

# SCHENECTADY COUNTY

NEW YORK ✓

## ITS HISTORY TO THE CLOSE

OF THE

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

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HISTORIAN AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HON. AUSTIN A. YATES

COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW

LATE DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND COUNTY JUDGE OF SCHENECTADY COUNTY;  
ATTORNEY TO THE STATE INSURANCE DEPARTMENT; MEMBER OF  
ASSEMBLY; MAJOR IN THE VOLUNTEER FORCES OF THE UNITED  
STATES DURING THE WAR OF THE REBELLION AND  
SPANISH AMERICAN-WAR.

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Men who their duties know,  
But know their rights, and, knowing, dare maintain,  
Prevent the long-aimed blow,  
And crush the tyrant while they rend the chain;  
These constitute a state.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE FIGHT FOR WATER.

Schenectady is fringed and honey-combed with springs. Until about twenty years ago, creeks of pure water oozed out under the banks along the base of Prospect Hill. This hill is now being levelled and sold as a sand heap and disappearing under the names of East Liberty, Landon Terrace, Prospect street and some other new streets under process of development. A hydraulic ram fed by a large spring furnished water for Union College as long ago as 1848. It was immediately in the rear of the Schenectady Brewing Co's plant and gave a generous supply. Under the bank below Veeder avenue, along South Center street, the earth was once honey-combed with springs and it is a damp country yet.

As long ago as May 7th, 1799, a firm composed of Wright Tryar, James Case and Oliver Bull, obtained consent from the common council to supply the city with water by aqueducts if they could get consent of the owners, the works to be at the disposal of the common council should they be needed. Nothing seems to have been done under this resolution.

On July 6th of the same year, the common council passed the following resolution :

Resolved, That Henry R. Teller, Richard Rosa and Remsen R. Teller be permitted to lead the water works through any of the city lands from a certain spring which heads at the road leading to Gerrit S. Veeder's, upon condition that this board shall have the use of the tubes to be made use of by them in case they should at any time be necessary for the purpose of conducting water to the city for public uses ; the said persons, however, in such cases, to have the use of the water so to be conducted to the city, in common with other citizens. Adopted.

No trace of the works can be found.

Subsequently, about the year 1836, Jabez Ward, a well known and much respected citizen, established a system of water delivery by tapping springs along Veeder avenue and the base of the hills there. The water was conducted by the gravity system through wooden logs which were of white pine and about one foot in diameter. The water was conveyed through a bore of not much more than two or three inches in diameter. It went to State street, down through State to Washington avenue with a branch at Ferry street, thence into Union. It seems also to have been made from Ferry to Front. Any quantity of these logs were taken up at the building of the water works by the Stanford Company in 1885. The tubes or logs were connected by cylinders of iron of an ingenious construction; plenty of them are in possession of many citizens now. It was a very scant supply and accommodated but a small territory. It was a private enterprise and probably abandoned because it did not pay. Many of the logs are in use in the cemetery to hold the bank where support is needed. The work about the Potter tomb is upheld by them.

No other efforts seem, from all we can learn, to have been made for a regular city supply, until the late Senator Stanford organized a company to supply the city with water. He began operations in 1872. His plan was to take water directly from the river, not a good source then, but far better than now, when the river, in open and flagrant violation of the law, is an open sewer for all the manufactories from Utica down. He built the present power house at the foot of Front street, supplying it by the use of Holly engines. The city was piped, hydrants established at the corners of the streets and the water began to flow. But the Senator had trouble from the start. Sand, silt and grit of all kinds cut the machinery, causing stoppages, delays and no end of trouble. So an intake was built at the east end of the second pier of the old bridge. The water there is very deep, about twenty-six feet. The pipes leaked, and, still persevering, a new intake was built on piles where it now remains in use in times of emergency in front of Mr. Yates' boat house. Schenectady, meanwhile, had obtained possession of the plant.

But the water was foul, in freshets too muddy even for the bath, and the city frantically struggled for pure water. For years, Cowhorn Creek, running from the cemetery westward under Lafayette, Barrett and White (now Clinton), and under State, through the lower bouwery to the river, had been a horror. Investigation had long shown that a dead line ran along its bank, within which pestilence did its fiercest work, and where typhoid fever held a terrible dominion. All efforts to prevent sewage into its open stream failed, and the city began to get a bad name. On the flats, south of the city, it was joined by the creeks from Schermerhorn's and Veeder's ponds. The culvert under the canal became clogged. Assemblyman Yates succeeded in passing a bill in the legislature by which the state opened the culvert and diverged the streams in a direct line to the Mohawk. It was a tremendous relief, but the malarious swamps still existed south of the city along between the banks of the D. & H., and the N. Y. C. R. R.

Meanwhile, the sewage of the city increased, and the mains leading to the Mohawk below the "poor pasture" were built in a day when no such monstrous growth was expected, and the town had to be dug up again.

The chemists and doctors were getting in fine work all these years and sounding the tocsin of alarm. And they were right. Less than a quarter of a century ago this city was in a deplorable condition. Rigid ordinances were passed compelling connection with the city mains in all new buildings, removing all pestiferous outhouses, closing up bacterial and bacillic wells. And all united in denouncing the vileness of the water supply.

The "city fathers" did their best. They made every effort to obey the demands of the Board of Health, of which the late Dr. Van Zandt, the present Dr. W. T. Clute and Livingston Swits were and are such efficient members.

The search for better water began. An attempt had been made by Senator Stanford to build wells at the foot of Ferry street, under the power house. It failed. Then great wells were dug opposite on the Glenville side. These were abandoned because the water was not there.

Then the city went to the head of Van Slyck's Island at the confluence of the Frog Alley and the main river, and began a plan of building wells there and established the power station on the south side of the canal. The wells were dug and the water tested. The water supply was still insufficient and the beautiful pond in Scotia, known as Sander's Lake, was harnessed into service to see if it could not help the town, which began by this time to be pretty dry. The water was known to be of exceeding purity, in fact one vast spring, and fed by others all around its edge. A dam was built across its outlet and a steam pump set at work to test the capacity of the supply. After two weeks' steady pumping, the lake was reduced three feet in depth and the surrounding springs were rivulets of magnificent, but insufficient water pouring from an elevation where the receding waters had left them, and despair began to settle down on the hydraulic engineers. The people were getting fretful and impatient with what was called a monstrous waste of money in mere experiments. Thompson Lake, Warner's Lake in the Heidleberghs, Marie Lake and Mariaville Pond in Duanesburgh and even Ballston Lake were suggested and measurements and estimates made. The streams running out from every one of the sources of supply were found inadequate.

All this time the Hon. Simon Schermerhorn and other prominent citizens of Rotterdam, who knew the lay of the land and the waters under the earth, had been insisting that the hillside back of the first and second locks No. 21,622 was a watershed of sufficient volume to supply all the city needed and give as good and pure water as could be found on earth.

So wells were dug and relief came at last. Magnificent water in abundance, from a source that seemed to be an underground river, was discovered by George Ingersol, the present superintendent. To his indefatigable efforts Schenectady owes as much as to any other man. He was in the business of discovery from the very beginning, and was given charge of the work. The present water station and power house in Rotterdam were built, water led two and one-half miles into town and the first power house retained for an emergency.

The creeks have been arched and culverted, the New York Cen-

tral completing the work by burying them beneath its new freight houses. Schenectady is to-day one of the healthiest cities in the state. It is an astonishing fact, but absolutely true, that while we use the water of Rotterdam, the city is positively free from typhoid fever. When an emergency arising from accident, drives us to a few hours use of the river water, typhoid appears. In every instance, and they have been very few, this fact has been demonstrated.

The water is of surpassing clearness and purity, decidedly blue in shade, while the river water is yellow. Its temperature is 46° Fahr. all the year around, a trifle hard for the toilet and laundry but fully available, and the finest table water east of the Alleghanies.

Its present supply is 8,826,000 gallons per twenty-four hours. Our needs and use at present are five and one-half million gallons in twenty-four hours. It will not admit of wasteful use with our increasing population. It is believed that the supply exists for miles east and west, and that a greater demand can be met without impoverishing the present wells.

It has cost \$400,000 to find a well, half a million to get rid of the river water, but no one now begrudges the money.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### GENEALOGY.

The full credit for all the wonderful research of this chapter must be accorded to Professor Pearson; to the aid of the distinguished archivist, the Hon. John Sanders has added his valuable contribution derived from research, personal knowledge and the history that comes reliably down from father to son. Wherever a family has died out and their blood no longer flows here, its name has been left out. It is intended in this chapter to give those families only whose blood still runs in the veins of descendants.

First we give the descendants of the original proprietors.