



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

The Newsletter of the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society

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Spring 2019

Happy Anniversary!

It's important to remember anniversaries if you're married, and even though McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society isn't married, your newsletter wants to pause and take note that 2019 is the 20th anniversary of MSPSPS. On January 14, 1999 MSPSPS was officially incorporated in Louisiana with the approval of a state filing made by our own attorney/member, and sometimes board member, Gary Fox (thanks Gary!).

The first meetings of what became the Preservation Society actually took place in late 1998, principally at the urging of Bob Hopkins and Larry LaBorde (still members like Gary), who had recently rediscovered the once well-known but now neglected old water plant. The meetings drew a good-sized crowd including the mayor-elect that discussed whether and how to revive the plant, which had been largely left to deteriorate for years after retirement of the steam equipment in 1980. Bob launched "The Flight Of The Phoenix" at that same time and named it after the mythical bird which burned itself up every



Ceiling in old office

500 years then rose from its own ashes, which seemed to fit the then-current situation in trying to revive the old water plant from its own neglected condition and return it to service of the city in a new way.

Anniversaries are frequently an occasion to pause and reflect on memories, so what's happened since those beginnings two decades ago?

The plant was not exactly in ashes, but it definitely needed a lot of TLC. The building's roof was the most worrisome problem since there were some places where you could see the sky through holes and many other places that

were leaking. An old building can't stand that, and structural failure was only a matter of time.

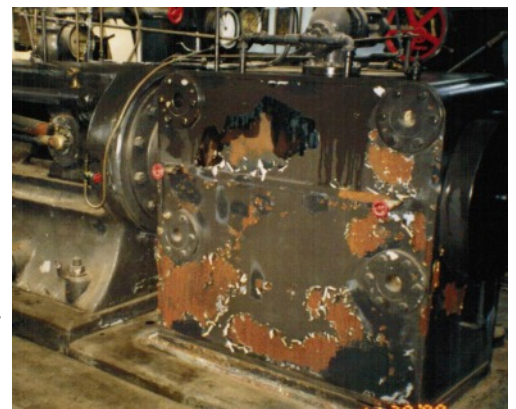
Besides the roof problem, there were hundreds of broken window panes, the ca. 1911 laboratory/chlorinator building was a mess, the ceiling in the "old office" was falling in, the crank-and-flywheel engines were seriously rusty, there was an ugly sinkhole beside a wall, and the mortar in the walls of the oldest part of the building was failing. This is not a complete list, but it conveys the idea. Where to start?!



Lime tank "after"



Lime tank "before"



Rusty engine in main pump room



Sidewalk-eating sinkhole next to building

The Preservation Society rolled up its collective sleeves and began working to publicize the site, get at least some restoration work started, and look for money to do even more. The very first restoration project undertaken by the Preservation Society was replacing 411 broken window panes in the main pumproom. The city furnished the antique glass and MSPSPS quickly raised the

\$10,000 needed for installation (putty was used for authenticity, not modern caulk) and got 'er done. The restoration effort got a huge boost in 2001 when the city (with assistance from the Preservation Society) snagged a \$150,000 grant from the Department of the Interior's Save America's Treasures program, which the city then matched. The \$300,000 was used to completely repair/replace the roof, repair all the exterior doors and windows, repair all the eaves/gutters, and paint everything outside. In the meantime, the Preservation Society was working on restoring the laboratory building and doing some painting and fix-up work inside (including the ceiling in the picture). Repairing the failing mortar was a tougher nut to crack, but that work on the exterior got started in 2013 thanks to a Community Foundation grant and wrapped up last year with Union Pacific grants to finally get the complete building shell in reasonably good shape. Other very important projects completed were repairing the big chimney, repainting the lime tank, and repainting the elevated water tank.

But, the Preservation Society not only wanted (and still wants) to preserve the site, it wanted a *museum* that would be open to the public so people could come see this historic jewel. Various ideas and trial balloons were floated from the very beginning in 1999, and after dead ends, lots of meetings, letters, trips to Baton Rouge, and to City Hall, there was success in 2006 in founding a museum when the city donated the historic area of the plant to the state and the state opened Shreveport Water Works Museum in April 2007. At that point the Preservation Society turned its attention to supporting the SWWM as a junior partner with the state.

In 2009 the state's still-new SWWM expanded by inviting Red River Valley Railroad Historical Society to use a vacant building on



Secretary of State Jay Dardenne (center) cuts ribbon for museum while board members look on



Russell Pedro puts up sign opening Railroad Museum at water works

site to exhibit their memorabilia. This was the control building for the outdoor filters and was of somewhat recent vintage (compared to the rest of the old plant) since it dated from 1942. The building was structurally sound, but the inside was a mess and needed a lot of remodeling to be suitable for museum exhibits. Railroad Society volunteers led by Russell Pedro got to work, and in 2012 the "open" sign was hung for the Shreveport Railroad Museum. This has been a great addition as a visitor attraction which capitalizes on the long history of railroading in Shreveport and the natural synergy between the two uses of steam power during the steam era.

Whew! That was just a few of the highlights from the saga with many people, events, and activities passed over. But, unless you are a brand-new newsletter reader, you know there is still another twist to the story. The state decided in 2016 that it couldn't afford SWWM anymore, and in February 2017 the site was returned to the city. The Preservation Society quickly offered to help the city keep SWWM open, which resulted in a contract that provides for the Preservation Society to fund and operate the museum with the city owning and maintaining the site. The city deserves recognition and thanks not just for that, but for its role through the years. It has never wanted to take the lead in site preservation or providing a museum, but through multiple mayors, city councils, and department heads, it has always been there for the Pumping Station when it counted most.

That's a lot of happenings to reminisce about, don't you think? Wonder what the 30th anniversary will add?

Give For Good

Give For Good is a yearly fundraising "donate-a-thon" sponsored by Community Foundation of North Louisiana. The format is a midnight-to-midnight online giving campaign that is available to all nonprofits in this area who wish to participate. The Community Foundation provides a special website, does all the bookkeeping, does a lot of advertising, and puts some extra money into the pot as a Lagniappe Fund that provides partial matching to donations and does it all for free.

Donations are accepted with a credit card online only and there is a small processing fee (about 4%) associated with that. The website to use is www.giveforgoodnla.org, but you'll have to wait until closer to the big day MAY 7, 2019 to use it. If you are otherwise occupied on May 7, it is possible to preschedule your donation on the website, but the transaction won't actually happen until May 7.



This is all very important because Give For Good has become the biggest fundraiser of the year for MSPSPS, second only to the annual donations from our membership. Last year the Community Foundation sent a check for about \$7,000 at the end of the campaign. Remember: Tuesday, May 7

Special Gifts

Peggy and Rory Wisner have made a donation to MSPSPS in honor of Jim Nuttall, Peggy’s father. Thank you Peggy and Rory for this thoughtful and generous way of remembering a great friend of McNeill Street Pumping Station.

Election Returns

The Preservation Society annual meeting of members took place on February 11 in the museum meeting room with the principal business being the election of directors to the board. Directors are organized into three groups, each serving a three-year term, and this year the terms of Conway Link, Paul Williams, Marilyn Joiner, and Nettie Brown were expiring. All of them offered to “run” for reelection if nominated, which is what happened, so welcome back!

Following the board election, as prescribed by the bylaws, the board elected its officers for the upcoming year. All the current officers were reelected to their positions, with Conway Link serving as president, Marilyn Joiner vice president, Paul Williams treasurer, Liz Swaine secretary, and Dale Ward executive director.

The bylaws charge the board with complete authority to oversee the affairs of McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society, and it has been a while since we provided members with a complete run-down of who’s who, so here is a re-introduction to your board!

Conway Link is the longest serving member by far since he has been on the board since the Preservation Society’s founding in 1999. Conway is (amongst other vocations and avocations) a semi-retired educator from LSUS. Marilyn Joiner has been on the board since 2007 with a day job as director of marketing for Willis Knighton. Paul Williams also joined in 2007 and is retired vice president finance for the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce. Jeff Little has served since 2015 and is an attorney in his spare time from the museum. James Van Hook is also a practicing attorney and has served since 2013. George Bakowski joined in 2009 and is a doctor of optometry when he is not busy helping with civic activities. Nettie Brown, Liz Swaine, Jeff Cornelius, and Stacy Brown all came to the board in 2017, but aren’t actually short-timers since all served on the state’s Shreveport Water Works Museum governing board before that group was dissolved in 2017. Nettie is a retired laboratory supervisor from the city’s water department, Liz is director of Downtown Development Authority, and Stacy is director of Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau (she knows *everything* about being a visitor attraction here!). Jeff is a retired, multi-talented individual with an interest in history and railroads who spent most of his career in the military. There is always a last but definitely not least, which is David Kunz. He came to the board in 2018 but, like several others, also served on the state’s SWWM governing board before that. David is a managing partner of Balar Associates engineering firm.

Thank you to each and every one of these fine board members who have donated so much of their scarce time to taking care of the past, present, and future of our National Historic Landmark.

HONOR ROLL

Want to be famous? If you made a donation of over \$100 recently, more than 6000 people will see your name this year! As mentioned in the last newsletter, the Preservation Society wants to give credit where credit is due: to our DONORS. There is now a snazzy new sign in the museum that lists those who have given \$100 or more in the last year. When a new year rolls around, we’ll update the display (we want to brag on you, but if you want your donation to be a secret, just let us know).



McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society
P.O. Box 957
Shreveport, LA 71163

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
Or, donations can be made online at www.shreveportwaterworks.org