

Water, Water Everywhere. . . And Not a Drop to Drink!

The subject of water, specifically Fairmont's water, seems to be somewhat of a hot topic in today's local news. However, that issue is not necessarily a new one. A *Sentinel* article from April 23, 1946, stated that "Fairmont lakes, Martin County's lakes, all the lakes in this region are disappearing. It is a question of just a few years and they will be gone." The focus of this 1946 article, although perhaps a bit "murkier" than today's issue, certainly posed a perplexing public concern at that time as well.

What seemed to cause those ominous predictions more than six decades ago? It wasn't a result of drainage, evaporation, where to obtain the water, or lack of precipitation. Rather, it was the concern that the lakes were simply filling up with soil from cultivated fields that would wash down natural and artificial drains, pour into the lakes, and consequently settle to the bottom. According to the 1946 *Sentinel* article, some went so far as to predict that Fairmont's lakes would be nonexistent in twenty years, that being by the year 1966.

In order to corroborate these concerns, a survey of Budd Lake was commissioned. Budd Lake furnished all of Fairmont's water at that time as well. To objectively conduct this study, the Water & Light Commission at that time arranged to obtain data during the winter of 1946 when the lake was frozen over. In doing so, lines were drawn on the ice from the filtration plant at 1022 Albion Avenue across the lake east and west to E. L. Ballou's residence which, according to the 1946 Fairmont telephone directory, was located at 321 Budd Lake Drive. Along these lines, soundings were taken at regular intervals. These soundings disclosed the present bottom, as well as the bottom as it originally existed.

According to the 1946 study, the following was cited: "The startling discovery was made that the lake is practically two-thirds filled." The study further revealed that the maximum depth, before mud was encountered, was 14.5 feet, therefore, twenty-seven feet of the water's depth had already been wiped out.

In conclusion, this article stated the following: "This certain ultimate elimination of the lakes (unless offset by continuous and expensive dredging) causes many concerns, chief of which to the people of Fairmont is the water supply in the city mains. Where will it come from in, say, 1966? That's the million dollar question with which our forward looking Water & Light Commission has commenced to wrestle."

Obviously, the prospect of the lake water being replaced by mud prompted some dire predictions back in 1946. Perhaps the most ominous was that there might eventually be, instead of the five lakes as we know them today, some kind of muddy creek or river cutting through what was predicted to eventually become the lake bottoms of Amber, Hall, Budd, Sisseton, and George. This waterway would in turn connect itself to Center Creek which, as a result, would enlarge itself to a broad, shallow river. It is also interesting to note that, in reference to the potential use of well water as an option at that time, the 1946 article stated the following: "Small consideration can be given the

alternative of pumping it from wells, something that engineering thought considers impractical.” In closing, the 1946 article directed readers to view the self-explanatory pictograph stating that it certainly did not present a very pretty picture.

Obviously, the bleak predictions of 1946 concerning Fairmont’s lakes and water supply did not come to pass. Significant advancements and improvements have been made regarding this issue since then. Although the time has changed, someone looking back at this era six decades from now will, hopefully, view current decisions regarding today’s water issues as being effective, efficient and appropriate.

Budd Lake Two-Thirds Filled With Mud

Fairmont's Water Supply Imperilled As Its Source Is Destroyed

