

## DESTINATION GROVEPORT

The year was 1940, speculation was running rampant about the economic potential of Grand Lake and it was flooding almost as rapidly as ideas were being created. Reality hadn't set in until March 21<sup>st</sup> when the last gate at Pensacola Dam was closed and water began to back up. In fact, the flooding was much faster than anticipated. During the previous two years of construction and the clearing of nearly 49,000 acres of land that would be inundated, the seasons had been unusually dry. But now, as if Mother Nature had given the signal, the Grand Lake watershed was seeing unprecedented rainfall. Within days, roads that had been passable were covered with water and were rapidly disappearing. In fact, some buildings that were slated to be moved above the shoreline had to be hastily burned. Now, around the lake, land developments extolling the potential virtues of lake recreation and promises of a "paradise unequalled" were being advertised locally and nation-wide. Using the lake's counterpart as an example, waters previously impounded by the Tennessee Valley Authority's Norris Dam in 1936, mere words could hardly express the potential of the lake now being formed.

One of the by-products created out of necessity was some link that would re-connect Grove, Jay and other communities on what would become the east/southeast side of the lake with towns on the west. Initially, Carey's Ferry and later the old Grand River bridge, constructed in 1904 had served that purpose, But the bridge would be inundated and in fact, had been dismantled and moved to the upper reaches of Horse Creek in anticipation of being used for another road. Consequently, a new bridge was constructed further north of the old one, built in an arch 2,548 feet long, that would enable sailboats with twenty five foot masts to pass underneath. Sarcastically dubbed "Sailboat Bridge" by Governor Leon "Red" Phillips, the southern approach would be planted squarely at the edge of a newly proposed development called "Groveport."

Groveport was the creation of Vinita resident Walter R. Eaton who lavished descriptive phrases on his project. He touted the location as being both the "gateway to the Grand River Dam" and "the mid-point of the lake from Langley to the Twin Bridges." In further describing the site he waxed eloquent, extolled it as being "where the spring fed waters of the Cowskin (Elk) River would produce an abundance of fish, a fisherman's paradise." Eaton backed his words with money and proceeded to plat the Groveport development illustrating the many features that this stellar site would include. Encompassing all of the shoreline north from what today would be NW 113<sup>th</sup> street and west of Highway 59 and NW 110<sup>th</sup> street east of the highway, Eaton proposed a sand beach that would wrap around the whole development. Within the boundaries he laid out smaller lots on the west side of the highway, site of today's Royal Bay Marina, and more spacious lots on the east side of the road. The east side also encompassed "Port Grove," the shoreline indentation that the Waterside Bar and Grill overlooks today. West of Highway 59, the area that currently includes docks where the Cherokee Queen is moored, Eaton proposed a hydroplane landing basin. During the 1930s, huge hydroplanes, seaplanes such as the China Clipper that transported passengers to destinations at points around the Pacific Ocean, had become extremely popular. He noted that "the hydroplane landing basin was adjacent to .72

square miles of landing surface for pontoon aircraft,” even suggesting Groveport as a central location for national defense that would enable military flying boats to reach either coast in a matter of hours.

Unfortunately, world events, first in Europe and subsequently the attack on Pearl Harbor redirected public attention to World War II and the development of Grand Lake could wait. Consequently, Eaton, along with a number of lakeside developers could not sustain or even regain the enthusiasm of potential investors during the post war period. Groveport, as well as several other proposed lakeside developments, soon disappeared.

Today, south of Port Grove as designated by Eaton, only a street sign labeled “Groveport Drive,” remains. Further north in the trailer park, Eaton’s plat noting “Circle Drive” has become Ballerina Circle. Both mute evidence of another lakeside vision that has become an...*Echo From The Past.*

