

## Houlton Water Company Has Been a Valuable Community Asset

### Monument To Civic Minded Early Business Men Who Gave It To The Town

For a very long time the value to the Town of Houlton of its municipally owned three-department utility company has been recognized as a considerable community asset. The Houlton Water Company has been, alike, a monument to the unselfish civic-mindedness of those early business men who made town ownership possible, as well as a resource that has turned back into the treasury of the town hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past 55 years.

In the current program of industrial expansion and business development being inaugurated by Houlton citizens, the sponsors will eventually find that this community possesses, in the facilities of the Houlton Water Company, an asset, the true worth of which has most certainly been underestimated in the past.

It is only normal to fail to appreciate the value of a thing, to the use of which we have been accustomed to take for granted. Once recognition comes, there can be no excuse for further blindness.

#### HIGHER LEVELS POSSIBLE

A more realistic exploitation of the true value of Houlton's three utility services, combined under one efficient managerial and administrative set-up, should bring about higher levels of productive value in the future to this entire area.

It should be noted, in passing, that the trio of essential public services provided in Houlton by a single company, and that company owned by the taxpayers, may be a combination that will be found in few, if any, communities in the New England states. Which gives the Houlton Water Company a distinction wholly aside from its tremendous economic value.

town was thoroughly aired with the idea of taking appropriate steps to remedy the deficiency insofar as was possible in those times. The two local newspaper editors of that day, were both alert to the importance of the question to be discussed and exhorted the citizens to attend.

#### COMPANY AUTHORIZED

The town, as a municipal agency, did not, at that time wish to build a water system. Accordingly the result of the special town meeting of Sept. 1, 1879 was all that insurance companies could ask for. Along with an affirmative vote authorizing the selectmen immediately to obtain a steam fire engine, together with hose and other necessary appurtenances not to exceed a cost of \$3000, the meeting also agreed to "grant and yield" to a group of citizens the right to provide "a

### Short But Busy

Looking around at its neighbors one day in January, 1885, the Aroostook Times was moved to comment: "For a short one, Court Street is well supplied with business firms. On the street there are two drug stores, five grocery stores, two dental offices, two law offices, one meat market, one clothing store, two newspapers and job printing offices, one barber shop, one saloon, one tailor shop, one doctor's office, the Exchange Hotel and the Opera House.

stall facilities for pumping that water, planning the lines and laying the pipe that would carry it over the town, and erecting hydrants from which it could be used.

#### WATER FROM B STREAM

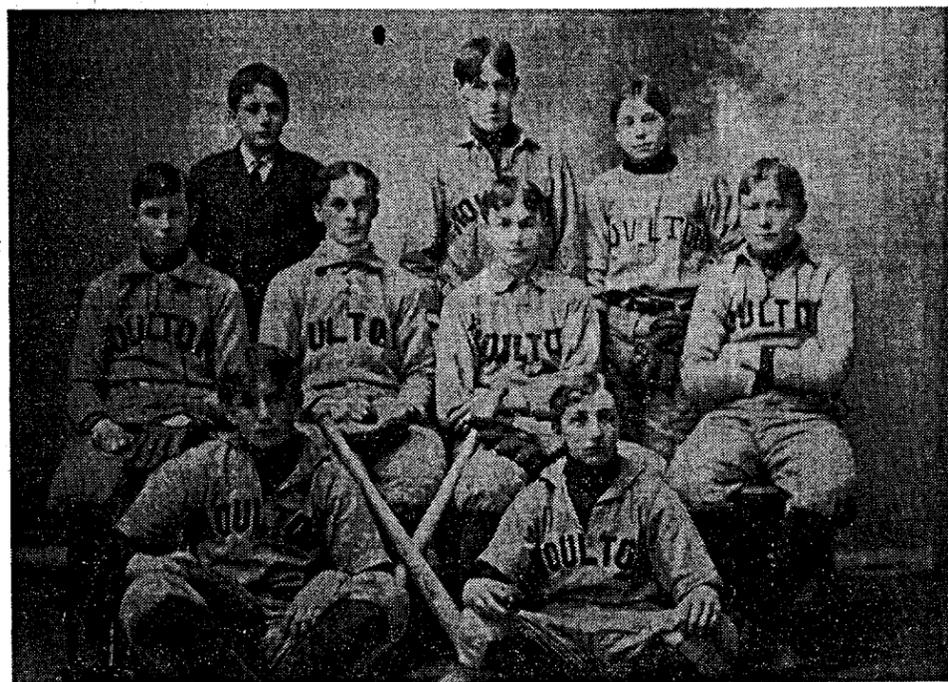
It was decided that water for use in the system was to be taken from the north branch of the Meduxnekeag stream just north of the Red Bridge, so called, now known as "B" stream, the outlet of "B" lake. This location was selected because it would be free from all sewage and mill refuse and also because it would permit fire protection on both sides of the Meduxnekeag.

However, before this decision was arrived at, several other sections of the town were surveyed, including Garrison Hill and Court street, south of Pearce Brook.

In the middle of all this there appears in the newspapers of early February, 1885, the report of a special town meeting held on the 12th of that month at which the question of a water supply to the town was again discussed and voted upon.

The report notes that James Frank Holland and G. E. Gilman spoke in favor of the project while Francis Barnes spoke in opposi-

### Some HHS Diamond Stars of the Future



This group of budding young diamond stars called themselves the Little Giants and they took on all comers of their age and class in Houlton before the turn of the century. Most of them also played for Houlton High School a few years after as will be seen from the picture below of the 1905 team. They are, front row, left to right, Frank Clayton and Charles Carpenter; middle row, Archie Dill, Don McLeod, James Palmer, Burpee Alexander; back row, George Shaw, mgr., Albert Millar and Fred Larrabee.

The original instake of water was through a crib situated in the channel of the stream about 400 feet north of the pumping station. This crib measured 20 by 15 feet outside, with double crib work of logs inside providing an open space five by ten feet in the interior. Space between the outer and inner walls of the crib was filled with stones or cobbles, to act as a mechanical strainer keeping the suction device free of sticks, leaves, fish or other unwanted foreign objects.

#### PIERCE BECOMES PRESIDENT

Walter Mansur served as president of the company until 1893 when he was succeeded by Clarence H. Pierce. Mr. Pierce, it may safely be assumed, had much to do with the events immediately prior to 1902 when the entire stock of the Houlton Water Company was purchased by the Town of Houlton.

The first pumping station was a two and one-half story brick structure 20 by 50 feet, the lower

and did away with the need for continuous pumping.

#### STOCK PURCHASE EXPLAINED

The acquisition of the property

fifths of the whole. The five directors hold one share each and 70 shares are owned by private parties.

#### SOLD AT PAR

It should be noted, in connection with this transaction, that the stock of the company was sold to the town for the exact par value that it had been purchased in the first place. This meant that the stockholders who relinquished their stock at this time did not realize any capital gain. The minutes of the meetings that had been held between 1880 and 1902 carried periodic references to the vote of a dividend of 5%, but this was no more than the money might have earned had it been otherwise invested.

"Under its Charter and by-laws, five directors are required. At the request of the Selectmen, Mr. C. H. Pierce and Mr. J. A. Browne, President and Treasurer respectively, retain one share of stock each and act as directors of the company, with the Selectmen, who have each purchased a share of stock in their own right."

Thus, the first board of directors of the Houlton Water Company, when it became the exclusive property of the Town of Houlton, were Clarence H. Pierce, J. A. Browne, Thomas P. Putnam, Frank W. Pearce and Wallace Dykeman. The latter three, members of the Board of Selectmen, continued as directors for some years after their terms as selectmen had expired.

#### McINTYRE BECOMES SUPT

It was July 1, 1902 that official control of the company passed into the hands of the town and on that day B. B. McIntyre was appointed as superintendent, a position he was to occupy until May 6, 1935.

Coincident with the switch in ownership and the appointment of

of a new storage basin. During this summer, a steel reservoir of 880,000 gallon capacity was erected near the site of the old reservoir. It will still be possible to utilize about 1,000,000 gallons of storage of the old reservoir. The total storage capacity will then approximate 1,800,000 gallons which complies with the standards as established by the National Board of Fire Underwriters for a town of this size.

At the same time the new reservoir was built the standpipe on Spring street was discontinued, it no longer being necessary. Another main was run from the pumping station to Smyrna street and Riverside streets, primarily as duplicate equipment, as a precaution should there be a failure for any reason in the original line. This extra line crossed the Meduxnekeag at the rear of the present plywood mill and proceeded to Bangor street.

In the intervening years lines have been extended to all parts of the town as the demand for service grew. At the present there are 1,911 customers who pay water rates annually to the company.

#### ADDITIONAL INSTALLATIONS

As growth has occurred there have been additional installations to keep the service abreast of needs. In 1907 a Gould Triplex pump was added with a capacity of 900 gallons per minute. Still another pump, one of the turbine type was added in 1912 having approximately 1,140 gallons per minute capacity. Both of these pumps were removed from service in 1938.

In 1929 a centrifugal pump was added and, nine years later, another of the same type still further increased the capacity of the equipment. Each had a per minute capacity of 1000 gallons.

Houlton has been especially fortunate in the relative purity of

inction wholly aside from its tremendous economic value to its owners.

One can get a quick picture of the extent of this growing value by the increase in the worth of the company's operating property from \$80,000 in 1903 to an estimated \$1,883,000 in this year of 1957 and by the growth of its total dividends to the town from \$960.30 in 1903, its first year of municipal ownership to \$521,768.84 reached during the town's fiscal year, 1956.

#### INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Impatience with inadequate protection from fire in the Town of Houlton probably was the spark that inspired the organization of the Houlton Water Company. The idea may have been in the minds of its founders before that time but the actual beginning of the company as we know it today had its origin in late 1879 in the weeks immediately following the first in a series of three fires in less than five years that caused losses in excess of \$200,000 in the town of Houlton.

In August, 1879, two decades of comparative freedom from the scourge of serious fire in Houlton, came to an abrupt end with a conflagration that caused \$25,000 damage to business and residential property.

#### FIRST IN CHAIN

This was the first in a chain of events that was to demonstrate beyond a doubt the extent of the town's vulnerability to fire. Up to that time an antiquated hand tub was the town's sole piece of mechanical fire fighting equipment. Its water supply came from a brick reservoir near the Snell House in Market Square. It was fed by a wooden aqueduct running from Spring street down Military street and across what is now Monument Park. In addition, there were some cisterns, springs and wells but none of these water sources were always within reach of a line of hose.

Insurance rates had soared to as high as \$60 a thousand, far out of the reach of many property owners. Thus, deprived of the protection either of adequate fire fighting equipment for their property or insurance to pay for their losses, the people of Houlton found in the grim alternative, a challenge that had to be met.

Hardly had the embers of the fire of August, 1879, cooled when the Selectmen moved into action. A special town meeting was called at which the grave problem of adequate fire protection for the

to grant and yield to a group of citizens the right to provide "a supply of water for the town of Houlton, for the use of its citizens and their better protection against fire, especially in Houlton village . . ."

The business men who petitioned the legislature to organize such a corporation under the general law, included, Walter P. Mansur, Hudson T. Frisbie, Almon H. Fogg; James F. Holland, Charles P. Tenney, Charles D. Merritt, Black Hawk Putnam, B. L. Staples, Eben Woodbury and J. H. Bradford.

#### LEGISLATION APPROVED

The necessary legislation was approved by the Maine House of Representatives (February 21, 1880), by the Maine Senate (February 23, 1880) and signed by Governor Daniel F. Davis (February 24, 1880).

In order to provide the considerable amount of capital that would be necessary to defray the costs of digging all the trenches, making all the excavations along the streets and roads of the town, laying the pipes and erecting reservoirs, hydrants and other essential facilities, the corporation was authorized to sell "real and personal estate" not exceeding \$50,000.

The original stock subscription record shows that 2,000 shares at \$25 a share, was sold. The first block of shares sold was 1100. It being necessary to dispose of 900 more shares to attain the required \$50,000, Clarence Pierce, Walter Mansur, Hudson Frisbie, James F. Holland, Black Hawk Putnam and Charles P. Tenney, each subscribed for 150 additional shares.

#### COMPANY ORGANIZED

The first meeting to organize the new company was held at the Town Hall, March 10, 1880. At this meeting it was voted that Clarence Pierce, William S. Gilman, Oscar F. French and Albert A. Burleigh be admitted as associate incorporators.

At the first annual meeting held two weeks later, March 24, at the same place, Clarence Pierce, Walter Mansur, Hudson Frisbie, James F. Holland and Black Hawk Putnam were unanimously elected directors. From this group came the first officers of the company: Walter Mansur, president, Black Hawk Putnam, vice president, James F. Holland, superintendent.

Next move was to embark on the tremendous job of locating a sufficient supply of pure water, in-

spoke in favor of the project while Francis Barnes spoke in opposition. At the start of the meeting, the news story relates, it appeared that the sentiment might be equally divided. However, as time wore on the proponents were able to advance additional arguments and it was better understood by those who had at first objected, the project steadily gained in favor with the voters.

When the final vote was taken, friends of the proposal prevailed by a vote of almost two to one, the vote standing at 176 to 92.

The first vote that was taken was almost precisely the same as the original vote passed in 1879. If it was not so in wording it certainly was in its meaning.

The series of articles renewed all of the permissions granted six years before and, in addition, empowered the Selectmen to enter into a contract with the Houlton Water Company to furnish the town with an adequate water supply for the protection of property in the town against fire and to provide and maintain for a period of five years, 20 good and effective hydrants to be located as directed by the Selectmen along the lines of the water supply. An annual rental of \$75 per hydrant was stipulated.

In the notes of the Houlton Water Company of a meeting held that same night, it is inscribed that the president, and the treasurer of the company were authorized to negotiate an agreement with the town on the hydrant matter.

In January of that year the officers of the company had voted to employ the firm of Crafts & Forbes of Boston, as engineers for the construction of the water works at a price of \$1,600.

Next move in this direction came the week following the February 12, 1885 special town meeting when the officers voted to contract with the contracting firm of Ferris and Halliday of Jersey City, N. J., for the construction of a system of water works in Houlton. It was stipulated that the system should be completed by about August 1, 1886.

#### PUMPING PLANT BUILT

A steam operated pumping plant was located just north of the Red Bridge, hard by the bank of the stream and two steam pumps were installed to pump the water that would eventually flow through the pipes and vastly increase, not only the town's protection against fire but provide other conveniences as well.

two and one-half story brick structure 20 by 50 feet, the lower floor being used for boiler and pump rooms and the upper floor as an apartment for the operator. Subsequently, additions were made to the building to accommodate electric lighting equipment. A comfortable house was completed nearby in 1928 for the use of the operator.

#### BOILERS ERECTED IN 1885

The original installation included two horizontal tubular boilers erected in 1885, rated at 50 horsepower each. The two pumps, also placed in operation that same year, were duplex high pressure Worthington pumps with steam cylinders 14 inches in diameter each with a capacity of about 350 gallons a minute, or 5,000,000 gallons per day against a pressure of 130 pounds to the square inch.

The size of the pipe through which the water was pumped graduated down from ten inches at the station to four inches at the outer extremities of the system. The full dimension was used until the intersection of Market Square and Court street was reached, via North street, under the Meduxnekeag and west under Union Square.

The lines serving Main street as far west as Winter street, and Court street as far south as Park street were reduced to eight inches in diameter. At these points the size was again reduced to six inches and this size of pipe was laid along Winter street, Military street east to the junction of Kelleran street, also along Park, High, Water and Bangor streets and along Pleasant to Summer street.

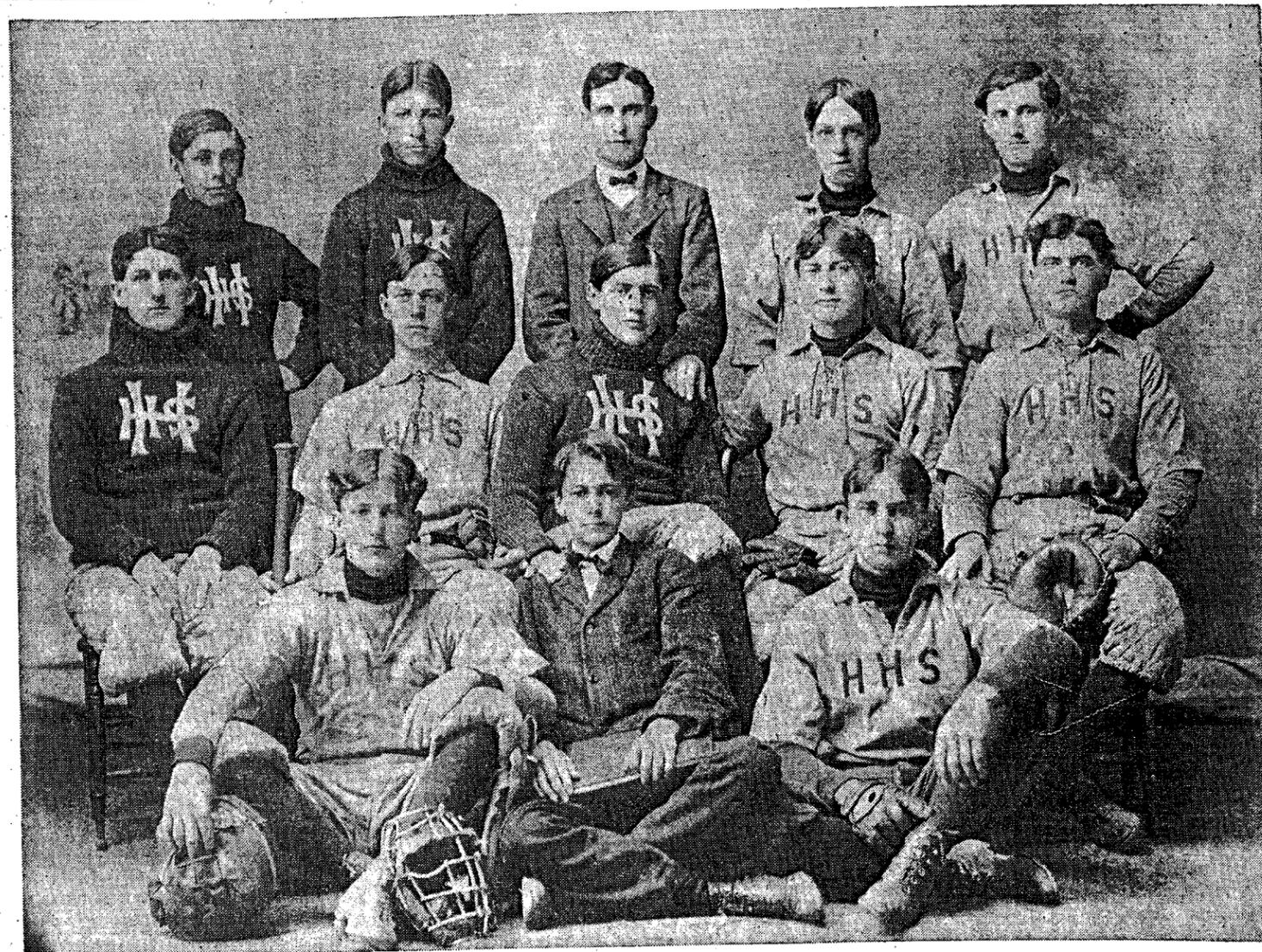
#### STANDPIPE BUILT

Four inch pipe was considered adequate for Kendall, Pierce, Leonard, School, Kelleran, Mechanic Winter and Summer streets and on Military streets between Bangor and Pierce streets.

As storage for surplus water, above and beyond the needs of the patrons of the system and as additional fire protection, an iron standpipe was erected on Spring street just behind property now owned by Bernard E. Esters on High street.

"This was 20 feet in diameter, 50 feet in height and was erected on brick foundation ten feet high. It had an elevation of 70 feet above Market Square and a capacity of 117,000 gallons. When full it would make possible a pressure of 55 pounds to the square inch

## Some "Little Giants" on High School's 1905 Team



Several years later some of the same faces, slightly older, appear in this picture of the Houlton High School baseball team of 1905, as appeared in the one above of the Little Giants. Front row, and in the same position as the picture above is Frank Clayton, George Shaw is still manager of the outfit and on his left is Jack McKay. The second row, left to right, is Herschel Shaw, Harold Royal, Bob Lawlis, Burpee Alexander and Fred Conlogue. In the top row is, Fred Larrabee, Linwood Ervin, Percy Rideout, coach, Albert Millar, also in the same spot as the previous picture, and Burns McIntyre.

al of the assets, plant and franchise of the company was made in 1901 by Walter H. Sawyer, a Boston engineer, possibly for the purpose of effecting a basis of sale by the stockholders to the town. In the meantime the footage of pipe throughout the town had been increased by some 8250 feet and the number of hydrants had increased from the original 20 which had been stipulated by the town as a condition of the original agreement "located as directed by the Selectmen along the lines of the water supply".

The most significant development in the history of the Houl-

ton was made in this manner, it was explained, rather than to purchase the company's charter rights, property and franchise because, "By purchasing the greater part of the stock, the Town thus controls the water company, and avoids any direct liability for damages or other losses that might occur."

It was noted in the Town Report of March 1, 1903, which contained a description of the transaction that "There are 2,000 shares of Capital stock of the par value of \$25 each. The Town has purchased and now owns 1920 shares or twenty-four twenty-

a new superintendent, expansions and improvements in the service were planned and put into effect a few years later. Up to that point few changes had taken place.

In 1904 and 1905, mains were extended out High street and carried to the top of Madigan's Hill, so called, where a reservoir was built with a capacity of 2,097,500 gallons. The pressure of the system, at street level was thereby almost doubled, still further contributing to the town's fire protection.

This reservoir served adequately until recently when cracks in the wall forced the construction

its water supply. The sparseness of the settlement over its drainage area, the heavily wooded growth that abounds through the approximately 36 square miles of its water shed and the porous gravel soil through which it flows are favorable characteristics.

#### CHLORINE IS ADDED

In 1919, in accordance with the approved practices of the day and following outbreaks elsewhere of typhoid fever and the discovery in some sections of a vegetable organism, causing pollution, the local company, preferring to take no chances, adopted chlorine