

**SIXTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH
OF THE CITY OF BOSTON,
FOR THE YEAR 1887**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649353507

Sixteenth Annual Report of the board of health of the city of Boston, For the Year 1887 by
Various

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BOSTON:
ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL, CITY PRINTERS,
No. 39 ARCH STREET.
1888.

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[DOCUMENT 21 — 1888.]

CITY OF  BOSTON.

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BOARD OF HEALTH,
12 BEACON STREET, BOSTON, JAN. 1, 1888.

To the Honorable the Mayor and City Council of Boston:—

The Board of Health respectfully submits its sixteenth report, covering the work of this department for the year 1887.

The mortality of the city for the past year has exceeded that of any like period for several years past, the total number of deaths from all causes having been 10,073 as compared with 9,268 deaths the year before. Putting the present population of the city at 400,000, which, however, is a lower figure than an actual enumeration of our population would show, the death-rate for the year is 25.18 for each one thousand inhabitants compared with a rate of 23.17 for each one thousand the previous year, and 24.04 in 1885.

A variety of causes have contributed to this excessive death-rate, the principal one being the unusual heat which prevailed during the summer months, and the consequent increase in the number of diarrhoeal diseases. During the months of June, July, and August the deaths from cholera-infantum alone numbered 414, being 4.10 per cent. of the total mortality for those months, against a percentage of 3.51 for the corresponding period the previous year. The mean average temperature for June, July, and August the past year was 68.2, and the average humidity 74.3, showing atmospheric conditions that bear heavily upon the health of the infant population in the thickly settled sections of a great city, however vigilant the health authorities may be in caring for the sanitary condition of such localities. During the same period the number of preventable diseases among adults also increased the death-rate somewhat, though hardly in a corresponding ratio. Measles was very prevalent during the months of July, August, and September, and immediately following there was a large and general prevalence of scarlatina, which continued with a diminishing fatality to the end of the year. Prompt and effective measures were taken by the Board to prevent the spread of this disease; and, though it was of the severest type with one exception for nine years, less than two per cent. of the total number of deaths were from scarlatina. Diphtheria proved an exception to the general rule, showing many less deaths resulting from it than for the year previous. The percentage of all the zymotic deaths to the total mortality during the year was 19.7, which, though slightly in excess of the percentage for one or two years previous, is far below the average rate for the past ten years, during which time the preventable deaths have shown a gradual but constant falling off until the year just closed. Among the diseases of a non-preventable character, which materially increased the number of deaths, may be mentioned cancer, respiratory and tubercular diseases, heart-disease, and those of an accidental and violent character, with a large number due to an advanced old age.

Another explanation of the increased death-rate of the city is undoubtedly to be found in the fact that, in estimating it, no account is taken of the increase of the city's population, which is generally conceded to be considerably in excess of the figures which form the basis of this Board's calculations. It has been thought best, however, to keep as near to the census figures as seemed reasonable, even though in so doing the death-rate was made to appear unduly large as compared with those of the other large cities of the country. The Board believes that an enumeration of the inhabitants undertaken by the police, as is done in several of our larger cities, in the years which intervene between the census years, would show that our population has rapidly increased since the last census was taken, and that the city's death-rate is not actually so large as is here given. The rates of mortality in some of the leading cities of the country are given in the following table; but it is always necessary to keep in mind the fact that these rates are based on estimated populations.

CITIES.	Death rate per 1,000 inhabitants.	Percentage of zymotic deaths to total mortality.	Percentage of children under five years to total mortality.
New York	26.27	26.3	46.4
Brooklyn	22.5	28.3	44.6
Philadelphia	21.9	16.3	38.2
Chicago	20.2	28.4	49.0
Baltimore	18.8	21.2	41.3
St. Louis	21.7	27.8	41.4
Cincinnati	19.9	25.7	39.0
Boston	25.18	19.7	36.35

To show how trustworthy these rates are, as indicating the comparative mortality of the cities mentioned, we give here a table showing their population, as given by the last national census, and the population claimed by the same cities now, on which they calculate their respective death-rates:—

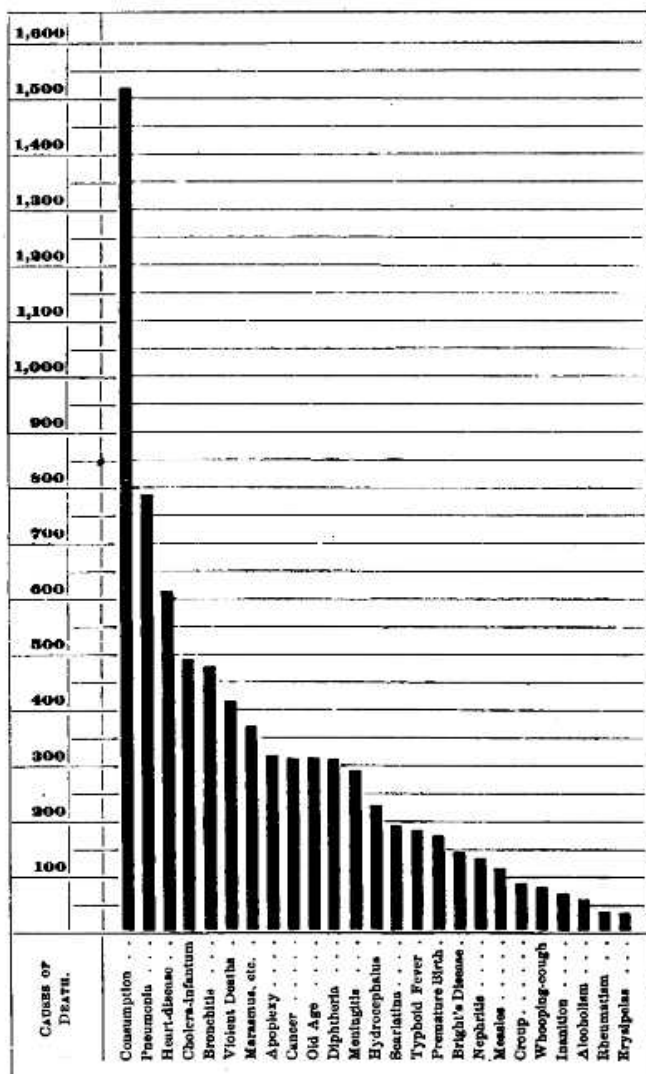
CITIES.	Population by Census, 1880.	Estimated Population, 1887.	Estimated Increase of Population.	Percentage of Increase.
New York	1,206,209	1,481,920	275,711	22.8
Philadelphia	847,170	993,801	146,631	17.3
Chicago	503,185	760,000	256,815	51.0
Brooklyn	566,863	757,755	191,092	33.7
Baltimore	832,313	437,155	104,842	31.5
St. Louis	350,518	420,000	69,482	19.8
San Francisco	233,050	300,000	66,941	28.7
Cincinnati	255,139	325,000	69,861	27.3
Boston	362,839	400,000	37,161	10.2

A glance at the foregoing table of population will account for the larger death-rate of Boston when compared with most of these cities.

A more reasonable and trustworthy basis on which to calculate the comparative sanitary condition of the several large cities is the percentage of deaths from zymotics to the total deaths from all causes. Taking this as a basis of calculation, it will be found, by reference to the first of the foregoing tables, that the percentage of preventable deaths in Boston during the past year was considerably lower than that of any other large American city, excepting only Philadelphia. The percentage of deaths of children under five years of age, which is another guide to the sanitary condition of a city, is shown to be lower in this than in any other of the large cities, not excepting Philadelphia.

The following chart shows the comparative mortality in the city during the year, from twenty-five of the more prevalent diseases:—

Comparative View of Twenty-five of the Principal Causes of Death, during the Year 1887.



■ Deaths from Zymotic diseases.
 ■ Deaths from other diseases.