



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

The Newsletter of the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society

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What's A National Historic Landmark, Anyway?

Visitors to the Shreveport Water Works Museum always learn that the water works is a National Historic Landmark, and a rather unique one. But, just what does it MEAN to be a National Historic Landmark? And what's the difference between being a National Historic Landmark and being on the National Register of Historic Places? Here is the explanation:

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is administered by the National Park Service and lists properties that include districts, sites, building, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.

Included among the more than 71,000 listings that make up the National Register of Historic Places are:

- All historic areas in the National Park System
- Properties across the country that have been nominated by governments, organizations, and individuals because they are significant to the nation, to a state, or to a community
- 2,500 National Historic Landmarks which have been designated by the Secretary of the Interior because of their importance to all Americans throughout the nation.

The National Park Service says that while many historic places like those on the National Register are important locally or on a state or regional level, a few have meaning to the entire country. Places like the McNeill Street Pumping Station that "possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating and interpreting the heritage of the United States" are designated National Historic Landmarks. They illuminate and tell our national story in Presidential homes, on stretches of arctic tundra, on battlefields, at pueblo ruins, in historic towns and communities, in the nation's industrial facilities, and in our masterpieces of architecture and engineering.

This program is actually older than the National Register and was established in 1935 when the U.S. Congress charged the Department of the Interior with the responsibility for designating nationally significant historic sites, buildings, and objects and promoting their preservation for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States. The National Park System Advisory Board considers completed nominations at public meetings, and based on recommendations of the Board, the Secretary of the Interior then designates National Historic Landmarks. Only 3% of all properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places are also listed as National Historic Landmarks. "Their preservation is an irreplaceable legacy to us and future generations," according to the National Park Service.

So, as a Landmark, McNeill is in an elite group of historic properties nationally such as the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the Brooklyn Bridge, and Mt. Vernon. Closer to home in Louisiana the list includes 53 sites, the majority of which are in the greater New Orleans area. There are only nine Landmarks north of Alexandria and in the Shreveport area there are only two: the Pumping Station and the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium.

However, contrary to what you might expect after reading these official goals, there is no preservation protection or federal assistance that is automatically conferred on a Landmark. The owner of a Landmark has NO obligation to properly maintain the Landmark or even to not tear it down. Being a Landmark makes it easier to APPLY for federal assistance, receive technical preservation advice, and receive special consideration in projects involving federal funds, but that's all. It's up to the Landmark's owner (now the State of Louisiana), or interested parties like the Preservation Society, to take the initiative to actually preserve the site and seek out help wherever they can find it.



Front view of main pump room added in 1921

Since its formation in 1999, the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society has taken a leading role locally in publicizing the Pumping Station, initiating restoration work, and promoting making the landmark available for the public to visit. The old water works was locked away and in a sad state of disrepair at the outset in 1999, but since then with the support of the city, the state, private foundations, and many, many donations from members, there have been a number of preservation success stories that everyone is rightfully proud of and thankful for. Preserving this National Historic Landmark is a responsibility that should be accepted by the entire community. The continued existence of the Pumping Station depends on it.

{You can learn more about these programs on the internet at www.cr.nps.gov/nhl and www.cr.nps.gov/nr.}

Clearwell History Clarified



View of the old clearwell with its roof in 1911

We love showing visitors around the water works with a personal guided tour, but for extra information or for those times when a tour can't be done, there are a couple of dozen exhibit signs stationed throughout the museum with key facts. A new sign has recently been added to the collection and can be found outside on the wooden deck overlooking the bayou.

The photograph on the new sign shows a spot that has changed quite a bit over the decades. The original open spot on the grounds in the corner of the pumphouse building was claimed in 1901 by a new underground storage tank for the now-clean water called a clearwell. There was originally no provision for water storage in the plant design and water had to be pumped straight out to customers as soon as it was produced. Although the storage was a welcome addition, the

tank soon proved to be too small. Later on, the wooden roof was taken off and the tank got a concrete roof that supported a new laboratory building added on top of it. In 1926 the elevated wash-water storage tank was installed above it all at the same time that a new, much larger clearwell was added in a completely different spot.

Special Gifts

The McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society has received a donation from Renee Rodi in honor of father James Mohr's birthday. James, of course, has been a dedicated and indispensable friend of preserving the Pumping Station and has for several years served on the boards of directors of the museum and of the Preservation Society. Thank you very much to Renee for the thoughtful gift and to James for his service to the Pumping Station.

Another Historic Water Works



Exterior of Museum

One of the unique things about Shreveport Water Works Museum is that it is an intact steam powered municipal water plant. Everything is still in place much as it was during the hundred years that it supplied water to the city. There are only a very few such places from the era of steam left standing in the United States, and besides in Shreveport, one of those few can be found in suburban Boston at Chestnut Hill.

The water works at that site consisted of a reservoir that stored fresh water brought by aqueduct from Massachusetts uplands and a pumping station that drew from the reservoir. Construction of the Chestnut Hill storage reservoir began in 1866, and in 1887 (same year as at McNeill) a high service pumping station was constructed that delivered water from the reservoir to customers. The high service building still stands and is quite a handsome structure that reminds of a medieval town hall with rough stone, towers, deep set windows, and arches. The inside was anything but medieval, as a complement of the most modern steam engines and pumps of the day kept water flowing to Boston. The last operating one was a Worthington-Snow pump similar to the No. 3 high service pump at SWWM which was installed in 1921 and ran un-



View of a section of Allis engine

in a process that went through various iterations during a period of more than ten years. The plan finally adopted was a public-private partnership that allowed a residential developer to acquire the site and build condominiums in the old low service building and elsewhere. However, the high service building was allowed to remain intact and be converted to a museum that receives ongoing financial support from the residential development.

So, today the still handsome high service building houses the Waterworks Museum that opened in 2011. The museum exhibits the three big pumps previously mentioned as well as tools and other memorabilia as it tells the story of water for the city. It's quite an interesting story, too, and the techniques used by the museum are worth mining for ideas for SWWM.

From its earliest days, the reservoir and the impressive, slightly mysterious adjacent buildings was a park-like recreational spot for residents to enjoy, and in a case of history repeating itself, that is once again true thanks to the Waterworks Museum.

(More information is available online at www.waterworksmuseum.org)

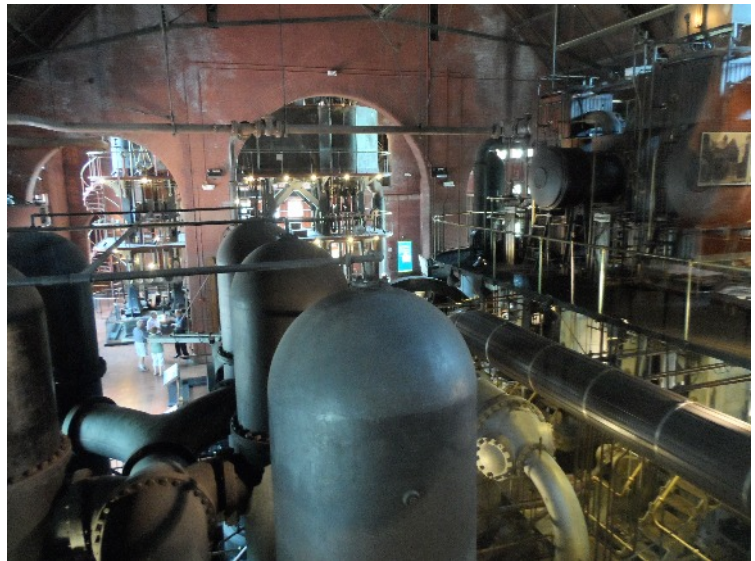
Odds 'n Ends

- The boards of the SWWM and the Red River Valley Railroad Historical Society were very pleased recently to welcome Mr. Drew Tessier, Director of Public Affairs for Union Pacific Railroad. Mr. Tessier was in town to personally deliver the checks for the grants announced earlier this year from the Union Pacific Foundation. Both awards were for \$10,000. The Preservation Society will be using this money plus other donations to work on brick repointing, and the railroad society will be developing the railroad museum expansion.
- We got a note not long ago from a Shreveport resident who brought visiting relatives to the railroad museum and the Water Works Museum. They wanted to compliment Kevin Haines, the museum's tour guide, for being "extremely knowledgeable about the history of the water works, very thorough in his presentation, and gave an interesting tour peppered with humor. He answered all our scientific and mechanical observations.....and made it so enjoyable... Thank you to Kevin for sharing this historic place with tourists and locals." Kevin actually gets lots of compliments like this in our visitor log, so good job Kevin! Bring your friends and family out and let Kevin do a great job for you, too.
- Although your Summer Flight of the Phoenix reported that the state intends to maintain a somewhat "status quo" budget for museums in 2017, the threat of big cuts to the Secretary of State's museum program just doesn't seem to want to go away. We're once again hearing rumblings from Baton Rouge that operating money for museums will run out at mid-year. Whether that will happen and, if so, what that means are unknown.

til 1976. Also still inside are a huge, 5-story Allis triple-expansion machine that was installed in 1898 and ran until 1974, and an unusual 1894 Leavitt triple expansion engine that was designed and built to fit the available space in the pumphouse.

In 1900 a low service pumping station was added that had the job of delivering water to another intermediate reservoir nearer to downtown Boston. Unlike the high service pumping station, this part of the water works is not intact anymore, which leads us to the latter day history of the site.

By the early 1990's, the steam pumping operation was abandoned and deteriorating and marked for demolition by the Metropolitan Water Board that owned it. Preservation advocates organized themselves and intervened to seek an alternate solution



Looking across the engine hall inside the high service museum building

McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society
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You Can Help.....Make A Donation!

The Preservation Society needs money for restoration and operation of the museum. Your donation can be put to good use!

Name _____

email _____
(If you provide your email address, we can send you occasional updates on activities)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail to MSPSPS, P.O. Box 957, Shreveport, LA 71157. Checks payable to MSPSPS.