

By Angie Mayes

As the town grew, so did the need for utilities. At first land owners had private wells and septic systems on their land, providing them with the basic needs. The telephone was the first to come to town, followed by electricity. Water service was noted as a main reason for attempting to incorporate. Sewer came after incorporation.

WATER

In 1961, voters rejected an incorporation measure in 1961, 90-176. A.B. Cox, president of the Men's Club at the time, stated "Our main purpose for attempting to incorporate La Vergne was to provide filtered water to the area." At the time, 90 percent of the well water in the city would not pass the state's fluoride tests given by the state health department. Residents often had to boil their water before they drank it.

Another reason for the incorporation was that the city desperately needed fire fighting equipment. Without adequate fire fighting equipment to save it, the administration building at the Farmer's Co-Op had burned to the ground in 1960.

In 1961, the La Vergne Utility District (LUD) was formed. Since the incorporation was denied, the LUD was the only measure offered to the citizens for the installation of a water system. At that time, the estimated cost was \$30,000 plus interest. There were 475 potential customers.

"Since the city voted against incorporation, this utility district is the only practical avenue open to the community at this time," the Courier stated. When the measure came to vote, nearly 70 percent voted in favor of the LUD.

In 1962, Smyrna approved a contract with the LUD, charging La Vergne 27 cents per 1,000 gallons. The contract was for 35 years. Nearly 500 residents signed up for water and with the aid of a Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency (FHHFA) loan of \$400,000, the first of 58,600 water lines from Smyrna was laid. An additional loan in 1962 from the FHHFA allowed La Vergne to install a 100,000 gallon water storage tank.

Rates for La Vergne residents were a \$5 minimum for the first 2,000 gallons. Then 80 cents for each additional 1,000. There was a \$75 connect fee with a \$10 meter fee. Today, residents pay a \$50 non refundable hookup fee, and then \$8.50 for the first 2,000 gallons and \$2.20 for each additional 1,000 gallons.

By 1963, the city had deposits from 900 potential customers. The availability of water helped make the city the fastest growing community in Middle Tennessee. They had the largest amount of water lines of any similar size city in the state. More than 100,000 feet of water lines from Smyrna to almost every part of La Vergne was laid.

In 1974, La Vergne planned new water service, opting to get their water from Nashville, rather than Smyrna.

In 1976, the commissioners voted 3-2 to acquire the LUD. In a public vote, the referendum was approved 366-280. Federal grants would now be easier to get, according to the Courier.

In 1980, the city began a new water project. With a loan from the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), the town connected water lines to the three water tanks and extended water lines to Sand Hill and the Morningside areas, down Blue Valley Road and Hazelwood lane. Commissioners reported that the water rates would not raise.

In 1983, the state acted on the new La Vergne water agreement. The city was to buy 50 percent of their water from Nashville and 50 percent from Smyrna. Smyrna had said that La Vergne had not lived up to their agreement. Smyrna then placed a surcharge for 5 million gallons of waters at \$2,400 per month, whether or not it was used.

In 1984, Puckett said that the surcharge measure was to “punish La Vergne.” La Vergne had annexed 837 acres that Smyrna had intended to.

The water rates increased in 1987, the first time since 1984. Metro had increased their water fee and La Vergne now paid \$1.64 per 1,000 gallons. Residential service then paid \$9 for the first 2,000 gallons and \$2.35 for each additional 1,000 gallons.

At the same time, the feasibility of a water plant in La Vergne was being studied. By 1988, the city announced plans to build the water plant which will cost \$4.45 million to get “off the hook with Metro.”

10.8 acres were bought near the lake in August of 1988 for the plant.

In 1992, La Vergne received a \$500,000 block grant to assist in the upgrading of water lines in the city. Nearly 47,000 linear feet of lines and fire hydrants were to be installed.

The plant opened in 1993, offering 3.75 million gallons of water per day storage capacity in tanks and a four million gallons per day in house capacity.

In September, 1993, the La Vergne water rates were cut by 50 percent one time only. This helped compensate for trouble the citizens has been experiencing. Discolorment, the result of manganese in the water, was the main problem.

Stringent testing policies require that the plant operators check the water every two hours daily and report to the state each month. The State of Tennessee takes samples from the water to ensure that the water levels are acceptable and within the stated guidelines.

In 1995, the water rates were reduced by 10 percent, a reduction which continues today.

Hook Up Fee: Residential, \$50 (non refundable)

Commercial/Industrial, \$75 (non refundable)

Rates: Residential, first 2,000 gallons - \$8.50, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$2.20.

Commercial, first 2,000 gallons - \$11, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$2.50.

Industrial, first 2,000 gallons - \$200, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$3.35.

SEWER

In 1966, the LUD planned to establish a sewage disposal system to serve the 900 members of the district. Cost for the system was estimated at \$1.6 million, half of which was available from the FHHFA. The balance was to be financed by members of the LUD.

The argument for a sewage disposal system was to “encourage the location of industry, to increase the present value of the homes, to attract more residents, to generally increase business, contribute to the long range community planning and to improve health conditions,” wrote the Courier.

In 1983, La Vergne received \$688,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to build main trunk lines and a pump station for a sewer system. The \$1.2 million project sent La Vergne’s sewage to Nashville’s Hurricane Creek plant for treatment. \$400,000 - \$562,000 will be financed by property owners in the area of the main line. The sewer project got the “official nod” from the city commission and approved the contracts in May, 1984.

In January 1985, the sewer plan was changed to replace the line size. La Vergne was in line for a \$2.1 million grant from the EPA for phase two of the sewer system.

The city applied for funds in 1985, stating construction would begin in 1986 and be finished by 1988. The city received the sewer grant (between \$1 - 2.9 million) in 1986. By August of 1987, over 1,000 had paid the \$1,000 tap fees for the new sewer system.

Although city leaders would like for La Vergne to have its own sewer plant, current indications are that one will not be built in the near future.

Rates: Residential, first 2,000 gallons - \$10.20, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$2.64.

Commercial, first 2,000 gallons - \$13.20, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$3.00

Industrial, first 2,000 gallons, \$240.00, each additional 1,000 gallons - \$3.35.

ELECTRICITY

Life was slow in La Vergne after World War I. When O.B. Tucker Sr. built his house in 1921, there was no hope of electricity. The closest power lines were in Una, nine miles toward Nashville. Tucker began talking with the Nashville Railway and Light Company in an attempt to bring electricity to La Vergne. The Company told Tucker he must secure 240 customers who would pay a \$3 tie-in charge.

Only 30 - 40 signed initially up. Many felt that the venture was impractical, some were afraid of the dangers of electricity running through their home while others dismissed the idea as economically unsound.

After a year, only 180 had signed up. Nashville Railway and Light Company refused to extend the lines. Tucker bargained with them, offering to bring in the utility poles from his West Tennessee business. (They paid him \$1 per pole, they were worth \$14 per pole.)

Finally, by 1923, La Vergne residents finally had electricity.

PHONE SERVICE

Although the first phone was installed in La Vergne in 1904 by Thomas Mason (and the phone Co-Op was established in 1913), toll free service to other areas such as Smyrna and Murfreesboro wasn't available until much later. In December 1968, calls to Smyrna were no longer long distance. In 1989, the calls to Murfreesboro were finally free. Not until Jan. 1973 did a direct line from the La Vergne Police Department to the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office exist.