



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO, OFFICE OF THE CITY  
CLERK, MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES

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**TITLE:**

City Water Board Records, 1918-1995

**DATES:**

1918-1995

**QUANTITY:**

5 ft. of printed material; 1 bound volume

**LANGUAGES:**

English

This collection was processed with the assistance of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

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**ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY:**

George Brackenridge sold his interests in the water company to George Kobusch of St. Louis. At that time the name was changed to the San Antonio Water Supply Company. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Kobusch sold the business to a Belgian syndicate. While it was under foreign ownership, the water company was known as "Compagnie des Eaux de San Antonio" and was managed by the Mississippi Valley Trust Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Partly to recover some of their financial losses from World War I, the Belgians sold the waterworks to a group of local investors in 1920. Contract and rate disagreements marred the relationship between the City and the new water entity. In 1924, the company demanded a rate increase, and since an agreement could not be reached, the new rates were put into effect and the City was enjoined from interfering. This situation prompted the City to issue seven million dollars in revenue bonds and purchase the system outright. On June 1, 1925, the utility became known as the City Water Board (CWB) and its management was placed under a Board of Trustees appointed by the City Council. At the time of purchase, the company was pumping an average of 25 million gallons daily to serve some 38,000 customers. While struggling to develop an adequate potable water supply

system, the City also attempted to address sanitary sewer needs. Mayor Bryan Callaghan II advocated an organized sewage system in 1890, but one was not authorized until 1894. By 1900, the system was fully operational. The original sewage collection effort divided the City into four districts and several sub-districts. A brick outfall main of 36" to 48" carried the flows to a sewage farm near the current site of Stinson Field. In 1897, San Antonio had contracted with a private firm to handle the irrigation and land disposal of the sewage. When downstream irrigators became irate over the increased sewage load in the river, San Antonio contracted with another private corporation for additional sewage disposal. The 1901 contract with the San Antonio Irrigation Company granted exclusive use for irrigation of all sewage present and future, except for those quantities already contracted for by the City of San Antonio. To contain any surplus, a dam was constructed at the south end of Mitchell Lake. The same year the City Water Board was established, the City of San Antonio began preparations for the construction of the Rilling Road sewage treatment plant. In 1930, that facility began operation with a capacity of 25 million gallons per day (MGD). The plan used an activated sludge treatment method and its treated effluent was routed by gravity to Mitchell Lake. Flows into Mitchell Lake quickly reached capacity, especially during days of heavy rainfall. Once the lake capacity was met, releases were made into the Medina River above its confluence with the San Antonio River. Due to complaints by downstream concerns the City took over operation and maintenance of Mitchell Lake. Modifications were made to the Rilling Road Treatment Plant in 1936, 1956, 1958, 1962 and 1966 to raise the facilities capacity to 105 MGD by the end of 1966. During the Depression and the war years the City Water Board was able to keep pace with increasing demand without much difficulty. However, the post-war building boom and the impact of the 1950's drought significantly taxed the Board's capabilities. In the mid 1950's the water operation utilized many widely scattered secondary pumping stations which were designed to serve immediately adjacent neighborhoods. These stations essentially operated independently and did not provide adequate system redundancy. Almost all the CWB pumps were set at elevations which corresponded to 623 feet mean sea level (msl) at the Beverly Lodges monitor well. In August 1956, the monitor well level dropped to 612 feet msl. The City Water Board had started an intensive process of lowering pumps, but the utility still strained to meet citizens' demand. The Board of Trustees had authorized a contract with Black and Veatch Consulting Engineers to evaluate the water system and develop a master plan for improvements in 1954. Black and Veatch offered a series of recommendations which involved massive improvements to the Board's operations. The original bond indenture provided that no additional bonds could be issued until all of the 1925 bonds had been retired. Since some of

the outstanding bonds had a 1965 maturity date, no funds other than revenues were available for capital improvements financing. In order to modernize the water utility, a \$21 million bond issue was approved by an election on June 22, 1956. During the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's both the water and wastewater systems continued to expand as customer demand increased. In 1965, the City built the Leon Creek Treatment Plant in order to ease the burden on Rilling Road. This facility had an initial capacity of 12 MGD and was later upgraded to a permitted capacity of 35 MGD. In 1970, the City added the Salado Creek Plant with an initial capacity of 24 MGD, and subsequently upgraded it to 36 MGD. Throughout much of this period, the City Water Board was involved in negotiations or court actions involving attempts to secure a supplemental water supply. In 1979, a committee established by the City Planning Commission reported to the City Council that San Antonio should pursue the necessary federal and state permits to construct San Antonio's first surface water supply project known as the Applewhite Reservoir. Shortly thereafter, the Council passed a resolution directing the Water Board to initiate the permitting process. The Water Board received the state permit from the Texas Water Commission in 1982, and the 404 Permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on August 28, 1989. Construction on the Lake began a few months later. On May 4, 1991, the citizens of San Antonio, by a narrow margin, voted to discontinue the Applewhite Project. In the following months the Board of Trustees of the City Water Board voted to sue the City over the legality of the election. Court action subsequently upheld the City's position and Applewhite construction was halted. While water issues garnered the most attention, wastewater continued to be a demanding subject. During the 1970's and 1980's the 208 Wastewater Policy Advisory Committee worked diligently to address the area's needs. A significant result of that effort was the City's decision to construct the Dos Rios Wastewater Treatment Plant and to abandon the problem-plagued Rilling Road facility. Dos Rios opened in 1987 at a capacity of 83 MGD. The City also purchased the Medio Creek Plant from Lackland Water Company in 1991. This plant was built in the early 1970's, with an initial capacity of 5.5 mgd and has since been expanded to 6.5 mgd. This acquisition allowed the City to provide service to the rapidly growing northwest portion of Bexar County. No longer used for treatment, Mitchell Lake has been declared a bird refuge, and the City of San Antonio has assisted in the planning and the implementation of many ecologically sound and aesthetically pleasing improvements to the lake and surrounding properties. In 1989 the City of San Antonio asked the State Legislature to pass a bill which would permit the creation of a district devoted to reuse of the municipality's effluent. Senate Bill 1667, which established the Alamo Water Conservation and Reuse District, was signed by the Governor on June 16, 1989. In 1991, the District

applied for a permit to divert water from the Leon Creek Plant for reuse purposes. The City Water Board opposed that action due to its possible impact on the Applewhite permit. The controversy brought on by competing water agencies prompted the City Council to vote in December, 1991 to establish a single utility responsible for water, wastewater, storm water, and reuse. The refinancing of \$635 million in water and wastewater bonds made the merger possible. A new entity, The San Antonio Water System (SAWS), became a reality on May 19, 1992. SAWS was created through the consolidation of three predecessor agencies: the City Water Board (the previous city-owned water supply utility); the City Wastewater Department (a department of the city government responsible for sewage collection and treatment); and the Alamo Water Conservation and Reuse District (an independent city agency created to develop a system for reuse of the city's treated wastewater). SAWS also owns and operates as a separate utility the former City Water Board's chilled water and steam plant, which is a centralized heating and cooling system for the buildings in and around HemisFair Park. In the consolidation of the previous agencies, SAWS was also assigned the responsibility for complying with federal permit requirements for treatment of the city's storm water runoff. In addition, the water resources planning staff of the City Planning Department was realigned to the new agency, to give it a complete package of related functions. An important component of SAWS' planning role is the responsibility to protect the purity of the city's water supply from the Edwards Aquifer, including enforcing certain city ordinances related to subdivision development.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT:**

This collection consists of various types of financial reports studies, subject files, and city council files pertaining to the city water board.

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**ARRANGEMENT:**

- I. Reports
  - a) Annual reports
  - b) Annual budget reports
  - c) Annual financial reports
  - d) Interim financial reports
- II. Assorted reports/studies
- III. City council files pertaining to the City Water Board
- IV. Subject files

**RESTRICTIONS:**

Unrestricted access.

**PREFERRED CITATION:**

[Box #, Folder title], City Water Board Records, 1918-1995, San Antonio Municipal Archives.

**INDEX TERMS**

**Organizations:**

- San Antonio City Water Board.
- San Antonio City Council.
- San Antonio Water System (Tex.)

**Subjects:**

- Edwards Aquifer (Tex.)
  - Water quality—Texas—San Antonio.
  - Municipal water supply—Texas—San Antonio.
  - Waterworks—Texas—San Antonio.
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Report on financial requirements: 1982-1985

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Construction program and financing plan: 1976-1977, 1976

Report to the San Antonio City Council on origin, effects, and  
future effects of ordinance no. 42018, 1973

Comprehensive water rate study, 1980

Comprehensive water rate study—executive study, 1980

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**Box 1** Report on combination of Water Works and sanitary sewer systems of the City of San Antonio, 1962  
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**Box 2** City Council discussion on City Water Board policy, 1974-1976  
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