Recently, the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners for the City of Mobile won the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region IV Award for Excellence in Drinking Water in the Large System Category. This award was made possible, in part, due to a project that, for most Mobilians, has meant more than any other engineering undertaking since the 1940s.

On September 27, 1949, a five-member “Water Works Board of the City of Mobile,” appointed by the City Commission, was established for the purpose of providing a public water supply for the City’s filtration plant on Moffat Road. This action was a result of population growth in the Mobile area during and immediately after World War II. A feasibility study proposed Big Creek, with a 120-square-mile watershed area in the western part of the County, as the best supply alternative. After several further studies of anticipated and desired industrial, commercial, and residential growth, the new Board recommended this location to the City and Planning Commissions.

Obtaining community support, the Board developed long-term water delivery contracts with Hollingsworth & Whitney Company (later to become Scott Paper Company and now Kimberly Clark, Inc.), International Paper Company, and the City of Mobile. These contracts guaranteed sufficient customer income to finance the new water supply with $7 million of Industrial Water Revenue Bonds. For the next two years, the Board proceeded with land acquisition and construction of the project that became: (1) a 75-foot high earthen dam with concrete spillway that created a 3,600 acre (18 billion gallon) lake at an elevation of 110 feet, (2) a 100 MGD pumping station with eight 800 horsepower vertical turbine pumps, (3) one 900 HP diesel powered pump, (4) two 60-inch diameter transmission lines 9 miles long to reservoirs at an elevation of 210 feet on the site of the existing filter plant, and (5) a 48-inch diameter transmission line extending 7 miles further east to serve the two industrial raw water customers at an elevation of 25 feet. Upon completion in 1952, the Big Creek project became the foundation for satisfying Mobile’s water needs for the next 100 years.

Mobile is now approaching the half-way point of the project’s operation, and the system is performing well beyond the level many had hoped. While several additions have been made to improve the system in the intervening years, and while the responsible authority is now the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners of the City of Mobile, the community has received and will continue to receive immense benefits from the original planning and construction of the Big Creek water supply project. Mobile continues to stand ready to provide water for potable or industrial use, as necessary, to accommodate this growing port city. In the next fifty years, the Board will concentrate on watershed management and water conservation to protect this resource and provide safe drinking water to future generations.