

History Question of the Month

What Butler Resident worked for Salt Lake City's Big Cottonwood Chlorination Station that began operation in 1917?

Answer

William Henry Staker was the son of Nathan H. Staker and Matilda Wagstaff. He was born in Butler, Utah, in 1889. In 1912, he married Mabel Hilton, the daughter of David A. Hilton and Margaret Burt. The Hilton family moved to Butler sometime after 1900, they bought the old Philander Butler homestead. Henry started working for the U.S. Government in 1913, as a forest ranger, patrolling the canyon. Around 1920, he began working for Salt Lake City at the Chlorination Station [predecessor of the Water Treatment Plant] at the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon]. He moved his family into the house that was built behind the Chlorination Station. He and his wife lived there for nearly 40 years, raising their three children in that home. When the Chlorination Station was replaced by a modern Water Treatment plant about 1957, they moved to a home on Wasatch Boulevard.

Operating the Chlorination Station was a 24/7 job. The Station was alarmed in case of malfunction of the chlorine feeding system or leakage of chlorine gas. If any malfunction occurred, an alarm sounded in the house. The plant had huge screens to screen the debris from the creek, but they had to be operated manually in order to wash the debris off of them. In the fall, the amount of debris increased significantly, requiring the hiring of an additional man to work the night shift.

During WWII, there was concern that the enemy would try and sabotage the water supplies, Murray City posted guards at McGhie Springs and Salt Lake City had their plant operator patrol the canyon making sure the wooden pipeline bringing water from the upper lakes, did not show signs of sabotage. Almon Green, in a history he wrote about growing up in Butler, mentions the house and Chlorination Station at the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon, where the Staker family lived. He recalled often seeing Henry on his motorcycle patrolling the canyon.

Henry's granddaughter, Judy Draper, has fond memories of visiting her grandparents, and still vividly remembers the home, Chlorination Station and the diversion dam. She recalls on one occasion, while visiting, the alarm went off in the building where the spare chlorine tanks were kept. Her grandfather told them all to stay in the house. He donned protective clothing and a gas mask and left to identify and correct the problem. She remembers that once the emergency was over and they could go outside, that everything was covered in fine yellowish green powder.