



## **BOROUGH OF DOYLESTOWN** **BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

### **Doylestown Borough Water Department History and Information**

In 1851 a pro water Borough Council set about the task of introducing water to the citizens of Doylestown with water supplied from a central source. It was assumed, and rightly so, that a public system would not only provide a safer, more reliable water source but would increase property values and as such improve life for its citizens. A mill property located in the southeastern portion of the Borough was offered to the Borough by Samuel and George Hart who had obtained it in 1850.

After a deed was secured on January 27, 1851 a committee, appointed by Borough Council, was to explore the possibility of using latent springs that were thought to exist below the grounds surface. The idea of using the springs for source water was apparently in response to complaints lodged by the owners of a mill downstream, at the Turk and Bridge Point Dam, that feared removing water from the stream would affect their milling operation. The search for springs that produced water of sufficient quantity were never found. As the quest for water continued, another committee was appointed by Borough Council to find an eligible place for the erection of a basin for the proposed water works. The committee reported back to council that the only suitable location was part of the cemetery property. The initial attempt to garner an agreement failed but, on the 18th of August 1851, the cemetery trustees conveyed to the Borough a lot 115' X 125' with the right-of-way from the street for \$200.00 upon the condition the Borough would furnish and install piping that would furnish a flow sufficient to produce a ½" stream of water for a fountain and install a hydrant. The cemetery would be billed \$10.00 per annum.

With the site secured, Council set about hiring a contractor to build the basin. The Philadelphia firm of Sidney and Neff was awarded the contract on September 15th 1851 for \$1200.00. The basin was to be constructed by depositing a two foot thick layer of clay against an earthen berm and atop the clay, brick set on edge that would cover the whole surface. In January 1852, at the request of the contractor, work on the basin was suspended until spring. However something else also happened in the spring- elections for Borough Council. Pro water council members found themselves voted out and replaced by anti-water members. At the May 1852 council meeting it was resolved that no further work would be done on the water system and a committee would be appointed to investigate the actions of the previous council in regards to their purchasing the mill property.

For the next 18 years work on the water system progressed no further. However in 1869 Borough Council solicited bids for the construction of an artesian well. There is no indication that bids, even if received, were let.

At a council meeting on April 22, 1869 the boroughs civil engineer, Mr. W E Morris reported that the water system, should it be completed at a cost little more than \$20,000" plus an additional \$3000 to \$4000 be expended for extra distribution piping and valves. One important item remained to be resolved- a reliable source of water.

A committee was organized to seek out and evaluate different sites. Each site came with its own problems from deficient supply to property owners unwilling to sell their land. In Mr. Morris report to Borough Council on June 1, 1869 he concluded that the Borough should reexamine the borough mill property and consider using the headwaters from the stream, before it entered the dam to avoid the impurities that collect in the dam. As part of the conveyance from Samuel

Hart the Borough had reserved the right to use two fresh water springs on the Winchester property, above the turnpike.

As quickly as the anti-water councils stopped work on the water works, the council members of 1869 revived the towns quest for a water system. There was, however, a small but determined group of residents that were still opposed to the idea of a water works. So upset was this band of citizens that on June 15, 1869 an advertisement was placed in the paper calling all tax payers to a meeting at the Court House to discuss the extravagant water scheme of the Council and the creation of a Borough debt that was beyond means of payment. Ironically, on the same day the Borough was asking for sealed bids to provide materials and labor to finish the water system. At the taxpayers meeting residents were concerned that costs for the completion of the water system being provided by Council were approximately the same as those quoted 20 years prior. Anti-water citizens protested that work to complete the project would surely go beyond the \$20,000 to \$25,000 estimate from Mr. Morris and the town would be left with great debt and an uncompleted water system. A system, they pointed out, that would leave the majority of borough streets without water mains. A system that all were expected to pay for but not all would benefit from. The anti-water taxpayers called for a stop to the intended sale of bonds to help pay for the system that would effectually scotch the snake.

The question of water service in Doylestown continued into the summer of 1869 with proponents forging ahead laying water mains, installing coal fired steam driven pumps, and completing cisterns to collect water from springs around the mill property. The total capacity of the springs were estimated to be 75 gallons per minute, an amount that was to be enough to supply the population for years to come. The springs would be conducted through terra cotta pipe to the cistern from there the water would be pumped through a 10" water main (located in what is now Borough Mill Hill Road) to State Street then up Church Street to Court and finally discharged into the basin.

On October 5, 1869, 18 years after it work was first commenced on the construction of a community water system in Doylestown Borough, water was lifted by a Worthington Hydraulic Works Company duplex steam pump and delivered to the basin at a rate of 350 gallons per minute at a steady pressure of 28 psi .

The cost? Mr. Morris estimate was close. When water began to flow the bills totaled around \$30,000.

In September of 1869 Mr. W. E. Smith was appointed Superintendent of Water Pipes. His function was to introduce a supply of public water onto properties within the Borough of Doylestown at the request of Borough Council on behalf of property owners. He was also obliged to maintain and keep from freezing all fireplugs. Water rents were based on the type of building.... The charge for an ordinary 2 or 3 story dwelling was \$10.00 per year, for a second class house \$8.00. Bathtubs were \$3.00 and water closets \$4.00.

There are still remnants from the original water system:

The stone wall at the cemetery is the site of the original basin. When it was first constructed the basin was uncovered. As citizens became more aware of health problems the basin was covered. Eventually the basin was filled in and a wooden stave standpipe erected. Through the years standpipes came and went, each being replaced by one of newer technology. The standpipe that is in place today was constructed in 1966. It has a capacity of 1,000,000 gallons. A chamber that is integrated into the stone wall of the reservoir was for the temporary storage of

the deceased while they awaited burial.

The Borough Dam, cistern and water works building are located in Chapman Park and were part of the original mill property. The original millstone is embedded in a sycamore tree in the front of the water works building. Water contained in one of the original cisterns is still available for use by the fire company.

One of the springs that were used to initially supply water is still active and flows through a pipe into the borough dam. An original springhouse is located in the southeastern part of Chapman Park.

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