



THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF HEALTH RELATIVE TO
 THE CONDITION OF THE POND NEAR McKENNA STREET,
 AND ALSO THE MOSHASSUCK RIVER.

[Presented to the Board of Aldermen, October 31, 1878.]

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF HEALTH, }
 Providence, October 23, 1878. }

TO THE HONORABLE THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN :

Upon the petition of Jacob Dubes and others, in relation to a pond of water west of McKenna street, I would report :

The pond referred to is a portion of the reservoir of Allen's Print Works, and is the portion into which the West river enters, and is mostly on the east side of McKenna street. It also communicates with the Moshassuck river, though the latter river does not flow through it.

The pond is very shallow, and apparently filled up with a black, filthy deposit from the river above. The river above receives large amounts of filth from the Wanskuck and other woolen mills, and other manufactories, and from the Silver Spring Bleachery. It also receives animal filth from tripe works on a branch of the river above Randall's pond. It also receives acids and other chemicals, and the refuse of the gas works from the Providence Tool Company. The aggre-

gate impurities are sufficient to convert the water of the small stream into a mass of liquid filth, and the stream being sluggish at and above the pond complained of, the stream and pond are both filled up with the disgusting deposit.

Of course such a condition of things cannot be consistent with the public health, and there can be no doubt that the whole of both rivers, the West and the Moshassuck above Allen's Print Works, and still worse, the Moshassuck below the Print Works, are causes, to some extent, of sickness, disease, and death to the public. The pond complained of, when full of water, is not greatly different in its condition from the river above the pond, and if kept full would not generally be complained of. But the complaint is, as I learn from the petitioners and others in the vicinity, that as often as once a week, and sometimes oftener, the water in the pond is drawn off and the whole bottom of the pond is exposed, filled with the most disgusting filth. At such times the stench is very great, and fills the whole vicinity of McKenna and neighboring streets, in which the population is very dense. There can be no doubt that this stench is highly dangerous to the public health, and should never be permitted.

In this connection, I would refer to another pond of which frequent complaint is made. It is a reservoir of the Allen Print Works, located up the West river, not far below Wanskuck. This reservoir is filled from a branch of the river, and does not receive the filthy water of the West river coming from Wanskuck. The water of the reservoir is therefore comparatively pure. But when the reservoir is full, the water covers a considerable extent of low ground filled with vegetable matter. The complaint is that the water in this reservoir is frequently drawn down (once a week, or oftener), exposing a large extent of surface filled with dead grass and other vegetable matters.

It is a well established fact that the exposure of the bottoms of ponds and reservoirs, by drawing off the water, especially in the fall of the year, is a most prolific source of fevers, dysen-

tery, and other diseases. The people living on the mill streams, in this and other states, are often severely afflicted with typhoid fever or dysentery, from this cause alone. There are few things done more dangerous to the public health than the exposure of the vegetable matter in the bottom of ponds, particularly in the autumn.

The unavoidable conclusion, then, in regard to the petition before you is, that the complaint is well founded; that the drawing off of the water of the pond is dangerous to the public health in the highest degree, and should be stopped.

Nearly a year since, I presented a report to your Board upon the impurities in the Moshassuck river, and urged immediate action. The report was printed, but no action was taken. There can be no doubt in the minds of any one, that the Moshassuck river, before it enters the city, is in a very filthy condition, and that, after it enters the city, the amount of filth is enormously increased by manufactories within the city limits. When to these sources of filth we add the rapidly increasing amount of sewage that is turned into the river, we ought not to be surprised that the river at Weybosset bridge has become extremely filthy, and, at times, very offensive to sight and smell. Of course, it must be more or less injurious to health, though there are counteracting causes that remove the danger in some degree.

The Woonasquatucket river is, in some respects, in a similar condition to the Moshassuck, though not yet as bad.

There are two important measures that require the early attention of the city government — in fact, that are imperatively demanded in the interest of the public health.

The first is that which I urged a year since — to obtain action through the General Assembly to prevent the pollution of the streams by manufactories throughout the State. This subject is exciting much attention in other states, and most valuable information has been recently printed in relation to it, especially in Massachusetts. It is a subject in which man-

ufacturers are interested as well as the public, as at the present time, the manufacturer who is located farthest up stream seems to enjoy the right to ruin the water for the use of all below him. The city is specially interested in the subject, as two mill streams are flowing through it, and another supplies us with drinking water.

The second measure of immediate importance is the construction of intercepting sewers to receive all the sewage of the city and carry it down to Sassafras point or beyond. This was and is a part of the system of sewerage upon which the city has entered, which was known to be an absolute necessity from the beginning, and the construction of which was made imperative by the introduction of the Pawtuxet water. As, then, its importance and positive necessity are universally conceded, it would seem to be the part of wisdom to make preparations for commencing the work at as early a day as possible.

Respectfully,

EDWIN M. SNOW,

Superintendent of Health.