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In favor of continuing the erection at Blackwells Island.

DOCUMENT No. 31.

BOARD OF

ASSISTANT ALDERMEN,

OCTOBER 13th, 1835.

Memorial of the late Commissioners of the Alms House &c. and Members of the Committee on Blackwell's Island and Long Island Farms, of the last Common Council, on the subject of the Lunatic Asylum.

Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

WM. HAGADORN, *Clerk.*

To the Honorable the Common Council of the City of New York.

THE MEMORIAL of the undersigned late Commissioners of the Alms-House, or members of the joint committee, on Blackwell's Island, and the Long Island Farms of the last Common Council.

MOST RESPECTFULLY represents:—

That your Memorialists have recently obtained copies of the Report of the Commissioners of the Alms-House, made

New York City Lun. Asyl.

to the Board of Assistant Aldermen, dated September 7th, 1835; and are of opinion that they owe it some notice to prevent the effect of inferences affecting themselves, which the report will warrant, and which their silence *will be construed as admitting to be just*; and in order that the facts may be correctly understood. Your Memorialists took a deep interest in the Lunatic Asylum, during their continuance in office, bestowed much time, and acquired some information upon the subject; and they yet feel bound to the public interests, to the people and the cause of charity, to aid the enterprise. The speedy completion of the Asylum is a matter in which the poorer and labornig classes have a great interest; the number of them, who become insane is very great, in proportion to those who are more at ease in their circumstances; and if visited by this dreadful dispensation of Divine Providence, they became at once dependent upon the public charity. Your Memorialists therefore, when in office felt, that great exertions were due from them to furnish an asylum for the insane poor, that would promise some relief to its inmates, in place of the present Hospital, to the inmates of which, hope even, is almost denied: Such an Asylum, they believe, that would be which the last Common Council ordered to be built.

The points which the aforesaid Report professes to consider, are two, namely—That the location selected "is not a good one;" and that the expense of the Asylum which your predecessors ordered to be built will be unwarrantable. The conclusions which the Report seems intended to support, are, that the late Boards, their Committees, and the late Commissioners of the Alms House, directed the Building to be erected upon a site, which is of a value to the city, which will not justify its use for the purpose; That they were proceeding to erect the edifice at an expense *double* what it ought to cost; That the Building adopted, is false in its principles, and not as well adapted to the purposes for which it is designed, as another which has been proposed.

If these positions are true, your predecessors, and especially your Memorialists, who recommended the measures adopted by the last Boards, are guilty of a dereliction of duty. If they are not true, the wrong will lie with others.

It appears that the aforesaid Report is intended to give the reasons of the Commissioners for the opinion expressed by them, intheir communication to the Board of Assistants dated the 29th of June last, and contained in Doc. No. 14. They say the location "is not a good one?" Is not a good one for what? Why, undoubtedly, for a Lunatic Asylum. It would be supposed then, that the reasons by which such a position would be supported, would be those relating to its salubrity, its adaption to the curative treatment of insane patients, its convenience in respect to the management and government of the institution; its features affecting its police. No reasons are contained in that Report, addressed to either of these points, of salubrity, treatment of patients, economy or police, saving and excepting what is said on page 198, in respect to the deleterious influence of the low ground at the northern end of the Island, and the eulogy of the site, contained on page 199; the arguments though arranged under this head, are solely applicable to another.

"The reasons" given in the Report in support of the position, "that the location of the building * * * is not a good one, are *first* that the site selected * * * * consists of an immense quarry of stone, and it is calculated * * * that it will produce 68,444 tons of the finest building stone in the world, worth at least $1 each ton." *Second*, that a large quantity of ground North of the site would become comparatively useless: That this piece of land is mostly low and marshy; contains sixteen acres and five perches of land; and "*when filled in* and *properly regulated*," could be sold for $2000 per acre—That the filling in and regulating could be done with but little expense by convict labour"—That the refuse stone and dirt from the quarry would be all sufficient for that purpose.—That at all events, this low ground must be filled in

and regulated "for all experience admonishes us that low and marshy situations are the continual sources of disease to all who reside in their immediate vicinity," (p. 198.)—*Third*, that the insane "ought to be *isolated* or removed as far as possible from all other public buildings on the Island; and it is not unlikely that the future policy or necessities of the Corporation may induce them to erect buildings for public purposes, nearer to this location than is at present anticipated."

These several positions or grounds of opinion, may be proper subjects of consideration on an inquiry as to the expediency or prudence, or economy, of putting the building on the selected site—but do not touch the point, that the location is not a good one for a Lunatic Asylum. Indeed, the excellence of the site for a Lunatic Asylum is strongly enforced by the Commissioners themselves, in their Report on page 199, and in opposition to their previous reasoning. In answer to the position of the Report, we submit, that the peculiar fitness and excellence of the spot, and its superiortiy to those of all other similar Asylums, is strongly commended by Dr. Macdonald in his very able Letter on this subject to the Hon. Stephen Allen, contained in Doc. 101 of March 1834, (see page 832;) that it has received the highest commendation of Dr. White; that the skill, science, and practice of these Physicians in the treatment of the insane, and their acknowledged talents, gives to their opinions the force of high authority. The views of your Memorialists in respect to the excellence of the situation for the Asylum are found in Doc. 38 of the Board of Assistants, and 54 of the Board of Aldermen of the last year. They believe that no site superior to it for an Asylum for the cure of the insane, is supplied by any spot within the precincts of this City.

Your Memorialists have no personal motives for urging the excellence of this site for the Asylum beyond its merits; they are not entitled to the credit of having selected it; such credit is due to the Committee and Commissioners of 1833-

4, at which time the present Commissioners, Messrs. John Targee, Thomas T. Woodruff and George Lovett, with their then asociates, Messrs. Ostrander and Roosevelt were Commissioners of the Aims House. Your Memorialists have only to sooth themselves with the reflection, that they had taste and knowledge, and sense enough not to differ from their opinion.

It is not said in the Report, that the location selected *is* unhealthy—though such an idea would seem intended to be conveyed. This low ground is a *salt* meadow, but it is no where stated in the Report that such is the fact, and that the ground though low is not marshy. It is not known to your Memorialists that *salt* meadows or marshes were ever considered unhealthy.

As to the remaining objection "that the future policy or necessities of the Corporation may induce them to erect other buildings for public purposes nearer to this location than is at present anticipated"—the idea is a novel one for Legislators to act upon. It results in this, "do nothing lest by possibility you may do wrong." Your Memorialists but remark that they thought it their duty to look as far into futurity as their short vision would allow; to settle the policy of the City by the exercise of their best powers, in reference to its probable wants; to design the buildings and its appurtenances with reference to its intended purposes. That being done, their wisdom had reached the limits of its exercise.

The cost of the Asylum.—Under this head, the facts and circumstances urged by the Commissioners against the location, are by them, here again made to perform a second duty; but they are applicable here, (if any where.) The language used under this head involves a charge against your Memorialists of gross, wilful or negligent extravagance in the appropriation of the public property; and the same

charge impliedly at least, is contained in the grounds used in support of the petition. Let us see how this matter stands—the Commissioners in their Report state, that the quarry will be lost by placing the Asylum on the proposed site, and that "the loss of this fine quarry will amount to the enormous sum of $68,444." Are the Commissioners correct in this fact, even on the assumption that the estimate is correct, (and your Memorislists do not intend to express a doubt of it,) that the quarry will yield, if worked, 68,-444 tons of stone? We say no, "1st. The value of the stone is stated in the Report to be one dollar per ton; and when estimating the value of the quarry, (which your Memorialists and their coadjutors, were se extravagant as to throw away at a loss of $68,444 as they assert,) no deduction from this amount of gross sales is madefor the expense of quarrying and delivering.

"2nd. No stone was ever sold from Blackwell's Island, previous to the present Commissioners coming to office, (and your Memorialists are not informed that any has since,) for more than 75 cents a ton; and previous to June 1834, it was sold at 62 1-2 cents per ton. This reduces the value of the quarry one quarter."

The actual value to the City of working the quarry, can be ascertained only by comparing the expense of each prisoner to the City, with the produce of his work, and your Memorialists do not possess the materials for making the estimate; though from what they have seen, they believe it to be very small. But in the second place, there is no necessity of losing the quarry if it be expedient to work it. Your Memorialists contemplated so doing, and were proceeding with the work of blasting the rocks, westward and southward of the site of the building, when they went out of office; and the Superintendant of the Island was proceeding in the execution of the plan, when the hands were ordered off from the work by the present Commissioners, and set to *graduating* ground at the Penitentiary, and

stopped the progress of the building. Had the quarrying been continued to this time there is much reason to believe that the work would now have so far progressed, that the further blasting of rocks there could have proceded without danger to the building. To allow of this quarrying, the ultimate regulation of the surface of the Island at the site of the Asylum was reduced to 18 feet above high tide, from 22 feet (the Committee yielding a reluctant consent thereto) to the injury in their opinion of the site for the Asylum by reducing its elevation, and consequently, the declivity of the arising grounds—a matter in the opinion of the Committee of more consequence than the quarrying and vending of stone, and more consistent with the dignity of the City, and those principles of Legislation which look to the good of the People. The feasibility of proceeding with both the quarry and the building, was maturely settled on the opinons of Mr. Acker the then Superintendant, and Mr. Brainard, then and still the quarry master of the Island.

Again the commissioners say that "a due regard to Economy and the interests of the city, induced them to take into consideration another circumstance *** it is that the point north of the Asylum consisting of 16 acres 5 perches *properly* REGULATED *and surrounded with a suitable wall, might* become the most beautiful and valuable part of the Island, worth rising $30,000 which otherwise would be sacrificed or to say the least could not be occupied to the best possible advantage." (pa. 200)—Let us see how this position holds with "a due regard to economy," the objects of this institution and facts.

What will it cost to regulate this part of the Island, and build the suitable wall? If it is to be made the most beautiful and valuable part of the Island—it may safely be assumed, that raising it at least six feet above high tide line will be required; for the Equinoctial tides rise four feet above common tides. To raise the tract six feet will cost rising $40,000—at nine cents per load of Earth; and

if the earth for raising the surface, is to be obtained elsewhere than on the Island, it is presumed it will cost at least that sum, whether obtained by convict or free labour. But the Commissioners say that the "regulating of this part of the island, so as to make it available for building purposes, can be accomplished with the greatest ease, in a short time, and with but little expense, by *convict labour*; and the refuse dirt and stone that would accumulate in the adjacent quarry if worked, would be all sufficient for that purpose." (pa. 198.) It seems to your Memorialists, that the commissioners have inconsiderately made these assertions. The outlay of cash, beyond the prison expenses, might not be so immense, yet still in horses carts and tools this expense could not be inconsiderable,—If the work be done by convicts the expenses of the Island, in proportion to the number of convicts employed, must be charged against the work; and this together with the expenses of teams carts and tools would raise this "little expense," to a large sum; and the "greatest ease," which it would be accomplished would be equal to 14,000 days work of Men, besides that of horses and teams. Your Memorialists have no hesitation in avering the fact to be, that Earth for filling in, to the requisite graduation, could not be obtained from the island, without so reducing its elevation, as to destroy it for sites of public Buildings, by rendering the yards as close, confined and pregnant with disease, as those at Bellevue, and throwing away all its present advantages for a thorough ventilation. The proposed regulation could not be effected by the refuse dirt and stone of the quarry. The dirt and refuse of quarrying out, 68,444 tons of stone, would not fill a space equal to more than 1-8th of the hole made by the quarrying. And if it should be necessary to carry such quarrying to the depth, that it has heretofore been carried, the site of the Asylum, would be ruined, in respect to the airing grounds; and the then necessary walls to those ground, would continually present to the patients, those ideas of imprisonment, which

it is a first principle in their treatment to exclude from their minds.

The "suitable wall" proposed, could not be less, than four feet above tide, and by the map of the Island it would be over 2,800 feet in length, and would have to be of a width which would make it to contain 134,400 cubic feet of wall, this could not be made at less than 25 cents per cubic foot and would thus cost the sum of $ 3,733,
add the above stated price of filling, 40,000,

and the proper regulation and suitable wall would cost $43,733.

As the land would then be worth, but $30,000, it would seem to your Memorialists, "that a due regard to economy," would not prompt the location of the building, "on this low land." With these views, your Memorialist respectfully submit the question, whether upon the grounds taken in the report, the value of this salt meadow, forms any reason why the Lunatic Asylum ought not to be built on the site proposed; and whether your Memorialists and their associates in their measures, or the authors of the report, are chargeable with a want of "a due regard to economy" in the appropriation of the public property.

Another argument, used in the report against the cost of the Building is that, "in the completion of the Asylum large quantities of stone of a peculiar quality, will be required for lintels, sills, flagging, water tables, jambs &c. which cannot be procured from any part of the Island, except from the quarry on which the work is commenced," and to get them elsewhere would be at great cost. It certainly must be that the authors of the report believe what it contains but they are here clearly mistaken; for in point of fact, the stone which will be required for lintels, sills, flag-

ging, water tables, jambs &c. are not, of so very a peculiar quality;—neither is it the fact, that they cannot (excepting perhaps the flagging) be procured from any part of the island except the quarry on which the work is commenced. The lintels, sills, flagging, water tables, jambs &c. which will be required are like those which have been put into the centre building, and north wing of the Penitentiary, and those were almost if not quite all, excepting the flags, taken from the Southern Quarry. Besides all this, there is no stone in the Northern quarry superior in its promise, to that at the southern part of that quarry, and which must be blasted out, for a cellar to the centre building of the Asylum.

It is further added in the Report, that "on making, an estimate of the cost of the work so far as it had progressed, it was found that about *double* the amount of money had already been expended upon it, which the same work could have been contracted for, by competent and responsible builders."—Your Memorialists do not pretend to say what calculations the authors of the report have made; but the covert charge contained in the above quoted passage, that your Memorialists or any of them have expended on the foundation of the Asylum, *double* the sum the same work could have been contracted for, is a broad one, and they meet it in its breadth by denying the charge and fact; and they aver that no "competent and responsible builder" would undertake to do that work for one half the sum expended. About 2000 loads of stone—or 26,000 cubic feet —are laid in the foundation of the Assylum, as appears by Colonel Harkers measurement. This at 20 cents per foot, (in contemplation of plain straight and vastly inferior work as distinguished from the many jambs and angles of this) would amount to $5,200. The pay of the masons and Master mason was about $2,500, leaving a balance of $2,700, for materials and labour of prisoners. The work done is of the very best quality, and by a set of hands who were skilful, and, worked their full compliment of hours per day, any

thing in the report to the contrary notwithstanding. The work done could not be contracted for by a competent and responsible builder for less than 25 cents per foot.

The Commissioners in their report have ventured upon some remarks, on the adopted plan of the edifice to which your Memorialists cannot assent.

If the position of the Asylum be reversed, "so as to let the foundation, which is already put up, and which is intended for its northern extremity remain, and build the other part north" instead of south—it would carry the building on to low land, by which that great excellence of the site—its height above tide, and consequent declivity for airing grounds would be lost—or such a height of ground would have to be artificially made at an enormous expense. And again the Island itself cannot furnish the earth for filling in the low lands—without spoiling the building sites. To avoid throwing the building on to too low ground at the north wing, the centre building was located last year 100 feet further south, than it was the year before. To remove the Octagon 20 feet further east, will remedy no evil; for it is a matter of no moment, in respect to the *utility* of the building whether the two east and west wings are of equal length or one 20 feet shorter than the other, and as to its *appearance* it would scarcely be seen.

"The plan of the Middlesex Asylum is defective in many important particulars," says the report. This may be so, but it was settled, by the most sagacious and scientific talent in this line in England. No *existing* defect in the plan, is mentioned in the report; the defects *charged* against it, are not in the plan. The three storied centre and octagoned buildings, are not breaches of the principle stated in the report. Those buildings are not tobe used by patients except for their day rooms, the intended use of them is fully stated in Docts. 38 and 54 of the last Board.

The *ventilation* of the building is defective, says the report. This assertion is denied, the ventilation of the cells is very perfect, as a slight examination of the drawings will show. The porticos and saloons, embracing 6 out of 14 windows will amply ventilate the corridors; and each cell should have its own ventilators, as in the new House of Detention now building. On one side of the corridors the dormitories occupy but 120 out of 200 feet.

For the recreation of the patients, *in doors*, ample day rooms and soloons are provided. The halls are not "the only places for recreation." And *out of doors*, extensive airing grounds to which the patients may at all times have access without the attendence of more than a single keeper for the whole class, and extensive grounds for gardens, groves &c. are appropriated and needed. The low ground before spoken of should be used for no other purpose, and should be reclaimed for that purpose, as circumstances, may direct. To give the patients proper means of recreation, 30 acres at least should be allotted to the Asylum.

Your Memorialists were greatly surprised to perceive it stated in the Report, that the plan of the building under consideration had "fallen into disrepute in Europe," and that the plan of the Limerick Asylum is preferred. They were still more surprised to see the authority of Mr. Haviland cited in support of the assertion. The Commissioners are mistaken in their facts; and your Memorialists have strong doubts, whether they understood the purport of Mr. Haviland's remarks to them· Mr. Haviland is eminent authority on the subject of prisons; and it is well known that in his opinion, as applied to prisons, the radiating plan of building is capable of the most perfect *combination* of supervision and ventilation of any form. Not long since one of your Memorialists had a conversation with Mr. Haviland on the subject of Lunatic Asylums, and then he professed not to be intimately acquainted with them, as he had never been called to give the subject particular attention. The truth is, (as

your Memorialists believe,) that the Middlesex Asylum is the last built in *England*, and is considered an improvement upon all other single buildings and modifications of the Wakefield plan; and that in *France*, the Parisian plan of separate houses for each class (the only plan for effecting perfect classification and ventilation) is the favorite: In Italy and Germany, these Asylums are made of monasteries and Fortresses. The Reports to the last Boards contain some remarkson this subject, which would naturally have suggested the necessity of comment in support of an opposite theory, if read, but we have no such remarks in the Report under review.

The Report contains many minor matters, notice of which might be expected; but as they affect your Memorialists personally, rather than the subject, they must be left to pass at their value. But in as much as this Memorial has ensued the assertion of the Commissioners that "on *mature reflection*, they were convinced" of the badness of the location of the Asylum, and extravagant cost of the edifice, and therefore had stopped the works: we may be pardoned for submitting the following facts which have been stated to us, and which we believe to be true, namely: On the 25th day of May last, the present Commissioners were appointed. On the 28th day of the same month they visited the Island, and ordered off the prisoners from the quarry and building, and set them at levelling ground at the Penitentiary, leaving the Masons at the Asylum without any one to attend them. On the Monday following (the 1st day of June) the Master Builders and the Masons were dismissed. On the 29th of June, the Commissioners made their communication to the Boards; and in pursuance of a Resolution of the 22d July, they on the 7th of September, gave their reasons for their conduct. No one of the now Commissioners had visited the Island before the day on which they drew off the prisoners from the Asylum. Two of the Commissioners had never be-

fore held office in the department, and would naturally yield to those who were experienced; one was in Europe, and the fourth is known to be a man engaged in active life.

Most respectfully submitted,

WM. MANDEVILLE,
JOSEPH HOXIE,
P. W. ENGS.
SAM. STEVENS,
ANTHONY LAMB,
ROB'T C. CORNELL,
JOSEPH TUCKER,
ROBERT SMITH,
WM. SAM. JOHNSON.

New-York, October 3d, 1835.