

Chapter X

HIGHWAY APPURTENANCES SIDEWALKS SEWERS

As a country-side gradually develops into a village, town and city, the demand for sidewalks increases. Sidewalks were first mentioned in the town report of 1843. From 1844 on, they received more and more attention. In the more populous and business sections, flagstones, probably imported from the quarries on the palisades of the "Hudson" were used and curbing and cross-walks were supplied by the local granite quarries. For many years cinders were used temporarily for the sidewalks in the outskirts of the city. The mills were glad to have them carted away but by 1925 when mills were running irregularly and some were using oil for fuel, cinders were scarce and the mills using coal sought to obtain a revenue from their sale.

About 1860, it was found to be much cheaper to construct curbed sidewalks of concrete than with flagstones and for many years, tar sidewalks, as they were called were predominant in the residential sections. In 1901, the Superintendent of Streets recommended that a walk of "manufactured stone" be laid around City Hall and in 1903, granolithic sidewalks, which cost twice that of concrete but would last many years longer were laid where abutters were willing to pay half the cost. These walks were laid by contractors and were in great demand. In 1903, 937.16 square yards were constructed and as long as the system continued the demands increased. In one season, ten years later, 23,679 square yards were laid. By 1921, the city had 86½ miles of granolithic sidewalks.

Sprinkling

In the days of dirt roads, because of the nature of the soil on the granitic base, only a few hours lapsed between mud and dust. The strong spring and summer westerly winds drove clouds of dust up the hillside causing much annoyance to storekeepers and housewives.

The town in 1848 spent eight dollars for "Watering streets around Market". Street watering was done on a larger scale in 1851, when Robert Cook was paid \$425 and the Fall River Iron Works Company \$175. Sprinkling carts were indispensable until the streets were oiled or surfaced with bound macadam. When city water became available, standpipes were located where the watering carts could be conveniently refilled but before that time it was necessary to pump the water from cisterns or the stream. Sprinkling was often done by contract. In 1860, Dwelly and Freelove were paid \$697 and the Fall River Laundry, \$130. In 1899 the city used nearly 39,000,000 gallons of water at a cost of approximately \$10,000 but it was impossible to properly lay the dust on the 130 miles of city streets. In 1901, the work was supplemented by the use of trolley cars equipped for sprinkling. Full freedom from dust was enjoyed along the twenty-three miles of trackage. In 1912, a five year contract was made with the Worcester Car Sprinkling Company to continue the work. About this time the city had been experimenting with oil and residents were paying a Providence concern to oil the streets adjoining their property. In 1914, the city oiled all the streets, with the exception of those that were paved and some on the outskirts, where watering carts continued in use.

By 1923, the small boy no longer gazed with awe upon the driver seated high above his span on the water wagon nor splashed his bare legs and feet in the water from the sprinkler behind.

In the days of dirt roads, dusters were worn by those who took long drives in the country. As automobiles multiplied, there were additional demands for the garments, until the roads were covered by dustless pavements.

Lighting

Street lighting is an adjunct of the street department and up to the time it was taken over by contract with the Fall River Electric Light Company, men and boys were employed by the city as lamp lighters and cleaners.

In October, 1847, the selectmen of the town voted to establish street lamps near the center of the village and in April, 1850, after much opposition, about \$375 was appropriated towards providing lights for the village, as far as the gas mains had been extended. The following report of the auditing committee of the town shows the rapid progress that was made.

"REPORT ON AUDITING COMMITTEE ON STREET LIGHTS 1853"	
"Fall River Iron Works Co., Lamp Posts and Setting"	\$ 98.75
Fall River Gas Works	47.48
Gideon Packard, Forging for posts	19.75



STREET WATERING – SINGLE HITCH



STREET WATERING – DOUBLE HITCH



ICE DELIVERY IN THE EARLY DAYS



HEAVY TEAMING

Thomas Wilcox & Son, Lanterns and repairs	50.95
Daniel Leonard, Glazing	21.36
Gager & Dunning, Fluid and Wicking	218.90
Fall River Gas works	261.69"

Jacob B. Dunham and Jeremiah Clark were the lamp lighters.

At dusk, as the number of lights increased, with the exception of moonlit nights, young men and boys, carrying short ladders went forth to light the lamps in the district assigned to each. The night watchman on his rounds turned off the gas lights in the early morning. Older men of the street department cleaned and refilled the fluid lamps each day. The amount expended for the lighting of the streets in 1875 was \$16,573.59.

The year 1883 was the first in which the city began the use of electric lights, in the illumination of streets. Three were erected that year and seven more ordered. The lights were not kept burning all night on account of the expense but by 1891, Mayor J. W. Coughlin was able to say, "I believe that I am safe in saying that we have one of the best lighted cities in the state." At that time there were 141 electric lights, 319 gas, and 465 kerosene lights. In 1908, many of the kerosene lamps were replaced by low power electric bulbs.

In 1913, a contract was made with the Fall River Electric Light Company for installing ninety-six ornamental, inverted luminous arc lights along Main Street and a short distance on some intersecting streets. Quite a celebration was held the evening the current was turned on and the lighted area was dubbed "The Great White Way".

Nineteen sixteen marked the disappearance of kerosene as an illuminant for street lighting purposes. The city auditor reported no expenditures for gas street lights for the first time in 1931. There were then 2,276 electric lights in use.

Sewers

The necessity of a sewage system was stressed by each incoming mayor. In 1857, Nathaniel B. Borden, in his inaugural address said in part, — "My predecessors have suggested the importance of providing sewers in some of our principal streets. As a system this would prove an expensive operation, and one in which perhaps the city could not readily engage." He however goes on to state, that conditions along Central Street "should be abated".

The first sewer, other than open drains, was constructed in 1857 on Spring and Washington Streets. "Benjamin C. Borden, who was at that time in the employ of the city furnished the plan drawings and reported on

all lines and grades.”¹ The drain was so constructed, that connections could be made by abutters but for the primary purpose of providing for surface flow, which ruined the roadways. There were a number of springs in this section, which together with the surface wash made it difficult to keep streets passable. The Central Street sewer, built the next year, diverted the surface water which was depositing silt about the wharves near the “Creek” and the Odd Street sewer built soon after diverted the heavy flow of water at French’s Hill. Culverts were provided near the center of the city to care for surface water and the overflow of fire cisterns.

In his inaugural address of 1860,² Mayor E. P. Buffinton expressed his views as follows. — “The importance of thorough sewage, as a sanitary means apart from the numerous conveniences it affords, cannot be over-estimated. Attention of previous municipal governments has been frequently called to the subject, and I would again suggest the topic for your careful consideration. In some portions of the city, wells have been rendered unfit for use by the drainage from stables, vaults and accumulation of other offensive substances. So far as this evil can be removed, I think it is the duty of the City Government to act in the premises.”

The office of City Engineer was not created by the City Council until 1880, when Philip D. Borden began his many years of valuable service, on March 7, 1881. Before that time, the Mayor was authorized to employ engineering assistance. In 1873, Phineas Ball, a civil engineer from Worcester was engaged to work out a plan of sewage in correllation with the rapidly developing water system. He made his first report in June, 1874 followed by a supplementary report, October 11, 1875.³

Many problems and difficulties arose and continued during the years to follow. Streets were constructed without regard to sewage problems and often diverted the natural flow westward to the bay or northward and southward toward the “Quequechan”. Principally, on account of the presence of granitic ledges, sewer construction in Fall River has always been an expensive proposition and before the invention of the power drill demanded long hours of labor. The most costly sewer was on Rodman Street. It passed through a solid granite ledge, placed thirty-five feet below the surface. A stretch of 165.14 feet built in 1903 cost \$7,845.26.

¹ A report by Danforth Horton, Superintendent of Streets, on sewers constructed from 1857 to 1877. “City Document, 1878.”

² City Document, No. 13.

³ Published in City Document of 1876.

The recommendations of Phineas Ball, under the expert supervision of Philip D. Borden and those who followed him has been closely followed. The diversion of sewage and surface water, and the confinement of the Quequechan River within narrow bounds as planned by Mr. Ball and recommended by Mr. Borden demands a large outlay of public funds. If the plan could be executed, it would greatly benefit the welfare and health of the community. No sewers can be constructed in a large section of the city adjacent to the westerly shores of the North and South Ponds and all the region east of Rodman Street until a trunk sewer and outfall for the Quequechan River valley have been built.⁴

⁴Mayor Murray in 1945 suggested as an alternative plan, the erection of a purification plant and the emptying of the drainage from this section into South Watuppa Pond.

