

Preface

This is the story of how Philadelphia got safe drinking water—or safe so far as the medical standards of the time were concerned, the major culprit in the nineteenth century being typhoid. Today we are no longer quite so confident about our water, knowing that chemical waste from industrial plants poses a new threat—an irony since the chemical chlorine helped greatly to eliminate the danger of typhoid contamination. We know also now that even brand-new plumbing fixtures can poison our water if lead solder is used in violation of building codes, as apparently it was in many homes in the Philadelphia area according to a recent investigation. In short, safe is relative, and in the years examined here, it meant free from bacteriological infection.

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