

LAKE ARLINGTON

THE "MIRACLE LAKE"



Lake Arlington dedication - L to r: Marvin C. Nichols (Freese & Nichols), Clarence R. Foster (Arlington Mayor Pro-Term), Tom Vandergriff (Arlington Mayor), and Seeman Fisher (TESCO Vice President), 04/29/1958

It should have taken two and a half years to fill, but after a period of severe drought, a miracle happened in the spring of 1957. Less than 30 days following construction, and after Water Superintendent Jack Cherry closed the dam's main valve Sunday night, March 31, 1957, Lake Arlington, the "Miracle Lake," was full.

Almost 17 inches of drenching rains, one of the worst floods in the city's history, fell during April 1957. It rained so hard for so long that rumors quickly spread about how the lake's newly built dam couldn't possibly hold. But the dam, which is 5,500 feet long and 67 feet high, held the record rainfall and provided Lake Arlington with 45,000 surface acres of water, enough to supply the rapidly growing city for eight years.

Lake Arlington was born from Arlington's 1952 Master Plan, a development plan envisioned by the newly elected "Boy Mayor" Tom Vandergriff and created by noted engineer Robert Caldwell of Freese and Nichols. Vandergriff, only 25 at the time, realized Arlington had the potential to transform from a bedroom community, dependent on the fortunes of Fort Worth and Dallas, into a self-sustaining city in its own right. Lake Arlington was one of the major components of that vision. By replacing a series of wells, which provided the city's only water source, with the lake, Mayor Vandergriff and city leaders established a resource that fueled Arlington's explosive growth over the decades.

Today, Lake Arlington serves several purposes. The Tarrant Regional Water District uses Lake Arlington for storing water that serves Arlington as well as the Trinity River Authority, which supplies much of northeastern Tarrant County. Lake Arlington's water is also used to cool Exelon Generation's Handley Steam Electric Station, located on the lake's western edge in Fort Worth. But perhaps the most tangible use of the lake revolves around boating and recreation.

Three parks, two of which are located in Arlington, Richard Simpson and Bowman Springs Park, border the lake. The most popular of these parks is Bowman Springs Park, acquired on January 9, 1959. Originally referred to as "Feather Beach," the 14-acre park takes advantage of its location perched on the southeastern edge of the lake. From Bowman Springs Park, paddlers can enter a 10.9-mile paddling trail that is the first of its kind in the DFW area and the first flat-water trail in Texas. The park also features a fishing pier, floating dock, eight-lane boat ramp and, as one lakeside resident pointed out, "the most beautiful sunsets in the world."

References:

Information and Aerial Photo provided by:
Mark Fadden and University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas
Aerial Photo courtesy of J.H. Dunlap Photograph Collection,
Other photos courtesy of Fort Worth Star Telegram Collection,
Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington Texas.



Arlington Mayor Tom Vandergriff breaking ground for Lake Arlington dam, 05/15/1956



Richard Smith, Construction Engineer, watches flood waters fill Lake Arlington and flow through the 10' tube



Lake Arlington Dam, 1957



Lake Arlington boat patrol: Carl Wornack, left, and J.E. (Hooks) Blanton with boats at the lake's opening, 03/03/1958