

Illinois American Water Company-Pekin District

Est. 1886

There was a time when your water bill was based on the number of people who occupied your home and the number of cows and horses you owned. Things have certainly changed. In 1886, the Pekin Water Works Company installed 14 miles of water mains under the direction of E.S. Alexander, an engineer from Chicago. Located on Broadway in Pekin, the company was owned by National Tube Works of Chicago and served 189 Pekin residents. Of notable interest to city residents was the stone circular water tower located at the corner of Broadway and Capitol which held 180,000 gallons of water.

Local businessmen George H. Lucas and Henry Lautz purchased the company in 1888, and it became the sole property of Henry Lautz and his family from 1901 until 1981. Customers saw many changes over the years including the installation of water meters in 1908 and billing based on actual usage. Rate schedules were first published in 1914, according to rules established by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

In 1940, the stone water tower was torn down to make way for a modern, concrete tank with a 2.5 million gallon reservoir. As the city grew, so too did its water company. By mid-century, 6,100 customers were served by 75 miles of mains. Electric pumps replaced the old steam-driven centrifugal pumps and, by 1969, the company was pumping 1.5 billion gallons of water a year from multiple well sites.

In 1971, after 84 years, the old pump house was razed and replaced with the current building at 328 Broadway. Other changes in the modern era included an opportunity for the City of Pekin to purchase the company in 1980. While the deal did not materialize, change occurred when American Water Company made the purchase and the company became the Pekin Water District of Illinois-American Water Company. From 14 miles of mains and 189 customers in 1886 to 125 miles of mains with over 12,600 customers today, the Pekin Water District of Illinois American Water has been an invaluable resource to the community.

Congratulations to Pekin Water District of Illinois American Water on becoming a Peoria Historical Society Centenarian organization.