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Reference Series

BOISE NATURAL HOT WATER HEATING SYSTEM

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After two decades of speculation concerning possible development of local geothermal energy, drilling for natural hot water was commenced in a warm-water swamp near the state penitentiary late in 1890. Warm water was found by December 24, and a month later, a large flow of hot water was struck. By spring 800,000 gallons per day of 170° water, pure enough for domestic use, flowed from the new well. Plans were made for a resort--the traditional commercial use for hot water-----and a handsome large natatorium was opened on May 25, 1892.

In the meantime, a new concept to utilize geothermal power was tried out. Elegant new mansions were being built along Warm Springs Avenue (the road that led to Kelly's Hot Springs, a resort farther up the valley behind Tablerock), and during February of 1892, C. W. Moore tried out natural hot water heat in his new dwelling. When he found that his novel heating system performed beautifully, H. B. Eastman (who had started the town's water system) also began to use natural hot water in his new house close by. A Warm Springs Avenue community heating line, planned at a cost of \$20,000 was slated to save \$50,000 a year in customer's heating bills. Wooden pipes (which provided superior insulation) were used initially. Abandoned in 1896 as "dangerous and useless," wooden pipes did not work. But with new metal pipe, the system grew. Water temperature proved stable over the years, and two large pumps increased production from a daily 800,000-gallon natural flow to 1,200,000. Rates remained more than reasonable: two dollars a month for a small house (up to eight rooms) and three dollars for a larger one. Nine miles of pipe (about half in main lines and half in feeders) served all the area that the system could accommodate.

Hot water heating continues to serve a section of the city that this innovative enterprise did so much to develop. Warm Springs Avenue retains most of its outstanding mansions, including C. W. Moore's home that pioneered the system. A number of commercial business structures utilized this service, although they require supplemental heat for a few days in some winters. As late as 1958, 244 customers employed natural hot water that served for domestic use as well as heat. New Customer's were not accepted until 1974, when about 200 house owners and a half-dozen businesses took over the system at a time when repair and renovation became necessary.

