

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT, NO. 20;
FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE STATE BOARD OF
HEALTH OF WISCONSIN, 1880**

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by State Board of Health of Wisconsin

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OF THE

STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

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WISCONSIN.

1880.

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MEMBERS.

E. L. GRIFFIN, M. D., *President*, Fond du Lac.

J. T. REEVE, M. D., *Secretary*, Appleton.

JOHN FAVIL, M. D., Madison.

SOLON MÆKS, M. D., Milwaukee.

GEN. JAMES BINTLIFE, Darlington.

H. P. STRONG, M. D., Beloit.

G. F. WITTEB, M. D., Grand Rapids.

GENERAL REPORT OF THE BOARD.

OFFICE OF THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH OF WISCONSIN,

October 31, 1880.

To his Excellency, W. E. SMITH,
Governor of Wisconsin:

SIR—In accordance with the provisions of law under which this board is organized, we have the honor to present the following fifth annual report.

In the accompanying report of the secretary, to which you are respectfully referred, will be found a detailed statement of the general work of the board, and of the means by which it is executing the important trust committed to its charge. That report will show that the work of the board has reached a larger proportion of the state than during any previous year of its history, and we trust that as its labors have been extended its usefulness has likewise been increased.

THE GENERAL HEALTH OF THE STATE

has been on the whole better than during the preceding years of the board's existence, though we still have to mourn the sacrifice of many valuable lives, and to witness a great amount of suffering which might have been avoided had the knowledge of sanitary science been more widely diffused among and heeded by the people. Among the chief causes of mortality in the state during the year covered by this report,

DIPHtherIA AND SCARLET FEVER

have stood pre-eminent, the former being charged by the returns of the health authorities of the several towns of the state with having caused 1,780 deaths, and the latter as being the cause of

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390; the aggregate of these numbers being more than four times that of the deaths due to small-pox, typhoid fever, measles and whooping cough collectively.

It is to be hoped that in the progress of medical and sanitary science some means will be found by which these diseases shall be robbed of their present terrors, and brought under control as certainly as has that scourge of former days, small-pox, which, though it still lingers among us, and breaks out into occasional epidemics where vigilance in regard to its prevention relaxes under a fancied security, no longer counts its victims by thousands annually. Small-pox is indeed a disease which sanitarians believe to be capable of being perfectly controlled; yet in the early part of the last century it alone caused the death of one-tenth of the whole population of central Europe, and the life-long disfigurement of one-tenth more. We have not yet the knowledge which will enable us as efficiently to control the the ravages of diphtheria and scarlet fever, and, until such knowledge has been obtained, we must fight these destroyers with the best weapons at our command; no insignificant portion of the work of this board has been to endeavor to spread broadcast among our citizens a knowledge of the most efficient of these weapons, and the methods of using them to the best advantage. That there is much encouragement for persistent effort in this direction is proven by letters which frequently reach the office of the board, testifying to the benefits already received by many localities.

OTHER DISEASES.

Typhoid fever has prevailed to a somewhat greater extent, and its type has been more serious than during the year 1879, while measles and whooping cough have been much less frequent.

Small-pox has caused only two deaths during the year; although the disease has been brought into the state from without on three several occasions, its spread in each case has been controlled and confined to the families in which it first made its appearance, by strict isolation of the patients and quarantine of the infected premises. And just here a word of warning seems eminently in place. While we are comparatively free from the attacks of this

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dreaded and loathsome disease, we are too apt to neglect the employment of the only precaution which has ever proven effective as a safeguard against its ravages, *i. e.*, vaccination. Parents, thinking that there is no immediate danger, put off the performance of the operation upon their children, and others who have been vaccinated in early life forget that the protection then acquired may wear out with advancing years, and neglect to assure themselves of its continued efficiency by the only means by which this can be tested, *i. e.*, revaccination; and thus a large number of unprotected individuals accumulates in the midst of a community, constituting an ever-present source of danger. By-and-bye a case of small-pox comes into the vicinity through some one of the accidental chances spoken of in the secretary's report, or it may be through some channel which cannot be traced out, and one after another those who are susceptible are seized upon, until the malady assumes the proportions of a full-fledged epidemic; every one takes fright, business comes to a standstill, and all the interests of the place receive a check from which recovery is always very slow, if it takes place at all. Then every one becomes anxious for vaccination, which is performed on a large scale, in some cases perhaps not with the thoroughness requisite for its full efficiency; and at last the disease subsides or dies out for want of further material, after which the people begin to count up the cost in money and life.

Now all this — and scores of places can testify that we have drawn no fancy sketch — can well and easily be avoided by the simple method of making vaccination compulsory. We are well aware that there are many among our citizens, especially among those of European birth, who are by no means ready to accept this conclusion, and it may also be the case that the community as a whole is not yet prepared for direct legislation for this purpose. But our school boards all over the state should see that no child is admitted to any public school without good and sufficient evidence that vaccination has been properly performed; the proprietors of large manufacturing establishments of all kinds should keep a proper oversight of their employes in this regard, and, the subject being in this and other ways kept before the people, the way may and probably will be finally opened for efficient action.

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ILLUMINATING OILS.

As was stated in our last annual report, our attention having been attracted by the frequency with which so-called kerosene "accidents," resulting in serious personal injury or loss of life, were reported in the columns of our newspapers, the cause of such accidents was made a subject of special study and investigation by the board. In the course of this inquiry a large amount of evidence was collected concerning the character of the illuminating oils then in general use throughout the state, and it was ascertained that, while stringent laws regulating the sale and use of such oils were enforced in the states adjoining our own, Wisconsin was practically without any law on the subject, and was, as a consequence, the recipient and consumer of oils rejected elsewhere as unfit for use because dangerous to property and life.

It was further ascertained that kerosene accidents were much more frequent in their occurrence in this state than in those states which were protected by statutes regulating the sale of petroleum oils. Under such circumstances the board felt it to be a duty to urge, in the interests of the property and lives of our citizens, that protection should be given to the people by proper legislation on the subject, and was gratified by the enactment of a statute which, thought not in all respects such as met its fullest approval, was, nevertheless, one which it was felt would secure a reasonable degree of safety in the use of one of the commonest necessities of daily life in nearly every household in the state.

It affords the board much pleasure to call attention to the noteworthy change, in the almost complete disappearance of the accounts of kerosene accidents which were of such frequent and painful occurrence in the columns of the Wisconsin press prior to the enactment of this law. A record like this is the strongest possible justification of the action of the board.

As has heretofore been the custom, copious and interesting extracts from the correspondence of the board throughout the state are appended to the report of the secretary. These, in many instances, show the progress already made in sanitary work in various localities, while in yet other cases they bring to light various local