

# **LAKE STANTON**

## Stanton County, Kansas

Written by Lucille Deselms

*Information provided by those who were involved with the Lake Stanton project.*

In the extreme western part of the state of Kansas in Stanton County, are two creeks. One is Buffalo Creek and the other is Bear Creek. They are about two miles east of the Colorado State line. Buffalo Creek runs into Bear Creek. These are known as dry creeks; although one-half mile east of where these two creeks join forces, some natural springs, keep living water standing in Bear Creek through the driest seasons. However, it is not large enough quantities of water to cause a natural flow.

In the spring months during the thaws and the heavy rains in Colorado, great floods of water come roaring down these creeks washing away bridges, uprooting trees, and carrying away small buildings, livestock, and anything else that chances to be in its path. In a few days, these creeks will be dry, the water having washed out into ponds, sometimes blocking roads for months and causing out-of-the-way detours, especially on Highway 160 west of Johnson, Kansas. This waste of water has gone on during the past ages, with no thought of ever preventing it and making it useful rather than a menace. About two years ago, a farmer, through whose land the creek runs, had a vision of a lake to conserve the water that had previously been wasted. An application was made to the government to locate a building spot and build a dam across Bear Creek. Approved as a W. P. A. Project, the work started on March 11, 1936, and is to be finished by July 1, 1937. Today, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the manual labor is finished.

Lake Stanton is located about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of the small town of Manter, Kansas. It is to be surrounded by a park, which at present consists of 662 acres. Stanton County however is contemplating buying more land. There are to be winding drives with trees, and shrubs. This will beautify the area and make recreational picnic festivities more pleasant. This will also make it a beauty spot that will command the attention of pleasure seekers and tourists.

There is to be a caretaker's house built on these grounds. It is to be made of native rock. There will be four rooms for the caretakers to use, all modernly equipped and one large room at one end used as a storage room for supplies and recreation during the winter months. The county will maintain and keep the park trees and buildings in proper condition.

The dam itself will be 51 feet high and 1,750 feet long. The width of the dam will be 308 feet at the bottom and will gradually taper up to about 30 feet at the top. The bottom of the dam has to be built of solid rock.

There is a road located about ½ mile southwest of the dam that leads to the quarry. It is a real sight to see, men with hand drills, drill holes deep into the rock bed, then dynamite placed in the drill hole. After the fuse is lit, somebody yells, "Everybody get back". Then, there is a scramble for safety. In a few seconds, you hear a loud "boom" and upheaved from their long resting place, are the broken rocks. They are about to serve their purpose. The men employed in this quarry receive about two dollars and thirty cents a day.

There are also 29 trucks working, which haul the rocks and sand used in the building of the dam. Four diesel tractors with Fresno Scrapers scoop up the sand from the creek bed. The rocks are loaded into trucks by a huge steam shovel, owned by the Jones Construction Company of Emporia, Kansas. This shovel is a very important and interesting piece of machinery operated by Guy Robe in a very systematic way. Each truck has its number and as they get their load, they are checked and the time is kept by Orval (Speck) Lane who is the official timekeeper and pay master. The trucks come one by one down the narrow little road, to a marker that is a certain distance from the shovel, to get their load of rock and sand. When the last shovel full is dumped into the truck, it moves on and another truck quickly takes its place. Thus throughout the day, the work moves along in progress.

The Superintendent of Construction of this project is Mr. Jim Owens, of Manter, Kansas. He also has an underforeman, Mr. Frank O'Banion of Johnson, Kansas. The Supervising Engineer is James Streeter, the County Engineer of Stanton County, of Johnson, Kansas. His assistant is Paul Harbison, also of Johnson.

There are men working and trucks whizzing around the corners from eight o'clock A.M. to five o'clock P.M. every day. There are 130 men on the payroll. Most of these men are farmers and are very thankful there is some project that they can make an adequate livelihood. There are different salaries paid according to the type of work that each man can do. The truck drivers receive much more than the manual laborers.

The spillway to the dam is 400 feet in length and the depth is 10 feet. The lake when filled with water is supposed to cover approximately 321 acres of ground. There are ten and seven-tenths miles of shoreline, and one hundred and eighty-one thousand, four hundred and sixty-seven cubic yards of embankment to this lake. The approximate water capacity is to be one billion, eighty-two million eight hundred and ninety-eight thousand, six hundred and ninety-nine and one tenth gallons of water. This lake will be stocked with fish and that will be a boon to the Western Kansans who love fishing. Hunters will also value it highly during duck season. Every fall ducks by the thousands fly over this county. With a body of water this size, it will attract the ducks as well as many other kinds of waterfowl that should be plentiful. Rowboats and motorboats will be on the lake. Boating will be a thrilling new sport for young people, reared in this high and dry climate. Swimming will be another added attraction. In the winter when the zero weather comes for its yearly visit, the lake will

be one big thrill of delight for skating parties, boys and girls hand in hand will skim over its glassy surface defying old King Winter and the icy north wind. There may even be other winter sports, which we who have never lived near rivers or lakes, have only read about and look forward to the new experience.

Lake Stanton will not only to be for pleasure, but it has a purpose far more valuable to those farmers who may be in a position to use this water supply for their irrigation of crops. It hardly seems possible that irrigation will be carried on to any extent in Stanton County. The land surrounding the lake is rough and very sandy. If irrigation was carried on by the use of ditches, only valleys along Bear Creek could use water. It is to be used on level ground and it will probably be necessary to pump to force the water to its destination.

The work on the dam is progressing nicely although the dam itself has hardly started. Added was a large cofferdam, built of dirt. Its purpose is to hold any water that may come down the creek and keep it from washing away the Dam before it is finished. Due to the severe cold weather, it is impossible to run the cement into the Dam at present, as it will freeze and crack and will not be as substantial, but as soon as the weather moderates, the work will go forward in progress

T. F. McMahon, a soil technician, is a busy man. He must test the moisture content of the soil, several times each day. He gets a container full of soil, weighs it, adds so many ounces of water, and then puts it through a screen. He then puts it into a pan and bakes it over a gasoline flame. After it is finished baking, he again weighs it, thus determining the amount of moisture contained in the soil.

Although at this time three-fourths of the manual labor on the dam is finished, there will be work for many in the building and maintaining of the surrounding park. There will be new roads and trees are to be set out and kept watered. Throughout the grounds, there will be different types of shrubs.

All of these different things will require considerable attention, or the rabbits that are very plentiful in this section of the country will eat them. Therefore, it would seem that the upkeep of this park would furnish employment for several people even after the building of the dam is finished.

The approximate cost of this project is one hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars. This enormous sum of money spent for the construction of a lake in one county has many people wondering if its benefits will ever balance with the cost. It will perhaps be several years before we know the answer. But this we do know, it is putting bread on the tables of at least one hundred and thirty families, most of them farmers who for several years have toiled and planted their crops only to see them destroyed by the drought or blown by the high winds. To get to work, the farmers have to drive for miles. Usually as many as five or six go in one car, each one paying the driver a small sum per day. Truck drivers must drive their own trucks.

New cabins that are on the grounds are for those who wish to stay near their work. They pay rent for one dollar per month. The general office is located in these cabins. Rules are very strict for the safety of the workers. If anyone is hurt only enough to draw blood on a finger, he must immediately report to the office for first aid treatment. If anyone is late to work in the morning, even by one minute, they do not work at all that day. To date, no one has been seriously injured, which is very often the case in the construction of a dam this size.