

Inaugural address  
of

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## Thursday, October 6, 1904

### Inaugural Address

*Gentlemen of the General Assembly:*

In accordance with the constitution of the commonwealth, we are convened for the purpose of legislating in the interests and for the prosperity and dignity of our state.

I believe that our industries are well represented in this body; that a full measure of the wisdom and virtue of the state are here assembled; and that we are united in the determination that the best laws should be enacted and that unwise laws should be repealed.

Trusting in an overruling Providence that guides the affairs of states and shapes our destinies, may we each realize the necessity of acting well and wisely our part for the greatest good of all our people.

#### TAXATION.

The question of taxation is one of the most important matters to be considered in this session.

We are trying to improve the condition of our state along all lines. For such improvements every one should be willing to pay a just proportion. All property should be made to pay taxes according to its productive valuation. We should avoid double taxation and all property, both real and personal, should be made to pay its share.

When we legislate to exempt any property or class of values from taxation it becomes a difficult matter to frame just laws. When all property is equitably taxed and there are no exemptions whatever, then laws are, and can be made more simple and effective.

In years past many million dollars' worth of property, largely in the form of lumber, has been taken from our hills and mountains into market without taxation, thereby depriving our state of enormous values without a just return. The only thing left in such instances is denuded land tracts and depleted streams.

I am in favor of a law whereby no property, real or personal, shall be exempt from its proper levy for the support of the public treasury.

#### SCHOOLS.

We have improved our laws considerably in the past few years in regard to the public schools.

The report of the superintendent of education, which you will have before you, shows that the average paid our teachers during the last two years has considerably increased. While the increase is small, it proves that the tendency is steadily in the direction of more competent instruction in our common schools.

In view of the widely scattered condition of our rural communities, I am of the opinion that it would be a step in the right direction for many towns to look toward a central school, to which all pupils can be brought, thus making it possible to give them the benefits of the better educational advantages thus afforded at a slight increase of cost. The added advantage of such educational facilities at home where the pupil while obtaining them can remain within the circle of home influence and restraint, would, I believe, be a guarantee of the best results. In such a school, with so much of nature all about, the science of agriculture should be prominently taught, in order that the pupil may better understand the deeper meaning and influence of home environments and advantages. In other states where this course has been pursued, the results have been most satisfactory. I am mindful of our somewhat strenuous weather during the winter months, but a slight readjustment of the school year to make the vacation in summer shorter and in winter longer, would remove much of the objection to this plan.

#### BETTER HIGHWAYS.

The roads of Vermont have been greatly improved under our present laws.

The report of the state highway commissioner will inform you fully of this important work.

I believe in government aid in road building. It is certainly reasonable for the general government, while doing so much in the larger towns by way of public buildings and public works, to do something that will benefit large and small towns alike in the way of road improvements.

Vermont's highways should be so constructed and maintained as to not only facilitate business, but also to add to the health and pleasure of those who chance to use them.

The roads have been built, paid for and maintained for the use and convenience of the traveler, whether on foot or in team. In keeping up with the wonderful inventions of the age, we should legislate so that the roads be kept safe for all. At present this is not the case.

Would it not be well to restrict the automobile to a few roads and trunk lines, when possible, reserving some, and the winding narrow hill roads for the exclusive use of teams? This would remove one source of danger.

I would recommend some system of highway supervision, requiring a license for the automobile, that it be numbered for identification, restrained in rate of speed, and restricted to the freedom of certain thoroughfares which could be marked so plainly that whoever runs may read and understand.

I am in favor of some law covering the better care of roadside environments. Obstructions, bushes and unsightly weeds should be destroyed, for they become an offence. Let the trees remain; the shade tree by the highway should be regarded the personal friend of every traveler for it helps to make his journey more pleasant. We should have laws in regard to these matters, and they should be strictly enforced.

I would have a law forbidding the custom of making bridges and highway fences billboards for the free advertising of all sorts of wares. In a chance trip for instance across the country, it is often a matter of considerable doubt, judging by the nature of the placards, just what a certain farmer's specialties are, potatoes or soap and patent medicine.

#### STATE INSTITUTIONS.

The proper conduct of the various public institutions of the state should be the pride of every loyal citizen.

I have recently had the pleasure of visiting these institutions on a tour of inspection with other state officials, and can frankly say that I was in every instance much impressed with the high grade of service the state has at its command in them. Along broad lines and speaking generally, the public institutions of Vermont are in excellent shape. I was forcibly impressed that in each instance the comfort and health of all inmates is always a matter of first concern, and as a result most of those thus cared for are better provided with the actual comforts of life than they could have possibly been at home. My only wish is that any one disposed to criticize any one or all of our public institutions, first visit them with a view to details. They are public institutions. They are open to public inspection, and those in control are not only willing but anxious to give all possible information in regard to them.

In the case of the hospital at Waterbury, it should be remembered that under our present law many towns are able to rid themselves of what was formerly an expense to them, thus lessening the burden to the town, but increasing the cost to the state.

Any one who visits the Soldiers' Home at Bennington must be impressed with the fact that Vermont cares most tenderly for the veterans. It is a touching lesson in patriotism to the generation just coming upon the stage of action. I am in favor of increasing, if necessary, rather than lessening, the cost of properly caring for the old soldier while he is with us.

As to these and other institutions, however, I have no specific recommendations to offer at this time. The reports of the officers of each, and the suggestions of the retiring administration as detailed by Gov. McCullough in his message, are before you, and are entitled to your careful consideration.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL.

I heartily recommend the creation of the new office of attorney-general.

I believe the services of such an official would not only be a great advantage to the state in its criminal prosecutions, but also a great convenience to the executive and other departments of the government in matters that are constantly arising where the best legal experience is demanded.

The custom has arisen in many instances of electing the younger and less experienced members of the bar to the office of state's attorney. This is perhaps natural enough and there are many good and sufficient reasons for it which it is not necessary to discuss at this time. The result has been, however, that the important interests of the state, in criminal litigation, especially, have often been placed in inexperienced hands, and the state's attorneyship has become an experiment station in the law.

The auditor's report for the biennial term ending June 30, 1904, shows that the following sums have been paid in the several counties for grand jury services during the past two years: Addison, \$293.60; Bennington, \$1,186.48; Caledonia, \$651.34; Chittenden, \$394.96; Essex, \$265.44; Franklin, \$557.76; Grand Isle, \$182.84; Lamoille, \$308.73; Orange, \$536.76; Orleans, \$874.00; Rutland, \$579.60; Washington, \$3,112.32; Windham, \$231.60; Windsor, \$575.36, a total of over \$6,000. It is reasonable to presume that if the state's attorneys had had the benefit of the experienced services of an attorney-general in the preparation of cases, some of this expense might have been avoided.

During the past two years there has been paid out in counsel for the state in county court \$2,870.30; supreme court, \$243.04; employed by the governor, \$541.73; employed by the railroad commission, \$555.00; employed by the board of health, \$70. The services for which this expense was incurred would have been satisfactorily performed by an attorney-general, had there been one.

I am sure that such an official, whose compensation should be placed at a reasonable figure and still be sufficient to attract our best talent for the service, would result in a more prompt and effective execution of our criminal laws, and at the same time tend to the administration of the affairs of the state along the lines of a broader economy.

## CATTLE COMMISSION.

At the last session of the legislature the work of this commission was separated from that of the board of agriculture.

With the law as it is at present, owners obtain eighty per cent of the value of their diseased cattle, and the hides. The proper execution of the law has been crippled by lack of proper provision for the expense of assistants and veterinaries. Many herds have been tested at the expense of owners. The biennial report of the commission will show cost of about \$48,000. I would advise enlarging the power of the commission and the establishing of some date after which the state shall cease to be responsible for nearly the full value of diseased animals.

## RAILROAD COMMISSION.

The power and duties of this commission have been considerably enlarged from year to year.

It would now seem advisable to go at least one step further and provide that in the cases where competing lines are so seriously at variance that there is no hope for reasonable results, the commission have the power to step in and take some action to prevent further inconvenience to the traveling public.

## VERMONT'S WEALTH AND ATTRACTIONS.

We are making commendable progress in the development of our mines and quarries. Our manufacturing interests increase by leaps and bounds from year to year, until nearly every city and large village within our borders has some important industry to the conspicuous success of which the whole state can justly point with pride. In a large number of instances these particular enterprises are standards of their kind, and by the excellent quality of their product are able to lead the way against the sharpest competition of the general market.

Mindful of all this, however, I still maintain that agriculture continues to be our distinction, and the most important field for our activity and best endeavor.

In view of possible legislation, I call your attention to the board of agriculture, the good work of the agricultural college, the interests of the forestry commission, the dairymen's association, the maple sugar association, the horticultural society, and kindred organizations.

There is no question but that the Vermont farmer aided by these and supplemented by the instructive work of the grange, has been able to systematically increase and wonderfully develop the agricultural wealth of the state, until today while cultivating less acres, he is making possible larger pro rata crops, and is producing larger pro rata amounts of maple sugar, fruit, corn, grain, hay, potatoes and dairy products, than any other state in the union. Furthermore, with improved machinery and with brains trained to better appreciate the relation of cause and effect, he is doing all this with better actual results in profits than ever before.

Today farming is recognized as a science. I could almost say it ought to be classed as one of the professions, for he who will succeed in it must study, must be well informed and must thoroughly understand the business. From this it follows that the farmer must recognize his rights and be ready to demand them in matters of legislation. The advantage in respect to numbers in this general assembly is, as always, with the farmer, and his interests should be given the just attention they deserve.

#### COMING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS.

At specified times during the session, it will be your duty to elect important state officers, including the judges of the supreme court. These elections demand your most careful attention. Upon the result of your action in these matters, depends to a great degree, our administrative success for the next two years.

You will be called upon to elect a successor to Hon. Redfield Proctor as United States Senator for the term of six years from March 4, 1905. The result of your action in this instance is of more than local or state importance; it is an affair of national consequence. So long as we are represented in the Senate of the United States by such men as Edmund and Morrill, Proctor and Dillingham, we shall be heard from in national affairs, and Vermont will, as in the past, continue to occupy a commanding position in matters of national legislation.

#### IN CONCLUSION.

Much intended legislation is suggested, and no doubt considerable is desirable, regulating the careful expenditure of public funds, looking to an improved system of auditing accounts, the better protection of fish and game, a reasonable caucus law, and a more effective restriction of the liquor traffic.

You are elected to attend to these matters in the best interests of the state. Let me suggest in closing, that you cannot conclude your work satisfactorily to yourself or the state unless you bring these matters up for consideration at the earliest possible moment, and, after necessary deliberation let your conclusions be prompt and honest and the result of most mature judgment.

At the conclusion of the message Governor Batchelder of New Hampshire addressed the Joint Assembly. Thereupon the Governor withdrew and the Joint Assembly dissolved.

FREDERICK G. FLEETWOOD

*Secretary of State, Clerk.*