

Water Conservation Pioneer Saluted

OKLAHOMA Water Resources Board appropriately salutes Dr. Lloyd E. Church of Wilburton in the first issue of its monthly newsletter.

The 84-year-old dentist "dedicated his life to the development and conservation of Oklahoma's precious soil and water resources," the publication notes.

Having been acquainted with Dr. Church for some 35 years, this writer can add a hearty "Amen!" to the story of his work. Many cities and towns will have water in their pipelines this summer because of work done by Dr. Church and associates in water conservation.

Dr. Church's 50 years of "intense water evangelism" have been truly statewide. He was born near Carmen in Alfalfa County in 1896 and his family moved to Seiling when he was 10.

"No one on welfare today had as hard a time as I did," Church recalled. "I grew up in a small, poor man's town. There was no money for kids like me. Just poverty."

His willingness to work impressed

a druggist, who put him through the school of dentistry in Kansas City. Church returned to Seiling in 1919. Later he moved to Grandfield, where he was elected to the city commission and plunged into the town's water problems.

Grandfield's supply was conveyed from Red River through a leaky cedar pipe. Before Dr. Church left there eight years later, the town had a system of airlift wells and a new pipeline.

He moved to Clinton in 1929, but water problems were there, too. Water levels were low and well water was hard and unpalatable. "Water was never far from my mind in those dust bowl days on the Oklahoma plains and in those poverty-ridden towns," Dr. Church said.

He worked to help solve the problems. He was first president of the Washita Council of Soil Conservation Districts and held other posts of responsibility. During the 1950s, Church headed a statewide water policy study committee, whose recommendations led to creation of the Water Resources Board and enact-

ment of improved water laws.

"Lured by the siren song of eastern Oklahoma's abundant water and resources" Dr. Church moved to Wilburton 28 years ago. He found that area had water problems, too.

"It is my conviction that the greatest threat to our prosperity, our health and even our lives is posed by the uncontrolled runoff of waters," Dr. Church said, adding that farmers alone cannot solve the problems.

"Without the support of people in our cities and towns, the state's water problems can be expected to multiply, affecting rural areas first, then crippling the economic progress of the whole state," the water conservation leader said.

Church is convinced that Oklahoma eventually must have and will have an east-to-west water conveyance system.

"It will come, and support for it will rise from the grassroots," Dr. Church says. "We mustn't worry about the cost of the water conveyance. Who worried about the cost of getting to the moon?"