

## **CITY OF BATAVIA PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY 1894-2008**

The citizens of the City of Batavia voted to approve the installation of a water system in 1893. The Batavia Herald newspaper printed an article on November 30, 1893 with a headline:

### **BATAVIA TO THE FRONT Her Citizens Say We Shall Have Water Works Our Property and Homes Will Now Be Protected VOTE CARRIED BY 302 MAJORITY**

And the story read: “Wednesday the news was heralded to the World, that Batavia had taken on the mantle of progress. She has stepped out of her infant clothing and joined the great procession of advancement, and could now boast of as fine city improvements as any of the Metropolises.”

The article goes on to mention that to get the word out to the electorate that the vote had passed, that “the enterprising Rock City Coronet Band had caught the key note of enthusiasm and marched through the streets of Batavia Tuesday evening in the snow and sleet, heralding the good news to the citizens by note, and sweet and soothing were their musical chimes”. “After the march, a very enjoyable and enthusiastic ratification meeting was held, at their Hall, that was attended by a number of our leading citizens.”

At the time, in 1893, the City Council gave eight reasons to persuade the voters to approve the bond sale:

- “It will give employment to workmen, and is a needed public improvement
- “The City need is for fire protection and as a sanitary measure. Many of our wells are becoming polluted
- “We can sell bonds at a low rate of interest, as money is cheap for choice investments
- “It will reduce insurance rates.
- “Iron pipe is CHEAPER than ever before. Now is the time to buy it.
- “We have good power and sufficient help to run same.
- “The want of fire protection has caused factories, which contemplated locating here, to abandon the idea.
- “It will be a public benefit and convenience and ENHANCE the VALUE of your PROPERTY



**BATAVIA'S ORIGINAL WATER STANDPIPE**

During the late 1800's and into the 1900's Batavia was famous for significant industries. Limestone rock quarries were prevalent. The rock was mined and used to construct many area buildings. A great supply of this limestone was hauled to Chicago to help the town rebuild after the Great Chicago Fire.

Batavia was also a world leader in the production of farm windmills and water pumps. At one time Batavia was home to three (3) major windmill factories that shipped the

windmills around the world. The companies making the windmills included the Challenge Co., the Appleton Manufacturing Co. and the US Wind Engine and Pump Co. These companies employed many hundreds of men and had huge factories located along the Fox River.

Being a very industrialized City, the need for a reliable water system was of great concern, especially with the potential for devastating losses from fires in the factories and foundries. The City had also recently lost the three-year-old East Side School to a major fire. So in 1894 with **\$20,000** in recently approved bonds, Batavia got to work in building a public water system.

The City hired Daniel W. Mead, Rockford, IL. to engineer the project. The General Contractor was Batavia's own, Challenge Wind Mill & Feed Mill Co. The water system initially included pumping capacity of 1,000,000 gallons per day that fed a standpipe (see photo above), which was built by Corbett & Stadler, also a Batavia company. The distribution system consisted of five (5) miles of water main.

Since the beginning, Batavia has relied on deep well water as a primary source of supply. Shallow wells have also been in use since the early 1990's. Batavia's first deep well was completed in 1895 and was drilled to a depth of 1,279 ft. The well was free flowing, or artesian, when completed. Today the water table at Batavia's Well #2 (constructed in 1918), located adjacent to the Well #1 site, has a static water level of nearly 500 ft below the ground surface. Originally, Well #2 had a static water level of 6 ft.

As we proceed into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Batavia continues in the tradition of our forefathers. Major improvements and expansion of the City's water works system were recently completed. Just over 100 years after the citizens decided to build a water supply system, Batavia's City Council authorized **\$17 million** worth of water system improvements. These improvements were funded utilizing water reserve funds and the State of Illinois Low Interest Loan program. The improvements included; two (2) new water towers (see photo), three (3) new wells, booster pumping station and transmission main. The City also expanded the water treatment plant to include radium removal facilities bringing the water supply into compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.



As we look forward, we also look back to 1893 and the reasons the citizens first decided to install a public water supply. *Most of the same eight (8) reasons to vote yes at that time are still relevant today (except the part about iron pipe being cheaper than ever!).* It is our job to never take for granted the importance of water to society and to ensure the supply is still viable 100 years from now. Batavia looks forward to the challenges that lie ahead including water supply and treatment, distribution system and infrastructure maintenance and public policy concerning water conservation practices. Batavia thanks the Illinois Section of the American Water Works Association (ISAWWA) for taking a leadership role in developing programs and sponsoring seminars that meet the educational needs of the water suppliers from our state and in promoting the importance of water to our citizens and legislators.