

Inaugural address  
of  
Asahel Peck  
As it appears in the  
Journal  
of the  
House of Representatives  
Biennial Session,  
1874

**Friday, October 9, 1874**  
**Inaugural Address**

*Gentlemen of the Senate  
and House of Representatives:*

It is a matter of congratulation that the period which has called us together to discharge the public trusts reposed in us under the Constitution, is marked by the general health and prosperity of the people; that the earth has yielded its abundance, and industry is generally reaping its accustomed reasonable reward. These, and the numerous blessing which we individually, and as a people, enjoy, should excite in us feelings of thankfulness and gratitude to the Giver of all good.

Your powers and duties are so comprehensive and varied, that it would be neither practicable nor useful to attempt, in the accustomed executive communication, to embrace all the subjects that may properly engage your attention, and require your action.

It is gratifying to find the finances of the State in the healthy and satisfactory condition indicated by the Treasurer's report, to which you are referred for a more full and detailed statement than is necessary to be here repeated. It appears from the account of the Treasurer, commencing August 1, 1872, that at that date he credits the State by balance in treasury, August 1, 1872, \$178,179.14, and by sinking fund in treasury, \$184,351.02; and also during the year commencing at the above date and ending July 31, 1873, credits the State numerous items, mostly from the ordinary sources of revenue, including \$4,386.80 received from Hon. J. S. Morrill, U.S. Senator, and \$7,836.74 received for interest on balances, amounting, exclusive of the two items first above mentioned, to \$506,504.08, making credit for the year above mentioned, \$869,034.24

Against this for the same period he charges—	
For extra State pay of \$7 per month,	\$5,404.84
“ allotted United States pay,	1,165.72
“ Auditor's orders,	\$274,963.89
“ court orders,	57,252.14
“ legislative debentures, 56,022.20	
“ registered loan redeemed,	53,000.00
“ coupon bonds redeemed,	32,000.00
“ discount on taxes,	14,227.52
“ interest paid,	32,374.34
	----- \$526,410.65
To balance this he charges balance of sinking fund,	\$101,851.02
And balance cash in treasury,	240,772.57
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Making	\$869,034.24

For the year ending July 31, 1874, he credits the State by the last two items of charge in the account of the preceding year, that is—

Balance in treasury August 1, 1873,	\$240,772.57
Sinking fund in treasury August 1, 1873,	101,851.02

And also by other items in detail from the usual sources, including \$6,328.98 received from Quartermaster General for military stores sold, amounting, exclusive of the first two items, to \$460,380.26

Making the credit to the State,	----- \$803,003.85
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For the year last named, ending July 31, 1874, the Treasurer debits the State —

For extra State pay of \$7 per month,		\$2,764.22
“ allotted United States pay,		608.90
“ Auditor’s orders,		216,722.94
“ court orders,		66,099.60
“ United States surplus fund paid towns,		167.91
“interest paid on allotment acc’ts,	\$181.93	
“interest paid towns on U.S. surplus fund,	694.64	
For interest paid on registered loan,	11,145.00	
“ interest paid on coupons,	15,495.00	
	-----	\$27,471.57
For discount on taxes,	12,353.06	
Paid on funded debt:		
Registered loan of 1874,	\$16,500.00	
Registered loan of 1876,	2,500.00	
Coupon bonds of 1874,	20,000.00	
Coupon bonds of 1876,	26,000.00	
Coupon bonds of 1878,	6,000.00	
	-----	\$71,000.00
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Making the debit		\$397,188.20
Leaving balance in treasury:		
Sinking fund,	\$37,932.36	
Cash and deposits n banks, subject to check on call,	367,883.29	
	-----	\$405,815.65
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		\$803,003.85

The Treasurer’s report shows the liabilities and assets of the State as follows:

#### LIABILITIES.

Due towns, U.S. surplus fund,		\$11,519.96
Due on soldiers’ accounts,		13,424.46
Due on outstanding checks,		1,886.06
Due on funded debt:		
Bonds due Dec. 1, 1874,	\$50,500.00	
Bonds due Dec. 1, 1876,	110,500.00	
Bonds due Dec. 1, 1878,	65,500.00	
	-----	\$226,500.00
Due Agricultural College fund, June 1, 1890,		135,500.00
		-----
		\$338,830.48

#### ASSETS.

Due on tax of 1873,	\$5,671.44	
Cash in treasury and on deposit in banks,	405,815.65	
	-----	\$411,487.09
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Excess of resources over liabilities,		\$22,656.61

Of the above liabilities it appears that \$194,000 is in outstanding coupon bonds payable	
December 1, 1874,	\$50,500.00
December 1, 1876,	109,500.00
December 1, 1878,	34,000.00
	----- \$194,000.00

And that \$168,000 of the above liabilities is in outstanding “certificates of registered loan,” issued under the act of 1867, and act of 1870, which sum includes the Agricultural College Fund. These certificates are payable:

December 1, 1876,	\$ 1,000.00
December 1, 1878,	31, 500.00
June 1, 1890, Agricultural College Fund	\$135,500.00
	----- \$168,000.00

In providing for the necessary revenues, and in the appropriations for the ensuing two years, I would advise that provision be made to meet, at maturity, the \$110,500 of the funded debt which is payable Dec. 1, 1876.

Little need be said on the subject of education; since, by common consent, its importance is acknowledged in the preservation of virtue and prevention of vice, and in promoting, in many ways, the general peace, prosperity and happiness of the people; and since it is as universally conceded that, in order to be effectual, it must be general among the people, and be disseminated among all classes by the most efficient agency for that purpose—our free common schools; and that to perfect the system of education the higher institutions of learning are also indispensable, all tending mutually to sustain and support each other; that all are of public interest and concern, and to be cared for accordingly by appropriate legislation. On this subject a Board of Education may be regarded as a part of the settled policy of the State. It has done much to further the cause of education by arousing a more general interest on the subject, and otherwise.

I am not aware that any further general legislation is necessary, or called for, in connection with the operations of the Board of Education; if so, it will, probably, be suggested in their report, to which I have not had access, and will, without doubt, receive such consideration on your part as it deserves.

Notwithstanding the commendable liberality exhibited by the people of the State in the support of schools, in my view we are deficient in one of the best, and which, ultimately, might be made one of the most economical agencies of education; that is, public town libraries accessible to all. In an economical view an expenditure for such purpose is not, like most expenditures for educational purposes, consumed by the use, and to be repeated annually, but it is permanent and serviceable for a succession of generations. It would furnish means of intellectual enjoyment in families, and thereby make home more attractive. The tendency of such well-selected library circulating among the youth of the town, would be to direct the tastes and habits of the young to substantial, solid and useful reading, and enable them to treasure up knowledge valuable in after life. It would furnish a class of reading consisting more of fact and less of fiction, and productive of a higher moral and intellectual culture than much of the reading that now attracts the attention of the young, which dissipates rather than cultivates and improves the mind. The gradual accumulation of such library in a town would scarcely be felt by the inhabitants, except by its wholesome influence and lasting benefit, to the old as well as the young. I think it is to be regretted that towns do not avail themselves of the enabling act authorizing them to establish such libraries. Whether any further legislation on this subject is advisable at this time I submit for your deliberate consideration.

I rejoice to see that the interest of agriculture, which has always been regarded as second to none in the State; an interest intimately identified with the prosperity of the State, and which must, at least for a long time to come, be the business and employment of the greater portion of our people, is enlisting increased interest and attention, not only among our people, but on the part of the Legislature. Our State is also rich in mineral wealth yet to be developed, and in water-power, affording abundant facilities for manufacturing purposes, not yet utilized. These interests have not been, and should not be, overlooked. The Board of Agriculture,

Manufacturers and Mining, recently established by the Legislature, it is hoped, will do much by the application of science to practical experience, and by other means to promote and develop these important industrial interests; and in this I trust the Board will be aided by all just and proper legislation.

I refer you to the report of the Trustees of the Reform School, and to the report of the Superintendent, for the history and operations of the school for the past two years, and for information as to its present condition. It is evident from these reports, and from other sources of information, that the school is in a prosperous condition, and that under its excellent management, it is fully answering the purpose of its creation as a reformatory institution, and as an effective agency in the police of the State. It is stated in the report of the trustees that, since the establishment of the school, several boys have been sent there convicted of minor, and often trifling offenses, that are so feeble-minded and idiotic as to be, in their opinion, incapable of committing crime, and incapable of receiving benefit by continuing there; and that, as the trustees have no power to discharge, except for thorough reformation, and as there can be no reform where no capacity to do wrong exists, they cannot discharge them. They ask that the law be so amended as to give the Trustees and Superintendent the power to discharge in such cases. I submit whether such power ought to be granted, except in connection with some other suitable provision for this class of unfortunate persons. It appears that the Legislature, at its last session, authorized the Trustees to purchase certain property named in the act—a lot with building and machinery—in their discretion, at an expense not exceeding \$15,000, for the purpose of the manufacture of chairs; that before any purchase was made, the building and machinery were burned, and that appropriation of \$15,000 remains untouched in the treasury. As to the question whether the purpose contemplated in the act appropriating that sum should still be carried out by the purchase of certain other property of like description, I refer you to the report of the Trustees, and also to the report of the Superintendent made to them. The propriety of making such purchase is urged by the Superintendent upon grounds of economy and profit to the State, by enabling the institution, by the labor of the boys, the inmates, to manufacture chairs entire, instead of simply weaving in the cane; and also upon the ground of making the school more efficient in its reformatory character, by teaching the inmates a trade that will afford them means of obtaining employment and gaining a livelihood, at the critical period of their lives when they leave the institution. I am not sufficiently informed to warrant the expression of an opinion on the subject, further than to recommend that it receive your consideration, and such action as your wisdom shall dictate.

The biennial reports of the Directors and Superintendent of the State Prison, as to its condition and management, show the financial affairs of the prison in good condition; and in this respect there seems to be a great improvement over that of former years. At the last session of the Legislature, on recommendation of the officers of the prison, an act was passed directing the Directors to construct a chapel in one of the buildings, and make such alterations and repairs of the old prison as were necessary for the better accommodation of the female convicts therein confined; and for these purposes they were authorized to appropriate so much of the surplus earnings of the prison as was necessary, not exceeding \$2,000. The reports show that the chapel has been constructed accordingly, and that the other repairs have not been made, on account of the insufficiency of the appropriation, and those repairs are again represented as being much needed for the convenience and comfort of the female prisoners confined there. I recommend that the necessary appropriation be made for that purpose. I call your attention to the remarks of the Directors in their report, in relation to “the impropriety of sentencing culprits for short terms on small offenses to such an institution as this. The main purpose of punishment is to prevent crime and reform the criminal. In order to accomplish this purpose, criminal laws must be punitive, but at the same time they ought to be reformatory as far as practicable. There are minor offenses for which the punishment prescribed is in the alternative, – fine, or imprisonment in the county jail, or in the State Prison, in the discretion of the court, depending on the circumstances of the particular case. In some of these cases, the milder punishment of fine or imprisonment in a county jail, proper for the purpose, would be sufficient, and answer all the purposes of punishment, and be much more likely to reform the offender than the fixing on him the infamy that attaches to a State Prison convict.

But our jails are places of detention of criminals of all grades and classes awaiting trial, and usually affording no means of separation of prisoners; the most abandoned and hardened criminals being turned in with those whose offense is of the lowest grade – committed, perhaps, more from weakness than depravity – thus

exposing the latter to the depraving influences of such associations. Such is generally the condition of our jails that a sentence to imprisonment in them is, practically, a sentence to idleness in a school of vice. If a fine is imposed, the consequence is often, from the poverty of the offender, the same, as it results in imprisonment till released by pardon. This same mischief also extends to cases of offenders imprisoned in the county jail for the most trifling offenses. Our jails are defective as a place of punishment, in not affording any means of employment to the prisoners. The very idleness to which they are condemned tends to vice and crime, while labor would be reformatory in its influence. It probably would not be practicable, at least not within the limit of reasonable expense, to convert all our county jails into work-houses, but they should be so constructed as to prevent the indiscriminate intercourse of prisoners and criminals of every grade.

But I have long been of the opinion that a work-house, to which prisoners from different parts of the State, convicted of certain minor offences might, under a limited discretion in courts of justice as to the place of punishment, be sentenced, would be of public benefit, and supply an existing defect in the means of the suppression of crime and the punishment and reform of criminals. Possibly the conversion of some one county jail into such work-house might subserve this purpose. I think the subject is worthy of your consideration.

The other biennial reports, which I have not had the opportunity of examining, will be before you for your consideration.

I trust that in the performance of the various duties devolving on you, both in investigating the past and providing for the future, that true public economy will be observed, which neither transcends, nor fails to supply the legitimate necessities of the State, and which will limit the session to the time necessary to do deliberately and well what the public good requires to be done.

ASAHIEL PECK.

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER, }  
MONTPELIER, Oct. 8, 1874.