

The Huntingdon Journal.

"LIBERTY AND UNION, NOW AND FOREVER, ONE AND INSEPARABLE."

WM. BREWSTER, EDITOR & PROPRIETOR.

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REPORT

OF THE POOR HOUSE VISITING COMMITTEE. To the Honorable, the Judges of the Court of Quarter Sessions of Huntingdon County.

The undersigned Board of Visitors, appointed upon the petition of the Directors of the Poor and of the House of Employment of the county of Huntingdon, by your honorable Court to examine the books, accounts, and all other matters and things of, in and relating to the said Poor House, and the management of the same, by Directors and Stewards of the same, from the organization and incorporation thereof until the time of the presenting of said petition, and to make report of such examination to the said Court and to the public; respectfully present the following report:

As soon as possible, after notice of their appointment, the Board fixed upon and named Monday, the 21st of June last, as the day of meeting; and immediately gave to all the newspapers in the county a notice to that effect, with a request that they should make the facts known through the columns of their several papers. Our request was cheerfully complied with, and the notice was thus made general and public. Written notice was also given to the Directors of the Poor. On the 21st of June, pursuant to notice, the Board of Visitors met in the borough of Shirellysburg, and proceeded in the duties of their appointment. The task was a novel one.—No special subjects of complaint, or for investigation, were mentioned in the order of the Court. We were to "examine," but in what way, or to what end, was left entirely to the discretion of the Visitors. The Board of Visitors believing that the honorable Court, the Board of Directors and the people, desired a full investigation into all the transactions connected with the erection and conducting of the business of the Poor House, in order that those most interested in the economical disposition of the funds of the county, should be informed whether or not those to whom they had committed the trust had been faithful in the discharge of their duties. Their first duty was an examination of the accounts for expenditures, for the several years, since the organization of the Poor House department, up to the time of the last annual settlement—(acting in the belief that to urge this investigation beyond that date, would be productive of no good results; as the accounts for a part of a year could only be a partial and imperfect statement, and might be the subject of a

second examination, should visitors be appointed at the end of the current year.)—It is proper that we should state, that both the late and present Steward, and the Directors severally, manifested an earnest and commendable desire that the investigation should be searching and thorough; and each of them, together with several of the late Directors, gave to the Board of Visitors every aid and assistance, within their power, to make a true exhibit of every transaction connected with their administration, severally.

An important department in the political economy of our county, involving the annual expenditure of a large sum of the accumulated taxes of the county, and demanding in its administration the industry and experience of the successful farmer,—the shrewd, active, and watchful attention of the merchant and manager—the careful, orderly, and nice detail of the book-keeper and clerk—and to add with all this a kind sympathy; a sternness and steadiness of purpose, which constitute a father, a friend and a superintendent, was, by our Poor House law, called into existence, and its care and direction committed to three of our citizens; none of whom had experience to direct their course, and, as was expected by your Visitors, they found on the examination of their accounts and vouchers, that no order or system had been adopted, so that those who might follow them could understand, or by which even the parties could explain many of the items of expenditures, as they appeared in the published accounts. A commencement, without a system, has been continued.—During the first years, little or no attention has been paid to the preservation of the evidence of the proper application of the money; the account, once settled and audited, in terms and items so general, that they gave no information, in definite form to the people; the vouchers were without date, without number, without arrangement; left without even cases to preserve them, to be shuffled from place to place, as of no value. Thus the accounts of the years preceding 1857, could not be tested by any comparison with the vouchers.—Enough appeared, however, after a careful and as thorough an examination as it was possible to make upon the data before us, to satisfy the Board of Visitors there had been no misapplication of the county funds nor was any wilful negligence or corrupt purpose, chargeable to the Directors or Steward. For the year 1857 the same want of order and system existed; and a laborious examination of the vouchers for this year, resulted in precisely the same convictions as was those relating to former years. It was apparent that an honest effort had been made to present a full exhibit of the transactions of 1857. But owing to the ill digested system, and the confusion consequent thereon, it was impossible for your Visitors to obtain accurate results except by a re-statement of the whole account. Being satisfied, that, to do so, would bring no new light upon our investigations, we did not attempt it.

Your Visitors cannot leave this part of the subject without a strong expression of their opinion, that it is necessary to adopt some more efficient and transparent system of accounts, in order that the tax payers may know, at any time, what has been the disposition of their bounty. No payment should be made, for the smallest sum without obtaining a sufficient voucher; all of which should be numbered and arranged so that reference could always be had from the account to the particular voucher—each voucher having endorsed upon it its date, and the date upon which the order was drawn for it; and in all cases where one item in the account is composed of sundry small sums, paid to different individuals, the general voucher for that item should be a statement of the several small items, and inside of that statement all the several vouchers for those small sums. Where, also, one voucher contains two or more items, which appear in separate parts of the account, a special reference should be considered necessary to classify the expenditures, then the vouchers for each class should always be numbered and arranged by themselves, and the whole should then be arranged in cases, so that for all time to come, the item of every expenditure can, at any moment, be explained by its receipt. Never, until all this is done, and an exact copy of the audited account, of each year, made and filed with the vouchers of that year, can a satisfactory and correct examination be made by any one; and as soon as this or some equally intelligible system shall be adopted and pursued, whatever of mistake or fraud shall creep into the Poor House administration, can be readily detected and brought to light.

Several charges of misconduct were especially referred to by some of the tax-payers in attendance. Without any powers to compel the attendance of witnesses, or the production of papers, the Board of Visitors concluded that by a patient hearing of all parties (for or against) without the administration of an oath, substantial justice would be secured, adopted that plan and proceeded to the investigation of the charges. We give their substance as follows: and dispose of each in their time. It was insisted that the Visitors should report whether any supplemental law had altered the pay of the Directors. By act of Assembly of 1831, page 21, the pay of the Directors is fixed at two dollars per day; and by the act of 1855, they were allowed mileage. In the original law the pay of each was fixed at \$20 per annum. It was alleged that the Directors had sold articles to the Poor House, while they were Directors, in violation of the 5th section of the act of 1850. The accounts, as published, and the vouchers, as well as the admissions of such of the Directors as were present, who have done so, establish the truth of this charge. Several of the Directors have done so, in ignorance of the provision in the law, as it was alleged. The provision in the law is eminently proper. When a Director is both buyer and seller, the latter will have no one to dispute his price; and sales, on any terms, could be effected. The law is plain and imperative. The Directors should have known what was the law of their being; and obedience to its provisions would have avoided cause of suspicion and reproach. In justice to the Directors, however, the Board of Visitors distinctly state, that a full investigation of each case of this kind, (and the whole amount of articles sold was not large,) gave conclusive evidence that the articles sold by the Directors to the House, were at reasonable prices, and the sales were caused by no corrupt or unworthy motives on the part of the Directors. It was alleged that a pair of oxen, the property of the county, had been let to hire, and subsequently sold to John Hicks, and that the amount due therefor, by said Hicks, had never been collected, and was now a loss to the county. This appeared to be true, in the main. John Hicks had obtained the use, and ultimately the title, to a pair of oxen which were the property of the county; at the time, or subsequently, the said Hicks contracted to lay the pipes, to bring the water from the large spring to the Poor House. He commenced the work, and progressing for some time with it, abandoned it, and ultimately left the county. All the purchase money, exceeding the value of the work done by Hicks, was a loss to the county. A contract of that kind should have been made after a public letting, and the contractor obligated to a faithful performance of his contract, with sufficient security. This would have saved the county from the loss. The whole transaction was loose and insecure—nevertheless, such as sometimes happens to the most prudent. No evidence appeared of any improper motives having influenced the Directors or the Steward, and the worst that can be said is that they were careless in their dealings with Mr Hicks. It was alleged that the Directors, or the Steward, had received articles of value from papers or their estates, and that the same had never been accounted for. In one case a land warrant had been obtained from William Bell; the published account shows that the money received from its sale was accounted for. A pair of oxen, a cow, and some hogs had been received from Webb. The title of Webb to the oxen was and is disputed, and suit is now pending to recover the cattle from the Directors. The oxen are now on the farm, the hogs have been sold and the money accounted for; the cow is now in the possession of the Directors. Some clothes were said to have been received by the late Steward, which were unaccounted for. A coat was sold and the money accounted for; the other articles of clothing had been applied to the use of the inmates. There appeared to be nothing in the whole of these transactions which is censurable.—Your Visitors, however, believe that some definite system should be pursued, so that full exhibit could be made, annually, of the product of everything which was received from the property or estate of any pauper. It was especially complained of, that a large and beautiful spring of water had been brought into service, by bringing the water by pipes into the Poor House, when a smaller spring, near to the house, could have supplied the water. In the opinion of your Visitors, this was a much needed and valuable improvement, and the only

wonder to them is, that it was not made years before. Connected with this was, also, a complaint that a cook stove had been removed and a large and valuable kitchen range been erected. This was another much needed improvement. The great advantage secured by this range is that a large supply of hot water is kept constantly on hand. The water from the spring supplying the water-back of the range, and the vessel connected therewith by pipes, make the whole matter of great convenience and economy. It was cause of astonishment that such important improvements should have been so long neglected, when there was so great a necessity for them.

The Visitors were desired to inquire into the sum of extra allowances paid to the contractor, who built the house, including the attic story and the cistern; and also the letting of the building of the privy and fence, the contract for which was also given to the same party. Dr J. G. Lightner had been accepted as the successful bidder for the house, the contract was closed, and the building nearly completed. It then became apparent that in part owing to the great increase in the price of every thing, that the contract or must be a large loser by his contract. In a measure, to relieve the contractor, and make up a portion of his loss, the then Directors thought they were justified in giving the extra work to the contractor, at liberal prices; and to the Visitors it is apparent, that for some of the work, especially the cistern, the price allowed was very large. The motives which dictated the conduct were not censurable, but it would doubtless have been more just and less open to complaint, had they done directly that which they did indirectly. The same motives induced the same Board of Directors to ask proposals, from mechanics, for the building of the privy and fence; having at the same time, a private understanding that in any event the contract should be allotted to Dr. Lightner, at a price at least as low as the lowest bidder. There were some other historical incidents as to the contractor, but they are not material, or was not, higher than the lowest bid. It is not important that that issue of fact be settled by this Board, as no remedy could be applied, or any good result therefrom. The mockery of a public letting was not necessary, if it were a foregone conclusion, as to the party, to whom the contract was to be allotted; and the Directors would have been less censurable if they had boldly followed their sympathies for the unfortunate contractor, without any attempt to conceal their purpose. Your Visitors saw no evidence of any corrupt or unworthy conduct by any of the Directors; and they are thus minute in all the details of the complaints, because it is expected that every complaint should be treated with respect.

Complaints were made that a case of surgical instruments had been purchased for the use of the House. This was admitted and justified on the ground of necessity. The expense was not great, and while it is probable that, many years may pass over before all, or perhaps any, of these instruments are required, still your Visitors are satisfied that the purchase was not an imprudent one. The attention of the Board was also called to bills for groceries &c., alleging that ale, raisins, and nutmegs, had been purchased for the House, and that they were such luxuries as ought not to be purchased. Two ten gallon kegs of ale, and half box raisins, and one pound of nutmegs, were admitted by the Steward to have been purchased; the first it was alleged, was purchased on the recommendation of the Physician, as of service for medicinal purposes, and was purchased for and by the Steward, with his own funds.—The raisins were for the culinary department, and the nutmegs were an absolute necessity. The whole charge was so small that it should not have been noticed had it not been urged with some pertinacity. Your Visitors saw nothing in all this, which sustains the charge of extravagance. An allegation was also made that some of the Directors, and others, had received groceries from the Steward of the Poor House,—the groceries having been purchased with the supply for the House. The basis for this charge was in the following facts: On one occasion the Hon. John Brewster requested the Steward to send for and purchase, in Philadelphia, when the groceries for the House were purchased, a box of candles for his use. This was done, and upon the delivery of the candles to Mr. Brewster he promptly paid for them. At another time one of the Directors, (Mr. Green,) made a similar request of the Steward, to purchase for him a keg of molasses, and the Stew-

ard complied. In both cases, however, the books of account showed that both gentlemen had promptly paid the Steward the price of the purchases. There was nothing like speculation in the transactions. It may have been imprudent, as likely to excite suspicion. A definite charge was made that the Board of Directors of 1857, had employed, as the attending Physician Dr. Baird at a salary of \$200 per annum, at the same time when Dr. McKinnon had proposed to perform the duties for \$100. This charge was not denied by the Board of Directors, averring that they were governed by no improper motives, but acted with their best judgement. Your Visitors believe it better to narrate the circumstances attending the transaction, and thus leave the whole matter to the judgement of their peers. As soon as the House was ready to receive paupers, Dr J. G. Lightner was selected as its attending Physician, and the salary fixed at \$200. This salary was continued up to the year 1857.—Dr. O. B. Baldwin having been the Physician during part of the year 1856. In the latter part of that year Dr. Baldwin being about to leave the place transferred his appointment to Dr. McKinnon; his service was accepted, and he was paid a proportionate share of the salary of \$200. For some cause, either and perhaps both political and personal, an effort was made to defeat the appointment of Dr. Baird,—there being no allegation against the capacity of Dr. McKinnon. A proposition was then made by Dr. McKinnon that he would accept the appointment at the salary of \$100.—The Directors ultimately conferred the appointment upon Dr. Baird, without fixing the salary, but leaving the compensation to be fixed by the services rendered. The Board of Directors did, however, make his salary \$200, alleging that upon an estimate of the service rendered, it did not appear to be too much. Upon the commencement of the current year, a proposition was made again by Dr. McKinnon, to fulfil the trust for \$150 per year. The Directors continued Dr. Baird at the salary of \$200 per annum.

There is no question in the minds of your Visitors that the salary was; at the commencement, fixed too high. The establishment of a fixed precedent did not warrant its continuance, and the salary was properly reduced in 1858, and should have been reduced before. Your Visitors will not presume to declare the motive which actuated the several parties to this contest. It is eminently proper, in the administration of such a trust, that all the action should be directed by a desire to promote the interest of the tax payers, and, as far as practical, all the influences exercised, inside and outside, should be devoid of partisan or personal considerations. Higher and nobler motives should control the counsels of every one who desires nothing but the prudent, and well directed application of the county charities. A charge of more substantial importance than any and all others, was contained in the allegation that the annual expense of maintaining each pauper, in our county, was more than twice as much as it was in some other counties, and much larger than in any other. What are the facts, in relation to a comparison between the expense in this and other counties, was not readily ascertained. A simple calculation of the costs for any one year, of another county, would be an unfair criterion from which to judge, unless the Visitors were familiar with the early history of the county Poor House, of which the calculation was made. So far as the knowledge of your Visitors extends, it is a well established fact that during the first few years of the history of any poor house, the expenses have always been much larger, than after they have systematized their operations, completed their improvements, and, by a sharp experience, learn how to direct their operations and to husband their resources; and a comparison would only be just in a case, where the circumstances attending each are alike. Your Visitors have no means within their power to enter into any comparisons which would prove anything. The only county that was organized about the same time as our own; and of which we have a report is Millin; the act for the erection of a poor house having been passed the same year as our own; and of this county we have a report for 1857. It is true that their report does not furnish a statement of the number in the House for each month,—the average number for each month of the year, therefore, cannot be ascertained; and a comparison with this county, for the year just past, will only be an approximation toward the truth. On the 1st of January, 1858, there were in the Millin county Poor House, only 15 inmates. In the Huntingdon county Poor House,

there were at the same time, 71 inmates. Millin county expended \$2,037 during the year. Huntingdon county expended, during the same time, \$6,142. By a comparison of these figures the annual expense for the maintenance of each pauper in our county, was \$86 50. While the annual expense in Millin, by the same test, cost \$135 80. In Huntingdon county, the average number of inmates was less than the number in the House at the end of the year. It is reasonable to presume that the same was true of Millin county. The difference exhibited then, as above, between Huntingdon and Millin counties, is, doubtless, nearly correct; and is largely to the credit of our own county. Applying the same method to the expenses of our own county, for the year 1856, would demonstrate the position first assumed—that the annual expense of the maintenance of each pauper, is largest at the commencement of the institution, and it gradually decreases, as experience, and more perfected operations make the working of their government more complete. Your Visitors, therefore, conclude the subject by expressing their clear convictions that no wilful extravagance or dishonest purposes on the part of any of the directors or either of the Stewards, was made manifest in our investigations, which were extended to every particular department; and were as searching and impartial as it was possible to make them. True, it is, that some violations of the letter of the law were apparent—some acts of imprudence—some neglects of wholesome economy; and a great want of care in the taking, filing and preserving of the vouchers, for the expenditures of each, and every year, were too evident to be denied or disputed. Yet the clear convictions of your Visitors, were, that no intentional wrong had been committed by any one of the persons connected with the conduct of the Poor House government, and that whatever error or wrong there might have been, arose wholly from want of knowledge and experience or from mistaken judgement.

The farm was examined, and to your Visitors it appeared to be a good one, and its annually increasing products; proving that no ordinary means are left unemployed to keep it in good order, and to cultivate and secure its crops. One or two fields, it is true, are very liable to be washed by heavy rains, the only protection against which, if any can be found, must be in the keeping of those fields, usually as practicable, in such grasses as give the surface the firmest sward. An inquiry was also pressed upon your Visitors, whether any improper conduct had been used by any one, at the time of the location of the Poor House and the purchase of the farm, and whether that improper conduct did not secure the purchase of an unsuitable farm at an extravagant price. Nothing was shown from which any improper conduct could be suspected. The commissioners for the purchase were evidently governed by their best judgement, and biased by no improper motive. The developments of its history may have changed the views of some to the propriety and economy of the location. Your Visitors do not see that any good can come from any discussion of that question now. That the farm is a good one, with some peculiar advantages, no one can deny—and your Visitors are satisfied that the opinion of the many intelligent citizens who agreed to and negotiated its purchase, is a better assurance than any opinion they can give that the price paid was not considered too high at the time of the purchase. It should be borne in mind, that a large growing crop was also included in the purchase, which largely enhanced its then value, and \$500 was the added consideration for the growing crop. You Visitors have thus disposed of the subjects of inquiry in relation to the maladministration of the Poor House affairs.—They cannot, however, close their labors, without offering some suggestions for the consideration of all interested. The House, as it now stands, is exposed to the burning sun during the entire day. It should be protected by shade, or large fruit trees. These would add much to the appearance of the grounds, and to the comfort of the inmates. The Office of the Board of Directors should be furnished with a letter copying press. A large correspondence is continually kept up, involving, at times, important pecuniary interests of the Poor House, and, consequently, of the tax-payers of the county. A copy of every letter of this kind, in fact, of every business letter, should be preserved, so that, at any future time, its contents could be exhibited and proved, if necessary. While upon this subject, your Visitors cannot neglect to call attention to the little care taken to preserve the letters received by the Stew-

ards and Directors. All letters should be systematically endorsed, and filed in some place especially appropriated for them.—Every business man knows how very important the contents of letters frequently become, when any subject of difference or difficulty arises between the parties to the correspondence. The business of the people demands strict care and accountability in their agents. Some important alterations should be made in the interior structure of the House. Now, the insane or troublesome inmates, are kept in the cells or rooms of the basement story; this should not be so. It is difficult to imagine why the whole basement story was cut up into little cells, of little or no use whatever, when, at the same time, no room was made for a dining or eating room. If possible, a large and commodious room for that purpose, should be arranged on the basement floor, opposite the kitchen, and the inmates, now compelled to occupy those ground floors, should be placed in some other part of the building. This would effect the suggestions of humanity, as well as be of great comfort and convenience to all. Your visitors also examined the several rooms of the paupers, and were pleased to find them cleanly, and exhibiting care and attention by those entrusted with them; and although your Visitors desired the inmates to speak frankly, no apparent cause of complaint was made. In conclusion, your Visitors cannot neglect this opportunity to say to the tax-payers of the county that, to them is annually entrusted the duty of selecting from among their number, one to take charge of their interest at the Poor House, and the Visitors have endeavored to show, by this report, how very important it is, that the choice should fall upon an active, shrewd, honest and intelligent citizen, whose business associations have been such as to fit him in some measure, to manage such a complicated and peculiar household as is found in the Poor House.

All of which is respectfully submitted. THOMAS FISHER, JOHN PORTER, WILLIAM DORRIS, JR., A. W. BENEDICT.

HUNTINGDON COUNTY, ES. At a Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, held at Huntingdon, in and for the county of Huntingdon, on the 24th day of April, A. D. 1858, before the Hon. GEORGE TAYLOR, Esq. President and BENJAMIN F. PATTON and JOHN BREWSTER, Esqs., his Associates, Judges of the said Court. The petition of the Directors of the Poor and of the House of Employment, of the county of Huntingdon, by their attorney was read, praying the Court to appoint so many, and such Visitors, as to them may seem best, to examine the books, accounts, and all other matters and things of, in and relating to the said Poor House, and the management of the same, by Directors and Steward of the same, from the organization or incorporation thereof, until this time; and to make report of such examination to the said Court and to the public. Whereupon it was considered by the Court, and ordered that Thomas Fisher, John S. Iselt, John Porter, Wm. Dorris Jr., and A. W. Benedict, Esq., be and they are hereby appointed Visitors, under the provisions of the 5th sec. of the act of 6th of May, 1850. BY THE COURT.

From the record, 21st June, 1858. Certified by D. CALDWELL, Clerk.

THE CORNUCOPUS.—A young gentleman from the rural districts inquired, a few days ago, where he might get his inner man refreshed. "Go to the Cornucopium," said a bystander. "The Korn—the what?" said the stranger. "The Corn-u-copium," emphatically responded the other. The young man looked as though he smelt a mice, and stiffening himself up, stalked off as much as to say, "You can't sell me. May be you want to hint I'm corned, but your'e too sharp." He crossed the street and asked another passer to "be so kind as to tell him where he could find a restaurant where he could get something to eat and drink."

A TREMENDOUS CON.—A modest young gentleman at a dinner party put the following con. "Why are most people who eat turkey like babies?" No reply. The modest man blushed, and would have backed out, but finally gave his reason: "Because they are fond of the breast." Two middle aged ladies fainted, and the remains of the young man were carried out by the courtes.

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