

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT.

FINAL REPORT OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE.

A History of the Old Organization, and Some Account of its Present Condition.

The following report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Fire Department was presented to the Board of Aldermen at its session, yesterday afternoon:

In view of the change in the management of the Fire Department, as provided in the ordinance approved October 24, 1873, the Joint Standing Committee of the City Council, which has had the general supervision of the department from the 16th of January last, begs leave to submit the following report, giving some account of the organization of the old department and a statement of its present condition:

As early as 1711, the General Court provided for the appointment in this city of officers known as Fire Wardens, with powers and duties similar to those now exercised by the engineers. The preamble to the act then passed recites that

"Whereas, by reason of the contiguity and adjoining of the houses and dwellings within the Town of Boston, persons are under great affliction and hurry upon the breaking out of fire, and not only the person in whose house the fire first breaks out, but the neighborhood, are concerned to employ their utmost diligence and application to extinguish the fire and prevent the progress thereof, and to preserve their substance by the removal of their goods, being glad of the assistance of the others in that regard, and divers evil-minded and wicked persons, on pretence of charitably offering their help, taking advantage of such confusion and calamities to rob, plunder, embezzle, convey away and conceal the goods and effects of their distressed neighbors,

"For preventing whereof,

"Section 1. Be it enacted by his Excellency the Governor, Council and Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, that it shall and may be lawful to and for the Justices of the Peace and Selectmen of the Town of Boston, from time to time, to appoint such number of prudent persons of known fidelity, not exceeding ten, in the several parts of the town, as they may think fit, who shall be denominated and called fire wards, and have a proper badge assigned to distinguish them in their offices, namely, a staff of five feet in length, colored red and headed with a bright brass spire of six inches long, and at times of the breaking forth of fire, and during the continuance thereof, shall, and hereby are fully authorized and empowered, to command and require assistance for the extinguishing and putting out the fire, and for removing of household stuff and furniture, goods and merchandises out of any dwelling-houses, storehouses, or other buildings actually on fire, or in danger thereof, and guards to secure and take care of the same, as also to require assistance for the pulling down or blowing up of any houses, or any other service relating thereto, by the direction of two or three of the chief civil or military officers of the town, as is by law provided, to stop and prevent the further spreading of the fire, and to suppress all tumults and disorder."

The first city charter, which went into operation on the 1st of May, 1822, provided that the citizens, at their respective ward meetings, should elect by ballot, a number of persons to be determined by the City Council, but not less than three in each ward, to be fire wards for the city, with all the powers and subject to all the duties then by law appertaining to the fire wards of the town. The condition of the department at that time is thus described by Mayor Quincy: "Its efficiency chiefly depended upon the skill of the inhabitants, applied under the authority of the fire wards. They formed lines of bystanders, who, by their direction, passed buckets of water from pumps or wells in the vicinity to the engines playing on the fire, and returned them for further supply."

This system of protection had its origin in the relations of the colonial state, when the inhabitants were few, habituated to labor, and respect for the rights of property was general. Dwelling-houses being then separated by gardens or vacant fields, extensive conflagrations were infrequent; yet, being of wood, and the means of insurance unattainable, their occasional loss kept alive the feeling of sympathy in the community. The duty of joining some fire company and assisting at every fire was, therefore, regarded as imperative.

At the time of the adoption of the City Government, Boston was in a transition state, and fast advancing to that period when, by the increase of population, ties of individual interest were diminished. The establishment of insurance offices had, in most cases, transferred the loss upon capitalists; and poverty and crime, multiplying with numbers, began to regard fires as harvests, from the gleaming of which they had not principle enough to abstain.

Although this state of things was obvious, and its effects began to be felt, yet it was long before the duty of aiding the sufferers caused the necessity of imposing restraint on the general interference of the citizens at fires to be recognized. This reluctance to acknowledge the effect of circumstances on the then existing system of protection was peculiarly strong among the engine companies, in whom the *esprit du corps* was active and general. From the earliest period of the settlement, the members of those companies had been accustomed to regard themselves as the guardians of the city against this element, and took a pride in the consciousness of their power. They were a body of men energetic and fearless. So far from regarding their labors as onerous, and looking for their reward in pecuniary compensation, a premium was often paid for admission into the companies, and they deemed themselves recompensed by a small allowance from the town, sufficient for an annual social supper, by exemption from militia duties, and the consciousness of useful and acceptable services to their fellow-townsmen. Their engines, found and supported by the town, were without ornament, and valued only for their power. To be first, nearest and most conspicuous at fires was the ambition of the enginemen; and the use of hose, as it had a tendency to deprive them of this gratification, was opposed.

In 1823 several companies petitioned for additional compensation for their services. It was refused. In one day all the engines in the city were surrendered by their respective companies; and on the same day every engine was supplied with a new company by the voluntary association of public-spirited individuals.

Authority was soon after obtained from the Legislature for the reorganization of the department, so as to make it independent of the aid of citizens in case of fire. The new organization went into effect on the 29th of April—the form then established having continued without any substantial change from that time to the present. The department at that time contained 330 men, sixteen hand engines and only 840 feet of hose. In 1837, the ordinance establishing the Fire Department was revised, and under its provisions the Chief Engineer submitted his first annual report in 1838. The department contained at that time thirteen engines, 595 members, fourteen hand engines, 8240 feet of leading hose, eighteen hose carriages and one hook and ladder carriage.

On the 17th of September, 1860, the manual engines were entirely dispensed with, and the steam engines (with hose tenders attached) and separate horse hose carriages substituted in their place. The apparatus of the department consisted of nine steam engines, with hose tenders, nine separate horse hose carriages and three hook and ladder carriages. The members, including the engineers, numbered 230 men.

The condition of the department at the time the great fire occurred, last year, has been so fully described heretofore that it would be superfluous to dwell upon the matter here. When the present Government entered upon its duties there was a very general demand on the part of the citizens that the efficiency of the department should be increased, both by additions to the apparatus, especially in the business portions of the city, and by changes in the organization of the force, so as to bring about a higher state of discipline. The recommendations made by the Mayor in his inaugural address, and also the recommendations made by the Commission appointed to investigate the cause and management of the great fire, received the immediate and earnest attention of this committee. On the 13th of March a report was submitted to the City Council, stating the progress made by the committee in strengthening and improving the department, and recommending certain changes in the ordinance by which greater responsibility in the management of the department would be secured. Those recommendations were referred to the Committee on Ordinances, and from that day to this no report has been made upon them. If the matter had received prompt attention, as requested by this committee, the principal defects of organization, which were dwelt upon with so much force after the fire of May 30, would have been cured, and the department would have been in a condition to meet calamity without fear as to the result.

The requests of the committee for appropriations from time to time, to carry out the improvements which they had projected have been responded to generally by the City Council with great promptness.

The following statements show the additions in men and materials made during the present year—January 1 to November 1—a period of ten months:

The following engine-houses have been built during the year, viz.:

Engine Company No. 12—Corner of Winslow and Dudley streets, Highlands. This house was built to take the place of the old one situated on the corner of Warren and Dudley streets, which was taken down on account of the widening of Warren street.

Engine Company No. 22—Parker street, Highlands. This building is for temporary use only.

Engine Company No. 24—Corner of Quincy and Warren streets, Highlands.

Engine Company No. 25—Washington Square. For temporary use.

Hose House No. 1—Northampton street. Has been enlarged so as to accommodate a steam fire-engine and horse hose-carriage.

Hose Company No. 12—Corner of Fourth and O streets, South Boston.

Hook and Ladder Company No. 6—Corner of River and Temple streets—Ward XVI.

Hook and Ladder Company No. 8—Washington Square. For temporary use.

A permanent house for Engine Company No. 25 and Hook and Ladder Company No. 8, corner of Washington Square and Perkins street, has been contracted for but not completed.

The building known as the "Normal School," on Mason street, is being remodelled so as to accommodate a permanent steam fire engine company.

A building for Hook and Ladder Company No. 4, on Dudley street, Highlands, has been contracted for.

Horse hose carriages have been placed in engine houses numbered 4, 7, 8, 9 and 25, to run in connection with the engines, in place of the small hose tenders formerly used.

In accordance with the order of the City Council, horse hose carriages will be placed in all the other engine houses as soon as they are completed.

The following pieces of apparatus have been repaired and put in the best condition:

Engines Nos. 6, 7, 8, 13 and 15; Hose Carriage No.

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9; and Hook and Ladder Carriage No. 7.

Several of the horse hose carriages have been remodelled so as to convey the firemen to fires.

The apparatus purchased or contracted for during the past year is as follows:

One steam fire engine from Hunneman & Co. (received), \$4000.

One steam fire engine from the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (received), \$4200.

One steam fire engine from Clapp & Jones (contracted for, to be delivered December 1), \$4250.

Four horse hose carriages from the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (contracted for), each \$650.

One horse hose carriage from William Gilchrist (received), \$1000.

One hook and ladder carriage from Hunneman & Co. (received), \$1600.

Four coal wagons from Joseph T. Ryan (received).

One self-acting fire engine (Hancock) from New England Fire Extinguisher Company (received), \$2000.

One steam fire engine from Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (contracted for), \$4250.

One self-acting fire engine from Holloway, Ballimore (contracted for), \$1500.

The following additions have been made to the working force of the department:

Engine companies numbered 4 and 7 have been reorganized by the appointment of the foremen and hosemen for constant service, making twelve permanent members in each company.

Hose company No. 1 has been changed to an engine company (No. 25), and twelve members appointed for constant service, making an addition to the department of five men.

Hose Company No. 4 has been reorganized and made an engine company (No. 23) on Northampton street, making an addition of two men to the department.

A new hook and ladder company, located on Washington Square and known as No. 8, has been organized with fifteen permanent men.

A new hose company has been organized in South Boston, known as No. 12, thereby adding to the department nine men.

Two new engine companies have been organized in the Highland District, known as Engine Company No. 22, on Parker street, and Engine Company No. 24, on Warren street, thus giving to the department twenty-two additional men, making a total of fifty-three men added to the department during the year. The company on Parker street was added in response to petitions from citizens of Wards VI and IX., to cover the recently occupied lands in those wards.

The report here gives a schedule of the men employed and the property in the departments, with the following recapitulation:

Steam engines in service, 25; horse hose carriages, 9; hook and ladder carriages, 8; Extinguisher Corps, 4; fire-boat, 1; Insurance Brigade, 1; coal wagons, 12; men employed, 515, consisting of 1 Chief and 14 Assistant Engineers, 1 Secretary of the Board of Engineers, 2 clerks, 42 foremen of companies, 25 engineers of companies, 55 drivers, 25 firemen, 272 hosemen, 120 hook and ladder men; 1 Captain, 1 mate, 1 steward, 1 engineer, 1 fireman and 1 deck hand of fire-boat; 16 Insurance Brigade; 153 constantly employed, 300 doing duty only in case of fire; horses, 96; number of feet of leading hose, 60,936; suction hose, 500; hydrants, 2872; reservoirs, 179; fire-alarm boxes, 177.

The members of the Insurance Brigade belong to the department as at present constituted, but they are paid for their services by the Boston Board of Underwriters. The City Solicitor has recently furnished an opinion to the effect that the members of the brigade cannot be considered the regular members of the department, for whom the city should bear the expense of furnishing accommodations.

It will be seen, by reference to the statement relating to the number of hydrants in service, that there have been 280 Lowry hydrants introduced since the 1st of May last. The promptness of the Water Board, in responding to the wishes of this department by enlarging the street mains in the city proper, and furnishing improved hydrants, is deserving of high commendation.

Inventions, for the extinguishment of fires, and for the preservation of life in case of fires, have been very numerous since the conflagration of last year, and the committee have given much attention and numerous hearings to parties interested in securing the introduction of new methods. (The report here gives a schedule of the estimated value of all the property belonging to the department.)

The appropriations made for the maintenance of the department for the financial year 1873-74 were \$531,316. The expenditures have been as follows:

May draft.....	\$120,416 48
June draft.....	36,270 57
July draft.....	43,919 11
August draft.....	39,257 94
September draft.....	38,447 36
October draft.....	38,329 65
November draft.....	46,684 10

Total.....\$472,665 16

Unpaid contracts chargeable to this appropriation..... 16,900 00

Total.....\$489,565 16

Estimated of expenses required for the maintenance of the department for the remainder of the financial year, including Commissioners, permanent force recently organized for the Masson Street Station at \$50,000 per month, for the remaining five months..... 250,600 00

\$739,165 16

Estimated excess of expenditures over appropriation..... \$84,149 46

In conclusion, the committee desire to acknowledge the obligations they are under to the Chief Engineer for the valuable assistance which he has given them, and they also desire to commend in the highest manner the great energy and fearlessness which he has invariably shown in the discharge of his difficult and dangerous duties. The long and faithful services of the present members of the Board of Engineers and their Secretary entitle them to the thanks of the citizens.