

It was called

A WHITE ELEPHANT IN A PORK BARREL.

If some elements in the Corps were cool to the waterway, so were some key players in Oklahoma, including Oklahoma Gov. Roy Turner, Oklahoma City publisher E.K. Gaylord, Tulsa's Congressman George B. Schwabe, and Tulsa oilman W.G. "Bill" Skelly.

Henderson contends that Skelly had railroad interests he wanted to protect against waterway competition. Railroad or no, he opposed the project only until he lost 800 acres of crops to a flood along the Verdigris; then he volunteered his services.

"Let's get the damn thing built," Skelly proclaimed.⁴

The national — and sometimes international — press was even less than cool to the waterway; they were hot on the trail of Senator Kerr's power and what some had no hesitation in calling a pork barrel project.

"More than any one man, . . . Kerr, the wheeling and dealing Oklahoma Democrat and oil millionaire, hooked this enormous . . . piece of pork out of the barrel," *Fortune Magazine* contended.⁵

The London Economist asked whether the project was a "white elephant in a pork barrel" but ended its analysis by speculating that the waterway just might produce an "economic miracle" in the resource-rich Arkansas basin. "It is," *The Economist* conceded, "a glittering prospect."⁶



1951 floods in Emporia (top photo) and Halstead, Kansas.