

The History of Tampa's Water



How do we get our water on a daily basis? Most of us know that we get our water from a source controlled by the water company, but how exactly did this come to be and what is this process called? The public water supply is a system created in the 1800s, that provides water via piping or other constructed conveyances to the city residents for their consumption.

The first record of the public water supply dates back to 1887, when the Tampa Water Works Company secured a 35-year franchise from the City. A total of 45 wells were drilled in an area north and west of today's downtown area. Of those wells, 21 were abandoned and the remaining 24 seldom furnished water that was suitable for general household use. The city realized that they needed to find an alternate source for potable water, so in 1922 they began to look for an adequate source. **The Hillsborough River**, which flowed into Tampa from a 640 square mile water shed, was chosen as our source and remains our primary source of water today.



In 1923 the system consisted of 24 artesian wells, one spring, a steam operating pumping plant with a capacity of 13 million gallons a day, and 60 miles of cast iron water distribution mains. The City began work on a new water treatment plant and pumping station on the south bank of the Hillsborough River at 30th Street, just upstream from Tampa Electric Company's dam, immediately after the purchase. This plant included its own steam plant, electrical generators, and steam-driven pumps. The treatment plant consisted of mixing and settling basins, rapid sand filters, clear well storage, chemical house, laboratory, and office and could supply 20 million gallons of quality potable water per day.



The History of Tampa's Water



In 1933, extreme weather and thunderstorms produced severe flood stage conditions in the Hillsborough River, resulting in the collapse of the Tampa Electric Company's dam. The dam was later rebuilt in 1944, but for years, water had to be pumped from the river directly into the plant.

A few years after the end of World War II, construction on new additions to the Water Plant began and were completed in 1948. With the new additions, the total deliverable capacity was more than doubled to 35 to 45 mgd. This level was projected to meet demands for a period of at least 10 years.



In 1950, Tampa marked the occasion of its 50,000th connection to the system. That means 50,000 individual sources were connects to the water system, pulling water for all sorts of needs through the city. During the early and middle 1950s, large industrial areas were developed bringing in industries having very high water demands. Close attention to these developments indicated the need for much additional capacity than was earlier anticipated in 1948, therefore, planning of new facilities was immediately undertaken and in 1959 a new expansion program that brought the total treatment capacity to a maximum of **71 million gallons** per day was completed. Today the plant is capable of producing up to 120 mgd.

The History of Tampa's Water



By 1971 water demand exceeded treatment and pumping capacity in the dry season and in response, sprinkling restrictions were initiated in 1972. **Morris Bridge Treatment Plant** came online in August 1979 to process groundwater from the 20 wells in the Morris Bridge wellfield. The plant increased Tampa's water treatment capacity by 40 million gallons a day and used unique energy saving roof-top filters which allowed the water pumped from the wellfield to utilize gravity to move it to storage tanks instead of repumping. In 1979, Tampa served over 400,000 people an average of 55 million gallons a day through over 1,700 miles of distribution pipe.



In 2000, Tampa faced record rain shortfalls in one of the worst droughts in recorded history. This water shortage resulted the first one-day-a-week irrigation restrictions being enacted. The severe shortage of water forced city officials to begin thinking of alternate sources of water. The city wanted its citizens to find alternate sources of water for irrigation, which is the biggest use of water other than for human consumption. By using alternate sources of water, we find and conserve the water that we need for drinking and bathing and we pull water from alternate sources for irrigation. Such as well water, water from lakes, ponds, streams, and harvested rainwater for irrigation. Since 2001, the City of Tampa has taken great strides to provide alternate sources of water so that we can continue to have enough water for our residents.

The History of Tampa's Water



Short Answer

1. Names the alternate sources of water mentioned in this document. What other alternate sources can you identify? Do you use alternate sources of water at home or other areas? Where can you use alternate sources of water?

2. How does the partnership between Tampa Electric Company and Tampa Water Works, show itself here? What happened to our water source in history when the Tampa Electric dam was destroyed and then later rebuilt?

3. Give examples of the steps that the City of Tampa took to keep up with the growing population of the area. How do you think the city with continue to keep up with the growth of the city in 5-10 years? 15-20 years?
