

**1853-1854. SECOND REPORT TO THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF RHODE ISLAND,
- RELATIVE TO THE REGISTRY AND
RETURNS OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, AND
DEATHS, IN THE STATE; FROM JUNE 1ST,
1853, TO DECEMBER 31ST, 1854**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649692163

1853-1854. Second Report to the General Assembly of Rhode Island, - Relative to the Registry and Returns of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, in the State; From June 1st, 1853, to December 31st, 1854 by Rhode Island Medical Society Committee on Registra

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

RHODE ISLAND MEDICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE ON REGISTRA

**1853-1854. SECOND REPORT TO THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF RHODE ISLAND,
- RELATIVE TO THE REGISTRY AND
RETURNS OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, AND
DEATHS, IN THE STATE; FROM JUNE 1ST,
1853, TO DECEMBER 31ST, 1854**

1853-1854.

SECOND REPORT

TO THE

General Assembly of Rhode Island,

RELATIVE TO THE

REGISTRY AND RETURNS

OF

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, AND DEATHS,

IN THE STATE;

FROM JUNE 1st, 1853, TO DECEMBER 31st, 1854.



PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
JOHN R. BARTLETT,
SECRETARY OF STATE.

PROVIDENCE:

A. CRAWFORD GREENE & BROTHER, STATE PRINTERS.

1856.

~~Econ 1494.1~~

1856 July 17
H. K. V.

Stimulus To Parsons, 1856

of Providence, R. I.



DEPOSITED BY HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

CORRESPONDENCE.

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

SECRETARY'S OFFICE, PROVIDENCE,
FEBRUARY, 1856.

To the Honorable General Assembly,

I have the honor to submit to you the Second Report on the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths in this State. It covers the period from June 1st, 1853, to the end of the year 1854. This space of time is subdivided in the Tables of this Report into two periods, the first extending from June 1st to December 31st, 1853, and the second including the whole year 1854. The reason for these seven months of 1853 being thus left to make one period of registration is, that the law has been changed so as to make the Registry year correspond to the Calendar year.

The statute authorizes me to look to a Committee of the Rhode Island Medical Society for aid in preparing this Report. Such a Committee has been appointed and permanently exists, Dr. Joseph Mauran being its Chairman. Dr. Mauran has found it necessary to place the work of preparation in other hands, retaining an active personal supervision over it. As mentioned in his accompanying letter, Dr. Thomas H. Webb, the able writer of the First Report, being engaged elsewhere, the present document has been prepared by Charles W. Parsons, M. D., of Providence. Wishing to submit it at your present session, I have not been able to give it a thorough examination, but am persuaded that you will find it contains facts and suggestions of great value.

It will be for your wisdom to determine, in view of the acknowledged importance of a good registry system, whether more compensation should be allowed to the Town Clerks for performing their duties under the statute; and whether other new and improved provisions may not be made for obtaining the facts. I would ask your attention to the suggestions in the letters from several Town Clerks, extracts from which are embodied in this Report. The value of the system depends essentially on the correctness and fullness of the first returns, and every reasonable facility and inducement should be offered to those whom we call on for the original facts.

I respectfully recommend that an appropriation of dollars be made for the annual preparation of the Abstract and Report which I am required (by section 2d of the Statute) to make and publish.

Respectfully submitted by
JOHN R. BARTLETT,
Secretary of State.

PROVIDENCE, December, 1855.

To the Honorable the Secretary of State :

DEAR SIR :—I received in order the State "Returns on the Registration of Births, Marriages, and Deaths," confided by the late Secretary and yourself to my special care, as Chairman of the Co-operating Committee of the Rhode Island Medical Society.

Owing to the change of time at which they were made returnable, under the amended Act of October, 1854, a period is embraced of nineteen months, viz. : from June 1, 1853, the termination of the last Report, to December 31, 1854. This change of time, you are aware, was effected through our immediate solicitation, to render our Reports more conformable to those of a like import abroad, and also in our own country, and consequently more conveniently available to the statist and statistician for general reference. After a careful and critical examination of the several returns, I am happy to acknowledge, that, although still meagre, and faulty in very many respects, they present a more promising aspect, *generally*, than those from which our "First Report" was, with so much unavoidable labor, arranged.

I regret, however, to notice the unpardonable indifference and want of attention to the requirements of the law manifested by officials and others in many of our otherwise law-abiding and enterprising country communities, especially those embracing a large manufacturing and mechanical population ; as facts from such sources are particularly desirable in perfecting a statistical and sanitary survey.

This class, densely populous along the borders of our mill-streams, living in ill-conditioned and badly ventilated apartments, hence subject largely to epidemic influences, should of all others be especially represented in a report, the perfect and successful completion of which will necessarily tend eventually to the development of measures in which the personal welfare, health and happiness of each individual composing such communities is immediately concerned.

In this connection I would express my astonishment that *parents*, upon whom the simple duty is imposed of registering the *births* of their respective children, should be generally so neglectful of that all-important duty to their offspring. They cannot appreciate the fact, that through this registry alone, in case of the decease or absence of parents and witnesses, (circumstances of every day occurrence,) can the child establish conclusively his age or legal birth-right in cases of descent of property, or secure a legal settlement in the place of his nativity under the ills of partial incompetency or absolute pauperism ; considerations of equal import therefore to each and every individual, be he rich or poor. A right to a legacy may depend solely upon this proof. Even in a strictly *financial* point of view, how necessary the establishment of the law, and still more its rigid and strict fulfilment.

As I had occasion to say, in an address setting forth the inestimable advantages of Registration, before our House of Representatives and Senate, in February, 1850, pending the action of the respective Houses upon the passage of the original act : "How many millions of property acquired and securely treasured up through the industry of our ancestry abroad, have been lost, or entirely unrealized by their legal descendants, inhabitants of this and other states. How much fruitless effort and litigation, through writs of error, reverse of judgment and demurrer, and what vast expenditures of money, of our very substance, have been made in unavailing endeavors at recovery of entailed estates, and all for the mere lack of the connecting link, which would have been readily furnished by that species of evidence (the recorded fact) contemplated in the bill before you, had a similar law been enacted and enforced, coeval with the early pilgrimage of the *puritan* forefathers to

CORRESPONDENCE.

v

the shores of our New England alone! Yes, millions of dollars, the well earned reward of the hardy and thriving industry of our ancestors now, and it is feared, ever will remain in the custody and under the control of the 'British Crown,' which would have long since been realized and distributed to legitimate heirs in this country, but for the want of that perfect registration by our forefathers, of the Births, Marriages, and Deaths of their respective children. Nor is this peculiar state of circumstances owing to any want of disposition or desire on the part of our Fatherland to ferret out and effect legal reversionary titles. England has many a time and oft, sought by special formal notices, legitimate heirs to these vast entailed estates among our transatlantic population, but in consequence of the lamentable defects in our ancient, and I might add recent, system of vital statistics, her endeavors have been in most cases wholly unavailing. Many instances might be referred to in confirmation of the above, but I will simply allude at present to the 'Angell property,' rightfully belonging to heirs in this country, aye, in our very city, amounting in 1825, to the enormous sum of five millions of pounds sterling:—Then again to the far-famed 'Jennings Estate,' wherein an amount exceeding forty millions of dollars had accumulated in 1848, and for which legitimate heirs have been as yet sought unavailingly in this country, where they are presumed to, and undoubtedly do reside. How true the remark of an eminent English jurist, 'that it is as necessary for the preservation of the rights of individuals to preserve a registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, as it is to preserve a registry of deeds.'

"The sacredness with which the British laws are observed with regard to property is beautifully illustrated in this matter. Here is an immense estate, which was left fifty years ago without any owner, and as far as Government knew, without a probability, after so great a lapse of time, of one being found; but under the parental care of the laws, it is watched and cherished until, we suppose, it has trebled its original value. It is still held in trust, to be conveyed to the heir, how remote or how far soever removed from allegiance to English sovereignty.

"Mr. Emerson, in one of his recent lectures, related a similar incident to show the stability of the English laws. A man died seven hundred years ago, leaving a portion of his property to be invested in such a way as to supply a bait of bread and ale to whomsoever should apply for it. Notwithstanding revolution, civil war, and progress and change of all sorts, the bequest is as rigidly observed to-day as it was when it was first made. Mr. Emerson himself, to test the matter, enjoyed the benefit of this strange and remote charity."

Again, evidences of relationship alone are easily lost among the lower, and indeed all classes of society. As remarked by me before our Historical Society, in a biographical sketch of some of our more prominent medical men of by-gone days, "it is truly astonishing, the apathy and indifference that exist, aye, absolute want of knowledge among men of the present business age, of the names, lives and character of their ancestry, even for the short period of half a century. From personal observation, I doubt whether it would be extravagant to declare that not one individual out of ten of the general masses of society can give you reliable information touching simply the Christian name of his grandfather, the maiden name of his grandmother, or the actual birth-place of either; and individuals are to be met with who know not even the maiden name, or birth-place of their own mother." In a merely *genealogical* point of view then, how necessary the present system of registration, especially in a State embracing a population so dense and migratory.

We trust that from this time forward our entire adult population, and State authorities particularly, will look to these things and endeavor effectually to correct

their former unpardonable acts of omission, in this respect, to themselves and posterity.

True, we cannot expect, especially under our new, free institutions of government, either State or General, to establish and develop so perfect and complete a system of vital statistics as is found to exist in those embracing older and more rigid forms of government, as Austria, Russia, France, Italy, &c., but it is confidently hoped that as our communities become more enlightened, touching the great and manifold advantages of the system, a vastly increased attention and devotedness may be manifested by all in fulfilling strictly the lenient, but wholesome requirements of the law upon which it is specially based; and that our State, small in territory, may vie with her sister States in sustaining heartily and cheerfully the important cause which we have so largely at heart.

Several of the Returns, from the imperfect manner in which they were made, have been necessarily re-copied, to arrange them for binding; this extra duty has been accomplished under my orders, through you, and with great faithfulness and care—a labor which I trust, since the issue of your recent circular to the public officials, will hereafter be rendered unnecessary.

After these preparatory arrangements, finding that, through my general professional engagements, leisure was not afforded sufficient for making up the tables, abstracts and analysis, and being desirous that the work should be promptly and satisfactorily accomplished, I, after much solicitation, was enabled to secure for the emergency, the valuable services of my esteemed young friend, Charles W. Parsons, M. D., of this City, a gentleman of untiring industry and perseverance, and hence admirably adapted to the successful performance of the work.

His labors, while in transitu, have been freely submitted in manuscript to my inspection and supervision, and it gives me pleasure to state, that they meet with my hearty approval and adoption, nor do I think they will be less appreciated by the Legislature, and others, enjoying an interest in statistical investigation and research.

That they may meet with due consideration from yourself, is the confident hope and trust of,

Dear Sir, yours, respectfully, &c., &c.,

J. MAURAN,

Chairman Com. on Registration, R. I. Med. Society.

To JNO. R. BARTLETT, Esq., Secretary of State.

PROVIDENCE, February 5, 1856.

JOSEPH MAURAN, M. D., Chairman of the Committee on Registration
of the Rhode Island Medical Society:

DEAR SIR:—I herewith submit to you the Second Report on Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths in this State, prepared under direction of your Committee. The document has been written in unavoidable haste, as the Returns were not placed in my hands till early in November last. Since that time I have given to it all the leisure I could obtain, but no one knows better than yourself the great difficulty of following up any continuous study, in the midst of the confining and irregular engagements of a physician's life. I particularly regret two things; that I was unable to make extensive comparisons of our statistics with those of other places, since it is by means of such comparisons that these studies become most val-

nable, and that it was utterly impossible to give that unremitting attention to correcting the press, without which, some errors will inevitably occur, especially in a work containing so many tables and figures. These defects would have been better remedied, if the work had not been begun so late, or if it had not been thought very important that the Report be presented during this session of the General Assembly. For the same reason, the paging of the Tabular Abstract and that of the Report have been made distinct, (the latter beginning, it will be noticed, near the middle of the document with page 1). By this means we have been able to have three or four compositors nearly all the time engaged on the work. This is a blemish, it must be owned, but without adopting the course which was taken, the Report could not have been printed till some weeks after the period when the General Assembly will probably adjourn.

The preliminary tables have been prepared from the original returns, mostly by a young lady of this city, to whose industry, faithfulness, and great skill in the use of figures, I feel myself very much indebted.

We must all regret that Dr. Webb could not write the second Report, with the advantage of practical experience added to his previously high qualifications. The former Report owed its value mostly to his industry and talent, aided by your minute acquaintance with the subject, and untiring interest in all its parts. But he had been called to labor elsewhere, and I undertook this task only at your particular request, and with great doubts of success under all the disadvantageous circumstances of inexperience, short time, and the pressure of other duties.

In drawing inferences and lessons from the facts obtained by Registration, in regard to the all-important subject of Public Health, it became necessary to show that some places, and some classes of population, are less favorably situated than others, in the circumstances which promote long life and comfort, or which govern the prevalence of particular diseases. Any remarks of this kind are made with the single view of saying what appears to be true, liable to be corrected as facts become more numerous. We have never desired to strengthen any existing prejudice, or create a new one, but have been guided by a belief that the truth ought to be known, and that the adaptation of particular outward circumstances to the human system can never be learned except by extensive, methodical, organized inquiry of this kind.

I remain, Mr. Chairman,

Yours with high respect,

CHARLES W. PARSONS.