



## CONCERNING WATER WORKS

March 25, 1933

Editor, WILMETTE LIFE:

The disclosures made on the first page of your issue of the 23rd, concerning the negotiations, or rather lack of negotiations between Wilmette and Evanston in the matter of establishing a fair price for water to be supplied by the latter city, is in the nature of a high explosive and may have considerable bearing on the completion of the proposed water works. I think you are to be commended for the publicity you have given this question, which is not satisfactorily settled yet.

For a long period of time the Village of Wilmette has been making a very large profit on the sale and distribution of water purchased from Evanston, and I have always thought that our Village was in error in charging so stiff a profit upon a prime necessity of life. I believe that our Village pays approximately \$65,000 per year for water, including all costs of metering, maintenance, collecting, etc., and that the gross revenue from the sale of water is about \$105,000. A profit of some \$40,000, based on a cost of \$65,000, would be a very handsome one for a private concern, so handsome, indeed, that a private water company would not long be permitted to enjoy such a margin. It is argued that this profit is returned to the residents of Wilmette by a reduction in local taxation equal to the profit on the water. This is obvious, of course, but the reduction in taxation benefits the home-owner, rather than the renter, as the tenant is a consumer of water and usually pays the water rate in addition to his rent. However, the practice of overcharging a community for vital service rendered is a vicious one and leads to village extravagance; the profit on the water is easy money, and it is apt to be spent quite as easily as received. Furthermore, the use of water should be encouraged, rather than discouraged, as there is a distinct and aesthetic value in the liberal use of water, and particularly in the development of all sorts of gardening enterprise. Property values are enhanced, the residents are encouraged to beautify their yards, and are afforded an opportunity for satisfying a natural instinct for accomplishment. With the increase of leisure made possible by the mechanical progress of the last few years, the mural beauty of the village should be greatly augmented and an even greater interest taken by the residents in their own properties, and I submit that this kind of citizenship is to be encouraged by the trustees of the Village.

Such a spirit can be largely furthered by an adequate supply of cheap water, as you cannot maintain any sort of lawn or garden without ample water. Nor is a householder likely to spend money for seed, fertilizer, nor to take the pains necessary to cultivate plant life if he has to pay by the nose for water, if he has restrictions placed upon the use of water when his grounds most need it, as has happened during July and August. Furthermore, it is a law of economics that the greater the use of a commodity, the lower the unit cost thereof, and this is particularly true in the case of Wilmette, where the source of water is a vast lake of fresh and

almost potable water, requiring a very minimum of cost to make this water fit for human consumption.

In the summer of 1931, I believe, the Village printed a pamphlet emphasizing the necessity for an adequate water system, and endeavoring to prove by a set of calculations made up by the consulting engineers engaged, that a water works plant could be paid for entirely in something like 80 years, based, however, upon charging the existing rates for water for a long period of time, with the ultimate reduction in unit rates, and citing the experience of a number of north shore towns. This document was far from satisfying any engineering or economic inquiry. The question of a plant becoming obsolete in a period of 80 years was not dwelt upon. During some 20 years of experience with pumping machinery the writer has observed mechanical change that is, conservatively stated, radical. The next 20 years are not less likely to bring about decided mechanical changes and betterments. In other words, the consulting engineers, who had a definite, almost a desperate, financial stake in the erection of another small water works, proposed to saddle upon the existing generation water rates that are admittedly too high. The Village trustees, under the leadership of the village president, adopted this report, assumed responsibility for it and recommended in the strongest terms its adoption by the electorate of Wilmette.

It seemed at the time that the trustees were so well sold upon the validity of the report that they made no real effort to negotiate with Evanston; it is a matter of record that they did make Evanston an offer so ridiculously low, so much below the engineers' estimate of the cost of pumping and filtration by an independent water works, that Evanston had to refuse the offer, but not, I believe, without offer of compromise. An impartial analysis of the engineers' report, and investigation of the cost of pumping and filtration by such communities as Kenilworth, Glencoe, Winnetka and Highland Park leads immediately to the conclusion that Wilmette can buy its water cheaper from Evanston, even at existing rates, than Wilmette can pump and filter. Any engineer can state truthfully that the cost of filtering and delivering water is proportional, although not directly proportional, to the size of the plant. Evanston has a plant of such a size as to be able to take care of Wilmette, now and in the future, for the delivery of the Evanston plant can be augmented with relatively small plant expense. In fact I believe that one of the main items in the capital outlay anticipated by Evanston, which would enable it to give Wilmette a far larger volume of water, was increase in the size of mains from the Evanston plant to the village limits of Wilmette.

The disclosures made in your article are not in harmony with the statements made by the village president, speaking officially, shortly before and after the referendum. As I remember, the statement was made that notwithstanding the fact that the electorate would approve, or had approved building a water works, the trustees would endeavor to negotiate with Evanston and that a water plant would not be built unless it were definitely and finally proven that negotiation with Evanston were fruitless. If the disclosures you make are bona fide and it is shown that the Village trustees were insincere in their effort to negotiate with Evanston, then those trustees must be prepared to face the charge of a breach of trust reposed in them by this community.

It would seem also that the affirmative vote cast in Wilmette for a water works was carried through by those of us who live in the West and North-west portion of the Village, where there is some 20 feet difference in elevation, as compared with the eastern half of Wilmette. Such a condition did not in-

volve an entire new plant; it simply meant an increase in the size of the distributing mains, and booster pump equipment. With a new plant at the foot of the lake the problem of difference in elevation is not solved, per se, as pressure generated at the lake level by pumps means that the Eastern portion of the village will get excessive pressure if the Northwestern portion is to receive adequate pressure and volume.

During the last ten years the writer has observed the installation of a number of small and relatively inefficient water works along the North Shore, plants that cost entirely too much money when expressed in terms of capacity. The capital cost of a plant of five million gallons per 24 hours, or the capital cost per million gallons, is considerably in excess of the capital cost per million gallons of a plant having forty million gallons per day. Furthermore, the operating costs, such as direct labor, power, maintenance, etc., are considerably less, per million gallons pumped, in the larger plant. However, I believe all this has been pointed out by men far more competent than the writer. Had the North Shore towns gotten together some ten years ago, built a plant that would have served the territory from the southern boundary of Wilmette to the Northern end of Highland Park, one plant and one plant only could have been built in the vicinity of Glencoe, with one adequate intake from the lake, the pumping plant located on cheap land in the Skokie Valley, and that plant steam or Diesel-engine operated, located on a switch and receiving its fuel and other supplies in carload lots. I made this suggestion some time ago before a board of engineers and I was informed that I might be mechanically correct, but that my suggestion was loaded with dynamite. My suggestion covered in part a central light and power station, adjoining the pumping plant, and serving the various communities with cheap light and power, and I realized at the time that the Public Service company of Northern Illinois would be vitally interested in fighting such a proposition. The fact remains, however, that our village, in conjunction with Kenilworth, and quite likely with Evanston could erect such a lighting plant to supply all three communities with light and power at a price that would show up the Public Service people for the racketeers that they are and at the same time pay for such a plant in ten years. An enterprise of this kind could and should be developed at this time, and without doubt could be financed by funds obtained from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. I mention this possibility, even if not directly connected with the water works, because it offers a possibility of a real saving to the three communities mentioned, and the lower rates that would obtain would materially increase the use of electrically driven household conveniences, such as electric stoves, etc., all of which now are too costly to operate, even for relatively wealthy communities such as Evanston, Wilmette and Kenilworth. Please note that a low power rate would directly affect the cost of pumping water.

My suggestion is that work on the Wilmette water works be held up, and that a thorough reinvestigation be made in view of the facts that have come to light through your disclosures, and that such reinvestigation be made in the spirit of an attempt to negotiate the fact with Evanston for a fair water rate, taking into consideration the fact that Evanston will have to spend money for mains, etc., for the benefit of Wilmette, and that if possible, a fair division of the capital outlay be made between the two communities, and the resultant rate charged by Evanston be reduced to the minimum, with the understanding that the benefit of such rate inure directly to the householders in the form of decreased rates, and by so doing, the authorities of this village can handle the Evanstonians to far better advantage. If Evanston knows that a low water rate made by them is passed on directly to the residents of Wilmette, and that the Village of Wilmette covers only the actual cost of handling the water, I think that in itself will be quite a lever in getting a rate from Evanston that is just a little above cost. And in this connection the proposition can be broached to cover an electric light and power plant of such a size as to be useful to the communities of Wilmette, Evanston and Kenilworth, and quite possibly Winnetka, notwithstanding the excellent success Winnetka has had with its own municipally owned plant. Such a plan would also include a plant for making gas, and I understand that Winnetka has threatened the Public Service company with a municipally owned gas plant, and has thereby secured a somewhat more favorable gas rate than is enjoyed by our village. These plants could be built now at a cost far less

than the plants built by the Public Service company during a time of peak prices, and such work would materially help the local labor and general economic situation.

Is it not possible to do a little co-operative planning, planning that looks a little beyond our noses, perhaps, and in conjunction with our neighbors who have identically the same problems as we have?

—Resident.

## NOT "INDEPENDENT"

Editor, WILMETTE LIFE:

In your issue of March 23 on page 9 in the article on the high school election, you speak of "independent" and "regular" candidates.

According to the Illinois statutes in the section on schools, the names of the candidates are to be placed on the ballot in the order in which they are filed. It makes no mention of "regular" and "independent" candidates.

You therefore state incorrectly that Mr. Ward is running on an "independent" ticket and that Messrs. Mulford and Peterson are the "regular" candidates. What you probably meant was that our two opponents were to be elected without opposition after being nominated by the so-called official groups.

Sincerely yours,

Eugene Ward, Jr.

## Walter Marshal Cowell Is Summoned by Death

Funeral services for Walter Marshal Cowell, retired lawyer, who died last Saturday morning, were held Tuesday afternoon at his late residence, 900 Forest avenue. The services were conducted by the Rev. Henry Hepburne, pastor of the Buena Presbyterian church, Chicago, and the Rev. John G. Hindley of the First Congregational church, Wilmette.

Following the services at the residence Masonic rites were held at the Memorial Park cemetery chapel under the auspices of the Kenosha, Wis., lodge, of which Mr. Cowell was a member.

For the past seven years Mr. Cowell had been a resident of Wilmette. He was born in Maine and had practiced law in Chicago, Kenosha, Wis., and in the state of Idaho. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Brown Cowell, and by two brothers, J. Harry Cowell of Nampa, Idaho, and Herbert Cowell of Plainfield, Ill.

## Sears School Boys Now Prepare for Baseball

Boys at the Joseph Sears school in Kenilworth are turning their attention to baseball now that the annual hobby show and exhibition is past. The affair was held last Saturday night.

Robert W. Townley, director of physical education at Joseph Sears, states that outdoor gymnasium work will keep the boys busy for the remainder of the school year. Barring inclement weather, they will play baseball every school day. When the weather is unfavorable the finals of the wrestling tournament will be held in the gymnasium.

All of the 160 boys under Mr. Townley's direction have been taking part in the wrestling tournament. These boys include those from the second to the eighth grades inclusive.

## Bonnam, The Tailor Takes New Location

Bernard Bonnam is moving his tailor shop from its present location at 1131 Greenleaf avenue two doors east to 1117 Greenleaf avenue. Mr. Bonnam has been in business in Wilmette for the past seventeen years. He has conducted his business at the 1131 Greenleaf avenue address for nine years. He expects to be in the new location today (Thursday).