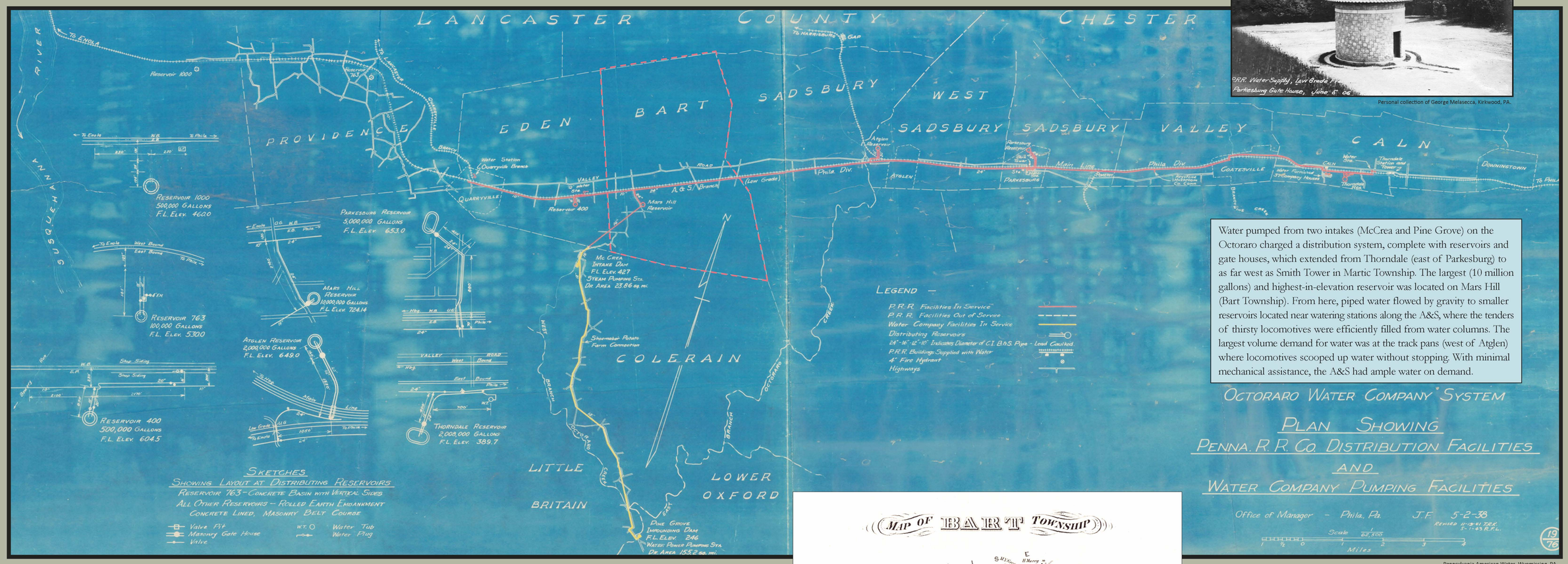
A Stream for Steam

The Atglen & Susquehanna in Bart Township



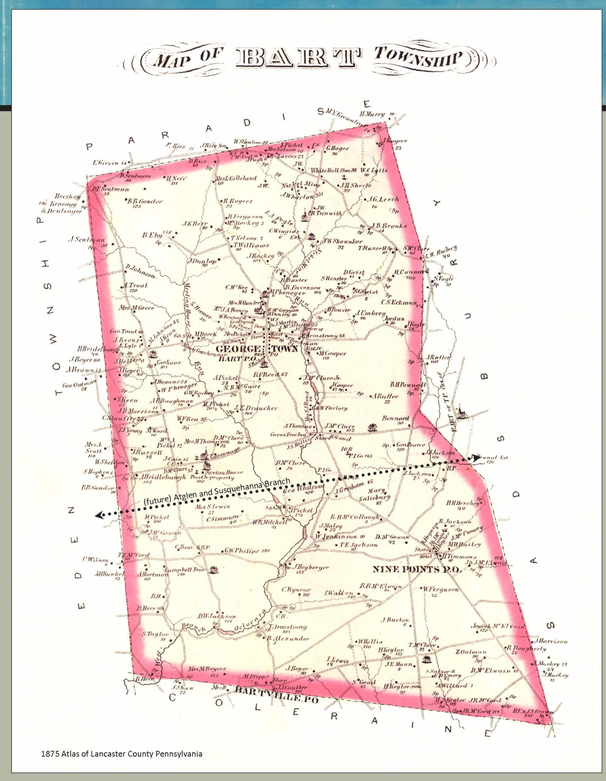
Personal collection of George Melasecca, Kirkwood, PA.

Water pumped from two intakes (McCrea and Pine Grove) on the Octoraro charged a distribution system, complete with reservoirs and gate houses, which extended from Thorndale (east of Parkesburg) to as far west as Smith Tower in Martic Township. The largest (10 million gallons) and highest-in-elevation reservoir was located on Mars Hill (Bart Township). From here, piped water flowed by gravity to smaller reservoirs located near watering stations along the A&S, where the tenders of thirsty locomotives were efficiently filled from water columns. The largest volume demand for water was at the track pans (west of Atglen) where locomotives scooped up water without stopping. With minimal mechanical assistance, the A&S had ample water on demand.

Pennsylvania American Water, Wyomissing, PA.

Of all the resources required for operation of the A&S, none was more deceptively vital than water. From its inception under steam locomotion, the A&S was quietly sustained by the vast water resources it continually crossed. Previous droughts and rapidly expanding service throughout Pennsylvania led the PRR to outfit the A&S with a reliable and thoroughly modern water system. When the Octoraro Water Company was formed in 1903 by merger of seven smaller water companies along the A&S route, the PRR was its sole customer. The water within the entire Octoraro Creek watershed (approximately 208 square miles) was at its disposal. Access to this water secured a highly desirable water supply for both the A&S and the PRR's main line. In the steam era, the estimated average daily consumption from this water system exceeded 2 million gallons per day.

As with many other water systems originally built for the PRR, the infrastructure of the Octoraro Water Company eventually came to serve the residential consumers of its neighboring communities. Though steam locomotives were replaced by electric ones, water continued to power the A&S via hydroelectric energy from Safe Harbor. Idyllic Octoraro Creek, slow and meandering in contrast to the mighty Susquehanna River, helped power one of the nation's busiest freight roads in the first half of the twentieth century.



1875 Atlas of Lancaster County Pennsylvania

Personal collection of George Melasecca, Kirkwood, PA.

Personal collection of George Melasecca, Kirkwood, PA.

Panel courtesy of Amtrak®