

North Newark's Castle

by Jeffery S. Bennett

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One of Newark, New Jersey's most unusual buildings is a yellow-stone crenellated tower located right across from Calandra's bakery on Bloomfield Avenue in Roseville. Is it a watchtower? A rook from a giant's chessboard? Or a library, as many old visitors apparently used to believe? No, no, and no. The Bloomfield Avenue tower is a memorial to Mayor Joseph E. Haynes and a former meter house for the Newark water supply.

The Pequannock Gate, as the tower is officially called, is located at a point where the aqueducts from the Pequannock watershed meet the ordinary Newark city mains. Formerly, there were five glass covered "pitometers" in the building to let engineers know the local water pressure anywhere in the city. In the old days, men worked round the clock in three, eight hour shifts keeping Newark's taps working.

The Pequannock Gate was designed by the chief engineer of the water department, George Sanzenbacher, and was built in 1917 by the firm of Francis McCue for \$12,496. The park around the gate is now just grass, but there used to be bushes and flowers.

The lunette above the door is an attractive plaque dedicated to Mayor Joseph Haynes. The plaque contains a profile of the bearded mayor with a rustic background of pine leaves on the left and oak leaves on the right. It reads:

THIS BUILDING IS ERECTED TO COMMEMORATE THE ACQUISITION OF THE PEQUANNOCK WATER
BY THE CITY OF NEWARK

The safety of tap water is something we take for granted, but in the old days of Newark taking a drink was something one did at his or her own risk. While Newark had once had unlimited good water from the Passaic River, ponds, and small streams, by the Civil War, Newark's surface water was anything but the gin clear liquid it had once been. Health conscious Newarkers drank well water, but by the 1880s even well water was becoming infested with bacteria, tannic acid, and unnamable bad tastes. Even the rich could not escape from the sickening waters, and Newark's breweries were threatening to go to a place with better water.

The person who did the most to rid Newark of miasmatic drinking water was Mayor Joseph Haynes, to whom the Bloomfield Avenue castle is dedicated. Joseph Emmett Haynes was born in Westford, New York in July 1827. He subsequently became a school teacher in Irvington and then the principal of the Morton Street School in Newark, at that time a large, selective high school. Haynes became involved with the Democratic party, and partly due to the anti-German politics of the Republicans, was elected mayor in 1884.

A shrewd politician, Haynes was reelected five times from 1884-1894. Haynes accomplished this, hitherto unprecedented, feat through the usual machine strategy of patronage politics, (possible) voter fraud, and, what he is most remembered for, good government.

Newarkers before Haynes realized that Newark's water was dangerously polluted. In 1879 an engineering firm had recommended that Newark acquire water from the watershed of the Pequannock river in Morris, Sussex, and Passaic counties, but it was Haynes who was finally able to do something about it.

After considering a dam on the Passaic River at Belleville, in 1888 Haynes contracted with a private group called the East Jersey Water Company to provide the City of Newark with facilities to provide up to 27,500,000* gallons of clean, Pequannock water a year for \$6,000,000. With that \$6,000,000, the East Jersey Water Company would build three dams and lay 28 miles of 4' steel pipe from the watershed to Newark. The East Jersey Water Company would cease to exist in 1939 and then turn its property over to Newark. The East Jersey Water Company was controlled by the directors of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company, who primarily resided in Philadelphia.

Despite the obvious need for clean water, Haynes' plan was extremely controversial. According to legend, Haynes was burned in effigy in front of City Hall. If his effigy was never really burned, we know for a fact that a noose was left in front of the building to remind Haynes that his political days were numbered.

The opposition to Haynes may seem incomprehensible, but there was a bizarre logic to it. Joseph Haynes was, indeed, a patronage politician. In the early 1880s Haynes fought a long battle with the Republicans over how police jobs were divided. Many of those burning their mayor believed that the water company would likewise be a den of corruption, and that even if the water works were run cleanly, there were nearer and cheaper places to get water from than northern Passaic County. Also,

there was a provision in the Pequannock bill that would have created an appointed Board of Works with powers rivaling those of the Common Council. Finally, there were some who believed that the still waters of a reservoir were a fertile environment for bacterial growth.

The effigy burners were wrong about the dangers of reservoir water, the unelected water board, and Haynes' corruption. Haynes appointed people to the water board who were not his political allies. The East Jersey Water Company did not deliver a satisfactory pumping house at Belleville, and the \$6,000,000 was an underestimate, but by 1892 everyone in Newark was drinking pristine, cold water from the Passaic highlands. Typhoid fever deaths dropped by 70 percent.

Haynes' popularity hit its nadir after the expensive water contract was signed and before the Pequannock water became available. In 1891 fellow Democrats offered an alternative nominee. The October 1891 contest was very close and the Republican nominee, W. Lehlbach, alleged that Haynes' minions had dumped Lehlbach ballots and inflated Haynes' totals.

Lehlbach pursued his cause in the courts but nothing came of it. *The New York Times*, not perceiving Haynes' water virtues, described Haynes in an aside thusly:

"The illiterate schoolmaster who, by the grace of repeaters and colonizers, is Mayor of Newark in the face of an overwhelming repudiation at the polls."

Pastor Andrew Jackson Sullivan of the North Reformed Church even had to resign his post after he praised Haynes in a sermon.

Haynes left office in 1894 to become postmaster of Newark. He died in his house at 433 Plane Street (now University Avenue) in December 1897. The still peeved *New York Times* did not give him an obituary, but the *Newark Evening News* gave him a respectful send off. He is buried in Clinton Cemetery in Irvington.

The Brothers Bontempo

The Pequannock Castle is technically in a 0.1 acre city park entitled the Salvatore Bontempo Memorial Park, or Salvatore Bontempo Complex, depending on what source you use.

Mayor Joseph Haynes did not live up to the corrupt expectations of the anti-Pequannock protesters, but that is not to say that corruption has never appeared in the management of the watershed.

On July 7th, 1981 valves in the Pequannock watershed were vandalized, causing a 40 million gallon water leak and Newark to lose almost half of its drinking water.

The questions went up, where were the guards? Who was in charge of security? The person in charge was none other than an eighty year old former police officer named Mickey A. Bontempo, who happened to be a former councilman and ally of Newark Mayor Kenneth Gibson.

Where was Bontempo? Living in retirement in Port St. Lucie, Florida on a \$24,255 a year no-show job. Kenneth Gibson was frank about what had happened, "[Mickey Bontempo] served the City of Newark for more than 40 years and I gave him a perk, if you will...I'll take the responsibility for Mickey Bontempo."

Fifteen years ago, the 0.1 acre grassy area around the Pequannock Gate was given a name - Salvatore Bontempo Memorial Park. Salvatore Bontempo was a chair of the state Democratic party and functionary in several Democratic administrations. At the time of his death he lived on a golf course in Florham Park. He was also Mickey Bontempo's brother.

Thus, we come full circle. The water tower was named in honor of a man who created a supply of water that was clean of pollutants and clean of graft. The water tower's park was named for the brother of a man who did nothing to make Newark's water supply cleaner or more abundant, but who lived off graft.