

# BINGHAMTON

ITS SETTLEMENT, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

AND THE FACTORS IN ITS HISTORY

1800-1900

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A board of lady visitors was established under the by-laws of April, 13, 1896, and was constituted as follows: Mrs. Joseph Schnell, Mrs. Gilman L. Sessions, Mrs. William H. Wilkinson, Mrs. C. F. McCormack, Mrs. Stoddard Hammond, jr., Mrs. George M. Harris, Mrs. Horace H. Crary, Mrs. A. D. Armstrong, Mrs. M. L. Barnes, Mrs. P. L. Brintnall, Mrs. N. H. Bump, Mrs. John P. Moore and Mrs. J. M. Farrington. In later years the personnel of the board has been somewhat changed.

*City Water Works*—Previous to the construction of a modern system of water works in 1867 and the years immediately following, Binghamton was inadequately provided with means for contending against fires, while domestic wants were supplied from wells of varying depths scattered throughout the village. These were generally dug on private property and designed for family use, though from six to ten or more houses were frequently furnished with water from a single well. Occasionally several public spirited citizens would unite in digging a well for the public benefit, the same being located in the near vicinity of their dwellings or places of business; and it frequently happened that the well was located near the center of the highway, after the established custom of all country villages.

In the early history of the village several wells of the latter description were constructed, one of the most conspicuous of which was "Peterson's well," located on Main street, near the corner of Front street. It was named in allusion to Samuel Peterson, whose tavern stood on the nearby corner and was the common resorting place for all the villagers west of the Chenango river. Still further down Main street was the "Stocking well," which also was dug in the middle of the road near the residence of Solon Stocking, after whom it was called. Near the corner of Court and Washington streets, and just outside the present curb line in front of the City National bank building, was a well built by Dr. Elihu Ely and other owners of land in that vicinity. This well supplied all the stores and residents in that neighborhood for many years, and was finally covered with stones and earth after street lines and grades were established. On Water street, a few rods north of Court street, was once the well known "Tompkins well." Another was at the foot of Carroll street, and was a famous well in "Millville" for a long time. Still another was at the foot of Varick street, and was in service until about twenty years ago.

Private family wells were numerous throughout the village, but no

attempt will be made to recall any except those which happened to be so located as to attract public attention. Not every owner could afford the expense of digging, stoning up and curbing a well on his own land, hence the custom of several families using water from the same well, the well having been dug at the cost of all with the understanding that the water should be common to all. But the old well standing on the knoll near the Broome County bank was strictly private property, yet it supplied water to all the business places and families near the corner of Court and Chenango streets. The same was equally true of the "Bartlett well," on Washington street between the Hamilton Collier dwelling and Robert S. Bartlett's dwelling. This was one of the much used wells of the village, and, to quote the words of an old resident, "its waters were seldom quiet." James Prendergast's store stands very near the site of the Bartlett well. On Collier street, on land now occupied by the Barrett building, was the "Brown well," from which the academy pupils, occupants of firemen's hall and a score of other buildings obtained their daily supply of water. An old well also existed on the Court House grounds, east of the Court House, from which the jail supply was obtained for many years.

A board of health of perhaps somewhat informal character was established in the village soon after 1850, and it was the custom and duty of that body to look to the surroundings of the public and private wells and see that the water was free from impure matter. Rodney A. Ford, Job N. Congdon and Dr. George Burr were among the earliest members of the village board of health.

At length, however, the population had so increased that the public welfare and safety demanded more modern means of supplying the village with water for domestic and manufacturing purposes, as well as providing more efficient means of extinguishing fires than was afforded by pumping water from the rivers, the canal, Brandywine creek or any of the several cisterns which the trustees had caused to be constructed in various remote and unprotected localities. This subject first attracted serious attention about 1855, and two years later steps were taken, though more than ten years passed before the desired improvement was secured.

On April 13, 1857, the legislature passed an act to incorporate the Binghamton Water Works company. The prime movers and incorporators in the enterprise were James Eldredge, George Park, Charles Eldredge, Levi M. Rexford, Thomas Jackson and Phineas B. Tomp-

kins, who were authorized to perfect the company organization with \$100,000 capital, and also to construct and maintain a system of water supply for the village. The company began its preliminary work with a fair prospect of success, but for some now unknown reason the project was soon afterward abandoned.

On February 18, 1860, the act of 1857 was amended by the legislature, and John A. Collier, Sherman D. Phelps, Daniel S. Dickinson, William R. Osborn, Hazard Lewis and Samuel H. P. Hall were declared to be a body corporate by the name of "The Binghamton Water Works company," with a capital of \$50,000. This company, like its predecessor, was authorized to acquire and hold real estate, construct reservoirs or other source of water supply, lay pipes through the public streets of the village, and to do all acts necessary to establish a complete water works system.

The second company encountered the same obstacles as did the first, and still other embarrassments due to the political situation just preceding the war of 1861-65, hence proceedings under the enabling act were so long delayed that the incorporators took no further steps toward the construction of the works. Then for a period of seven years more the people of the village continued in the primitive ways of early times.

In 1866 the subject was revived, but in another form, as the village authorities proposed to construct the water works as a corporate measure and maintain it as such. However, before definite action was taken the village became a city, and when on April 25, 1867, the board of water commissioners then created became a distinct municipal body, vested with the authority necessary to construct the system at the public expense, and in payment therefor to issue bonds on the credit of the city to the extent of \$100,000.

The first board of water commissioners comprised William P. Pope, Edward F. Jones, J. Stuart Wells, Sabin McKinney and Frederick Lewis, and under their direction the work of construction was begun. On the permanent organization of the board Mr. Pope was elected president, Frederick Lewis, treasurer, and Julius P. Morgan, clerk. The Holly pumping system of machinery was adopted, upon which the board secured a tract of land between Brandywine creek and the railroad bridge, on the river front. Here the necessary buildings and pumping station were erected, and two large storage and supply wells were constructed. These wells are still in use although the subsequent

growth of the city necessitated additional sources of water supply in other and still larger wells, with an intake pipe extending into and up the Susquehanna a considerable distance, thus securing an abundant supply of pure water beyond the possibility of pollution from city sewage.

The original work of erecting buildings and settling machinery and of laying main pipes through the city streets occupied the attention of the commissioners during the year 1867 and the early part of 1868. In the latter year water was first pumped into the mains for general distribution. The system was an admirable one for the time, but at length the cement pipes began to show weakness under fire pressure, and were afterward required to be replaced with pipes wholly of iron. The work of relaying of course covered a period of several years, and not until about 1890 was the last of the old cement piping taken from the streets.

During the thirty and more years of operation of our water works system, frequent changes, enlargements and additions in all its departments have been made by the commissioners, but each step has been one of progression and increased capacity, keeping even pace with the growth of the city in other directions. The commissioners, too, have been selected from the best business men of the city and, fortunately, partisan politics has rarely been a factor in the choice. Unlike any other auxiliary department of city government, the members of the board are elected by the people, annually in June, and in the event of vacancy the remaining members have power to fill the place by appointment.

After the completion of the original works the revenues derived from water rates were not equal to the annual expenditures and payments of interest and principal on the bonds, and it was not in fact until after 1887 that the department became self-sustaining. Again, the rapid growth of the city necessitated the constant extension of the service to distant localities, with a consequent outlay of money in carrying out the work. On the morning of March 10, 1874, the pumping station was seriously damaged by the explosion of one of the large boilers. In this disaster engineer David J. Smith was instantly killed, and fireman William J. Courtney and John Malane were seriously injured. To rebuild the boiler house and replace the boiler cost the city nearly \$12,000.

A few weeks after the accident all the commissioners resigned, and

on the first Monday in June following an entire new board was elected, as follows: Harper Dusenbury (for 5 years), John Evans (4 years), James B. Weed (3 years), John Anderson (2 years), Abel Bennett (1 year). The new board organized June 8, 1874, by the election of Harper Dusenbury, president, James B. Weed, treasurer, and Thomas A. Sedgwick, superintendent and clerk.

From that time to the present the affairs of the board have been managed prudently and upon safe business principles, and no serious event has since disturbed the councils of the commissioners. As occasion has required, with but a single exception, the taxpayers have promptly consented to all the bonding measures suggested by the board, and full harmony has always characterized the relations of the people and the commissioners.

Unfortunately, during the first fifteen years of existence of this branch of city government, the records of the board were not well kept, hence much information which might be of interest in this connection cannot be furnished; but beginning with the current year 1885, the minutes of proceedings have been fully recorded and an annual report has been published. These reports disclose that in the years 1885-87 the city made annual appropriations for maintenance and extension of the water works system as follows: In 1885, \$14,170; in 1886, \$14,065; in 1887, \$12,460.

The city has a present total of 66 miles 345 feet of street main pipe, 921 valves, 662 general and 13 private fire hydrants. The total number of taps (presumably meaning water takers) is between 6,000 and 7,000. About 480 water meters are in use. The amount of water bonds outstanding is \$163,000.

The following table shows the aggregate receipts and expenditures of the board of water commissioners from 1885 to 1899. The table is interesting in that it illustrates the growth both of the water works department and the city:

	Receipts.	Expenditures.
1885.....	\$41,477.23	\$58,292.11
1886.....	46,663.58	60,785.92
1887.....	54,725.86	66,190.81
1888.....	61,582.98	62,726.68
1889.....	66,106.67	57,895.26
1890.....	70,713.59	91,622.66
1891.....	73,237.17	73,969.88

	Receipts.	Expenditures.
1892.....	80,119.26	64,184.77
1893.....	77,276.54	63,127.20
1894.....	81,044.90	58,648.31
1895.....	87,455.74	54,939.88
1896.....	90,908.04	86,030.26
1897.....	92,168.50	101,494.07
1898.....	92,013.13	73,644.52

*Water Commissioners* (with date of election or appointment).—Wm. P. Pope, Edward F. Jones, J. Stuart Wells, Sabin McKinney, Frederick Lewis, designated April 25, 1867, under the act creating the commission; William E. Taylor, appointed June 24, 1867, vice Jones, resigned; William E. Taylor, 1870; J. Stuart Wells, 1871; Frederick Lewis, 1872; Wm. P. Pope, 1873; Simeon C. Hitchcock, appointed October, 1873, vice Wells, resigned; Harper Dusenbury, John Evans, James B. Weed, John Anderson, Abel Bennett, new board elected June 1, 1874; Abel Bennett, 1875; John Anderson, 1876; James B. Weed, 1877; John Evans, 1878; Harper Dusenbury, 1879; Abel Bennett, 1880; John Anderson, 1881; James B. Weed, 1882; Duncan R. Grant, 1883; George W. Lester, 1884; Jefferson Kingman, 1885; John Anderson, 1886; James B. Weed, 1887; Duncan R. Grant, 1888; George W. Lester, 1889; John Bayless, appointed January 2, 1890, vice Weed, resigned; Jefferson Kingman, 1890; William Shanley, appointed September 16, 1890, vice Lester, resigned; John Anderson, 1891; Stoddard Hammond, appointed Nov. 21, 1891, vice Anderson resigned; John Bayless, 1892; Stoddard Hammond, 1892; Duncan R. Grant, 1893; Moses Stoppard, 1894; Jefferson Kingman, 1895; Stoddard Hammond, 1896; John Bayless, 1897; Duncan R. Grant, 1898.

Presidents of the board—William P. Pope, June 12, 1867–June, 1874; Harper Dusenbury, 1874–84; John Anderson, 1884–91; Duncan R. Grant, Nov. 21, 1891–99.

Treasurers—Frederick Lewis, June 12, 1867–June, 1874; James B. Weed, June 8, 1874–Jan. 2, 1890; John Bayless, Jan. 2, 1890–99.

Secretaries—Julius P. Morgan, June 12, 1867–Sept. 23, 1868; Thomas A. Sedgwick, Sept. 23, 1868–July 30, 1874; Albert A. Rose, July 30, 1874–Sept. 15, 1875; Chauncey L. Saunders, Sept. 15, 1875–June 4, 1883; Perry P. Rogers, June 4, 1883–March 3, 1884; Horace E. Allen, March 3, 1884–died Nov. 4, 1891; John Anderson, Nov. 21, 1891–99.

Superintendents—Thomas A. Sedgwick, July 25, 1868–April 12, 1875; Darwin Felter, April 12, 1875–99.

The personnel of the present board of water commissioners, with the office staff, is as follows: Commissioners, Duncan R. Grant (president), John Bayless (treasurer), Jefferson Kingman, Moses Stoppard, Stoddard Hammond; John Anderson, secretary; Darwin Felter, superintendent; John D. Davidson and Michael F. Dillon, inspectors.

*The Police Board*—The board of police commissioners as established by act of the legislature passed April 3, 1881, and now existing, had the effect to entirely remove that important branch of municipal government from the uncertain control of political factions and to place it in charge of a non-partisan body of men whose chief aim has been to increase the efficiency of the police force. Previous to the creation of the board the common council held the power to regulate the force, and each political change in city government was followed by a corresponding change in the police department, with all its attending inconveniences and complications. Under the act referred to the mayor was authorized to appoint four police commissioners to constitute the board, the first appointees to hold office one, two, three and four years, as lot should determine. Later appointments were made for a term of four years, beginning February 1. The mayor is an ex-officio member of the board.

In 1867 the first city police force comprised chief James Flynn and five policemen. In 1881 Charles D. Rogers was elected chief, C. Burdette Able, assistant chief, and at the same time nine policemen were appointed to comprise the force. That there has been substantial improvements and enlargements in later years is shown in the fact that the present force includes a chief and two assistants, two roundsmen, twenty-nine patrolmen and a detective. In 1867 an annual appropriation of \$5,000 was ample for the ordinary and contingent expenses of the department; the charter now authorizes \$30,000 for the same purpose.

The personnel of the board of police commissioners from 1881 to the present time has been as follows:

Commissioners—Tracy G. Rich, appointed Feb., 1881, for one year; re-appointed 1882 and 1886; service expired Feb., 1890. J. Stuart Wells, appointed Feb., 1881, for two years; re-appointed 1883; resigned Feb. 12, 1883. George W. Dunn, appointed Feb., 1881, for three years; re-appointed 1884; resigned Feb. 28, 1885. Lewis S. Abbott, appointed Feb., 1881, for four years. Edward F. Jones, Feb. 15, 1883. Jas. F. Carl, appointed Feb. 14, 1884; re-appointed 1885 and 1889.