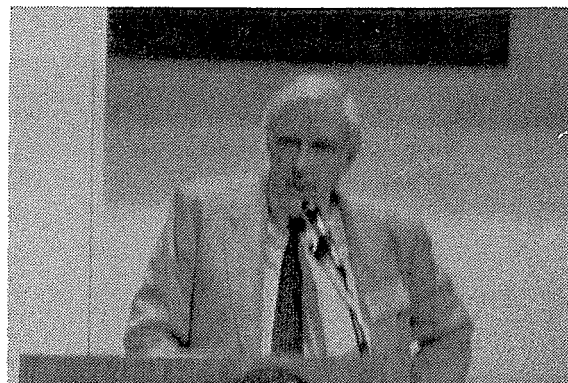


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THE COLORFUL HISTORY OF BRANTLEY DAM

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Tom Bahr has asked me to give a talk on what he calls "The Colorful History of Brantley Dam." There certainly is no doubt of the Brantley project's importance---importance for safety, importance for water development, and importance for the future of southeastern New Mexico. And its history certainly is a long one. I will let you judge whether or not that history has been "colorful."

The history of Brantley demonstrates that, ultimately, government works. It is slow at times, but ultimately, it works in the public interest. Brantley's history is a tale of success---success for New Mexico, for the people of Carlsbad and Artesia, and for the Bureau of Reclamation. It is certainly a tribute to men like "Mud" Runnels, Steve Reynolds, Mayor Ernest Thompson of Artesia, former Mayor Walter Gerrells, Mayor Bob Forrest of Carlsbad, and Senator Pete Domenici.

The first thing you need to know about Brantley is that it is a project that predates a young man named Tom Bahr. It predates another young man named Garrey Carruthers. And it even predates the ultimate young fella, Steve Reynolds. It is a project with roots that extend back to a time before New Mexico was a state, before we had a national reclamation law.

Just over a century ago, in 1887, a private company, the Pecos Irrigation & Improvement Company was founded by Sheriff Pat Garrett and others to develop an irrigation system. It was called the Carlsbad Project. That system, which included the construction of Avalon Dam and McMillan Dam, was completed in 1893---not a bad pace by today's standards, which often seem to set delay and inaction as the goal of any water resources project.

It was not very long before we knew we had some problems. In that very first year, Avalon Dam was washed away by floods. And a large segment of the embankment of McMillan Dam had to be blasted away to save the structure. The dams were repaired, but Avalon was destroyed again by flooding in 1904, the same year that a man in his late 20s by the name of George Washington Brantley came to the town then called Eddy.

Although not associated with George Brantley's arrival, the Pecos Company developed financial problems. Early in 1906, the newly formed Pecos Water Users Association entered into a contract with the Reclamation Service to rehabilitate the project. The dams were subsequently rebuilt by November 1907, and the Carlsbad project became one of the earliest projects under the Federal Recla-

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mation Act of 1902, one of the great legacies of President Teddy Roosevelt.

However, one of the continuing problems was the accumulation of sediment of McMillan Dam, reducing the dam's effectiveness. So in 1935, another President Roosevelt, Franklin, authorized construction of Alamogordo Dam 250 miles upstream on the Pecos as a way to augment the storage of the Carlsbad project and, in effect, replace some of McMillan.

Not long after the completion of the Alamogordo project, now known as Sumner Lake, floods occurred that exceeded any on record. This forced the federal government to reexamine the criteria used in the design of the spillway of the Alamogordo project. It was found to be seriously inadequate. Thus in 1954, a law was passed to enlarge the spillway of Alamogordo Dam, and it was carried out.

But problems continued downriver. Following a 1964 flood in Montana, the Bureau of Reclamation decided it needed to reexamine a number of dams using new meteorological and hydrologic data. Among the dams studied were McMillan and Avalon. In August 1966, new floods swept down the Pecos, reemphasizing the need for that study. Finally, in 1969, the commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation concluded that McMillan and Avalon Dams were unsafe and needed to be replaced.

The projects were not unsafe because of structural deficiencies; no big voids existed. They were unsafe because of design. The spillways were inadequate to handle potential runoff. The commissioner determined that a replacement project was needed and justified.

The issue went to Congress, where legislation to build a project in honor of the late George Washington Brantley was finally introduced in 1971. Now, the Senate doesn't mess around. It held a hearing in Washington on January 25, 1972 and passed the Brantley bill two months later, on March 30.

However, the Brantley concept was not applauded universally. A group of 20 irrigators, the Pecos River Pumpers Association, took a position "unalterably opposed" to Brantley unless its members were given ironclad assurances that their irrigation rights were protected.

On April 14, the House Interior Committee visited Carlsbad for a hearing in the Stevens Motel. It was an interesting hearing, historically. Representative Manuel Lujan attended; you've heard of him. So did Representative Runnels, a strong Brantley proponent. Steve Reynolds was there. So were Mayor Thompson and Mayor Gerrells, State

Representative Walker Bryan, Chairman Joe Hood of the Eddy County Commissioners, former Representative Tom Morris, Prentiss O'Neal of the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce and Maynard Shearer of the Artesia Chamber, John Walker of the Pecos River Compact Commission, and Draper Brantley, who, like his father, served as board president of the Carlsbad Irrigation District.

It was a good hearing, an impressive hearing, one focusing on the need for the project and the problems raised by the Pecos Pumpers Association. Steve Reynolds, in his testimony, declared that "the rights of the Pecos River Pumpers and the Carlsbad Irrigation District are adjudicated and fully protected by a federal court decree and by existing law." He went on to say that the new dam was "so urgently needed that the opposition of the Pecos River Pumpers should not be allowed to delay the authorization of the Brantley project."

The Senate, of course, had already passed a bill to construct Brantley. After that hearing on July 19, the Senate passed a totally unrelated Colorado water storage bill, S. 520. When the House took up the Colorado bill on September 27, the House added the Brantley project as Title 2, including language protecting the Pecos Pumpers. The bill passed on a vote of 293 to 64. Relatively quickly, on October 5, 1972, the Senate passed the revised version of S. 520.

It might seem as if things were set. But that was not so. Throughout this period, there had been an issue hanging over the project: How was it to be financed? Was Brantley really a "safety" project to be constructed at federal expense, or was it designed as a backdoor way to obtain a vast increase in irrigation?

The commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation stated:

[I]t is proposed that the federal government recognize and accept the responsibility for the safety of McMillan and Avalon Dams and that the costs of the 'Safety of Dams' feature be non-reimbursable.

But there were those in the White House who argued that the project should be held up while the entire issue of unsafe federal structures and cost sharing was reexamined under the Water Resources Council's "Principles and Standards for Planning Water and Related Land Resources."

What would happen? This was October 1972, and a young Albuquerque lawyer was campaigning for the U.S. Senate. He wasn't a Senator yet, merely

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a candidate. But as this young lawyer recalled to me earlier this week, Brantley was truly important.

Thus, in October 1972, Candidate Pete Domenici telephoned President Nixon. He told the President of the significance of Brantley, and urged Presidential approval. The President listened to Pete Domenici, and on October 20 signed the bill authorizing the construction of Brantley Dam at a cost of \$45,605,000. It became Public Law 92-514.

When Pete Domenici took office in 1973, we had a project. But we had no money for it. President Nixon might have agreed to authorize the project, but he was not interested in funding it. After all, Pete Domenici was a Senator, and Mr. Nixon had his own problems.

When the Administration failed to request a planning start, Pete Domenici and Mud Runnels got together and saw to it that Congress appropriate \$325,000 in fiscal 1974 to begin preconstruction planning. Congress added another \$1.6 million in fiscal 1975.

But, as usual, things failed to proceed smoothly for the Brantley project. This time the problem was engineering. The initial site selected by the Bureau of Reclamation was at Seven River Hills. It was a good site, one that was relatively narrow, requiring a dam less than a mile in length. Unfortunately, the engineers discovered that the Seven River Hills site wouldn't work. It could not be grouted. The aquifer was simply too deep and porous. The Bureau's engineers had to move the dam 2,100 feet downriver to its current location, a site where the aquifer came closer to the surface, and a true barrier could be constructed. The problem with the change, of course, was that the dam at the new site had to be far longer---4 miles long.

This change, as well as the concerns that followed the Teton Dam disaster in Idaho, pushed costs far above the original estimate of \$45.6 million.

I can recall clearly the concern in the Domenici office: the meetings, the search for a solution, the frustrations. I'm certain that frustration existed in Carlsbad and Artesia to a far greater extent. This continued through the 1970s.

On February 5, 1980, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5278, a bill to authorize a number of Bureau feasibility studies. It was a bill that had absolutely nothing to do with Brantley. When that bill came up on the Senate floor on September 17, 1980, Senator Domenici made his move. He added a simple amendment, but one that was critical. The amendment simply raised the authorized cost of constructing Brantley to \$172,728,000. The house accepted the Senate ver-

sion on September 24 and on October 3, 1980, President Carter signed it as Public Law 96-375.

More than 90 years after the Pecos Irrigation & Improvement Company, more than 75 years after George Washington Brantley moved to what is now Carlsbad, the real Brantley success story began. Money was appropriated quickly, with a groundbreaking ceremony in October 1984.

In fact, work proceeded so rapidly that the project was almost closed down in 1987 before Congress was able to get the Bureau to reprogram \$6 million from work in other states so that Brantley could continue. That reprogramming of funds kept the Brantley project where the people of New Mexico wanted it: ahead of schedule. In fact, the project was completed more than one year ahead of schedule, a real tribute to the leadership of the Bureau and the citizens of the Pecos Valley.

And finally, on May 13 of this year, this great project was dedicated. And it is quite a project: 143 feet in total height---110 feet above the riverbed ---10.7 million cubic yards of rock and fill and 158,000 cubic yards of concrete. It can hold 966,000 acre-feet of water, with 149,000 acre-feet set aside for siltation, 42,000 acre-feet for irrigation and conservation, and 157,000 acre-feet for normal flood storage.

As I see it, this is a project that could never have been achieved without the strong support from the people of Carlsbad, Artesia, Dexter, Hageman, Lake Arthur, Midway, and Loving. This project is good for each and every one of those communities. It is a project that provides irrigation water and vital flood control for Carlsbad, as well as fish and wild-life benefits.

But there is one other thing that is particularly noteworthy about Brantley. As of September 30 of this year, the federal government has spent \$138 million on the project. We have another \$3.7 million to spend to complete the recreation facilities. And once that money is spent, we will have come in \$31 million under budget. How many times can you recall the feds achieving that? We finally have the project, and did it right.