

CONSISTENCY, CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT



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The Story of Community Partners in Action
1875 - 2015

CONSISTENCY, CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT

The Story of Community Partners in Action | 1875 - 2015

Based on the author's complete history of CPA

The Connecticut Prison Association and the Search for Reformatory Justice



Gordon S. Bates

Consistency, Creativity and Commitment
The Story of Community Partners in Action

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Forewords



A significant part of my agenda as Governor of Connecticut has been to make more sense, both fiscally and morally, to help nonviolent offenders reintegrate into society rather than return to a life behind bars. We cannot perpetually be a punitive society. We have to do better in Connecticut. We no longer want to create lifetime criminals out of people who made a mistake.

I am pleased that Community Partners in Action has always believed in “Second Chances.” The State of Connecticut’s partnership with CPA began when it was founded in 1875 and continues to this day. We truly value the historic role they played in shaping and informing the evolution of our criminal justice system.”

— *The Hon. Dannel P. Malloy, Governor,
State of Connecticut*

The Connecticut Department of Correction has long supported the work of Community Partners in Action, which for so many decades performed important functions for those leaving prison, and whose hard work was one of the factors that helped lead to the centralization of the correction system in the 1960s. Our important contracts and partnerships with CPA, including the Prison Arts Program and re-entry projects, have provided a major benefit to the state.”

— *Scott Semple,
Commissioner, Department of Correction,
State of Connecticut*

Working with grace, humility and an undying belief in the power of human redemption, CPA has been the conscience of a caring community for over 140 years.”

— *The Hon. Michael R. Sheldon,
Judge, Appellate Court
State of Connecticut*



The Connecticut Public Defender’s Office has worked with CPA for decades, particularly in regard to the Office’s recommendations that clients be referred to CPA’s alternative programs in the community. I can’t emphasize too much the importance of this venerable and crucial institution to the Connecticut community.”

— *Susan O. Storey,*
Chief Public Defender, Division of Public Defender Services,
State of Connecticut

Long before collaboration became the buzzword that it is today, Community Partners in Action (and its predecessor, Connecticut Prison Association) has served as a model of what can be accomplished when those in the private sector and government work together in the pursuit of common objectives. The people of Connecticut – and, most important, the interests of justice – have been well-served by this fine organization over its 140 plus-year history.”

— *Kevin T. Kane,*
Chief State’s Attorney, Division of Criminal Justice,
State of Connecticut

From its earliest days as the Connecticut Prison Association, with Mark Twain as a silent supporter, Community Partners in Action has been working to make Connecticut a true second chance society. CPA has helped thousands of men and women to rebuild their lives and become productive members of our communities after incarceration, and CPA’s work is vital to making our neighborhoods safer and stronger.”

— *The Hon. Luke A. Bronin, Mayor,*
City of Hartford
State of Connecticut



The CPA has a long and rich history of giving true meaning and action to the term “second chance society”, going back to a day when advocates for this group were few and far in between. They have been tireless pioneers in all aspects of offender services including legal, housing, alternatives, basic needs, employment and many more, often known as the flagship of offender programming. Most of all, their exemplary work has contributed to enhanced public understanding of the needs of this population and the best ways to meet those needs without compromising public safety.”

— *William H. Carbone,*
Executive Director of Justice Programs, Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Science, and Director, The Tow Youth Justice Institute
The University of New Haven

When the Innocence Movement came to Connecticut, we found that exonerees were promised compensation from the State but faced years of delay before they could receive any of that support. Community Partners in Action stepped forward to team with the Connecticut Bar Foundation. Together they created the Connecticut Innocence Fund, a first-in-the-nation revolving fund to make bridge loans to exonerees, repaid from their eventual state compensation. CPA’s caring service has made a great difference to these victims of our criminal justice system’s errors, while its moral leadership has helped shine a light on the systemic flaws we must cure.”

— *Timothy S. Fisher,*
Dean and Professor of Law
School of Law, University of Connecticut,
State of Connecticut

Introduction

In March 1875, the Prisoners' Friends' Society was organized in Hartford, Connecticut, one of many organizations established to reach out to the poor and society's cast-offs during the so-called Gilded Age. Connecticut was the fifth state in which an association had been founded specifically to provide services to adult prison inmates.

The Prisoners' Friends' Society's Articles of Association contained five "objects" or goals for the organization:

- To benefit society by the reformation of criminals,
- To assist prisoners in the work of self-reform,
- To promote reformatory systems of Prison Management,
- To aid discharged convicts in living honorably, and
- To co-operate in the repression of crime.

Today, the organization lives on as Community Partners in Action (CPA). A few decades is a long time for most organizations to survive, in the modern world, but CPA is in the league of those that not only have survived, but also have continued to thrive for over 140 years. No other criminal justice agency in Connecticut can offer the same lengthy record of achievements.

Few people outside the criminal justice process have a clear picture of the obstacles that are faced by someone leaving the prison life. A released prisoner needs a place to live, a job, and some basic re-connections with society such as a driver's license, a Social Security card and an insurance card for medical coverage. But the list does not always convey the pain of the stigma of being an ex-inmate; nor does a list reflect the shock of re-learning how much the cost of an efficiency apartment, bus fare, groceries, medications, a haircut, insurance and child care may have increased since imprisonment began. The world to which most inmates return after even a few years in prison can be a strange and complicated one.

In each generation, CPA has met the challenges of its era successfully, expanding far beyond its original charge of helping individual ex-prisoners. Flexibility and adaptability have been bywords of the agency in each decade. When new policies were needed, CPA has either written legislation or supported bills written by others to move the state forward. When programs were needed to assist prisoners, CPA was amongst the first to discern how best to respond, or collaborate with other agencies to develop a range of services.

When Connecticut found itself in a prison overcrowding crisis from 1984 to 1990, CPA was the first to suggest a program that satisfied all sides of the argument about how to resolve it. That ability to adjust to the needs of the time, in terms of policies and programs, will continue to permit CPA to survive and thrive no matter what the problems facing the state or the agency.

Introduction continued

Finally, the very qualities that made CPA a successful contributor to the development of Connecticut's criminal justice system are still abundantly in evidence today. They are *consistency, creativity and commitment*. Consistency of operation, creativity at every level, and commitment to excellence in both board and staff are as much a part of the fabric of CPA in the second decade of the 21st century as they were in the eighth decade of the 19th century. Consistency, creativity and commitment are the essential qualities that kept the agency at the top of its game in the past. They will continue to do so as the 21st century unfolds.

Community Partners in Action believes that people can change and that even those labeled by society as criminals, despite the odds against them, can change for the better. Our experience with thousands of prisoners, year after year, has confirmed that belief. Certainly there are failures in our programs. The mountain of restoration is too high for some. For others, the help needed does not come at the right time. For still others, help never comes or is rejected.

But for the great majority of those who come into the CPA orbit and use the programs we offer, change is not only possible; it becomes real. Change happens. Each step of progress is celebrated; every setback is acknowledged and dealt with. Throughout the time they are with us, program participants receive the respect of CPA staff. They are accepted as responsible people. They are accountable as they rebuild their own lives and set their own goals. They are offered a friendship that does not ignore the past, but does not judge it. We have found that these participants appreciate the opportunity to strengthen their own ability to trust another human being once again, and to enter into a community of partners who will walk with them toward a new life.

In offering this historical account of our work, we welcome all who want to join our efforts to assist others to help themselves, and to work to improve the criminal justice system in Connecticut.

— **Gordon S. Bates, Executive Director Emeritus, Community Partners in Action**

Gordon S. Bates is the author of *The Connecticut Prison Association and the Search for Reformatory Justice*. Published by Wesleyan University Press in 2017, the book provides a thoroughly researched history of Community Partners in Action, or CPA, from 1875 to 2000. CPA's history is written in the light of developments on the state and federal level. *Consistency, Creativity and Commitment* is an abridged version of his book that extends the history to 2015 and provides additional detailed information concerning CPA's work, along with a photographic record.

“ The science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of that one.”

— *Alexis de Tocqueville*



On a cold evening in January 1875, a group of prominent jurists and philanthropically minded citizens met at the Allyn House, Hartford's main hotel, to form an organization that would aid prisoners after they left jail. [Credit: The Mark Twain House & Museum]

Chapter One

The Founders

The cells [at the State Prison in Wethersfield] are three feet and a half in width by seven in breadth, and about seven in height....They are without ventilation, the little orifices in the rear failing to show any current of air when a lighted match is held in them. The lower tier is damp, especially in the summer ...We have a right to insist that the influence of prison life should tend to elevate a man and to cultivate any latent spark of goodness there may be in him, and not to degrade them. ...It is agreed that more provision needs to be made for the discharged prisoners. Some of the states employ an agent, whose duty it is to meet them at the prison door, to endeavor to procure for them some honest employment, and to care for them somewhat until they are settled in the ways of ordinary life.

- Charles Dudley Warner, Gurdon W. Russell and Francis Wayland,
"The Prison Commission: Report of the General Assembly," *The Hartford Courant*, May 28, 1872

The snow was deep in Hartford as the New Year of 1875 opened; the winds were intense, and the temptation to remain inside one's home was hard to resist. Yet on January 30, a small group of Connecticut citizens gathered in the Allyn House, Hartford's premier hotel, to discuss ways to help prisoners being discharged from the State Prison in Wethersfield. They came in response to an invitation from the Hon. Heman H. Barbour, a Hartford probate judge and a member of the Board of Directors of the prison.

It was common knowledge, thanks to *The Hartford Courant*, that the 46-year-old institution had been under intense scrutiny for alleged financial mismanagement. But although financial integrity was critically important, it was not the uppermost concern of those gathered by Barbour. Their focus was the welfare of the prisoners there.

They worried about the treatment of these men and women, and the practical issues they face when released. Barbour's invitation suggested that the time had come for a group of like-minded people to stop talking and take action to alleviate the basic need for positive programs for prisoners in prison, and for jobs, health care and shelter when they left.

Among those who came to listen were such luminaries as the Rev. Elias H. Richardson, pastor of the First Church of Christ of Hartford (known as Center Church); and the Hon. Benjamin Stark of New London, chairman of the State Board of Charities. What they heard spurred them to act.

Articles of Association stating the proposed purpose of the new organization were formulated, to be circulated for comments in the next few weeks and presented to the Common Pleas Court of Hartford for approval. The Prisoners' Friends' Society would be a membership organization, with annual dues for each member of \$2.00.

The new organization would undertake several critical tasks. The first was to find ways to help inmates from the State Prison re-enter Connecticut society. Warden E. B. Hewes had indicated that he would welcome such an initiative. A second task was to work on submitting a bill to the state legislature that would improve the sentencing system then used in the courts and lead to changes in methods of prison discipline. The first formal meeting of the society was set for March 9.

That meeting, at Richardson's historic Center Church, was considerably larger. The early champions of the agency came from across Connecticut. From Middletown came the President of Wesleyan College, Dr. Joseph Cummings. The Hon. Origen S. Seymour came from Litchfield. J. H. Wadhams traveled from Goshen, the Hon. A. R. Goodrich



Hartford's historic Center Church - the institutional descendant of the first church in the old Puritan city - was also the site of the first formal meeting of the Prisoners' Friends' Society in March 1875. The group adopted bylaws, appointed a president and hired an "agent" someone to deal directly with released prisoners. [Credit: Connecticut Historical Society]



Charles Dudley Warner, co-owner of the Hartford Courant, co-author with Mark Twain of the political novel The Gilded Age, and a man with a deep passion for prison reform, was a key figure in the organization's early days. [Credit: The Mark Twain House & Museum]



Judge Nathaniel Shipman was among those attending the first formal meeting of the Prisoners' Friends' Society at Hartford's Center Church in March 1875. The Shipman law firm was already a Hartford fixture. [Credit: U.S. Courts Library for the Second Circuit]

from Vernon, and the Hon. Truman Smith from Stamford. It was a remarkable group, indicating that a great number of the Connecticut judiciary, as well as business and political leaders, were concerned about prison reform.

SETTING THE TASK

It shall be the duty of the committee on discharged convicts to ascertain as far as shall be practicable previous to the discharge of each prisoner from the state prison, his or her feelings, views and capabilities, with a view toward making the best arrangements for his or her future employment; to keep a record of all persons who will employ discharged prisoners; to procure such employment for prisoners applying therefor as seems best adapted to the capacity of each; to hold correspondence and employers and keep a record of the conduct and prospects of those for whom places have been obtained; and to furnish discharged prisoners board, clothing or other necessaries as their condition may require, with the sanction of the executive committee.

- By-Laws of Prisoner's Friend Corporation, 1875

After the official adoption of the Articles of Association, Barbour was elected to be the first President, with the Hon. Timothy Allyn, also of Hartford, as Vice President. Among those who agreed to serve on the first Board of Directors were Cummings;

Francis Wayland, Dean of the Yale Law School in New Haven; and General Joseph R. Hawley of Hartford, a Civil War veteran, former governor, newspaper publisher and Republican leader. Nathaniel Shipman of Hartford, co-publisher with Hawley of *The Hartford Courant*, were also present. Shipman's law firm was already a Hartford fixture, and Warner was a close friend of Samuel L. Clemens, otherwise known as Mark Twain, who had moved to the city four years before.

The most famous citizen to serve on the initial Board of Directors was the Rev. Dr. Noah Porter, then President of Yale University. Porter was one of the leading scholars of his era, with a national reputation.

Wayland was another luminary of the Gilded Age in New England. His father had served as President of Brown University and had a town in Massachusetts named after him. After graduating from Harvard Law School, the younger Wayland quickly gained a reputation for honesty and intellect as a lawyer in private practice. He served one term as Lieutenant-Governor of Connecticut in 1869-70, and became Dean of Yale Law School in 1873. The national movement for prison reform had engaged his attention in the early 1870s. Joining a local movement was a natural progression.

The next step for the organization was to hire an Agent — someone to assist discharged inmates in practical ways, develop the organization's operational policies, and link the agency to the local community. The Agent would also be the secretary of the agency, reporting his work in writing to the Board of Directors every month, enlisting businesses to hire ex-prisoners, and serving as the contact person for the various social services available in the towns and cities across Connecticut. Obstacles abounded. Most individuals returning from prison to the community needed to locate housing, obtain jobs and find their way to other social services. Younger men and women, particularly those from outside Connecticut, would find life outside prison especially lonely and intimidating. Some would need transportation. All of them could use a friend.

WAITING AT THE GATE

The Rev. Mr. Richardson opened this interesting part of the proceedings and spoke earnestly and well, referring especially to the need of society organizing itself against the criminal class whose emissaries are always waiting at the prison gate to lead back into crime those who have completed terms of imprisonment for crime.

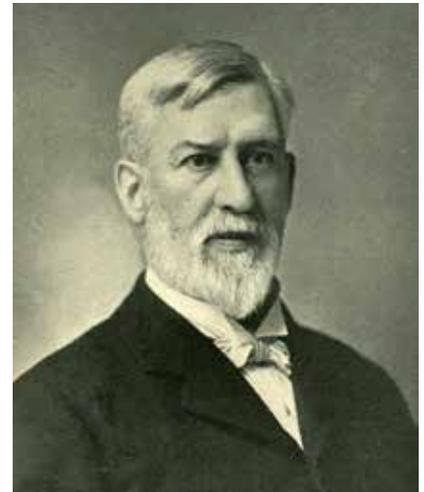
- "PRISON REFORM: Organization of the State Corporation — Meeting at the Center Church Lecture Room," *The Hartford Courant*, March 10, 1875

Two days after the March 9 meeting, it was announced that the first Agent would be John C. Taylor, a 30-year-old resident of Hartford. Taylor was a Civil War veteran, discharged in 1865, looking for a career. Wartime experience with the Union army had

matured him beyond his age. Military discipline had accustomed him to regulations and chain-of-command leadership. He had seen death and destruction among his fellow citizens on both sides. He had witnessed the abominable conditions in the army prison camps for captured Confederate soldiers and Northern deserters. He welcomed the opportunity to give men — especially young men who had made bad choices — a second chance. He started work on March 11, 1875, and provided exemplary service to CPA for the next 34 years.

Taylor lacked any direct experience with Connecticut’s way of handling criminals. He turned out, however, to be ideally suited to the work. From his annual reports, he appears to have been a patient man, rough and direct in his dealings with clients, but not judgmental about their backgrounds. He was ready to go to great lengths to help anyone who was open to the offer of friendship.

Taylor’s control over the decision-making process increased gradually as he gained experience. That same experience caused his optimism to fluctuate during his three decades of service as the percentage of former prisoners who succeeded in re-establishing themselves in the community rose and fell. He was learning what all who work in criminal justice eventually learn: that human behavior cannot be firmly predicted or easily re-directed.



CPA’s first agent was John C. Taylor, a Civil War veteran. Having seen abominable conditions in wartime prison camps, he welcomed the opportunity to give ex-prisoners from the state prison a second chance. He provided exemplary service to CPA for the next 34 years. [Credit: CPA Annual Report, 1909]

A “STATE PRISON BIRD”

Mr. E. M. Elwell was then introduced as a man who had once been in prison. ...Mr. Elwell stated that he was ... discharged at the expiration of his term of imprisonment with four dollars in money and a suit of clothes which would advertise him everywhere as a “State Prison Bird.” ... Mr. Elwell’s next experience was with a poor woman who received him as a boarder. ...The fact of his being a “State Prison Bird” leaked, and the landlady was waited upon by a deputation of the boarders (of which she had nineteen) and informed that she must discharge him or her boarders would all leave. She depended upon them for her living; she asked for a day to consider the matter and it was accorded. The next day she informed the boarders that she had concluded to permit Mr. Elwell to remain, and if the boarders chose to leave her, they might do so; to the credit of human-kind, be it stated, that but one left, and he proved to have been “no better than he might have been” himself, which is illustrative of the fact that those who cast the stones are not always entirely without sin themselves.

- “PRISON REFORM: Interesting Meeting Last Evening - Speeches by Judge Barbour, Mr. E. M. Elwell, Dr. Wines and Hon. T.M. Allyn,” *The Hartford Courant*, March 23, 1875



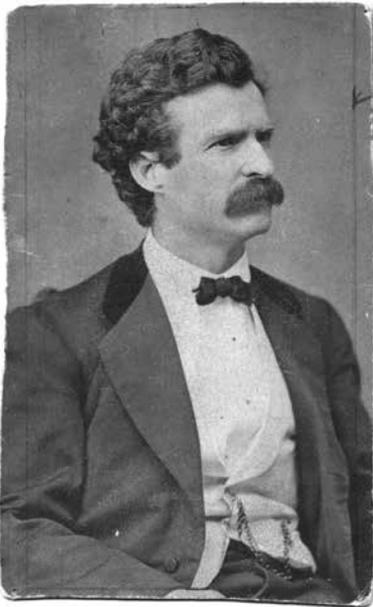
Dear me, for what trifling offenses the most of those forty-seven men and women were shut up there! Indeed, some were there for no distinct offense at all, but only to gratify somebody's spite...The newest prisoner's crime was a mere remark which he had made. He said he believed that men were about all alike, and one man as good as another, barring clothes. He said he believed that if you were to strip the nation naked and send a stranger through the crowd, he couldn't tell the king from a quack doctor, nor a duke from a hotel clerk. Apparently here was a man whose brains had not been reduced to an ineffectual mush by idiotic training."

— *Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, 1889*



Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It wouldn't fatten the dog."

— *Mark Twain, Speech to the Public Education Association, New York, November 23, 1900*



When a group of citizens of Hartford were invited to serve on an advisory board to CPA in its earliest months, Samuel L. Clemens - Mark Twain - of Farmington Avenue was among those who answered the call. Clemens' brilliant dark humor often took aim at the incongruences and inhumanities of the prison system. [Credit: The Mark Twain House & Museum]

At a later meeting in March 1875 at the Charter Oak Insurance Company offices, an advisory board was established. Among luminaries such as Hawley and Henry Barnard, the nationally known educational reformer, was listed the name of Clemens - Mark Twain - the friend and neighbor of Warner, and co-author with him of a novel about Washington politics and corruption, *The Gilded Age*. Clemens seems not to have otherwise participated actively in the group during his residence in Hartford in the 1870s and 1880s, but often lent his acerbic pen to the cause of human justice, including the reform of prisons.

MARK TWAIN ON PRISONS

Toward the end of the founding year, in December 1875, Porter demonstrated his enthusiasm by organizing a mass meeting in New Haven featuring Governor Charles R. Ingersoll and the former President of Yale University, Theodore Woolsey, as the principal speakers. Their efforts produced the first local auxiliary for the new Prisoners' Friends' Society.

The State Prison that was now the worksite for Taylor had been built in 1829 as a more compassionate replacement for the widely condemned Old Newgate Prison, in what is now East Granby. Constructed to be a model reformatory, it had become, after a half-century, an institution

marred by inconsistent management and misuse of funds. The prison was overseen by a Board of Directors responsible to the governor until the creation of the Connecticut Department of Correction in 1968.

The number of prisoners being discharged annually was approximately 150, and Taylor worked with almost all of them each year. He dealt with the whole spectrum of those who were willing to receive his helping hand: the young and the old, in-state and out-of-state prisoners, first-timers and habitual offenders, the native-born and those from abroad, alcoholics, the physically disabled, and even those who were deemed insane. He had no one to guide him, no training to prepare him, no time off. Whatever discouragement or other feelings he had, he kept them to himself. He set a remarkable example for all who succeeded him.

“FREED FROM THE BARS’

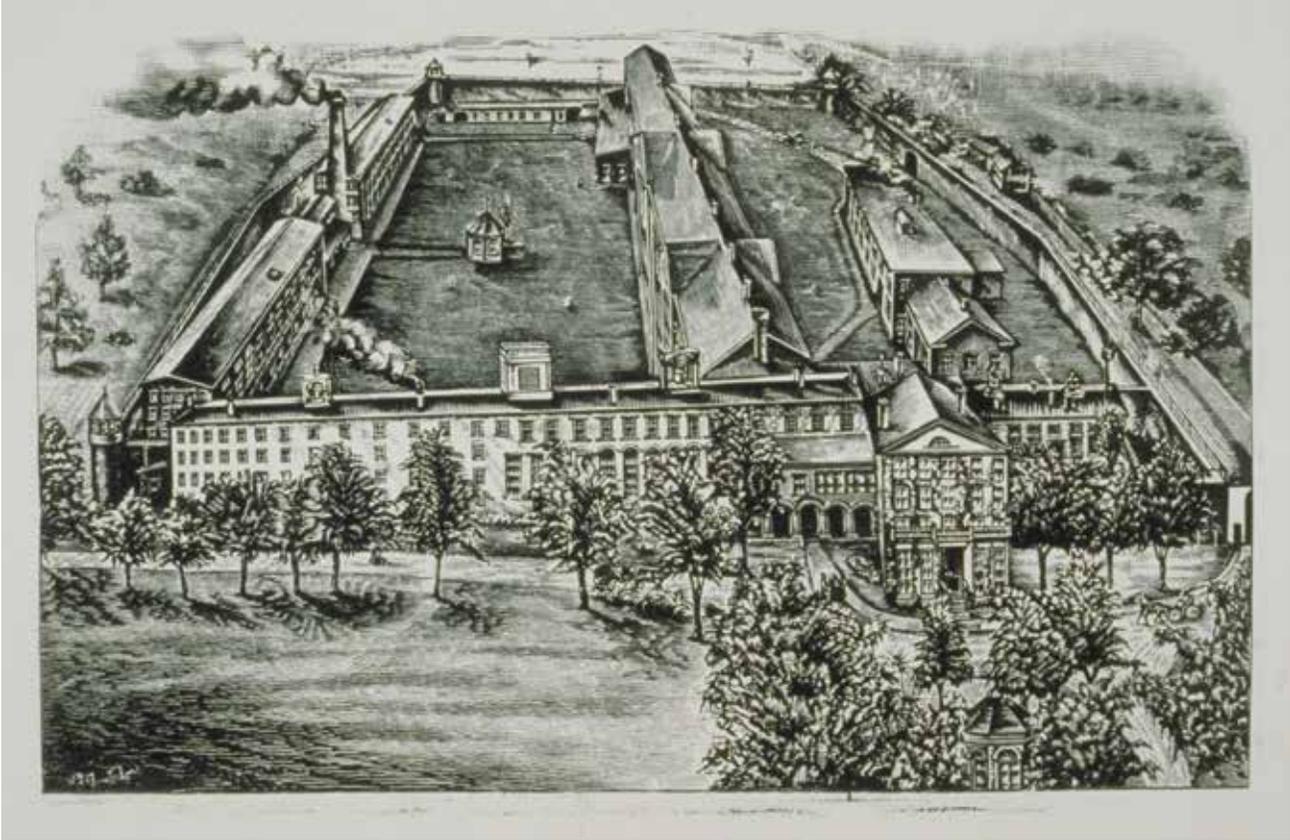
No. 1 - Born in Massachusetts; is 27 years of age; has a wife and two children. He has no trade, but is a smart, bright, educated man; has been a “professional” for a number of years. Has been in this prison for two years for burglary. He says (and Chaplain Howard, who has talked a great deal with him, believes he is honest in what he says) that he really wants to go “on the square;” that he is tired of stealing; he has children and wants to settle down. His first wishes are to go and see his family as soon as he is discharged, and then would like to have some place found for him by the association. He will be aided as he requests.

No. 3 - Born in Ireland, is 45 years of age; not married; no trade; was sent to prison for three months as a tramp. This man is a thoroughbred tramp and was the first man convicted under the tramp law of the state....After a rigid examination the committee failed to discover where he had done two consecutive days’ work for the past seventeen years....The association decided to do nothing for him, for he will not work a week if employment is furnished him.

No. 4 - Negro; born in Ohio; is 32 years of age; has a wife and four children; was sent to prison for two months for adultery; wishes to be furnished with employment when discharged and work will be provided for him.

No. 5 - Born in France; age when convicted, thirty-six years; single; sent to prison from the United States navy for three years; crime, desertion. This man is a fine looking, smart young fellow. He speaks French, German, Spanish, Latin and English well. He is an educated chemist, and feels very keenly the disgrace of his position ... When assured by the secretary that...he should be quietly provided for until employment could be found for him, he burst into tears and it was plainly evident that he was sincerely grateful for the tender of assistance and friendship.

- “FREED FROM THE BARS: FOURTEEN CONVICTS TO BE RELEASED FROM WETHERSFIELD IN SEPTEMBER,” *The Hartford Courant*, August 3, 1880



In 1875, The Connecticut State Prison was situated in Wethersfield, just south of Hartford, and its warden supported the Connecticut Prison Association, first named the Prisoners' Friends' Society - and today known as Community Partners in Action. This illustration shows the prison around the time of CPA's founding. [Credit: Connecticut Historical Society]

By 1900, immigrants from Europe and the Southern states made up more than 12 percent of Connecticut's population. Many of them adjusted poorly and ended up in jail or prison, and many of the foreign immigrants knew little or no English. Taylor seems to have harbored no prejudices against any of them. His participation in the Civil War, fought at least in part to protest and limit slavery in the United States, may have given him an attitude of empathy and tolerance that enabled him to look beyond the cultural barriers of language and color differences — especially his experience with African-Americans who fled the South after Emancipation.

Taylor worked hard, and alone, in the interest of the Connecticut Prison Association's basic purpose. The agency was able to give him an assistant only in the last year before his death in 1909.

While Taylor labored with former prisoners, the society underwent unexpected changes in leadership during its first year. Judge Barbour's health during his brief time as President went into a severe decline, and he passed away in June 1875. Cummings, the Wesleyan President, was appointed in his place, only to resign in December to resume his calling as a Methodist pastor.



Dr. Joseph Cummings, president of Wesleyan College and a Methodist pastor, was a key CPA founder. After the untimely death of founding President Heman Barbour, immediately after the group's formation, Cummings served briefly as president of the group until Wayland took the helm. [Credit: Wesleyan University, Olin Library]



An important figure in the early CPA - and its president for 28 years - was Francis Wayland, dean of the Yale Law School. His political connections, legal skills, and open-mindedness to the new fields of sociology and psychology brought CPA needed clout in a turbulent era. [Credit: Yale University Manuscripts & Archives]

In January 1876, Francis Wayland accepted the presidency. It was a position he would fill with enormous energy and wisdom for the next 28 years.

Wayland brought to the office several significant advantages. He had strong political connections, drawn especially from his year as the state's lieutenant governor. He was also a highly respected legal scholar and teacher as Dean of Yale Law School. Most significant, however, was his intellectual openness to new fields of study, such as the growing fields of sociology and psychology.

Wayland's influence was felt immediately after his election in 1876. He believed that the name "Prisoners' Friends' Society of Connecticut" was unwieldy, narrow and dated. He successfully urged the organization to rename itself, urging that the organization link itself to the National Prison Association, formed five years earlier. Wayland had a high regard for its impact to date and its potential.

Another board member, Timothy Allyn of Hartford, a former mayor and wealthy dry goods merchant, had attended the organizational meeting of this national group in Cincinnati in 1870. The national gathering of hundreds of criminal justice practitioners from across the country in a "Congress on Correction" had gained considerable attention. No such gathering had been held before in America, and its chairman was Rutherford B. Hayes, the Governor of Ohio, a politician being talked about as a future presidential candidate.



By the time CPA was formed, Old Newgate Prison was a tourist attraction – as seen in this 1889 photo – but conditions in the “new” State Prison in Wethersfield, opened in 1837, were under fire. The size of cells, ventilation, dampness were noted as examples of its inhumanity – and the lack of provision for inmates after they left the prison. [Credit: Connecticut Historical Society]

Wayland’s second achievement was to create a larger purpose to encompass the five goals that had been established for the Connecticut Prison Association. The national group had approved a set of principles that outlined what was called “the rehabilitative ideal” for prison management. With Wayland, Allyn, Porter and others, the rehabilitative ideal provided a lofty theme that could direct all efforts to help individuals and progressively reform the prison system. This vision of humanity’s potential guided the agency from its origin. Caught in one phrase, it was the assumption that people can change.

THE IDEA OF CHANGE

The rehabilitative ideal is the notion that a primary purpose of penal treatment is to effect changes in the character, attitudes and behaviors of convicted offenders, so as to strengthen the social defense against unwanted behavior, but also contribute to the welfare and satisfaction of offenders.”

— Francis A. Allen, *The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal*, 1981

The rehabilitative ideal was an approach to crime control that became a true alternative to the brute force and harsh discipline commonly used in prisons and jails. If the assumption was correct that a majority of ex-prisoners were willing to improve their attitudes and behavior, then a prison management system was needed to assist them to do so. By February 1876, the Board of Trustees voted that the Connecticut Prison Association (CPA) should become an affiliate of the National Prison Association (NPA) and have as its overriding goal the pursuit of the “rehabilitative ideal.”

For the next 25 years, while Taylor aided individual ex-prisoners, Wayland focused his personal energies on systemic changes in prison management.

In 1885, he received a letter from Clemens which illustrates the attitude of both men toward racial injustice. During a visit to Yale, Clemens had met a black law student named Warner T. McGuinn. In the letter, Clemens asked Wayland if he considered McGuinn worthy of help. “I would not very cheerfully help a white student who would ask a benevolence of a stranger, but I do not feel so about the other color,” Clemens wrote. “We have ground the manhood out of them and the shame is ours, not theirs, and we should pay for it.” He offered to cover McGuinn’s cost of living at Yale up to 24 months. Wayland must have responded in the affirmative: McGuinn was the commencement speaker at his graduation in 1887 and became a prominent lawyer in Baltimore, sharing law offices with Thurgood Marshall, the future Supreme Court Justice. The story is consistent with both Clemens’ ideas about race and the persistent advocacy of Wayland for cultural reform — not just the reform of penology.

Wayland attended the annual meetings of the National Prison Association, speaking out frequently about rehabilitation and citing it as the primary reason for the existence of prisons. Few convicted criminals could change radically, he acknowledged; some resist change to their dying day, but he was convinced that the majority of former prisoners would like to change, and could change. The aim of prison discipline, therefore, was to determine which clients were capable of becoming reformed and productive citizens, how that process could be encouraged while they were in prison, and when they should be released. Wayland’s view was shared by Taylor and the Board of Directors. During the Founders’ era, there was never any significant deviation from it.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During this early period, the Association pressed for legislative changes in line with this philosophy, and won important victories.

A law providing for insane inmates released from prison, 1884. During most of the Founders' era, prisoners deemed to be insane were incarcerated at the Wethersfield State Prison, there being no other facility in the state to house or care for them. This law gave CPA a mandate to provide assistance to such inmates, including relocating them to their state of origin.

The indeterminate sentence law, 1901. Indeterminate sentencing was a central tenet of 19th-century prison reform. Since Colonial times, American judges had used a fixed sentencing approach, specifying a set term of years to be served. The number chosen was based solely on the severity of the crime and the past history of the prisoners. Under the new law, judges' sentences would specify a maximum and minimum term, and the time of discharge was to be decided by the prison administration. The principal goal of incarceration had to be rehabilitation.

The new system required the construction of a treatment plan, implemented by prison staff and submitted to willingly by the inmate, over the period of confinement. It had taken more than 20 years to convince enough members of the Connecticut House and Senate to adopt this new set of assumptions about criminals, prison management and the possibilities of rehabilitation. Passage of the indeterminate sentence law established CPA as a political force to be reckoned with, and the law would remain in force for 80 years in Connecticut.

A statewide adult probation law, 1903. A section of this law made the newly authorized service the responsibility of the Connecticut Prison Association. CPA staff would supervise, support and record the activities of probation officers appointed by each judicial district. The law was the crowning legislative achievement of the Wayland years.

At the same time, it was accomplishing these important legislative tasks, CPA continued its programmatic work. This included:

Assisting individuals discharged from the State Prison. In 1880, the first year for which statistics are available, 135 prisoners were released – seven by pardons from the General Assembly, one pardoned by President Rutherford B. Hayes, and one pardoned by the Secretary of the Navy. The remaining 126 had completed their sentences. Of those released, 131 were men and four were women. About half received some clothing, and 95 were aided in finding work. Fifteen needed no help, or got none due to unacceptable conduct.

Between 1880 and 1910, about 125 former prisoners were helped annually. During this time it is likely that CPA assisted more than 3,700 prisoners return to society.

Taylor worked on a monthly basis with more than 40 probation officers, each of whom had at least one client to supervise and often six or eight. It was an enormous caseload for one man to carry, and a tribute to his dedication that he carried it so ably year after year.

Advocating for ex-prisoners to regain the right to vote. Forfeiture of the rights of citizenry was an automatic result of conviction under state law. Most politicians resisted the idea of returning those rights to people with a criminal background, reflecting the views of many of their constituents, who believed that the stigma of conviction should be permanent. As early as 1880, Taylor urged the Board of Trustees to fight for the reinstatement of the right to vote for ex-inmates who had proven their ability to live productively in the community. The effort was unsuccessful in the legislature, but CPA continued to press for the restoration of the right to vote – finally meeting success in 1975. Persistence in the search for more equitable justice has always been one of the assets of CPA.

Struggling to overcome the relationship of alcohol to crime. Taylor worked with men whose crimes were often the result of drunkenness and alcoholism. He voiced despair over the number of saloons available to discharged inmates during their first few days of freedom, deploring the hungry children and broken families when those he tried to befriend were incarcerated once again. He applauded the temperance movement and, had he lived long enough, he probably would have been among the supporters of Prohibition in the 1920s. In subsequent years, CPA would continue to study the problem and devise practical rehabilitative programs to alleviate the human and financial cost to society.

“ CONSTANT FRIENDS

It is our claim that no prisoner who has been discharged from the Connecticut State Prison during the past quarter century can truthfully say that necessity has compelled his return to crime. It is our promise and practice to aid each prisoner upon his release from prison until he can become self-supporting, if his conduct continues to be correct, and then to have him understand that we are his constant friends.”

— *John C. Taylor, Agent, The Connecticut Prison Association, 1904*