

### ***THREE MAYORS AND CITIZENS COMBINE TO DISPLAY WATER TANK BALL***

The efforts of three Mayors and generous civic minded citizens results in the top ball (finial) crowning the original Lucedale water tank being placed on display in the Lucedale City Park Northeast of the Library and just North of the location of the original tank.

Mayor Al Rouse with a keen sense of historical significance preserved the ball from the tank when it was demolished in 1970. The ball was given to him by D. S. "Dude" McLeod who contracted to remove the old tank and salvage the steel.

Mayor Rouse wanted the ball exhibited in a visible place for the enjoyment and education of the citizens of Lucedale and the surrounding area. This led him to donate it to his close friend Evern Malone whose State Farm Insurance Office was on Main Street just West of Winter Street. Mayor Rouse also had a marble plaque prepared that gave the history of the ball. Evern had the ball mounted in a concrete foundation with the marble plaque and a flag pole. The ball was displayed on Main Street by Evern and his wife Ruth until their retirement. Evern and Ruth then had the ball, plaque, pole and foundation transported to their home in the Shipman Community by Mike Polk. The ball was mounted on a rather large concrete foundation with the flag pole and the marble plaque resulting in a bulky unwieldy heavy load that required the full limits of Mike's wrecker truck to move. Evern and Ruth prominently displayed the ball in their yard and mounted bird houses on the flag pole.

Mayor Dayton Whites visited with Evern and Ruth where he was shown the ball and monument. During their conversation, Evern and Ruth agreed to donate the ball and monument to the City for public display. Mayor Whites, a Lucedale history buff with an appreciation for the gift, agreed and made plans for the relocation to Lucedale after the completion of some ongoing City projects. Time and an election stifled his intentions.

I wrote an article entitled "A Failed Water Tank Fall" that was published in the George County Times earlier this year. After this article ran, several people told of the ball being exhibited at Evern Malone's Office on Main Street. I called Evern and Ruth to discuss the ball. They graciously invited me to their home where I was able to view the ball and marble plaque. While visiting with Evern and Ruth they told of Mayor Whites visit and their offer to tender the ball and monument to the City. They said the offer still stood. I promised them I would discuss their offer with Mayor Doug Lee.

Mayor Lee was enthusiastic about this symbolic piece of Lucedale history being returned to public display. Mayor Lee and the City Public Works Superintendent traveled with me to the Malone home and were able to view the ball and determine the difficulty in removing and transporting it to the Lucedale City Park. Evern and Ruth repeated their desire to give the ball to the City for public display. The City of Lucedale recently removed and transported the ball to a prepared display site in the City Park.

Thanks to three visionary history "minded" Mayors and generous citizens, the historic old water tank ball will be on public display in the Lucedale City Park for all to enjoy.

An unveiling and dedication was held on July 18, 2016 at the site in the Lucedale City Park.

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## A SHORT WATER TANK FALL

In the mid to late 1960's the City of Lucedale embarked on a project to upgrade the water and sewer systems. Under the leadership of Alderman John Peters who was in charge of the Water and Sewer Systems for the city and with the able assistance of Mayor W. A. (Al) Rouse the City was able to obtain grants and loans for extensive improvement and extension to the systems. This work also included the first sewer lagoon on Cowart Street and the new elevated hydrospheroid water tank. This newfangled tank was one of the first erected in South Mississippi and served as a symbol of the progressive leadership in Lucedale. The citizens of Lucedale and George County were proud of this new icon showcasing our innovative community. The new tank was erected in 1968 and 1969.

The new tank had a capacity of 250,000 gallons the old tank had a capacity of 50,000 gallons. Due to the age, small capacity and deterioration of the old tank it was decided to have it removed.

It saddened me to see this long familiar landmark removed from the skyline. During the 1930's the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey (USGS) performed extensive mapping and monumenting of George County. Temporary tall towers, one inside of the other, were erected all around the County. The inside tower was for a transit theodolite and the outside tower was for the surveyors. The weight of the surveyors moving around the tower would not affect the transit theodolite on the separate tower, which allowed the measurement of very accurate angles that would be read and recorded numerous times to assure extreme accuracy. This work was so well done it is still used today in intricate GPS surveys and for mapping (Google Maps are based in part on these surveys). The original water tank was located at the site of the Public Library on the South side of Park Street and resulted in a USGS marker being set at the tank site that still exists today near the Northwest corner of the Library. This old tank site is the second highest land in George County with an elevation of 320 feet or so. The highest land in George County is one-quarter mile NW of the Rocky Creek Catfish House/Sand Hill Baptist Church with an elevation of 330 feet or so. Most of the USGS markers set in and around George County referenced the City of Lucedale Water tank which served as a steady visible beacon for these beneficial surveys. The tank was topped with a distinctive finial of a round ball which made an excellent survey target. The elevation of the top of the tank was above 400 feet which made it visible from most all high areas of George County that were used for the USGS towers. The City and County had the foresight to protect and preserve the important USGS marker that resulted from the location of the tank and the USGS surveys. Unfortunately, many of these valuable markers out in the County have been lost to dozers, progress and ignorance of their importance.

The new hydrospheroid tank was erected 150 feet or so North of the existing tank on City Park property that had been given to the City *as a park* by the Luce Family many years earlier. The Luce heirs, Dwain, Jex and Doug Sr. signed a release that allowed the City to erect the new tank on the park property. The ground elevation was a little lower, but the site allowed for safe construction and efficient connection to the existing water system pipes.

Mr. D. S. (Dude) McLeod, a local scrap dealer and entrepreneur won the bid for dismantling the old tank. The tank sat on 4 large steel legs approximately one hundred feet tall and was about ten feet in diameter by twenty or more feet tall. Dude came to my office to hire me to measure the height of the tank "the boy scout way" with my survey instruments, which was a rather simple task. He explained that he was going to have Harold Landrum of Modern Welding to partially cut the North two legs and have the tank tied off with a cable from a winch truck anchored to the North in the Park area. The winch truck would pull on the tank structure while Harold cut the South two legs with an acetylene torch. This would allow him to fall the tank on vacant land to the North and away from nearby

buildings facing Main Street (US 98).

I made an estimate of the cost for the survey and suggested to Dude that it would be cheaper, easier, quicker and more accurate if he purchased a 100 foot tape and had someone climb the tank for the measurement. I even offered to lend him a tape. He thanked me profusely and went on his way.

I noticed that over the next few days Park Street was closed off to traffic and J. W. (Jake) Griffin, a local contractor was hauling dirt and placing it on Park Street just North of the tank. Jake told me that Dude hired him to place a dirt pad to protect Park Street pavement from the impact of the falling tank, which I thought that was a good idea.

In January, 2016 I wrote of the tank fall and it was published in the George County Times. After it ran in the paper, Ronnie Thompson told me his father, W. R. Thompson an expert rigger well experienced in erecting and demolition of steel towers, was in charge of the demolition. Ronnie, Boney Thompson (brother of W. R. Thompson), Chester Steede and Herbie Howard were all employed by W. R. for the demolition. W. R. backed his winch truck "Little Green" up to the tank. Boney and Chester pulled the one-half inch diameter cable attached to the winch on Little Green and climbed the tower while manhandling the steel cable. Boney and Chester seeing nothing substantial to connect the cable to ran it all the way around the tank utilizing a narrow walkway at the base of the tank 100 feet or so up. They then secured the cable "noose" with a shackle. W. R. and Herbie with Ronnie in tow pulled Little Green North of Park Street out into the City Park. Herbie said he operated the winch by applying firm pressure while Harold notched the North two legs and then cut the South two legs.

Thus, Dude had everything in order and a crowd gathered to watch the big show. There was the tank and the large cushion of dirt on Park Street. Just like clockwork Herbie on the Little Green was applying pressure with the winch and Harold cut the legs according to Dude's plan under the expert eye of rigger W. R., then with a swoosh and a huge bang *the tank fell short of the street!*

When the tank fell it burst open and had a dead squirrel in it, much to the displeasure of the onlookers who had recently been drinking water from the tank!

Ronnie and Boney both said when the tank started falling the North legs buckled and caused the tank to fall short. When the tank started falling Herbie thought it was going to fall on Little Green and he bailed off and ran further into the park woodlands.

I never had the courage to talk to Dude about the tank measurement and wondered how he got it so wrong. I felt that I "shoulda took" his money and saved him some, as the survey would have been considerably cheaper than hauling and removing all that dirt. I now know that my years of doubt were unfounded as the northern legs buckled and caused the tank to fall short. Boney said if the legs had not buckled, the tank would have fallen on the cushion which means *Dude's measurements were correct*. This all should have been filmed!

After the original story was published in the George County Times, I was asked what happened to the finial that was on top of the tank that was the target of the many readings by surveyors with theodolite/transits? After a few days and with some prompting, I remembered it being at Evorn Malone's State Farm Insurance Office that was located just east of the Pizza Inn on West Main Street across from Century Bank. I called Evorn and he said former Mayor W. A. (Al) Rouse gave it to him along with a marble plaque and he displayed it in front of his Office. When he sold his office he had Mike Polk bring it and the block of concrete it was embedded in to his home where it currently resides.

On February 10, 2016 I visited with Evern and his wife Ruth at their home in Southeast George County. Evern and Ruth told me that former Mayor Dayton Whites visited them and Evern told Dayton that he instructed Ruth to give the finial to the city upon his death. Ruth told Evern that he should go ahead and give it to the city while he was living, Evern agreed. Dayton said the City forces were busy in the Park, but as soon as time permitted they would transport the finial for public display in the City. Apparently, time did not permit before Dayton left office. Evern and Ruth assured me the offer to the city for the public display still stands.

The marble plaque given to Evern by Al states: "This ball is from the original water tank in Lucedale, Miss. 1908 – 1969".

The finial is a round cast iron ball approximately 12 inches in diameter with four 2 inch holes around the center and one on top of the ball. The ball has a shell thickness of one-half inch or so. The holes were most likely to allow for air to be expelled when water was pumped into the tank and also allow for air to flow into the tank as water was drained out. The holes look just right for a curious squirrel to enter in search of shelter or food after a long climb up the structure and tank.

This corrected story is based on my earlier contacts with D. S. "Dude" Mcleod, J. W. "Jake" Griffin and Harold Landrum. My later conversations were with Louise Landrum (widow of Harold Landrum who told me she could not sleep the night before Harold was to cut the tower legs), Ronnie Thompson, Boney Thompson and Chester Steede (Chester said he could remember the job, but not the details. He said it was so long ago *that it was before he married*). Ronnie also gave input from Herbie Howard.

Wayne Brown, January 28, 2016 Revised February 9, 2016.

On February 25, 2016, Mayor Doug Lee and Public Works Director, Bobby Howard and I (Wayne Brown) drove down to Evern and Ruth's home to view the finial/ball monument. Evern led us out to the monument and assured us that he and Ruth were willing to gift the monument to Lucedale for public display. Bobby dug around it and assessed the equipment needed to remove and haul it to the City. On Wednesday, March 3, Bobby and his crew moved the monument to the city and deposited near the existing water tank, which is 200 feet or so North of the Original tank. The finial/ball will now reside in the city where it first made its appearance in 1908 according to the plaque on the monument. Thanks to Al Rouse, Evern, Ruth, Dayton Whites, Mayor Doug Lee and the City public works department employees.

Revised March 3, 2016/July 18, 2016