

## WATER, WATER, WATER

Starting in 1874 with the arrival of Josh Bailey and friends, the need for increasing amounts of water has concerned the growing population of the Gila valley.

The proximity of Safford and the other small communities to the Gila River was no coincidence. People needed water for themselves, their livestock and their crops and the river water was constant and plentiful.

The early inhabitants of Safford would make daily trips to the river to renew their water needs. Because of the constant Indian threat, it was usually the men that would make the trip and often accompanied by sons or neighbors to stand guard. There was a massive mesquite tree forest between Safford and the river and adversaries could hide and attack almost anywhere along the route.

The men would fill their wood barrels atop the wagons for themselves and others in the community they were responsible for. It was not long before enterprising men decided a dollar was to be made and would charge fellow citizens for the convenience of having them do the work and deliver the water to the people in town. They would also charge the town or businesses for filling the watering troughs located on the streets.

It was in October 1874 that the digging of the Sunflower canal was started near Safford and ran parallel to the River. It was located running east and west about where the Pepsi cola plant is today. The Sunflower supplied water to the farms and of course brought drinking water closer to the people of Safford.

It was not long before a ditch from the Sunflower was dug running north and south through the center of Safford and was located just east of Central Avenue.

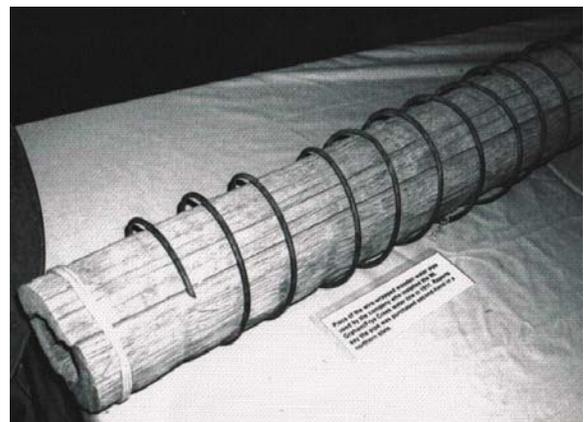
Almost every household would dip buckets in this supplier for household needs for many years. This ditch not only supplied water but also various diseases that swept the community because the water looked clean enough although often muddy and was consumed without boiling by many.

The early wells in and around Safford contained brackish, mineral laden water that could be used for crops but not for drinking.

Although often discussed and planned, the first water company was not constructed and operational until 1912. The first water supplying pipes arrived by train and came in ten foot sections of redwood in two pieces. These were joined and tarred and wrapped in heavy bailing wire and were laid above ground along Relation Street in Safford. It was up to the property owner to tap into the pipes at his own expense and under the supervision of the company.

The water supply did improve over the years with wells in Artesia and the flow from Bonita Creek being utilized. Attached is a picture of the wire-wrapped wooden water pipe on display.

A section of the original pipe can be seen at the Graham County Historical Society.



Piece of wire-wrapped wooden water pipe used by the company who installed the Mt. Graham /Frye Creek water line in 1911.

Story and Photo by Danny Haralson