

Brookline TAB

Column: New Waterworks museum a community success story

By **Beryl Rosenthal**, Guest Columnist

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Posted Feb 18, 2011 @ 12:00 PM

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As a rapidly growing city, Boston in the 1880s faced a tough decision: what to do about its growing need for a safe, reliable water supply. The “new” aqueduct, completed in 1848, already lacked sufficient supply to meet the developing city’s needs for continued public health and fire prevention. A more elaborate delivery system involving new reservoirs and steam-powered pumps was proposed as the solution, and the Reservoir was completed in 1870, followed by the first pumping station in 1887 at the intersection of Boston, Brookline and Newton, in the area known as Chestnut Hill.

In continuous operation from 1887 to 1976, the High and Low Service Pumping Stations provided much of the water to the region. Finally decommissioned by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority in 2004, the High Service building was vacant while discussions continued about the possible reuses.

The Friends of the Waterworks was created in 1991 to save the High Service Building from demolition by neglect. Crumbling and empty, the building was deteriorating and quickly running out of options for redevelopment. Composed of residents and neighbors from Brighton, Brookline and Newton, the Friends advocated tirelessly against reuses that did not respect the historical integrity of the building. With their assistance, legislation passed in 2000 that authorized the sale of the buildings within the Waterworks complex, provided that they preserve the existing structures.

Redeveloped by EA Fish Associates as the Waterworks Park condominiums, a portion of the High Service Building was reserved as the Waterworks Museum, following a public bid process. As the awarded bidder, the converted Friends group began the process of planning the new Museum while including more residents from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The new Waterworks Museum, scheduled to open March 27, includes one of the country’s few collections of steam pump engines available to the public, as well as Richardsonian-Romanesque architecture that reflects the ideals of Boston’s “Golden Age.” Dedicated to telling the story of one of the country’s first metropolitan water systems, as well as the importance of public health

and environmental awareness in a growing city, the Waterworks Museum is a significant addition to the community. The former Friends group is reincarnated as a dynamic, energized Board of Trustees that represents each of the three original communities, as well as the goals for the museum's future.

Visit us at www.waterworksmuseum.org.

Beryl Rosenthal is executive director of the Waterworks Museum.

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