

Arkadelphia's Water System Got Its Start in Nineteenth Century

Prior to government ownership of Arkadelphia's water system, several different corporations provided that necessary service. City control did not occur until the mid-twentieth century, and came about only after a great deal of controversy.

In the late nineteenth century, original water company stockholders W. P. Hillyer of Topeka, Kansas; R. A. Holder of Cincinnati, Ohio; E. N. Maxwell of Texarkana; and A. E. Carder of Arkadelphia, built Arkadelphia's first reservoir tank. Once the company completed building that structure, it laid water mains and began operations in 1891.

The water tower became quite a distinctive landmark and was simply called, "The Standpipe." At about 100 feet tall, it was the tallest structure in town and easily visible from all around the city. The cylindrical iron tube was located south of Caddo Street about two blocks west of the river and had a 245,000-gallon capacity. But the large edifice had a few drawbacks. For example, some people who lived near the standpipe feared it might blow over in a windstorm. Others lamented the fact that it was uncovered, meaning that debris sometimes accumulated in it. At some times, there was almost no water pressure due to low water levels.

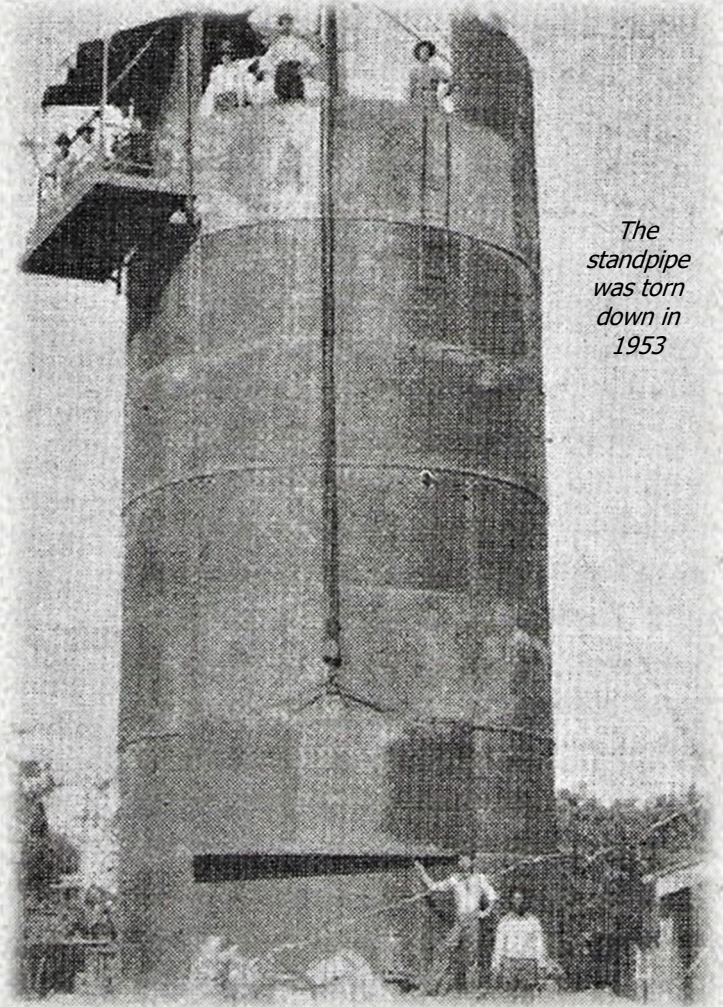
In 1897 a new corporation took over. Among the largest stockholders were W. E. Barkman, B. F. Rudolph, J. R. Dale, E. W. McCorkle, G. C. Jones, J. W. Conger, and C. V. Murry.

In 1901, J. W. and Florence Wilson, J. H. Crawford, Josiah Hardage, and Willis Wilson, bought the company and ran it under the name "Wilson Water and Light Company." Then, in 1910, Harvey Couch and his future Arkansas Light and Power Company purchased the system. Hoping to improve service in Arkadelphia, a new filtering plant began operations in 1921. The pumping station's reservoir had a capacity of 800,000 gallons and was fed by four pumps that could carry 1,500 gallons a minute.

In 1948, public hearings concerning the city's acquisition of the waterworks began. Many city leaders opposed the move, saying it was a step toward socialism or communism. Controversy surrounded the proposition as the process moved forward. In an election late that year, voters failed to approve the purchase---the measure fell thirty-two votes short, but moves toward a second election were begun immediately. Accusations of election irregularities in the first election resulted in the water company's manager and two employees being charged with bribery of voters. At their trial, the jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty" after only thirteen minutes of deliberation.

In 1950, the Arkadelphia Water Company awarded a contract for construction of a new, 150-foot, 300,000-gallon bowl-shaped tank on tubular steel columns. The new tank took over the workload of the old standpipe, which was demolished and removed in 1953.

In 1963, new revenue bonds were issued for construction of a new water facility, which was completed in 1965. The new pumping station and treatment plant had a capacity of over 3 million gallons of water per day. More water-filtering tanks were built in the 1980s.



The standpipe was torn down in 1953