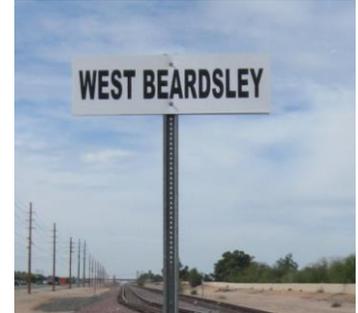
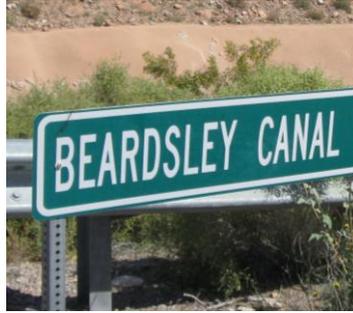

Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen



Beardsley was here long before Sun City ... who was he?

The northern boundary of Sun City is Beardsley Road. Over in Sun City West, there is a Beardsley Park Rec Center. If you drive to Vistancia, you cross the Beardsley Canal ...and if you know where to look, there is a "West Beardsley sign along the railroad track. So who was this "Beardsley?"

The canal gives us the clue that he must have been associated with water – and he was in a big way! Earliest settlers in the Salt River Valley realized the depressions in the earth were remnants of ancient canals. Add water, and the desert was very fertile. Miles of new canals were dug on both sides of the Salt River as the Valley went "canal crazy" in the late 1800s.

A group of businessmen saw a potential further west in the watershed of the Agua Fria River, whose bed today lies between Sun City and Sun City West. If it were dammed, canals could deliver water to 160,000 acres along the far west side of the Valley. Engineer George Beardsley was so excited with the potential, that he called his brother William out west to join him in building the dams and canals. George died soon after, and it would be William who would guide the project for the next 30+ years.



What seemed a straight-forward construction project ran into one obstacle after another. The first dam begun in 1892 washed out in the heavy rains of 1895 ... and Beardsley's company went broke. He returned east, got funding from former associates, and pressed on. In 1902, to foil land speculators, the federal government withdrew all public lands in the Valley from sale while they planned and built Roosevelt Dam – leaving Beardsley without land to irrigate. He got the Santa Fe railroad to exchange worthless land across northern Arizona for 32,000 acres of government land in the Agua Fria watershed. He paid them \$2.50/acre, and now had land for irrigation. Beardsley promptly sold 6,000 acres to the SW Cotton Corp. for \$20/acre, and had the funds for construction of a major dam.

There would be other setbacks, and Beardsley would never see the completion of the dam.

Fortunately, he had brought his son into the business, and he would take over and complete the project.

Thinking ahead earlier, Beardsley had platted the town of Beardsley along the railroad at about where today's Beardsley Rd would intersect Grand Ave. It was to be the center of the farming community -- the place where supplies were received and farm products shipped. It didn't become much more than a sheep-shearing station with people living in the tents seen in the background of this photo. The small town of Beardsley gradually faded into history in the 1940s.



Visit the Visitor's Center at Lake Pleasant for the remarkable story of this man, his son, and two others whose names live on in the West Valley: Engineer Carl Pleasant and investor Donald Waddell.