

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FIRE COMMISSION.

Efficiency of the Department— Slight Additions Proposed.

METHODS OF ECONOMY ADOPTED

Expenditures and Results—An Uneventful Year.

The annual report of the Fire Commissioners has been issued, covering the transactions of the department for the year ending April 30. The Commissioners say that

The Past Year

has been a singularly uneventful one. It has been marked by no great and disastrous fires, no large destruction of property by fire, and no loss of life in consequence of fire. On the contrary, the aggregate loss on buildings and contents amounts to less than \$550,000—a loss smaller than has been recorded for many years. But the record of the year is not without interest as showing an essential progress in all that goes to make the department what it should be. The general sense of security, which is in people's minds today and is manifested in numberless ways, is most desirable provided it is well founded in fact, and in so far as it is founded upon the condition of the Fire Department there seems no reason to think that this confidence in the ability and efficiency of the officers and members of the department is misplaced. The organization of the force remains the same that it was a year ago, except that Engine Company No. 22, at that time located on Parker street, has been changed from a "call" to a "permanent company," as was then proposed, and now occupies the new house on Dartmouth street.

Additions Proposed,

The only additions to the force proposed are Chemical Engine Company No. 6, which is to occupy the new house near Allston station the 1st of May, and Chemical Engine Company No. 7, which will occupy the house at West Roxbury village when finished, and take the place of Head Engine Company No. 2, Centre street. The Board do not think that any additional houses will be needed for the use of the Department the coming year. The expenditures for the repairs and alterations have been but \$4960 70. That it is so moderate an amount, in view of the work done, is due to the fact that almost the entire labor has been performed by the permanently employed members of the Department, in accordance with the system adopted the year before.

Discipline of the Force.

The permanent force consists of 292 men and the call force 368 men. While the discipline has not been relaxed, the number of dismissals for intoxication and bad conduct has been but thirteen, as compared with thirty-one dismissals the year before for the same causes. It is still a matter of regret that so many are forced to leave the service for such reasons. As usual, the use of intoxicating liquors is the cause of almost all the extreme cases of discipline.

Hose.

The number of feet of hose of all kinds, on hand and in use, is somewhat more than was reported a year ago, and is as follows: Leather hose, 22,496 feet; cotton hose, 25,910 feet; rubber hose, 22,411 feet; rubber hose (chemical engine), 3205 feet; total 74,022 feet. A considerable quantity of hose of all kinds has been condemned as entirely unserviceable, and most of it sold. The new hose purchased during the year is as follows: Cotton, 2112 feet; rubber, 6000 feet; total, 8112 feet.

Items of Detail.

The department has been and is at present well equipped with horses. The number now in service is 134, including those used for the fire-alarm telegraph. The number in service April 30th, 1876, was 126. During the year one has died from disease, four have been sold or exchanged, and twelve have been purchased. The apparatus repair shop has proved a complete success. During the year a large amount of work has been done in repairs and alterations of apparatus, in new apparatus, in repairs of buildings, and in fire-alarm telegraph work. The work turned out is believed to be of the very best quality, and time will show the economy of sound materials and thorough workmanship. In addition to the workmen regularly employed, a considerable number from the permanent force, varying with the amount of work to be done, have been detailed to work in the shop. They respond to the alarms of fire, and the city has the advantage of their skilled labor as well as their services in case of fire. The following is a list of the causes of the casualties to members of the department, all in the line of duty: Fall from ladder, 2; thrown from carriage, 2; falling of ceiling, 1; cut by falling slates, 1; cut by falling glass, 1; burned, 1; total casualties, 8.

Expenditures.

The expenditures of the year for the whole department, which includes the fire-alarm telegraph and care of bells and clocks, after deducting the charge for water, and the care of hydrants, have amounted to \$489,652 28, which is \$137,672 72 less than the amount appropriated by the City Council. This is a gratifying result to the Board, but the question has been raised whether it should be considered creditable to them or looked upon as an evidence of bad judgment when making their estimates at the commencement of the year. The test which the Board are most anxious about, is whether the expenditures have been proper, and the city has received an equivalent for the money paid out.

Reductions Explained.

Delay in getting the new buildings ready postponed the organization of the three new companies until late in the year. The location of some of the engines is such that the Board found that the number of members of the permanent companies having them in charge could safely be reduced; and the ordinary changes in membership from time to time taking place will always leave a small balance in favor of the salary account. While the Fire Department is under the present management the Council may be sure of one thing, that whatever may be the state of the appropriation, no expense which in the judgment of the Board is unnecessary will either be authorized or continued; although, with but a year's experience, they asked for an appropriation of \$30,000 for repairs of apparatus, it is a source of real satisfaction to them to report that the success of the new repair shop has been such as to enable them to get through a year with charges to this appropriation amounting to only \$9,209 36. It is but proper, however, for them to add that the year has been a remarkably fortunate one, so far as fires and alarms, and of course exposure of apparatus, is concerned; still, the system of keeping the apparatus always in repair, of daily reports as to its condition, and immediate attention to any defects, large or small, with the work done at the repair-shop, much of it by detailed labor, is clearly an improvement upon the old system, and in any season will result in better work for a good deal less money. Of the amount appropriated for the repairs of houses, less than one-half has been expended; and this in a good measure is accounted for by the detail of members of the department, whose mechanical skill could be taken advantage of, quite as much for their own good as for the pecuniary interest of the city. About one-half only of the appropriation for new hose, fuel for engines, small supplies, etc., has been expended, owing mainly to the fact that the number of fires has not been large, and promptness in reaching them has prevented conflagrations. Hay and grain too, the fluctuations in the price of which have this year favored the purchaser, show an unexpended balance of \$6650 27. The expense for horses has, by good care, good health and good luck, been less than was expected. The expenditure for new apparatus has been much less than the estimate, the necessity for the purchase of a new engine having been obviated by rebuilding an old one at the repair shop.