A Pioneering Effort

1940s

A 1947 Dodge truck was an early HRSD purchase.

Major challenges lay ahead following voter approval of the referendum authorizing creation of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District. First was identifying which communities planned to opt out of the district to build their own facilities. Next was securing Federal funding and passing a new referendum authorizing $6.5 million in bonds. Not least was commencement of World War II, which threatened momentum due to possible materials shortages.

Vote TODAY on the Pollution Problem

A CLEAR STATEMENT OF FACTS REGARDING THE POLLUTION PROBLEM – EXPRESS YOURSELVES AT THE POLLS TODAY EITHER "YES" OR "NAYSAYS" IT . . . NO, DO NOT FAIL TO VOTE

QUESTION: What is the Hampton Roads Sanitation District?

QUESTION: What is the Hampton Roads Sanitation Commission?

QUESTION: What is the primary object of the Hampton Roads Sanitation Commission?

QUESTION: What does the word "pollution" mean as applied to water within the sanitation district?

QUESTION: Why should anything be controlled?

QUESTION: Is it practicable to control pollution?

QUESTION: If a town is at present connected to a sewer system what would be the approximate cost?

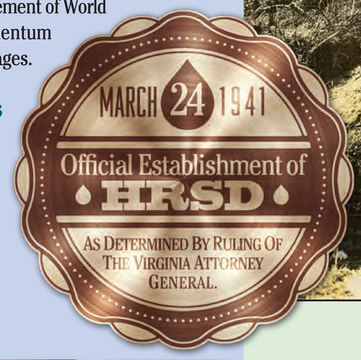
QUESTION: How will the 10,000,000 necessary for building and operating the sewerage disposal system be raised in the community?

QUESTION: What is a vacuum tank?

QUESTION: Does a sewerage bond involve heaping taxes against real estate?

QUESTION: Is it more economical for each City and County to operate its own sewerage disposal system?

There was early success in obtaining support for $2.5 million from the Federal Works Administration and $1 million from the Defense Department. But even these funds were not assured as Portsmouth, South Norfolk, Norfolk County and Yorktown voted to secede from the district and apply for their own grants. Federal funds were also dependent on a successful bond referendum.



Raw sewage ran in open ditches as children played in the Simonsdale neighborhood in 1944, documenting the need for construction of a sanitary sewer system.

"Defer the Sewage Program"

"After mature and deliberate consideration and appraisal of all the factors involved, we have arrived at the studied conclusion that consummation of the program should be deferred until the demands and urgencies of the war have been relieved. To us a full and undivided concentration on the war effort is paramount."

– *DAILY PRESS*, MARCH 18, 1942

The Lamberts Point Plant outfall was constructed in 1946.

July 1, 1941 The Hampton Roads Sanitation District Commission held its first meeting.

Retired Vice-Admiral Joseph K. Taussig worked closely with the Hampton Roads Sewage Disposal Commission in the late 1930s as Commandant, Fifth District, to support passage of the referendum.

On July 1, 1941, he became chairman of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District Commission which also included vice chairman Braden Vandeventer; Newport News City Manager Joseph C. Biggins; J. S. Darling of Hampton; and Hugh Johnston of Portsmouth.

"Let's Not Retreat"

"…HRSD has officially pledged itself to undertake no construction not entirely compatible with the war effort, (with) the question of compatibility to be decided not by the commission but by the U.S. government. Let's not retreat. Let's go ahead."

– *THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT*, JULY 20, 1942

July 1943 Vice-Admiral Joseph K. Taussig was called back to active duty and resigned as Chairman and General Manager of HRSD.

October 18, 1944 HRSD hired its first fulltime General Manager, Reid W. Digges.

August 14, 1945 People were dancing in the middle of Granby Street after President Truman announced the surrender of Japanese forces, thus ending World War II.

June 21, 1946 The first three major contracts under the $6.5 million bonding authority were awarded by HRSD to begin laying pipelines at Boat Harbor in Newport News and Lamberts Point in Norfolk.

June 26, 1946 The Warwick County Trunk Sewer, HRSD's first construction project, began.

October 14, 1947 The Army Base Plant was acquired from the U.S. Government, becoming HRSD's first wastewater treatment plant. It opened 4 days later on October 18.

June 15, 1948 Lamberts Point Treatment Plant began operation.

June 24, 1948 The Boat Harbor Treatment Plant began operation.

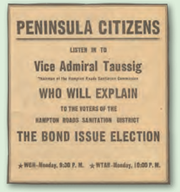
NEW BULKHEAD PILINGS AT BOAT HARBOR

This shows the new steel pilings being placed at the municipal boat harbor, one of the last steps looking toward the completion of the large sewage disposal plant to be erected at the boat harbor as a part of the vast Hampton Roads sanitation commission's project. The steel pieces are set into place with the large derrick, at the left of the picture. The ferry slips may be seen, over the top of some of the pilings already in place, to the right.

DAILY PRESS – JANUARY 12, 1947

Even in the 1940s, technology was utilized in efficient and environmentally friendly ways. A network of gravity pipelines, in conjunction with pump stations, channeled wastewater to the treatment plants. There it was processed using a system of chemical and organic treatments that killed bacteria before discharge. Byproducts of this process were used to heat treatment plants, operate plant machinery and for use as fertilizer. In addition, excess electricity generated from the plant was sold.

A Regional Effort: Divided but United



PENINSULA CITIZENS

LISTEN IN TO

Vice Admiral Taussig

Chairman of the Hampton Roads Sanitation Commission

WHO WILL EXPLAIN

TO THE VOTERS OF THE

HAMPTON ROADS SANITATION DISTRICT

THE BOND ISSUE ELECTION

WGH–Monday, 9:30 P. M. WTAR–Monday, 10:00 P. M.

While there was a commitment by all the communities to establish facilities as required by law, there were competing solutions and some chose to go it alone – at least at first. Even still, it was a regional effort with a unified goal of stopping water pollution. Initially, the Norfolk City Council voted itself out of the district, but almost immediately opted back in. Norfolk County voted itself out in 1941 before deciding to return in 1942. South Norfolk passed a $150,000 bond vote in early 1942, but with expenses more than anticipated, voted itself back into HRSD in August 1946. Meanwhile, Portsmouth, working in cooperation with HRSD and the Federal government, successfully continued its $3 million independent effort to establish wastewater facilities converging at Pinner's Point.

Daily Press

Threat By Nazis To Caucasus Multiplies

SANITATION DISTRICT BONDS APPROVED 2-1

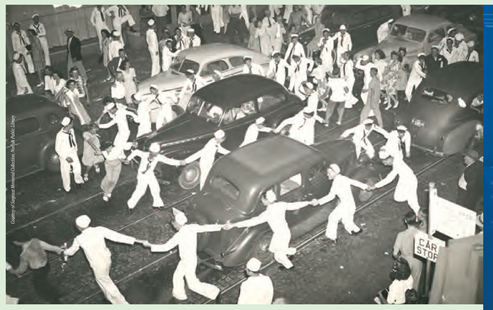
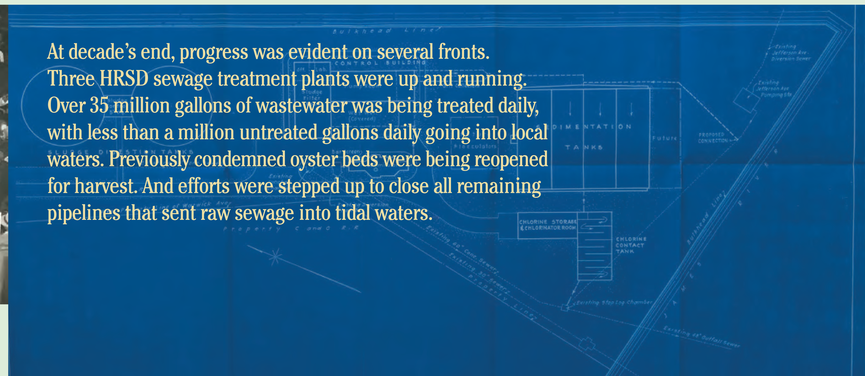
Vote Extremely Light In Whole Area; 1,805 Favorable Majority

Vote By Units

July 21, 1942 A $6.5 million HRSD bond referendum passed 3,389 to 1,584.

Despite turmoil, division and uncertainty, the $6.5 million HRSD bond referendum passed by a 2-1 margin. But there was concern that wartime was not the right moment to embark on such an ambitious project. Even the *Daily Press*, a stalwart in advocating for a solution to the sewage problem, editorialized that construction should wait.

Meanwhile, the early 1940s saw a significant increase in population with an influx of as many as 150,000 defense and civilian workers. New housing developments began springing up, which greatly impacted sanitation and sewage disposal. HRSD worked to have all new sewer lines conform to its newly approved Master Plan.



At decade's end, progress was evident on several fronts. Three HRSD sewage treatment plants were up and running. Over 35 million gallons of wastewater was being treated daily, with less than a million untreated gallons daily going into local waters. Previously condemned oyster beds were being reopened for harvest. And efforts were stepped up to close all remaining pipelines that sent raw sewage into tidal waters.