

# 9 YEARS LATER

# AIKEN'S H-BOOM

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## Section Enjoys Steady Growth As Hydrogen Facility Expands

BY ED KENNEY

Observer S. C. News Service

AIKEN, S. C. — Nine years ago this was a peaceful little community of some 7,000 persons — including the nearby areas.

Today, it's a bustling city of 21,000.

In the same period of time, the county's population jumped from 52,000 to an estimated 90,000.

What caused this tremendous population boom, an increase of 300 per cent for the city and nearly 100

per cent for the county? You might call it an H-Bomb explosion.

Because the growth can all be traced back to Nov. 28, 1950 when the Atomic Energy Commission announced plans for its big Savannah River plant, 12 miles south of here.

As a prelude to growth, there was first a period of destruction, of confusing, of uprooting families and destroying entire cities.

No longer do the South Carolina maps include such towns as Ellenton and Dunbarton.

They were evacuated. Entire cemeteries were moved.

To start construction enough dirt was excavated to build a wall 10 feet high and six feet wide from Atlanta, Georgia, to Portland, Oregon.

The boom had begun!

For instance:

Enough lumber, 85 million board

feet, was used to have built 15,385 homes, enough to house a town of 46,155 people.

From 1951 to January of this year a total of \$648 million in wages was paid by the big Du Pont facility.

Today, the annual payroll is \$50 million. An additional \$36 million is spent annually for equipment, materials, and services.

This is the dollar sign that keyed the population boom.

### A World Wonder

The \$1.3 billion installation is one of the wonders of the world. But Uncle Sam's top-secret stamp on most of its operations will keep it from ever qualifying as a tourist attraction.

The "H-Bomb Plant" produces atomic and hydrogen weapons. And it also produces some important peace-time by-products.

"I have a strong feeling," said AEC Plant Manager Robert C. Blair, "that history will record that the Savannah River plant played an important role during a critical period of international tension."

The plant has been described as the largest single construction job ever undertaken in the United States. The work force of 38,582 men is almost as large as that required to build the Panama Canal.

Little is known about the details of the plant's operation.

It has, however, been revealed that the plant has five huge nuclear reactors, a heavy water plant, separation and storage facilities for the "hot" by-products.

Production figures are a military secret.

### Peace-Time Goals

Peace-time projects include experiments in preserving food through irradiation, the sale of heavy water, the irradiation of cobalt for cancer treatments, and the distribution of uranium to schools and universities for use in sub-critical reactors to train nuclear engineers.

Institutions which have received aid in this program include North Carolina State College, Georgia Tech, Auburn, and the University of Florida.

The plant is also one of several "atomic garbage" sites in the nation.

The storage tanks here contain some of the "hottest" wastes stored on U. S. soil. The thousands of gallons of atomic waste material are in tremendous underground tanks.

### They Don't Talk

The veil of secrecy here was lifted slightly earlier this year to disclose that experiments are under way on possible use of radioactive plant by-products to create electric power for space missiles.

Secrecy is no major problem at the plant.

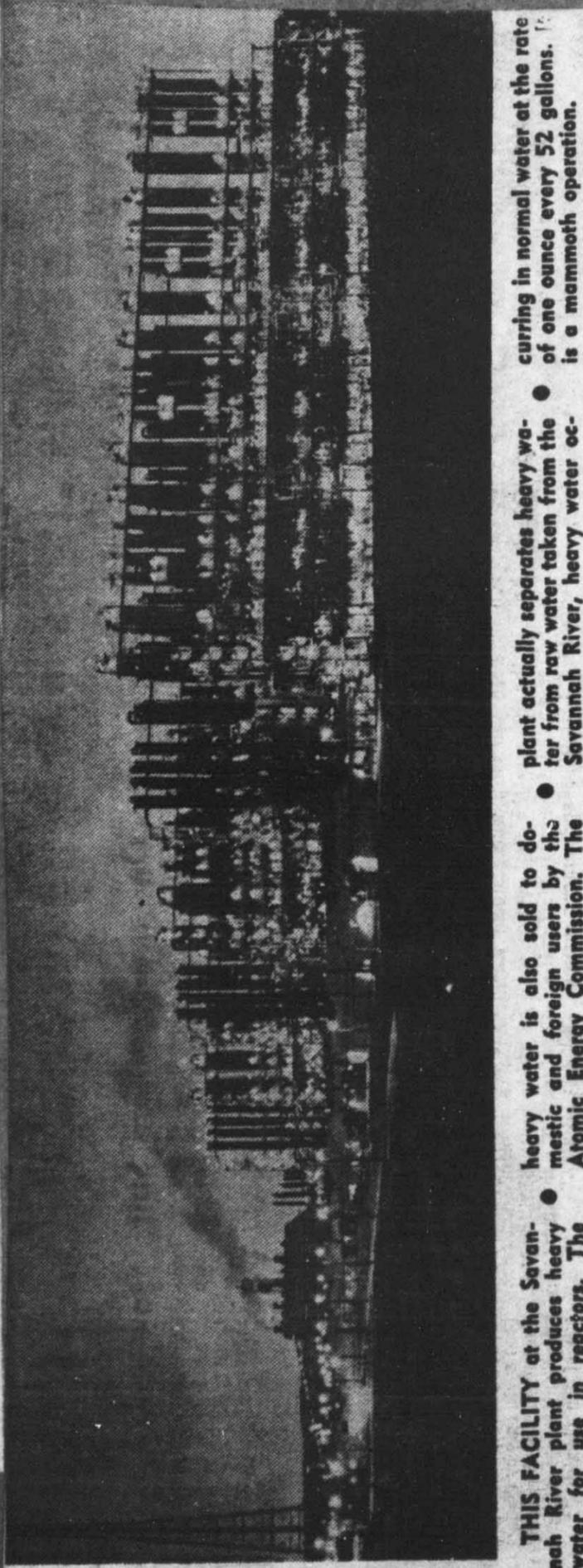
There is a security force.

Employees do not discuss their work.

And the average citizen figures he wouldn't understand them if they did.

They aren't too concerned about the actual work at the plant.

They are satisfied, for the most part, with the tremendous economic boom that the plant has caused in Aiken county, a boom that has spilled over into Barnwell and Allendale counties in S. C. and Richmond county in Georgia.



THIS FACILITY at the Savannah River plant produces heavy water for use in reactors. The heavy water is also sold to domestic and foreign users by the Atomic Energy Commission. The plant actually separates heavy water from raw water taken from the Savannah River, heavy water occurring in normal water at the rate of one ounce every 52 gallons. This is a mammoth operation.