

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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CAUSES OF DEPENDENCE

Here are the residents and staff of the Orleans County House around 1900 pictured with Varnum Ludington, Superintendent of the Poor with his wife in the foreground. In a clerk's book entitled Record of Inmates, Orleans County Almshouse, Pursuant to the Provisions of Chapter 225, Laws of 1896, we can find the name of every resident who lived at the County House up until 1933. There are 1519 names inscribed in the clerk's book. Information on each person includes age, civil state, last residence, parents, birthplace, occupation, education, color, religion, habits, and so on, including cause of dependence. The two most common reasons for dependence were intemperance and old age. However, here below is a compiled listing of other causes:cripple,chronic alcoholism,feeble minded, one arm off, idiot, blindness, paralysis of limbs, varicose veins, fell from a load of hay, epileptic fits, acute alcoholism, sick and unable to work, dislocation of hip, rheumatism, no home, pregnancy, sickness has asthma, fractured skull, a baby and no home, crushed foot by cars, stroke of apoplexy, severe headache, mal-nutrition, fingers cut off in buzzsaw, tuberculosis, plurisey, dropsey with Brights, Locomotor Ataxia, unable to talk-very sleepy-this young man cannot tell where he came from or where he wants to go.

Lumbago, Typhoid fever, stone cutter's consumption, no home is deaf, rheumatism, bruised back - fell from apple tree, parents cannot provide, bunch on face, can't live with husband, frozen hands, bladder trouble, old age - demented, sugar diabetes, no home vagrant, injured on the B L & R, blood poison, fractured spine, throat cut (suicide), family have the measles, pneumonia, paralysis, deaf and dumb no home, skull wound - badly injured by the breaking of derick while working in Fancher & Robinson Quarry.

Razor wound left arm, no support from husband, pregnancy out of wedlock, mutilated hands, no one to care for her, bad thumb, bad eyes, destitute - no home, insanity, bullet wound, venereal disease, cancer, attempted suicide, mental defection, ulcers on leg, drink, shock, drugs, senility and finally bad business management. To all that the only thing which can be added is County Your Blessings.

As I perused that old clerk's book I thought about those poor unfortunates of humanity, some now in unmarked graves, and how as Ingersoll so aptly put "...go down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust." Indeed, were it not for this record the existance of some of these people would never be known. It brought to mind this rhymed chronicle of Norman Dukes by Master Wace which holds a basic truth.

"All things to nothingness descend,
Grow old and die and meet their end;
Man dies, iron rusts, wood goes decayed,
Towers fall, walls crumble, roses fade
Nor long shall any name resound
Beyond the grave, unless't be found
In some clerk's book; it is the pen
Gives immortality to men."