WATER IS free to all. But it isn't always available where people want it, in condition for them to use it. It is the water company's job to take over the task of collecting water, transporting water and making sure that the water delivered is safe for human consumption and suitable for human use, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. That is what you pay for when you pay your water bill.

The earliest records of our civilization are linked to the spring and the waterhole, the river and the well.

The earliest record of the local water supply in that, beginning in 1887, the city (or should we say village?) of Baton Rouge was served with filtered Mississippi River water. There was some trouble getting customers, for most people had their own cisterns.

On Nov. 8, 1887, an ordinance was adopted making a contract with K. M. Eadsley and John H. Wood, authorizing and empowering them to erect, own and operate a system of waterworks in the city of Baton Rouge and to supply said city and its inhabitants with water.

The contract stipulated that the water works have a capacity to furnish two million gallons of water in 24 hours and that a standpipe be constructed to hold 100,000 gallons. It also specified that pumping engines and suitable boilers be installed with a capacity of two million gallons per 24 hours.

The contract stipulated that there would be approximately six miles of cast iron main, varnished inside and outside with Dr. August Smith's Patent Coal Tar Varnish, for distributing water throughout the city, the pipe ranging in size from 4 inches to 12 inches in diameter.

A sample of the annual rates are as follows: Barber shop with one chair and basin, $6; public bath-tubs, $10; billiard saloon, one table, $5; cigar factory, five hands and one master, $5; livery stable, $3; offices with wash basins, $5 to $10, blacksmith shop, first fire, $6, each additional fire, $2.50.

Within a few years after the system was started, it was realized that the quality of the water desired could not be obtained from the river, and the first well was drilled. This was the beginning of the development of the present deep well supply of high quality soft water.

The Baton Rouge Water Works Company obtained its charter on April 5, 1919. Its first president was W. J. Bird, vice president, W. W. Jackson; secretary, J. H. Wood.

The standpipe mentioned above was constructed in 1888 in front of the company's present offices. That standpipe was constructed with wrought iron, the cast of which would today be prohibitive. Wrought iron resists rust a great deal more than steel; however, due to the exorbitant price of wrought iron, all present-day elevated water tanks are constructed of steel. These tanks are properly protected by paint applied every five to six years.

On Jan. 1, 1940, the city increased its area by annexation from approximately 4.85 square miles to 20.32 square miles, an increase of more than 459 per cent, and increased its population from 45,000 to 120,400, an increase of 187 per cent.

Prior to the date of annexation, there were 614 fire hydrants in the city of Baton Rouge. Today there are 1,924, an increase of 147 per cent in 45 years. Since Jan. 1, 1940, the water company has made additions to its plant amounting to a total of $2,475,000. More than $2,000,000 of this amount has been spent for the installation of additional fire hydrants, and the program is still in progress.

The capacity of 100,000 gallons in 1888 has been increased to 28 million in 1954. The storage of 100,000 gallons in 1888 has been increased to over 6,000,000 gallons in 1954. The six miles of mains in 1888 has increased to over 600 miles of mains in 1954.

After an expenditure of $1,200,000 by the city and over $2,000,000 by the company, for fire protection, the water supply was graded by the National Board of Fire Underwriters as Class 1. Of some 17,000 public water supplies in the United States serving populations greater than 20,000, only approximately 40 are graded as Class I.

In 1940 the average daily water consumption here was 4,500,000 gallons. In 1954 this average has increased to 11,500,000 gallons.

The largest consumption for a single day in 1940 was 6,000,000 gallons and in 1954 the largest consumption was 27,000,000 gallons.

Baton Rouge is one of few cities in the United States that enjoys a water supply with zero hardness—perfectly soft. This water is so perfectly balanced chemically that it is neither corrosive nor scale-forming.

The city obtains its entire water supply from deep wells, approximately 1,500 feet deep. This water is obtained from strata that come to the surface of the ground around Vicksburg, Miss. Therefore, it is the rains in Mississippi that replenish the underground storage of the water supply, and not local rains. The temperature of the water as it comes from the wells is 91 degrees Fahrenheit.

A seldom considered phase of the water required daily by the homes, offices and stores in Baton Rouge is the matter of transportation. This daily transportation is equal to five times as many ton miles as that of all railway and freight lines serving the city, something over 100,000 ton miles daily.

One of our greatest blessings is the fact that Baton Rouge water does not have to be treated. While this water will satisfy all of the requirements of the local state and national health boards without chlorination, it is chlorinated at the request of these bodies as an added precaution; however, only 1/2 pound of chlorine is added to each 1,000,000 pounds of water.

WHEN D. R. Taylor, general manager of the Baton Rouge Water Works Company, was asked if the company has had any unusual experience or humorous incident in the water service, he recalled that a customer once was upset, as a result of an abnormal water bill. After a thorough investigation by the company to determine the cause of his abnormal consumption, he discovered that his mother-in-law was leaving the faucet open one day.

A customer on his property, for 7.2 cents per ton for butter, $170 per ton for sugar and $3 per ton for dirt for his rosebushes, whereas he has water delivered not only to his property but to any particular point on his property, for 7.2 cents per ton. The average customer drinks 20,000 gallons of water during his lifetime, all of which he could buy at one time for $.06.

The bath has not always been considered a requisite of personal hygiene. Taylor added, as a sort of footnote to local history, "LSU once had a rule that each student must take a bath once a week. The morning bath is one of these inestimable privileges taken for granted when it was one of those hard earned privileges of freedom."

The water company dislikes abnormal consumption as much as the customer and continuously uses every means possible to assist the customer in maintaining normal consumption and in advising customers to seek and stop all leaks immediately. In this connection, he kept his wife water pipe or leak in a forest 1/4 inch in size will waste 400 gallons of water in one day.

The cost of water to the customer is mainly for transportation. The average customer pays $1.00 per ton for butter, $170 per ton for sugar and $3 per ton for dirt for his rosebushes, whereas he has water delivered not only to his property but to any particular point on his property, for 7.2 cents per ton. The average customer drinks 20,000 gallons of water during his lifetime, all of which he could buy at one time for $.06.

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Occasionally, as a result of a main being broken accidentally, a small quantity of air is entrapped in that portion of the distribution system adjacent to the broken main and it is surprising how many telephone calls are received inquiring as to the cause of the air in the water. An occasional milky condition is caused by bubbles of oxygen. If this water is allowed to stand in a glass or other open container for a minute or two, the oxygen is dissipated and the water will clear immediately.

While oxygen does no one harm, it causes cast iron pipe to rust. Water companies do not like it.

Does soft water make a difference? Baton Rougians have become accustomed to such perfect water that they consider water of a quality used by other Louisiana cities “horrible.”

H. P. Connell, president of the Baton Rouge Water Works, says that visitors to the city “frequently use the normal amount of soap in bathing that they use at home, and either complain because they cannot get all the soap off or the bathtub becomes so sleek they call for someone to assist them in getting out of the tub!”

There’s no reference to personal welfare, yet the health of your community, of your family and of yourself is protected by the vigilance of the water works men who check and recheck the water supply to make sure that it is safe.

The really important thing about your water bill is not the charges it records but the savings it doesn’t.