

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE,

A. D. 1858.



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1858.

THIRTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE.

SENATE.]

[No. 40.

STATE OF MAINE.

The Joint Standing Committee on the State Prison, to which were referred so much of the Governor's message as relates thereto, together with the reports of the Warden and Inspectors, and sundry orders of this Legislature, ask leave to

REPORT:

That on the ninth day of February, the Committee, in pursuance of a joint order of both branches of the Legislature, visited the prison "for the purpose of examining into its affairs."

The Committee are gratified in being able to report, that they found the prisoners kept under strict discipline; that neatness and order are observable throughout the entire institution, and that the Warden, in the opinion of the Committee, discharges his varied and responsible duties with great energy, fidelity and skill. The examination of the Committee could of course be but cursory and superficial, limited as it was to so brief a period, and they therefore are not able to give any specific details of the financial operations of the institution. Convinced as they are of the utter impossibility of a legislative committee going into any thing like a thorough or systematic examination of the affairs of the prison, the Committee have in a subsequent part of this report, recommended a measure for the consideration of the Legislature, the adoption of which may, in their opinion, lead to important practical results.

There are three subjects to which the Committee desire to call the attention of the Legislature as of pressing importance at this time. One relates to the enlargement of the prison, another to the payment of debts long since contracted, and the third to the expediency of making such an examination into the system of labor and discipline in the institution, as may lead to its being placed on a self-supporting basis. They will be alluded to in order.

THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE PRISON.

The increase in the number of convicts has rendered an enlargement of the prison not simply a matter of expediency but one of necessity. The space at present provided is already so overcrowded that five of the convicts have to be confined in the Hospital cells, and with the certainly anticipated increase during the coming year, all the rooms in this department will be entirely exhausted, and even then sufficient accommodations will not be afforded. An enlargement therefore seems to be such an inevitable necessity, that the Committee deem it needless to enforce it by any lengthened argument. It is, besides, in the opinion of the Committee, a wise measure of economy to make the enlargement, inasmuch as it will very greatly increase the probabilities of rendering the labor of the prisoners profitable, by giving them greater facilities and more advantages in the prosecution of their various handicrafts. If the prison can at any time be made self-supporting, it must certainly be when all proper advantages are afforded to make the labor of the convicts profitable, and therefore, simply as a measure of wise forecast, the proposed enlargement of the prison commends itself to the favorable consideration of the Legislature.

The Committee have endeavored to inform themselves fully, as to the recent improvements in the construction of prisons of other States and countries, before recommending any plan for extending and remodeling our own institution, well knowing the importance of embodying those principles in prison construction which have been of late years the study of some of the greatest philanthropists of the age. By personal examination of these matters in detail, as contained in recent reports of operations upon other State Prisons, as well as by personal examinations of some of the buildings upon which the latest philanthropic and practical improvements have been

brought to bear, the Committee have been enabled to arrive at a clear decision, in their own minds, of what is only their simple *duty* to recommend, for the approval of the Legislature, to be done, in the great emergency which exists in the Institution at Thomaston.

With a view to present to the Legislature a plan containing, as far as practicable, all improvements of an acknowledged important character, your Committee at an early day called to their aid Mr. Gridley J. F. Bryant of Boston, an architect, who for the last ten years has made the construction of Prisons, Jails, Houses of Correction and Houses of Reformation his particular study, he having been employed by no less than twelve Boards of Commissioners for the erection of this class of structures, and who is now engaged in the construction of three county jails and houses of correction in our own State. The Committee submit as an appendix to this report, Mr. Bryant's letter of instructions, together with his own report upon the condition of the buildings at the present time, with suggestions for their improvement, accompanied by a full and highly creditable set of drawings, to which the Committee take great pleasure in referring.

The Committee have given Mr. Bryant's report and his plans a most thorough examination and scrutiny, with a view to recommend to the consideration of the Legislature only such parts thereof, as seem to be actually necessary for the immediate and pressing wants of the institution. With this view, they decide to ask the Legislature for the means of constructing the forty-eight cells recommended to be made in the present Hospital building, and to construct the octagon centre, which is intended to connect the Hospital building with the present new prison, or west wing, so called, and with the present Warden's house, by a small addition being made to the L part of this structure. The formation of this octagon centre seems to your Committee to be second to no other improvement in weight and importance, accomplishing as it will, a connection, beneath one roof, of all the prison buildings, and affording apartments for cooking, washing, ironing, baking, guard-room and chapel, in its three stories. The location of a chapel directly between the old and new prisons, will enable the inmates to be assembled immediately from their cells, without the trouble and risk of marshaling them to a separate building located in the yard of the institution. This ar-

rangement will enable the present inconvenient chapel, over the wheelwright's shop, to be discontinued, and appropriated for shop room—a great lack of which now prevails,—and by this change, a large sum of money may be saved, by avoiding at this time the expense of erecting an additional shop in the yard of the institution, or by a large extension of the shoe shop. The Committee therefore recommend the passage of the following resolve :

STATE OF MAINE.

RESOLVE for the enlargement of the State Prison.

Resolved, That the sum of thirteen thousand dollars
2 be and hereby is appropriated for the enlargement of
3 the state prison at Thomaston;—the enlargement to
4 be made after such plans and specifications as may be
5 approved by the governor and council, and the money
6 to be expended under their direction.

DEBTS OF THE PRISON.

For some years past the prison has been oppressed with an old debt of several thousand dollars. The Warden estimates that the present amount of it is about \$7,500, and he judiciously enforces the necessity and propriety of its payment. In connection with this, the Warden desires an appropriation of \$2,000 to pay in part for the subsistence of the prisoners during the current year. The Committee feel very deeply the necessity of relieving the prison from the incubus of the old debt, and at the same time discharging an honorable and imperative obligation of the State. They do not however feel like recommending the whole amount at this time, inasmuch as a large appropriation is asked for the enlargement. The Committee have therefore fixed upon \$8,000 as the sum to be applied both to the payment of the old debts and to supply deficiencies in the subsistence account for the current year. They therefore submit the following resolve :

STATE OF MAINE.

RESOLVE in favor of the State Prison.

Resolved, That the sum of eight thousand dollars is
2 hereby appropriated for the payment of the debts of
3 the state prison and subsistence of the prisoners the
4 current year, to be expended by the warden under
5 the direction of the governor and council.

CAN THE PRISON BE MADE SELF-SUPPORTING ?

By a Legislative order of March 12th, the Committee was instructed "to inquire into the expediency of having an investigation made into the system of labor and discipline in the Maine State Prison as compared with that of other States, with the view of determining whether the same may be placed on a self-sustaining basis, and not continue, as heretofore, a burden upon the State treasury."

The Committee deeply appreciate the importance of having such an investigation made as seems to be contemplated in this order—and the more so as they are convinced of the total impracticability of ever having a satisfactory examination made by the members of a Legislative Committee. The time allowed is too short, and the various other matters which necessarily engage a large share of the attention of every member preclude all hope of ever having the subject thoroughly examined during the session of the Legislature. The desired end can only be attained by an investigation which shall be instituted during the recess, and the Committee feel persuaded that such an examination might result in the most marked and permanent benefit to the interests of the State. It is highly desirable that an honest and earnest effort should be made to place the institution on such a footing as shall not leave it an annual and constant drain upon the public treasury.

It is well known that in many of the States the labor of the convicts is sufficiently remunerative to defray all the expenses of the prison, and that in several instances a very considerable net revenue is derived therefrom. In Maine, the prison has always been an expense to the State, and at some periods a very heavy expense. The Committee feel it therefore to be their duty to recommend a measure which may prove an initiatory step towards the relief of the treasury from this burden, and which by the expenditure of a few hundred dollars may be the means of saving many thousands to the State treasury.

The Committee cannot believe that the people of the State, or their representatives in the Legislature, are willing to accept as a permanent policy the conclusion that the prison shall always be an expense. There are at the present time 113 convicts in the prison, and the Warden estimates that within five years the number may be

increased to 150. The greater part of these convicts are able-bodied, intelligent men, and a large proportion are skilled artisans. It seems therefore an anomaly to your Committee that their labor may not by some means be made sufficiently remunerative to at least pay for their clothing and food, and it is accordingly recommended that an investigation be instituted which may lead to this result. The systems adopted in other States with success should be carefully examined, and with a full and comprehensive view of the whole subject the next Legislature may be enabled to take wise and prudent action in the premises. The Committee accordingly recommend the adoption of the following resolve as being the most expedient and certain mode of securing the information desired :

STATE OF MAINE.

RESOLVE providing for an investigation into the affairs
of the State Prison.

Resolved, That the governor be authorized to appoint
2 some suitable person to examine into the system of
3 disbursement, labor and discipline in the Maine State
4 Prison, and to compare the same with that of the
5 prisons in other states, in order to determine whether
6 there may not with advantage be some change effected
7 so as to render the prison self-supporting, and, if
8 possible, a source of revenue to the state treasury.
9 The person thus appointed shall be entitled to have
10 free access to all the books and papers of the state
11 prison, and to all documents in any of the depart-
12 ments relating to the same, and he shall report
13 the result of his labors to the governor on or before
14 the first day of February next, and the governor shall
15 immediately thereafter lay the same before the legis-
16 lature. The compensation allowed to the person per-

17 forming the labor enjoined in this resolve, shall not
18 exceed four dollars per day in full payment and in-
19 cluding all expenses during the time employed in the
20 investigation—the account to be audited and paid by
21 the governor and council.

The Committee having attended to all matters referred to them,
ask leave to be finally discharged.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

JOHN BERRY, JR., *Chairman.*

March 22, 1858.

STATE OF MAINE.

IN SENATE, March 22, 1858.

ORDERED, That 350 copies of the foregoing report, resolves and accompanying documents, be printed for the use of the Legislature.

ATTEST:

JOSEPH B. HALL, *Secretary.*