

# The Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association

*“Over 100 Years of Service to State and Nation”*

Dear Members Of The Association:

It is my pleasure to congratulate the Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association as you commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your founding this year.

CARIA does an outstanding job in promoting the importance of our inland waterway system. Through your fine efforts, the Coosa-Alabama is a thriving link in this chain. You have contributed to our state’s economy by making sure our waterways operate efficiently and reliably. I have enjoyed working with you through the years and I appreciate the fine information you provide me each year in testimony before my committee. I wish you many more years of success and I look forward to working with you in the future.

With kindest personal regards, I am  
Sincerely,



U.S. Rep. Tom Bevil  
4<sup>th</sup> District of Alabama  
Chairman,  
Subcommittee On Energy  
And Water Development



## THE COOSA-ALABAMA RIVERS’ ROLE IN SOUTHERN HISTORY

Since the beginning of civilization, mankind has congregated along rivers. From ancient days through the present, humans have depended on rivers for many of the services vital to sustaining an acceptable quality of life-irrigation, economical transportation, access to mineral riches, communication food, recreation and in this century, electric power.

Many of the most vibrant societies on Earth-including those centered in Rome, Paris and London-can credit much of their economic and cultural evolution to the proximity of their rivers.

With more miles of navigable waterway than any state in the country, it is not surprising that Alabama’s rivers have played a tremendous role in its history, particularly the Alabama and the Coosa.

The Coosa is formed at Rome, Ga., at the junction of the Oostanaula and Etowah rivers. The river flows west and swings southward toward Wetumpka where it joins the Tallapoosa to form the Alabama River. The length of the main stem made up of the Alabama and Coosa rivers in Alabama is 569 river miles.

Their very names hint at their historic significance. The word “Alabama” comes from the designation given the state’s greatest river by early travelers. An aboriginal people arriving sometime between 1540 and 1700 settled along the river. The early comers referred to the area as the “country of the Alibamos,” a name historians say is probably Choctaw in etymology. A linking of the words “alba” ‘ and “amo,” the name is interpreted to mean “vegetation gatherers” or “thicket cleaners.”

Historians tell us the state’s earliest inhabitants were prehistoric Indians. The location of their burial mounds indicates they dwelled along the riverways.

The first white men came upon a land largely occupied by four great Indian nations, all with large settlements

clinging to the river banks. Creeks inhabited the banks of the Alabama and the Coosa rivers; Cherokee villages also dotted the upper stretches of the Coosa.

“Coosa” was the name of a Creek settlement on the west bank of the river in what is now Talladega County. It was there that Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto rested men and horses during a trek through the valley, which he entered in 1540.

DeSoto was the first of many famous historic figures whose activities in what is now Alabama would be linked to the water-ways. Bienville, the famous French explorer and governor of the Louisiana colony, found his way into the Coosa valley in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and built Fort Toulouse in 1714 at the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers.

A century later, Andrew Jackson’s efforts during, the War of 1812 put him deep in the same valley. He built Fort Strother on the Coosa in what would become St. Clair County. Via flatboat he traveled southward, ultimately, to fight the Creeks at the famous Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

The role of the rivers in pioneer days would not diminish with the downfall of the great Indian nations. Cahaba, near the Alabama River in Dallas County, was the first capital when Alabama gained statehood in 1819.

River vehicles evolved from the canoe to the flatboat to the paddlewheel. The Alabama River saw steamboat service beginning in 1821, the upper Coosa in the 1850s.

For some 30 years prior to the Civil War, traffic on the rivers from the thriving cotton plantations as well as the transport of industrial products led to the development of river communities. During the heyday of the steamboat era some 200 riverboat landings dotted the banks of the Alabama River alone.

Flatboats had been the first major mode of commercial transportation on the waterways, with the route from Montgomery to Mobile taking six weeks. The steamboat cut the trip to a remarkable 10 days.

It was a period of romance. People looked to this bustling new means of travel as a way to gain previously unattainable luxuries, like fine china, silver and marble fireplace mantels in addition to getting the cotton crop to market. Much of the antebellum culture as well as the economy was closely tied to the river system.

The riverway also was utilized during the Civil War to move artillery. Legend has it that Cummins M. Lay, father of the organizer of the Alabama Power Co., steered the steamboat Laura Moore from Rome to Mobile to prevent its falling into the hands of Union forces. This marked the first and only time a steamboat was maneuvered through the rapids of the Coosa River.

Commonly referred to as one of the 10 greatest undeveloped waterways in the country, in 1913 a magazine journalist gave his national readership a glowing report on its potential. Writer William M. Hardy saw the Coosa-Alabama’s full development as promising “a period of manufacturing and industrial development second only to that of New England.” Calling the river basin “a country whose beauty is beyond description,” Hardy saw it as holding riches sufficient to “enrich this section by an amount of natural resources without a superior on the globe.”

The strength of the dream has been proven in its durability. It has withstood the Depression, wars and a century of setbacks, delays and near failures. Perhaps its longevity is due ‘in part to the diversity of its proponents. The dream of a fully utilized Coosa-Alabama waterway is shared by the U.S. government, chambers of commerce, city and county governments, state and national lawmakers, private citizens and businesses.

## THE ASSOCIATION

When a group of civic minded residents of the Gadsden area decided to Join force 1890 to promote improvements on the Coosa River to facilitate the transport of goods between their city and Rome, Ga., they had reason for optimism, having observed the success of the steamboat era.

Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association’s Board of Directors, circa 1895.

Likewise, a report on a river convention in Montgomery in 1887 captured the enthusiasm of the early supporters of a navigable Rome-to-Wetumpka route. With representatives from nine counties in Alabama and several in Georgia, the



“wise, prudent and dispassionate” delegation discussed “every question touching this splendid project” including the mineral wealth of the basin, its status as an agricultural stronghold and its temperate climate.

They envisioned “the almost sudden birth and miraculous growth of towns and cities” that would economically utilize the riches of the state to fill not only the needs of their fellow Americans, but also “to apply the surplus to the satisfaction of foreign wants.” Indeed, cheap freights to the sea (so) our manufactures will permeate the world.” So enthralled were the delegates that they saw Alabama with a future as “the richest, thriftiest and most populous state in the union.”

Such, groups of forward-thinking residents shared the dream of seeing the, navigable segment of the upper Coosa connected with the Alabama River, thus opening a route to Mobile, even then a bustling port city. .

In the century since its founding, the Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association has been a driving force behind the successes achieved in the pursuit of that dream. The years have seen:

- The opening of a 9-foot navigation channel on the Alabama River from Mobile to Montgomery.
- The construction of federal and private power plants on the rivers that have harnessed the energy to generate electricity sufficient to power tens of thousands of homes and businesses.
- Flood-control projects that provide protection for thousands of residences and farms in the basin.
- Improvements to Mobile Harbor that have placed it among the top ports in the nation.
- The creation of a series of lakes in Alabama and Georgia along the waterway, sparking dozens of public recreation areas that provide for the enjoyment of millions of outdoor enthusiasts annually.

The three Corps of Engineers-constructed locks and dams and their adjoining lakes-representing an investment of almost \$178 million and providing a sportsman’s paradise in south Alabama-are stars in the crown of the Alabama River portion of the waterway. Much credit for their existence can be placed with the Association.

Some vital statistics on these developments:

Robert F. Henry Lock and Dam-northernmost of the three and previously called Jones Bluff Lock and Dam-was opened to navigation in 1972. Its power plant provides electricity sufficient to serve more than 40,000 homes. Its construction created R. E. “Bob” Woodruff Lake, which with 372 miles of shoreline and 11 recreational areas, attracts some 2 million people annually

Millers Ferry Lock and Dam, completed in 1970 and providing enough power to serve more than 53,000 homes, created the William “Bill” Dannelly Reservoir. With 516 miles of shoreline and 18 recreational areas, it attracts more than 4 million people each year.

Claiborne Lock and Dam was completed in 1971 but opened to navigation in 1969. Claiborne Lake, with 160 miles of shoreline and just north of the lock and dam, is the most primitive of the three lakes. It boasts 12 recreational facilities and attracts some 750,000 people annually.

The Association has come to represent cities, counties, businesses and private citizens ‘interested’ in seeing the 100-year-old vision fully realized. It is this core that has mobilized and coordinated efforts to bring about congressional approval and appropriations to fund the Corps of Engineers’ construction of many of the improvements.

Numerous studies by the Corps have supported the development projects, echoing the predicted impact a fully developed system could bring to the 27-county basin, which covers almost 23,000 square miles and stretches from southeast Tennessee, northwest Georgia diagonally west through much of Alabama. The Corps cannot seek funding for any project and it has been the Association’s officers and members who have taken the initiative and convinced Congress of the sensibility of investing in each step of the waterway’s development.

Incorporated since 1955, after the efforts of the loosely organized all-volunteer group were stalemated for a decade, the Association continues to devote tremendous energy toward seeing the dream of a fully navigable Rome-to-Mobile waterway become reality.

With offices in Montgomery, it is governed by a president, two vice presidents (one from Alabama and one from Georgia), and a board of directors of up to 60 members.

In the 100 years since its founding, the Association has seen public and private investment in the waterway of more than \$800 million. Since its opening for navigation, the system has seen years in which more than 4 million tons of goods have been transported on the rivers.

A third-generation riverman, the groundwork was laid before his birth for William Patrick Lay to play an important role in the development of Alabama waterways. It was his life’s work to see the Coosa opened to navigation and harnessed for the creation of hydroelectric power.

## RIVERMAN WITH A VISION: WILLIAM PATRICK LAY

A third-generation riverman, the groundwork was laid before his birth for William Patrick Lay to play an important role in the development of Alabama waterways. It was his life's work to see the Coosa opened to navigation and harnessed for the creation of hydroelectric power. His path was strewn with obstacles. Long before Lay and other Gadsden businessmen founded the Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association in 1890, the federal government had conducted studies on the feasibility of trying to enable the Coosa to facilitate commercial transportation. Four low-lift dams were built but abandoned when engineers judged that the return could not justify the investment.

This was a tremendous disappointment to those hoping to see cargo shipped from Rome to Mobile, but in the end, perhaps a blessing. It made possible the opening up of the river to a more useful role, with a greater benefit to a larger number of people.

Lay was convinced that the river's full promise would be realized through the combination of the two goals—navigation and power. The solution would be in the construction of high dams - taller than ever envisioned by the federal engineers.



William Patrick Lay founded the Association and served as its first president.

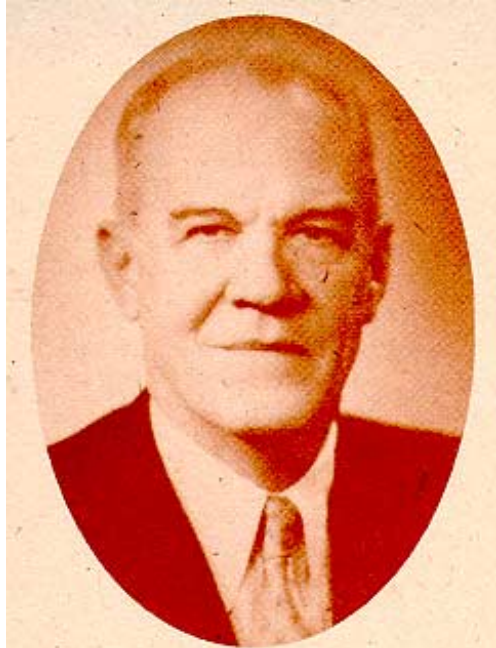
It would require dams of more than 100 feet in height to back up pools deep enough to facilitate river traffic. His idea also canceled the need for numerous low locks and dams. A byproduct of his grand scheme was that it would also assist in flood control and in overcoming the greatest hindrance of any Southern waterway—low water levels during hot summer months. Another plus was that the larger pools envisioned within his master plan would provide for faster transportation than maneuvering through a larger number of smaller locks. .

Lay sold his steam-generating plant in Gadsden and built a small hydroelectric plant near Attalla to test the soundness of his plans. The plant proved to be a tremendous success.

Because the federal government had abandoned its efforts to open the Coosa, Lay knew private investors would have to fuel his plans. With \$5,000 of his own funds, he formed Alabama Power Co. in 1906 and became its first president.



John Hornaday succeeded Lay and served as Association president until about 1949.



Everett Lay served as the Association's third president: 1949-1955



Robert F. Henry served the Association as its president 1955-77 and as chairman of the board until August 198



Chris B. Heinz, the Association's fifth president, served in that capacity 1977-1984.



Lister Hill Proctor held the office of Association president 1984-88.

He finally convinced the government to make additional surveys. After securing permission to build a dam, he had to raise the \$2 million to \$3 million necessary to build. Investors in Canada and England had more trust in his genius and came forth with the capital.

The first of a trio of dams he saw constructed on his beloved Coosa is located near Clanton, was completed in 1914 and bears his name today.

Next came Mitchell Dam, completed in 1923 some 14 miles downstream. The last and largest is Jordan Dam, completed in 1929.

The three opened 56 miles of river to navigation-wiping out almost one-third of the length of the rapids that had so deviled the efforts of earlier haulers, at a cost of many lives and, numerous cargos.

That construction was followed by the building of Weiss, H. Neely Henry and Logan Martin and Walter Bouldin dams, giving Alabama Power Co. a total of seven on the Coosa. (Bouldin Dam shares the same reservoir as the Jordan

development.) All the projects were constructed to accommodate future navigational locks, to be installed by the federal government.

Alabama Power Co.'s Coosa River facilities created lakes and reservoirs with a total of 1,615 miles of shoreline, providing some of the most popular recreational areas in the state today.

Additionally, in the late 1920s the company built Martin, Yates and Thurlow dams on the Tallapoosa River, with the last, Thurlow, becoming fully operational 1931.



Tom McKenzie, the Association's seventh and current president, took office in January 1988.

## SOME LANDMARKS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM

1870 - The federal River and Harbor Act of 1870 provides for the first survey of the Coosa. Engineers found the river to be navigable between Rome, Ga., and Greensport, Ala., and suggested opening the water-way to Wetumpka.

1890 - The Coosa-Alabama River Improvement Association is founded.

1906 - Alabama Power Co. founded.

1914 - Alabama Power Co. completes Lay Dam on the Coosa.

1923 - Alabama Power Co. completes Mitchell Dam on the Coosa.

1929 - Alabama Power Co. completes Jordan Dam on the Coosa.

1945 - The River and Harbor Act of 1945 authorized the beginning of the modern of improvements to the Coosa, with the goal of facilitating flood control, power development, navigation and other purposes.

1950 - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completes Allatoona Dam, constructed for flood control and hydroelectric production, on the Etowah River, a tributary of the Coosa in Georgia. The regulated streamflow it provides benefits power dams located below it on the system.

1954 - Congress suspends approval for Coosa improvements to the extent, necessary to allow Alabama Power Co., which already had three power dams on the river, to build three more and modify its existing facilities.

1962 - Alabama Power Co.'s Weiss Dam on the Coosa is fully operational.

1963 - Development of the Alabama River begins.

1964 - Alabama Power Co.'s Logan Martin Dam on the Coosa is fully operational.

1966 - Alabama Power Co.'s H. Neely Henry Dam on the Coosa is fully operational.

1967 - Alabama Power Co.'s Walter Bouldin Dam on the Coosa is fully operational.

1969 - Corps of Engineers completes Millers Ferry Lock and Dam on the Alabama.

1969 - Corps of Engineers completes Claiborne Lock and Dam on the Alabama.

1969 - The Coosa Valley Development Authority is created by the Alabama Legislature to acquire, hold and dispose of funds to develop the Montgomery-Gadsden leg of the water-way, and to pursue a navigable route to the Alabama-

Georgia boundary. Later that year, Alabama voters authorized a \$10 million bond issue to provide for the non-federal cost of construction.

1972 - Corps of Engineers completes Robert F. Henry Lock and Dam on the Alabama.

1979 - Corps of Engineers completes Carters Dam on the Coosawattee River, another tributary of the Coosa Georgia. Like Allatoona Dam, its opening carried tremendous benefits for the lower portions of the basin.

## THE ASSOCIATION'S GOALS



Association members study documents with President Robert F. Henry, circa 1968.

Entering the 1990s, the Association will continue to focus on efforts to:

- Open the Coosa River to navigation.
- Maintain and improve the Alabama River.
- Maintain, deepen and improve Mobile Harbor.
- Market the use of the navigable waterway between Montgomery and Mobile.

The first challenge is by far the greatest. Officials have estimated the work necessary to open the Coosa will cost \$1.4 billion. But there is cause for optimism that the project will continue to gain favorable attention in Washington; the most recent study shows an increase in economic activity in the Coosa basin.

Extending the 9-foot channel from Montgomery to Gadsden is still seen as a crucial next step and remains a focal point of discussion during annual

presentations to lawmakers. The Montgomery-to-Gadsden portion of the system lacks only the Corps of Engineers' installation of locks on the Alabama Power Co. dams to be made navigable. Completing the channel from Gadsden to Rome remains the final effort to assure navigational capability throughout the system. The second goal-maintaining and improving the Alabama-is the focus of continuing efforts of Association officials. In recent years the Association has taken a strong marketing stance in promoting, coordinating and facilitating continued and expanded use of the Alabama.

The Association is a staunch advocate in the drive to improve Mobile Harbor. While currently a bustling facility, increasing the shipping channel from its current depth of nearly 45 feet to 55 feet would pave the way for an even larger role as an international port, experts believe. Increases in Mobile's channel depth have consistently been followed by increased water commerce, in recent years averaging 34 million tons annually, with half of that amount representing foreign trade.

The continued commitment to the Alabama and improvements to Mobile Harbor are paying off. Plans call for a wood pulp mill now under construction on the lower Alabama near Perdue Hill to eventually be expanded into the largest facility of its type in the world, according to its owners.

Accomplishing our fourth goal will require that the Association attempt to convince this company, and others like it, of the viability of the rehabilitated Alabama in terms of reduced cost transportation.

This area of the waterway is also realizing the benefits of the soon-to-be-completed Lower Alabama Rehabilitation Project, which included dredging and removal of rock formations to minimize drought impact. Final construction on the project, representing an investment of \$8 million-\$11 million by the federal government, is scheduled to end in spring 1990. The Alabama south of Claiborne will benefit from the installation of a series of 14 training dikes to better focus flow during low-water periods.

The Association can be considered a partner in a rescue effort to protect historic Fort Toulouse, which had been in danger of erosion damage. Association officials helped area officials draw the problem to the attention of the Corps of Engineers, which developed a plan to stabilize the river bank.

Some of the Association's most aggressive efforts in recent months have focused on the protection of Alabama's rivers from adverse impacts experts believe would likely follow if water is diverted to serve the needs of the greater Atlanta area. The Association is involved in ongoing negotiations aimed at heading off attempts to divert flow from the Coosa and its headwaters. Officials in Alabama, Georgia and Florida are facing a situation similar to those met by Western states 50 years ago-the dilemma of servicing an exploding metropolis with water. Tough decisions must

be made now to protect Southern rivers for the future. The Association will be a vocal opponent of any effort to reallocate water to the detriment of the Coosa-Alabama system.

To begin the work of translating these goals into action, three objectives have been set:

- Developing interest in and understanding of the river system's potential.
- Ensuring that local interest and understanding play forceful roles in the public decision-making process.
- Serving as a catalyst for federal, state and private investment in the system.

The first objective requires reaching the public, the second our elected officials, the third calls for work on behalf of the waterway similar to that done by a chamber of commerce.

How can the Association and its membership accomplish its goals? By succeeding in the following seven tasks:

1. Maintaining current, reliable information on the economic and social benefits of waterway transportation. The facts bear out the continued sensibility of river transport. A barge moves the same amount of cargo as 15 railcars or 60 semi-trailer truckloads, with much less wear on the environment.
2. Informing the public through news media, public speaking, newsletters and the promotion of an appreciation of our waterways to school children. In the area of education, the Association continues to provide free kits tailored for fourth-graders and encourages teachers to stress the role Alabama rivers have played in the state's history.
3. Informing officials at all levels of government of the potential benefits of an improved waterway. The Association enjoys excellent working relationships with members of Congress, state and local officials. A continuous information program is needed, with participation by as many members as possible.
4. Providing testimony annually before congressional subcommittees in pursuit of the funds needed to proceed with further waterway improvements.
6. Maintaining a sound base of financial support. The Association subsists on dues and a modest appropriation from the Alabama Legislature. It has occasionally also benefited from grants awarded on behalf of activities focusing on industrial development.
7. Reinforcing the professional reputation and image of service of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Our region, as well as the country as a whole, has profited from the technical skill and productivity of the Corps. As we conduct our business, we have an opportunity to represent the Corps as an important and direct contributor to the economic strength of our nation.

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