

Chapter VI

FALL RIVER A CITY 1854-1902 THE LIQUOR PROBLEM

Fall River with 12,000 inhabitants, a valuation of \$8,939,215 and a taxable income of \$56,523.70 could no longer properly conduct its affairs under a town system of government.

On January 5, 1854, the first step was taken to obtain a city charter. A committee was appointed consisting of N. B. Borden, Israel Buffinton, Thomas Wilbur, Robert C. Brown, Samuel L. Thaxter, Eliab Williams, Louis Lapham, Benjamin Earl, with Foster Hooper as chairman to draft a charter and petition the legislature. The charter drawn by this committee, with a few amendments was approved by the legislature and adopted in town meeting by a vote of 529 to 274, on April 22, 1854.

The charter called for the division of the city into six wards and the election of a mayor and one alderman, and three councilmen from each ward. The first city election took place May 6, 1854. James Buffington received 796 votes for mayor, Foster Hooper 381, Nathan Durfee 64. There were fourteen scattering votes not recorded. The names of the city's first elective officers were as follows:—

FIRST CITY GOVERNMENT OF FALL RIVER — 1854

Mayor, James Buffington.

Aldermen, James Henry, Edward P. Buffinton, Oliver H. Hathaway, Alvin S. Ballard, Edwin Shaw, Julius B. Champney.

Common Council, Robert C. Brown, William F. Goodrum, Peter J. Denney, Henry Wilbur, Obadiah Chace, Henry Dimon, Jr., Oliver Grinnell, Gardner Groves, Howard B. Allen, Christopher W. Tillinghast, Nathaniel Bonney, William M. Almy, John Mason, Jr., Thomas T. Potter, D. Sewall Brigham, Sheffield Brightman, Smith Winslow, Albert Winslow.

John R. Hodges was appointed clerk of the Board of Aldermen and George W. Billings clerk of the Common Council.

The change from a town to a city was marked by a grand Fourth of July celebration costing \$1,235.09.

The last full financial year of the town of Fall River ended January 31, 1854. The Auditing Committee for that year, composed of Charles O.

Shove, Jonathan Slade and Joshua Remington in their report stated, "In view of the anticipated change in the form of our municipal system of Government, which, should it take place, will probably vary some of the items of expenditure, your Committee has refrained from estimating the sums necessary to be raised, by tax, the current year." The next printed report of receipts and expenditures of the town is from February 1, 1854 to May 15, 1854 and is preceded by an inaugural address of the Mayor and followed by a report of receipts and expenditures of the city from May 16, 1854 to February 28, 1855.

The Hon. James Buffington in his inaugural delivered April 2, 1855 said in part, "The true secret of the prosperity of a place, and of adding to its wealth and character, is in keeping the rate of taxation within reasonable limits, and the only good reason for resorting to an increase must be found in absolute necessity.

"In this age of progress, as it is now termed, there is in everything a tendency to excess, and this is true with respect to public matters as well as individuals, often times giving rise to complaints. It is your duty therefore to weigh well every important proposition that may be presented for your consideration, and all which are uncalled for, inexpedient, or which would add nothing to the prosperity of the whole, should be dispensed with."

The salaries of city officials for the first full year amounted to \$2,547.92. The Mayor received \$500, John R. Hodges as Clerk and Treasurer \$600, George Billings, clerk of the Common Council \$100, each of the six Aldermen \$50, John S. Brayton as City Solicitor \$100, Jerome Dwelly as City Physician \$208.33 and Guilford Hathaway as Assessor \$208.33. The remaining assessors and members of the General School Committee received amounts varying from \$175 to \$16.50. The standing committees of the elective officers assisted the Mayor as chief executive.

It is interesting to note the locations of the ward rooms in the first general election thus revealing the general location of the wards and the long distances the voters in the outlying districts were forced to travel.

Ward 1—Corner of Mulberry and Spring Streets.

Ward 2—Columbia Hall, Second Street.

Ward 3—Armory Hall, Bedford Street.

Ward 4—Union Hall, North Main Street.

Ward 5—Cataract Hall, Rock Street.

Ward 6—Corner of North Main and Bowenville Lane.



HON. NATHANIEL BRIGGS BORDEN
1801 - 1865

In the month of August, after the inauguration of the first city government, the Board of Health,¹ which at that time consisted of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen was confronted by a serious outbreak of Asiatic cholera. One Jeremiah Holland contracted the disease and died August twenty-fourth and contrary to the advice of Father Murphy, a number of his friends attended his "wake". By the following Sunday, fifteen residents had died. Before the disease was stamped out in October, one hundred and thirty had succumbed. Mayor Buffington in reviewing the situation in his inaugural address the following April said, "Everything in the power of the city authorities was done to stop the ravages of the fell destroyer." He further stated, that while a few of the victims could not be accounted for, the large majority were subject to quick contagion because of want of cleanliness, free use of spirituous liquors, the crowding of swine and places of filth in close continuity to dwellings.

At the second election there were two changes in the Board of Aldermen. Isaac L. Hart and Major Borden replaced Alvin S. Ballard and Julius B. Champney. Mr. Ballard became City Clerk and Clerk of the Board. John C. Davis was appointed City Messenger and Clerk of Market, Dr. Jerome Dwelly, City Physician and John S. Brayton, City Solicitor.

James Buffington resigned his office as Mayor before the end of his second term to enter the National House of Representatives. Edward P. Buffinton succeeded him.

At this time there were bitter discussions and debates on the questions of free masonry and slavery and these subjects were undoubtedly brought up in mayoralty elections. Nathaniel B. Borden was strongly against and outspoken against both.

In 1857 Mr. Borden defeated Mr. Buffinton for Mayor by a small margin and the next year he was defeated by Josiah C. Blaisdell by about the same margin. Mr. Blaisdell was re-elected over Chester W. Greene in 1859.

The Hon. Nathaniel Briggs Borden was one of Fall River's most eminent citizens. He was born in 1801, in a house that stood on the west side of Pocasset Street, near the corner of the Main Road. It was directly in front of this house that two British soldiers were killed in the Battle of Fall River.

Before he was twenty years old, he became the clerk and treasurer of the then, new Pocasset Manufacturing Company. His skill and ability in management along with his strict integrity were recognized by his fellow

¹ The Board of Health was not established as a separate entity until 1878.

townsmen and he was elected in town meetings to serve as Town Clerk, Selectman and Highway Surveyor. He was elected at four different times to the State Legislature and as Representative in Congress from 1835 to 1839 and again in 1842. He and his family resided for many years in a house which he built on the east side of Second Street, a short distance south of Pleasant Street, now used as a parking lot.

The year that he served as mayor was a period of business depression throughout the country and Fall River along with other manufacturing communities suffered acutely. Nearly all the mills were closed and in consequence there was much want and suffering. Mayor Borden, rather than make paupers of the unfortunate provided work at low wages on the city farm and on the highways, thus benefiting the unemployed and the city. He served as mayor for one year only but in 1859 he was elected an alderman, serving the city through the Civil War period until his demise, April 10, 1865.

The municipal year did not conform with the calendar year so in 1860, election day was changed from the first Monday in March to the first Monday in December and later to the Tuesday next after the first Monday.

Edward P. Buffinton was elected mayor without opposition for the short term beginning in March and again in December by a large majority, over Walter C. Durfee for the full term, which began the first Monday in January 1861. In December 1861, he was again elected without opposition and from 1862 to 1865, he defeated each year in turn, Leander Borden, Elihu Grant, Chester W. Greene and S. Angier Chace.

Mr. Buffinton was a man of marked executive ability. He had for many years carried on his business in the Market Building and was known by nearly everybody in the city. He was of large stature and courteous in manner. It would seem from the results of his administration during the critical Civil War period and the time of the annexation of Fall River, Rhode Island, that he was one of the best chief executives Fall River ever had. He was fortunate to have as aids men of exceptional abilities on the Board of Aldermen. There were eighteen individuals who served on the "board" for one or more years. Their names and their occupations at the time of their elections gives evidence of their value: — George H. Eddy, a provision dealer; Nathaniel B. Borden, a former mayor, in business with W. H. Hawkins selling provisions and building materials; Asa Pettey, a sawfiler; John Mason, Jr., a dealer in hardware and agricultural tools; James Ford, an attorney; Job B. Ashley, a grocer at Steep Brook; Joseph Borden, a bleacher; Samuel Hathaway, a farmer; Benjamin Covell, a

carpenter; Charles O. Shove, a yarn manufacturer; Walter Paine 3d, treasurer of the American Linen Mill; Weaver Osborn, a blacksmith and land owner; Daniel Stilwell, in the hardware business; Philip D. Borden, superintendent of the "Iron Works" and James Henry, superintendent of the American and Bay State Print Works.

In 1862 an ordinance was passed establishing a system of financial accountability and the office of City Treasurer and Collector was divided. Benjamin Earl was the first to hold the office of Collector. In 1864, the indebtedness was greatly increased occasioned by the payment of bounties to volunteers and for the support of operatives thrown out of work because of financial conditions and the difficulty of obtaining raw materials to operate the mills.

In 1866, George O. Fairbanks, a local dentist, with rooms in Granite Block, was elected mayor over his opponent Robert Adams and re-elected in 1867 by a small majority, over Chester W. Greene. In 1867 the mayor received a salary of \$1000 and each alderman \$300.

Samuel M. Brown was elected mayor in 1868 defeating Southard Miller. He retained the office for four years defeating in turn, Edward P. Buffinton, Abraham G. Hart and Isaac Smith, Jr.,² receiving in 1871, 1381 votes out of a total of 1969 cast. At the end of Mayor Brown's administration Fall River was a fast growing and well equipped city, fully prepared for further expected developments.

Candidates for mayor seemed to be lacking in 1872. Dr. Robert T. Davis, the choice of both parties agreed to serve for one year only. He was elected without opposition and at the end of his term presented his salary (at that time \$2000), to the Fall River Children's Home. Continued progress was made in municipal developments some of which will be considered later.

Hon. Robert Thompson Davis (his photograph is reproduced in Fascicle II) was born in Ulster County, Ireland of Scotch-Irish parents, August 28, 1823. When he was three years old his parents made their second migration to America and settled in Amesbury. His father became an overseer in and later a superintendent of a woolen mill. He was able to give his son a good education at Amesbury Academy, under private tutors and at the Friend's School in Providence. While visiting his brother in Tiverton, he became acquainted with Dr. Thomas Wilbur³ of Fall River,

² Isaac Smith, Jr. was a physician residing on Bank Street.

³ Dr. Wilbur was born in 1795 and died in 1857.

who led him to take up the study of medicine. He finally graduated from the Harvard Medical School in the Class of 1847. He located permanently in Fall River in 1850 and practiced with notable success for over thirty years. He was in full charge at the time of the cholera epidemic.

Dr. Davis joined the Liberty Party and upon its organization became a strong supporter of the Republican Party.

He was a member of the School Committee in 1851; a State Senator in 1858 and again in 1861. He was appointed in 1868 by Governor Claflin, a member of the newly organized State Board of Health and continued a member until 1884, when he resigned to take his seat in Congress, to which he had been elected by a large majority. He served in the Forty-eighth, Forty-ninth and Fiftieth Congresses.

Mr. Davis was one of the largest investors in Fall River mill stocks and a director in several corporations. He always listened with an open mind to the demands of the operatives, often taking their side in a betterment plan. He was a gifted orator and was frequently invited to speak on special occasions. The twelve room public school on Quequechan Street was named in his honor. A graceful and valuable memorial to Dr. Davis is the reference room in the "Public Library" and the fund provided for the purchase of books. Dr. Davis died October 29, 1906 leaving a son Robert C. Davis,⁴ a Harvard College and Law School graduate, who was deeply interested in the welfare of Fall River.

The growth of the city in 1871 and '72 was phenomenal; brought about by the organization of fifteen corporations and the building of eleven mills, which brought an influx of operatives and the accompanying artisans and storekeepers. It was in the early seventies that the eastern section, known as Flint Village, was changed from an agricultural community to a residential and business center. This remarkable growth had its beginning during the administrations of Samuel M. Brown and Dr. Davis. In 1871 the Watuppa Water Board was appointed consisting of Philip D. Borden, William Lindsey and Joseph A. Bowen. The next year Charles H. Churchill was appointed the first Water Registrar.

In 1872, James F. Davenport, opposed by John S. Brayton, was elected mayor and was re-elected over Judge Louis Lapham for the three succeeding years.

The city debt was mounting and none too soon provision was made for a sinking fund, and a board of commissioners was appointed in 1874 con-

⁴ Robert C. Davis died February 18, 1926.

sisting of the mayor, George W. Billings, Simeon Borden, Samuel M. Brown, William Connell and Charles P. Stickney. Samuel M. Brown, Jr. was appointed in 1875 to act as agent for the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, who at that time were the Overseers of the Poor. On January 6, 1876, the Academy of Music located in Borden Block, at the present time the largest business block in the city had its "opening night". "The Academy" was for years to follow, the principal theatre in the city and at the time of its opening provided the second largest stage in the State.

Crawford E. Lindsey was mayor in 1878 and 1879. The Board of Health as a separate entity was established in 1878 by the appointment of James S. Anthony, Benjamin F. Winslow, James E. Sullivan and Dr. Charles W. Copeland as members. Dr. John H. Abbott was appointed in 1879. Charles W. Copeland signed the first annual report.

Before the sewerage was extended, cesspools were emptied by means of a bucket attached at the end of a long pole and the contents carted away in what were generally known as "honey carts". One of the first official orders of the Board of Health prohibited the use of the box type, insisting on the use of sealed barrels. The first year of its existence, the "Board" spent \$473.66.

The decade from 1870 to 1880 was crowded with events, favorable and unfavorable to the city's welfare and reputation. Hard times and strikes slowed progress temporarily. In 1878 and '79 the community was shocked by the defalcation of several trusted and respected citizens. By their business connivances and embezzlements they forced several mills into bankruptcy, endangered the financial structure of two savings banks, ruined the financial prospects of many stockholders in comfortable circumstances and deprived the operatives of their earnings. Prior to 1878 there had been a great laxity on the part of corporations, in the issuing of commercial paper. It became a habit for a treasurer to issue mill paper with no counter signature or registration and with the treasurer's official signature alone. Such paper had been accepted generally by financial institutions.

At this time the appropriations for highways and sewers were largely increased, for, as Mayor Lindsey said in his inaugural address, it was wise, "both as a matter of policy and humanity" [for] "at a very little larger outlay of money the City assisted men instead of supporting paupers."

The city continued to grow. The population in 1870 was 27,191; in 1880, 47,883. Within this decade, the increase in valuations was fifty-nine per cent, in taxation eighty-seven per cent and including the water debt, the increase in indebtedness was eight hundred twenty-nine per cent.

City elections were carried on for years along strictly party lines. The first people from foreign lands to come to Fall River were from the British Isles and after the Civil War, the English and Scotch folk were nearly always to be found voting the Republican ticket and the citizens of Irish descent were Democrats. Soon after the Civil War the French Canadians, finding ready employment in the mills, began to migrate here in ever increasing numbers and soon became an important factor, often a deciding factor, in city elections.

Men of Irish descent were for years the leaders of the Democratic party in this section and in 1879 Jeremiah R. Leary was nominated to oppose William S. Greene for the office of mayor. He received 2,481 votes out of a total of 5,471 cast.

The future prosperity of the city seemed far distant in 1879, for in addition to bankruptcies and a general business depression, a strike was called by the mill operatives. In 1880, however, the strike had been settled and the financial difficulties caused by embezzlements were rectified by the investment of new capital, a considerable portion of which came from outside the city, showing that investors appreciated the advantages the city afforded.

In 1880, the office of City Engineer was established and Philip D. Borden, Jr. (See Fascicle I, p. 141) began his long and valuable career, serving continuously until his retirement in 1913. In 1881, the office of Superintendent of Public Buildings was created and Isaac T. Brownell was the first to assume the responsibilities and organized the department.

William S. Greene was re-elected mayor in 1880 but resigned the following March to accept the office of Postmaster. Robert Henry was elected to serve from March twenty-eighth to the end of the year.

In 1880, the ward lines were re-drawn and three wards added, thus dividing the city into nine wards and increasing the number of aldermen and councilmen.

Henry K. Braley, later a member of the Supreme Court was elected mayor over Milton Reed. In 1883, Milton Reed defeated Michael Tootle and in 1884, John W. Cummings defeated Henry J. Langley by a margin of only one hundred votes. William S. Greene again entered the "field" and there followed four closely contested campaigns with John W. Cummings, of which, Mr. Cummings won three out of the four. Hard fought as these political battles were, Mr. Cummings and Mr. Greene remained fast friends.

Dr. John W. Coughlin entered the political field in 1888. For two years he was defeated by James F. Jackson but won over William J. Wiley,

Dr. John H. Abbott, Philip H. Borden and William S. Greene the following four years. He was mayor from 1891 to 1894 inclusive.

During Mayor Jackson's term (1890), the Board of the Overseers of the Poor was founded as a separate entity. Up to that time the Mayor and Board of Aldermen were the Overseers of the Poor; a part of the time assisted by an agent appointed by them. The first members appointed to this board were Mayor Jackson, Charles J. Holmes, Henry K. Braley, Charles C. Buffinton and Cornelius S. Greene.

The Liquor Problem
The Police and License Commission

Intemperance has always been recognized as a source of crime and poverty. Resolutions were often passed in early town meetings registering disapproval of the ways that sales of liquor were conducted. "In January 1843, a preamble and resolutions were adopted to the effect that moral suasion for the suppression of intemperance had failed, and that, therefore, an agent was needed to take charge of prosecutions of violators of the license laws."⁵ Later the town tried to control sales by establishing a "Liquor Agency". The town auditors submitted the following report from July 22, 1852 to Jan. 1, 1853, a period just preceding the adoption of the city charter.

"LIQUOR AGENCY ACCOUNT"

| | |
|--|------------|
| "Total amount paid for Liquor | \$1,430.42 |
| Incidental expenses and rent, | 118.04 |
| Services of C. C. Dillingham, Agent at \$450 per annum | 200.31 |
| Do do to July 22, 1852, | 4.50 |
| Do do Azariah Shove, for assisting Agent, | 50.00 |
| Amount of profit, 188.83." | |

The auditor's report for 1867 shows that \$487.07 was paid to make up a deficiency in the city liquor agency. All methods seemed to fail of their purpose and the licensing was vested in the Board of Aldermen.

As time went on and the city's population increased the powers vested in the aldermanic committee to grant licenses and control the police department aroused suspicions of favoritism and the inevitable political "line ups". Under the local option law, there were periods of "no license" and "high license" without satisfactory results.

Mayor Reed, in 1884 and Mayor Jackson, in 1889 recommended that licenses be controlled by a commission appointed by the City Council. Mayor Coughlin, in 1894 had this to say, after condemning the law which

⁵ "Our County and Its People," 1890, p. 520.

limited the number of licenses to be granted:—"The creation of a monopoly of the liquor business established on a partisan basis is not only of exceedingly questionable propriety, but it savors of that gross injustice which is sure to receive the rebuke of every right minded citizen."

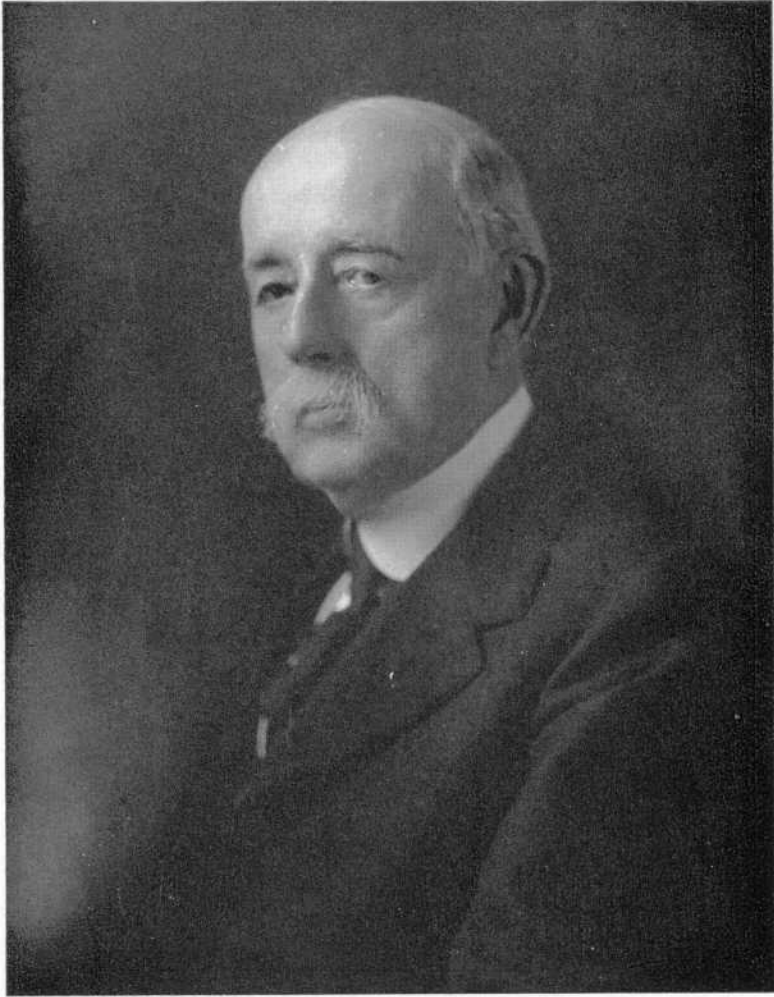
The conditions then existing led a group of citizens to appear before the Legislature and request the passage of a bill which would remove the licensing power and the police department from the jurisdiction of the Board of Aldermen and vest the powers in the hands of a commission of three local voters to be appointed by the Governor. This petition was granted and became a law, May 7, 1894. The next year, William S. Greene, again elected mayor said in his inaugural,—“The Legislature of 1894 placed the administration of our police department and the granting of innholder, victualler and liquor licenses in a ‘board of police’ appointed by the Governor. The provisions are similar to those in Boston, and if the same success in the enforcement of the law is accomplished here that has resulted in the former city, there will be no reason for complaint. The board of aldermen will be relieved from the duty of granting liquor licenses, and ought to be able to render better service in a business capacity.”

In 1894 there were three candidates for mayor and William S. Greene was again elected over Augustus P. Gorman and J. Dwight Brady. Mr. Greene won the next two elections with substantial majorities over Cornelius C. Murphy and William E. Quirk. A “Reservoir Commission”, to protect the water supply, consisting of Mayor Greene, City Engineer Philip D. Borden, Jeremiah R. Leary, Samuel Watson and George H. Eddy was organized in 1895.

Hon. William Stedman Greene

For many years, whenever the Republican Party in Fall River needed advice or leadership, the counsel or leadership of William S. Greene was sought. He was a strong party man but his loyalty to his party, strong as it was, never exceeded his affection for his city and the citizens, who so many times had honored him. Any one, who spoke disparagingly of Fall River to Mr. Greene soon found he had made a mistake.

William S. Greene was born in Tazewell County, Illinois, April 28, 1841 and when three years of age was brought by his parents to Fall River. He received his education in the public schools and at the age of fifteen started his business career as an errand boy. In 1858 he associated himself in the insurance business with John P. Slade. He left the city for a very short period to engage in business in Buffalo and New York City returning



HON. WILLIAM STEDMAN GREENE
1841 - 1924

in 1866 to assume a partnership with his father in the real estate and insurance business, under the firm name of Greene & Son. He continued the business after the death of his father and when his son Chester W. finished his education, he became a member of the firm which for many years had their offices in the building which stood on the northwest corner of Bedford Street and Court Square.

The greater part of Mr. Greene's life was given to public service. He was elected a member of the "Common Council" in 1876, serving as its president in 1878 and '79, when he received his first nomination and election as mayor. His abilities were recognized from without the city. President Garfield appointed him Postmaster in 1881. He served for four years and then, for a short time returned to private life. In 1888, Governor Ames appointed him Superintendent of State Prisons, in which office he gained an enviable reputation. He was elected a member of the National House of Representatives in 1898 and represented his district with distinction until his death September 22, 1924.

While a member of Congress, Mr. Greene's political friends and opponents received prompt and equal courtesies. The welfare of Fall River and his fellow citizens was ever uppermost in his mind. He was a member of the St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church and for many years the Superintendent of the Sunday School. Mr. Greene was able, upright and thorough. He proved conclusively that a politician with honesty and courage can succeed.

In 1897, Dr. Amos M. Jackson defeated James Hoar in the mayoralty election and John S. B. Clarke in 1898. Dr. John H. Abbott defeated Mr. Clarke in 1899 and James E. Holland in 1900. Attorney George Grime defeated Michael B. Jones by the largest majority in any city election in 1901, and Michael Sweeney by a smaller majority in 1902. For nine successive years the "Republicans" had elected their candidate for mayor. In 1902, the first agent of the Board of Health, Samuel B. Morris, was appointed.

