

A Closing Thought – Appreciating History

In the day to day world, we don't think much about our heritage. Yet we live in a historic part of the country and some of our facilities are nationally significant examples of our industry. NEWWA has a historic recognition program, as does AWWA, mostly for designation of a particular facility as a historical landmark. This is to be encouraged but I urge you to also consider the history, the stories and the people who came before you and make an effort to document what you have learned about your system for those who follow. This is a small return for the education that you have been given by people who shared with you. A good water system history also helps immensely with public education and community pride in its achievements. There can be incidental benefits such as getting support for needed improvements or just cooperation in such areas as source protection.

NEWWA's offices have some interesting historical resources but space is limited and a more comprehensive and publicly accessible museum could be a regional resource. Some other local specialty museums like the MA Museum of Public Health and the RI Museum of Steam Pumping are examples of smaller museums that fit a niche. Nationally, Philadelphia has a water works museum that celebrates their status as an important early system. It is housed in the Greek temple-like buildings of their early Schuylkill supply and has a well developed interpretive history center. Baltimore has a sewerage museum near its Inner Harbor area (I will have to admit that you can smell it well before you get close to it). New Haven CT has created a small interpretive center focusing on water supply.

Locally, there are historical exhibits at many utility offices and consultant offices but little continuity between them. Upcoming possibilities for improved water works exhibits include the former MWRA Chestnut Hill Pumping Station, a MA Historic Landmark, which was recently surplused with the stipulation that redevelopment include museum use of the engine room that houses the ASME Historic Landmark Leavitt Engine. This presents an interesting opportunity to present water supply history in an impressive backdrop. Public interest regarding major public works is not unusual, especially something like water supply that touches everyone's lives, so perhaps a successful museum can be leveraged to generate interest in the other intriguing water facilities found throughout New England.

The last suggestion is to keep recognizing the people. Personally, I think a New England Water Works Hall of Fame could be an interesting thing, but the list of Honorary NEWWA members and award winners is a great start.

Thanks

Thanks to a couple of my old mentors, Jim Matera and Russ Babcock, who had such infectious enthusiasm for water supply history that it sparked my lifelong interest in the subject. I thank Ray Raposa for suggesting this history for the 125th Anniversary and trusting me with the treasures of the NEWWA library. I thank all the people who helped me collect material, especially Rebecca Kenney and Mary Lydon at the MWRA Library. I thank the volunteers that helped review the draft paper, especially Pat Grady, Bernie Lucey, Denise Breiteneicher, Chuck Larsen, Jim Powers, Kirsten King and Peter Karalekas. I thank my wife Martha and all of my

various bosses, past and present, for their patience with my ever growing collection of historical material.