



LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

Places in Time

FALL 2017

The Water Crisis of 1975: How Lawrence Firefighters Helped a Parched County

by Laura Nawrocik

Forty-two years ago, the area was faced with an unusual and nearly crippling water shortage that lasted a little over a week. About 70 percent of Lawrence residents were impacted by what became known as the Water Crisis of 1975. One of those residents, volunteer firefighter Rudy Fuessel, played a key role in helping residents of the county cope with the sudden lack of a critical utility.

On Sunday, August 31, 1975, at around 10 a.m., the main reservoir for the Trenton Water Works suffered a pump failure that led to gallons of clean water backing up into the filtration system. Workers tried to use a secondary pump to stop the flow, but ultimately the fault in the system proved too much and that pump also failed, along with the motors on seven other pumps. A 12-inch thick concrete culvert was also damaged when it developed a crack under the pressure of all the extra water.

Adding to the problem, the water crisis began on Labor Day weekend, making it hard for the required parts to arrive quickly and causing supermarkets to run out of bottled water. The culvert concrete also required at least two days to set before it could handle the pressure put out by the pumps. The holiday did help in that most businesses and government offices were closed, but many did attempt to open on Tuesday only to end up closing or reducing to essential staff by noon. Schools did not even attempt to open on time with the traditional post-Labor Day first day of school. A state of emergency was declared by Tuesday, and Mercer County's Civil Defense coordinator mandated that all public buildings impacted by the issue be closed until running water was restored to customers. Local newspapers ran pages of information regarding how to reduce water use, how to find potable water, what to expect at places such as hospitals and lists of closures and cancellations.

Enter Rudy Fuessel, miles of hoses and volunteer firefighters with pumper trucks from all over New Jersey and neighboring states. It was Fuessel, working with other emergency personnel, who devised a system of connected hoses that would stretch for several miles in order to port the city's supply system with those serving other parts of Mercer County and nearby Burlington and Bucks Counties. According to an article in the *Indiana Evening Gazette*, Fuessel noted that the technique of connecting hoses and pumpers is one that was often practiced, but seldom used, as it was typically needed to reach fires in difficult to access areas or to bring in extra water for larger fires. At the time of the crisis, Fuessel was serving as chief of the Slackwood Volunteer Fire Company and had been a volunteer there for 21 years. Along with fellow Slackwood volunteers Tom Smires and Jack Kontura, Fuessel was able to assemble a large crew to bring extra water to Lawrence from the Elizabethtown Water Company. A similar relay was set up over the Calhoun Street bridge to connect the

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**Annual Mary Tanner Lecture Set for November 12;
Mary Walton to Speak About New Jersey Suffragist Alice Paul**

by Laura Nawrocik

The 14th Annual Mary Tanner Lecture will be held on November 12 at 2 p.m. in Sweigart Hall, Room 115 at Rider University and will feature Mary Walton and her lecture, "Shaming Woodrow Wilson: Alice Paul's Battle for Democracy in a World at War." Walton is the author of *A Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot*, as well as *Car: A Drama of the American Workplace* and *The Deming Management Method*. A Harvard graduate, Walton began her career in journalism at the *Charleston (WV) Gazette* and has also written articles for the *New York Times* and *Washington Monthly*. Local readers will recognize her as a long-time staff writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, where she worked on the Sunday Magazine.

In anticipation of this lecture, I recently read Ms. Walton's book on Alice Paul. While I had expected a typical biography that traced the life story of the main subject, I was pleasantly surprised that the book featured a much broader look at the Women's Suffrage Movement, both in the United States and in Great Britain. I found this refreshing, as all too often an author will put such a narrow focus on the subject of a biographical work that the reader is isolated from seeing the person's life and work in the context of general history and culture. In addition to placing Ms. Paul in proper context of the suffrage movement, Ms. Walton also includes information to place her life in terms of culture and other historical events taking place, particularly Word War I and the beginning of Prohibition.

Ms. Walton begins her examination of Ms. Paul's life in typical fashion, with a brief overview of her family and early years. This is followed by a quick look at the role Ms. Paul played in the British suffrage movement, which sets the stage for her activities fighting for the 19th Amendment once she returns to the United States. Over the course of the rest of the book, Ms. Walton demonstrates why it is impossible to discuss the history of the U.S. suffrage movement without mentioning Ms. Paul, as she played a rather important role, yet is not typically included in popular texts and histories about the subject. Along the way, Ms. Walton manages to set the context for the entire movement in terms of world and domestic politics, as well as to remind the reader of the social and popular culture views of women at the time. The detail provided by Ms. Walton as to the struggles faced by the suffragettes range from protesting in extreme weather to prison conditions that can only be described as inhumane. More than a few times, I cringed while reading the reports of misjustice and overall gained a much greater appreciation for the women that worked tirelessly, sometimes fatally, so I can exercise the right to vote.



Fortunately, Ms. Walton traces Ms. Paul's life to the end, so the reader is also brought fairly far into the 20th century and given a glimpse into the history of the Equal Rights Amendment. Included in the wrap-up are also some tidbits on what became of the various groups that fought for suffrage, including the origins of The League of Women Voters. Overall, the book was an accessible and informative look at one of New Jersey's forgotten female heroes and the harsh conditions which the women working toward the 19th Amendment had to endure.

Dr. Ian Burrow Completes 1761 Brearley House Report; Delivers Lecture and Workshop

Dr. Ian Burrow, the archeologist who led over 1,800 Lawrence Middle School students in their introduction to archeology, delivered the 13th Mary Tanner Lecture last October.

From 1998 until 2005, every eighth grade student was able to dig side by side with professional archeologists from Hunter Research Inc. They learned how to record each distinct layer of soil in which an object was found. As a fascinating extra, Dr. Burrow demonstrated how the native American Lenni Lenape used “fire-cracked rocks” to boil water.

A small display case in the hallway of the Brearley House containing eight objects from the digs has long been a highlight of the House’s tours. With a grant to Lawrence Township from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, the final report was completed last fall. In December 2016, more than thirty boxes of artifacts and records from the 1998-2005 excavations at the Brearley House and the nearby Prehistoric American Indian Site were permanently stored at the Brearley House.

Ian Burrow was Vice President of Hunter Research Inc. for 27 years and currently runs BurrowIntoHistory, LLC. He conducted a workshop on how to make the most of the collection in March. The Society is planning a new display and is eager to pursue Dr. Burrow’s recommendations for further research. The report compiled by Dr. Burrow is available on the society’s website, www.thelhs.org.



Dr. Burrow and 8th graders from Lawrence Middle School at one of the Hunter Research-led digs in 1999.

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Morrisville water supply with the city. Smaller relays of less than 1,000 feet connected hydrants in Burlington and Hamilton to hydrants in Trenton to supply the southern part of the city. Together, all of the relays were capable of delivering 2,000 gallons per minute.

The Lawrence to Elizabethtown connection included two hose relays that were laid out along Princeton Pike, porting a hydrant on Gallup Road in Princeton to one in front of the Union Camp building on Princeton Pike (now the location of the new Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. building). The connections utilized 18 miles of hose, 700 volunteers and almost 90 trucks in the first 48 hours of operation. In a history of the Chapin School, there is a section that mentions the relay and that the school was kept open 24 hours a day so that the volunteer firefighters could use the bathrooms and sleep on cots that had been set up in the multi-purpose room. Cots and tents dotted the roadway as many of the volunteers slept next to the fire engines in order to monitor controls on the pumps. Food was delivered by other volunteers and grateful residents.

By Thursday, despite the pumping efforts, the situation seemed to be getting worse while repairs continued at the reservoir. Regardless, life began to return to normal as some businesses reopened with bottled water, and residents were able to get a supply at local tank stations, which were set up in many neighborhoods. Friday saw the return of pumping operations at the filtration plant. Over the weekend the reservoir was built back up and the fire hoses began to get packed up, starting with the one connecting the city to Morrisville. Schools in Lawrence began the year, a week late, on Tuesday, September 9, when public buildings and businesses were allowed to reconnect to the Trenton Water Works system. The effort led by Fuessel, his fellow Slackwood volunteers and the help they received from around the region was assessed as one of the largest volunteer emergency responses ever in the United States by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner David Bardin, who had been tapped by Gov. Brendan Byrne to review the work for the state. For area residents, it was a welcome relief to a crisis that capped a summer that was also marked by two cases of heavy rainfall and flooding, lightning striking Trenton City Hall and a large fire that destroyed the Trenton Civic Center.

Sources:

The entire September 2, 1975 issue of the *Trenton Evening Times* was used as background for this article. The issue contained numerous articles by David A. Maraniss, Jerry Knight, Warren Sloat, and Henry Bryan that touched upon the different aspects of the water crisis.

Katzenbach, John. "Biggest Job He Ever Managed." *Trenton Evening Times*, September 4, 1975 p. 1

Maraniss, David A. "Water Returns – Slowly." *Trenton Evening Times*, September 5, 1975 p. 1

Maraniss, David A. "Water Situation Worse; Half of Area Runs Dry." *Trenton Evening Times*, September 4, 1975 p. 1

Norman, Michael. "Pride Sustains Volunteers." *Trenton Evening Times*, September 4, 1975 p. 8
-. "Trenton Water Problem Viewed." *Indiana Evening Gazette*, September 4, 1975 p. 9

Photo Essay: The Water Crisis of 1975

The photographs below were taken by firefighters and their families during the hose relay along Princeton Pike in September 1975. The photos are part of the Lawrence Township Historian's Collection, which is housed at the Lawrence Headquarters Branch of the Mercer County Library System. Members of the Lawrence Historical Society have been helping digitize the photos and slides in the collection and have made them available on our Flickr page, www.flickr.com/thelhs.



Grant Funds Help Improve Signage at 1761 Brearley House and Port Mercer Canal House

The 1761 Brearley House has seven historical panels now on display in the large upstairs chamber. If you have not toured the 1761 house recently, you are in for a wonderful treat. Topics covered on the 3 by 4 foot panels include the Brearley Family, the Delaware and Raritan Canal, the Great Meadow, Slavery & Abolition, the Princessville Cemetery, and the Princessville Inn.

Also new to the room is a map of all the Brearley family properties in Lawrence Township. The map is superimposed on the present-day street grid. One fifth grader who recently visited the house was delighted to find that his house is on what was once Brearley land.

These fascinating additions to the Brearley House are the work of society members Brooke Hunter, Laura Nawrociak and Dennis Waters and the graphic design firm Three Bears.

With grant funding from Mercer County Division of Culture & Heritage and the New Jersey Historical Commission Division of Cultural Affairs, they researched the textual material and found the pictures and maps to illustrate it.

Of course, before one even steps inside the house, a large new sign in the back yard introduces the visitor, or any passerby, to a brief history of the Brearley House. It was created by the same resourceful team and partially funded with grant money from the Lawrence Township Community Foundation. Hats off to them.

The 256-year-old house is most definitely worth a return visit these days.

Port Mercer Canal House also received new trailside signage thanks to a grant from the Lawrence Township Community Foundation. The new sign, seen below, was installed last fall and features a history of the house and photos of the Port Mercer area through the years. The sign was researched and written by Dennis Waters, with help from the staff at the D&R Canal State Park office. Three Bears designed the sign, which was installed by park maintenance staff.



Society Receives Operating and Project Grants

In addition to the grant projects noted on page 6, the Society has received several grants from the Mercer County Division of Culture and Heritage (MCDCH), New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC), and the Lawrence Township Community Foundation (LTCF) since 2011. Operating grants of \$5,000 per year were granted to the Society for 2011-2016 by the NJHC and \$5,800 was granted by MCDCH in 2017. Those funds helped offset rising insurance and other operating costs. Project grants from MCDCH and LTCF covered part of the cost of the signage projects, as well as the NJ 350 article series that is featured on the Society website. We thank these organizations for their support.

Winter Program Highlights - Hogmanay and Annual Meeting Almost Set

The holidays are right around the corner and we are busy preparing for our biggest event of the year, the annual New Year's Eve Hogmanay bonfire. As in the past, the bonfire will take place in the Great Meadow at the 1761 Brearley House. Parking details are being finalized and will be posted to our website, but we anticipate that we will once again use the lot at the end of Lenox Drive and provide shuttle bus service to the bonfire. There will also be a lighted path from the parking lot if you wish to walk. Captain Paul's Firehouse Dogs will once again sell refreshments. We do ask that you leave your pets at home. The event is free, but donations will be collected on site to help defray the costs of this large event. Fire will be lit at 6 p.m. on December 31.

The annual meeting will take place in late February at Lawrence High School. The featured speaker will be Township Historian Dennis Waters, who is preparing a talk about the history of Millham Township. Millham had a short, but eventful, life between the time it seceded from Lawrence Township and was absorbed by the City of Trenton. Look for more information in our Winter 2018 newsletter and on our website.



Places in Time is published four times a year by the Lawrence Historical Society. Back issues are available at the LHS website -www.TheLHS.org. We can be contacted at the following address: webmaster@thelhs.org This program is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Mercer County Division of Culture and Heritage, in partnership with the New Jersey Historical Commission, Division of Cultural Affairs/ Department of State.

The Lawrence Historical Society
P.O. Box 6025
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Return Service Requested



“GHOULIES & GHOSTIES & LONG-LEGGED BEASTIES & THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT”

So goes an old Scottish poem, as it begs the Lord to deliver us from them. So come all you fearless Lawrence citizens over ten years of age and step boldly aboard the Lawrence Historical Society's first

GHOST BUS TOUR

Saturday, October 21
departing 6:30 PM and 8:00 PM from
The 1761 Brearley House

Get your \$15 Tickets while they last! Only 27 seats available per trip.
Use your credit card to purchase tickets online at www.theLHS.org , or complete the form below and return with your check.

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
6:30 tour _____ 8:00 tour _____ (indicate number of tickets)

Make check payable to The Lawrence Historical Society, P.O. Box 6025, Lawrence Township, NJ 08648