

**INSTRUCTIONS AND LAWS
CONCERNING THE REGISTRATION
OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND
DEATHS IN MASSACHUSETTS**

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Instructions and Laws Concerning the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths in
Massachusetts by Henry B. Peirce

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HENRY B. PEIRCE

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OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND
DEATHS IN MASSACHUSETTS**

① Mass.—Secretary of State. (1887.)

*Copies of this pamphlet will be furnished to Town Clerks,
Clergymen, Justices of the Peace, Physicians, Sextons and
Undertakers upon request.*

INSTRUCTIONS AND LAWS

CONCERNING THE

REGISTRATION

OF

Births, Marriages and Deaths

IN

MASSACHUSETTS:

DESIGNED FOR

TOWN CLERKS, PHYSICIANS, CLERGYMEN,
SEXTONS, UNDERTAKERS, ETC.

By HENRY B. PEIRCE,

SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

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Bill of
Hon. J. A. Green.

NOTICE.

Wherever the term "Town Clerk" appears it will be understood to mean the Clerk or Registrar of a city or town.

Blanks for all Returns and Certificates called for herein will be furnished upon application.

The bill for obtaining, recording, indexing and returning the facts called for within must be certified by the Secretary before being presented to the town. (See chap. 32, sect. 12, P. S.)

Letter postage (two cents per ounce) must be paid upon returns when sent by mail.

Any additional legislation will appear in the Annual Registration Reports.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT.

BOSTON, May 2, 1887.

To City and Town Clerks:

The amount annually expended in this Commonwealth to obtain the facts concerning Births, Marriages and Deaths will exceed forty thousand dollars. This liberal outlay ought to secure complete and carefully prepared returns. Many of the returns made to this department are models of neatness and correctness, while some are made up in a careless and slipshod manner. The object of this pamphlet is to stimulate to the greatest care on the part of all, to the end that the Registration of Massachusetts may be the most perfect in the world. Every name should be plainly written and correctly spelled, and all facts called for under the laws distinctly entered. *A few of the Clerks have inferred that the statute directing Physicians, etc., to make returns of Births, relieved them from the duty of canvassing, when it was only intended as an auxiliary: the law requires the Clerks to obtain all the facts, otherwise the fee of fifty cents in each case would be manifestly excessive.* The Physicians' returns are a great help, especially in thickly settled localities: oftentimes the record of a Birth is thus obtained which

the canvasser would miss, the family having meantime moved from town. Births occurring late in the year are sometimes returned without Christian name ; in all such cases, the names should be obtained as soon as possible and forwarded to this department. Failure to follow this suggestion may involve no end of trouble in the future. Marriage certificates should not be issued until all the facts called for under the law have been entered therein ; neither should they be accepted from the Minister or Magistrate before whom the Marriage was solemnized, until he has affixed the date thereof, and his name, residence and official station.

Probably few persons are aware of the importance of an accurate Registration to every civilized country, or of the legal and historic value of the statistics obtained. The decision of questions of legitimacy, of legal settlement in towns, and various other contested points, may often depend upon the facts registered, to say nothing of the important deductions relating to longevity, local salubrity, the relations of diseases, and the general subject of vital and mortuary statistics.

Especially during and since our late civil war has the value of a Registration system been apparent, in authenticating the claims of soldiers or their families upon the government, and in securing the identification of their wives or relatives.

The importance of *perfect* accuracy in the collection of facts and preparation of returns cannot be overestimated. While it is gratifying to commend the general fidelity and correctness of the returns transmitted to this office, leaving but little room for

improvement, and in many cases nothing further to be desired, it can never be amiss to suggest, that nothing less than complete returns will satisfy the requirements of law, or the ambition of a faithful Town Clerk.

Yours respectfully,

HENRY B. PEIRCE,

Secretary of the Commonwealth.

INSTRUCTIONS.

DUTIES OF PHYSICIANS AND MIDWIVES IN RELATION TO BIRTHS.

[Chap. 158, Acts 1883.]

Physicians and Midwives shall on or before the fifth day of each month report to the Clerk of each city or town, except Boston, a correct list of all children born therein during the month next preceding, at whose birth they were present, stating the date and place of each birth, the name of the child (if it has any), the sex and color of the child, the name, place of birth and residence of the parents, and the occupation of the father.

Fee. — The fee of the Physician or Midwife shall be twenty-five cents for each birth so reported, and shall be paid by the city or town in which the report is made.

For the convenience of Physicians and Midwives, and to insure uniformity in the reports, blank forms have been prepared, and may be obtained on application to the Clerk of the town where they reside.

DUTIES OF PHYSICIANS IN REGARD TO DEATHS.

[Chap. 32, Sect. 3, P. 8.]

A Physician who has attended a person during his last illness shall, when requested within fifteen days after the decease of such person, forthwith furnish for registration a certificate of the duration of the last sickness, the disease of which the person died, and the date of his decease, as nearly as he can state the same.

Penalty. — For refusing or neglecting to make such certifi-

cate, the Physician shall forfeit ten dollars to the use of the town in which he resides.

Suggestions to Physicians.

Upon the Undertaker or other person having charge of the funeral rites will usually devolve the duty of applying to the Physician for the certificate above referred to, in order to communicate the facts therein contained to the Town Clerk; and such application will commonly be made within twenty-four hours after the death.

In order to facilitate the effective operation of the law it is earnestly *recommended* that the Physician who has been in attendance at the death or during the last illness of any person, shall *place his certificate of the Cause of Death, immediately after such death, in the hands of some person in attendance, or of some member of the household in which the death occurred*, for the use of the Undertaker or other informant in making return of the death to the Town Clerk.

Entire accuracy in stating the Cause of Death cannot reasonably be expected; but the *opinions* of medical men on this point are deemed very desirable.

The Duration of the Disease should be *reckoned to the time of death*. When a death is the result of two or more successive or concurrent Causes, *each* Cause should be specified and the duration thereof as nearly as may be. The successive Causes should in all cases be entered in the order of their appearance (i. e., in the order of time), not in the order of their presumed importance.

In the case of *post mortem* examination, the fact may be indicated in the certificate by writing *p. m.* after the name of the disease.

For the use of Physicians and for the purpose of securing precision and uniformity in the nomenclature and classification of Diseases, the Statistical Nosology adopted for Registration purposes in this State is appended. (See page 17.)

For the convenience of Physicians, and to insure uniformity of returns, blank forms of Certificates of Causes of Death have been prepared, and may be obtained on application to the Clerk of the town in which they reside.