

# Silver Hills

## *Reservoirs*

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### Silver Hills Reservoirs

New Albany Water Works Company

*1875 - 1999*



*New Albany Water Works c. 1893*

(Picture 1)

*Art Work New Albany Illustrated*

Mr. John Frederick Gebhart made the reservoirs on the knob west of the city of New Albany possible. Born December 1831 in Maytown, Pennsylvania and with a family background in the woolen mills, Mr. Gebhart came to New Albany in 1860 at the age of 29. With the help of John T. Creed he set up a small woolen mill on State Street. In 1869 the New Albany Woolen Mill Company located on Vincennes Street purchased Mr. Gebhart's mill, and he became president and superintend of the New Albany Woolen Mills Company. The mill produced jeans, blankets, kerseys, plaid and government flannels and cotton wraps. By 1883 Mr. Gebhart had successfully established the Woolen Mills, Cotton Mills and Hosiery Mills in New Albany.

Articles of Incorporation for the New Albany Water Company were filed in 1881 by a group of capitalists in New Albany. Interestingly, M. Gebhart's name is not listed as one of the first subscribers. The plan to build reservoirs on the knob failed to gain support

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*John F. Gebhart, Roselinda Gebhart. John Gebhart had three sons: John R. Gebhart, David R. Gebart and James J. Gebhart*

*Photo Courtesy The New Albany-Floyd County Public Library*

due to the proposed cost of construction. A few years later Mr. Gebhart found his Woolen Mills in need of a clean supply of water. The New Albany Woolen Mills Company was unable to manufacture fancy plaid flannels to compete with the mills back east for lack of pure water. Water in the reservoirs moved slowly ***“through opposite diagonal corners, from one reservoir to the other, until delivered into the new one, allowing sufficient chance for settling and aeration by exposure to the strong current of air on the knobs.”***<sup>1</sup> The water was cleansed by this process. Mr. Gebhart eventually convinced investors and city officials the reservoirs would bring huge benefits to the residents and industries in New Albany. With a system of hydrants installed throughout the city the New Albany the city fire department could provide better fire protection, lowering insurance rates.

<sup>1</sup>*The Advantages of the Surrounding of New Albany, Indiana June 1892*

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A story appears in the Daily Ledger-Standard on August 12, 1879 three years after the water works began operation. The article lists the top five consumers of water from the water works. Mr. Gebhart's Woolen Mill is listed as the largest user at an annual rate of 150,000 gallons. The flouring mills are listed the next largest users at 21,000 gallons.

With Mr. Gebhart as the primary investor in the project Articles of Incorporation for the New Albany Water Works Company were filed with the State of Indiana on October 16, 1874. It was initially capitalized at \$150,000. The following New Albany business men invested in the Company: John F. Gebhart, W.S. Culbertson, Jesse J. Brown, Morris McDonald, John K. Woodward, Sr., R.G. McCord, D.C. Hill and H.O. Cannon. W.H. Dillingham purchased the stock remaining. The Water Works was set up to be managed by seven directors: John F. Gebhart, W.S. Culbertson, Jesse J. Brown, Morris McDonald, John K. Woodward, Sr., R.G. McCord and D.C. Hill. Mr. Gebhart was chosen president, W.N. Mahon, secretary, and Frank Shefold, superintendent. New Albany's beloved Seth Woodruff notarized the Articles of Incorporation.<sup>2</sup>

The land on the Knob was purchased from John B. Winstandley in 1875 and construction began. In 1876 an additional \$150,000 was raised bringing the total capitalization to \$300,000. By August, *Conger* and Howard had manufactured 1,100,000 bricks. ***"The brick work of one of the reservoirs has been completed, and about one-third of the masonry on the other is finished."***<sup>3</sup> The bricks were used to line the ponds. The company purchased additional property from George Tuley and George Morrison to run pipes to the pumping station. The pumps were located down on the river between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> streets.

In 1891 improvements were made to the reservoirs. There were four ponds initially, two large ponds and two smaller ponds. The two smaller ponds were combined to make one large pond bringing the number of reservoirs to three (see picture on page 1). The water mains throughout the city were upgraded resulting in an increase in water pressure. ***"The company is desirous of giving first class service and when the new reservoir in New Albany is completed and the new mains laid the water service in New Albany will be equal to the best in every particular."***<sup>4</sup>

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*The house in picture (1) on the first page is the home of Henry Terstegge and his family. Morris McDonald, mayor of New Albany from 1889 to 1892 built the house in 1883. Mr. McDonald sold the house to Henry Terstegge in 1891. The house was referred to as the "Towers". The three-story house was magnificent with a reflection pool in the front, a long circular driveway, a beautiful carriage house, and an annex located across from their private drive and behind the house. The front of the house faced the east. Adams Street, which turns into Highland Avenue today was originally a private drive to the Terstegge residence. Mr. Terstegge died in 1913 and the house was sold. It eventually burned down (date to be determined).*

<sup>2</sup>Articles of Incorporation October 16, 1874

<sup>3</sup>The Daily Ledger Standard

<sup>4</sup>Public Press June 22, 1891

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*New Albany Water Works  
c. 1999*

(Picture 2)

*Photography by  
Kelly Carnighan*

Residents in the City began to complain about the quality of the water coming from the New Albany Water Works Company and in late 1915. The City started construction of a filtration plant on Highland Avenue. By July 13, 1916, ***“The filter plant proper, a large three story building of brick, and pure water tank, from which the city will get it’s water direct, are practically done, but the connection with the great raw water tanks is not established.”*** By the late 1940’s a tragic event occurred prompting the New Albany Water Works to erect a perimeter fence around the facility. A baby was found dead in one of the ponds, a victim of “abortion”. The identity of the baby and its mother was never established.<sup>5</sup>

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*The house circled to the left in picture 2 above is the Endris house. The house circled to the right is Squire George Tuley’s home built in 1891.*

<sup>5</sup>*Record of Deaths in New Albany January 8, 1949*



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*Post Card Picture  
c. 1909*

(Picture 3)

*Silver Hills Historical Society*

For 73 years before the fence was installed the reservoirs served as a community gathering spot for the residents of Silver Hills. The reservoirs took on a park like atmosphere. For ten cents, “Mr. Thomas Fawcett, caretaker of the reservoirs”, allowed people to go up in the brick tower for a grand view of the Ohio River Valley below. Neighbors strolled around the ponds on brick sidewalks enjoying the evening sunset. It offered a place to go to relax from the summer heat. Young, romantic couples held hands and experienced their first kiss. Boys used it for a swimming hole. Folks leisurely boated in the ponds. Hattie Tuley, Squire George Tuley’s daughter by his second wife, married George Everbach. They were married on September 10, 1911. The wedding and reception was held on George Tuley’s front lawn. Uninvited neighbors gathered on top of the reservoir to watch the party below. In the latter days boys dug a hole and wiggled under the fence at night to swim in the ponds, climb the water tank and frolic about. The operator on duty would scare them away but rarely was anyone caught.

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*The house in (picture 3) and to the left of the tall tower is the home of J.O. Endris. The property originally belonged to G. W. Morrison, one of the first residents on the Knob. Mary Endris bought the land from the Morrison heirs on January 27, 1902.*

**Conger of D. J. Conger** – D. J. Conger built the New Albany Highland Railway trolley car line in 1891.

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