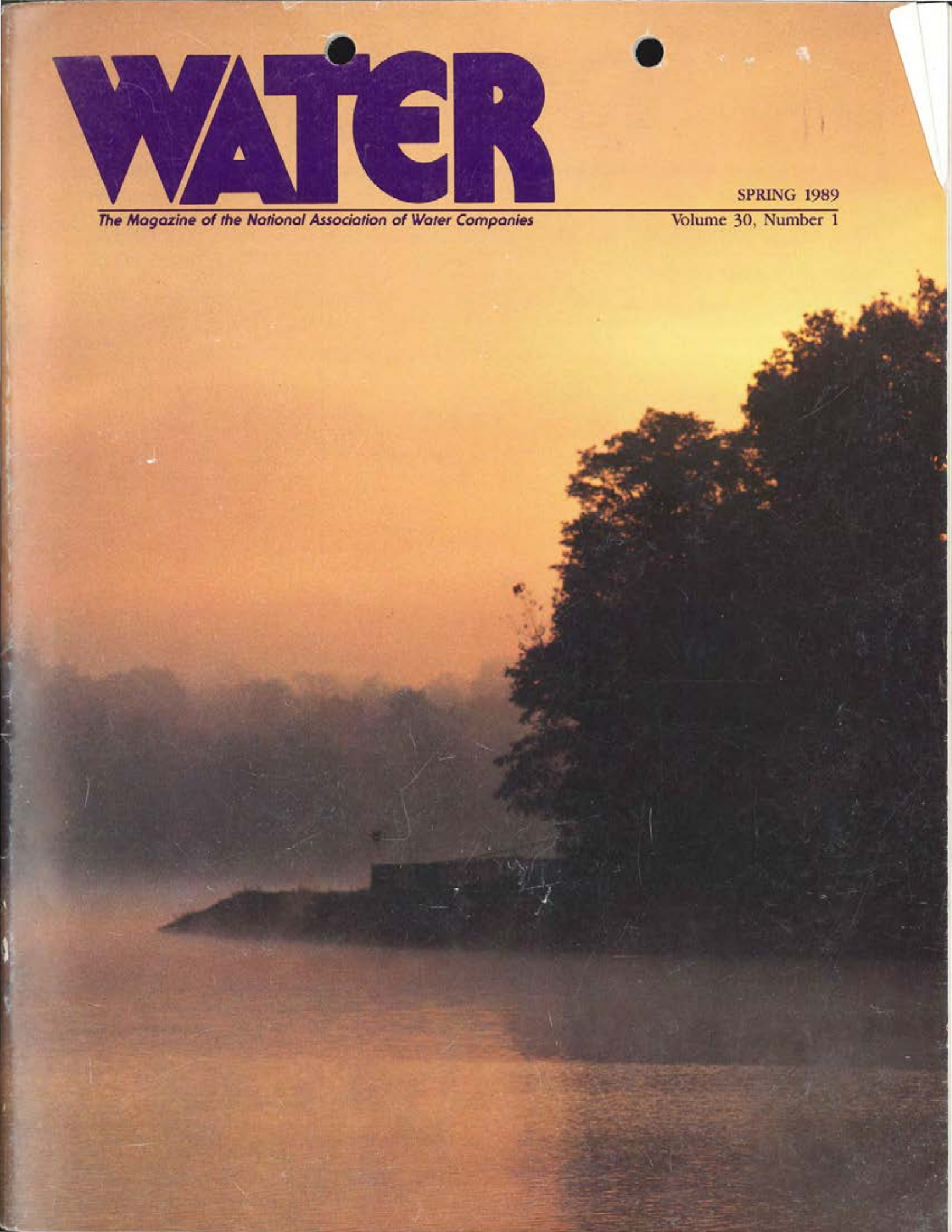


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Water Museum Opens in Peoria



Illinois-American Pump Station #1, now the Illinois Historical Water Museum.

Did you know that wooden logs were actually used as water pipes around the turn of the century? Or that most pumps used to supply a community with water in the early 1900's were powered by steam?

Most visitors entering the Illinois Historical Water Museum don't—at least not until they've had the chance to see a variety of such historical exhibits and photographs, showing some of the equipment and techniques used years ago to furnish communities with a supply of good drinking water.

The Illinois Historical Water Museum, sponsored by the Illinois Section of the American Water Works Association, was unveiled during grand opening ceremonies this summer at Illinois-American Water Company's Illinois River Treatment Plant in Peoria. Housed in a century-old pumping station adorned with copper flashing and guarded by four ferocious gargoyles, the museum has done a brisk business, hosting over 800 visitors since its opening in June.

"We've even had some visitors from as far away as India, Rhode Island and Ohio," said Sue Atherton, Community and Employee Relations Manager for Illinois-American, and the creator and curator of the museum.

The water company in Peoria became

host to the museum after learning in early 1986 that the Illinois section of AWWA was looking for a place to house the museum.

Illinois-American volunteered its unique pumping house, which was built in 1890 and is listed on the National Register of Historical Places, along with two other buildings at the river treatment plant.

"It's something we, as a company, really wanted to do," added Atherton. "A lot of technology has changed as water systems are updated, and a lot of old artifacts have been lost. We're trying to preserve what we have."

The museum exhibits are laid out in circular fashion around the old steam engine pumping pit and are grouped into five categories: laboratory equipment, production methods and equipment, commercial displays, distribution materials and historical photographs and exhibits.

"What we're trying to do is show some of the old equipment that was used, and then side-by-side, show the new equipment we've replaced it with," said Atherton.

Exhibit items have been collected from water utilities all over the state, while new items are being prepared for future display.

"This is really phase one of the project," added Atherton. "By next spring we hope to have additional rooms in the pumping house tower open for exhibit space. The AWWA Illinois Section meeting is in Peoria next April, so we're working towards that date."

Some of the exhibits already on display are old distribution items, including a collection of fire hydrants—some collector's items over 100 years old. There are several sections of wooden water pipe, bound in wire or metal straps, on display; and cutaway, working models of valves and fire hydrants that visitors can operate to see how these items actually work.

Another section of the museum features a pictorial history of the river treatment plant, with its brass and walnut trimmed steam engines and picnics and floods in Water Works Park. On an opposite wall, photographs and the story of the Great Standpipe Disaster of 1894 comprise one of the more popular displays.

"We've tried to appeal to various age groups and to people who may have previously known nothing about water treatment or a water works system," said Atherton. "We've had a variety of visitors, from school groups and civic organizations to Boy Scouts and neighborhood groups."

Some of the exhibits are specifically geared to children and school groups, with booklets, maps, coloring books, sunvisors and other handouts given out to make the visit, and water treatment, more understandable as well as interesting and enjoyable.

Some of the success of the museum Atherton attributes to the excellent publicity the museum has received through the media, company billing inserts and word-of-mouth. Several television and radio stations covered the grand opening, and local newspapers have done news stories and feature articles on the museum. Some members of the Peoria Historical Society were so impressed at the grand opening that the museum was selected as the site of the Society's September meeting and was host to 65 of its members. ♠