

Department of Health of Alexandria

Any city of the present day, is largely judged by the kind of health protective organization its citizens are willing to spend their money to maintain. And it is perfectly just and logical that a city should be so rated for what could be more important than the protection of the lives and health of its citizens? It is certainly an imperative duty of the people of any city to make it a safe place in which to live!

The four principal questions asked of a city at the present time are: Have you a well organized and efficient Health Department? Have you a competent and modernized Fire Department? Have you an efficient Police Department?

As this article deals with the Health Department only, we will take up the first question and answer it in some detail.

In 1918, owing to certain conditions then existing, and to the fact that Alexandria was in the military zone of Camp Humphrey, a Sanitary Unit of the U. S. Public Health Service



Dr. Louis E. Foulks

was assigned to the City, with a commissioned medical officer in charge. This unit included Red Cross nurses, bacteriologist, sanitary inspectors, etc., and took full charge of all health protective measures. On Jan. 1, 1919, Asst. Surgeon General Clark, of the Public Health Service, assigned Dr. Louis E. Foulks, a medical officer who up to that time was attached to the Influenza Relief Headquarters, U. S. Public Health Service as Chief of the Division of Food Control and Sanitary Inspection, Military Zone of the District of Columbia to Alexandria as Chief Sanitary Inspector, and ordered him to make a complete sanitary survey of the city. This survey was finished in March, and the various maps, charts, and photographs, together with the official report with suggestions made to correct insanitary conditions found, were brought to the attention of the City Councils by the commanding officer, Dr. R. P. Sandridge. It should be understood that prior to the Public Health Service taking charge in 1918, there was no regular health organization in the city. A local physician acted as health officer, with a local veterinarian as an assistant. Both gave only a portion of their time to the work, and received a nominal salary.

In an address before the City Councils, Dr. Sandridge pointed out that part time health work was practically money wasted. He also called attention to the fact that the Public Health Service would withdraw its unit on June 30th, and strongly urged Council to make provision for an efficient full-time health department, with a bacteriological laboratory and trained personnel. Realizing that the time had come for serious action, they requested Dr. Sandridge to submit a plan for the formation of a permanent, full-time health organization, to be effective July 1, 1919. He did so, the plan was promptly adopted and an appropriation was made to carry it into effect. The next step was to secure a competent outside man, who would be entirely free from and local ties or affiliations, to act as health officer, and organize and carry out the large and varied amount of pioneer work the new department of health would have to do. Dr. Sandridge knowing the wide, practical experience of Dr. Foulks, along the lines of disease prevention and general sanitary work; in both field and laboratory; strongly urged that his services be secured. Although Dr. Foulks was offered the same position in another city of more than twice the size of Alexandria, and at twice the salary, he gave the matter serious thought. He consulted with the Asst. Surgeon General, who pointed out the fact that as he had made the sanitary survey of the city, he knew more about the conditions needing correction than any other individual, and should be able to do work of great public benefit, far more so than in the other Virginia city, that desired his services. This induced Dr. Foulks to agree to accept the office for a period of one year. At a joint session of the City Council, held in June 1919, Dr. Foulks was unanimously elected Health Officer. Lieut. R. S. Dearstyn was elected City Bacteriologist and Miss Sallie Jeffries, R. N., Public Health Nurse. Immediately after his election, Dr. Foulks appointed Dr. James J. Garvey, Veterinarian, to be Assistant Health Officer. This appointment was promptly confirmed by Council. He also appointed Miss M. A. Brock, as clerical

On July 1st, 1919, the newly organized, full-time Department of Health took official charge of the city, with headquarters in the City Hall. This is the history of the birth and organization of the present Health Department of Alexandria.

What Has The Health Department Accomplished since its Organization?

Since taking charge on July 1st, 1919, it has done a large amount of important and constructive work in making Alexandria a safer place in which to live. It has greatly reduced the number of cases of such communicable diseases as typhoid, scarlet fever, diptheria, smallpox, etc. It has reduced the death rate of all forms of communicable diseases, from 85 in 1919 to 64 in 1921. It has reduced the death rate of typhoid over 65 per cent! The total deaths from all causes shows a steady decline during the past three years. A clinic for treatment of venereal disease has been conducted, also a general daily clinic for treating the poor of the city. A special tuberculosis clinic is also held. The department has, from time to time drawn up and secured the passage by City Council of many important and comprehensive laws regulating the handling of all forms of foods and drinks. The regulation of restaurants, grocery stores, meat markets, etc. The regulation of dairies, etc. The regulation of dairy farms fixing the standard quality of all milk sold within the city limits. A law regulating the storage and collection of garbage, requiring it to be stored in fly-tight metal cans. A special law prohibiting the sale of unwrapped bread.

This department has given special attention to various unanswered sections of the city, where the most dangerous unsanitary conditions existed. In order to correct these conditions, the department from time to time prepared a total of 26 petitions for sewer extensions, and presented them to City Council. All of these were granted and the extensions have been constructed, the last section being finished in February of this year. All houses abutting upon these sewer extensions, over 400 in number, have been connected thereto, except those upon the section finished last month, and these will be between now and April 1st.

When the health department began its sanitary work in July 1919, it was found that approximately 375 houses had been abutting upon city sewers from 1 to 7 years, yet had never been connected. This constituted a serious menace to the public health, a menace the department was determined to correct. As fast as these houses were located and inspected, an official notice was served upon the owners, and if they failed to comply with the order to connect their properties to the city sewers, they were summoned into Court. This made some enemies for the health department, but as the health officer was working for the public good, it did not deter him from his work. At the present time there are no houses abutting the city sewers, that are not connected thereto, except the few that have had their time extended to April 1st.

A Few Facts and Figures Taken from Official Records General Food Inspection

From July 1st, 1919 to Dec. 31st, 1921, the department condemned and destroyed a total of 28,805 lbs. of tuberculosis meat, 3,216 cans of spoiled fish. There is also a long list of various stuff condemned that would take too much space to list here, consisting of many hundreds of pounds of chickens, turkeys, livers, pork, lamb, mutton, barrels and crates of fish, gallons of oysters, etc. All of the thousands of pounds of diseased beef and other food mentioned above, would have been sold to the people of Alexandria, but for the constant inspection work of the health department.

All the restaurants and hotels are kept under almost daily inspection, while other places such as meat markets, grocery stores, fish markets, candy and ice cream stores, bakeries, soft drink establishments, are, as far as it is physically possible, inspected once a week, and more frequently when necessary.

Dairy and Milk Inspection

When the health department began its work in 1919, it found the milk situation far from satisfactory. Many of the dairy farms supplying milk to this city, were found to be in an unsanitary condition and without sufficient or modern equipment to enable them to produce milk of a standard safe quality. Some had no milk houses and the milk was bottled under unsafe conditions, while others having milk houses had made no provisions for heating water to wash bottles and dairy utensils. These conditions and many others have been changed for the better. All cows furnishing milk to this city, must be tuberculin tested at least once each year. Every dairyman must secure a permit from the health department, before he can sell milk within the city limits, and this permit is only issued after his cows have been tested, his barns and equipment inspected and passed upon by the veterinarian and dairy inspector, Dr. Garvey, who is the Assistant health officer. To state it in a few words, the health department has revolutionized the whole situation to such an extent, that today Alexandria is getting as good a grade of milk and as free from contamination, as any other city in this section of the country.

Medical Inspection

The Medical Department assists the Board of Education in the medical examination of school children. The department nurse also assists the school nurse in daily inspection work. Over a thousand school children have been vaccinated since this department was organized. Any scholar who has been excluded from school on account of having symptoms of a communicable disease, or where such a disease exists in the family, cannot return until examined by the Health Officer and given a written order by him.

The employees of all restaurants are kept under constant observation by the Health Officer, and when deemed necessary by him, must submit to a full medical examination and laboratory tests to insure his or her freedom from communicable disease.

The Health Department does a very large amount of medical examination work, in order to prevent the spread of the various forms of communicable diseases. This is all done in such a quiet, tactful way, that few people know it is being done. It is none the less very important work.

Venereal Clinic

This clinic was established October 1st, 1919, and is conducted jointly by the Federal Government, the State of Virginia and the Health Department, with Dr. W. Clyde West, a specialist in genito-urinary diseases, as clinician.

The official records of the clinic show that from Oct. 1st, 1919, to Dec. 31st, 1921, a total of 970 patients were treated for venereal diseases and 8,160 treatments were given! This will give some idea of the extent of the work done by this section of the Health Department in not only protecting the health of the present generation, but of future generations as well, from the most destructive and widely extended diseases known to medical science.

General Clinic For The City Poor

This clinic was started September 1920, and from that date up to Dec. 31st, 1921, it has treated 345 patients and given a total of 1,013 treatments. The Clinician also visits the City Alms House and looks after the in-

mates requiring medical attention. He also looks after the inmates of the Anne Lee Memorial Home. When the case requires, the Health Department nurse visits the poor patients in their homes. This will show that the poor of our city need never suffer for a lack of medical attention.

Some Plans for the Future Besides improving and extending the various sections of the work now being conducted, the Health Department expects to establish a children's clinic, both medical and dental, to be conducted with the assistance of local doctors and dentists. It expects to improve the present garbage collecting system, and if possible, have daily collections during the summer months. It might be stated here, that the garbage collecting system of this city does not cost the taxpayers a single cent! This is about as cheap a system as any person could well devise.

The department has in preparation a revised and up-to-date plumbing code, also a plan to have a "Board of Condemnation," with powers to condemn buildings that are unsafe and unfit for human habitation. It has plans to improve the general sanitary condition of our alleys, streets and vacant lots.

In fact it is proposed to make the department of Health of the city of Alexandria, second to none of any other city of its size in this country!

Health Department Personnel

Health Officer: Louie E. Foulks, B. Sc., M. D. Asst. Epidemiologist, U. S. Public Health Service. Member, American Public Health Association. Society of American Bacteriologists. Ass't Health Officer: James J. Garvey, D. V. S.

Clinician and Bacteriologist: W. Clyde West, M. D. Specialist in Genito-Urinary diseases and Syphilis. Public Health Nurse: Miss M. A. Davis, R. N. Department Clerk: Miss Elizabeth F. Schneider.

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to Hungary, on the south to Greece, on the east to Rumania, and on the west to the Adriatic Sea. It is not sufficient to fight for it, but one must try to put her in order, and cause education to penetrate so that she may then be equal to other great countries.

"First, each inhabitant must take care of his house; embellish and construct houses up to the highest floor. Also pay attention to the poor villages,