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From the Archives…Naming a Lake?

Congress authorized Buford Dam in the late 1940s but it was not until 1956 that the reservoir created by the dam was officially named. Because Buford Dam is a federal public works project built with Federal dollars it would be up to *Uncle Sam* to name the lake. For many years the newspapers simply referred to the lake as Buford Lake, which was not unusual considering that many dams and reservoirs they created bore the same name. It would seem though, that everybody and his brother had their own ideas for the reservoir's name. Atlanta Mayor, William B. Hartsfield *(Fig. 1)* felt the reservoir should be named after Richard B. Russell Jr., then Georgia's junior Senator *(Fig. 2)*. Hartsfield felt that Russell had been part of key authorization and funding legislation that made the construction of Buford Dam a reality. The Mayor was himself a candidate for lending his name to the lake, as he was a tireless promoter for the project. He had spend an untold number of hours as the unofficial orchestrator in the movement to first get

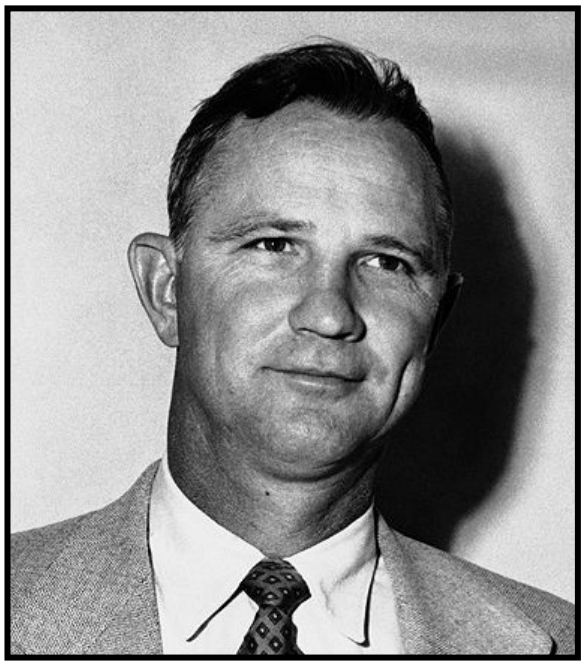
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

(Fig. 1) (left) William B. Hartsfield speaking at the grounding breaking in 1950. *Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District (Fig. 2) (right)* Senator Richard B. Russell fought hard on Capitol Hill for early funding for the dam's construction. *Courtesy Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress*

the dam approved then see funding appropriated to start construction. There was even a suggestion that the lake bare the name of then Georgia Tech Football Coach Bobby Dodd *(Fig. 3)*. For many this was an idea that had considerable merit. That was until someone noted that saying *"Dodd Dam"* on the radio would probably get someone in trouble. You have to remember this was the 1950s.

Fig. 3



Legendary Georgia Tech Football Coach Robert Lee "Bobby" Dodd.

As the project and the lake it would produce became more and more of a reality so did the idea of naming the reservoir being created by the dam. The media picked up on the issue and a number of stories appeared in local newspapers throughout the area. One such story appeared in the Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution on Sunday, January 31, 1954. The article was two years before the lake was officially named. It was entitled *"Will Rogers'* Lake" by Harold Martin and it examined the suggestion of a Mr. A.S. Furcron, a geologist, who felt that the lake should be named after Will Rogers. Furcron explained that such an act would be a fitting tribute to the popular humorist who was killed in an airplane crash in 1935. According to Mr. Furcron when the lake was formed it would bury forever a section of Georgia hill country that is rich in Indian history. He used genealogical research to point out that Will Rogers was a descendent of a family of Rogerses living on the Chattahoochee River near the site of Buford Dam today. They were three-quarters Indian and one-quarter white but like most Cherokees of this regions had long sense developed European ways of living.

There were still others who made their suggestions known usually in the form of a letter or personal contact with their representatives in Washington, D.C. The Sons of Confederate Veterans, the John B. Gordon Camp no. 46 out of Atlanta, drafted a letter to Senator Richard B. Russell Jr. on May 3, 1954 *(Fig. 4)*. In the letter they believed that the reservoir that would be created by Buford Dam should be called Lake Sidney Lanier in honor of the Georgia poet. To the groups knowledge Lanier had never had his name used in such a manner and it seemed fitting that the man who brought such fame to the Chattahoochee River be honored in such a manner. This idea gained considerable

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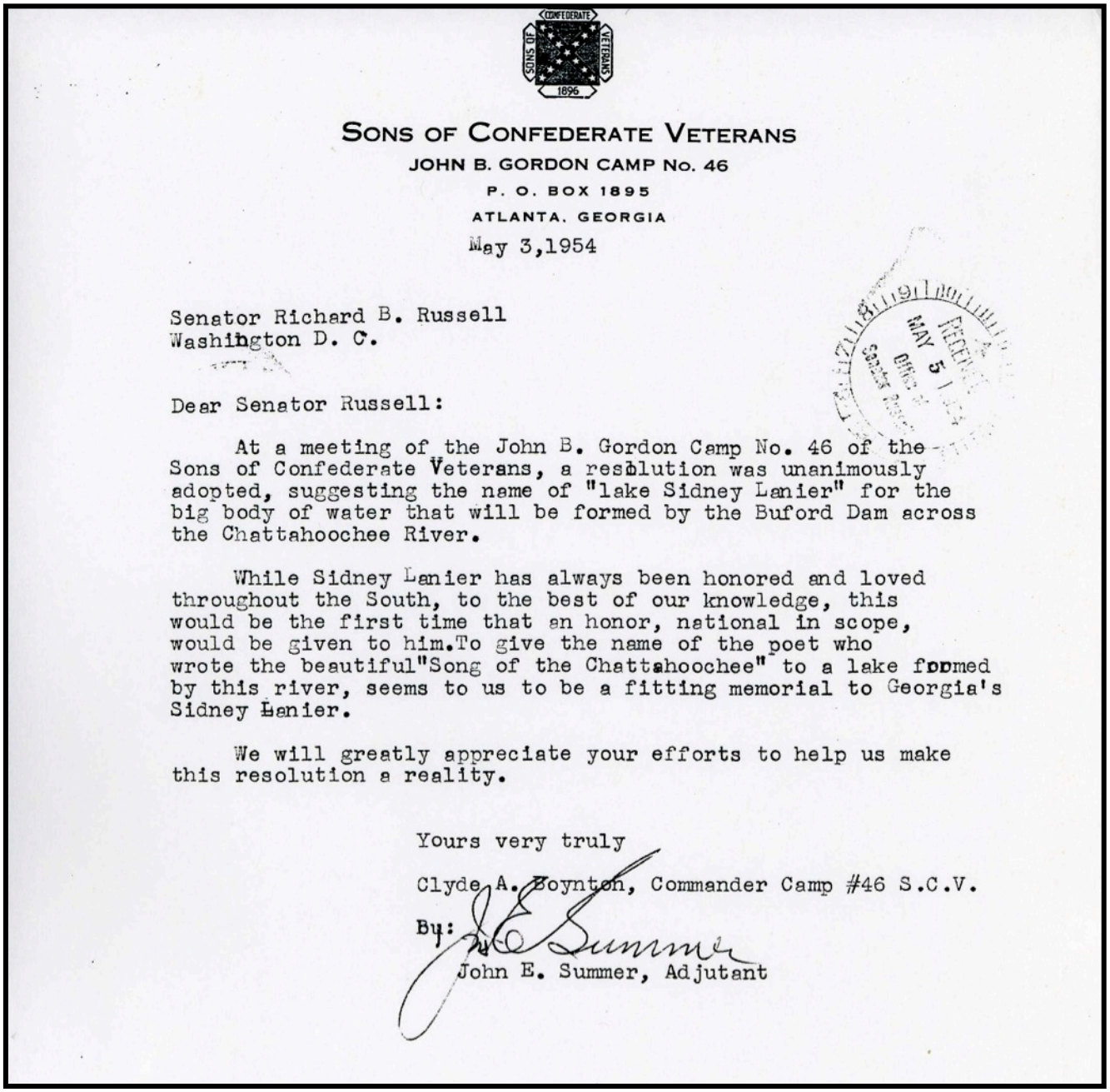


SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS
JOHN B. GORDON CAMP No. 46
P. O. BOX 1895
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

May 3,1954

Senator Richard B. Russell
Washington D. C.

Dear Senator Russell:

At a meeting of the John B. Gordon Camp No. 46 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, a resolution was unanimously adopted, suggesting the name of "lake Sidney Lanier" for the big body of water that will be formed by the Buford Dam across the Chattahoochee River.

While Sidney Lanier has always been honored and loved throughout the South, to the best of our knowledge, this would be the first time that an honor, national in scope, would be given to him. To give the name of the poet who wrote the beautiful "Song of the Chattahoochee" to a lake formed by this river, seems to us to be a fitting memorial to Georgia's Sidney Lanier.

We will greatly appreciate your efforts to help us make this resolution a reality.

Yours very truly

Clyde A. Boynton, Commander Camp #46 S.C.V.

By: John E. Summer

John E. Summer, Adjutant

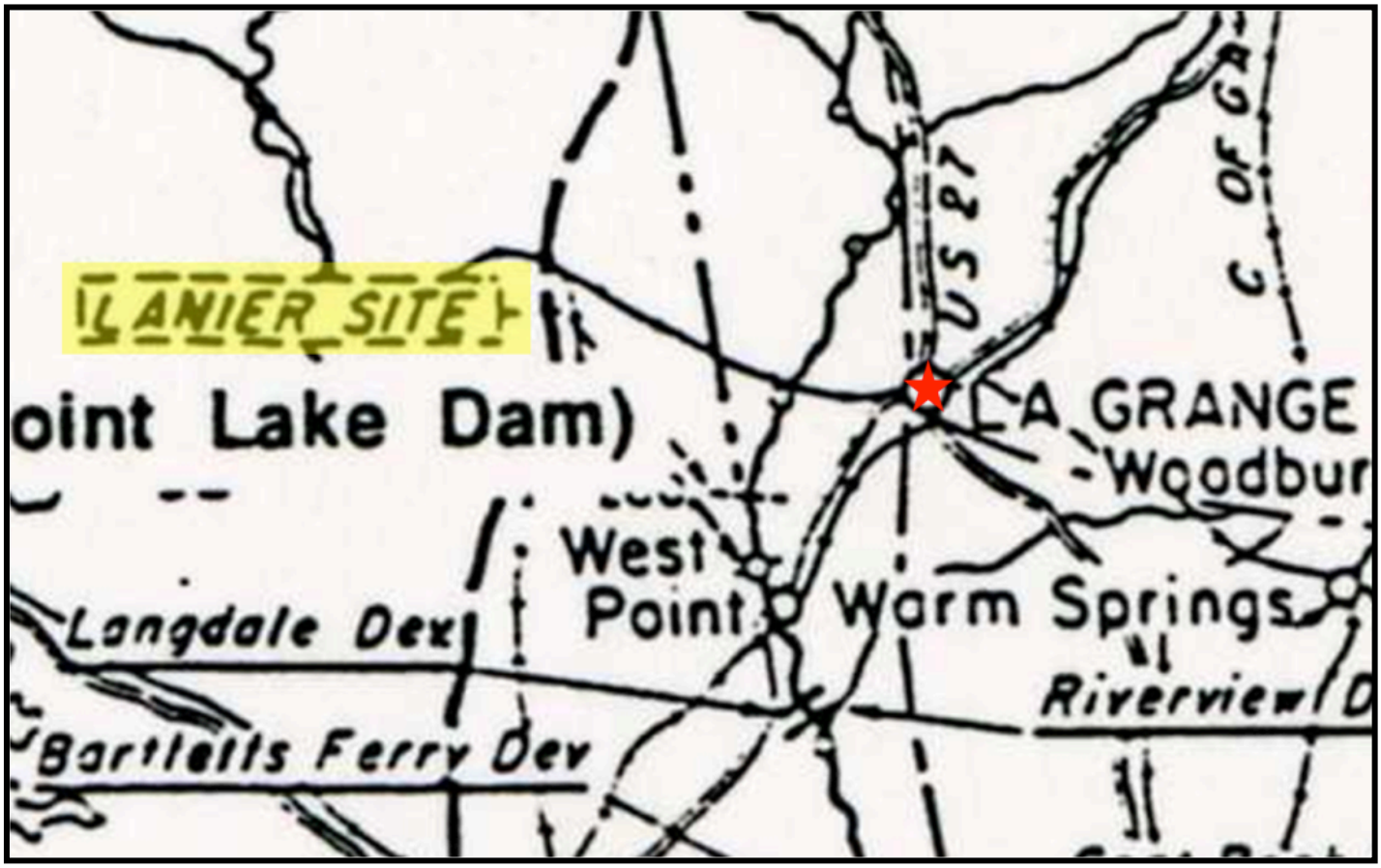
Fig. 4

(Fig. 4) A letter from the Sons of Confederate Veterans, John B. Gordon Camp no. 46 concerning naming the Buford Dam reservoir. *Courtesy Sons of Confederate Veterans*

support as that same year the Georgia General Assembly passed a proposal asking the U.S. Congress to name the reservoir after the Georgia poet.

A small bit of irony can be noted here as it seems one objection to naming the lake after Sidney Lanier came from a rather unusual source, one of his own descendents. Apparently J. Smith Lanier of West Point, Georgia, a civic leader and a kinsman of the late Georgia poet, opposed to the lake being named after his relative. Mr. Lanier was

not opposed to the his ancestors name being used, but rather what it was being used for. Evidently, according to Lanier, Lake Sidney Lanier was supposed to be given to a proposed Georgia Power Company dam just above his hometown of West Point, Georgia. It was Lanier's belief that had the Great Depression not crippled the economy, then the dam would have been constructed as originally planned and his ancestor's name would have been used for that project. Official records indicate that, at least in part, Lanier's claim was correct. A 1939 survey map had a Lanier Dam listed as a proposed dam and at the approximate location of the present West Point Lock and Dam.



(Fig. 5) The site chosen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Lanier Dam that was a proposed project found on a 1939 river survey map. Although it was not a Georgia Power Company project it did remain a proposed project by the government for many years. *Courtesy U.S. Congressional Record*

Fig. .