

1875.
NEW ZEALAND.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS OF THE COLONY.

(FURTHER REPORTS ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

Mr. MORPETH to His Honor the SUPERINTENDENT, Auckland.

STATEMENT under Section 60 of "The Lunatics Act, 1868," from 31st December, 1874, to 30th June, 1875.

1. Official visits to the Asylum from 31st December, 1874, to 30th June, 1875	...	...	...	...	...	...	26
2. Patients seen in the Asylum between 31st December, 1874, and 30th June, 1875,—							
Males	...	...	...	...	...	...	125
Females	...	...	...	...	...	...	69
							194
3. Miles travelled to and from the Asylum between the above periods							260
Miles travelled elsewhere on Asylum affairs	...	...	...	...	...	...	24
4. Letters sent and received between said dates	...	...	...	...	...	...	104

H. D. MORPETH,

Inspector of Provincial Lunatic Asylums.

Ponsonby, 30th June, 1875.

No. 2.

Mr. CROMPTON to His Honor the SUPERINTENDENT, Taranaki.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 2nd July, 1875.

I have the honor to state, for the information of the Hon. the Colonial Secretary, that I have continued my frequent visitation of the Lunatic Asylum during the past half-year.

Since my last report the following lunatics have been removed to the Asylum at Wellington, viz. C. F. Hursthouse, Daniel Farrin, Thomas Olden, Thomas Coad, James Doherty, and Michael Flanagan. Of the remaining patients, Denis Clifford shows satisfactory symptoms of recovery, and now employs himself in the Asylum with considerable industry in his trade of shoemaker. Stephen Coad is with his family on trial for three months, and as yet I have every reason to be satisfied with his conduct. William Jordan is with his family, his brother and brother-in-law having entered into a bond for his safe keeping.

Every attention possible, under the circumstances of the crowded state of the Asylum, was paid to the comfort and cleanliness of the patients.

I have, &c.,

WM. M. CROMPTON,
Inspector in Lunacy.

His Honor the Superintendent, New Plymouth.

No. 3.

Mr. ROUGH to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

Nelson, 19th July, 1875.

SIR,—
Having lately accepted the office of Inspector of Lunatic Asylums for the Province of Nelson, I do myself the honor to submit the following report on the condition and management of the Asylum at this place, as far as I have been able to make myself acquainted with the same since my very recent appointment.

There is only one Asylum for the insane in this province; it is situated on an elevated and healthy position, at the distance of about a mile from the centre of the city towards the Waimea.

The buildings now assigned to the insane were originally intended to be a temporary residence for refugees from New Plymouth during the war at Taranaki, and whilst there were only a few lunatic persons in this province these small and low buildings, of slight construction, served tolerably well for an asylum; but during several past years the number of inmates—many of whom have been brought from the gold fields settlements on the West Coast—has so much increased as to render such an arrangement quite unfit for the safe keeping and proper treatment of the insane.

The division occupied by female lunatics is however sufficiently well adapted for use as a temporary asylum, and most of them appear to be comfortably lodged, and kindly treated; but the day-rooms, sleeping-rooms, and airing yard occupied by the male lunatics, are small, confined, damp, out of repair, many of the windows are broken, and altogether such as to render the condition of the inmates very pitiable.

There are four men and two women who, in consequence of idiocy or violence, and dirty habits, have for a considerable period necessarily been kept in small buildings apart; but these are mere dens, without means of being heated, and otherwise very discreditable to any asylum for the insane.

New buildings on a compact and apparently suitable plan have been erected on the highest part of the ground belonging to this institution; and as most of the rooms were so far advanced as to be used for the reception of immigrants in the month of October last year, I think it is much to be regretted that the new Asylum had not been made available for the insane before the coming of the present winter season.

At this time there are forty-five lunatics in the Nelson Asylum, viz.,—

	Males.	Females.	Total.
English	11	9	
Irish	9	3	
Scotch	6	2	
German	1	...	
Norwegian	1	...	
Swede	1	...	
American	1	...	
Jew	1	...	
	—	—	
	31	14	= 45
	—	—	—

Eight were admitted since the 30th of June, 1874; six were discharged; and two died.

I have seen every one of the inmates, and examined the orders of admission and medical certificates of the insane, which in most cases are according to law. But one lunatic, David Scrimgeour, appears to have been admitted, in the year 1866, only by an order signed by the Superintendent of the province; and another, Henry R. McDonald, by a letter from the Chief Clerk in the office of the Provincial Secretary.

The admission of Mary Ann Gardiner, an idiot from her birth, and Sarah Connell, an imbecile from epilepsy, are recorded on the books, but without orders or medical certificates. An order for the admission of Mrs. Freeth, accompanied by the requisite medical certificate, appears to have been produced but cannot now be found.

A medical journal is regularly kept up, but no form of case-book has been supplied (*vide* "Lunatics Act, 1868," section 25). As far as I can learn, in the greater number of cases the predisposing cause of insanity is intemperance.

The Nelson Asylum is under the management of a superintendent, a matron, three male and one female attendant, who is also household servant; in the proportion of about one attendant to eleven lunatics. None of these keepers have had any special training to their duties; but Mr. Butler, the superintendent, has had over eight years' experience in charge of this Asylum, and the medical treatment of the insane inmates is under the control of Dr. L. Boor, Provincial Surgeon, who has been for some time accustomed to the practice in England, and resides in the hospital, at a very short distance from the Asylum.

One of the male attendants is paid at the rate of £70, and two at £60 per annum, and the female attendant at the rate of £30 per annum, with which they are not at all satisfied. I have not the means of comparing the rate of their pay with those of persons similarly employed at other Asylums in this colony. But in order to secure the services of attendants possessing the intelligence, firmness, and forbearance required to fit them for an office on which the well-being of the insane so much depends, liberal wages should be given.

There is at present no provision for a night watchman.

When attendants are being engaged, I think that men able to play on some musical instrument, and being otherwise qualified, should be preferred.

Considering the condition of the buildings before stated, the lunatics are fairly treated by those in charge. No coercion appears to have been employed during the past twelve months, and only one man, an extremely violent lunatic, has been subjected to a small amount of restraint. But, with the exception of one or two men who can be trusted to work in the open garden, there is no employment whatever for the male inmates. Some of the women take a share of the household work.

The food supplied to the lunatics is wholesome and abundant; but the clothing and bedding of the men is scanty, of poor materials, and very untidy.

Good strong corduroy suits, shirts, hats, strong boots, and a change for Sundays and holidays, would add much to their comfort and self-respect.

Clergymen of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church occasionally visit the Asylum, but there is no regular Divine service on Sundays.

There is a small collection of mostly old books, to which the inmates have access, and concerts, dances, and excursions have occasionally been got up for their benefit, chiefly at the expense of private

persons and by the Artisans' Society; but there is no system of amusement, or indeed much in any way likely to withdraw the lunatics from the monotony of their sad condition.

The new Asylum, as at present constructed, has room for sixty patients, with suitable arrangements for their comfort and convenience.

The Provincial Engineer has prepared a plan, and been instructed by the Provincial Government to call for tenders to erect considerable additions to the original plan, which will enlarge the space intended for quiet lunatics, and afford suitable means of separating and properly treating the worst cases.

I hope the day-rooms and corridors will be painted in lively colours, the walls hung with interesting though inexpensive pictures, and the workshops provided with tools and suitable appliances for indoor employments.

The dining hall is spacious, and might be provided with moveable fittings for scenic and other entertainments.

The information I have obtained by visiting asylums in Great Britain and America leads me to believe that the best means of alleviating the mental distress of the insane and restoring them to health is to provide them with scope for outdoor exercise and field labour. A skittle-ground under cover, for rainy days, might be prepared, and regular gardening and farming operations carried on in the fine weather for the benefit of the lunatics and the profit of the institution. But the ground on which the new Asylum is built is not more than eight acres in extent, including the yards and site of the buildings, which is not, in my opinion, at all sufficient space for outdoor work; and therefore I would beg leave most earnestly to recommend that at least twice as much land should be procured for this establishment in the rear of the new buildings, or at some other spot within a reasonable and convenient distance of the Asylum.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
D. ROUGH.

No. 4.

MR. MACGREGOR TO HIS HONOR THE SUPERINTENDENT OF OTAGO.

SIR,—

7th July, 1875.

In reporting on the general management and present condition of the Dunedin Lunatic Asylum for the year ending on the 31st March, 1875, I have very little to add to the Surgeon's report. I have visited the Asylum at many different hours, and always unexpectedly, without ever seeing anything that could be made the subject of reasonable complaint. Last year I pointed out the inadequacy of the dining accommodation, and drew special attention to the evils resulting from the bad bread supplied by the contractors. Both these evils have been thoroughly remedied, as has been fully explained in the Surgeon's report.

I regret to say that, in spite of repeated warnings, the Town Council have made no provision whatever for carrying off the Asylum sewage. The whole place is thoroughly saturated with odour, and waits but the spark of contagion to become a hotbed of typhoid disease.

Another matter which demands instant attention, is the fact that if a fire were to originate in any part of the buildings, which are wooden, there is no adequate water supply. For about ten days last autumn there was no water to be had at all, except what was carefully saved and carried from a small spring. Is it possible that the Councillors are speculating on the chances of getting rid of all our lunatics at a blow by means of one vast holocaust?

Some time ago a man named Alison died during the night in an epileptic fit without any one of the officials being present—the only case of this kind which has ever happened here. I was present at the inquest, and was perfectly satisfied that the occurrence was unavoidable, and cast no blame on anybody. I mention the matter here simply because the jury recommended that an additional warder be appointed for night duty; to this reasonable recommendation I would add a suggestion to the effect that all the epileptic and suicidal patients be lodged in one part of the building, and put under the special care of this officer.

Bearing in mind that the Asylum has grown with the growth of the province, it is not surprising that its present state is a reflex of the varying fortunes of the Provincial Treasury. Considered absolutely, as the asylum of a wealthy and enlightened province, it is labyrinthine in plan, and generally unsuitable. In fact, it is essentially temporary in character and intention—at least I hope so. Nothing will, perhaps, convey so good an idea of it as comparing it to a two-roomed cottage to which a vigorous young couple came home after getting married, the rapidly arriving babies being accommodated in additional rooms hurriedly improvised for their reception. Considering all that this implies, it is quite astonishing what a degree of comfort the patients enjoy, and how satisfactory the results are found to be, when compared with those of similar institutions elsewhere.

Taking the returns of Her Majesty's Commissioners in Lunacy for the years 1859–1872, I find that the average of recoveries per 100 admissions is 33·95. Since the opening of our Asylum in 1863, to the present time, the average has been much higher, being 61·9 per 100 admissions. This is a very singular fact, and one which demands some explanation, though as yet I am not able to furnish it adequately. Many things have to be considered in dealing with a result so complex and apparently anomalous as this, even if it do not require careful sifting in various respects. One thing, at any rate, is clear: our Asylum is successful, however much allowance is made for altered circumstances and a selected population. I am glad to be able to say that at length, in consequence of the urgency of the annual reports on this subject, the Provincial Government have determined to attach to the Asylum a large farm in the Blueskin district. The effects of this cannot fail to be beneficial in many ways: chiefly, however, in two main respects. The Asylum will be rendered nearly self-supporting, and its curative efficiency will be greatly increased. Nothing strikes the student of mental science more than this—namely, that science and experience declare, with annually increasing emphasis, that the cure of

insanity is hopeless, without first of all reversing, as far as possible, its casual conditions, making drugs and restraint merely exceptional aids.

The treatment, as being developed in the most scientific hands both in Europe and America, is steadily tending in this direction. No form of mechanical restraint, seclusion, or confinement, even in airing courts, will, I venture to say, be much longer practised where it can possibly be avoided; and the use of drugs will be increasingly restricted where a known diseased process, acute in character, has been actually recognized. Comfortable rooms and clothes, a good diet, and plenty of out-door exercise, especially in the form of carefully regulated employment, are the truly scientific means of combating mental disease.

One of the most marked characteristics of chronic lunatics is a strong aversion to regular industry. Their natural tendency is to indulge aimless mooning and morbid dwelling on depressing thoughts, so seductive even to the sane, when they are not mentally robust. Let any grief or overwhelming calamity overtake a healthy vigorous man, and he instinctively betakes himself to some engrossing pursuit—to labour, the anodyne of Nature's own providing. I am convinced that here we have the main indication of all rational treatment of the insane. We must combat by all means in our power this tendency to idleness, this aversion to do anything save what chimes in with their disordered fancies.

I believe that the success of our Asylum is largely due, among other things, to the extent to which Dr. Hulme and Mr. Hume have availed themselves of regular employment as a means of cure. Nothing is more mischievous, next to actual restraint, than that lunatics, strong and in the prime of life, should be allowed to stroll all day in pleasure-grounds, indulging in aimless brooding and morbid fancies. Mere walking exercise, be it ever so regularly taken, has comparatively little effect in checking this evil. In the case of women the matter is still worse; and this I take to be the greatest defect in our mode of treating them. All except the few who can be regularly employed in washing, scrubbing, and cooking, are usually employed in sewing, one of the most automatic of all employments, and which therefore leaves the mind free to roam. May not much that is characteristic of women generally be traced to the fact that sewing and other kindred avocations are so admirably calculated to leave the wandering fancy free?

Dr. Hulme has very forcibly called attention to the disproportionate increase in the number of our lunatics, due to the inferior character of our recent immigrants. Formerly we reaped all the benefits of the fact that advancing communities attract the more energetic and pushing members of retrograde communities and employments, while the weak and the lunatic are left behind, where they propagate and raise the average of pauperism, lunacy, and crime. There is every reason to fear that our recent policy has with lamentable rapidity greatly altered if not entirely reversed this state of things; the heaviest part of our immigration expenditure has yet to become apparent. We shall do well to look to our schools, our hospitals, and our asylums. Not merely may we expect our lunatics and criminals to multiply at an unprecedented rate, but even our types of lunacy will change. Instead of acquired and therefore largely-curable insanity, the result of a selected, active, and enterprising people, we may expect numbers of idiots and imbeciles, the outcome of long-continued poverty, ignorance, and a low degree of development.

I have, &c.,

D. MACGREGOR,

Inspector.

His Honor the Superintendent, Otago.