

## Omaha's Official Housekeeping Staff Covers a Large Job



Crosswalk Material Yard

Geo. Redman's Crosswalk Gang



Wagon Derrick Handling Crosswalks



Street Commissioners Brigade



Repairing Asphalt Streets

OMAHA'S housekeeping costs a flat million dollars a year, and considerable besides in the way of "paying for a dead horse," bond interest and the like.

The city's housekeeping staff is large, considerable of it very active, a fair percentage muddling busy, and some not busy enough to keep in good fighting condition. Some members of the big staff are alive and thinking, perforce, more hours every day than the law allows, according to strict union rules; some few, it has been said by their brethren, don't know they are alive. Still, as they all show up with commendable promptitude on pay day, the rumor alleging continual bodily torpidity cannot be entirely true.

This housekeeping staff for the city of Omaha is made up of various groups, boards, "gangs" and details. The word "gangs" is, of course, used in the working sense, primarily; though there be those who sometimes apply it in the political sense with some vehemence, when they speak of city hall employees.

Unlike the ordinary housekeeping, this thing of taking care of Omaha's housework is not confined to one building, although many of the workers do labor in the city hall and are not compelled to tempt the storm or the stress of weather. And talking of "storm and stress" makes it convenient to say here that when the storm rages hardest and the stress is on for keeps the active men of the city engineer's and the street commissioner's departments accumulate some anxiety. At such times things break or give way, banks cave, sewers stop up, and unless close tab is kept on the danger spots damages result that mean heavy expense to the city.

### City Engineering Department Handles Big End.

The big end of the city engineer's housekeeping falls to the department of the city engineer. Here is centered the responsibility for the planning and opening of all new work, whether new streets, grading, paving, curbing, sewers, sidewalks, crosswalks, everything connected with the streets except cleaning the surface. The street commissioner used to have charge of repairing the streets, but that work is now in the hands of the city engineer. All public corporations must deal with the city engineer when they want to dig holes in the pavements or break up the surface of the streets for any purpose.

Last year the city engineer's department had at its disposal the sum of \$164,933.86, of which \$17,001.80 accrued from miscellaneous receipts. The department spent \$164,429.69, leaving a balance of \$504.11. Over thirteen miles of repavement and new pavement was laid last year, in the streets and alleys, mainly in the down town district. This does not include the pavement laid by the street car company. The cost of the pavement laid was \$615,823.23.

At this time the total amount of pavement on the streets of Omaha is 132,718 miles, which has cost \$7,727,199.68. To this must be added work under contract and not finished at the close of last year, amounting to \$227,320.

Of curbing there was placed last year \$5,256 linear feet, at a cost of \$65,582.82.

Of sewers, 9,338 miles were laid in 1910, at a cost of \$122,100.27. The sewer department, in charge of City Engineer Craig, laid 1,151 miles, including new catchbasins, costing \$21,897.63, and at the close of the year \$10,000 worth of sewers under contract were

unfinished. In this department plans have been prepared for upward of \$300,000 worth of sewers to be laid this year.

### Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Viaducts.

As will be noted from the illustrations the city engineer now runs a stone crosswalk foundry. So heavy was the demand for crosswalks last year, because of the great extent of the new home building, that 407 stone crosswalks were laid and 137 wooden ones. The two and a half miles of concrete crosswalks cost the city an average of 19 cents a square foot, or 57.2 cents per linear foot. For the wooden crosswalks the cost was 41 cents per linear foot. The duration of the stone crosswalks is reckoned as ten to one against the wooden.

New sidewalks laid in 1910 totaled a trifle over twenty-five miles, of which seventeen and two-tenths miles were of artificial stone and the rest of brick. Omaha now has 329.54 miles of sidewalks, costing an aggregate of \$1,260,032.

Among other items of improved housekeeping proposed for this year by the city council are six new viaducts: Across the railroad tracks on Locust street; Nicholas street below Sixteenth; Eleventh street, to replace present viaduct; Bancroft street, Dodge street and Mason street. At present the city engineer has supervision over eighty-one existing bridges, of which eighteen are steel, four combined steel and timber, and fifty-eight timber. The railroads maintain twenty-seven of these structures, and the city maintains the others. Six new bridges were built by the city last year.

### Asphalt Repair Plant Owned by City.

It would be hard to recognize the old Capitol avenue market house in the substantial new structure in which is located the city chemical department and the headquarters of the asphalt repair plant, built of the old material. The new building represents a cost of \$9,915.25 complete. Mr. Craig estimates it should pay for itself in a very few years. It is at once a workshop and a storehouse. Everything, from nails to machinery and cement, is bought by one man, the purchasing agent of the department, and it is checked in and out of the plant. Old shovels even must be accounted for, and broken tools of any kind must be turned in with a report. In this way nothing is unaccounted for, and someone is responsible and pays if a loss does occur.

At this city plant the old asphalt torn from the streets ordered repaved is worked over and is then used to repair the streets wherever they require resurfacing in patches. During 1910 23,854 square yards of asphalt was laid by the repair department, at a cost of .326 cents a yard. Brick pavement repairs amounted to 2,892 square yards, costing \$1.29 per yard. Stone pavement repairs totaled 17,123 square yards, at an average cost of .476 cents per yard. Of this repaving 7,344 square yards were necessitated by plumbers' cuts and other miscellaneous work, for which the city collected the sum of \$16,515.35.

At this particular time the city engineer's department has on hand plans for work already ordered and proposed improvements which will cost approximately \$1,500,000, to be done this season. Thus, while the amount of work done last year exceeded all previous records, the increasing demands of Omaha for better

housekeeping opportunities bids fair to raise the limit every year.

### Machine and Hand Brooms Kept Busy.

The department of brooms in Omaha's scheme of housekeeping is, in a sense, the "most exposed to the spotlight of any branch of the work," as Street Commissioner Flynn puts it. As usual to brooms, the city's sweepsticks have a back-entry location, in a ramshackle cubbyhole under the Sixteenth street viaduct. From that point the brooms on wheels and the hand brooms are sent out to all points far and near where the housewives, and their providers, think some sweeping and brushing should be done. Likewise, the tank flushing machines and the hose flushers foregather under the viaduct when not in active use, and have to put in much of their time traveling back and forth to and from the scene of their work. This seems to be one costly element of city housekeeping which has not been improved since the day it was entered on, except to secure new tools when the old ones are worn out.

The province of the street commissioner's force is to keep the main thoroughfares and the alleys of the city clear of dirt and rubbish by means of brushing, flushing and hauling it away. The street gang also cuts weeds for the health commissioner, and last year cut the weeds from 4,276 blocks, at a cost of \$2,135.

Reckoning by blocks, during the 1910 season the street commissioner's force cleaned 16,628 blocks with hand and machine brooms; 19,383 intersections were swept, and 4,342 blocks were flushed by hand or machine. Dirt and sweepings removed from the public places made 22,301 loads, while the ice and snow removed made 5,200 loads. The cost of this branch of the work was, for 1910, \$57,584.58.

Care of unpaved streets and alleys falls to the street commissioner's department, and in this job \$1,870 loads of material were used last year, for filling in washouts, keeping sidewalks and crosswalks up to grade, making roundups on broken streets and furnishing cinders for bad walking places. This sort of work cost in 1910, \$24,998.26.

### Care of Health of the Household.

Health Commissioner Connell has exclusive charge of the hunt for bugs, bacteria, flies, streptococci, dip-

lococci, germs, gnomes and all the things with peculiarly dangerous qualities concealed about their bodies. To see that the Omaha household keeps clean, healthy and reasonably happy is the task of the health department. Dr. Connell doesn't personally chase the insistent and dynamic mosquito, or slay with lethal weapons the bugs and bacteriological tribes, but he does direct the attack. Also he camps on the trail of the deadly garbage pile, which Omaha has no real good way of making disappear, and the threatening ash heap and wild-springing weed are additional abominations in his sight.

The health department has a bacteriologist, whose business is to keep Dr. Connell posted on the proximity, prolificness and peregrinations of pestiferous bacteria in milk, meat, canned goods, water and other varied fluids and solids used by the general run of housekeepers. Thus the health commissioner becomes, in a sense, an overseeing housekeeper, and when he issues dictums or orders it is well to obey, for the commissioner holds 'tis better to err on the side of safety than to flout the scientific findings of his assistants. If Dr. Connell could be well rid of the weeds and garbage he would consider himself as holding a comparatively nice situation, since he has learned to run an automobile.

### Work for Full Weight and Measure.

Do you get correct weights and full measures, Mrs. Housewife? If not, John Grant Pegg, who is attached to the official household for the express purpose of seeing that you are not cheated too much, will jump in and take the fight off your hands. Mr. Pegg is quite a scrapper, too, when he feels serious, as he most usually does. He carries with him the implements to "show" the tricky dealer where he is wrong, and if anything starts he has "Casey's odds" handy, in the shape of a weight in his fist. Mr. Pegg insists he has now got this matter of weights and measures fixed for the busy housewife better than it has ever been before; and he has in his office a collection of crooked antiques to prove it.

### Withnell, Wolfe and Waldemar.

"Charley" Withnell, the building inspector, is an important part of Omaha's housekeeping force. He it is who sees to it that pedestrians shall not be

crushed in the street, or sleepers in their rooms, by falling buildings. Withnell once in a while finds a citizen making plans to build that do not meet the requirements for strength, and when he refuses to issue the permit the plans are usually brought up to standard.

In a city like Omaha, building and hustling with business at every turn, a great many wires go necessarily brought into use. Robert U. Wolfe is the man who cares for this part of good city housekeeping, and he has an assistant who helps in the work. Every boiler must have Wolfe's O. K. before being put into service, and elevators also receive his attention. Although comfortably stout, Mr. Wolfe has no hesitancy in crawling into the interior department of any boiler that looks suspicious, and he has never yet got "jammed" so hard a derrick could not pull him out.

Waldemar Michaelson has a good many wires going, even for a politician. He has on his shoulders the responsibility of seeing to the proper installation and insulation of electric light wires in new and old houses; and every time a fire is reported as the result of improper insulation or installation Michaelson gets warm under the collar. Then he cools off, and tightens up the screws another turn.

### License Inspector and Marketmaster.

Richard A. Schneider makes inspection of all licenses except those for matrimony, on behalf of the general household. In more and more vocations every year a license is required that costs anywhere from \$1 to a price up in the hundreds, and Inspector Schneider takes a particular pride in showing the citizens that he is collecting more money than any of his predecessors. If anybody is getting away without paying the price he wants to know it.

When you go marketing, especially at the public market, it is well enough to know that John Killian is the man in charge of that detail of municipal housekeeping. He sees to it that all vegetables and fruits are properly sprinkled and kept clean and palatable for prospective buyers; but principally his duty is to see that no one backs in and sells at the public market without paying the price provided by ordinance.

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