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Bragg, Braxton, 1817-1876.
The water question. -- [New Orleans : Office
City Water Works, 1869]

THE WATER QUESTION.

THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION
WILLIAMS RESEARCH CENTER
410 CHARTRES ST., NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130

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[Copy.]

OFFICE CITY WATER WORKS,
New Orleans, April 9, 1869.

Hon. Jno. R. Conway, Mayor of New Orleans:

Sir—The weekly summary statement of the finances of these Works is herewith inclosed.

Also, copies of two important communications to the Board of Commissioners on the subject of water supply and water rates, to which the Board asks the special attention of the Common Council.

Cases of appeal on account of water rates have been frequently sent to this office recently by individual members of the Council, and I am desired to ask attention to the fact, that a communication recommending a reduction of these rates was made to this Board on the 5th March last, approved and sent to the Common Council asking a concurrence. This office has not been notified of any action, and this Board does not now feel authorized to act.

If the Council will approve that recommendation, or refer the subject back to the Board of Water Commissioners, with authority to act, an immediate and large reduction in the water rate will be made, applicable as well to those who have as to those who have not paid for this year.

I am, sir very respectfully, your obedient servant,
BRAXTON BRAGG, Sup't.

OFFICE CITY WATER WORKS,
New Orleans, April 7, 1869.

To the President and Board of Commissioners of Ctiy Water Works:

Gentlemen—You are presented herewith an abstract of the measurements of water, delivered in the first quarter of this year, by meter.

To make a fair and just showing, they have been placed in tabular form, by which a comparison can be made, not only of the rates charged this year, but also of those paid by the same parties last year.

The results are so remarkable and extraordinary, as to induce me to ask your special attention and scrutiny. They go to show the entire correctness of the *principle* on which you acted in establishing your rates, viz: to make them uniform; and though the result is not yet satisfactory—the small consumer paying too much in proportion—you have made a long stride in the right direction.

A few more applications of the meter now being made will enable you to do full justice to all parties. These measurements fully develop the cause and the animus of the recent misrepresentations made both to the city government and the public.

The large distillery, for instance, that received its water last year at *two and nine-tenth cents* for one thousand gallons, now pays twenty cents for the same supply. Per contra, the poor laborer or widow, who paid *ninety cents* last year, now gets the same allowance for *forty cents*.

The large steam bakery, which paid only *eighteen cents* last year, whilst his small neighbor paid *eighty*, is now put on an equality with the latter—the one being put up and the other down to a medium.

But the greatest contrast is to be found in the larger establishments. In the three large sugar refineries, one paid *four and seven-tenths cents* for one thousand gallons, another *three and two-tenths cents* for one thousand gallons, and the third and largest *one and four-tenths cents* for one thousand gallons.

Here was a discrimination of more than three hundred per cent. against one man, and in favor of another engaged in the same commercial business. Yet this is called "protecting commerce," and a correction of this gross discrimination is denounced as "destroying commerce." This one establishment, Mr. Thomson's Refinery, uses more water than *three thousand small families*. Yet *they* paid last year $45,000, whereas the wealthy consumer paid $1000. Such monopolies are not in consonance with the fair and just views of our people, and will not be tolerated when once exposed. *Just 15 per cent. of all the water that is paid for, is now taken by five large consumers. Yet they have heretofore paid only two per cent. of the revenue.*

It is due to Mr. Goodale, the owner of the smallest of these Refineries to say, that he candidly acknowledges the fairness and justice of the increased charge against him, and only *claims to be put on the same basis with others engaged in the same trade*. Mr. Pelton, of the second Refinery, has also very gracefully yielded to facts and figures. Not so with Mr. Thomson, of the Crescent City Refinery, however. Every artifice and device have been invoked to postpone and evade a fair settlement. Yielding to the necessity, permission has at last been given to put on the necessary meters, which will be done as soon as the castings can be prepared.

The correspondence with the proprietor of this establishment shows some very strange and inexplicable assertions and denials, totally inconsistent with each other and with existing facts, which will be laid before you at any time he may desire. But in view of the fact that he has verbally expressed a willingness, now, for the placing of the meters, it is deemed unnecessary to refer to the matter in greater detail.

No system of assessment or calculation can be perfectly uniform, except that of the meter; but the application of this instrument is not practicable, on account of its cost, to very small consumers. A fair discrimination, too, is proper, when it is applied in favor of the large consumer, on the general principle of wholesale and retail, and also owing to the fact, that the cost of delivery to the small consumer is higher per 1000 gallons than to the large one.

The absolute cost of delivering water here, taking the expenses of 1868 as a basis, and calculating the value of the Works, as appraised,..... - $2000,000

At 5 per cent. would be for interest.....	100,000
Operating expenses and repairs.....	80,000
Deterioration in Works 5 per cent. on par value.....	75,000
	$255,000

Delivering 2,227,000,000 gallons, as was done last year, the cost was just eleven cents and a half per 1000 gallons. The loss by waste, and that consumed by the public and not paid for, would add at least 40 per cent to this, thus making the cost about sixteen cents for each thousand gallons taken by paying consumers.

The working of the meter, so far, goes to show that a still further reduction may hereafter be made in the water rates; but, in justice, that reduction should enure almost entirely to the small consumer, until he is brought nearer an equality with his more fortunate neighbor.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
BRAXTON BRAGG, Superintendent.

OFFICE CITY WATER WORKS,
New Orleans, April 7, 1869.

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT of work done and stores consumed at the pumping works (City Water Works) for the month of July, 1868, preceding this administration, and the month of March, 1869):

Saving in one month.....										$717 20
COST.								Fuel.	$1,428 53	727 65
								Stores.	$98 19	82 47
								Total.	$1,526 72	809 52
FUEL AND OTHER STORES CONSUMED.							Rope Cutting, pounds.		62	47½
						Packing Yarns, pounds.			20½	48
					Tallow, pounds.				101	96½
				Oil, gallons.					45¾	92¾
			Coke, bushels.						....	2,259
		Coal, bushels.							6,211	2,271
Water Gauge, feet.									20	28
Days.....									31	31
Months.....									July	March
Year.....									1868	1869

Galls.

Average daily quantity of water delivered in the month of July, 1868..... 6,137,303
In the month of March, 1869..... 4,583,585

Average daily saving..... 1,553,718

And supplying more consumers than in July last. At the same time the height of water as indicated by the gauge is INCREASED from 20 to 28 feet, showing the supply 40 per cent. improved.

These results have been obtained, first, by checking the many abuses leading to the waste of water, and, second, by judgment and good management in running the machinery, six months' close attention and experiment having developed many errors and much unnecessary expense.

It may not be practicable to keep the expense down to the low figure of March, but the saving can certainly be made to average $500 per month.

To the officers and men of the pumping department much credit is due for this most gratifying result.

Respectfully submitted,
BRAXTON BRAGG, Sup't.

CITY WATER WORKS,
New Orleans, April 6, 1869.

MEMORANDUM OF BILLS RENDERED for first quarter of 1869 for water delivered by measurement, compared with bills for 1868.

No.	Designation of establishment.	Quantity of water used—gallons.	Charge per 1000 gallons—1869.	Amount of bill, 1869.	Price paid per 1000 gallons—1868.	Remarks.
			Cents.		Cents.	
1	Purvis's Sash Factory.....	57,396	40	$202 94	43 6-10	By Meter measurement.
2	United States Bakery.....	69,174	40	247 67	18	
3	Carré's Lumber Yard.....	83,298	40	292 32	30	
4	Golding's Iron Foundry.....	137,780	40	555 00	38 3-10	
5	Crescent Billiard Saloon.....	185,480	37	70 63	37	
6	Leonard's Livery Stable.....	262,045	37	96 35	54	
7	City Hall.....	582,670	00	free.	00	
8	Maginnis's Oil Factory.....	670,019	28	187 61	5 6-10	By rule measure and calculation on the basis of Boston and Cincinnati.
9	St. Charles Hotel.....	2,264,400	20	452 88	7 7-10	
10	Goodale's Sugar Refinery.....	3,150,000	20	630 00	4 7-10	
11	Madden's Distillery.....	4,237,074	20	847 40	2 9-10	
12	Dwelling—four rooms and four persons.	5,400	41 3-10	2 50	92 6-10	
13	ten	18,000	41 6-10	7 50	70	
14	Bakery, 105 Dumaine street, dwelling	20,610	40	8 08	80	
15	horses and carts.....	18,480,000	20	2,696 00	1 4-10	
16	Crescent Sugar Refinery.....					

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The lowest schedule rate for water by measurement to large consumers in different cities from which rates have been obtained, is as follows: Cincinnati and Louisville, 15 cents for 1000 gallons; Jersey City, 16⅔ cents; New Orleans, New York,* Brooklyn, Chicago* and St. Louis, 20 cents; Boston and Cambridge, Mass., 30 cents. New York and Boston are supplied without the use of steam power, the natural elevation being sufficient.

Note—In none of these cities, except New Orleans, is the interest on the cost of the works paid from water rent, but by special tax and appropriation. Of course the water rent can be reduced to that extent. If that discrimination were removed, as recommended by this Board, the rates in New Orleans can be made lower than in any city in the United States.

BRAXTON BRAGG, Sup't.

* In these two cities, the Water Board, in special cases, may contract at a lower rate.

OFFICE CITY WATER WORKS,
New Orleans, March 5, 1869.

To the President and Members Board of Commissioners, City Water Works:

Gentlemen—It becomes my duty to invite your attention to the suspension of payments by nearly all water renters, under the present unsettled condition of affairs, and to suggest some action as a remedy.

In establishing the present tariff of rates, you acted on the understanding that you were to raise sufficient revenue to meet:

1. The interest on the bonds given in payment for the Works	$75,000
2. The current expenses of the Works, which have averaged, since the war,	75,000
3. Current repairs, which in the present condition of the Works will require	20,000
4. You were to deliver the supply of water *for all public purposes* without charge.	
Total	$170,000 *

This is an average of the revenue for the last three years.

After consulting the schedules of water rates in many other works, you adopted your present one, having for its object the raising of the above sum, which was expected at your hands; and you endeavored to make your rates uniform. The result was a reduction of the charges from $15 first to $10, and then to $8, in the smallest domestic establishments, and others in proportion, and an increase on those who use water in large quantities, and as an article of trade and profit.

The application of your tariff has produced much dissatisfaction, whether just or unjust, and appeals innumerable have been made to this office and to the City Council for revision and reduction. Many seem to have concluded that no charge should be made after the Works became the property of the city.

But whatever may be the reason, the result remains. The compulsary process of collecting rents having been suspended, nearly all payments have ceased, and our gross revenue to date is not 70 per cent. of what has been collected in former years. Under this rule the revenue may not be sufficient even to defray expenses of operation.

There is but one remedy, it seems to me, for this condition of affairs, and I suggest it to your better judgment for consideration, viz:

To apply to the city to relieve you from the burden of paying interest on the bonds for the purchase of the works, and from the further tax of supplying water *free* for public purposes.

These are obligations not imposed on any other works in the country, as far as I can learn, and my correspondence is extensive.

The city of Louisville, for instance, which I visited last October for information, though consuming only one-third of the quantity of water daily that we do, pays from $11,000 to $12,000 a year for her public supply.

If the city of New Orleans will place these works on an equality, in this respect, with those of other cities, you can accept any of their rates, with an assurance that your revenue will not only cover your operating expenses and current repairs, but also leave a balance of some thousands applicable to extensions.

This rule might not be perfectly uniform—indeed, no system of taxation can be—but it will remove the present wide-spread dissatisfaction, will add largely to the present number of consumers, will simplify and reduce the harassing duties of administration, and will probably produce as much revenue as we shall now receive, if the present unsettled condition continues.

I submit the rates of Louisville, a copy herewith enclosed, as being the most elaborate, the best arranged, and, on the whole, the lowest of any in the country where water is delivered by the use of steam power, to serve as a basis for a new tariff, should the change be deemed advisable.

A very careful comparison of data shows that we deliver in New Orleans 100 per cent. more water per capita than in the other cities of this country, or in those of Europe. Should the proposed schedule be adopted, it follows that we shall be doing the same work at half price. Yet such is the economy with which your works are now operated, that no fears need be entertained as to the result.

I am, gentlemen, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
BRAXTON BRAGG, Sup't.

* In the Budget of the Common Council for the current year, it will be seen the net revenue of the Water Works is placed at $50,000. To realize this sum upon the above data, paying operating expenses and repairs from 1st August, 1868, seventeen months, our gross revenue must be $209,583 33, instead of the $170,000 we estimated for.

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