

## Then and now

# Water crisis ended with firing of chiefs

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The newly-constructed Middletown Water Works went through its first major crisis 100 years ago this spring -- and two of the original commissioners lost their jobs as a result.

The trouble started in early spring when the village trustees were deluged with complaints of homeowners who had been hooked into the system less than a year. Some complained of odor, some of taste and color.

Investigation showed that a "tower" that directed surface water from the reservoir into the runoff pipe had been damaged, and that water was being drawn from the bottom of the lake.

Weeks went on and nothing was done to correct the situation. The odor and taste became worse. In early June (1869) the village trustees fired Edward M. Madden

and J.M. Matthews, the original commissioners, and appointed W.W. Reeve and John L. Bonnell, a contractor, in their places.

There was immediate action.

The commissioners ordered the construction of a "wooden pipe made 16 feet high and of the same diameter as the discharge pipe from the reservoir," the County Press reported. They "procured the services of a diver from New York to clear away the rubbish that had collected around the intake."

On June 17 -- 100 years ago today -- commissioners and village officials gathered at the reservoir to observe the work.

"Having donned his submarine armor," said the Press, "the diver descended at about half past one o'clock and remained under for about half an hour to reconnoiter and learn the situation. He again descended

after a short time with a crowbar and other tools, and cleared away the obstruction and inserted the wooden pipe.

"This was properly fastened and anchored and the water let in, and was found to work admirably. By five o'clock the work was all accomplished.

"We trust that there will be no further cause to complain about the smell and taste of the water."

During the preliminary investigation of the broken tower, the reservoir had been lowered several inches, causing some residents to fear a shortage. But the Press reassured them:

"People need not scant themselves in the use of this wholesome beverage for fear of wasting it, and take to Bourbon and such like, for there is a copious supply of Monhagen sufficient to quench the thirst of all."