

**1869 – AUBURN – 1969**

**100 Years a City**

**A Study in Community Growth**

PRODUCED BY

AUBURN HISTORY COMMITTEE

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1968

Printed by Twin City Printery, Lewiston, Maine

## Chapter 10

### THE DISTRICTS

#### PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

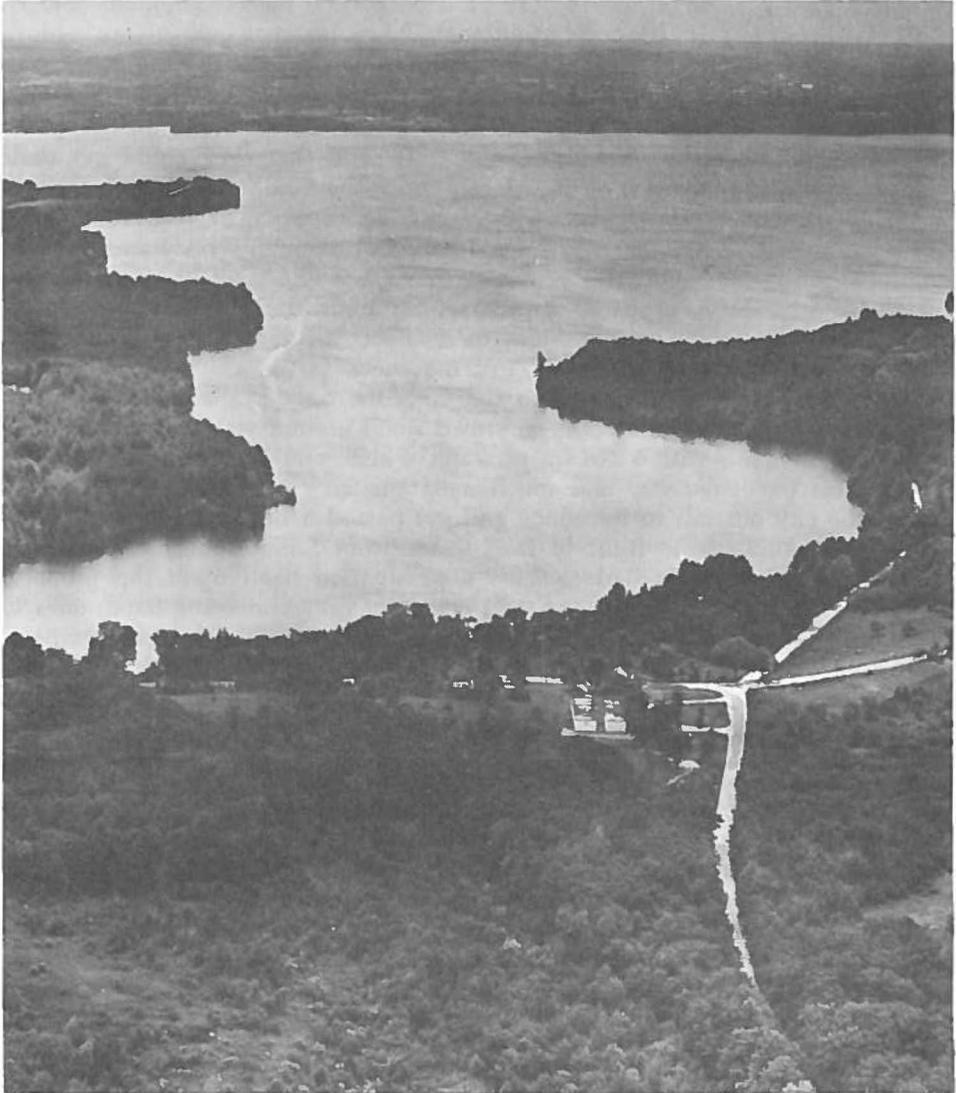
**T**HE first public water supply system in Auburn was instigated when three private citizens, Frank Jordan, Edward A. Little, and Joel Vickery, installed a log pipe line, in 1868, from a spring off Main Street, near the location of the present Central School, to their houses on Laurel Street. The eagerness with which their neighbors wished to connect to this line led the owners to form the Auburn Aqueduct Company, in 1869.

An act of legislature, in 1871, authorized this company to draw water from springs on Goff Hill. Pipe lines of bored logs were then laid to lower sections of the city.

In 1874, authority was granted by the legislature to take water from springs on the City Farm, now Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute, near the place where the present pumping station stands. A ten inch cast iron main was laid from these springs to the city at that time, and was still in use in 1968. The next year, the legislature authorized the company to take water from Wilson Pond, now known as Lake Auburn.

In 1878, the company entered into a contract with the City of Auburn for fire protection. The contract had these provisions: 1. "Said city shall pay the Auburn Aqueduct Company a sum of money equal to the expense of purchasing and putting in certain hydrants together with a sum of money equal to the difference in the expense of purchasing and laying a four inch pipe and such a pipe as said city may require. 2. Payment annually by said city to said Aqueduct Company of a sum of money equal to the taxes assessed by said city upon capital stock of said Aqueduct Company. 3. Said city shall pay to said Aqueduct Company the sum of two thousand dollars and pay all expense of changing or keeping said hydrants in good and reasonable repair in the future, and the Aqueduct Company further agrees in consideration of the above to furnish the city with water for one public watering trough."

In 1879, the first line (12 inches in diameter) was laid from the lake. This main was placed without engineering aid; and the grade was such that after completion and opening the gate at the lake, it was three weeks before water appeared down-town. The removal of air pockets from this line was always one of the major problems of the officials. A time book of that era indicates that the rate for the laborer was 10¢ an hour, whereas that for the foreman was 17½¢ per hour.



*Lake Auburn, source of the water supply for the cities of Auburn and Lewiston. This aerial view taken above "The Basin" at North Auburn and looking southeasterly.*

*Courtesy Auburn Water District*

## Difficulty Develops

Furnishing good service was not a virtue of the Aqueduct Company as can be illustrated by the attitude taken during the winter in the late 1880's. The line on Main Street froze, depriving all of the customers on this line of water. Upon their complaint to the company, they were told that they lived near the river, and that they could get their water from there for the rest of the winter; which they did.

In 1881, a steel stand-pipe, with a storage capacity of 500,000 gallons, was built on Beacon Avenue, near Lake Street; and the high service was put into operation. This stand-pipe was removed in 1908.

There had been growing dissatisfaction with the Aqueduct Company for several years which was brought to a climax with the "soap house" fire, around 1890. Because of the location of the check valve, which prevented the high pressure from going back into the lake, the only available hydrant was one on the low pressure system. The crowd stood around watching the firemen try to fight the fire with a stream of water which would barely run from the nozzle. This particular fire and much agitation from the citizens of Auburn, caused the city officials to introduce and get passed a bill in legislature giving the City of Auburn the right to take water from Lake Auburn. Before this could be done, the City had to have a revaluation fixed upon the property of the Auburn Aqueduct Company, and upon the valuation being fixed, offer to pay the Aqueduct Company the valuation which the Aqueduct Company could accept or reject. If they rejected it, then the City was at liberty to exercise its franchise granted under the act of 1891. The Commission named a figure of \$250,000 as the proper price to pay for the plant. By 1893, the transfer had been made.

## Commission Takes Over

To finance this purchase, and to make needed improvements to the system, the bonded debt of the City would exceed its legal limit. Therefore an act was passed to incorporate the Water Commission of the City of Auburn in the belief that the act would relieve the City of the entire obligation.

In the 1900's, a 24 inch main was laid into Lake Auburn and extended 3,000 feet to a well house on the then City Farm. Valves and screens were located there. From the well house, a 20 inch main was laid to the city. This line provided the gravity flow to lower parts of town. The 12 inch suction, or pump, line was connected to this main. In 1907, a 6½ million gallon concrete reservoir was built off Court Street on Merrill Hill and still served the city in 1968. This is at elevation 444 feet above sea level and 187 feet above lake elevation.

In 1921, plans were drawn up for a different layout for the high service.

A new pumping station was to be built at the lake, a new 16 inch main laid from there to the reservoir, and East Auburn supplied with water.

To finance this work, \$100,000.00 in bonds were sold. It was then decided by the lawyers to whom the certification of these bonds was referred, that these and all previous bonds were the direct responsibility of the city.

### Water District Is Formed

To relieve the City of Auburn of the indebtedness incurred during the existence of the Auburn Water Commission, the formation of the Auburn Water District was proposed. Judge Harry Manser drew up a charter which was presented to the legislature in 1923. This act was passed and accepted by the citizens of Auburn in September of that year. By that act, the District assumed the responsibility of paying the interest and principal of all water works bonds outstanding.

In 1925, a second concrete reservoir was built beside and connected to the 6½ million gallon reservoir built in 1907. Having a 1 million gallon capacity, it served as an auxiliary reservoir so that the larger one could be cleaned and repaired.

In 1927, the Auburn Water District purchased from the Union Water Power Company all its rights at Lake Auburn, the Basin, and along Bobbin Mill Brook to the Androscoggin River. This gave the District absolute control over the outlet of the lake, and in 1946 the old wooden dam and gate house at East Auburn was replaced with a new concrete dam.

### New Auburn Standpipe

In order to reinforce the New Auburn section, a 300,000 gallon steel standpipe had been erected on Ipswich Street, in 1941. Thirty feet in diameter and 55 feet high, it was somewhat lower than the reservoirs on Goff Hill, making it necessary to install an altitude valve to keep the standpipe from overflowing. The altitude valve worked satisfactorily until the new 12 inch feeder line was extended into New Auburn, in 1961. This increased supply caused the altitude valve to remain closed, as no demand was made on the water supply in the tank. Consequently, there being no movement of water, ice became quite thick in the tank. To correct this situation, the standpipe was extended 25 feet in height and the altitude valve removed. This was done in 1961. The addition of 25 feet in elevation gave an increase in water pressure in the New Auburn area, also an increase in storage.

Started in 1951, at Court Street and Fairview Avenue, a 12 inch line was completed into New Auburn in 1961, entailing crossing the Canadian National and Maine Central railroad tracks and the Little Androscoggin River. This second high-pressure line greatly increased the water supply in that section of the city.

## Accelerated Program

In 1964, the District took advantage of the Housing and Home Finance Agency's Accelerated Public Works Program to secure a grant of \$194,500. With the District's matching funds, a total sum of \$389,000 was made available; and 23 projects were carried to completion, all under three contracts awarded by bid. These projects, along with the District's own program, resulted in laying over 9½ miles of water mains. This was by far the most pipe installed in any one year in the District's history.

One of the projects under the H. H. F. A. was the building of a concrete dam at North Auburn. Located at the outlet of "The Basin" and the inlet of Lake Auburn, this replaced a wooden dam which went out in 1953.

## Underground Reservoir

In 1965, a post-tensioned, underground, concrete reservoir, approximately 100 feet square, with a center wall which allowed for a two compartment reservoir, was constructed off the Hardscrabble Road. Each compartment had a row of columns and beams down the middle for support of the concrete roof, and a capacity of 500,000 gallons.

The water system as of 1968 was divided into three sections; the high and low services, and an intermediate service supplying the Riverton section through a reducing valve. About two-thirds of the water used was on the high and intermediate services, all of this being pumped.

There were two pumping stations; the main station at the lake, and the original station, on Court Street, which was used strictly as a standby.

The low pressure system supplied the lower sections of the city and was fed by gravity from the lake, mostly through the 20 inch main laid in 1901. The high and low pressure systems could be connected at several places throughout the system by opening gates. There were also three connections with the City of Lewiston's system which could be used by either city in case of emergency.

Auburn's daily consumption of water was 2½ million gallons, with a high of 5½ million gallons in the summer.

In case of a bad fire on the low pressure system, a hydraulic lift gate, located at the Court Street pumping station could be opened, thereby putting the entire low pressure system on high pressure. A check valve above the city towards the lake prevented the water from going back into the source.

## Metered Rates

In 1959, the District applied to the Public Utilities Commission for a rate increase. It was granted as of October 1, 1960. This was the first rate change since 1896, at which time the rates were lowered. Present rates are approximately the same as those previous to 1896.

One of the requests of the Public Utilities Commission in granting the rate increase was that the entire city be metered as soon as possible. Accordingly, a meter room was finished off below the offices. Necessary metering equipment was purchased and actual installation began around April 1, 1961. By the end of the year, 2,041 meters had been installed. By the end of 1963, approximately all services except summer ones and those of municipal buildings were metered; and by the end of 1964, all except summer services.

As the Auburn Water Commission had operated the system for thirty years, the Auburn water supply system had been under municipal ownership for 75 years in 1968.

The total lake frontage is 13.6 miles, of which the Auburn Water District owns 70%: Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute, 2%, and private ownership 28%. Of this 28%, 5% does not border the lake shore due to an intervening highway. The land purchased by the District has been cleared and set out to pine and spruce. Hardwood leaves blowing into the lake, decay and impart color, taste, and odor. The needles from the soft woods form a carpet and cover which acts as a sponge, preventing erosion and giving a more regulated flow of surface water into the lake.

In spite of some extremely dry seasons, Lake Auburn has seldom lowered more than three feet below the legal elevation at which it may be kept.

Auburn and Lewiston are indeed fortunate in having such a bountiful supply of water, unsurpassed in quality by any lake supply in the United States.

The Board of Water Commissioners was duly organized July 31, 1893. The first commissioners were, W. W. Bolster, A. L. Goss, E. S. Paul, H. G. Goss, R. M. Mason, A. M. Pulsifer, S. K. Ballard.

The last commissioners were also the first Trustees of the Auburn Water District. They were: Lewis W. Haskell, Jr., Robert Haskell, George W. Lane, Jr., Alonzo Q. Miller, Horatio G. Foss, Andrew F. Warren, Mayor Charles S. Cummings.

Forrest E. Bisbee was Superintendent of the Auburn Water Commissioners from 1894 until the Auburn Water District was formed in 1923. Horace J. Cook was first Superintendent of the District, serving from 1923 until his death in 1943. Lyndall K. Parker served as Assistant Superintendent from 1932 until 1943, and as Superintendent from 1943 until his retirement in 1966. Earle A. Tarr, Jr., served as Assistant Superintendent from 1958 until 1966, and as Superintendent from 1966.

Those serving as Clerk of the system were as follows: Auburn Aqueduct Company, N. I. Jordan; Auburn Water Commission, Jerome B. Hunton, 1893-1898; A. W. P. Cobb, 1898-1923; Auburn Water District, A. W. P. Cobb, 1923-1931; Kenneth E. Packard, 1931-1940; John M. Littlefield, 1940-1958; Frank O. Stephens, 1958-1964; Evelyn L. Wincapaw, 1964-1967. The latter served as as-

sistant clerk from 1931 until 1964 and as Clerk from 1964 to May 31, 1967, when Clark H. Dunlap took over the office.

Lester L. Rand operated the pumping station for the Auburn Water Commissioners and the Auburn Water District for over fifty years; and John Lawlor was with the Commission and the Auburn Water District for over fifty years, most of the time as assistant Superintendent.

The Board of Trustees in 1968 was Bertrand L. Pontbriand, President; John Abromson, Treasurer; C. William McFadden, Robert St. Hilaire, Jr., Harry W. Woodard, Jr., Theodore Collins, Mayor Clyde E. Goudey, (Ex-officio).

## THE SEWERAGE DISTRICT

In the early days, the sewerage and drainage system of the City of Auburn was administered as a department under the municipal officers, the Mayor, and the Aldermen. The person directly responsible was the Street Commissioner.

This set-up of the sewer system continued until 1917, when the Auburn Sewerage District was formed by Act of Legislature. The District assumed the sewer loan of the City of Auburn, an amount of \$24,000, and the City of Auburn transferred to the District the care of the entire sewer system, including all pipe, conduits, fixtures, and rights of way, excepting the street catch basins and their connections with the sewer mains. As of 1968 the territorial boundaries of the Sewerage District were the same as those of the City of Auburn, a fact which was not true when the District was formed.

The affairs of the District were managed by six trustees; until 1923, the Auburn Water Commissioners served as such. Since then, the Sewerage Board Trustees had been separate from those of the Water District. One trustee is elected annually by the City Council to serve for a term of six years. The Mayor serves as trustee ex-officio. Annually, after the appointment by the City Council of one member, the trustees organized by electing one of their number as president, one as clerk, one as treasurer, and any other proper officials as they might designate.

New sewer construction was financed by a construction assessment against owners of lots benefited and abutting on streets or ways in which said sewers are laid. This was based on a frontage-area figure. When necessary to construct treatment plants, an additional sum was charged for each structure entering the plant. Normal operating expense was covered by a yearly special sewer tax on the valuation of all property receiving service from the sewer system.

For the most part, the District still had a combined system, whereby storm water and sanitary sewage was carried in the same pipes. This necessitated large pipes in many instances when entire breaks have to be enclosed. It also created a sewage treatment problem.

Until the 1930's, practically all construction work was done by hand. Large