



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

The Newsletter of the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society

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Winter 2020

Happenings At SWWM

This year is winding down, and good riddance! The virus crisis has continued to impact visitation at Shreveport Water Works Museums since the reopening on May 19 after the two-month-long stay at home order from the State. However, even though the total for the year will be the smallest since 2010, visitors have continued to trickle through and the October number this year was actually slightly more than October last year. At least half of our visitors have been from elsewhere, frequently from Texas, but also from further away than that while on an extended road trip.

We're always happy to show visitors around, but other activities have been scarce this year. The planned "Railroad Day" event has been postponed twice and we're now hoping for a date next May. Any expense that's not an absolute gotta-have-it, like janitorial, has been trimmed, and it seems the city has done the same since yard service was coming only every six weeks during the growing season, all of which created a definite scruffy look around the place. Maintenance needs are accumulating, though, which will be a challenge next year.

So, all in all, the state of SWWM is acceptable, but could be better!

Smile While You Shop

Online shopping is a big thing now, so here is another reminder that you can help SWWM if you do your Amazon Christmas shopping using their "Smile" feature. Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase amount to the Preservation Society if you will make your purchase using Smile. The Preservation Society has been getting quarterly checks from Amazon from this program, so it works! It doesn't cost the shopper anything and all you have to do is go on the Amazon web site and search for Smile and follow the directions to register McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society as your choice as the nonprofit you are supporting. After this, when you shop on Amazon you will be steered to the Smile program, and if that doesn't happen automatically, just type in smile.amazon.com in your browser instead of the usual www.amazon.com.

FIRE!

The Shreveport Water Works Company opened for business in 1887 and provided the city its first modern pressurized water system from a new plant on McNeill Street. Before then, residents were on their own to get the water they needed for drinking, bathing, cleaning, and so on. Perhaps surprisingly, though, the driving force behind the City's effort to get a modern water system was not sanitation, but fighting fires. Several serious fires in the 1880's finally pushed the city council into the successful action to acquire water.

The new water system was welcomed by the various well-regarded volunteer fire brigades that provided fire protection, and in 1891 the City took over and implemented the first municipal fire department. Fire fighting continued to be a struggle, though, due to slow communications and mule drawn equipment that frequently had to contend with boggy, muddy streets when every minute counted. Passing years brought solutions, but on September 4, 1925 disaster struck.

At 5pm ground movement during a serious drought ruptured all three water mains leaving McNeill Street Station water plant, and the stage was set for the worst fire in Shreveport history. Water superintendent Tom Amiss, fearing a fire, left the bedside of his dying brother and hurried to the plant to supervise repairs. Amiss'

concern about fire proved to be tragically justified, as fire broke out four hours later less than one-half mile away in the Allendale neighborhood before water main repairs could be finished.

A hot water heater had exploded in a rental house (ironically owned by a retired city fire chief) across the street from the Allendale firehouse. The nearby firemen tried to extinguish the blaze, but without water the house quickly turned into an inferno. A driving wind spread sparks to other structures and the whole area was soon ablaze. A local oil company teamed with the Texas & Pacific Railroad to move in some rail tanker cars filled with water, and the fire department then ran over 1200 feet of hose to attack the blaze. Fire Captain Horace Oxford said later that the entire “Bottoms” area back almost to the McNeill Station would have burned but for the tanker cars.

Allendale at that time was largely settled by working-class Italian and Sicilian immigrant families, with a scattering of black, Greek and Lebanese families. Frank Fulco Jr., then barely 17 and destined to grow up to be a state representative and businessman, recalled, “It was blazing all over. We were on top of my sister’s house at 1416 Buena Vista, trying to keep the fire away. We were dodging sparks everywhere we went, and they were flying everywhere. We were trying to bring buckets of water to wet the roofs to keep the fire from spreading, but it was uncontrollable. There was nothing to do but let them (houses) burn down.”

By the time it was over, the fire had burned to the ground nine blocks with almost 200 homes, leaving over 1000 people homeless. As bad as it was, it could have been worse since there were no deaths and only six people injured, and the relatively quick work by firemen with the tanker cars kept the fire from spreading even further. Allendale never really recovered and was hit hard again in 1940 by a tornado that swept away several blocks.

If any sort of reminder was needed as to the impetus behind the McNeill Street Station 38 years earlier in 1887, this terrible fire certainly would have provided it.

Special Gifts

The Evolve Foundation, directed by Donald Wiener and W. B. Wiener, Jr., has made a large donation to the McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society that will allow Society finances to finish 2020 on a positive note. Thank you very, very much to the Wieners for their interest in supporting a community and national gem and joining the Pumping Station’s other friends to preserve the site and make the museum possible.

Important! Don’t Skip This!

The Preservation Society exists and is able to operate the Shreveport Water Works Museum solely because of its members and donors. The Board of Directors (who are all members and elected by the membership) is grateful for this support and is once again inviting everyone to renew their membership (or join up). Please see the letter enclosed with this newsletter for details.

This annual membership appeal is THE big fundraiser each year. The Preservation Society doesn’t throw an event like Christmas In The Sky, we just straight out ask for your support without providing any entertainment and count on your generosity to keep the doors open! Memberships are for a rolling 12 months, so if you’ve joined or renewed sometime earlier this year, you’re still good, but nearly everyone renews just about now to save the need for ongoing reminders. Please help Shreveport Water Works Museum stay open another year! And, remember that memberships/gifts of \$100 or more will earn a spot on our donor recognition sign at the museum (unless you ask us not to).

Now Hear This: Membership Meeting

The annual meeting of the membership is scheduled for February 15, 2021 at 5pm in the meeting room at the museum. Principal item of business will be the election or reelection of directors to the board.