

FORAGING ON THE STATE

Bold Raids Being Made on the State Funds by Fusion Officials.

PAID FOR SERVICES NOT RENDERED

How High Up Officials Have Promoted Treasury Raids—Fresh Bread for Officials and State Bread for Inmates.

BEATRICE, Neb., Aug. 6.—Last week's report concerning the management of the State Institution for Feeble Minded Youth at this place only gave a brief recital of the facts.

FORAGING ON THE STATE.

Not content with placing an army of incompetents on the payroll, there is positive evidence that, not only have favorites been permitted to furnish their relatives with bed and board, but they have been permitted to draw money from the public treasury for services never rendered.

He also informed the governor that he did not believe Miss Keating would do such a thing. "Well," said the governor, "just send her a voucher made out for the full amount and see what she will do."

"BEATRICE, Neb., Oct. 7, 1899. Hon. J. J. Sullivan. My Dear Sir—I learned from some sources that you are not satisfied with the disposition of Miss Abigail Keating. Your letter of inquiry to me a short time ago was courteously and kindly answered."

"At the same time he mailed a voucher signed in blank to Miss Keating, appended to which was the following caustic letter:

"BEATRICE, Neb., Oct. 17, 1899. Miss Abigail Keating: As I understand there has been some talk as to the amount due you from this institution, I have sent out vouchers for you to fill out for time served at this institution and on duty. You will fill out the same and swear to them. I trust that you will observe that it is to be a matter of record, and also, that the manner in which you left the institution is known to each and all. In my dealing with the state of Nebraska I observe the same rule that I would in dealing with individuals. That you resigned your position here the 31st day of August, 1899, and turned over the keys of your voluntary act, goes without dispute. I regret very much that any person of our party of the state of Nebraska would ask me to sign an act of record, which is not a prudent. I signed the voucher only on the back, expecting you to fill out for time served. Yours respectfully,

One week afterwards Superintendent Lang received the following reply from Judge Sullivan, written from Columbus, Neb., on a letterhead of the supreme court:

SUPREME COURT OF NEBRASKA.

COLUMBUS, Oct. 13, 1899.

Dr. B. F. LANG. Dear Sir—Your favor of recent date received. My views of the matter about which you write me are these: Miss Keating was matron of the institution during August. She was ready and willing to do the work incident to the position and was therefore, legally and morally entitled to receive the salary. Retaining that I am obliged to differ with regard to the justice of her claim, I remain, very truly yours,

J. J. SULLIVAN. Miss Keating signed the voucher for the full month, swore to it, and returned it to Superintendent Lang to be forwarded to Lincoln. Superintendent Lang refused to have anything to do with it and sent it back to her. She then sent it to Lincoln, but there must have been quite a wrangle over it, as it was not allowed until October 30th and was not paid until November 27th. (See Voucher B. 40803.) Appended to the voucher is a letter from Governor Poynter to Auditor Cornell under date of November 23, in which the governor says:

"So far as I am informed Miss Keating was matron at Beatrice and entitled to her full salary until September 1. Evidently a mistake has been made in allowing Miss Keating a voucher for salary from August 1st to August 8th, and then afterwards allowing her a full month for August. She should be allowed for her full month for August, but not double allowance for part of the month."

Neither is this the only instance wherein the state treasury has been looted by salary grabs of this nature. Under the superintendency of Dr. Sprague, who preceded Dr. Lang, a henchman of the fusionists, one C. W. Phelps, was steward. He was of a charitable turn of mind, especially in dealing with himeself. The first thing he did was to gather remnants of a large family around him at the institute and feed them at the expense of the state. At times, the Phelps family was well represented at the board. The number is variously estimated at from five to thirteen, the records of the institute being in such shape that nothing definite can be learned as to the number of people outside the inmates living there at the expense of the state. True to tradition, Phelps became obstreperous, refused to obey the superintendent, and, after a period of months, during which time he kept the institution in turmoil, he abdicated. He was a hold-over from the Holcomb administration, and his only recommendation was that he needed the position to support his family.

Shortly after Poynter entered upon the discharge of his duties Dr. Sprague went to him and laid the Phelps case in his hands. Poynter told him he had no interest in Phelps any more than in thousands of other men, and that if Phelps was a disturbing character he should be summarily dismissed. Relying on this, Dr. Sprague gave Phelps thirty days notice to quit the institution. Phelps paid no attention to the notice. The first notice was given March 1st. On the last day of March, seeing that Phelps had taken no action towards moving his effects, Dr. Sprague gave him a written notice announcing his dismissal. This notice Phelps took to the governor, and, though having authorized Dr. Sprague to remove Phelps, Governor Poynter, for some unknown reason, turned a complete mercantile, and instead of upholding the superintendent, told Phelps to return to the institution and stay there. He was relieved of his duties on the last day of March, but stayed at the institute with his family until June 15th, at which time both he and Dr. Sprague retired. Having nothing but spare time on his hands, Phelps turned his attention to creating discord, going among the employees and telling them that they might with impunity disobey the orders of the superintendent, that he had a "pull" with Governor Poynter and would back them up. When the change came and Phelps had to go perfect bedlam reigned. However, since April 1st, Phelps' salary had been held up. He had performed no services and was entitled to no pay. But he got his pay, and like the Keating case, it was through the instrumentality of Governor Poynter. Dr. Sprague resisted payment of the claim, protested that Phelps had not worked at the institute and was therefore not entitled to draw any pay, and on learning that Governor Poynter was aiding Phelps in his effort to get the money, filed with the auditor a sworn statement (September 13th) to the effect that he discharged Phelps April 1st, and that from that date until June 15th Phelps was neither steward nor employed in any capacity at the institute. That he (Sprague) did not withdraw any request on the governor for the discharge of Phelps, nor consent to his remaining. That he made no request on the governor to discharge him for he discharged himself, as under the law as interpreted by Holcomb and the State Board, he had a right and the authority to do. In the face of this, Governor Poynter wrote the following letter to Auditor Cornell, being careful, however, not to make oath to it:

"I hereby certify that Mr. C. W. Phelps was steward of the institute at Beatrice until June 29, 1899. Prior to that time, Dr. Sprague, the superintendent, requested the removal of Phelps from the stewardship, but subsequently withdrew the request and agreed with me that Mr. Phelps should be retained, and he was retained until June 29th."

"W. A. POYNTER, Governor." Here it is, one official under oath declares that Phelps was discharged April 1st and another "certifies" that he was not. The one who made the oath was at the institute and in charge of it, and certainly ought to speak advisedly. The other was at the capitol at Lincoln, forty miles away, and had no way of knowing the facts other than by hearsay. There is

inconsistency in the statements of the two men. Sprague says under oath that Phelps did not perform the services for which he wanted pay, that he never consented to Phelps remaining and that he never recalled his request for removal. Poynter "certifies" that he did.

At any rate Poynter and Phelps carried the day and Phelps, in addition to living with several of his family at the institute and doing nothing for nearly three months, was allowed and paid \$222.21, the full salary for that time. (See Voucher B. 36462.)

OUTRAGE ON TAXPAYERS.

Perhaps one of the most shameful outrages that has been perpetrated on the taxpayers of the state by the fusion agency is the maintenance of the name of Mrs. Thomas upon the payroll of the state. Mrs. Thomas has her name on the payroll because, and only because, she is the mother of State Oil Inspector Sprecher, who is reputed to be Governor Poynter's most trusted orderly. She is a woman who has crossed the meridian of life, being about 60 years of age. She has held the position of matron, first at Lincoln, then at Norfolk, and was from Norfolk transferred to Beatrice.

At Beatrice she stubbornly refused to perform any of the duties incident to the position, and the duties of matron are being performed by the wife of the superintendent, who draws a salary of \$25 per month. Thus, two persons are on the payroll for the same office, and the state pays \$91.66 per month, simply that the mother of a leading fusion politician may have her name on the payroll and live in luxury. The wife of the superintendent is not envious of her position and, according to her own words, she is "forced to do the work in order to prevent disease, sickness and death among the inmates as a result of filth and uncleanness, as Matron Thomas refuses to perform the duties." Ever since she has been at the institute at Beatrice she has, with her 13-year-old daughter, lived luxuriantly in apartments at the institute, drawn a salary of \$66.66 per month and refused to perform the duties of matron.

Only a few weeks ago Superintendent Lang resolved to submit to the indignities no longer and summarily dismissed for insubordination Matron Thomas, Miss Mutz, Miss Candee, Miss Brady, Miss Spanogle and Miss Larson.

All provisions, or nearly so, are supplied by contracts, and the rule is to award contracts to the lowest bidder. The evil of this is, that the contracts are let in omnibus form, and, as usually results, the state pays more for an article by contract than it could buy it for in the open market. By conspiring with the steward a contractor can reap a rich harvest, and to all outside appearances it would be legitimate.

STALE BREAD FOR INMATES.

Considerable feeling has been aroused over the reported fact that Contractor Wolf, who furnished bread to the institute for the second quarter of the present year, delivered two kinds—fresh bread for the officials and employes and stale bread for the inmates. When asked what became of his stale bread Mr. Wolf, without realizing perhaps the force or significance of the statement, replied: "I sell it to the institute."

"Do you ever take stale bread back from the grocery stores?" "Yes." "What do you do with it?" "I sell it to the institute." "Do you take back any stale bread from the institute?" "No."

Other bakers are required to sell their stale bread, and do it every day, for five cents a barrel. It is used for food for hogs and horses. Not so with Contractor Wolf. He sold his to the state for \$2.40 per hundred pounds. When asked about it Superintendent Lang persisted in a flat denial and declared that, so far as he knew, there was not a word of truth in it. He said that he and his wife used the same quality of bread supplied to the inmates. The bread received was received by the steward and not by Superintendent Lang and Superintendent Lang would therefore know little or nothing about the quality of the material delivered. However, the authority for the statement that stale bread was delivered is Contractor Wolf, the man who delivered the goods.

A DEPLORABLE SPECTACLE.

To close the chapter, which is but a partial recitation of the facts, it is enough to say that the Beatrice Institute of itself presents a bitter arraignment of the fusion party. It is not a pleasant subject for contemplation that this institute, designed to care for almost helpless and defenseless people, should be converted into a political mad-house and maintained as a resort for broken-down politicians and party henchmen. It is bad enough that the state should be required to support an army of political parasites without having the treasury exposed to the rapacity and perfidy of this same element. It is no doubt true that could the records speak they would disclose some startling facts.

One instance is recited where a young lady, who was an official at the institute and who is now an official at another institute, disposed of about \$50 worth of brushes manufactured by the inmates and made no report of it, nor has she ever paid over the money to the state. This is only one instance of dishonesty; there are said to be many others.

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