Sources

Neue Preußische Zeitung (Kreuzzeitung), 22 Sept. 1883, No. 221
The "Post" has gotten word that the mentally-ill criminals who escaped from the Dalldorf insane asylum on September 15th had gone outside with their attendants to get some exercise. As the four "wild men" were drinking a few beers with their attendants in a pub near the asylum, they grabbed their mugs – probably according to a plan – threw them at the guards and ran off.

Der Reichsbote, 9 Nov. 1883, No. 262
Among the 25 inmates on the "wild-man ward" of the Dalldorf insane asylum there are a few real characters. The burglar Knauer keeps himself constantly busy by very craftily constructing large model ships. And while his colleagues Wessel and Halsband engage in all sorts of maschinations in order to stage an escape, the pickpocket Franke recently demonstrated his nimbleness in a surprising way. Medical supervisor Dr. Ideler visited Franke in his cell, and during the discussion F. was able to make off with the doctor's watch. Only as Dr. Ideler was walking away did F., with a mischievous grin, return the stolen watch to him, whose absence he had up to then not noticed.

Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 12 May 1884, No. 220
Yesterday around noon a detestable scheme carried out by five criminals housed by the city of Berlin in the Maison de santé in Schöneberg placed the asylum at risk of being burnt down and seriously endangered the lives of numerous people. A building in the rear section of the garden houses 171 mentally-ill patients who have been transferred to the asylum by the city of Berlin. Among them are five serious criminals, who seem to have been planning their escape for quite some time now and who yesterday took steps to execute their diabolical plan. As the patients were led into the cafeteria yesterday for lunch, the five succeeded in making off to the sleeping quarters. Once there, they barricaded the door and set the beds on fire with matches that they had secretly stowed away. Their absence was of course immediately noticed, but before anybody could make their way into the blocked off dormitory, it was already engulfed in flames. The criminals exploited the excitement caused by all of this to escape into the garden using a rope made of bed sheets. Recognizing the danger, the director of the asylum rushed to commandeer a large regiment of soldiers, who quickly responded to the call. With the help of the military three of the criminals, who had thought to have already reached safety, were caught and the flight of the other two was prevented. The other patients had been brought outside in an orderly fashion, so that nobody was hurt. The fire in the dormitory was put out by the fire department, which had been called from Berlin by telegraph.
The insane asylum's administrative report for 1883/84\(^2\) reports, among other things, on the "wild men" in Dalldorf: Caring for the mentally-ill criminals became that much more difficult in the past year, as no less than 18 mentally-ill criminals (15 men, 3 women) were admitted, criminals who are serving harsh sentences and who have led criminal lives. Among them were notorious burglars and thieves, whose presence in the asylum was felt all the more by the doctors, as it is the practice of the asylum to afford its patients free treatment in the broadest sense, its architecture being designed in accordance with this purpose. In addition to that, the personnel of the asylum have been trained to care for the mentally-ill in a humane and, when possible, familial way, and are not normally assigned to duties comparable to those of a prison guard. The personnel are not up to the task of dealing with the criminal types that have accumulated here, and over time they are being worn out by the weight of the arduous, often dangerous work .... One should also add that these patients who have come into conflict with the law are by no means simulating their illness. These so-called "wild-men" have been subject to careful examination, which has confirmed without doubt that they are insane. As far as the records for this year go, the majority of them suffer from an epileptic ailment that has been recognized as the foundation of their mental disorder. These findings are in accordance with those of the doctors at the Charité, who had examined the criminals before their transfer to the asylum. The well-planned escapes that have often been carried out by these patients in no way justify the conclusion that one is dealing with mentally stable criminals, as experience has shown beyond doubt that mentally-ill people are capable of the same actions and even go about them with a certain cleverness. These remarks sufficiently demonstrate that caring for insane criminals, whom the asylum is no longer permitted to turn away, has brought about a state of emergency in the asylum. Efforts to resolve this state of emergency are a constant concern for the doctors and lead them to direct their time and energy towards tasks that hardly have anything to do with caring for the mentally-ill. The asylum's curatorium\(^3\) has taken this issue into consideration and has urged the state to help resolve the difficulties.

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\(^3\) The curatorium was a supervisory and administrative body responsible for the city's psychiatric institutions. On the membership and the duties of the curatorium, see Carl Wilhelm Ideler, "Geschichtliche Entwicklung der städtischen Irrenpflege in Berlin," in Die städtische Irren-Anstalt zu Dalldorf, ed. Magistrat zu Berlin (Berlin: Springer, 1883), 3-52.