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MESSAGE

OF

ROBERT T. CONRAD,

Mayor of the City of Philadelphia,

WITH

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS.

READ IN SELECT COUNCIL MAY 17th, 1855.

PHILADELPHIA:

CRISSY & MARKLEY, PRINTERS, GOLDSMITHS HALL, LIBRARY STREET.

1855.

Report from the Chief Commissioner of Highways.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HIGHWAYS,

*May 12th, 1855.*TO HON. ROBT. T. CONRAD, *Mayor.*

DEAR SIR:—Your communication, asking information relative to this department, is received; and I shall endeavor to give all the information at my command, that the limited time will admit of.

Previous to the consolidation of the city, and until the organization of this department in October last, the executive duties now performed by it, were in the hands of committees of the various districts, superintendents, supervisors, clerks of districts, and other officers, of whose doings and expenditure this department has no means of ascertaining.

The published report of the City Controller, shows the aggregate payments made up to the first of January; and annexed you have a statement, marked "A," showing the contracts (belonging to this department,) made by the late districts, that remained unsettled on the first of January, with the amounts paid on them since that date, and the estimated cost of completing the same, amounting to \$217,575 56. In addition to which, on the 13th March last, Councils appropriated the sum of \$80,000 for the payment of claims prior to January first, about \$50,000 of which is chargeable to the old districts; making an amount of \$267,575 56 of liabilities incurred previous to consolidation, to be settled by the new city during this year.

The organization of the department, as provided for by the ordinance approved August 29th, 1854, consists of a chief commissioner, six commissioners, and forty-two super-

visors. For the better supervision, the city has been divided into six districts, as follows :

1st District	comprises 1st, 2d, 3d and 4th wards,	- - -	6 supervisors.
2d	" " 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 24th wards,	11	"
3d	" " 13th, 14th, 15th and 20th wards,	- 6	"
4th	" " 11th, 12th, 16th and 17th wards,	- 5	"
5th	" " 18th, 19th and 23d wards,	- - 8	"
6th	" " 21st and 22d wards,	- - - 6	"

Each district is in charge of a commissioner, who has an office within the same; the supervisors have each their ward, or division of a ward, and have the immediate charge of the laborers employed on the streets or roads, in paving, grading and cleansing, and are subject to the control of the commissioner, and purchase no materials without his orders.

Since the passage of the supplement to the Consolidation Act, the commissioners and chief meet weekly, as a board, in accordance with the requirements of that document.

The department has been in existence little more than six months, and that including the winter months. Its operations have been confined to the cleansing of the streets, repairing of roads and bridges, grading new streets, preparatory to the contemplated improvements of the present year, repairing sewers and inlets, and repairing the paved streets, after the severe frosts of the past winter.

The ordinance to regulate the manner of paving the streets having passed Councils a few days since, the Board submitted a list of streets to be new paved, to the late Committee on Public Highways, who reported the same to Councils, at their last meeting. As soon as the same will receive the sanction of Councils, the department is prepared to commence, without delay, the paving of new streets, as asked for by the owners of property; the appropriation for that purpose, is \$200,000—a sum more than fully equal to

meet all demands for the year; and the return to the treasury may be safely estimated at three-fourths of the amount expended.

The other sources of revenue received at this office, consists of permits granted for buildings, for openings to the sewers, licenses for omnibuses, hackney-coaches, wagons, carts, barrows, &c. Most of the ordinances regulating them have been passed within the last month; I am unable, at this time, to make any estimate of the amount to be derived from them.

The statement annexed, marked "B," shows the appropriations made to this department since the first day of January, with the purposes for which the same were made, and the actual amount for new works during the year, to be \$658,310; which, however, might be further reduced, as the item No. 7, of \$400,000, is for completing contracts made prior to consolidation.

The amounts of the second appropriation are believed to be ample to meet the demands for the objects for which they were made.

Two important works to be paid from the item of "Grading Streets," are—first, the opening of Delaware avenue, from Callowhill street to Cohocksink creek, which is now rapidly progressing—the other, the opening of Girard avenue, from Landing street to the Schuylkill, to connect with the bridge now nearly completed. This work has been delayed by the necessity of calling a jury to assess the damages to the property through which the same must pass. As soon as that can be settled, the work will be pushed forward as rapidly as possible.

Among the subjects to be recommended to the consideration of Councils—

The providing for the payment of damages for opening streets should receive early attention; many are due, for

which no provision has yet been made. An ordinance, creating a loan of \$100,000, to meet such demands, was reported by the late Committee on Highways, and has been duly published, as required. Should it be enacted into a law, it would materially aid in forwarding desirable improvements.

A bridge over the river Schuylkill, at Chestnut street, was provided for by Act of Assembly, and the sum of \$125,000 borrowed for the purpose of erecting it; no improvement is more desirable. Much attention was given to the subject by the Committee on Highways; and a report, recommending the adoption of a plan now in this department, is before Councils for their action. A work of so much importance to the public, should receive early attention.

The Department of Surveys is preparing plans and specifications for the culverting of Cohocksink creek, from Front street to Sixth street: also for culverts in Moore street, from the Delaware to Ninth street, and in Vine street, from Nineteenth street to the Schuylkill. As soon as received, proposals will be issued for their construction, and the result will be reported to Councils for their action.

An ordinance was reported to Councils, providing for the opening of Broad street, of its full width, (113 feet,) to the Germantown road — an improvement much desired, which I trust will receive your recommendation.

The opening of one or more of the wide avenues running from the Delaware to the Schuylkill, in the northern part of the city, is a subject that should be strongly urged upon Councils, as the expense at this time would be trifling in comparison to what it will cost at a future day.

That portion of the City Railroad lying east of Delaware Eighth street, is in bad condition; and no appropriation was made by the late Councils, for keeping it in repair. In its

present condition, it is a nuisance, and should be either relaid, on an improved plan, or should be taken up forthwith.

Machines, constructed for the purpose of cleansing streets, have recently been introduced here; and a portion of the City of New York is now being cleansed with them. A proposition from the proprietors is now being prepared, for the cleansing a portion of our city, which will be submitted to Councils in a few days. The cleansing of the streets, with the exception of the six wards comprising the old city, is now done by day's work; it could be equally well done, at much less cost, if divided into districts, and let by contract.

The subject of laying passenger railroads through the city, was referred to the heads of the Survey and Highway Departments; the duties connected with the organization of the Survey Department has deferred action for the present. It will be taken up and reported upon at an early day.

I would suggest the propriety of recommending to Councils the passing of an ordinance requiring railroad companies to have gates and watchmen at points where their locomotives cross on a level with highways much used.

The foregoing are such subjects as occur to me at this time, and are thrown together for your consideration. The department having been in existence so short a time, and having no record of the aggregate expenditures on the highways by the county and districts, prior to its organization, no comparison can be made of the cost of the present, as compared with the past system.

Very respectfully,

THOMAS BIRCH,

Chief Commissioner.

A.

STATEMENT

Of Contracts made by Corporations prior to the Act of Consolidation, the settlement of which must be made during this year.

Amounts paid since January 1st, 1855—

District of Richmond, for seven bridges over				
Gunner's Run,	-	-	-	\$31,673 17
do do culverts at do				4,778 00
do do street paving,	-	-		5,858 97
District of Kensington, for culverts,	-	-		23,207 25
Southwark, for paving,	-	-		2,577 93
West Philadelphia, for paving,	-	-		6,473 20
Germantown, for grading,	-	-		1,200 00
Girard Avenue, for grading,			}	7,900 00
Montgomery and Berks Avenues, grading,				
Girard Avenue bridge,	-	-		8,885 20
Thompson street culvert,	-	-		20,000 00
Estimated amount required to complete them,				\$112,483 72
*Richmond bridges,	-	-		\$25,000 00
do culverts,	-	-		3,000 00
*Kensington culverts,	-	-		5,000 00
Germantown, grading,	-	-		1,000 00
*Kensington, grading,	-	-		3,091 84
Girard Avenue, grading,	-			30,000 00
Montgomery and Berks, grading,				15,000 00
Girard Avenue bridge,	-	-		15,000 00
Mill Creek bridge,	-	-		5,000 00
*Thompson street culvert,	-			3,000 00—105,091 84
				<u>\$217,575 56</u>

* Payable in bonds.

Report from the Department of Surveys.

DEPARTMENT OF SURVEYS,
Office of Chief Engineer and Surveyor,
Philadelphia, May 14th, 1855.

To His Honor, ROBERT T. CONRAD,
Mayor of the City.

SIR:—Your circular of date, May 1st, instant, has just been handed me. I hasten to comply with your wishes therein

set forth, so far as the limited time allowed for their preparation and the short time that has elapsed since I have had an opportunity of becoming familiar with the detail of this department will permit. The existence of this department can date only from the 7th inst., as all arrangements previously made were rendered nugatory by an Act of the Assembly, changing entirely its organization.

The interests connected with and under charge of this department, are of great importance to every individual of our extended city, and have not heretofore received that attention which is their due. The documents, plans, &c., under our charge, relating to property lines and lines of streets, are of incalculable value to the city and property holders generally, and should be guarded and preserved with jealous care.

I therefore ask for an office, wherein sufficient room can be had for such arrangements as will allow easy reference, and render them secure from loss or destruction. If offices, with a proper attention to security, were furnished to the Surveyors and Regulators, it would add much to the safety of valuable papers which will require time to be concentrated in the general office.

The sanitary interests of the city, are, to a great extent, in our charge, and are, without doubt, seriously affected by a want of information that should be in the possession of this department. This can be reached only by minute and extended examinations, as to the state and position of existing sewers, and also for the purpose of obtaining plans to regulate future drainage. For this purpose I desire assistance, with which a complete drainage map can be completed, exhibiting the topographical features of the city. This is rendered necessary from the accumulation of business that requires the constant and undivided attention of the Surveyors and Regulators, preventing an energetic action on their part, to other than

the immediate duties for which they have been elected. This assistance to the Chief Engineer and Surveyor, could take charge of the construction of all sewers, bridges, and other improvements, and insure that proper attention will be given to the character of the work, from the imperfections of which, heretofore, the city has suffered serious pecuniary loss.

Another matter, which is very necessary for early attention, is, that all ordinances relating to Surveyors and Regulators, framed for the old city and districts, previous to consolidation, be made to harmonize, that we may have a uniform system and basis to work on, over the entire city.

The expenses for the current year will be as follows :

Chief Engineer and Surveyor,	-	\$3,000	00	
Clerk and Messenger,	-	1,600	00	
Draftsman,	-	800	00	
Twelve Surveyors and Regulators,				
\$500 each,	-	6,000	00	
				<u>\$11,400 00</u>
Office Rent and Stationery,	-	-	1,600	00
Extra Assistants,	-	-	2,500	00
				<u><u>\$15,500 00</u></u>

There are no projects or improvements that I can safely say should be deferred, other than the Schuylkill bridge at Chestnut street, the immediate necessities for which are not pressing, but the Cohocksink culvert should be proceeded with at the earliest moment, yet not without full examination as to its location and proportions, neither of which have been satisfactorily ascertained or reported upon, and immediate attention should also be given to any culverts that now deliver sewerage into the dam at Fairmount, and means taken to

connect them with others delivering below the dam, that the water supplied for city use should not be affected deleteriously thereby.

Very respectfully,

STRICKLAND KNEASS,

Chief Engineer and Surveyor.
