

HOUSE . . . . . No. 392.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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REPORT OF THE JOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
GENERAL COURT OF 1887,

ON

ARMORIES FOR THE USE OF THE MILITIA.

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Hon. CHAS. J. NOYES, *Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

The undersigned, appointed a special committee of the General Court of 1887, under the following order, respectfully submit the report appended.

“*Ordered*, That there be appointed a joint special committee, to consist of three members on the part of the House of Representatives, with such as the Senate may join, to sit during the recess and hear such evidence as may be submitted, after public notice, in relation to the subject of armories for the use of the militia, to be owned, leased, or controlled wholly by the Commonwealth, or by the city or town in which said armories may be situated. Said committee shall report fully to the Legislature at its next annual session the result of their investigations, together with their recommendations relating thereto, and shall serve without pay or expense to the Commonwealth.”

The committee have endeavored to ascertain the facts and figures relative to armories of the militia at the present time, to obtain the opinions of such civil and military officers and other persons as are familiar with the matter, or have had occasion to give it special attention. It has been greatly aided by the kindness of the adjutant-general, who has furnished such information and figures as were on record in his office, and has given us the results of his careful personal observation and large experience. The committee has held two public hearings; has consulted with the two brigade commanders, the committee on armories of the board of aldermen of the city of Boston and the city solicitor of that city, and has sent invitations to be heard to all battalion and company commanders, as well as to mayors of all cities and selectmen of towns where military companies are located.

The existing system of small, scattered and insufficient armories in large cities is not only the worst that can be conceived from a military point of view, but exceeding extravagant and wasteful. The problem is to provide armories which shall be safe from attack or fire and sufficient for the drill and discipline of the State troops located in them, at an outlay equal to or less than that which the State and cities now are compelled to make.

In the city of Boston, the city that is most interested in this question, we find that the several companies of infantry, cavalry and artillery are located in scattered and isolated quarters throughout its whole territory, the only exceptions being the small battalion of the First Cadets, which is possessed of a temporary drill-shed built and owned by the corps, — the precursor of a more ambitious structure which they hope to construct at their own charges, — and four companies of infantry which, under stress of circumstances, are quartered in Winslow's rink, hired under compulsion of the State law, at a high rent at a time when these organizations were turned out of doors by the demolition of the Boylston market, and when no other shelter could be found for them after a thorough search by both the adjutant-general and the city committee on armories. This arrangement furnishes a

good illustration of the inequitable working of the present law, the city being compelled by the statute to furnish this one armory at an annual rental of \$6,000, while it receives from the State only \$1,600, the maximum which can be allowed by the adjutant-general, being \$400 per company.

But the most important consideration with reference to armories is their security and availability from a military standpoint. The State maintains its volunteer militia not only with reference to possible wars in which the nation may become involved, but also as a supplementary arm to the police force for maintaining the authority of the laws. At the present time the latter object is the one which demands our chief and immediate attention.

The military situation of our armories in large cities in case of riot or insurrection is simply deplorable; language too strong to describe the weakness of the existing system can hardly be used. In the city of Boston there are some 1,300 stand of arms, four field-pieces, two gatling guns, sabres, carbines and ammunition distributed at twenty-two different isolated points, unprotected, ready to the hands of the first comers in case of any disturbance. The armories are for the greater part in upper floors of combustible buildings, and in case of fire the arms and uniforms are usually a total loss, as was the case at the armory in Lowell burned last January.

It is entirely probable that, in case of a riot like those at Pittsburg and Cincinnati, the troops that are maintained at an annual expense to the city of Boston of \$35,000, would be unavailable, and the trouble could only be suppressed by a force of suburban militia assembled outside the city, who would find turned against them the very arms and ammunition supplied by the State. In case of a riot extending over the whole city the individual members of the militia would be overpowered and prevented from assembling in the first instance, or, even having assembled in companies of fifty or sixty, could be cut off, surrounded, smoked out in their attics and extinguished in detail by the mob. Military critics agree that five hundred men well armed, and disciplined, assembled in a fire-proof and bullet-proof armory, are practi-

cally worth to the State ten times that number in isolated squads and companies spread over a district several miles square, and cut off from communication with their superior officers.

The subject of armories for the city of Boston has already been reported upon (Oct. 24, 1887), by a special committee of the Board of Aldermen. As this report cites many facts that are in the line of this investigation, and states the unfortunate situation of the city in this respect, we cannot do better than place in this report the following extracts:—

The city now provides accommodations for 25 infantry companies, one cavalry battalion, two brigade headquarters, three infantry headquarters and two signal service headquarters, at a cost of \$35,000 a year, allowing a fair rental for the use of the city buildings in East Boston and Charlestown in addition to the \$31,000 directly paid in rent. Besides, the city pays in taxes at least 40 per cent. of the annual expenditures by the Commonwealth, or \$12,000 more, and in return receives from it only \$9,700. This unfair discrimination against the city and the disproportionate expense imposed upon it are due in part to the present statutes which require cities to provide armories, and allow from the treasury of the Commonwealth in return no more in this city, where, of course, rentals are far larger, than in the small cities; so that while in very many localities the allowance from the Commonwealth meets the whole local expense, in this city it is not much over one quarter.

There is urgent need of two regimental armories, one of which should be built in the North End, convenient to the Boston & Maine and Fitchburg systems of railroads, and the other with reference to the railroads coming in at the south. From these localities troops could come into and go out from the city without marching through the streets, thereby preventing annoyance to business; and a much more important consideration, in time of public disturbance the militia quartered here could come together without comment, and, in short, that excitement and danger which would be inseparable from small companies marching from the present armories to some general rendezvous. Such buildings could have commodious drill-halls, and, in addition, rooms suitable as headquarters of the G. A. R. Posts of the Commonwealth, as well as for the meetings of the Posts in Boston.

Even if the present policy of compelling cities to provide armories for the militia in their limits shall be continued, it will be far more economical for the city to erect two such regimental armories than to go on paying the large rental of to-day. The estimated cost of these two buildings, with the land, varies from \$300,000 to \$400,000, and the

interest, even upon the larger sum, will be considerably less than one-half the annual rentals for the present accommodations.

Besides, in the opinion of your committee, armories ought to be built and provided, not by the municipal authorities, but by the Commonwealth. They are for the convenience and accommodation of the soldiers of the State, and the arms and uniforms stored therein belong to the State. No control is given over either to the local authorities, and it seems anomalous that one authority should compel another to provide accommodations for a purpose wholly beyond the sphere of the latter. Much waste, too, is the inevitable result of the present system, or, more correctly speaking, lack of system, by which the city provides the armory and the adjutant-general approves or condemns it. Even the scant return for rent now allowed to the city by the Commonwealth is not so large as that permitted by the statutes, because many of the armories are not acceptable to the adjutant-general.

Fortunately the public credit is so well established that the money necessary for the building of two armories and the purchase of the land can be borrowed by the Commonwealth at from 3 to 3½ per cent. per annum, and the interest charged need not much, if any, exceed its present allowance.

Under the existing law, Acts of 18·7, chapter 411, section 97, the State allows to cities and towns armory rents, as follows:—

For armory for company of artillery or cavalry, not over,	\$600 00
company of infantry,	400 00
signal or ambulance corps in same proportion	
as a company of infantry, say,	200 00
each headquarters,	200 00

The mayor and aldermen, or selectmen, are required to make oath annually (section 96) to the amount paid or charged for rent, and that the same is fair and reasonable. The amount allowed by the State is decided by the Adjutant-General within the above limits, and the withholding of this rent is the only direct control the State has over its armories, except that, as provided in section 95, every officer whose command “occupies” an armory “shall have control of such premises during the period of occupation,” the legal interpretation of this section being still in doubt.

The several amounts asked for by the city of Boston and allowed by the State (1887), are tabulated below.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION.	Asked for.	Allowed.
Headquarters of 1st Brigade, . . . . .	\$500 00	\$200 00
“ of 2d Brigade, . . . . .	600 00	200 00
“ of 1st Regiment, . . . . .	1,000 00	200 00
“ of 5th Regiment, . . . . .	600 00	200 00
“ of 9th Regiment, . . . . .	1,000 00	200 00
“ of 1st Battalion Cavalry, . . . . .	450 00	200 00
Co. A, 1st Regiment of Infantry, . . . . .	1,208 33	400 00
C, 1st “ “ . . . . .	1,208 33	400 00
D, 1st “ “ . . . . .	1,200 00	400 00
K, 1st “ “ . . . . .	1,208 33	400 00
L, 1st “ “ . . . . .	875 00	400 00
A, 5th “ “ . . . . .	1,200 00	400 00
D, 5th “ “ . . . . .	1,208 33	400 00
H, 5th “ “ . . . . .	400 00	400 00
L, 6th “ “ . . . . .	900 00	400 00
A, 9th “ “ . . . . .	900 00	400 00
B, 9th “ “ . . . . .	960 00	400 00
C, 9th “ “ . . . . .	1,100 00	400 00
D, 9th “ “ . . . . .	400 00	400 00
E, 9th “ “ . . . . .	1,000 00	400 00
G, 9th “ “ . . . . .	291 67	400 00
H, 9th “ “ . . . . .	400 00	350 00
First Corps of Cadets, . . . . .	3,600 00	600 00
Co. A, 1st Battalion of Cavalry, . . . . .	2,000 00	600 00
D, 1st “ “ . . . . .	1,200 00	600 00
Co. A, First Battalion Light Artillery, . . . . .	1,961 00	600 00
Signal Corps, 1st Brigade, . . . . .	700 00	200 00
“ “ 2d “ . . . . .	300 00	200 00
	\$28,371 00	\$10,050 00

Under the existing law quoted above, the Adjutant-General can allow no more rent for armories in cities located upon land worth twenty dollars per foot or more, than in towns where it may be worth five dollars an acre, which is manifestly most inequitable.

Your committee, therefore, would recommend that section 97, chapter 411, of the Acts of 1877, be so amended as to remedy the injustice of the present distribution of State money for armory rents.

With reference to the armories themselves, we recommend that legislation should be immediately enacted to remedy the present pernicious, demoralizing and wasteful system of unsafe and unsuitable detached armories in cities, which is maintained at an expense to the community greater

than that required for commodious, safe and suitable regimental armories.

Taking into consideration the fact that the city of Boston is unable to negotiate a loan for building a proper armory without passing the debt limit, we find no practicable solution of the question better than that offered by the city of Boston under their petition to the General Court. We advise that the bill submitted to the Legislature by the city solicitor be carefully scrutinized and revised by the committee on Military Affairs, with the assistance and advice of the Adjutant-General, then reported to the present Legislature, and by them enacted.

CHAS. F. WOODWARD,  
ARTHUR C. WALWORTH,  
HORACE G. KEMP.

