

Fledgling Reservoir Evolves Into Major Taxpayer Tracing Aquarion Water Company's Role in Shelton

*Spectacular sunsets that rival Key West.
The serenity of a pristine chapel.
Wildlife you might find in a zoo.*

With these elements, the beauty and eco-magnetism of Trap Falls Reservoir almost eclipse its role as Aquarion Water Company's main source of drinking water for the city.

The reservoir came about just after the turn of the last century, when the men running Aquarion's forerunner, Bridgeport Hydraulic Company, realized the population in the greater Bridgeport area was growing too fast for their water supply to keep up.

They had other challenges too: low water pressure from small reservoirs around the city, and pollutants from the many factories that sprang up during the Industrial Revolution.

Samuel P. Senior, a young engineer who later served as the water company's CEO for 35 years, devised a plan that would address all the challenges. According to current CEO Charles V. Firlotte, Senior planned a system of four large, interconnected reservoirs at high elevations outside the city. The reservoirs would be large enough to supply water for the burgeoning population in the decades ahead, the elevation would increase pressure with the help of gravity pulling water down the pipes, and the rural locations would keep the water free of factory emissions.

"Senior was a visionary," Firlotte said. "A century later, those four reservoirs are still the backbone of our water supply for a major part of Fairfield County."

Trap Falls Takes Shape

The first of the four was Trap Falls, a 2.3-billion-

gallon reservoir that went into service in 1905.

A southern section of Huntington already formed a natural basin, which made it an ideal choice for BHC — but first the company had to acquire the land, which was divided among numerous landowners.

The parcels varied in size, from one acre formerly owned by William E. Hine, to 50.3 acres BHC bought from Ira Northrop in 1902. The names on many of the deeds would be familiar to anyone who knows even a little of the city's history: Nichols, Hawley,

Wooster and Beard, for example.

Once BHC held the deeds, its workers cleared the land, laid in pipes, and then diverted nearby Far Mill River and Means Brook in the White Hills area to fill the reservoir.

Today water piped in from much smaller reservoirs on Far Mill River and Means Brook still supply Trap Falls. The water from Means Brook enters through a pipe that comes up through

a stone structure at the northern end of Trap Falls called an aerator, or "bubbler." The agitation of the water as it tumbles out of the pipe and down over the stonework infuses it with oxygen. Many people enjoy watching the fountain-like effect and the wildlife the fresh water attracts, such as ducks, egrets, otter, beavers and foxes.

BHC begins to expand

Once the reservoir was in full operation, BHC began to expand its holdings in Shelton. In 1916, it acquired Shelton Water Co., which had been incorporated in 1875, and retained the latter company's water sources for emergency back-up.

By the early 1950s, BHC once again was looking for more water to supply the region's ever-growing population, but so much land was taken up by homes and manufacturing plants by then, there wasn't enough room to establish a new reservoir.



The Trap Falls Reservoir

COMMUNITY NEWS



Workers and managers from Bridgeport Hydraulic Company survey the progress during creation of Trap Falls Reservoir a century ago.



The Trap Falls dam

Instead, BHC started drilling wells, including a site in Shelton above the Housatonic River. Firlotte said the Housatonic Well Field was one of the largest supplies of drinkable underground water in all of New England, and the new water source helped BHC weather a four-year drought in the 1960s.

Answering another challenge

The federal government's Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 meant another challenge for BHC, Firlotte said, because it introduced more stringent quality standards.

The company's answer was a state-of-the-art treatment plant on 10 acres at Trap Falls. Construction took three years, and the plant went into service in 1981, bearing the name of then-BHC executive Donald W. Loiselle.

The 1900s gave way to a new century, and BHC became Aquarion. Under both names, the company has always been concerned with the environment, from the days when Sam Senior looked for areas free of pollutants, to modern day when Aquarion

diligently monitors its land and water sources to ensure they remain undisturbed.

Firlotte, a former Shelton resident, said Aquarion "is proud to be part of a great city like Shelton and to support it as one of its top taxpayers. We're also cognizant of our role as an environmental steward, and we are committed to preserving the land around the reservoirs, protecting the wildlife inhabiting that land, and striving for the highest quality in the water we provide." ♦



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