

From the Archives...Closing the Gates

Prior to noon on Wednesday, February 1, 1956, one month shy of six years from the Ground Breaking ceremony, the gates of the intake structure were closed. In a ceremony atop the left bank of the main earth dam a group of dignitaries were invited to simultaneously throw the intake gate switches. At that moment Lake Lanier was born.



(Fig. 1) Dignitaries invited to throw the switches that day Mrs. Viola Davis, the 85 year old mother of Congressman James C. Davis, 5th District who could not attend; Atlanta Mayor, William B. Hartsfield; John M. Cooper, Atlanta Freight Bureau; General H.J. Hoeffner, South Atlantic Division Engineer; Frank Shaw, Industrial Manager of the Atlanta Chamber

of Commerce; James E. Jackson, Chairman of the Atlanta Aldermanic Board; Colonel H.E. Bisbort, Mobile District Engineer; Roy P. Otwell, Mayor of Cumming, Georgia; H. Weldon Gardner, pas President of the Upper Chattahoochee Development Association; Carl Lawson, President of the Upper Chattahoochee Development Association; and J.C. Dover, Buford City Manager.

After the gates were closed, a bucket of water was drawn and presented to the Atlanta Waterworks Manager, Paul Weir as a symbolic gesture denoting the beginning of a new era in the development of the Chattahoochee River. Following the gate closing the ceremony was moved to Buford City Park where an unveiling ceremony took place. Four bronze plaques honoring those organizations and people that worked tirelessly to get the dam funded and constructed, were officially dedicated. The plaques (*Fig. 3,4,5, & 6*) were mounted on a cylindrical monument bored out of solid rock by a rotary drill

Courtesy Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University

Fig. 1

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

over 192 feet below the present site of the intake structure. Atlanta's Mayor, William B. Hartsfield unveiled the plaque that carried the names of city officials and Atlanta citizens that helped see the project completed. Congressman Davis' mother Viola Davis, unveiled the plaque which contained statistical data about the project. General H.J. Hoeffner, South Atlantic Division Chief unveiled a plaque honoring the United States Senators, Congressmen,

**THE BUFORD DAM BEGINS OPERATIONS
PROGRAM**

PROGRAM CHAIRMAN—H. Weldon Gardner, First President of Upper Chattahoochee Development Association.

11:30 A. M.—Music by the Third Army Band of Fort McPherson, Ga.
Band Master, Chief Warrant Officer, Wilmont N. Trumbull.

DEDICATORY PRAYER—Rev. Jack Tatum, pastor of the Buford First Baptist Church

WELCOME—H. Weldon Gardner

LOWERING OF THE GATES—Conducted by Charles A. Jackson, Jr., Resident Engineer

Congressman James C. Davis	Robert M. Holder	James E. Jackson
Mayor William B. Hartsfield	Col. Harold E. Bisbort	Carl Lawson
General H. J. Hoeffner	J. C. Dover	John M. Cooper
H. Weldon Gardner	Roy Otwell	Frank K. Shaw

GIFT TO THE CITY OF ATLANTA—First gallon of water taken from Lake Lanier presented by Weldon Gardner to Paul Weir, Manager of Atlanta Water Works Association.

MOTORCADE FROM DAM TO CITY OF BUFORD PUBLIC SQUARE

12:30 P. M.

MUSIC—Third Army Band

WELCOME—Lionel Drake, Chairman of the Buford City Commission

MASTER OF CEREMONIES—H. Weldon Gardner

Unveiling of bronze tablets mounted on granite test core taken by rotary drilling 192 feet below the surface at the Buford Dam site.

READING OF INSCRIPTION ON TABLETS—Paul Weir,

Tablet No. 1—Congressman James C. Davis, Atlanta
Tablet No. 2—General H. J. Hoeffner, Division Engineer
Tablet No. 3—Carl Lawson, President of the UCDA
Tablet No. 4—Mayor William B. Hartsfield, Atlanta

Following the unveiling 200 invited guests will go to the High school cafetorium for a luncheon.

1.00 P.M. —Luncheon—Carl Lawson, Presiding

MUSIC—Third Army Band

INVOCATION—Rev. Lester M. James, Pastor of the Buford Presbyterian Church

RECOGNITION OF DISTINGUISHED GUESTS—Col. Joseph E. Cheeley, Jr., Secretary of UCDA

MASTER OF CEREMONIES—Mayor William B. Hartsfield, Atlanta

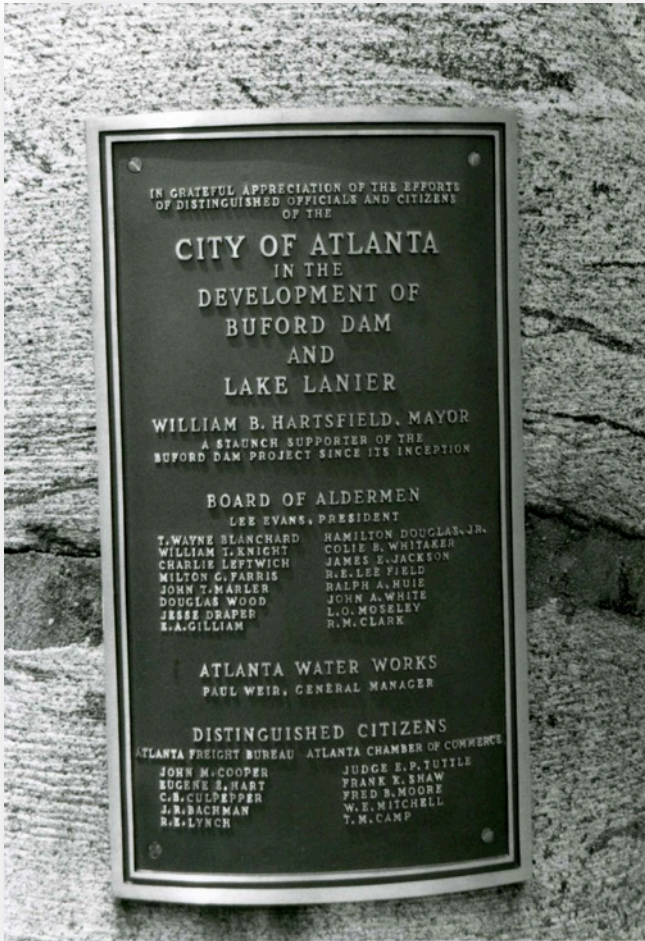
BRIEF REMARKS BY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS:

Congressman James C. Davis.	Col. Harold E. Bisbort, District Engineer
Gen. H. J. Hoeffner, Division Engineer	Charles A. Jackson, Resident Engineer
Paul Weir, Manager of Atlanta Water Works Association	John Quillian, State Highway Department AND OTHERS

Fig. 2

and Corps of Engineers' officials responsible for the project's construction. Weldon Gardner, a past president of the UCDA, City of Buford, Gwinnett County Commissioners, counties in the lake area, and the press for the work they gave to the eventual construction of the dam. Following the unveiling ceremony some 200 guest were invited to a luncheon at the same high school cafetorium where six years before the Ground Breaking dinner was held. Original estimates, based on amounts of rainfall predicted and general contract work on the bridges, roads, and other facilities, were for the lake to fill near capacity within a year. Although this did not happen it did reach close to normal pool in a little over two years. During this period there would be only two major interruptions in the Chattahoochee River impoundment schedule with minor temporary limitations set on the process of creating Lake Lanier. One of the first

Fig. 3



Corps of Engineers was using pumps to rid the powerhouse of excess water. The Corps had a paradox of sorts or at least it seemed that way. The very water that was causing the leak would Eventually stop it. The huge intake gates were constructed on a pressure seal principle meaning the intense water pressure that would be present when the lake filled up would in time seal the leak. The resident

(Fig. 4) Mrs. Viola Davis unveiled a plaque which contained statistical data about the project. *Courtesy RDC Productions*

(Fig. 3) Atlanta Mayor, William B. Hartsfield unveiled the plaque honoring the officials and citizens of Atlanta who helped to see the project through fruition. *Courtesy RDC Productions*

limitations occurred two weeks after the gates were dropped. Removal of a cemetery in Forsyth County, work on a power line, and salvage work on old Brown's Bridge caused the elevation of the lake to be held at 965.0 for a little over six days. Not long after the gates were closed a report surfaced that the dam was leaking. Rumors were the

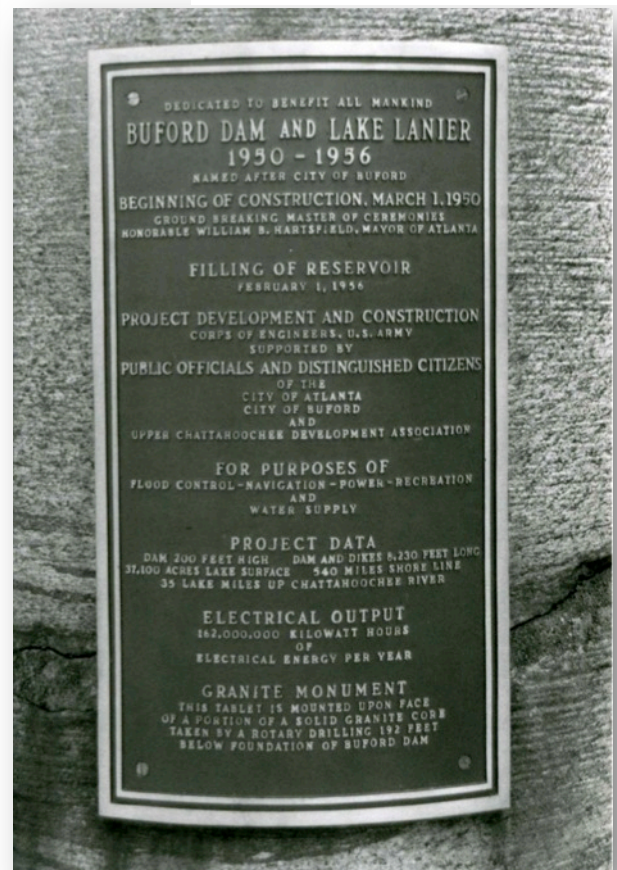


Fig. 4

engineer also explained the abundance of water at the powerhouse construction area. A good deal of water present was a designed flow as it was needed to keep newly poured concrete wet during the curing process. So even if there had not been a leak the Corps of Engineers would have pumped water into the facility to wet the concrete.

In March, 1956 one month after impoundment began the lake had grown nearly 48 ½ feet in depth to an elevation of 976.72 and nearly 20 miles in length. Several creeks near the dam that were tributaries of the

(Fig. 5) General H.J. Hoeffner, South Atlantic Chief unveiled a plaque honoring the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Congress, who were responsible for the dam's construction. *Courtesy RDC Productions*

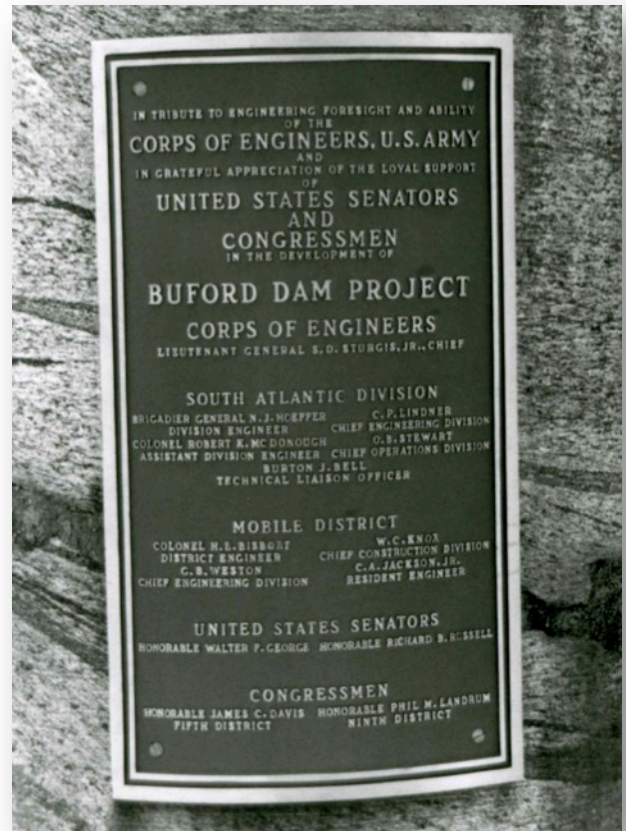


Fig. 5

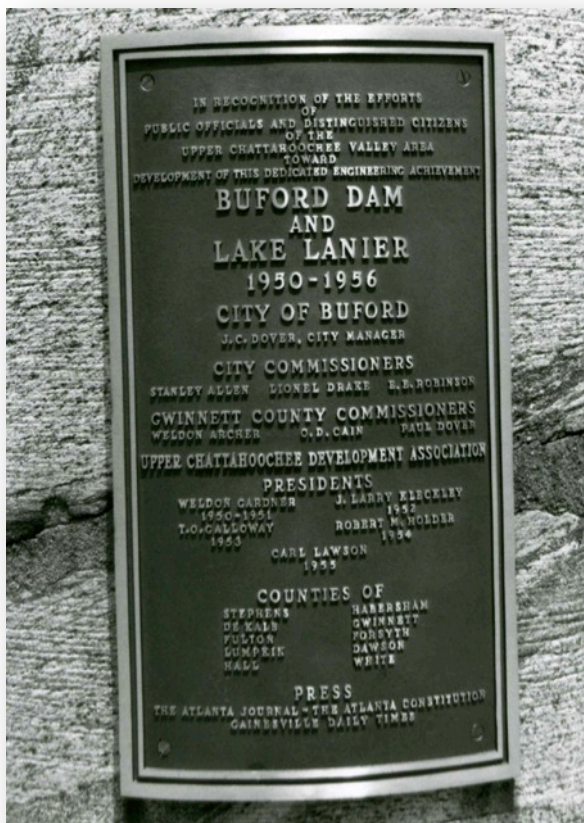


Fig. 6

(Fig. 6) Weldon Gardner, past President of the UCDA unveiled a plaque honoring the UCDA, City of Buford, Gwinnett County Commissioners, counties in the lake area, and the press for the work they gave to the eventual construction of the dam. *Courtesy RDC Productions*

Chattahoochee had seen their mouths all but disappear. Big Creek whose mouth was located at elevation 930.0 was just a stream. The river covered a least four major bridge sites in this time period. Light's Bridge, located on Highway 997 between Flowery Branch and Forsyth County; Old Brown's Bridge on Highway 141; Keith's Bridge at the confluence of the Chattahoochee and Chestatee Rivers; and Kelly's Bridge located upstream from

Keith's Bridge. Keith's Bridge, Light's Bridge, and Kelly's Bridge would not be relocated. Keith's Bridge was temporarily rebuilt after it was destroyed by a fire. It would not last long though, as it would be removed once Lake Lanier began to form in 1956.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

(Fig. 7 & 8) (top right) You see a section of the core plug placed in Buford City Park in 1956. This was the site of the plaques unveiling ceremony that was part of the gate closing ceremony. Notice the top of the Baptist church in the background. (bottom left) A steeple was added years later as you see today. *Courtesy RDC Productions*



Fig. 9

(Fig. 9 & 10) (left) The forebay excavation is filling up six days after the gate closing. (right) Same date and time directly out from the main earth dam. *Courtesy U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District*



Fig. 10