

**Name/Address:** Vernon Pumping Station, off Wyman Park Drive

**Construction Date:** 1930

**Town/Vicinity:**

**County:** Baltimore City

**Access:** public

**Summary Description:**

The Vernon Pumping Station is a one-story masonry water pumping station designed between 1927 and 1930 and constructed in 1930-1931. The building was designed in an eclectic style, incorporating elements of the Italian Renaissance Revival, such as its symmetry, use of quoins, pediments, and keystoned round arches; and the Mission and Spanish Eclectic styles evidenced in its prominent curvilinear gable and use of profuse polychrome terra cotta ornament. The buff-brick masonry is laid in a Flemish bond, while the gable roof and flanking hip-roofed wings are clad in green pantiles. The symmetrical building has a recessed central block with forward projecting hipped-roof wings. The ornate curvilinear parapet articulates the entry bay, and includes terra cotta coping and an urn/finial captured between two volutes.

**Statement of Significance**

The Vernon Pumping Station is an active Baltimore City water pumping station, continuously operated since its completion in April 1931. It is an example of public architecture thoughtfully designed to reflect the refinements and achievements of Baltimore's public works department in the first third of the twentieth century. The eclectic architecture housed an advanced electrically-driven pumping system that superseded the steam-driven pumping stations of the nineteenth century. The Vernon Pumping Station, notable for its well-preserved terra cotta ornament, is significant under criterion C for its architectural integrity, as an example of its type and period in Baltimore; and for the important role played by the pumping station in the advancement of public utility technology in Baltimore.

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Vernon Pumping Station

and/or common Vernon Pumping Station

## 2. Location

street & number Off Wyman Park Drive

not for publication

city, town Baltimore

vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland

county Baltimore City

## 3. Classification

### Category

- district  
 building(s)  
 structure  
 site  
 object

### Ownership

- public  
 private  
 both

### Public Acquisition

- in process  
 being considered  
 not applicable

### Status

- occupied  
 unoccupied  
 work in progress

### Accessible

- yes: restricted  
 yes: unrestricted  
 no

### Present Use

- agriculture  
 commercial  
 educational  
 entertainment  
 government  
 industrial  
 military

- museum  
 park  
 private residence  
 religious  
 scientific  
 transportation  
 other: public utility

## 4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Baltimore Department of Public Works, Environmental Services

street & number 3001 Druid Park Drive

telephone no.: 410/396-0287

city, town Baltimore

state and zip code 21215

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Maryland Department of Real Estate and Taxation

liber

street & number accessed online at <http:// www.DAT.state.md.us>

folio

city, town

state

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title Cultural Resources Investigations for Proposed Construction of Double Track, North Half, Central Light Rail, Baltimore & Baltimore Co., MD

date 1999

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust

federal  state  county  local

city, town Crownsville

state MD

## 7. Description

Survey No. B-1309

### Condition

- excellent  
 good  
 fair

- deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

- unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

- original site  
 moved

date of move

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

### Summary

The Vernon Pumping Station is a one-story masonry water pumping station designed between 1927 and 1930 and constructed in 1930-1931. The building was designed in an eclectic style, incorporating elements of the Italian Renaissance Revival, such as its symmetry, use of quoins, pediments, and keystone round arches; and the Mission and Spanish Eclectic styles evidenced in its prominent curvilinear gable and use of profuse polychrome terra cotta ornament. The buff-brick masonry is laid in a Flemish bond, while the gable roof and flanking hip-roofed wings are clad in green pantiles.

### General Description

The Vernon Pumping Station is a one-story masonry utility building built of buff brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern set on a granite base with watertable. The symmetrical building has a recessed central block with forward projecting hipped-roof wings clad in green pantiles. The ornate curvilinear parapet articulates the entry bay, and includes terra cotta coping and an urn/finial captured between two volutes. An oval window is centered over the round arch entrance with double leaf paneled metal doors. A semicircular fanlight surmounts the double-leaf doors. Flanking the entrance bay are two rectangular windows set into terra cotta surrounds each featuring an engaged balustrade panel, polychrome *rinceau*, and a broken swan's neck pediment. Round arch windows throughout the rest of the buildings have 6/3/6 sashes. The most distinctive feature of the pumping station is the polychrome terra cotta ornament, including tiles with *rinceau*, engaged colonnettes and capitals, and terra cotta quoins. The cornice features terra cotta crests or shields of the city of Baltimore (dolphin and *fleur de lis*) and shields representing the triumph of electricity over steam power (electricity ascendant and steam engine in ruins). A tile reading "Vernon Pumping Station" is paired with one reading "Anno Domini MCMXXX," the date of construction. In fact, the station was not completed until 1931 due to problems with the quality of the first batch of terra cotta. All of the terra cotta is well-preserved. The rear (east elevation) has three blind windows treated in a decorative brick pattern. This is modern brickwork, and the only visible alteration to the exterior of the building, which has been designed and executed to be compatible with the historic character of the structure. A similar blind bay is located on the south elevation. Interior not accessed.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. B-1309

Period	Areas of Significance-	Check and justify below	
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1999	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	

Specific dates: 1930

Builder/Architect: Department of Public Works

check: Applicable Criteria: A B C D  
and/or  
Applicable Exception: A B C D E F G  
Level of Significance: national state local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

### Statement of Significance

The Vernon Pumping Station is an active Baltimore City water pumping station, continuously operated since its completion in April 1931. It is an example of public architecture thoughtfully designed to reflect the refinements and achievements of Baltimore's public works department in the first third of the twentieth century. The eclectic architecture housed an advanced electrically-driven pumping system that superseded the steam-driven pumping stations of the nineteenth century. The Vernon Pumping Station, notable for its well-preserved terra cotta ornament, is significant under criterion C for its architectural integrity, as an example of its type and period in Baltimore; and for the important role played by the pumping station in the advancement of public utility technology in Baltimore.

### History

In 1927, Baltimore recorded its highest water usage to date, averaging 113,000,000 gallons per day (BDPW 1928:9). The strain on an infrastructure dating to the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries necessitated the improvement of Baltimore's water supply and management system. A bond issue was passed by the citizens to pay for new public works projects. Included among the new services was the Vernon Pumping Station, located at the eastern edge of Druid Hill Park. Originally, City Engineer Charles F. Goob was planning to rehabilitate the Mt. Vernon station, a small, stone Classical Revival building below the Druid Lake (EPFL: *Evening Sun* 7/11/1928). The station would be electrically driven and succeed the Mt. Royal steam-driven station near the North Avenue Bridge. Plans changed, and that same year the drafting division of the Baltimore Public Works Department began drafting plans for a new station. In his annual report, Goob noted that

“ . . . new design work was undertaken on . . . projects, including the motor-driven Vernon Pumping Station to replace the steam-operated Mt. Royal Pumping Station. . . . it is interesting to note that, with the construction and operation of the Vernon Pumping Station and the resulting abandonment of the Mt. Royal Station, the pumping facilities of this Bureau will be one hundred per cent motor driven, and Baltimore will be one of the first, if not the first, large city of this country, to reach the goal of complete electrification of pumping, thus placing Baltimore well in the van of the inevitable march of progress that must accompany the ever-increasing use of electric power” (BDPW 1928:65-66).

The Vernon Pumping Station was constructed on the site of the former Mt. Vernon Station. At the time of its construction, the station was located within Druid Hill Park, and its refined design would have complemented the park and its architecture.

## 8. Significance (continuation sheet)

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That it was one of the earliest electric systems, compact in size and its ease of use compared to old steam stations, was touted in contemporary article. It was "next to Montebello, the most important of the pumping stations, its location in the center of the city making it particularly valuable" (*Power Pictorial* 1932:59). Terra cotta ornament is the main decorative feature of the building, shields depict the city seal and the triumph of electricity over steam power (electricity ascendant and steam engine in ruins).

Upon completion, the Vernon Pumping station was heralded as an efficient electrical triumph over the dinosaur technology of steam power. Its compact and architecturally sophisticated design metaphorically triumphed over the rambling and exaggerated Richardsonian Romanesque Mt. Royal station, the last steam station in the city. This is noted in a contemporary article describing the Vernon Station as being "of attractive architecture and contrasts greatly in appearance and size with the towering bulk of the Mt. Royal Steam Station which it superseded" (*Power Pictorial* 1932:59). Inside the compact station were the pumps, set in a pit 8' below floor level. The three pumping units, rated for pumping 30, 40, and 50 m.g.d (million gallons daily), comprised "one of the largest electrically driven units in the country," capable of pumping 120,000,000 gallons daily at maximum capacity (*Power Pictorial* 1932:60). Whereas Mt. Royal required 30 men to operate, Vernon required only seven: two for each shift and one floater. Vernon was also capable of running on automatic.

The Mt. Royal Station, next to the North Avenue Bridge, was razed in the late 1950s for the construction of the Jones Falls Expressway (EPFL: *Evening Sun* 6/1/195?). The Vernon pumping station, which formerly faced Druid Hill Park, now faces the elevated Jones Falls Expressway.

### MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended \_\_\_\_\_

Eligibility not recommended \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Considerations:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer, NR Program

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. B-1309

Baltimore Department of Public Works (BDPW)

1928- Annual Report to the Mayor and City Council for the year ending December 31. Reports filed in the Department of 1931 Public Works Museum, Eastern Avenue Pumping Station, Baltimore, MD.

1928-30 Vernon Pumping Stations Plans. Available for review at the Ashburton Pumping Station, Baltimore, MD.

1999 BDPW website. Available online at <<http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/dpw/>>. Accessed 9/20/1999.

Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL)

n.d Baltimore Public Works Vertical Files. On file in the reading room, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD.

*Power Pictorial* no. 21, January 1932. Consolidated Gas, Electric Light and Power of Baltimore. Vernon Station, pp.58-61. On file in the reading room, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD.

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property: less than one acre

Quadrangle name Baltimore West 7.5'

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM Reference do NOT complete UTM references

zone easting northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The station is bounded by the Jones Falls Expressway on the west, Wyman Park Drive on the North, the CSX train yard on the east and south. The boundaries are contiguous with the public works-owned parcel on which the pumping station sits.

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### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kerri Culhane/Project Architectural Historian

organization John Milner Associates, Inc.

date 10/1999

street & number 5250 Cherokee Avenue, Suite 410

telephone 703/354-9737

city or town Alexandria

state Virginia

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
DHCP/DHCD  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032

**PRESERVATION VISION 2000; THE MARYLAND PLAN  
STATEWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXTS**

**I. Geographic Region:**

- Eastern Shore (all Eastern Shore counties, and Cecil)  
 Western Shore (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's)  
 Piedmont (Baltimore City, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery)  
 Western Maryland (Allegany, Garrett and Washington)

**II. Chronological/Developmental Periods:**

- Rural Agrarian Intensification A.D. 1680-1815  
 Agricultural-Industrial Transition A.D. 1815-1870  
 Industrial/Urban Dominance A.D. 1870-1930  
 Modern Period A.D. 1930-Present  
 Unknown Period (  prehistoric;  historic)

**III. Historic Period Themes:**

- Agriculture  
 Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Community Planning  
 Economic (Commercial and Industrial)  
 Government/Law  
 Military  
 Religion  
 Social/Educational/Cultural  
 Transportation

**IV. Resource Type:**Category: BuildingHistoric Environment: UrbanHistoric Function(s) and Use(s): GOVERNMENT: public works; pumping stationKnown Design Source: Baltimore Department of Public Works

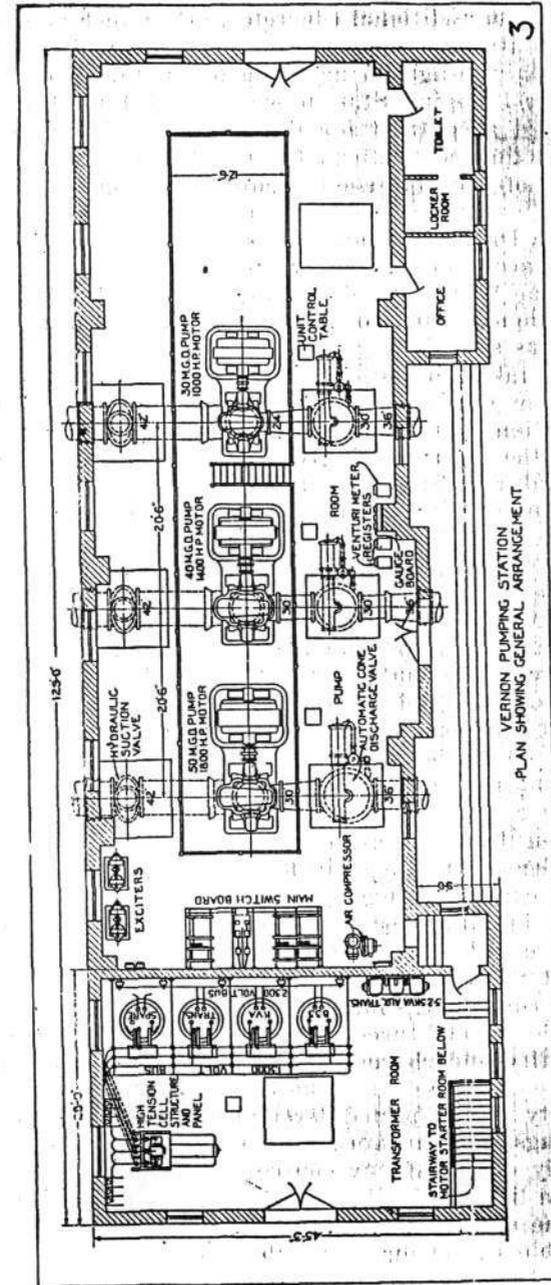
in correcting the foundation difficulties, including the piling and all other related work, was \$13,744.26, and the delay in the building construction caused by these operations amounted to about ten weeks.

Considerable difficulty in connection with the construction of the Guilford Pumping Station was encountered with the terra cotta work. Notice was not given when the terra cotta was ready for shop inspection and our first knowledge that the terra cotta had been completed was when the delivery of this material at the site of the work was commenced. A large percentage of the terra cotta was rejected at the site for various manufacturing and handling imperfections, and a shop inspection of the remainder of this material resulted in further rejections. Unfortunately, the condition of the terra cotta as it was originally offered for acceptance did not come to our attention until the substructure of the building had about been completed to the point where masonry could commence, as a result of which a delay of about ten more weeks arose from this cause for the reason that the masonry work could not be placed without proper and acceptable terra cotta being at hand.

Other delays of lesser duration than those indicated above, but to a great extent clearly avoidable by proper diligence on the part of the contractor, occurred in the construction of the building, with the result that the building construction was carried over into 1931. The exterior work included in the building contract could not be done advantageously until the building construction was completed and the old dwelling adjacent to the station was razed. This portion of the work was, therefore, postponed until the spring of 1931 without prejudice to the contractor.

Following the receipt of complete information from the contractor for the pumping equipment of the Vernon Pumping Station, contract for which was awarded on July 9, 1929, the preparation of plans and specifications for the Vernon Pumping Station building were developed during the first part of the period covered by this report, and bids on the construction of the building were received on June 4, 1930, the contract being awarded on June 11, 1930, to the Consolidated Engineering Company at their bid price of \$129,700.00, this price including the razing of the old gatehouse formerly used to control the flow of water between Hampden Reservoir, Druid Lake and the old Mt. Royal Reservoir, as well as the construction of a concrete roadway around the building, the fill for a new roadway west of the building to give a proper approach, and the grading of the area around the new station in a manner suitable for proper landscape treatment after the construction is completed. The contract price, in addition to including a lump sum for all the work shown on the drawings likewise included several items of an indeterminate amount for work to be done on a unit price basis, such

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VERNON PUMPING STATION SHOWING GENERAL ARRANGEMENT WITH SPACE PROVIDED FOR A FOURTH UNIT

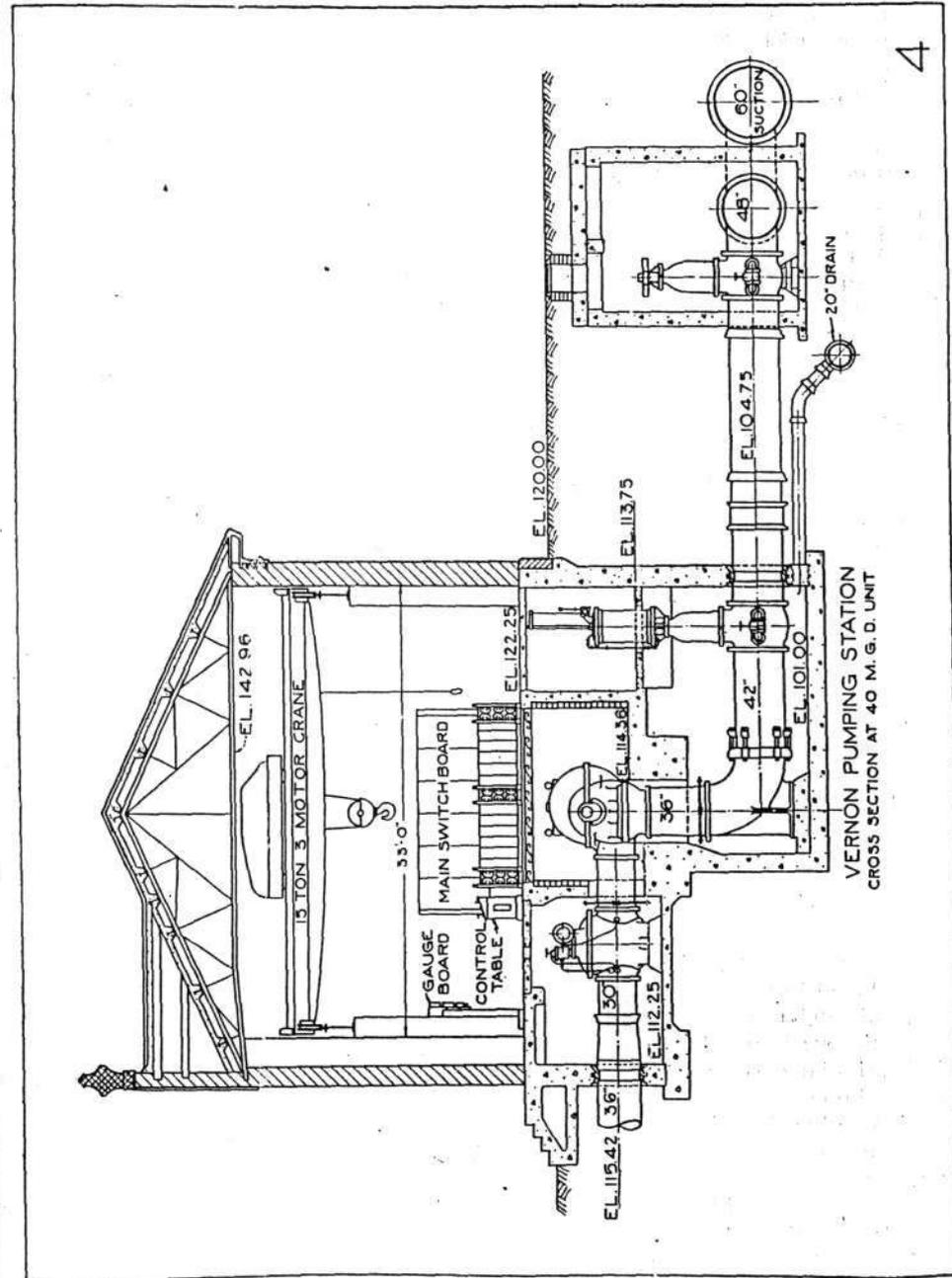
BDPW 1930

as rock excavation, additional concrete work if such be found necessary, and other items of this nature.

The Consolidated Engineering Company, at the time the contract for the Vernon Pumping Station was awarded to them, had just about completed a contract for the Bureau of Water Supply for placing the suction connections for the Vernon Pumping Station and a portion of the Montebello-Druid Lake conduit between the suction connections and a connection previously placed for this purpose leading to Druid Lake and low service mains extending down Mt. Royal Terrace. As a result of this circumstance, the construction work on the Vernon building was started promptly, the razing of the old gatehouse being commenced on June 12th, the same day the contract was signed.

Test borings taken at the site prior to the preparation of plans and specifications were used as the basis of the estimated quantities of rock excavation that would be encountered in the building construction, but the information given by the borings was deceptive and a considerably greater quantity of rock was encountered at the north end of the building, with the result that the expense of additional rock excavation required resulted in the cost of the completed structure being somewhat higher than the bid price. The character of the rock excavation varied greatly, considering the comparatively narrow confines of the excavated area; the rock unexpectedly encountered in the north end of the building was of an ingenious nature, while that for the south end, particularly under the pump foundations and the east and south building walls, was sedimentary in nature, disposed in a manner having a cleavage plane at an angle of about 60 degrees to the horizontal. Because of the nature and disposition of the rock toward the southerly half of the building a considerably greater quantity of this rock than was indicated on the drawings had to be removed and replaced with concrete in order to yield a satisfactorily stable construction, and the additional expense brought about by these factors also contributed to the building cost being somewhat higher than the bid price; the cost of all of this additional work, however, was cared for by the unit price items provided for in the specifications and included in the contractor's bid.

Aside from the expenditures in excess of the bid price caused by the extra quantity and character of the rock excavation that was encountered, the construction of the building was prosecuted, without any difficulty or unexpected development, along the lines of the contract drawings, and the work went forward practically without delay. The only delays of any consequence that arose were those resulting from a little difficulty in settling certain questions in connection with the design and manufacture of the terra cotta work and some trouble in getting acceptable work done on the bronze covered doors. The contract time for the construction of the build-



CROSS-SECTION OF VERNON PUMPING STATION, SHOWING 42-INCH HYDRAULIC VALVE ON PUMP SUCTION AND 30-INCH AUTOMATIC CONE CHECK VALVE ON DISCHARGE LINE

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BDPW 1930

ing called for the completion date to be December 24th, but because of the delays referred to the construction of the building was carried over into 1931, in the early part of which it is expected that the contract will be completed in so far as the structure is concerned. The exterior work could not be done satisfactorily until the handling of all material in connection with the building construction was completed, and as the time when the exterior work could be executed fell in the winter season it was decided to postpone all such work, without prejudice to the contractor, until the spring of 1931.

At the instance of the State Board of Health and the Baltimore County Metropolitan District, which agencies were interested primarily in an adequate supply of water for the Mt. Wilson Sanitarium, the Chief Engineer's Office instructed this Bureau to prepare plans for a pumping station that would take its suction from the Pikesville Reservoir and discharge the water by mains laid out the Reisterstown Road to the sanitarium, serving, in addition to this institution, those residents who wish to avail themselves of the City water supply. In accordance with these instructions, this Division prepared plans and specifications for the Pikesville Automatic Pumping Station, this structure to be built on the property of the Bureau of Water Supply, through which a main is extended from the Reisterstown Road to the Pikesville Reservoir.

The building is planned to be located about 215 feet from the Reisterstown Road and the suction connection for the pumps will be taken from the 36-inch main, which leads to the Pikesville Reservoir, with the discharge led to the Reisterstown Road, and thence northwesterly to the point where it is carried to an existing standpipe built on the sanitarium property. The plans call for a building about 19 feet by 23 feet for the main portion of the structure housing the pumping equipment, with a separate stairwell structure about eight feet square to give access to the pump room. The main portion of the building will be under ground at a depth sufficient to protect all of the apparatus in the station against freezing, so that the expense of artificial heat will be eliminated and there will be no hazard of breakdown of station equipment from freezing, such as would exist if means of artificial heating were used. All portions of the structure below ground will be of reinforced concrete, with particular care taken to guard against the entrance of ground water, our knowledge of nearby springs in the vicinity of the station location indicating the desirability of taking all reasonable precautions against ground water. The only portion of the station showing above ground will be a brick structure of the same size as the stairwell, this being provided with an entrance door only.

Instructions for the preparation of the plans and specifications for the Pikesville Automatic Pumping Station were received from the Chief Engineer's office on March 31, and these were completed

to the point where they were ready to be released by this Bureau on May 20. Following this date, nothing further was done in the matter for several months, the delay being due principally to the development of an idea that it might be advisable to extend the contemplated range of the distribution system leading from the station to include Reisterstown and the villages between Reisterstown and Pikesville. Had this scheme been adopted, the plans for the building might have been materially different from those prepared, and for this reason the release of the plans and specifications for approval and the preparation of them for issuance to bidders was held in abeyance until the question of supplying Reisterstown with water was definitely settled.

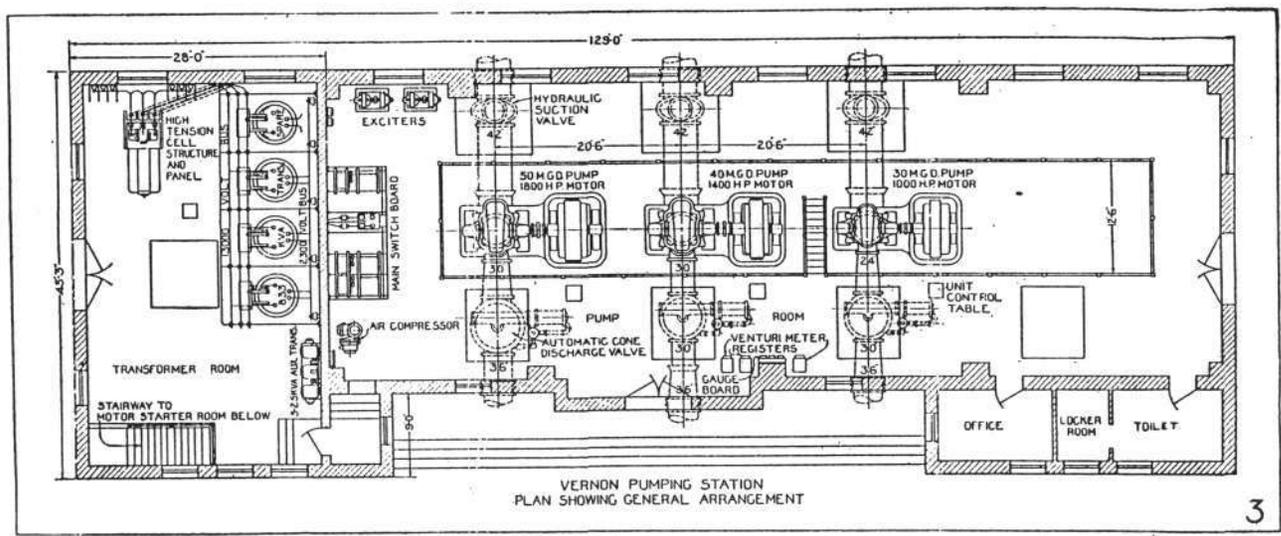
During the latter part of August a decision to abandon the idea of supplying Reisterstown from the Pikesville Station was reached and instructions received from the Chief Engineer's office to proceed with the issuance of the plans and specifications in the manner in which they were prepared; shortly before these instructions were received, the Consolidated Gas, Electric Light and Power Company entered into negotiations with the City for the purchase of a piece of property included in the Bureau of Water Supply's right of way to the Pikesville Reservoir, for the installation of a gas booster station and appurtenant works, and at the instance of this Division one of the considerations for the property desired by the Gas Company was the building of a suitable crossing over the tracks of the United Railways, together with the construction of a roadway leading up to the site of the proposed water pumping station.

Negotiations for the construction of the roadway occupied a period of time all out of proportion to the amount of work involved and largely as a result of this, the plans for the pumping station were not released by this Division until October 21, 1930. Following this date, about two weeks delay was incurred in getting the approval of all bodies interested in the execution of the work and bids were finally opened on November 26th. Eight bids were received, the Mullan Contracting Company being the low bidder at a total bid price of \$7,980.00, this including an item for excavating fifty cubic yards of rock at a unit price of \$10.00 per yard. At the instance of the Public Improvement Commission, the bid of the Mullan Contracting Company was rejected on the grounds of excessive unit prices for rock excavation, and this Commission recommended that all bids be rejected and the specifications redrawn so as to eliminate unit prices for rock excavation, with the stipulation that the excavation of all classes of material be included in the lump sum bid. These changes were made and the project was readvertised for bids which were opened on December 21st. Nine bids were received and DeCon and Chidlaw were the low bidder, with a lump sum price for all work to be done of \$6,949.00.

BDPW 1930

B-1309

B-1309



PLAN VIEW OF VERNON PUMPING STATION SHOWING GENERAL ARRANGEMENT WITH SPACE PROVIDED FOR A FOURTH UNIT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS







VERNON  
PUMPING  
STATION

ANNO DOMINI  
MCMXX

B-1309

VERNON PUMPING STATION

BALTIMORE CITY, MD

K. CULHANE

8/1999

MD SHPO

FACADE / W. ELEVATION . VIEW TO E / NE



B-1309

VERNON PUMPING STATION

BALTIMORE, MD

K. CULLANE

8/1999

MD SHPO

3/4 VIEW TO N/NE



B-1309

VERNON PUMPNG STATION

BALTIMORE CITY, MD

K. CULHANE

8/1999

MD SHPO

FACADE DETAIL, W. ELEVATION. VIEW TO EAST.



B-1309

VERNON PUMPING STATION

BALTIMORE CITY, MD

K. CULLANE

8/1999

MD SHPO

N. ELEVATION. VIEW TO S / SW



B-1309

VERNON PUMPING STATION  
BALTIMORE CITY, MD

K CULHANE

8/1999

WDSHPD

3/4 VIEW OF S AND E ELEVATIONS. VIEW TO NW



B-1309

VERNON PUMPING STATION

BALTIMORE, MD

K. CULLANE

8/1999

MDSHAPO

DETAIL OF MODERN BRICKWORK IN BLIND BAYS - VIEW  
TO SW