A BRIEF HISTORY…

The Discovery of Gold
The first discovery of gold in Western Australia was made in the Kimberley region in 1885. Subsequent discoveries were the Yilgarn find in 1887, Pilbara in 1888 and the Murchison in 1889. However, the discovery of gold by Bayley and Ford at Coolgardie in 1892, followed by the Hannan’s find at Kalgoorlie (previously named Hannans) in 1893 led to a boom from which developed the world famed Golden Mile. These discoveries focused attention on the State's gold producing potential and enticed prospectors from all parts of the colony and overseas. The influx of prospectors was so great that by 1896, Coolgardie had a population of over 4,000 while nearby Hannans had been declared a municipality.

Scarcity of Water
In 1895, the Government decided that some form of comprehensive water scheme would be necessary. Under the guidance of the Engineer-in-Chief, C.Y.O’Connor who was responsible for designing and overseeing the construction of the pipeline, thirty one alternative proposals were prepared and from these, three were chosen and placed before the government. The source of supply in each case was to come from The Darling Ranges where the water would be pumped in successive lifts to Mount Burgess, north of Coolgardie then sent to other mining centres.

The three schemes provided for pumping amounts of 1, 5 or 10 million gallons of water daily; of these, the scheme adopted for a daily supply of 5 million gallons at a probable cost of $5,000,000 and a selling price of 35 cents per 1,000 gallons. In September 1896, under the guidance of the premier, Sir John Forrest, Parliament sanctioned the raising of a loan of $5,000,000 for the construction of a storage reservoir, pipeline, requisite pumping stations and receiving tanks.

Construction Commenced
The foundations were laid by January 1900 and work continued day and night until completion in June 1902. In all, a total of 77,508 casks of cement were used. Contracts for the pipes were let in October 1898, and for the pumps in March 1900. The excavation of the pipe-trench was begun in March 1900 and the laying and jointing of pipes in March 1901. About 90 miles were completed that year and the remaining 260 miles (including the extension to Kalgoorlie) in 1902. The first pumping took place in action by April 1902 and the Weir and subsidiary works were practically completed in April 1903. Water reached Kalgoorlie in the middle of January 1903.
The Pipeline Completed
This would be a huge undertaking by today’s standards. The fact that it was done at the turn of the century makes it a remarkable achievement. The whole period of construction was less than five years even though it was necessary to import most of the construction materials from overseas. The scheme in its conception is magnificent and its construction is rightly regarded as an engineering triumph.
The cost of the original work was $5,732,908.
On January 22, 1903, Lady Forrest started pumping machinery at an opening ceremony held at Mundaring Weir. On the 24th of January 1903, Sir John Forrest turned the guiding wheel valve in Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie to officially open the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme.

Development of the Scheme Since 1903
In 1907, the construction of a branch main, North of Tammin began to supply agricultural regions in the area with additional water. By 1947, some 800 miles of pipes had been laid, bringing water to nearly 1,000,000 acres of farmlands. Further developments to the pipeline continued after this time with the “Modified Comprehensive Scheme” which served a further 4,100,000 acres of land. Extensions continued until 1973 to ensure that adequate supply of water to agricultural areas between Perth and Kalgoorlie.
The original scheme had eight steam driven pumping stations. The first four each had three pumping engines and the remaining four, two each. With increasing demand for water, it became necessary to progressively replace these stations with more powerful equipment.

Completion of a Cycle
The Goldfields Water Supply Scheme was born out of the necessity to provide an adequate supply of water to the Goldfields, following the discovery of mineral wealth – gold in the late 1800’s. This, in turn, focused worldwide attention on Western Australia and contributed largely to its development by attracting large numbers of prospectors and settlers.
With the decline of the gold mining industry in the first quarter of the last century, development spread to the agricultural areas; an expanding sheep and stock industry was made possible by extending the Water Supply built originally in the Goldfields. The cycle has been completed. Mining is again flourishing in the Goldfields District. Although gold still retains an important place, the main prizes now are other metals such as nickel in Kambalda and iron ore in Koolyanobbing.

Predictions Fulfilled
The Goldfields, Country Towns and Agricultural Water Supply Scheme now stands as a monument to the foresight of the statesman at the turn of the century and to the engineering skills and the determination of the designer and builder of the scheme.