

Behold

THE GRAND DEBATES.

Behind any dam, only a finite amount of water can be contained, and heated controversies arose about competing needs for that water storage. A case in point was the debate over uses of water behind Pensacola Dam on the Grand River in northeastern Oklahoma.

Pensacola Dam was under construction by the Grand River Dam Authority when the Tulsa District was formed in 1939. The GRDA dam had a single purpose: hydropower production. But the Corps determined, meanwhile, that flood control was also needed. It concluded that such a use could be justified economically at not only that site but also at two others on the Grand: Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson.

The Public Works Administration, which had granted \$20 million toward the Pensacola construction, insisted that most of the reservoir storage be reserved to hold water that would generate hydropower. But flood control advocates such as Tulsa's Newt Graham warned that increasing power storage reserves would reduce the space that should be reserved to hold flood water. This, he claimed, would threaten those in the flood plain below the dam.

In a historic confrontation, Tulsa District personnel and Col. Eugene Reybold, the Southwestern Division Engineer, argued against sacrificing needed flood control storage for power-only projects on the Grand River. Reybold (who became the Corps' Chief of Engineers in 1941) also argued that the projects' impact was so broad that the decisions on project use and operation, including power marketing, should be made only by Congress.

The issues were settled, at least initially, in 1941 when Congress upheld the Corps' position and included the Pensacola, Markham Ferry, and Fort Gibson projects in the comprehensive flood control plan for the Arkansas River. The effect of this action, because Pensacola had already been built by GRDA, was to authorize the Corps to manage the flood control features at Pensacola and to build dams at Markham Ferry and Fort Gibson. (But, after later changes, GRDA — not the Corps — built Markham Ferry.)

That congressional action, the Flood Control Act of 1941, also extended the Arkansas River comprehensive flood control plan to include the Verdigris River basin in Kansas. It authorized dams near Toronto, Neodesha (never built), Elk City, and Fall River in Kansas.



Master dealers in "white gold" — water politics — included (left to right) Col. Wilson, Senator Bob Kerr, Glade Kirkpatrick, and Newt Graham.