THIRTIETH

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS

OF

Compliments of . . .

Commissioners of Water Works,

in the City of Erie.

COUNCILS,

FOR THE

YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 1896.

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HISTORY OF WATER WORKS AT ERIE, PENN'A.

ERIE, PA., Dec. 31, 1896.

To the Commissioners of Water Works in the City of Erie, Pa.

GENTLEMEN:—At your request I submit the following account of the first water introduced into the then Borough of Erie and of the construction of the present Water Works.

From the settlement of the town up to 1841 the only water for fire purposes was the wells; and the streams running through the town. In 1841 wooden pipes were laid to the springs on the Reed farm south of Eighteenth street and tanks built in the streets near the street corners, which were kept filled by the pipes. This spring water was also used to a small extent for house use.

The records show that on April 16th, 1841, a petition was presented to the Councils by the Hon. Thos. H. Sill and others asking Councils "to take immediate measures to bring water into the Borough as a protection against fire." On June 11th Councils authorized the Town Clerk "to advertise for bids for bringing the water into town in wooden logs."

On June 22d Rufus S. Reed and Thos. G. Colt were appointed a committee "to enquire for what amount they could get the water brought into town from the Reed springs;" and June 25th, the same committee was authorized "to contract for bringing the water into town in wooden logs and devise ways and means to defray the expense."

The work was completed during the summer and fall of 1841, as the last record of payment to the contractors was November 27, 1841. These Water Works were in operation until the completion of the present works; but were very inefficient and afforded protection to only a small portion of the city. There was some discussion of new Water Works in 1865 and 1866, and on February 11, 1867, Mr. Jno. M. Kuhn introduced a resolution to ask the Legislature "to authorize the Councils of the City of Erie to issue bonds for three hundred thousand dollars to be appropriated

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to the erection of Water Works." The resolution was lost, only two members of the Council, Messrs. Kuhn and Loverin, voting for it.

Previous to this date a Water and Gas Company had been organized in the city, and on March 11, 1867, the Mayor was authorized by the Councils to enter into a contract with the said company to furnish the city fifty fire plugs for the term of twenty years for nine thousand dollars per year, being $180.00 per plug per year.

This contract provided that the city might purchase the works of the Water and Gas Company, at any time within five years, by paying the said company cost and interest, and it also provided that if the city commenced the erection of Water Works within one year the contract was to be null and void; but the city to pay the Water and Gas Company any amount expended by them and interest. Fortunately for the interests of the city they did commence the construction of Water Works within the year, for at the rate agreed upon in that contract the city would now be paying the Water and Gas Company nearly $90,000.00 per year for fire and other purposes, and its citizens would be paying largely increased rates.

On February 23, 1867, the Councils, in joint session, approved a bill, presented by Judge Vincent, to be presented to the Legislature authorizing the city to construct Water Works, and directed the clerk to certify the action of Councils to our Senator and Representatives and request that the same be enacted and become a law.

The act authorizing the City of Erie to construct water works, and empowering the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas to appoint three Water Commissioners to construct and operate said works, passed the Legislature and was approved by the Governor April 4, 1867.

At the May term, of 1867, Judge Vincent appointed Wm. L. Scott for one year, Henry Rawle for two years and myself for three years as Water Commissioners for the City of Erie, and on the 14th day of June we met and organized the commission and appointed Wm. Brewster secretary.

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Previous to this the Water and Gas Company had engaged Mr. H. P. M. Birkinbine, of Philadelphia, to make them a plan and estimate of Water Works, and this plan formed the basis of the plan of the present work. But after visiting Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburg the Commissioners decided to dispense with a stand pipe and adopt the Detroit plan of a tower and tank, and on July 22, 1867, they so reported to Councils and asked for an appropriation of $250,000.00 which request was approved by Councils and the bonds ordered issued and delivered to the Water Commissioners as they were needed in the construction of the Works.

Subsequently the Commissioners decided to make all the work done by them a part of a general plan that in the future would supply South Erie, then a borough, and abandoned the tower and tank plan and adopted the stand pipe plan.

On September 27, 1867, the Mayor and a committee of the Councils met the Water Commissioners and fixed the price of the bonds at 85 cents on the dollar, and on September 28th the Commissioners made a requisition on the Councils for $50,000.00 of bonds sold to General C. M. Reed. This was the first sale of all bonds, of which were sold at 85 cents, except about $15,000.00 which a Committee of Councils authorized the sale of at 80 cents on April 20, 1869.

The price of the bonds was fixed by the city and for the heavy loss from discount on them the Commissioners were in no way responsible, and if previous to, and during, the construction of the works the city finances had been properly managed, and its interest and liabilities promptly paid in cash, the bonds could readily have been sold at par.

On November 16, 1867, the Commissioners applied to Councils for water lots 136 to 140 inclusive, and the request was granted, and on the same day the bid of M. C. Boyer & Co., for two Cornish Bull Engines, and boilers and pumps complete for the sum of $55,000.00 was accepted.

On December 16, 1867, the contract for the stand pipe was let to the Erie City Iron Works, and it was erected in place the following summer.

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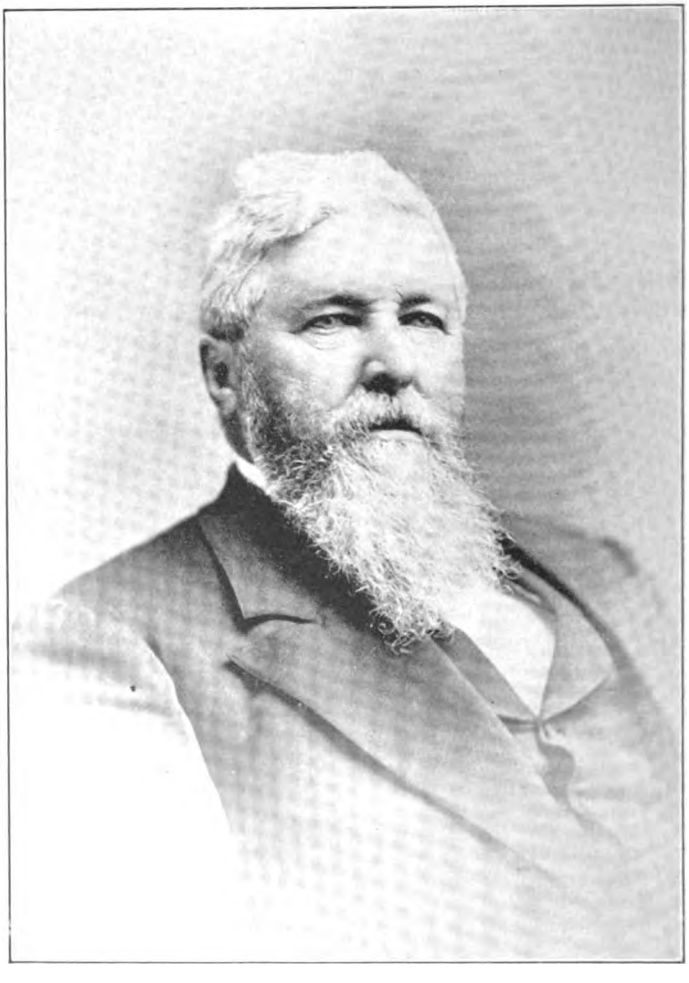

MATTHEW R. BARR,
COMMISSIONER.
1872-1876.

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This work, raised in place by a new and ingenious plan devised by the late Geo. Selden, Esq., deserves fuller notice. A strong derrick, about sixty feet high, was built and securely guyed. This was planked over the top, and about twelve feet from the bottom, and in the center a circle was cut out large enough to let the pipe pass through; then with heavy tackle the pipe was raised as each ring was riveted and another ring slipped under the pipe, commencing with the top ring and finishing with the bottom ring of the pipe. After the pipe projected above the derrick, guys were put on it and kept taut, except when loosened to raise the pipe to slip under another ring. The critical time, after the pipe projected from one hundred to one hundred and sixty feet above the derrick, was in slackening the guys to raise the pipe and slip under another ring. But the work was done without an accident and delivered to the Commissioners in better condition than if subjected to the strains incident to the usual way of erecting stand pipes.

On January 15, 1868, the engine house, boiler house and stack, and the masonry and brick work of the stand pipe, was let to John M. Kuhn and completed in the summer of that year, except the brick work of the stand pipe, which was built the following year.

During 1867, and the following year, there was considerable opposition developed against taking the water from the Bay. Some persons insisting that we should take the water from the springs and streams south of the city. Others that we should go to Lake Pleasant. My answer to the first proposition was that in a few years the city would require much more water than it was possible to obtain from the springs and streams; and, as to Lake Pleasant, there was no evidence that its waters were any purer than those of the Bay; that it would cost a large amount more to bring the water from Lake Pleasant than to establish pumping works to pump it from the Bay, and that the act under which the Commissioners were appointed required them to take the water from the Lake or Bay, and that they had no authority to take the water from either the springs or Lake Pleasant, and would be individually liable for every dollar they expended on either of these projects.

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In the fall of 1867 bids were advertised for 800 tons of pipe of various sizes and the necessary bends, T's and crosses, but the lowest bid being $79.00 per ton, none of the bids were accepted and subsequently the Commissioners made a contract for the pipe with Walter J. F. Liddell at $78.25 per ton, he agreeing to start pipe works and make the pipe in Erie.

During the summer and fall of this year the city was engaged in laying Nicholson pavement around the Parks, and pipe was obtained through the Erie Gas Company, and the pipe laid and house connections put in around the Park, and also on Peach street, between the Parks and Twelfth street.

The timber crib for the inlet was let to James Dunlap and completed in the summer of 1868, and the Pumping Works were completed and put in operation in November, 1868.

May 2, 1870, the Commissioners reported to Councils in favor of the building of a Reservoir and suggested the purchase of the only available site, that of Cochran's woods.

It was in 1872 that the first State Fair was held in Erie, and a pipe had been laid from Eighteenth street to the Fair Grounds to supply water during the Fair, when one day Mr. Kincaid reported to me that the valve chamber of the west engine had broken and he had started up the east engine. I telegraphed Mr. Birkinbine to have Boyer cast another valve chamber as quickly as possible. A week or two afterwards Mr. Kincaid came to my house one Sunday forenoon and told me the other valve chamber was broken. I went at once to the Works and found a crack started in the valve chamber, but not as bad a one as in the west engine valve chamber, and ordered him to unload the engine to 60 pounds to the square inch and start it up. He protested that if I had the engine started the valve chamber would smash up. I told him it would be no worse for the city to be out of water with both engines smashed than to have one smashed and we afraid to run the other, and to start her up on a pressure of 60 pounds. This gave us pressure sufficient to supply the Fair Grounds and we continued to run the engine until after the close of the Fair, it being late in the fall when we got a new valve chamber in the west engine.

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These expensive breakages were the result of an error in construction. The valve chamber was bedded on the rock and the air chamber was seated on a brick wall and connected with the valve chamber with flanges and bolts. The constant jar of the engine had settled the brick work and the air chamber and several tons of pumping main was hanging on the flanges with which they were bolted to the valve chamber.

In replacing the valve chambers I changed the plan and connected the valve and air chambers with a lead joint that allowed for settling, and also put stone caps on the brick piers, and with these improvements there is no probability of a similar accident to these engines.

About this time there was a committee of leading citizens formed to suggest improvements in the City Charter. I went before the the committee and urged them to recommend an amendment authorizing the Water Commissioners to levy a tax of 75 cents per foot on each side of all streets on which pipe had been, or might hereafter be laid, urging on them the impracticability of the city furnishing money to lay pipe on all the streets on which there were calls for pipe and the rank injustice of taxing those to whom the facilities of obtaining water were denied, to pay for the pipe laid in the streets on which their more fortunate neighbors lived. But I found it impossible to get the consent of the committee to such a proposition.

I also suggested that the President of the Commission be a salaried office, and he be paid $2,000.00 per year, and give his entire time to the supervision of the Works, and the other Commissioners be paid as at present. They asked me if I was fixing up a berth for myself. I told them I was advising what I thought for the best interests of the city and pledged myself to resign on the day such a provision became a law.

These are the only amendments, so far as I know, that were ever proposed to the act authorizing the Water Commission, and unfortunately, as I think, for the city, they were not favorably received.

In September, 1872, the Councils appropriated $125,000.00 for the construction of a Reservoir, and the timber was cleared off that

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fall, and the Reservoir constructed the next year, with the exception of sodding the slopes, which was finished in 1874.

With the completion of the Reservoir the Works were practically completed on the original plan, and there only remained the annoying question of pipe extension which I hope has not given the Commissioners as much trouble in later years as it did during the twelve years I was connected with the Commission.

My associates on the Commission were Wm. L. Scott, Henry Rawle, John C. Selden. John Gensheimer, M. R. Barr, Michael Liebel and J. M. Bryant.

Respectfully yours, etc.,

WM. W. REED.

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Commissioners of Water Works, in the City of Erie, and Officers, from Organization to Dec. 31, 1896.

The Commissioners of Water Works, in the City of Erie are appointed by the Court of Common Pleas of Erie County, Pa., for a term of three years, one member being named annually, in May.

	Commissioners.			President.	Secretary & Treasurer.	Assistant Secretary.
1867	*W. L. Scott,	Henry Rawle,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. Brewster,	.....
1868	*John C. Selden,	Henry Rawle,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. Brewster,	.....
1869	*John C. Selden,	Henry Rawle,	Wm. W Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1870	*John C. Selden,	Henry Rawle,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1871	*†John C. Selden,	Henry Rawle,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1872	Matthew R. Barr,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1873	Matthew R. Barr,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1874	Matthew R. Barr,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed.	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1875	Matthew R. Barr,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1876	Matthew R. Barr,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1877	Michael Liebel,	John Gensheimer,	Wm. W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1878	Michael Liebel,	*J. M. Bryant,	Wm W. Reed,	Wm. W. Reed,	*J. C. Perkins,	.....
1879	Michael Liebel,	*J. M. Bryant,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	Michael Liebel,	B. F. Sloan,	.....
1880	Michael Liebel,	*J. M. Bryant,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	Michael Liebel,	B. F. Sloan,	.....
1881	Michael Liebel,	Benjamin Whitman,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	*G W. F. Sherwin,	B. F. Sloan,	.....
1882	Michael Liebel,	Benjamin Whitman,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	B. F. Sloan,	.....
1883	Michael Liebel,	Benjamin Whitman,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	B. F. Sloan,	.....
1884	Michael Liebel,	Benjamin Whitman,	*G. W. F. Sherwin,	Benjamin Whitman,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1885	Michael Liebel,	Benjamin Whitman,	Geo. W. Starr,	Benjamin Whitman,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1886	C. Kessler,	Benjamin Whitman,	Geo. W. Starr,	Benjamin Whitman,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1887	C. Kessler,	C. J. Brown,	Geo. W. Starr,	Geo. W. Starr,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1888	C. Kessler,	C. J. Brown,	Geo. W. Starr,	Geo. W. Starr,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1889	C Kessler,	C. J. Brown,	Geo. W. Starr,	Geo. W. Starr,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1890	C. Kessler,	C. J. Brown,	Geo. W. Starr,	Geo. W. Starr,	B. F. Sloan,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1891	C. Kessler,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Hardwick,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1892	T. W. Shacklett,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Hardwick,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1893	T. W. Shacklett,	C. J. Brown	Wm. Hardwick,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1894	T. W. Shacklett,	C. J. Brown,	Wm. Hardwick,	Wm. Hardwick,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1895	T. W. Shacklett,	‡C. J. Brown,	Wm. Hardwick,	Wm. Hardwick,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,
1896	T. W. Shacklett,	Clark Olds,	Wm. Hardwick,	T. W. Shacklett,	Wm. Himrod,	Geo. C. Gensheimer,

* Dead.

† Mr. Selden resigned before the expiration of his second term; Mr. Barr was substituted by the other Commissioners, and afterwards appointed by the Court.

‡ C. J. Brown resigned December 28, 1895, having been elected Treasurer of Erie County, Pa. Clark Olds was chosen by the other Commissioners, for the unexpired term, on the recommendation of the Court, January 2, 1896.

NOTE.—Mr. Brewster was elected June 14, 1867; resigned October 26, 1868; served 1 year, 4 months and 12 days. Mr. Perkins was elected June 14, 1867; resigned March 30, 1878; same accepted December 21, 1878, to take effect January 1, 1879; served 10 years, 2 months and 5 days. Mr. Sloan was elected January 1, 1879; continued in office to June 1, 1891; served 12 years and 5 months. Mr. Himrod was appointed Secretary May, 23, 1891, to take effect June 1, 1891. Mr. Gensheimer was appointed Assistant Secretary January, 26, 1884.

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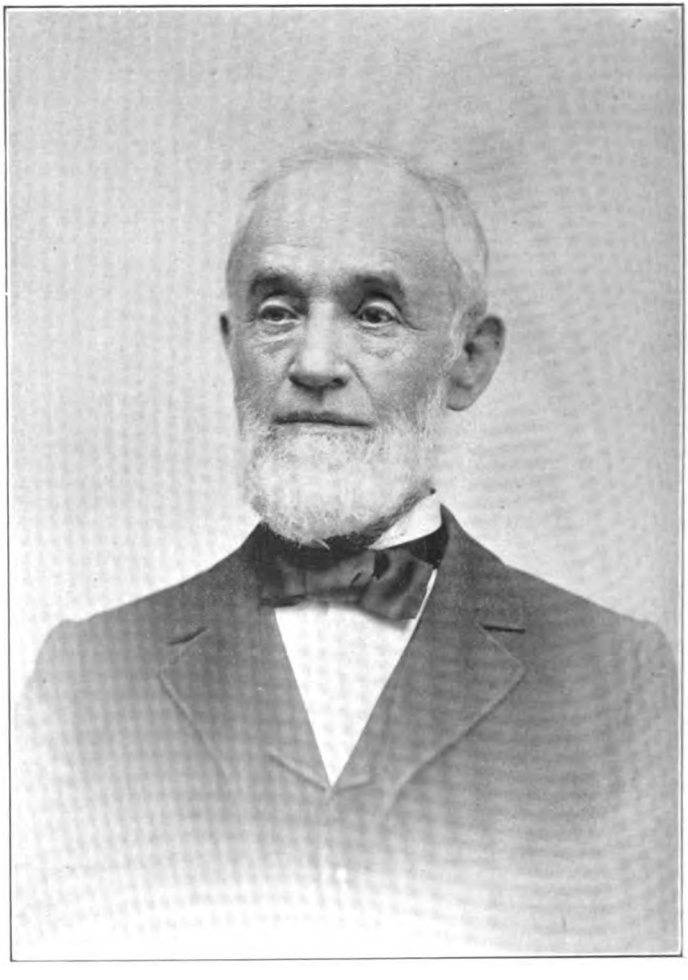

JOHN GENSHEIMER,
COMMISSIONER,
1872-1877.

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