The Importance of Water

Name_____

Key Inquiry Question- _____

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List all the ways we use water in our daily lives.

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Uses of Water

Discuss the words domestic, agricultural and industrial, then colour code.

Domestic- blue	Agricultural- green	Industrial- red

Electricity

Cooking food

Growing food

Watering fields and gardens

Washing clothes, dishes, ourselves

Making clothes

Manufacture

Transport

Drinking

Key Inquiry Question- _____

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What year were these places settled?

Sydney _____

Newcastle _____

Maitland _____

Describe one way a Hunter Valley resident could get water before tap water was introduced into homes.

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Give definitions for these words-

contaminated-

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filtered-

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SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Perhaps Walka's main claim to heritage significance has yet to be mentioned – as the centrepiece of the most important advance in public health in the history of the Hunter Valley. Other engineering building projects can be cited involving many if not all of the historical features of the Walka Waterworks. Clark designed other works, though not in the Hunter, Moriarty designed and executed many other similar projects, Blunt and Russell constructed equally impressive earthworks or buildings elsewhere but it is impossible to find another complex as significant for the health and happiness of hundreds of thousands of residents of this region.

Before Walka, the towns of the Hunter relied on rivers, creeks, wells and tanks for their water and the contamination of the water obtained from these sources caused large numbers of deaths and countless cases of sickness. Particularly in drought but also at other times people suffered and died unnecessarily in all the towns later supplied with Hunter River water filtered at Walka.

The necessity of an adequate supply of reasonably pure water for the maintenance of good health was well understood in the 1870s and Dr. R.S.S. Bowker, in particular, had been active in pressing the local and colonial governments to improve the situation in Newcastle. Evidence collected by William Clark had shown sharp increases in the number of deaths from zymotic disease during the 1870s and he concluded that the mortality rate in Newcastle was "nearly three times the number which nature demands as inevitable; no stronger reason need be urged for an improvement in the sanitary condition of Newcastle."

It is important to realize that the Walka scheme not only ensured that filtered water would be continuously available for drinking and for washing people, clothes, houses, streets and so on, but also made it possible for the towns of the region to be provided with sewerage systems. Not only, therefor, did the Walka works improve the health of the community by reducing the likelihood of the consumption of contaminated water, but also by greatly improving the cleanliness of the population and their urban environment.
Prior to 1887 water had been so scarce that it had to be conserved at all times and Newcastle, as the largest town, had to endure conditions that are difficult to imagine today. Bathing was a luxury few could afford and, of course, only the homes of the rich had bathrooms. Water was normally not available for gardening and many houses burned down for want of a water supply. In every sense, water was a precious commodity and the Walka Waterworks was to transform the situation. It is not an exaggeration to say that the water it supplied laid the foundation for civilized town life in the towns of the lower Hunter Valley in the 20th century.

Equally important, perhaps, was the role water played in the development of secondary industry in the region. Without an adequate water supply, many of the industries that provided employment in the Newcastle area would not have been established.

This study has been extracted from *'Specialist Reports for Walka Waterworks Conservation Plan'* Tresev Pty Ltd 1986

Taken from "Walka Water Works: Detailed Study- It's Historical Significance (Maitland City Council)