

## The Shattuck Report

### General Plan for the Promotion of Public and Personal Health

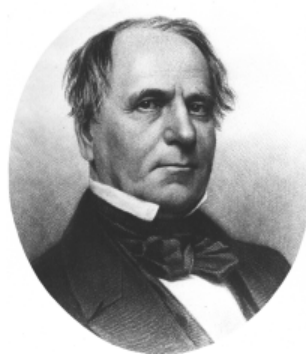
#### “The Sanitary Survey of 1850”

*This report was possibly the most significant document in the history of public health.*

*His far reaching ideas on health and sanitary reforms resulted in the establishment of the  
Massachusetts State Board of Health in 1869.*

*This was the first, fully organized state health agency in the nation.*

#### Lemuel Shattuck



**1793 – 1859**

*publisher, bookseller, teacher, statistician, legislator;  
a man with high moral and social standards  
is often referred to as the*

*“Father of Public Health”*



# The Shattuck Report

*“The Sanitary Survey of 1850”*

*EXCERPTS*

REPORT  
of a  
GENERAL PLAN  
for the  
PROMOTION OF PUBLIC AND PERSONAL HEALTH  
Devised, Prepared and Recommended  
by the  
COMMISSIONERS  
Appointed Under a  
Resolve of the Legislature of Massachusetts  
Relating to a  
Sanitary Survey of the State

Presented April 25, 1850

Boston:  
Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers  
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1850

Report of the Commissioners

The Commissioners appointed on the third day of July last “to prepare and report, to the next General Court, a plan for a Sanitary Survey of the State, embracing a statement of such facts and suggestions as they may think proper to illustrate the subject,” have considered the matters referred to them, and submit their Report.

We believe that the conditions of perfect health, either public or personal are seldom or never attained, though attainable; that the average length of human life may be very much extended, and its physical power greatly augmented; that in every year, within this Commonwealth, thousands of lives are lost which might have been saved; that tens of thousands of cases of sickness occur, which might have been prevented; that a vast amount of unnecessarily impaired health, and physical debility, exists among those not actually confined by sickness; that means exist, within our reach, for their mitigation or removal; and that measures for prevention will effect infinitely more, than remedies for the cure of disease.

But, who does this great matter of public health concern? By whom is this subject to be surveyed, analyzed, and practically applied? And, who are to be benefited by this application? Some will answer, the physician, certainly. True, but only in a degree; not mainly. It will assist him to learn the causes of disease; but it will be infinitely more valuable to the whole people. The people are principally concerned, and on them must depend, in part at least, the introduction and progress of sanitary measures.

In a subject of such vast importance, on which so little is generally known, and so much ought to be universally known, and which is so full of interesting and useful illustrations, it is difficult to confine ourselves within the limits of a single report of reasonable length. Yet, in our judgment, it would be unworthy of Massachusetts, under whose authority we act, and it certainly would be unsatisfactory to ourselves, if we failed to make the attempt, at least to present the subject so that the



people of the state may know what we mean; so that they may be able, if they choose, to carry our recommendations into practical operation; and so that, if thus applied they will add to their physical power and increase their intellectual, social, and personal happiness.

It should be born in mind, however, that this report is designed to suggest a plan for a sanitary survey of the state, and not to contain the survey itself. We were authorized, however, by the resolve, to embrace a statement of such facts and suggestions as we might think proper to illustrate the subject. We have accordingly been at no inconsiderable labor and expense to obtain the most recent authentic information concerning the history and present condition of the sanitary movement; and we shall proceed to give some of the results of the investigation, before presenting our plan for a sanitary survey of this state.

## The Sanitary Movement at Home

**Sanitary Police.** Some historical notice of the sanitary legislation of Massachusetts seems proper, preliminary to any statements of its present condition. The subject seems to have received little attention from the General Court, during the old colonial charter. Two acts, which have some relation to it, we shall presently notice. Laws were passed by the provincial government, relating to nuisances, drainage, smallpox, and some other matters; many of which were special acts, or partial in their operation. But though imperfect, they are honorable to the state, and exhibit the care, which the Legislature has ever wished to exercise over the people. To them, we have been indebted for many excellent sanitary municipal regulations, which have continued until the present time.

**Nuisances.** In 1692 and 1708, acts were passed, providing that “in Boston, Salem, Charlestown, respectively, and other market towns in the province,” “slaughter-houses for killing of meat, still-houses, and houses for the trying of tallow, currying and dressing of leather be assigned by the selectmen to places where it may be least offensive,” and prohibited elsewhere. The Revised Statutes modified this act, extended its provisions to any town in the state, at the option of the selectmen, and included “any trade or employment offensive to the inhabitants, or dangerous to the public health.”

**Drainage and Sewerage.** In 1702, an act was passed providing “for appointing commissioners of sewers, for the draining and removing of the banks and obstructions of the passage of waters in rivers, brooks, or ponds that occasion the overflow and drowning of meadows and low lands; and also for the draining and flowing of swamps and other unprofitable grounds, and drying of them.”

**Sickness.** Legislation on this subject, principally with reference to the smallpox, has been frequent in the history of the State. As early as 1701, “an act providing in case of sickness,” was passed, “for the better preventing the spreading of infection.”

**Quarantine.** In 1700, the masters of ships were required to furnish a list of all passengers to the selectmen of towns, and give security for the support of any “impotent, lame, or infirm person” who might be discharged. At a subsequent period, not exactly known, a hospital was erected on Spectacle Island, by the town of Boston; in 1799, the whole quarantine regulations were transferred to the Boston Board of Health; and there it rested, as it always should have done, until the Revised Statutes were passed.

(After reviewing a tragic century of epidemics of smallpox, cholera, scarlet fever, typhus, and yellow fever, all of “uncommon malignity” this section concludes with these paragraphs :)



It is proved that causes exist in Massachusetts to produce premature and preventable deaths, and hence unnecessary and preventable sickness; and that these causes are active in all the agricultural towns, but press most heavily upon cities and populous villages.

It is proved that measures – legislative, social and personal, do not at present exist, or are not so fully applied as they might be by the people, for the prevention, mitigation, or removal, of the causes of disease and death.

It is proved that the people of this state are constantly liable to typhus, cholera, dysentery, scarlatina, smallpox, and the other great epidemics; and to consumption, and the other fatal diseases, which destroy so many of the human race in other parts of the world.

It is proved that the active causes of disease and death are increasing among us, and that the average duration of life is not as great now as it was forty or fifty years ago.

## PLAN FOR A SANITARY SURVEY OF THE STATE

We now proceed to give an outline of a plan for the Sanitary Survey of the state, which we propose for adoption.

Our plan consists of a series of measures, which may be rendered permanent if desired, presented in the form of separate recommendations. They are divided into two classes, and are to be regulated and controlled by the agencies which are proposed to be established; one by the legislative authority of the State, and the municipal authorities of towns and cities, and the other by social organization and personal action. Some of these measures are of great magnitude, and would each furnish matter for a volume, if fully explained and illustrated. All we propose to do in this connection is to name and define each and to give a brief explanation and illustration of its character and design. These measures, it must be recollected, however, are only a series of plans by which a sanitary survey might be carried forward. The accompanying information is inserted merely to illustrate these plans.

## STATE AND MUNICIPAL MEASURES RECOMMENDED

We recommend that the laws of the state relating to Public Health be thoroughly revised, and that a new and improved set be passed in their stead.

We recommend that a general Board of Health be established, which shall be charged with the general execution of the laws of the state, relating to the enumeration, the vital statistics, and the public health of the inhabitants.

We recommend that the Board, as far as practicable, be composed of two physicians, one counselor at law, one chemist or natural philosopher, one civil engineer, and two persons of other professions or occupations; all properly qualified for the office by their talents, their education, their experience, and their wisdom.

We recommend that a local Board of Health be appointed in every city and town, who shall be charged with the particular execution of the laws of the state, and the municipal ordinances and regulations, relating to public health, within their respective jurisdictions.

We recommend local Boards of Health endeavor to carry into effect all their orders and regulations in a conciliatory manner; and that they resort to compulsory process only when the public good requires it.

We recommend that the successive enumerations of the inhabitants of the state be so made, abstracted, and published, that the most useful and desirable information concerning the population may be ascertained.

We recommend that the laws relating to the public registration of births, marriages, and deaths be perfected and carried into effect in every city and town of the state.



We recommend that, as far as practicable, there be used in all sanitary investigations and regulations, a uniform nomenclature of the causes of death, and for the causes of disease.

We recommend that the local Boards of Health provide for periodical house-to-house visitation, for the prevention of epidemic disease, and for other sanitary purposes.

We recommend that measure be taken to ascertain the amount of sickness suffered in different localities; and among persons of different classes, professions, and occupations.

We recommend that the causes of consumption, and the circumstances under which it occurs, be made the subject of particular observation and investigation.

We recommend that nuisances endangering human life or health be prevented, destroyed or mitigated.

We recommend that a sanitary association be formed in every city and town in the state, for the purpose of collecting and diffusing information relating to public and personal health.

We recommend that public bathing-houses and washhouses be established in all cities and villages.

We recommend that, whenever practicable, the refuse and sewage of cities and towns be collected, and applied to the purposes of agriculture.

We recommend that local Board of Health, and others, interested, endeavor to prevent the sale and use of unwholesome, spurious, and adulterated articles, dangerous to the public health, designed for food, drink, or medicine.

We recommend that institutions be formed to educate and qualify females to be nurses of the sick.

We recommend that persons be specially educated in sanitary science, as preventive advisers as well as curative advisers.

We recommend that parents, and others to whom the care of those in infancy and childhood are entrusted, endeavor to understand and discharge their duties so that a good foundation may be laid for vigorous manhood and old age.

## REASONS FOR SANITARY SURVEY

The sanitary reform we advocate is not like some of the popular reforms of the age. It rests upon no visionary theories, conceived alone in the closet, or by some impracticable enthusiast. It aims at the establishment of no abstract principle, with no definite, practical bearing or application. It is not radical in its character or tendency; does not seek to overturn nor overturn any social, political or religious sentiment or institution; nor abrogate any constitutional or statute law.

Every person in every station can do something to promote this reform; and every such effort, wisely directed, will increase the amount of his own individual enjoyment, and add to the aggregate enjoyment of the people of the whole Commonwealth.

Massachusetts has always been eminent among the American states. Her metropolis has ever been the metropolis of New England. Her example has been imitated and her influence has been felt, wherever the sons of New England are found, or the name of New England is known.

She established in the United States the first system for the public registration of births, marriages, and deaths, by which the personal history and identity, and the sanitary condition of the inhabitants, may be ascertained. She founded the first Blind Asylum, the first State Reform School; and aided in founding the first Deaf and Dumb Asylum; and her money, public and private, has flowed freely in the support of all the noble charities and religious enterprises of the age.



One of her sons first introduced into the United States the remedy of vaccination for the prevention of smallpox, which has deprived that terrific disease of its power, whenever used, and rendered its approach generally harmless. Another of her sons has the honor of making the great discovery of etherization by means of whose wonderful capabilities the surgeon's instrument is deprived of its sting, and labor of its sorrow; the operator is permitted to pursue his work undisturbed while the patient remains passive, unconscious, and unmoved by the horrors, which, without it, might be inflicted.

On the pages of her history are recorded the noble deeds which have given her a good name and rendered her glorious. But her people demand at her hands a more full enjoyment of life, and amore abundant diffusion of its blessings; and no more noble and honorable and glorious page can anywhere be found, than that which shall record the adoption of some simple by efficient and comprehensive plan of Sanitary Reform; by which the greatest possible amount of physical power may be produced, the greatest possible amount of physical suffering may be prevented, and the greatest possible amount of physical, social, and moral enjoyment may be attained. "This is the true glory, which outlives all other, and shines with undying luster, from generation to generation, imparting to its works something of its own immortality."

All, which is respectfully submitted.

Lemuel Shattuck

N.P. Banks, Jr.

Jehiel Abbott

Commissioners.

Boston April 25, 1850

