

[DOCUMENT NO. VI.]

**BOARD OF
ASSISTANT ALDERMEN,**

DECEMBER 19, 1831.

Report of the Committee on Streets, on the subject of enlarging Union Place.

B. CRANE, *Clerk.*

THE Committee on Streets to whom was referred the petition of Thomas A. Emmett and others, to have Union Place enlarged upon the plan shown on a map deposited in the Street Commissioner's Office, or otherwise,

RESPECTFULLY REPORT,

That by a law of the State passed 11th April, 1815, Union Place was appropriated for public purposes. Its shape is an irregular polygon, embracing the triangle bounded by the Bowery on the west, Bloomingdale Road on the east, and Fourteenth-street on the south, together with that part of the Fourth Avenue where it merges in the Bloomingdale Road from Fourteenth to Thirteenth streets, commencing at the "Forks," so called, at Seventeenth-street, where the Bowery and Bloomingdale Road unite, and terminating at Thirteenth-street.

In its present form, Union Place presents to the eye a shapeless and ill-looking place, devoid of symmetry, and is also of two limited dimensions for any purpose for which hereafter it may be not only expedient, but necessary to de-

vote it. In making up their minds upon this question, your Committee ask permission to detail some of the reasons which have induced them to report favourably to the petition, and being well aware of the importance of this subject, not perhaps in the abstract of so great consequence, but as establishing a precedent which may hereafter have a tendency to influence others in their opinions, they have carefully and with a single eye to the future welfare of the city, examined both the petition, the direct and prospective advantages that wil' accrue from its being granted, as also the several remonstrances on this subject which have been referred to them.

In the year 1803, in May, when the corner stone of our City Hall was laid, there was in Broadway and above and contiguous to Chambers-street, as your Committee are informed, but one brick house; the city then approximated not more nearly to the Park than it now does to Union Place, and at this time, in the short space of thirty years, such has been the unexampled rapidity with which we have increased, that for nearly two miles from this place, through Broadway, and for the most part across the Island, a continuous and dense mass of houses occupy the ground, that at the time above alluded to, was an uninhabited succession of hill and dale, mountain and morass, so that now the majority of our population is probably above Broome-street.

The future growth of New-York who can predict, or who shall mark the limits of her population and her wealth? It may be considered as susceptible of mathematical demonstration, that our future increase in all that has a tendency to elevate a people in the scale of nations, wealth, population, &c. will be not only in proportion as it has been, but in a geometrical ratio.

Located as our favoured city is, at the confluence of two great rivers, which, in connexion with various canals, roads, extended lakes, and a virtuous and enterprising people, are floating to our warehouses the rich products of an almost boundless inland country—a spacious harbor opening before

us, and pointing as with the index of destiny, to the incalculable extent of our future prosperity—may we not confidently anticipate the day when we shall equal the proudest cities of the eastern continent?

From statistical evidence, it appears that in the year 1697 our population did not exceed (in round numbers) 4,300 souls—in 1730, forty-three years, there was 8,600 inhabitants—in 1756, twenty-six years, it was 13,000—in 1790, thirty-four years, it was 33,000—in 1800, ten years, it was 60,000—in 1805, five years, it was 75,000—in 1808, three years, but a small increase was ascertained, it then was 83,000—in 1810, two years, there was 96,000—in 1820, ten years, there was 123,000—in 1825, five years, it was 165,000, and in 1830, when the last census was taken, it amounted to 203,007.—In 1730 there were 1,400 houses, in 1830 over 20,000.

Thus in recapitulating, it appears from 1697 to 1790, say 100 years, the increase was about 800 per cent.—from 1790 to 1810, twenty years, about 200 per cent., and from 1810 to 1830, twenty years, over 100 per cent. In the same ratio, in 1850, twenty years more, we shall have a population of 400,000, and in 1870, twenty years more, or forty years from this period, not less than 900,000 persons will constitute the population of New-York.

It may be thought that your Committee are refining too much, and that they are too sanguine in these speculations; but they assert them to be the results of calculations based on actual facts, and that instead of overrating the probable numbers, they are confident they have confined themselves much within the range of probabilities. Allowing then that your Committee are correct in these statements, where will be the dividing line between the upper and lower halves of this city in 1850, and where in 1870, when we shall have increased about 700 per cent. beyond our present population?

These remarks are offered by your Committee, to prove the importance that it is to the present generation, to locate

both for themselves and for those succeeding us, squares and public places *now*, while they can be obtained at a price comparatively small, and *so* to locate them, both with reference to the present and future importance of positions where great streets and avenues, the arteries of our body politic, diverge or unite, and where, now that the ground is unoccupied, the purchase *can* be effected, which in the lapse of a few years, when valuable buildings are erected, will be impracticable on account of the great expense; thus precluding to future generations, the advantages that would necessarily accrue to them from having such squares in various parts of the city, for purposes of military and civic parades and festivities, and what is perhaps of more importance, to serve as ventilators to a densely populated city.

It is worthy of remark, that almost every stranger who visits us, whether from our sister States or from Europe, speaks of the paucity of our public squares; and that in proportion to its size, New-York contains a smaller number, and those few of incomparably less extent than perhaps any other town of importance.

In Europe particularly, your Committee are informed there is scarcely a market town of a few thousand inhabitants, that will not in this particular, bear comparison with New-York, and in their larger towns, how far do they surpass us?

Hyde Park in London, contains about three hundred acres, and is a place where all classes congregate for pleasure and exercise, from the regal equipage of state through every gradation, to the humble pedestrian. The Regent's Park contains about fifty acres, and Kensington Gardens is about the same size. There are besides, an almost infinite number of smaller squares and places similar to our Park, Battery and Washington Square.

In Paris, the Champ de Mars contains about two hundred acres, the Thuilleries about fifty, and the Jardin des Plants about fifty.

Many more places of this kind, both abroad and in this country, could with peculiar propriety be cited in this place by your Committee, in proof of the importance with which such subjects are viewed by others. They refrain, however, from occupying the time of the Board, and in passing would merely hint at, rather than describe the noble square of St. Mark's in Venice, as one which bears a closer comparison to what Union Place is intended to be, than others which have been mentioned.

And shall it be said that we, residents of New York, the wealth and enterprise of which is known in every civilized land, whose "canvas whitens every sea," are so far behind the spirit of the age in this important matter, that we cannot imitate in this queen of cities of the western world, even at a humble distance, the example that is set us wherever we turn our eyes, both at home and abroad? Your Committee hope for a more just estimate, for a more enlarged and liberal policy from the present generation.

In this view of the importance of public squares to large towns, of the actual, nay pressing necessity that exists for their formation, your Committee are approaching what may be thought a new and questionable ground, when they offer the remark, that as a general rule when private property is taken for the purpose of being converted into a public square, and for the benefit of the public, it would be consistent with the strictest principles of justice and equity, that a proportion of the charge be imposed on the city at large; a charge that would be scarcely felt by the many, but which would be extremely onerous to the few. Without meaning, however, to be tenacious on this point, your Committee cannot suffer this occasion to pass without expressing their decided conviction of the propriety of this course, and the necessity which sooner or later will enforce its adoption.

It has been thought desirable in other large towns, that public buildings, such as from their extent and architectural beauties, reflect honor on the taste, liberality and enterprise of the people, should be so situated as to afford the citizen and stranger an opportunity of seeing, perhaps of admiring

these *landmarks* in the history of the arts, and at the same time to surround them with parks of sufficient magnitude to contain the majority of the people in times of political excitement, or on days of local or national rejoicings.

The destiny that appears to await this our favored city, demands of us, as we now have opportunity, to secure some location for any future public buildings, and one that will be commensurate to their probable magnitude. In the Twelfth Ward alone can we now look for such a site; there we have at our election every variety of situation and soil; and your Committee would suggest, that as our predecessors have been pioneers in this matter, in the erection of the Bellevue establishment, it would seem desirable to take the incipient steps in relation to farther improvements, so that they may not be too far separated from the City-Hall, with a prospective eye to the conversion of that establishment into one of a judicial character.

A passing remark may here be admitted, that any investment to a certain extent, of the public funds, as above suggested, would in the opinion of your Committee, be judicious, and well repay the first cost, as is instanced in the case before us. In the year 1795, the grounds now occupied by that establishment (Bellevue) were purchased by the Corporation for the sum of \$4,500, and would doubtless at this time bring under the hammer, over \$200,000, exclusive of the buildings, an amount which would be about 40 per cent. per annum on the cost.

Whether Union Place will, on being enlarged, be considered an advantageous location for public buildings, appears to your Committee rather problematical, and is a subject of great interest for future consideration. Nevertheless, in its immediate vicinity, a location may be obtained, which is in every point of view perfectly unobjectionable, and to which the extension of Union Place would be very ornamental.

Your Committee have been led farther in the illustration of this subject than they intended, but would offer its importance as their apology.

By the map accompanying this Report, and to which reference has been had, it will be seen that the boundaries of Union Place will be Fourteenth-street on the south, Seventeenth-street on the north, Fourth Avenue on the east, and an imaginary line on the west, from Fourteenth-street to Seventeenth-street, running north and south, five hundred and two feet nine inches from, and parallel to the easterly side of Fourth Avenue, and containing about eleven and a half acres.

It is understood by your Committee, that the owners of the major part of the land which it is proposed to take for this purpose, are willing to have the square enlarged. A great proportion of the ground, two-thirds or probably more, has been already, or will be taken for the avenues and streets, so that but for a small part comparatively will assessments be made, for the extension of Union Place.

It appears desirable that it should be extended, as it will hereafter serve as a ventilator to that section of the city, as a present parade ground for our numerous regiments of militia, and as a point from whence four of the largest streets and greatest thoroughfares radiate.

Upon the subject of extending the proposed enlargement west of Bloomingdale Road, your Committee have out of doors heard doubts of its expediency expressed, but as to the propriety of including the two parts of blocks between the Fourth Avenue and Bowery, there can be but one opinion. Your Committee are inclined, however, upon deliberate reflection, to adopt the plan on the map in its full extent, believing as they do, that a very few years will find a dense population surrounding it, and that now is the proper time, if ever, for accomplishing a purpose so desirable, while the land is comparatively of trifling value.

Without further trespassing upon the patience of the Board, your Committee beg leave to offer the following resolutions:

Resolved, That it is desirable for public convenience, that the plan of the city should be altered by enlarging Union Place, as follows: commencing at the south-east corner

formed by the intersection of Fourteenth-street and Fourth Avenue, running northerly on the east side of the Avenue to the north side of Seventeenth-street, where said Avenue shall terminate ; thence westerly on said line five hundred and two feet nine inches, till it strikes the east side of Bloomingdale Road ; thence southerly in a parallel line with Fourth Avenue to the south side of Fourteenth-street ; thence easterly five hundred and two feet nine inches, to the place of beginning.

Resolved, That the Counsel be directed to prepare the necessary law for the above improvement, and a memorial to the Legislature, praying for the passage thereof, and to cause such memorial and law to be presented as early as possible at the next session.

Resolved, That on the passage of such law, the Counsel take the usual measures to have Union Place enlarged and opened in the manner above mentioned, and that all papers necessary for such purposes be authenticated by the proper officers of the Common Council.

WM. W. HOLLY, *Ch.*

J. R. WHITING.