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## About Water

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Newton became a city in 1874. In his first inaugural address Mayor James F. C. Hyde urged the members of the Board of Aldermen and the Common Council to turn their attention to what would now be called the "infrastructure," emphasizing particularly the need for a municipal water supply. "The buildings in Ward One" he said, "like those in other parts of the city, are mostly of wood, and being built close together, the danger of a large and sweeping fire is greater....Is it wise or prudent to leave so much property without protection? We could not well afford to lose so much taxable property as a large fire would be likely to destroy...."

The lack of adequate water for fire protection had been a matter of concern for several years. The fire departments first pumper, bought in the mid-1860s, was of little use except near the river, brooks and ponds, or one of the small reservoirs scattered around the city. Although two or three aqueduct companies served a limited number of houses, most of the domestic supply came from private wells, many of which were being contaminated by sewage leaching from nearby cesspools.

A committee appointed in 1871 examined two sources for town water, the Charles River and Bulloughs Pond (then about twice as big as now). The committee recommended the river. No action resulted, nor was any advantage taken of an 1874 Act of the Legislature permitting Newton to draw water from Cold Spring Brook and the three ponds: Bulloughs, Hammonds, and Wiswalls (Crystal Lake).

The new city government, however, moved quickly. Following a ballot held in December, 1874, in which those in favor of a municipal water system outnumbered those against by more than two to one, a commission to determine the source of supply was appointed in January 1875. In May the commissioners reported, their recommendation to take water from the river was accepted immediately and implementation began in July with the acquisition of the site for the pump house (on the river on Needham Street, opposite Oak). The building would be designed by local architect Charles Edward Parker.

To ensure the purity of the water, the site chosen was above the mills at Upper Falls. But, as there was still the possibility of pollutants being discharge by the bleachery and the mills in Waltham, the water was not take directly from the river. Instead, the city took the Needham bank between Kenricks Bridge and the "new" bridge on Needham Street, and a large wooden flume, or basin, was built into which the water filtered, the sand and gravel through which it passed screening out any impurities. From the filter basin the water was pumped to an open reservoir built on Waban Hill.

The first pipe was laid in October, 1875.

The first water was pumped in October, 1876.

Barely a decade later, as Newton entered a new phase of suburban growth, the question of an additional supply began to "occupy the attention" of the Water Board. In 1889 the City was permitted to take more than triple the number of gallons withdrawn daily from the river, and the following year a further 664 acres were acquired in Newton, upstream from the pumping station, and tube wells were driven into the pockets of gravel found there. The capacity of the pumps was increased and the first section of the covered reservoir built on Waban Hill.

In the 1930s the supply was again increased. The waterlands in Needham were extended for the last time and two more filter basins were built. Additional wells were sunk in Newton and the pumping station was "refurbished."

Newton joined the Metropolitan Water District in 1895, but for half a century its membership remained nominal. By the late 1940s, however, drought and questions about the quality of the local water made temporary tie-ins to the metropolitan system necessary; the final switch coming in 1954. The pump station, then no longer needed, was demolished. The reservoirs, mains and pipes were taken by the water division of the Metropolitan District Commission (now the Massachusetts Water Resources Commission) and the waterlands became, and remain, part of the MDC's park system.