

**A Brief of Special Events
In the Professional Life of
Felix G. Doggett**

*By
Felix G. Doggett
(Age 87)*

January 1996

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January 6, 1996

This is a supplement to "Pleasant Memories." I am 87, still active but nearly blind, hard of hearing and getting forgetful - especially of names. Dr. Wesley Doggett, nuclear physicist of Raleigh, suggested recently that I should list some of my experiences in my public life that might be of interest to family. Allene and Sarah agreed and insisted that I do so.

I graduated from Monticello High School in 1926 and enrolled in the School of Civil Engineering, U.N.C.-Chapel Hill in the fall - the Class of '30. At the end of the spring term in '29 I began working for the City of Charlotte - six months as chemist at the water plant and six months as chemist for the sewage treatment plants. This was the beginning of the Great Depression. Pa's bank in Greensboro had closed in the spring of '29. I graduated in Civil in '31. In August I was again employed by the City of Charlotte as chemist for the sewage treatment plants. In 1932 due to the severity of the Depression I was asked to work the evening shift as plant operator at the Sugar Creek Plant and also to continue my work as chemist for the treatment plants. We worked eight hour shifts seven days a week.

Allene and I were married on September 7th, 1933. The city installed in the plant operators house inside plumbing, gas for heating and cooking, and fenced the lot for a dog for her protection.

On the first of May, 1936, I began working for the Town of Mount Airy, N.C., as Superintendent of the water plant and Assistant City Engineer. In 1937 I designed, and with help from Mr. Oscar Merritt and the Merritt Machine Shop, built and installed hydraulically operated filter sweeps that greatly facilitated cleaning of the filter sand. It resulted in national publicity. The process had been patented by a Mr. Palmer of Erie, Pennsylvania, but he had not built one yet. However, the publicity was a good promotion and a large equipment manufacturer soon made the equipment available world-wide. It is known as the Palmer Filter Sweep.

In March 1939 I received a certificate as a Registered Engineer. A little later Mr. Will D. Merritt retired. On Mr. Merritt's recommendation I was appointed by the City Board of Commissioners to take his place as City Engineer. I served in this capacity until October 1, 1941, at which time we moved to Raleigh with the Division of Sanitary Engineering, State Board of Health. While City Engineer in Mount Airy, work projects included water and sewer extensions and street improvements. W.P.A. (Federal aid projects to give people work) which I planned, applied for and supervised were in progress the entire time. The single most extensive project was improvement on Worth and South Streets for a truck by-pass of the business district. Considerable regrading and widening was necessary on South and heavy rock excavation from Mill to old Virginia Street - now Independence Boulevard. South Street was extended

from Orchard to West Lebanon. The SHC did the paving. It served as the truck by-pass until U.S. 52 By-Pass west of Mount Airy was built in the mid '50's. Occasionally tractor trailers overturned on the sharp curve near the railroad crossing. I would send pictures to highway officials to show the need for an out-of-town by-pass. They would install bolder warning signs.

When I went to work with the Division of Sanitary Engineering I left two well-qualified men to carry on in Mount Airy. However, soon after the out-break of World War II they were both drafted. As a result I was called back on occasions when troubles arose, so I kept in touch with city officials.

Soon after the December 7th attack I was recruited by the Army Sanitary Engineer Corps., and in January 1942 I took a physical at Fort Bragg. I was in good physical condition and was told that the history of an operation in '31 could be waived. I also had an interview with General Colburn at the base hospital. He said he would like to have me on his staff - that they had a new sewage treatment plant and no one that knew how to operate it. But I would have to get a release from Dr. Reynolds, State Health Officer. Dr. Reynolds said "No. You are needed here." In 1943 I made an inspection and recommendations of the facilities at Pinehurst which had been taken over by the army to do tests on conscientious objectors of diseases in the Pacific Theater. A serious out-break of dysentery had occurred and my visit led to the cause and correction. A few days later Dr. Reynolds and the Surgeon General of the U.S. (General Purvis) visited my office to give me a Personal Commendation. The General said "You have rendered your country a far greater service here than you could possibly have done in the Sanitary Corps. We were on the verge of closing the facility at Pinehurst. We are indebted to Dr. Reynolds for not releasing you." I had other interesting experiences while with the Division of Engineering but the above was the highlight.

In the spring of 1947 I received an urgent call from the mayor of Mount Airy. At a meeting of the City Board of Commissioners I was made an attractive offer to return to my former job as City Engineer and Superintendent of Utilities and I accepted. Immediately after returning there was a major flood - 10.5 inches in 24 hours that washed out 550 feet of the raw water supply line. I was able to handle it so as not to have any disruption to the public or industry.

Extensive repairs and maintenance were done in the Public Works Department to make up for neglect during the war years and growth. New construction included:

- (1) Mount Airy was the second municipality in the state to install a modern landfill for garbage disposal.
- (2) Construction of a second Main Street (Renfro) was begun in 1947 and paved in 1952. The SHC extended it south to the city limits in the early sixties and north to Main Street to be designated US-52 Business.
- (3) In 1953 the capacity of the Orchard Street water plant was modernized (+1.0 MGD to 2.5 MGD).
- (4) The Rockford Street water tower was completed in 1949.
- (5) In 1959 a modern sewage treatment plant was completed together with out falls and collector sewers.
- (6) Two new fire stations were built in the late sixties.

The state of North Carolina announced in 1959 that it would, with Federal, State and

Municipal cost sharing, offer municipalities (1) major thoroughfare and (2) community facilities planning. I urged our commissioner to apply for both. Mount Airy was the first municipality to apply and first to get approval. I also asked to employ a well-qualified assistant to work with the planners. In the spring of 1960, Mr. S.L. Spencer (Sam) was hired. He was an honor graduate in Civil at V.P.I., had completed two years in military service as required then, and had worked two years as resident engineer on a thoroughfare around Columbus, Ohio. He and Mrs. Spencer were both from Martinsville, Virginia and were happy to get closer home. State officials were pleased to have him work with their planners, a third of his time for which Mount Airy would get credit for its share of cost.

Billy Rose was our thoroughfare planner. He and Sam made a great team. After the plan was completed at a municipalities meeting in Charlotte, the city manager of Salisbury said he had heard so much about Mount Airy's plan that he had gotten a copy. He said that if Mount Airy tried to go through with it he would forecast that they would go broke. The chairman said, "Doggett, what have you to say about that?" I said, "Just this - it is a long range plan and we expect to grow with it." Recently the Mount Airy News announced that the opening of Dixie Street extension across to Rockford Street was the completion of the city's major thoroughfare plan which was made in the early sixties. The execution of the plan has made possible major growth in industry and business. The last census indicated that total employment was double the population. Of course community facilities planning and timely development was essential also. Mr. Raymond Smith, Sr. (an industrialist and highway commissioner) said to me, "Doggett, it's easy to get approval of a project for Mount Airy because Mount Airy has a plan." I was told by an assistant to Governor Holhouser that my letter was responsible for Billy Rose's appointment as Director of Highways. I believe he served until his recent retirement.

In the early sixties Spencer and I obtained permission to contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). At that time their projects with major Federal funding were primarily for large cities, but Mount Airy was successful in breaking the barrier. Early approval and funding included: slum clearance; public housing; urban renewal including adoption of a stringent housing code. Sub-standard housing was to be made to comply or torn down. The Board began to feel the heat. The mayor said, "Doggett, we are not going to let people in Atlanta (the HUD area office) tell us how to run Mount Airy." I called an official and as a result our mayor and Board flew down and met with several officials and then took a tour of like project areas in Atlanta. It was a success and allowed us to proceed.

Our projects with HUD assistance received considerable publicity - an HUD official remarked to me that they were getting inquiries from municipalities as far away as Florida and Louisiana.

In 1962, as a result of the flood in 1947, Mount Airy and Surry County were able to get the Soil Conservation Service (a division of the Department of Agriculture) to make flood control studies of Lovill's and Stewart's Creeks. As a result ten years later a watershed project providing flood control, municipal storage for water supply and recreation was dedicated. The municipal storage permits doubled the F.G. Doggett Water Treatment Plant from six to twelve million gallons per day. Mount Airy's share of the cost was 22.36%, Federal's cost was 77.64%. I served as professional engineer representing Mount Airy.

Another major project which I was directly involved in planning, site selection, land

procurement and financing was the present F.G. Doggett Water Plant at Laurel Bluff on Stewart's Creek. Mount Airy sold \$1,225,000 bonds in March 1968. In addition through HUD, Mount Airy received a total of \$550,000, ^{at the} ~~at~~ the bond sale at the Local Government Commission's office. ~~At the time~~ a vice-president of North Carolina Bank of Raleigh (now Nation's Bank), the successful bidder, remarked that Mount Airy's financial statement and report was the best municipal report he had ever read. "That is the reason we bid 5% on Mount Airy's bonds and 6% on Madison's (which they also purchased)."

About the mid-sixties, I suggested to the mayor and Board to consider asking the Local Commission for authority to set up a "Capital Improvements Fund" to avoid the necessity of bond issues. They were pleased and authorized me to proceed. The Commission thought well of it and gave approval. Our financial report in the bond issue showed \$300,000 in the fund but not to be used for the water plant construction. When I retired December 31, 1972, Mount Airy had \$1,650,000 in its Capital Improvements Fund. Mount Airy has not had to issue any bonds since the water plant issue in 1968. About three years ago I saw in the Mount Airy News that the city had over fourteen million dollars in its C.I. Fund which was providing over a million dollars in interest a year. About ~~ten~~ ⁷ years ago I heard on TV news that a school bond vote to authorize 59 million dollars in Guilford County had failed to pass, but the county commissioners promptly authorized 59 million be taken from its Capital Improvements Fund for the proposed school improvements. I was glad to hear that the plan that we got started in the '60's was being used in Guilford County and probably by others.

In 1985 I saw in the Mount Airy News that the City Board of Commissioners were to be presented a plan prepared by consultants to eliminate the old Orchard Street Water Plant and expand the F.G. Doggett Plant. I got a copy of the report and saw that it had made a number of erroneous assumptions. I wrote Mayor Beamer a report pointing out their mistakes and the hazard of not having a back-up source - pointing out that a wreck of an oil or hazardous waste transport could shut the Doggett Plant down for weeks. He prepared copies for his Board and Industry. The plan to close the Orchard Plant was dropped. Instead the Orchard Street Plant was modernized and dedicated as the S.L. Spencer Water Plant. Former Mayor Beamer was the first to speak. He said, "All I have to say is that had it not been for F.G. Doggett, this plant would not be here today." Mr. Spencer had retired about five years ago and died suddenly in 1994. He had been opposed to closing the plant, but the city manager then was fixed in his opinion and left soon after the decision to keep the plant. I was the last speaker at the dedication and used my allotted time in reviewing Mr. Spencer's achievements. The spokesman for local industries that had made every effort to keep and modernize the Orchard Street Plant, Mr. Robert Merritt, expressed to me appreciation for the action I had taken.

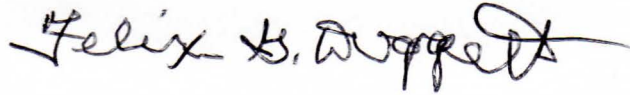
In conclusion I wish to express my thanks to the good Lord Who has spared my life many times. To mention one: In 1931 when I was taken to Watts Hospital in Durham one month before graduation and had emergency surgery. James was notified by telephone that it was necessary to proceed. As I was taken to the operating room I asked the Lord that I might live with the hopes that I might recover and try to help others. I have done a lot of praying for His help in public life as well as private, and for family and country. I truly believe He has been with me all the way.

As most of you know, Mount Airy was selected as an All-American City in 1994. As a

matter of record it was the first one to be selected.

Recently in a magazine selection of the 100 Best Cities to Live In (population 5000 to 15,000) Mount Airy was 36th. Also in the grading process Mount Airy took fourth place in Bank Deposits per Capita.

Adieu,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Felix B. Doggett". The signature is written in dark ink and has a fluid, somewhat stylized appearance with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Felix Doggett
January 18, 1996

P.S. I was appointed city manager of Mount Airy in the fall in 1962, and served until my retirement on December 31, 1972.

Robert E. Merritt

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Telephone: 910 786-8359

March 25, 1996

Mr. F. G. Doggett
331 Grace Street
Mount Airy, NC 27030

Dear Mr. Doggett:

Thank you for sending me the revised copies of your *Brief of Special Events in the Professional Life of Felix G. Doggett*.

The Museum of Regional History will be pleased to have this record in their archives. It adds a lot of important facts to the public records of the past sixty years.

The part about the design and construction of the filter sweeps brings back vivid memories of my father's pride in having a part in this project that worked so well for so many years. And I am proud to have had a part in preserving the Orchard Street Plant.

Most of all, I want you to know that I appreciate how much you have contributed to making Mount Airy what it is today.

Very truly yours,