



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

The Newsletter of the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society

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Fall 2017

Let's Get To Work

A lot of very good things have happened since 2007 when the Shreveport Water Works Museum opened for business, but one of the things that hasn't happened very well is keeping everything clean and tidy, and our old Victorian gal has a dirty face that needs a good scrub. It has literally been years since a lot of the site has had a good cleaning. We plan to change that on September 23, which has been declared Clean Up Day at the Museum.

All of the museum's friends (and enemies if they have elbow grease to spare) are invited to come out and sweep, mop, wash windows, de-cobweb, and polish. The fun will begin at 8am on Saturday and last until lunchtime. (But, if you really insist, you are welcome to work after lunch, too!) Bring brooms, water/mop buckets, mops, work gloves, and whatever else you might have on hand that would be handy for housecleaning. A shop-vac would be handy, but a regular residential vacuum might not survive the experience. Non-slip shoes and old clothes would also be a good idea. We'll provide rags, degreaser, and plenty of wash water. Children over 12 are welcome to help, but younger children could find too many ways to hurt themselves if left unsupervised.

We will provide FREE LUNCH and DRINKS as a bribe afterward, so it would be nice to get a headcount to make sure nobody goes away hungry. You can register on the Shreveport Water Works Museum Facebook page or send an email to mneill1887@gmail.com.

Come help make Shreveport's Victorian treasure shine again. Our National Historic Landmark and National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark will thank you and so will we!



New Helpers

The McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society has a new volunteer for the fall to help with chores around the museum. Randall Palmer has finished his course work in library science and historic preservation at Northwestern State University and is waiting on his degree to be awarded at the end of the fall semester. In the meantime he has volunteered to help us out to get some hands-on experience in his area of interest.

Randall has learned how to be a tour guide to help out our regular guide, Kevin Haines, and is pitching in on some other activities like Work Day at the Museum. In a project for the future, he is also working to investigate alternative ways that we could provide a self-guided tour at the museum. The best way to visit is with a guided tour by a docent, usually offered by Kevin. But, as visitation has grown, there are some days that Kevin is swamped and can't get around to everybody. This will happen more and more often (we hope) as traffic increases, so we need a better self-tour than walking through and reading things. Randall is looking at various ways to use technology to enhance the experience, and hopefully we can find a grant to pay for whatever he develops. A big thanks to Randall Palmer for taking on Shreveport Water Works Museum as a volunteer project!

There is also more really exciting news to share about a new helper. Spring Street Historical Museum is another downtown former state museum, and the two of us have gotten together and agreed to share the services of one employee. Both museums have enough work to keep one or more full-time employees of their own occupied without sharing, but cost is an issue. So, both groups are contributing 50% each to pay for one part-time employee who will work at both places.

Those of our readers who are SWWM Facebook friends have doubtless seen the “help wanted” posting there, which snared several nicely qualified applicants. Maria Schmelz has been selected as the “winner” and will be starting to work soon. Maria is an artist and photographer who has been involved with various nonprofits here and at an earlier home location and also worked in the retail sector. At SWWM, we will be asking Maria to help the museum be open an extra day each week, which will leave Monday as the only “closed” day. Plus, Maria will fill in as tour guide for Kevin when he is gone, help with after-hours rentals, work on organizing events and fundraisers, and work on getting grants. Spring Street Museum has a similar list of their own for Maria, who is not going to lack for things to do and will need a thick planner to keep up.

A big “welcome” to Shreveport Water Works Museum for Maria Schmelz!

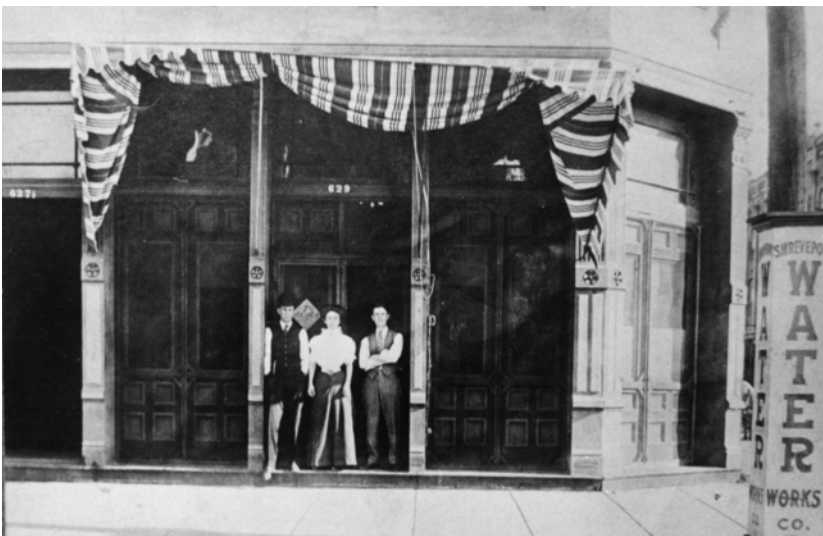
Save The Date

Last year the Shreveport Water Works Museum staged a really fun event called Food Trucks At The Museum (or FTATM for a handy acronym). There was live music, some great food truck fare served in the parking lot, a silent auction, and, what turned out to be most popular, guided tours of the museum. Hundreds of people came out to enjoy, so an encore performance was definitely called for.

Saturday November 18 is the date for FTATM II, The format will likely be similar to last year, but planning is currently in progress. This will be a great time to come visit the museum, and bring along that acquaintance or family member who doesn't know about this great historic site that made the city possible.

Did You Know....

.....that the Shreveport Water Works (original name of the McNeill Street Pumping Station) wasn't owned by the city? When the water works opened for business in 1887, it was owned by Samuel R. Bullock & Company of New York City, which already operated numerous other water systems in several states. Bullock through his local subsidiary the Shreveport Water Works Company had quickly built 8.5 miles of water mains and 106 fire hydrants that were supplied with water taken from Cross Bayou by the heart of the system, a pumping station located at the head of McNeill Street.



Office of Shreveport Water Works Company at 629 Market in 1905

The relationship between Shreveport and the Bullock company proved to be unhappy and short-lived. Although the Mayor and City Council was initially satisfied with the system that supplied pressurized water to the city after decades of nothing, complaints soon arose. Shortcuts taken in the design of the system resulted in the fire department frequently having difficulty fighting fires because of inadequate pressure, and many residents complained that the water was so muddy that it was unfit even for bathing, much less drinking.

Although details are sketchy, it appears that Bullock was having financial difficulties at some of his other plants too, and in 1889 the firm went bankrupt. Ownership of the Shreveport water works was taken over by the holder

of the construction bonds, First National Bank of New York City. The new owners continued work begun by Bullock to install filters to improve the aesthetic qualities of the water – its taste, odor, and color. The need to combat bacteria was still not recognized by science at the time.

The bank soon found a buyer to remove themselves from the fractious world of water operations when they sold the system in 1892 to a group of business associates led by Peter Youree. Youree, the namesake of modern day Youree Drive, was a prominent Shreveport business leader originally from Missouri who made his home here after being mustered out of the Confederate army. The new owners launched a series of improvements in the form of new pumps and boilers to improve pressure in the mains and a small dam was constructed on Cross Bayou to impound as much water as possible for the system.

Youree's operation was seriously hampered by the increasing impurity of Cross Bayou, which was the sole source of water. Initially, Cross Bayou was outside the settled areas of the city and unpolluted. But by the late 1890's, as a result of the city's rapid growth, a number of tenements and small industries had been built upstream from the water system intake. The dumping of raw sewage and other wastes from these developments caused a steady decline in the quality of the water being pumped into the city's mains.

Complaints thus continued from the City Council, the board of health, from fire insurance vendors, and from many citizens offended by the smelly water that frequently ran from the taps in their homes and businesses. Talk of the city taking over the water system began, but before this got very far, Youree and his partners took themselves off the hot seat by selling to American Water Works and Guarantee (AWWG) of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. AWWG was a holding company that owned several water systems and was an experienced operator. By the standards of the time, AWWG's performance was quite good. Substantial amounts of money were spent by the company to greatly expand both the filtering and pumping capacity of the McNeill Street station. This was accompanied by greatly expanding the water distribution system through the laying of new mains and installation of new fire hydrants. The plant was an early adopter of improvements in water treatment technology and applied alum treatment and chlorination soon after these were developed.

Despite all that, it was apparently too late, as relations between the water company and the city showed little improvement. So, in July 1914 the city voters approved a bond issue to buy the water system. At this point there was yet another difficulty because the city ignored the appraised valuation set by arbitrators as required by the franchise and offered \$750,000, less than half the appraisal. AWWG refused. The city then undertook to get voters to pass another bond issue with enough money to build a completely new water system, which also passed. Whether the city actually had enough money in hand to build from scratch is debatable, but this maneuver finally forced AWWG to sell for \$800,000.

On January 1, 1917 the city assumed control of the water system from AWWG, and has been in the water business ever since. The city also soon hired away an AWWG employee, Thomas L. Amiss, that in hindsight was quite a fortuitous coup. But, that is another story!

Latest Museum Happenings

After a busy, busy spring, the summer season passed somewhat uneventfully at the Shreveport Water Works Museum. No budget ultimatums, changes in ownership, party rentals, or museum events, just lots of visitors from all over the place. There was one minor challenge when our veteran docent Kevin took a vacation and the museum's volunteer tour guides were called on to fill in and avoid disappointing visitors. Quite a few of the museum's visitors are from out of town and only have one shot at coming out, so a locked gate is a real bummer for them.

With no events or fundraising activities during the season but with the usual ongoing bills arriving in the mail, the Preservation Society's bank balance inched down. But, FTATM II and the normal Preservation Society membership renewals that are concentrated at the end of the year will hopefully provide a boost soon. Although it's not enough to "live on", many visitors thoughtfully leave a donation, so more visitors helps in that way. There's still a lot of work to do in order to make the Preservation Society's new role as museum proprietor viable in the long term, but so far, so good.

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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 71163. Checks payable to MSPSPS.