

OFFICIAL

Proceedings of the Common Council

Regular Meeting.

St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 2, 1884.

President Smith in the chair.

Present: Ald. Carr, O'Brien, O'Connor, Robert, Colton, O'Connell, Johnson, Van Slyke, St. Peter, Mr. President.

COMMUNICATIONS.

From His Honor the Mayor.—Precautions against cholera.

From the Common Council of the City of St. Paul.

GENTLEMEN: The occurrence of the recent and still existing cholera epidemic in Europe, together with the enormous ravages which it has made there, has necessarily attracted general attention throughout the United States, and experience would seem to indicate that the transmission of such an epidemic to this country, and that upon its appearance here it has usually followed the great avenues of travel and commerce.

In view of the facts and of the important duties with reference to the public health with which your honorable body and the executive officers of this city are charged, I have deemed it my duty to investigate the condition of this city with reference to the same, and in that behalf have called upon the Health Department for their views upon the subject.

The response from that Department has been immediate and exhaustive, and I herewith submit to you a communication from Dr. Hoyt which speaks for itself and need not be to your most earnest consideration.

With the consent of Dr. Hoyt I also called the matter to the attention of the County Medical Society of this city, which is composed of the most eminent physicians of the city, whose opinions and recommendations in their profession entitle them to the highest consideration upon any question which they may express with reference to matters within the scope of their professional duty and requirements. Their views upon this matter I have directly discussed, and I submitted to the body at one of its meetings the following questions:

First—Are we likely to have the cholera in St. Paul during the summer of 1885?

Second—Is the city in a good sanitary condition?

Third—What steps should be taken to place the city in the best possible condition in anticipation of a cholera epidemic?

These questions have been fully answered by the medical society through certain of its members, and the necessary investigation and response, and I herewith submit their answers to you for your consideration and action in connection with the communication of the health department, believing and trusting that the same will be thoroughly and wisely considered by you, and that the most important matter of the public health.

I do not intend to extend this communication beyond the necessary length, although I consider it my duty to make it the subject of a special meeting of your honorable body; nor is it my desire that in making it I should be considered to any extent to appear in the character of an alarmist. I simply seek to discharge the duties which are imposed upon me by the nature of the threatened approach of this most dangerous and epidemic disease, and with the desire to further enable your honorable body to obtain such accurate and reliable information upon the subject as will enable you upon your part to most thoroughly and efficiently, and for the general public good, perform the duties which you have undertaken and which you have so well discharged in every respect.

It must not be forgotten that in the extraordinary epidemic which has recently occurred in which we are now engaged, and that the magnitude of the public and private works in which we are now engaged, and that the question of the public health both underlies and surrounds them all in its importance, and that the duties which it imposes upon us, whether our magnificent public improvements, or our commercial enterprise, financial success, or general advance in culture or prosperity, are of any service to us unless at the same time the sanitary condition of the city is such as to afford the most thorough protection of the public health, and that should be particularly guarded against the occurrence of epidemics of any character.

In our situation, and with our climate, Nature has put us in a position to be amply protected from the ravages of such occurrences, if due care is given, and proper precautions are taken against the existence of dangerous localities, or the accumulation of the accretions of the city in the shape of garbage or other filth which form the hotbeds of disease.

We are under a special and solemn duty in this particular to that large portion of our citizens who, upon the advent of such a disease, would be unable to protect themselves in their own homes, and who, in their particular locality, or a removal from them to other points. It is further apparent from the report of the Health Department, and the very important communication from the County Medical Society, that there are in this city conditions and localities which would be fruitful sources for the inception and spread of the disease referred to, should the same obtain a foothold upon this continent and be transmitted to this city. That these gentlemen seriously apprehend such an invasion of the United States by the cholera epidemic, believe that in case of such an invasion it will be necessarily transmitted to this city; and that if the conditions which they complain of are not changed and immediately removed, it is apt to assume an epidemic form among us under these circumstances immediate action is required.

There is but one policy to pursue and that is to place the city at once in the best sanitary condition possible at whatever trouble or expense the same may be obtained.

No question of hesitancy ought to be considered for an instant. If the apprehensions of the gentlemen referred to should be fulfilled, and no steps should be taken in the interim to avert the pestilence, it will be too late when the fatal certainty of the disease has become a fact, and that which we can do now, and that which we have ample time and opportunity to effect, and neglect or hesitation upon our part in this matter would, if the result should be fatal to any of our citizens, be a criminal negligence upon our part beyond the effect of an absolute affirmative crime.

I therefore most earnestly request your immediate and most thorough investigation of this subject, and upon the apprehended appearance of cholera in the United States during the coming summer and the condition of this city to resist its attacks.

The necessary steps to be taken to make such resistance require immediate action.

I do not stop to point out to you from among the various means which are available, the action, and the benefits to accrue to the city from a public conviction and belief founded upon your action, that the sanitary condition of the city would be such as to practically protect against an epidemic, so far as human means could do so, for I conceive it to be the fact that the higher obligation, our duty to the public and the preservation of the public health, is a sufficient, and more than sufficient, reason for the most prompt and the most energetic action upon your part. But the improvements suggested, or which you may find to be necessary, will of great benefit in another respect; that is, in giving employment during the winter to such portions of our people as may need it.

The liberty of suggesting that the matter be placed in the hands of a committee of your honorable body, upon whom, in connection with the health department, there shall be conferred the most full and complete powers of action: that such committee be authorized to employ the County Medical Society, or any other medical society, or any other persons, to make such investigation and report, and that, as a result of such action, the opening of spring will find our city in such perfect sanitary condition as will be able to give our citizens, and others who may come among us for refuge, a reasonable and fair probability of immunity from the disease the approach of which is so seriously apprehended.

If we do this, which is neither more nor less than our plain and imperative duty, we shall have done our duty, and, knowing that, in the providence of God, our country shall be spared from the dire misfortune feared, we, in the apprehension of its advent, have taken all the steps that we

humanly should to protect our people against its dangers. D. O'BRIEN, Mayor.

November 29, 1884.

The following are the communications referred to in the foregoing:

To the Honorable, the Mayor and the Common Council of the City of St. Paul:

GENTLEMEN: For the past I have been engaged in making a personal inspection of different parts of the city, with a view of ascertaining its deficiencies, their location and remedy. I shall first present for your consideration a few facts and figures in connection with the portion of the city northward known as "Swede Hollow," and the Conemaugh settlement. Above the Seventh street fill, built down in the valley of Phalen creek, are shanties for one hundred families; above the Seventh and Fourth streets; same distance from Lafayette avenue and Fourth street, are fifty families. A large majority of the people are very poor and ignorant, especially in regard to sanitary measures. Their only facilities for drainage are the creeks. These, of course, are full of filth, and the most of it is thrown out upon the streets or washed along and lodged on the banks of the streams, and there left to decay. The water supply of these people is these streams, wells and springs. The result of drinking water from such wells or streams is too well known to mention, and their springs cannot be much better, they being simply the natural drainage from the inhabitants of the hills above them. It is not necessary to dwell on the condition of these localities, they being well known to you.

After careful investigation and thorough study of the matter from all its bearings, the only solution of this difficulty—in the opinion of the Health Department—is the removal of the shanties from their present position, the city where the natural drainage of the water supply will not be so prejudicial to their own and the public health as their present site; but removal at this or any other season of the year means to these people expense and hardship, and the removal of which they will undertake voluntarily. The only removal is out of the question, as the Council decided at their last meeting their removal if accomplished, must be at the expense of the city. If this is favorably considered, the Health Department is appointed to secure another location, estimate the cost, and report as soon as possible when action can be taken.

PLATS IN THE SIXTH WARD.

Emanating from the bluffs in West St. Paul are a series of living springs, each one contributing a certain quantity of water to the spring, and running away by a small stream which runs along the foot of the bluff; latterly this stream has been completely obliterated by the construction of streets and other improvements, and the water now collects in pools which lay there stagnating, and which are a source of filth, and which, with dead animals and other material, are a source of filth. With the kind assistance of City Engineer Somers, and Abstract Clerk Passavant, a description of the property covered with these ponds and the names of the owners was obtained, and a visit to whom disclosed the fact that they were more or less as follows: The Health Department is appointed to have the nuisance abated, and some of them have, while others are now filling their respective lots, and with the steady supply from the springs, the water is of a material difference as regards general result. The flats are flat, and when one lot is filled the water simply seeks its level somewhere else. A large main sewer is more than badly needed, commencing several blocks west of Dakota avenue and running east to the river, the necessary steps for the construction of which should not be delayed. The idea is practicable, as there is a fall of one foot in a thousand along the proposed route. After sewers will come the water works, and the percentage of each service, and the same can be brought to the water, and an equality with the rest of the city, instead of being greatly in the excess, as previous reports show.

The stagnant pools on the side of the river I am endeavoring to have filled by the owners; if I do not succeed I shall apply for assistance later. Now that we shall shortly be in possession of such a magnificent water supply, provision should be made to flush all the pipes, at regular intervals, especially during winter months, and to clean them probably nearly as much in cold weather as warm, and as fresh air is excluded so much more from dwellings during cold weather, the injurious effects of the gas, when it does obtain entrance, is therefore greatly increased.

We do not want nor wish to be sensational nor exaggerate, and have endeavored to present nothing but plain unvarnished facts in this communication, and with a strong probability of a cholera invasion of the city, the sooner the necessity of vigorous and immediate action is apparent to all, by all universally conceded and not only conceded but demanded. These conditions which I have called your attention to, I think no one who has visited them will deny that they are veritable hotbeds for the reception and propagation of disease germs, and under the present circumstances, they cannot be regulated too soon, but they are on a large scale, and we need your assistance. Past years of money and labor have been expended in Paris during the past season in sanitary precautions, and when the dread disease has been carried into their midst by a traveler from the infected districts, it finds the city in a considerable extent prepared, and what might have been a very fatal epidemic, is held far to be held in abeyance. I will quote a few extracts from a cablegram of November 15th: "Cholera as a disease in Paris is fast subsiding, the best medical experts are uniting their exertions to the authorities, as well as to the people, to the very best of their power to combat not only its present attack, but to provide measures for the complete stamping out of the scourge." They say: "That any feeling of security during the winter, even in the event of the total disappearance of the epidemic, is fatal, for the latent germs of the disease are likely to be excited into quick life on the first approach of the coming summer. Crowds of fugitives are already filling the London hotels."

It is suggested by prominent members of the government, that the city of Paris borrow 50,000,000 francs and expend it in sanitary improving the capital. But to return to St. Paul, it will do no harm to look at these suggested improvements from a financial point of view. It is suggested that the city be properly managed and our city can be made second to none in the world in this matter of health. Do it, and if the cholera reaches our seaport-cities you will get dollars back where cents were expended.

In connection with the fact that when you strike a blow against cholera, you are duplicating the same action against diphtheria, scarlet and typhoid fevers. Very respectfully,

HENRY F. HOYT, M. D., Resident Board of Health.

Nov. 20, 1884.

Hon. C. O'Brien, Mayor of St. Paul:

Sir: At a meeting of the Ramsey County Medical Society, held on the evening of the 24th of October, a committee of physicians were appointed, viz: First, J. H. Murphy and H. F. Hoyt; Second, Park Ridge and Talbot Jones; Third, D. W. Hand and C. E. Smith; Fourth, Daniel Lesure and A. E. Senker; Fifth, Samuel D. Flagg and James Sloan; Sixth, O. A. Beal and J. M. H. Jones.

The present sanitary condition of the city, in view of the probable advent of epidemic cholera here next summer. This committee met at the city hall on the evening of the 25th inst., and after an earnest interchange of opinion, they leave to respectfully report as follows:

The committee restricted its inquiries to three questions, each of capital importance.

First—Are we likely to have cholera in St. Paul during the summer of 1885?

After a full and candid consideration of the matter, we are led inevitably to the conclusion that there is a great probability, if not a reasonable certainty, that St. Paul, the following summer, will be visited by Asiatic cholera. This belief is based upon the facts that, in the history of Asiatic cholera, which has thus far prevailed in Europe, the United States has either coincidentally or subsequently suffered from the same scourge.

(b) That on at least two different occasions in the past, cholera has prevailed in St. Paul, and that it was prevailing elsewhere in the country.

The mildness which characterized these epidemics when the city had but comparatively few inhabitants, should not be taken as the measure of the possible severity of an epidemic which may again appear here, with our enormous increased number and density of population.

Second, Is the city in a good sanitary condition? We believe the various parts of

the city to be in a fairly good sanitary condition, with certain notable exceptions, which are pronounced and notorious. The portion of our city known as "Swede Hollow," a section of West St. Paul on the flats at the base of the bluffs near Yeorg's brewery, and certain parts of Dayton bluff beyond the Van Buren school house are the city's plague spots and are in the highest degree dangerous to the public health.

We believe these spots are public nuisances and should be abated even though we were not threatened by an epidemic of cholera, but the necessity for their abatement in view of this city's menace from cholera, becomes imperative. The recent frightful experience with cholera which Toulon, Naples and other cities have undergone should warn the authorities of this city that efficient and vigorous measures should at once be undertaken, if possible, to avert such a calamity here. It is probable, and spread of the scourge in these cities was owing to just such unsanitary conditions as exist in certain parts of St. Paul to-day.

Third, What steps should be taken to place the city in the best possible condition in anticipation of a cholera epidemic? There was a unanimity of opinion amongst the committee that the most efficient and radical remedy would be the destruction or removal to sections of the city of the shanties and the water works and pools on Dayton bluff which contains surface water, effluvia, etc. We would lay special stress upon the importance of abating the nuisance known as "Swede Hollow."

It would be difficult to conceive of a section in a more lamentable condition as regards public health than this.

The air is impure, the dwellers are crowded together in miserable shanties, the drinking water is polluted, and the refuse is a means of getting one, and even the ground itself is poisoned by slops, garbage, refuse matter and the excreta of the inhabitants.

We believe the best methods for dealing with this problem, being the most radical and thorough, are the destruction of the houses, and the removal of the dwelling houses in Swede Hollow; but as special legislation would be necessary and the question of damage to property owners arise, the committee would recommend, which they earnestly do, that the Board of Health be authorized to purchase and means to abate the nuisances referred to, and their efforts in this connection will receive the cordial co-operation and support of the members of this committee.

If our recommendations are adopted we believe the city will be put in a good sanitary condition and an epidemic of cholera may be averted, but should we be visited in spite of all precautions, the city would at least be in a condition where the danger from the disease will be at a minimum.

Very respectfully,
ALD. STARKE, who moved that the communications be accepted and referred to a special committee of five to be appointed by the President.

The motion prevailed and the President appointed as such committee Ald. Starke, St. Peter, Van Slyke, Ots and O'Connor.

From H. F. Hoyt, Health Officer—

For permission to remove the small frame building, formerly used as a health office, to the foot of Chestnut street.

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