

INTRODUCTION

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The Shattuck Report: *Perhaps the most significant single document in the history of public health. --- I know of no single document in the history of that science quite so remarkable in its clarity and completeness and in its vision of the future.*

C.-E.A. Winslow, 1948

The 1850 Report of the Sanitary Commission of the State of Massachusetts is commonly termed the Shattuck Report. In 1849, Lemuel Shattuck, Nathaniel Banks, Jr. and Jehiel Abbott were appointed by the Governor as Commissioners to prepare *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.*

Lemuel Shattuck was a teacher who later became a bookseller, publisher, genealogist and legislator. His interest genealogy caused him to become a statistician. Shattuck would not be considered a public health professional. He was a visionary who developed and applied a broad ranging knowledge of public health and positively impacted the public policy process. Through his efforts, the Massachusetts System for registration of births, deaths, and marriages was established in 1842. In 1845, he conducted a sanitary survey of Boston. In 1849, as a state legislator, he secured enactment of authorization for the Governor to appoint the three Commissioners to prepare the Sanitary Survey.

When the Shattuck Report was re-published in 1948, public health giant C.-E.A. Winslow wrote the Foreword and stated that “the report is one of the most remarkable documents -- perhaps the most significant single document -- in the history of public health.” More than half a century after Professor Winslow’s appraisal, this is still true. I number among untold thousands who have frequently quoted portions of the Shattuck Report in public and professional presentations.

While 2,000 copies of the original report were originally printed in 1850, it was re-printed by the Harvard University Press in 1948 in time for the City of Boston to present a copy to each member of the American Public Health Association Governing Council meeting in Boston that year.

Shattuck used the term sanitary in the broadest sense as meaning relating to health. *When applied to the inhabitants of a town or district, in their social capacity, it relates to public health; when to individuals, it relates to personal or private health.*

More than 150 years following the Shattuck Report and its numerous seminal recommendations, public health practitioners still 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 still 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 disability exists among those not actually confined by sickness;*
- *That these preventable evils require an enormous expenditure and loss of money, and impose upon the people unnumbered and immeasurable calamities, pecuniary, social, physical, mental, and moral which might be avoided;*
- *That means exist within our reach for their mitigation or removal;*
- *And that measures for prevention will affect infinitely more than remedies for the cure of disease.*

The Shattuck Report covered a wide range of public health matters in detail. Many of its visionary and far reaching recommendations have been implemented widely. But to mention just a few of the many that are still applicable in Century 21, note the following:

- *We recommend that provision be made for obtaining observations of the atmospheric phenomena, on a systematic and uniform plan at different stations within the Commonwealth.*
- *We recommend that measures be taken to prevent, as far as practicable, the smoke nuisance.*
- *We recommend that, in laying out new towns and villages, and in extending those already laid out, ample provision be made for a supply, in purity and abundance, of light, air, and water; for drainage and sewerage, for paving, and for cleanliness.*

The report also contained far reaching recommendations relative to housing, schools, occupational health, and adulterated food and drugs, and recommended *that persons be specially educated in sanitary science.*

In Century 21, the Shattuck Report is still an amazing document and might appear to have been more than a century ahead of its time. Our progress in public health has not been so rapid as to be cause for concern. It was an astounding document for 1850, and remains astounding today. The Report will continue to motivate future public health students and leaders.