

Notes from Rex George relating to history of the City of Fayetteville Arkansas Water Department (1975)

The first water plant was installed and owned by Reeves Brothers in the 1890s for a while and they sold out to McIlroys and McIlroys sold out to the city of Fayetteville for \$90,000.

The first water pumping station was out at the West Fork of White River. The first pump station was operated by steam power and later they went to diesel engines and electric power.

My Uncle Art George went to work in 1902 at the old steam pumping station and my father Andy George went to work in 1908 at the old steam pumping station on West Fork of White River.

In 1909 they had a drought and the river dried up and in 1910 they installed a steam pumping station out on Clear Creek at Johnson Arkansas. My father Andy George moved out to Clear Creek to operate the pump station. I was born at the pumping station at Clear Creek and grew up around the station.

In 1923 they installed diesel engines to pump water at West Fork of White River. My father Andy George moved back to West Fork of White River pump station. I went to work for the city as a helper under my father at age of 15 in 1928.

I have seen a lot of changes in the town. When I went to work the city used about 700,000 gallons of water per day. Now they use about 9 million gallons of water per day. When I went to work for the city they had one service truck and two servicemen. The Street Department had one man and a grader to keep the streets up and they didn't have anybody on the Sanitation Department.

I worked 15 years at night operating the pumping station. In 1949 I was promoted to Maintenance Engineer. I took care of the pumps, traffic lights, and runway lights at the airport. I also maintained the filter plant at the swimming pool and the filter plant on Mt. Sequoia and I also maintained the old pollution control plant. I have worked for the City of Fayetteville for 48 years. I am planning on retiring in 1978.

We started getting water from Beaver Lake in January 1972. We have 16 sewer lift stations and four water booster stations that I maintain and keep running.

My father worked for the city 35 years. My uncle worked for the city 27 years. My father and uncle operated the first light and power plant in Fayetteville. They would start the plant at 5:00 am and run it until 12 midnight. They were engineers, firemen, and linemen.

Swimming Pool

The first swimming pool for the City of Fayetteville was built in 1926 at the Wilson Park. It is about a 300,000 gallon pool. For years we drained the water out of the pool every Saturday night and filled it out of a fire hydrant and had it ready to swim in on Sunday during the spring and summer months. In the year of 1950 the City of Fayetteville installed a swimming pool recirculation and purification system.

In 1926 there was a spring northeast of the swimming pool that helped fill the pool until about 1936 when we had a drought and the spring dried up. It flowed about 100 gallons per minute until the 1936 drought. This was when the swimming pool was first built.

Sewer

The first sewer was installed in Fayetteville. In 1907 they had a septic tank down on town branch and one at the north part of Fayetteville on Skull Creek. The first pollution control plant for the city of Fayetteville was installed in 1926.

HISTORY CITY OF FAYETTEVILLE

- 1895 First Power plant located at sight of old County Courthouse on College Avenue
- 1902 Power plant built on University Avenue where Power House Restaurant presently located
- 1906 Coal burning steam powered water plant on White River
- 1907 First sewer system – 2 septic tanks installed – one on Town Branch and one on Skull Creek
- 1910 Water plant moved to Clear Creek because of drought
- 1917 First filter and purification plant
- 1923 Frame building built at White River site – 150 horsepower diesel engine installed
- 1924 Frame building destroyed by tornado
- 1926 First Pollution Control Plant
- 1926 Stone building erected at the White River site
- 1925 First Swimming Pool – Spring Fed

- 1931 Lake Wilson built when White River or Clear Creek could not meet water supply demand for the city. The 40 acre lake traveled 2 miles down downstream to the White River Pump Station. Recovery was only 50%. A 300 horsepower 5 cylinder diesel engine was installed and used in addition to the 150 horsepower engine already in use.
- 1949 Lake Fayetteville was constructed but not hooked up to the City's water supply. 1952, 1953, and 1954 the lake sat untouchable. Because of a water shortage the city was able to pass a bond issue to build a pump station at the lake.
- 1959 Another water supply was needed at which time Lake Sequoyah was built.
- 1972 Beaver Lake began providing water for the area of Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, and Fayetteville.

Andy George began working in 1908 at the City of Fayetteville water plant, and from 1910 to 1923 he worked for Clear Creek pumping station in Johnson. Andy moved back to White River pumping station in 1923 and ran that pumping station until his death on May 11, 1943. His sons Harry, Joe, Henry, Rex, and Raymon worked under their father's supervision when they were old enough to work.

Two of Andy and Lula Belle Payne George's children, Henry and Rex, spent their careers working for the City of Fayetteville.

Henry George worked for the City of Fayetteville in many roles, most notably as assistant city engineer and as fire chief. He was highly respected among his peers as a self-taught engineer. He was a very innovative person and had a long list of accomplishments. Probably his most notable achievement was the design of a hangar for the University of Arkansas's pilot training program during World War II when metal was a scarce commodity. He constructed a prototype to illustrate that his design was feasible. The hangar, completed in 1942, still stands today as a monument to his technical genius. The hangar is home to the very popular Arkansas Air Museum at Drake Field in Fayetteville.

Rex George, like his brother Henry, decided to spend his career with the City of Fayetteville as well. Rex was hired by his father Andy George in 1928 at the age of 15 to keep the diesel engines cleaned and oiled. Rex was born in a house next to the water plant pumping station on Clear Creek where the water plant was moved in 1910 after a 1909 drought that dried up the White River. By 18, he was operating the machines, and by 1949 he was promoted to maintenance engineer foreman for all of the equipment in the water and sewer department for the City of Fayetteville. The scope of his work ranged from handling issues related to the City's filtration system, the sewage processing plant, the pumping systems, the traffic lights, and the runway lighting system at Drake Field. Like his brother Henry, Rex was highly respected for his ability to keep the City's systems operating around the clock. Rex worked for the City of Fayetteville for 55 years, retiring at the age of 70 in 1982.

The City's water source changed five times during Rex George's lifetime. From Clear Creek at Johnson where he was born; to White River in 1923 with the addition of Lake Wilson upstream White River in 1931; to Lake Fayetteville in 1949; to Lake Sequoyah in 1959; and finally to Beaver lake in 1972.