

From the Archives...Ground Breaking

On March 1, 2000 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers along with a group of business and civic leaders in the area celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the ground breaking ceremony for the Buford Dam Project. It was a significant milestone to celebrate. It had been 50 years since hundreds of people made the trek to a Gwinnett County hillside overlooking the proposed dam site to ring in a new era. Nothing of this scope and magnitude had ever been attempted in this region of North Georgia (*Fig. 1*).

The day chosen for the celebration was March 1, 1950, which also happened to be the 59th birthday of one of the project's most ardent supporters, Atlanta Mayor, William B. Hartsfield. This was no coincidence as early on Hartsfield had been appointed as the acting chairman of the lake

committee set up to plan the ceremonial program. This was right up the Mayor's alley as his tenure as Atlanta's mayor had prepared him well for the task at hand. Hartsfield had long been a champion of the project and had spent many years pushing the idea for a dam north of Atlanta. He saw the good for not only Atlanta and north Georgia region but for the South as a whole. In January, 1950 Mayor Hartsfield held a luncheon in the President's Room of the Capital City Club in Atlanta to work out the final details for the up coming ground breaking ceremony. Hartsfield (*Fig. 1*) was just one of a group of local, state, and federal officials who showed up to christen in the new public works project. Herman Talmadge, who was then Georgia's Governor; South Atlantic Division Chief, Colonel Bernard L. Robinson; Walter K. Wilson, the Mobile District Chief; Roy



Fig. 1

(*Fig. 1*) Hundreds of people from all over North Georgia and beyond braved the cold and damp conditions of the ground breaking ceremony.
Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District

P. Otwell, Mayor of Cumming, Georgia; Weldon Gardner of Buford; J. Larry Kleckley of Gainesville and Hall County; Eugene Hart of the Atlanta Freight Bureau (later Georgia Freight Bureau); Colonel J.R. Jewett, Deputy Chief of Engineers where also present and along with Hartsfield would actually turn the earth with ceremonial shovels.



Fig. 2

(Fig. 2) Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield addresses the hundreds of people who visited the ground breaking site. They came to get a glimpse at the speakers and to take part in the event. Local schools even let out that day so students could attend the event. Notice the American flag in the background it only has 48 stars.

Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District

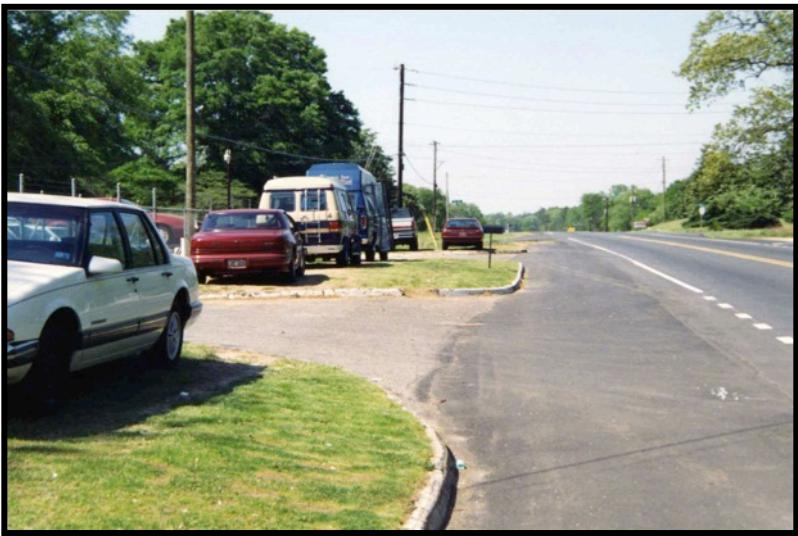
The event was well publicized and it seemed everybody and his brother wanted to come and catch a glimpse of the many dignitaries that would be present. It was a big event, one that to this day has probably not been duplicated for the affect it has had on this region of North Georgia. It was reported that a motorcade of some 200 vehicles from several cities were going to make their way to the ceremony site. They all linked up with another motorcade about two miles of Buford at Carroll's Texaco gas station (Fig. 3) on Highway 23 where they proceeded through town that was decked out in full

Fig. 3



(Fig. 3) A motorcade carrying Governor Talmadge stops at Carroll's Texaco station on Highway 23 near Buford to link up with another group making the trip to the ground breaking. *Courtesy Mrs. Weldon Gardner* (Fig. 4) A photograph today taken from the same spot 59 years later. Quite a change from then and today. *Courtesy RDC Productions*

Fig. 4



their feet to get to the ceremony site.

At 11:00 AM the North Georgia band played the National Anthem and then Mayor Hartsfield addressed the crowds (Fig. 2). He welcomed the many visitors who braved the cold damp conditions to come to the ceremony and spoke of development of the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, Flint River System with navigation

regalia. The motorcade made its way through Buford horns blasting and sirens from the local law enforcement agencies ringing loudly. The influx of cars and trucks was not limited to the areas south of Atlanta. People and vehicles from seemingly every direction of North Georgia had descended upon the ceremony site on a hillside in Gwinnett County overlooking the dam construction site. One thing the committee had not planned on nor could control was mother nature. It had rained the night before and the roads leading to the ceremony site, which were not paved and little more than construction access roads, were in awful shape. Just about everywhere on the route leading to the ceremony site where cars and trucks mired in the mud. They were sliding off into ditches or being pushed to the shoulder and left abandoned while their occupants took to

(Fig. 5) Governor Herman Talmadge seen talking to a group of men outside of Carroll's Texaco station. The group seen in Fig. 3 stopped the motorcade to link up with other vehicles that day. *Courtesy Mrs. Weldon Gardner*



Fig. 5

first to Columbus then Atlanta. Here you see his dream of Atlanta becoming a port city. It would be a dream he would never see realized and one he felt was a bitter pill to swallow, leaving office without seeing it to fruition.

He then turned the podium over to Buford resident Weldon Gardner, a local businessman and advocate for the project who had made many trips to Washington, D.C. in the early years for both approval then funding for the project. Gardner spoke of the river finally being made to serve mankind instead of being an angry red river that was carrying away the wealth of North Georgia at a rate of thousands of tons of topsoil each year. After his brief comments Gardner introduced the keynote speaker of the day, Governor Herman Talmadge who would become the state's junior Senator in 1956 when he defeated Georgia's then long time senior Senator, Walter F. George. Talmadge (Fig. 6) was a very popular politician in Georgia who like his father Eugene Talmadge had his own eloquent way of addressing constituents. Talmadge spoke of the South missing out historically of the large manufacturing that other areas of the country enjoyed. In an ironic twist of history, he spoke of the plight of the Southern Economy and its inequity of trade with the rest of the nation. He would live to see that change and the South become a Mecca of industry and trade in the latter half of the 20th Century. When finished he relinquished the

Fig. 6



(Fig. 6-Left) Herman Talmadge
(Fig. 7-Bottom) Charles A. Jackson, Resident Engineer.
Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District

Fig. 7



podium to representatives of the Corps of Engineers; Colonel B.L. Robinson, Division Chief; Colonel Walter K. Wilson, Mobile District Chief; and the resident engineer for the project, Charles Jackson (Fig. 7) who would eventually become the resident engineer at Hartwell Dam also introduced H.N. Rodgers representing the firm that was charged with constructing the spillway and saddle dike no. 3 both a mile or so east of the ceremony site. Colonel Robinson said “*the Buford Dam Project was one which the federal government could not afford to not build The factors of water and soil conservation are pressing upon the industrial and agricultural life of the American people and the Buford Dam Project is an ideal method for the advancement of both factors*”.

With the preliminaries out of the way the day’s dignitaries took their ceremonial shovels and began turning the earth in a symbolic gesture to begin the project. It was later learned that a number of individuals had ceremonial shovels that did not break ground that day, probably souvenirs. At the conclusion of the ceremony out of town visitors were invited to a luncheon sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. The event was held at a new constructed schoolhouse in Buford. At the luncheon Mayor Hartsfield was presented with a birthday cake in honor of his 59th birthday. Several hours after the ceremony the crowds had thinned considerably but there were still lines of people making their way back to their vehicles, many of which were still stranded in the mud and had to be towed out with cars, trucks, and tractors. For those who attended the event, it would be something they would never forget.



Fig. 8

(Fig. 8) Breaking ground to begin constructing Buford Dam. (L-R) Governor Herman Talmadge; Weldon Gardner; Eugene Hart; Mayor William B. Hartsfield; J. Larry Kleckley; South Atlantic Division Chief, Colonel B.L. Robinson; Cumming Mayor, Roy P. Otwell; Mobile District Chief, Colonel Walter K. Wilson; and Deputy Chief of Engineers, Colonel J.R. Jewett. *Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District*