



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

The Newsletter of the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society

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Summer 2020

Virus Crisis Closes Museum

Shreveport Water Works Museum was closed on March 24 in conformance with the statewide stay-at-home directive designed to slow the spread of Covid-19. So, not much news to report from around the historic water plant this quarter. Despite being historic and 132 years old, the site has never seen anything quite like this, with the possible exception of the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic. The plan to have a Railroad Day event at SWWM on May 3 was collateral damage of the situation as well. Railroad Day has been postponed until the fall when we hope that it will be possible to have what is sure to be a fun event.

During the hiatus with no visitors to entertain, our tiny staff worked on housekeeping and fix-ups to make the site tidy for visitors again someday. Reopening day did finally arrive on May 19 and the museum is once again available to amaze the uninitiated with the story of steam powered technology that provided the city's water beginning in 1887.

"Social distancing" has joined everyone's vocabulary lately, and SWWM offers an inherently socially distant and virus unfriendly environment with large, open, high-ceilinged rooms that get lots of outdoor air circulation (although it's hot air this time of year!). The museum is the perfect place to break the stay-at-home boredom if you're a local family with restless kids or a traveler hitting the road again. Visitors have begun to trickle back through, but there's plenty of space for more, so come on out. You'll be glad you did!

Brick Repair Gets Done

Regular newsletter readers will remember that Union Pacific Foundation awarded the Preservation Society a \$6000 grant to work on repairing failed mortar on the inside of the walls of the oldest part of the pumphouse. The Preservation Society added \$4000 from other donors and got the project underway in late March. This turned out to be the perfect time since the museum was closed to the public, and it allowed the brick mason to be "socially distant" at the same time he was making a dusty mess removing old mortar then reinstalling new mortar.

There wasn't enough money to do the entire



Brick mason at work repointing joints



Close-up of repaired wall

interior, of course, and the area selected for repair was the south wall of the old high service pump room. All of the interior walls in this room need work, but the south wall faces the exterior and was in the worst condition due to exposure to moisture from outside. The brick was painted somewhere along the way, perhaps in the 1950's, and masonry preservation experts advise that this is not a good idea since it creates a vapor barrier that traps moisture in the wall. Consequently, the newly repaired area

was not repainted. The appearance of the result is pretty good, sort of fashionable for nowadays. In any case, it is great to have the wall's structural soundness restored, hopefully for another hundred years.

You may notice in the pictures with this story that the bricks are not uniform in size or color and are laid somewhat unevenly. This is not our fault! Why the bricks are like this is lost to history. We can make some guesses, and one guess is that Samuel Bullock's company, always eager to control costs, bought a batch of bricks salvaged from elsewhere.

The Preservation Society is very grateful to Union Pacific Foundation for making this project possible. The city is lucky to have both a very unusual National Historic Landmark and a corporate citizen that cares about the communities it serves. If you know a Union Pacific employee, be sure to give them an "attaboy"!



This is a view of most of the finished wall

It's A Wrap

This year's edition of the Community Foundation's Give For Good happened on May 5, and generous donors once again gave the Preservation Society a lot of money. Donations less processing fees plus a \$500 door prize from the Community Foundation plus the Community Foundation's partial match from the Lagniappe Fund made a grand total of \$7,767. The Lagniappe Fund match amounted to 12.7%, which gave the money from donors a nice boost. This year's total was very similar to 2019's total of \$7,396, but with a change in the good direction!

Give For Good has been an effective and important fundraiser for the Preservation Society's work at the museum since it came along in 2014. This year was no exception as the result is contributing about 15% of expenses budgeted for operating the museum in 2020. Thank you very, very much to all our donors and to the Community Foundation for sponsoring the event.

And, Speaking of Money

Working with visitors is more fun than collecting and managing money, but we've gotta have it and gotta do it in order to keep Shreveport Water Works Museum open. So, without getting into a whole bunch of details, what can be said about the museum's financial situation in 2020?

As the year began, estimated expenses were roughly \$50,000 and projected income was \$30,000, which would be the first deficit budget since the Preservation Society took over the museum in 2017 if it played out just like that. But, as Yogi Berra said, making forecasts is tough, particularly about the future. The virus crisis has muddied the water and will likely reduce on-site cash donations and souvenir sales by perhaps \$2500, but we've made cuts to things like janitorial service and payroll. The virus crisis also has resulted in the Preservation Society obtaining one of the well-publicized Paycheck Protection Program loans/grants for \$5000, but on the negative side has made it virtually certain that the City won't be awarding a grant like the one last year that brought in \$25,000.

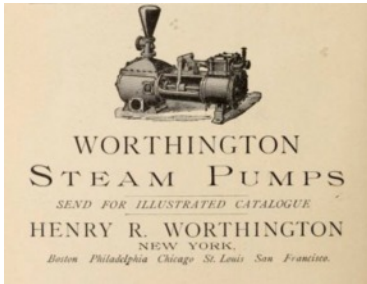
Back in the good news category is a \$10,000 grant just received from the William B. Wiener, Jr. Foundation. Thank you very, very much to the Wiener Foundation for this crucially needed support. Bill Wiener has been a steady and important friend to the old steam water plant for a very long time and was instrumental in securing the National Historic Landmark designation back in 1983.

The pluses and minuses result at this point is a best guess that there is as much as a \$10,000 shortage still facing the museum for the year. This is not *really* a lot of money (unless you don't have it!), and your board of directors for the balance of the year will continue to chip away at expenses and be looking for more revenue.

Facebook Fans

Many of our [Flight of the Phoenix](#) readers are Facebook participants, but others (like your editor) are not. There have been several interesting posts published on the SWWM Facebook site this quarter that we will share right here and now since Facebook has been just about the most interesting thing happening lately....

We're 'gauging' our return here at the Shreveport Water Works Museum and so looking forward to seeing you again! The great thing about the SWWM is that when we reopen, it is going to be very easy to maintain good, safe social distancing. We know that you'll be ready to get out of the house and we'll be ready for you.



Please allow us to introduce you to Henry Rossiter Worthington. Mr. Worthington, who lived 1817-1880, is a big reason the McNeil Street Pumping Station (Water Works Museum) has such cool steam pumps. Worthington was a busy man - he was an American mechanical engineer, inventor, industrialist and a founder of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He also developed the direct-acting steam pumps used at the water works, an invention called "one of the most ingenious advances in engineering in the 19th century." When the Water Works is open again, we invite you to come take a look at our pumps that bear his name!



We've talked about downtown's beautiful trees and wonderful doorways. Today, awesome signage! I admit I am partial to historic signs, signs that have borne witness for 75 years or longer, but we have some great newer signage, too, signage that one day will be looked on as historical. Take a look. Which is your favorite sign downtown, or do you have another that you love?



There aren't many historic water works that have survived more or less intact - That's why we're always so happy to find friends in far flung places. One of those is the [Twyford Waterworks](#) in south-eastern England. [See Summer 2018 newsletter.] One of their members is always happy to share good ideas with us; and those tips are always most appreciated. You might want to like the Twyford page and keep up with them, too!



We want to share this very cool photo taken by Jessica Perez on one of her trips to the Shreveport Water Works Museum. We love the old boilers in black and white. We hope to be open sometime in late May or early June for you to be able to come by and see them yourself!



And, this is our favorite: we are OPEN! Our hours are Tues.- Sat. 10 am-4 pm and Sunday, noon-4 pm. Admission is free (donations are always appreciated) and we have tour guides to walk you through -or- you can pick up a brochure for a self guide. Our historic water works combines equal parts engineering, chemistry, sanitation and Shreveport/downtown history. It's a really remarkable story. For those of you unfamiliar with our facility, it is large and open;

very easy to maintain needed social distancing. We look forward to seeing you!

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.