Chapter XV

The Advent of Utilities, Public and Private

Living as we do today in an era when public and private utilities are taken for granted, it is difficult for us to conceive of a time when such utilities were practically non existent in Grenada. Soon after the establishemnt of the town of Tullahoma a well, either dug or drilled, was provided for the convenience of the citizens of the town. This well was located on the public square of the town. This well continued to serve the general public for many years. We do not know when it was abandoned, but do have information that it was in use as late as the year 1885. This information comes from a news item in a local paper stating that there were three public wells in Grenada; one located in the western part of town; another in the eastern part of the area, and another on the public square. It is probable that the people of the eastern and western parts of Grenada did not all depend upon the public wells. Some of the people obtained water from wells bored, or cisterns constructed, upon their residential lots. There were no sanitary and storm sewers for many years after the beginning of Grenada. Falling rain water ran freely, following the natural drainage courses which emptied in either the Yalobousha river or the Bogue. Animal owners had the responsibility of removing the carcass of any animal belonging to them, which chanced to die within the city limits. Most of the homes had outdoor toilet facilities. An early attempt was made to provide some street lights, but this provision consisted of a number of oil-burning lamps located at strategic points in the town. Some early settlers complained that the lamps served only to guide the people in the direction they were supposed to go, but did not give them enough light to keep them from falling into the mudpuddles found in the streets and on the plank sidewalks which had spaces of earth between the boards. It was well into the year 1880 before any reasonably satisfactory system of street lights was constructed.

Today, we would consider the loss of any of our public utilities a very serious defect in our usual way of life, but for many years the early citizens of the community did not enjoy the conveniences which we have come to consider necessities of urban life. Perhaps the one utility which we have today which was most urgently needed by the earlier citizens of Grenada was an adequate water supply and distributing system. Their concern about an adequate water supply arose not only from a desire to have available water at their homes, but from their constant apprehension of disasterous fires which could not be controlled without an adequate supply of water. By sad experience those citizens knew just how much destruction of property could result from uncontrolled fires. There must have been fires destroying some of the early flimsy, wood houses from the very beginning of the two little towns of Pittsburg and Tullahoma, but it seems that it was not unitl 1855 that the people of Grenada were brought to realize the full fury of an uncontrolled fire which could destroy large sections of the town. A fire which occured that year and which threatened the whole town, destroyed about half of the existing buildings. This fire was a paralizying blow to a town which had not entirely recovered from the effects of the Tornado of 1846 which destroyed 112 houses, and killed and wounded many inhabitants of the town. Soon after the fire of 1855 the governing authorities of the town adopted an ordinance requiring all future buildings erected around the square to be of brick or stone. As the years passed, and the supply of water continued inadequate to make any considerable headway against fires, destructive fires continued to occur. Some of the fires which were detected soon enough were either extinguished, or prevented from spreading to other buildings, but there continued to be fires which ravaged individual buildings and larger sections of the town.

On August 23, 1884, there occurred a fire which destroyed three fourths of the business houses of Grenada. The fire started in the Furniture House

of S. H. Garner and destroyed most of the buildings around the square. The Grenada Sentinel came out with scare headlines: "GRENADA IN RUINS ... There could not have been a worse moment for a disaster of this magnitude. Two private banks, which had the only banking facilities in the town, had failed earlier in the year, bringing financial hardship to the under-insured business men of the town. Friendly people from neighboring towns expressed sympathy and offered help. It is indicative of the courage and fortitude of the people of the town that Mayor B. C. Adams, Jr., could answer an offer of help from citizens of Winona by expressing the gratitude of the people of Grenada for the offer, but stating to these good neighbors "Grenada needs no outside help." Damage to business buildings was estimated at \$300,000 which, of course was a lot of money at that time. Much of the merchandise housed in the damaged buildings was destroyed, but the Grenada Sentinel reported that, within a few days time, some of the merchants were back in business using temporary housing to display the stock which they had been able to save from the flames. Other merchants who had been able to salvage mostly damaged goods were advertising fire sales. It would seem that the city had already had its full share of fire disasters but the people were destined, within a very few years, to suffer again as flames swept the business section of the town. This fire occurred in 1891, and broke out in the store building of A. Summerfield, resulting in the destruction of that building, and sweeping part of the north side of Depot street and all of the east side of the square. Other stores which were destroyed included the buildings of Pryor & Company; Dry Goods Store of E. Parker; Barber Shop of Henry Johnson and Robert Purdy; Store of Mrs. L. Bernhardt, and some unidentified stores on the east side of the square. The fire destroyed fifteen buildings, eight of which were of brick construction.

Faced with this dismal record of destructive fires, it is not surprising that the people of the town began to demand a better type of fire protection. In 1886 a citizen, who was not identified, in a letter which was published in the Sentinel, had a proposal relative to improved fire protection. He advocated the erection of a tank, similar to the water tanks then used to provide water for railroad locomotives, on the city square with a pump in the well in the square, which tank would be operated by a windmill. The tank would be kept full of water and seventy five to a hundred buckets would be kept in readiness for use when a fire broke out. The citizen claimed to have observed similar provision in other towns. Sometime in 1891, probably after the fire of that year, J. W. Buchanan of the Sentinel published his views on the vital subject of fire protection: "Amongst the hundreds of thousands dollars destroyed by fire in Grenada, a few thousand dollars devoted to a good fire department might have saved a greater part of this ... With a first class handworked engine, with sufficent hose, ladder etc. (those were once bought and placed in a house built for that purpose, but if there is any part of them left we do not know it) with a small tank filled with water by a windmill placed in a little enclosure in the square convenient to an inexhaustable well (which is already there) the town might have been richer by many thousands of dollars which have gone up in smoke and flames." This editorial would seem to indicate that the well in the town square was still of considerable public use. This appeal did not, at once, bring about the fire protection advocated by the editor, but in 1892 a Hook and Ladder Company to be composed of volunteers who would be provided with a hand-pump engine was organized. This was, perhaps, the best that could be done under the circumstances. Real fire protection would have to be delayed until a city wide water distribution system could be provided.

The need, especially for fire protection, for such a system, then called "water works", was the impetus which was eventually to bring the city, not only a city water system, but a sewerage system and electric generating plant as well. For several years there was much discussion relative to the need of such utilities with the usual dissenting citizens who contended that the city could not afford the luxury of these utilities. Public opinon in favor of the city providing these facilities so solidified, that on January 25, 1897, the governing authorities of the city set up an election to determine if the citizens of the town would approve a \$10,000 bond issue to finance "a complete system of water works, electric lights and sewerage." Having been given the opportunity to express themselves on this vital question, the voters of the city approved the proposed bond issue, and the purpose for which the proceeds were to be used.

Although the people approved the proposal to have electricity available for the city, the need for electricity was not, at that time, as vital as the need for water distribution and sewage disposal. A temporary, and for a time, a satisfactory system of street lighting had been provided some years before electricity was to become available. On January 20, 1891, six years before the approval of the bond issue, the Sentinel ran the following quoted news item: "The street lighting of Grenada was definitely settled for a time by a contract with the Sun-Vapor Street Light Company of Canton, Ohio, for forty lamps at sixteen dollars per year for each lamp, the contract to run for five years, with the provision that the contract could be terminated at the end of two years. The lighting fuel is gasoline and the gas used is generated in the burner and makes a light four times brighter than coal oil. When they are all up and at work our little city will not grope in darkness anymore. We congratulate the Maor and Aldermen on their success in giving us brightly lighted streets. This is no experiment as in Ohio alone, there are thirty five cities using this system, beside its use in other cities." Two expressions in the news item may be of some significence: "definitedly settled for a time" and "the contract could be terminated at the end of two years" would seem to indicate that the editor realized that improvements over the proposed system were anticipated in the not too distant future.

There was some dissatisfaction with the bond issue, some people criticizing the extravigence of such an ambitious program, and others, wiser than most, who felt that the bond issue would not provide sufficient funds to complete the whole project. These people were justified in their position by the subsequent necessity to issue another \$15,000 in bonds to complete the project after the funds provided by the original bond issue had proved to be insufficient to complete the project. This second proposal for bonds was approved by the pro-ponents of the issue by a four to one vote over those who opposed the proposal. Evidently the three different kinds of utilities involved were let in one general bid. The Sentinel notes that J. H. Hazelhurst & Company of Atlanta, Georgia, was awarded a contract to construct the water distribution system, the sewerage system and the electric generating plant. In order to provide water for the distribution system the City Board awarded a contract to J. W. Wohl to drill two artesian wells. The contract price was slightly over \$38,000 for the work awarded to the Hazelhurst Company. We do not have the price of the well contract.

The Hazelhurst Company began work, and was making rapid progress when work was interrupted by labor trouble. The heavy common labor work was done by negro men who were being paid eighty cents for a ten hour day. After a time these laborers demanded one dollar per day for the work. Mr. Hazelhurst protested that he was paying above the usual wage scale - that he could get all the common labor which he needed at seventy five cents per day. In some way, not known to us, the labor trouble was resolved, and the work continued. Before the project had been completed the city officials realized that the utility should cover a larger extent of the area than had first been contemplated, so then they set up the second bond proposal which has been mentioned heretofore.' In less than a year the project was completed. The night of September 25, 1897, was a great night of celebration on the part of the citizens of the town. This was the night when the utility system was to be tested. At the appointed time

the current was turned on and some people, for the first time in their lives, saw the wonder of lights provided by an electric current: others who had observed the power of electricity as it was used in other places, now rejoiced that their town had the opportunity to be served by this new source of power. In order to test the pressure in the water mains, a hose was attached to a fireplug near the square, the water turned on in the hose, and the people saw a column of water rise many feet in the air. At last they had the adequate water supply; the distribution system, and the water system necessary to control fires. The people were not so enthusiastic about the sanitary sewerage system. They resented the attempts made by the city officials to induce them to connect their houses with the sewers. It took money to get connected, and it took money to purchase the equipment such as bath-tubs, sink, and indoor toilets which would be connected with the sewer lines. There were angry protests at the cost of such installation. Some compained that the city officials had so constricted the list of plumbers approved for such work that one firm had a practical monopoly of the work. To quell this disturbance the city finally agreed to let workmen connected with the utility plants make such connections and installations at a stipulated price. Still some people refused to take advantage of the utilities. They had averted part of the danger from fire, but were willing to take the risk of illness brought on by un-sanitary conditions.

With the provision of a water distribution system and sufficient pressure to do a good job in fire fighting, the men of the town were ready to form volunteer fire-fighting companies. Three of these companies were organized; two of which were 'composed of white men and one composed of negroes. Company number one was to keep its equipment on the public square, and its primary responsibility was the protection of the business section of town. The foreman of this company was W. D. Salmon. Company number two was assigned to the East Ward and its foreman was B. E. Moore. Company number three was assigned to the West Ward and it was composed of Negroes. P. S. Golden, a negro shoemaker and shoe repair man was made foreman of this company. H. D. Lowd acted as Fire Chief for the city with J. C. Wilson as Assistant Chief. J. B. Perry was Secretary and Treasurer of the organization. Although each company had its primary assignment, they were supposed to be ready, at the direction of the Fire Chief, to go to any part of the city where they were needed.

At the time these utilities were established in Grenada there were very few towns in Mississippi which had similar facilities. As a result the city officials did not have any well established standards by which they could determine the charges which should be made to consumers of the water and electricity. It was understood that the rates to be announced were only temporary, and would be adjusted up or down as the revenue derived from the charges proved either excessive or insufficient to operate and maintain the services. A Superintendent of the combined operation was secured, and the city officials depended very largely on him to guide them in the establishment of rates. This man, who was supposed to be a graduate engineer, was secured from Yazoo City. The Board, upon his advice, announced the following rates for electric current: Business Houses with less than five lights seventy cents per month per light; those with twenty to twenty five lights sixty cents per month. Residences: with less than five lights thirty five cents per month per light, those with five or more lights thirty cents per light. The water rates were: Dwelling houses with four to six rooms fifty cents per room per year with a minimum charge of six dollars; house with a bath three dollars per year extra. Barber Shops: one chair six dollars per year: with a charge of two dollars and fifty cents for each extra chair; first bath-tub eight dollars per year, with a charge of four dollars for each extra tub. People of the younger generation will find it difficult to believe that, at the time of the publication of these water rates, very few of the homes of Grenada had bath tubs. Many of the men went to the barber shops for their baths. The usual charge for a bath was twenty five cents. Restaurants and Hotels were charged ten dollars

per year for their water supply with extra charge for bathtubs. Extra charges were made on additional tubs. These utility charges proved to be unrealistic and it became necessary to adjust the charges. Eventually meters were installed for both utilities, and the people paid for the amount of water or current which they used. At the time the electric generating plant began operation electricity was used almost exclusively for lighting purposes. As various electrical appliances came into general use, it would be necessary to increase the generating capacity of the electric plant. The artesian wells providing the water supply for the distributing system were located in the vicinity of the power plant. One of the wells had a constant external flow of water and became the center of attraction for many of the citizens. Many people would walk down to the well and drink of the water which it gave off.

For a period of approximately thirty years Grenada continued to own and operate all its public utilities. Many other towns in the state were without such facilities. When the use of electricity became popular many small towns desired an adequate electric supply, but were either unable or unwilling to finance the construction of a generating plant and distribution system. This desire for current opened the way for the organization of corporations to generate and distribute electricity over high voltage lines to many towns and cities which would grant franchises for such service. Because of the cost of the construction of these facilities it was to the advantage of those companies to be able to obtain franchises from all the towns in the area through which their lines would be constructed. Towns without electric service were glad to grant these franchieses to the power companies operating in their vicinity, but the towns which had already financed and constructed city owned plants were not so anxious to make a change. The power companies had to do a good selling job to these towns. The first step in this selling job was to convince the city officials that it was practical to generate current at one point and then transmit it great distances for use in towns and cities. In order to do this power company officials invited city officials on expense paid jaunts to see power installations at various places. One such trip made by Grenada officials was mentioned in the Grenada Sentinel on March 20, 1925. The paper reported that a party from Grenada headed by Mayor W. J. Jennings was joined by a similar delegation from Winona as guests of the Mississippi Power & Light Company to observe power property in Alabama, including the Gorgas Reserve Steam Plant. In explanation of the purpose of the trip the paper stated: "The Miss. Power Company is one of those figuring on the purchases of Grenada's power plant." Soon thereafter a meeting was called to be held in Grenada in which meeting other towns approacehd by the power company could formulate some sort of concert of opinion relative to the offers made by that company for either franchises where there were no existing city owned power plants, or for franchises and purchase of power plants in those towns which had constructed such plants. Among the towns and cities represented in the Grenada meeting were Grenada, Charleston, Pontotoc, Senatobia, Water Valley, Oxford, Duck Hill and Jackson. Officers representing two of the rival power companies appeared before the representatives attending the meeting, but apparently no decision was reached by the representatives regarding the desirability of the offers made by the power company representatives. The city of Grenada decided to go it alone in their negogations with the companies. They decided to request bids, or proposals, from the companies interested. We know that two companies interested were the Mississippi Power Company, and the Mississippi Power & Light Company, which was the Mississippi affiliate of the Couch power interests which had large interests in Arkansas and Louisana. When the date for the submission of bids arrived the Mississippi Power Company requested additional time in which to submit their proposal. The City Board refused to grant this extension and accepted the propcsal of the Mississippi Power & Light Company. The proposal was for the purchase of the existing power plant and franchise rights. In payment for the plant the Power Company agreed to assume payment of interest and principal on outstanding city bonds in the amount of \$81,000. Not all of the bonds were

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outstanding against the city utilities plant. \$14,500 dollars worth of these bonds were designated as "Water & Light Bonds". Another \$5,000 issue was designated in the same way. Bonds amounting to \$25,000 were designated as "Water, Light, Sewer, Street and Sidewalk" bonds, \$31,500 was identified as School Bonds, and \$1,000 as Street Improvement Bonds. The deed given by the City in May, 1925, stipulated that the city retained all wells, pumps, water distributing system, and was to have continued access to the lot and building which the pumps and wells were located. Under the agreement Grenada was to obtain electric service from a high tension line coming out from the Greenville Properties of the Couch Interests, which property was furnished electric energy generated by that company's hydroelectric developemnt in Arkansas, and its Sterlington Power Generating Plant. The Grenada Power Plant obtained by the company was to serve as a standby plant to be used when there was any interuption in the electricity delivered in Grenada by the power company's high tension line. It was well that this was done because, during the early years of service by the power company, electric storms were responsible for frequent interruptions of service in Grenada. It was only after the power company had built additional lines into Grenada that the service became satisfactory.

Several years before city owned utilities were provided outside capital became interested in a telephone communication system for Grenada. The first public notice of any activity along this line was a news item in the Grenada Sentinel of January 27, 1883. That item read: "We are glad to announce that the Bell Telephone Company has succeeded in establishing an exchange over Captain McCord's store. The convenience of this thing will be more fully realized when our business people begin to use it. Already they have some ten or twelve subscribers, and wires are being stretched to different parts of town for the purpose of bringing in immediate business relationship. We learn that this place will soon be connected with Memphis by phone, an advantage at once apparent to all business men." In March 1883 The Sentinel had news of progress in the matter of long distance communication: "Representatives of Louisana Telephone Company and Memphis Telephone Exchange met in Grenada for the purpose of establishing telephone connection between Grenada and Memphis." Soon an advertisement appeared in which the Louisiana Telephone Company solicited bids on "600 chestnut poles 28 feet long and seven inches in diameter at the smallest end of the poles, said poles to be delivered along the road between Colliversville, Tennessee, and Holly Springs, by way of Mount Pleasnat." A little later another advertisement by the same company appeared soliciting bids on three thousand poles of the same material and dimensions as set out in the first advertisement, these poles to be delivered in Grenada. It would seem that from 1883 to 1895, a period of twelve years, the Bell System rendered satisfactory, or at least acceptable service, but for some reason, in 1895, a charter was issued to The Grenada Telephone Company, a corporation formed by B. L. Roberts, H. W. Latimer, E. Levy and "such other persons as may associate themselves with them." We have been unable to determine if the newly charted company bought out the Bell System, or just went into competition with it. In September the Sentinel notes that the new company has begun installation of phones under the direction of H. W. Latimer, formerly of Canton, but now the efficient manager of Mississippi Cotton Oil Mill. This statement would seem to indicate that the company was installing a new system rather than taking over the property of the Bell Company. The new company furnished service for a period of about three years and then sold out to the Cumberland Telephone Company, which company was engaged in buying up a number of privately owned telephone companies, and consolidating them into one large system. The Cumberland people raised the rates charged for telephone service; business house phones were raised from two dollars to three dollars per month and residential phones from one dollar to one dollar fifty cents per month. Immediately there was an angry reaction on the part of telephone subscribers. The Grenada Sentinel reported: "Many people have had their phones removed, hardly half

a dozen phones now in use." The company survived this reaction and continued to serve Grenada until it became consolidated with the Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph System. In 1896 L. B. James of Sabougla completed arrangements for a telephone line to connect Graysport, Williamsville, Sabougla and Slate Springs with the Grenada Exchange.

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The last utility product to be brought to Grenada was natural gas. During the early years of settlement wood was the chief fuel used for heating purposes. With the arrival of the railroads it became practical to transport coal to Grenada, and there was a gradual increase in its use, although for many years wood remained the primary fuel in use. Kerosene had been used from an early date for lighting purposes and had a limited use as a heating fuel, particularly for use in kitchen stoves. After electricity became available there was a growing use of that source of energy for small heating devices used in small rooms. It would be half a century after the introduction of electric energy as a source of light and power before there would be available in the city another source of heating energy. This would come with the construction of a natural gas transmission line from Greenwood to Grenada. For almost a quarter of a century the Mississippi Power & Light Company has controlled the sale and distribution of electric power. The company did this thru franchise contracts which were negotiated with the city from time to time. In 19h7 this company began negotiations with the city relative to securing from the city a franchise to build a gas distributing system and to sell gas to local consumers. There was much opposition to the proposal. Many people looked upon electricity and natural gas as competing forms of energy, and felt that it would not be wise for one company to control the distribution of both electricity and gas. On December 29, 1947, the City granted a franchise to the Power Company to control the sale of gas in the City, and to construct the necessary gas lines to make gas available to people in all parts of Grenada. On June 12, 1948, work began on the job of extending the gas transmission line from Greenwood to Grenada. 16h employees were engaged in the construction of the line. The Power company would expend approximatelya million dollars on the project. While the transmission line was in the process of construction, there was feverish activity in Grenada. At the time work began on the Greenwood-Grenada line, 18,000 feet of gas mains had been constructed in the town. It was expected that the gas would be brought to Grenada to be available for use in the Fall of 1948. The transmission line was completed to Grenada in mid-September of that year. On the day the gas was to become available for local use, the Chamber of Commerce had a sort of ceremony by which they welcomed the arrival of another form of energy. A special sort of gas burner had been provided for the occasion, and the use of the gas in Grenada was begun by Mayor Knox Pierce igniting a gas flame from that burner.

The Mississippi Power & Light Company operated both the electric and gas distributing systems until March, 1952, when the power company conveyed its gas franchise and distributing system to the Mississippi Valley Gas Company.

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