

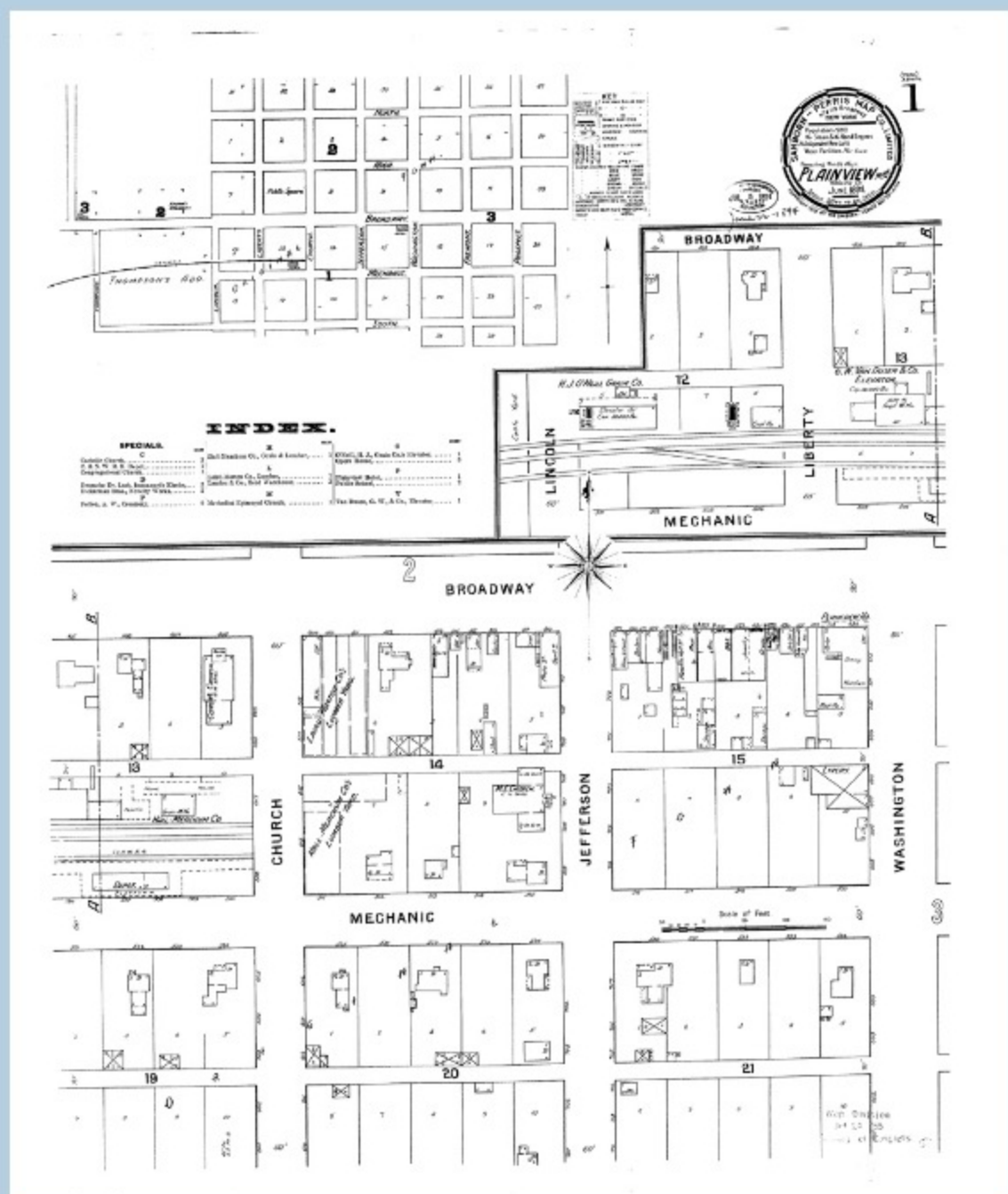
An intriguing case, Mr. Holmes!

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, groundwater from wells supplies about 75 percent of Minnesota's drinking water and nearly 90 percent of the water used for agricultural irrigation. The small town of Plainview, MN, a little northeast of Rochester, is no different. In the midst of a heavy agricultural region and with pollution potentially seeping into the groundwater from all manner of sources, protecting the purity of that drinking water is vital.

The State requires that all wells that supply public drinking water establish a protection plan to ensure its safety. A Part 1 Plan that set the groundwater modeling and a 10-year capture area based on the aquifers and pumping rates was created several years ago. That was the easy bit. WHKS engineers recently completed the Part 2 Plan - the hard part.

The Part 2 Plan requires that all potential sources of groundwater contamination in the capture area be identified and located and that a strategy for preventing any contamination be set. The hard part is identifying and locating those sources. This is where the exercise becomes part history lesson and part detective work.

For example, a town map from 1894 identifies the railroad depot and Felton's Creamery among many other establishments. Both of these no doubt had wells and maybe septic tanks. But what became of them?



An old well could easily still be a hole in the ground through which contaminants can reach the aquifer that supplies today's drinking water. Was the well filled in? Was it simply abandoned and covered by a new building? Is it still in use? The old wells, the disused industrial sites that stored chemicals, the disconnected and covered-up septic tanks; they're everywhere and they're all sources of nasty things that we don't want in our water.

Following an exhaustive search that identified hundreds of potential contaminant sources, the team created a 10-year plan that sets out the mitigation process. Old wells to be sealed; education plans for homeowners; cooperative programs with conservation districts; guidelines for farmers applying manure to their fields. With the plan in place, we can all breathe easy and enjoy that cold glass of water from the tap.

