OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

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Residents of urban areas are accustomed to the amenities made possible by underground systems.

Buried conduits, cables, wires ana fiber optic installations might provide telephone or cable television service, and, in some cases, electricity. Buried pipes might bring water or gas.

The first municipal water mains in North America were installed more than 160 years ago in Philadelphia and were of lead or iron. There were even some wood- or brick-lined tunnels, although these were rare.

Later, water companies utilized cast iron pipe, and it became a standard until the 1940s when pipes made primarily of concrete were introduced. Less than a generation later, plastics were being widely used.

Muncie's original water system dates to the 1880s, and some of the original cast-iron mains may still be in use.

The 1880s also saw the widespread construction of systems in cities and towns to distribute natural or artificial gas for lighting, heating, cooking and various industrial processes. Steel pipes became the standard for gas.

And, of course, there were sewers, to remove residential, industrial and business wastes. Pipes for this purpose were of clay tile or concrete, with plastic coming along in recent years. In Muncie and many other cities of any size, there are even sewers built of brick — more like tunnels than pipes.

Many people would not think of East Central Indiana as being basically urban, but it is, with a population density far above what you might find in Iowa, Kansas or Nebraska.

For that reason many rural dwellers enjoy the same services as city folks, and in this part of Indiana the first one of these to come along was gas, This was a result of the ready availability of natural gas locally. A number of independent natural gas companies and cooperatives were formed in the 1880s and '90s, after gas was discovered near here in 1886.

Next came telephones and electricity, systems being established in many localities before 1900.

Many rural areas did not get electric service until the 1920s or '30s and only then through federally assisted Rural Electric Maintenance Cc:porations (REMCs). Privately-held power companies in many cases had avoided areas where it was necessary to string wires a long ways to reach only one or two customers.

Telephone lines, for many years strung overhead, have gone underground in recent years, to prevent interruption by the weather. Power lines are less practical to bury because they generate heat.

And surprising as it might be, some early gas lines were laid above ground; such an installation existed on Cowan Road from 26th Street south well into the 1940s.

Mostly a 20th century phenomenon was the construction of long-distance underground lines to transport petroleum products and natural gas.

A map published a couple of years ago by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources shows interstate and intercity pipelines.

Included are smaller gas lines, such as those that feed various communities. And then there are major lines. The latter include the Panhandle Eastern Pipeline Company's lines that traverse Delaware County from northwest to southeast, as well as an Indiana Gas Company line that enters the county near Crossroads in Salem Township and ends on Muncie's east side.

When East Central Indiana's natural gas started to give out in the 1890s, an artificial gas plant was built in Muncie on Brotherton Street north of Burlington Drive by the Muncie headquartered Central Indiana Gas Co. (a predecessor of Indiana Gas Company, whose offices were in Indianapolis).

In 1913, a 16-inch diameter steel pipeline was constructed from West Virginia to Indiana. Some 18 years later, 18-inch lines were built from Texas and western Kentucky, merging in western Indiana and continuing on to Muncie, where they met at King Station, on the south side of Memorial Drive just east of White River.

The natural gas was mixed with locally-generated gas well into the 1940s, when the artificial gas plant was phased out.

A few months ago a donor who wished to remain anonymous provided the Our Neighborhood man with a monograph used in Muncie's junior high schools in the 1930s and '40s.

One of several in a series designed to tell students about Muncie's industries and previously mentioned in Our Neighbrhood, it was entitled *Story of the Muncie Gas Supply.*

The booklet tells of the manufacture of artificial or "blue water" gas locally, and a small aerial view of the gas plant is shown. It was a place of considerable size east of the Broderick Co. (later Harsco).

Shown in the picture are several multi-story buildings, a large smokestack, the boiler room, a water tower, a huge pile of coke (a coal derivative) and three gigantic holders.

There was a 200,000 cubic foot holder for the temporary storage of blue water gas, a holder 2½ times as large which was used for a mixture of artificial and natural gas, and a million-cubic-foot holder also for mixed gas.

In 1939, the booklet noted, some 1.75 million cubic feet of gas were being used daily in the Muncie market.

Most was used in industry. Many homes were heated with coal, although some used oil or gas. And other uses cited for gas included cooking, water heating, refrigeration (both domestic and commercial) and air-conditioning.

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