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Report of the Special Committee on the Maine State Prison, 1851

E.L. Osgood

Special Committee on the Maine State Prison

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REPORT

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE

ON THE

MAINE STATE PRISON.



Augusta:

WILLIAM T. JOHNSON, PRINTER TO THE STATE.

1851.



REPORT

STATE OF MAINE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE

MAINE STATE PRISON



Printed by
WILLIAM T. JOHNSON, PRINTER TO THE GOVERNMENT
1891.

STATE OF MAINE.

IN COUNCIL, April 25, 1851.

THE Special Committee on the state prison appointed by the governor under the law of the last legislature, having made three several visits to said prison,

R E P O R T :

That at each visit they were kindly received by the warden and other officers of the prison, who rendered them every facility in examining the buildings and workshops and every thing connected therewith. At their first visit, they found a large quantity of manufactured articles (which had been accumulating for years) on hand,—such as wagons, carriages and sleighs, most of which they were informed were appraised to the present warden, and as they were told, had been appraised from year to year. As many of these carriages were somewhat antiquated, the committee advised the warden to make a speedy disposition of the same, at auction or otherwise, at his discretion. The manufacture of carriages, wagons, sleighs, &c., cannot be profitable, and has to a great extent, been abandoned.

With the shoe shop at each visit, the committee were well pleased. Some thirty persons were very industriously at work in the same, under the direction of two overseers, and as the committee believed, to good advantage and profit to the state.

The appropriation of one thousand dollars made by the last legislature, has been faithfully and judiciously expended by the warden, in the building a stone wall, one hundred and sixty feet of

which, from three to four feet thick, and ten and one-half high, including a gate way or entrance, costing three hundred dollars, is already finished, and a foundation laid for three hundred feet more. This foundation is from three to four feet deep and below the frost, and as many feet wide. The wall, as far as finished, is neat and handsome, as well as firm and substantial, and cannot be otherwise than durable and lasting. It presents to the eye a pleasing view in contrast with the old wooden fence surrounding a portion of the prison yard, and its extension and final completion, will add greatly to the appearance of the prison grounds and the security of the prisoners.

Since the adjournment of the legislature, a portion of the buildings have been destroyed by fire. These of course will have to be rebuilt. Plans and specifications as drawn by B. S. Dean, Esq., of Bangor, for the building of a dwelling house for the warden, a guard house and watch houses, were submitted to the committee and by them approved, and which have also been submitted to the governor and council who have fully approved the same, and have authorized the warden, William Bennett, Esq., to proceed to erect and complete the same agreeably to said plans and specifications. For this purpose an appropriation of seven thousand dollars will be necessary, and for the completion of the wall already begun and the repairs upon the fences, a further appropriation of two thousand dollars.

As to the financial affairs of the prison, the committee are unable to give any definite information. They find in the hands of an attorney for collection, seven thousand five hundred dollars, and in the hands of the warden twenty-five hundred dollars, of accounts, notes and executions, which have been accumulating for eleven years. Perhaps of this amount, from four to five thousand dollars, may eventually be saved to the state. For any losses which may accrue to the state, the committee attach no blame to any former warden or officer of the prison, for any neglect or want of care, but believe the loss arises from the universal credit system which has been too prevalent in our state. The committee have recom-

mended to the present warden a different system, and a closing up of all accounts, at least once a year, so that at a glance, it may be seen how the financial affairs of the prison stand.

A considerable quantity of boots and shoes are now on hand ; several carriages, wagons and other manufactured articles, the value of which will be seen from the report of the inspectors, which will be made after an appraisal, and before the meeting of the legislature.

The present number of convicts is eighty-four, and about one half are now in the shoe shop, which has been doing the present year, according to the opinion of the overseer, as good, if not a better business than in any former year. Upon this information the committee can rely, as it comes from one who has had charge of the shop for many years, and who is well qualified to judge of its yearly business. The residue were found at work in the other shops, in the quarry, and at such business as the warden and overseers thought them best adapted for. The committee noticed the introduction of a new business, that of making baskets, which is carried on by the old and decrepid, and such as are unable to labor in the quarry or work shops ; this may prove of profit to the state, the raw material costing little if any thing.

The general appearance of the prisoners at each visit was good, and their general conduct during the present year has been such as to merit the approbation of the officers. Many of the prisoners, the committee at each visit, conversed with, and more particularly with those whose cases were before the governor and council for pardon ; all of which cases have been acted upon by the committee.

The discipline of the prison, the committee are inclined to think is of the right kind. There should be no imposition of unnecessary hardship to carry the punishment beyond the law. All beyond what a sentence defines, or what the common regulations of a prison requires, is abuse, and very censurable, and which the committee are happy to say has not been practiced. The warden is not harsh, cruel and vindictive, inflicting chastisement upon the prisoners as some might do, to show his authority and gratify his spleen,

but displays on the contrary, a kind and feeling disposition, and endeavors to govern upon the law of kindness and love ; believing, no doubt, that the convicts possess some latent seeds of virtue, which by being cherished may be aroused, and brought out by kind and gentle words, feelings and actions. As there exists in community, a great difference of opinion in relation to discipline and government, it is not at all strange that the same difference should be found at Thomaston, among the citizens of the place and even among the officers of the prison. The system of those who, believing in total depravity, and who do not of course recognize the fact that man is capable of a good action, or has a single redeeming quality, that if he violates a law, however slight and trivial may be the sin, he must be so dealt with, as to feel his *utter* degradation, and be *whipped* into an acknowledgment of the justness of his punishment, the committee cannot wink at or even tolerate, but wholly condemn as at war with the better feelings of humanity and in conflict with the laws of God.

Which is respectfully submitted.

E. L. OSGOOD, *Chairman.*

IN COUNCIL, April 25, 1851.

Read and accepted by the council and by the governor approved.

ATTEST :

JOHN G. SAWYER, *Secretary of State.*

STATE OF MAINE.

IN COUNCIL, April 26, 1851.

ORDERED, That 750 copies of the foregoing report, from the Special Committee on the State Prison, be printed.

JOHN G. SAWYER, *Secretary of State.*

STATE OF MAINE

In Council, April 28, 1881.

Resolved, That 750 copies of the foregoing report, from the Special Committee on the State Prison, be printed, and JOHN G. SAWYER, Secretary of State.

JOHN G. SAWYER, Secretary of State.