

This Is The Mansfield That Was

By PAUL L. WHITE

A popular postcard picture scene of Mansfield during the first decade of the 1900's was the newly constructed sewage disposal plant located along the west bank of the Rockyfork near the Wooster road.

Perhaps it was the long hard agonizing battle fought to obtain the facilities that focused the attention of postcard makers and senders or maybe it really was a point of interest or beauty to Mansfielders of that day. Regardless of the reason for the postcards many were sent to various points of our country as indicated by the relative large number still available to collectors.

By early 1900 the problem of sewage disposal for the fast growing community had reached a critical point. Numerous law suits had been filed by farmers living along the Rocky Fork against the city of Mansfield for polluting that stream to the point where it represented a health hazard.

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On March 3, 1900 Richland County Representative Hunter introduced a bill into the Ohio General Assembly to permit Mansfield to issue bonds to construct a sewage treatment plant and an incinerator to dispose of the wastes created within the city. Similar legislation introduced before had met with no action.

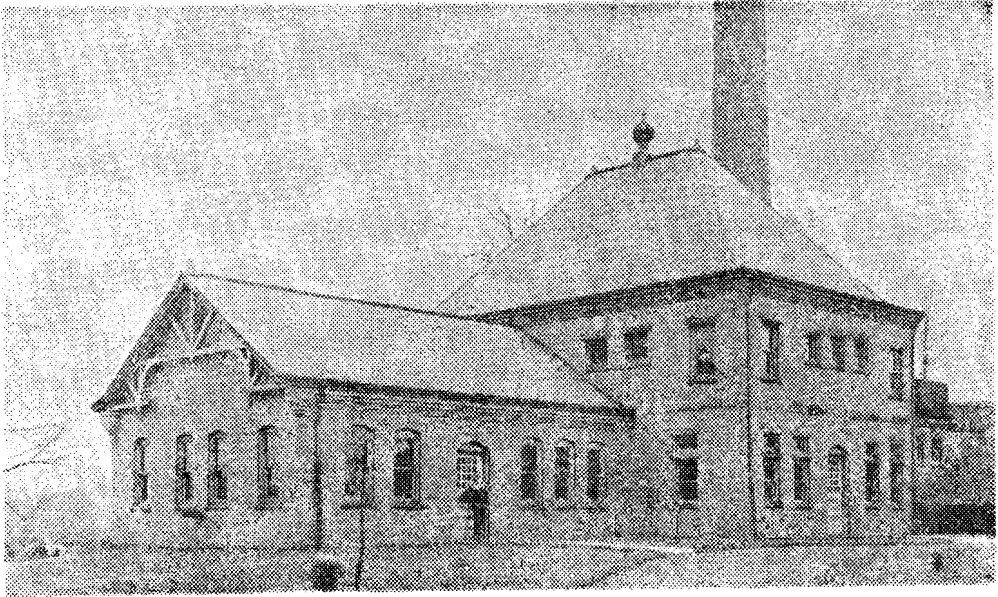
Unfortunately a Senator Dunham introduced a bill in the state senate at the same time that was to cover similar situations on a state-wide basis. Introduction of this bill only served to muddy the waters for the Mansfield Sanitary Bill.

Council president Flockerzi, Mayor Huntington Brown and City Solicitor Welden went to Columbus on March 8 to testify before the legislative committee. A wave of complaints from Lucas residents from the Rocky Fork motivated increased action to get the legislation passed.

By March 13 Mayor Brown and Representative Hunter had a more acceptable revised version of the bill ready for the house committee on municipal affairs and, with persistent lobbying of the Mansfield city officials and citizens, the bill finally passed the house on March 21, 1900.

Mansfield Clerk of Council Frank Remy and Finance Committee Chairman Ott in the meantime were shepherding the Senate through hearings on the bill but the measure was passed by that body too late for the citizens of Mansfield to vote on the bond issue at the regular election.

Council voted the next evening to hold a special election on May 5 for the sani-



Treatment plant: a tourist attraction!

tary bond issue. The issue passed 1,613 to 291 and the first big hurdle was crossed.

A Sanitary Commission was set up for the project which not only consisted of constructing the sewage disposal but also the lines leading to the new treatment plant.

Selected on the commission were: Robert G. Hancock a contractor, George A. Clugston a former Mayor, A. C. Cummins another former mayor, and John Cahall a master mechanic and former councilman.

The committee had heard of the new type sewage treatment systems used in England and contacted the firm of Snow & Barbour of Boston, Mass., who were familiar with the installations. A trip to Brockton, Mass., convinced the committee that this was the type of system for Mansfield.

Snow was hired for \$15.00 per day to draw up the plans and specifications for the project. The second snag was struck when Snow submitted his bill to the Commission who in turn took the account to Council. The sum billed by Snow was \$2,642.74.

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Some Council members, not having previous experience with employing expert services, refused to pay the account. Snow reminded them that his usual charge was \$30.00 for such a project.

Council delayed the project for many months but the plans drawn by Snow were eventually put into use even though he had to wait over a year for his pay.

On July 7 the land for the disposal plant was finally purchased from Henry C. Hedges. The site totaled about twenty acres, counting the perpetual easements which were included in the deal. The tract was located along the Rocky Fork between Wooster Rd. and the Pennsylvania Railroad and is still owned by the city. At present, remnants of the old disposal plant are still stand-

ing on the site. The city garage is also located on the land.

The total cost for the site and easements was \$6,500, far below the initial estimate of \$9,175 made by the engineers.

Construction got underway in early autumn and the old Mansfield News expressed the speculation of some prominent citizens who saw the possibility of a municipal electric power plant deriving its fuel from the incinerating of garbage and solid wastes. The scheme was dropped after a few months of talk.

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Construction progressed steadily but slowly through the winter months. Attention was drawn from the project by the construction of the line, French's shortline to Shelby and the Dowdette riots that excited the populace into defying law and order.

On Dec. 20 attention was again focused on the sanitary plant project when a huge vein of water was struck during excavations and the rate of flow reached 1,256,560 gallon per each 24 hours.

Suddenly the possibility that a new source of water supply might be available to Mansfield drew the interest of Council since there had been talk that Walker's Lake northwest of Mansfield at the headwaters of the Blackfork would soon need to be tapped for a new supply.

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It was estimated that a 5,000,000 - gallon-per - day supply could be pumped from this new-found source. However, the vein was diverted or walled off and construction continued. After completion of the plant in 1901 and landscaping was finished, the area became the subject of postcard pictures.

On Dec. 15, 1903 the disposal plant again came into the limelight when a delegation of officials and civic leaders from Columbus chartered two special railroad coaches to

come to Mansfield and view the unique plant installed here.

E. G. Bradberry, the Sanitary Engineer on the Mansfield project acted as guide for the tour. He pointed out that the plant was patterned after the works originated by a Mr. Cameron, the city engineer of Exeter, England where the first experimental works was built.

Bradberry also explained that the Mansfield plant was the first of its kind in the U. S., built at a cost of \$85,000, and that similar plants were then under construction, one at the Sandusky Soldiers Home and another at Saratoga, N. Y.

He also told the delegation that the Mansfield plant operated at a cost of \$4,000 per year.

The visitors were royally entertained by Mansfield officials and business leaders with a dinner at the Vonhof and Southern Hotels and speeches of welcome by members of the original Sanitary Commission and Mayor Brown.

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As the visit at the disposal plant site drew to a close, the Mansfield officials noted that many of the Columbus men took small bottles from their pockets, filled them with the effluent from the plant, recapped them and returned them to their pockets to take back to Columbus for laboratory examination. Apparently they did not believe the stories concerning the quality of treatment provided by the new system. They later reported back to Mansfield that the sample tested 99.6 per cent pure according to the newspaper story of the event.

The old disposal plant was abandoned when the present municipal sewage treatment plant went into operation July 5, 1960. To date there are no postcard pictures of the new plant available — it is doubtful if there ever will be any.

(Courtesy Richland County Historical Society.)