

Sewer And Storm Water

My wife and I have lived at Lynn Haven since the 1950s. We have been aware of the affairs at City Hall and the consequences thereof since high school.

We have seen our city progress from septic tanks at residences to the expansion of the 1928 sewer system to most areas in the middle 1960s. But guess what? The new 1960s system which replaced the 1928 municipal septic tank at the end of West 7th Street with its drain line that emptied into Lynn Haven Bayou, wasn't environmentally efficient.

Since 1970 we have lived at two locations on Lynn Haven Bayou, one at the end of Missouri Avenue, the other where we live today at 1115 Kentucky Avenue, just a few feet from where my friends and I camped, swam and boated in the bayou at the end of Carolina Avenue where the "drainage canal for the World War II oil terminal began."

In 1970 we drove to Ohio Avenue businesses by way of West 12th Street. Guess what? After a rain, and not the flooding we see today, there would be the superintendent for roads, water and sewer, a friend of mine, with gas powered pumps with hoses inserted in the manholes for the 1966 sewer at Virginia Avenue and Alabama Avenue, pumping raw sewage, just as we see today, into the branch and railroad ditch which flows into Lynn Haven Bayou, as "I talked with him about birddogs." It was in the 1970s that a moratorium was placed on additional taps to the 1960s system, compelling the city to attempt to bring the system into compliance (read period newspapers). The 1960s plant was pumping treated waste into Lynn Haven Bayou in violation of Federal regulations. A spray irrigation site was then built on the Lynn Haven garbage pit south of Hwy 390, but the flow of raw sewage into the bayou continued at Virginia Avenue.

In 1970 my birddog and I swam in the bayou until a 1930s next door neighbor told me it was polluted. In recent years a residential sewer line cleanout plug opened to relieve pressure from the Virginia Avenue manhole cover that is often lifted above the pavement, usually gushes knee-high, then down the sidewalk, to join with waste flowing from the manhole to flow down both sides of the avenue and into Lynn Haven Bayou. The air from this discharge of waste in the neighborhood smells of sewage for days. In 2012 I ceased to use my small boat in the bayou.

I built; my father built; and my grandfather built. I have sat on boards and, as a builder, observed communities, especially Lynn Haven, attempt to keep sewer systems in compliance so as not to have to suspend additional connections.

Several years ago my wife and I attended a commission meeting and listened as a motion based on a study paid for by the city was approved by the commission. It reportedly reduced the amount of water used and treated sewage from (I think) 100 gallons per day, by about 30 (?) gallons per household. Having often spoken to City Manager Kinsaul when the allotment of taps was restricted by the state as he attempted to justify more taps (buildings burned or torn down), I believed it was to convince the state that additional connections could be made without enlarging the city's current capacity.

But enough. This discharge, which is known to have continued yearly since the middle 1960s, needs to end now! Not just because we are aware of it flowing past our home, but because "you all know" it is a health and environmental danger. You also know the millions of gallons of raw sewage drivers and pedestrians unknowingly splash through, flow into North Bay to the Gulf.

Capped paving raising roadways above existing drives and lawns, roadways designed as drainage, fifty foot building sites, multiple raised buildings on filled wetlands and disappearing roadway ditching once continuously maintained, have created additional flooding and pollution.

I have often wondered why DEP hasn't shut our system down. On numerous occasions I have started to send the department years of photographs of city trucks with tires on manholes, or sandbags or discs of concrete, often with caution markers, but knew from past experience it would only mean taxpayer dollars expended for fines and to lawyers...

It is time to acknowledge that there are no temporary fixes for our sewer system!

As many know, originally Lynn Haven city blocks, except for commercial, were platted in 50 by 150 foot lots for purchase by Federal veterans or widows of the American Civil War in their 60s and 70s to build cottages, usually winter homes as an escape from their northern homes they maintained and returned to during warmer months. Many walked about town as churches, stores, bakeries, rooming houses, post office, newspaper, and a school and bank were built. But most continued to return to their northern homes as more houses were built, and there was a reason. Imagine; open surface or hand pump wells, smelly outhouses, the burning of garbage or saved magnolia leaves which when burned drove away biting insects during hot humid months. After a deluge of rain, outhouses were flooded, and water unless boiled or from numerous springs (all destroyed) flowing into the bayous, was undrinkable. Where my wife and I live on the east prong of Lynn Haven Bayou (Cavanaugh Branch), there were remains of two outhouses. The frame of one built on posts (one post remains) over the water, and another further up the property of corrugated metal. I wish I had saved it.

In the 1920s automobiles became popular with about 120 registered at Bay County. Eloise Davis Perkins, an early Lynn Haven resident and historian, told that to extend the distance between outhouses and reduce vehicle congestion on roads as most continued to walk to church, stores and to visit friends, the lot size for building a house was changed to two lots for new owners wanting to build. Houses, except for original 1911 lot owners, had to be placed on 100 by 150 foot sites. The population density and road traffic were reduced and fewer houses meant less foul outhouses, septic tanks and shallow wells.

In 1928 Ohio and Florida Avenues were paved with concrete, and water and sewer lines installed in the commercial district's alleys from 3rd to 14th Streets to include Hotel Lynn Haven at the end of Ohio Avenue overlooking North Bay. Water lines extended east and west for several blocks. Septic tanks were required, but not mandatory for existing houses. The city's septic tank drain line at the end of West 7th Street for sewer lines, drained waste into the bayou. At Panama City, the line for the town's septic tank extended to the middle of East Bay from the vicinity of the end of Harrison Avenue (slightly west).

In the 1960s Lynn Haven extensively expanded water and sewer lines within the original town plat and built a modern treatment plant at the 1928 septic tank site. The plant's treated waste was discharged into Lynn Haven Bayou. After severe rains, raw sewage flowed from manholes.

Does it make it acceptable for raw sewage to flow into bayous and bay as has been the norm since the 1960s? Is it justifiable to not correct this defective environmentally harmful system before all other projects because it has been known to continually occur and no one has had the gumption to call a moratorium on additional taps? The safety of residents comes first. Currently, I don't want to walk my dog on our community sidewalks. I have seen and smelled the areas of accumulated sewage. At the risk to their health, city workers are keeping the dried waste on roads and sidewalks cleaned. Why should this continue to be necessary?

I was fortunate to complete the U.S. Army Engineer Basic Course. I was taught to build simple bridges and residential sites to include drainage, water and sewer. I descend from a family of builders. I don't remember how many houses I built at Lynn Haven, but all were on 100 by 150 foot lots or larger. I often reoriented a house to save an oak, pecan, cedar or magnolia. Where we currently live at Lynn Haven, I saved two pecan trees and a magnolia on eight lots on which I built 4 houses.

Ridgeway Croley was the first contractor I knew who was permitted to divide three lots to create a 75 by 150 foot building site "facing avenues." Others followed. The dollar was more important than trees.

Then came a mandate by the state: Lynn Haven's sewer system could not support additional connections, or continue to discharge treated waste into Lynn Haven Bayou, a violation of Federal laws protecting waterways. This was about the time the city built the spray irrigation site south of Hwy 390. City Manager Kinsaul asked me and others to buy taps for sites where we planned future houses as a means of raising funds for the system.

At some point, and I assume in recent years, 2 houses "facing a street" began to be permitted on 100 by 150 "corner lots." The depth of a lot is now 100 feet from front to rear rather than 150. Established homes, built with the expectation neighboring houses would meet initial codes, now have backyards where there should have only

been front yards, facing their front entrances, most often within the minimum setback. To build on these 75 foot wide lots, all trees in the "footprint of the house," many historic, are removed because the "footprint" covers most of the lot. The area for absorption is greatly reduced by the house, walks and driveway on the small lot, where in most cases ditching is filled or replaced by covered plastic pipes with drain vents causing flow onto roadways.

Most often, these new buildings are on monolithic slabs, called "mud" or "floating floors," built on wetland that has been built up so high with fill that water flows onto other's property, a violation of federal, state and I am sure, Lynn Haven ordinances (Cinder block foundations should be required so as not to flood adjoining property).

What the motivation, and I assume within the last 10 years, a building was again permitted on a 50 foot wide lot, can only be about a dollar. It certainly isn't protecting our city or residents who built homes and improvements with the expectation that adjoining building would be on the 100 by 150 required when they built. Established zoning should not be changed for the convenience of one party, especially where others have established their homes to existing zoning and building codes. The amount of raw sewage flowing from numerous manholes makes it appear the 7th Street sewer plant designed for 1960s code must be about maxed out. Leaking sewer pipes that need sleeved??? Well, within four years of the 1966 system being completed, manholes were already overflowing.

A healthy environment is more important than the dollar. We don't need a city that is wall to wall buildings. You cannot keep building rooftops, drives and paved roadways on every piece of property. There must be plants, absorption and critters; aquatic and land. Those who bought wetlands knew what they were buying, probably very cheap, that it was wetlands and probably designated as such. They should not be permitted to turn these absorption and water holding areas into monolithic floors for multiple houses, commercial buildings or parking lots that most often divert water onto others property or contribute to flooding and pollution.

I have seen Lynn Haven streets and avenues resurfaced; paving over existing paving that should have been removed, raising roadways higher than existing driveways and yards, and guess where the water goes... to someone's front door, carport or garage who built to code and inspections by the city. I have seen developments accepted by the city where roadways are designed as the egress... and where does the water go?

Lynn Haven once had well maintained ditching. The city had motor grader operators who pulled ditches that were along both sides of most streets and avenues. A crew of men continually cleaned culvert openings; even homeowners cleaned their property's ditches and culverts. As a youngster, this was one of my chores, as I continue to do where we reside today. With the paving of streets and avenues, especially when resurfaced, these ditches began to disappear. Where there are open ditches that flow or once flowed to main drainage ditches, many are filled with plastic pipe and vents... "I don't want a ditch in my yard..." (it is city property) and that individual's water flows onto a roadway often leaking through a sanitary sewer cover to be mixed with sewage, the yard of someone else or into a "difficult to maintain for city workers" continuing open ditch adjacent to more plastic or galvanized pipe and vents... issues inherited by more recent city officials and employees. And if individuals open their sewer lines cleanout plugs to drain their flooded yards into the city sewer to be treated as raw sewage, are they fined?

After a recent visit with Manager Gainer concerning history, I toured our city's roadways. The problems with our drainage are as I have described above. Also, as an example, where my father built our home at the northeast corner of 6th and Michigan in the 1950s, there were well drained ditches on the avenue and street. Today all is level from crown of road to the house. During recent rains the roadway, yard and ditch filled with pipe, looked like a lake. Property owners, paving and ditches that no longer drain are the problem... and, a "huge problem," the opening on Tennessee Avenue is inadequate. Twice since the 1980s "I have seen" water seep over it from "east to west." Drainage from Sharon Sheffield Park, Hwy 77 and the 6 lane Hwy 390 flows to this "dam" that retards passage into the immense Lynn Haven Bayou natural flood plain west of Tennessee Avenue.

A sanitary sewer system which functions during most periods of heavy rainfall should be our first priority. Ours hasn't been continually sanitary for over 50 years... through no fault of those who attempt to make the system operate properly. For these very same reasons and consequences relating to density, flooding and pollution, building on 50 foot lots was halted by responsible residents many years ago...

Flooding Remembered

Flavius Josephus wrote in his *Antiquities of the Jews* published A.D. 93: “*God afforded them (humans) a longer time of life on account of their virtue, and the good use they made of it in astronomical and geometrical discoveries, which would not have afforded the time for foretelling [the periods of the stars] unless they had lived six hundred years...*”.

Noah is written to have lived 950 years. The flood he, his family and the critters experienced, dried after 375 days.

How does this relate to today? Areas of the earth where we see severe flooding, especially in recent months, have flooded before! Unfortunately humans don't live to be six hundred or a thousand years old. If they did they could point out where there was severe flooding. There are records though, most often newspaper accounts. The first account I read about our area after the 1822 settlers, was the hurricane of September 1856. A vessel was passed over Hurricane Island and back to settle west of the eroded bluff at St. Andrew's City. George Sharit was killed at the branch named for him.

I remember flooding in our area as my grandmother who we visited, lived at Lynn Haven in the 1940s. Think about the entrance gate to the development at Lake Merial. Immediately north, on Hwy 77, there is a decline in the roadway, built up when the highway was widened to 4 lanes, where in the late 1940s Lake Merial crossed the slag highway. To the east of the lake is Stockade Pond, named for the stockade where the owners of the lumber mill at Southport imprisoned those they leased for laborers from Panama City and Bay County for a few cents a day for most often violating vagrancy laws the owners had local governments enact. Lake Merial and Stockade Pond became one huge lake. As a Cub Scout in 1950, I swam to huge live oaks and dove off large limbs of the trees that must have been centuries old. All the oaks died before the water receded. Just before you get to today's Hwy 20, there is a branch (where you see the railroad boxcar) that sometimes flows from Court-Martial Lake to River Pond (just to the northeast) and sometimes flows in the direction of the lake... this was as far as you could drive on Hwy 77, a good place to secure fish baskets which were popular at the time (homemade). Just past Greenhead there is Dumajack Road to the east. A mile or so east the road was flooded. You could launch your boat and fish from the rooftop of houses (I only remember one). On a 1950 United States Department of the Army Map, *Gap Lake, Fla.*, “culture and drainage in part compiled from aerial photographs taken 1947,” the area is called “Deadenings Lake.” I wonder how the area got its name? You suppose there is a several hundred year history of flooding in the Deadenings? Next was Mobile Bay (no one knows how it was named), just north of the Sunny Hills entrance. I will let you use your imagination as to what this body of water looked like. You had to drive to the west and north to approach Chipley. At Blue Pond, the body of water to the east of Hwy 77 as you approach today's I-10, a reverse well was drilled in the pond to drain water into the aquifer to remove floodwater on Hwy 77.

In 1948 I lived between Chipley and Cottondale. Cypress ponds flowed into fields, along with blackfish and suckers (good feed for my other grandmother's swine). The road to my grandmother's house was overflowing but fordable. Today there is no sign of the 4 foot diameter concrete culvert water flowed through and over as I walked to board the school bus at U.S. Hwy 90. During recent roadwork the culvert was removed. Someone wasn't told about past flooding.

At West 11th Street where Lake Caroline flows, flooding washed the street out at Lisenby Hospital.

Beginning in 1950 I rode my bicycle to most areas of Lynn Haven on dirt streets and avenues. I don't remember the flooding we see today. There were problems with the spillway at Davis Lake No. 2 where my friends and I often swam (the State Road Department would maintain Colorado Avenue as an alternate route to “Panama City Country Club”), and the continuous flooding at Davis Lake No. 1 (Sharon Sheffield Park), originally the “town fishing hole” that has flowed over Ohio Avenue since 1911 as has the site of the lily pad wetland, today's Baptist Church parking lot. Flooding flowed over Alabama Avenue into the natural drainage at 11th Street (mostly drains today from Hwy 77 to Alabama Avenue through covered pipe with vents). Most streets and avenues had ditches which diverted water to main drainage such as the south to north open ditch east of Ohio Avenue (today a partly paved alley with covered pipe and drain vents) that flows under Hwy 77 into Lynn Haven Harbor. The worst natural flooding I remember was during two hurricanes in the 1970s.

Most recent flooding has been the result of developments, paving, and disappearing ditches filled with pipe and vents.

We cannot continue to cover every inch of land with roofs and paving and expect there will be no flooding or changes. Carbon emissions were regulated in our country years ago, evident by the brown haze you once saw when you flew into Atlanta or Birmingham... and the smell! Any warming of the planet we inhabit is due to destroying earth cooling shade trees and covering the ground with asphalt and concrete. View recent flooding and deaths in built-up areas that are entirely steel, brick, concrete and asphalt (usually many degrees warmer than forests), or where streets have been designed as drainage (news footage of New Orleans' flooded roadways in developments). Where projects are designed in wetlands, the water has to go somewhere. You see the results in our city where ditches have been filled with pipe and drain vents; the flooded streets and avenues, yards and the raw sewage flowing from manholes.

There are no new flood areas unless as a result of a flawed design. All streams, rivers, ponds and wetlands have flooded at some period, most often written about for hundreds of years... and remembered. There are records!