NELSON'S

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

... AND ...

.. Historical Reference Book ..

... OF ...

ERIE COUNTY,

Pennsylvania.

Containing a Condensed History of Pennsylvania, of Erie County, and of the Several Cities, Boroughs and Townships in the County;

—ALSO—

Portraits and Biographies of the Governors since 1790, and of Numerous Representative Citizens.

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CHAPTER IV.

Water, Fire and Police Departments.

THE earliest step towards securing a public supply of water for Erie was in 1835, when the borough was authorized by act of Assembly to borrow $50,000 for the purpose. The project was never carried out, and the town continued to depend for fire protection, as it had for a number of years, upon wells or tanks sunk at the intersections of the principal streets. In dry seasons men with carts sometimes supplied the citizens with water from the springs, streams, bay or lake, according to the use it was intended for.

In 1840 or '41 the city constructed its first "water works," if such they can be called. They consisted of lines of pump-logs laid in some of the most thickly built-up streets. The supply was taken from a large spring on the Reed farm, south of Eighteenth street and west of Parade. Though comparatively insignificant, these simple gravity works were very useful in their day. They gradually ceased to be used, and were totally discontinued when the supply of the Reed House was taken from the present works.

THE SECOND STEP FORWARD.

In 1853 a movement was made in Councils to supercede the pump-log system with something more in accordance with the demands of the people. After making a preliminary survey, the matter was allowed to rest until 1865, when, by an act of the Legislature, John W. Shannon and certain other citizens, were incorporated under the name and style of the "Erie Water and Gas Company." The company shortly afterward organized in accordance with the provisions of the general law of the State relative to the formation and organization of gas and water companies, approved March 11, 1857. By their charter the Erie Water and Gas Company were privileged to have a capital of $100,000, to build and maintain gas and water works, to increase the capital to an amount sufficient to cover the cost of erecting works, and to furnish and contract to furnish water and gas to individual persons, corporations, etc. The Mayor and Councils of the city of Erie and the Commissioners of Erie county were authorized to contract with said company for supplies of water and gas.

On the 16th of July, 1866, the City Councils appointed a committee to engage the services of a competent engineer "to examine and report plans for both sewerage and water." H. P. M. Birkinbine, of Philadelphia, was secured, and made a report February 23, 1867, which put the cost of erecting water works at $350,000, the supply to be taken from the bay. March 9, 1867, the Erie Gas Company, then, as now, supplying light to the city, secured an act supplementary to their charter, authorizing them, in conformity with the provisions of the general law of March 11, 1857, to introduce water wherever they were authorized to introduce gas. This was done as a sort of checkmate to the new company.

A CONTRACT AUTHORIZED.

Two days after this act had been approved by the Governor, the City Councils passed a resolution directing the Mayor to enter into a contract with the Erie Water and Gas Company to supply the city with water for fire purposes for twenty years, from July 1, 1868, or as soon thereafter as the works could be completed, provided it should not be later than two years from the date of said contract; if not completed within that period the contract to be null and void. By this contract it was to be stipulated that the city should pay a yearly rental of $9,000 for fifty fire plugs, and the contract was to be further subject to the following conditions, viz.: that the said water and gas company should commence building within one year from the date of con-

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tract; and that, if within one year from the date thereof, the city should begin the construction of water works of sufficient capacity to supply the wants of the community, said contract should be annulled. The city was to have the right at any time within five years to purchase the works of the company on certain specified terms. The contract thus proposed was duly entered into, but was never carried out.

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

The scheme of taking water from the bay was strongly opposed by a large number of citizens, who advocated a resort to the springs on the ridge south of Erie, and other streams rising on the same ridge or near it, or to Mill creek, or to the head waters of French creek, or to Lake Pleasant. It was argued that the water of the bay, on account of its liability to contamination from the inflow of sewers and of the canal, then in operation, was not fit, or at least not likely long to remain fit, for use for drinking and culinary purposes, and it was further urged, as a great objection to the plan, that the cost of pumping would be large and continuous.

The other side contended that there were no springs of sufficient size to give an adequate supply; that the nearby streams were no purer, or would not be for any length of time, than the bay water; that Lake Pleasant was a small body, which would be exhausted as the city grew in size, and besides, would require a pumping station, the same as if the supply were taken from the bay; and that the pumpage from the bay would cost no more in the long run than would the dams, reservoirs, etc., which it would be necessary to construct in order to bring in and render available by gravity, at a head sufficient to serve all purposes, the water of the various sources named.

The strife about these, and questions of paving, sewerage, etc., was carried on with considerable feeling, and several public meetings were held to discuss the points in dispute. The Mayor's election of 1867, when Orange Noble was chosen, was made to turn mainly upon this issue. It resulted in the triumph of the party in favor of immediate and extensive city improvement.

NEW LEGISLATION SECURED.

Strengthened by the verdict of the election, the friends of the present system of water works immediately applied to the Legislature for an act authorizing their construction. The act of April 4th, 1867, followed. It is entitled "A further supplement to the charter of the city of Erie, to provide for the appointment of Water Commissioners, and to define their powers and duties." This act made it the duty of the Judge of the Court of Common Pleas to appoint three persons as Commissioners of Water Works—one to serve one year, one two years, and one three years—and one to be named annually thereafter at the May term of Court. The first appointees were William L. Scott, Henry Rawle and William W. Reed. On June 29, 1867, the Board was permanently organized by the election of William W. Reed as President, and the appointment of William Brewster as Secretary. 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 that in operation in Detroit, Mich., but in September it was abandoned for the present system.

WORK BEGUN.

The location of the works at the foot of Chestnut street was agreed upon in November, and in the same month a contract for a pair of "Cornish Bull" engines was made with the West Engine Company, of Norristown, Pa. In December the contract for the stand-pipe was awarded to the Erie City Iron Works, and early in 1868 contracts were let for the buildings, including the stand-pipe tower, to John M. Kuhn, and for the crib work of the inlet or conduit from the bay, to James Dunlap. The excavation for the foundation was commenced April 7, 1868, and from that time the work of construction made steady and rapid progress. The raising of the iron stand-pipe, a straight wrought-iron tube five feet in diameter and 217 feet high, was a feat worthy of special record. It was accomplished in a way suggested by George Selden, of the Erie City Iron Works, by the use of heavy blocks and tackle rigged on a derrick. The top of the pipe was first raised a short distance and stayed. The next lower section was then put on, and so, section by section, until the full height of the pipe was reached. Around this pipe the brick tower was afterward built. It

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rests on a very heavy foundation of stone, octagonal in shape, which extends with tapering sides to a height of thirty-one feet above the level of the lake. Its base area is a circle of twenty-four feet. Forty-five feet above the top of this foundation—the intervening distance being built of brick—is a belt course of stone five feet high, and from thence the stand-pipe is a circle, inside of which is a spiral staircase to the top of the platform, which is fourteen feet in diameter, enclosed by a substantial iron railing for the safety of visitors. The tower is lighted by nine windows. It is claimed that the stand-pipe is the highest for its purpose in the world. By additions made since the original stand-pipe was erected, its height above the zero level of the bay is nearly 260 feet.

A RESERVOIR ASKED FOR.

In 1870 the Commissioners called the attention of the City Councils to the immediate necessity of purchasing a site for a reservoir. This recommendation resulted the next year in the purchase of about seven acres of land from the Cochran estate, on the south side of Twenty-sixth street, between Chestnut and Cherry. The work was completed in 1874. The bottom of the reservoir is 210 feet above the surface of the bay; the height of its sides is twenty-eight feet perpendicular, and it holds about 34,000,000 gallons, or enough for six days' supply to the city, under average conditions, with the present population. The water is forced to the reservoir from the pumping station through two pipes, one twenty inches and the other thirty inches in diameter.

THE OLD ENGINES AND THE NEW.

The first engines purchased—two in number—were of the kind known as the "Cornish Bull Engine," originally designed by the celebrated inventor, James Watt. Their pumping capacity is, single, 2,500,000 gallons per day; double, 4,000,000.

In 1885 the Commissioners became convinced that the limit of safety in the matter of water supply had been almost reached, and that an additional pump must be provided. The following year a contract was made with the Holly Manufacturing Company, of Lockport, N. Y., for a Gaskill engine of 5,000,000 gallons capacity per diem. The contract price was $24,850 for engine and foundation. The work of building a new engine house and placing the new pumping engine in position was completed early in 1887, and the machine accepted June 11 of the same year. The engine is one of the most wonderful in existence, having performed a duty that has seldom or never been surpassed.

In 1892, the demands upon the works requiring more pumping capacity, the Commissioners contracted for a Worthington horizontal compound condensing high duty engine, of 12,000,000 gallons capacity, the price, set in place, to be $46,300. An additional engine house, to accommodate the new engine, was built in 1893, and the engine itself was accepted January 6, 1894.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The original intake pipe extended but a short distance into the bay. In the fall and winter of 1895 a new and larger pipe was laid to deep water in the bay, with the ultimate purpose of carrying it through the peninsula into the open lake. It is made of wrought iron and laid in a trench, dug by steam dredges, in the bottom of the bay. The size of the pipe is sixty inches interior diameter, and its length will be 8,200 feet, to twenty-three feet of water in Big Bend.

The improvement of the grounds around the works, resulting in a beautiful little park, was begun in 1883, under Commissioners Liebel, Sherwin and Whitman.

The cost of constructing the works, up to December 31, 1894, inclusive of street piping, fire hydrants, house connections, etc., was $1,311,781, of which $685,677, in bonds, were advanced by the city, which were subject, when sold, to a considerable discount. The balance of the cost has been paid from the net earnings of the works.

The gallons of water pumped each year were 384,062,415 in 1873; 815,939,685 in 1883; and 1,816,596,518 in 1894.

The receipts from water rents were $25,500 in 1873; $48,269 in 1883; and $111,822 in 1894—the latter sum being collected, with slight changes, under the rules and regulations adopted by the Board in 1885.

The length of water mains in the streets of the city was a little over 89 miles in 1894, and the number of fire hydrants set in place 479.

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OFFICERS OF THE DEPARTMENT.

One Water Commissioner is appointed by the Court of Erie county in May of each year. The Commissioners from the beginning of the works have been as follows:

1867 to '68—Wm. L. Scott.
1867 to '72—Henry Rawle.
1867 to '79—Wm. W. Reed.
1868 to '72—John C. Selden.
1876 to '77—Matthew R. Barr.
1872 to '78—John Gensheimer.
1877 to '81—M. Liebel.
1878 to '81—J. M. Bryant.
1879 to '85—G. W. F. Sherwin.
1881 to '87—Benjamin Whitman.
1885 to '90—George W. Starr.
1886 to '91—C. Kessler.
1887 to date—C. J. Brown.
1891 to date—Wm. Hardwick.
1892 to date—T. W. Shacklett.

The Secretaries and Treasurers of the Board have been as follows: Wm. Brewster, appointed June 14, 1867; John C. Perkins, October 26, 1868; B. F. Sloan, January 1, 1879; William Himrod, June 1, 1891 (present incumbent).

The official who has been longest in the employ of the department is George C. Gensheimer, who was appointed Clerk April, 1877, and promoted to be Assistant Secretary in 1883.

SALARIES.

The salaries paid the Water Commissioners and their principal employes in 1895 were given as below in the City Manual for that year:

Commissioners—Wm. Hardwick, C. J. Brown, T. W. Shacklett	$4.00 per day,
Secretary and Treasurer—Wm. Himrod.	$2,000.00
Assistant Secretary—Geo. C. Gensheimer	1,440.00
Bookkeepers—John Kolb	1,080.00
R. H. Bear	960.00
W. W. Todd	840.00
Clerk—M. L. Whitley	660.00
Inspectors—John D. Spafford	815.00
Wm. McCleery	780.00
P. F. Weinheimer	780.00
Meter Taker—Perry E. Thurber	780.00
Supt. of Street Work—R. T. Walker	1,320.00
per day	2.75
Foremen of Street Work—Fred'k Simons and Fred'k D. Gross, each, per day	2.75
Chief Engineer—F. A. Roth	1,320.00
Assistant Engineers—Geo. R. Miller	960.00
John Kelly	960.00
Firemen—R. W. Simons	660.00
Joseph Burns	660.00
Jacob Mullen	660.00
Watchman at Pumping Station—Michael Flynn	660.00
Janitor at Pumping Station—Nathan Block	600.00
Keeper of Reservoir—Samuel Phister	480.00

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

The earliest movement of which there is any record to secure fire protection in Erie was on February 22, 1826, when the Active Fire Company was organized. Its roll of membership included nearly all the grown male residents of the borough. R. S. Reed was president and chief engineer; Daniel Dobbins, second engineer; E. D. Gunnison, secretary, and John Riddell, treasurer. The company was first furnished with buckets, but subsequently the town purchased a small fire engine, which did service for some years. Its supply of water was taken from wells and tanks sunk at the street intersections.

Other companies of later date were as follow: Red Jacket Fire Company No. 1, organized in 1837; Perry and Eagle Fire Companies, in 1839; Mechanics, No. 3, in 1844; Vulcan, in 1848; Phœnix Hook and Ladder Company, in 1852; Parade Street Company, in 1861.

The first city fire organization with general officers was formed in 1851, but was not very effective. As the population increased and fires became more numerous, the people grew clamorous for a more efficient fire organization. In 1861 the steamer "Keystone," a third-class Amoskeag, was purchased and used for a period of twenty years when it was sold to parties in Conneaut, Ohio. Some time afterward the steamer "McLane," named after Erie's gallant soldier-citizen, Col. John W. McLane, was procured. This was ultimately sold to the Silsby Manufacturing Company, of Seneca Falls, N. Y., in part payment for the steamer "D. T. Jones," of that make.

THE PAID DEPARTMENT.

The fire apparatus of the city was operated under a volunteer system until March, 1871, when the latter was replaced by a paid department, which has been growing in effi-

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