



Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

“How far that little candle throws his beams . . .”

—Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

What did he know, that brash young planner?

See him in the hazy light of retrospect, an audacious dreamer, perched on his nail-keg chair and hunched over his packing-crate desk.

It's July 1, 1939, day one. The Tulsa District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers just opened shop in the Petroleum Building in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Could he, this planner, envision 50 years into the future? Could he foretell the full scope and effect of his early thoughts, calculations, and jottings? Could he imagine those who would come after him, who would bolster broad-brushed dreams with the wherewithal to see the job done?

He was the first of a new breed with a new way of thinking in a ravaged region. Oklahoma, southern Kansas, northern Texas, and western Arkansas were rising from the ashes of the depression, still choking in the dust bowl.

How could he see the reality he would create?

Could he see

SEAGULLS

ON THE PLAINS, nesting near an inland seaport, over there where the dry brush blows down the sleepy streets of Catoosa? Seagulls that would, in time, follow barges from the Gulf and become permanent plains residents on the Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers?



And the parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water.

— *Isaiah 35:7*

