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School Children's Lives Are in Danger

Threatening Condition of Many Buildings

Pupils are Penned In

No Means Afforded for Escape in Case of Fire

Situation is Alarming

What Mr. Preston Has to Say of the Need of Modern Structures

As a result of the throwing together of what have been heretofore called houses I am consistently called upon to make recommendations.

Some parts of the building laws are so carelessly worded that it is impossible to enforce them.

The buildings owned by the city are in poor condition. The City Hall is a disgrace to the city, and many of the schoolhouses are absolutely uninhabitable.

These are the principal points of Building Inspector Edward D. Preston's annual report which was submitted to the mayor yesterday. It is an exhaustive and voluminous document. All of the city building laws are discussed in detail and each of the 193 municipal buildings is considered separately.

Many of the schoolhouses are condemned as being unsafe. Mr. Preston's comments upon a few of them follow:

Children in Danger

No. 27 Primary, Fayette and Chester Streets—"It seems cruel, if not inhuman, to occupy parts of this building. Its overcrowded condition has forced the use of several rooms in what is called the basement, but in reality is the cellar. One of these rooms has its floor level five feet below the street. It receives its ventilation from a coal hole."

No. 1 Male Grammar school, Greene and Fayette Streets—"It is in a most dangerous condition on account of improper furnace work. I wonder that it has not taken fire."

No. 9 Grammar, 808 North Calvert Street—"The means of exit are entirely inadequate, and should fire or any alarm take place serious results may follow."

Annex to No. 1 Annex, Washington and Harrison Streets—"If a fire occurred here it would be impossible for all the children to escape."

Mr. Preston's recommendations contemplate a complete overhauling of the building laws and the reconstruction of a large number of the municipal buildings.

Shell Dwellings

During the year 1900 Mr. Preston made a heroic effort to put a stop to the erection of rows of "shell" dwellings in the outskirts. In former years these were put up by the hundreds. Today many of them are on the verge of collapse.

"By reference to the record," Mr. Preston says, "It will be seen that the number of permits for new buildings has not been so large as last year. This is due, principally, to the fact that the strict adherence to the building laws, as now required by this office, has prevented, to a great extent, the throwing together of material into what had heretofore been called houses. I cannot but regard this falling off in this class of buildings as of the greatest benefit to the city generally. The rapidity with which such property depreciates and goes to pieces is a serious detriment to the taxable basis of the city, and also a fraud on the people who invest for a home out of their hard earned savings, and who, in most cases, obtain a loan to help purchase the property, and before said loan is fully paid must abandon it for want of ability to rebuild. This class of property has also had the effect of retarding better buildings as well as depreciating the value of well built houses, and I think the city of Baltimore may look forward to better conditions of real estate when such buildings are not allowed."

Regarding the City Hall, Mr. Preston says:

"While the style of architecture and the various proportions may be good, yet its dingy appearance and absolute need of renovation throws every good quality in the background. Frequent complaints are made of insufficiency of heat in various parts of the building. Some offices are using gas stoves in addition to heating registers, and the fire-alarm telegraph room has never had any provision for heat whatever. The operators have been compelled to sit at their apparatus day and night with their overcoats on. This department has been run with great inconvenience this winter on account of some of the operators having taken pneumonia from exposure."

The city engine houses also come in for severe handling. Some of them, says Mr. Preston, are in wretched condition. The house of No. 4 chemical engine, for instance, is on the verge of collapse.

"It will require the greatest care on the part of the driver," he sayd, "on going out of the house, as the least accident may overthrow the entire building."

The report shows a total expenditure on city property during the year of \$119,142.18. The income from building permits issued was \$25,554.98. The number of applications made was 5,928. The total number of condemnations was 1,227, as against 449 for 1899 and 449 for 1889.