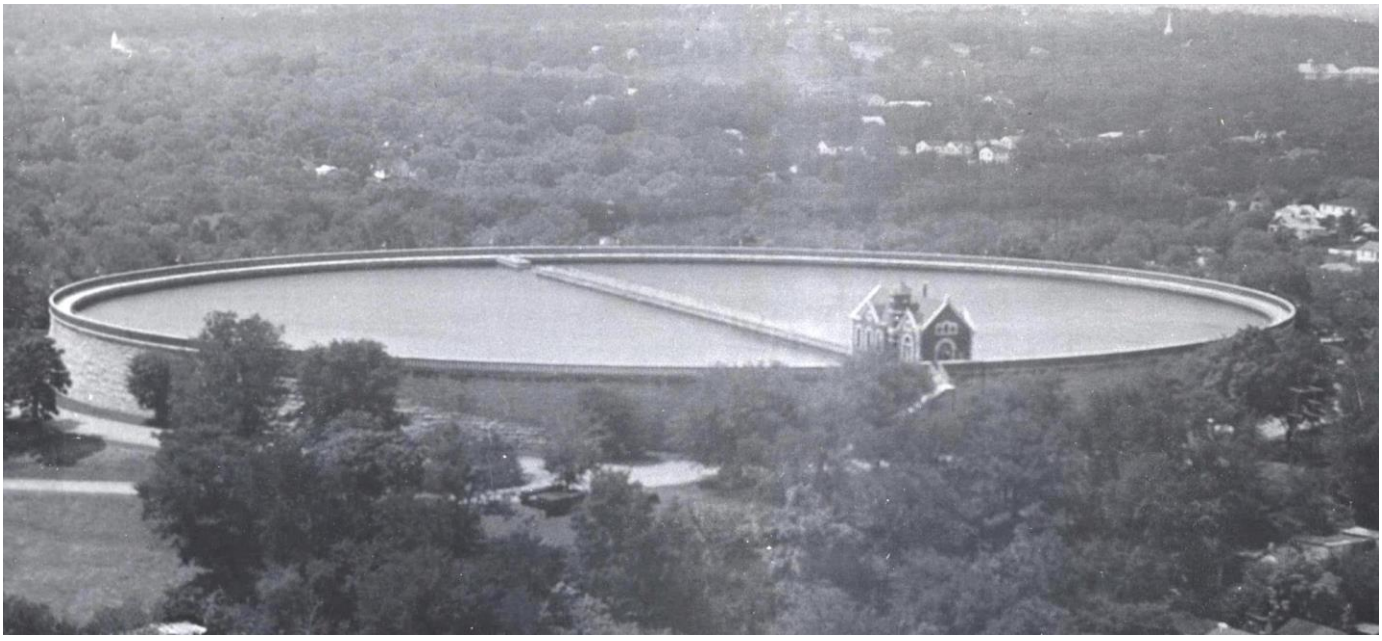
Metro Water Services 100 Years Ago: How much has Changed?

Picture a flock of birds circling the Nashville skyline in the mid-1920s, eventually dipping down to rest on the massive water-filled tank in the middle of town. Today, the idea of wildlife landing directly in our city's drinking supply would trigger a public health emergency. But a century ago, it was just an ordinary Tuesday.

In 1926, the Eighth Avenue Reservoir was in full operation to provide water to the City of Nashville, but it was completely open to the sky. Water from the Cumberland River was pumped via steam engines up to the reservoir to allow for the heavy river mud to sink to the bottom. River water was pumped into an open-air tank to allow the grime to settle, given a quick dose of liquid chlorine, and sent straight to residents' taps. Feeling queasy yet? This was considered adequate water treatment 100 years ago. You can imagine how much has changed over the past century!



The Eighth Avenue Reservoir was completed in 1889 by city engineer J.A. Jowett to hold water for Nashville.

The production of clean, reliable drinking water became a growing concern for Nashville, meaning new advancements were a necessity. At this time,

waterborne illnesses were a constant threat. While having direct access to a major river is often the economic catalyst for great cities, a resource is only as good as your ability to utilize it. In this case, how good was the Cumberland's water for Nashville if the city couldn't properly clean and treat it?

In response to the public health concerns and growing population demands, Nashville leaders recognized that basic chlorination and a settling basin simply wouldn't be enough to support a growing population. Driven by this urgency, construction began on a new filtration facility historic new Boiler Building and the Robert L. Lawrence Filtration Plant at Omohundro Drive in 1926. The facility introduced the structured coagulation, flocculation, and rapid-sand filtration water treatment process. When the filtration plant finally opened its doors in 1929, it marked Nashville's official transition to modern, large-scale water treatment.

100 years later, Metro Water Services has evolved into a world-class utility. Serving over 215,000 customers, we process roughly 180 million gallons of clean, safe, reliable drinking water a day across two plants. A century of progress has transformed Nashville's water from a public health gamble into a stable and reliable necessity.

Want to learn even more about our water treatment process? Sign up for a tour of our facilities.

Stay Tapped in!