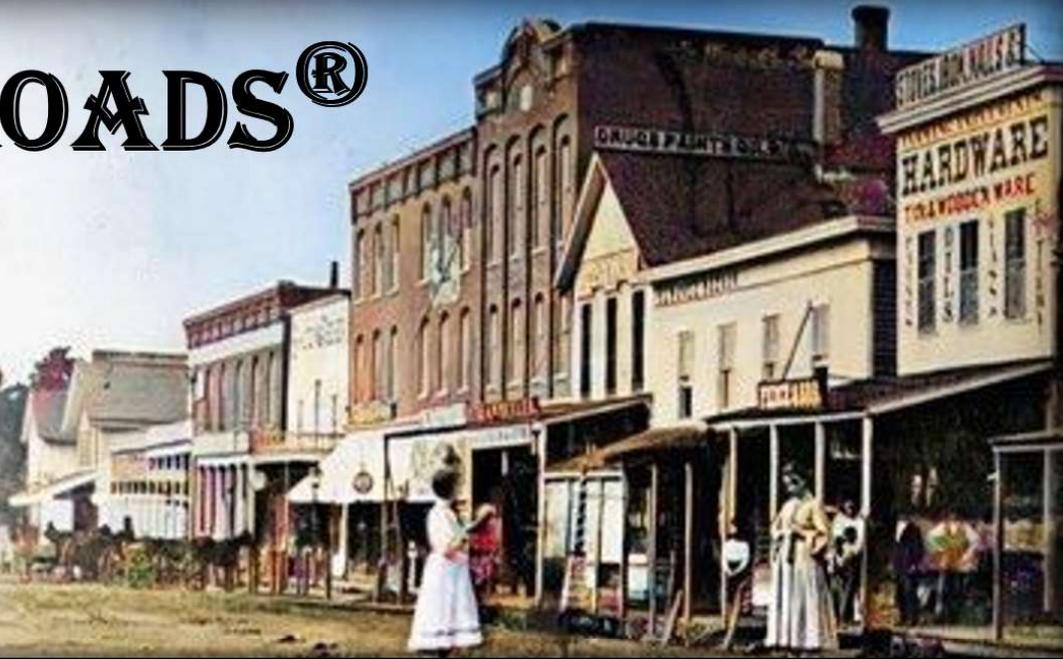


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STORIES OF

KEWANEE

PAST & PRESENT



Dean Karau

August 2022

Dave Clarke on Kewanee Private Utilities

Another Hometown Company Which Was Known 'Round the World

(Recently a reader of the Facebook page, Kewanee Nostalgia, run by the Kewanee Historical Society, (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KewaneeNostalgia>), posted a photo of a Kewanee Private Utilities pump found in Michigan and asked about the company. When I started looking into the business, I found that, as usual, Dave Clarke had previously written about this world-famous company based in our hometown. Rather than reinventing the wheel, here's what Dave found and wrote in 2011.)

The next time you turn on a faucet and water comes gushing out, you are using something first invented in Kewanee - a pump that pushes water and air through the same pipe. No one had thought of it until a man named James Jelinek, who worked for the Kewanee Water Supply Co., devised the system that replaced elevated tanks which relied on gravity to pull water into a house or other building.

Jelinek's pneumatic water pump made it possible to locate the storage tank in the basement and pump air pressure and water up to the faucet. Kewanee pumps were immediately popular in sparsely populated rural areas for two reasons — they relied on a well rather than a municipal water supply, and they were made of material twice as heavy as other pumps of the day and did not require service or repairs usually not available outside of cities.

THE KEWANEE SYSTEM OF WATER SUPPLY

**Keep The Tank
Throw Away the Tower**

THAT'S what you do when you install a Kewanee System of Water Supply!

The Kewanee Pneumatic Tank is buried in the ground or located in the cellar—there is no elevated or attic tank to freeze, over-flow, leak or collapse—and the water is delivered by air pressure evenly and abundantly to all fixtures. Temperature in winter and cool in summer.

Every country or suburban home can be provided with all the sanitary conveniences and comforts of the best city water system with

**The Kewanee System
of Water Supply**

which ten years of practical experience and technical knowledge of trained experts has made the most perfect, the most practical of all water supply systems.

Over nine thousand Kewanee Systems in successful operation supplying water for country and suburban residences, clubs, farms, schools, public and private institutions, villages, etc. The Kewanee System is not an imitation—is not a substitute. It is the original water supply system involving the use of air pressure instead of gravity pressure. Avoid cheap imitations. Look for our trade mark and name plates on tanks and pumping machinery. Get the genuine and you will take no chances—we guarantee that.

Kewanee Pumping Outfits

Kewanee pumping outfits are furnished for any special pumping requirements. The same technical skill and practical knowledge required to develop and perfect complete Kewanee Systems, are devoted to the solution of individual pumping problems.

No charge for expert engineering service. Let us help you solve your water problem. Write for our 64-page illustrated catalogue No. 16. It is free.

Kewanee Water Supply Co., Kewanee, Ill.
1212 Marquette Building, Chicago, Ill.
1566 Hudson-Terrace Building, 50 Church Street,
New York City.
305 Diamond Bank Building, Pittsburg, Pa.

Kewanee Water Supply Co. advertisement, 1909

The story actually has a Star Courier connection. The man who founded what eventually became Kewanee Water Supply, Xenophon Caverno, also combined the Kewanee Daily Courier and the Kewanee Star in 1898 and formed the Star Courler. He also built the building which housed the newspaper for many years at the corner of Tremont and First streets in 1908.

Caverno was apparently a very busy man. According to "HISTORY OF HENRY COUNTY, VOL. I," by Henry L. Kiner, published in 1910, Caverno began the sale of water supply goods in 1897 as the Kewanee Pneumatic Water Supply Co. The 1900 city directory lists the company at 118 N. Tremont St., now occupied by Breedlove's Shoes & Boots. The original building, of course, was destroyed in the 1942 downtown fire. Caverno is also listed as president of Kewanee Light & Power Co., at the same address.

According to Kiner's 1910 history, the company built its own two-story brick building in 1904 on Franklin Street, just south of the railroad tracks, which is now the middle of the three buildings. In 1905, the name was changed to Kewanee Water Supply Co., and a two-story brick office was constructed between the first building and

Franklin Street. Kiner lists the warehouse which now faces Boss Street as being added in 1906.

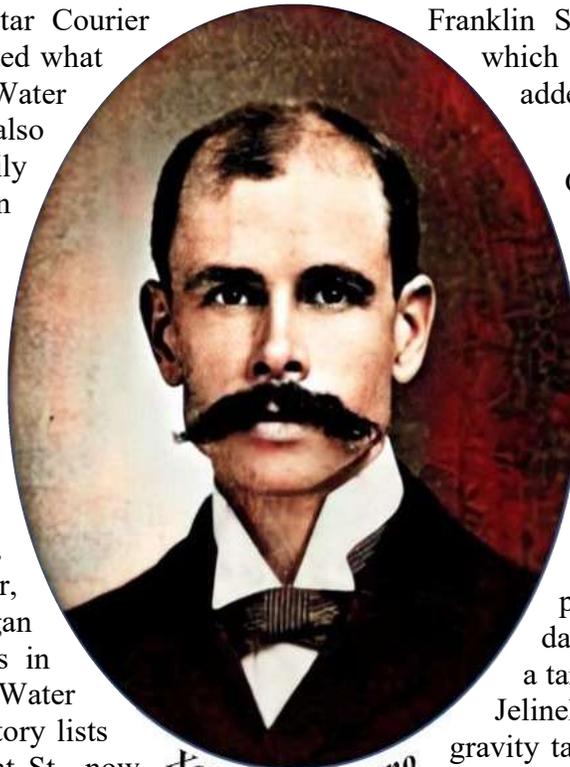
Jelinek and his partner, Earl Canedy, were making pumps in their shop in Chicago Heights when Caverno found them in 1907. He purchased their business and moved Jelinek and the company to Kewanee.

The idea of combining compressed air and water within a steel tank appealed to those who wanted running water. Remember, the only way most people got water indoors on those days was to carry it in or draw it from a tank on an outside tower. The pump Jelinek designed eliminated overhead gravity tanks that delivered warm water in summer and froze up in winter and only provided about 18 pounds of pressure. Kewanee pumps produced at least 60 pounds of pressure, more with a bigger steel tank.

Jelinek conceived the idea of delivering air and water from the same pump, thus eliminating the need for a separate air compressor and the power to run it.

The company grew rapidly and, according to Kiner, a sales office was established in New York City in 1906 and in 1907 offices were opened in Chicago and Pittsburgh.

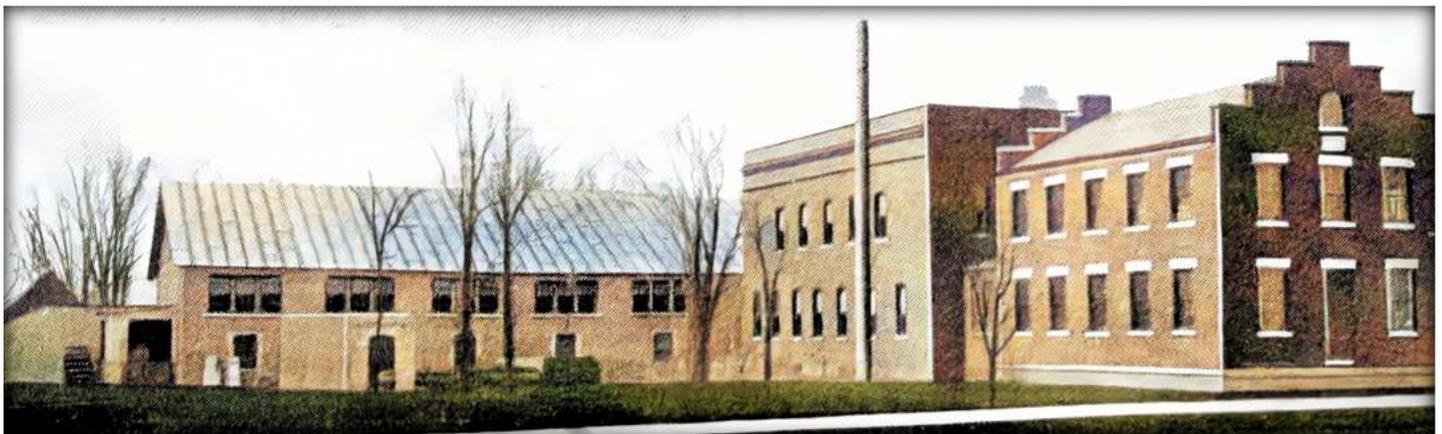
An extensive advertising campaign "spread the



Xenophon Caverno



Kewanee Private Utilities Co. advertisement, 1915



Kewanee Water Supply Company plant on Franklin Street, 1913

word” and soon, Kewanee pumps could be found in almost every major city in the world, rivaling Kewanee Boiler Co., with its plant across the tracks, for a worldwide reputation for quality and durability.

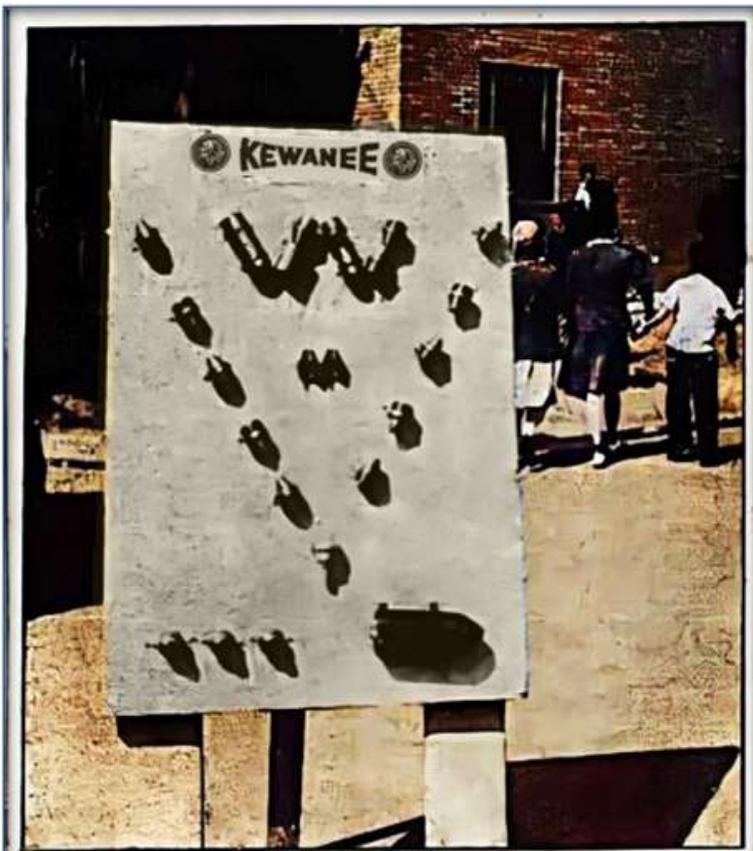
Over the years we will occasionally hear from someone who has found a pump somewhere with the “Kewanee” name on it. We never knew such things were ever made here.

During World War II, material for making pumps became almost impossible to find due to the war effort so the company went after and obtained contracts with the War Department to make various products for the military. These included airplane gun turret parts, water mine detonators and rocket

shells used to clear the beaches for the landing troops on D-Day. The around-the-clock record day’s production was 4,465 shells in 22 hours.

Some 165 people - both men and women - were employed in the war effort at the Kewanee plant.

After the war, however, recovery was slow and sales fell off. In 1949, the Portable Elevator Co. of Bloomington, Ill., bought the property and inventory with intentions of continuing the pump business with their line of grain elevators. They chose to operate with their own personnel with no knowledge of the pump business and after two years were forced into bankruptcy.



SERVING SHIPS In addition to anti-tank shell fuses such as shown in the photo above, the Kewanee Private Utilities company has made pumps serving many naval vessels. Other products are manufactured in connection with the war effort. (Star-Courier Photo.)

December 7, 1943, Kewanee Star Courier



*Antique Kewanee Private Utilities
hit & miss engine*