

Baltimore Morning Herald
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Immense Fire Losses During Present Year

***The Question Raised As to Whether Politics and Conflagrations
Are Not in Close Relationship in This City***

Politics in the Fire Department.

An Increase of 20 Percent in Insurance Rates.

To many observant citizens the first of these sentences seems to set forth the cause and the second the effect.

The Fire underwriters, concerned with nothing but cold facts, know only that within the last year their losses in Baltimore have been more than double what they believe they should have been. Consequently they have raised their rates by 20 per cent, and before long they will probably make a further increase.

Meanwhile the property owners of the city, who pay the bills, have been thinking.

During "the brad awl days" Baltimore's loss by fire increased year by year. Politics then dominated the department and merit was at a decided discount. In the four years 1892, 1893, 1894 and 1895 the bill was \$3,265,504.93. Then the people of Baltimore decided that it was time to call a halt, and with a loud splash the politicians fell overboard.

In 1895 the reform fire board made William C. McAfee chief engineer and gave him a free hand. During the next four years, though the number of fires increased by 1500—nearly 50 per cent—the losses fell to \$2,295,240.95.

Last year came the Democratic majority in the board and the beginning of the campaign for cheap hose and a figurehead chief. In 1899 the fire loss was \$464,809.78. In 1900 it was \$917,097.54. During the first two months of the present year it was \$500,000. This rate, if maintained for a year, would make a loss of \$3,000,000, more than the total loss for the four years from 1896 to 1899.

At today's meeting of the Fire Board, President Cathcart will probably call his Democratic colleagues' attention to the increase in insurance rates. It is also possible that Chief McAfee will tender his resignation. Disheartened by the efforts made to tie his hands, it is no secret that he has endeavored to secure employment elsewhere. With his passing will end the day of the fire department's greatest efficiency.

It is no by "brad awl" politics that the department has been disorganized, for such methods, under present conditions, are impracticable. But the feeling that merit is not at a premium has spread throughout all ranks, and as a result, the men are uneasy and discouraged. The belief that fire apparatus is selected with an eye to its cheapness, rather than to its quality, has also had its effect.

Since January 1 there have been 13 fires large enough to necessitate a second alarm. At eight of these the third was also sounded, and at one the general alarm. A list of them, with the losses, follows:

January 4—Silberman & Todes, notions, 115 and 117 West Baltimore street; \$70,000; general alarm.

January 17—American Ice Company, foot William street; \$2500; two alarms.

January 27—Eisenauer, Machen & Co., lumber yard, 306-318 West Falls avenue; \$15,000; three alarms.

January 30—The Zoo; \$200,000; three alarms.

February 3—People's Bank building, Hopkins place and Lombard street, \$65,000; three alarms.

February 16—Maryland Biscuit Company bakery, 516-522 South Charles street, \$100,000; three alarms.

February 20—A. Weiskittle & Son, stove foundry, Alicenna and Washington streets, \$10,000; two alarms.

February 28—Hirshberg, Hollander & Co., paints, 25 Hanover street, \$150,000; three alarms.

March 3—Edward Stinson & Co., wheel factory, 327-335 North street, \$2,000; two alarms.

March 7—M.P. Hubbard & Co., fertilizer factory, 235-239 Smith's Wharf, \$7,000; three alarms.

March 11—N. Frank & Sons, rag shop, 1402-1406 Mullikin street, \$9,000; three alarms.

March 20—Startzman, Millikin & Co., and others, 215-217 Pratt street, about \$100,000; three alarms.

In addition there have been more than 200 fires at which but on alarm was sounded. Since the first line of this story was written three alarms have been sounded.

This increase in the number of fires has not been met by corresponding additions to the department resources. Half a dozen more engine houses are needed. Ordinances providing for the establishment of a new engine at Carroll will be considered by the board today. At Tuesday's meeting, in President Cathcart's absence, the Democratic commissioners gave a hearing to District Engineer Lucas, who declared that the western annex needed no additional fire protection. Yesterday Councilman Steinacker, who introduced the ordinances, made a vigorous effort to save them from the waste basket. He has the support of President Cathcart, but in the fire board the majority rules.