

REPORT

OF

THE CITIZENS' COMMITTEE

UPON

THE NUISANCES

OF

NEW YORK CITY.

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THE AIR WE BREATHE.

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APRIL, 1878.

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NEW YORK:  
PRINTED BY S. HAMILTON'S SON,  
No. 61 CEDAR STREET.



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# THE STENCH FACTORIES

## OF NEW YORK CITY.

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The offal of 2,676,200 slaughtered cattle, hogs, calves and sheep, per year, poisoning the air.

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### REPORT OF A CITIZENS' COMMITTEE.

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LAST summer the press, in a series of editorials, called attention to the sickening smells pervading the city. A public meeting was called, money was subscribed, and a committee appointed, of which the undersigned was chairman, to investigate and report the *cause* and *cure* of the disgusting odors that destroy not only the pleasure of living, but often life itself, even in the best portions of the city.

The air we breathe, coming in contact in the lungs, at every inhalation, with millions of small blood vessels, gives, if pure, at each pulsation of the heart, health and strength to every portion of the body; but, if loaded with poisons, it in like manner bears disease and death to every member and faculty of the human system. A wise Providence has made healthful odors pleasant to the senses and malarial ones disagreeable. The nose, like a friendly and watchful sentinel, alert both day and night, scents instantly in the air a dangerous smell, and gives warning of its approach as that of a deadly enemy.

This city is by *nature* one of the most highly favored

spots on earth for pure air. Long and narrow and high in the middle, it slopes down on each side to broad and deep streams of salt water, that flow and reflow with every tide. Lying near the ocean, it is daily fanned by a breeze from land or sea. The winds from whatever quarter they blow, before entering our streets and dwellings, are or should be purified and cooled in crossing the broad salt rivers that surround us.

We have a Board of Health composed of two gentlemen; one, Charles F. Chandler, Ph. D., salary \$6,500 per year, an eminent chemist and an active, well-paid professor in two colleges; the other, Edward G. Janeway, M. D., a distinguished physician, and presumably overwhelmed with patients, salary \$5,000. Their clerk is Emmons Clark, the gallant Colonel of the Seventh Regiment, salary \$4,800. Their counsel, learned in sanitary law, has a salary of \$4,500, with a clerk to do the work at \$3,400. This Board has almost despotic power to abate all nuisances in their judgment detrimental to the public health. Their capacity to detect such nuisances is sharpened by the skill of a Sanitary Superintendent, salary \$4,800; and he is aided by an assistant at \$2,700 per year, and by a chief clerk to do the work at \$2,000 per year. Then, in order to secure the prompt and efficient performance of their duties, the taxpayers are mulcted \$200,000 per year for the regular expenses of this Board, most of which money goes to pay salaries of themselves and their numerous staff of inspectors, engineers, &c. In addition to this sum, they can incur expense without limit in cleansing and purifying buildings and lots declared by them to be injurious to health, and can assess the cost upon the property renovated.

*Law* has thus supplemented *Nature* in providing perfect safeguards for health.

No city should have purer air than ours; and we ought to have the lowest annual death rate of any large town.

What are the facts? Let us make a comparison with our other cities for ten years, and also for the last year;

this will give us the average, and the present relative condition, as to healthfulness.

CITY.	Population.	Average annual death rate per 1,000 inhabitants.	
		Av'rage for 10 years. 1868-1877.	One year. 1877.
New York, . . . . .	1,093,171	28.71	24.32
Philadelphia, . . . . .	876,118	21.54	18.80
Brooklyn, . . . . .	549,438	25.50	21.51
St. Louis, . . . . .	501,489	17.30	11.62
Chicago, . . . . .	460,000	22.39	17.83
Boston, . . . . .	375,476	24.34	20.10
Cincinnati, . . . . .	280,000	20.68	15.81
Providence, . . . . .	104,500	19.20	18.81
Lowell, . . . . .	55,798	22.50	19.09
Worcester, . . . . .	54,937	22.30	21.07
Cambridge, . . . . .	53,547	20.83	18.69
Fall River, . . . . .	53,207	24.96	20.35
Springfield, . . . . .	33,981	19.77	16.04
Salem, . . . . .	27,140	21.15	20.38

From the above table it appears that New York, not only for the last ten years, but now, instead of being the most healthful city, is, in fact, the most unhealthy.

The death rate ought not to average yearly over 21 in a 1,000. Instead of that, it is 28; or 25 per cent. greater than it should be. In other words, 7,500 lives are annually sacrificed in this city by bad sanitary administration. The destruction of these 7,500 lives means the prostration, mental and physical by malaria, of a great many thousand others.

What is the cause of this? It is not far off, or difficult to find. Our noses tell us daily and nightly.

When the pure, bracing, tonic, westerly wind crosses the Hudson, in its approach to this city, it takes up from the blocks bordering the river, from 15th to 50th streets, a sickening, malarious, poisonous odor, and wafts it through our streets and avenues, and into our doors and windows, and the air-boxes of our heaters, until every room in our houses smells of carrion.

When the wind is from the east, though it moves across the country and over the Sound as pure as the breath of the Creator, yet, as it comes up from the margin of the East River, near 45th street, into the mansions on Murray Hill and Fifth avenue, it nauseates every one that inhales it with the stench of rotting and steaming manure yards, decaying and boiling tallow, fat, bones, hides and offal.

In the warm evenings, we are obliged to shut our windows to exclude the villanous smells; and in the night, one often wakes from a sound sleep nauseated with the carrion odors pouring in through his windows and ventilators.

When the stench-factories are in full blast it would be safer to have one's room hermetically sealed, and to breathe over and over again, for the whole night, the atmosphere shut within, than to let in from without, what should be pure air, but what is permitted by our Board of Health to be made a pernicious and noisome malaria.

Some of these smells come regularly at 10½ in the evening; others, just after midnight.

The object of the Committee was to discover the causes of these poisonous and sickening stenches, and who is to blame for their not being stopped.

Selecting a time when there was a fine northwesterly breeze and a clear atmosphere, and yet the air even about Murray Hill and 5th avenue, so charged with nauseating smells as to be scarcely endurable, I was led by the ever-increasing stench to the foot of West 39th street, where I found the *Algonquin*, a hulk of an old steamship, owned by Speir & Lounsberry, or Speir & Co., moored in the slip, and filled with boilers, vats, cauldrons and kettles, all in full blast, boiling blood, offal, bones and carrion, and generating a sickening stench of the most disgusting character, and poisoning the air for miles around. This hulk manufactures 8,000 tons a year of fertilizers, and, in the opinion of the eminent Dr. Marcy, destroys in the same period the lives of many hundred of our citizens.

*It has the permit of the Board of Health.*

At the foot of 39th street is a similar stench-factory, owned by Lister Bros., *permitted by the Board of Health*, and manufacturing 7,000 tons a year of fertilizers, and filling the air with a nauseating malaria destructive of human life.

Next are the odorous places of M. Donohue & Co. and of Monroe Crane, boiling blood, fat, tallow and offal, also *licensed by the Board of Health*.

Adjoining, on 39th, 40th and 41st streets and North River, are the extensive hog butcheries of Monroe Crane, of Davis & Atwood, of Toby & Booth, of Spring & Haynes, of Chas. White & Co., of Stahlnecker & Son, and of Metcalf & Gibbs. They yard and kill, during the killing season, on an average, 7,000 hogs a day, or, in the course of the year, a total of 1,680,000, and the offal and fat is worked up in the above stench-factories.

A traveler says he found, by actual experiment, he could smell an Indiana hog-yard, from which they ship to this city, ten miles: condense seven such yards into one, and add the extra stench of the hogs diseased in the transit to New York, and you will get about the average smell of this pest-hole maintained right in the right side of our great city, *under the permits of the Board of Health*.

In the same locality, on 40th and 41st streets and North river, and as it were to ward off the hog cholera, on the allopathic principle of introducing another poison of a different character, are the sheep slaughter-houses of Charlotte Loewell, of C. & P. McIntyre, of John Shea and of P. Whalen; killing weekly 5,650 sheep; and the cattle slaughter-houses of Stern & Metzger, of Adolph Strause, of C. & P. McIntyre, and of Donohue & Co.; killing 1,200 cattle per week. The blood, offal, entrails, heads and refuse of all these places enable the Algonquin and Lister Bros. to produce their 15,000 tons of fertilizers per year, and to pour into our streets and houses a never-ending stream of nauseating poison.

*All are protected by the permits of the Board of Health.*

Adjoining, on 38th street, is the stench factory of P. Throp. He produces about \$100,000 of soap per year.

Close by, on 38th street, is a manure yard extending from street to street, and 240 feet long, containing 1,000 tons of fermenting and rotting manure, *protected also by the Board of Health.*

The above establishments generate pernicious odors sufficient, with a westerly wind, to envelope the city from North river to Madison avenue, and to sicken thousands of our people.

We have often been told that the cause of this is the wind blowing into the sewer openings on North river, at low tide; but the smell is as strong and as widespread at high tide as at low; hence the sewers are innocent. Again, the gas works are accused as the guilty cause; but the smells are quite different from any generated by gas companies.

The real culprit is the Board of Health. This board is created and given the power and paid the money to stop these smells, and yet, instead of doing that, *they have given every one of them a permit.*

Leaving this 38th street pest-hole, I took the Elevated Railroad at 34th street and 9th avenue, to go down town; but soon struck a new stink of a vile character. It filled

the atmosphere as far down as 14th street; and I got out there to investigate, and as before followed my nose. I soon came upon a whole brood of stench-factories, under the guise of soap-works, and *licensed or permitted by the Board of Health*; but managed without regard to the public health, and filling the air for many blocks with the odor of boiling rotten soap-fat and carrion.

The proprietors and location and annual product of each are as follows: Eliza Buckland, 17th street near 10th avenue, 10,400 barrels soft soap, and 5,200 boxes hard soap; Peter Feeney, 521 W. 15th street, between 10th and 11th avenues, about the same quantity; G. J. Gregerson & Co., 19th street, between 10th and 11th avenues, a like quantity. Benjamin Wallace, 430 W. 17th street, between 9th and 10th avenues, \$100,000 worth per year.

This group, and the Algonquin group of stench-factories have driven out the better class of tenants from miles of houses in this part of the city, and compelled the owners, to accept at low rates, tenants of a class similar to the employees in these factories.

The damage to property caused by these places is far more than the whole value of the lots and structures used in this deleterious business.

When the wind is due north or south, the air about Murray Hill is comparatively pure; but when it blows from the east, it is charged with sickening effluvia. In searching for the cause of this, I found at 45th street and East river a large building full of boilers, vats, cauldrons and kettles, engaged in a business similar to that of the Algonquin, and emitting for miles around a like stench. It is flanked on one side by a private manure yard, M. Kane owner, containing 500 tons manure; and on the other side across the street, by a public manure yard, 200 feet by 250 feet, and storing 2,500 tons of manure; all of it in both yards rotting and steaming in the process of fermentation.

The stench-factory has on it the sign "Schwarzchild & Sulzberger, Hides, Skins, Tallow, &c." The odor from it

was so nauseating, that even the hardy crews on the manure boats that come for cargoes are often attacked with vomiting, while lying at the wharf near by. The street cleaning inspector on the station said, the rotting manure was a delightful bouquet compared with the smells from this stench-factory. It is often quiet during the day, but starts up 10 p. m., hence the frightfully disgusting smells that with an Easterly wind permeate the houses on Murray Hill, regularly at 10½ p. m. The proprietors say they purify the carrion, and grease and make oleomargarine of it. From the quantity of stench they throw out into the atmosphere one would think the work of purification perfect.

At midnight the night soil scow of Frank Swift, the night soil contractor, was discovered in the middle of East River, opposite 95th street, *without any inspector aboard*, and dropping through its hinged bottom its whole cargo. This cargo soon rose and covered the surface of East River from 95th street to the Battery with filth, and floated down on the ebb tide to Sandy Hook, where Swift had contracted to transport and dump it. With an easterly breeze it nauseated in its passage our slumbering and helpless citizens with its suffocating effluvia.

This accounted for the odors coming with an easterly wind at regular periods after midnight.

The pest-factory of Schwarzchild & Sulzberger, like the Algonquin, has a companion in the next block 44th street and East River, in the establishment of Rafferty & Williams, who steam, grind and work up blood, bones, fat, grease, guts and offal, using sludge acid, which is oil of vitriol fouled with the refuse of petroleum, and produce 7,000 tons a year of fertilizers; but poison the area of a square mile at least of the city with their malarious stench.

Instead of doing their odorous work in steam-tight iron tanks, and condensing the poisonous vapors into fluid, and discharging it through pipes, deep down in the East River, where it would harm no one, they are allowed to infect

the atmosphere of the whole of that part of the city. They have only to go to the great slaughter house of Eastman & Co., at 61st street and North River, where he slaughters and works up the blood and offal of 1,500 fat cattle and 1,800 fat sheep per week, to learn how rendering can be done without any perceptible odor escaping into the air.

This East side centre of bad smells has fit surroundings.

On 43d street and East River, is a very offensive tannery for green hides, J. B. Hoyt & Co., owners, with *a permit from the Board of Health*. Between these nuisances and First avenue, are slaughter houses, of which below are the owners locations and weekly business:

#### SHEEP.

- D. Harrington & Co., cor. 1st avenue and 43d street ;
  - A. Kann, cor. 1st avenue and 43d street ;
  - J. Rodman, 1st avenue, near 43d street ;
  - A. Vanderbeck, 45th street, near 1st avenue ;
  - M. Scanlon, cor. 45th street and 1st avenue ;
  - Westheimer and Strouse, 46th street and 1st avenue ;
- Killing per week, 5,700 sheep !

#### CALVES.

- A. Vanderbeck, 45th street and 1st avenue ;
  - Aaron Frank, 45th street and 1st avenue ;
  - H. Frank, 45th street and 1st avenue ;
- Killing per week, 1,850 calves.

#### CATTLE.

- F. Samuels, 44th street, near 1st avenue ;
- Steinrich's, 44th street, near 1st avenue ;
- Butcher's Hide & Melting Association, 44th street, between  
1st avenue and East river ;
- M. Fleischhaur & Son, 45th street, near 1st avenue ;
- Levy & Weil, 45th street, near 1st avenue ;
- Schwarzchild & Sulzberger, 45th street, near 1st avenue ;
- Levy & Meyers, 1st avenue, between 45th and 46th streets ;

Metzger & Meyers, 1st avenue, between 45th & 46th sts.;  
 George Strause, 1st avenue, between 45th and 46th sts.;  
 Westheimer & Strause, 46th st., betw. 1st ave. & E. river;  
 H. Eisner, 47th street and 1st avenue.

Donohue & Co., 43d street, near 1st avenue;

Killing per week, 1,700 cattle.

The above butcheries supply, in part, the offal, blood, bones, hides, grease and guts for the above two stench-factories of Schwarzchild & Sulzberger, and of Rafferty & Williams.

A part of the supply, however, comes across the city from the west side, and often in open carts, emitting a frightful smell as they jolt along.

These four blocks, bounded by 43d street and 47th street, 1st avenue and East river, are the source and cause of the malarious and nauseating smells that, with every east wind, poison the air of one-half of the best residences in the city.

These nuisances, like those on the North river, cannot exist legally a day, if the *Board of Health withdraws its permits*.

This Board, created and given the power and the means to protect our lives from these poisons, *shamefully neglects its duty*. The individual salaries of this Board are double the corresponding ones of the Health Boards of Philadelphia and of Boston; and the gross amount of the salaries of our Board is larger than the gross amount of the salaries of the Boards of Philadelphia and Boston combined, though those Boards have charge of the street cleaning and quarantine, which ours have not. Yet those Boards find time to keep their respective cities free from malarious odors.

For years it has been the habit of the Board of Health to assure the suffering public that the East side smells all came from the Petroleum Works and Coe & Co.'s manufactory of fertilizers at Hunter's Point; and to allege that the statutes gave them no power to suppress nuisances there.

I investigated Coe & Co.'s factory, and found it a nuisance of the most glaring character; equal, in fact, to either the Algonquin or Lister Bros. on North river, or to Schwarzchild & Sulzberger or Rafferty & Williams, on the East river, in every particular, *except that it was not protected by a permit from the Board of Health.*

I learned that the law for its suppression was ample, and had been enacted for just such cases, and had been on the statute book twenty-six years (see copy of this statute, chap. 415, laws 1851, below); and yet the board with its nearly \$200,000 of salaries, and its counsel and chief clerk, paid to be skilled in sanitary law, did not know it.

I prepared the evidence last September for an indictment of this nuisance; laid it before the District Attorney of this county; he pronounced it sufficient, and obtained the indictment and suppressed the nuisance. The Board of Health then, *to save their reputation, falsely claimed the credit of this proceeding.*

The President of the Board, Prof. Chandler, promised last October that, now having found there was a law for the suppression of these nuisances, he would have it done. Instead of doing this, he lets them go on, while he falsely states at a meeting of the N. Y. Public Health Association, held on the 12th inst., that his board is powerless to act against the nuisances at Hunter's Point, Long Island City, and Newtown Creek, and urges that a law be passed conferring such power.

This statement was a device to deceive the people, to draw their attention away from the North River and East River nuisances above described and working under his permits, and to cover up the inefficiency of his board.

*What this city needs, is not more laws, but efficient executive officers and better administration of the laws we have.*

The Health Board is now well provided with laws and with money to suppress all the nuisances that poison the air of this city; and when the people detect a disgusting smell in the atmosphere they may fairly and justly charge it to the gross neglect of plain duty by our Board of Health.

I recommend that a committee of citizens be appointed to call upon the Mayor and request him to require the Board of Health to put an immediate stop to these nuisances ; and if they, as heretofore, neglect their duty in this regard, to remove them from office and appoint in their place officers who will see that the laws against nuisances are promptly and effectually enforced.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

THOS. B. MUSGRAVE.

*Chairman.*

Chap. 415, Laws 1851 (referred to above.)

An Act in relation to the indictment and place of trial of nuisances, passed July 8, 1851.

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows :

§ 1. Whenever any nuisance shall be erected or continued on or near the boundary lines of the counties of New York, Westchester and Queens, the same and the persons by whom such nuisance shall have been erected or continued, may be indicted in either county injuriously affected thereby ; and thereupon the same proceedings shall be had and taken, and the sentence of the Court may be enforced in the same manner, as if the said nuisance was situated within the county in which the indictment was found.

§ 2. The record of any conviction under this Act shall be filed in the clerk's office of the county in which such nuisance is located, and thereupon process shall be issued to the sheriff of such county to abate such nuisance, in the same manner as if the conviction was had in the county in which the record was filed.

§ 3. This Act shall take effect immediately.

The thanks of this Committee are due to Drs. Marcy, Hammond and Fordyce Barker, for the valuable medical opinions which will be found expressed in the following letters :

New York, April 16th, 1878.

MY DEAR MR. MUSGRAVE :

In response to your request to give you my views respecting the poisonous odors from bone-boiling, and other kindred establishments, which have, for so long a period, contaminated the atmosphere of our city and poisoned its inhabitants, I beg to remark : That the atmosphere cannot be impregnated with vapors and gases arising from bone-boiling, and other establishments where refuse, animal, vegetable and other deleterious matters are employed without injuring, to a greater or less extent, the sanitary condition of those who are forced to inhale them. The effects arising from these noxious substances are often insidious and slow of development ; but during the summer months, we believe that every man, woman and child, who remains in the city, is more or less injured and enervated by them. We are quite certain that a large number of bowel complaints of children, typhoid and other similar maladies, occurring in summer especially, are directly traceable to these vile poisons, blown from both sides of the city, through the streets. We are, also, equally certain, that a considerable number of deaths are caused annually by these same influences.

There is scarcely a large city in the world which tolerates these poisonous traffics, except New York. In most other large cities a decent regard is had to the sanitary condition of the inhabitants, and all nuisances are summarily suppressed by the municipal authorities ; but year after year the nostrils of the citizens of New York are offended, and their health and lives imperiled, in order that a few heartless corporations and individuals may make money. The comfort and health of the city is held and kept subordinate to the greed of a few score of individuals for gain.

There are many days and nights during the Summer months, especially when our city is rendered almost uninhabitable by the dreadful stenches which pervade the streets. Even closing the windows on hot and sultry Summer nights does not exclude the poisonous smells. They penetrate everywhere, lurk in every place, and sow the seeds broadcast of typhus, dysentery, cholera-infantum, and the like.

It is doubtless a matter of much difficulty to ferret out and detect these public nuisances and these wholesale poisoners; but we respectfully submit that if the proper authorities would put two or three energetic detectives on the track of these health destroyers, a speedy and permanent termination could be made of these pestiferous public nuisances.

The people of New York are very much indebted to you, my dear Mr. Musgrave, for your disinterested labors to abate this great nuisance, and I beg to express to you personally my gratitude, and my earnest sympathy with you in your praiseworthy efforts.

Very truly yours,

E. E. MARCY,

396 Fifth avenue.

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43 WEST FIFTY-FOURTH STREET, }  
NEW YORK, April 15th, 1878. }

*Dear Sir :*

In answer to your request that I should give you my views in regard to the odors given off from the fat-melting establishments in this neighborhood, I have to say that they are both offensive to the nostrils and prejudicial to the mental and physical well-being of those who are forced to inhale them.

The sickening character of the emanations in question is so indisputable that I do not suppose it will be denied by any one who has been subjected to the influence of the horrible stench. It oppresses us in the streets, disgusts

us in our moments of relaxation, and worst of all, nauseates us at our meals. I have heretofore borne the nuisance quietly, under the supposition that the sources were beyond the limits of the City, and hence, not under the control of the Health Board, but now that you tell me that they are located within its jurisdiction, I hope that by a united effort of the citizens, we may either by persuasion or compulsion, succeed in obtaining the relief so necessary to our health and comfort.

Yours, sincerely,

WILLIAM A. HAMMOND.

THOS. B. MUSGRAVE, Esq.

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85 MADISON AVENUE, }  
New York, April 18th, 1878. }

MY DEAR SIR :

I have no hesitation in complying with your request, to give you, in writing, my professional opinion in regard to the pernicious influence on the health of an atmosphere permeated with disgusting odors, which this apathetic city has been compelled to endure for some years past.

It cannot be necessary for me to give a detailed statement of the scientific reasons, why an air so offensive, as to create intense disgust, nausea and vomiting, even in those in good health, and which compels even strong workingmen, whose senses are not morbidly delicate, to close their windows and endure stifling heat, as a lesser evil, in the warmest weather of our summers, must be dangerous and destructive to the life of those who are ill, who require pure air and efficient nutrition, as more important agents in the restoration of health, than drugs. Many thousands of our citizens have had practical and personal experience of this horrible nuisance, and have endured it with a pusillanimous submission that cannot be deemed meritorious.

I have no doubt that many, in common with myself, have wished themselves, at least temporarily, in the condition of a beautiful patient of mine, in whom the sense of smell is entirely wanting, who truthfully avers that she cannot distinguish the odor of a rose from that of an onion, or that of cologne water from carbolic acid.

I have observed that these nauseous and noxious odors are the most aggressive and overwhelming during the hours of night, when the human system is least capable of resisting their deleterious effects. This has suggested to my mind the query whether they were not created by the pursuit of illegitimate business, whose work must be carried on in stealth and darkness?

Certainly no business ought to be legitimate, which renders wretched, miserable and ill many thousands, solely to gratify the avarice of a few capitalists.

I think that I am warranted in saying, that scientific progress has made possible, in such a way that no nuisance is created, all works, such as the melting of fat scraps, the refining of oils, the manufacture of acids, fertilizers and illuminating gas; in short, every kind of process which generates offensive and deleterious odors. I am quite certain that in no other city in the world, except the metropolis of this country, would the evils from these causes, have been so long tolerated, without their arrest, either by the strong arm of the law, or the destruction of these works by an outraged and indignant public under mob law.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

FORDYCE BARKER.

To

THOMAS B. MUSGRAVE, ESQ.

*List of subscribers to the "Fund for the Investigation of the Nuisances of Hunter's Point and of the City of New York."*

---

George Bliss,  
 Joseph Brandon,  
 Buckingham Hotel,  
 James Buell,  
 Charles Butler,  
 A. F. Carpenter,  
 M. A. S. Carter,  
 Watson E. Case,  
 F. H. Cassitt,  
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 H. K. Corning,  
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