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CHAPTER VIII

Water Works in the Town of New Shoreham

“Water was taken from what is known as “Sands Pond,” located on what may be called the south side of the Island. The water system was organized and owned by three men, namely, Frederick Rose, Edward S. Payne and Thaddeus Ball. Work was begun on the project, sometime in the late 1870s; a water pipe some eight inches in diameter was laid between the plant sight and the downtown streets. The water was pumped from the pond to a large wooden tank, by a huge windmill. Water was fed to downtown areas, by the free flow of the water as the tank was several feet in height above buildings in and about town. There were six fire hydrants at the inception of the system, however, they have long since been of no use.

The company seems to have gotten things operating well almost at once, since the town council, in 1887, granted a franchise to the company, this seems to have been an exclusive.

Came a time, and Frederick Rose, sold out his interest in the water pump system to Edward S. Payne. Thaddeus Ball soon followed suit. All are now deceased. It fell to the three sons of Edward S. Payne, namely Roy, Ray and Frank Payne, to carry on. These last named are also deceased. At which time William B. Phelan become owner and operator of the water system. In the meantime the windmill which had pumped millions of gallons of water, over a period of years, finally succumbed to the many gales she had weathered.

Let’s say “She had performed faithfully,” and to be succeeded by an internal combustion engine. This too gave way to “progress” and was replaced by electric motors, which silently pumped water from several driven wells about the pond area.

Over a period of years the level of the water in the pond has dropped sharply, a dozen years ago, it seemed the pond would go dry for sure, but heavy rains and snows, perhaps stabilized the situation. Since the water system was established, in the 1870s. It is getting up towards 100 years old and the water pipe conducting water all these years, began, years ago to crack up, requiring extensive repairs.

Came the time when something had to be done about the water system. Mr. Phelan, put it up for sale, a very good idea. It would frequently cost \$1,000 to repair a water lead, and these were becoming more and more frequent. The water, sometimes contained iron rust etc., even the new wells did not entirely eliminate unwanted factors in the water flow, or the water itself.

I believe, Mr. Frank Joseph, a local businessman, drew together several other business men and some users of the water, to the end that they would buy the system from Mr. Phelan, and an agreement was reached. Some new pipe was laid in conjunction with the laying of sewage lines in the town. Rates were raised, the system was improved to the point, that I hear no “beefs” at this time.

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Now let's get back to Sands Pond, a few years back shall we say? When the water became very low and it seemed like another large pond on the island (once 22 feet deep,) which had been gone for years even though I had fished in it in my younger days. It is now grown over with bayberry bushes. I have been on the island 75 years and I am of the opinion that Sand's Pond has lost two thirds of the volume of its water, since I first played and fished about it as a kid. The pond has an excellent water shed and should catch huge volumes of water and snow when we have it. I believe, in the foreseeable future, some of the younger people may one day be looking at "Sand's Hollow," as well as "Rodman's Hollow." The water has receded a hundred yards from where I once knew it to be, a large reef shows up, almost every summer. Let's get to the water, specialists, etc., come over here, especially to tell us about drinking water. I've heard say, "that water will rust iron pipes," and by gosh when they dug up some of the water pipes, they were rusty. But I still drink water. It flushes out the system. It waters down highly toxic fluids that may inhabit the body at times, also it's good for you anyway. But drink pure water. We have pros and cons in regard to the purity of the water in terms of drinking the same. I did not hear much about the purity of water back in say 1910, I may have heard it, but if you are assuming that it went in one ear and out the other, you are wrong, more aptly it merely bounced off my head. But I want to tell you something, you didn't know, I betcha, huh? Well, when I was a small boy, rather I was eight years old, I used to play around Sand's Pond many a day. So let's get to the "pigs in the pond age." Mr. Sands had every summer six or eight large sow hogs, penned up, but come June he let them run and they ran right down to the pond shore. Even as you and I went to the seashore, so went the pigs to the pond shore. And here on the west side of the pond, on the sandy shore, the water was warm, here they enjoyed a warm bath, lying in the water with just their snouts out, really living high on the hog.

I heard nothing about contamination, pollution, or chlorine at that time. But be that as it may, our porcine friends journeyed daily to the "baths." Few people knew of this situation, and drank the water with "Gusto," and maybe you would go around more than once if you are having more than one, the pigs had several. But come the time when Mr. Sands passed away as did the pigs, came people who question water in terms of drinkability, and years after the poor pigs were gone, the water was found to be contaminated, but by bacteria from outhouses, etc. strangely enough, for there was not an outhouse within three quarters of a mile from Sand's Pond, not yet an inhabited dwelling, thereabouts. Come the do-gooders and the chlorine. We drank the water with a wry face and an expression of wonder, but we are bacterially safe, as far as Sand's Pond water goes, and some of it goes a long way.

Albeit there are many dug wells, driven wells, and some famous springs, such as "Dick's Springs," "Cold Spring," "Precious Spring," Boiling Springs near the Spring House, Lewis's Cove Spring, along with Block Island some 300 fresh water ponds, of various sizes, depths and clearness of water.

Medical science tells us to drink at least one gallon of water per day, for good health. "Bottoms up."

In the course of events, there will be those who read this article on "how it was," and they may exclaim, "those dirty pigs," but in defense of the defenseless pigs, I submit the fact that the pigs in question bathed daily, and they never heard of "swine flu." "

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