MANUAL LABOR PAID FOR AS "STREET SWEEPING."

More About City Hall Methods Which Are Calculated to Benefit the Contractor at the Taxpayer's Expense.

Upon the result of a conference between City Auditor Mason and President McMath of the Board of Public Improvements depends their future course in relation to the recent discovery that the city has been paying large sums of money for what Mr. McMath terms "fictitious street sweeping." Mr. Mason has been ill at home for a week, otherwise a decision would have been reached before this.

The investigation conducted by Mr. McMath and his chief clerk, Wilbur F. Allen, is now known to have brought about the introduction in the Municipal Assembly of the ordinance to authorize the Street Commissioner to employ labor to clean the paved streets by scraping, scrubbing and washing.

Under the street sweeping contract the contractor is allowed to clean the streets by manual labor only during the winter months and at such times when the use of machines is deemed impracticable by the Street Commissioner. The records of the Auditor's office since 1892 indicate on their face that no manual labor has been employed. As a matter of fact manual labor has been employed every year, the cost of same 1-ing put in as street sweeping at a certain price per 1000 square feet—street sweeping which was never done.

The question arises whether there has been a misapplication of public funds.

When Street Commissioner Varrelmann was presented Thursday with a list of prepared questions relating to the proposed ordinance, it was expected that he would explain in detail the peculiar state of affairs existing under the street-cleaning contract with the Metropolitan Improvement Company. While Mr. Varrelmann answered the questions, it has since been learned that he did not tell the whole story.

In 1892, during the regime of Street Commissioner M. J. Murphy, vouchers presented at the City Auditor's office by the St. Louis Improved Street Sprinkling Company, which then held the street-cleaning contract, showed an account for manual labor, in the words of that contract made with that company: "During inclement weather the roadways of such streets as may be designated by the Street Commissioner shall be kept free from snow and ice." The contractor was allowed 10 per centum above the actual cost of such work as provided in the contract.

Captain Brown's Discovery.

A former employe of the Auditor's office, now in another city department, relates the particulars of an early discovery, which brought about "fictitious sweeping," as follows:

"The company holding the contract for cleaning the paved streets was taken to task by the late Captain Joe Brown, then City Auditor, for turning in accounts for manual labor in the months of June. The Auditor considered it to be rather a severe lay on his credulity to be called upon to audit bills for the removal of ice and snow in the summer months. His decision left the contractor no alternative but to lump the cost of such 'manual labor' and tender bills for the work as 'street sweeping by the square foot.'

"The city of St. Louis has paid tens of thousands of dollars for street sweeping which was never done. In other words, there has been nothing less than a falsification of accounts. Each year the appropriations have increased and since the time of Captain Brown three contracting firms have been paid for work which was never done, the last one being the Metropolitan Improvement Company, which then held the street-cleaning contract, showed an account for manual labor, in the words of that contract made with that company: "During inclement weather the roadways of such streets as may be designated by the Street Commissioner shall be kept free from snow and ice." The contractor was allowed 10 per centum above the actual cost of such work as provided in the contract.

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"Never did the words 'manual labor' appear on the vouchers after the incident of June 16, 1892. The contractors have presented large accounts for street sweeping and have been paid from the city treasury. The arrangements between the Street Commissioner and the contractor by which the latter has drawn pay for manual labor through a division of its cost by the contract price per square foot—I quote Mr. McMath's words—I presented to the street cleaning inspectors returns back to April, 1898, and identified the attendants.

"The purpose of the ordinance pending in the City Council is to protect Mr. Varrelmann, who is known to be opposed to the irregular arrangement. He is the victim of an established precedent."

Charter Provisions.

Article 16, section 11 of the City Charter follows:

"Details for cleaning the streets of the city shall be established by the Board of Public Improvements, and any member of said board, or any officer or employe who shall be engaged in the service of the Assembly and any member of the City Council, any member of any board or commission, or any officer or employe of any department thereof, or any member of any board or commission having jurisdiction over any such department, or any person or firm interested in any contract or contracts for work in any such department, or in furnishing any supplies or materials, or in any way furnishing labor or material for any such work, such member of officer or employe, who shall knowingly vote for, assent to, report or otherwise permit or aid in the execution of any contract or any matter in which he shall have any interest, or in the letting of any work by any department thereof, or any board or commission having jurisdiction over any such department, or any person or firm interested in any such contract or contracts for