

Baltimore Morning Herald
February 28, 1901

Old Water Board Severely Criticized

***President Quick's Report Comments on Superfluous Labor,
Useless Material and Loose Management—Ground Rent Paid on Private Property***

Water Engineer Alfred M. Quick, whose part in the criticism of the municipal subways recently subjected him to a vigorous "roast" at the hands of Subway Engineer Phelps, has evidently become something of a "roaster" himself.

In the annual report of the water board, submitted to the mayor yesterday, half of the sentences are burning "knocks" at the board's predecessors in office. The latter are charged with all sorts of lapses and blunders from extravagance to loose bookkeeping.

Much space is devoted to an elaborate consideration of the \$2,000,000 loan for improving the water supply. The manner in which the former board expended the greater part of the sum is described as "extraordinary." After describing how a few of the improvements contemplated had been made at a cost of \$1,367,000—\$31,000 less than the total estimate—the report says:

"We found, however, that the following work provided for in the plans for improving the water supply, and the cost of which the loan was to cover, had not been touched, viz.: A new 75,000,000 gallon reservoir, new screens at three gatehouses, 6,500 feet of the force main in North avenue, running from Pennsylvania avenue, out to Walbrook: 4,000 feet of the 30 inch pipe, on the west side of the city: 4,000 feet of 16 inch pipe, on east side, and a new water supply system for the Eastern district of the upper service area. This amount, added to the \$31,000 saved on what had been done, would give \$618,600 as the balance which should have been left unexpended from the \$2,000,000 loan on March 1, 1900.

"But we found that about \$51,000 had been expended for books, stationery, drawing materials, tools, machinery and other miscellaneous articles, which were properly chargeable to the loan, but which were not included in the consulting engineer's estimate. Deducting this amount, we have about \$567,600, which should have been the unexpended balance from March 1, 1900. The actual unexpended balance on that date we found to be \$239,113.46, leaving over \$328,000 to be accounted for. From our examination of the records, payrolls and plans of work done we should judge that part of this amount had been spent on superfluous labor and salaried positions, useless material and unnecessary pipe laying, and that the balance had been spent for routine work and supplies that should have been paid for out of the receipts of the department.

"The charging of such items to the loan and thus cutting down the amount to be taken from the department receipts to pay the regular operating expenses partly explains how large surpluses have been shown for the last two or three years, in spite of the fact that previous to 1896 the department very seldom had a surplus. Not only did we find that only \$239,113.46 was left unexpended out of the loan on March 1, 1900, but also that there was still due on the

machinery at the Mouth Royal pumping station \$21,188.49, besides several thousand dollars on pipe, lead and other contracts and that over \$10,000 would have to be spent in completing unfinished work in and around the station, all of which items would have to be charged to the loan. The result has been that on December 1, 1900, the balance unexpended from the loan was further reduced \$196,313.07.”

In speaking of the former board’s books, the report says: “The accounts were not very carefully kept; records were lost and bills were wrongly charged through careless auditing. Ground rent was paid for years upon a piece of property occupied entirely by private parties.” In its references to the former board’s establishment of a trouble station at West Arlington—five miles from the trouble center—the report is most sarcastic.

The board very modestly says little of its own achievements. When it assumed office it points out there were 446 men on the department payroll. In a month this number had been reduced to 332, and the monthly salary account from \$19,000 to \$13,000. During the year the water pressure in the northern and western portions of the city was much increased. This improvement would have been extended to other sections had it not been that the exceptionally dry weather and low rainfall made it imperative to hold down the consumption of water.

The report was signed by Engineer Quick, the president of the board, and Messrs. J. T. Miller, Albert C. Tolson, Richard H. Pleasants, Jr., and Albert Weil. Mr. Well has since resigned from the board.