HISTORY

OF

ERIE COUNTY,

PENNSYLVANIA.

CONTAINING A HISTORY OF THE COUNTY; ITS TOWNSHIPS, TOWNS, VILLAGES, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, INDUSTRIES, ETC.; PORTRAITS OF EARLY SETTLERS AND PROMINENT MEN; BIOGRAPHIES; HISTORY OF PENNSYLVANIA, STATISTICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS MATTER, ETC., ETC.

VOLUME I

ILLUSTRATED.

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Health Officer.—Dr. E. W. Germer has filled this position from 1872 up to the present time.

Superintendents of Streets and Sidewalks.—1879–80, Matthias Detzel; 1881–82, John Warren; 1883, James Leask.

WATER WORKS.

The first water works in Erie were a small affair consisting merely of a line of wooden pipes, or "pump logs," laid to convey the water into town by gravitation, and distribute it to several small public reservoirs provided for fire purposes, and to a very small number of private patrons, the water being obtained from a large spring on the Reed farm or "Berst place," just south of the Buffalo road and west of Parade street. These works, constructed in 1841, though insignificant in comparison with those of to-day, were useful in their time, but were discontinued upon the construction of the present ones. By the legislative act, approved March 16, 1865, John W. Shannon with certain other citizens of Erie were incorporated under the title of the "Erie Water and Gas Company," and soon afterward organized for business. The authorized capital was $100,000, but the company was privileged to increase its capital to any amount necessary to build and maintain water and gas works at Erie.

On the 16th of July, 1866, the City Councils appointed a committee to procure the services of a competent engineer "to examine and report to the Councils plans for both sewerage and water." H. P. M. Birkinbine, of Philadelphia, Penn., was secured, and made a report February 23, 1867, which put the cost of erecting water works at $350,000, the water to be taken from the bay of Presque Isle.

On the 11th of March, 1867, the Councils directed the Mayor to make a contract with the "Erie Water and Gas Company," to supply the city with water for twenty years, beginning July 1, 1868, or as soon thereafter as the works could be completed, but obliging said company to finish the same within two years from the date of contract. The city agreed to pay an annual rent of $9,000 for fifty fire plugs, but said Water and Gas Company was not to commence the erection of the works for one year from the date of contract, while the city reserved the right of erecting its own water works provided it began their construction within the year, said contract to be void in such case. It also reserved the right of purchasing any works that might be erected by this company, at any time within five years from date of contract. Nothing came of this arrangement, as the city subsequently concluded to erect its own water works.

Much opposition was aroused against the proposed improvement, and the assertion freely made that besides the works being too expensive the water from the bay was unfit for domestic uses, because the bay was the natural reservoir for the filth and sewerage of the city. Many advocated bringing the water from Lake Pleasant, or from the springs and head-waters of the streams south of Erie. The majority, however, were in favor of erecting the works on the bay, and an act was procured and approved April 4, 1867, providing for the appointment of three "Water Commissioners" to control the erection, maintenance and management of water works in Erie, the city to furnish money for said Commissioners to carry out the proposed improvement. Under this act, William L. Scott, Henry Rawle and William W. Reed were appointed by the court, and organized June 14, 1867. Mr. Birkinbine was selected as the engineer to plan and superintend the construction of the works. After examining the plans used in several cities, the Commissioners adopted in July that in operation in Detroit, Mich. but in September it was dis-

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carded in favor of the present plan devised and recommended by Mr. Birkinbine.

The location of the stand-pipe at the foot of Chestnut street was agreed upon in November, 1867, and a contract was made for the engines the same month, with the West Engine Company, of Norristown, Penn. In December, 1867, the contract for the stand-pipe was given to the Erie City Iron Works; early in 1868, John M. Kuhn was awarded the erection of the buildings and stand-pipe tower, while at the same time Capt. James Dunlap was given the crib work. The work began April 7, 1868, and progressed steadily and rapidly. In May, 1868, William L. Scott was succeeded as Water Commissioner by John C. Selden. At the close of 1868, one engine began pumping, and by the end of 1869 the works were completed, consisting of an engine house, a boiler house, stand pipe tower, smoke-stack, crib-work, and machinery, at a total cost of about $675,000.

The engine house is a solid brick structure, with stone foundation, 30x35 feet square and sixty-five feet in height, surmounted by an octagonal turret fourteen feet high. The boiler house is 50x60 feet square and twelve feet high; smoke-stack fourteen feet square at the bottom and 100 feet in height, with a draft of twenty-five feet. The stand-pipe tower, built to inclose the stand-pipe, is octagonal in shape. Forty-five feet above its foundation, throughout which distance the tower is brick, a belt of stone five feet high is placed; thence upward it is a circular brick tower. Its total height is 217 feet, and its total elevation 237 feet above the surface of the bay, while an additional sixteen feet has been added to the stand-pipe since its erection, making it 253 feet above the water level—the highest stand-pipe in the world. A spiral stairway in the interior ascends to the top of the tower, which is suitably decked and inclosed by an iron railing. The visitor may here obtain the finest view imaginable of the city, harbor and lake.

The works are operated by two "Cornish Bull" engines of the finest make, driven by eight double-flue boilers. The pumping capacity of these works is about 5,000,000 gallons daily, but at present one engine is usually found sufficient for pumping purposes, the Commissioners wisely saving the other to guard against accidents which might cut off the water supply. The most marked feature of the Erie Water Works are their completeness, solidity, and durability, combined with cheapness of construction and efficiency, which is unquestionably due to the genius of the accomplished engineer who planned and supervised the building of them, as well as to the Water Commissioners in charge at the time, more especially William W. Reed, whose whole time and attention was devoted to the enterprise from the beginning of the works until their completion.

The reservoir located on Twenty-sixth street, between Chestnut and Cherry, has a capacity of 33,000,000 gallons. In the fall of 1872, the Water Commissioners purchased seven acres of land at that point, whereon they constructed the reservoir, the bottom of which is 210 feet above the surface of the bay, while the water is kept at an average depth of twenty-five feet. At the present time the city has forty-three miles of water mains, and 213 fire hydrants, which affords a first-class water supply for all purposes. The water is taken from between two piers, at about midway between the surface and the bottom of the bay, in a depth of twelve feet; and December 31, 1882, there were 4,687 patrons on the books of the department.

Since the works were finished, many improvements have been made, one of the most important being the putting in of new boilers in 1880, their removal further south in the building and the construction of a switch railroad track

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running through the center of the building between the engine room and the boilers, whereby car loads of coal are brought right to the furnace doors, and all laborious handling and hauling done away with. Up to 1883, no special effort was made to improve the grounds around the water works, but the Commissioners in office this year began the work of improvement, and have progressed so far as to complete the road down the hill, also grade and sod the bank to a point half way between Chestnut and Myrtle streets, the limit of their jurisdiction, and sod the lower portion of the grounds. Trees have been planted all over the grounds, under control of the department, while the whole has been laid out under a general plan, in contemplation of a drive way being built along the bay front of the city.

The Water Commissioners since the establishment of the works have been as follows: William L. Scott, 1867–68; Henry Rawle, 1867–72; William W. Reed, 1867–79; John C. Selden, 1868–72; Mathew R. Barr, 1872–77; John Gensheimer, 1872–78, J. M. Bryant, 1878–81; M. Liebel, 1877–83; G. W. F. Sherwin, 1879–85; Benjamin Whitman, 1881–84.

The following exhibit shows the amount of coal consumed, cost of coal, water pumped, etc., from the construction of the works to the close of 1882:

YEARS.	Tons Coal Consumed.	Cost of Coal.	Gallons of Water Pumped.	Gallons Raised to the Reservoir by one pound of Coal.
1868	59.1	$ 309 61	.....	.....
1869	544.4	4,818 48	.....	.....
1870	1,064.5	5,159 10	246,648,960	.....
1871	1,422.7	7,117 00	279,868,495	168.45
1872	1,808.5	6,528 50	395,076,000	150.96
1873	1 672.5	8,412 65	384,062,415	114.81
1874	1,759.0	7,709 54	444,817,395	126.44
1875	1,886.4	8,657 61	581,005.475	145 57
1876	1,856.0	8.925 22	670,726,650	180.68
1877	2,456.6	8,509 38	660,981,810	135.74
1878	2,463.8	7,945 37	682,892,815	136.49
1879	2,628.1	7,428 92	807,800,400	153.68
1880	3,076.1	6,978 41	775,805,250	126.01
1881	3,480.3	6,517 58	975,640,984	142.20
1882	2.968 2	5,355 93	829,759,260	139.77

This exhibit shows the amount of water rents collected each year since the commencement of the works to the close of 1882:

	Amount Received.
From January 1, 1869, to December 31, 1869	$4,264 47
From January 1, 1870, to December 31, 1870	9,287 30
From January 1, 1871, to December 31, 1871	18,138 08
From January 1, 1872, to December 31, 1872	21.652 68
From January 1, 1873, to December 31, 1873	25,560 40
From January 1, 1874, to December 31, 1874	27,958 90
From January 1, 1875, to December 31, 1875	29,639 38
From January 1, 1876, to December 31, 1876	31,048 76
From January 1, 1877, to December 31, 1877	32,276 57
From January 1, 1878, to December 31, 1878	29,686 01
From January 1, 1879, to December 31, 1879	33,343 20
From January 1, 1880, to December 31, 1880	37,385 00
From January 1, 1881, to December 31, 1881	40.385 87
From January 1, 1882, to December 31, 1882	43,818 73
Total water rents received	$384,380 35

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