

A HISTORY OF WILKES-BARRE

LUZERNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

FROM ITS FIRST BEGINNINGS TO THE PRESENT TIME; INCLUDING
CHAPTERS OF NEWLY-DISCOVERED

EARLY WYOMING VALLEY HISTORY

TOGETHER WITH MANY BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND MUCH
GENEALOGICAL MATERIAL

BEGUN BY

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ILLUSTRATED WITH MANY PORTRAITS, MAPS, FACSIMILES, ORIGINAL
DRAWINGS AND CONTEMPORARY VIEWS



COMPLETE IN FOUR VOLUMES

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body politic and corporate for the purpose of making, using and maintaining telegraph lines and communications between the city of Philadelphia and the borough of Wilkes-Barré, and intermediate towns and villages by the name, style and title of "The Philadelphia and Wilkes-Barré Telegraph Company."

Following issuance of the charter, agents of the company were prompt in reaching Wilkes-Barré in the solicitation of stock sales. From the *Advocate* of June 6, 1849, we learn that "an agent is busy in procuring subscriptions. * * * In Easton and Bethlehem he was very successful. In the latter place stock was taken to the amount of \$2,500."

The line itself, it is learned from other sources, followed the turnpike from Wilkes-Barré, through Hazleton, Mauch Chunk, Allentown, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Easton and Doylestown, to Philadelphia. The real work of construction, owing to weather conditions, was not begun until the Spring of 1850, when it was pushed through with considerable rapidity. On May 15th, it appears that stock subscriptions in Wilkes-Barré had reached a point sufficient to complete the last section and that "only a few hundred dollars are now needed." That these final subscriptions were shortly forthcoming may be gleaned from the following cheerful newspaper description which appeared under date of July 17th, the margins of which paper, are so worn by time that its name is not distinguishable:

"On Friday of last week (July 9, 1850) to the surprise of many and the gratification of all the Telegraph came stalking up Main street of the Borough and housed itself on the North side of Public Square. * * * The enterprise and energy of the gentlemanly constructors of this line, Dr. A. C. Goell and James L. Shaw, Esq., cannot be sufficiently commended; both for their despatch and the rapid completion of their work of unrivalled excellence. It will be seen that our Borough is now placed in communication with the whole telegraphic world through Philadelphia and a separate line has been constructed to Berwick and Danville. The greater part of the stock has been taken to extend it to Pittston and the work is already commenced."

The room occupied by the company "on the Public Square" is not mentioned in any of the earlier notices of its selection as a terminus, but through an advertisement appearing in October, 1853, when it doubtless remained in its original location, we find that the "office of Morse's Magnetic Telegraph is at the drug store of Seth Tuck, Public Square, Wilkesbarré, now headquarters of the Philadelphia and Wilkesbarré Company as well as that of the Susquehanna West and North Branch Telegraph Company." A few years later, both of these companies were absorbed by the Delaware River Telegraph Company, extensions being made in the system to include Carbondale. After the completion of the Atlantic cable and its opening on September 1, 1858, the way was paved for the consolidation on a big scale of many theretofore independent companies. This task was undertaken by the Western Union, chartered April 4, 1856 which, by the year 1866 had acquired practically all the telegraph lines of the east, controlling more than 75,000 miles of wire.

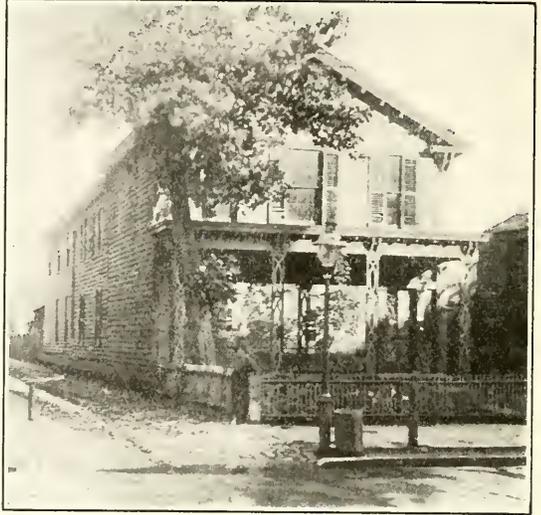
Up until the appearance of the telegraph, Wilkes-Barré was without the services of a single corporation to-day classed as a public utility.

"Every house hoisted water from a well by a windlass and crank, showing that there were *cranks* as far back as 1830." Samuel H. Lynch, Esq., somewhat facetiously remarked in an address "Reminiscences of Early Wilkes-Barré" delivered before the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, October 18, 1901. Continuing his description, the same historian states; "the water from these wells was of various quality, mostly too hard for Monday's wash day,

to obviate which, barrels and hogsheads were used to catch the water from roofs; also utilized to raise mosquitoes until old enough to raise themselves by transformation."

The town pump, on Market Street, has been hereinbefore mentioned as a source of water supply in case of fire.

The first attempt of the community to secure a water supply other than that furnished by its wells is found in an Act of Assembly of May 5, 1832 which chartered the Wilkesbarré Water and Insurance Company. Nearly three years later, a meeting of those interested was held in the hotel of Col J. J. Dennis, at which time Andrew Beaumont, John Myers, Ziba Bennett and H. F. Lamb were named a committee to open subscription books. As no further mention of this enterprise can be found in records of that time or later, it is natural to imagine that the community did not then feel the need of a water supply to the extent of risking money in a dubious venture.



HOTEL OF COL. J. J. DENNIS, SOUTH MAIN STREET

The subject, however, would not remain quiescent. In its edition of January 24, 1844, the *Advocate* thus sums up what activities were then on foot:

"We perceive that anxiety on the part of our citizens to have the Borough supplied with water, has not subsided. We hope it will not, until the object is accomplished. The project is feasible, and the means necessary, under proper arrangement might be raised.

"By request of a number of citizens George W. Leuffer, Esq., a competent Engineer, and of much experience for one of his age, assisted by Messrs. Alexander, Dickinson, Maffet and Bennett, have made surveys, etc. which are now completed, and which establish the practicability of the project. Explorations have been made, and levels taken, on two routes; one from Coal Brook, and one from Laurel Run, either of which may be adopted. Mr. Leuffer has prepared a draft or sketch of both Routes, exhibiting in miniature the shape of the ground, together with the descent or fall on each route. This sketch may be seen by calling at his office on Franklin street. He is decidedly of the opinion that the water on one of these routes is sufficiently abundant to supply the town (with a greatly increased population) and that the ground admits of bringing the water into the Borough with a reasonable expenditure. Those interested, who are acquainted with Mr. Leuffer, will place great confidence in his judgment, and be pleased to learn that the ground is so favorable.

"It is hoped the subject will be kept in view, and that our citizens will unitedly put forth exertion until the important, the necessary object is accomplished."

A month later, on February 24th, a meeting of citizens is reported by the same publication in the Phoenix Hotel, George M. Hollenback being named chairman and Eleazer Carey secretary of the gathering.

From that time forward for a period of four years what, if any, activities were in evidence were not subjects of publicity. That Mr. Hollenback was impressed with the practicability of the scheme may be judged from the following mention of the *Record of the Times* under date of October 13, 1848:

"Col. G. M. Hollenback, we know has had the question of bringing water into Wilkesbarré under consideration for some years, and has had surveys made and estimates of the probable

expense. Even with all the heavy interests now requiring his attention, we shall not be surprised soon to hear that he has determined to construct the works at his own expense. knowing as he does, that the investment will not lie idle."

But it was not until the year 1850 that a step was taken which was eventually to provide the community with an adequate supply of water.

By an Act of February 12th of that year legislative permission was granted to organize the Wilkes-Barré Water Company.

The incorporators were: George M. Hollenback, Samuel P. Collings, Henry M. Fuller, W. J. Woodward, Lord Butler, Thomas W. Miner, Peter C. McGilchrist, Harrison Wright, Calvin Parsons, Ziba Bennett, George P. Steel, Samuel Puterbaugh, Oliver B. Hillard, Edward M. Covell, Sharp D. Lewis, Francis L. Bowman and Joseph LeClerc; President, Hendrick B. Wright; Secretary and Treasurer, Isaac S. Osterhout; Managers, Alexander Gray, John Orquhart, William Wood, Charles Parrish, John Reichard and Samuel R. Marshall. The original capital stock was \$40,000, with the privilege of increasing it to \$80,000. By subsequent amendments it has been increased from time to time. In 1879 it amounted to \$220,000, and in 1887 to \$440,000.

Books were opened at the Phoenix Hotel and secondary surveys, conducted by engineer C. F. Ingram, followed the course of several streams deemed suitable as a source of supply.

These being finished, a meeting of those interested was called in Cahoon's hall in the Spring of 1858, when decisive action was demanded by those who felt that delay was no longer justified, particularly in view of the fact that the charter of 1850 required completion of the work by 1860. Laurel Run was favored by a majority as the stream to be tapped, in spite of assertions made by members of the minority that "the stream ran dry in summer and froze solid in winter." To overcome both of these objections the company authorized the construction of a stone dam for storage purposes and let the contract for approximately three miles of 10 inch mains, the material of which was sheet iron lined with cement, to be furnished by the Patent Water and Gas Pipe Company of Jersey City.

These mains reached the borough line at North Street and from them six inch taps of the same variety of pipe were carried under the principal streets. On June 15, 1859 it was announced that the sum of \$23,000 had been subscribed toward the capital of the company and that the laying of mains was in progress. Records of the original company, now in possession of the Spring Brook Water Supply Company, state briefly that "water was turned on September, 1859." This is obviously an error, as mains had not reached the borough line at that time. The exact date of this event, as disclosed by newspapers of the period, was September 19, 1860, one of them describing the incident as follows:

"The long looked for Laurel Run water came running through town today. The force was sufficient to throw a stream from a three-fourth inch nozzle as high as the three story brick store of the south side of the Square."

In spite of prophesies to the contrary, the company from the start was a financial success. Attachments were made to the mains on the part of some three hundred customers the first year, and lines were extended to meet districts not incorporated in the first survey. By 1869 an additional source of supply was in demand. This was met by diverting a portion of the waters of Mill Creek to the Laurel Run reservoir, the stream being carried by means of flumes and open

ditches, and the work being completed on September 16, 1869. To overcome evaporation in the three mile stretch of open ditch which, in times of drought had a noticeable effect on the supply, the company, in 1876, laid a sixteen inch terra cotta connection between the two streams. The growing use for its product forced the company in 1874 to duplicate its connections between reservoir and the city, a fourteen inch main of iron pipe being laid which took care of the "Heights" district as well as augmented the supply of central city users.

A final step taken by the company to complete its Laurel Run unit of supply soon followed. A long summer's drought indicated that the two streams feeding the Laurel Run basin would not adequately meet the situation. As an auxiliary source of supply it was deemed advisable to tap the Susquehanna above the mouth of Mill Creek. A pumping station, still in existence, but now unused, was thereupon constructed and on July 24, 1877, a steam pump, having a capacity of 800,000 gallons per day, was used to augment the reservoir supply in case of emergency.

It is not the intention of this Chapter to narrate in detail the organization of subsequent corporations which supplied water to other portions of the Wyoming Valley nor trace the development of the original company in later times. The capital of this and other corporations furnishing a like service was increased from time to time as new sources of supply were needed and new districts of the community connected to their mains. Only once in the history of the original company was an epidemic of sickness traced to its supply. From the very nature of the water shed and its occupancy, Laurel Run was to prove an unsafe source. In 1889, just as had happened in Plymouth five years before, an unexpected and violent outbreak of typhoid fever startled the community. Between June 20th and August 1st, two hundred and twenty-nine cases of the dread disease were reported.

August added one hundred and ninety-seven more cases to the list, September ninety-two cases and October forty additional cases. To those reported in the city, forty-two cases in hospitals must be added as well as fifty cases in Parsons and Miners Mills.

A careful survey of the situation disclosed that practically all the six hundred and fifty cases then existing occurred in districts provided with water from the Laurel Run reservoir. This discovery led to the use of a water supply from a small reservoir at Pine Run supplemented by water pumped from the river which, followed by boiling the water before use, checked the contagion. To avoid its repetition stockholders of the Wilkes-Barré Water Company made overtures to the Spring Brook Water Company, a Scranton concern then supplying water to both Scranton and Pittston and having a far greater capacity for the storage of its supply than the local company. The consequences of these overtures will hereinafter be noted.

The earlier typhoid outbreak at Plymouth, above referred to, was on an even greater and more deadly scale than the later epidemic at Wilkes-Barré.

The source of contagion in the former case was so unusual and its effects could be traced with such accuracy as to command wide attention at the hands of the medical fraternity. During the summer of 1885, typhoid cases in the Plymouth District multiplied so rapidly that the community soon realized that it was dealing not alone with an epidemic but with a catastrophe.

Before the source of contagion could be definitely fixed and its cause remedied, one thousand one hundred and four severe cases had developed, resulting in one hundred and fourteen deaths.

Located on a slope of the watershed from which the Plymouth Water company secured its supply were two houses, an occupant of one of which, returning from Philadelphia, found that he had contracted the disease in the latter city. No attention was paid to the sanitation of the premises and germs of the disease from this isolated case were washed into the lower Coal Creek reservoir.

The primary outbreak came from this source. A secondary stage of the epidemic followed when people, warned of danger in the company's supply, turned to abandoned wells and the river for water, only to find both sources as badly contaminated as was the original. The removal of the patient from the offending house and the razing of all residences formerly permitted to exist on the slope of the water shed averred further danger of contamination from that quarter and restored the confidence of consumers.

It remained for the Spring Brook Water Supply Company to consolidate various units in the Lackawanna and Wyoming Valleys which had theretofore furnished water to some forty-five different localities of the anthracite country.

Chartered March 2, 1896, with an authorized capital stock of \$5,000,000 and the authority to issue bonds in like amount, the new corporation proceeded rapidly with its plans of consolidation. In only three cases were the charters of the affiliated companies discontinued, the remaining forty-two companies concerned retaining their original franchises and being operated by the parent organization by stock control or perpetual lease.

Starting with only four reservoirs of any useful proportion in 1896, the four being Spring Brook, Huntsville, Pine Run and Crystal Lake and a new auxillary pumping station from the river above the mouth of the Lackawanna, the company now controls forty-two reservoirs, including intakes; has a present storage capacity of over nine billion gallons of water, which will be increased to approximately eleven billion gallons upon completion of the Watres reservoir along Spring Brook.

Upon legislation sanction of the merger, the new company laid a thirty inch main along Wyoming Avenue connecting its main at Pittston with mains on both the east and west sides of the Susquehanna, thus giving the entire community an abundant supply of pure water which has been increased from time to time to meet the public's needs. Officers serving the company at the close of 1924 were, Louis A. Watres, President; Lawrence H. Watres, Vice-President and General Counsel; L. W. Healy, Vice President and General Manager, S. H. Hicks, Secretary-Treasurer.

The first locally promoted and locally owned public utility to actually offer its services to the community was the Wilkes-Barré Gas Company, chartered October 26, 1854. The original incorporators were George M. Hollenback, Hon. George B. Steele, Oliver B. Hillard, S. H. Puterbaugh, P. McGilchrist, Harrison Wright, John Reichard, Ziba Bennett, Charles Denison and Alexander Gray.

The financial success of like ventures elsewhere brought subscribers to the \$50,000 capital stock of the new venture much more quickly than in the case of any other local corporation thus far formed.