

Portland Water Supply by Dave Kuzminski, May 1999

The **Portland Water Company** was incorporated in 1889 with capital of \$100,000, which was bonded for \$75,000. In 1889 the Town exempted the water company from paying taxes for a period of ten years, with a provision that the Town could also purchase the water company for a price set by three commissioners appointed by the Superior Court. In 1913 the company was purchased by a Boston businessman, Mr. Dewey. His superintendent at the time was a Mr. Mckernan, who operated an office on the east side of Main Street adjacent to Spring Street. The revenue in 1913 was approximately \$9,000 per year. In 1943 it was approximately \$21,000. In 1945, it was purchased by the Town of Portland after getting a bill authorizing the Town to acquire the system through the State Legislature. The town purchased the system for \$190,000, with bonds bearing interest at 1.4%, to be retired in 20 years. At the time, the superintendent was the town blacksmith, **Harry Brooks**. **Walt Dower Sr.** was the next superintendent for the water works. He retired in the spring of 1953, and was succeeded by **Joseph Seiferman** later that year. Joe Seiferman was a fixture in the water department for many years and was responsible for many of the improvements that are still serving the town to this day. He was given the responsibility of Public Works Director under First Selectman Jack Keefe. Joe retired in December of 1988. In 1947, the town experienced a severe water shortage and had to pump directly out of the quarry, which had to be pumped 24 hours a day for 60 days! The water was chlorinated and pumped directly into the system. In order to increase the town's safe yield (capacity to meet peak demand periods), a new gravel packed well was sunk on Glastonbury Road in 1951. This property later became the location of the existing Town Garage. The pumping capacity of the new well was 500,000 gallons a day. This well is still producing water today during summer's peak demand. During 1952 and 1953, a .5 million gallon water tank was constructed on High Street along the now high school driveway which better supplies water to residents on the higher elevation of High Street. The Bartlett Street pump station was also built at this time and is used to refill the tank during low demand time. In 1964, construction of a new dam was started at the reservoir to increase the capacity of water reserve from 65 million gallons to 125 million gallons. A new 1 million gallon storage tank was also installed on High St to better serve customers at the top of High St. A.R. Lombardi was hired to write a water supply plan in 1980 in order to comply with the Health Department's Safe Drinking Water Act. Such plans are now produced every five years to help the town prepare for future demands, while assessing its current infrastructure to meet these demands. Joe Seiferman retired in 1989 and was succeeded by **Mark O'Connell** and now **Richard Kelsey**. Due to the town's need for an expanded water supply, along with requirements for filtering surface water supplies (reservoirs) from the Safe Drinking Water Act, **Nathan L. Jacobson Associates** designed a plan for 7 wells along the Connecticut River on the Anderson and Goodrich properties. This plan recommended replacing the existing reservoir with a well system to avoid building a filtration plant. After extensive environmental impact studies, DEP rejected the plan in 1991. The reservoir was reevaluated at this time for feasibility. The diversion permit was then revised to developing 2 wells instead of 7 on the Anderson property to supplement the existing reservoir. The plan was crafted in a two-phase approach with phase 1 making improvements to the reservoir and constructing a filtration plant. In order to do this, a land swap was arranged with the State of Connecticut to facilitate the new plant. Phase 2 consisted of developing 2 wells by the river and installing a raw water transmission main from Strongs Avenue to the reservoir. The diversion permit was finally secured in 1992, after spending well over \$300,000. Pilot testing of filtration plant equipment commenced along with the development of contract documents for the filtration plant. In June of 1993 a Consent Order was signed by the Connecticut Department of Public Health to have a filtration plant operational by 1/1/97. In November of 1994 a town referendum authorized a bond issue of \$1,400,000, bringing the total bond authorization to \$7,400,000 for

much needed improvements to the town's water system. By 1995, the filtration plant design was essentially complete and all permits were received and in place. At this time Portland became aware that the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) in Hartford was willing and able to provide water to the Town of Portland. In April of 1995, officials from MDC made a presentation to the Portland Board of Selectmen. At this time approximately \$300,000 was expended on filtration plant design, pilot testing, land exchange and surveys. The Board of Selectmen then voted to further explore the possibility an interconnection with MDC. After a series of round table meetings, projected development costs for the interconnection were estimated at \$4,500,000, \$2,900,000 less than the proposed \$7,400,000 for the construction of the filtration plant. The interconnection also gave us the capacity to eliminate the development of the Strongs Avenue well fields which would have cost an additional \$500,000. Portland's projected demands would than be provided for within MDC's safe yield and approved diversion capacity. A joint diversion permit was required for the interconnection. In January of 1996 a contract was signed between MDC and the Town of Portland to purchase filtered water from MDC via a new transmission line to be constructed between South Glastonbury and Portland. In order to satisfy the diversion permit requirement in April of 1996, MDC and the town retained the firm of **Milone and MacBroom** to prepare the diversion permit application. In December the permit application was filed with the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). In April of 1997 The Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA) filed an intervener status with the State of Connecticut to oppose the project. A long series of negotiations began with FRWA, MDC and the Town of Portland to hammer out a compromise on the project. A slow review process was then ensued by DEP. In June of 1997 the consent order that was signed in 1993 with the State of Connecticut Health Department was amended to have all work associated with the MDC interconnection complete and operational by 12/3/99 or receive a penalty of \$100,000 and a \$200.00 fine per day. With slow arduous negotiations continuing with FRWA, DEP began public hearings to discuss the concerns of interveners. After a year of intense negotiation an agreement was finally signed to address the concerns of FRWA. This agreement eliminated their opposition to the diversion permit. The diversion permit was than forwarded from the Department of Public Health Officer to the Commissioner of DEP for signing. After four long years from the initial signing of the contract with MDC, the Department of Environmental Protection signed and issued the long awaited diversion permit in January of this year. As of the writing of this article two contracts have been signed for the installation of the pipeline, with construction expected to commence May 1. Design and construction for two new tanks at the existing reservoir is expected to begin early summer. Portland is finally going to get filtered water! The down side to this is that Portland water rates (one of the lowest in the state for many years) are now going have to reflect all of the mandated improvements. The expected rate increase will more than double the average residential customer's rate. This will be somewhat buffered by the adoption of quarterly billing which has been in effect for the last two billings. Instead of paying your bill semi-annually you now pay quarterly, which has been the norm in the industry for many years. Under the watchful eye of present Public Works Director Richard Kelsey, who is working tirelessly with department staff preparing the water department for the new millennium, the town is making significant improvements on its aging infrastructure. Some of the latest improvements include total rehabilitation and replacement of the Glastonbury Road pump, replacement of the heating system at the Chlorinator Building as well as main improvements on Coe Avenue Ext. It is now more important than ever for residents to continue to be conscious of conserving and using water wisely. Portland has been a leader for many years in conservation efforts, not only on a local and state level but also on the national as well. With the help of my **Walter the Water Saver**, I have been privileged to educate children throughout our school and the state for many years. I have also been involved with implementing an educational outreach program with four area high schools on developing conservation plans, as well as appearing on Connecticut Public Television to spread the conservation ethic. These projects won acclaim at the national convention in Dallas, Texas this past June. Anyone interested in learning more on how to conserve water can log on to **Walter the Water Saver's Web Site** at

[http://www.portlandct.org/water/Walter the Water Saver.htm](http://www.portlandct.org/water/Walter_the_Water_Saver.htm)
or call me at the town hall at **860.342.6769**