not a rational state; he was after a considerable period, placed in a private family. When the little means left of the small remnant of his once sufficient property was consumed, he was removed to the poor-house—there I saw him: without vice and without crime, he has been the victim of

disease and the prey of misfortune; he is withering away in an obscure room of a county poor-house, receiving his share of that care and attention that must be divided and subdivided among the hundred feeble, infirm, and disabled inmates. For such men as Judge S., is no hospital needed? or if too late for him, hasten—it may be finished only to open its merciful shelter for yourselves or your children.

The JAIL IN BRIDGETON, *Cumberland county*, contained but one prisoner, an ignorant coloured boy, who was detained for trial. The apartments were in order and respectably clean.

The COUNTY POOR-HOUSE, a short distance from *Bridgeton*, had sixty-two inmates, which is less than the average. The house was remarkably neat and comfortable throughout; nothing could seem better ordered in a building which was not conveniently constructed for the purpose to which it was appropriated. The farm includes two hundred and fifty acres, and is well conducted. There is no school for the children: religious meetings are holden at irregular intervals. Several imbecile, idiotic, and epileptic patients are here, but none at present in a highly excited state. If any should be sent, or if any now there, become violent, there is no suitable provision either for their comfort or security. *Chains* are resorted to when deemed necessary.

CAPE MAY POOR-HOUSE, is said to be well regulated as regards the poor in general; but the insane here, as elsewhere, have suffered from the injudicious management to which they have been subjected. Sometimes a patient may seem well enough to labor, and no doubt, if this was directed with judgment, it would prove beneficial; but excessive exertion may produce the most disastrous effects. This has been the case in one instance at least, in this poor-house, and examples are not wanting of like results, elsewhere.

The JAIL AT WOODBURY, *Gloucester county*, is of good size, well built, and contains one dungeon, and five rooms, well lighted and neatly arranged. I found here no prisoners.

Some time since, an insane man was sent from there to the penitentiary, at Trenton. I am informed, by citizens resident in the county, that the offence with which he was charged, was committed when he was known to be insane; that he was exceedingly troublesome in the jail; and after various delays, at a time when the violence of his paroxysms had subsided, he was produced in court, tried, convicted,

and sentenced for a term of years to the state prison. Beyond doubt, he was a dangerous person to be at large; but that it was unjust to send him to the penitentiary, is equally beyond doubt.

The POOR-HOUSE of *Gloucester county*, some miles west of *Woodbury*, is populous with imbecile, insane, and epileptic patients, amounting to from twenty-five to thirty individuals. Twenty-three, at first, were counted by name, but others afterward recollected and referred to. Of these, three were very crazy, and one man dangerous and difficult of control at all times. The crazy-house contains ranges of small cells, having the single recommendation of strength, and are altogether unfit for the class of unfortunate beings to whose use they are appropriated. But this is not all, these insane cannot have fit care—*responsible* care and judicious management. One of the paupers, so far as *his education* and *capacity* enable him, takes the active charge, and is called “*the keeper*.” There are both men and women; and round about all the place are the irresponsible and the corrupt—corrupt in speech and in act. I believe that those who have charge of this poor-house, with all its appendages, seek to discharge their very onerous duties to the county and to the inmates; but they must possess rare gifts for discipline, and rare personal influence, if they are successful in maintaining here either morality or order. Taking into view the character of the largest portion of the inmates, and the construction of the buildings, I consider this to be absolutely impossible; yet this is the only resort the county affords, except the jail, for insane men and women. County-houses, except at immense expense, can never be made fit places for the reception of the insane; they will be mere receptacles, where starvation is prevented, but where deficient protection and aggravation of the malady are sure to be found.

BURLINGTON COUNTY JAIL, at *Mount Holly*, was in thoroughly good order, clean throughout, and evidently conducted by persons who understand how to maintain discipline. There were several prisoners.

BURLINGTON COUNTY POOR-HOUSE, near *Pemberton*, contained, in November, one hundred and thirty-four inmates: no school for the children; religious meetings sometimes. This establishment is directed by very respectable persons, qualified for the difficult place they fill. The house is well ordered, all the apartments very neat, well scrubbed and white-washed. Ventilation, as in almost every crowded dwelling, entirely insufficient, especially in the cold season, when stove fires are

kindled. I found here twenty-two insane—ten of these were occupants of the cells in the cellar, “or low basement.” Here was a strange and woful contrast to the rooms above; the dreary confined cells, insufficiently lighted, insufficiently warmed, and pervaded with foul air to an intolerable degree, offer scenes at which humanity revolts. Here is a want of competent “care-takers,” and a want of all, that to a humane mind appears necessary for the helpless and debased insane paupers. Here they are left to acquire or confirm brutal and brutalizing habits, which without control, exercise their destructive and offensive influence. “We have no other place for such as these,” replied the master of the house, to my remarks upon the unfitness of the cells for those crazy *men and women*: “we need a State Hospital.” Some feeble and incompetent persons were beginning to perform the necessary duties of arranging and cleansing the cells; a crazy woman was attempting to light a fire, for the morning was cold, and the place below somewhat damp. The mistress, who accompanied me to these dismal abodes, admonished some loiterers to be more alert in performing their tasks, but it seemed little likely these would be properly accomplished. I cannot hastily censure the superintendents of this establishment, for what was much amiss in this department of the otherwise highly creditable institution, and I shall be very slow to blame the visiting physician for neglect in prescribing for some cases evidently needing medical care; for I much doubt if prescriptions under such untoward outward circumstances would be of any avail, if even they would not be positively injurious. I cannot complain, either, that the county does not build a hospital; but there is a sin of omission somewhere.

MONMOUTH COUNTY JAIL, at *Freehold*, is tolerably well arranged, and the apartments are sufficiently large and numerous to admit, in some sort, a classification of the prisoners. The only individual held there at the time of my visit, was a coloured man, who is represented not only as dangerous to be at large, but dangerous to “his keeper,” being of late years subject to violent paroxysms, and when suffering under any injury, real or imaginary, both threatens and attempts personal violence. His history, as related by citizens in the county, is briefly this: He was from infancy of an eccentric and excitable temper, and was “brought up” by a family to which he was much attached, the master of which, perceiving a mental defect, avoided what disturbed his quiet, and by skilful management made him a faithful and useful servant. Death deprived him of this judicious guardian: he remained

with the family; but the son-in-law of his late master less well understood his mental disabilities, and how to manage him: the result was, that in dealing him a blow for some supposed neglect of duty, he instantly returned the attack, and was roused to a terrible excitement. The master, through fear, caused him to be committed on a charge of assault and battery, with intent to kill: he proved very ungovernable in the county jail, and, after a considerable time had passed, was tried, convicted, and sentenced to *ten years imprisonment* in the State Penitentiary. During all this dreary period, he was considered a “very crazy man,” and of course, as the warden himself told me, came out worse than when he entered; “for how can we,” continued he, “bring madmen under curative treatment in the prison, even if they are curable at all?” He received his discharge, poor fellow! what was he now to do? his heart yearned for his old home—the home of his “dear old master, who was dead and gone.” True to the instincts of his nature, thither he wandered, for neither friends nor home had he beside; he was received, but his obvious insanity made him feared: indeed he was a dangerous inmate at times. He roamed over the fields and through the old familiar woodlands, gathering into heaps old wood, that “nothing should be wasted.” On this ground, occasion was made to charge him with petty depredations: he was again committed to the county jail, and there I found him. The keeper said he was often “dangerous to approach, especially if long kept close.” I have refrained from giving the details of this painful history: they are known to many of your citizens.

We have not dwelt upon his sufferings in the jail; we have not followed him to his dreary prison, and there looked into his cell, cheerless and lonely, as month after month, and year after year, the crazy man, incapable of occupation, and beyond the reach of appropriate care, wore away time till ten times twelve months were numbered. It is possible it may seem no great evil, such a life as this, just as here it is briefly touched upon, but it is terrible in its reality. The poor-house pauper, the wandering beggar, find the relief they seek, the aid they ask; but who are the friends of the insane poor, and what is the meed rendered to their necessities? What do our investigations reveal? kindly care, skilful remedies, guardian protection, or chains, bondage, and long imprisonment? mitigated suffering or unmitigated wo? Where is the hospital? for a hospital, behold I show you the cells of the poor-house, the dungeons of the prisons?

I have asked, who are the friends of the insane poor—few can effectually befriend them—this affecting christian duty devolves on *the state*; and the state will cancel this sacred obligation, only by acknowledging the wardship of these, the *Pariahs* of our country, and establishing an asylum for their protection.

Attached to the SHARK-RIVER POOR-HOUSE, in *Monmouth county*, is a farm of nine hundred acres, one hundred of which are cultivated. The cost of supporting the poor, is about sixty cents per week for each individual; the supplies appeared to me sufficient and of good quality, although the system of the distribution of provisions, and separate cooking in the lodging-rooms, is very objectionable; and the more so, as there is no infirmary or hospital department connected with the establishment. The sick, the infirm, and the imbecile, are indiscriminately distributed and associated. The house, which is built of wood, is very old and inconveniently constructed for the purpose for which it is occupied. It contains, in winter, about sixty paupers, gathered from three townships: in the spring, a portion of these seek maintenance elsewhere. At this poor-house I found, in November, forty inmates, chiefly aged and infirm persons, imbeciles, idiots, and insane: of the latter there are *seven idiotic, two whole idiots, two very insane*, and several demented.

In the vicinity of the main dwelling is a small brick building, containing on the first floor two poor cells, from eight to nine feet square, warmed in cold weather by a stove set into the dividing wall, or partition. A straw bed and blanket, spread upon the floor, constitute the furniture, if one except the *ring-bolts* and *iron chains* for securing the patients! Ventilation by a small window, is quite deficient. At the time of my visit, there was but one cell occupied: the crazy man was allowed to go abroad during the day, for it was "his calm time," and it was deemed necessary to fasten him up only at night; at present, too, the chains were disused. Over these cells was a third, which could be reached only by a ladder, "quite unfit," as I was told, "for any one to be kept in." A kind and considerate master and mistress directed this establishment.

I heard in this township, of three wandering insane persons, but learned nothing special of their history; little interest was expressed for them. Where they belonged, to whom they were allied, or what their name and degree, were facts equally obscure and equally uncared for.

At SHREWSBURY POOR-HOUSE, at the present time, are no cases of violently excited insane, and no accommodations for any such, if the superintendent should again be charged with the care of them. At one period they had great trouble with the unmanageable patients. A portion of the poor belonging to this township are boarded with one of the overseers, preferring that residence, to the regularly appointed poor-house. I understood one dollar per week was paid for their board, and am not sure if this charge included the cost of clothing; I think it did not. A crazy man had lived there; but, to employ the words of the mistress of the house, "he took worse in August, and would wander into the woods, absenting himself till hunger forced his return;"—hastily appeasing his appetite, he would again depart, and finally, "*he did not come back at all.*" "He was worse, wonderfully worse," said an old man sitting by, who listened to my inquiries with curiosity. "*Perhaps,*" resumed the mistress, "he has gone home to his friends—we lay out to write; we have talked of it for some time." "How long has he been gone, do you say?" "He went off in *August.*" It was now *November*;—a feeble insane man gone *three months* from the watch of those who had, officially, the care of him, and no diligent inquiry yet made; no search instituted, if perchance the perishing remains might be found in the forest, or the swollen disfigured corpse given up by the returning tide in the Shark-river: no letter yet written to relations "at home," to learn if, in sickness and pain, he had reached the familiar fireside, and the few he had loved; or to acquaint those poor kindred that he was "missing," and they knew nothing of his fate. Fancy may busy itself concerning the probabilities of protracted suffering through pining debility, and the slow, painful approach of death; or it may picture the sudden, and almost unfelt termination of a miserable life: it may follow the, *perhaps*, yet living wanderer through difficult paths, and on weary journeys, now hungry, and cold, and confused, half comprehending evil, but not competent to combat with, or avoid it;—all this may fancy do; but *one* of these conditions must have been realized—*one was the sad true history.*

MIDDLESEX COUNTY JAIL, in *New Brunswick*, is in decent order, contains two apartments on the first floor, and a dungeon below. I found here but one prisoner; he occupied the same room with an idiotic or demented man, who had been committed here, either for his own safety, or the safety of others. Of his history, I could learn only this: