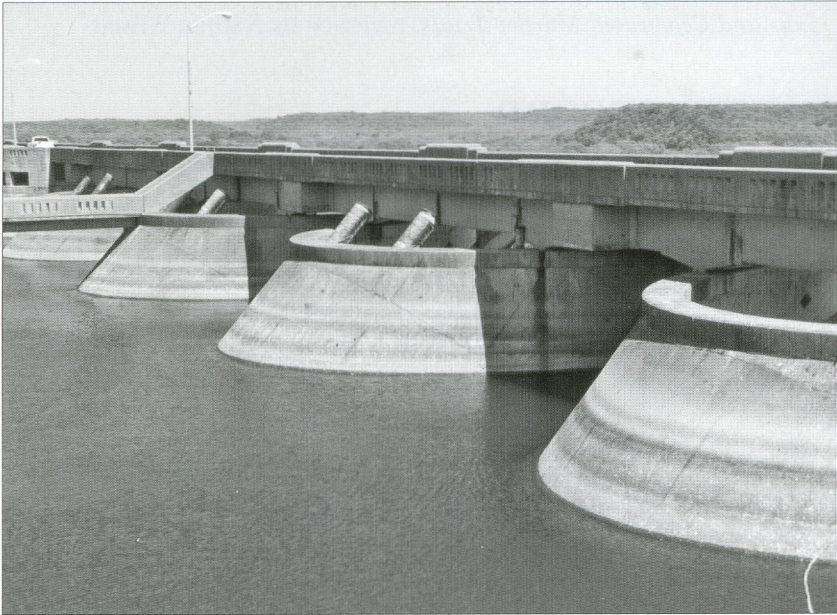


Water and Power



Developing the Grand River Dam Authority, Part 1, 1935–1944

*By Richard Lowitt**

The Grand River Dam, constructed with federal funds and costing Oklahoma taxpayers nary a penny, helped turn northeastern Oklahoma green and transformed an economically deprived, poverty-stricken area into a thriving, generally prosperous region. The Grand River Dam Authority, the state agency overseeing the dam's operation, would never have been developed if not for the arduous efforts of U.S. Representative Wesley Ernest Disney

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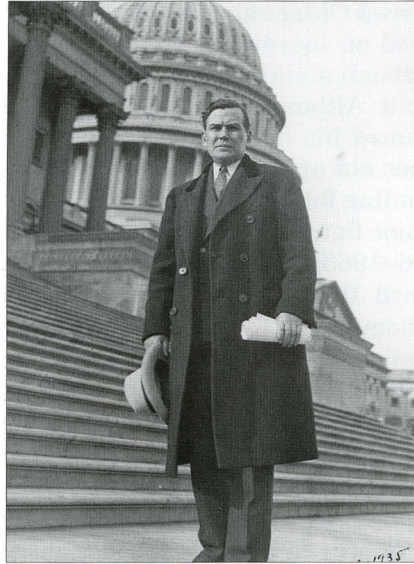
(1883–1961), a member of Congress who is all but forgotten today. Disney served Oklahoma's First District for seven terms (1931–45) and devoted an inordinate amount of his time to shepherding the project through a maze of New Deal agencies that were required to sign off on it. Although a settlement that sprang up near Pensacola Dam assumed his name, by his own request the name of Wesley Disney does not appear on any of the plaques recording the names of the founding fathers of the Grand River Dam Authority.

The major figure in Oklahoma water history has been Robert S. Kerr (1896–1963), and rightfully so. But Kerr did not enter the U.S. Senate until 1949. In that half of Congress Elmer (John William Elmer) Thomas (1876–1965) played a key role in furthering projects to develop the Arkansas River. When possible, Kerr assisted Disney's efforts in pushing for the creation and development of the Grand River Dam Authority. In 1944, when he sought to replace Thomas in the Senate, Disney was defeated. Thomas in turn met defeat by Mike Monroney in the 1950 Democratic primary. Thereafter, Kerr emerged as an influential member of the Senate. He devoted his efforts to making the Arkansas River, the nation's last major undeveloped river, a viable waterway, one that helped change the course of Oklahoma history. Although Kerr was instrumental in bringing this project to fruition, Wesley Disney played a key role at the outset.

Interest in developing the Grand River dated back to the early decades of the twentieth century. Historically, floods had repeatedly devastated crops and homes in the Grand River drainage system, which was a part of the Arkansas River system. Originating in central Kansas, the Neosho River flows in a southeasterly direction, joining the Spring River in northeastern Oklahoma. Here the stream becomes the Grand River, retaining that name until it flows into the Arkansas River near Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. The Grand registered a watershed length of more than 250 miles and a maximum drainage width of approximately one hundred miles near the Kansas-Oklahoma border. There its waters were joined by those of the Spring and Elk Rivers. Though comprising only one-thirteenth of the Arkansas Basin area, the Grand River produced one-fourth of the flood control problem on the lower Arkansas River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported to Congress in 1935 and recommended "that there be participation by the United States in the control of floods in the Grand (Neosho) waterbed." Engineers claimed that the discrepancy could be resolved through a dam that served for both flood control and power generation.¹

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*U.S. Rep. Wesley
Ernest Disney
(Courtesy Carl
Albert Center
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Archives,
University of
Oklahoma).*



However, neither a local market nor funding for multipurpose river valley development became available until the Great Depression spawned the New Deal in the 1930s. In 1935 U.S. Representative Wesley Disney began advocating the development of the Grand River. A committee for the Proposed Arkansas River Development approved a dam on the river, and the Mississippi Valley Committee gave the project an “A” rating. In addition to serving the purpose of providing jobs to the unemployed in northeastern Oklahoma, the project would add to the resources of the area, in terms of electrical power, and would improve recreational, and thereby economic, opportunities. Groups throughout the region reiterated these views and clamored for development to be initiated. For several years Senator Elmer Thomas had been trying to get the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to commit to the construction of dams and reservoirs as flood control projects. Thomas’s approach left the Grand River project to rest on its merits as a power site approved by the state.²

On April 9, 1935, Senate Bill 395, creating the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) and defining its powers, rights, and responsibilities, was proposed by Senator Jack L. Rorschach of Vinita. The bill moved swiftly, almost without a hitch, through both bodies of Oklahoma’s Fifteenth Legislature. Governor Ernest W. Marland

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signed the Grand River Dam Authority Act, the agency's enabling measure, on April 26, 1935. A state agency, the GRDA would manage "a conservation and reclamation district" that encompassed fourteen counties of northeastern Oklahoma. The agency was to have a nine-member board of directors, three of whom were to be appointed by the governor, three by the attorney general, and three by the commissioner of labor. However, as the bill moved through the legislature in the spring of 1935, Glade R. Kirkpatrick, a state representative from Tulsa, had attached an amendment requiring that all of the power generated by the project was to be sold at the turbines and only to utility companies that would then resell it to consumers. Thus, the Authority was to be denied the right to develop its own distribution system that would sell electricity directly to the public.³

In late April and May the board was constituted. Governor Ernest W. Marland, Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson, and Commissioner of Labor W. A. Pat Murphy made known their selections of directors as soon as possible. The directors' terms of office varied in length, ranging from two to six years, and the composition of the board changed as directors completed their terms.⁴

The GRDA's directors faced the immediate question of securing funds for the construction of Pensacola Dam, the first of three such structures the Authority contemplated. Early in the process GRDA representatives appeared in Washington, D.C., to determine whether to seek construction as "a Federal project or through the Administration of Public Works under the loan and grant provisions of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act." The former required Congressional approval, the latter would necessitate gaining the assent of New Deal administrators. On September 12, 1935, Congressman Disney, in whose district the Grand River Dam Authority was located, announced that the Public Works Administration (PWA), chaired by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, had approved a \$16 million application for a power plant on the Grand River. The application called for an outright grant of \$7,199,182 and a loan of \$8,799,000.⁵

However, there was a problem. The Kirkpatrick Amendment would permit the selling of power only to organizations that built transmission lines to the proposed Pensacola Dam. To overcome this obstacle, the Grand River Dam Authority needed to be able to provide transmission and distribution lines to reach customers in distant markets and to reduce rates in other markets. In brief, it needed to engage in the retail sale of power. Disney thought that

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Ickes would have been willing to approve the project despite the objection but for the fact that he needed routine endorsements from several department heads, including Chief of the Power Division Clark Foreman, as well as from Works Progress Administration (WPA) Director Harry Hopkins. Securing these endorsements would entail some delay in Public Works Administration approval and provide time for the Oklahoma Legislature to repeal the Kirkpatrick Amendment or initiate a petition to achieve that end.⁶

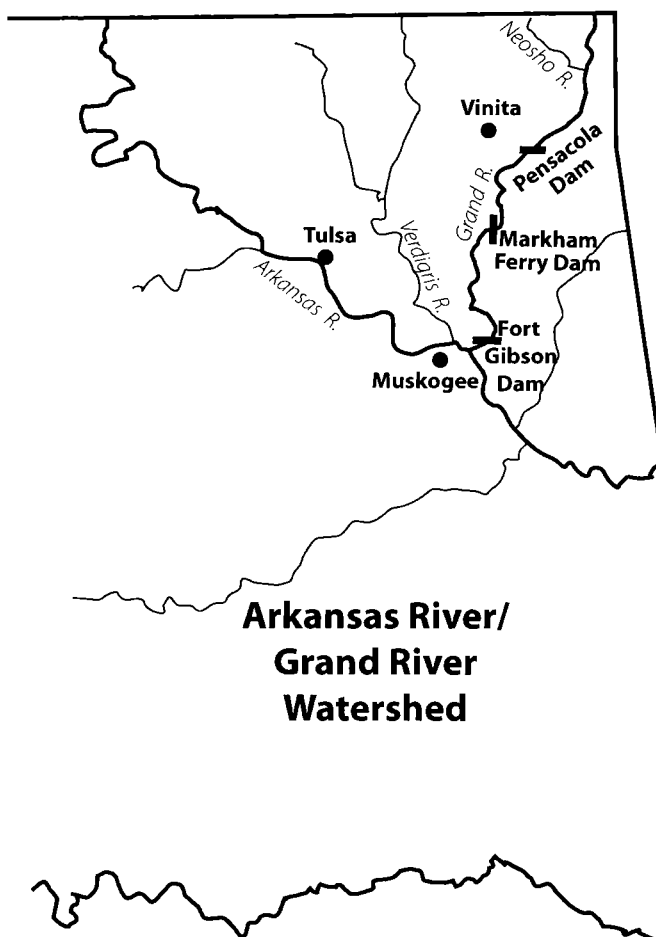
During the interim, Disney was encouraged when the Senate and House Commerce Committees included in the 1935 flood control bill not only Pensacola, but also Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams on the Grand River. These three would complete the Grand River power project and would lead to the electrification of farms and the establishment of new industries. Disney announced that he would “concentrate all my energy and abilities looking forward to the final approval” of the Grand River Dam project and would not involve himself in the 1936 senatorial campaign.⁷

He was jubilant over the Supreme Court’s decision that upheld the government on questions raised in the TVA case (*Ashwander et al. v. Tennessee Valley Authority* [1936]). He announced his intention to call on the president to discuss prospects for a grant of several hundred thousand dollars for a preliminary survey of the Grand River project. Unfortunately, Roosevelt was unavailable, and Secretary Ickes flatly refused Disney’s request. An impasse was reached. Proponents could find some solace by keeping in mind that the project had been formally proposed and investigated. It had been deemed plausible and would certainly find funding when conditions changed.⁸

Disney persisted and held onto hope that the application for a \$16 million loan and grant would be favorably reported to Secretary Ickes. He was heartened by the findings of the National Resources Board that there were “sufficient customers” in the area. This data, Disney asserted, countered a U.S. Army Engineers report that while the project was feasible, the power sale possibilities were not striking. Enthusiasm for the project so evident in 1935 dissipated in the early months of 1936 when its chances appeared slim and optimism gave way to pessimism. But Disney nevertheless persisted in his efforts, prodding PWA officials and securing an interview with the president. All expressed interest, but Secretary Ickes claimed that “we don’t have money for such a big project now.”⁹

In June 1936, as a result of Disney’s efforts, Roosevelt called for a complete engineering survey of the Pensacola Dam project. He as-

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sured the congressman that, if necessary, he would allot money from the new work relief act to get it under way. Under the terms of the recently approved flood control legislation, the new survey would ascertain the feasibility of both flood control and hydroelectric power. Moreover, the president, who was campaigning for reelection in 1936, paused long enough at Vinita, headquarters of the Grand River Dam Authority, to call for Disney's return to Washington and to say kind words in behalf of the project. He promised to send a party of army engineers to resurvey it. With a favorable report ready to present to Congress when it convened in January, Disney

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was confident that “we can go right to bat for necessary authorization and appropriations for the project.” *Harlow’s Weekly*, a statewide journal that at various times had opposed the project, admitted that “Mr. Disney appears to have detoured the War Department and won his case at the White House.”¹⁰

Sparked by these developments, GRDA Chief Engineer W R. Holway began correlating data for the proposed Markham Ferry Dam. Disney claimed that if industrial plants could be located in the area, the prospects of securing loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for both Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams would be greatly enhanced. Holway acknowledged that a major problem to be encountered on the Markham Ferry project would be rerouting twelve miles of the Kansas, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad line.¹¹

A further development, one that justified Disney’s optimism, occurred in September when the Natural Resources Board reported to President Roosevelt that the project was feasible from both an engineering and economic standpoint. The board recommended a PWA loan for immediate construction. But there was one snag still to be removed: the Kirkpatrick Amendment forbidding the Authority to sell power at retail. The National Resources Board insisted that the amendment be replaced before work started.

Repeal provided a dilemma for Governor Marland, who had endorsed the Grand River Dam Authority. He hesitated to call a special session of the legislature, because the utility companies could exert enough influence to stall the passage of the GRDA bill. To get around this barrier, an initiative in the form of an amendment to the Grand River Dam Authority Act was under consideration. The change would permit the GRDA to distribute electricity at retail, as TVA did. Despite this impasse, Disney informed Governor Marland that he would ask for orders to be issued for an immediate start on the work, pending action by the Oklahoma legislature. However, Disney recognized that before construction could get under way, the Allotment Board, including Harry Hopkins, Harold Ickes, and others, with the President Roosevelt as the chair, needed to agree on funding to build the dam. After a dispute broke out between Hopkins and Ickes, all PWA projects came under Ickes’s purview at the Department of the Interior. Disney’s task became one of convincing Ickes and of again appealing to the president that the Grand River Project be among the first to get under way.¹²

Although Congress was not in session, Congressman Wesley Disney remained in Washington to further lobby for the biggest federal

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project his state had ever requested. By the end of September 1936 Secretary Ickes informed Disney that because of the complications pertaining largely to the Kirkpatrick Amendment, Pensacola had been put on a deferred list to be considered after the national election. Having "put in several years on this matter," Disney did not "intend to quit now." Like the president, he too had to campaign for reelection, in his case, to a fourth term representing the First Congressional District. Meanwhile, at the state capitol efforts were made to pledge a majority of members to an act repealing the Kirkpatrick Amendment.¹³

The Democratic landslide in 1936 gave advocates of public power in Oklahoma, backed strongly by Disney and Governor Marland, their greatest victory. Before the legislature repealed the Kirkpatrick Amendment, the Oklahoma Public Works Administration director took the Grand River Dam Authority plan to Washington because Disney was confident that President Roosevelt would sign the order starting work. Owing to an abundance of proposals, the project had been reduced from its original \$16 million to \$4.9 million to complete the first unit. Shortly thereafter, the legislature revised the GRDA Enabling Act to permit the agency to build transmission lines. Marland signed the law on January 28, thus ending Disney's long ordeal to get the project launched.¹⁴

By its original legislation the Grand River Dam Authority was empowered to generate and sell electricity and was also authorized to sell bonds to finance construction of Pensacola Dam. Later amendments to the enabling act provided similar authorization for Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams and the purchase of a steam plant. Since the statute provided that no state revenues should ever be allocated to the Grand River Dam Authority, and as the agency likewise was barred from levying or collecting taxes, federal funding, preferably from a New Deal agency, would be required to construct dams on the Grand River. Although directors went to Washington, D.C., to present their case, the key figure in furthering the cause of the Grand River Dam Authority was Congressman Disney, who continued devoting his time and energy, but he was not alone.¹⁵

Senator Elmer Thomas rendered yeoman service in June 1937 when he secured an amendment to a War Department appropriation bill of \$16 million for the project. In a telegram to Grand River Dam Authority Thomas stated that "if I can keep this item in the bill this project is definitely assured." With this boost from Thomas, who now joined forces with Disney, it appeared that starting work on the project was but a matter of time. It did not quite happen as

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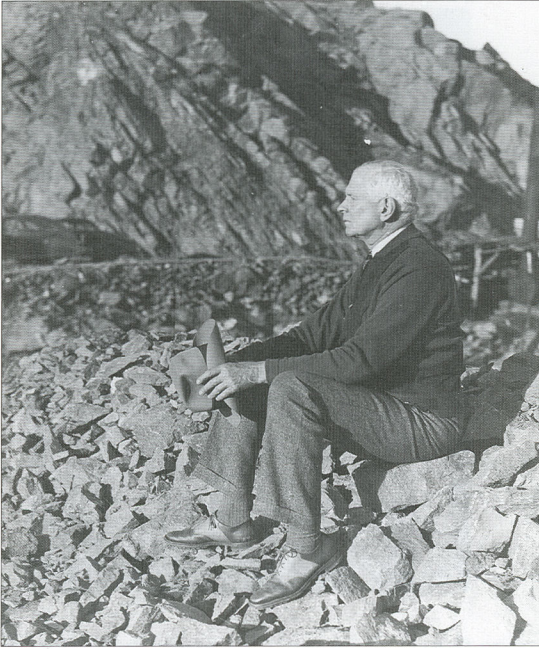
Thomas envisioned, but it did happen. In September the president approved the Pensacola Power Project (Public Works Administration docket 1097P) in the amount of \$8,437,000 as an outright grant and \$11,563,000 as a loan. The loan would be utilized to issue bonds which in turn would be sold to the PWA.¹⁶

By the end of 1937 the Grand River Dam development was getting under way as a federal project with a new manager, Robert Van Lear Wright, an engineer with the PWA in California. He was also vice president of William Wrigley's Santa Catalina Island Company. Wright was a veteran of public works projects in Kentucky, Illinois, and California, and he was close to Harold Ickes. While some directors grumbled about the appointment, it was accepted by a unanimous voice vote. R. L. Davidson of Tulsa was named general counsel for the GRDA.¹⁷

Earlier in the year army engineers conducted field surveys of the three dam sites: Pensacola, Markham Ferry, and Fort Gibson. This work was performed in conjunction with the massive flood control program being conducted throughout the Arkansas River basin. Disney initially hoped to have the dams included in this program with the government assuming the expense of flood control. His efforts kept the project in the mix of several federal proposals. In March 1937 the state senate by a 33 to 0 vote extended the life of the Grand River Dam Authority to June 1939, thereby assuring time for construction to get under way. By September with the PWA grant and loan in place and with no special act of Congress necessary, Disney predicted that ground would be broken for the Pensacola Dam as a self-liquidating project by the start of 1938.¹⁸

The dam, at that time projected to be 6,150 feet in length and 157 feet in height, would create a huge artificial lake containing upwards of two million acre-feet of water. The lake would be approximately fifty-seven miles long and would range from a few hundred feet to possibly seven miles in width, with thirteen hundred miles of shoreline. The first 135 feet of height would be for power production. An additional fifteen feet would facilitate flood control, which engineers calculated as furnishing one-fourth of the flow for the Arkansas River (the other seven feet would complete the platform needed at the top of the structure). The Federal Power Commission (FPC) would control the price and distribution of the dam's estimated annual production of 283 million kilowatts of power, depending on the number of turbines installed. The FPC would also ensure that land values of forty thousand acres in the reservoir site not be inflated. Disney estimated that the project would take approxi-

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*U.S. Senator
Elmer Thomas
(Courtesy Carl
Albert Center
Congressional
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University of
Oklahoma).*

mately two thousand men off relief rolls for four years, and the power commission estimated an annual revenue from power and the sale of water at more than \$1 million. Power would be sold to utility companies with existing transmission lines. The Grand River Dam Authority also could construct its own lines to furnish power to cities and rural sections. In addition, one town, Bernice, would be inundated by the backed-up waters, along with an estimated 44,600 acres, including about thirty-five hundred farms.¹⁹

Headquarters for the Grand River Dam Authority was established in Vinita. Personnel were recruited, working when necessary in conjunction with the U.S. Army Engineers. A crew of draftsmen, clerks, and others were put to work preparing data and providing accurate records to determine land values in areas to be inundated. Thanks to the district's state senator, Jack Rorschach, the original sponsor of the Grand River Dam Authority Act, the Oklahoma Planning and Resources Board made seven thousand dollars available to help start the project. This sum is possibly the only state money ever contributed to the project. In September 1937 a committee of board members toured the Buchanan Dam, south of Aus-

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*Rep. Wesley Disney (left)
and army engineer
Eugene Reybold
in Vinita in 1938
(Courtesy Carl Albert
Center Congressional
Archives, University
of Oklahoma).*



tin, Texas, to familiarize themselves with its organization and construction in order to avoid problems in constructing the somewhat similar Pensacola Dam, which was expected to become operational in 1940.²⁰

The onset of the Grand River Project, Disney reflected, “amply repays the long, hard work I have done, amidst discouragement, political backbiting, and other wrong thinking about the subject. It has taken patience and perseverance in large quantities.” He was delighted that the greatest “flood control-water conservation-power project in the southwest was now underway.”²¹ Henceforth, as Disney informed the nine men of the GRDA board of directors, “gentlemen, I leave in your laps the Grand River Dam project, your judgment must control from this day on.” Newly appointed General Manager R. V L. Wright would become the chief spokesman, but as long as he remained in Congress Disney maintained his ever significant vigilant concern for the project.

Although it would take two or more years before the big lake actually took form, preparations of all kinds were under way even before formal papers were received from the PWA. They had to be signed so that funds could be forwarded in order that work could officially begin on the biggest construction job in state history. As

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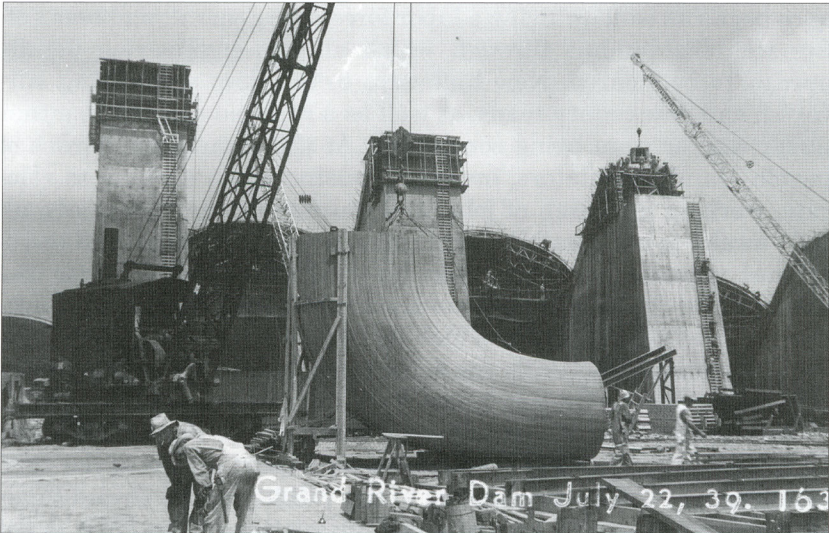
soon as Wright was on the job, land acquisitions and timber clearance began as well as hiring a labor force. The general manager's office was the conduit through which all non-engineering details needed to be cleared. New highways to the dam were being surveyed, and new county roads, as well as a railroad spur, were either under way or were being considered. At the same time, hordes of people—land speculators, investors, businessmen seeking to relocate, workers in search of jobs, and tourists by the thousands, all fully awake to the possibilities of cheap power, irrigation, and recreational attractions that would be available—trekked into the Grand River Valley. Once the contract was signed, the GRDA directors adopted bylaws under which its business would be conducted. They contained practically the same provisions as those of the comparable Buchanan Dam in Texas.²²

As a precaution, and wanting no challenge to the Grand River Dam Authority's legality, Ickes called for a court review of the 1935 enabling law. Until a decision as to the validity of the Grand River Dam Authority bonds was resolved, no portion of the PWA grant would be advanced. The contract contained a clause that the Authority could demand a test case to establish the validity of the 1935 law by the Oklahoma Supreme Court. This provision prompted Ickes's action.²³

R. V. L. Wright assumed command of the Grand River Dam Authority in the midst of this controversy and quickly plunged into its affairs. After his meeting with the board, it was announced that the Pensacola Dam would be "approximately 147 feet" instead of the 165 feet that was being cited in the lawsuit to test the Authority's legal status. Changing the height meant that the lake level would be approximately at the 750-foot elevation. Among other items considered was one instructing Wright to draft an organizational plan and an employment policy. This action indicated that no further recruitment would occur until the plan and policy gained board approval. The approved wage schedule, which was arranged by state labor officials and the Grand River Dam Authority, called for \$1.25 per hour as top pay, with the lowest at 40 cents per hour.²⁴

On February 1, 1938, in a 7-2 decision the Oklahoma Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Grand River Dam Authority Act. The decision cleared the way for the construction of Pensacola Dam with funds furnished by the federal government. General excavation work soon began, and contracts were awarded for the construction of two spillways situated at the east side of the projected six-thousand-foot-long dam. As the earth-moving equip-

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Construction of Pensacola Dam, July 1939 (OHS Research Division photo).

ment began to roar, residents of nearby communities, including the newly created town of Disney, began to cast aside the gloom and the tediousness of the Great Depression years. They expressed optimism associated with both increasing population and modicum economic development. The largest federal project thus far to receive approval in Oklahoma would serve as the engine for developing its northeastern counties.²⁵

The contract for building the main dam and power house was awarded to the Kassman Construction Company of Kansas City. At the same time, the Authority's chief engineer's plans were being readied for the dam at Markham Ferry. That structure would be twenty miles downstream from the Pensacola project. The Grand River Dam Authority believed it would have funds remaining from its original bond issue on the Pensacola Dam funds to launch the project at Markham Ferry, and the board exuded confidence that the government's assistance would be forthcoming to complete it. The third dam, at Fort Gibson, would be undertaken later, as the GRDA anticipated asking the state legislature for funding. Although both dams were eventually completed, those projects did not progress as rapidly as GRDA Chief Engineer Holway had hoped.²⁶

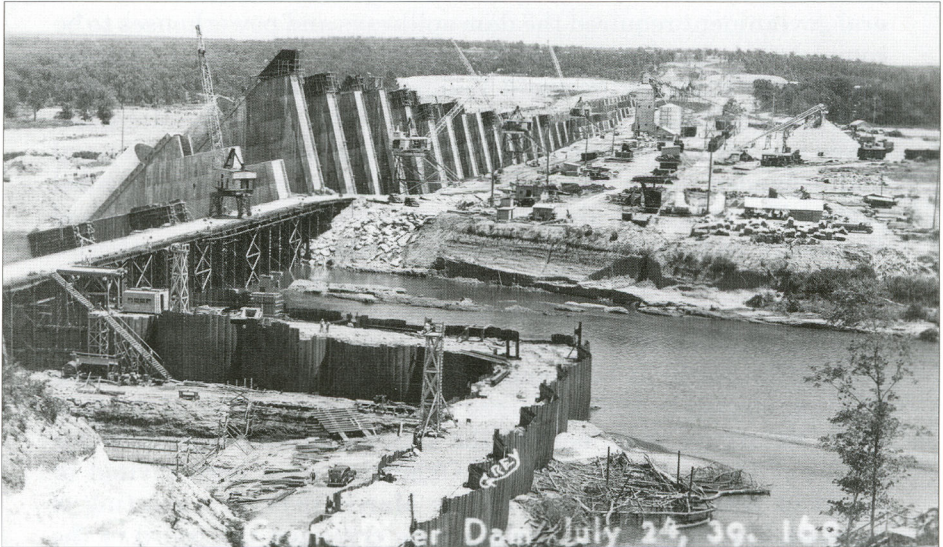
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Nevertheless, in 1938 optimism was the order of the day. The federal government required the dam spillways and powerhouses to be completed by January 1, 1940. Pensacola Dam would be the longest multiple-arch dam in the world. Congressman Disney soon reported that the application for a \$2.025 million PWA grant for Markham Ferry was virtually assured. By early 1939 the Tri-Dam proposal had expanded into a \$51 million federal power and flood control project. The effort was given impetus in Congress with the Corps of Engineers' backing and with Disney introducing a bill to authorize construction of Markham Ferry as part of a power and flood control unit on the Grand River in line with the Corps' recommendation.²⁷

As the fund-raising barreled along, a major controversy arose in early 1939. Early in his tenure, Oklahoma Governor Leon Chase Phillips, elected in 1938, emerged as an adamant critic of the New Deal. He argued that "neither the views, concerns, objections nor advice of the sovereign state of Oklahoma have been invited or heard in Washington." Then in late March 1939, at a meeting of northeastern Oklahoma legislators, he criticized the board of the Grand River Dam Authority and prompted the legislature to change the Grand River Dam Authority Enabling Act to reduce board membership from nine to five. This action caused both General Manager Wright and General Counsel Davidson to resign and gave Phillips a chance to fill their positions. His most dramatic act involved calling out the Oklahoma National Guard to halt all work on Pensacola Dam.²⁸

Phillips insisted it was the duty of Grand River Dam Authority to relocate roads, some of which were being flooded by water backing up behind the closed gates of the partially completed Pensacola Dam. The governor wanted the PWA to pay the amount the state contended was due (more than \$800,000) for road and bridge damages caused by the rapidly growing lake. He asserted it was the duty of Grand River Dam Authority to relocate all roads in the reservoir basin, but they had not done so. Initially, a full panoply of guardsmen, replete with machine guns, rifles, and other weapons, appeared to shut down all work on the dam and keep the gates open. Quickly, one of their commanders, Major H. B. Haws, was able to achieve the same objective with two other unarmed National Guard officers. The construction foreman quickly complied and said he would obey the orders not to close the gap in the dam. With the matter tossed into the docket of a state district court, Phillips's declaration of martial law remained in place, but only as a threat. The

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Construction on the upstream or "arch side" at Pensacola Dam on the Grand River in July 1939 (OHS Research Division photo).

three officers enforcing it promised that their only order—to keep the river flowing—would be observed.

Meanwhile, the Public Works Administration rejected a proposal by the GRDA to put \$871,000 in escrow, pending court action on highway damages sought by the state. To speed the process and to get the construction under way more promptly, Disney suggested out-of-court arbitration. PWA officials claimed, however, that their agency owed less than half the amount sought. Within Oklahoma, Phillips quickly lost support for his dramatic move, which nevertheless continued “under the eyes of three ‘military observers’ assigned to maintaining martial law.” The troops were withdrawn when the governor was enjoined by a three-judge federal court from interfering with the construction of the project. Due to April showers, water levels began to rise even with the floodgates open. At the end of May a resolution of the conflict seemed possible when Phillips was urged to accept Grand River Dam Authority bonds in settlement of the claim.²⁹

Meanwhile, during the controversy Disney, who was in Washington, introduced a measure authorizing the construction of the

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Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams. He left "the question wide open to how the projects would be built" but added that the Grand River Dam Authority would supervise them. These dams, unlike Pensacola, would equally serve both hydroelectric and flood control purposes. Initially, he called on the Grand River Dam Authority to construct the dams. He later removed this provision and cited the army engineers as the construction agency. In the second version he made no mention of either group. Disney now concluded that funds would be provided through a flood control measure under the aegis of the Corps of Engineers, or from PWA with construction by the Grand River Dam Authority, or from some other funding agency. In any event, it was clear that the completed dams would serve both flood control and power purposes and be part of the broader program to develop the Arkansas River as a navigable body of water. However, the question of who would eventually build the dams remained a matter of contention between those favoring the Grand River Dam Authority and those willing to accept the Corps of Engineers. For his part, Disney confessed that he did not know how a "common understanding" between the United States and Oklahoma could be negotiated to sustain the three dam link should army engineers build the remaining two.³⁰

Although he was not as active as Disney, Senator Elmer Thomas sought PWA funding to construct Markham Ferry and conferred with the chief of army engineers for a special study of several proposed reservoir, flood control, and power projects in eastern Oklahoma. Because of the political rivalry between Disney and Thomas, they never were able to coordinate their efforts, although each claimed credit for the Grand River Dam Authority. In one area Thomas alone merited credit, and it was credit in one area that never concerned Disney or most of his constituents. Thomas claimed that in the hiring of workers discrimination was "being made in favor of the white race and it is only fair that negroes be called according to their percentage of population and given as much consideration with reference to wage scales as everyone else." In addition, as chairman of the powerful War Department and Flood Control Subcommittee, Thomas hoped to get Markham Ferry and the other projects promptly authorized and funded by congressional appropriations.³¹

Meanwhile, at the Grand River Dam Authority tensions arose between the Authority and Public Works Administration over the selection of a new general manager. Dissatisfied with R. V. L. Wright, the board of directors demanded his resignation and went

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to Washington for a conference with PWA officials, who declined to interfere. At the outset of the next board hearing, Wright resigned, and a contentious search for a new official got under way. Despite the search and the concerns over adequate funding and land sales, the board resolved most of these questions as well as a few remaining settlements for highway and bridge damage.³² Leaving Davidson in place as interim manager (apparently having stymied his earlier resignation), they eventually hired Thomas P Clonts, a civil engineer from Muskogee, as general manager, and he assumed his duties in February 1940.³³

Early in 1939, with the construction of Pensacola Dam well under way, the Grand River Dam Authority presented a revised application to the Federal Power Commission for an order authorizing a license for a major project. The commission ordered the license be issued for a period of fifty years, effective January 1, 1939. Construction, including the installation of generating units, was to be completed on or before December 31, 1940. Equally favorable was the action of the state legislature in April granting the Authority the power to increase their bond issue from \$15 million to \$25 million dollars.³⁴

The attraction of Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson to Grand River Dam Authority was that these dams, utilizing water that passed over the spillways or through the turbines of Pensacola Dam, would be able to produce electricity at a lower cost than did the larger Pensacola Dam. The important point was that these dams function as a unit of Grand River Dam Authority and not be integrated into the Corps of Engineers' program to develop an Arkansas River waterway. The tension over who should control the projects, already evident in 1939, would be central to the construction of the Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams. Although the debate was already under way, in 1939 neither dam was yet authorized by Congress or approved by the PWA, which soon would cease to exist.³⁵

During and after 1940 the discussion would take on dimensions reflecting concerns over national defense and the war effort. This perspective was evident when U.S. Army officials promised to consider a proposal to construct a government arsenal in the Grand River Dam area. The offer was made before Pensacola Dam was operative. By mid-April only about six thousand of the fifty-two thousand acres in the reservoir was at the 668-foot water contour level that was considered necessary to generate electricity. The level had been reached while the National Guard kept the spillways open to

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prevent further inundation of state roads. Quick to grasp the possibility of the area as a vital center of the defense program, Disney conveyed his enthusiasm in a long letter to the president (copied to other officials and industrial leaders), explaining that the location offered the advantages of a wide range of energy resources, including coal, natural gas, oil, and water power.³⁶

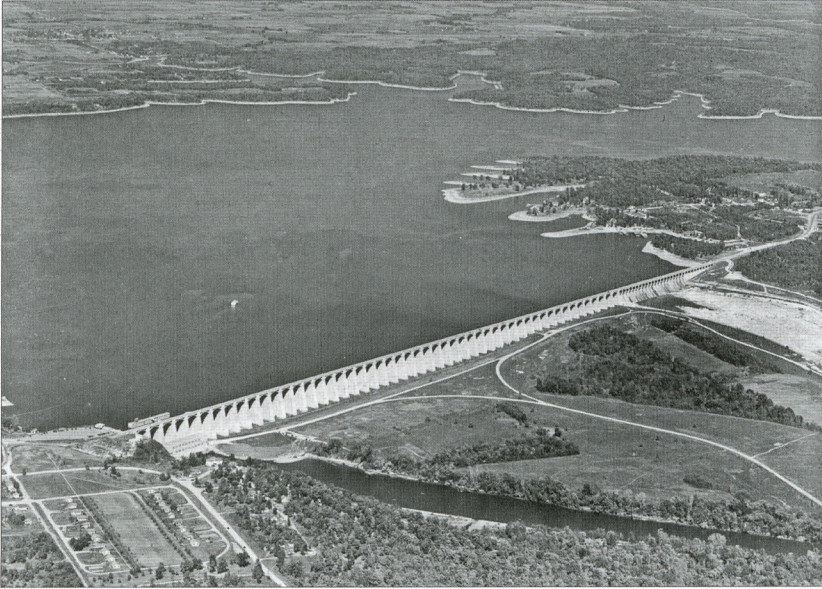
By June 1940 rumors swirled that an aluminum plant would be located in the area. Clark Foreman, chief of the PWA power division, indicated that only a community using Grand River Dam Authority power would be considered. If industrial plants were to be located in the area, Disney was confident that prospects for Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams would be greatly enhanced through loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.³⁷

In October 1940 Disney's seven-year effort was realized. The PWA underwrote the project by advancing \$11,563,000 as a loan and \$8,437,000 as an additional grant with another \$2,750,000 loan and grant allotted in 1940. The loaned money, it was anticipated, would be repaid by Grand River Dam Authority through the annual sale of approximately 200 million kilowatt hours of low-cost power. Pensacola Dam, completed in 1940, 1.25 miles in length, was the largest in the Southwest. The lake created by the dam was named "Grand Lake." The directors did not name the lake after a particular Indian tribe, for fear of offending other tribes. With fifty-one arches resting against hollow buttresses placed fifty-four feet from center to center, the structure was the longest multiple-arch dam in the world. Filling steadily behind it, Grand Lake already contained more water than all of the other lakes in Oklahoma combined. It would eventually cover about fifty-two thousand acres. The project was placed in commercial operation on May 1, 1941.³⁸

Early in 1941 the opportunity arose for localities to make transportation improvements. The Grand River Dam Authority received permission from Federal Works Director John Carmody to hold the water level for a limited time at an elevation of "approximately 732-1/2 feet above mean sea level," which was twelve and one-half feet below the normal pool level of 745 feet. This action allowed the state and the affected counties, if they so desired, to raise the elevation of bridges and roads to a height sufficient to avoid high water in the future. Fear that the rising waters of Grand Lake would isolate a portion of northeast Oklahoma prompted the opening of the floodgates.³⁹

Throughout 1941 the GRDA's plans moved, albeit slowly, forward. In Washington, D.C., the House Appropriations Committee

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Aerial view of Pensacola Dam (OHS Research Division photo).

provided funds for four Oklahoma dams, including Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson. At the same time, the chief of army engineers outlined plans for the completion of the Grand River dams' development. The Federal Power Commission also recommended the immediate construction of Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson so that power could be available for distribution in 1943. Further impetus for these dams came with word that federal officials were seriously discussing plans to alleviate a national shortage of electrical power for defense industries. Of more immediate significance was a story that broke in August 1941, the federal government would build a \$51 million smokeless powder plant. The facility, covering six thousand or more acres, would employ approximately five thousand men in its construction. The same number would be hired for its operation, under the management of E. I. Dupont de Nemours and Company. To be located near Chouteau, the plant would use power generated by Pensacola Dam. Selected after months of lobbying by Disney, Thomas, and Senator Josh Lee, among others, this would be the largest defense project in Oklahoma. At that time, the community

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of Chouteau had a population of four hundred, seven business houses, and no industries.⁴⁰

Shortly thereafter, President Roosevelt signed a \$275 million flood control act that authorized, among other projects, two additional dams on Grand River. For the dams to be allocated and to expedite the start of construction, army engineers had to indicate defense necessity to the Budget Bureau. "These dams," Disney explained to Chief of Army Engineers Major General Julian Schley, "can be built very rapidly and at relatively small cost" and "nearly half a million annual kilowatt hours of energy can be produced." Both Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams were viewed as combined flood control and power projects. To assist the Budget Bureau, the Office of Production Management began a thorough study of the two projects in conjunction with the Federal Power Commission's overall national plan to increase defense power output. In November the Budget Bureau approved the proposal.⁴¹

In 1941, as armed conflict in Europe and Asia escalated and the United States speeded up its defense measures, the federal government decided to assume control of the Grand River project. On November 21, 1941, by Executive Order, President Roosevelt federalized the Pensacola dam and its reservoir. This meant that power generated by the facility would be integrated into defense efforts. In January 1941 an engineering contract had been awarded for the construction of both the Fort Gibson and Markham Ferry Dams. They would be built by the Corps of Engineers and operated in concert with the GRDA. The dams would embrace both flood control and power, and work was scheduled to start on Markham Ferry on or about May 1, 1942. Together the three dams would provide an ample power grid and an excellent flood control system for the area and for the Arkansas River Basin.⁴²

Following the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor and the nation's entrance into the war, individuals in northeastern Oklahoma strove mightily for new projects to assist in the war effort, to accelerate the region's economic development, and to improve people's ability to earn income. Early in 1942, for example, the government approved plans for a railroad line to be built from a point near Tulsa to the powder plant near Chouteau. To counter dispatches from Washington that the War Production Board would not allow any more war industries to be located in the state because of a lack of power, the president of the Oklahoma Gas & Electric Company (OG&E) asserted that no such shortage existed. In addi-

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tion, another dispute arose that later would erupt into bitter controversy about project purpose and control.⁴³

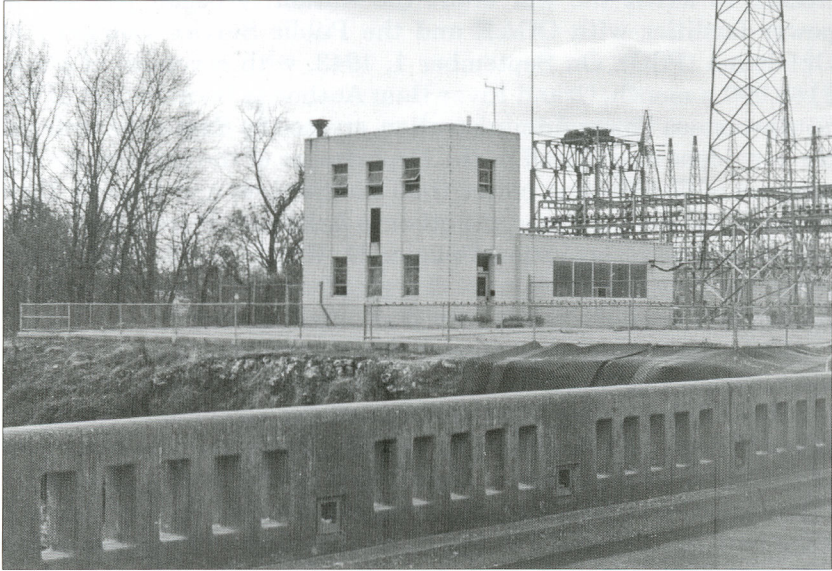
The discussion revolved around the question of whether the Grand River Dam Authority's facilities existed for flood control or for power generation. The GRDA had constructed Pensacola to generate hydroelectric power. On the other side of the question was the projected Fort Gibson dam. The Corps of Engineers planned for it to be ten feet higher than originally planned, in order to store more water and insure greater flood control. Pensacola's operators had eliminated most of its flood storage by raising the crest of the power pool from elevation 735 to elevation 745. In designing Fort Gibson and Markham Ferry, engineers planned for a higher elevation to insure greater flood storage. The higher elevation meant that more shore-front acreage would be required to meet the demands of increased capacity.

The dispute pointed up an ongoing conflict between two theories of water control. The Grand River Dam Authority was strictly an Oklahoma corporation in the power business and not concerned with flood control. The Federal Works Agency, as it took over the facility, agreed. The army engineers, on the other hand, were primarily concerned with flood control along the Arkansas River and along the lower Mississippi. Although the two theories never melded perfectly, the issue was resolved through compromise after the end of World War II.⁴⁴

Local groups were also involved in the debate, and they favored flood control. In early 1942 the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce and its president, Newton Graham, called for the creation of an Arkansas River Waterway. The group sharply opposed the Federal Works Administration and the Pensacola project because both the dam and the agency ignored the needs of flood control. When the chamber learned that the Bureau of the Budget had frozen funds appropriated for Markham Ferry, Graham protested. He called for the construction of this dam and of Fort Gibson by calling attention to the disastrous floods in the lower Arkansas River Valley and citing the importance of flood control in the nation's defense.⁴⁵

The Grand River Dam Authority and the Federal Works Administration also had their advocates in Tulsa. They expressed their views through the Arkansas Valley Electric Power Association. The association's vice president insisted that public power was important not only "as a war measure," but for the future as well. If Oklahoma did not industrialize and stop importing finished commodities and exporting raw materials, he said, "we will always be

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Electrical substation and transmission equipment at Pensacola Dam at Grand Lake (OHS State Historic Preservation Office photo).

an ideal field for the W P A. and other relief organizations.” He criticized the army engineers’ greater interest in flood control and castigated the private utilities for “exercising every means of opposition at their command to prevent the development of hydroelectricity as a competitive measure.”⁴⁶

Hopes for the rapid construction of both the Fort Gibson and Markham Ferry Dams faded when the Bureau of the Budget was not convinced the projects were demanded as part of the war effort. However, the Corps of Engineers recognized that power was necessary to produce munitions and instruments of war. For that reason they intended to complete the dams as rapidly as possible and also for that reason Congress appropriated the funds. But it was not to be. The funds were impounded, and Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson became casualties of war. Pensacola would be the public engine furthering the war effort in Oklahoma.⁴⁷

By 1943 the transmission facilities of the Grand River Dam Authority included several substations and interconnection terminals. The GRDA operated its own 225 miles of transmission lines as well

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as two hundred miles for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). To assist the war effort the Authority began pooling its power facilities with OG&E and the Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO). On September 1, 1943, with revenues of about \$160,000 a month, Grand River Dam Authority became part of the Southwestern Power Administration, created by Executive Order of the president and placed in the Department of the Interior for the purpose of distributing power from the Denison and Norfolk Dam Projects, the first in Texas, the other in Arkansas. During the entire period of federal operation Douglas G. Wright headed the newly federalized agency. He came to this post from the Grand River Dam Authority, for which he had served as administrator.⁴⁸

While the federal government was taking over the power projects, nature intervened to cause havoc. Unusually heavy rains fell for three days in May 1943 throughout the Grand and Arkansas River Valleys, and flooding was extreme. To protect the properties of the Oklahoma Ordinance Works, that is, the powder plant near Chouteau, the GRDA temporarily raised the pool level at the dam from between 744 and 745 feet to an elevation of 754.5 feet above sea level. The flood and the action of the Grand River Dam Authority prompted a heated exchange between GRDA Administrator Wright and Newton Graham, serving as chair of the board of the Southwest Valley Association.

Graham loudly protested the GRDA flood control action. Long an advocate of flood control and power dams, the formula utilized by the Corps of Engineers, Graham charged that "every person who advocated the building of this [Pensacola] dam [was] promised flood control and that promise is not being kept." With a power pool level the 745 feet approved by the Federal Power Commission over the published objections of the Corps of Engineers, the commission, in disregarding these objections and raising the elevation, bore prime responsibility for the devastation. In addition to the loss of life, thousands of acres of crops were ruined and many homes destroyed. In Graham's view, the loss, numbering "well above a million dollars," could have been avoided. Although Graham recognized that power was needed for war, he added that "so are potatoes, corn and livestock."⁴⁹

Douglas Wright responded on behalf of the Federal Works Administration. The main issue, as he saw it, was whether the reservoir elevation should have been held at 745 feet or at 735 feet. Citing channel capacity and cubic feet of water per second, he insisted that an additional ten feet of storage would not have been of "any

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material assistance in controlling the flood.” Offering a “very simple description of the flood,” Wright asserted that “the Grand River Valley was completely full of water from the Grand River Dam to the end of the watershed” and was roughly one-third to one-half full from the [Pensacola] dam to Fort Gibson where the Grand River entered the Arkansas. Had Fort Gibson Dam already existed, the flooding of the Fort Gibson and Muskogee areas and on the Arkansas River could have been minimized while the water level in the Grand River Valley from Fort Gibson to the Pensacola Dam would have increased. Wright explained that “there was no other place left in the entire water shed to have put the water.”

Utilizing all the storage capacity in Pensacola above 735 feet (about 939,000 acre-feet), there was little water left to be stored in other reservoirs or discharged in the river channel. Moreover, tributaries in the Grand River below the Pensacola Dam added more waters that needed to be stored in reservoirs in order to secure adequate flood control on the Arkansas River System. While dams could be built on these streams, Wright recognized that constructing flood control dams on the Grand River would “destroy potential power producing capacity on one of the best power producing streams in the area.” He was critical of Graham for criticizing “one dam for not controlling a flood in the Arkansas River System” when studies already showed several dams were necessary to accomplish that goal.

The debate continued with further statements by Graham and a rebuttal by Wright, both of which were longer than their original statements. Finally, given the flooding and the controversy it engendered, Major General Philip Fleming, the administrator of the Federal Works Administration, assured a congressional critic “that the use of water for the generation of power of the Pensacola Dam will be so managed as to retain at all times adequate storage capacity to take care of flood control.” In his management of the Grand River Dam Authority and in the controversy following the May floods, Wright proved himself to be energetic and a “first class scrapper with a good command of the problems presented in the power situation.”⁵⁰

In an editorial the *Tulsa Tribune* added a penetrating postscript to the controversy when it remarked, “Surely no one will maintain seriously that a single dam could be expected to stop and a single lake to store more water in a few days than falls in five months 15 years out of 19.” Through May 18, 1943, 17 19 inches of rain fell in Tulsa. In all the other years since 1924, there were only four years

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when more rain fell in the first five months of any year than cascaded down in the May 1943 flood. To argue that the 1943 flood could have been mitigated appeared "quite unfair to the war job of it making power." The one way to beat a seventeen-inch rain, the editorial concluded, would be "to construct the Fort Gibson and Markham Ferry dams on the Grand as soon as possible."⁵¹

While the debate over Wright's management continued, Senator Thomas devoted his energies to expediting the construction of the Fort Gibson Dam. Its location near the mouth of the Grand River would play a major role in curbing one of the major flood-producing streams in the Arkansas Basin. The 1943 flood devastated crop production in eastern Oklahoma and in western Arkansas, along with many homes and barns. Nineteen individuals lost their lives, and dead livestock possibly ran into the thousands. Everyone recognized that the proposed Fort Gibson Dam would meliorate the situation in the Grand River drainage. The Corps of Engineers actually started work on the project shortly before the war, only to have it be stopped by the War Production Board. Thomas and others called for resumption of the project, and the Corps of Engineers was fully prepared to renew construction on an expedited schedule. However, the War Production Board remained firm in opposition because there was no material available with which to build Fort Gibson and other dams.⁵²

Thomas, however, remained persistent. When Congress appropriated \$25 million to repair the loss sustained by the recent floods, he contacted the board and stressed the value of Fort Gibson for flood protection of agricultural areas. In addition, the War Food Administration indicated to both the War Production Board and to the Corps of Engineers its interest in Fort Gibson. Further, the Corps of Engineers requested that the War Production Board reconsider its previous order, in light of statements made by the War Food Administration. The matter came to an end in August 1943 when the War Production Board concluded that neither manpower nor materials were available to justify the construction of Fort Gibson Dam. Thomas disagreed but was unable to change the decision.⁵³

Although construction of Fort Gibson and Markham Ferry Dams would have to wait until the war ended, the board of directors of the Grand River Dam Authority was "very happy" when the Oklahoma Highway Commission awarded contracts for the construction of a decent road to the Pensacola Dam from Vinita and the north. In an Executive Order issued in August 1943 President Roosevelt refocused the entire controversy emanating from the year's floods. His

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directive shifted the authority over the Pensacola, Norfolk, and Denison Dams from the Federal Works Administration to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. Henceforward, the emphasis would be on integrating their power facilities, interconnecting with other utility systems, and selling and disposing of energy to war plants, public bodies, cooperatives, and others at rates approved by the Federal Power Commission. Effective on September 1, 1943, the Executive Order emphasized the primary purpose of producing hydroelectric power.⁵⁴

The region's need for power became increasingly obvious as the war progressed. By October 1943 the GRDA was purchasing coal-generated power from private utilities to meet customer demands. This situation led OG&E President George Davis to crow, "It would appear that the dam failed as a flood control project last spring in the flood, and now is failing as a source of power in the drought—all in the same year." What concerned the Authority more than drought was the expectation of compensation for the water rights it claimed in the Grand River in the event Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson would be constructed by the Corps of Engineers. The Authority argued that with the state legislature having already authorized the issuance of \$10 million of its bonds, an additional bond issue plus surplus revenues from the Pensacola project would allow it to construct these two dams. The result would be "a splendidly integrated power system while providing as large a measure of flood control as should be imposed on Grand River alone." To achieve this goal the GRDA requested a conference with Governor Robert S. Kerr to discuss water rights and a test suit to determine if the Authority could sell the uncommitted \$10 million to \$11 million in bonds that it had been authorized to issue.⁵⁵

The year 1943 ended without any resolution of the ownership and use questions concerning the waters of the Grand River. Nor was there a decision about which agency would construct Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson and for what purpose or whether the government would allow construction to begin. In the story's only new development, the individual in charge of land acquisition had begun to secure land in the Fort Gibson area, "some 500 tracts" by year's end. The coming year, 1944, was emerging as a critical election year. This development hinted that little of consequence would occur until the votes were counted and until the war needs could be more clearly delineated.⁵⁶

While the debate over the construction of the new dams raged, the Oklahoma Ordnance Works (the smokeless powder plant) near

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Chouteau on Grand Lake was nearing completion. The Authority stood ready to provide it with power, and in doing so would bring itself "out of the red ink." Happily, that occurred early in 1944; in March, Douglas Wright, serving as Southwestern Power Administrator, announced that the Grand River Dam "has 'licked' the worst period of low water recorded." Thanks to a rising water level at Pensacola, Wright said, the project was expected to "carry practically all its own loads." Boosting his optimism was the exciting news that B. F. Goodrich would construct a \$5 million tire plant at Miami to take advantage of cheap Grand River power.⁵⁷

Less exciting, but of great significance, was Wesley Disney's defeat in the primary election as he sought to replace Elmer Thomas in the United States Senate. Disney was replaced by a Republican hostile to the Authority. The "father" of Grand River Dam Authority, largely responsible for obtaining government funds to build the project and its most vigorous champion, gradually faded into obscurity. Because he refused to allow his name to appear on any of the five plaques on the Pensacola cornerstone, visitors saw embossed only the names of other public officials. The nearby town of Disney is the only recognition he received, and most residents now would have trouble recognizing his remarkable contribution in launching the project. The election, however, brought into the Congress from the Second District a new member, William G. Stigler, who was keenly interested in the project.⁵⁸

At the same time, Senator Thomas, now assured of another term, recognized that the lengthy fight to launch construction of Fort Gibson was over until the war ended. It was also evident that when postwar construction got under way, army engineers would direct the project. It was apparent that they would emphasize flood control and relegate power production to secondary status. In a Senate speech Thomas made his position abundantly clear, stating that "if the government may develop the power and then let private companies distribute such power, then no taxes will be lost and outstanding securities will not be injured or destroyed." However, with the war still raging and the demand for energy constantly increasing, the GRDA accepted bids to construct a fifth generating unit at Pensacola, along with improvements to the spillways. In addition, an effort was made to secure federal assistance to improve the roads around the Grand Lake.⁵⁹

In 1945 Thomas asserted that he would try to make certain "that any future dams built on the Arkansas or any of its tributaries, will be designed primarily for flood control purposes and power will be

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incident to flood control.” With Wesley Disney no longer on hand to champion the Grand River Dam Authority, the support Thomas offered would now be dwarfed by his forceful views on the primacy of flood control. He wanted the Corps of Engineers to manage all future dams on the Arkansas River, and he objected to any “to be constructed like the authority of the Grand River Dam.” In fact, he was now informing his constituents that Pensacola “was constructed largely for the control of floods,” even though some people thought it was designed primarily for the generation of hydroelectric power.⁶⁰

Without a member in Congress to champion their view, groups in communities bordering or near Grand Lake continued to support the construction of Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson “chiefly for the production of electrical energy.” They argued that the Grand River “is the best, if not the only real ‘power stream’ between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.” Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson were designed as “power dams” so that water stored at the Pensacola reservoir could again be utilized in the production of electrical energy, assuring an ample supply of firm power. Using the river for power purposes would assure that lakes would remain at a constant level and create a natural recreation area. In the postwar years, the Grand River Dam Authority’s supporters would carefully hone and elaborate these views.⁶¹

ENDNOTES

* Richard Lowitt is a retired Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. The photograph on page 132 is provided courtesy of the OHS State Historic Preservation Office. Map on page 137 shows the positioning of the three dams of the Grand River Authority in reference to the Grand River.

¹ For a discussion of the early efforts to develop the Grand River see W. R. Holway, “Dams on the Grand River,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 26 (Autumn 1948): 329–34. Holway was a consulting engineer long connected with the Grand River Dam Authority. He is the author of *A History of the Grand River Dam Authority: State of Oklahoma, 1935–1968* (Tulsa, Okla.. Privately printed, 1968). See also Wash Hudson to Elmer Thomas, May 12, 1933, for a previous proposal to build dams on the Grand River, in Folder 24, Box 24, Subject Files, Elmer Thomas Collection, Congressional Archives, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman [hereafter cited as CAC]. For discussions of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assessments of the extent of flooding in the river systems, see “Reservoirs on the Grand (Neosho) River,” 1939, H. Doc. 107 76 Cong., 1 Sess., Serial 10331, and “Report of the Corps of Engineers on the Arkansas Rivers and Its Tributaries,” 1935, H. Doc. 308, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 3 vols., Serial 9936-1, 9936-2, 9936-3.

² C. A. Stanfield to Thomas, January 28, 1935, Folder 57 Box 10, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; Resolution: Democratic County Wide Precinct Organization of Tulsa, April 3, 1935, Folder 42, Box16, Legislative Files, *ibid.*, Thomas to George

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Schaefer, August 14, 1935, and Business Mens' Club of Spavinaw to Thomas, August 16, 1935 (telegram), Folder 14, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.* Early in 1935 every Chamber of Commerce in northeastern Oklahoma had joined a movement to aid Disney in the Pensacola Dam fight. As early as January 1935 Disney had brought the matter to the attention of the president, who indicated he did not favor the construction of new hydroelectric power projects at this time. See story in the *Vinita (Oklahoma) Journal*, January 31, 1935. For discussions of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assessments of the extent of flooding in the river systems see "Reservoirs on the Grand (Neosho) River," 1939, H. Doc. 107 76 Cong., 1 Sess., Serial 10331, and "Report of the Corps of Engineers on the Arkansas Rivers and Its Tributaries," 1935, H. Doc. 308, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 3 vols., Serial 9936-1, 9936-2, 9936-3.

³ *Journal of the Senate of the Fifteenth Legislature of the State of Oklahoma, Regular Session* (N.p, 1935), 1375, 1412, 1468, 1479, 1853-65, 2054-55; *Journal of the House of Representatives, Regular Session, Fifteen Legislature of the State of Oklahoma, 1935* (N.p., 1935), 2793, 3396, 3488, 3490, 3550, 3613-15, 2968-69. See *Journal of the House of Representatives* for April 24, 1935, p. 1855, for the text of the Kirkpatrick Amendment.

⁴ *Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City)*, April 27 and May 31, 1935, October 3, 1937. Article IV, Chapter 70, *Session Laws of 1935* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1935), 350-58.

⁵ Warren T. Hannum to Thomas, August 24, 1935, Folder 14, Box 6, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; *Tulsa (Oklahoma) Tribune*, September 12, 1935.

⁶ *Tulsa Tribune*, September 12, 1935; unidentified clipping September 16, 1935, Folder 5, Box 1, Wesley Disney Collection, CAC. The Wesley Disney Collection in the CAC consists almost entirely of press clippings, many of which include his weekly newsletters. "The Political Bird's Eye" a column by R. M. McClintock, which appeared in the *Pawnee (Oklahoma) Dispatch* on October 31, 1935, indicated that Grand River Dam Authority officials had conferred with Governor Ernest W. Marland, who had gone on record enthusiastically for the project. Clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Disney Collection.

⁷ *Tulsa Tribune*, November 20, 1935, column by McClintock, and unidentified November 1935 clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Disney Collection.

⁸ *Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, February 19, 1936; *Daily Oklahoman*, February 21, 1936, clippings in Folder 6, Box 1, *ibid.* See also the February 1936 clippings in Disney, Folder 6, Box 1, covering his activities at this time.

⁹ Quote is from an unidentified March 1936 clipping in Folder 6, Box 1, *ibid.* This paragraph is based on perusal of clippings Folder 6, Box 1, Disney Collection. See also *Harlow's Weekly*, April 18, 1936, for the article titled, "With the Oklahoma Delegation at Washington."

¹⁰ "Capital Topics," by McClintock, in *Ponca City (Oklahoma) News*, June 26, 1936, *Shaunee (Oklahoma) News*, June 25, 1936, plus late June clippings, Folder 7 Box 1, Disney Collection. The quote from *Harlow's Weekly* is in the *Grove (Oklahoma) Sun*, July 9, 1936.

¹¹ *Tulsa Tribune*, July 12, 1936.

¹² *Tahlequah (Oklahoma) Star* "The Political Bird's Eye," September 13, 1936, and *Ponca City News*, "Capital Topics, September 27 1936, and Disney's "Weekly Washington Letter," in *Pryor (Oklahoma) Democrat*, September 19, 1936, and his newsletter in *Nowata (Oklahoma) Star* September 19, 1936. These and other relevant clippings can be found in Folder 8, Box 1, Disney Collection.

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¹³ *Nowata (Oklahoma) Times*, Disney's "Weekly Washington Letter," October 3, 1936, and *Heavener (Oklahoma) Ledger*, "The Political Bird's Eye," October 3, 1936, Folder 8, Box 1, *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Medford (Oklahoma) Star* "This Week at the Capital," November 21, 1936, Folder 7, Box 1, *ibid.*, *Muskogee (Oklahoma) Phoenix*, January 29, 1937 Folder 2, Box 1, *ibid.*

¹⁵ W. R. Holway, *A History of the Grand River Dam Authority: State of Oklahoma, 1935-68*, passim, 1-12. Holway, a consulting engineer, was associated with the Grand River Dam Authority. His volume contains key documents, outlines, and lengthy accounts of the developing project.

¹⁶ *Nowata Times*, July 1, 1937 clipping in Folder 30, Box 11, Legislative Files, Thomas Collection; Virginia Smith to Thomas, September 16, 1937 (telegram), Folder 16, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.*, Holway, *History of the Grand River Dam Authority*, 7. Holway to Thomas November 10, 1937 Folder 16, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.* Holway wrote, "I appreciate the important part you played in getting the Grand River Project over." *Tulsa Tribune*, January 25, 1937 and related clippings in Folder 1, Box 2, Disney Collection. Thomas called for the Public Works Administration to fund the construction of Pensacola Dam. See also *Ryan (Oklahoma) Democrat*, June 24, 1937 and related June clippings.

¹⁷ *Daily Oklahoman*, November 23 and 24, 1937

¹⁸ *Vinita Journal*, February 2, 1937 "News from the Capitol," by Wesley Disney, and *Vinita Journal*, February 4, 1937 Related clippings can also be found in Folder 1, Box 2, Disney Collection.

¹⁹ *Grove Sun*, July 29, 1937 *McAlester (Oklahoma) Capital*, July 27 1937 and related clippings in Folder 2, Box 2, *ibid.*

²⁰ *Vinita Journal*, August 4, 1937 *Miami (Oklahoma) Record*, September 23, 1937 and related clippings in Folder 3, Box 2, *ibid.*

²¹ For Disney's remarks in full see his article in the *Afton (Oklahoma) American*, September 23, 1937 For stories of celebrations throughout the area see clippings, most notably *Harlow's Weekly*, September 18, 1937 Folder 3, Box 2, *ibid.*

²² *Harlow's Weekly*, October 2, 1937 and October 30, 1937 for perceptive stories. The *Tulsa World*, October 16, 1937 published the complete text of the Public Works Administration contract. See related clippings in Folder 4, Box 2, *ibid.*

²³ *Oklahoma City (Oklahoma) Times*, November 6, 1937; *Daily Oklahoman*, November 9, 1937 *Muskogee (Oklahoma) Democrat*, November 6, 1937 and related clippings in Folder 5, Box 2, *ibid.*

²⁴ *Tulsa Tribune*, November 28, 1937 Folder 5, Box 2, Disney Collection; *Tulsa World*, January 6, 1938, and *Oklahoma City Times*, January 6, 1938, clippings in Folder 6, Box 2, *ibid.*

²⁵ *Daily Oklahoman*, February 2, 1938; *Oklahoma City (Oklahoma) News*, February 2, 1938; *Tulsa World*, January 2, 1938; and clippings in Folder 6, Box 2, *ibid.* See also *Daily Oklahoman*, February 24, 1938, for pictures and stories about five individuals already benefiting from the approval of the project, Folder 6, Box 2, *ibid.*

²⁶ *Tulsa World*, June 18, 1938, story by R. P. Matthews; *Pryor Democrat*, July 21, 1938, clippings in Folder 10, Box 2, *ibid.*

²⁷ *Tulsa World*, July 21, 1938, and January 15, 1939; *Oklahoma City News*, August 7 1938; *Miami Record*, January 15, 1939, clippings in Folder 1, Box 3, *ibid.*

²⁸ *Oklahoma City Times*, February 2, 1939; clipping (no newspaper cited) March 29, 1939, Folder 1, Box 3, *ibid.*, Quince Biffle Boydston, *Growing Up With Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982), 120-21.

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²⁹ *Tulsa World*, March 1 and March 3, 1940; *Okmulgee* (Oklahoma) *Daily Times*, March 9 and March 16, 1940; *Oklahoma City Times*, March 16, 1940; *Miami Record*, March 8, 1940; *Mangum* (Oklahoma) *Star* March 13, 1940; *Muskogee Democrat*, March 8, 1940; *Durant* (Oklahoma) *Democrat*, March 18, 1940; *Newkirk* (Oklahoma) *Daily Reporter* March 9, 1940, all in Folder 4, Box 2, Disney Collection. See also *Tulsa Tribune*, April 19, 1940, Folder 5, Box 3, Disney Collection; *Tulsa World*, May 23, 1940, Folder 1, Box 2, *ibid.* The Leon Phillips Papers in the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma contain a mass of scrapbooks and clippings. There is one folder in Box 21 pertaining to the Grand River Dam Authority. It contains several letters requested by the governor from Authority officials providing him with information about their assignments. "No governor," said Federal District Court Judge Robert L. Williams, himself a former governor, "has the power to declare martial law until the civil authority has failed." See story in *Daily Oklahoman*, March 26, 1940, "Gov. Phillips Criticized for Calling Out Troops," copy in Folder 23, Box 6, Projects Files, Thomas Collection. The preliminary injunction enjoining any interference with the construction of the Pensacola Dam can be found in Holway, *History of the Grand River Dam Authority*, Section IX, 16–18.

³⁰ *Vinita Journal*, May 4, 1939, *Pryor Democrat*, May 4, 1939, *Tulsa Tribune*, May 3, 1939, *Daily Oklahoman*, May 2, 1939, and related clippings, all in Folder 1, Box 3, Disney Collection. See *Tulsa Tribune*, August 23, 1939, in Folder 3, Box 2, *ibid.* Elmer Thomas talked about the possibility of trying to develop a number of Oklahoma projects into a small TVA. See Thomas to R. L. Davidson, October 10, 1938, Folder 10, Box 11, Projects Files, Thomas Collection.

³¹ M. E. Pool to J. C. Wilkerson, October 10, 1938, Folder 15, Box 9, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; Thomas to R. Y. L. Wright, October 31, 1938, Folder 6, Box 18, Projects Files, *ibid.*, *Mayes County* (Oklahoma) *Daily Democrat*, January 16, 1939, story entitled "Senator Elmer Thomas Back of Grand River Development," copy in Folder 73, Box 40, Legislative Files, *ibid.*

³² *Miami Record*, January 8, 1940, *Tulsa World*, January 12, 1940, *Daily Oklahoman*, January 9, 1940, all clippings in Folder 4, Box 3, Disney Collection.

³³ *Daily Oklahoman*, February 11, 1940.

³⁴ "Federal Power Commission Order Authorizing Issuance of License," January 27 1939, copy in Folder 25, Box 13, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; William Kavanaugh to Thomas, April 24, 1939, Folder 22, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.*

³⁵ For some of the dimensions of this tension, see Thomas to M. S. Kreiger, June 27 1939, Folder 10, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.* For a discussion by the Chief of Engineers, viewing these dams as serving the dual purpose of flood control and power development, see H. Doc. 107 76 Cong., 1 Sess. The document was transmitted to the Speaker on January 12, 1939.

³⁶ *Muskogee Democrat*, March 30, 1940, *Tulsa Tribune*, April 19, 1940, and unidentified clipping, "Disney Seeks Arms Plant for GRD Area," Folder 5, Box 3, Disney Collection. See also *Vinita* (Oklahoma) *Star* June 1, 1940, Folder 6, Box 3, *ibid.*, and Everett Bateman to Thomas, June 1, 1940, Folder 85, Box 4, Subject Files, Thomas Collection.

³⁷ *Vinita Journal*, June 13, 1940, *Tulsa World*, June 12, 1940, Folder 5, Box 3, Disney Collection *Tulsa Tribune*, July 11, 1940, Folder 6, Box 3, *ibid.*, *Miami Record*, July 17 1940, Folder 7 Box 3, *ibid.*, *Pryor Democrat*, August 12, 1940, Folder 6, Box 3, *ibid.*, *Tulsa World*, October 27 1940, Folder 8, Box 3, *ibid.*

³⁸ *Mayes County Democrat*, Special Edition, November 1940, Section E, "Romantic Story of Grand River Dam," Folder 8, Box 3, *ibid.*

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³⁹ T. P. Clonts to Thomas January 22, 1941, Folder 26, Box 6, Projects Files, Thomas Collection. For the situation in one particular lakeside community, Grove, see O. E. Butler to Thomas, January 7 1941, Folder 25, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.*, and *Tulsa World*, January 8, 1941, *Daily Oklahoman*, January 19, 1941, both in Folder 1, Box 4, Disney Collection.

⁴⁰ *Pryor Democrat*, March 27 1941, and *Tulsa World*, March 27 1941, Folder 1, Box 4, Disney Collection; *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1941, Folder 2, Box 4, *ibid.*, Thomas and Jack Nichols to Victor Barnett, telegrams, n.d., [1941], Folder 33, Box 5, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; *Grove Sun*, July 31, 1941, Folder 3, Box 4, Disney Collection; *Tulsa Tribune*, August 4, 1941, *Daily Oklahoman*, August 2, 1940, Folder 3, Box 4, Disney Collection; C. A. West to Lyle Boren, October 9, 1941 (telegram), Folder 35, Box 12, Lyle Boren Collection, CAC.

⁴¹ *Tulsa World*, August 24 and September 14, 1941, *Stigler (Oklahoma) Tribune*, August 28, 1941, *Tulsa Tribune*, September 2, 1941, all in Folder 3, Box 4, Disney Collection; *Daily Oklahoman*, November 13, 1941, Folder 4, Box 4, *ibid.*, Jack Nichols, Thomas, Josh Lee, Disney to Major General J. L. Schley, September 2, 1941 (telegram), Folder 14, Box 11, Projects Files, Thomas Collection.

⁴² *Pawhuska (Oklahoma) News*, December 5, 1941, Folder 4, Box 4, Disney Collection; *Wagoner (Oklahoma) Tribune*, January 6, 1941, Folder 5, Box 4, *ibid.*, Boren to C. C. Grimes, November 12, 1941, Folder 35, Box 12, Boren Collection; Thomas to J. P. Arnold, December 12, 1941, Folder 18, Box 9, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; *Tulsa Tribune*, December 15, 1941, Folder 18, Box 9, Projects Files, *ibid.* See also *Daily Oklahoman*, November 22, 1941. Details about the takeover can be found in Holway, *History of the Grand River Dam Authority*, Section XII, 4–10.

⁴³ *Pryor Democrat*, March 10, 1942, Folder 5, Box 4, Disney Collection; *Duncan (Oklahoma) Banner* April 16, 1942, Folder 6, Box 4, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Tulsa World*, April 21, 1942, Folder 6, Box 4, *ibid.* Disney declared that he did not care who built the dams “just so long as someone does.” *Enid (Oklahoma) Morning News*, April 28, 1942, Folder 6, Box 4, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ N. R. Graham to Harold L. Smith, February 18, 1942, Folder 19, Box 9, Projects Files, Thomas Collection. Smith was director of the Bureau of the Budget. See also the Resolution adopted by the Waterways Committee of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, April 20, 1942, copy in Folder 34, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ T. W. Stallings to Thomas, April 21, 1942, Folder 34, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Holway to Board of Directors Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, April 21, 1941, and Thomas to Holway, April 24, 1942, Folder 34, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ For details of “Government Takeover and Occupancy,” see Holway, *History of the Grand River Dam Authority*, Section XII, 1–10, and “Grand River Dam Project [brief statement]” (n.d.) in Folder 13, Box 2, Conservation Files, Robert S. Kerr Collection, CAC.

⁴⁹ N. R. Graham to Board of Directors, Tulsa Chamber of Commerce May 18, 1943, copy in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection.

⁵⁰ Douglas L. Wright, “Memorandum on Protest of the Operating Policy of Pensacola Reservoir,” May 25, 1943, copy in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection. Graham on June 2, 1943, responded to Wright’s rebuttal and admitted to suffering “from the temptation to replace logic with personal insinuation.” Graham’s letter is also available in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, *ibid.* See also Philip Fleming to Fadjo Cravens, March 11, 1943, copy in Folder 35, Box 12, Boren Collection. The characterization of Wright can be found in Edward P. Marshall to Kerr, March 1, 1943, Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection. It is on page 10 of

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Marshall's lengthy letter. See also the May 21, 1943, "Resolution of the Pryor Chamber of Commerce that refutes the veracity of Graham's arguments," copy in Folder 37 Box 6, Projects Files, Thomas Collection.

⁵¹ *Tulsa Tribune*, May 19, 1943, copy in Folder 35, Box 12, Boren Collection.

⁵² Thomas to Major General Eugene Reybold, June 16, 1943, and Reybold to Thomas, June 24, 1943, Folder 35, Box 5, Projects Files, Thomas Collection, for both items; Thomas to Witt Dill, July 6, 1943, Folder 36, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁵³ Thomas to War Production Board, July 18, 1943, Thomas to Reybold, July 15, 1943, Reybold to Thomas, July 21, 1943, Folder 35, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.* In his letter to the War Production Board Thomas provided three pages of data pertaining to agricultural losses and damage caused by flooding. Thomas to Hub Adams, September 22, 1943, Folder 36, Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Earl Ward to Kerr, August 6, 1943, Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection; Harold Ickes to Thomas, August 11, 1943, Folder 36, Box 6, Projects Files, Thomas Collection. A copy of Executive Order No. 9373 can be found in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection.

⁵⁵ *Oklahoma City Times*, October 11, 1943, copy in Box 38, Folder 10, Boren Collection; Edward P Marshall to Kerr, October 15, 1943, and November 2, 1943, Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, Kerr Collection. Marshall was General Counsel of the GRDA. See also a brief prepared by Marshall, "In Re: The Proposed Construction of The Markham's [*sic*] Ferry and Fort Gibson Dams by the United States Insofar As Their Construction Constitutes a Taking of Water Right In Grand River Vested In The Grand River Dam Authority by the Grand River Dam Authority Act" [November 1943], copy in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, *ibid.* See also Marshall to Reybold, December 17 1943 (draft), in Folder 12, Box 2, Conservation Files, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Thomas to H. H. Ogden, November 2, 1943, and November 10, 1943, Thomas to W. H. Dill, November 16, 1943, N. R. Graham to Thomas, November 22, 1943, Folder 36, Box 5, Projects Files, Thomas Collection. In March 1944 the War Production Board disapproved construction of the Fort Gibson Dam. See Holmes Crosby to Col. George Goethels, March 7 1944, copy in Folder 37 Box 5, Projects Files, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Daily Oklahoman*, November 15, 1943, Folder 25, Box 4, Boren Collection; *Tulsa World*, March 6, 1944, Folder 2, Box 5, Disney Collection; *Tulsa Tribune* (editorial), January 4, 1944, Folder 2, Box 35, Gubernatorial Files, Kerr Collection. For an analysis of the Goodrich decision and of its impact plus a discussion of public power see Wright to Kerr, March 8, 1944, Folder 2, Box 35, Gubernatorial Files, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ See *Tulsa Tribune*, April 2, 1941, Folder 2, Box 4, Disney Collection, for a story about the plaques on the dam cornerstone. Howard Maginniss to Disney, January 2, 1941, Folder 1, Box 4, *ibid.* Maginniss, a reporter on the *Tulsa Tribune*, asked why he "emphatically insisted" that his name be withheld from the "dedicatory emblems."

⁵⁹ Thomas to C. R. Sallee, July 31, 1944, Folder 31, Box 5, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; Thomas to Reybold, August 16, 1944, and Wright to Thomas, November 10, 1944, Folder 69, Box 4, Projects Files, *ibid.*, France Paris to Thomas, August 29, 1944, Folder 18, Box 11, Projects Files, *ibid.* Paris was chair of the State Highway Commission. For Thomas's Senate remarks, see *Congressional Record*, 78 Cong., 2 Sess., November 24, 1944, 8488.

⁶⁰ Thomas to W. H. Breedlove, February 17 1945, Folder 70, Box 4, Projects Files, Thomas Collection; Thomas to F. M Baumgartner, February 21, 1945, and Thomas to R. Guy Scott, February 20, 1945, Folder 40, Box 6, Projects Files, *ibid.*, Thomas to Mrs. R. W. Armstrong, February 17 1945, Folder 7 Box 8, Subject Files, *ibid.* See also N. R.

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Graham to Thomas, February 9, 1945, Folder 44, Box 59, Legislative Files, *ibid.* Graham wrote, "You and I are in complete accord in our desires for river development."

⁶¹ "Chamber of Commerce Resolution, February 27 1945, adopted at Pryor, Oklahoma," copy in Folder 71, Box 4, Projects Files, *ibid.* See also Haskell Gaither et al. to Thomas, August 27 1945, Folder 21, Box 9, Projects Files, *ibid.*