

HOBOKEN'S DISGRACE.

The Town Aroused.

MURPHY UNDER SUSPICION

Action of the Citizens Association.

The City Hall Officials Reticent—Some Deny that Murphy is a Defaulter—Col. Stevens' Statement.

The JOURNAL's extra announcing the skipping out of Water Registrar Michael Murphy fell like a thunder clap upon Hoboken's citizens. While the utmost consternation prevailed, universal regret was expressed that Murphy should have placed himself in such a position. He has held the office for fifteen years, and was universally liked and respected. The bottom facts are as yet inaccessible. Searching inquiries by the JOURNAL's reporters show that Murphy left his office about 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. About 6 o'clock he stopped at his home and told his sister that ex-Mayor John O'Neill now Assistant Superintendent of the Bureau of Engraving at Washington had telegraphed him to meet him (O'Neill) in New York. He then started towards the ferry, and no subsequent trace of him has been learned.

Hoboken now obtains its water supply from the Hackensack Water Company, of which Colonel Edwin Stevens is Treasurer. The city is allowed a percentage of the collection in order to meet the expenso of the Water Department. The company for more than a year past has been dissatisfied with the amount it received, so much so that its lawyers, Counsellors Foster and Weeks, were directed to take steps to compel the city to settle up. They were met by the Water Commissioners statement that the taxpayers had fallen behind, and that the city could not pay over the water rates until they were collected.

As has been stated, Col. Stevens, three days ago, wrote a letter to Water Commissioner Winges. Both decline to divulge its contents, but it is believed that the letter hastened Murphy's flight. Others of the Water Commissioners who have been asked about the letter pretend to be ignorant of it altogether.

The Water Commissioners met last night in secret session. They did not adjourn until nearly 1 o'clock this morning. Murphy, who is secretary to the Board, did not appear. Commissioner Lohman acted in his place. During the meeting Commissioner Winges revealed Col. Stevens' letter to his colleagues. The Board decided to meet again this afternoon at 1 o'clock. At 11 o'clock this morning Assistant Water Registrar George Perry was summoned into the Council Chamber by the Water Commissioners and closely questioned. The result was that Messrs. John Bruning and Martin Stelfes, who are Registrar Murphy's bondsmen, were notified to be present at this afternoon's meeting.

When the Board got together the bondsmen, Corporation Attorney Minturn and the Water Board, with the exception of Commissioner Rudolphy, were present. The public was excluded. It was ascertained that the Commissioners directed their Finance Committee, Commissioners Lohman and Pfeiffer, to thoroughly investigate Murphy's accounts. Corporation Attorney Minturn drew up a resolution summoning the absent Registrar to appear before the Board at 8 o'clock to-night under penalty of removal from office.

The entire batch of city officials who are directly concerned in the case appear to be desirous of telling as little as they possibly can about it.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons, in response to a JOURNAL reporter, said that he believed that all the water rates collected by Murphy had been paid over to the company.

Mr. John Bruning, one of Murphy's bondsmen, when asked for information by a JOURNAL reporter, choked up and said: "Well this is bad news—very bad!"

Commissioner Winges said: "I would sooner have had a knife thrust in my heart than to know this about Mike. If he had told me about it the thing could have been fixed without any trouble."

From this it is inferred that the shortage is comparatively small.

Early in November last the Executive Committee of the Citizens Association of Hoboken, met at John Reed's house and appointed Edward Russ and W. A. Macy of the Hoboken Land and Improvement Company to obtain a statement from Water Registrar Murphy. They were unable to obtain any satisfaction.

At a subsequent meeting the committee requested the Water Commissioners individually to make a statement of the water account. In response to this Murphy gave the committee through Mr. Russ a statement to the effect that he had paid the Water Company \$10,000 on account, and would pay the balance due in a few days. Mr. Russ ascertained that the \$10,000 had been paid over, and no further action was taken by the committee.

Mr. Russ informed a JOURNAL reporter that on March 22d he paid water rates amounting to \$19 14, by check drawn to the Water Company's order. The check has never been returned to him.

Real estate agent John P. Crevier claims that he paid considerable amount of water rates upon leased property. The tenants also paid the water rates. Mr. Crevier tried to obtain a refund from Murphy but was unable to do so.

It has been ascertained that Murphy was in Schlatter's saloon, Hudson street, about 7:30 He drank wine with the proprietor.

THE STORY OUT.

The news leaked out about 1.30 o'clock to-day. In less than an hour the City Hall was crowded with people. But few believed the rumor, and those who did took occasion to deny it whenever the opportunity offered itself. A JOURNAL reporter was the first to learn of the matter. An investigation covering a half hour convinced him that the story of Murphy's defalcation was only too true. Murphy's bondsmen were looked up. The only one that could be found was ex-Assemblyman Stelfes. He was seen as he came off a ferry boat. "I have just heard of the rumor," said he. "What is there in it?" He refused to say whether or not he was on the defaulting Water Registrar's bend, but made his way to the City Hall, where the Board of Water Commissioners were in secret session.

Treasurer Edwin A. Stevens, of the Hackensack Water Company, was then seen. He was closeted with Mr. Shippen, assistant superintendent of the works. Said Mr. Stevens:

"I really don't know what to say. In fact, I can't believe that Mr. Murphy has fled, but I must admit that his absence gives ground for suspicion."

Upon being pressed for information Mr. Stevens said:

"We began to supply the city with water in November, 1882. We agreed to pay the city a good percentage on water used. The amount used I am not at liberty to state. For the first year the returns came in promptly and regularly, but then fell off. The amounts decreased and the returns became slower. We notified Mr. Murphy, also the Board of Water Commissioners. Mr. Murphy visited us and explained that the receipts were slow in coming in, and requested us to lengthen the time in which to forward the returns. We did so. This had little or no effect, and our accounts became so greatly muddled that we considered it time to give the matter more attention. About two years ago I addressed another letter to the Board, in which I stated that a settlement must be made. Another explanation was made, and the matter rested until about three days ago. I decided that a definite understanding must be had with the Commissioners. I mailed a letter to the President of the Board, William J. Winges, and another to Mr. Murphy. I have as yet received no answer from either, but as a result Mr. Murphy has made himself scarce."

"Will you tell me the amount of the shortage?" asked the reporter.

"That I cannot estimate until I hear the result of the meeting of the Commissioners. I am not even at liberty to give you an idea."

The reporter then asked to be shown the contents of the letter sent by him to President Winges.

"I cannot do even that," said he. "I have no objection to having its contents published, but it was a private correspondence, and I don't consider it proper to divulge its contents. However, I think that the whole matter should be published and will willingly surrender a copy to the letter, provided you can obtain Mr. Winge's consent in writing."

President Winges was then looked up. His horse and buggy standing in front of the City Hall was evidence of his presence at the meeting of the Water Commissioners. Mr. Winges finally came out, and to the reporter's request to consent to have the letter published, he said: "I am not at liberty, as the letter is addressed to the Board. We will act upon it to-night, and if the Board decides to make its contents known, I am satisfied."

A prominent politician said: "I can't believe it. I am sure that Murphy did not leave the city last night, I saw him at 6 o'clock this morning."

Ex-Mayor Timken said this afternoon, "It is not so much of a surprise to me, I expected something of the kind long ago. In fact I had a petition drawn up which I intended to present to Judge Hays requesting him to order an investigation of the Water Registrar's books. I have the petition in my desk and can show it. We have others," said Mr. Timken, "who are now shivering in their boots, and I think it would be advisable to have their accounts investigated."

The City Hall is corrupt and should be ventilated," continued Mr. Timken. But one more of the old ring remains, and I will see that his books are investigated."

Philip H. Haines, Jr., said: "I am very sorry for Mike Murphy, but I don't see how a man receiving a salary of \$2,500 a year can spend \$5,000."

THE BOARD MAY BE WILD.

Under the law, the Board of Water Commissioners are each under \$10,000 bonds for the faithful performance of duty. The bonds held good eighteen years.