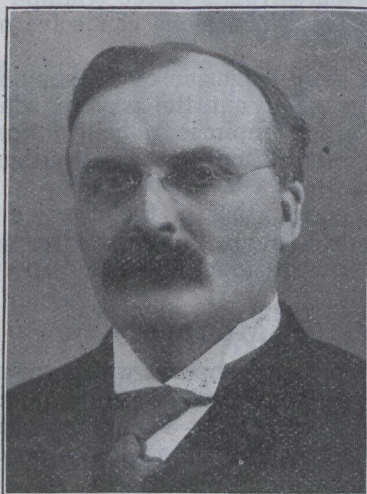


Prison Reform in Ontario

HON. W. J. HANNA, Provincial Secretary



It may not be amiss to refer briefly to the origin of prison labor and its introduction into Ontario. Within living memory society dealt with its criminals as a class only to be punished and, if necessary, exterminated; idleness was enforced; torture was substituted for reform. Then it was recognized that the merely punitive policy had completely failed, that torture should be abandoned and that enforced idleness was as cruel as bodily torture. At first, as a remedy, resort was made to labor merely as a means of punishment. Prisoners were set to exhaustive work without any regard to its being productive. This was the age of treadmills, of loaded cranks, of shot drills and the carrying of heavy loads from place to place. In time the failure of those as a reformatory measure was admitted and the necessity for productive labor was advocated.

Today only extremists say that prisoners should not be employed at productive labor. Everybody else agrees that from every point of view, physical or moral, practical or humane, prisoners must be put to productive work. The problem is to reduce the competition of convict labor to a minimum, and especially to reduce the proportion of prison-made goods that are sold in the open market. This problem has been ever present since productive labor was advocated.

Because Prison Labor in this Province, as well as elsewhere has been a difficult problem, the Provincial Government in 1907 appointed a Committee of the Legislature, whose report was adopted in 1909, and as a result early in 1910 we purchased the farm at Guelph; and in April moved up our first lot of prisoners, and put them to farm work, without lock or gun or prison garb.

The fall of 1910 found us with 180 men and the winter saw teaching for a couple of hours a night established in the Institution.

How have the men been employed? From the very outset there has been more work than men. There were the lands to clear, fields to cultivate, ditches to open, tile drains to put down, roads to build, bridges to construct, fences to build, temporary premises to erect, quarries to open.

This was followed by the construction of our lime kiln, lime hydrater, brick and tile plant, sand and gravel pit, temporary sewage system, followed by a hermanent one, (the effluent from which will be as harmless as modern science can make it,) waterworks, quarries for lime purposes concrete and roads, building tone, and the construction of permanent buildings, as far as possible with our own material and with the work of the prisoners themselves.

Then there were the field crops, hoe crops, vegetable garden, dairy, hogs and hens. There is a lot of useful work in growing 6,000 bus. of potatoes, 8,000 bus. of grain, 300 tons of ensilage, with 20 acres of mangels and turnips for upwards of 100 cattle, and enough table vegetables to meet not only our own requirements, but with considerable to spare for other institutions as well.

The dairy is essentially our own,—our own material dug and quarried on the premises, with brick and till manufactured by the men, with some of the best work in the way of floor and manger construction supervised by a prisoner who took as much interest in it as if it were his own. This dairy with its 80 cows takes the work of seven or eight prisoners.

In our north-western country round, Fort William and Port Arthur, we have an average gaol population of 65 prisoners with accommodation for thirty.

When we took up this question of moving back to the lands the Minister of Crown Lands found unlocated some 1,000 acres of fertile land with all the timber standing.

Last summer we established a camp on those thousand acres of 50 prisoners.

The men set to with a will, and in five or six days, cleaned up five or six acres, which were immediately planted in turnips and potatoes with the result that

last year we grew some several hundred bushels of roots of splendid quality.

In the last six months, they have chopped and windrowed about 300 acres, cut roads around and through that thousand acres where roads were surveyed, and have built themselves permanent quarters. They have also put down wells.

We have fed them well and they have worked well, and have given us a good return.

The men have worked on with an interest that is most encouraging. More than once a prisoner whose time was up on Saturday morning would ask if he would be permitted to remain until Monday morning.

How many men have charge? But four paid men, all told. We have but one man as guard over the whole lot of forty-five or fifty men who form our average population and who frequently operate over an area of 200 or 250 acres of land. We have a watchman, but he is himself a prisoner.

How about escapes? We had at Fort William camp some three or four escapes, but will anyone say that work should be stopped, or plans abandoned because out of a population of some 200, some two or three have failed to live up to the trust reposed in them?

We are to-day looking into that north country for other locations, because we have a lot of men at the Soo, and at North Bay. We purchased near Whitby some 600 acres for the transfer of Toronto Asylum. There was much work to do. Farm work, of course, but with that we did not trouble the prisoners. But there was construction that we did try to do with patients, and we went to Central Prison and selected some 40 or 50 prisoners, sent them down to Whitby, and set them to do what?

The site covering many acres of land was laid out, there was drainage, there were railroad sidings, sewers. And we set those 45 prisoners at that work. We carried at Whitby an average population of about 65, all out in the wide open, all doing work subject to rules, regulations and discipline, but all working without lock or gun.

These men have given in return for the confidence that we have reposed in them a full efficiency in work, just as full as we could have purchased at \$2.00 per day, and we have yet to have the very first attempt at breach of discipline or violations of the rules.

So we have at Guelph, 320 men; at Fort William, 50 men; at Whitby, 70 men, all working in the open. That is to say, 440 men, giving a full percentage of efficiency, everyone of whom four years ago would have been confined in the old time prison with all that it entailed.