

## The Creation of Colebrook River Lake

The Metropolitan District Commission, a company providing water and other services to the Greater Hartford Connecticut area, with the thought toward providing water resources for the future, in the 1930's, began buying up available land in the watershed area of the West Branch of the Farmington River. Essentially, this meant the village of Colebrook River would be drowned by the waters behind a dam constructed at a narrow gorge known as "The Hogback", just east of the Colebrook town line in the town of Hartland. Here is a chronology of the events leading up to the elimination of Colebrook's eastern population center, and the creation of the body of water known today as Colebrook River Lake:

- June 11, 1945**            The M. D. C. now owns 75% of Colebrook River land.
- October 13, 1945**      The M. D. C. continues clearing land at Hogback.
- Sept. 26, 1947**        A number of prospective buyers were in Colebrook River looking over houses and other buildings there that the M. D. C. now owns and which are being offered for sale. Purchasers demolish and carry away the lumber and other building materials salvaged. It was understood that the M. D. C. now owns 80% of the valley.
- January 21, 1949**      The Methodist Church and its property was sold with the right to occupy it for 3 years until Jan. 13, 1952.
- May 24, 1949**        Despite an aggressive fight against the Hogback "water grab" bill by many throughout Litchfield County, it passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 117 to 84.
- August 31, 1949**      The M. D. C. plans to spend \$10,000,000 for the Hogback Dam. The main expenditures as proposed by their finance board are:
 

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Dam & appurtenances.....                | \$4,400,000  |
| Clearing land.....                      | \$385,000    |
| Relocation of highways & cemeteries...  | \$605,000    |
| Constructing tunnel to Barkhamsted Res. | \$2, 750,000 |
| (This was never done.)                  |              |
| Interest (on money) during construction | \$355,000    |
| Unallocated expenses.....               | \$705,000    |

William Wurts, district manager, urged that construction for the reservoir be started in 1950. The M. D. C. hoped to have the reservoir completed by 1955 to fulfill the *secret contract* with riparian rights owners such as the Collins Company, Stanley Works, and others.

4,411 acres are already acquired with a projected 575 additional proposed. Capacity of the completed dam will be 6,500,000,000 gallons. It will back up 4 miles, be 116 feet deep maximum, and cover 550 acres. Besides purchasing additional land that will be filled with excess water during flood stages, the M. D. C. will rebuild about 3½ miles of State Highway along the west shore of the reservoir.

**July 29, 1953**

Residents of Beech Hill were shaken when blasting for the construction of the re-aligned Conn. Rt. 8 caused damage such as cracked ceilings and walls as well as disruption of water flow. (Springs and wells were affected.) An arrest was made.

**July 31, 1953**

The M. D. C. is preparing to remove existing cemeteries in Colebrook River to a new location now under construction on Eno Hill. Persons interested in arranging for the removal of the remains of relatives to locations other than the new cemetery are requested to communicate with the Chief Engineer of the M. D. C.

**February 18, 1954**

The M. D. C. has recently acquired the final piece of property needed for the construction of the Hogback Dam. This was property owned by Austin and Hazel McCormack of N. Y. C. It consisted of an 18-room dwelling, large barn and 64 acres located just north of the church property on Route 8. The Commission now owns 4,106 acres. The next-to-last property sold was Eugene Bourquin's 89 acres, sold on November 15, 1953. All bodies from the old cemeteries have been moved. A number of the graves were from former inhabitants of Tolland Mass.

**1955**

The M. D. C., barely finished with the construction of the Goodwin Dam at Hogback, began planning for the construction of the Colebrook River Dam. In 1965, the Army Corps of Engineers took over the project, explaining that the valley and the towns below needed adequate flood protection. They cited the damage caused by the 1938 and 1955 floods. They constructed the

**1969**

Colebrook River Dam, dedicated on June 27, 1969. The total cost, including 7 miles of Rt. 8 in Conn. and Mass. was \$14,400,000. The maximum amount of water stored behind this dam is 16 billion gallons, although the normal amount is 10 billion, the rest being an emergency reserve in case of flooding.

When the pool (as they call the body of water behind the dam) is at its maximum, (the height of the spillway on the east end of the dam) it stands at 761 feet above sea level. This gives it a water surface area of 1,210 acres, extending 6 miles upstream and into Massachusetts. This is about where present day Route 8 crosses south of New Boston. The depth of the water would then be about 200 feet. The dam that can be seen from Rt. 8 is 1,300 feet long with a maximum height above the streambed of 223 feet. An earthen dike, 1,240 feet long with the access road on top, stretches from Rt. 8 to the opposite hillside. A 243-foot high control tower houses 3 service gates and 3 emergency gates, all hydraulically operated. The controlled reservoir outlet is through a 10-foot diameter tunnel, and is 778 feet long. The drainage area served by this dam is 118 square miles.

**1990s**

A power generating plant was added at the dam, its output being added to our electrical grid.