

A UNION THAT FLOWED FROM WATER

(Subtitle: "Water Shortages, Sanitation Needs -- The Unifier Of Cape Town A Century Ago (1913)")

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Abstract

A century ago, the eleven municipalities in the Cape Peninsula, of which the then Municipality of Cape Town was only one, set in motion a process towards a unification that was motivated almost entirely by the need for services reform. Supporters of reform argued that only in unification was there hope of addressing the backlog of and innovation required for service delivery.

Indeed, the need for adequate water was by far the single most compelling reason for the institution of a unified municipality for the whole of the metropolitan area. Some of the small municipalities were dependent on boreholes and springs, and had made little provision for further growth. Other municipalities had explored options in the mountains across the Cape Flats, but none of them individually had the resources to embark on any of these schemes.

In 1913 (next year, 100 years ago), all the municipalities of the then metropolitan area (with the exception of Wynberg) united, and additional areas were also incorporated.

Thus the unified City Council of Cape Town inherited the water problems of each municipality, and was forced to take action. Construction work on the first post-union dam (Steenbras Dam) began in 1918 -- none too soon, because, before the dam was completed, water rationing had to be imposed.

The need, a century ago, to address service delivery for a growing urban area, and in particular the requirement for assured water supply, led to citizen action, and thence to the institutional reform of local government. These events have parallels in our own time.

Introduction

The primary purpose of government, it is sometimes forgotten (although not by those participating in the "service delivery" protests of recent years), is to provide services to the governed, while giving them a say in the process. In view of this, it is surprising how few examples there are of civil society demanding a restructuring of the local government system in order to better provide these services.

The process, from the turn of the century until 1913, which led to unification of the small municipalities of the Cape Peninsula was motivated almost entirely by the need for services reform. The argument

was advanced that only in unification was there hope that the backlog of and innovation required for major services (especially water supply and sanitation) could be addressed.

In view of the approaching 100th anniversary of the 1913 unification, and recalling another unification in 2000 of the now very much larger Cape Town metropolitan area¹, to the so-named "unicity" form of municipal government, it is of interest to describe the circumstances that led up to Cape town's restructuring of 1913.

A hundred years ago, the old Cape Peninsula municipalities had grown around a series of nodes. Some of these small urban areas were still physically separate from one another, but the likelihood was that within a decade they would form one contiguous urban area - this had services implications. Furthermore, some of the areas were much better served than others. Particularly in respect of providing water and waterborne sewerage, it was apparent that substantial economies of scale were available, and that the smaller urban areas could not afford to improve their services unless they participated in joint ventures.

Historical background

The Municipality of Cape Town was established on 3 March 1840 in terms of Ordinance No 1 of that year. From this date revenue was raised through a rate on immovable property, thus laying the foundation of the municipal rating system.

In 1854 the first Town Engineer of Cape Town was appointed.

Under Act No 1 of 1867, wardmasters were abolished, eighteen town councillors were elected and the chairman of the Council became Mayor of Cape Town. The appointment of the City's first Town Clerk was also made at this time.

In 1882, the Cape Parliament enacted legislation which laid down the powers and the duties of municipalities and the procedure to be followed in constituting future municipalities. They were "given control of water supplies, slaughtering, washhouses and sewage disposal." (Morris, 1970, p4)

In the following year the then existing villages of Mowbray, Rondebosch, Claremont and Wynberg combined under the title of the Liesbeek Municipality.

In 1886, however, Wynberg seceded, and Claremont shortly after followed its example. In 1890 Mowbray and Rondebosch also parted company. It would appear that the disruption had been caused by reasons which even at that stage must have seemed parochial, bearing in mind that the populations of some of the municipalities were extremely small, e.g. that of Rondebosch was less than 5 000.

Thus at the turn of the century there were no less than eleven local authorities in the Cape Peninsula. They were the municipalities of Cape Town, Green Point and Sea Point, Woodstock, Mowbray, Rondebosch, Claremont, Maitland, Wynberg, Kalk Bay (which included Muizenberg), and Simon's Town, and the Cape Rural Council.

Towards the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the Municipality of Cape Town became anxious about its future water supply and passed a resolution requesting the Cape Colonial Government to appoint a commission to enquire into and report upon the matter. The Government appointed "The Cape Peninsula Commission" and directed it not to limit its scope to water, but to cover the whole question of local government in the Peninsula, from Sea Point to Simon's Town, and particularly to deal with water, drainage, sewerage and lighting. After more than a year's labour, a majority and a minority report were issued. The majority report recommended one municipality from Sea Point to Wynberg, inclusive.

¹ Also in view of recent comments on possible review, in order to improve infrastructure service delivery, of the boundaries and powers of municipalities. (For example by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA, 2011).)

(Cape Colony, 1902; Cape of Good Hope, 1903)

The report met with a chilly reception in municipal circles. Most of the municipalities expressed the desire to be left alone and independent. Cape Town's wish was to be constituted as a kind of water board for the Peninsula. Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont had no great objection to amalgamation, but preferred an independent board of works to carry out water and sewerage schemes. The report was not implemented, and so matters rested for a number of years.

The Cape Peninsula Commission has been described in more detail elsewhere (Van Heyningen, 1981, pp5-8). The purpose of the present paper is to continue the story to the time when unification was eventually achieved, and to describe the first steps thereafter taken to address the need for water and sanitation.

Re-awakening of interest in metropolitan unification

Just over 100 years ago, in 1910, the two former republics and two former colonies came together to form the independent nation of South Africa. This national union had substantial implications for broad-scale service delivery, not least in that it led to the unification of the railway system. (Wall, 2010)

But unification was also in the air at local level -- towards 1910 there was a re-awakening in Cape Town of interest. It would seem that this interest can be ascribed to:

- General sentiment, with unification of the four colonies being seen to have parallels at the local government level.
- More important, the realisation by many of the more prominent citizens that the long-term interests of efficiency and economy in the provision of municipal services lay in the unified provision of these services. Indeed, it was realised that in respect of certain services, especially sewage disposal and water supply in certain areas, the only hope for the timely provision of these services lay in unified provision.

It should be noted that the latter factor could be at least partially sufficed by the formation of a board of works for the Peninsula as a whole.

From 1910 the crusaders for unification formed a "Peninsula Municipal Union Society", whose chairman was John Parker, an architect and Cape Town councillor.

Parker asked if the following description fitted the area between Sea Point and Diep River. "A group of eight Municipalities, each widely contiguous with, or closely wedged in between its Municipal neighbours, permanently hampered and embarrassed alike by the want of space for the requirements of its position, unable to carry out independently any scheme for water supply, drainage, or sewerage. Indeed, the whole conditions of these eight Municipalities are neither favourable to their progress, nor in the best interests of their ratepayers." (Parker, 1911, p13.) Parker noted that the 1904 census had counted a population of 170 000 of all races in the area, of which 78 000 were citizens of the Municipality of Cape Town.

Cape Town (which also supplied Green Point and Sea Point) and Wynberg had "barely sufficient" water reserves for their populations. The Suburban Municipal Waterworks Board, in which Woodstock, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont were partners, was able to provide a supply "totally inadequate for existing needs." (Ibid, p18.) Cape Town and Wynberg both possessed dams on Table Mountain, but the other municipalities depended upon wells, springs and small streams. (Buirski, 1983, pp 131-132; Cape Town, 1986.)

The Cape Peninsula Commission had emphasised the necessity for the municipalities to unite in exploiting water sources distant from Cape Town. "Such a supply would be obtained only from a source distant at least forty miles from Cape Town, and that the cost would amount to about £ 1 500 000." (Parker, 1911, p18.) However, parochial considerations prevailed: for example, the

Woodstock councillors conceived a scheme for obtaining water from Olifantshoek near Fransch Hoek. They were extremely possessive of this scheme, despite clearly not having the resources to carry it out on their own, and thus nothing came of it. Other schemes, such as Steenbras and Assegaaibos, foundered for the same reasons.

Whereas as early as 1902 the Cape Peninsula Commission was able to report that "nearly all" of the houses in Cape Town Municipality were connected to a waterborne sewerage system, ".....this experience was not matched in the southern suburbs. While by 1915, the suburbs of Woodstock, Maitland, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont were served with a more stable water supply from the Newlands Storage Reservoir, with respect to sewerage [sic] removal, little had changed since 1895. Thus the districts of Woodstock, Maitland, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont continued to be served via a pail system - the sterCUS being removed on a weekly basis. In Woodstock and Maitland moreover, there being no system of surface drainage, slop water was allowed to pass into the street gutter or on to adjacent land, and ultimately to find its way into neighbouring streams - in the other suburbs, the 'very dirty slop water' was collected in pails or tubs and emptied every day except Sunday, whilst other water and bath water was treated in the same fashion as in Woodstock and Maitland. It was a most unsatisfactory situation." (Buirski, 1984, p132)

"There is no more urgent work required in the Peninsula today than the sewerage of these suburban municipalities. ... [There] should be one sewerage scheme for the five municipalities concerned. No doubt a joint scheme could be carried out even if the municipalities do not unite. But that means the creation of a Drainage Board, another local authority in a district already congested with local authorities. On this question there is only one satisfactory way out, and that is for these five municipalities to unite as one, even if no greater amalgamation is possible." (Parker, 1911, pp23-24.) However, the water supply needed to be augmented first.

It was perceived that, whereas water supply and sanitation would greatly be facilitated by unification, there would also be significant advantages in the metropolitan planning and supply of street lighting, stormwater drainage, fire protection and public transport, among others.

In respect of electricity generation, Parker pointed to economies of scale evidenced by comparison between the Cape Town Municipal electricity undertaking and that of the smaller Suburban Electric Company. "This is all an argument for one generating station, even if Municipal amalgamation be impracticable." Referring to the private consumers in Mowbray and Claremont, they "would also save very considerably on their lighting accounts, for they would pay about 50 per cent less for electric current than they pay at present." (Ibid, p29.)

Dr Beck, a medical practitioner and councillor of Claremont Municipality, supported Parker as follows: "If there is one aspect that far outweighs any other aspect of Peninsula Union it is that of public health, which, to my mind, is the most important, and so much so that I regard it as imperative for the benefit of the community that we unify as early as possible." He emphasised: "There is not the slightest doubt that the health work of the community will be very much better done if administered from one centre, with uniform regulations." (Beck, 1910, pp10-14.)

Beck also gave attention to drainage. "For the purposes of drainage we are so situated that it is impossible to drain if we dissociate one from the other. The natural fall is in the direction of the Cape Flats, with an outlet or outfall in the direction of False Bay, i.e. Wynberg and Kalk Bay, with the upper portions of Claremont and Kenilworth; and in the other, in the direction of Table Bay, i.e. Cape Town and Sea Point, with the suburbs up to the lower portions of Claremont and Maitland." Referring to sewage works, "on the expense side also, one big scheme is bound to be cheaper than eight or nine different small ones." (Ibid, pp12-13.)

Finally, Parker and Beck both pointed out that the larger municipality does not only offer to a municipal official the attraction "of larger opportunity", but also of better remuneration. Each of the four municipalities of Woodstock, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont employed a Town Engineer.

"Their joint salaries probably amounted to £ 1 800 per annum. Half this amount would attract an engineer of high standing and wide municipal experience, who could do all the work without any increase in the engineering assistants employed by the four municipalities." (Parker, 1910, p5.)

Parker commented on the attention which the Cape Peninsula Commission had given to the suggestion for the establishment of a "Board of Works". "While nearly all of the delegates from the Councils advocated a Board of Works, the Commission states that this plan was urged not so much because of any experience of the satisfactory working of such Boards, or because of any reasoned belief in their suitability in the case of the Peninsula, but because the alternative involved some surrender of their Councils' present independence, and might result in an increase of their financial burden

"The Commission examined the objections to this complete form of union in great detail and came to the conclusion that many of them were groundless, and none was so formidable that it could not be overcome, if seriously tackled by an intelligent body of men representing the various Municipalities. Undoubtedly the most serious difficulty was the adjustment of the ratings in the unified Municipality, so that no district should be burdened to provide another district with advantages not possessed at present; or that districts with comparatively little debt should not be asked to contribute towards interest and sinking fund charges upon the liabilities of districts more heavily indebted than themselves. The view taken by the Commission was that in the meantime, if it were found necessary, there might be 'special assessments' or 'differential rating' to meet these objections; but that gradually the whole Peninsula would be raised to the same standard as regards Municipal services, when the necessity for such special rating would disappear." (Parker, 1911, pp29-42.)

He concluded with a ringing appeal: "A great deal could be done, no doubt, by some kind of co-operation. But is that method not like commencing to build at the top, and supporting the several parts with temporary and insecure props, which may fail at any moment, and endanger the whole edifice? Why not take the natural course - beginning at the bottom, and on the solid foundation of union rear our municipal structures?" (Parker, 1910, p7.)

Metropolitan unification

These arguments drew considerable support. In 1912 a "Municipal Union Conference" of delegates from all the municipalities was held, except that Wynberg declined to take part in any way, even to the extent of refusing to furnish data. (Municipal Union Conference, 1912, p6.)

Following a detailed analysis, including a projection of population increase and of water consumption, the Conference reached the conclusion that within five years, taking the Peninsula as a whole, the water supply "position might be serious if no adequate steps were taken to augment the water supply, whilst at the end of ten years the position would be disastrous to the health and prosperity of the community. ... [The necessary] augmentation will be more efficiently and economically carried out by a Unified Municipality than under the existing conditions. In the period which must elapse before implementation of the water supply can be completed, the present water supplies can be utilized more beneficially and economically for the good of the community under Unification." (Ibid, pp24-28.)

"The Peninsula is suffering in reputation, its development is being retarded, and it is more open to attack from an epidemic of some infectious disease so long as large portions of it are unprovided with sewerage. ... Under unification most of the difficulties in the way of carrying out a sewerage scheme would disappear, the necessary money would be raised on better terms, and the reproach of the absence of sewerage in many of the best parts of the Peninsula would be speedily removed. A more complete system of stormwater drainage could be more economically carried out by one authority over the unified area, and this would result in a certain saving in road maintenance." (Ibid, pp19-20.)

Additionally, "the Engineering Staff of one [unified] Municipality would be more highly skilled and would cost less than under present conditions." (Ibid, p20.)

The Conference (with two dissenters) came to the conclusion that "the necessity for unification is generally admitted." (Ibid, p65.)

The Conference regretted that Wynberg did not see its way clear to participate in the proceedings. "The Conference understands that the reasons given by the Wynberg Council for refusing to take part in the Conference are [inter alia]:

- that there is a danger that Wynberg ratepayers will be called upon to pay a share for improvement in other areas;
- that they possess their own drainage and water supply, and are in every sense self-contained, and in no way dependent upon adjoining Municipalities for their successful and efficient development.

It is felt that the whole report of the Conference is a sufficient reply to all these objections” (Ibid, p55.)

Resultant legislation

Largely thanks to these efforts, the Ordinance to provide for the combination and better government of Municipalities in the Cape Peninsula was promulgated on 28 July 1913 and came into operation 8 September 1913. Not only were the eight municipalities of Cape Town, Green Point and Sea Point, Woodstock, Mowbray, Rondebosch, Claremont, Maitland and Kalk Bay combined, but additional areas listed in the Second Schedule to the Ordinance were also taken over. These latter consisted principally of the township of Camps Bay, what is today known as Athlone (then "West London"), and the area around Retreat, Steenberg and Zandvlei. Furthermore the Ordinance expressly provided for taking over all assets of the Suburban Municipal Waterworks. (Province, 1913.) Fittingly, the first Mayor of the unified City was John Parker. (Pryce-Lewis, 1985, p45)

For a period of not more than twenty years from 1913, a differential rating system was to be followed in that the capital expenditure on the improvement of sewerage and stormwater drainage on each of the areas named below was to be recovered by way of rates levied exclusively on these areas:

- Sea Point and Green Point;
- Cape Town and Kalk Bay;
- Woodstock, Maitland, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont. (Province, 1913, Section 18.)

Water supply -- and other service delivery stresses -- 1901 to 1913

Thus, in 1913, the unified City Council of Cape Town inherited the problems of each municipality. Chief among these problems was an impending water shortage. However, it is of value, before describing the most important of the work that had to be undertaken post-unification, to describe the water supply problems encountered -- and plans drawn up -- in the decade or so prior to unification. Much of this concerned recognition of the unprecedented scope of the work that needed to be done. Indeed, efforts were made to plan for new engineering works, but, without the resources and the political will to carry these through, none could come to fruition until unification.

Despite the five reservoirs built on Table Mountain between 1890 (commencement of work on Woodhead Reservoir, for the Cape Town Corporation (Hodson, 1981)) and 1907 (completion of De Villiers Reservoir, for Wynberg Municipality), the need for increased supplies of water remained of first importance among municipal services matters.

Water consumption rocketed over the period that these five reservoirs were built. To a substantial but temporary extent this was due to the influx of people (British troops, Boer prisoners) during the South African War of 1899-1902. More significant were population increase and, thanks to more households being linked to waterborne sanitation (which in many instances also meant that for the first time they had water piped to their house), much higher consumption per capita. "Rich and poor alike were

beginning to enjoy the cheap luxury of pure, readily available -- and increasingly easy to heat -- running water. Water supply thus became a priority, and ... the supplies began to run out almost as quickly as they were made available ". (Murray, 2001, p20)

Thomas Stewart ("Consulting Waterworks Engineer") reported in 1901 that the only reservoirs then available to Cape Town, those on Table Mountain, could only provide 3 million gallons per day. Cape Town was soon in trouble, as in 1905 it was discovered that the daily water consumption had risen to between 2,3 and 3 million gallons per day. (Burman, 1969, p108)

"Several alternative Table Mountain schemes were put forward. A dam was proposed in the Waai Vlei (now called Echo Valley); another reservoir holding 180 million gallons was suggested in Disa Gorge, above the entrance to the Woodhead Tunnel. A third scheme was the heightening of the Wynberg municipality reservoirs to trap 250 million gallons, or alternatively, the building of another reservoir in Orange Kloof. But these schemes had strict limitations, for the bulk of Table Mountain water was already being utilised. To implement any of them would have involved expense out of proportion to the advantages received.

"A Peninsula Water Commission considered the problem, and its findings were startling - it recommended that no large additional works should be constructed on Table Mountain; that instead the Peninsula authorities should amalgamate, and embark on a scheme giving at least 10 million gallons per day, for which it would be necessary to go a distance of up to 50 miles from Cape Town." (Ibid, pp108-109)

During 1904, J Cook (City Engineer of Cape Town) together with R H Charters and R W Menmuir (Town Engineer of Woodstock) (of whom Charters and Menmuir were founder members, in 1903, of the Cape Society of Civil Engineers -- the South African Institution of Civil Engineering of today) submitted a report on various water supply schemes, amongst which were Muizenberg, Twenty-four Rivers, Steenbras, Palmiet, Zachariashoek, Franschoek and Berg River Hoek. (Cape Town, 1962, p5). The scheme favoured by the Cape Town Council was the Franschoek reservoir. This was to be on the headwaters of the Berg River, with a watershed of 30 square miles. Cape Town bought most of the ground and then, with the support of Claremont, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Woodstock, introduced a bill into Parliament. When it became clear that pressure of work would prevent Parliament from passing it, the Bill was postponed. By the next session, the southern municipalities had changed their minds.

"The Bill was finally dropped when, in 1907, the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town Water Supply Act authorised Claremont, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Woodstock to proceed with a scheme on the Wemmers River and its tributaries. Cape Town, thus abandoned to her own devices, muddled on for the next six years with the existing water supplies." (Ibid, p111.)

"From 1904 onwards, Cape Town was on short supply during the summer months; the water being stopped off for as long as 15 hours per day. To conserve water, salt water was used for street watering and during 1908 a system of metering was introduced in order to prevent waste." (Cape Town, 1962, p5.)

"Prior to the installation of a sewerage system, "night-soil" buckets were conveyed by train nightly to a depositing site at Bellville. In 1895 W T Olive, a consulting engineer, was commissioned to design a sewerage system for Cape Town. Almost co-incidentally the Green Point and Sea Point Municipality introduced a waterborne sewage system which provided for final discharge into the sea." (Murray, 1987, p27) (This designation of Olive may not be correct. According to the City Engineer's records, he was City Engineer of Cape Town 1894 - 1896).

At the same time, a waterborne scheme was designed by Stewart for Wynberg in 1898. "This consisted of septic tanks, percolating filters and land treatment. The final effluent found its way into Princess Vlei which overflowed to discharge into the sea in False Bay. However, due to the Anglo-Boer

War, construction of the scheme only started in 1902 and sewage arrived at the works only in January 1905." (Murray, 1987, p24) Note however that Morris remarked that the scheme was "apparently a failure, and it became necessary to revert to broad irrigation for dairy herd grazing". (Morris, 1970, p5.)

All this was progressive for its times. By 1914 "... only 5 sewage disposal schemes had been put into operation for inland local authorities, viz. - Bloemfontein, Wynberg, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Pretoria. However, during this period sea outfalls had been constructed at Cape Town (Green Point and Sea Point), Muizenberg, and Kalk Bay". (Murray, 1987, p27)

Then, in 1913, the Municipalities of Cape Town, Sea Point, Woodstock, Maitland, Mowbray, Rondebosch, Claremont and Kalk Bay amalgamated; the resultant City Council inherited the water problems of each municipality, and was forced to take action." (Burman, 1969, p111)

But unification was seen as the only solution in respect of other services as well.

"Cape Town, with a municipal staff of five hundred and thirty-three employees and a budget which, in 1910, allowed of the expenditure of some £172 500 from general revenue and some £17 000 from capital funds, was the only municipality in the Peninsula that could hope to find the large sums for future capital works which now were an urgent necessity owing to the growth of population, the development of industry and the advent of mechanical transport. The coming of the motor-car and, later, of buses and lorries demanded better road surfaces. The Town Council was pursuing a programme along these lines, particularly where the main thoroughfares were concerned, but much more still had to be done while the ratepayers now were demanding surfaced pedestrian pavements.

"The smaller municipalities faced these prospects with dismay, as urban road-building and pavements implied substantial expenditure on stormwater drainage and they just did not have the financial resources to cope with demands of this nature to say nothing of the growing necessity for water-borne sewerage and child welfare clinics, for in Cape Town the establishment of the first of these clinics was only three years away. Slum clearance and better housing for the poorer sections of the community were problems that also had to be faced, while the need for larger water-supply schemes was imperative." (Slinger, 1968, pp26-28)

After 1913: the implementation

The responsibility for managing the unification fell largely on civil engineers.

"Once Sir Frederick De Waal, the Administrator of the Cape Province, had approved the Unification Ordinance of 1913, the City Engineer, Mr W J Jeffries [City Engineer of Cape Town since 1907], faced the onerous task of integrating into a single entity the engineering departments and branches, some of them run on highly individual lines, of the eight municipalities concerned. He now had to take control of all water supplies, roads, drainage and sewerage in an area of some seventy-six square miles. To complicate matters, the First World War broke out during the following year and it soon was impossible to obtain urgently needed equipment at a time when a serious staff shortage had arisen as a result of large-scale enlistments in the Forces. This amalgamation ... was a situation which required the utmost efficiency and tact. Most of the credit for its accomplishment goes to Mr D E Lloyd-Davies, who succeeded Mr W J Jeffries in September 1914 [and remained as City Engineer until 1931]. He brought about the streamlining of the hitherto separate departments with the minimum of fuss and without disruption of the essential services they provided." (Shorten, 1963, p338)

Water supply received priority attention.

"Prior to 1913 the old independent municipalities of Mowbray and Rondebosch had already purchased options on farms in the Steenbras Valley some 70km from Cape Town with a view to obtaining water. After unification these facilities became available to the city as a whole. In 1915 the Board of Engineers, consisting of Messrs D E Lloyd-Davies, City Engineer, W A Tait and Thomas Stewart,

decided it would be expedient to go outside the Peninsula for adequate water supplies. After investigating both the Wemmershoek Valley on the Berg River and the Steenbras Valley, they recommended in December 1916 that Steenbras should be developed as a water supply for the City. Some civic excitement followed when a referendum among ratepayers was held: Steenbras versus Wemmershoek. Steenbras won the poll and in May 1917 the Council adopted the Steenbras Scheme." (Robertson, 1976, p139)

Construction work began in 1918. This was none too soon, because, before the dam was completed in 1921, water rationing was imposed. Supplies were cut by as much as 20 hours per day. In order to keep ahead of rising demand, the dam was raised for the first time only a few years later, thus securing the water supply until the mid-1940s.

Unification accentuated problems of refuse and nightsoil disposal. "In the year after amalgamation 660 000 sanitary removals were made; meanwhile, tipping and disposal at Bellville were becoming impractical." (Morris, 1970, p6)

"One of the requirements of the Unification Ordinance of 1913 was that '... it shall be the duty of the Council with all possible expedition ... to proceed with a sewerage scheme for the municipalities of Woodstock, Maitland, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont'. To this end Mr Lloyd-Davies submitted a report to the City Council in 1915 on the main drainage of the southern suburbs and at the same time he recommended the extension of the Green Point outfall, built in 1895. (This extension was only built in 1931.)

"The central feature of Mr Lloyd-Davies's scheme recommended the construction of the original Athlone sewage treatment plant and the laying of some one hundred and fifty miles of sewers in order to meet the requirements of the suburbs relative to the terms of the Unification Ordinance itself. Work on the Athlone project began in 1921 and its cost, together with that of the sewers, amounted to some £850 000." (Shorten, 1963, pp341-342.) The Athlone site was then "in a remote and rural area" (Morris, 1970, p23.) (Cape Town, 1989.)

In due course the water supply position in Wynberg Municipality, sufficient in 1913, changed to one of impending shortage, and in 1927 Wynberg joined this union. (Wynberg, 1926)

Verdict of history

Of the alternatives considered in 1913, among them metropolitan boards each for a single function such as water and drainage, or public transport, Cape Town chose that of metropolitan government with multipurpose service responsibility. In other words, Cape Town chose multipurpose government with direct representation of voters (then almost exclusively Whites, plus a small number of property-owning "Coloured" people), rather than single-purpose bodies without direct representation.

The verdict of history has been entirely favourable to the 1913 unification. Slater (then Provincial Secretary), writing six decades later, was able to state that: "Just imagine the overlapping and chaotic conditions which would certainly have developed had this amalgamation not taken place. The authorities of those days deserve the highest of praise and thanks for their forethought." (Slater, 1972, p1.)

There is good reason to believe that the verdict of history will also be favourable, at least in broad terms, to Cape Town's 2000 "unicity" restructuring. Nevertheless, while it is understood that the main reasons for the demarcation of boundaries and the allocation of powers and functions are other than those of services efficiency, it is regretted that "minimise services disruption [and] not fragmenting catchments" (such as stated in Local Government, 1995, p6 -- the report which led to the 1996 interim restructuring) was not more frequently a primary determinant of these.

Conclusion

The single most compelling reason for the unification of the small municipalities of Cape Town was the need for adequate water and sanitation. The need to provide urban engineering services, prominent among them water and sanitation, was also a compelling reason for the year 2000 local government restructuring (and also the creation, in 1997, of the Cape Metropolitan Council, which was tasked with integrating and managing all "bulk services" in the metropolitan area).

So – as the centenary of the 1913 unification approaches, apart from being a record of an interesting period in local history, does the story told in this paper have any relevance today?

No and yes.

"No", because the 1913 unification was unique in the extent to which it was driven by water and sanitation delivery issues -- the 2000 amalgamation had, and any future municipal consolidation in the Western Cape will have, much less to do with water and sanitation. But "yes", because water and sanitation are just as much of an issue for a huge number of Cape Town citizens as they ever were – as they are indeed of all South Africans.

Water and sanitation have never in South Africa's history ever been higher on national agendas than they have been since 1994. Not just water supply of the right quantity, and to potable standards, but access and management of the supply; also levels of service, and the price of water, and payment (or non-payment). Of concern also are issues of wastewater quality, and where it goes to. Water resource limitations, too, are of increasing concern at both national and local level.

Even Cape Town, a relatively well-managed municipality, has not been free of service delivery protests -- and access to water (and its price) has as often as not been a key focus of such protests.

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