

Inaugural address

of

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Inaugural Address

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives:

Elected and sworn to be Governor of the State, I humbly enter upon the duties of the office, impressed with the importance of the trust.

In so doing I would gratefully and appreciatingly acknowledge the honor conferred, craving the kind forbearance of all.

Good government depends upon wise laws faithfully executed.

We are assembled in regular biennial session to assist each other in encouraging such government in Vermont, and under Divine guidance let us enter upon the work of such an under taking.

UNITED STATES SENATOR

Among your duties will be the election of a United States Senator for the term of six years from the fourth day of March next, to succeed the Hon. Justin S. Morrill.

FINANCES

This is probably the most interesting subject, all in all, you will consider, and from time immemorial has been instinctively accorded first position among the message topics of my honored predecessors.

Receipts, disbursements, resources, and liabilities are words suggesting the ins, outs, reliability, and emergency of the exchequer.

They are the ways and means language of public financing; four words in the Treasurer's report, to which your most careful attention is directed, standing for revenue, appropriations, dependence, and credit.

The money supply now occupying so much thought invites an equally earnest consideration of its use, wherein lies its value.

In raising and appropriating the public moneys be just and prudent; avoid both extravagance and parsimony; keep the resources secure and the credit firm.

TAXATION.

Our revenue flows into the treasury from various sources and out in various ways. Instead of presenting to you a statement from the Treasurer's report, showing its different features, it seems better that you each examine it for yourselves. It is brief and able, rendering clearer the particular workings of the treasury, than any abridgment of it I can furnish you.

From the resources and liabilities given, you will be able to determine the State tax, additional to the other taxes, necessary to defray the expenses of the State the ensuing biennial term.

This tax should not be larger than was assessed in 1894, assuming list to be nearly or quite the same, and if upon re-adjustment, corporation taxes should be increased and special appropriations are kept at the minimum, so that ordinary expenses can be the expectation, a smaller tax will suffice. This calculation encounters the proverbial IF. It depends upon the work of the session, and before we reach the State tax question you will know by your own conduct how large it should be.

CORPORATION TAXES AND TAX COMMISSIONER'S REPORT.

Thirteen annual taxes have been collected under the corporation tax law; the first in 1883 amounting to \$196,678.51 and the last in 1895 amounting to \$376,723.04. The tax for the last biennial period was \$734,582.81, being \$42,351.62 more than for the preceding biennial period. These taxes, show a uniform increase, are cheerfully paid and are important to the State. They should be so assessed and collected as to deal

justly by the corporations paying them, and at the same time so as to realize for the State in proportion to the protection afforded. An inquiry into the equality of assessment is suggested as a proper investigation.

The assessment and collection of the corporation taxes, constituting nearly 75 per cent, of the State's revenue, is a very important official duty. The faithfulness with which the work is done signifies much to the treasury. Your attention is directed to the Commissioner's report for the information it affords concerning this source of income.

THE FIVE PER CENT. STATE TAXES.

These taxes are equalizers of the school and highway burdens in the different towns of the State. They are drafts upon the stronger in favor of the weaker. Steps in the direction of true democracy calculated to strengthen our education and improve our roads.

This plan for upbuilding the State, always acceptable to the poorer, is generally agreeable to the wealthier towns, for they well know any excess they pay, inures to the benefit of the State as a whole. All, believing in Vermont, recognize that doing it to the least is doing it to the greatest, and so welcome the 5 per cent. State taxes. Whether this step in the right direction should be lengthened is a question for you to decide. Road improvement can profitably use more money and incorporated school districts are reminders that the poorer communities have a right to equality in school burdens.

DOUBLE TAXATION.

The public burdens should be borne by all equally, according to what each taxpayer is worth, yet the grand list upon which taxes are extended does not rest upon such an equitable foundation; until it does there will be uneasiness among the people. The taxpayer who owes more than the appraisal of his personal estate, as the law now stands, pays taxes on his debts or on more than he is worth. Offsets against personal property in making the grand list are an acknowledgment that taxes should be paid upon the basis of solvent worth.

To illustrate: The debts of A. are the credits of B., and B. should pay taxes on these credits unless he is in turn a debtor. If A. cannot offset his debts against his property appraisals he pays taxes on more than he is worth. B. may hold credits secured on A's farm, the full appraisal of which goes into A.'s list. In this case the value for which the credit was given and the credit are both taxed.

B. should pay taxes on the credit, for A. pays him interest with which to do it, but A. should not pay taxes on the value part of the farm covered by the credit, because he pays interest to B. and owes for it besides.

It is conceded that this feature of our tax system is wrong, and that the parties burdened by it are entitled to relief. The indirect remedies heretofore proposed are at the best theoretical. Some of them have been suspected of making a bad matter worse. Remember, it is the debtor that should be relieved. If farm mortgage indebtedness wherever held were taxed against the mortgagee, the tax paid by the mortgagor and deducted by him in settling with the mortgagee and the mortgagor allowed offset against his real estate appraisal, the landed values of the State would pay taxes once and the payment would be by the right parties. Each, mortgagor and mortgagee, would then pay on what they respectively hold in the property. This would by short cut accomplish the desired relief, without changing materially, if in the least, the volume of the grand list of the State.

It is to be hoped you will give this subject your earnest attention and unless satisfied it is a wrong without a remedy, provide necessary legislation.

STATE EXPENSES.

Next in importance to income are expenditures.

A contented treasury must receive more than it disburses.

The income should be sufficient to meet the proper needs of the State. In representing the wishes of the people, you will be safe in avoiding new ways of expense and providing for existing ways with reasonable economy.

The biennial term just closed records an expense of \$1,140,097.56, being the largest in our history. The preceding term cost \$920,397.48 and the term preceding that cost \$1,031,710.92.

These are large biennial expenditures. They should be decreased rather than increased. The expenses of the State have gradually argummented during the last twenty-five years; so have our public gratuities and institutions. The increase of expenses I apprehend has been principally occasioned by the creation and maintainance of the multiplied institutions.

The Reform School, the House of Correction, the Soldiers' Home, the Waterbury Asylum, the Fish Hatchery, the State Board of Health, the Normal Schools, Donations to the Colleges, the Experiment Station, the Railroad Commission, the Grand Isle County Bridges, and the Gettysburg Monument are reminders, in part, of the consideration for which the people have exchanged their money.

To denominate such expenditures, extravagance is a misnomer. The State has value received and in most if not all instances, the investments were wise, patriotic, in the interests of better government and of humanity.

The money was in large part for higher improvements, which mark our progress and adorn our better civilization.

Without prejudice to the past or allowing it to influence the present, let us discriminately consider the various expenses of the State, and according to the times, fearlessly and fairly adjust each item.

Previous to 1880, our State tax averaged about 63 cents for the biennial term, and since it has averaged about 14 cents. The direct tax burdens to the people have not increased, and while we have expended more money it has been for what we needed.

STATE AUDITOR'S REPORT.

The State Auditor's concise and able report is an instructive bill of particulars, showing where and for what, the public money is used. It is not convenient in a message, to mention in detail, the various items accruing, for instance, under the head of court expenses, salaries and the numerous other classes of expense and the Auditor's report showing plainly what you ought to know upon this subject, fortunately, renders such a message unnecessary. I respectfully refer you to it, urging upon your attention, the business it presents, a study of which will assist in reaching an intelligent, economical action upon measures inviting money from the treasury. Your attention is especially directed to court expenses, which it is claimed, have increased without apparent reason. The fees paid by the State in State cases for the biennial period just closed, amounted to \$4,643 and for defending respondents \$9,826. A limitation placed upon these fees might do justice and make a saving.

Expenditures of all kinds are quite in your hands, yet you can depend upon my hearty cooperation in any efforts you make to keep the money flow from the treasury at "neap tide."

Special appropriations should indeed be very special to receive your sanction.

Small appropriations, incidental to State institutions and necessary to their preservation or more economical management, will be expected.

We are committed to care for our own, and an economical provision of a businesslike character, for all State institutions, is an evident duty.

In considering retrenchment ascertain, in the interest of the public welfare, what we can do without, and then do without all such things. Apply the same economy to public, as acting prudently, you would in private life to your own affairs, and the State will be conserved to the best of your ability.

ROADS AND THE STATE ROAD COMMISSION.

Good roads are an index of civilization and poor roads are a heavy tax upon any community. A general interest in road improvement exists throughout the States. Early in our history national appropriations were made for interstate turnpikes, then came railroad building, absorbing all thought concerning traveled ways, and now we are returning to first principles in which the better road figures conspicuously.

Vermont is interested in all her roads alike, and encouraged by the progress made it is hoped she will extend the system of permanent road improvement already so successfully begun. The 5 per cent State tax and any enlargement of it should be exclusively expended in aid of this system. Successful road improvement has been accomplished in other States through individual contribution from the locality to be directly benefited.

A measure authorizing competitive subscriptions from neighborhoods asking the State tax and awarding the tax to the locality offering the largest local contribution would carry out this thought, and would materially aid in realizing the object sought.

Expensive road building should be avoided and the minimum, not the maximum cost of a good road should be the guide in carrying out the reform.

Probably no one thing will attract temporary and permanent dwellers to the State more than good roads.

If the policy of permanent improvement is continued by means of State funds there should be a State supervision of their expenditure and perhaps this can not be provided for any better than to make a permanent State Road Commission, giving it more voice in determining the character and location of the reform. Regarding this subject nearer than almost any other to the material prosperity of the State it is consigned to your care.

RAILROADS AND RAILROAD COMMISSION.

For full particulars showing the condition, business and management of the railroads of the State, reference should be made to the able report of the Railroad Commissioners, where a full account is given of the different systems within the jurisdiction of the State.

The Railroad Commission, born of a right to supervise the doings of railroads, is now ten years old. Its powers are said to be too limited. It is old enough to speak through its record for itself. If it can be strengthened to render the people any better service than they now receive let it be so strengthened. Let it be made complete in all respects for doing in a fair, just way to all concerned, the most good. You will give this subject your attention and consider whether the railroads should not pay a portion of the expense of the Commission.

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE.

This Board is rendering faithful service along the different lines of work it conducts, and doing much good in various ways. Its meetings held in all parts of the State supply food for thought, awaken interest and quicken endeavor among the farmers. It is a State institution that goes about doing good. It has rendered an important service in furnishing statistical information to sellers and buyers of farms and summer tourists.

TUBERCULOSIS.

This dread disease among stock has created a deep interest and incurred not a little expense. The mystery of the disease and uncertainty of its treatment dwell so much in the unknown, that more than ordinary interest has centered in the methods employed to eradicate it.

The tests made upon which slaughters have been based are as convincing as experimental work can be, and undoubtedly point the way to extermination as clearly as present knowledge upon the subject is able to.

After examinations have covered the State, and should they not do so as soon as possible, whether invited or not, a more definite account of presence, progress and control of the disease can be kept. If the present work is in the right direction let it proceed until reduced to a system by which an accurate estimate can be made of what is being accomplished. The compensation for slaughters is perhaps as just as can be devised in such cases. The disease exposed by slaughters, in every instance, so far as reported, whatever it may be, is something common consent pronounces incompatible with healthy animals and healthy food.

This subject invites your attention that the public and the individual may be better satisfied with and feel more secure in what is being done. The slaughters during the last biennial period cost the State \$20,000.

STATE BOARD OF HEALTH.

The work of this Board should not be overlooked nor its needs neglected. That its report will be consulted and the importance of its duties appreciated is the common desire of an interested people.

SOLDIER'S HOME.

This institution, true to its name, is a home for the indigent veteran of the late war. It is filled, the greater part of the time, with those who shared the dangers, endured the hardships of that gigantic struggle and have grown old, feeble and poor. The generosity of a grateful people in 1884 determined at whatever cost the brave preservers of the union, being needy, should have an alternative between a home and the poor house. This determination stands upon the records of State legislation, a monument of patriotic gratitude, to the soldiers of that war, whether dead or living, rich or poor. I need not suggest that you consider the needs of this institution in the same spirit that has always characterized Vermont's bearing towards the old soldier.

INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.

This institution, in reality a school, such a blessing to so many boys and girls, benefits the State in more ways than at a glance appear. It restrains youthful wanderings, and fits for men and women the wanderers. It discharges its inmates higher in the scale of being than it receives them. Its purpose and management are to be commended. Your attention is directed to the report of the trustees and the recommendations therein contained as to the needs of the school.

STATE PRISON.

This institution having changed the contract for its labor and provided new machinery incident to the change, expects hereafter to be self-sustaining, a desirable condition for a penal institution to enjoy, calling for congratulations to State and management. A small farm utilizing a certain class of the prison labor and a keeper's dwelling should be added to the property of this institution. Such additions would save the State more than the interest on their cost.

HOUSE OF CORRECTION.

The much needed improvements having been accomplished within the appropriation authorizing them; this institution is now a credit to the State.

Short terms of imprisonment prevent as profitable employment of its labor as might be made under longer terms. The earnings, however, compare favorably with similar institutions in other States.

The return by the directors of about \$4,000, the unexpended portion of the appropriation of 1894, is a welcome surprise to the treasury.

PRISON REFORM.

The criminals of a penal institution should be classified according to previous life, offence committed and general character of the individual; which suggests putting prison life under reformatory discipline, so that the inmate will be a better person at discharge than at commitment. The principal being that the State has the criminal in charge simply to secure the public against his vicious tendencies while he is being punished, and not to hinder in any way the development of his better nature and growth in manhood; and in a broader sense that he should, while restrained, be subjected to moral influences so that he will be nearer to, if not absolutely in, a better life when entitled to his liberty. Vermont has hardly kept pace with the other States in legislation, looking to a return of those who have erred to the paths of good citizenship.

If a move should be made in this direction I am sure I need not bespeak at your hands its careful consideration.

THE ASYLUM.

The Waterbury Asylum is the most important of our State institutions. In design and completion it is a model. Humanely and economically administered it is a credit to the State. It has cost about \$350,000, and being exclusively under State control will accomplish an interesting saving in the care of our insane poor.

Under the Poland pauper law, the expense of this unfortunate class became a State burden instead of a subdivided one among the several towns.

This centralization of the burden tends to an equalization of it, and is without objection unless it multiplies the number of patients.

The records at Waterbury casually observed do not show such a tendency. With it in view to protect the Asylum against such possible imposition, I recommend that you investigate this subject and act according to the information your investigation affords. The inmates can be more humanely cared for at this institution with less expense and greater security to society than by the towns.

It is somewhat in the nature of a common cause to provide for the insane poor, which the State is as much interested in as the town. Patients whose condition still invites treatment and those beyond the reach of such a benefit should remain in the asylum, the former class that they may be cured and the latter that the close of an unfortunate life may be made as comfortable as possible. The insane poor of the State should be cared for at the asylum.

SAVINGS BANKS AND TRUST COMPANIES.

These institutions are reported in good condition. Deposit withdrawals have increased of late under the menace to financial security occasioned by political discussion. Trusting the prayer of the people will be answered soon, this disturbance is not expected to last long.

THE PROHIBITORY LAW.

For nearly half a century prohibition has been an omnipresent theme with the people of Vermont, and a study of temperance has become a feature of our educational system. It has stood and stands a bulwark between brutality and home, order and riot, the better and the worse in all things. The prohibitory law has occupied a conspicuous place upon our statutes and signally aided the cause of temperance.

It has not exterminated from our society all disposition to violate its provisions, nor does any law destroy the germ of transgression but it has to a very satisfactory extent restrained the offender, making rum selling unprofitable and a reproach. Violations are the exception and confined mostly to the larger places.

The general temperance of our people is superior to that of any sister State. Our prohibitory law insures a better home for the laboring man and his family here in Vermont than in any other community of its size on the face of the earth.

We have reason to congratulate ourselves upon many things but upon no one thing more than the character which has become a part of our life since prohibition has guarded the avenues of our society.

With these and other considerations in full view we are confronted by the usual biennial inquiry, shall the prohibitory law make way for high license, or shall the law be more carefully enforced? Among the things clear to judgment and conscience is the demand for a more careful, diligent, day and night, everywhere present enforcement of the law.

Such attention should be given the subject as to render it very inconvenient if not impossible to indulge in violation.

Law, however good, not enforced, becomes bad, and soon imparts its character to the people enacting it. The wisdom of the fathers, traceable in our society and our institutions, urges earnest enforcement of all our laws.

Public sentiment in many localities regards the enforcement of the prohibitory law differently from the enforcement of other law, and in my opinion you should provide better pay to the officers called upon to enforce it.

Provide in such way as commends itself to your discretion a better enforcement of this law or public expectation will be disappointed.

Salary the municipal trier and compensate the prosecuting officer according to the fruits of his labor. If prosecuting officers were paid special fees, under a well-regulated system, in cases arising under the prohibitory law, the county courts approving semi-annually their accounts, better enforcement might follow.

Officers cannot nurse crime in Vermont for the fees derivable from prosecuting it unless the people are willing. Interest the prosecuting officer and make it an object for him to do his work, if you would be sure of the best service. Pursuing and punishing crime as a work of love cannot always be relied upon.

EDUCATION.

The strength of our State is in the character of our people, which is determined by our education. The schools are the moulding sand in which the common mind is formed. The best school is none too good. The district school, has outlived its early usefulness, of which we have reason to be proud, entered a transition process, resulting in the present town system, with which some are yet dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction with the district system arose from natural causes, and were a return made to that system the same dissatisfaction would recur. The reasons for the success of the system are no longer a part of our life, and we must use some new plan for conducting our schools. Originally opposed to town schools, yet remembering the disadvantages of the old district and intermediate system, I believe the existing law as good as any change would afford. It should be borne in mind, though, that the incorporated districts prevent in towns where they exist a fair application of the town system. If concessions could be arranged to obviate these complaints contentment might be expected.

COLLEGE.

The colleges are successfully pursuing their lines of work. The University at Burlington reports a prosperous condition and so does the college at Middlebury. Norwich University is progressive. Its Increasing attendance speaks well for its disciplines and the proficiency of its work. The Agricultural College and Experiment Station are conducting a work in which the agricultural classes are becoming more and more interested.

NORMAL SCHOOLS.

These schools in the report of the Commission appointed by joint resolution, number 346, General Assembly 1894, are presented to your consideration for such action as in your judgment suits the facts.

The people wish every school in the State well, and implicitly trust to your wisdom as their representatives, in so disposing of this important question as to not impair the usefulness of our educational system and to so bestow or withhold their money in the premises as to accomplish, in the interest of education, the most good for the greatest number.

FISH AND GAME.

Your attention is directed to the report of the Fish and Game Commissioner and Superintendent of the Hatchery. It appears that the State has an interesting property in this line, costing already quite a little money, and promising to cost more. The fish and game of Vermont properly protected constitute a property of general value to the people. These interests should be fostered.

For a knowledge at the needs in this direction see the recommendations and estimates in the reports referred to.

UNIFORMITY OF LAWS.

Hon. Alfred A. Hall of St. Albans, appointed by my predecessor, Commissioner upon the Uniformity of Laws, has reported his doings pursuant to such an appointment. His commission having expired, if further work in this direction is desired, your action in the matter will be necessary. Uniformity in the laws of the several States as more particularly pointed out in the Commissioner's report is undoubtedly desirable, and can be completed now with as little expense as any other time.

FIRE MARSHAL.

It is requested that an office be created to discover the origin of fires consuming property covered by insurance. Such detective officer would supply a need in which the people and their insurance companies are

mutually interested. His work would lessen the moral hazard of fire insurance risks and accomplish a saving to the companies and a lower rate to the policy holders. Whether it would do this or not, it has the moral recommend of being a proper move to expose and punish a crime somewhat common. A measure creating such an office, the expense to be borne equally or in such proportion as you might consider just by the insurance companies and the State, would receive my approval.

ATTORNEY GENERAL.

It is a very general opinion that the office of an Attorney General would aid the administration of the State's affairs and accomplish an annual saving to the Treasury. I recommend that you inquire into the cost to the State of counsel in prosecuting State cases, and doing other State business for the purpose of determining whether such an office cannot be wisely authorized. If such an office can be created within the cost of what is now paid by the State for legal services, I recommend the proposition to your favorable consideration.

COMMISSIONS.

Commissions or boards are frequently created designed to assist the service in special ways which generally cost much more than expected.

When authorized they should be carefully limited as to expense to the State, so that thousands of dollars are not entailed unawares upon the public expenditures where hundreds are contemplated. Too much care cannot be exercised in this direction.

NATIONAL GUARD.

Our militia consists of twelve companies and a battery of four pieces. Its discipline and efficiency are commendable.

Though the guard is not large, yet military organization being expensive, it is all in these times the State can afford. The officers and men make a very considerable sacrifice in time and money in affording us what we have in this respect. What they receive does not make them whole, so the people should thank them for the patriotism and public spirit they contribute towards the military establishment of the State.

The permanent camp ground near Fort Ethan Allen when completed should accomplish a saving in the current expenses of the militia, and prove conducive to the better equipment of the organization.

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS.

Believing the Waterbury Asylum sufficient to accommodate all our insane poor, and that the trustees and physicians of the institution can properly supervise its administration, I recommend a repeal of the law authorizing commitments to the Brattleboro Retreat, and that you abolish the Board of Supervisors for the Insane.

The pay of the State boards varies from three to eight dollars a day and I recommend that you consider this subject with a view to establish a more uniform compensation, according to the importance of each board and the service rendered by them respectively.

I recommend that the law authorizing the appointment of Railroad Commissioners be amended and the official term of the members of the commission made to expire so that one only will retire from office each biennial period.

VERMONT.

Vermont first, after the historic thirteen, would have been one of a more historic fourteen if the sturdy independence and Puritan patriotism of her early manhood had been properly recognized.

Her sisterhood in the family of States has been harmonious and progressive. By common consent, she occupies a position in the honored galaxy constantly in sight. This prominence is the pride of our people. The assembled wisdom and virtue has always faithfully guarded our honor and inspired our progress. May the legislature of 1896 promote this excellence, so bravely given by the fathers and jealously fostered by

intervening generations. May our associated faithfulness and prayerful endeavor hand unimpaired to our successors this expectation of continuing honor.

CONCLUSION.

Unless Thanksgiving fails to adjourn your deliberations, in an even forty days you will conclude your labors; deduct for an adjournment to vote the presidential ticket and thirty-six or seven working days are the possible length of the session.

When in the exercise of a constitutional prerogative, to outline the business of the session, I have, consulting brevity and abridgment, felt compelled to present thirty or more different subjects, each one of which may have as many or more ramifications, and that you too may have many business matters to offer, I am reminded that the session is short.

When, too, judging by former sessions, I recall the occasional adjournments suggesting a probable ten or twelve days during the session, and that your respective bodies will patiently entertain and pass upon the many corporation measures, the subject matter of which can as well for all concerned be incorporated under the statutes, I am still more forcibly admonished of the shortness of time in which to do so much.

When also it appears that it costs the State fully twelve hundred dollars for every working day, three hundred dollars for every hour and five dollars for every minute, I am sensible of the value of our time.

Therefore I would earnestly recommend:

1st. That all bills be introduced on or before the twenty-fifth day of the session, and that such day be determined early by resolution, after which no new business can be offered.

2nd. That your respective bodies refuse to entertain any corporation measure, the subject matter of which can be incorporated under the statutes.

3rd. That you keep adjournments at the minimum and make them all depend upon some common necessity, bearing in mind that every day of unnecessary adjournment is equivalent to a useless appropriation of twelve hundred dollars from the treasury.

4th. That you begin now, not delay till the closing days of the session, to prepare the business to be considered, so that a better system will attend and assist your labors.

The constitution wisely requires the executive branch, to prepare and present at the opening of the session, its business suggestions, and the legislative branch will find it of great economic advantage to follow the spirit of this requirement so far as practicable in its work.

These recommendations observed and the business of the session is under better system, will receive more careful attention, resulting in more mature enactments and last but not least the rush incident to the last days of the session and especially the jostling confusion of the last night during the weary hours of which the most important measures are frequently considered will be happily avoided.

Impressed with the sense that the time of the session cannot be too carefully accounted for to the State and that our good name for accurate laws cannot be too sacredly guarded, I urge as your present help, the same patriotic purity of purpose and wise discrimination that has from the foundation of our government so kindly led our people.

JOSIAH GROUT.