

## PUMPS & WELLS OF SAVANNAH

The following information addresses the digging of wells for the purposes of creating a public water supply in Savannah from 1734 until 1892 when the second Savannah Water Works opened. When Savannah was first established the only source of potable water came directly from the river. Starting in 1734 wells were built drawing water from the ground. Early maps of Savannah show the increasing appearance of wells during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The Mayors Annual Reports show the existence of a Committee of Pumps and their activity can be tracked over time through the annual reports of the treasurer where they disclose their annual expenditures. The papers of the Committee of Pumps contains numerous petitions from Savannah citizens requesting the installation of pumps in various neighborhoods. By the end of the nineteenth century many of those petitions are for the removal of pumps that were no longer needed or for the extension of pipelines to connect neighborhoods to the Water Works.

Most information on pumps and wells can be found in Papers of the Pumps Committee as well as the Mayor's Annual Reports between 1855 and 1888. There are also some corresponding newspaper articles from the *Savannah Morning News*.

## TERMINOLOGY

### **Well**

Refers to wells that have been dug to access fresh water, usually from the river filtered through earth. Not deep enough to pierce the aquafer.

### **Pumps**

Built on platforms over wells, with a shaft that descends into the well. Water is drawn out through manual cranking of the pump on the portion above the platform. Originally pumps were made of wood, eventually they were replaced with iron.

### **Artesian Wells**

A four inch pipe that descends into a well bored 300 feet deep, or more. These wells draw water from the aquafer and provide strong water pressure, giving 12000 gallons of water and hour with a lift of sixteen feet.

### **Aquafer**

A body of permeable rock containing or conducting groundwater.

## KEYWORDS AND SEARCH TERMS

Pump(s)

Well (s)

Artesian Well(s)

Cisterns

Water

Water Supply

City Pump

## MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORTS

1855-1877

Mayoral reports from this period contain very little mention of pumps. However, the treasurer's annual report always makes mention of the expenditure for City Pumps. This record is usually broken down into two parts, the salary for the pump contractor and the cost of sundry repairs. There are a few cases where more information was included.

1858

Four new pumps were added at the cost of \$394.

1860

There was no mention of pumps in this year's report.

1861

Concerns about diseases are addressed by Mayor Charles C. Jones Jr. on page 12. He talks about the lack of cleanliness around the pumps and the need for a system of sewerage in the city.

1867

The first mention of Water Troughs as part of the Pumps Committee purview. Also the first mention of pump contractor, Alfred Kent.

1868

First appearance of a budget for cesspools.

1868

First time the Committee of Pumps is named. The committee consisted of Aldermen Lavin, O'Byrne, and Haywood.

1876-77

Tables are provided comparing the expenditure of the Committee of Pumps over the past five and seven years, respectively.

1877

Annual expense was \$6000 which greatly exceeds all past expenditure which ranged from \$1100 to \$4500.

MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORTS, continued.

1877-1888

The format of annual reports seems to have changed starting in 1877. Instead of just showing the expenses paid in the Treasurer's annual report, a written description is provided in the mayor's section of the report under the heading City Pumps. This written section describes how well the wells and pumps are being maintained and then expands on any new changes.

1877

Wells have been cleaned and cemented and new platforms built. Eleven wooden pumps were replaced with iron pumps because the wood had decayed.

1878

Number of public pumps serviced by the city: 135

Twenty two wooden pumps were replaced with improved, metal pumps.

Council was urged to modify the privy arrangement so that people used river water in their privies as opposed to well water.

1879

Eighteen pumps were condemned and replaced.

Twenty new cesspools were built

Committee of Pumps was named as Aldermen Ballantyne, DeMontmollin, and Schwarz.

1880

Number of public pumps serviced by the city: 149

Eighteen pumps were condemned.

Ten were replaced.

Eight were removed and the wells abandoned. Hydrants connected to the water mains were positioned in their place.

1881

Number of public pumps serviced by the city: 152

Three new wells with pumps were completed

Nineteen decayed pumps were condemned and replaced

Wells were cleaned and cemented

Council adopted a new policy so that each repair would be contracted.

1882

Number of public pumps serviced by the city: 149

One new well complete with pump was built

Four wells and pumps were discontinued

1884

Office of pump contractor abolished and his duties assigned to the department of Water Works.

1885

Number of public pumps serviced by the city: 138

The Water works and Pump Departments were folded into The Water Department

Ten pumps were replaced

It was recommended to Council that they use artesian wells because seepage from the vaults of existing wells was badly contaminating the water. Three artesian wells existed on Tybee at the time, and Council was strongly urged to adopt the same system.

1886

Artesian Well System was adopted.

The equipment to bore the wells was purchased for \$4803.

An artesian well was placed in Green Sq. It was 400 feet deep and provided water for a hand pump and a fire hydrant on Green Square as well as for two hydrants on Bay Street whose water supply, previously provided by wells, were contaminated with oil.

1888

All the old pumps were almost entirely abandoned. Only four remained in use.

City was now supplied by artesian wells. All old wells, no longer in use, were dismantled.

## PETITIONS

The papers for the Pumps Committee can be found in the Clerk of council Meeting Papers in Box # WAT1 which contains the Water Committee Papers. Folders 1-4 contain petitions for the building of individual wells and pumps from sundry citizens of various wards. Petitions are numerous and range in date from 1866 to 1889. Petitions by the 1880s advocate for the removal of wells due to sanitation issues.

## DEEDS

The deed books contain reference to multiple contracts by Alfred Kent, who was the pump contractor from 1867-1881. Reference to these contracts can be found in Volume one of the indexes from the Clerk of Council's office.

Also found in this volume are miscellaneous deeds regarding wells and pumps from the Sanitary Board and Pfeffer & Co. in relation to artesian wells.

## NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Many of the petitions found in the Water Committee papers are reflected in the local news under the sections labeled *Petitions and Applications* and *Street Notes and Resolutions Adopted*. Several articles were also written in the *Savannah Morning News* concerning the role of well water in the spread of diseases. All articles can be found through the Savannah Historic Newspapers Archive. <http://savenewspaper.galileo.usg.edu/savnewspapers-j2k/search>

“Reports Received for Information and Refereed for Report,” *Savannah Morning News*, 10 July 1869, 3.

Discusses the purity of water sources comparing the Ogeechee canal water (used by the Water Works) and water from the Savannah River. Also addresses the removal of pumps from the centers of thoroughfares, pumps attached to wells on Bull Street.

“Is Pump Water Unhealthy?” *Savannah Morning News*, 8 June 1874, 2.

Advocates for the removal of all wells and pumps in the city and suggests that if removal is not feasible that placards be placed near wells stating that well water is not safe for drinking or cooking.

## Bibliography

Maps to show the appearance and record of wells in Savannah

“City of Savannah 1734” Volume I. Plat 1. Waring Maps Collection 1018. Georgia Historical Society. Savannah, Georgia.

Depicts Savannah, as it was March 29<sup>th</sup>. A single well is shown on what is now the intersection of Broughton and Bull streets.

“City of Savannah 1770” Volume I. Plat 35. Waring Maps Collection 1018. Georgia Historical Society.

Depicts Savannah as it was on February 5<sup>th</sup>. A second well appears on the intersection of Abercorn and Broughton. This map is a replication of a previous map.

“City of Savannah 1802” Volume II. Plat 9. Waring Maps Collection 1018. Georgia Historical Society.

Depicts historic downtown Savannah showing wells in the first 12 squares and at intersections along Broughton street where it intersects the streets of Abercorn, Bull, Barnard, and Montgomery. No date was given for this map and no cartographer was named. The map is dated by the watermark on the paper it was drawn on.

“City of Savannah 1812” Volume II. Plat 9. Waring Maps Collection 1018. Georgia Historical Society.

Shows two more wells added to historic downtown Savannah where Broughton street intersects Habersham and Houston streets.

#### Newspaper articles mentioning petitions for removal of wells and pumps

“Reports Received for Information and Refereed for Report.” *Savannah Morning News*. 10 July, 1869.

Raises some questions about the water quality between the Savannah River water and water from the Ogeechee Canal. Recommends the consideration (without immediate action) of the removal of the pumps at intersections so they don't block major thoroughfares in the city.

“Is Pump Water Unhealthy?” *Savannah Morning News*. 8 June, 1874.

Discusses pump water as the carrier and spreader of diseases such as typhoid and cholera. Also recommend the removal of pumps because they are “unhealthy.” Article is definitely biased but seems more like an opinion piece.

“Corporation Proceedings.” *Savannah Morning News*. 11 March, 1875.

Application for removal of a pump in Choctaw Ward. Also referenced the existence of the Committee on Pumps.

“Resolutions Adopted.” *Savannah Morning News*. 31 August, 1875.

Application for the removal of a pump on W. Broad and Berrien streets. Also introduces a proposal for the building of a reservoir south of the city.

“Mayors Annual Report: Interesting Document.” *Savannah Morning News*. 15 January, 1873.

Discusses the pumps within the Water Works and how much annual revenue it has made and is predicted to make.

“Street Notes.” *Savannah Morning News*. 30 July, 1873.

Advocating for the cleaning out and removal of weeds from public water pumps to make them easier to use for residents.

“Petitions and Applications” *Savannah Morning News*. 29 November, 1877.

Advocating for the preservation of a water pump on the corner of West Broad and Broughton streets. Again reference to the Committee of Pumps.

#### Mayors Annual Reports: Finances of the Savannah Water Works construction

Anderson, Edward C. *Mayor's Annual Reports*. City Hall. Office of the City Treasurer, 1856.

City Treasurer notes that \$13,000+ in bonds were issued for the construction costs of the Savannah Water Works in 1856.

Champion, A. and John J. Kelly and Richard D. Arnold. *City Treasurer's Annual Report*. City Hall. Office of the City Treasurer, 1857.

*City of Savannah, Georgia*  
*Pumps and Wells*

Mayer notes that an extension was added to the Water Works. One he predicted would benefit the entire city.