JANUARY 2024

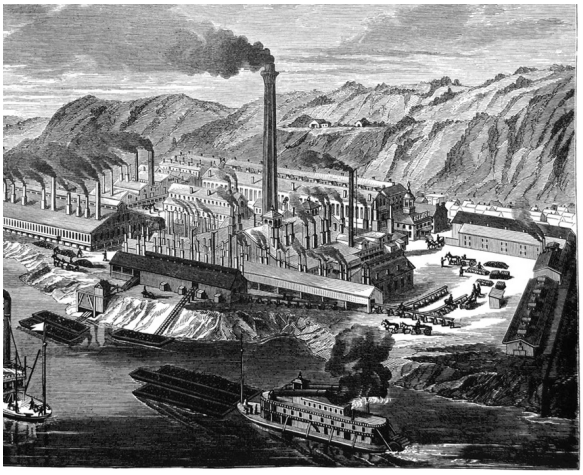
# CURRENTS

## Rivers (and canals) of Steel

**Next Board Meeting: January 26**

*For more information and to join a PWSA Board Meeting, please visit pgh2o.com/board*

*For a complete list of PWSA's community meetings and events, please visit pgh2o.com/events-meetings.*



*Boats travel a busy river delivering raw materials to J & L Steel's American Iron Works in 1875.*

Pittsburgh, the city which once produced over half of the nation's steel, simply would not be if not for the waterways which directly led to the establishment, growth and development of the industries that placed it on the map. For this reason, at the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA), our gratitude for our waterways runs deep. As we peer back at the service our rivers have provided to our steel city, we are reminded of their inherent value.

Since the early 1800s, our three rivers have served as an indispensable transport route. With an abundance of coal, iron and timber nearby, Pittsburgh rose to prominence as a steel town with goods coming in by waterways. Water was so important as a transport option that Pittsburghers lobbied in the 1840s to have canals and aqueducts built throughout the city to make the delivery of raw materials by water even easier.

The city's population increased four-fold during the decades of the canal system's operation[1], but with a growing population and more industry came less care for our rivers. By the 1880s, hundreds of boats were navigating Pittsburgh's rivers, waste from factories was being dumped into the water and it was customary for sewage to be sent directly into the river. The terrible result was that Pittsburgh had the highest typhoid fever mortality rate of any city in the nation by the early 1900s[2].

The dismal state of Pittsburgh's rivers would improve from our industrial years as new regulations were set in place and commitments to better public health outcomes became a priority in more recent decades. Though many challenges remain for our rivers, our local waters have come a long way from the industrial days of our city.

At PWSA, we are working hard to continue the trajectory towards better health for our local waters and for our community. We are mitigating historic sources of pollution to our waterways with actions such as reducing sewage overflows into our waterways, stabilizing stream banks to reduce erosion and flooding and utilizing green infrastructure to slow stormwater and stop pollution from entering the rivers.

As a public, not-for-profit water authority, you can be assured that each dollar goes towards operating, maintaining, and improving our water and sewer systems for the continued betterment of our communities and our environment. Learn more about PWSA's stormwater plans and projects: pgh2o.com/stormwater-plans.

1 Blackley, Katie. WESA. Aqueducts, inclines and mules: How the Pennsylvania Canal changed the Commonwealth. Available at: https://www.wesa.fm/development-transportation/2020-04-08/aqueducts-inclines-and-mules-how-the-pennsylvania-canal-changed-the-commonwealth. (Accessed: 20 November 2023).

2 The Search for Pure Water in Pittsburgh: The Urban Response to Water Pollution, 1893-1914: Western Pennsylvania History: 1893-1914 | Western Pennsylvania History: 1918 - 2020, journals.psu.edu/wph/article/view/3450/3281. Accessed June 2023.

*A stormwater bumpout in Squirrel Hill collects runoff from the road and redirects the water to be absorbed slowly through grasses and plants. This bumpout slows stormwater flow and filters pollution.*

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Signing up is simple at **pgh2o.com/subscribe.**

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# Additional Stormwater Resources

Explore the resources below for additional information about the stormwater fee, the stormwater credit program, and a searchable map to understand the amount of hard surface on your property.

**Stormwater Credit Program:** Property owners choosing to manage stormwater on site may reduce their monthly stormwater charge by installing stormwater management systems such as a rain garden or an underground stormwater system on their property. For information about the stormwater credit and to apply visit pgh2o.com/stormwater-fee.

**Fee Finder Website:** Use our searchable map to view the amount of impervious surface on your property and understand your stormwater fee. To use the site:

- Launch the Fee Finder Website
- Enter your address in the search bar and press enter
- Click inside the boundaries of your property for the amount of impervious surface and Equivalent Residential Units (ERU's)
- To determine your fee amount, multiply the number of ERU's by the current stormwater rate and subtract any credits that may apply

**Disputing Stormwater Fee:** If you have questions about the amount of impervious surface calculated for your property or believe there is a discrepancy, please contact our Customer Service department by calling 412-255-2423 (Press 5), to start the process.

**Questions:** Please call PWSA Customer Service at 412-255-2423 (Press 5) or email info@pgh2o.com for questions about the stormwater fee or general questions about the credit program. For more information about our plans to manage stormwater, please visit pgh2o.com/stormwater.

# Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Your donation to PWSA's Hardship Grant Program will directly benefit PWSA customers having difficulty paying their bill. Donate online at pgh2o.com/give.

# Enroll in eBilling

Convenient and easy to use, our online billing and payment portal ensures timely delivery of bills and payments. Visit pgh2o.com/ebilling to enroll.


Penn Liberty Plaza 1
1200 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

**Customer Service***
T 412.255.2423 (Press 5)
info@pgh2o.com
*translation services available

**Emergency Dispatch***
412.255.2423 (Press 1)
Available 24/7

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PGH2O WATER WISE

# Responsible Snow and Ice Removal

Melting snow and ice can cause problems as stormwater runoff. When the ground is frozen at the surface during winter, it is difficult for soil to absorb melting snow. This presents a unique flooding challenge. In addition, the presence of environmentally harmful chemicals in de-icing salt makes winter runoff a significant risk to the health of our rivers and streams.

**Try these tips to help reduce flooding and pollution:**

- Clear out snow surrounding your downspouts. This will allow melting snow from your roof to flow instead of collecting at your foundation, which can help prevent basement flooding.
- Do not pile snow on top of storm drains. Clear off any blocked storm drains near your property.
- Pile snow where it is most likely to be absorbed by the ground when it melts. For example, choose areas that are relatively flat or do not typically pond during rainstorms.
- Do not over-apply de-icing salt or sand. Shovel or plow before salting.
- Use less-toxic ice removal methods. For example, mix beet juice with de-icing salt to reduce salt use and lower the freezing point.

Learn more at **pgh2o.com/help-manage-stormwater.**