SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH OF THE CITY OF BOSTON, FOR THE YEAR ENDING APRIL 30, 1879; DOCUMENT 89

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CITY OF BOSTON.

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

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OF THE

CITY OF BOSTON.

MAY 1, 1879.

To the City Council of Boston: —

Agreeably to the ordinances relating to the public health, we herewith submit our annual report for the year ending April 30, 1879. During the year our attention has been given, as usual, to such matters as are comprehended in the abatement of nuisances, examination of vacant lots, drains, offensive trades, tenement-houses, small-pox, scarlet fever, fish-peddlers, grease-collectors, removal of manure, care of burial-grounds, infant boarding-houses, lying-in hospitals, adulteration of food, and quarantine. Some of the subjects mentioned require a more extended notice, as will be seen elsewhere.

NUISANCES.

The work attending the abatement of nuisances has been continued as heretofore. During nine months in the year a

systematic inspection has been made, not less than twice, of every court, lane, yard, and alley in the city, and of every tenement-house not less than three times. Many of them have been more frequently examined. The remaining three months in the year, which is the hot season, the officers have been engaged in investigating complaints made at the office, which are so numerous as to require their whole time.

The total number of nuisances abated by our order during the year is 27,593, and are classed as follows: —

Relating to	May.	June.	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April.	Total.
Vaults and privies . .	128	743	2,782	2,644	1,178	892	128	297	136	101	109	110	8,748
Drainage	155	179	155	233	194	207	194	254	235	219	214	244	2,483
Cellars cleaned, etc. .	33	143	447	469	314	92	25	70	43	59	83	65	1,793
Yards " . .	17	483	1,341	1,308	661	127	54	110	21	31	46	56	4,255
Cesspools	17	346	1,185	1,414	599	235	8	10	9	2	9	10	3,850
Vacant lots	14	27	58	73	53	1	2	3	. .	1	1	3	271
Passageways	4	308	981	915	555	128	3	4	2	4	3	7	2,867
Stagnant water . . .	29	27	45	84	29	29	42	40	17	25	45	70	473
Exposed manure . .	4	6	9	8	7	3	1	8	. .	4	3	11	61
Fowls	8	10	6	16	20	7	4	26	14	9	1	8	129
Swine	3	4	5	11	6	2	3	4	1	. .	1	. .	40
General want of cleanliness	5	6	10	4	7	7	2	6	9	8	16	14	94
Receptacles for garbage	1	3	3	7	. .	. .	2	5	2	6	2	. .	31
Repairs	. .	2	1	1	. .	. .	. .	. .	3	3	4	11	25
Streets cleaned and disinfected	. .	129	431	643	293	60	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	1,556
Goats	1	. .	1	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	1	2	. .	. .	5
Whitewashing	. .	1	1	1	. .	2	1	. .	. .	. .	2	1	9
Cellars occupied for sleeping purposes .	. .	. .	. .	2	1	3	. .	. .	. .	1	. .	. .	7
Sundries	12	41	177	250	234	23	16	30	30	22	36	25	896
Total	431	2,456	7,618	8,083	4,151	1,309	490	864	523	497	525	646	27593

The number of houses ordered to be vacated, 108.
" " " actually vacated, 28.
80 houses were repaired or put in order at once, whereupon the order to vacate was cancelled.

BACK BAY FLATS.

The Back Bay flats are still a great source of the most offensive odors, which reach to a great distance among the dwellings of the South End and Back Bay. The condition of these flats is now such that they are offensive at all times, but more so at low tide, when they are left bare in a warm sun. With any disturbance of the mud by filling or otherwise, the stench renders the habitation of houses at the leeward of this place almost unbearable. The Board of Health will rebuild the dam at the Beacon-street sluiceway again this season, to be torn down again in the fall. This keeps the flats covered to a moderate degree at low tide, and, undoubtedly, lessens the escape of gases from the mud.

The disturbance of the mud in the process of filling for the new park, is a great source of offence, and should not be permitted during the warm weather, and the dumping of ashes, or other material which contains garbage, dead animals, or filth of any kind, should not be permitted at any time except on condition that it shall be *immediately and deeply covered and confined by good clean gravel, and there remain undisturbed.* The filling and covering of these offensive flats should be forwarded with all possible despatch during cold weather, and then leave the mud quiet during the summer.

It is expected that the sewers now discharging upon these flats from Boston will be diverted some time during the next year (1880), but with the present serious nature of the nuisance, it behooves us to consider carefully to what extent temporary measures may be taken to render habitation in the vicinity of these flats tolerable until the new sewer becomes available. The dam at the sluiceway, raised to grade six, cannot be carried higher without clogging drains which find an outlet in the Stony-brook sewer, and doing other damage to property on the south and east borders of the flats, but the temporary extension of the Stony-brook sewer to deeper water would be an improvement.

SEWERAGE.

To abate a nuisance caused by the great area of sewage-polluted flats in Charles river and the Back Bay, was one of the principal objects in building our large intercepting sewer.

That this great piece of work will mitigate the evil in the localities mentioned, and relieve other places now intolerable nuisances, and be justified by a thankful people, there can

be no doubt. But that the *whole object* sought for in this expensive enterprise will not be realized when the sewage on this side of the river has been all diverted and taken to a safe distance from the city, is equally true.

If we take the lower East Boston ferry for the limit, we shall find that Boston discharges into the waters above this point, twenty-two sewers, representing about 90,000 inhabitants; while Cambridge, Somerville, Waltham, Watertown, Arlington, Belmont, Winchester, Medford, Everett, Malden, Revere, Chelsea, Charlestown, and East Boston, representing 202,593 inhabitants, are discharging fifty-nine sewers into the same waters, above the same point on the opposite side.

To this great amount of common sewage is added a very large quantity of animal matter from the numerous slaughtering and fat-rendering establishments in Cambridge and Somerville.

The flats in Charles river, and the sewer outlets from Cambridge and Somerville, may be seen upon the first map. It will also be seen that the channel of the river sets over towards Beacon-street sluiceway, making it favorable for this sewage to be carried, on a flood tide, directly through the sluiceway to the Back Bay flats upon the spot for the new park. Brookline, Brighton, and Newton, representing 29,000 inhabitants, turn their sewage into the Charles river, above Boston, on this side.

It will be easily seen how far short of real success we shall come with our expensive enterprise if such an amount of filth is still permitted to settle upon the flats and defile the shallow waters about us. Disappointment will be sure to follow the completion of our most praiseworthy undertaking.

The people on the west side of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay territory, having been fanned for the last twenty years by the prevailing polluted summer breezes across this immense bed of mud-flats, have been led to suppose that sweet, cool, and refreshing air was near at hand; that the completion of the intercepting sewer would complete the existence of their noisome odors. There can be no doubt that a great improvement in the atmosphere of the West End, South End, and Back Bay territory will follow the use of the new sewer; but we ask you to look at Map Number 2 in connection with Map Number 1, and with no sewage entering the river from the Boston side, calculate the effect of fourteen cities and towns, with a population of over 200,000, draining out over the area of flats there represented. The conclusion is inevitable: you are forced to see that so long as this great amount of filth is permitted to settle upon these flats, they will be a source of great offence, and will depreciate the value of real estate in the vicinity.