

Aptos

Mulepower used on first pump

By VINCENT T. LEONARD

By the time this article appears, I hope Aptos will have decided to have its first adequate supply of and distribution system for water in its 123 years as an American village.

In the 1850's, the first piped water came to the village when a well was sunk into the triangle of flat land where the Aptos and Valencia Creeks meet, an area that became Joe Martin's apple orchard about 1909 and that is now the southern extremity of Paul Johnston's property.

A mule walking slowly in a circle provided the motive power for a pump that lifted the water to two tanks in tall tankhouses, one on the Pat Walsh property, behind where the Terrible Herbst Service Station now stands, one on the Joseph Arano property, just in front of the present Village Fair.

Only the buildings within 500 yards of the tankhouses could get water service. The pupils in Aptos School continued to get their drinking water in a common dipper, from buckets carried up from Aptos Creek.

When Claus Spreckels bought the Rancho Aptos in 1870, he built a reservoir on a small hill behind the house he erected. That reservoir is still in service. It is near the northern end of the Rio del Mar overpass. Pipes were laid to carry the water into the village and beyond, to the new Aptos School that Mr. and Mrs. Spreckels donated to the village.

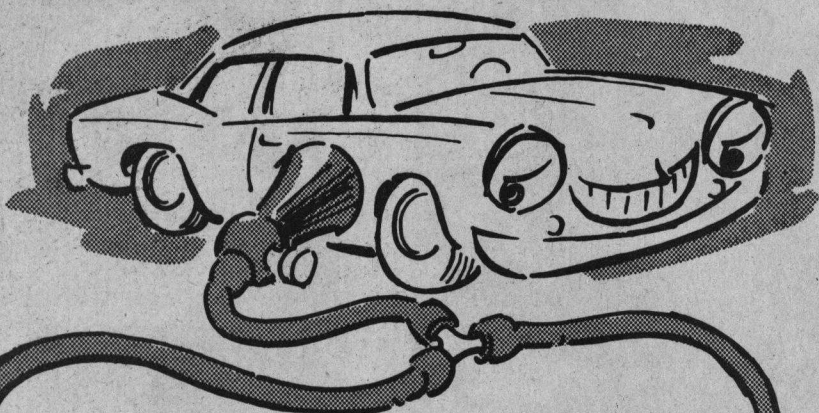
Farmers between Spreckels Ranch and the village were supplied with unmetered water at a small flat rate to compensate them for the riparian rights Mr. Spreckels had infringed upon by taking water from the headwaters of Valencia Creek.

For the first time watering troughs in the barnyards and pastures were kept constantly full with float-controlled valves and sprinklers could play constantly in vegetable gardens and alfalfa fields.

But the Spreckels system did not entirely replace the original water system until the 1920's.

When the Soquel Creek County Water District took over the Aptos area, it did not change the existing systems immediately. Cathedral Drive was cut through the hill north of the village. The water from a deep well at Cathedral and Trout Gulch was

no filtering. But, in my youth, bore a fat filter, part of which was a glass tube filled with fine gravel or charcoal, or both, and we knew why when we found bugs and bits of leaf and unidentifiable dark flecks in our bath water.



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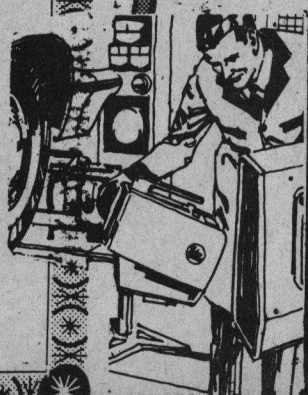
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pumped to a tank on the top of the hill, behind the Eddie Arano residence, The Hills of St. John.

Because of the high elevation of his tank, the pressure in this little water system was so great that plumbing had to be sturdy to withstand it. At the same time, the water pressure in the Spreckels system often fell so low that taps on the second and third floors of the Bay View Hotel would yield little or no water.

Until well into the 1930's, there was no part of the Aptos area that had enough water to fill a fire hose.

Even in the village, the volunteer fire department had to use its tank trucks. And if desperate fire fighters did resort to garden hoses for a couple of hours, all users had to be cautioned to use very little water until the inadequate reservoirs had been refilled.

Perhaps it was an omen of what future settlers could expect when the diarists of the Portola Expedition in praising the quality and volume of the water in Aptos Creek, also lamented the height and steepness of the banks, which, they said would preclude the founding of missions or settlements on the banks.

Lack of water in dependable quantity has cost residents of the area untold millions of dollars in high insurance rates through the years, has retarded the development of such desirable areas as Day Valley and the upper San Andreas district, and in some instances, notably the Wilshire-Vienna Woods area, has produced something close to financial disaster.

When I first looked at the faucets in my retirement home, I had the strange feeling that something was missing. Then I realized that the Soquel Creek County Water District was supplying us water that needed