

# THE HISTORY OF CITY OF GENEVA WATER DEPARTMENT

For many Genevans “water works” represents a line item on utility bills above its significant other “sewer”. “Wells” represent wishing, and drinking water may be secondary to sprinkling, bathing and pool-filling water.

Children and adults have tried to possess “water works” since Monopoly raised real estate consciousness in 1933, but few really understood its relevance in their lives.

This chronology details civic efforts to bring cool, clear water to growing Geneva neighborhoods during the past century.

The voice of staunch water works’ proponent, Geneva Republican Publisher Charles B. Mead, returns to us across 10 decades as he pleads with contemporaries for “water works, green lawns, and the general attractiveness of progress.”

Return with us now, as we experience the saga of Geneva’s water works and its transformation into the City of Geneva Department of Public Works.

**March 14, 1896**

Geneva solicits proposals for the construction of a system of water works.

**April 15, 1896**

In a Republican editorial, Charles Mead writes:

*“It is useless for the Republican to dwell upon the fact that for three years it has ardently supported the erection of a water works system in Geneva. It has been done solely in the interest of public growth and general prosperity, believing and knowing that only progress along the lines of modern improvements is what makes a prosperous town. To attract outside people and capital to a town it must have water works, green lawns, and the general attractiveness of progress. No business man of Geneva, if he consults his own interests, can afford to be against a water system. Certainly no laboring man, and more especially if he be the owner of a home. He can in no manner expend a like sum that will add so much worth of his property, as will be his proportion of the public water works system.”*

Two days later, the Geneva City Council approves an ordinance dividing special assessments into installments and issuing bonds for the construction of a water works system.

The following day, 32 bidders submit proposals. Following a review by Mayor Irving L. Howell, Engineer Sturtevant, Clerk Flynn, and the Water Works Committee, four candidates are chosen:

Samuel Pope, Chicago \$29,465; Thatcher & Burke, Chicago \$29,000; Challenge Co., Batavia \$29,789; and C. A. Weeks, Chicago \$28,355.

A special supplement to the Republican contains the full text of the ordinance for construction of Geneva’s water works system.

**April 29, 1896**

The Republican’s Charles Mead once again raises his mighty pen:

*“Not only for fire protection, but as a matter of convenience are water works (an) important consideration. There are but a few really good wells in the city and a good water supply convenient to every home in town would be a matter of inestimable satisfaction. Decreased rates of insurance would follow, lawn sprinkling benefits would be easily secured, and residences, hotels, livery barns and, in fact, all buildings could easily be supplied with all the water convenience desired.”*

*“Electric lights would follow as a natural consequence of water works. Power would be necessary for pumping purposes and this could also be used in operating the electric light plant...”*

*“Let us not be behind in the procession of push, enterprise and public improvement. Geneva is on the eve of a more marked era of progress than ever before. Let us make the most of our opportunities.”*

**May 11, 1896**

At a special City meeting, the Council consents to the assignment of its water works construction contract with C. A. Weeks to Seckner Contracting. The vote is tied, with Mayor Howell casting the deciding vote.

**June 6, 1896**

The City Council passes an ordinance for the building by special taxation of Geneva sidewalks. F. S. Wrate is appointed Street Commissioner, and Ed F. Lundgren of Aurora is named Inspector of the water works construction.

**August 1, 1896**

Mead’s advocacy is again apparent as he updates the water works project.

*“Work upon the building is nearly completed, and a portion of the machinery is being placed in position. Though at the foot of the hill buildings look well, and the 70 foot smoke stack is quite imposing. The foundation for the stand pipe is completed, and the steel for the extension is expected the first of next week. Mr. W. D. Turner, who is a member of a rival firm bidding upon the job, says: ‘I have watched the work very closely and I consider it a first class job. I think the foundation for the stand pipe is the best one I have ever seen erected.’”*

Later that summer, Mead also comments on the outcome of litigation brought by five special assessment protesters.

*“The jury ‘Ten good men, and true’, say after a deliberation of 48 hours that the Commissioners were just.*

*“The trial was a costly one, and will amount to more than either side claimed for or against the assessment.”*

**September 12, 1896**

*“The storm was turned on at the water works last Saturday,”* writes Charles Mead, *“and the machinery started for the first time. The deep well pump and the ponderous water power pump worked perfectly when properly adjusted.*

*“The carpenters and painters will be done on the interior finish; then all that will be needed to complete the station will be placing the electric light engines and dynamos...”*

**October 7, 1896**

Mead again comments on the status of the assessment protests:

*“Active work on the Geneva water works system was begun again Thursday morning. It had been at a stand-still for some days, owing to the inability of the contractor to dispose of the bonds he is to take in payment, while the case was in court.*

*“Five of their most wealthy citizens held out against their assessment, and though beaten before a jury in five days trial, threatened to carry the case to the supreme court. This put the contractor in a box, and he yielded up \$650 rather than lose what he had done. It looks considerably like a holdup rather than a fight for principle.”*

**October 24, 1896**

The City Council approves the assignment by C.M. Seckner to the Geneva Electric Lighting Works.

**November 4, 1896**

The City Council approves an ordinance concerning Geneva water rates.

**November 7, 1896**

Mayor Howell announces the appointment of Ed Lundgren as Superintendent of Water Works and Electric Light Plant and City Engineer, and of Magnus Freeman as Assistant Superintendent.

**November 9, 1896**

Another Charles Mead editorial arrives on the scene, reprinted from the Chicago Record:

*“When the dynamos are started and the electric current switched onto the wires at Geneva on Saturday night the last of the Fox River towns in Kane County will have succumbed to progress and have adopted modern methods of illumination.*

*“With the exception of the villages of North Aurora and Clintonville all of the towns, from Carpentersville to Aurora including West Dundee, St. Charles, Geneva and Batavia, will now be lighted by electricity and all but St. Charles will have attained to the metropolitan dignity of water works...”*

**December 9, 1896**

Charles Mead entitles this story the “Enterprise of the Little Town.” “The novel presence of hydrants, and bristling poles is due to the influence of men whose interests are centered in Geneva, rather than to those who come so far from their business in Chicago for the quiet and serenity of this semi-country town. Some of the latter had already installed their private water systems. It is considered to be an instance of remarkable enterprise that Geneva should have undertaken improvements that will cost some \$45,000 during the year of such commercial distress. The taxpayer may grumble at first, yet it is probable that the improvement will eventually be a means of increasing property values considerably. There will be added inducements also, for location of manufacturing industries and many new comforts for residents, as well as greater security against fire...”

*“The largest of the manufacturing plants here have no need for the municipal lighting, but the stores and homes will soon discard kerosene for the subtle electric fluid, some houses being already wired for the change. The great factory of the glucose company is already lighted from a private dynamo and a wire from Batavia supplies the current for another manufacturing company. These two, with a creamery foundry, flouring mill and window screen factory, are the industries of the town and they furnish employment for hundreds of Swedish workmen.*

*“The hours ride on the Chicago & Northwestern from Geneva to Chicago does not prevent about 50 people from the pilgrimage daily. Some of them are prominent in politics, finance and philanthropy in Chicago. Hereafter when they whirl homeward along the high embankment and across the railroad bridge in the dark the town spread on both sides of the river will be aglow and white standpipe will be visible which on rainy nights will tower dimly in a glowing canopy of mist. This scene will be a strong contrast with the previous nocturnal appearance of the town, lying in somber blackness, dotted only with scattered lights where the feeble rays of street lamps struggle through the trees.*

*“Geneva’s Water and Light Plants”* are further described by Charles Mead. *“Both the electric and pumping machinery are housed in a neat brick building near the west end of the wagon bridge. The water supply is hoisted to a reservoir by an expensive deep well pump, set several hundred feet in the bowels of the earth. The rest of the equipment consists of two duplex compound pumps, capable of sending 1,250 gallons of water from the reservoir to the standpipe every 24 hours; two dynamos, which can grind out nearly one million candle-power of lightning; two engines of 160 h.p., and the necessary boilers, all of which seems sufficient for Geneva’s needs for many years to come...”*

**February 3, 1897**

*“The fire at the glucose factory last Thursday evening was a splendid test for our city fire system and department,”* writes Charles Mead, *“and both did most excellent work. It was the hottest fire Geneva has seen in years, and the entire building was well on fire when the department arrived. The big pump was soon working at a pressure of 130 lbs. and four large streams were thrown with a force and capacity that would soon have deluged an ordinary blaze.*

*“Many believe that only for the work of the city water system the entire glucose factory and the Howell Company’s buildings would have been consumed.”*

**1924**

Well #2 is completed east of River Lane and south of State Street. It is drilled to a depth of 1,156 feet by W. L. Thorne Co. of Des Plaines. After completion, the well is tested and water pumps at a rate of 340 gallons per minute (gpm). In 1992 the well is sealed and abandoned when the property is sold.

**1930**

Well #3 is drilled to a depth of 980 feet by William Cater of Chicago. Located on Logan Avenue north of Center Street, well water is pumped into a collecting basin by a 500 gpm turbine pump. Construction was also completed on a 300,000 gallon elevated tank. The riveted steel tank by Chicago Bridge and Iron was replaced in 1997.

**1944**

Well #4 is drilled to a depth of 2,267 feet by S. G. Geiger & Co. Located behind City Hall north of James Street and west of First, the well pumps approximately 900 gpm.

In 1995, it is sealed and abandoned upon the sale of a portion of the site to the Geneva Public Library for its expansion.

**1955**

Well #5 is drilled to a depth of 2,264 feet. Located on Dodson Street west of Eastside Drive, the well pumps approximately 1,000 gpm. In addition, two high service booster pumps are installed at 500 gpm each, which pump from a 50,000 gallon above-ground storage reservoir.

**1957**

Construction is completed on a 500,000 gallon elevated tank at the Well #5 site. The tank was constructed by Chicago Bridge and Iron and is still in service today.

**1966**

Construction of a high-service booster station and deep well facility is completed. Located at Kaneville and Randall Road, the site also includes a 500,000 gallon underground storage reservoir.

Well #6 is rated at 1,100 gpm, and the two high-service boosters pumping from the reservoir at 1,000 gpm and 650 gpm.

**1982**

Well #7, one-half mile east of Route 25 and south of the Union Pacific tracks, is purchased by the City from the State of Illinois Dept. of Corrections. It is rehabilitated to a depth of 1,986 feet with a rated capacity of 1,000 gpm.

**1988**

Well #8 is completed at Peck and Keslinger Roads to a dept of 150 feet with rated capacity of 1,500 gpm.

In addition, manganese green-sand filters are installed at the Kaneville and Randall Road pumping station for the removal of iron and manganese from the shallow well. An additional high service booster pump is installed and the original pumps replaced with a rated capacity of 1,000 gpm.

The transformation from deep well reliance to shallow well was primarily due to elevated Radium 226 and 228 levels in the deep wells. At the time, the deep wells averaged 13.0 pico curies per liter with a federal proposed standard of 5.0 pico curies per liter. It was anticipated the blending of shallow well water with that of deep well water would allow some continued use of deep well water and still meet the 5.0 pico curies per liter proposed standard.

**1993**

Well #9 is completed. Located on Keslinger Road west of Peck Road, it is 1153 deep.

**1994**

Construction is completed on a 500,000 gallon elevated water tank on Kirk Road north of Fabyan Parkway. This project allows for the division of the water system into two pressure zones to better serve the higher elevation customers east of Eastside Drive.

**1995**

In December, Well #10 at Heartland Drive and Westhaven Circle was completed to a depth of 179 feet.

**1997**

Constructin was completed on a 750,000 gallon elevated water tank at well #3 located on logan ave. Thes tank replaced the 300,000 gallon tank that was built in 1930.

**2008**

A new Water Treatment Facility is built at the corner of Peck Road and Keslinger Road. The 8 MGD facility uses Reverse Osmosis Technology to soften the water from 25 grains to 6 grains, virtually eliminates the radium in the water, and is sized to meet the future needs of the residents and businesses of the City of Geneva.

To meet the needs of the new Water Treatment Facility several projects also were completed. Well #11 is completed. Located on Bricher Road east of Peck Road, this shallow well is 168 feet in depth. Well #12 is completed at 300 south Peck Road; this deep well is 1310 feet in depth. Well #13 is completed at 500 north Peck Road; this deep well is 1300 feet in depth. Raw Water Transmission Main is completed to bring water from wells 6, 11, 12, and 13 to the new Water Treatment Facility. Booster pumps at well #5 are replaced. The new pumps are rated at 1,600 gpm each.

Finished water and R0 reject sanitary sewer is completed. This project connected the Water Treatment Facility to the existing water and sanitary sewer system. Western Avenue Sanitary Sewer Lift Station improvements are completed to accept the additional flows produced by the Water Treatment Facility.

Total Cost: \$36,000,000.00