

New Jersey  
State Reformatory  
Commission  
1901



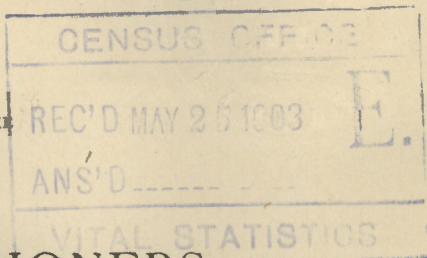
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FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE



COMMISSIONERS

OF THE

New Jersey State Reformatory

FOR THE

Year Ending October 31st, 1901.

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# REPORT.

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*To His Excellency Foster M. Voorhees, Governor:*

The Commissioners of the New Jersey State Reformatory would respectfully submit the following report:

The last report of the Commission was rendered in December, 1900, but little was done previous to May of 1901, excepting preparing the buildings for the reception of inmates.

On April 30th, 1901, the original Commission ceased and the Commission instituted by the new law assumed control.

Pursuant to notices received from your Excellency, the following Commissioners met for organization on May 9th, 1901:

His Excellency Foster M. Voorhees, George A. Squire, Patrick Farrelly, Charlton T. Lewis, Percy R. Pyne, Benjamin Edge, Richard H. Wilson, George W. Fortmeyer, Thomas M. Gopsill.

Commissioner George A. Squire was elected President, and Commissioner Thomas M. Gopsill was elected Secretary.

At the same meeting Mr. James E. Heg was selected as Superintendent.

On the 5th of August, 1901, the Reformatory was opened to receive men committed to it, and on August 6th three inmates were taken in.

It is not necessary to detail to you the amount and character of the work required to open an institution of this kind.

The decision of the Commission that no prisoners should be transferred from the State Prison at Trenton or from other penitentiaries until after it could be seen what the courts would do, was especially gratifying. The experience of every reformatory where prisoners have been brought in considerable numbers from the prisons has proved very unsatisfactory. Some of the men were old in crime, though young in years, and all had been more or less contaminated by their experience in prison. They had learned how to give the officers a vast lot of trouble and, in general, to demoralize discipline from every standpoint. The results, so far as effecting reformation



is concerned, were also doubtful. In fact, statistics go to prove that fully 75 per cent. of men serving time in prison are almost certain to be returned to some prison again.

The law, moreover, provides that the prison authorities shall select the men to be transferred, when instructed to do so by the Governor.

Though the courts did not convene in regular sessions until some time after the Reformatory opened, yet thirty-six young men were sent to the institution prior to November 1st. This is fully as many as was expected, and it is now plain that the courts are in harmony with the Reformatory idea, particularly when its scope and workings are fully comprehended. The judiciary find a happy solution of the perplexing question whether to send a first offender to jail for a long term, or to prison for a short term, and they eagerly share the responsibility of protecting society against criminals with the officials of the Reformatory, who have far greater opportunity to learn when a criminal is ready to take a place in society as a citizen, than has any judge in the brief time that a criminal is before him on trial.

But however it may be with the judiciary, many people do not understand the objects and designs of the Reformatory. The principle on which this institution is organized is by no means a new one. It has been in successful operation in New York, at Elmira, since 1876; at Concord, in Massachusetts, since 1884, and in many other States for shorter periods. The principle denies the correctness of the old idea that so much punishment should be meted out for so much crime. The civilized world no longer believes in that idea. The new theory and practice has enacted into law a better purpose as the object of criminal treatment. Society is to be protected from the criminal first of all, but this protection is to be through the reformation of the criminal rather than through his incarceration as a punishment. Through these new methods the wrongdoer is returned to society when there is a strong or reasonable probability that it is safe to do so, without regard to punishment, whether little or much, and without regard to the particular crime for which he may have been imprisoned. Whenever any prisoner will live at liberty, without prejudice to the welfare of his fellow men, then he is entitled to liberty, and, what is just as important, not till then.

The Reformatory, therefore, has been established for the purpose of reforming those who have been improperly formed as to habits and character, or neglected physically, intellectually or morally. It must begin where the parent, the church and society have failed.



Its design, in brief, is to give every one within it a chance, by good conduct and his own efforts, to rehabilitate himself; to give proper schooling; to teach industrious and honest habits, and by all possible means to advance his material, mental and moral interests.

When he comes to the Reformatory, the young man convicted for the first time of a criminal offense is considered in his individual capacity; his past life, his heredity, his environments, his mental ability are all closely investigated, as well as the causes of his downfall, the temptations and steps that brought him into the custody of the law. The Reformatory is supposed to be for first offenders in crime, between the ages of sixteen and thirty years. Rarely, however, do we find a case where the crime for which a man is sentenced is a first crime, though it may be his first conviction.

Upon his reception at the institution, the prisoner is first bathed, shaved and clothed in new garments throughout. His hair is cut closely to prevent the possibility of vermin getting into the institution, but thereafter it is trimmed the same as in the world outside. His uniform is cadet blue, cut in military style, without pockets. He next undergoes a searching medical examination, and is measured by the Bertillon system. The school instructor locates him in the proper school class, from an examination of his mental ability and previous school work. He then undergoes a rigid and minute examination as to his life's history. His name, age, parentage, birth-place, educational advantages, occupation, habits, mental proclivities, and antecedents are inquired into and verified by correspondence, as far as possible, and the result entered into a register for future reference, additions to which are made as the man develops. Each prisoner, on entering, is placed in the middle grade, and is given five credit marks each day for good behavior, diligence in work and progress in school. For a perfect record he is given a bonus at stated times so that in six months he may earn the 1,000 credit marks which will entitle him to enter the first grade. Six months of perfect record in the first grade entitles him to a parole, when suitable occupation will be found for him and he will be allowed to leave the institution and go at large. Six months of perfect record while on parole will entitle him to an absolute discharge.

The sentences to the Reformatory are indeterminate, the law only stipulating that no imprisonment shall exceed the maximum term provided by law for the crime for which the prisoner was convicted and sentenced.



The system of sentence and the marking system adopted places the period of detention for any prisoner practically with himself. He can, as shown above, without very great effort, secure his conditional release in one year, and his absolute release in a year and a half from the date of his admission.

The daily routine of the prisoner occupies his time and best efforts from 5:45 in the morning until 9 o'clock at night. So far as possible he is taught a trade. At all events he is taught how to apply himself to work. The right conduct of reformed criminals depends greatly upon the readiness with which they can suitably support themselves. Two things are essential to a prisoner's reformation. He must first acquire the *will* to live honestly, and then the *power* to earn an honest living.

To the present time no remunerative industry has been established here, and none can well be considered until the population has increased so that there shall be a fair surplus of those required to perform what may be called the domestic work of the institution. The commission hopes to organize a manual training department before many months, and from it to branch into a number of industries suitable to the inmates.

#### CHANGES IN THE LAW.

Experience in the workings of the organic law of the Reformatory has suggested a number of small changes that would prove advantageous.

Numerous complaints are made by incoming prisoners that pleas of "guilty" are often extorted from them, though innocent, by threats on the part of prosecuting officers that if such pleas are not made the accused will be sent to prison for long terms, while if they are made, the prisoners will be sent to the Reformatory for a short period, which is usually stated as from three to six months. The enactment of a law providing that no person shall be sentenced upon a plea of "guilty" until he shall have first admitted under oath not only his guilt, but the specific facts upon which the charge was founded, would obviate this cause of complaint. If, in addition, the court officers were required to forward to the Reformatory a copy of the testimony given in such sworn admission of guilt, the Superintendent would have authentic information concerning the crime, and would better understand how to deal with that particular case.



There can be no argument, we believe, as to the general desirability of the indeterminate sentence for persons accused of crime. But there are cases where a definite limitation as to the length of time a person may be compelled to serve would be preferable to the general statement that the duration of sentence should not exceed the maximum term provided by law for the crime for which the prisoner was convicted and sentenced. Some prisoners have been received at the Reformatory on six or seven indictments for essentially the same crime, including assault and battery with intent to rob, breaking, entering, larceny and receiving, all of which were parts of one crime, and the maximum of the cumulative sentences being twenty-four years. A sentence of one year in jail or prison for the crime committed in the specific case mentioned, would be deemed sufficient. The law of Massachusetts limits the sentences to the State Reformatory to not less than one year nor more than five years, except in certain specific cases, and this system is found to work much more satisfactorily than where some small crime is burdened with half a dozen indefinite sentences, through the ingeniousness of the law officials, who have in view a bill of taxed costs for each sentence.

Prisoners are often brought to the Reformatory after lying in jail several weeks since sentence has been passed upon them by the courts. Each day in jail adds to the degradation of the young man sentenced for the first time, and makes the work of regeneration all the more difficult. The associations in jail tend to harden many and confirm them in a criminal career. There can be no reasonable excuse rendered why any sheriff cannot deliver a sentenced prisoner to the Reformatory within three days from the time of his sentence.

Sheriffs are paid mileage to deliver prisoners at the Reformatory, but no provision is made for other expenses. The institution is a mile and a half from the railway station. The electric car service is not frequent, and often the sheriffs will compel a handcuffed prisoner to stand on a crowded street corner for half an hour or more while awaiting a car. There should be some means whereby this could be avoided, and the young prisoner saved the humiliation and disgrace of becoming a public spectacle for the curious to gaze at.

The understanding of the law is that loss of citizenship follows conviction and sentence to a penal institution for a felony. While undoubtedly this is necessary as regards those sent to State Prison, it seems very harsh as regards the inmates of a Reformatory, many of whom are mere boys and all of whom are sent to the Reformatory



with an understanding that they are to have a chance to become good, honest citizens. But when the time arrives for them to assume the duties of citizenship, they find that they cannot become citizens in reality without great publicity, much trouble and considerable expense.

A number of judges have a mistaken idea concerning the kind of prisoners to send to the Reformatory, and have confined their commitments to boys just over the age which permits them to be sentenced to the Reform School at Jamesburg. The average age of the thirty-six received up to November 1st is exactly nineteen years, while the average age in reformatories in general is twenty-one to twenty-two years. Any man under thirty years of age who has, so far as known, been convicted of a criminal offense for the first time, ought to have a chance given to him to re-establish himself in the world. If the prison is for habitual criminals, incorrigible convicts, long term and vicious men, it is only right that young men, who through accident, passion, temptation or bad associations, have stepped from the path of right, shall not be compelled to associate with those who will certainly make them worse. Every man leaving a prison carries with him the stigma of a felon. It is impossible to escape it. But a sentence to a reformatory or reform school does not necessarily burden the man with any odium. The helping hand is eagerly offered to its paroled inmates, and if the young man tries to show that he wants to be an honest man, he finds friends and assistance everywhere.

#### THE NEEDS OF THE INSTITUTION.

It should be borne in mind that to open the Reformatory several changes were made in the original plans, and the suggestions named here are because of the changes made in the plans of the institution as originally drawn.

The Reformatory as constructed to date has a capacity of 256 prisoners. Before additional cell-room can be constructed the present capacity will be crowded. A cell-room cannot well be built and equipped in less than one year. If the construction of the south wing could be commenced in the spring, and completed with 300 cells for the following spring, it would be all that could reasonably be expected. This would give all the cell room needed for ten years to come, and further additions could be made by the prisoners themselves, as needed.



Since the Reformatory was opened in August, one inmate attempted to escape. This one attempted escape emphasizes the fact that it is a pressing necessity that the stockade should be commenced at once. At the present moment we have but a temporary wooden stockade about a portion of the grounds. The building of a brick wall about the grounds will be a matter of considerable expense, and the Commission respectfully asks that the coming Legislature appropriate a sum to commence said wall, so that from year to year it may be extended until the premises are enclosed. In this way it will not entail a very great amount of money in any one year. The work would be altogether done by the inmates.

The present kitchen, bakery and dining-rooms are on separate floors of the Domestic building. This requires more officers to guard the inmates working in these departments than should be used for such purpose. If a combined kitchen, dining-rooms and bakery could be built, so as to be connected by a grated corridor with the Dome building, it would save much trouble, considerable money, and enable those in charge to feed the men earlier in the morning and later at night. The second story of the dining-room might be used for school purposes—an urgent need at the present time. The present kitchen and dining-rooms could be used for trade schools or manufacturing shops, if desired. The shop-room will be much too limited when the population has increased to 200 inmates, as will, no doubt, be the case before the end of next year.

The laundry is now on the second floor of the Domestic building. This is inconvenient and annoying because of the steam and water which affects operations above and below. There is now no clothes distributing room, nor is there space for one. The clean clothing has to be brought to the cells, where the inmate selects what he needs and carries with him to the bath-room, which is not only unhandy, but wastes time.

In relation to the bath-room. It has shower-baths for twenty men, but the space for dressing is too narrow. Not more than one-half of the number can comfortably occupy the room at one time.

If one building could be constructed containing a large, well-lighted and ventilated bath-room, and a laundry, with a clothes-room between them, it would be a valuable improvement. It need not cost much money. We can construct the entire building and equip it completely with the work of the inmates. The only expense necessary would be the cost of the materials used. The brick work and



the carpenter work, the steamfitting, plumbing and lighting can all be well done by the prisoners, and the work will furnish what is most needed—a chance for a practical application of their trade-school work.

An ice and refrigerating plant is almost as essential as the kitchen itself. The institution has a very complete electric plant. The expense, therefore, of operating a refrigerating plant would be comparatively small and the saving in the expense for ice as used at present would soon pay for the plant.

A library in an institution of this character is a requisite of the first order. Books are needed not only for the purpose of responding to a demand for mental food on the part of the inmates, but when a man is especially interested in some useful study or profession, text-books treating on technical subjects are absolutely necessary. In the school work, moreover, a reference library would be useful to a marked degree. It is to be hoped that an appropriation of \$1,000 may be obtained for the purpose of equipping a good working library.

Arrangements have been made whereby a school will be organized about the middle of November. This school will be held each evening from six to eight o'clock, with Professor Shearer of Elizabeth as director. The annals of prisons show that crime grows out of neglect and ignorance as often as out of vice, and that lawbreakers are largely recruited from the idle and ignorant classes of society. Fully 40 per cent. of men received at the Reformatory are virtually illiterate. Few, indeed, have had more schooling than would be covered by the fifth grade in any city school. The work of the school will be directed in teaching every inmate, as far as time and his ability will allow, to read and write correctly and easily; to use the calculation of figures readily for all the common business of life; to know something of the lives and products of other men and other countries, and to know the duties one owes to himself and his fellow men.

Much of the success achieved in the various operations of the Reformatory thus far, and certainly this will be true of the future, is due to the faithful and efficient services of the subordinate officers and keepers. While it is not expected of them that they shall work along any line themselves, but shall teach and direct the inmates how to do the work, yet conditions are such in the commencement that we have been obliged to call on them for much work, which has



been cheerfully and faithfully rendered. The Commission would call your attention to the fact that the pay of the officers is not as large as that of officers at the prison in this State, nor equal to that given in most institutions like the Reformatory. It would be a good plan to have salaries graded according to the length of service, setting a maximum to be reached in say five years.

At present there is no hospital at the Reformatory, neither is there any room or building that could by any possibility be utilized as such. If the men are sick, they remain in their cells. If there should be an epidemic or a single case of contagious disease it would be necessary to fight it out in the same place.

Not quite as important, but still a very important feature of a Reformatory, is the lack of solitary cells or discipline room. There must be some method of punishment where an inmate refuses to work, or otherwise seriously disobeys the reasonable rules laid down for his guidance. The Commission is opposed to the use of the paddle or other corporal punishments; a reprimand is worse than useless in such cases, yet what can be done? Discipline demands that the refractory inmates be sequestered until they see the error of their ways clearly, and have time to feel thoroughly the foolishness of their position. If the south cell wing shall be built this next year, the discipline room ought to be constructed therewith. Better still, if the hospital and discipline department could be combined in one structure. It is to be hoped that neither may be needed, but it is better to be prepared for an emergency.

There is considerable land belonging to the institution. Most of this land is of fine quality, especially for garden purposes, in which it is particularly needed. Some forty acres of this land has been ploughed this fall, after having laid fallow for twenty years or more. The Commission expects great things from this land next year, but horses will be needed to work the land as will also cows and pigs, in order to obtain the highest value from the farm. If we have these it will also be necessary to have barns, pig pens and other buildings. Twenty-five per cent. of the subsistence bill can easily be saved by the products of the gardens, and a still further saving can be made if we supply pork, poultry and milk.

A statistical list of the few inmates in the institution thus far received would serve no particular good, and would be of no use for comparison, and it has been omitted.



The officers have all labored hard to improve and build up the Reformatory. They have shown an interest in the work, and a determination to do their duty in every particular.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE A. SQUIRE,  
FOSTER M. VOORHEES,  
PATRICK FARRELLY,  
CHARLTON T. LEWIS,  
PERCY R. PYNE,  
DR. BENJAMIN EDGE,  
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