

**THE DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC CHARITIES OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK:
A STATEMENT OF FACTS**

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The Department of Public Charities of the City of New York: A Statement of Facts by Various

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VARIOUS

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PUBLIC CHARITIES OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK:
A STATEMENT OF FACTS**



BUILDINGS OF DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC CHARITIES AT SOUTH END BLACKWELLS ISLAND, APRIL, 1908
CITY HOSPITAL NURSES' HOME ADULTON TO NURSES' HOME
MATERNITY HOSPITAL.

THE DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC CHARITIES
OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK

A STATEMENT OF FACTS

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NOTE

This pamphlet is the second in a series of pamphlets upon the principal city departments. The first of these, upon the Department of Health, was published in March, 1903. The pamphlets are not campaign documents. The desire of The City Club is to present facts without reference to their political effect, and to lay before the citizens a plain statement of what each department is, and how it does its work. The contrast between the present administration and that which immediately preceded it resides in the facts, and is unavoidable.

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THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC CHARITIES

INTRODUCTION

The work of the department of charities is constantly caring for more than eight thousand of the city's destitute, appeals to the popular mind. The slightest hint of abuses in the department has always served to call forth public protest. The people will not countenance neglect and cruelty in the charitable institutions of the city. But serious abuses have existed in the past, and popular ignorance of the conditions has permitted them to continue. For such abuses publicity is the certain remedy. Publicity as to all branches of the city government is necessary for the best results. The citizen has a right to know how public officers are spending his money and serving his interests. The worst administration will be better, if the people know what it is doing; the best administration will be stimulated by popular approval or by popular criticism based upon popular knowledge. But the city's business has become so vast and complicated that the citizen unaided can not follow intelligently the work of even one department. This pamphlet is an attempt to present the facts which will enable the citizen to understand the work of the department of charities, and which will prepare him to form an intelligent opinion of the administration of the department from time to time in the future.

In return from the large sums that it pays for the support of its public charities, the city should demand an honest and judicious administration which will protect the inmates of its many institutions from abuse, and make the conditions under which they live endurable. To quote the words used by Mayor Strong in his message to the board of aldermen on January 26th, 1897: "In a city the size of New York the charitable institutions should form a model for the entire country. It is not too much to say that a city can well be judged for its advancement materially and socially according to the degree of care given to its poor and unfortunate. It is not necessary that the city's charitable institutions should furnish luxurious accommodations or entail a profligate expenditure of money. It is desirable that the hospitals should be able to take care of the

"city's indigent sick, and furnish medical treatment and accommodations consistent with the most advanced science and the greatest progress in municipal affairs."

By an act passed on April 19th, 1798, five commissioners to be called the commissioners of the almshouse were appointed to have charge of the city's charities, consisting of the almshouse and "Bel Vue Hospital." In 1800 the number of these commissioners was reduced to three, and these were subsequently replaced by a single commissioner. An act passed by the legislature in 1849 abolished the office of commissioner of the almshouse, and established a board of ten governors of the almshouse, elected by the electors of the city. The number of these governors was changed from time to time. By a law passed on April 17th, 1860, the department of public charities and correction was created to take over the functions of the governors of the almshouse. On January 1st, 1896, the correctional institutions, including the penitentiary, the workhouse, the city prison (familiarly known as the Tombs), and the five district prisons, were separated from the charitable institutions, and placed in the new department, of correction. On February 28th, 1896, the New York City Asylums for the Insane, with 6,800 inmates, were transferred from the department of charities to the control of the board of managers of the Manhattan State Hospital.

The public charities of the City of Brooklyn were under the management of officers of Kings County. Before 1838 the charitable institutions of the county were administered by overseers of the poor and justices of the peace. Acts passed by the legislature in 1838 and 1847 authorized the election of county superintendents of the poor. An act passed in 1858 divided Kings County into five districts, a superintendent of the poor to be elected in each district.

The superintendents of the poor were succeeded in 1870 by the three commissioners of charities of Kings County, who were elected as provided in the law creating the new department. The election of commissioners continued until 1880, when a law was passed to provide for the appointment of three "commissioners of charities and correction of Kings County," two to be appointed by the president pro-tem. of the board of county supervisors and one by the supervisor at large of Kings County. Subsequently, and until the creation of the Greater New York, the appointment of commissioners was made solely by the supervisor at large.