

**FIRST REPORT OF THE  
RECORDS  
COMMISSIONERS OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON, 1876**

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First Report of the Records Commissioners of the City of Boston, 1876 by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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## CITY OF BOSTON.

*City Document No. 92.*

### FIRST REPORT OF THE RECORD COMMISSIONERS.

*To his Honor the Mayor and the City Council of Boston:—*

The ordinance\* creating the office of the Record Commissioners defines their duties as follows: "To complete, as far as practicable, the record of births, deaths and marriages in the town and city of Boston, prior to A. D. 1849." The reasons which led to the passage of the ordinance will be found in Appendix A, being a portion of the report of a Joint Standing Committee of the City Council for 1875.

A reasonable construction of the duties of the commissioners seems to include therein all such investigations as will directly assist in perfecting the record of the vital statistics of Boston. How great are the deficiencies in those records will be seen by the statements made in Appendix A; and although the readiest mode of supplying the information will be to copy the existing church records, the commissioners

\* SECTION 1. In the month of July in the year 1875, or as soon thereafter as may be, and every fifth year thereafter, the Mayor shall appoint, subject to the approval and confirmation of the City Council, two suitable persons, to be termed Record Commissioners, who shall hold office for the term of five years from the first Monday in May in the year of their appointment, and until their successors shall be appointed and qualified. They shall have and exercise the powers and duties hereinafter designated, shall serve without compensation, and may be removed at any time by the mayor or by concurrent vote of two-thirds of both branches of the City Council, and all vacancies occurring from any cause shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments are herein directed to be made.

SECT. 2. It shall be the duty of said commissioners to complete, so far as practicable, the record of births, marriages and deaths, in the town and city of Boston, prior to A. D. 1849, and to receive and collect all documents obtainable therefor. All documents and records so collected shall become at once the property of the City of Boston, and be deposited in the office of, and be in the charge of, the City Registrar, or such other officer as the City Council may direct.

SECT. 3. The said commissioners shall have no power to enter into any contract or agreement in behalf of the city with any person, whereby the expenditure of money, or any other obligation, shall be incurred, unless expressly authorized so to do by the City Council: provided, however, that, unless otherwise ordered, they shall have the charge and control of the expenditure of all moneys expressly appropriated for copying any documents or records supplementary to the town or city records.

Passed July 6, 1875.

[July 12, 1875, William H. Whitmore and William S. Appleton were nominated and confirmed as Record Commissioners.]

desire at this time to report upon certain preliminary investigations which they have made.

Evidently, any trustworthy information as to the names of the inhabitants of Boston during the period for which the registers are so defective, must be of the greatest value in any attempt to supplement those records. If we know the heads of families, we shall have a guide to the extent of the information yet to be obtained.

The earliest directory of the inhabitants of the town was published in 1789, and contained 1,474 names; the second in 1796, containing 3,531 names. No earlier list of names is known to be in print, except two given in Nathaniel Dearborn's "Boston Notions" (1848), and one appended to "John Dunton's Letters from New England," published by the Prince Society in 1867.

The various writers who have treated of our local history, Pemberton, Snow, Shaw, Dearborn, Drake and Shurtleff, have apparently been unable to make any attempt at supplying the names of the earlier inhabitants, or, indeed, of those living here at any date prior to 1789. The very defects which have led to the appointment of this commission have so disheartened our successive historians that they have all failed to write a town history of Boston. As is well known, a great proportion of the towns in New England possess full and satisfactory histories, not only of the acts of the communities, but of all families therein resident. Of Boston it may be said that much has been written about the town, and very little about the citizens.

It is with the greatest pleasure, then, that the commissioners announce that, very recently, documents have been recovered, which will enable those interested to gain a very satisfactory knowledge of the inhabitants of the town prior to A. D. 1700.

Although the records in charge of the city clerk, outside of the books of the town and of the selectmen, are very scanty, a number of very valuable papers have been found in the custody of the Board of Overseers of the Poor. That Board has recently had examined the papers which had accidentally come into its possession, and has kindly given the Record Commissioners every facility for examining and copying the same.

In this collection are portions of the tax lists of 1674 and 1676, and fortunately the missing parts are not parallel. There are at the State House tax lists for 1687 and 1688, and in the city clerk's office a list of inhabitants made in 1695.

Inasmuch as these lists will afford a very satisfactory

account of the heads of families in Boston for one generation, and as this information is at present not easily attainable by the public, it has seemed to the commissioners best to make this report, and to advise the publication of these lists. The field to be covered by their work is so large and the results will be so diversified, that it now seems best to report whenever any particular subdivision can be completed. In the present case it seems evident that the public good will best be served by furnishing a sufficient number of printed copies of these papers to supply all of our citizens who may desire them. Such documents are not easily read in the original, and the worn and tattered condition of these papers renders it highly undesirable that they should be handled often. A printed copy, carefully made, will meet the wants of all but special investigators, and will enable us to preserve the originals for posterity.

Should the present proposition be favorably received by the city government, the commissioners will feel encouraged to pursue other subdivisions of their work, in the belief that whatever directly contributes to a knowledge of the past history of Boston will be promptly made available by its inhabitants.

The commissioners, therefore, respectfully suggest that this report and the accompanying papers be printed for distribution.

W. H. WHITMORE,  
W. S. APPLETON,  
*Record Commissioners.*

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CITY OF BOSTON.

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IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, Sept. 25, 1876:

*Ordered*, That the Record Commissioners be authorized to print and distribute fifteen hundred copies of their report, with the accompanying papers, at an expense not exceeding six hundred and fifty dollars, to be charged to the appropriation for Printing.

Read twice and passed: sent down for concurrence. Sept. 28; came up: concurred. Approved by the Mayor, Sept. 29, 1876.



## APPENDIX A.

The following extracts from a report of the Joint Committee on the Public Library (City Document No. 46 of A. D. 1875) contain some special information in regard to the deficiencies in the city records, and are, therefore, worthy of reproduction. The committee reported in favor of establishing the Board of Record Commissioners, and, as this advice was accepted, the argumentative portions are omitted.

The report states as follows:—

“It appears by the statement of N. A. Apollonio, the City Registrar, hereto annexed, that the records of births, deaths and marriages in the City of Boston are now kept systematically and have been since the year 1849. This, however, is but a brief part of the period since the settlement of the town, and your committee is obliged to report great and deplorable deficiencies in the earlier records.

“To explain the extent of these deficiencies the following statements are copied from Shattuck's Report on the Census of 1845, pp. 5, 130, showing the population of the town:—

A. D. 1680, population was	4,500
1690, “	7,000
1700, “	6,700
1710, “	9,000
1715-1724, population averaged	11,000
1725-1734, “	13,060
1735-1744, “	17,000
1745-1754, “	15,731
1755-1764, “	15,631
1767-1774, “	15,520
1811-1820, “	38,274
1821-1830, “	58,281
1831-1840, “	78,603
1841-1845, “	102,620

“It may be assumed that the annual number of births is about 3 in every 100 inhabitants, and the deaths about the same. Let us examine the number of probable births in Boston during certain periods:—

“1st. From 1680 to 1700, the probable average population was 3,000, giving 90 births per annum, and in 70 years 6,300 births. Our record has about 1,850 births.

“2d. From 1700 to 1744, average population, 13,000, births, 390 per annum,\* or for 44 years, 17,160 births. Our record has 20,000 for the whole period, and is therefore reasonably full.

\* Shattuck's table shows in ten years, 1735-1744, there were 6,779 baptisms.

"3d. From 1744 to 1807, average population, 20,000; births, 600 per annum; for 63 years,\* 37,800 births. Our record has about 5,000 names, or not one seventh.

"4th. From 1807 to 1849, average population, 70,000; births, 2,100 per annum; for 42 years, 88,200 births. Our meagre record is for 3,500 births.

"We see then that for about a century, viz., from 1744 to 1849, the births must have amounted to at least 125,000, and our records preserve the names of but 8,500, or less than seven per cent.

"As to deaths, the record is even worse. Out of at least 60,000 deaths which have occurred in Boston between 1630 and 1810, we have a record of some 4,700 only. In fact, these statistics are almost entirely wanting. Yet at the same time we are able to fix with considerable accuracy the number of deaths, since a weekly table was published for many years in the newspapers. A copy is given in Shattuck's Report, Appendix, p. 71, showing that from 1704 to 1774 there were 35,673 deaths.† Add 35 years (1775-1810), at 500 per annum, 17,500, and at least 10,000 for the 60 years previous to 1700, and the total is 60,000 deaths.

"As to the marriages, in any particular period, the number is rather less than half the number of births. It seems, therefore, that from 1630 to 1807 there were undoubtedly some 25,000 to 30,000 marriages. Our volumes contain about 20,000; and this part of the record is the best of all.

"We are forced to report, therefore, that in regard to the records of the city proper, between the years 1630 and 1849, not more than 7 per cent. of the births are preserved, about the same percentage of the deaths, and probably about two-thirds of the marriages. We also see that in regard to the births the deficiencies occur mainly in the century from 1744 to 1849, and that, owing to the increase in population, the greatest number of the unrecorded deaths occurred during the eighteenth century.

"To any one familiar with the records of the towns in Massachusetts, and aware of the care and completeness with which records have generally been kept, this report on our Boston records will be a disappointment. It is impossible now to learn when or where the deficiencies in these records were caused. The successive town clerks may have neglected their duties, or the records may have been destroyed, or a part at least may yet be recoverable.

"It is evidently the duty of the city, now that these deficiencies have been pointed out, to take immediate measures to fill the blanks by all the secondary evidence that can be obtained. Your committee, therefore, desire to point out the sources from which much important information can be at once procured.

"The church records of baptisms, burials and marriages are numerous and copious. Although their records relate mainly to church members, with their families, this class during the last two centuries embraced by far the greater part of our citizens. Prior

\* Also he shows in thirty years, 1745-1774, there were 12,284 baptisms.

† See tables later in this Appendix.

to 1700, at least seven churches were established here, and three or four times as many have been founded since.

"The custom of infant baptism enables us to obtain the births, therefore, of a great number of children, with an accuracy of date sufficient for all purposes. In fact, it is to be remembered that in England nothing but baptisms are recorded, and the system of town records of births, like the system of registering deeds, was practically employed in New England as a new plan.

"But inasmuch as the records of the thirty oldest churches of the city, are in private hands, and not generally accessible, and as,

[\* The following list of Boston churches, which omits a few churches discontinued, may be of service in this connection. It is copied from a book entitled "Boston and its Vicinity," published in 1851.]

#### TWENTY CHURCHES, 1630-1804.

1. First Church,	founded in 1630.	11. Federal Street,	founded in 1727.
2. Second "	" 1650.	12. Hollis Street,	" 1732.
3. Friends,	" 1664.	13. Trinity,	" 1734.
4. First Baptist,	" 1665.	14. West Church,	" 1737.
5. Old South,	" 1669.	15. Second Baptist,	" 1743.
6. Stone Chapel,	" 1688.	16. First Universalist,	" 1785.
7. Brattle Street,	" 1699.	17. Ch. of the Holy Cross,	" 1788.
8. New North,	" 1714.	18. Chapel of ditto,	" 1788.
9. New South,	" 1719.	19. First Methodist,	" 1792.
10. Christ Church,	" 1722.	20. First Christian,	" 1804.

#### LATER CHURCHES.

21. African Baptist,	founded in 1805.	58. Harvard Street,	founded in 1839.
22. Second Methodist,	" 1806.	59. Tremont Street,	" 1839.
23. Third Baptist,	" 1807.	60. Suffolk-street Chapel,	" 1839.
24. Park Street,	" 1809.	61. German Evangelical,	" 1839.
25. St. Matthew's (E.),	" 1816.	62. Bowdoin Square,	" 1840.
26. Second Universalist,	" 1816.	63. Fifth Methodist,	" 1840.
27. New Jerusalem,	" 1818.	64. Sixth Methodist,	" 1840.
28. African Methodist,	" 1818.	65. Sixth Universalist,	" 1840.
29. Hawes Place,	" 1819.	66. German,	" 1840.
30. Essex Street,	" 1819.	67. Mount Vernon,	" 1842.
31. St. Augustine (C.),	" 1819.	68. Second Adventist Ch.,	" 1842.
32. St. Paul (E.),	" 1820.	69. Ch. of the Messiah (E.)	" 1843.
33. Bulfinch Street,	" 1822.	70. Freewill Baptist,	" 1843.
34. Phillips,	" 1823.	71. Winthrop,	" 1844.
35. Twelfth Congregational,	" 1825.	72. St. Peter & St. Paul (C.),	" 1844.
36. Bowdoin Street,	" 1825.	73. St. John's (C.),	" 1844.
37. Thirteenth Cong'l,	" 1825.	74. Advent (E.),	" 1844.
38. Pitts-street Chapel,	" 1826.	75. Holy Trinity (C.),	" 1844.
39. Salem Street,	" 1827.	76. St. Nicholas (U.),	" 1844.
40. Pine Street,	" 1827.	77. Synagogue,	" 1844.
41. South Congregational,	" 1827.	78. Twenty-Eighth Cong'l,	" 1845.
42. Row-street Baptist,	" 1827.	79. Ch. of the Saviour (U.),	" 1845.
43. Bethel,	" 1828.	80. Union Baptist,	" 1845.
44. Mariners' Church,	" 1828.	81. Second Hawes,	" 1845.
45. St. Stephen's Chap. (E.),	" 1829.	82. Payson,	" 1845.
46. Grace (E.),	" 1829.	83. Baptist Bethel,	" 1845.
47. Fourth Universalist,	" 1830.	84. South Universalist,	" 1845.
48. South Baptist,	" 1831.	85. Seamen's Chapel,	" 1845.
49. Third Methodist,	" 1834.	86. Indiana Street,	" 1845.
50. Warren-street Chapel,	" 1835.	87. Shawmut Church,	" 1845.
51. Fifth Universalist,	" 1835.	88. Pilgrim Congregational,	" 1846.
52. Central,	" 1835.	89. Wesleyan Methodist,	" 1846.
53. St. Mary's (C.),	" 1836.	90. East Boston,	" 1846.
54. St. Patrick's (C.)	" 1837.	91. Eighth Methodist,	" 1846.
55. Maverick,	" 1837.	92. First Presbyterian,	" 1846.
56. Zion,	" 1838.	93. St. John's (E.),	" 1848.
57. Fourth Methodist,	" 1839.		