

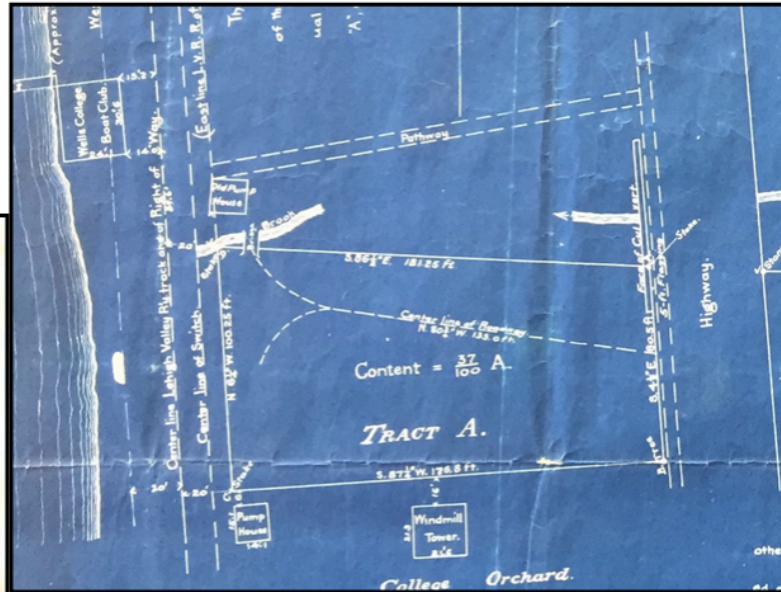
“Well, That’s Weird!”
How a College Came to Own a Water Plant

Oral history: “In 1926, N. Lansing Zabriskie gave the water plant.”

But there’s more to the story, and that’s not quite how it all happened. The Village of Aurora not only proposed the plant but paid its share to connect.

How did residents get water before a municipal system?
Everyone had a well and a cistern.
There were also pumping systems and reservoirs that served limited areas.

Linda S. Schwab, Ph.D., Village Historian, Aurora NY



Pump houses (old and new) and windmill on Henry Wells property; blueprint 1897, boathouse view ca. 1910. A relatively new pumping system was already in place.



Dr. Albert Leffingwell's
diary, 1914: Village
Trustees propose a water
system, expense to be
shared with Wells College.
Pres. Macmillan: sewer
system must come first.

Tuesday. May 19
Another warm day - A.L.L. called this
afternoon: said trustees of village, (Lynn. Best
Shark and Martin Maloney Jr.) held conference
last night with introductory water system into
village, & sharing expense with the College.
To my surprise, L. seemed very much
in favor of it. —

Wednesday. May 20
Very warm and sunny. Ch. Gordin
planting lower garden. Mr. Maloney
told me to day that Macmillan
favored water system &c. but insisted that
a sewer system should go with it. He
are not yet ready for that, but wanted to
be obligatory on all the towns above us,
such as Otisco: though it should come, and
will come some day. —

Aug. 1-1919. At a meeting of Village Board of Trustees held at the home of Mr. S. G. Zygon Friday evening August 1-1919 the following were present, Mr. S. G. Zygon, President; Marcus Webb and S. J. Maloney, Trustees. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. Communication from State Department of Health stating that it was necessary that the board of trustees

Aug. 1919: the Village moves forward, working with State Health Department

appointed a registrar for the village of Aurora. Motion made and duly carried that S. J. Maloney be appointed for a term of four years ending August 1-1923. No further business on hand. Meeting adjourned. Bert G. Shook, Clerk

Feb. 1925: A contract with Wells College

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the village of Aurora held at the Way Side Inn, Thursday evening, Feb. 19-1925. The following were present, Mr. S. G. Zygon, Pres., John Vandewick, and Thomas Hoffingworth, Trustees. K. V. Macmillan was present as representative for the trustees of the College. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. Business before the meeting was that according to the State laws governing villages, that College and village could not act in conjunction unless present law was amended. Mr. Zygon had a draft of bill of what would be necessary to do to have village connect water main with that of the college to make contract legal. No further business on hand. Meeting adjourned. Bert G. Shook, Clerk

MAY 4 1925

By Mr. E. J. Maloney

Resolved, that the following proposition be submitted to the qualified voters of the Village of Aurora at a special election to be held on the 18th day of May, 1925, as hereinafter provided:

"Shall the Village of Aurora establish a system of water works for supplying the village and its inhabitants with water, by the acquisition and laying of necessary mains and pipes and the connection of the same with the water works of Wells College, all as provided by Chapter 374 of the laws of 1925, at a total expense not exceeding the sum of \$27,000, and issue in payment thereof bonds of the Village of Aurora to the amount of \$27,000 as follows: 20 bonds of \$900 each, to be dated July 1, 1925, and to mature, one on July 1, 1926, and one on each first day of July in each of the twenty nine years thereafter, and to bear interest at 5% payable semi-annually;"

\$27,000 in 1925 is equivalent to about \$494,000 today.

May 1925: the pace picks up. A bond is proposed and voted.

Result of election held in Library Hall
May 18th 1925 voting on proposition for
widening road and water system

No 1 proposition for widening road

Ayes	37
No	20
Void	3
Blank	3
	<hr/> 63

No 2 proposition for water system

Ayes	54
No	6
Void	3
	<hr/> 63

Respectfully,
Eugene P. Maloney
Thomas H. Lippard

By Mr. Maloney: *Thomas Kiffingwell*
Resolved, that the map, plans and specifications prepared by Arthur J. Adams for the proposed village water supply system - copy of which is on file with the village clerk and also with the Water Control Commission at Albany, in connection with the application of the village for the approval of such construction and installation - be and the same are hereby approved and adopted as the map, plans and specifications for such proposed water supply distribution system; further

A map was prepared
(but where is it today?),
bids taken, and plans
sent to the State Water
Control Commission

The agreement with the
College went forward with
College Trustee Robert
Zabriskie. The contract was
awarded to Brayer Bros.

By Mr. Zabriskie.
Whereas consent has been given by the Water Control Commission to the installation of a water supply system in the village in accordance with the map, plans and specifications heretofore prepared therefor and on file with the Water Commission; and Chap. 374 of the Laws of 1925 authorizes the entering into a contract by the Board of Trustees on the part of the village and Wells College; and the Board of Trustees and Wells College have entered into such contract for the sale by the college to the village of water at the rate of 5¢ per thousand gallons delivered - for a period of ten years after the installation of such system, it is
Resolved, that the president of the village be and he is hereby authorized on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the village to execute a formal contract with the college evidencing such contract and agreement.

State of New York
Department of Conservation
WATER POWER AND CONTROL COMMISSION
Water Supply Application No. 380
In the Matter of the Application
- of the -
VILLAGE OF AURORA,
for approval of its acquisition
of a source of water supply and
of its financial and engineering
plans for the construction of a
water supply system.

MODIFIED DECISION
Application filed June 18, 1925
Original decision July 8, 1925
Modified decision June 11, 1935

MODIFIED DECISION ON WATER SUPPLY APPLICATION NO. 380

The Village of Aurora, in the town of Ledyard, Cayuga county, on June 18, 1925, filed a water supply application with our predecessor, the Water Control Commission, which application was duly approved July 8, 1925.

This approval was made subject to certain modifications, one of which read as follows:

"1. The authorities of the village of Aurora and those of Wells College shall, in conjunction with the State Department of Health, procure the enactment of suitable rules and regulations for the protection of the sanitary quality of the water of Cayuga lake in the immediate vicinity of the college intake and thereafter shall put this territory into condition conformable with such rules and diligently enforce the provisions of such rules."

This condition was necessary, in part, on account of the close proximity to the intake of dangerous sources of pollution.

On May 23, 1935, the State Department of Health, in a letter addressed to this Commission, stated that the most dangerous of these conditions had been eliminated by the installation of a sewage treatment plant in the village and by the extension of the intake pipe line an additional 1300 feet into the lake. The Department recommended that the Commission reconsider this condition of the decision of its predecessor, as it believes such rules and regulations would now serve no

But then, a complication: the Department of Health raised a concern...

useful purpose. The Commission concurs in these findings.

In consideration of the above, it is hereby determined that said decision of the Water Control Commission of July 8, 1925, be modified by rescinding the first condition thereof and substituting in lieu thereof a new condition to read as follows:

1. The Commission reserves the right to require the taking of additional sanitary precautions, or the treatment or purification of all water supplied for use in the village of Aurora, should future analyses or inspections show necessity for such action.

On November 18, 1931, the village applied to this Commission for final approval of these works under Section 524 of the Conservation Law. After an inspection made on December 10, 1931, by a representative of the Commission, it was recommended that these works be approved after the sanitary rules and regulations referred to above had been enacted and were in force. With the elimination of the condition requiring such rules and regulations, it now appears that these works may be approved as completed.

STATE OF NEW YORK
CITY AND COUNTY OF ALBANY } ss.

I, F. P. Williams, Secretary to the Water Power and Control Commission, State of New York, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of the original modified decision "In the matter of the application of the Village of Aurora, for approval of its acquisition of a source of water supply and of its financial and engineering plans for the construction of a water supply system", duly filed in the office of said Water Power and Control Commission on the 11th day of June, 1935, and remaining on file therein.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that the said copy has been compared by me with the original thereof and that the same is a correct transcript therefrom and of the whole of said original.

WITNESS my hand and the seal of said
Water Power and Control Commission
this 13th day of June, 1935.

F. P. Williams
Secretary to the Commission

...which had earlier been corrected (a sewer plant, by NLZ).
And so it continued for almost ninety years.

The water plant proposed by the Village Board on a May evening 111 years ago tonight took eleven years to plan, approve, fund and build. It was ten more years to final, modified approval.

It cost a lot of money, and involved two State agencies.

It took almost the entire career of Pres. K. D. Macmillan, two generations of Zabriskies, Maloneys, and Leffingwells, and countless hours from Village and College workers.

And that's how it happened.

Linda S. Schwab, PhD.
Village Historian
Aurora NY
May 21, 2025]