

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

BOARD OF VISITORS

OF THE

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY,

MADE TO

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

FOR

THE YEAR 1874.



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1874.

REPORT.

WEST POINT, *June*, 1874.

SIR: The Board of Visitors appointed to attend the annual examination of the Military Academy at West Point have performed that duty, and beg leave to submit the following report:

SUB-COMMITTEES.

The different subjects to be investigated by the board were promptly referred to appropriate committees, and have received all the attention that the brief time at their command permitted. The report will naturally follow the division of labor which controlled the apportionment of the various committees.

DISCIPLINE.

The discipline of the Academy is austere, but free from passion, steady, and carefully considered. It is administered by the superintendent and commandant with justice and benevolence, and with anxious solicitude for the interests of the cadets. It is believed that the discipline of the Academy has never been higher than it is to-day, and that the corps of cadets has never reached a greater state of efficiency. How far the austerity by which this discipline is characterized can be safely relaxed is a question upon which the board does not feel competent to express a decided opinion, but thinks it wiser to leave the matter for the consideration of the humane, experienced, and very able officers to whom the management of the Military Academy is intrusted.

The mess-hall, kitchen, bakery, and store-rooms were found to be in excellent condition. The table-linen and table-furniture are very clean and well ordered. It is believed that the food supplied to the cadets has been improved in quality during the last two or three years, but it is the opinion of the board that there is still great room for improvement; that the diet-list should be revised and varied, and that, even at some additional cost, the meal of the cadets should be made more acceptable. More attendants are needed in the mess-hall, and the method of serving the food might be altered with manifest advantage.

The visitors were very much gratified to learn that the barbarous custom of "hazing" has been suppressed by the strong hand of the authorities, and they confidently hope that no future relaxation of discipline in this direction will tolerate its revival.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND FINANCE.

The public buildings at West Point are generally in good condition and well preserved. The edifice now used as a hospital is badly ventilated, and much too small for the use to which it is devoted. It is therefore recommended that the new hospital in process of construction be finished as rapidly as possible, and that large and commodious piazzas be added, for the purpose of affording to the invalids ample facilities for exercise and recreation. The board is of the opinion that the entire cost of the new building, including foundation and preparation of the grounds, ought not to exceed the sum of \$60,000. It is further recommended that the hospital, when completed, shall be used exclusively for hospital purposes, and in no case for families or officers' quarters.

The building now used as a store-house for the cadets is an old wooden structure, in daily danger of being destroyed by fire. The goods stored therein are the property of the cadets, and the loss would be theirs if the house and its contents were consumed. The board recommends the erection of a new brick store-house, and that the sum of \$5,000 be appropriated for that purpose. The school-house in which instruction is given to the children of men employed at the post is not sufficiently large to furnish the needed accommodation, and it is recommended that the sum of \$5,000 be appropriated for the construction of a suitable building. The visitors further recommend that the sum of \$10,000 be appropriated to complete the drainage and sewerage of officers' quarters. This is a sanitary improvement which is imperatively demanded, and there should be no unnecessary delay in perfecting the work already commenced. The board also recommends that additions be made to the band stationed at this post. It is the only band connected with the Army which is provided for by law, and it should be made to correspond in its character and quality with the other appointments of the Military Academy.

EDUCATION.

The board are of the opinion that the methods of instruction pursued by the faithful and competent instructors of the institution are admirably adapted to secure thorough study and exact knowledge. The classes are divided into small sections, so that the teacher can carefully test at each recitation the familiarity of the cadet with the prescribed lesson. Sufficient time is invariably allowed for a complete comprehension of the subject, and the indolent student cannot conceal his want of preparation, while the diligent pupil has abundant opportunity to show the results of conscientious study. It naturally follows that while some of the cadets acquire a perfect mastery of their lessons, the less successful students, in most cases, display a very considerable knowledge of the branches in which instruction is given. If a cadet is pronounced deficient in any department of study, it is only when the

patient toil of the teacher with this particular pupil has failed to awaken his ambition, or to stimulate his love of study, or when the capacity of the cadet is unequal to the prescribed standard. No cadet is ever the victim of neglect or oversight.

The examinations of the first and second classes satisfied the board that a very large proportion of those cadets who were in the lowest sections had acquired a creditable knowledge of the studies in which they had received instruction. While the difference in natural ability and in persevering industry must always separate by a wide interval the highest from the lowest scholars, it is believed that no cadet can receive his diploma who is not qualified to become a serviceable officer and a valuable citizen.

In arranging the curriculum of study, and in devising the best mode of imparting instruction, it should always be borne in mind that the Military Academy at West Point is expected to contribute annually, hereafter, from fifty to seventy-five young men to one of the most important and distinguished professions in our republic. Its graduates are to command and influence bodies of men, and as they grow older will be the companions and models of their juniors in the service. Those of them who shall be conspicuous and successful in time of war, may be called by their fellow-citizens to occupy responsible positions in the civil service of their country. They are the wards of the nation. They are withdrawn from the control and guidance of their parents at an early age, and the entire employment of their time until manhood is rigidly prescribed by public authority. A most serious responsibility is thus assumed, and, whether we consider the possible future of the cadet in an exalted civil station or his more probable career as a member of the military profession, it is evident that he ought not to be transformed into a mere machine, fitted only to accomplish with unvarying precision a definite and distinct object. It should rather be the aim of the Military Academy to add to those habits of exact discipline and of constant subordination to rightful authority which constitute the indispensable groundwork of military education, a culture as broad and a scholarship as generous as are compatible with the resources of the institution and with the time allotted to instruction within its walls. The visitors, therefore, recognizing the importance of a wider and more varied culture in literature and in general knowledge than is contemplated by the existing course, and not being entirely agreed as to the best mode of changing the curriculum at the expense of the branches now pursued, wish to indicate their sense of the value of the study of law and of the French and Spanish languages as tending to the attainment of the desired result, and to express the hope that the time devoted to these departments will not be abridged.

In the opinion of the board, it is desirable that the law now in force should be so far modified as to require that candidates for admission to

the Military Academy should not be younger than eighteen or older than twenty-one years of age.

The board cannot too highly commend the proficiency displayed by the cadets in what may be called the more practical departments of military education. The cavalry, battalion, and skirmish drills, and the practice with the siege, sea-coast, mortar, and howitzer batteries, afforded most gratifying evidence of the fidelity of the instructors and of the aptness and industry of the cadets.

In conclusion, the visitors desire to record their grateful appreciation of the uniform courtesy which was extended to them by the officers of the Academy. The labor of inspection and examination was materially lightened by the cordial co-operation of superintendent, commandant, and instructors, and every possible facility was cheerfully afforded which could enable the visitors to perform the duties assigned to them in as thorough a manner as their want of training for the task and the inadequate time at their disposal permitted.

FRANCIS WAYLAND, *of Connecticut,*

President of the Board.

A. B. KENDIG, *of Iowa, Secretary of the Board.*

J. D. CAMERON, *of Pennsylvania.*

C. S. HAMILTON, *of Wisconsin.*

THOMAS J. MORGAN, *of Nebraska.*

C. R. P. RODGERS, *of U. S. Navy.*

O. P. TEMPLE, *of Tennessee.*

GEO. R. DENNIS, *Senator from Maryland.*

TIMOTHY O. HOWE, *Senator from Wisconsin.*

ROBERT S. HALE, *Representative from New York.*

GEO. F. HOAR, *Representative from Massachusetts.*

PIERCE M. B. YOUNG, *Representative from Georgia.*

Hon. WM. W. BELKNAP,

Secretary of War.