

WAYNE INDEPENDENT

Heat, light and water come to Honesdale

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Editor's note: This is another "best of" column which was written by the late Gloria McCullough.

Coal, transported from the Carbondale area by means of the gravity railroad, was the fuel used to heat homes in Honesdale. By the 1850s coal gas technology was being developed and community leaders were studying the feasibility of forming a gas company. In March of 1854 the Honesdale Gas Company was chartered by the state legislature and the company was organized in November of that year but the managers failed to negotiate a contract to begin construction and that initial attempt failed.

An agreement was finally completed in May of 1855 to build the gas works

and put the system in operation at a cost of \$30,000. The contractors were S. A. Dickson and James M. Porter.

By November it was announced that most of the pipes or "mains" had been laid and the building at the eastern end of Fifth Street was almost complete and the gasometer ready for operation. Gas service was introduced for the first time on January 22, 1856.

Unfortunately, a problem soon developed. Service had to be suspended by late February because ice that had formed in the gasometer disconnected it from the street mains. The pipes then filled with water and it a long time before repairs could be made and service restored. However, once that initial hurdle was surmounted, the operation continued with relatively little trouble.

The next matter of public concern to be addressed was street lighting. Darkness fosters crime and general mischief so in the spring of 1858 a petition requesting street lighting was presented to the town council.

Despite the fact that the petition was started by the president of the gas company, it still had the support of two-thirds of the property owners of the borough.

Since providing street lights meant the expenditure of public funds there were some objections. Some residents felt that the public square should be re-fenced and beautified but the borough revenue was not enough to pay for both projects.

Although the town council decided to proceed with the new fence and improvements to public square, the issue of street lights remained a topic of concern. Proponents of the lighting project requested citizens to present their views in writing or in person at a council meeting.

In November of 1859 a contract with the gas company was signed. The agreement stated that the company would furnish gas at a cost of \$15 per annum per light and the number of lights could not exceed twenty. It was further stated that the company was required to keep the lights clean and to light them at nightfall and extinguish them at midnight.

Evidently the thinking was that no self-respecting criminal would be out and

about after midnight.

The Borough Council stated that if the residents would "at their proper cost, charge and expense erect and keep in good repair the lamp posts with proper lamps" and would connect them to the gas company pipes, the Borough would pay for the gas used. The cost to the Borough for the street lights was \$300 which was raised by a five-mill tax.

The need for a safe supply of drinking water to the town was a matter on which almost everyone was in agreement.

Throughout the 1850s, newspaper articles had addressed the lack of an adequate water system.

An act incorporating the Honesdale Water Company was passed in 1850 but the company failed and in 1852 a company known as the Jefferson Water Company was incorporated.

Their plan was to provide pure water to the town from various springs. No authority was granted to draw water from the area streams.

The Jefferson Water Company was under the impression that they had the rights to utilize these springs but once the task of laying the pipelines was begun disputes arose, laws suits were filed regarding the proprietorship of these springs and the project was abandoned.

Public demand for a clean water supply continued and in April of 1860 a meeting to discuss the matter was held at the Allen House but only five people attended.

In 1863 the Honesdale Water Company was again incorporated since the original charter had expired and work was finally begun. Their first source for water was a small brook that runs parallel to Beech Grove Road.

A small stone dam was constructed creating a reservoir with a capacity of 50,000 gallons of water. The water then flowed through wooden pipes to a distributing reservoir on the side of Beers Hill. A hill was chosen for the site of the reservoir to allow for adequate pressure for fighting fires.

The wooden pipes, sometimes called "tanks" were made of hemlock boards an inch and a half thick and were eight and a half inches square. These pipes were buried below the frost line. The water from the distributing reservoir was then sent to the street mains through six-inch pipes made of iron. It was soon apparent that this water system was inadequate to meet the needs of a growing community and a terra cotta line was installed along a hillside to Bolkcom's Creek to obtain a greater supply of water.

The water system was rebuilt several times over the years.

In 1903 the Honesdale Consolidated Water Company was formed by combining three companies: the Honesdale Water Company, the Wayne Citizens Water and Supply Company and the Consumers Water Company of Honesdale.