

“When They Built the Deep Creek Dam...”

by **John Grant**
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**Yough Hydro-Electric Corporation
Power House Foundation, July 1, 1924.**

Anecdotes are the stories which surround some kind of an event. When the event is a large construction project such as the construction of Deep Creek Lake there are a multitude of anecdotes.

Back in the early 1940s, not too many years had passed since the creation of Deep Creek Lake, and once in a while I would mention to someone that as a little boy, I could remember what it looked like before the area filled with water. Our family used to take Sunday rides, and as we passed the lake area we would comment on the rise of the water level over the cleared land. In particular, I remember the small concrete culvert/bridge on the lake bottom in the area where Point View Inn is located.

Some nine miles of state and county road had to be relocated because of the inundation of the lake's water. Near Point View Inn, a section of the state road had to be relocated including a small culvert/bridge. Each week

as we passed the area, we would notice how close the encroaching water was to the old state road. Gradually it covered the road and the bridge as it got higher and higher. For a week or so, only the three-foot-high side walls of the structure could be seen; then they also disappeared under the lake's surface.

Today, the asphalt of an abandoned road is removed. The asphalt on the old state road was left in place. Thus, there were paved surfaces going into the water at different places along the shore line.

During the summer these paved spots made excellent places to swim or launch boats; in the winter the road entrances into the water made excellent launching spots for dare-devils who drove their cars out on the ice and spun them around in circles.

Growing up and going to school in Oakland, each day I got to see two pieces of equipment that existed long after the dam workmen had completed their jobs. These were the Rio buses owned by Gorman Thayer and Cecil Ramsay.

A camp was built for the construction workers in the Red Run area, and for the two years it took to clear the timber and do other tasks, Gorman and Cecil used their buses to haul the men to and from various locations. Then, for the next ten years, the buses were put into service transporting school children to and from their classes in Oakland.

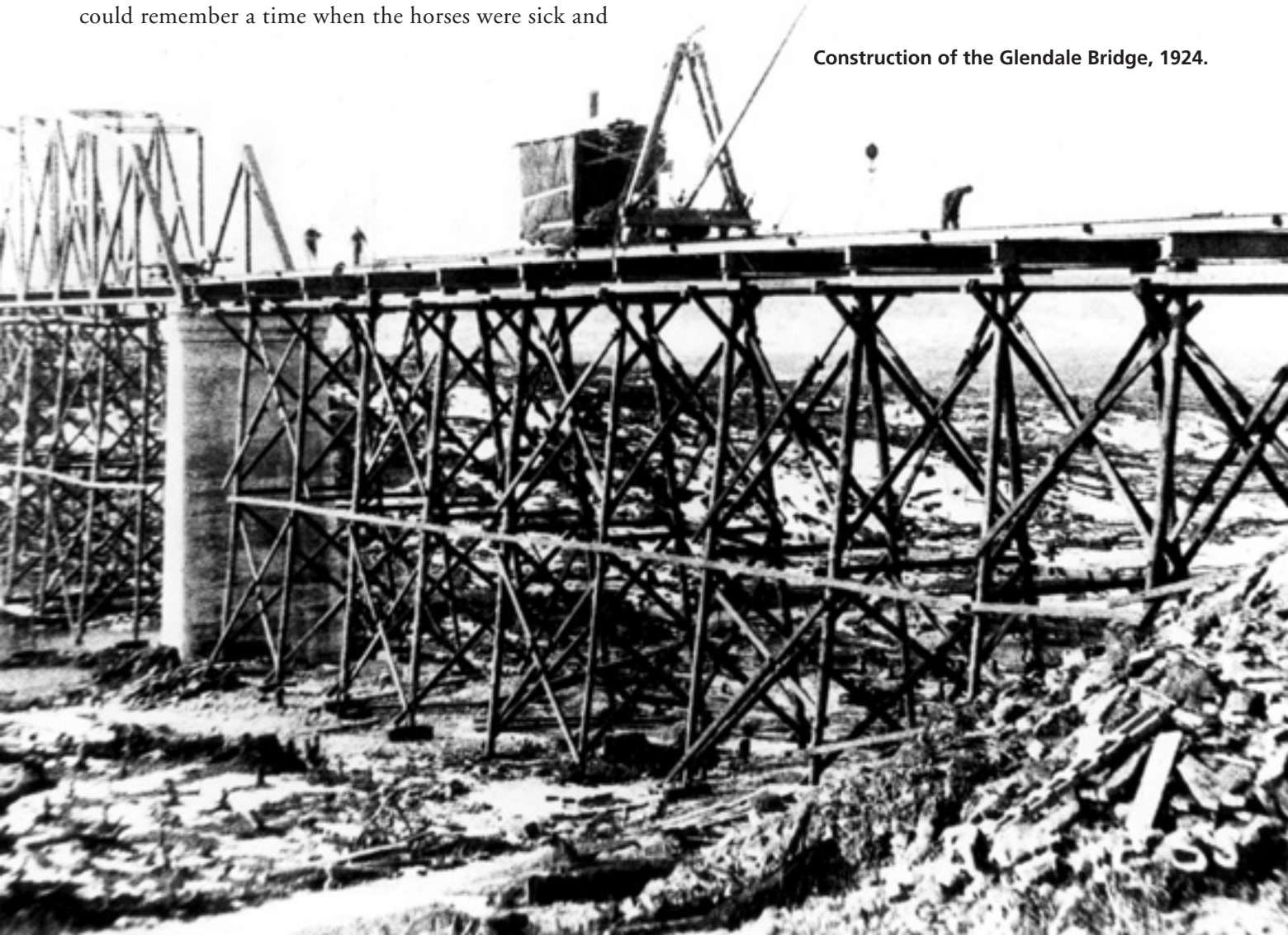
Generated electricity has to be transmitted to customers, and it was necessary to build a long transmission line from the power house to Pennsylvania where the Penn Elec Company picked up the electricity for their system. George “Redskin” Browning was a teen-aged boy during the time and got a job working for his Uncle Bert Browning on the transmission line. Bert had a contract for delivering poles to the right-of-way. Most of the time a team of horses was used to drag the poles to the necessary spots. “Redskin” could remember a time when the horses were sick and

Bert used his Dodge car to drag the poles over some open fields.

In a sense George Browning is an unsung hero of Deep Creek Lake. Following World War II, George worked as an engineer for the power company, and lived in a house that overlooked the breast of the dam. He noticed that the flow of water in Deep Creek below the dam did not fluctuate with the change of seasons, but remained fairly constant all year long. His conclusion was that water was leaking from the lake through the rock strata of the immediate area. Running a series of tests on the water level of the lake when the turbines were not running, he proved that leakage was gradually getting worse.

Eventually, he persuaded the Penn Elec management that a serious problem existed. They ran additional tests, and then began to pressure grout concrete into the seams of rock where the leakage was occurring. Finally, the offending rock seams were plugged and Deep Creek lake didn't lose any more water.

Construction of the Glendale Bridge, 1924.



Three Men Tell Their Stories

During the summer of 1946, I worked for C. Milton Sincell, county surveyor. One day, Mr. Frank R. Corliss happened to be in Mr. Sincell's office at the same time. It was a rainy day, a good day for conversation, and the three men started talking about the time when they worked together on building Deep Creek Lake.

Frank Corliss was involved in the preliminary land survey work for the power company and then kept track of timber cutting to make sure that trees were cut to the limits of the "high water" mark. One of Frank's stories was about winning a five dollar bet from Arch Bittinger, a foreman of a timber cutting crew. Arch's crew was cutting trees in the North Glade area at the time.

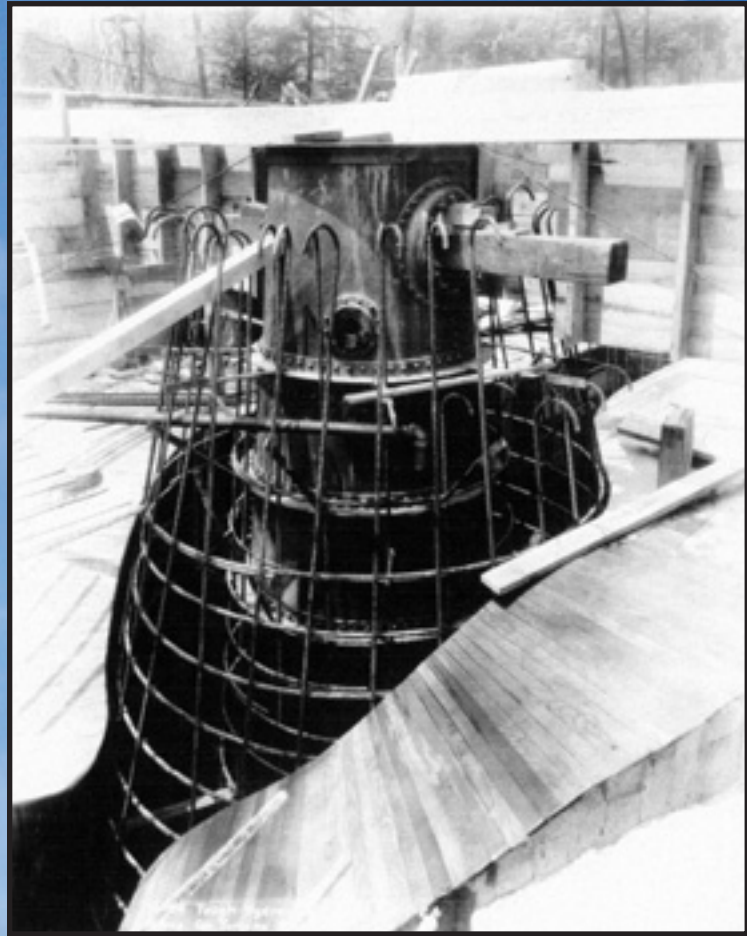
A small lake existed in the same area called the State Dam and it backed up water for half a mile in the glades area. Arch didn't believe it when Frank told him the State Dam would be under 30 feet of water when the lake was full. As a result he couldn't see the reason for cutting all the trees in North Glade where his crew was working. He got in an argument with Frank and bet him \$5 that water would never reach the place which Frank called the "high water" level.

"One day in the summer of 1925, after the lake had filled up," said Frank, "Arch came into my office and handed me the \$5. He wasn't grudging about it...said I'd won the bet fair and square. What he really wanted to know was how surveys were conducted, and what instruments were used. He stayed about an hour. When he left he mentioned the five dollars again, and said it was the best money he ever spent. 'Now I know how you were so sure you'd win' were his parting words."

Mac MacMurrey stayed with the power company and became the plant superintendent. He told a number of stories but the one I remember best was about the first inspection of the tunnel which carried water from the dam to the power house. As a student engineer, I was interested in what inspection procedures were carried out for a project the size of Deep Creek Lake."

"The power plant had been in operation for about a year," said Mac, "and the people up at Johnstown decided there should be an inspection of the tunnel. It meant that the whole plant would be shut down for the better part of a day since the tunnel was a couple miles long.

"On the date assigned to do the inspection, we drove over to the intake structure and set about lowering the



Power House turbine before encased by concrete, 1924.

big concrete slab that formed the gate valve for the tunnel. Down it went...then it stopped about two feet from the bottom of the tunnel. It was pulled up and lowered again... still it wouldn't go all the way down. So we quit until we could find out what was the matter.

"Couple of days later we got a diver to go down and inspect the bottom of the tunnel. Darndest thing...he found a wheelbarrow sitting there which jammed the slab so it wouldn't go all the way down. Never could figure out how it got there, or why it wasn't carried on into the tunnel by the flow of water."

Milton Sincell was on the engineering staff of the power company while the lake was being built. One day the superintendent of the whole project called him in the office and began a long speech about the importance of a transformer being shipped to the power house. Then he told Milton to go to Rochester, New York, meet the train carrying the transformer, and stay with it until it was delivered here.

"I left Oakland on the evening train," said Milton, "and it took at least two days to find the transformer.



Tunnel beneath the Deep Creek Lake Dam, 1924.

Finally, I located it and began riding freight train cabooses behind the transformer railroad car. What with switching around from one railroad to another, it took about 10 days to reach Oakland and was parked out on the siding by the 88 Bridge.

“Half a dozen people appeared to ride from Oakland to the power house, and we all crowded into the cab of the dinky engine that was going to haul it down to the power house. Near Miller’s Run, someone looked back and cried, ‘the transformer’s gone!’ Immediately everyone else looked back...and sure enough the railroad car with the transformer wasn’t there.”

Milton began to laugh.

“What happened next was like something from the Keystone Cops. The engine backed up and suddenly, there was the transformer car coming down the tracks straight at us. Everyone started shouting at once... We

got the engine going forward again...with the transformer car almost catching up to us.

“Finally we came to a slight grade, and the transformer car began to slow down. Then came the question of how to couple up to it again before it started to go back the other way.

“As we went slower and slower, the discussion grew louder and louder. Frank Browning, who was acting as locomotive engineer, simply climbed down from the engine and put an ax handle under one of the wheels of the run-a-way car when it came to a stop. Then he set the hand brake, backed up the engine, coupled up to the transformer car again and off we went.

“All I could think about during the confusing minutes when the transformer car was loose, was what a rotten shame it would be to have it crash somewhere within seven or eight miles of its destination after being shepherded all the way from New York state.”

Memorabilia

Milton Sincell died in 1948, and I bought some engineering things from his estate; among them a four-foot-long tee square. He had salvaged it from the dam engineer's office when the work was completed. Now, each time I use it I recall the rainy day that I sat in his office and heard Milton, Frank, and "Mac" tell about what happened "when they built the dam..."

**Yough Hydro-Electric Corp.
Spillway Wall, May 2, 1925.**



Brenneman Well Drilling

Written by **Dan Whetzel**
New Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

The Brenneman family can proudly state that its business is closely associated with the development of Garrett County, Maryland. The Brennemens can also state that four generations have operated the well drilling company that began with founder Aubrey C. Brenneman in 1930, making it one of western Maryland's oldest continuously owned family businesses. Each generation has maintained the dedication to hard work established by Aubrey Brenneman more than eight decades ago when he became involved with the building of Deep Creek Lake.

Mr. Brenneman was born in 1901 on a farm located in Thayerville, Maryland. At the age of 21, he walked a distance of two miles from his family farm to the construction site of a dam being built by the Youghiogheny Electric Power Company. The young man's long walk was rewarded when he landed a job as fireman on a steam powered drilling rig. His 5:00 am starting time, 4:00 pm quitting time, and two mile walks made for long work days.

The Youghiogheny Electric Power company, through a Delaware chartered company called Eastern Land Corporation, began buying up real-estate for the development

of Deep Creek Lake in 1923, and subsequently started building the breastworks and other land features that would create the impoundment. The contractor used two steam powered rigs to drill holes which were blasted by dynamite, thereby creating the rock and earthen fill material necessary for constructing the dam's fortifications. Aubrey Brenneman's experience with the steam powered rigs later proved to be useful when a deep well was required on property he purchased in 1930.

Mr. Brenneman decided to take on the task of drilling a well if machinery could be located, so he returned to the dam site in hopes of securing a rig. Two machines remained at the area where he worked years earlier and a request for permission to rent one of them for personal use was issued through written correspondence; the contractor graciously agreed. While in the process of drilling a well on his property, two neighbors requested that Brenneman perform the same service for them. A second correspondence to the contractor arranged for the purchase of the used rig, and A.C. Brenneman was in business!

The Great Depression created economic hardship across the country and business owners worked extra hard to make ends meet. In 1932-1933, Mr. Brenneman coped with the economic downturn by making arrangements with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to haul dirt from Piney Mountain, thereby enabling the purchase of a Ford dump truck that he used for the job. Over the years his company performed a variety of jobs, including drilling coal mine ventilation shafts, elevator shafts, blast holes for quarries, and foundation holes.