

**Memorial to Dr. Charles S. Hoyt, Deceased, Formerly Secretary and later
Superintendent of State and Alien Poor, in the Service of the State Board of Charities
June 8, 1822 - December 13, 1898**

“Dr. Charles S. Hoyt, long time Secretary of the State Board of Charities, and later Superintendent of State and Alien Poor under the same Board, was born June 8, 1822, and died December 13, 1898. His was a long, faithful and useful life. Active almost to the last day in the discharge of public duties, he warded off the approach of the last Messenger as long and as bravely as he could, but when the summons came, he calmly and quietly, without murmur, laid himself down to die. It is a melancholy satisfaction to all who loved Dr. Hoyt that, as he himself would have chosen, he died while in harness.

He was of commanding stature and dignified bearing. His opinions, weighted with the wisdom of long experience as well as good judgment, were forceful wherever expressed, and his personality came to be widely and strongly felt, its influence by no means limited to his own State.

In 1867, during his last term in the Legislature, Dr. Hoyt was active and instrumental in securing the passage of chapter 951, entitled An act to provide for the appointment of a Board of Commissioners of Public Charities, and defining their duties and powers. This was passed May 23, 1867. The Commission was at once organized, with Hon. John V.L. Pruyn as President. A clerk was appointed who served for a very brief period, when Dr. Hoyt was made Secretary of the Commission June 5, 1868, and his connection with the duties of the Commission, or Board, as it was later denominated, was never interrupted during his life. It is a matter of knowledge to those most familiar with the early history of the Board that it was menaced not only as to its usefulness but as to its very existence, but these attacks were successfully defeated by its earnest and active Secretary.

It now seems appropriate to note that the first work of Dr. Hoyt as Secretary of the Board was to systematize. At once, upon his appointment, he inaugurated a system of statistics and set about to collect facts and figures from which the Board could establish methods of procedure. The first tabulated results, from which have gradually grown and developed a series of tables in each annual report of the Board, showing by a vast aggregation of figures

the financial and statistical standing of the various public and private institutions in the State, the first of these, the formative work, emanated from Dr. Hoyt. It is in devising a new thing that labor chiefly enters; to improve upon and enlarge as conditions change or expand is comparatively easy.

One of his latest efforts in this particular line was in devising the system by which the records of children in the various institutions of the State could be reported, from month to month, by a comprehensive yet concise method. All previous attempts or suggestions having proved cumbrous, the aid of Dr. Hoyt was invoked and a system of blanks was very soon presented to and at once accepted by the committee, from which no deviation has seemed necessary or even desirable after four years of trial. These facts are brought out to illustrate his marked ability in the line of devising statistical methods.

Dr. Hoyt's first visitations after his appointment as Secretary of the Board were of almshouses, which he found in very poor condition. Defective ventilation, overcrowding, lack of facilities for cleanliness, imperfect classification, so that the innocent and the vicious, children and adults mingled indiscriminately; these were prominent among the ill conditions found. To these was added the problem of insane and feeble-minded inmates for whom no special provision was made in most almshouses, and for which classes the public institutions were of inadequate capacity. A motley combination. These findings were emphatically and tersely stated in the first comprehensive report of the Commission to the Legislature, and from time to time, with his whole energy, and by the wise direction of the Commissioners, - Commissioner Letchworth particularly whose special labors have always been in the interest of children, - Dr. Hoyt gave himself to bettering the condition of the county almshouse buildings and to the improvement of the condition of the inmates. With what success his thirty years' service has been fraught is attested by these facts: That it has become a misdemeanor to retain a child in an almshouse; that he has witnessed and been actively engaged in the organization of three additional institutions for the care and protection of feeble-minded, and that the provision for insane has been increased from three institutions to eleven, in the organization of five of which Dr. Hoyt had voice and influence. Three of these hospitals have been opened since the care of the insane was transferred to the Commission in Lunacy. The influence of Dr. Hoyt was also strongly exerted in the

establishment of the Craig Colony for the care of epileptics, and special and very arduous duties were assigned to him in selecting from the almshouses such patients for the Colony as were most suitable to the institution, and at the same time such as would be most amenable to treatment and best relieve the almshouses, but yet maintain an equitable quota among the counties. The selection of patients was later extended to families, and this often added to the embarrassment in an effort to give satisfaction to the friends of the patients and to the managers of the Colony as well. As was his wont, he first secured statistics, and from these drew his inferences, deductions and working plans. It is but a just tribute to Dr. Hoyt's memory to add, that while his duties in this line involved long, wearisome drives in the visitations of almshouses and proposed patients from families, very uncanny hours of rising and retiring in order to connect with public conveyances, etc., he never deviated from the straight line of duty which he had himself marked out, but often started on these trips when his friends and associates begged him to desist or postpone until he was stronger or the weather more propitious. The immense correspondence in connection with this class became a great tax upon the Doctor, and the anxiety of patients and their friends, with the disappointments for which he sometimes appeared to be responsible, while only performing his duty, touched him, accustomed as he was to tales of woe and scenes of darkness, very keenly. The last work of kindred nature in which he engaged and which he had just completed, was the preparation of a census of the idiotic or feeble-minded inmates of almshouses needing State custodial care.

Thus, by the creation of new avenues of relief and by persistent watchfulness, in season and out of season, Dr. Hoyt lived to see his own official life crowned with such improvements in almshouses alone as should be a glory to his memory. In this work, as in all other, while guided and sustained by an able body of Commissioners, it is no discredit to these to claim for their chief executive officer that his mind created many of the projects which later took substantial form.

Dr. Hoyt was fully intrusted with the execution of three very important legislative enactments, as follows: The State pauper act, chapter 661 of the Laws of 1873, which made provision for the care of such persons as have not resided for sixty days in any county of the State within one year preceding the application for relief; the Alien poor act, chapter 549 of

the Laws of 1880, which authorized the return to the countries from which deported, any crippled, blind, lunatic or otherwise infirm alien poor sent to this country by cities or towns or by societies, relatives or friends; the Indian poor law, chapter 436, Laws of 1894, for the care of Indians in certain designated almshouses. The principal provisions of these three acts became chapter 225, Laws of 1896.

Under the first of these, now called the State poor act, with the operation of which Dr. Hoyt closed September 30, 1893, twenty-five years of service, there have been 36,964 poor persons cared for in the several designated State almshouses. Of this number 24,402 were sent out of the State to their legal settlements, or to friends able and willing to care for them, but in most instances with the personal direction of Dr. Hoyt either by correspondence or examination.

Of the alien poor, during the eighteen years in which this act has been in force, 3,350 persons have been returned to their legal settlements across the ocean, at an average per capita expense of \$22.48. The care of the Indian poor had not yet assumed any great proportions during the administration of the act by Dr. Hoyt, but he was becoming seriously anxious in regard to the outcome of this work in instances where circumstances required the relief to be administered outside the almshouse, that is, as temporary relief.

Since the State poor act of 1873 and the Alien poor act of 1880 went into effect, there have been sent out of the State 27,752 poor persons, either to other States or to other countries. At an estimate of fifteen years' duration of life in the almshouses or other public institutions in which these persons were found, and at an estimated annual cost of \$100 each for support and care, the expenditure saved to the State by this faithful 'watch dog of the treasury,' Dr. Hoyt, has been estimated as over \$41,000,000.

By concurrent resolution of the Senate and Assembly of May, 1873, the State Board of Charities was authorized to make an exhaustive inquiry into the causes of pauperism. Dr. Hoyt was given charge of the work, under direction of the Board, and at once prepared a detailed schedule for the collection of information, and personally or chiefly by deputy, visited the almshouses of every county in the State and secured the personal history of every

inmate with as much accuracy as possible. The immensity of this work may be appreciated from the fact that 12,614 persons were examined, the schedule to which each examination conformed containing sixty questions to be answered, and the time occupied in making the inquiries extended over more than one year. Dr. Hoyt then grouped these results into eighteen different tables or schedules of such value that a few of the most important results may be of interest at this point. Of the 12,614 persons thus examined, 6,384 were males and 6,230 females; 5,835 were native born, 6,566 foreign born, while of 213 the birthplace could not be ascertained.

The aggregate number of years of almshouse life was 61,595 and the average duration of almshouse life 4.88 years. Of the 9,855 who were over sixteen years of age, 3,106 were unable to read or write but 2,918 were reported as having received a fair school education. Of the 12,614 inmates of almshouses 4,047 were reported insane, of whom 1,593 were of intemperate habits. The total 12,014 represented 10,161 different families, and 14,901 persons of such families showed dependency to have existed through three generations, 4,968 represented three generations known to have been insane, while 844 represented three generations known to have been inebriates. The conclusions were, that of the 12,614 total inmates, 8,145 would remain permanent dependents, and that there could be entertained strong hopes of the recovery of but 1,116. This report passed into a State paper under the title, Pauperism. It was transmitted to the Legislature of 1877 over Dr. Hoyt's signature as Secretary of the Board, and perhaps for a period of ten years there was a continual demand from all parts of the English speaking world for copies of 'Pauperism' by Dr Hoyt.

Some of the most severe physical strains upon Dr. Hoyt were in connection with the exemption of counties from the operation of the Willard Asylum act of 1865, designed to relieve the almshouses of their insane. The Willard Asylum was opened in December, 1869, for the chronic insane and was soon filled to overcrowding from the county almshouses. It became necessary to make immediate further provision for this class of dependents, and by an act of the Legislature of 1871 the State Board of Charities was authorized to exempt such counties as should apply, from the operation of the Willard Asylum act, provided their buildings, means, employed, etc., were found sufficient and satisfactory for the care of the insane. Many counties at once applied for this exemption, and the executive labor of

investigation, etc., naturally fell upon the Secretary of the Board. This duty was not only very laborious and trying, but it required unusual tact and decision of character to execute without inducing a great deal of antagonism on the part of the county officials. Even when the decisions in respect to the exemption of many counties were made, and their insane transferred back from the Willard Asylum, the responsibility and the work were not ended, but were rather increased and increasing. Dr. Hoyt visited these exempted county asylums, which became nineteen in number, often, examined the accommodations and the provision made for the care and comfort of the insane, and reported such visitations quarterly to the Board. To make these visits often involved long country drives and many discomforts, but he never swerved from his duty for the sake of his own physical comforts or pleasures. With the transfer of the insane to the State Commission in Lunacy came relief from these exacting duties.

A few of the very many affectionate tributes which have been offered to the memory of Dr. Hoyt are appended:

From Dr. John B. Chapin, of Philadelphia, Penn., who was formerly of Brigham Hall, Canandaigua, and long time superintendent of the Willard Asylum for Insane of this State: 'My acquaintance with Dr. Hoyt goes back to the time of his election to the Legislature of the State of New York. He was mainly instrumental in securing the passage of the law creating the Board of Charities, and it seemed very proper that he should in time come to take a prominent position in the executive functions of that organization. The organization of that Board was the first effort of the State of New York to administer its charities, and to supervise its expenditures, so that in the change that was brought about by the passage of that law he was intimately identified with the evolution of the *whole* charity system of the State as it now stands. It may be said of him, that the active forces of his whole life were devoted to the duties of the office he held. Since my removal from New York State, I have rarely seen the Doctor, but I think the verdict must be that he has held an official position of the greatest importance for an unusually long period, and that his forces and enthusiasm have been faithfully applied to the public service. It is very unusual for any one to serve the public for so long a time, and I can well understand that the State has experienced a great loss.' "

The Inmates of Willard 1870 to 1900

SOURCE: Reprinted from Memorial to Dr. Charles S. Hoyt, Deceased, Formerly Secretary and later Superintendent of State and Alien Poor, in the Service of the State Board of Charities by Miss Julia S. Hoag, Clerk to the Board. Thirty Second Annual Report of the State Board of Charities for the Year 1898, Transmitted to the Legislature January 16, 1899, Wynkoop, Hallenbeck, Crawford, Co. State Printers, New York and Albany, 1899, Pages 167-178. <<http://books.google.com/>>