The
Communicator
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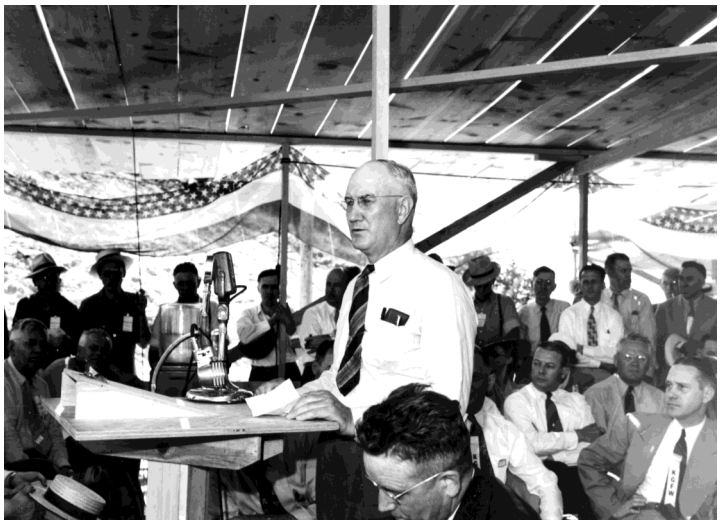
75 years later, Kingsley Dam still looms large

Almost 30 years of hard work, disappointments, achievements and ultimately triumph, culminated on a hot summer day in 1941 when more than 2,000 people gathered to celebrate the completion and formal dedication of Kingsley Dam.

Construction of the dam began in March 1936, thanks to the tireless efforts of a core of people who were either among the founding fathers of the "Tri-County Project," or whose support and assistance directly led to the construction of the project. Men named Kingsley, McConaughy, Johnson, Norris, Canaday, Wallace, Aabel, Binderup, Shallenberger, Cochran, Mickey, Condra and many others refused to be deterred by obstacles and setbacks and were eventually successful in building a project that, 75 years later, continues to benefit Nebraska.

On the afternoon of the dedication ceremonies — July 22, 1941 — the crowd consisted of many Keith County residents, but also included state and federal dignitaries, politicians and a large contingent from the media. The audience numbers were boosted by the occupants of two special trains that brought attendees from Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings and many other towns across the state.

A recorded message from President Franklin Roosevelt was delivered to the crowd and K. Sewell Wingfield, the chief of the Public Works Administration's Power Division, gave a stirring speech, including praise for Sen. George Norris. Sen. Norris, an ardent supporter of public power and the Tri-County Project, was unable to attend because of other commitments, but his personal intervention in Washington on behalf of the project were crucial to the eventual approval of a federal grant and loan to build the massive hydro-irrigation project.



George E. Johnson, chief engineer of Central's hydro-irrigation project during construction, addresses the audience during the dedication ceremonies on July 22, 1941 at Kingsley Dam.

An article in the *Keith County News* read, "The enormity of the dam, which is the second largest earthen dam constructed in the world, is not realized fully even when the layman stands at the top of the hill to view the great structure. The earth material used to build the dam would form a train of loaded coal cars that would stretch from New York City almost to Hawaii."

Almost 1,100 people worked at the dam site during the peak construction period, many of whom resided at the construction camp, dubbed Georgetown for the many men named George who were designers, engineers or promoters of the project.

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75th anniversary of Kingsley Dam (continued from p. 1)

Their labors produced one of the largest public works projects in Nebraska's history, a project that drew upon the initiative and foresight of those irrigation pioneers who saw a prosperous future for Nebraska in the development and beneficial use of the state's water resources.

The Keith County newspaper covered the event thoroughly; the enthusiastic and colorful prose reflected the excitement and optimism engendered by the new dam. The reporter wrote:

"Kingsley Dam is officially, formally and perpetually dedicated. It is the first time in the history of Nebraska that 2,000 gathered in 100 degrees of heat to cast their blessings on a great pile of sand and gravel — which was once their bitterest enemy.

"For generations, the people of Nebraska have sworn a vengeance on the dirt and sand that filled the air, blotted out the sun and eventually laid itself over the fertile farm lands to choke vegetation to death.

"So, seven miles north of Ogallala Tuesday afternoon, a memorable event for Nebraska took place. On that hot summer day, people from every corner of Nebraska gathered to congratulate themselves. At last they had turned a terrible liability into a great asset. They had harnessed the sand and gravel that for all times past had wreaked havoc on the state of Nebraska.

Jean Carter and Mary Menke, daughters of two of the many engineers working to build Kingsley Dam, cut a cable to send a time capsule into a casing buried within Kingsley Dam. Originally intended to be opened on the dam's 100th anniversary, the capsule was located in the early '90s, but the casing had bowed and there was evidence that the capsule itself had been damaged, leaving its future recovery questionable.

"The people of Nebraska, through the intelligence of civil engineers and the benevolence of a federal government whose treasury has a seemingly bottomless pit, have made use of their enemy — dirt — to hold back the water that has been running away unused since time began. Keith County is serving as a fine reservoir to hold this once-wasted water."

This summer The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District will rededicate Kingsley Dam on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its completion. A series of events and activities for the public and planned in cooperation with the Ogallala/ Keith County Chamber of Commerce and the Keith County Visitors Bureau will be held at Lake McConaughy on **July 22 and 23.**

Details of the events — which will include a free BBQ for the public, a boat parade, sand volleyball tournament, kayaking and paddleboarding, and much more — are still in the planning stages, but will be made available as they develop.

A crowd begins to gather near the south end of Kingsley Dam on July 22, 1941 for ceremonies to formally dedicate the dam. The dam was closed and storage of water had begun, but — as the photo illustrates — work to complete the structure was unfinished, including construction of Highway 61 across the dam's crest.

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On the Lakefront

Central will begin a dredging project at Jeffrey Lake in early May to remove a large amount of sediment that has accumulated in the lake over the years. The project will result in significant improvements for recreation, aquatic habitat and hydropower operations.

Central has leased a dredge specifically designed to remove the sediment. The material will be pumped through a floating pipeline over the dam and deposited inside a containment structure on Central-owned land and a parcel owned by Ward David of Lubbock, Tex. Mr. David agreed to temporarily lease the property to Central for the project.

Due to the presence of the dredge and the pipeline, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's public boat ramp on the northeast side of the lake will be out of service for about three months while the project is underway.

However, to facilitate recreational use of the lake on the Memorial Day and 4th of July weekends, dredging will be halted and the ramp opened for public use on those two weekends.

Gothenburg Division Manager Kevin Boyd, who is overseeing the project, said, "Central regrets any inconvenience while dredging is underway, but it will result in significant improvements to recreational opportunities at Jeffrey Lake."

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Central is planning to hire a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to develop alternatives to enhance the residential, commercial and recreational opportunities in the Bullhead Point/Bossung Lake area at Johnson Lake.

Pending receipt of acceptable proposals, Central's board of directors plans to award the bid at its July board meeting.

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This summer's tours of Central's hydro-irrigation project for residents of Johnson Lake/Plum Creek Canyon have been scheduled on the following dates:

Fri., June 3; Fri., June 24; Thurs., June 30; and Fri., July 15.

The tours depart from the Johnson EMS building at 7 a.m., and return at about 5 p.m. Central will provide transportation and lunch at Ole's Big Game Bar & Grill in Paxton.

Tour stops include the Water Interpretive Center at Lake McConaughy, the lake's outlet structures, Kingsley Hydroplant and the North Platte Diversion Dam.

Reservations - on a first-come, first-served basis - can be made by calling Holly Rahmann at 308-995-3560.

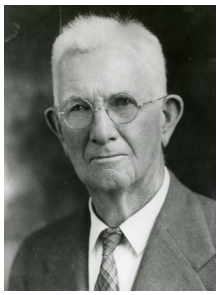
Kingsley and McConaughy: The men behind the names

Central's board of directors voted in July, 1937 to name the dam that would be completed in 1941 after George P. Kingsley, one of the original and most influential advocates for the irrigation project.

According to a *Hastings Tribune* article that announced the decision, "He piloted the movement through its most discouraging stages, never faltering in the face of almost unsurmountable obstacles and donating constantly to the funds which were required for its promotion.

"Countless trips to Washington and the state capital, meetings without number and unceasing labor with scientists, technical persons, industrial leaders and others who had a part in

George P. Kingsley



C.W. McConaughy

shaping the project (and public opinion) … were all part of Kingsley's contribution."

Kingsley died in 1929, long before others carried his dream to fruition, but his tireless efforts from 1913 until his death helped keep prospects for the project alive.

Charles W. McConaughy is credited with the idea that evolved into the "Tri-County Project."

In one of his first speeches (ca. 1914) to promote the irrigation project, McConaughy said:

"When I have stood and seen for weeks great volumes of water rolling down the Platte in the flood season … and when I have seen the semi-arid lands in our counties suffering and thirsting for water during the crop-growing season, my heart has been set on fire with a vision. I have a vision of what Nebraska can be and ought to be if a combined effort (to build an irrigation project) were made by all of its citizens."

Although others before him had built canals to irrigate Nebraska lands, none were as ambitious, nor did they

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The men behind the names (continued from p. 3)

include large storage reservoirs (save for Pathfinder Dam in Wyoming, completed in 1909).

McConaughy's original idea closely followed this template. It wasn't until 1924 that plans to build reservoirs entered the picture. The plan called for two reservoirs on Plum Creek in Gosper County filled from a supply canal branching off the Platte River west of Brady.

Eventually, engineers recommended the present site of Kingsley Dam and - after original approval of the project - the site was affirmed by Central's board of directors.

McConaughy vehemently disagreed with the decision to build the dam on the North Platte River and resigned from the board on Dec. 7, 1935. "I take this action with a broken heart," he told his fellow directors.

Although he saw much of the project's construction, McConaughy died on April 13, 1941, a few months before dedication of Kingsley Dam and the reservoir that now bears his name.

Retirements and new faces, new positions at Central

Central bid farewell to two long-time employees who recently retired, and welcomed new employees to the District.

Assistant real estate administrator Kent Aden (25 yrs.) and equipment operator Rick Johnson (35 yrs.) recently retired from their positions in Gothenburg and Holdrege, respectively.

New employees at Central include biologist Dave Zorn in Gothenburg; Bryon McDorman and Nicholas Smith, irrigation service specialists in Holdrege; and Joshua Clark, computer systems analyst in Holdrege.

In addition, Devin Brundage was recently promoted to assistant Gothenburg Division manager, and Deanna Bartruff is the new assistant real estate administrator in the Holdrege.

Transferring from ISS positions to equipment operators in Holdrege are Karl Boutwell and Justin Warning.

http://www.cnppid.com

On the Web

With irrigation and recreation season fast approaching, visit (and "like") our Facebook page at **www.facebook.com/cnppid** to keep tabs on the latest news and updates from the Central District.