

# houston waterworks: its early development



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The original Houston Water Works was built in the year 1879 by the Houston Waterworks Co. The initial system was begun shortly after the organization of the company on April 15, 1879, and was completed by August of the same year.

The original waterworks consisted of a pumping plant to draw water directly from Buffalo Bayou and pump it directly into the water mains (using a Worthington duplex pump with a 12-inch bore), a pumping reservoir adjacent to the pumphouse and a system of underground mains for distribution. At the time that the Houston Water Works was established, Buffalo Bayou was described as "a clear, sparkling stream."

Until 1887, Buffalo Bayou was the sole source of water for the Houston system. But afterward, increased numbers of artesian wells came to supply most of the water. As Buffalo Bayou became more and more polluted through industrial and residential wastes, the artesian wells, with their greatly improved water quality, became the favored water source for the consumers.

However, the water company persisted from time to time in pumping bayou water into the mains, a prac-



**ORIGINAL PUMPING RESERVOIR** for Houston Water Works in 1879, located adjacent to Bayou Pumping Station near downtown, is in use in present system.

tice that made the entire privately-owned system very unpopular with the citizens. The city authorities and the waterworks management were constantly at odds with each other

The only visible remains of the original 1879 waterworks consist of a circular brick and concrete reservoir adjacent to the present-day Bayou Pumping Station. This structure, lo-

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“a practice that made the system very unpopular”

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over the occasional use of bayou water.

The disputes between the citizens and city officials on one hand and the water works management on the other were solved in 1906 when the City of Houston purchased the waterworks for \$901,700. From that time until the present, the city has operated the system.

cated near downtown Houston, was the original pumping reservoir for the 1879 water system.

The underground reservoir is 32 feet in diameter and is covered by a conical concrete roof known to have been in use at least as early as 1912. It continues to be used today as a sand trap for a well on the present water system. □□

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