

By Michael Wentzel and Michael Shultz

The River You drink – III

City's Foresight, Fire Led To dams, Loch Raven, Prettyboy Reservoirs

The Big Gunpowder Falls, the source of much of the Baltimore area's drinking water, was harnessed by a bureaucracy that made an unusual step 60 years ago and looked forward instead of standing still. A Loch Raven and Prettyboy resulted. This is the third installment in a five-part series by Michael Wentzel and Michael Shultz on the Gunpowder River.

Land O' Lake's Churns Names

Names are a mysterious and farfetched business in the Gunpowder Basin. The origin of the river's name is a source of some controversy and the romantic tales which explain many names must be reviewed with some skepticism, even if the reasoning is likable. Loch Raven, which recalls lakes of England and Scotland, got its name "prosaically enough" from a man named Luke Raven, the Baltimore county Historical Society says.

Luke Raven, an English man, came to the area and purchased large holdings of land, including the area where the dam now is located. A son got the Big Gunpowder falls portion of the land in 1724 when Mr. Raven died and patented the name Raven's rocks on the Falls tract. When the big Gunpowder became available for the city's water supply, the area reminded James McLean, then president of the city Water Board, of a Scotland loch.

The lake became Loch Raven. Prettyboy Reservoir takes its name from Prettyboy Creek, a small stream in the area of northern Baltimore county known as the "Devil's Backbone." It seems that a farmer bought his daughter a colt. The girl immediately fell in love with the silken colt and thought it so beautiful she named it Prettyboy.

One evening, after a storm, the horse failed to return home. The farmer and his hands searched the night and in early morning solved the mystery. Prettyboy had wandered off, stopped at a stream for a drink of water, slipped on the soft bank and sank slowly into a marsh, never to be seen again.

Arabian-like Feat Of Transforming Hamlets And Farmland Into A Lake Of Drinking Water - Sun headline on Loch Raven construction Pure water is one of the best gifts that man to man can bring. - Lord Neaves. Lord Neaves was a famous Scottish judge who died during the year of the American Centennial. He was then his country's foremost authority on criminal law as well as a much published author of verse and prose. He was a man who lived through the many epidemics that terrorized England in the Nineteenth Century, plagues that often sprang from the disease of a single well. He was a man who witnessed the growing awareness of the value and necessity of pure water. Today, his simple words of "pure water" stand in the Montebello filtration Plant above the dials and charts which track the flow and chemistry of the water many of us drink, the water is the Big gunpowder Falls.

This slender stream, that rises just above the Pennsylvania line and twists and turns its way southward can provide at times of peak demand more than 148 million gallons of water a day and average about 131 million gallons.

The water, along with the water drawn from the Patapsco River, serves more than 1.5 million people in Baltimore City, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard and Carroll counties. The quality of the water in Big Gunpowder is surprisingly good. But what is ore surprising is that the city government more than 60 years ago - thought far enough ahead to tap this resource, and with that bold move helped make the Baltimore area what it is today.

Civilizations grew up around good watering spots, and today's great cities would have died of thirst as infants without good, secure water supplies. Baltimore's history shows a steady movement toward a larger water supply creating an ever-growing circle as the larger supply attracted more people and more people required a larger supply.

In young Baltimore, in 1737, springs and wells had proved adequate, not for drinking water but for firefighting. The General Assembly authorized a private company to supply water to the city, but nothing happened until 1799, when a lottery, the frequent form of support for colonial projects, was authorized to raise money for the water system.

Then, in 1800, a smallpox epidemic ravaged the city and stopped most municipal projects. "For awhile, the main preoccupation was the compelling one of burying departed neighbors an d wondering who would go next," one author wrote.

In 1804, a stock company ws formed to construct a dam on Jones Falls at what is now Preston street. This was the beginning of the city's outward reach for clean water. The water was conducted from Jones falls through an open channel to a reservoir at Calvert and Centre streets where The Sunpapers building is located today.

This original water company was set up at the cost of \$250,000, and by 1829, had about 13 miles of wooden water mains in the city. The city government also purchased four springs to provide water for the public. By the 1830's, the city government again was searching for more water sources, casting an eye this time on

Gwynns falls. But, it really wasn't until 1854 that a move was made. The city purchased the Baltimore Water company fir \$1,350,000. It received two reservoirs and 50 miles of water mains that carried water only to those parts of the city lying 60 feet above sea level or lower. The water supply was immediately inadequate. Some civic leaders proposed going tot he Gunpowder, but such a move was considered too bold. Instead, the city constructed the Swann Lake Reservoir - now known as Lake Roland - and the Hampden and Mount Royal reservoirs at the cost of more than \$3.5 million.

The new system was barely six years old when a severe drought in the fall of 1869 sent t he city looking for more water. The Water Department finally decided on the Gunpowder. A 36 inch cast iron pipe, a temporary measure, was laid between the Big Gunpowder and Lake Roland. In 1875, a stone dam was constructed across the Big Gunpowder - this is now the lower dam at Loch Raven - and more reservoirs were built, Lake Montebello nd Lake Clifton. Lake Montebello is still around, but Lake Clifton is gone with a namesake, Lake Clifton High School, remaining where the waters once flowed.

A tunnel, 12 feet in diameter and 36,510 feet long and an engineering marvel for its day, was built connecting the dam and Lake Montebello. The city's water supply from Jones Falls, which was almost completely polluted, and the Big Gunpowder and its 3.1 million-gallon reservoir system in 1880 gave Baltimore the best water system in the country.

In 1881, after the city annexed land from the county, water demands from Walbrook, Waverly, and Roland Park taxed this great water supply. The city built pumping stations and Lake Ashburton to meet the demands, but it was the Great fire of 1904 that forced the city to rethink the whole water system.

Abel Wolman, a jack of all trades in the public works area who has held many city and state positions, can recall the history of his decisive era It was in 1908 that the city boldly went to the General Assembly and asked for the rights to all the water of the Big gunpowder Falls. The city not only wanted the water rights but also the power to dam the river and condemn huge amounts of land for ta reservoir. "It raised hell for a lot of years." Dr. Wolman said in his office

at Johns Hopkins University, where he is a professor emeritus. At 84, he is clear-eyed, alert and active. He had just returned from consultant work for the Greater Miami Conservation district, inspecting dams in 10-degree weather on the Miami River in Ohio. On his desk and a nearby table were a bizarre collection of reports, all dealing with water. A hefty report - "The assessment of Environmental Effects of Proposed Development in the Senegal River Basin," - dominated a pile with other African studies.

There also were. "A short History of Water management in Hungary," and a thick report on water supply and sanitation in developing countries produced in Tel Aviv. Baltimore had the riches, the conception, and the foresight," Dr. Wolman said. "But the rural areas in the legislature had the votes. But they needed their big-city neighbor to provide services, to show them how to do things. That's why it got done. As Dr. Wolman said, however, the fight was a hard one." "The debate was intense," he said. "Today's fights over the environment are reminiscent of the climate surrounding the dam."

In the case of Loch Raven, the opposition came mostly from corporate interests, the mill owners in the towns that the dam would drown, It also meant moving roads, rerouting the tracks of the North Central Railroad and uprooting families. But the slightest hint of a drought moved the project ahead. The city withstood lawsuits and settled its fights, usually at bargain prices. "Nobody knows, or recognizes who made the cities viable," Dr. Wolman said. "It was not the mayors or politicians, though I hasten to add that we in Baltimore have had mayors blessed with foresight and understanding,. It was the engineers who created these public works that made our cities.

To the people of Baltimore, the construction of Loch Raven was one more step toward greatness after the devastation of the Great Fire. These projects took on a poetic and heroic stature for the city. The Sun caught this mood in describing the project, referring to Loch Raven as "one of the most picturesque spots near the city, suggestive of Scotland and Deeds of romance rather than the prosaic business of furnishing the city with water." After the approval of a \$5 million loan to begin the project in 1908, a sun reporter wrote these charged words. "To the sentimental, the wiping out of the homes in the hamlets, the razing of the thrifty mills, the moving of the railroad in the valley, the cutting down of wood and the rest of the necessary work is a heartless work. But, to the materialists who know the needs of 600,000 persons in the greater city, and the many more who are to come with the future, the work is one of absolute necessity."

Phoenix, Warren, Sweet Air and Bosley were the towns that would fall to Loch Raven's water. Warren was the largest with 100 people, three mills and a general store. Phoenix , which would rise again, was a town of 600 people with a cotton duck mill and a flour mill along with four stores and a post office. Sweet Air, with only 52 people had two churches, a cannery, two mills, and a post office. Bosley had only a few residents but it did have a post office. and a blacksmith.

The project was begun in June 1912 and, along with the city's top quality filtration system plants completed in May 1914. The city pushed further out in 1920 acquiring more land and, in 1923, 52 feet of height were added to the dam, giving the dam its present elevation of 240 feet. There are 2,400 acres and 23 billion gallons of water behind the dam. But t he city wasn't finished.

In 1918, V. Bernard Stems, one of the city's water friends, was wading and hiking the Big Gunpowder Falls near the state line. He became upon a deep ravine, almost a canyon, where the river twisted through steep , wooded hills. He spotted a cliff of Gneiss that rose over 200 feet perpendicular to the river and several hundred feet away was another similar cliff. Mr. Sterns would remember this rugged stretch of river years later when the city decided it needed a reserve for Loch Raven.

At 4:51 P.M. April 10, 1933, water began filling the Prettyboy Reservoir. This time the city had purchased some of the best farmland in the area, including the Shamburger farm with a house that dated back to 1790.

The Big Gunpowder River Recreation club, known for its excellent hunting, the Rockville Powder Company, and historic Hoffman mills all surrendered to the waters. The 130 foot dam crest helped form a 1,500 acre reservoir holding 20 billion gallons of water. The city's 150-year drive for a more secure water supply was achieved, if the city could protect it. And The Sun's headline the week construction began on Prettyboy told the story well: Farmers Adopt Fatalism As Dam Threatens Homes Even Where Sentiment Binds Then to Farm Realize Futility of Bucking Big city Project.