

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

Late in the Nineteenth Century Tuscaloosa obtained its "tap" water from a private company later purchased and operated by the city (circa 1910).

The "Pump House" was just west of Riverview and the water was drawn from the bottom of the river some distance from the riverbank and thence bumed to the "Water Tower" located on 27th Ave. just north of 5th St.

Many citizens filtered the water to remove the muddy discoloration while most families boiled their drinking water or imported in jugs or demi johns the necessary drinking water.

To obtain a better and more palatable supply of drinking water the City of Tuscaloosa had an artesian well and drinking fountain installed in the heart of town. The four-sided fountain was installed in the center of the intersection of 6th St. and 24th Ave. The well was bored midway

between the Alston Building and a store, just east of the line of pedestrian traffic. The pump and motor were in a pit below ground. This water was extensively used for drinking for all who would come after it.

An interesting incident occurred one day when the water failed to flow although the pump was operating at normal speed. City policeman Alex Simpson was accompanying Clayton Strickland who was called to locate and repair the trouble. The trouble was located instantly. When a match was struck in the pit there was a terrific explosion. The well was emitting an inflammatory gas instead of water. Clayton Strickland received severe injuries from this explosion resulting in lifetime facial scars and the loss of most of the exterior of his ears.

Soon after this incident the city filtered and treated the "tap" water so the fountain was no longer needed and was removed.