

History Tour – Water Supply

This area had the original patent names of Morgan's Delight, Samuel's Hope and Young's Delight, all c 1694.

In 1792 the Baltimore Water Works, a private company, was chartered. It was the first chartered waterworks in the United States.

In 1853 the Baltimore Water Works was purchased by Baltimore city along with their land in this area. From 1853-1857 Baltimore City purchased additional land including the Eagle Mill, all adjacent to the streams.

Eagle Mill – Had a small pond in existence at the time due east of the Relay House and the mill itself was powered by that pond and lay somewhere downstream (probably Lake Falls Village or the property just north of it – Imhoff's'). Eagle Mill was the successor of a grist mill built about 1914 (or renovated by) Jesse Tyson, father of Isaac Tyson who discovered chrome in the Bare Hills area, and grandfather to the Jesse Tyson who built Cylburn. After grandpa Jesse's death the works had been changed to cotton manufacturing and the name changed to Eagle Mills. It had many ownership transfers, bankruptcies, etc and name changes. The millrace may have been part of what we call Lakeside Drive.

Lake Roland was where Jones' Falls, Roland Run and Towson Run all converged and it was felt would make a good lake.

Actual construction of the dam began in 1858 and by 1861 was supplying the city with water. There is a masonry aqueduct from Lake Roland to Hampden Reservoir which is five feet wide, six feet four inches high and about four miles long.

There were several names associated with the Lake – Jones Falls Lake, Lake Roland, and Swann Lake. It was referred to as Jones Falls Lake in early stages because the water of the Jones Falls flowed through it. Then came the name Lake Roland which comes from the Roland Run a stream mentioned as long ago as 1694, when Roland (Rowland) Thornberry had a tract surveyed named Selsed north of here.

During its construction it was dubbed Swann Lake for Mayor Swann who was mayor at the time of its development, I suspect by those opposed to him or the lake. Officially named Lake Roland and then changed.. In Water Department reports it was referred to as Swann Lake as late as 1867. The name, however, was never changed on the Valve House which was completed in 1861.

By 1862 there was the dam and gatehouse, a gate-keeper's cottage surrounded by a wood paneled fence, a carriage road on Relay Hill with trees planted on the banks and around the carriage drives. Embankments near gatehouse were sodded and a boat house erected. An iron bridge was added just south of the dam which was swept away in a flood in 1868 and replaced with a Bollman bridge of cast and wrought iron in 1871. The Bollman bridge was taken down in early WWII for scrap. Later hay barracks were built and hay, corn, oats were raised and provided to the other water stations with which to feed the

mules and horses. Some of the leftover was sold; along with ice when the lake was frozen and wood from downed trees and one year they even sold an old mare. An ice house and fountain were added near the keeper's house, a barn and a 16 foot addition to the keeper's house.

Problems

From the beginning Lake Roland was plagued by problems due to siltation from the slopes surrounding the lake and filth thought to be coming from the slaughterhouse in Towson via the Towson Run. The banks of the lake were ripped in 1862, 1879 and again in 1902 to try to eliminate the silting problem. They were continually needing to dredge the lake, as well as the area where the streams converged. Whenever there was a hard rain the lake became muddy, too muddy to send water to the city and it was shut off. Annual reports would state the number of days that the water was too muddy for use. During a typhoid outbreak in Towson it was shut down for fear of spreading the typhoid to the city. On the lighter side, there was the problem with fish getting into the conduit going to Hampden reservoir so screening had to be made up and added up here and flushed periodically to remove the fish.

By 1869 as predicted prior to construction, it was not enough water for a growing city. Severe drought caused the City to go looking for more water and they decided to run a 36 inch cast iron pipe from the Gunpowder to Lake Roland as a temporary measure and by 1880 water was being pumped in from the Gunpowder to Lake Roland.

By 1892 yearly increase in demand demonstrated the necessity of an immediate relief being given to Jones' Falls.

1899-1900 major dredging was carried out by a contractor

In 1911, a chlorinating system was installed in the Lake Roland gatehouse. Known thereafter as a hypochlorite plant, the Lake Roland waterworks was one of the two sites used for large-scale testing of the application of liquid chlorine to a public water supply system. Experiments conducted at the plant documented the merit of utilizing liquid chlorine and led to its widespread use in public water supply systems in the United States both before and after filtration.

By 1913 the original capacity of Lake Roland's four hundred million gallons was reduced by deposits of silt to about three hundred million gallons, in spite of all the dredging. The sanitary condition of this source of supply was rapidly becoming a menace to the city, but it could not be completely abandoned until the new dam is completed at Loch Raven.

By November 1915, the new water works at Loch Raven had begun operation and on December 2, 1915 Lake Roland ended its time supplying water to the City and the lake was left in the care of a groundskeeper. According to his obituary, the groundskeeper was John Boone from the time of the first survey before the Civil War until the position was eliminated several years before his death in 1921 at age 85.