The Somerset Herald.

ESTABLISHED 1827.

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The Somerset Herald
ESTABLISHED IN 1827.

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REPORT

—OF THE—

Committee Appointed to Investigate the Accounts Etc., of the Directors of the Poor of Somerset County.

In the matter of the petition of Samuel P. Snyder For The appointment of visitors to the County Poor House.

In the Court of Q. S. of the Peace of Somerset Co., Pa. No. 38, Feb'y. Sess. '85. Q. S.

And now, 17th of April, 1885, the petition of Samuel P. Snyder, verified by affidavit, presented to the Court, read and filed, setting forth that the Directors of the Poor and of the House of Employment for Somerset County, have not complied with the provisions of the 5th Section of the Act of Assembly entitled "An Act to provide for the erection of a house for the employment and support of the poor of the County of Somerset, and for other purposes," approved April 15, 1845, which requires them at least once in every year to lay before the Court of Quarter Sessions and Grand Jury of Somerset Co., a list of the members, ages and sex of the persons maintained and employed in said House of Employment, or supported or assisted by them elsewhere, and of the children by them bound out to apprenticeship, with the names of their masters or mistresses, and their trade, occupation and calling. That there is a general complaint, and he thinks it well founded, that the expenditures of said Poor House has been for the last few years entirely too large, and the books and accounts of said corporation have not been properly kept, or the moneys and property thereof been properly accounted for. And he therefore, in behalf of the interests of the county, prays the Court to appoint some suitable persons as visitors to said Poor House, and make an order requiring the Directors of the Poor and their Steward, Frank Launtz, and all other persons who may have possession, control or charge thereof, to submit to the inspection and free examination of said visitors all their books and accounts, together with rents, interest and moneys payable and receivable by the said corporation, and also account for all the sales, purchases, donations, devises and bequests as shall have been made by or to them. Agreeable to the provisions of the Act of Assembly aforesaid, &c.

Whereupon the Court, on motion of Valentine Hay, Esq., attorney of the petitioner, appoint John J. Hoffman, John C. Weller, E. D. Miller, Capt. A. Heffley and Wm. B. Cook, Esq., visitors to perform the duties prescribed by Sec. 5 of Act of 15th April 1845, and make report to Court.

SOMERSET COUNTY, ss.

Extract from record, certified 22d April, 1885.

N. B. CRITCHFIELD, Clerk

REPORT.

To the Honorable, the Judges of the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace of Somerset Co., Pa:

In pursuance of an appointment and a commission issued to them by your honorable body, bearing date of 17th April, 1885, and which is hereto attached, the board of visitors thus constituted met and organized on the 28th day of April 1885 and after being duly sworn, proceeded to inquire into the management of the Poor House of Somerset County.

SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF THE WORK.

It was thought proper to extend the examination over a period of three years, beginning with 1882. The books of the Poor House were found to be of little service in this work, as they furnish but a meagre record of transactions, and that which does appear there is, to a great extent, unintelligible. The examination of the orders and vouchers as found on file in the office of the County Commissioners, was then entered upon. A record of each order for the years of 1882, '83 and '84 was made, noting the date of order, the number, to whom issued, for what, the amount, how endorsed, and whether accompanied by an itemized bill or voucher. In the progress of this work, each order was compared with its corresponding number on the Order Register. The orders for each year were then classified, or grouped under appropriate heads. On comparing these classifications with those of the statements as annually published, it was found that they did not agree. This is accounted for in part by the fact that in a number of instances orders that were issued in one year were held over and paid in another year. It therefore became necessary to compare the order list as made from the orders on file, with the tally sheets of the clerks at the annual settlements, from which the published statements were made out. These comparisons were carefully made, item by item, with a view to verify the published statements, but a slight discrepancy still remains for each year gone over. In some instances moneys are reported to have been paid out for which no corresponding orders or vouchers are found, and in others it appears that orders issued for certain amounts have not been correctly entered on the clerks tally sheets.

NAMES OF DIRECTORS AND EMPLOYES.

The names of the Directors and their Employes, together with their annual salaries, during the years covered by this investigation, are as follows:

1882.

Directors,	Rudolph Perner,	salary,	$ 50 00
	Alex Korns,	"	50 00
	Daniel Kimmel,	"	50 00
Steward, Frank Launtz,		"	400 00
Clerk, John H. Weimer,		"	25 00
Physician, Dr. H. S. Kimmell,		"	175 00
Counsel, John R. Scott,		"	50 00
Treasurer, John H. Weimer,		"	50 00

1883.

Directors,	Alex Korns,	salary,	$ 50 00
	Daniel Kimmel,	"	50 00
	Jesse Hoover,	"	50 00
Steward, Frank Launtz,		"	500 00
Clerk, John H. Weimer,		"	25 00
Physician, Dr. H. S. Kimmell,		"	150 00
Counsel, F. W. Biesecker,		"	50 00
Treasurer, John H. Weimer,		"	50 00

1884.

Directors,	Daniel Kimmel,	salary,	$ 50 00
	Jesse Hoover,	"	50 00
	Reuben Woy,	"	50 00
Steward, Frank Launtz,		"	600 00
Clerk, John H. Weimer,		"	25 00
Physician, Dr. H. S. Kimmell,		"	175 00
Counsel, F. W. Biesecker,		"	50 00
Treasurer, John H. Weimer,		"	50 00

GENERAL LOOSENESS.

There seems to have been a very loose system, or rather, no system at all, in the payment of moneys. The Steward and the Treasurer, it appears, paid out moneys at will, and in many instances before the bills were approved or orders granted. Frequently the bills accompanying orders were made out by the Clerk at the same time the orders were issued, and these were seldom itemized. The object in making out these bills seems to have been more to have a corresponding amount of even date and number placed upon a printed bill-head, than to set forth the items composing them. Most of those so-called vouchers are, therefore, no vouchers at all, and the items composing the amounts of many of the orders are, after all, a mere matter of conjecture.

ENDORSEMENT OF ORDERS.

Many of the orders are also either improperly endorsed, or not endorsed at all. Of the orders for 1883, there are over one hundred endorsed by others than those to whom they were payable, and nearly one hundred without any endorsement whatever. Still others are endorsed "paid on bill," "paid to boy," "paid on street," "paid down town," "paid self," "paid in front of Glade House," etc., etc. The same is true of other years in this respect, and it serves to show the careless and unbusinesslike manner in which this important part of the business has been conducted.

THE PURCHASE OF SUPPLIES.

In the matter of the purchase and furnishing of supplies for the Poor House, the system as practiced for the last several years is not what it ought to be. The Directors have given the purchase of materials and supplies entirely into the hands of the Steward, and he makes his purchases, when, where, how and what he pleases, without restraint. The Steward and his wife have made these purchases with as much freedom as they could have exercised in buying for themselves, and apparently, with less concern as to necessity and cost. This unrestricted privilege exercised from year to year, is almost certain to be abused, and it cannot but foster a system of extravagance. Without intention of wrongdoing, as is believed, articles have been purchased which, presumably, were not for the paupers, whilst others were wholly unsuited to their wants and condition. In articles classed as merchandise, not only the prices and quality, but the quantity consumed, excite surprise. For the year of 1883, the gross amount of calico purchased was over 1,800 yards; of muslin, nearly 1,200 yards; of gingham, 500 yards; of shirting, 250 yards; of jeans, &c., nearly 300 yards, aggregating, of cotton goods the enormous amount of about 4,000 yards. Add to this the amount of ready-made clothing purchased, which was considerable, and the 160 pounds of wool reported for that year and now claimed to have been manufactured chiefly into clothing for the paupers, and it seems almost incredible that this amount could have been consumed.

In the purchase of provisions, the quantity seems to be equally large. Of beef and pork there was purchased 12,200 pounds, which, added to amount produced on farm, aggregates over 20,000 pounds of meat for the year, equal to fifty beeves of 400 pounds weight each, not counting the 332 pounds of veal reported raised on farm. Other purchases for the year were, coffee, 1,850 pounds; sugar, nearly 2,000 pounds; apple butter, 500 gallons; syrup, 300 gallons; wheat, over 900 bushels, making with that grown on farm, nearly 1,200 bushels; potatoes, 200 bushels, added to amount raised on farm, 600 bushels, equal 800 bushels; oats, over 600 bushels; corn, 150 bushels, which added to oats and corn produced on farm, make over 2,200 bushels of oats, and nearly 800 bushels of corn. Of tobacco, there was purchased nearly 450 pounds.

The purchases for the year of 1884 fall considerably below this, especially in the line of provisions, which is somewhat remarkable in view of the fact that in this year 9,800 meals are reported to have been furnished to 4,900 tramps, an average of over 400 men for every month in the year. It must not be forgotten, however, that a new building was erected in 1883, which may partly account for the seemingly excessive purchases of that year; but as against this is the claim that much of the work on this building was done by the inmates. But even though the purchases for 1882 and 1884 are less than for 1883, still they seem to have been excessive, and in none of these years, in the opinion of this commission, has there been practiced in this respect, that wise frugal and economical policy demanded by the public interests.

NUMBER OF INMATES.

From an examination of the Register of Paupers for the years of 1883, and 1884, it appears that the number of inmates at the poor house was considerably less than the number reported for those years. According to the Register it was as follows:

1883.

Whole number on Register	111
" " marked died	21
" " " discharged	27
" " " bound out	9
" " " eloped	3
" " " return school	1
" " " Harrisburg	1
	62
Whole number remaining at close of year	49

1884.

Whole number on Register	161
" " marked died	19
" " " left	11
" " " bound out	12
" " " House of Refuge	2
" " " Insane Asylum	1
	105
Whole number remaining at close of year	56

It is probable, however, that the Register is not correct, and that the number of inmates was larger than it indicates, but the register and the reports should agree, or else one or the other means nothing.

DRUGS AND MEDICINES.

Nearly one hundred dollars has been expended during each of last several years for drugs and medicines. These were also purchased by the Steward, generally on his own responsibility, and consisted largely of cough syrups, liniments and other patent nostrums, with an adequate proportion of alcohol and spirits frumenti. So far as ascertained, very few, if any, of these articles were bought on the order of the poor house physician, or used by his direction.

NEW BUILDING.

In 1883 the board of directors after conferring with the county commissioners, determined to erect a new building for the use of the paupers. The plan and specifications were drawn for a one story frame building. The directors advertised the letting of the contract and on the day specified received a number of bids and the contract it appears, was let to Peter Pritts. Afterwards, the whole matter was reconsidered by the board and without further notice to the public they proceeded to annul the former contract changed the plan to a two-story building and put its erection into the hands of Frank Launtz, the Steward as sole manager or boss of the work. Mr. Launtz acting in this capacity, purchased and furnished the material, employed and directed the workmen, kept their time and presented their accounts for payment. Among the workmen employed on the building were some if not all of the directors themselves, and they were paid the same as others for the work they did.

This entire transaction seems to have been ill-advised and the manner of its consummation contrary to law. The act of 1874 says "that it "shall not be lawful for any director of the poor * * * to be "concerned or personally interested "in any contract for furnishing supplies for the maintenance of the "poor, or for the construction or "improvement of property under "their control."

CHARACTER OF THE BUILDING.

Aside from the legal aspect of this matter it may not be out of place here to refer to the character of the building itself. This commission did not make an inspection but in passing through the building its general inferiority in points of material, workmanship and durability was forced upon their observation. The interior presents a rough unfinished appearance the ceilings of some of the rooms have sagged down several inches and door frames and transoms have been forced out of square by the giving away of the structure. After the directors had undertaken this work among themselves, a first class building in every respect might in a great measure have atoned for the violation of authority, but when at a cost of nearly $2,500.00 to the county they present an inferior structure, their action becomes little less than criminal.

WORK DONE AND SUPPLIES FURNISHED.

Some little work has been done at the Poor House in other years by some of the directors, for which they have been regularly paid, but, although in violation of law, and in some instances known to be so, it amounts to so little that it is scarcely worth mentioning.

It has also been found, and in most cases is a matter of record, that supplies have to a limited extent, been furnished the Poor House by directors and their employes in each of the years gone over. In a few instances, articles have been exchanged at and purchased from the Poor House by directors. In one or two cases articles have been furnished by officials and an order for the same made out in the name of some one else.

In nearly all the foregoing transactions the Poor House officials, it is claimed, were ignorant of the existence of any prohibitory statutes, which in the main is believed to be true, yet, it is extremely difficult to reconcile some of these transactions with such a presumption. But if during all these years all these things have been done in entire ignorance of the law in the premises, then that fact is a serious reflection upon the legal advisers they had hired from year to year. It was clearly the duty of their paid attorneys to give them the counsel and advice they so much stood in need of. It may be further stated upon the authority of some of the directors, that they did certain things and paid certain bills under protest and against their own judgment, at the instance, and upon the advice of their counsel. Under circumstances like these the directors of the poor should not perhaps be held to too strict an accountability.

EXTRA PAY.

In the matter of extra pay there also have been serious abuses. Large sums of money have been taken from the treasury annually and paid out for "extra," labor without warrant of law. The act of 1868 says the "fees of directors shall be fifty dollars per annum for each director," but makes no provision for any extra fees. But the custom has been for each director to charge extra at the rate of two dollars for every day employed other than at the regular meetings of the board on the first of each month. It will readily be seen to what exceses such a custom sanctioned by long usage, is almost certain to lead. A principle that permits those holding positions of trust to make their own time and fix their own pay, cannot but be regared as contrary to sound policy. That the practice has led to its natural results will be seen by the statements to follow. Nor has it been confined to the directors alone but some of their employes who have been hired at a fixed salary have come in for a large share of extra pay. In some instances duties belonging to one class of officials were performed by another class and paid for extra out of the county funds and that too at prices by no means incommensurate to the work done.

UNITEMIZED BILLS.

As has already been casually stated many bills for which orders are issued are not properly itemized. But when bills are rendered for moneys paid out by the Steward or other employes the granting of orders for their payment without the closest scrutiny is to be deprecated. May of these bills are lumped and apparently paid without question. This will be better understood when it is stated that in 1883, bills like the following were presented by the Steward for moneys paid out:

For Constable and Justice fees	$ 21,20
" going to visit paupers and bringing them to Poor House	93,10
For Ashes Split-Brooms, Dinner bells, Cabbage plants and a great many other things bought from poor people	109,17

Moneys paid out on bills like these on orders Nos. 110 to 149 inclusive aggregate $871,08—all paid at one time. In 1884 the Steward received on a single order No. 128, the sum of $270,83 for moneys paid out in 1883. This bill is partially itemized, but is scarcely more satisfactory than if not itemized at all. Among the items are these for conveying paupers to Poor House, $44,32; Labor on farm, $80,00; Preaching, $19,00; Vegetables $10,00; Drugs, $5,75 and so on.

Now these bills may have been all right but it was the business of the directors to know they were so before granting orders on them, and this they could have known only by requiring of the Steward a more specific statement as to when to whom and in what separate amounts these moneys were paid out. Apart from the question as to the correctness of these bills the custon of the directors to authorize or permit any of their employes to pay out moneys indiscriminately in this way is of doubtful propriety. However fairly and honestly it may be done, it cannot be long continued without creating suspicion, and for this reason if for no other it ought to be abandoned.

THE MUSSELMAN FUND.

Another matter which calls for notice is the Musselman fund. In 1882 the poor directors purchased from C. C. Musselman about ninety-five acres of land adjoining the poor farm for $1,916,00. Of this sum $500,00 remains a charge upon the land as a donation, the interest of which, $30,00, is annually to be applied to the purchase of reading matter for the education and improvement of the inmates of the Poor House, as follows: $15,00 or so much thereof as may be required, shall be applied to the purchase of one copy of every reputable newspaper published in the county, and the balance if any to the purchase of such useful books as the directors together with the donor during his life time may see proper, and the remaining $15,00 shall be applied in the same way to the purchase of books, stationary and apparatus for the use of the school at the Poor House. All books so purchased shall be labelled "County Library," and an itemized account of the expenditure of said interest shall be made annually by the county auditors and styled "The Musselman Fund."

These stipulations have not by any means been carried out. The directors seem to have had no definate knowledge as to the conditions of the donation and consequently were ignorant of their duty in the matter. In the report of 1883 there is reported expended for books postage, etc., $39,13. In 1884 for reading matter $21,70, these were purchased by the Steward with perhaps one or two exceptions, without consulting either directors or donor. Of the amount reported in 1883, less than one half and of that in 1884 about one third could be properly classed as reading matter. Since the passage of the act of 1883 prohibiting the receiving and detaining of children between the ages of two and 16 years at the Poor House there can of course be no school there now and the portion of this fund which was to have been expended for school supplies must be otherwise applied.

THE BOUCHER LOAN.

In 1860, or thereabouts, Solomon Boucher made a deposit of one thousand dollars with the County Commissioners as a loan, the interest of which was to be annually applied to the support and maintenance of his son, a lunatic, in the Poor House, during his life. The provisions of this loan have not been carried out, for it does not appear that the Poor Directors ever received this interest, or any part thereof, for the purpose set forth, and to which they are entitled. It is possible that a neglect to comply with the conditions of this loan may work a forfeiture thereof in the lifetime of the beneficiary, and for this reason, if for no other, the attention of the County Commissioners should be called to the matter.

TABULAR STATEMENTS.

The general financial management of the Poor House, and the condition of affairs as developed by the investigation just closed, will be more fully shown by the tabular statements which follow, with such explanatory notes as are deemed necessary:

ORDERS ISSUED IN ONE YEAR, BUT REPORTED IN ANOTHER YEAR.

In 1881, held over and reported in 1882	$ 129 10
" 1882, " " " " 1883	454 96
" 1883, " " " " 1884	493 52
" 1884, " " to be " " 1885	56 14

COMPARISON OF ORDERS ON FILE WITH PUBLISHED REPORTS.

1882.

Orders on file for 1882	$ 10462 87
" brought over from 1881	129 10
Total	$ 10591 97
Orders carried over to 1883	454 96
Total orders paid in 1882	$ 10137 01
Total orders reported paid in 1882	10138 79
Amount overpaid	$ 1 78

1883.

Orders on file for 1883	$ 13497 69
" brought over from 1882	454 96
Total	$ 13952 65
Orders carried over to 1884	493 52
Total orders paid in 1883	$ 13459 13
" " reported paid	13456 77
Amount overpaid	2 36

1884.

Orders on file for 1884	$ 9264 01
" brought over from 1883	493 52
Total	$9757 53
Orders carried over to be paid in 1885	56 14
Total orders paid in 1884	$ 9601 39
" " reported paid	9602 66
Amount overpaid	$ 55 27

NOTE.—On the Clerk's tally sheets in the settlement for 1883, are the following entries for moneys paid out: Coffins and burials, $18; Shoes and leather, $13 25. The corresponding orders are: No. 109, J. J. Miller, burial expenses, $8 00; No. 432, Sol Uhl, shoes and leather, $5,25. These amounts have each been "raised" ten dollars on the tally sheets by prefixing the figure 1. On the tally sheets for 1884, are found the following entries for moneys paid: Out-door relief, $14; Fertilizers, $11,62; Shoes and leather, $12 25; Merchandise, $15,45. The corresponding orders are: No. 12, James Carter, boarding, $4; No. 29, Mrs. A. E. Uhl, merchandise, $5,45; No. 105, William Brubaker, ashes, $1,62; No. 235, Parker Trent, Shoes, $2,25. These items have each been "raised" ten dollars on the tally sheets by prefixing the figure 1. The changes thus made would account for twenty dollars of the amount overpaid in 1883, and for forty dollars of the amount overpaid in 1884. It has not been ascertained by whom these changes were made. It is, however, not to be supposed that the Poor House Treasurer paid out more money than the actual face of the orders, and unless he did so there must have been a balance in his hands unaccounted for, as the excess was evidently drawn from the County Treasury.

EXTRA PAY OF DIRECTORS.—1882.

Rudolph Perner	$50 00
Alex Korns	72 00
Daniel Kimmell	85 70
Jesse Hoover	8 00
	$215 70

1883.

Daniel Kimmell	$54 00
Alex Korns	76 00
Jesse Hoover	48 00
	$178 00

1884.

Daniel Kimmell	$22 00
Jesse Hoover	38 75
Reuben Woy	44 00
Josiah Ankeny	8 00
Total	$112 75

EXTRA PAY OF EMPLOYES.—1882.

Frank Launtz, Steward	$29 50
John H. Weimer, Clerk	19 00
J. R. Scott & J. H. Weimer, Clk's	40 00
	$79 50

1883.

Frank Launtz, Steward	$5 00
John H. Weimer, Clerk	4 00
Mrs. Frank Launtz, extra labor	50 00
J. R. Scott, Attorney	100 00
Total	$159 00

1884.

Fred W. Biesecker, Attorney	$100 00
John R. Scott, Railroad Counsel	50 00
Dr. H. S. Kimmell, Physician	100 00
Clk's assistant '82 '83 and '84	27 00
Total	$318 50

NOTE.—The Director's extra pay is made up principally by charges for "extra days," "work at the Poor House," "visiting paupers," "attending settlement," etc. In some few cases there may be included in the above charges trifling amounts for traveling or other expenses. Work done at the new building is also included. The extra pay of employes is made up of charges as follows: Steward Launtz, "visiting paupers". Clerk Weimer, "extra days": Clerks Scott and Weimer, "fixing up records"; Mrs. Launtz, getting dinner for "Convention of Poor Directors". Attorney Scott, "making reports to Board of Public Charities for five years"; Attorney Biesecker, similar reports for '83 and '84; R. R. Counsel Scott, "counsel in right of way case". Physician Kimmell, "extra medical services at Poor House." The amount paid to Clerks at settlement was for Clerk hire at the annual settlements for the years specified.

OVERPAID ON SALARIES.

The amounts paid as salary to certain employes for certain years, with the amounts due them for the same time, are as follows:

Steward Launtz, for year '82	$ 450 00	
" salary " "	400 00	
" overpaid " "	50 00	
Paid for year 1883	600 00	
Salary	500 00	
Overpaid	100 00	
Paid order No. 149 '82, "error on settlement"	41 59	
Total overpaid		$191 59
Att'y Scott, paid for year 1882	$ 50 00	
" salary	50 00	
Overpaid	50 00	$20 00
Physician Kimmel, for year 1882	150 00	
" salary	140 00	
Overpaid	10 00	$10 00
Total		$221 59

OVERPAID BY CHANGE OF OFFICIAL YEAR.

Phys. Kimmell 3 mo. at $175 a year	$43 75
Att'y Biesecker, 3 mo. at $50 "	12 50
Clk Weimer, " 25 "	6 25
Total overpaid on salary	$284 00

NOTE.—Up to January 1, 1884, according to the Poor House minutes the official years of the attorney, physician and clerk commenced on the 1st day of April. On the 1st of January, 1884, the year of the Attorney was made to begin on the 1st of January, 1884, thus going back and covering three months of time already paid for. In the same way, on the 1st of