Yesterday

Today

Tomorrow

40 YEARS OF PROGRESS
MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY OF WESTMORELAND COUNTY
Back in the early 1940s, officials in Westmoreland County began to realize that their county — Pennsylvania’s largest — had not grown and developed as it had been expected to.

And what had been happening — or not happening — in the past could be expected to continue into the future.

One of the reasons for the area’s slow growth was fairly clear. It was being stilled, at least in part, by inadequate, widely-scattered and increasingly unsafe water supplies.

In many areas of the county, the well water was so poor that only extensive and complicated treatment could make it useable for domestic purposes — procedures too expensive for the average homeowner.

Other sections suffered from inadequate supplies, so scarce that what was obtainable wasn’t enough to support even minimal development.

And the whole situation was being aggravated by extensive coal mining operations in the area.

One solution was companies which could treat the water and deliver it to the homes and businesses of customers. Several such companies were spotted around the county. But they were serving only small portions of the population and they lacked the financial resources to expand into other sections.

But if the area was to grow, officials realized, this situation could not be allowed to continue. A way had to be found to provide safe, reliable water service to virtually all parts of the county — and at as low a price as possible.

A way was found by the county’s three commissioners in office at the time — Harry White, James A. Kell and Frank K. Cochran.

On April 15, 1942 — 40 years ago — they formed a municipal corporation charged with developing and operating a county-wide water system. The corporation was named the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County and, under the Municipal Authorities Act of 1935, could issue tax-free bonds to raise the money needed to build such a system.

Five community leaders were appointed to the Authority Board by the Commissioners to oversee its operations and activities — George R. Sweeney, chairman; Lawrence F. Brink, David Magill, Roy Laughead and Charles Booth. In fact, as the Authority marked the 40th anniversary of its founding, Mr. Sweeney noted his 40th anniversary as an Authority member, having continuously served as its chairman from the first day.

But supplying water was a big step into a new area for the county. And it immediately faced two major problems — how to make the municipal bonds it was offering in order to finance this undertaking as attractive to potential investors as possible and how to obtain people experienced and qualified in the water supply field.

The Authority solved both problems at once by negotiating a management
agreement with Municipal Management Co., a wholly-owned subsidiary of American Water Works Co. Inc. Under the plan, the company began to manage the Authority from the beginning and continues to do so today. Within a year of its founding—on February 5, 1943—the Authority acquired the Citizens Water Co., which served Scottsdale, Mount Pleasant, Everson and portions of adjacent townships.

In 1950, the program moved into higher gear with the acquisition of the Westmoreland Water Co., which had been in operation since 1886, and the Vandergrift Water Co. as well as developing a major new source of supply north of Greensburg on Beaver Run.

Financed by a $24,350,000 bond issue, the project included erection of a dam to impound 9 billion gallons of water and the construction of the 10 million gallon-a-day Beaver Run filtration plant along with the necessary pumps, pipelines and storage tanks needed to supply the growing system.

Water from the Beaver Run plant went into the system for the first time in February, 1952. By April, 1959, the plant had had to be expanded to 20 million gallons-a-day treatment capacity. In 1962, the reservoir's capacity was enlarged to hold 11 billion gallons.

Between 1950 and 1965, business and industry had begun to notice Westmoreland County. In that period, numerous companies moved offices or plants into the county. Among those currently being served by the Authority are such names as Westinghouse Electric, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Modulus Corp., Gibson Electric, International Paper, Robertshaw Controls, Allegheny Ludlum Steel and Mellon Institute. More recently, Volkswagen of America decided to build a plant in the United States and chose New Stanton as its site.

Obviously, water had now become less and less of a concern. But that was mainly because the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County had anticipated and kept up with the demands.

To accomplish that, numerous bond issues were sold to finance almost constant system expansion and improvement and to acquire other water systems and fold them into the county network.

In 1965, $6.2 million in bonds were sold to build distribution reservoirs with capacities totalling more than 11 million gallons; to add more supply, transmission and other storage facilities; to increase pumping capacity at Beaver Run; and to extend service into several new areas of the county.

As the county continued to grow, the need for another high capacity treatment plant started to become obvious. So design work was begun as part of another bond issue in 1968.

Actual construction of what was to become the Indian Creek plant near Connellsville, utilizing the Youghiogheny River, was financed as part of an October, 1970 bond issue. Several new pumping stations, a pair of 5 million gallon storage tanks and miles of new pipeline also were included. The Indian Creek plant, with a 20 million gallon-per-day treatment capacity, went on line in 1973.

Most recently, the New Alexandria Authority's system became part of the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County's ever-expanding service area in the now economically healthy and constantly growing southwestern corner of Pennsylvania.
Today

In Today already walks tomorrow... Samuel T. Coleridge

The citizens of Westmoreland County today own a water system valued at more than $126.6 million which meets the treated water needs of more than 70,000 customers – more than 287,000 people – in 53 political subdivisions spread over 1,535 square miles. Treated water also is supplied to 9 nearby water utilities.

All this is accomplished with two treatment plants — Beaver Run and Indian Creek — with all necessary water intakes, filtration and pumping facilities; 39 filtered water storage reservoirs; 26 pumping stations necessitated by the area’s hilly terrain; and approximately 1,215 miles of pipes ranging from 2 inches through 48 inches in diameter.

It is all operated by the largest water authority in the state — the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County — with a work force of 184 employees (73% of whom have been with the Authority for more than 10 years) operating out of four distribution centers, a main office along Route 30 in Greensburg, and two district offices – in Vandergrift and Scottsdale.

In addition to providing treated water, the Authority also supplies untreated water to two Allegheny Ludlum Steel mills in the Leechburg area.
Latest Authority records show that approximately 13 billion gallons of water were sold to all its customers in 1981 – more than 35½ million gallons a day.

Most of the Authority's revenues to support its far-flung operations come from the sale of water and other water-related activities.

But simple recitation of facts, figures and numbers can't begin to tell the whole story of the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County as it exists today.

Instead, it is a story of dedicated people aware of their responsibility for providing safe, useable water at reasonable prices.

One example of this concern for the public's well-being are the two complete, fully-certified water quality laboratories operated by the Authority. The Indian Creek laboratory contains such highly sophisticated equipment as an atomic absorption spectrophotometer and a gas chromatograph.

Another is a control system which gives plant operators complete, centralized monitoring and controlling capabilities. This system is equipped with warning lights and buzzers which alert the operator to any chemical feed problems, filter malfunctions or other operating difficulties within the plant.

In addition, there are water quality control panels and recording gauges to monitor the levels in tanks and flow rates through the system.

All these are for but one reason —
to give operators enough warning to take timely, proper action to
guard the public health or to
assure the availability of water in
their customers’ homes, offices
and factories.

Efficiency is one way to hold costs
to as low a point as possible. For
this reason, in 1980, the Authority
updated its data processing
system in the Greensburg office
with on-line facilities in
Scottsdale to help speed up such
major, time-consuming tasks as
customer billing, bookkeeping,
record-keeping, payroll and
inventory control as well as
numerous other support activities.

Then, of course, there are the field
crews, probably — except for its
more than 3,000 fire hydrants —
the most visible portion of the
Authority’s operation. These are
the men and women who read the
meters, repair the pipes, install
new mains — do what is
necessary to get the water from
the plants to your homes.

Not to be overlooked are the office
staffs which handle the myriad
paperwork and deal with
the public.

In short, then, the Municipal
Authority of Westmoreland
County is much more than an
amalgamation of pipes, plants,
pumps, storage tanks and
reservoirs.

It is People — people serving
people; neighbors serving their
neighbors. Because the
Municipal Authority of
Westmoreland County was
created for one reason and one
reason only:
It was “Created to Serve.”
The Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County's record of constant, often rapid growth over the past 40 years has been directly related to the area's poor quality well water and inadequate supply sources. Those problems still exist today—though most people living or working in the county don't realize it because the Authority has been so successful in carrying out its mission.

An almost phenomenal industrial and population growth has been experienced in Westmoreland County over the years. If that trend is to be fostered in the future, thus assuring the area's continued economic health, then there must be continued and further expansion of water sources as well as the means for treating and delivering that water to customers.

So the Authority—with an ever-alert eye on the future and its probable needs—began planning back in 1979 for more and better water supply facilities.

Current projections call for an expected customer increase from the approximately 70,000 now being served to nearly 90,000 by the year 2000. Resulting water sales over the same period are expected to reach about 17 billion gallons a year—4 billion more than what was sold in 1981.
Based on this kind of information, the Authority has already launched a three-phase expansion program as part of a $23 million bond issue floated in August, 1980.

In total, the entire expansion calls for doubling the Indian Creek plant near Connelsville from 20 million gallons per day treatment capacity to 40 million gallons. The Authority already has received approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources to double its daily withdrawal from the Youghiogheny River, to 50 million gallons.

Although the Indian Creek plant will have a "rated capacity" of being able to treat 40 million gallons a day, it is expected that, once completed, it actually will be able to process up to 50 million gallons, thus matching the raw water withdrawal allowance.

Beyond expanding the Indian Creek plant's treatment capacity, the third phase of the project calls for increasing the pumping capacity of the plant along with various booster stations; installation of additional, larger transmission pipes, some up to 54 inches in diameter, to allow delivery of increased amounts of water; and the addition of a number of storage units at strategic locations around the system. Further, several improvements to secondary distribution systems are planned to solve some localized problems.

Rights of way and many sites for additional storage have already been obtained and the Authority
is working to acquire other, necessary rights of way and sites in order to complete the total project.

Customer convenience has been and is a concern of the Authority. To bring it even closer to the people it serves, a fourth business office is to be built soon in the North Huntingdon area.

In today's world, it seems nothing stands still. After all, if you start to "coast", you can only "coast" in one direction — down hill. You must always be looking and moving forward and upward.

It's active, vital role in southwestern Pennsylvania's continued growth and prosperity is well-recognized by the Authority. Without reliable sources of adequate supplies of water for drinking and other home uses and for industry, the Westmoreland County area undoubtedly will begin to stagnate.

Forty years ago, the Municipal Authority of Westmoreland County was formed not only to bring water to all sections of the county but to help the area grow economically as well. Forty years have been spent successfully pursuing those goals. And the Authority is prepared to continue its role in assuring that the area's future will be as full of success and growth as its past.