

[DOCUMENT NO. III.]

**BOARD OF
ASSISTANT ALDERMEN,**

DECEMBER 5, 1831.

*The Special Committee, to whom was referred a
Petition of S. B. Ruggles, to have certain
Lands exempt from Taxation, made the fol-
lowing Report, which on motion was ordered
to be printed.*

B. CRANE, Clerk.

THE Special Committee to whom was referred the Petition of Samuel B. Ruggles, an inhabitant of the city of New-York, to have the taxes and assessments which may become chargeable on certain lands which he proposes to lay out in an Open Square, hereafter rateably apportioned and imposed as an additional charge upon each of the lots surrounding the square, so that the square itself may be exempted from taxes and assessments,

RESPECTFULLY REPORT,

That the want of a sufficient number of open and public squares in this extensive and densely populated metropolis, is a cause of frequent and just complaint, inasmuch as they would greatly tend to embellish and ornament the city, and promote the health and convenience of its inhabitants.

It is really to be lamented that the whole of that part of this island south of Fourteenth-st., which contains a population amounting to 191,059 souls, has only five open squares of any extent, viz. the Battery, Bowling Green, the Park, Washington Parade Ground, and Hudson Square, the latter of which is private property and liable at any time to be built upon by the owners of the lots fronting thereon.

As this is the first time that any question relative to open or public squares has ever come before this Board, the Committee will be excused, if they digress a little from the immediate subject under consideration, and exhibit some facts, which will clearly show that the Common Council ought speedily to adopt measures, not only to lay out more public squares, but also to facilitate enterprising individuals in laying out private squares, whenever it can be done without prejudice to the public interest.

With regard to the particular square proposed to be laid out by the petitioner, he represented to your Committee that he owns a block of ground in the 12th Ward containing 42 lots, lying between the 3d and 4th Avenues, and between 20th and 21st streets, and also the lots on each side; that he intends to lay out said block in an open square 520 feet long from east to west, and extending north from 20th to 21st street, if the Corporation will facilitate him in that undertaking.

There can be no doubt but that the proposed square will greatly ornament that part of the city, when a dense population shall extend as far north as 21st-street. The lots fronting on the square are about 27 feet wide, and the petitioner intends to prevent the purchasers of those lots from erecting any other buildings thereon than private dwelling houses. He also proposes to enclose the square with an ornamental iron fence, maintain the same at his own expense, and keep it forever unoccupied by buildings so as to admit the free circulation of air. The square, in the opinion of your Committee, will be judiciously located, being on the property which was a part of the country seat of the late

Judge Duane, about 750 feet north of the termination of Union Place ; in a central position, on high and salubrious ground, between the 3d and 4th Avenues, which will be the two great outlets of the middle part of the city.

The dimensions of the proposed square are sufficiently extensive to justify the Common Council in affording the petitioner any reasonable facilities not injurious to the public interest. When compared with squares in this and other cities, its size will warrant the expectation that it will be an elegant improvement. In length it will be 520 feet ; the Park at the City Hall from Broadway to Chatham-street is about 580 feet wide,—the south side of Hudson Square is 405 feet long,—the widest part of the Bowling Green is less than 200 feet,—and Washington Square is about 950 feet long and 450 feet wide. On examining a map of the city of London it will appear that some of the most important squares in that city are not much larger, and some are actually smaller than the one proposed to be laid out by the petitioner. Grosvenor Square is about 650 feet long,—Portman and Berkeley Squares each about 500 feet,—Cavendish Square about 400 feet,—and Manchester Square less than 400 feet long. And it is a fact worthy of note, that all those squares are contained in a district of London, not more extensive than the 9th Ward of this city. It was stated to your Committee by the petitioner that the open squares in Philadelphia are about 600 feet in length.

The Committee will now inquire whether there is a reasonable prospect, that this city will be densely populated as far north as the proposed square within a moderately short period of time. In order that they may come to something like a correct conclusion on this point, they will endeavour to ascertain with reasonable certainty what number of vacant lots capable of being occupied by dwelling houses can be found in the city south of the proposed square, and the number of additional inhabitants those lots

can probably accommodate. In pursuing this inquiry they may obtain information useful to this Board and perhaps to the city at large. To facilitate your Committee in this investigation, the petitioner furnished them with a digest made from the Assessor's books in each of the thirteen southern wards for the year 1830, the correctness of which digest was proved before your Committee.

The south line of 21st-street is distant two miles from the present City-Hall, and the whole of the city south of that street will soon be so far regulated as to be capable of improvement, except about 250 acres of low land east of the 1st Avenue, commonly called Stuyvesant's Meadows. Deducting those meadow lands, the city south of 21st street contains about 2746 acres of land, 1000 of which are south of Grand-street, 1451 between Grand and 14th streets, and the remaining 295 between 14th and 21st streets. These 2746 acres, after deducting lands necessary for streets, are divisible into 32,952 building lots of 2,500 superficial feet each, but are actually subdivided into 30,484, (besides public lands and churches not taxed,) of which 26,445 are below 14th street, and the remaining 4,039 are between 14th and 21st streets. It also appears from said digest, that of the 26,445 lots south of 14th-street 20,093 were assessed in June, 1830, as being occupied by buildings, and 6,352 were assessed as vacant. Of the latter number about 800 may be set down as river lots, situate on streets on the margins of the Hudson and East rivers, and will not probably be occupied by dwelling houses, which number deducted from 6,352 leaves 5552 to be occupied by dwellings. It would appear to your Committee, that in the whole city at least 2,500 lots must permanently remain unoccupied by dwelling houses to furnish sites for churches and other public buildings, and places of deposit for lumber, fuel, stone and building materials, for ship building and other manufacturing purposes; thereby reducing the number of vacant lots practically capable of being occupied by dwelling houses from 5552 to 3052. Of these 3052 lots it is not easy to ascertain exactly

how many have been built upon since June, 1830, but it has been proved to your Committee, that during the year 1830 309 houses were erected in the 9th Ward alone, and it is safe to estimate that during the years 1830 and 1831 in the whole 13 wards south of 14th street 1000 buildings have been erected on lots vacant in June, 1830, thereby reducing the supply of vacant lots in those wards from 3,052 to 2,052.

The state of the city as to building lots between 14th and 21st streets has been easily ascertained. In that rectangular part of the island the 1st Avenue runs on the margin of the East River, and the 10th Avenue on the margin of the Hudson. There are 7,220 running feet on each side of every street running from the 1st to the 10th Avenue, making on both sides 14,440 feet divisible into 577 lots, each of 25 feet front, so that in the seven ranges of blocks between the 14th and 21st streets there are not more than 4,039 lots; 447 of which it has been proved to your Committee are now built upon, reducing the number of vacant lots in that section to 3592, which added to the 2052 vacant lots south of 14th street, make the total number of vacant lots south of 21st street practically capable of being occupied by dwelling houses 5644.

Your Committee having thus ascertained to their satisfaction, that there are only 5,644 lots south of the proposed square, (exclusive of the Meadows aforesaid,) practically capable of being occupied by dwellings, the question arises, what increase of population will they accommodate? To solve this inquiry it is necessary to ascertain the rate of density of our population in the compact part of the city. The following table will show the number of vacant and occupied lots, the population, and the density thereof in 1830:—

Wards.	No. of Lots Assessed.		Population.	No of Inhabitants to each Lot built upon.
	Vacant.	Occupied.		
1	79	1898	11,327	5.9
2	11	1239	8,202	6.6
3	84	1134	9,620	8.4
4	21	1423	12,705	8.9
5	141	1709	17,722	10.3
6	49	1189	13,596	11.4
7	883	1326	15,868	11.9
8	362	1989	20,920	10.5
9	2838	2539	22,752	8.9
10	78	1481	16,438	11.1
11	1287	1766	14,901	8.4
*12				
13	343	1074	12,638	11.7
14	176	1326	14,370	10.8
6352 20,093 191,059				9.5 general average.

(Arranged Geographically.)

The Lower Section, comprehending the 1st, 2d, 3d and 4th Wards.

Vacant.	Occupied.	Population.	Average.
195.	5694.	41,854.	7.2.

The Central Section, comprehending the 5th, 6th, 8th and 14th Wards.

Vacant.	Occupied.	Population.	Average.
728.	6213.	66,608.	10.7.

The Eastern Section, comprehending the 7th, 10th and 13th Wards.

Vacant.	Occupied.	Population.	Average.
1304.	3881.	44,944.	11.5.

The Upper Section, comprehending the 9th and 11th Wards.

Vacant.	Occupied.	Population.	Average.
4125.	4305.	37,653.	8.9.

* The 12th ward comprising all the island of New-York north of 14th street, contained in 1830, 11,901 inhabitants, of which it is estimated that 4000 were between 14th and 21st streets.

(Summary.)

Total number of Lots assessed as vacant in June, 1830, in the 13 Wards south of 14th street,	6,352
Deduct for river Lots, - - -	800
Built on since June, 1830, - - -	1,000
Necessary for purposes other than dwelling-houses, - - - - -	2,500
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	4,300
	<hr/>
	2,052

Total number of Lots between 14th and 21st streets, - - - - -	4,039
Now built upon, - - - - -	447
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	3,592

Total number of vacant Lots south of 21st street, practically capable of being occupied by dwelling-houses, 5,644

For the correctness of the above tables, the Committee rely upon the Assessor's Books, and the evidence produced before them by the petitioner. And it will be perceived that they have excluded from their calculations, the low grounds in Stuyvesant's Meadows, which when filled up, will contain about 2,500 lots.

The aggregate of all the wards south of 14th-street in the year 1830, contained 20,093 lots occupied by buildings, (exclusive of public buildings and churches not taxed,) and 191,059 inhabitants, making a general average of $9\frac{5}{16}$ inhabitants for each lot built upon. By adopting the average rate of density thus ascertained by actual experience, it will appear that the 5644 vacant lots when occupied, will contain 53,618 souls; and when that number shall be added to our present population, this city must be densely peopled as far north as 21st-street. Some allowance, however, ought to be made for the meadow lots, which may be improved to a certain extent before that increase will be added to the number of our inhabitants. But if our population shall continue to increase at the same rate, that it did from the year 1820 to 1830, to wit, from 123,706 to 202,960, it is evident that this city must soon contain 300,000 inhabitants; for the increase between those two periods was 79,254, and the same ratio continued until 1840, will give a result of 332,958 inhabitants. There cannot, therefore, be a reasonable doubt, but that the proposed square, will in a short period of time, be surrounded by substantial and valuable dwellings. It is a fact of material importance to the City Treasury, that the taxable value of lots fronting on squares, is at least double what it would be, if those squares had not been opened; for lots on Fourth-

street, now fronting on Washington Square, which in the year 1825, were taxed at only \$500, are now taxed at \$2,100, and a vacant lot on Hudson Square is now taxed at \$7000. In a financial point of view, therefore, it is highly expedient to encourage the opening of squares, particularly when done solely at individual expense. And since the attention of the Committee has been drawn to the subject of squares and the rapid increase of the city, they cannot refrain from expressing a desire that public squares may be laid out in the northern sections of the city, before land shall arrive at so high a price that it cannot be obtained for public purposes, without materially affecting our finances. These suggestions are made with a view of drawing the attention of the Common Council to this interesting and highly important consideration.

In respect to the particular application referred to the Committee, they cannot doubt that the city will be financially benefitted by granting the prayer of the petitioner. He does not request that the aggregate amount of his tax shall be diminished, but merely that those taxes or assessments which would otherwise become chargeable on the proposed Square, may be directly levied on the lots surrounding the same, in order to avoid the detail and risk of annually collecting in small portions, the amount of the tax levied on the whole Square, from the owner of each lot surrounding the Square. This cannot be accomplished without a special act of the Legislature; but as your Committee can see no good objection to the granting of the prayer of the petitioner, they therefore recommend the adoption of the following resolution:—

Resolved, (If the Board of Aldermen concur herein,) that the Counsel of the Corporation, be directed to submit to the Common Council, the draft of a law directing all taxes and assessments, which would otherwise become chargeable on the square laid out by Samuel B. Ruggles, between the 3d. 4th Avenues, 20th and 21st streets, hereafter to be rateably apportioned and imposed as an additional charge upon each of the lots surrounding the square, so that the square itself, shall be exempted from taxes and assessments as long as the same shall be kept open and unoccupied by buildings.

All which is respectfully submitted.

WM. VAN WYCK,
E. BARNES,
WM. MANDEVILLE.

APPENDIX.

It is believed that the facts contained in the following tables, when taken in connexion with the statistical information reported by the Special Committee upon the petition of S. B. Ruggles, may become convenient in determining the prospective value of lands necessary for public purposes in the upper part of the city. They exhibit,

I. The increase in value of the taxable Real Estate in the city compared with the increase of its population.

II. The distribution of that increased value among the several wards.

III. The comparative increase of population and value in the different geographical sections of the city.

IV. The fluctuating value of taxable Real Estate before the Western Canals were constructed, and its progressive increase since that period.

I.

The population of the whole city in 1825 was	-	166,086
“ “ in 1830,	-	202,960
Increase in five years, $22\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.	-	35,884

This increase of 35,884 inhabitants was divided among all the wards except the 2d and 3d, and in those the population decreased.

The	In 1825.	In 1830.	Rate.
9th ward increased from	10,956 to	22,752	—108 pr.ct.
11th	7,344	14,901	—103
12th	7,938	11,901	—50
10th } then part of 10th	23,932	16,438	} 29,076—22
13th }	12,638		
5th	15,093	17,722	—17
1st	9,929	11,327	—14
7th	14,192	15,868	—12
6th } 20,061		13,596	} 48,886—10
8th } 24,285	44,346	20,920	
14th } Then part of 6th and 8th.		14,370	
4th	12,240	12,705	—4

Decrease.			
The 2d Ward decreased from	9,315	to	8,202
3d	10,801	to	9,620
			11 pr. ct.

II.

The taxable real estate of the city in 1825, (as

by Assessors returns of 1826,) was - \$64,803,050 00

Ditto in 1830, (as by returns of 1831,) - 95,716,485 00

Increase in value in five years, $47\frac{7}{10}$ per cent. \$30,913,435 00

This increase of \$30,913,435 to the landed wealth of the city, was diffused among all the Wards in the following proportions :—

WARDS.	In 1825.	In 1830.	Rate.
9th increased from	\$4,498,550 to	9,073,450—	102 pr. ct.
11th	2,320,200	3,874,900—	67
3d	5,300,600	8,779,000—	66
1st	11,647,900	18,415,350—	58
5th	5,264,900	7,616,600—	45
6th	4,742,590	5,590,000	15,551,700—42
8th	6,197,050—10,939,640	6,058,800	
14th	then part of 6th & 8th.	3,902,900	
12th	3,664,980	5,178,735—	41
10th	4,314,400	3,749,570	5,927,370—37
13th	Then part of 10th.	2,177,800	
7th	4,071,630	5,515,780—	35
2d	7,537,000	9,434,150—	24
4th	5,243,250	6,349,450—	21

SUMMARY.

Between the Years 1825 and 1830.

POPULATION.				VALUE OF REAL ESTATE.			
1st Ward—	increased	14	per cent.	—	Increased	58	per cent.
2d “	—decreased	11	“	—	Increased	24	“
3d “	—decreased	12	“	—	Increased	66	“
4th “	—increased	4	“	—	Increased	21	“
5th “	—increased	17	“	—	Increased	45	“
6th	} increased	10	“	—	Increased	42	“
8th &							
14th							
7th “	—increased	12	“	—	Increased	35	“
9th “	—increased	108	“	—	Increased	102	“
10th	} —increased	22	“	—	Increased	37	“
13th							
11th “	—increased	103	“	—	Increased	67	“
12th “	—increased	50	“	—	Increased	41	“

III.

BY GEOGRAPHICAL SECTIONS:

1. LOWER SECTION—1st, 2d, 3d and 4th Wards, south of Reed, Chatham and Catharine streets.

Decrease of Population from 42,285 to 41,854 — 4 per ct.
Increase of Real Estate from \$29,728,750 to \$42,977,950—44 pr.ct.
Positive loss of Inhabitants, 431.
Positive gain of Value, \$13,249,200.

2. CENTRAL SECTION—5th, 6th, 8th and 14th Wards, between Reed and Houston streets, Bowery and Hudson River.

Increase of Population from 59,439 to 66,608 — 12 per ct.
Increase of Real Estate from \$16,204,540 to \$23,168,300—43 pr.ct.
Positive gain of Inhabitants, 7,169.
Positive gain of Value, \$6,963,760.

3. EASTERN SECTION—7th, 10th and 13th Wards, east of Bowery and Catharine-street, and south of Rivington-street.

Increase of Population from 38,124 to 44,944 — 18 per ct.
Increase of Real Estate from \$8,386,030 to \$11,443,150—36 pr.ct.
Positive gain of Inhabitants, 6,820.
Positive gain of Value, \$3,057,120.

4. UPPER SECTION—9th and 11th Wards, north of Houston and Rivington, and south of 14th-street.

Increase of Population from 18,300 to 37,653, — 103 per ct.
Increase of Real Estate from \$6,818,750 to \$12,948,350—89 pr.ct.
Positive gain of Inhabitants, 19,353
Positive gain of Value, \$6,129,600.

5. TWELFTH WARD, north of 14th-street.

Increase of Population from 7,938 to 11,901 — 50 per ct.
Increase of Real Estate from \$3,664,980 to \$5,178,735—41 pr. ct.
Positive gain of Inhabitants, 3,963.
Positive gain of Value, \$1,513,755.

IV.

Chronological Table of the Values of Real Estate in the city of New-York, during two commercial periods of seven years each.

1st Period.—Foreign Commerce regulated by the Tariff of 1816.

1817.	Real Estate assessed at	-	-	-	\$57,799,435
1818.	"	"	-	-	59,846,185
1819.	"	"	-	-	60,490,445
1820.	"	"	-	-	52,063,858
1821.	"	"	-	-	50,619,820
1822.	"	"	-	-	53,331,574
1823.	"	"	-	-	50,184,229
1824.	"	"	-	-	52,019,730

Decrease in seven years, - \$5,779,705.

2d Period.—Internal Commerce with the Western States.

1825.	(Erie Canal finished,)	-	-	-	\$58,425,395
1826.	"	"	-	-	64,803,050
1827.	"	"	-	-	72,617,770
1828.	"	"	-	-	77,139,880
1829.	"	"	-	-	76,835,580
1830.	(Part of the Ohio Canal finished,)	-	-	-	87,603,580
1831.	"	"	-	-	95,716,485

Increase in seven years. - \$43,706,755.

V.

During the year ending 1st March, 1831, there was loaned on mortgages of landed property in the city of New-York, \$6,616,642

Of this sum there was loaned—

By individuals residing in the city of New-York,	-	\$4,136,222
" do. do. in the State of New-York	}	200,653
and out of the city.		
" do. do. out of the State,	-	313,310
" Incorporated Companies in the city,	-	1,966,457
		<hr/>
		\$6,616,642

It was loaned at the following rates of interest :—

At 5 per cent.	-	\$ 444,398
" 5½ "	-	222,252
" 6 "	-	4,253,587
" 6½ "	-	57,100
" 7 "	-	1,639,305
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Total	-	\$6,616,642