

George W. Brackenridge and His Control of San Antonio's
Water Supply, 1869-1905

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Trinity University in Partial Fulfillment

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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Colonel George Washington Brackenridge, a towering, full-bearded man of many moods and contradictions, became an outstanding financier in San Antonio after the Civil War. His business pursuits encompassed the San Antonio First National Bank, the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company, the San Antonio Express Publishing Company, the cotton firm of Brackenridge, Bates and Company, the First National Bank of Austin, and the San Antonio Water Works Company.

Business astuteness enabled him to devote a fortune as well as his abounding energies to the education of the masses. Success of the University of Texas was paramount among his ambitions, but other schools also profited from his guidance. Through his numerous gifts and services, Brackenridge became one of Texas' greatest exponents of

education, especially education for women and Negroes.

Local citizens frequently questioned Brackenridge's right to own and control the water supply of San Antonio, charging that an abundance of pure, free water was the life of a city. As early as 1869 the Brackenridge properties enclosed the headsprings of the San Antonio River, the water supply of the city until 1890. However, Brackenridge's efforts to return ownership of the "head of the river" to the city in 1872 failed. After he acquired control of the crippled Water Works Company in 1879, established by J. B. LaCoste in 1877, struggles spasmodically erupted between the city government and the water works' staunch president. Suffering severe shortages of funds in 1880 and 1893 and unable to meet rental agreements on fire hydrants to the Water Works Company, the city council canceled all water contracts. Amended contracts between the firm and the city resulted. Rejection by local citizens of the proposed city purchase of the water company in 1890 terminated the lengthy struggle which erupted in 1886. Through these turbulent years the firm surely would have failed without Brackenridge's knowledge and financial advice. He almost alone pulled the venture together and made it work.

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WATER SUPPLY, 1869-1905

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PREFACE

The ancient philosophers stated that four basic elements were earth, air, fire, and water. In 1951 Leonard A. Scheele, Surgeon General of the United States Health Service, summed up the present-day importance of water: "The domestic use of water is universally classified as the most beneficial use of that resource. Water is essential to life--the life of a city as well as the life of a human being. Without water, a man dies. Without water, a community faces the same fate."¹

A goodly supply of pure spring water at the "head of the river" and the San Pedro Springs form the waters of the San Antonio River. This relatively abundant supply of pure water, winding its way through the valley, made San Antonio the garden spot of South Texas and formed the basis for a pioneer settlement. Water carried from the river or shallow wells was adequate for a frontier settlement, but not for a thriving city. Dense population created the problems of cholera and pestilence, and the entrance of the railroad created a denser population. Unpolluted water became essential for survival.

¹ Quoted in Nelson Blake, Water for the Cities: A History of the Urban Water Supply in the United States (Syracuse, 1956), 265.

Many community leaders recognized the necessity of a water works company, but the city did not provide the service. Not until after the Civil War did George Washington Brackenridge appear on the scene to render this basic need.

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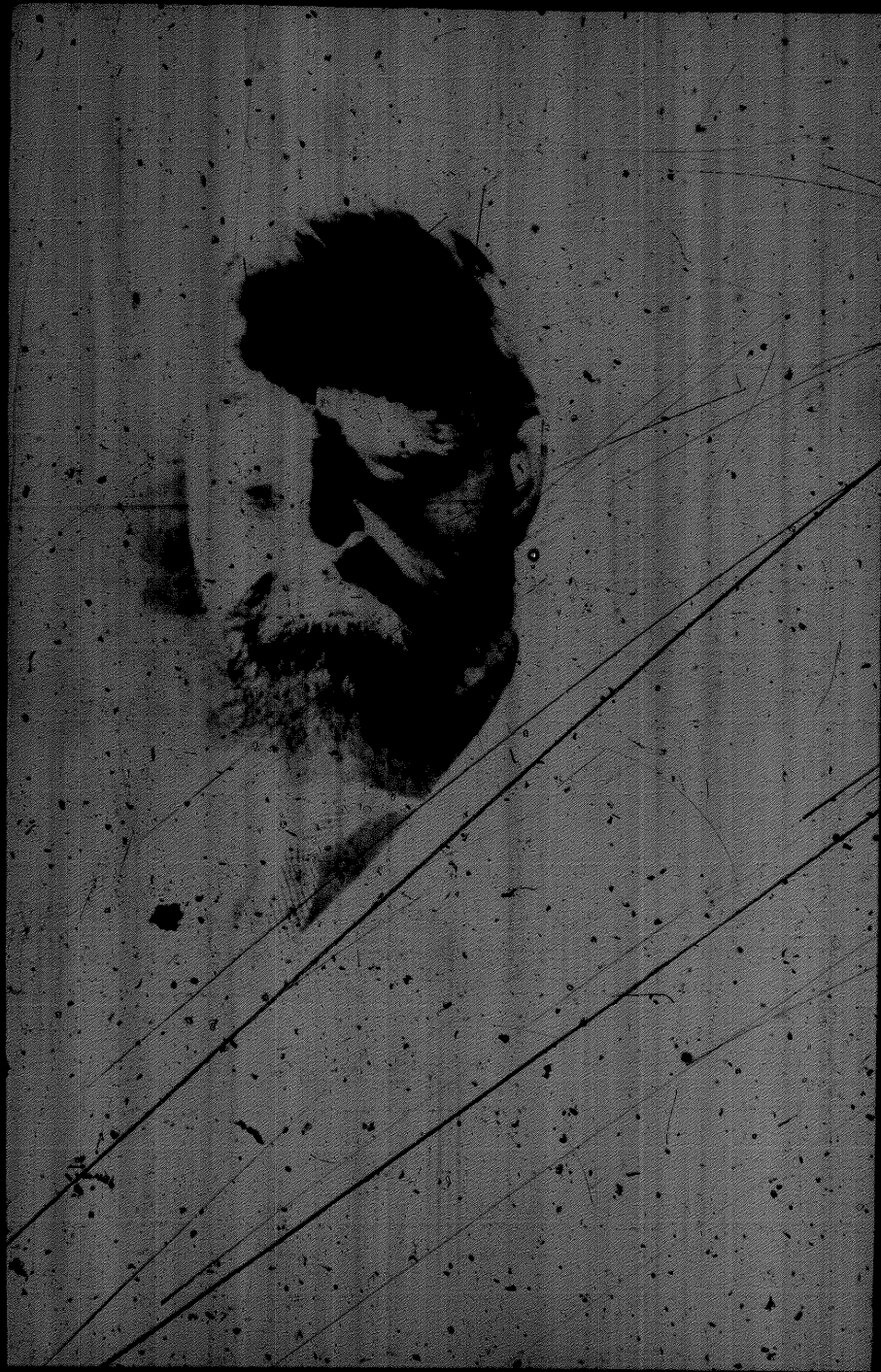
CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION: COLONEL GEORGE W. BRACKENRIDGE

Colonel George Washington Brackenridge was the towering full-bearded man of many moods and contradictions to whom fell the challenging task of building the San Antonio Water Works Company. For a period of over fifty years he played a dominant role in shaping the economic, political, educational, and social development of San Antonio and the State of Texas. Son of John Adams and Isabella McCulloch Brackenridge, he was born in Warwick County, Indiana, on January 14, 1832. His father was a native of the District of Columbia; his mother, of Kentucky. They married and settled down in Indiana where their four sons--John Thomas, George, James Adams, and Robert--and two daughters--Lenora and Eleanor--were born.¹

Young George's paternal grandfather presided for forty years as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Washington and served as chaplain of the United States Senate for twenty years. John Brackenridge, George's father, was

¹ A. W. Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, 1(April, 1913), 103; Walter Prescott Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, 2 vols. (Austin, 1952), I, 202.



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a distinguished lawyer in Indiana, "whose eloquence and advice inspired the ambition of the farm boy--Abe Lincoln."² Although John Brackenridge was an ardent Whig, he served in the Democratic controlled legislature of Indiana; and, as a presidential elector, he strenuously campaigned for Henry Clay. It was only natural that the "descendant of a long line of ancestry which can be traced east and west and south by the churches and school houses they left behind" became a staunch supporter of the United States of America.³

Young George, who attended Hanover College, the University of Indiana, and Harvard University, earned degrees in engineering and law from Harvard. When the Brackenridge family moved to Jackson County, Texas, in 1851, the young graduate launched his business career by working in his father's general store. During this time his recreation included skiff riding, reading books, or entertaining young people in his father's great white mansion along the Navidad River. In later years both he and his brother Tom welcomed their friends to this same locale aboard "The

² Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 103.

³ Ibid.

Navidad," their comfortable boat which provided a pleasant change for busy lives sailing along the coast of Lavaca Bay.⁴

During these carefree years preceding the war, George, who had diversified his business pursuits, became a great land baron in West Texas as did his friend Samuel Augustus Maverick,⁵ but by 1857 three years of drought destroyed the young landowner's fortune. He sacrificed his saddle horse to terminate his last debt and, lacking the price for stage fare, walked back to the family home.⁶

Jackson County provided a new role for Brackenridge. He became county surveyor and devoted his free time to the life of an "embryo scientist" with his books and instruments housed in a private laboratory at the pleasant family home,⁷ but the peaceful years were interrupted by the rapidly approaching war. Brackenridge, though a devoted Texan by this time, supported the Union; his three brothers championed the cause of the Confederacy. When unfavorable public sentiment mounted against him and an enraged mob swept down on the Unionist at his home during the evening hours,

⁴ Ibid., 104; Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 202.

⁵ Albert Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio (San Antonio, 1955), 53.

⁶ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 104

⁷ Ibid.

he escaped into the dark night on a good black horse. From there he fled on a skiff and was rescued by a federal gun-boat.⁸

Buying and shipping cotton along the Rio Grande and clerking on a steanship filled the next two years for the restless wanderer. When war came Brackenridge's father, who shared his son's feeling towards the Union, gave George a letter of introduction to a former student, President Abraham Lincoln, who in his youth frequently had borrowed law books from the elder Brackenridge's library.⁹ Receiving an appointment as a treasury agent of the United States, Brackenridge served in New Orleans following its Union capture. In performance of his duties the agent handled millions of dollars and received financial training; however, he continually lacked personal funds, having devoted his salary to the support of southern Union refugees, prisoners of war, or the employment of friends. One of his own brothers was a prisoner who received Brackenridge's aid.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.; Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 202; J. Evetts Haley, George W. Littlefield, Texan (Norman, 1943), 218-19. Years later when Brackenridge deeded land to the University of Texas, he included a peculiar provision that, if the land were not used by the university, it would revert to the people of Jackson County. The reason given for the reversion clause was that Brackenridge wanted to show these people his gratitude for their failure to catch and kill him.

⁹ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

¹⁰ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge." The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 104.

During his tenure as an agent for the government, he played a part in one of the most intriguing pages of American history--the rise and fall of Emperor Maximilian. President Lincoln summoned Brackenridge to Washington and entrusted him with a message to Benito Juárez, who was attempting to free Mexico from the "Austrian yoke" by aid of poorly equipped and scattered bands of his countrymen. Brackenridge carried Lincoln's verbal message that the Union would "adhere to the Monroe Doctrine" and support the movement for Maximilian's overthrow. Whether or not this aid extended beyond these assurances the courier never disclosed, but two years after Lincoln's death, Maximilian was executed and Juárez became the liberator of Mexico.¹¹

At the conclusion of the Civil War, George became head of the Brackenridge clan and with some reluctance assumed the management of his father's store. With funds obtained from the sale of cotton--which his father had taken during the war in place of Confederate money--he improved the family finances and in 1866 formed the cotton firm of Brackenridge, Bates, and Company in San Antonio.¹² Shortly thereafter with funds borrowed from Charles W. Stillman, the New York financier and an old friend from Brackenridge's Rio Grande days, the colonel opened the San Antonio First

¹¹ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

¹² Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 202.

National Bank and began his forty-six years of service as president.¹³

The Brackenridge bank was the first national bank in Southwest Texas, established only three short years after the formation of the system of national banking; consequently, San Antonio's first national bank, one of the first four national banks founded in Texas during the year 1866, was a pioneer institution in the nation as well as in the state and served as a federal depository.¹⁴

The new institution was originally housed in the French Building opposite the courthouse. Its board of directors, selected at the inaugural meeting of stockholders, included George Brackenridge, Louis Zork, Thomas H. Stribling, Edward Degener, David Bell, Isaiah A. Paschal, and August Nette. John Thomas Brackenridge, George's older brother, served as the first cashier.¹⁵ Other distinctive directors who later served during the bank's long history were Dr. Ferdinand Herff, D. A. Dueler, Mrs. Thomas Stribling, and

¹³ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 104.

¹⁴ Claude Aniol (comp.), San Antonio and Your First National Bank Through the Years 1866-1953 (San Antonio, 1953), 1.

¹⁵ Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, New Encyclopedia of Texas, 4 vols. (Dallas, n.d.), I, 44; Aniol (comp.), San Antonio and Your First National Bank Through the Years 1866-1953, 1; Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 54.

Miss Eleanor Brackenridge, George's youngest sister.¹⁶

Following the initial meeting, the board of directors elected Brackenridge president and Paschal secretary. Immediately the new president departed for Washington, D. C., to obtain a federal charter which was secured on July 30, 1866. Returning to San Antonio, Brackenridge met with the board of directors and granted the new corporation a loan of \$57,000 at seven per cent interest. The doors to the bank opened sometime between November 1 and November 5, the exact date not being known, with \$125,000 capital.¹⁷

Both Brackenridge and his friends prospered as the bank, fulfilling a definite public need and aided by Brackenridge's eastern connections, flourished. Soon the firm had outgrown its quarters and moved into its second home, the Eager Building, located between West Commerce Street and Main Plaza. A third bank location was on the northwest corner of Commerce and St. Mary's Street. In 1886 the bank built its Islamic structure, designed by Brackenridge and Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz of New York City, and moved into its present location.¹⁸ In the files of the new

¹⁶ Davis and Grobe, New Encyclopedia of Texas, I, 44.

¹⁷ Aniol (comp.), San Antonio and Your First National Bank Through the Years 1866-1953, 1-13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2-3; James Pearson Newcomb, The Alamo City (San Antonio, 1926), 87-88; Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 53-54; San Antonio Evening Paper, June 8, 1886.

structure Brackenridge preserved all important letters, documents, and records pertaining to the development of the San Antonio First National Bank, and frequently he and the other bank officials referred to the historical information for continued inspiration.¹⁹ In June, 1945, twenty-five years after its founder's death, the bank directors changed the firm's name to the First National Bank of San Antonio.²⁰

The prosperous banker, who referred to the silver dollar as an "infamous fraud" and claimed that the dollar was worth only seventy-five cents,²¹ became famous throughout the business world for his financial wizardry, and railroad magnates, such as Edward H. Harriman of the Union Pacific, frequently consulted him on railroad financing.²² His association in business with the National City Bank of New York City eventually led to the offer of the presidency of this, the largest bank of the United States, but he refused the honor. He preferred a modest existence in Texas among

¹⁹ George W. Brackenridge to John T. Brackenridge, March 7, 1888, Letter and Business Records of Major John T. Brackenridge, Austin, Texas, banker, being chiefly his correspondence with business associates and his brother George, 1880-1905 (Eugene C. Barker Library, Austin).

²⁰ Aniol (comp.), San Antonio and Your First National Bank Through the Years 1866-1953, I.

²¹ San Antonio Evening Paper, September 29, 1886.

²² San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

his friends and familiar surroundings.²³

As Brackenridge amassed a larger and larger fortune, his interests grew more diversified. He served as a director of the Express Publishing Company and headed the San Antonio Gas Light Company, the Water Works Company, the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company, and the First National Bank of Austin.

The San Antonio Gas Light Company, organized in 1859, did not furnish services for the city until 1866. By 1872, however, the gas works were out-dated. In the reorganizational meeting, the directors elected Brackenridge president, J. H. Kampmann vice president, and E. A. Florian secretary. Other directors of the firm included E. Guilbeau, August Nette, and H. P. Howard.²⁴

Brackenridge rose to the challenge of renovating the crippled firm. The directors approved their president's policy to assess all capital stock holders of the firm fifteen per cent for rebuilding and repairing the works. The assessments were to be paid in three installments on September 15, October 15, and November 15. With these funds Brackenridge hired Syvester Watts of Missouri to act as the agent of the board of directors in the purchasing of necessary material and the hiring of labor to place the company in good order.²⁵

²³ San Antonio Express, January 2, 1921.

²⁴ San Antonio Daily Express, March 9, 1872.

²⁵ Ibid.

The success of the firm was assured with Brackenridge's guidance and with the later provision of electrical lighting by the firm.

Following his failure in 1872 to sell the city "the head of the river," Brackenridge financed the San Antonio Water Works Company and served as its president from 1879 to 1905. This struggle is the subject of the following chapters.

In 1876 he founded and served as president of the First National Bank of Austin, a role assumed by John T. Brackenridge in 1877. Needing a firm to assume all business matters unsuitable for a commercial bank, Brackenridge founded the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company in 1892. Directors of the loan and trust company included Mr. Brackenridge, Dr. Ferdinand Herff, Charles Hugo, Friedrich Groos, A. B. Frank, George H. Kaley, H. D. Kampmann, Thomas H. Franklin, John Fraser, W. Meuermann, T. C. Frost, and Ben A. Stribling.²⁶

Brackenridge did not enter into all his financial undertakings for personal gain; some he instigated solely to bolster the economic status of the community or state. Many times he traveled at personal expense to Philadelphia and Baltimore to interest railway firms in building a railroad line to San Antonio. When the city voted to accept the

²⁶ Ellis and Grobe, New Encyclopedia of Texas, I, 44.

proposition from the Gulf West Texas and Pacific Railroad in 1872 to give San Antonio a road, the people exchanged \$500,000 in county bonds for an equal amount of railroad stock. The president of the railroad asked for a cash subscription of \$100,000 to be given to the company by rich citizens or the railroad would stop at Cuero. Brackenridge donated \$2,500 to the cause. He believed that once a single railroad entered the city that others would follow.²⁷

As a civic leader his sound advice as well as his financial aid was sought. When the city fathers planned to expend \$150,000 on street improvements in 1882, Brackenridge advanced the following precautions:

I feel as much interest in public improvements for the city as almost anyone. But before we proceed to work on a large scale, I suggest the employment of experts to prepare plans and specifications of the works necessary to be done for consideration and action upon by the city council. Competent engineers could be employed to determine the grade, sewerage, character of surface work, estimates of costs, etc. The available material we have for paving is best. Proper sewerage, I think, will save much valuable time and trouble. I am in favor of unlimited improvements, and am willing to pay my share of the taxes to enable the city to do the work. The plans of Mr. Lockwood and Mr. Story are vague and not matured sufficiently to give a proper idea of what they intend to do, but I am glad they are willing to make a beginning. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars expended now on city improvements will be worth to us at least a million in a few years to come.²⁸

²⁷ San Antonio Daily Express, April 24, 1872; ibid., July 2, 1872; Mary Olivia Handy, History of Fort Sam Houston (San Antonio, 1951), 25.

²⁸ San Antonio Daily Express, February 26, 1882.

In 1885 he donated \$5,000 and the right of way for the construction of River Avenue, now Broadway. An additional \$5,000 came from other citizens. When the city ran short of funds, the colonel advanced \$800, without interest, to complete the road. Although the sum paid by the city was only \$800,²⁹ attacks on the colonel claimed that he had had the city pay for a road which would benefit only him.³⁰

As Brackenridge built his various enterprises into a financial empire, attacks against him by the city administration and local citizens were not rare. Frequently suffering a shortage of funds and unable to meet interest payments to the San Antonio First National Bank or rental agreements on fire hydrants to the Water Works Company, the city leaders would revoke all payments to his firms and would charge that Brackenridge was a monopolist, tyrant, and unscrupulous businessman. Patiently Brackenridge would attempt to overcome all obstacles and provide terms by which the city could legally discharge its obligations, but the councilmen, sometimes encouraged by Brackenridge's enemies and by the San Antonio Light in their struggles against "the monopolist," would not immediately submit to arbitration. At these times the enraged businessman would

²⁹ San Antonio Express, January 20, 1921

³⁰ San Antonio Evening Paper, July 29, 1886.

abruptly file suit against the city. Public condemnation would mount against him, but Brackenridge remained silent, refusing to publicly justify himself or to add to the petty bickering. He did not care what people thought of him, and those who met him in the transaction of business never knew his true character. Of the many battles which erupted between the Water Works Company and the city, only the suit filed in 1880 actually came to trial. Once his rage had subsided, Brackenridge offered terms so favorable that he and the city government amicably settled their differences out of court.³¹

Keenly interested in politics all his life, and nominally a Republican, he did not hesitate to support Democratic candidates in whom he had confidence but fought machine politicians.³² Except for his terms as a member of the Board of Regents of the state university and the San Antonio School Board, Brackenridge never held public office in Texas. In the city election of 1902, three candidates running for

³¹ "Journal District Court, Bexar County (Tex.), Vol. J, September, 1879-December, 1881," Case 559, June 3, 1880, pp. 264-65; William Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History (San Antonio, 1890), 84; S. G. Newton, The Water Works Contract, Opinion of City Attorney S. G. Newton, Delivered to the Mayor and Council of the City of San Antonio, on January 4, 1886 (n.p., 1886), 11-13; San Antonio Daily Light, August 23, 1890; George Paschal, Financial Condition of the City of San Antonio, with Propositions of Settlement with the San Antonio National Bank (San Antonio, n.d.), 13; San Antonio Daily Express, November 20, 1894.

³² San Antonio Express, December 20, 1920.

the office of mayor consented to withdraw in Brackenridge's favor if he would accept the office. Knowing that the citizenry would criticize him because of his interest in the San Antonio Water Works Company, he declined the position.³³

No man left a greater impression on San Antonio. The following saying was current: "Get on the Brackenridge board of directors and your fortune is made."³⁴ He never "gained money through trust combinations or laws made to favor predatory methods, . . . His clear mind has never been disturbed by the delusive dream of buying universal peace with money."³⁵

An ultra-domineering, frugal, and uncompromising business man, he was greatly feared, "but business was a side issue with him apart from the world in which he lived."³⁶ In addition to his financial acumen, Brackenridge was a scholar. "His mental companions were Charles Darwin, Alfred Russell Wallace, Thomas Henry Huxley, Herbert Spencer, John Tyndall, and curiously enough, Isaiah and Paul."³⁷

33 Ibid.

34 Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 54.

35 Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 106.

36 Robert E. Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII(January, 1940), 284.

37 Ibid.

Nightly he read their works and "quarreled with them." "Any extended conversation would always arrive, sooner or later, at cosmogony, the origin and evolution of life and its destiny."³⁸

His chief pleasure lay in the seclusion of his library and the companionship of books. His library contained outstanding works on science and history as well as the classics of Greece and Rome. Many, even those among his intimates, did not know that throughout his life he read a chapter from the Bible daily, a promise he had made his father. Although not actively affiliated with any denomination, he had the greatest respect for church work and made many donations. The denomination did not matter so long as the cause was righteous and would benefit humanity.³⁹

Only men of culture--such as Dr. Ferdinand Herff, Judge Thomas Stibling, Colonel John Withers, Louis Zork, David Bell, Isaiah Paschal, Edward Degener, August Nette, and D. A. Duerler--knew the innermost phases of his character and enjoyed his friendship and thoughts on science, history, navigation, astronomy, and philosophy. He delighted in their company and that of his sister, Eleanor, on outings aboard the family boat and loved the shock of arguments. He admitted no one to his circle of friends who was outside

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ San Antonio Express, January 2, 1921.

the bounds of "strict and exalted morality." Brackenridge avoided association with vulgarians, abhorred alcoholic beverages, and applied the "strictest rules of propriety" to both sexes.⁴⁰

The Brackenridge home was a showplace, and distinguished guests entertained there included General U. S. Grant, the gifted Italian Brignolia, Theodore Tilton, and Count Szechenze.⁴¹ Having always maintained a lively interest in Mexico, but not in the political struggles of that country, Brackenridge also shared a close friendship with President Porfírio Díaz and later with President Francisco Madero. Frequently he was a guest of Díaz in Chapultepec, an honor accorded few foreigners. His fondness of hunting led him every "place in Mexico where a railroad could go, and many where none could be built."⁴² Enthusiasm for sports also united Brackenridge in friendship with the old hunter, Captain Ernest Dosch, who operated an orderly saloon famous for its collection of buck horns.⁴³

Most characterizations of the philanthropist extoll only his finer qualities, but Brackenridge possessed a

⁴⁰ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I (April, 1913), 106; San Antonio Express, December 30, 1920.

⁴¹ San Antonio Historical and Modern (San Antonio, 1909), 43.

⁴² San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

⁴³ Newcomb, The Alamo City, 107-108.

violent temper. Unreasonable at times when things did not go his way, he was known to raise his cane in anger⁴⁴ or throw persons bodily from his office.⁴⁵ Sculptor Pompeo Coppini claimed that the colonel was a domineering person who wanted to appear modest and shy and that those who sought financial aid could obtain all they wanted if they carefully observed his moods.⁴⁶ One can scarcely keep from musing that Brackenridge controlled his temper very well the day Jesse James held up his stage on the way to Austin.⁴⁷

Not all of Brackenridge's energies were devoted to business pursuits. He was a life member of the Texas Historical Society and belonged to the San Antonio Club and the Casino Association. Brackenridge served as the first

⁴⁴ San Antonio Evening Paper, June, 1886; ibid., June 3, 1886. On one occasion the city sanitary inspector opened a fire hydrant to flush the gutter. Brackenridge evidently was not informed of the action because he emerged from the crowd threatening the inspector with his cane if the water was not turned off immediately. The inspector did not heed the colonel but continued his chore, having raised his heavy wrench as his badge of authority.

⁴⁵ Pompeo Coppini, From Dawn to Sunset (San Antonio, 1949), 119. On another occasion when Brackenridge was "in an ugly mood, extremely discourteous, unreasonable, and ungenerous," the artist asked Brackenridge for a sitting to model a bust of the colonel for the Women's Club. He threw the artist out of his office exclaiming that he would see to it that Coppini's work would never be put up, and it was not.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Boyce House, City of Flaming Adventure: The Chronicle of San Antonio (San Antonio, 1949), 179.

president of the San Antonio Scientific Society.⁴⁸

Brackenridge, the man, can best be pictured through his services, contributions, and outlook on education. Unlike many successful men who have often stifled every honorable impulse and have been dominated by some "master motive," Brackenridge dedicated his abounding energies to the acquisition of wealth "to obliterate the misery of the masses" created by ignorance.⁴⁹ In speaking of Mr. Brackenridge, William L. Herff made the comment: "In my life-long relations with George W. Brackenridge I have come to the conclusion that he took our democracy seriously, in fact so much so that it became the paramount thought of his life. Hence his untiring efforts to help educate the masses for he well knew that without education our democracy would not survive."⁵⁰ He believed that universal peace could prevail only after "the brute instincts of man have been refined and his mind lifted up by education from the dominion of ignorance,"⁵¹ and so the world came

⁴⁸ Marin B. Fenwick and Sara Hartman (comp.), Directory of Societies and Ladies' Address List, San Antonio, Texas, 1897 (San Antonio, 1897), 50-51.

⁴⁹ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 106.

⁵⁰ Mason Williams, "Recollections of George W. Brackenridge," The Alcalde, VIII(February, 1921), 284.

⁵¹ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 106.

to know him "as a great financier--a great philanthropist-- a great friend of lower and higher and eternal education-- not only an education that would make the world safe for Democracy but that would make the individual safe for the world."⁵²

The welfare of the University of Texas, which opened its door to 103 students in 1883, received Brackenridge's most earnest thought and co-operation. The greatness of this institution was paramount among his ambitions, and he served intermittently on the Board of Regents from December, 1886, until his death in December, 1920. Governor John Ireland conferred the appointment of the first and only Republican, and Brackenridge's non-political attitude resulted in his appointment by six governors and thirty years of service as regent.⁵³

The greatest gift Brackenridge contributed to the university was that of himself: the gift of his financial skill, intellectual vigor, and breadth of accurate knowledge. As chairman of the university land committee, he collected back rents on the university property and placed the land on a paying basis. Frequently he came to the relief of the "ill-fed infant of a university" from his own private funds. Few regents "took the University to

⁵² Williams, "Recollections of George W. Brackenridge," The Alcalde, VIII(February, 1921), 284.

⁵³ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII(January, 1940), 286-90.

heart" as did the colonel during his years of regency.⁵⁴ He served "in the crucial period of the institution's history when it was receiving its bent and gathering the ideals which were to guide and govern it in maturity."⁵⁵

In 1890 Brackenridge presented Brackenridge Hall to the university. He wanted ambitious youths to have a home where they could afford to stay during their tenure in school. "B" Hall, as the dormitory was called by its residents, served as an outpost for "pioneering youth," and "pioneers are democrats."⁵⁶ Because his personal ambitions were stifled when he had to take over his father's business, Brackenridge devoted his life to the down-trodden, to the oppressed, and to the desire to save every poor boy in Texas from a life of labor in work they disliked.⁵⁷ The regent granted innumerable scholarships and loans to boys and girls, who otherwise would not have received a higher education. In exchange Brackenridge accepted a note which read: "When convenient I promise to pay."⁵⁸ Although

⁵⁴ Edwin W. Fay, "George W. Brackenridge, Regent," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 100.

⁵⁵ R. Bedichek, "The Patron Saint of the University of Texas," The Alcalde, V(April, 1917), 481.

⁵⁶ Nugent E. Brown, B Hall, Texas: Stories of and About the Famous Dormitory, Brackenridge Hall, Texas University (San Antonio, 1938), 1.

⁵⁷ San Antonio Express, December 30, 1920.

⁵⁸ Ibid., December 29, 1920.

legally uncollectable, Brackenridge took hundreds of such notes and considered them the best of security.⁵⁹

During his lifetime Brackenridge deeded a five hundred acre tract of river land in Austin, valued at \$450,000, to the university. He wanted to move the main campus to a larger area so that the school's growth would be unlimited from the stand point of ample space. He asked Dr. Robert E. Vinson, the president of the university, "Why don't you undertake something really worth while for the future of the University? Give the Legislature and the people of Texas a shock. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Let's go after this thing in a really big way."⁶⁰

After his death the board of regents decided to make the move as a memorial to Brackenridge. In doing so, the university would have lost the Littlefield grant of \$300,000 for a girls' dormitory and \$500,000 for a main building, but Vinson felt that the loss of \$800,000 would be wiser than spending \$5,000,000 for additional real estate.⁶¹ Lesser men, "who would not only have been willing to move the university to the river's banks, but who would have

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII (January, 1940), 293.

⁶¹ San Antonio Express, January 22, 1921.

preferred to dump it in the river," defeated the project.⁶²

Not all the years of service to the university were pleasant ones. Brackenridge encountered the animosity of George W. Littlefield, who held nothing but contempt for those who lived in the South and had not served her during the war but had returned to make a profit in times of peace.⁶³ "Each regarded the other as the representative, if not the embodiment, of the principles which had once driven the nation asunder. Any yielding of one to the other would have been regarded as a surrender of the principles for which they had stood and fought."⁶⁴

When Governor Oscar B. Colquitt offered to appoint Littlefield to the Board of Regents, he declined, refusing to serve with Brackenridge. Encouraged by Colquitt's explanation that he had not wanted to appoint Brackenridge but that the "University bunch wanted him very much,"⁶⁵ Littlefield finally accepted the appointment because "Texans should not surrender, without a struggle, even to a peaceful infiltration of Yankees."⁶⁶ Brackenridge submitted

⁶² Williams, "Recollections of George W. Brackenridge," The Alcalde, VIII (February, 1921), 285.

⁶³ Haley, George W. Littlefield, Texan, 220.

⁶⁴ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XVIII (January, 1940), 283.

⁶⁵ Haley, George W. Littlefield, Texan, 220.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

his resignation on January 25, 1911, but returned to the board in August, 1917, upon appointment by Governor William P. Hobby.⁶⁷

The university was the only interest that the two men had in common. Both disregarded personal differences and looked objectively upon their common goals for the university. Littlefield shared Brackenridge's long established policies concerning the university: no political interference; the best man available for the faculty irrespective of political opinion, religious beliefs, or origin; and complete equality for women.⁶⁸

Brackenridge occasionally encountered political pressures in which he seemed well versed in handling. When one governor wrote Brackenridge asking him to place some of the governor's personal friends in positions on the university faculty, Brackenridge answered the letter thanking the governor for his interest in the university and for taking so much time to investigate material for the university faculty. He intimated that the regents would automatically assume that these men possessed the required qualifications for the offices without checking and that the governor, consequently, would be held responsible for them.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bedichek, "The Patron Saint of the University of Texas," The Alcalde, V(April, 1917), 482.

He implied that the regents would give the governor's recommendations serious consideration. In a letter sent by return mail the governor withdrew from the responsibilities of the appointments.⁶⁹ Another governor's request for similar appointments of his political henchmen merely met peals of laughter from Brackenridge until the matter was dropped.⁷⁰

Governor James E. Ferguson, less easily dissuaded in his attempts to control the policies and appointment of the institution, vetoed in 1917 the legislature's entire appropriations for university expenses for the next two years. Brackenridge, rather than surrender his principles to political pressures agreed to underwrite the expenses of the institution for two years from his own private funds; thus, the regent gambled his entire fortune at the age of eighty-six. Following the impeachment of Ferguson in August, 1917, a special session of the legislature passed the bill, and Governor William P. Hobby signed it. An aroused public opinion freed the university of political controls.⁷¹

Brackenridge's regency terminated again in 1919, but in December, 1920, shortly before his death, Governor Hobby reappointed him. Confirmation by the Senate did not take

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 485.

⁷¹ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII(January, 1940), 286-90.

place until two weeks after his death.⁷²

Less than a year before his death, Brackenridge told Vinson that his will provided about half of his property for the university.⁷³ On the very last day of his life, he again expressed his wish that the university be moved to the larger site and reiterated his intention to add to his already numerous gifts to the institution.⁷⁴ The will submitted for probate was not the one that some of his friends had seen. This one established only a \$400,000 trust fund for the school, an amount far short of the sum the regents expected. Thus Brackenridge, the man who had almost a fetish concerning legal technicalities, left a heritage of court trials over his will.⁷⁵

Although Brackenridge remained a bachelor, he saw the status of women as a "relic of a barbaric age in the laws which deny to the wife all the civic rights enjoyed by the husband."⁷⁶ He staunchly supported his sister, Mary Eleanor Brackenridge, and the Texas Suffrage Society in their

⁷² San Antonio Express, January 21, 1921.

⁷³ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII(January, 1940), 294.

⁷⁴ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

⁷⁵ "Two Interesting Wills," The Alcalde, X(November, 1922), 1517-19.

⁷⁶ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 105.

struggles for enfranchisement.⁷⁷ He was the first bank president in Texas to have a woman on his board of directors. Both his sister Eleanor--who was the first woman in the United States to hold this position--and Mrs. Thomas Stribling shared in this honor, for Brackenridge contended that every avenue of honorable employment open to men should be open to women on the same terms.⁷⁸

Many deserving young ladies, seeking an education in home economics, architecture, law, engineering, and medicine, shared in scholarships or loans from the Brackenridge family.⁷⁹ The colonel contributed \$40,000 for the establishment of University Hall at the Galveston Medical School for women medical students; \$50,000 for a building at Columbia University, New York City, to make possible the study of medicine by women on equal footing with men; and funds for the founding of the first school of home economics in the state at the University of Texas. The success of the new school proved the wisdom of its founder. Institutions

⁷⁷ Marin B. Fenwick (ed.), Who's Who Among the Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas: Blue Book and Directory and Year Book of the Women's Organizations (San Antonio, 1917), 42.

⁷⁸ Davis and Grobe, New Encyclopedia of Texas, I, 44.

⁷⁹ Fenwick (ed.), Who's Who Among the Women of San Antonio and Southwest Texas: Blue Book and Directory and Year Book of the Women's Organizations, 42; Webb, The Handbook of Texas, I, 202-203. Eleanor and Tom also contributed. Eleanor served as a regent of the College of Industrial Arts from the day of its founding.

all over the country followed his lead. The department of domestic science was recognized "as a necessary adjunct to any co-educational institution of the first class."⁸⁰

Even though he deemed higher education a necessity to advance civilization, Brackenridge feared the millions who remained in ignorance, a problem which only a system of public education could obliterate. He began his services as president of the San Antonio Public School Board before San Antonio truly had public schools. By 1871 his guidance was apparent, and the education of the common masses in San Antonio began.⁸¹

During his many years of dedicated service the school board member donated property and funds for three public school buildings, including George W. Brackenridge High School, and the manual training building at the Navarro School. He also contributed funds which established the

⁸⁰ Bedichek, "The Patron Saint of the University of Texas," The Alcalde, V (April, 1917), 483; San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

⁸¹ Newcomb, The Alamo City, 90; San Antonio Daily Express, February 18, 1872. Although the town maintained public schools from the year 1850, they were not adequately developed until 1871. The town built a four room two story school house on South Flores Street. This was San Antonio's first public school building and the nucleus for the present public school system. The school for colored children which was founded during the Reconstruction by the Freedman's Bureau was taken into the public schools also in 1871. The advancement of these schools was credited to the principles and financial guidance of George W. Brackenridge.

departments of domestic science and manual training and paid the first year salaries of the teachers in these fields. Both the linotype school and the library for Brackenridge High School came from the same generous source. The schools of Los Angeles Heights, Harlandale, Edgewood, and Alamo Heights received their first equipment for industrial work from him.⁸² Four public schools in San Antonio today honor the Brackenridge family. This seems appropriate because even in death Brackenridge has continued his aid. The income from \$400,000 still aids common school purposes, insuring Brackenridge's role as one of the greatest benefactors to public schools.⁸³

In the "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," the judge pointed out that a man's true character was revealed in his role of a slave holder. "If with unbounded powers to do wrong, he uniformly tries to do right and blends the prerogatives of an absolute owner with the benignant feelings of our nature, we may be satisfied that he is a just man. If, after the slave was emancipated, the former owner helped to prepare him for citizenship, we may be sure he is a good man."⁸⁴ When the

⁸² San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920; ibid., December 30, 1920.

⁸³ "Two Interesting Wills," The Alcalde, X(November, 1922), 1518-19.

⁸⁴ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I(April, 1913), 106.

ballot was granted to the Negro, Brackenridge, again in his fear of ignorance, perceived a great peril. Although his father had owned slaves when he came to Texas, Brackenridge had always believed that slavery was wrong. After emancipation he "calculated the value of the labor of the family slaves during their servitude, and determined to spend that amount of money on the race."⁸⁵

In addition to the contribution of \$15,000 to San Antonio's Negro schools, he donated the land and buildings for the Prairie View Normal School for Negroes, and \$50,000 for the endowment and support of the Guadalupe College at Seguin. Throughout his life time and after his death he continued his generous contributions to Negro education. He willed the income of \$50,000 to educational purposes connected with the Prairie View Normal School and funds for the education of poor boys and girls, half of which was to be devoted to Negroes and half to whites. He contributed more to the education of Negroes than any other Texan because of his firm belief that the greatest way to assist a man was to enable him to help himself. He advised them that "patience and education" were the greatest assets possible for their race.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920; ibid., January 1, 1921; ibid., January 3, 1921; "Two Interesting Wills," The Alcalde, X(November, 1922), 1521-22.

No one can say how many scholarships were bestowed or how much money was involved in the Brackenridge gifts to education because of his practice of making anonymous donations. General estimates place the sum at over two million dollars during his lifetime alone, but he did not keep records because of his indifference to public praise for his benefactions.⁸⁷

Towards the close of life Brackenridge acted as though "life had played a trick on him and had by some means kept him from the fulfillment of his most cherished desires, . . . and so he became an inglorious, if not an altogether mute, Herbert Spencer."⁸⁸ He left his river home, practically giving it and its valuable library to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. He donated his large holdings along the river banks to the city. Today this beautiful wooded area bears its former owner's name, Brackenridge Park. Mahncke and Funston Parks were gifts from the same generous donor. Having contributed profusely through the years to the Salvation Army for the aid of frail women and wishing to see a continuance of the dedicated work, Brackenridge granted land and funds for the construction of a rescue home.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920; Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 202.

⁸⁸ Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII (January, 1940), 284. Brackenridge would have preferred a life as a natural scientist and philosopher.

⁸⁹ Terrell, "Address of Judge A. W. Terrell, of Austin, Presenting the Portrait of Colonel Brackenridge," The Alcalde, I (April, 1913), 107.

He began parting with shares in the San Antonio First National Bank, by 1905 he sold the Water Works Company, and in 1914 he retired as president of the bank. It seemed he could not rid himself of his property rapidly enough. That which had taken him a lifetime to obtain was now held in abhorrence. He wrote his brother that no "greater curse was ever placed upon man, I think, than the ownership of real estate in excess of what is absolutely needed. It is not only a serious damage to the owner, but an injustice to mankind generally who are without ownership in the soil."⁹⁰

He had a premonition that those he loved would "slip into heaven in advance" of him,⁹¹ and so he began smoothing their paths and assuring his brothers and sisters that it would "always be a source of pleasure to have you near us, although as you are aware, I am not given to demonstrations of anything except my ill-nature."⁹² He placed large sums in his brother Tom's bank account to ease his last, sickly years, and even advised Tom to sell their boat, "The Navidad," and "put the money in your pocket or do some good work with it to which you may seem inclined."⁹³

⁹⁰ George W. Brackenridge to John T. Brackenridge, June 15, 1889, and December 6, 1904, Letters and Business Records of Major John T. Brackenridge.

⁹¹ Ibid., August 29, 1905.

⁹² Ibid., July 31, 1903

⁹³ Ibid., December 6, 1904; ibid., August 29, 1905.

As the pages of life closed for the dynamic philanthropist, he expended his energies only in the field of education. Death came quietly to Brackenridge as he sat in a wheel chair reading his Bible on the evening of December 28, 1920, leaving behind only Eleanor and a will which would provide a multitude of never ending legal battles. Services were held at the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, Eleanor's church. He was buried at Edna, Texas, with full Masonic rites, having attained the level of a thirty-second degree mason.⁹⁴

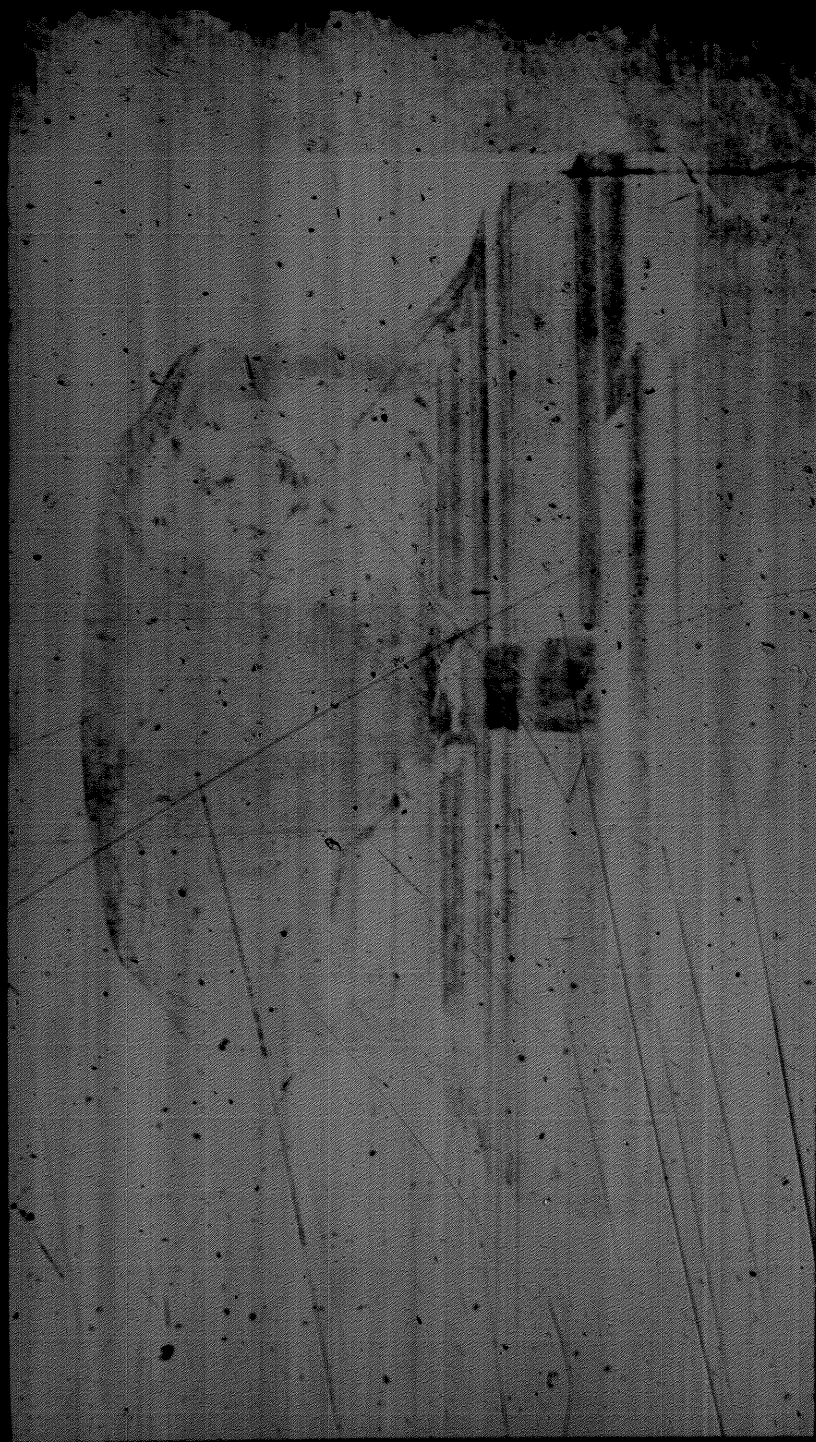
To the general public he left a heritage of diverse images. To those who opposed him in business, he was a tyrant, monopolistic octopus, demagogue, or devil. To those who courted his aid even if only for selfish reasons, he was an easy mark if approached at the opportune moment. To those who were his true friends, he was a faithful and devoted citizen, noble son and kindred, benefactor of mankind, and prince--a prince to whom no marble monuments have been erected.

In 1951 Frank G. Huntress, president of the Express Publishing Company and executor of the Brackenridge will, proposed that a monument designed by Pompeo Coppini be erected to the colonel. The estimated cost of the project was \$25,000, and the monument would reflect Brackenridge's favorite philanthropy, the education of children "for good

⁹⁴ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920; Webb (ed.), The Handbook of Texas, I, 202.

citizenship and worthy endeavor."⁹⁵ The marble and bronze shrine, however, was never erected. Somehow the failure seemed appropriate because Brackenridge's monuments are his gifts to the city and state, to education, to the salvation and hope for the masses, and to the continual upsurging of the Negro race.

⁹⁵ San Antonio Express, April 17, 1951; ibid., June 22, 1951; ibid., September 9, 1951.



CHAPTER II

THE HEAD OF THE RIVER

San Antonio receives its water from a vast underground reservoir located from two hundred to one thousand feet below the earth's surface in the Edwards limestone formation. The Edwards reservoir extends from San Antonio to Kyle, west to Edwards County, south to Kenny County, and east through Uvalde and Medina Counties back to Bexar County. Rainfall run-off from approximately sixty-five hundred square miles replenishes the reservoir.¹

From this table of water one of the finest artesian wells in the state bursts forth as springs at the head of the San Antonio River, maintaining an even temperature of seventy degrees the year round. These springs serviced the seven acequias, four outlying mission farms, the hundreds of projected tributaries, and the local mills of colonial San Antonio. These springs, controlled by George W. Brackenridge, furnished the water supply for the first water works plant.²

¹ Elmer A. Dittmar, San Antonio's Water Problem (San Antonio, 1956), 11.

² Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 275; Stephen Gould, The Alamo City Guide, San Antonio, Texas: Being a Historical Sketch of the Ancient City of the Alamo and Business Review; with Notes of Present Advantages, Together with a Complete Guide to All the Prominent Points of Interest About the City, and a Compilation of Facts of Value to Visitors and Residents (New York, 1882), 83.

Shortly following the colonel's arrival in San Antonio, he--like others-- began purchasing a large estate for his family home. With his keen eye for beauty as well as property values, the colonel purchased the estate which was originally known as the Worth Springs and later as the Sweet tract; then after the Brackenridge ownerships the name became Fernridge. It contained the valuable head springs, including the important North Spring, of the San Antonio River. Additional properties purchased by the owner followed the heavily wooded banks of the river. At one time the Brackenridge holdings included the land on which Fort Sam Houston and Camp Travis were situated.³ These properties became the source of many stormy battles between the city government and their owner; indeed, they had presented problems to the city fathers in the past.

In 1734, when San Antonio was in its infancy, the king of Spain granted about eight leagues of land to the town as common grazing land. Every inch of the grant not specifically deeded to some private person remained the property of the community. The most valuable portions of the grant were the headwaters of San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River.⁴

³ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

⁴ Ramsdell, San Antonio, a Historical and Pictorial Guide, 188-89; John H. Copeland, San Antonio at a Glance (n.p., n.d.), 78.

Preceding the entrance of Texas into the Union, the city government decided to establish accurate boundaries for San Antonio. François Giraud conducted the original survey in 1842 which showed the lots including the head springs within the city's domain. Giraud submitted precautionary recommendations that the city continue indefinitely its guardianship of the city's "birth right."⁵

When the finances of the city fell into a sad condition in 1850, the council had no resources to build the sorely needed court house, jail, or school house. In section eight of the City Charter of December 14, 1837, which provided that certain lands might be sold if the proceeds went to the erection of public buildings and the endowment of public schools, they found their financial relief. The city council decided that San Antonio had grown land poor.⁶

On August 24, 1849, the city government issued orders to sell the public lands. With funds obtained from the sale they proposed on October 29, 1849, to erect a court house. Erection of the building known as the old "Bat Cave," started on September 6, 1850, served as the excuse for the

⁵ Quoted in Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 51; the complete information concerning these dealings can be found in the Texas Report, Volume 7, page 288 et seq.; Wright, San Antonio de Bexar: Historical, Traditional, Legendary, 120.

⁶ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 51.

tragic squandering of land. The council appointed a special committee to regulate the sale. On November 4, 1852, it reported that they had chosen Martin H. Campbell, a licensed auctioneer, to sell the city lands by public outcry.⁷

Giraud, immediately seeing the mistake about to be committed, appeared before the council on November 8, 1852, and submitted a report in which he pleaded with the council to reserve certain lots at the "head of the river" for the city. He recommended the construction of a United States arsenal or other public works there. At the San Pedro Springs, Giraud suggested the reservation of a square for a college. Further advice also included the retention of the hard stone quarries and construction of a road on the east bank of the river and the Alamo Madre ditch as near the river and ditch as possible. The latter act would have preserved the river banks for the city.⁸

⁷ Ibid., 51-52; "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. B, January, 1849-August, 1856," October 29, 1849, p. 62.

⁸ Ibid., November 4, 1852, p. 189; ibid., November 9, 1852, p. 191; Wright, San Antonio de Bexar: Historical, Traditional, Legendary, 120; Frederick C. Chabot, With the Makers of San Antonio: Genealogies of the Early Latin, Anglo-American, and German Families with Occasional Biographies, Each Group Being Prefaced with a Brief Historical Sketch and Illustrations (San Antonio, 1937), 264; Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 52.

"Incredible as it may seem, the city fathers sweated to get rid of these assets. The head of the river, . . . was quietly put on the auction block, and speedily snapped up by one of the city fathers."⁹ On the very day that Giraud appeared pleading before the council, lot thirty-one in range one, district two--containing approximately twelve acres--sold for \$820. Lot thirty in the same range and district--also containing similar acreage--sold for \$655. Both lots, which controlled the head springs, were purchased by James R. Sweet, an alderman and later mayor of the city, who erected his home on lot thirty-one. Later the Brackenridge home adjoined the Sweet homestead.¹⁰

François Marchant purchased lots thirty and thirty-one in range one, district three, but lost them. Later Sweet obtained these two lots through the sheriff. The city sold lots twenty-eight and twenty-nine in range one, district two, to T. J. Devine. Devine sold them to Eugene O'Hara, and O'Hara, to Sweet. George M. Martin bought lot thirty-two in range one, district two, but in 1859 it, too, passed into Sweet's possession.¹¹

The customary terms for these purchases were a cash payment of twenty per cent, an annual payment of eight per

⁹ Ramsdell, San Antonio, a Historical and Pictorial Guide, 188-89.

¹⁰ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 52.

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

cent interest on the balance, with the principal due in fifty years. The interest supposedly accumulated in a permanent school fund.¹²

On August 29, 1859, Sweet sold all seven lots to George W. Barnes of Savannah, Georgia, who held them until 1869. In that year Barnes sold the lots to Isabella H. Brackenridge, the mother of George W. Brackenridge. From his mother Brackenridge purchased Ojo de Agua, the "birth right" of the city.¹³

Interest from the land sales was not laid aside for the school fund as the council had promised. City councilmen, hoping to return the money when the public schools needed it, spent the sums on pressing city needs. Purchasers of the land, who had the option of paying the annual interest for fifty years or paying in full at any time, paid for the land near the close of the Civil War with comparatively worthless Confederate bills.¹⁴ Not until 1875, during Mayor James H. French's administration, did the council honor its trust and pass an ordinance which acknowledged the city's indebtedness to the city school fund.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴ Copeland, San Antonio at a Glance, 78.

¹⁵ San Antonio Daily Express, January 16, 1872.

After the valuable property passed into Brackenridge's control, he spent large sums developing his woodland paradise and buying adjoining lands. Soon he encountered difficulties with the city leaders. A dam which had been constructed across the river by the city backed water onto the Brackenridge estate and blocked its entrance. The property owner, intent on retaining full value of his river properties, petitioned the city council in January, 1872, for a right away across city lands. In addition to this request Brackenridge asked the council to sell him six acres of city property.¹⁶ Mayor William C. A. Thielepape appointed a committee to confer with Brackenridge concerning the water, the removal of the dam, and his petition.

During the period of conferences Brackenridge discussed with Julius Van Slyck, the editor of the Daily Express, his desire to buy ground from the city which lay south of and adjoined the property he had previously purchased from Gregory Hermann. Slyck warned his wealthy friend that the city had already sold too much land, particularly the land which included the San Antonio Springs, and that some day the city would be forced to repurchase the property owned by Brackenridge at the "head of the river." Slyck advised the land owner to sell his property to the city at the lowest price possible, if he were truly interested in the

¹⁶ San Antonio Daily Express, January 16, 1872.

future of San Antonio.¹⁷

During the following conferences with the committee of aldermen, the colonel offered to sell the whole property owned by Isabella H. Brackenridge and himself to the city for \$50,000. Brackenridge firmly believed by this time that the city should own this magnificent property which would be invaluable whenever the city did construct a water works system, a project which he could foresee only as a municipal one.

The financial arrangements rendered were magnanimous as the full \$50,000 would not fall due for fifty years, and the note would bear eight per cent interest payable semi-annually. In addition to this, the colonel offered to rent the property from the city for four thousand dollars a year, the exact amount of interest due annually. The offer was read and accepted by the mayor and the council on January 23, 1872.¹⁸

News of the purchase filled the newspapers as the entire town grew interested. The Daily Express heralded the purchase of 240 acres--which included the springs of the river, the starting points of most of the irrigation ditches, and the most valuable hard rock quarries--as the

¹⁷ Ibid., March 19, 1872.

¹⁸ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. D, March, 1870-February, 1879," January 23, 1872, p. 29; San Antonio Daily Express, January 25, 1872.

most popular act of the administration. Slyck felt that the purchase of the sources from which the water supply of the entire valley flowed had been made at a reasonable price. Reminding the citizens of the plunder made from the sale of this same property for a mere song by the city authorities, who had neither the "fear of God nor man before their eyes," the editor demanded that the entire property be dedicated to public uses and be placed beyond the power of any future "tammany" gang.¹⁹

Not everyone seemed as pleased as Slyck over the council's project. As a commotion arose, the editor warned the public to disregard all nonsensical talk which suggested that Brackenridge had realized a "snug little sum" and that they would be taxed to pay him. Slyck reminded his readers that not a word of protest had arisen when a few unscrupulous speculators had thrown the same property away. The public, he proclaimed, should control its water supplies. If the city did not, not a dam could be erected, water pipe laid, right of way obtained, or a drop of water be used. Only by this purchase could endless litigation be prevented in the future.²⁰

Some local citizens did not share the editor's dark views. Edward Steves, who had previously refused a commission on the city council from Governor Edmund J. Davis,

¹⁹ Ibid., January 28, 1872.

²⁰ Ibid.

suddenly rescinded his decision and took a seat. Steves, joined by other aldermen, opposed the council's transaction. Some feared that the purchase of the Brackenridge property would affect the value of real estate on Commerce Street, the main street of this era, and would also interfere with the development of San Pedro Springs as a public resort.²¹ Added to these trepidations, verbally circulated rumors charged that some of the council members had been bribed into making the purchase.²²

On January 31, 1872, a called meeting of the council assembled to reconsider the issue. City Attorney Alexander E. Sweet informed the council that the deed had already been made and placed in his hands. Since the colonel was out of town, little could be accomplished until his return, and so the meeting adjourned.²³

The resignation of several aldermen mistakenly led those who favored city ownership of the head springs to believe that the opposition had weakened. They anticipated that Alderman Steves would also weary of his position and resign.²⁴

²¹ Ibid., February 4, 1872.

²² Ibid., February 2, 1872.

²³ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. D, March 1870-February, 1879," January 31, 1872, p. 29.

²⁴ San Antonio Daily Express, February 16, 1872.

When the colonel returned to the city in early March, the general public was informed that the clerk's office had filed the deed for record on March 5 and that city ownership had become a "fixed and irrevocable fact."²⁵ The contract between the city and its former owner dedicated the property to public use forever. It appeared that never again would a city council be able to sell the property except by an act of the legislature or by a vote of the people if the citizens at any time wanted to disperse the property.²⁶

Forces of opposition did not terminate as anticipated but continued to rage as rumors of sweeping removals among city officials erupted. The opposition received support from Governor Davis, whose decision was influenced by Secretary of State James P. Newcomb. On March 12, 1872, the governor terminated all proceedings, removed Mayor William Thielepape from office, and placed Colonel Samuel G. Newton in the position. In a newly appointed council, only Alderman Steves retained his position.²⁷

At the council meeting on April 1, 1872, the new mayor informed the board that Colonel Brackenridge had called on him on the pretext of asking for instructions

²⁵ Ibid., March 4, 1872.

²⁶ Ibid., March 6, 1872.

²⁷ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 53; San Antonio Daily Express, March 20, 1872.

in regard to the completion of a rock wall around the Brackenridge property. The location of the wall depended upon the outcome of the land purchase. According to Newton the transaction remained incomplete, and either the city or Brackenridge could withdraw from the proposition. The mayor appointed a special committee to study the matter and to determine the council's future actions.²⁸

Brackenridge's lawyer, Judge Thomas Stribling, informed his client that the city, not Brackenridge, owned the property; that annulment of the contract was impossible; and that Brackenridge could not repurchase the land because the deed dedicated the property to public uses and prevented the city's reselling the land.²⁹ As both parties adhered to opposite interpretations of the law, Slyck recommended the submission of the matter to a vote of the people before the city council became involved in a law suit, but the city leaders rejected such a logical solution.³⁰

On May 16, 1872, when the city council met, the special committee submitted its findings. The report was unfavorable; the council revoked and rescinded the purchase

²⁸ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. D, March, 1870-February, 1879," May 6, 1872, p. 32.

²⁹ San Antonio Daily Express, April 1, 1872.

³⁰ Ibid.

of the Brackenridge property.³¹ Finding the council's actions unacceptable, Brackenridge tendered the sum of two thousand dollars for the rent of the property, but Mayor Samuel Newton and the council rejected the payment.³²

Fearing that the title to the property would not be clear, the exasperated owner entered suit to either force the city to honor its obligation or else clear his title, but less than a year later on April 16, 1873, a communication to the council from Brackenridge's lawyers proposed that the matter be arbitrated.³³ The council referred the question to the city attorney, who confirmed at the following meeting that Brackenridge sought only to settle the question of the validity of the purchase of his property by the city.³⁴ Finally an amicable settlement out of court occurred in November, 1874; the contract was declared null and void, and Brackenridge continued his ownership of the "head of the river."³⁵

³¹ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. D, March, 1870-February, 1879," May 6, 1872, pp. 26-28.

³² Ibid., August 12, 1872, p. 44.

³³ Ibid., August 16, 1873, p. 74.

³⁴ Ibid., April 22, 1873, p. 75.

³⁵ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 54.

CHAPTER III

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WATER WORKS COMPANY

When Brackenridge arrived in San Antonio in 1866, he found a vanquished and disheartened people. The Civil War had been a critical period for the city which had opposed secession but had accepted the Confederacy after the state convention had voted against the Union.

Following the war several thousand of General Kirby Smith's rebellious Confederate troops passed through the city on their way to Mexico to aid Emperor Maximilian. They looted shops and homes as they passed. Business was at a low ebb. There were no funds for city improvements or for keeping the city clean. The gas works, completed in 1859, lay idle because of the lack of funds to operate it. The streets were dark, rough, and muddy. After torrential rains they became impassable; vehicles remained stuck in the mud for days. Trash and garbage filled the yards and streets.¹

Drinking water came from shallow wells and irrigation ditches, just as it had in the days of the Spanish padres. In the early nineteenth century aquadores, or water carriers,

¹ Charles Ramsdell, San Antonio: A Historical and Pictorial Guide (Austin, 1959), 44; Ione William Wright, San Antonio de Bexar: Historical, Traditional, Legendary (Austin, 1916), 110-11.

dipped water from irrigation ditches and springs into large buckets or barrels, toted the filthy containers around town on shoulder yokes, and sold the contaminated water.²

Typhoid fever and malaria were prevalent because of water contamination from outhouses. Grain and garbage harbored thousands of rats and millions of flies. "Where there is one rat in San Antonio now there were thousands then: they fought the dogs and killed the cats."³

A devastating flood in 1865 and the continual usage of the river as both water supply and sewer caused the city's second severe cholera epidemic in September, 1866, which closed schools and businesses for two months. The San Antonio Daily Herald recorded 198 deaths the last twelve days of September and 112 for October.⁴

In the medical field "empiricism in all its forms reigned rampant; medical quakery and lay guillibility attained previously un hoped-for heights."⁵ The concerted efforts of Dr. Ferdinand Herff and the Board of Health

² William Curtis Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio" (M. A. Thesis, Trinity University, 1957), 8.

³ Ramsdell, San Antonio: A Historical and Pictorial Guide, 44.

⁴ Pat Ireland Nixon, A Century of Medicine in San Antonio: The Story of Medicine in Bexar County Texas (San Antonio, 1936), 136.

⁵ Ibid., 128.

resulted in the issuance of orders for drainage of all ditches; removal of weeds, filth, and garbage from yards and streets; clearance of jails; prevention of overflow from irrigation ditches; regulation by law of crowded conditions in tenement houses; and removal of all military camps beyond the limits of the city.⁶

The number of cases finally diminished, and by early November the city's health was restored. Schools and businesses reopened, but the depressing effect of the scourge greatly retarded the progress of San Antonio. The fact that the epidemic was brought under control so rapidly demonstrated the wisdom in cleaning up the city.

Following the reinstatement of former officers by an act of the Legislature, J. H. Lyons returned to his office of mayor of the city on August 24, 1866. In the charter election on January 1, 1867, he was again elected, but on November 8, 1867, Colonel Joshua J. Reynolds of the Third U. S. Cavalry appointed William C. A. Thielepape to the office which he held until his removal by Edmund J. Davis on March 12, 1872. Unionists filled all city positions. In 1869 James Pearson Newcomb, the San Antonio newspaperman, became the Secretary of State.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 134-36.

⁷ Edward W. Heusinger, A Chronology of Events in San Antonio: Being a Concise History of the City Year by Year From the Beginning of Its Establishment to the End of the First Half of the Twentieth Century (San Antonio, 1951), 32.

Occupation of the city by federal troops was harsh, but with the army's return came a limited revival of prosperity and protection against the Indians. New arrivals flooded into the city--"Men of exceptional education, talents, and skills: doctors, teachers, scientists, musicians, lawyers, craftsmen. even some members of nobility."⁸ The volunteer fire department was reorganized, but the event which caused the most comment was the opening of the town's first ice plant. Ice was precious because it had been brought all the way from New York or Boston to Indianola, and from there it was carted in wagons to San Antonio.

A "new economic era was at hand for San Antonio. The plains were thick with herds of half-wild cattle, left untended to spread and multiply during the war. Cities in the East were famished for meat."⁹ The drives gave work to cowboys. Profits enabled ranchmen to improve their stock and ranches. The sudden accumulation of wealth made them great spenders, and San Antonio became the cattlemen's capital.¹⁰

⁸ Boyce House, City of Flaming Adventure: The Chronicle of San Antonio (San Antonio, 1949), 117.

⁹ Green Peyton, San Antonio: City in the Sun (San Antonio, 1946), 36.

¹⁰ House, City of Flaming Adventure: The Chronicle of San Antonio, 134-35.

In 1869 once again a flood struck the city. The editor of the Herald called attention to the same conditions which had prevailed during the epidemic in 1866: weeds along the streets, the need for sidewalks, ditches filled with stagnant water, and mud, old bones, and cow manure in the streets.¹¹ From the days of the cholera epidemic in 1866, continual agitation of an enlightened few for a water works system finally awakened the city fathers to the fact that San Antonio was behind eastern cities in providing citizens with a pure water supply and sewage disposal.¹² The city, however, could not supply water services because George W. Brackenridge owned and controlled the head springs of the San Antonio River, the springs which were the "birth right" of San Antonio and the natural supply for a municipal water system. City efforts to regain ownership of the head waters in 1872 had failed.

In May, 1873, George W. Maverick offered the first really definite program for a water works system, but the panic of that year created a period of low prices and retarded the development of industry and of commerce, which had not yet recovered from the Civil War and Reconstruction, and so the proposition failed.¹³

¹¹ Nixon, A Century of Medicine in San Antonio: The Story of Medicine in Bexar County Texas. 138.

¹² Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio," 14.

¹³ Ibid.

A second attempt followed in April, 1875. Representatives of the National Waterworks Company of New York City, who came to San Antonio by invitation of the city council, proposed to build a water works system, provided the city offered suitable inducements as subsidies. A meeting of local businessmen held at the Menger Hotel expressed favorable public interest in the undertaking. With this encouragement the city administration decided to grant the contract to the New York company, but the representatives refused the offer. Evidently the inducements were not promising enough. The New Yorkers departed, leaving the work to be carried out by local San Antonians.¹⁴

Although those in attendance at a second meeting on May 6 at the Menger Hotel talked enthusiastically of a water works system for the city, only apathy and indifference confronted the futile efforts of the small water works firm organized on September 3, 1875, with Hardin B. Adams as president and François Giraud as secretary. "The time . . . was not ripe," and once again all efforts failed.¹⁵ Furthermore, the anticipated arrival of the railroad excited San Antonians more at the time.

As the community grew aware that railroad facilities should be provided to insure trade with a much larger

¹⁴ Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 274; Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 54.

¹⁵ Ibid.

territory, liberal inducements were offered for a railroad, both before and after the Civil War. Finally the golden age of San Antonio began. The first passenger train of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway arrived in the city on February 19, 1877. In less than ten years San Antonio was transformed from a small town in which the Alamo served as a grocery store and warehouse to a city of over forty thousand, the leading horse, mule, and livestock market in Texas.¹⁶

When the railroad entered San Antonio, "there was no sewer system or drainage except the river, no garbage collection, no sidewalks and a great deal of mud, even during dry weather, because of the overflow of the irrigation ditches which still were the principal source of municipal water supply."¹⁷

Interest in a water works for the city had not completely abated as Dr. Ferdinand Herff continually had urged the imperative need for a sanitary system of water and the discontinuance of surface wells and ditches for the domestic water supply. Finally on April 3, 1877, Mayor James H. French and the city council awarded an exclusive contract to Jean Bastiste LaCoste and some associates to supply

¹⁶ Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 248.

¹⁷ Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio," 14.

the city with pure water near "the head of the river."¹⁸ At long last San Antonio obtained the two major requirements which assured the future growth of San Antonio, a modern system of water supply and a railway.

The twenty-five year contract granted to the new firm required that work should begin on the water system within six months and should be finished within fifteen months from the date of the contract. At the end of the period, the city should have the right to purchase the works if it so desired. This right would "inure" to the city every five years, but the city was required to give at least twelve month's notice of its intention to buy. The original contract of 1877 would continue in force until the city purchased the work.¹⁹

The city leased six acres of ground on the upper part of Rock Quarry Road and also the property at the head of the Upper Labor Ditch to the new firm for five hundred dollars a year.²⁰ Walter R. Freeman, who constructed the Kansas City and Austin water works and designed the San Antonio system, conducted a careful survey of the river

¹⁸ Ibid., 14-15; Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 54-55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55; Bert J. McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution (San Antonio, n.d.), 21.

²⁰ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 55.

at these locations for LaCoste. He reported that the exact volume of the river was 16,149 cubic feet per minute, an equivalent of thirty and one-half horse power for each foot of fall, and that the total fall in the river from its source to the end of the city limits was about 107.38 feet.²¹

Having found that the river contained adequate power and an ample supply of water, Freeman served as engineer in the construction of a raceway and pumphouse near the Meadsprings, taking advantage of a large bend in the river to secure the desired fall of water to work the powerful turbines. Water powered turbines drove the pumps, and the raceway carried the river water to a large water reservoir which, in turn, distributed the water to the pipes and fire hydrants throughout the city by gravity.²²

J. B. LaCoste, founder of the new firm, brought to his organization a creative and visionary mind. He hoped eventually to attach a mammoth ice machine to the water works to manufacture ice for the purpose of supplying refrigerated cars to preserve the beef and mutton shipped to eastern and northern markets.²³ This man of vision did

²¹ Gould, The Alamo City Guide, San Antonio, Texas, 84; Andrew Morrison, Historic San Antonio, the Alamo City, Her Prosperity and Prospects (New Orleans, 1887), 122.

²² Gould, The Alamo City Guide, San Antonio, Texas, 84; Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 274.

²³ Houston Texas Sun, February, 1878.

install the first telephone line in the city between the pump house and the office of the Water Works Company, an innovation also adopted by the San Antonio National Bank. A private line extended between the Brackenridge home and the bank.²⁴ At one time LaCoste was involved in such projects as the development of coal mines in West Texas and oil fields in the San Antonio area.²⁵

On July 5, 1878, the company began its services to the city. At that time the firm was valued at \$100,000.²⁶ "To the dismay of the officers and stockholders it was found a most difficult task to overcome the prejudice of the day against new methods and to educate a people reluctant about changing old habits."²⁷

Brackenridge, who was among those who doubted the future of the new company, surprisingly assured its success. Suddenly he, too, caught the dream, and with his enthusiasm came the firm's salvation. Brackenridge advanced money to the LaCoste company and in return accepted stock in the firm. By 1879 the banker owned the largest share of the firm's stock and became its new president.²⁸ He freely

²⁴ Gould, The Alamo City Guide, San Antonio, Texas, 104.

²⁵ San Antonio Evening Light, January 14, 1882.

²⁶ Heusinger, A Chronology of Events in San Antonio, 32.

²⁷ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 6.

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

gave his time and knowledge to the plant. Often he took trips for the firm at his own expense and rendered engineering services over a period of twenty-six years without charge. Years later one of the firm's engineers attested to Brackenridge's skill in a claim that if the mains and pumping stations were to be replaced, "not a line of mains or location of a plant could be changed to give better service."²⁹

If the prejudice against the firm were not sufficient to handicap survival, its growth suffered greater reverses on February 3, 1880. On that day the city council, finding itself unable to meet its financial obligations, repealed the privileges granted the company and prohibited the payment by the city of any additional sums to the firm.³⁰ Because the rates charged by the firm seemed exorbitant, the council--still headed by Mayor French--appointed a committee to investigate the records of the firm and ascertain whether or not any official on the council--past or present--had ever had any financial connection with the firm.³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. E, January 29, 1879-February 25, 1884," February 3, 1880, pp. 129-30.

³¹ Ibid., February 17, 1880, p. 134.

The committee reported its findings at the following meeting on March 9, 1880. The report claimed that the Water Works Company was a monopoly, that the council had had no authority to enter into a contract with the company, and that the company had violated its contract.³² The council accepted the report and declared the company's contract invalid.³³

On May 26, 1880, Brackenridge instituted suit against the city to recover the five thousand dollars due the company for past rent of fire hydrants. The district court ruled against the city on June 3, 1880, and Judge G. H. Noonan ordered the city to pay the firm \$4,384.49, with interest, as well as all costs in the law suit.³⁴

On January 29, 1881, the French administration submitted an amended contract to the water company. The city agreed to pay an annual rent of fifty dollars for each fire hydrant instead of one hundred dollars as formerly paid; the city would relinquish the five hundred dollar yearly payment of rent on city property leased by the company; hydrants would be placed only in such places as

³² Ibid., March 9, 1880, p. 140.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "District Court Records, Bexar County (Tex.), Journal J, September, 1879-December, 1881," Case 559, June 3, 1880, pp. 264-65.

the city council designated; the company would furnish free water for public buildings and drinking fountains; fire hydrants would be used for fire, and only in case of actual necessity could they be used for flushing gutters; the company would pay taxes on an assessment up to the amount of \$250,000; and if the city should desire to purchase the firm at the expiration of the original contract of 1877, and the parties could not agree on a price, the matter would be settled by arbitration.³⁵

Objections arose immediately from the council members over the compromise with the water firm. The aldermen claimed that the city had no power to release the company from the payment of city taxes. Mayor James H. French, hesitating to sign the amended contract if difficulties were to continue, sought legal advice from the law firm of Devine, Howard, and Harrison. The lawyers assured the mayor that the city did have the power to exempt the water works from taxes, "it being nothing more than the yielding up of a stated amount of taxes for a valuable consideration."³⁶ The lawyers advised, nevertheless, that the judgment in the case of the Water Works Company against the city would

³⁵ Newton, The Water Works Contract, 22; Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 55; San Antonio Daily Express, March 15, 1881.

³⁶ Thomas H. Devine to James H. French, in facsimile of, in Newton, The Water Works Contract, 13.

be reversed if appealed because the city should own the works, "as it alone had the power to erect them as owner and no right to part with this power."³⁷ The lawyers warned the council against any rash action inasmuch as the city could not take something of value for nothing, but would have to pay a fair valuation for the property and the water it had used. If the city and company were unable to agree upon the price, the city could seize it for public use, "first paying its value as assessed in the manner provided by law."³⁸ No effort was made by the city to purchase the plant until 1890, so the amended contract was signed.

As the city government and the water works company arbitrated their differences, San Antonio erupted into a building spree. As the city grew, the first high school and the first telephone exchange opened; electric lights appeared on streets trod by Russian refugees and German immigrants escaping European tyranny. Orange, yellow, red, and blue street cars traversed the city. San Antonio became the "flashy, sin-dazzling metropolis of wild and woolly Texas . . . 'Pleasure capital of the Southwest.'"³⁹ The evangelist Dixie Williams said: "San Antonio is the

³⁷ Howard and Harrison, Attorneys, to the Mayor and Council of San Antonio, in facsimile of, ibid., 13.

³⁸ Peyton, San Antonio: City in the Sun, 51.

³⁹ Ibid.

wickedest city in the Union, not excepting Washington City, which is the wickedest out of Hell."⁴⁰ While some visitors to the city sought excitement, climate and pure water attracted tuberculars. "Countless patients left the comforts of a good home and came to Southwest Texas where insufficient funds, inadequate food and poor living conditions served to lessen whatever chances of recovery may have been present."⁴¹

The march of progress did not destroy the custom of the "chile queens" who came out at night into the plazas, nor did the mud, weeds, and filth in the streets, ditches, and river improve. Newspapers were filled with pleas for street improvements and sidewalks; the editor of the Light advised paving streets with wooden blocks. Complaints against the foul odors erupting from the stagnant pools of water and mud and physical injuries received because of the lack of proper sidewalks or level streets filled the newspapers during January and February of 1882. Only by flooding the streets with water from fire hydrants could the filth be washed away, and this, the most economical method of disposing of the mud, could be done only as long as the water works company did not object. When, in January, 1882, the city ordered the use of water from the fire hydrants in the battle against the mud, the city

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nixon, A Century of Medicine in San Antonio, 153.

itself broke the water contract less than one year following the signing of the amended contract.⁴² Such acts always aroused explosive actions from the firm's president.⁴³

As the city continued its purchase of fire hydrants, local citizens frequently proposed the purchase of the company by the city at some ridiculously low figure. Rarely did they recognize the need for a sewer system, many still believing it nonessential.⁴⁴ While Mayor French urged the extension of the water works as a preventive to cholera, he regarded the construction of a sewer system as a "little far-fetched."⁴⁵

The poor patronage of the water works led LaCoste to dispose of his remaining interest in 1883 to Colonel Brackenridge and his friends. By this time the firm was valued at \$500,000.⁴⁶ In the same year the Water Works Company received from the State of Texas a charter which would expire in fifty years. The franchise granted the firm the use of the streets, alleys and public places of San Antonio and the right to operate its water system until a

⁴² San Antonio Evening Light, June 24, 1882.

⁴³ Ibid., June 2, 1886.

⁴⁴ Ibid., February 23, 1882; ibid., March 3, 1882; ibid., March 15, 1882.

⁴⁵ Ibid., January 25, 1882.

⁴⁶ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 21.

date ten years after the expiration of its charter.⁴⁷

Great heights of achievement lay ahead as the company president foresaw a city, not a village, whose needs for water would be almost limitless. Even though modern plumbing was unknown at this time when only a single tap in the yard furnished water for all household purposes, for which customers paid three months in advance at the rate of one dollar a month, Brackenridge advised his company to put thousands of dollars in pipelines underground.⁴⁸

Throughout the years Brackenridge purchased large acreage of land along the river south of his home. When the value of the water rights of these lands became apparent to the firm, the company took them over in 1883. Brackenridge greatly feared that the original plant at Lambert Beach might prove inadequate to fill the needs of a larger city and that the heavy usage of the artesian basin might curtail the quantity of water supplied from this plant. To meet these possibilities, Brackenridge made still greater purchases of river property. In 1885 construction of a second plant and a new raceway,

⁴⁷ Chester B. Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas with Form of Contract Suggested to the City and the Water Works Company and a Plan for Re-adjusting Rates for Water Service (San Antonio, 1902), 3.

⁴⁸ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 21.

equipped with a turbine and a direct connection pump, began.⁴⁹ Gradually the water system superceded the acequias. Under the Brackenridge rule the water works took a new lease on life, and with his knowledge, financial standing, and love of the San Antonio River, he guided the struggling firm to full fruition.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8-9; Warranty Deed, Heirs of William E. Howth, deceased, to George W. Brackenridge, Filed September 8, 1885, in Bexar County Record of Deeds, Vol. 45, p. 47.

CHAPTER IV

THE TURBULENT YEARS, 1885-1894

Within ten years after the railroad had entered San Antonio, the city's population had more than doubled.¹ As the hectic, boisterous era of the early eighties reluctantly gave way to the beginning of a more elegant one, Bryan Callaghan assumed his position as mayor of the city of San Antonio in 1885.² In cooperation with other political leaders, "King" Callaghan's dynasty lasted for thirty years. His enemies claimed that he ran San Antonio for gamblers, riffraff, and crooks.³ They believed that he was a "very detrimental feature" to the city, but according to writer Samuel G. Blythe, others "considered him more of an asset than the Alamo."⁴ Callaghan, nevertheless, loved San Antonio, and he gave her "the best he could under the code he believed in."⁵

¹ Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 11-14. In 1877 San Antonio had a population of 20,000; by 1887 this number rose to 40,000.

² Ibid., 13; Rupert Nerval Richardson, Texas, the Lone Star State (New York, 1943), 332.

³ Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 282; Ramsdel, San Antonio, a Historical and Pictorial Guide, 50; Handy, History of Fort Sam Houston, 56.

⁴ Quoted in Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 282.

⁵ Ibid.

Sanitation had not improved in the city except for the water works. Streets remained in a sad state. Not until 1890 could Callaghan proudly report that the city owned 29.5 miles of graveled roadways, but these streets remained in poor condition because repairs were not made soon enough.⁶ Mud and the lack of sidewalks continually harassed pedestrians; water from fire hydrants remained the only method for cleaning gutters and streets, and in mid-summer ugly water wagons lumbered through the city sprinkling the dusty streets. Inasmuch as the river continued its services as a surface drain and as an open sewer, the mayor asked for the construction of flush gates at each dam to control the flow of the river so that the waters could effectively carry away the impurities, vegetable growth, and discharged wastes from thickly inhabited districts.⁷ He repeatedly urged upon the citizens the necessity of a system of sewerage and the control of the water supply in the hands of the owners of the sewerage system.⁸

The water works company encountered turbulent years during the reign of "King" Callaghan. Even so, from 1885

⁶ Bryan Callaghan, Annual Message of Honorable Bryan Callaghan, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, and Reports of City Officers for the Fiscal Year Ending February 28, 1890 (San Antonio, 1890), 88.

⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁸ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 9.

until 1900 the water company enjoyed an almost steady period of growth, handicapped only by the intermittent struggles with the city government. As San Antonio "emerged from the village class" the local inhabitants increasingly accepted innovations as a matter of course.⁹ Aspirations for city ownership of the growing water plant and continual financial difficulties of the city government generally created the struggles which erupted.

During the council meeting of December 1, 1885, Alderman Nelson Mackey proposed that the city should purchase the water works company. The council, however, laid the resolution aside until the city attorney could submit his opinion on the legal points of the existing contract between the city and the company and could give the city fathers a better position for bargaining. City Attorney S. G. Newton submitted his report to the council on January 4, 1886, and claimed that the contract did not prohibit the city from erecting a plant of its own if it so desired; but this was not the council's goal. On March 22, 1886, the city council adopted Mackey's resolution to purchase the firm, and amicable discussions began between the company, the mayor, and the city attorney to attain the terms required for the completion of such a purchase.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Newton, The Water Works Contract, 29; San Antonio Evening Paper, July 1, 1886.

The battle which erupted on May 17, 1886, came without warning. Alderman Mackey suddenly requested that the city engineer survey all lots on the east side of the San Antonio River and that the city attorney submit a descriptive report at the following meeting of lots twenty-six and twenty-seven, in district two, which lay near the dam and the head of the river.¹¹ Mackey wanted to learn who truly owned the river banks. He claimed that records, as surveyed by Raymond Clemmens and recorded on January 30, 1854, on page 205 of the San Antonio City Survey Book, did not grant the river banks to Brackenridge. Claiming that the land owner had illegally fenced in the river and had taken in some eighty varas more than the survey showed, the alderman believed a law suit might establish city ownership of these properties and facilitate a successful purchase of the water works company by the city at a reasonable price.¹²

In his report to Mackey and the council, the city attorney described lot twenty-six, according to Clemmens' field notes, as containing 725 varas. The field notes did not mention the water's edge but referred to a stake set five varas from the river bank.¹³ Mackey raised the

¹¹ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. F, March 3, 1884-June 28, 1886," March 17, 1886, p. 836; Ibid., June 7, 1886, p. 751.

¹² San Antonio Evening News, June 8, 1886.

¹³ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. F, March 3, 1884-June 28, 1886," June 14, 1886, p. 757.

question as to the right of anyone to go beyond the stake called for in the deed or the field notes. He claimed that Clemmens' field notes intended a reservation of the river banks, since they did not call for the river; therefore, such field notes did not warrant the Brackenridge claim that the property embraced all the land along the river.¹⁴

City Attorney Newton's report contradicted Mackey's assertions and favored the cause of the property owner, and he cited similar cases to prove his point. When the council accepted the attorney's opinion and rejected Mackey's, he raised a vigorous protest. His request that the city engineer conduct a survey of the lots in question suffered rejection likewise.¹⁵ Alderman James French's proposal that a suit be brought to test the question of a river reservation met a similar fate, indicating a hesitancy of the city leaders to become involved in any arguments with Colonel Brackenridge.¹⁶

Refusing to accept defeat, Mackey proclaimed: "Good, cheap water is one of the necessities of the people, and no corporation will be allowed to fatten upon the necessities of the people. Water, like air, like the sunshine, is a dangerous element for even the best organized, best

¹⁴ Ibid., San Antonio Evening Paper, June 15, 1886.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., June 16, 1886.

guarded incorporation of modern invention to deal in . . .
The City must own the water works, and the sooner this
consummation is reached, the better for all parties."¹⁷

The editor of the San Antonio Light, James P. Newcomb, championed Mackey's battle and stated that a large number of citizens anxiously awaited any opportunity to test the water works contract and to demand some means of release for the city from "this incubus" which was growing heavier daily.¹⁸ Yet, the editor pointed out, the very people who cursed Brackenridge as a monopolist hastened to pass resolutions every time they gathered in a council meeting to have the water works extended and to have the city acquire additional fire hydrants.¹⁹

City councilmen, laying charges against the water company that the city had paid for services which it had not received and that some citizens were not receiving services to which they were entitled, proposed a resolution to debit all amounts paid for dead hydrants and to pay no more until the connections were made. The Light's editor charged that the council's investigation had begun "in order that their [the council's] constituents may believe that they are bearding the monopolist in his den . . . while the monopolist laughs over such trifles as a dry

¹⁷ Ibid., June 22, 1886.

¹⁸ Ibid., June 10, 1886.

¹⁹ Ibid., June 25, 1886.

drinking fountain or dummy fire hydrant."²⁰

Confidence in the power of the company permeated its president's reply to the council's demands. The firm informed the city officials that sixteen hundred feet of additional piping would be required to make the necessary connections, and the company flatly refused to lay any additional pipes unless the city agreed to take another fire hydrant.²¹ Thereupon, the council confirmed the editor's charges by ordering new extensions and contracts amounting to thirty-two thousand feet of pipe and forty new hydrants.²² If the city ordered new extensions and contracts for fire hydrants, the editor reasoned, it could not afterward place itself in the position of repudiating its acts. Newcomb warned his readers that the mounting hydrant bill would soon reach the staggering sum of \$25,000 annually.²³

Actually, he claimed, it seemed senseless to heap so much abuse upon the head of Colonel Brackenridge, for he was not entirely to blame. He was merely pursuing his legitimate business under a contract with the city as a

²⁰ Ibid., June 29, 1886.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., June 25, 1886.

²³ Ibid., June 10, 1886.

citizen carrying on a corporation that had fallen into his hands in a crippled condition. He had taken unabounded pride in this enterprise and had induced his friends to invest their money with him. The colonel's ambition was to complete a perfect system of water works, which would bring profit to its stockholders and comfort and convenience to the people.²⁴

As the furor raged, the council proposed to borrow \$400,000 for the establishment of a sewerage system. Newcomb viciously attacked the proposal as completely idiotic. He advised his readers to accept the proposal whenever the sewerage system and a water works system were jointly proposed. Then, and only then, should the issue receive full public support.²⁵

Colonel Brackenridge maintained his customary role of silence during these attacks. Only the San Antonio Daily Express came to his defense by contending that had the city bought the water works when LaCoste sold it, the works would have degenerated and would not have been self-supporting. Then the city would have had a "white elephant" on its hands with only a portion of the city supplied with water and fire protection. Furthermore, asserted the editor, if the people could have bought the firm at half

²⁴ Ibid., June 22, 1886.

²⁵ Ibid., June 23, 1886.

the value, they would have voted it down. If the city had waited until it had a sufficient sum of money to construct the water works, the city would not have had a water works system at that time.²⁶

On September 20, 1886, the undaunted Mackey laid startling facts before the council. His detailed investigation assured him of the existence of property lying beside lots twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and twenty-nine located at the head of the river which had never been sold and still belonged to the city.²⁷ All these lots were sold containing so many acres, more or less, and no man, challenged Mackey, could determine what the sale had been by looking at the deed. Antonio Walton, introduced to the council by Mackey, had carried the chain for the city surveyor in 1854. Walton claimed that his father had been interested in a piece of land along the river and had been informed that this same land, owned by Brackenridge, did not run to nor include the river. Walton testified that there was a vacancy retained along the river banks.²⁸

Mackey requested a map of all city property and, for

²⁶ San Antonio Daily Express, June 29, 1866.

²⁷ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. G, July 12, 1886-June 15, 1888," September 20, 1886, p. 154.

²⁸ San Antonio Evening Paper, September 21, 1886.

the third time, asked that the city engage the services of the city engineer, county surveyor, and ex-city engineer Giraud for the purpose of surveying the lots. Persistence rewarded the councilman; his resolution received unanimous adoption from the cautious councilmen.²⁹

The labors of Alderman Mackey to establish the right of the city to control the water supply were heralded by the Light, which noted that it remained only for those in charge to do their duty and to enforce the rights of the city in the courts. "No individual, no matter how great, how good, how wise, how rich should be allowed for a single day to hold the source of supply of water that the people depend on for their very life."³⁰

The mayor selected the law firm of Simpson and James to conduct the litigation concerning the title of the property and to ascertain whether or not the city had a good case.³¹ Having gained confidence in Mackey's struggle and of their role, the councilmen began justifying their cause. They claimed that James R. Sweet, who had purchased the same lots in 1852, had also contended the springs were in his purchase. When the council threatened to refund Sweet's money because the city had not sold the property

²⁹ Ibid., September 23, 1886.

³⁰ Ibid., October 25, 1886.

³¹ Ibid., October 26, 1886.

to embrace the springs, he withdrew his claim.³² Further justification lay with the recommendations submitted to the council by Francois Giraud when the lots were sold. The council claimed that purchasers, who had attended the sale, had heard the statement of reservation. The city leaders further argued that council proceedings from 1852 to 1860 were full of legislation looking to the protection of the river banks from encroachment.³³

The city, however, lost its rights to the river banks. The law firm, after making a careful study of the situation, concluded that the city had lost all privileges by reason of limitation. The lawyers cited the case of Menard versus the city of Galveston, in which it was held that cities with special charters must be treated like private corporations, and five years' possession granted title.³⁴

Having lost the struggle, the councilmen resumed their original plan of buying the water firm. Because the city paid almost \$25,000 annually for fire hydrants and remitted most of the taxes on the corporation, the city fathers maintained that the city could easily afford to purchase the firm, which they valued at only \$401,900.³⁵ They reasoned that the saving in rent on the hydrants alone

³² Ibid., November 3, 1886.

³³ Ibid., November 30, 1886.

³⁴ Ibid., December 7, 1886.

³⁵ Ibid., November 27, 1886.

would pay the interest and sinking fund on the bonds issued to meet the purchase, since the stocks would yield five per cent and the bonds seven per cent.³⁶ Years of idle talk elapsed because Brackenridge did not wish to sell his growing firm at that time. Finally in 1890 Mayor Callaghan took positive action; he appointed a committee to arrange the city's purchase of the water works system. Callaghan informed the citizens that the city desperately needed a system of sewerage, but that such a project required control of the water in the hands of the owners of the system of sewers.³⁷

With some reluctance Brackenridge submitted a tabulated statement to Dr. Amos Graves, the committee chairman, and placed the annual revenue of his firm at \$125,000. With consumers increasing at a rate of fifteen hundred a year and with consumer payments ranging from one dollar to twenty dollars a month, the anticipated income increased in 1891 to \$150,000. Brackenridge valued the entire holdings at three million dollars.³⁸

The committee insisted that the price was outrageous. Dr. Graves claimed that his group would have to report a failure at the next meeting of the council. He flatly

³⁶ Ibid., December 2, 1886.

³⁷ San Antonio Daily Light, August 21, 1890; Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 56.

³⁸ San Antonio Daily Light, August 21, 1890.

stated that the city would never pay the three million. The Light, resuming its editorials against Brackenridge and for city ownership of the utility plant, called for the appointment of a commissioner to condemn the system and to allow Brackenridge reasonable compensation. When Dr. Graves was asked if the city could condemn the plant, he made the following reply: "Yes, the city could take possession of the plant as a health measure, which the board of health, of which I am a member, has recommended. There are no obstacles in the way of condemnation."³⁹

Learning that the colonel had decided to place public welfare ahead of his personal ambitions, the committee again called upon the colonel on August 22, 1890, and this time Brackenridge agreed to sell the entire plant, consisting of one hundred miles of new pipe--ranging from six to thirty-six inches in diameter--three pump houses, machinery, tools, supplies, mules, horses, wagons, and real estate--which alone comprised nearly six hundred acres of city property along the river, property at Main and San Pedro Avenue, and property at Casino and Market Street--for the sum of two million dollars payable in fifty years at five per cent interest. The committee submitted this offer and the recommendation of its purchase to the council on the following day. An ordinance, passed by the council,

³⁹ Ibid.

approved the committee's suggestions and ordered an election for September 30 to determine the people's will in purchasing the water works company.⁴⁰

At meetings held to discuss the issue, reactions towards the proposal expressed both favorable and unfavorable public opinion. Gustave and Friedrich Groos led the opposition. Gustave Groos advised waiting until the firm's charter had expired and then buying the system at a much smaller sum.⁴¹ Friedrich Groos claimed that the city did not need to own the system, that the proposed price was too high, that the city was not in a position to pay such a price, that the city could erect a system at a lower price, that taxes would increase \$1.50 more per one hundred dollars, and that Mayor Callaghan had begun the movement with his principal argument of a proposed sewerage system for which Brackenridge had already promised to furnish the needed water at a very liberal rate.⁴² On September 25, 1890, the citizens' committee, which opposed the proposition, decided to appoint a committee of eight for each polling precinct to work vigorously to defeat such a purchase.⁴³

Those who favored the issue claimed that the property

⁴⁰ Ibid., August 23, 1890.

⁴¹ Ibid., August 26, 1890.

⁴² Ibid., September 22, 1890; ibid., September 23, 1890.

⁴³ Ibid., September 26, 1890

was worth over three million dollars, but Brackenridge had generously offered it at a mere two million dollars. The plant's income of \$125,000 would enable the city to pay \$100,000 in interest and \$25,000 to the sinking fund; therefore, not one dollar needed to be added to the city taxes.⁴⁴ This purchase would also give the city a park "such as will be the glory and pride of San Antonio for generations to come."⁴⁵ The water front of the property was over 1700 feet. Dr. Graves, pricing the river property at one thousand dollars an acre, jubilantly announced that the city would own \$600,000 in real estate. Supporters pointed out that the purchase would terminate the payment of twenty-five dollars a year for every three hundred feet of pipe installed, which amounted to almost \$25,000 annually on the pipes which had already been laid.⁴⁶ Colonel Columbus Upson favored city ownership not only of the water works but also of the street railways and sidewalks.⁴⁷ Some even expressed views so favorable that they hoped that Callaghan "would be our mayor forever."⁴⁸

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., August 27, 1890.

46 Ibid., August 30, 1890.

47 Ibid., September 22, 1890.

48 Ibid., September 25, 1890.

Colonel Brackenridge finally expressed his feelings on the matter:

Now the stockholders, after sowing for thirteen years, with the hope of ultimately harvesting, think it a little hard that their large expenditure of patience and money should be met by public clamor, as though they had perpetrated some great wrong upon the community, instead of having added a valuable and necessary property to the city. Yet they believe strongly in the justice of mankind and feel confident that the stockholders of the Water Works will be permitted to reap the benefits which they feel are due them. Should it be considered necessary for the public good to deprive them of their property, and rights under their franchise, they think they will be honestly and fairly dealt with.

The Water Works were constructed in 1877, at a time when the City was unwilling or unable to do with the scheme, giving it neither countenance nor credit, believing that it would be a very great advantage to the city, and of little benefit to the stockholders. These were, I believe, the views entertained by nearly all the citizens, including myself. At present the Company is completing what the stockholders hoped would be the last large addition in the plant, necessary to be made during the continuance of its contract with the city. I can say truly, that, so far, they have received less interest on their investment than any citizen in San Antonio would be willing to accept, . . . the officers contented themselves to work without salaries.⁴⁹

On September 30, 1890, the taxpayers, however, voted against the proposed purchase. Brackenridge remained at the head of the firm, guiding it towards fuller benefits for both the stockholders and for those it serviced. During the entangled battles with the city, the firm had

⁴⁹ Corner (comp.), San Antonio de Bexar, a Guide and History, 56-57.

not stood still. Growth of San Antonio had forced extension of the company's mains so widely that a steam turbine pump was installed at the lower plant in 1888. The water turbine pump continued only as an auxiliary device.⁵⁰

Periods of limited rainfall caused Brackenridge to fear the complete failure of the river as a source of supply. As the springs began to fail during a long period of drought, he spent much time trying to solve the problem of future supply. He lay awake nights, he said afterwards, wondering where the water was to come from.⁵¹

An artesian well drilled for the Crystal Ice Company in 1887 supplied large quantities of pure clear water, giving evidence that a water bearing stratum did exist. Brackenridge drilled a well near the reservoir in 1890, but at twenty-five hundred feet struck no water. The drilling continued to three thousand feet, but the well's capacity was so small that it was abandoned.⁵²

Dr. Ferdinand Herff, who owned an interest in the water firm, continually stressed the importance of an artesian supply of water for the city. He possessed a wealth of knowledge on epidemics and saw a rising danger

⁵⁰ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 9.

⁵¹ San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920.

⁵² McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 10.

in the use of river water. When a cholera epidemic broke out again in Russia in the late 1880's, Herff urged Brackenridge to discontinue the use of river water and to drill artesian wells which would give protection against certain germs and diseases.⁵³

Brackenridge purchased property on Market Street from which he believed he could strike the artesian basin at a lower level. In 1891 he sank an eight inch well and at a depth of 890 feet struck artesian water which had so much pressure that it flowed out a pipe fifteen or twenty feet high and blew out pieces of rock "as large as a man's head." The well daily flowed three million gallons of water of such an exceptionally low mineral content that the new source of water was called the second best in the United States.⁵⁴ Other wells twelve inches in diameter followed. In 1895 steam pumps were installed for direct distribution of water through mains radiating from the plant.⁵⁵

Interruption of the firm's growth occurred during the difficult year 1893. Bryan Callaghan had resigned December 5, 1892, and George Paschal had become mayor. City government found itself once again in a sad finan-

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 9-10; Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 274.

⁵⁵ McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 10.

cial condition. No entry had been made into the records of the auditor from May 31, 1892, until March 1, 1893. Accountants hired by Paschal commenced their investigation in February, 1886, to ascertain the city's true financial condition.⁵⁶ Auditors discovered that the city had spent during Callaghan's administration, from 1885 through 1892, \$812,865.17 over and above the appropriations made in the annual budgets and an average of \$100,000 a year in excess of the amount estimated in each annual budget. The city owed \$447,925.51 in notes and outstanding past due accounts.⁵⁷ An ordinance submitted to the taxpayers on July 10, 1893, enabled the council to discharge its responsibilities to the San Antonio National Bank.⁵⁸

In his report to the council on conditions existing in San Antonio, Mayor Paschal stated that the death rate of the city had risen higher than it should. This state of affairs, he charged, was due to the pollution of streams with filth and corruption and "the daily accumulation of fifty tons of excrementitious matter emptied into the streams or stored in vaults and cesspools . . . When this city is properly sewered and abundant pure water furnished

⁵⁶ George Paschal, Financial Condition of the City of San Antonio, with Proposition of Settlement with the San Antonio National Bank (San Antonio, n.d.), 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

to the public by the people's money, which means water without profit, or the next thing to free water, then and not until then can we look for a reduction in our death rate to what it should properly be."⁵⁹ Paschal further advised the erection of a sanitary, city-operated slaughter house. Next, he demanded sprinkling of the streets during the long, dry summer months by water carts, regular flushing of the gutters, and construction of standpipes by the water company to facilitate the sprinkling of streets.⁶⁰

Urged by his brother, Dr. Frank Paschal, to take a firm stand on the sewerage controversy, Mayor Paschal claimed that not until the question of sewerage was ultimately settled could he recommend the expenditure of any money on the construction of streets. "Sewers should precede and not follow street improvements; thereby, saving additional cost."⁶¹

He recommended that the city buy the water works in conjunction with building a sewerage system. In this way there would no longer be an annual estimate of \$33,000 in

⁵⁹ George Paschal, Mayor's Message to the City Council Submitting the Auditor's Annual Report, August 7, 1893 (San Antonio, n.d.), 19-20.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

⁶¹ Ibid., 22; For a fuller development of this thesis, see George Hugh Paschal, "The Public Aspect of the Medical Career of Dr. Frank Paschal in San Antonio, 1893-1925" (M. A. Thesis, Trinity University, 1956).

the budget for water, increasing each year; water rates could be greatly reduced.⁶² He suggested that an auxiliary source of water might be obtained from property owned by the city along the San Antonio River.⁶³ Efforts of Paschal, Callaghan, and local physicians were rewarded by the favorable vote of the local citizens in 1894.⁶⁴

Turning his attention to the water problem, Paschal attacked the Water Works Company and accused the firm of violating the contract of 1877 and the amended contract of 1881.⁶⁵ In his accusations he noted that the company was unable to throw six streams from fire hydrants at one time through fifty feet of two and one-half inch hoses, that the company had failed to establish a telegraph line for fire alarm to the police headquarters, and that the company had not erected standpipes for sprinkling purposes. The latter violation had resulted in the city's spending three thousand dollars a year for sprinkling carts.⁶⁶ These accusations led to the adoption of Alderman Henry

⁶² George Paschal, Message of the Honorable George Paschal, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, Delivered Before the City Council June 8, 1893, on Sewers and Water-works (San Antonio, n.d.), 6-7.

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio," 23-24.

⁶⁵ Paschal, Message of the Honorable George Paschal, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, 13-15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 15-16.

Elaendorf's resolution which nullified the contracts of 1877 and 1881 and discontinued all payments to the firm.⁶⁷ For the second time Brackenridge entered suit against the city for payment of water furnished to the city from September, 1893, until June, 1894.⁶⁸

Mayor Paschal appointed a committee to confer with the firm's president to draw up a new contract which would last only one year.⁶⁹ City councilmen rejected the proposal submitted by Brackenridge as unworthy of consideration; the water establishment refused to consider the city's proposal because it would drive the firm into the hands of a receiver immediately. Once again the colonel surrendered personal remuneration for the welfare of the city and agreed to a reduction of rents.⁷⁰ Drawing up an ordinance to regulate and prescribe the rates, prices, and terms water should be furnished for public and private purposes, the city placed the sum of thirty dollars annually as the rent for each fire hydrant. Brackenridge countered these rates

⁶⁷ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. K, August 7, 1893-January 2, 1895," September 18, 1893, p. 100.

⁶⁸ San Antonio Daily Express, June 5, 1894.

⁶⁹ "Journal of the City Council, City of San Antonio, Vol. K, August 7, 1893-January 2, 1895," September 18, 1893, p. 100.

⁷⁰ San Antonio Daily Light, November 1, 1893; ibid., November 2, 1893.

with the rental on old hydrants quoted at forty dollars annually and thirty dollars for each new one. He placed domestic water rates at seventy-five cents for inside faucets and ninety cents for outside hydrants and promised to flush all sewers free of charge and to lay at least 25,000 feet of main pipe per year.⁷¹

As these rates were agreeable to both parties, the city and George W. Brackenridge set aside and annulled the contracts entered into by the city of San Antonio and J. B. LaCoste in October 3, 1877, and the amended contract of January 29, 1881.⁷² In the new contract the city paid the company \$7,500 for water furnished during the period of three months which ended June 1, 1894, and omitted the illegal provision for exclusive privileges. The company agreed to furnish the city all its water needs for the next nine years, including erection of additional hydrants and the flushing of sewers, and to supply private consumers for not less than seventy-five cents a month. The city promised to pay two thousand dollars a month for fire protection--the company had wanted \$2,500 and the city \$1,500. The city agreed to a sixty day warning before requiring the company to lay new mains. The company paid \$15,505.13 to the city for taxes from 1893 through 1894. This contract for

⁷¹ Ibid., November 14, 1893; ibid., November 28, 1893.

⁷² San Antonio Daily Express, June 5, 1894.

public and domestic water service would terminate August 1, 1903.⁷³

The agreement of future conduct of business did not immediately terminate the suit which was pending in the thirty-seventh district court; this agreement occurred six months later when the Brackenridge anger had subsided. On November 4, 1894, in a letter to Mayor Elaendorf, who had assumed office after Mayor Paschal's death on September 6, 1894, Brackenridge offered to settle the suit out of court and to accept the full amount of rent for hydrants at the rate fixed by the former contract in easy installments which would not unduly burden the city. The colonel allowed the city to pay the sum in three equal, annual installments beginning June 30, 1895, and ending June 30, 1897. The utility director generously agreed to put in twelve thousand feet of main pipes in addition to those provided for in the new contract.⁷⁴ Adoption of the compromised terms by the council marked the termination of the last major struggle between the city and the Water Works Company during the era of the Brackenridge control.

⁷³ Ibid.; Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 3; McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 24.

⁷⁴ San Antonio Daily Light, November 20, 1894.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST YEARS OF THE BRACKENRIDGE CONTROL OF THE RIVER

LANDS AND THE WATER WORKS COMPANY

By the middle nineties San Antonio had grown into a thriving metropolis of mixed cultures and one of the most interesting resorts in America. The Paseo, rechristened Houston Street, became the center of the business section. Mesquite blocks paved only the downtown streets; elsewhere, the expanding city endured narrow, muddy trails. Rowdy night life still flourished in the city, and the first electric lights brightened the Vaudeville Theatre at the corner of Soledad and Main Streets, the "fatal corner."¹

With the city's expansion came the acceptance of new ideas. San Antonians became accustomed to the daily advantages of water services. Having merely installed an outdoor faucet in the back yards of its customers during the eighties, the water company now extended its services throughout the interior of the houses. With the introduction of modern plumbing and the increased interest in shrub and tree planting and better care of lawns, the firm reached an accelerated period of development. Rapid

¹ Peyton, San Antonio: City in the Sun, 47, ff.

growth of the city itself was of no small aid.²

After 1900, local inhabitants began building indoor bath rooms in their new homes, but it took years to perfect these modern, sanitary innovations. As late as 1913 the company fined Judge Thomas M. Paschal two dollars and shut off his water because his bath tub and water closet leaked.³

As the water works company gained security and recognition, its builder grew old, tired, embittered, and restless.⁴ Brackenridge informed Mason Williams that he was going to leave his beloved Fernridge.

I bought this land and built my house on the head of the River when the River's head was a bold, dashing spring, and the River, which it fed, played and sang over the rocks and eddied quietly through mossy nooks--where ferns fringed its path, and the little, fat squirrels and red birds and mocking birds--and in winter the red robins--quenched their thirst. And I have seen this bold, bubbling, laughing river dwindle and fade away. It now is only a little rivulet, whose flow a fern leaf could stop and its waters are hardly enough to quench the thirst of a red bird. This river is my child, and it is dying, and I cannot stay here to see its last gasps. It is probably caused by the sinking of many artesian wells. I have paid thousands of dollars

² McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 11.

³ William Curtis Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio," 25.

⁴ George W. Brackenridge to John T. Brackenridge, December 6, 1904, Letters and Business of Major John T. Brackenridge; ibid., December 15, 1904; ibid., August 29, 1905; Vinson, "The University Crosses the Bar," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLIII(January, 1940), 284.

for legal opinions on the question of stopping the boring of wells, but they all say I have no remedy,--and I must go.⁵

And so he did, blaming himself for destroying something he loved for the firm he had created.

The Reverend Mother St. Pierre of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, a close personal friend of the colonel, proposed that her order purchase a part of Fernridge as a school for the collegiate education of women. At first Brackenridge refused, but as the river suffered from the prolonged drought, the saddened owner changed his mind. He sold his entire estate of 280 acres at such a low valuation and on such easy terms that many felt he had almost given away his home.⁶

On June 4, 1897, the Sisters assumed possession.⁷ Brackenridge moved, giving up his huge front yard, Brackenridge Park. If the legend of the San Antonio River were true, it seemed appropriate that the place fell into the hands of the religious.⁸

⁵ Williams, "Recollections of George W. Brackenridge," The Alcalde, VIII(February, 1921), 284-85.

⁶ Ibid.; Sister Mary Helena Finck, The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of San Antonio, Texas (Washington, 1925), 126.

⁷ Ibid.; Heusinger, A Chronology of Events in San Antonio, 54.

⁸ See the legend of the San Antonio River as told by Don Antonio Menchaca in Charles Merritt Barnes, Combats and Conquests of Immortal Heroes: Sung in Song and Told in Story (San Antonio, 1910), 76-79.

As the thriving water enterprise turned towards artesian wells for the city's complete supply of water, the Water Works Company in 1899, acting through George W. Brackenridge, conveyed to the city Brackenridge Park, the "Central Park" of San Antonio. Other donors of the park included John J. S. Stevens, Frank Grice, Ferdinand Herff, Sr., Eleanor Stribling, and Henry B. Andrews.⁹ The park received its name from its former owner, but his intimates humorously called it "Prohibition Park," because Eleanor Brackenridge, the sister of George Brackenridge, had suggested that he write into the deed of the gift the provision that no liquor or beer could be sold on the grounds.¹⁰ If such should occur, the park would revert to the state of Texas for the benefit of the University of Texas.¹¹

The deed drawn by Brackenridge reserved all water rights in the park for the water firm, including the erection of dams and lakes, which would be useful for supplying water to the city or for irrigation purposes. Brackenridge submitted similar deeds when he donated Mahncke and

⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰ Curtis, Fabulous San Antonio, 54: Raymond Edwards, San Antonio's Parks: Their Title and History as Well as a Brief Description of Their Features (San Antonio, 1923), 8.

¹¹ Ibid.; The fifteen acre section of the park known as Koehler Park was donated by the Koehler family with the expressed requirement that permits be issued to sell malt liquors and non-intoxicating drinks on its premises as long as it did not violate any laws of the state.

Funston Parks to the city and thirty-five additional acres to Brackenridge Park.¹²

Because the firm reserved a strip of land fronting on River Avenue, now Broadway, Brackenridge once again came under attack from the city council, which asserted that the park was not tendered by George Brackenridge but by the corporation, seemingly ignoring the fact that the colonel was practically the sole owner of the firm.

The city attorney pointed out that, since the deed reserved all River Avenue frontage of more than a mile in length and 250 feet in depth and also a strip twenty-five feet wide around the entire park, not a street could be constructed into the park except the 250 feet stipulated as the entrance into the park from River Avenue. The attorney attacked the reservations that the city could not sink a well for its use in the park, could not use water from the river, and could not sell intoxicating liquors. He acted as though Brackenridge had committed some terrible crime by donating the park to the general public's pleasures, at the same time tying the hands of future ambitious city councils.¹³

Brackenridge stubbornly refused to make any modifications of the stipulations encompassing the gift, but he

¹² Ibid.; San Antonio Express, June 22, 1920.

¹³ San Antonio Daily Light, December 4, 1899.

did donate certain entrances into the park as the council had asked.¹⁴

After the city spent five thousand dollars clearing underbrush and laying streets, the park opened to the public in 1901 and featured a large deer reserve.¹⁵ "One can imagine what joy it gave Mr. Brackenridge, on holidays and on Sundays, to see hundreds of children laughing and romping by the River, under the Pecan trees, whose thick foliage defies the rays of the sun,--children educating themselves in free sports, in the free air, for freedom and for Democracy."¹⁶

Following the donation of land which adjoined the river to parks, the philanthropist placed a beautiful tract of land on River Avenue at the disposal of the Salvation Army. When Captain Volney Cockran appealed to him for financial aid, he contributed profusely to the erection of the rescue home and later established a trust fund for

¹⁴ Ibid., December 5, 1899.

¹⁵ Marshall Hicks, Annual Message of Marshall Hicks, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, and Review of Reports of City Officers, for Fiscal Year Ending June, 1901 (San Antonio, 1901), 37.

¹⁶ Williams, "Recollections of George W. Brackenridge," The Alcalde, VIII(February, 1921), 185.

the continuance of the home's good deeds.¹⁷ City fathers tried unsuccessfully to prevent construction of the rescue home on property so near the park, but the courts ruled in favor of the Salvation Army.¹⁸

During the ensuing years the San Antonio city government continued its haggling and its chronic ailments of unpaid salaries, indebtedness, and over expenditures.¹⁹ Even though the sewerage system embraced seventy-two miles and 932 house connections by 1898, Marshall Hicks found the city anything "but cleanly" when he took office in 1899.²⁰ By 1901 he informed the citizens that the proper handling of the garbage, the cleaning of the streets and gutters, and the draining of stagnant pools had properly reduced

¹⁷ Captain Volney Cockran to John T. Brackenridge, February 11, 1905, Letters and business Records of Major John T. Brackenridge; San Antonio Daily Light, February 11, 1905; "Two Interesting Wills," The Alcalde, X (November, 1922), 1618.

¹⁸ Bryan Callaghan, Annual Message of Honorable Bryan Callaghan, Mayor of the City of San Antonio and Review of Reports of City Officers for Fiscal Year Ending May 31, 1910 (San Antonio, 1910), 300.

¹⁹ John P. Campbell, Annual Mayor's Message and Financial Reports of the City of San Antonio for the Fiscal Year Ending May 31, 1904 (San Antonio, 1904), 3; Callaghan, Annual Message of Bryan Callaghan, 1910, 301.

²⁰ Bryan Callaghan, Annual Message of Honorable Bryan Callaghan, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, Texas, and Reports of City Officers for the Fiscal Year Ending May 31, 1898 (San Antonio, 1898), 142; Heusinger, A Chronology of Events in San Antonio, 54; Marshall Hicks, Annual Message of Honorable Marshall Hicks, Mayor of the City of San Antonio, and Reports of City Officers for the Fiscal Year Ending June, 1900 (San Antonio, 1900), 3-4.

the death rate of the city but that the work of paving San Antonio had just begun.²¹

Through the city's innumerable dirt ruts, called streets, the water works spread its mushrooming tendrils, but the colonel no longer desired to continue his control of the now stable, well-accepted necessity, the Water Works Company. He offered to sell the entire system to the Hicks administration in 1900 for \$25,000 a year for twenty-five years. The annual payments approximated the amount which the city paid annually for fire protective hydrants. The firm itself was worth many times more than the amount asked, but the city government foolishly rejected the offer.²²

In January, 1902, more than a year preceding the termination of the Paschal water contract of 1894, Mayor Hicks and the council began work drawing up a new agreement, one which would mark the last efforts of Colonel Brackenridge as president of the firm. The city desired the insertion of some new features in the contract and a revision of the water rates, the right of which they claimed according to the revised charter.²³

After two submitted contracts failed to satisfy Brackenridge, the council, having had its fill of struggles against

²¹ Hicks, Annual Message of Marshall Hicks, June, 1901, 28-29; ibid., 18.

²² San Antonio Express, December 29, 1920; ibid., April 17, 1951.

²³ Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 3-4.

the staunch president, hired Chester B. Davis and Peter Milne, both waterworks engineers from Kansas City, to aid in the preparation of an acceptable contract.²⁴ Only Davis arrived, and after a careful study he submitted his report to the administration on June 7, 1902.²⁵

In his summary Davis stated that the plant was conservatively and economically administered and operated; however, some changes, such as a larger reservoir, would be required. In some places he found the style, number, location, and spacing of the fire hydrants to be the weakest and least efficient part of the plant. This condition was the direct result of the city fathers' demand in 1881 that they name the location of each fire hydrant. In addition to these faults Davis' study showed that some sections of the town suffered a scarcity of mains and fire protection and that too many of the mains had dead-ends. To remedy some of these conditions the council ordered the immediate extension of twenty thousand feet of pipe to connect dead-end lines.²⁶

Davis valued the Water Works Company in investments alone at \$1,370,400.75. This amount did not include the

²⁴ San Antonio Daily Express, June 10, 1902.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 6; San Antonio Daily Express, January 21, 1902.

interest on the cost of construction before the plant had begun to produce revenue, which he placed at sixty thousand dollars, nor the services contributed by Colonel Brackenridge which at \$4,000 a year would amount to \$92,000.²⁷

The contract drawn by the water engineer provided for ample fire pressure for the growing needs of the city, three hundred new fire hydrants of the most modern type, enlargement of the water mains and restrictions against any future laying of fire mains of less than a six inch diameter, and household rates and water meter rates at prices lower than the existing contract of 1894.²⁸ Rates for homes, which included all kitchen and household uses, came to eight dollars a year and were subject to voluntary meter service and fines for any useless wasting of water. Citizens paid extra charges for sprinkling their lawns, and the firm rationed the hours for this privilege.²⁹ These new rates enabled the company to earn eight per cent of its value annually.³⁰

²⁷ Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 70.

²⁸ A completely itemized list of the water rates are found in Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 31-48.

²⁹ San Antonio Daily Express, June 10, 1902.

³⁰ Davis, Report Upon a Valuation of the Plant of the Water Works Company of San Antonio, Texas, 31.

Council members adopted the Davis contract on June 2, 1902, and the exhausted president, finding the contract fair and acceptable, signed his last binding agreement as that firm's president.³¹ In a short time, tired of so many responsibilities and pressed for cash funds, the colonel decided he must sell his firm. His work was done. "He had for twenty years put in not only his knowledge, his legal and financial advice and what is more important, his whole-hearted and enthusiastic support. Apparently he almost alone had pulled the venture together and made it work."³²

Having failed twice to sell the water works to the city, Brackenridge offered the firm to one of his employees who, however, lacked the necessary funds. Finally George J. Kobusch of St. Louis made arrangements to purchase the firm. At that time the company had an authorized capital of \$2,500,000 with \$150,000 issued and authorized bonded indebtedness.³³

When the colonel was actually faced with the transfer of the property which he regarded with almost a father's

³¹ San Antonio Daily Express, June 10, 1902.

³² William Curtis Chase, "A Study of the Influence of Water on the Growth of San Antonio," 34.

³³ George W. Brackenridge to John T. Brackenridge, August 29, 1905, Letters and Business Records of Major John T. Brackenridge; ibid., September 20, 1905; McLean, The Romance of San Antonio's Water Supply and Distribution, 23.

love, he grew reluctant to carry through, but having given his word, he did. However, he forced the purchaser to bring \$100,000 in cash to bind the option and to deposit it in the San Antonio First National Bank.³⁴ Thus, the year 1906 marked the termination of the era of a titan's control of San Antonio's water supply and the passage of the firm's control into foreign hands. Not until June 1, 1925, did the control of the firm return to the local scene.³⁵

When the need for a water works company became apparent in 1866, the city alone had had the power to construct and to operate a water works company, a privilege from which no city should have the power to part. However, when J. B. LaCoste constructed the Water Works Company, the city government was unable to undertake the project. Furthermore, believing that neither the city government nor the firm's stockholders could benefit financially from ownership of the company, the city fathers surrendered all rights to control the city's water supply.

If Brackenridge had not stepped into the breach and salvaged the floundering firm so essential for the city's survival and largely responsible for its growth, the LaCoste

³⁴ Ibid., 12.

³⁵ Aniol (Comp.), San Antonio and Your First National Bank, 24; Dittmar, San Antonio's Water Problem, 2.

venture would have failed. Years filled with disease and a rising death rate would have elapsed before the city government could have rendered both water and sewerage services. Of the many enlightened citizens who constantly advocated construction of a water works system, Brackenridge alone had the enthusiasm, knowledge, funds, and perseverance to pull the venture together and to carry it to a successful conclusion.

Through the long years marking the development of the Water Works Company, even Brackenridge had recognized the advantages of city ownership and twice had offered to sell his company to the city for a fraction of the firm's value. However, the city could not or would not accept its responsibility at these times, nor did the city council attempt to purchase the firm in 1905 when Brackenridge sold his interests. Finally in 1925 city officials recognized and assumed the responsibility which they had so long rejected by purchasing the water works company for \$7,000,000.

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VITA

Bobbie Whitten Morgan was born in Austin, Travis County, Texas, on February 2, 1926, to Aaron Wesley Whitten and Fleecie (Seiders) Whitten. She received a public school education and graduated from Austin High School the spring of 1942.

She spent the next two years studying at the University of Texas; however, her subsequent marriage and the birth of two children interrupted her education. In 1953 she resumed her studies at South West Texas State Teachers College and graduated the summer of 1955, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education.

Moving to San Antonio, she has taught for the past six years at Thomas Jefferson High School and Horace Mann Junior High, both schools in the San Antonio Independent School District. She is married to Harry C. Morgan, and they have one daughter, Jane Ann. Their permanent address is 351 Addax Drive, San Antonio, Texas.

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