



LAKES? WHAT LAKES?

The Tulsa Tribune's writer Roger Devlin recalls a day in the 1920s, when somebody put an outboard motor on display in a store window on Tulsa's Main Street. It was a curiosity.

"It drew a crowd because many citizens had never seen one," Devlin wrote in 1971. "I don't know how long it took to sell it because — well, even if you had an outboard back in those days, where would you have been able to use it?"

"... The Arkansas? Sometimes it flooded past its banks but usually was a muddy trickle meandering through sandbars. Grand River? No better. The Verdigris? Even worse and mostly mud.

"Lakes? What Lakes?"

"Well, there was Sand Springs Lake, reachable by the interurban. But to call it a lake was flattery . . . There was Big Lake — the 'Big' was a comparative term — over toward Claremore. And Yonkapin. Both were shallow ancient meanders of the Verdigris . . . The water was inhabited mostly by tired migratory ducks. And frogs and water moccasins.

"Lake Francis, over near Siloam Springs in Arkansas . . ., nice even if not large enough to be on the map . . .

"Lakes or real, honest-to-gosh rivers on which to boat? You had to go to Minnesota. Or Colorado . . .

"Sure, we had rainfall back in those days, but what didn't soak into the soil trickled off into rivulets and creeks and eventually into drainage ditches we called rivers.

"And it was gone. Unused. Unenjoyed . . ."

By contrast, Devlin told of a flight over modern-day, lake-dotted eastern Oklahoma, "a water wonderland:

"Keystone, right at Tulsa's back door, was a great river-fork 'Y' of beaten silver. Hulah gleamed far to the north. There was always-surprising Oologah [and] silken-looking Gibson, Markham Ferry and Grand . . ., Tenkiller on the Illinois and gem-like Greenleaf . . ., Eufaula . . ., Wister on the Poteau, [and] up north of it a huge expanse of shimmer . . ., the Robert S. Kerr Reservoir on the Arkansas . . .

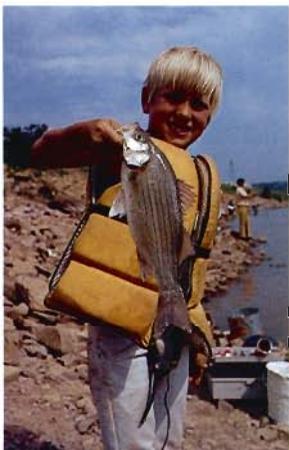
"Any one of them could cradle Sand Springs Lake or Big Lake or Lake Francis in one of their smaller arms, and you'd never know it was there . . .

"The amount of water this corner of Oklahoma has challenges the senses today . . . We've got so much water today it is hard to appreciate it, unless you had known this country before.

"You don't have to be in your dotage to recall how important to our land-locked, arid, Great Plains lives Sand Springs Lake and Yonkapin and Francis once were.

"Now they're almost forgotten as the boats-on-trailers whiz by on their way to Keystone or Grand or Eufaula."

— The Tulsa Tribune, Jan 31, 1971



A Keystone striper, a Broken Bow reflection.