

# The Land Speaks

New Voices at the Intersection of Oral  
and Environmental History

Edited by Debbie Lee and  
Kathryn Newfont

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## SENDING THE FLOOD UPRIVER

Impersonal Change and Personal Stories in  
the Savannah River Valley

Robert P. Shapard

### Place

The Savannah River and its tributaries were in many ways a blessing for residents of the river's valley before World War II, as they farmed or worked in town in communities such as Lincoln County, Georgia, and McCormick County, South Carolina. The river system drained the cotton and grain fields, powered mills, provided a transportation route and venue for poling on the water in wooden bateaux and fishing for distraction and sustenance. It offered the sound of water over rocky shoals as a natural comfort. But the Savannah, with its inherent power for spinning turbines and its history of occasionally flooding the city of Augusta, Georgia, also became a vehicle for a human-made transformation when the federal government dammed the river about twenty-two miles upstream of Augusta. Authorized in 1944 and completed seven years later, Clarks Hill Dam created a reservoir of approximately seventy-one thousand acres, surrounded by roughly seventy-five thousand acres that the Army Corps of Engineers acquired around the lake's edges—a newly federalized landscape of water, woods, and former farmland. Congress renamed the project for Senator Strom Thurmond in 1987, but I use the project's original name of Clarks Hill.<sup>1</sup>

Oral history with Joe Miller Holloway Jr. by Robert P. Shapard,  
Lincoln County, Georgia, March 22, 2008

*Joe Miller Holloway Jr., born May 1, 1920, was in his late twenties when the Army Corps of Engineers acquired approximately 270 acres of his family's farm in Lincoln County. The sprawling lake and its surrounding lands formed a new kind of public space on the doorsteps of families like the Holloways, a space in which people could*

*participate in recreational activities on the lake and camp in designated areas around its edges. Meanwhile most farming ceased on the newly public lands, and the corps managed the pine stands partly for timber. In researching how people experienced this dramatic change, I wrote an article for a local newspaper and asked people affected by the dam's construction to contact me. A Lincoln resident, Jimmy Smith, called and said he knew someone I should meet. He was protective of his friend Joe Holloway but eager to bring us together, as he felt that Holloway's stories should be heard.*

*Smith met me at a gas station in March 2008 and escorted me to Holloway's home in the Double Branches community. Holloway, a white man, Baptist, one of nine siblings, made a living from the land his entire life. He farmed with his family before World War II, and after four years in the US Army he worked in pine forests to extract pulpwood logs, hauled rocks and wood chips, and cut timber on his property. The sun was out on the morning of our interview. We sat in Holloway's backyard as crows cawed in an adjacent pasture, songbirds chirped in shrubs, and the random notes of a wind chime punctuated the interview.*

### The Farm Kid

JOE HOLLOWAY: I remember one time, when I was a chap, I'd say three or four years old, something like that. We'd go down to Price's Store, and Daddy loved to buy a lemon soda. It was a clear drink made by Nehi. And he'd buy one. He didn't buy me none of 'em because he wasn't able to [afford] two drinks. He'd buy that drink, and he'd always save me a little. I remember this as good as it was yesterday. When he was drinking too much, I'd get over there and catch him by the leg, just like this right here. [Robert laughs]. I never will forget that. And he'd look down at me and I reckon he'd save me about that much. [Indicates about an inch] . . .

We'd patch our clothes. Ten cents a hour was all people could get for work. Work at the sawmill, ten cents a hour. I caught some minks over there one time. I went over on Christmas Eve morning and caught one, it was a large black one. That thing brought twelve dollars. Went back the next morning and had another one, it brought twelve dollars. I made good money. I sold everything, my rabbits and everything, whatever it was. I had a bunch of rabbit boxes, that's how I made my money. I'd have twenty of them rabbits in there on Thursday, and I'd go out there and kill 'em and dress 'em. And Uncle Bud lived right down the river. He was a chicken peddler. He'd take them rabbits down there. He'd give me ten cents for 'em, and he'd sell 'em for fifteen cents, every one he could get.

ROBERT SHAPARD: What would people use them for? For the fur, or the meat?

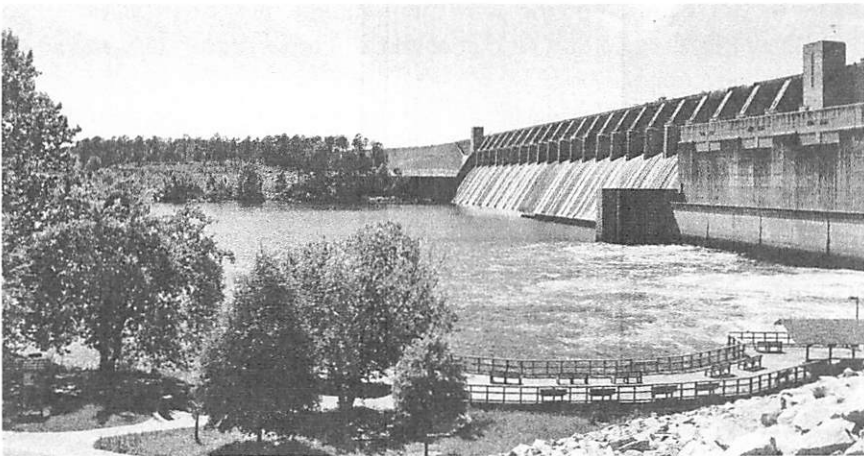
HOLLOWAY: The meat [*emphatically*]. The meat. Rabbit fur ain't no good. Wasn't a bit of good. I'd catch possums, and I'd skin 'em and sell the hide, and I'd put 'em out there in that store of Daddy's, and when them sawmill people come in I'd get about a dollar for every one of 'em. They'd go home and eat 'em.

SHAPARD: Now, were those folks black or white, or both, the sawmill hands?

HOLLOWAY: Most of 'em, black. Most of 'em, black. Some whites would, now. I know a lot of whites worked at the sawmill. I remember Milton Holloway down here. They were paying ten cents a hour, and he got twelve cents a hour to run the edger, and the saw man got fifteen cents a hour to run the saw, cutting that lumber. That was the price that he was getting. There wasn't much money made. You didn't need much. You'd go buy a pair of overalls, cost you fifty [cents], get a pair of overalls. And Mama patched 'em, man. She'd take ahold of 'em and she fixed them patches on there and sew 'em up. Go to school with 'em like that. No such thing as throwing 'em away or nothing . . . . Mama, the only thing she ordered from a store was soda and thread, and let me see what else, something else. Can't think of what it is. But she'd lay them eggs out there, and she'd say, "Gimme a spool of Number 40 thread and soda, a box of soda, Epsom salts up there," and just a few more things she had to have.

SHAPARD: And she would trade eggs for that?

HOLLOWAY: Trade eggs for that. I'd say, "Mama." [And she'd say], "Just wait a minute, I'm gonna save you some eggs." I was afraid she was gonna spend all them eggs [Smiles]. She would give me two or three eggs. We'd go down here to Price's Store. The old man, he was good as he could be. And Theron, he run the store down there, that was his son. He wouldn't give you nothing but what you had. If you had two cents' worth of eggs, that's what you got in candy. I'd [wait] for sure enough a hour, waiting 'til Mr. Price to not get busy



The waters of the Savannah River flow from the back of Clarks Hill Dam (renamed Strom Thurmond Dam), which the Army Corps of Engineers completed in 1954 near Clarks Hill, South Carolina, to create a large reservoir for controlling floods, generating electricity, and other potential benefits. The project remade the landscapes of communities like Lincoln County, Georgia, and McCormick County, South Carolina, in requiring many property owners to sell land, homesteads, and farm buildings and other structures to make way for the lake. *Courtesy of the Savannah District US Army Corps of Engineers*

and he could wait on us. I'd get them eggs out, boy, and when Mr. John Price get over there and I give him my eggs, he had a little bitty paper sack, I always remember it, wasn't no bigger than that. He just reached over there and filled that thing up with candy and all such of stuff as that, and give it to you. He was good as he could be. But now, Theron, if you got one egg's worth, that's all you got. We'd wait on Mr. John Price. He was [Theron's] daddy. He was really good to people . . . .

### The River

SHAPARD: Do you ever miss the Savannah River, the way it used to be?

HOLLOWAY: Yes, sir. [*Draws out this phrase*] . . . . It meant a lot to me, the river. They had what they called a boat sluice in that river, sort of over on the Carolina side. They blowed up all them rocks some way or another, and they run that big boat to Augusta every week. And they would load it up with cotton and corn and stuff and carry it to Augusta. And you would put your order in, or you'd be down there, and you'd make your order for flour and stuff that you wanted, and they'd bring it back [from Augusta]. They said when it come in down here at Bussey's old mill, they had a loud thing they'd blow, and they said you could hear it up through here just as good as anything, to let you know that the boat was in. Then they had a big shed there, where the man would unload it in that shed and put yours in one place, and you'd go get it, where it wouldn't get wet or nothing if you happened not to be there when they were unloading. And that same thing would run to Lisbon [Georgia],<sup>2</sup> go up there to Lisbon and get all that cotton and tobacco and stuff, and go on out and hit Savannah River . . . .

It went right on into Augusta and hit that levee down there, right there at Augusta. They're redoing [the levee and canal] now. I would talk to some of the people who used to work down there. They had a mule. When you go in there and load that boat up, that mule would pull it out. It's brick in the bottom of that [canal], and they didn't want you using your poles to push up them brick. That mule pulled it out to the river. And you got your poles and brought it on up Savannah River. And it must have been good back there then. They cooked meat on there and everything. But I don't see how they pushed that loaded boat up through there.

SHAPARD: Was that going on in your time or was that before?

HOLLOWAY: No, way before my day, when my daddy was growing up. In fact, he used to tell me about these things.

SHAPARD: And when you were growing up, did you look forward to going down to the river and fish?

HOLLOWAY: Yeah, man. [*Extends these words for emphasis*]. My daddy, he loved to go down to seine and fish. And yeah, I looked forward to it. I couldn't hardly wait to get down there.

SHAPARD: Why? Tell me why.

HOLLOWAY: Go seining. Just catch them fish. I remember one time I went down the river [was] backed up, by myself. And I caught I think twelve, fifteen pounds of catfish, a stringer that long. [*Indicating a couple feet*]. I ain't never had caught that many before with a hook. But every time I threw a hook out there, one of 'em grabbed it. Brought them things home and cleaned 'em. Now, we could always catch 'em with a seine. We could catch 'em. Get on them rocks, take this end [of the seine] and hold it down below, and have this man up here. It'd usually be about a twelve-, fourteen-foot seine, and he'd come along there and run 'em up, and when they'd start down the river, you'd catch 'em. See what I'm talking about? They'd run right in there where you were, and you'd rear back and come up with it, and have somebody with a croker sack,<sup>3</sup> would go down and get 'em all out of there and put 'em in that croker sack. Take three of 'em to really run it; they'd put [the fish] in that croker sack.

But yes, goodness, we'd go down there and fish at night. It was a lot of fun when I was growing up. Daddy, he'd be cutting oats over here, wheat and stuff, mostly oats. [*Speaks in his father's voice*]. "Y'all go and cut them things, and stack 'em up. After dinner, go back over there and stack 'em up where they'll dry, then you can take the truck and your hands, and you go to the river." We'd go down there and fish and seine or something. Get in the river naked as jaybirds. [*Robert laughs*]. I remember one time, we went way up the river to get out the way of this girl who lived right down the road down here. We was in there, all of us naked as jaybirds, about ten or twelve of us, and here they come up there, right where we were. I said, "Y'all get my clothes and carry 'em around. I'm going around." This one old boy, lived right over across the road over here, [said], "They had no business coming here. Get out from here and up on this here boat and I'm going to put my clothes on. Gimme my clothes." He got up on the boat, naked as a jaybird, and put his clothes on. [*Joe and Robert laugh*].

SHAPARD: It was just easier that way? The clothes wouldn't weigh you down?

HOLLOWAY: Yeah, yeah. It was just—. We didn't mind going in there. Didn't think no more about going in that river naked as nothing. Didn't give it a thought. Yes, sir . . . Now if there was anybody with families or something, we didn't do it. But we would walk from here down to Bussey's old mill. A crowd of us would walk down there on Sunday evening. I had a bicycle; I was the only one who had a bicycle. And we'd go down there and get naked, and stay in there all evening and turn around and come back home.

## The Land

SHAPARD: So your father felt like, whatever the government offered [for his land], he had to take?

HOLLOWAY: Yeah [*emphatically*]. He just felt like he had to take it, had to take it. Um-hmm. Sure did. And he didn't put up no—. Well, it put him out of business. I run the farm. I stayed there until I was twenty-one years old, and I run the farm. He had a T-model truck. Didn't many people have one. I could go around and get hands up to pick cotton or whatever we was doing. Had a tractor with a plow with it. I done all the plowing. He had five mules, he had some wages hands. [I] run that farm. And at cotton-pickin' time, he would haul a bale every day to Plum Branch, South Carolina. And he'd go up here to the river. Later in years, he'd cross that bridge, but before then, he had to cross on the ferry down here. Go right over that way with his cotton. Sold it mostly at Plum Branch . . .

SHAPARD: Tell me again, how much land did your family have? And out of that total, how much did the government take?

HOLLOWAY: Let me see just what they left us. There are seventy acres over yonder in that place. There are forty acres down here in this one. And that was about it. And left twenty [acres] down here. That's how much we had *left*. And they had taken one hundred twenty-one over yonder, and taken right near one hundred fifty over here, over here in the bottom. That's about what they taken from us. Nearly two hundred acres, they taken from us. [Total appears to be about 270 acres.]

SHAPARD: So that sounds like more than half?

HOLLOWAY: Yeah, they taken over half of it. They sure did. They just about put us out of business. It just about put Dad out of business. He got sick, and he hired some wage hands and he farmed some after I left here [for the army]. But three of us brothers, they got all of us [in the draft]. They didn't leave none of 'em at home. [*Laughs*]. They got us all three . . .

It wasn't right. Some of that land [acquired by the corps] had been in them families for years and years, and they didn't want to sell it, wasn't going to sell it. And they just come in there and took it, whether they wanted to sell it or not. I don't think we would have had no complaints if they [had] took ten foot above the high-water mark and got that, and left it. But they didn't do it. They wouldn't have touched none of this place over here, what I'm telling you about now [his family's land]. They wouldn't have touched it. Would have left it right there for us.

SHAPARD: But instead they took a lot more than that?

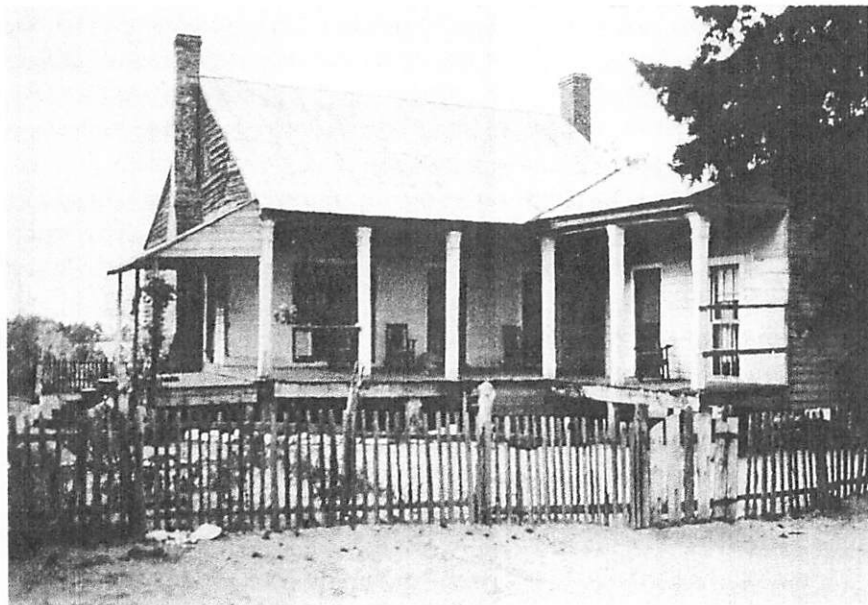
HOLLOWAY: Say a creek run up like this up through here and down. Instead of them following that creek, they just come in and went right across here. Got all this land in here when they didn't need none of it . . . Right down this road here. We owned land down there. And they left right over yonder, a hollow, and come to another hollow on this side. There's a lot of land around that hollow. They should have went around the hollow. But they didn't do it. They just cut [across] and got all of it, that land. Took it. They just run straight lines for themselves . . .



Years ago land was cheap, but you couldn't get no land. You couldn't get a bank—. I have been up yonder at Lincolnton with my daddy where he was trying to borrow fifteen dollars. And sometimes we'd be in there a hour or two, trying to borrow fifteen dollars. He'd have to mortgage every mule he had and every cow he had, [describe] the color of it and everything, before he could get that money. I remember that when I was growing up. You couldn't borrow it. And people would—. Farmers, a lot of people, colored folks especially, they wanted a house and a little land [to] farm theirself. Well, Guy Wright and some of the folks up there with money would buy 'em some fertilizer. And when they come in there to cash that check where they done ginned that bale of cotton, he was waiting. They had to pay for that fertilizer right then. He got his money. And if there was anything left, they could have it . . .

SHAPARD: Sounds like a number of people didn't like [the land acquisitions]. People were upset, but most people felt like there wasn't anything to do about it?

HOLLOWAY: No, wasn't nothing to do about it [*emphatically*]. No, they didn't have nothing to do about it. They just sit down and took it. The Dunns is the only somebody I know of. John Dunn and them down there's the only somebody



A house near the Savannah River was purchased and demolished by the federal government to make way for the Clarks Hill Dam and Reservoir. Homes acquired by the Army Corps of Engineers in the 1930s and 1940s for the project ranged from solid farmsteads to rough tenant cabins, and they represented connections to the land that were impacted by the dam. *Courtesy of the Savannah District US Army Corps of Engineers*

I know of put up a fight for it. They got some good sawmill men that went down there and testified for 'em, how much timber they had. They finally got forty dollars a acre for it. By the time they paid [their legal costs], they would have been just as well off to take the twenty-five dollars and go on . . . They lost the land. They went to Augusta, both of 'em went to Augusta. One of 'em opened up a filling station down there, and I done forgot what the other one done. But, now, they had a great big pretty barn out there [before the lake]. They fooled with goats and sheeps and cows and all. Made a good living.

### Commentary

Oral history relies in part on the notion that, when an experience makes such a lasting imprint on the consciousness of a narrator such as Joe Miller Holloway Jr. that he or she remembers it vividly after many years, it is important both for that person and for historians looking for meaning in that person's life. During an interview past scenes take shape in the mind of the person hearing the stories, as well as in the mind of the narrator. The scenes are co-created in the telling of the stories and the listening. But the past scenes that Holloway evokes are also a means of considering the larger story of Clarks Hill Dam and the current flowing around it of personal narratives, connections to the land, and public and private boundaries.

One scene that Holloway recalls is set inside a local crossroads store in the 1920s, where, as a young boy, he anxiously watched his father drain a bottle of Nehi lemon soda and tugged at his father's pants leg in hopes of getting a taste of the tantalizing drink, a rare store-bought treat. He recalls another store scene, in which he cradled two eggs in his hands, waiting for John Price to reappear at the wooden counter to help him, rather than dealing with Mr. Price's stingy son, Theron, because the generous elder Price would fill his sack with extra candy. Like the lemon soda, the candies in Price's store were rare treats for Holloway, and the stories call attention to such small, simple pleasures.

Holloway relates another memory, when he and his pals followed a dirt road down to the Savannah River and stripped off their overalls to wade naked into the water. They were happy and boisterous in this relative isolation, focused on straining the water with a net to catch plump catfish. Fishing "naked as jaybirds," the boys caught food for their families, but they also were building friendships. Leaving their overalls on the bank put them further away from the sweat and dirt of farm work as they immersed their bodies in the river.

A quality that only oral history can capture is literal voice. As Holloway described these scenes, the qualities of his voice varied. Sometimes it seemed to match his age in the present—eighty-seven years—but at other times his voice sounded rejuvenated, as if the much younger Holloway were speaking. His voice at those moments sharpened the images offered by his words and demonstrated that, over his lifetime, he has been many versions of himself. Holloway in these

memories was a country boy in a farming family that provisioned itself with the basics but had very little money for extras, in a time and place where the river provided simple, free entertainment along with additional food.

Holloway's narrative reveals some of the character of life in that rural, southern setting before the Second World War. Before and during the Depression, the barter economy remained important in his daily world. His mother, Lillian Burgess Holloway, traded farm products at the crossroads stores for staples the family could not produce readily. Getting a living was a constant and intensely local endeavor, with a few important connections to the broader world, such as the cotton markets. Holloway's narrative offers a glimpse of the difficulties in obtaining farm credit faced not only by tenants but also by landowners like his family. The Depression intensified these obstacles, but they existed in the 1920s in the lives of people like the Holloways, as represented by the memory of Joe Sr. going hat in hand to the bank.

Holloway also remembered meaningful connections with the nonhuman environment of the upper Savannah valley in the 1920s and 1930s. His narrative expresses a fluency with the land that comes only through an intimate relationship with it. On the farm he was keenly aware of factors like the quality of the soil, the rainfall, seasonal temperatures, and the strength of the crop. He trapped minks, rabbits, and opossums, an enterprise that required skill along with knowledge of these animals' habits. He regularly swam in the Savannah River and knew its currents, deep holes, and shallows in the pursuit of entertainment while also supplementing the family's table. The recollections suggest an environmental ethic that allowed for knowing and appreciating nonhuman nature, although not to a degree that put significant limits on the drive to use these natural elements, whether it was trapping minks for their fur, tapping the river for its fish, or cutting pine trees for the pulpwood industry. In asking Holloway why the land was important to him or what connection he felt to the land, I had in mind partly some sort of emotional connection. But he responded first in terms of economic value:

Right now, I definitely don't believe that you can make no money out of growing timber. It takes thirty years to grow a pine tree. I got land back over here in nothing but gullies and ditches and oak woods. You don't get *nothing* for hardwoods . . . . When I get through paying my taxes on this place over here, I'm really losing some money. I let the deer hunters have a little bit. They help me out on it, and the government sometimes. I carry insurance on it, and if I don't make something, they'll help me out two or three hundred dollars or something like that.

Holloway's views and actions in relation to the nonhuman environment were in keeping with the prevailing views in his rural culture, grounded in the need to sustain large families primarily with the yields of the land, from the products of cultivated fields to wild game and fish. His mink furs sometimes

brought twelve dollars, compared to the one or two dollars per day men earned at the sawmill. Holloway had five sisters and three brothers, and between the children and the farm workers, his mother faced a real challenge each day feeding them all.

Holloway's father had put him in charge of the farming operation several years before he went into the army, or as Holloway put it, "He turned that farm over to me from chap up." Holloway left school after the seventh grade, which he says was fine with his father. "My daddy didn't care about nothin' but workin'," he recalled. When Holloway came home after the war, he found that none of the \$5,000 he had sent home from his army service was waiting for him; presumably his family had spent it. He set his mind on working for himself and saved another \$2,000 to buy a truck for hauling pulpwood, steering his truck deep into the piney woods, cutting trees and trucking them to McCormick, South Carolina, for rail shipment.

Holloway had purchased two more trucks and hired some men by 1950, and he was in a good position to earn money when the corps started clearing trees for Clarks Hill Dam. As a contractor for the corps, he and his crew cut and hauled countless truckloads of pine logs out of the future lake basin. He also cut and hauled pulpwood from the basin of Hartwell Lake, which the corps built upriver on the Savannah in the late 1950s. While his choice to earn a living in the construction of these lakes contained a measure of irony, and perhaps even hypocrisy, given his critique of the federal government's approach to building Clarks Hill, Holloway did not see things that way. For him it was about adapting and pursuing available opportunities in a setting where options for a livelihood were far from plentiful and where the federal government held much of the power. Holloway also worked hauling loads of large rocks to a site below Augusta. He contracted with Champion Paper throughout the 1960s to log pines on the company's lands, and he hauled wood chips to a factory in Augusta, before retiring to tend cattle on his land in Double Branches.

Holloway holds strong views on the acquisition of land by the Corps of Engineers for the Clarks Hill project. He was drafted into the US Army in 1942 and served for four years. Two years after he completed service, the corps finalized its purchase of about 270 acres of the Holloways' land, a little more than half the family's property, including sixty acres of rich bottomland. The farm previously yielded about twenty-five bales of cotton in good years, along with corn and other grains. His father also owned a crossroads store, although he closed it at times during the Depression. Holloway contends that the federal government's actions in acquiring lands often were unfair and unnecessary. He sharpens his critique later in the narrative, arguing that the government in effect "stole" land from his family. "Sure they did, sure they did," he insists. He does not sound bitter in making this statement, but he is resolute. The fact that the government paid for the land was beside the point for him. More than sixty years later this view resides near the surface of his thoughts.

The corps sometimes reached settlements with landowners without court involvement, and in other cases it condemned properties and deposited a payment with the court in Augusta. The owner could accept that payment or challenge it in court. The legal task in such cases was to determine a fair price—but not to decide whether the government could take the land, since it claimed that legal power through eminent domain. The government acquired roughly 146,000 acres in Georgia and South Carolina, in properties that ranged from just a few acres to thousands of acres. While much of the land was unoccupied, the project forced a number of people to vacate their homes. In addition, about 1,700 graves were moved, as was the Mulberry Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Lincoln County.<sup>4</sup>

Holloway's critique is significant in part because he does not state explicitly that the entire dam project was an injustice. He makes a meaningful distinction by stating that the corps was greedy and oblivious to the impacts of taking too much land—land beyond the high-water line. This was a choice of convenience for the corps, in Holloway's account, in that drawing the acquisition lines as straight as possible was easier than winding the lines around every property border or geographic feature. However, for the affected people, the course of the line often made a great deal of difference; a largely impersonal matter for the corps was quite personal for the landowners. About half of the land the corps acquired from the Holloway family was beyond the highest water level. Holloway suggests that if the corps had taken just enough land for the lake and another ten feet beyond the high-water line, then losing the land would have been an easier pill for people to swallow.<sup>5</sup>

Holloway also contends that the federal government took advantage by giving the impression that accepting its offer was the only option. He claims his father did not realize he had the choice of challenging the price in court. That indeed might have been the case if Joe Sr. had agreed to the price early in the acquisition process. But this memory also raises a question. Considering that many landowners were dealing with the corps, there was undoubtedly a lot of talk among neighbors, and the option of contesting the government's offer must have come up in such discussions. It seems possible but unlikely that his father knew nothing about the option of challenging the price. It might be that Joe Sr. said he did not know as a way to make the loss less painful, something that he could live with, while Joe Jr. might have shaped his own memories along these lines for similar reasons.

The perspectives of Holloway and other people affected by Clarks Hill Dam suggest that, to a degree, it was not so much the project itself that troubled the affected people as the belief that the corps went about things in an unfair and insensitive way, in effect "stealing" their land. In addition, to ask Holloway and other narrators about the government's actions in building Clarks Hill is to ask about the corps' actions after the project was completed, such as selling a significant amount of the land beyond the water's edge after declaring it "surplus"

in the late 1950s and early 1960s, land that included a portion of the former Holloway property. In the words of the *Lincoln Journal's* editor, many properties once included "homes and farms that [people] had lived on all their lives, raised families, or were raising them, [on] land that had come down from generation to generation; places of family pride, history and 'prosperity.'"<sup>6</sup>

In Holloway's recollection, the former owners could buy back the land, but parcels for which the corps had paid perhaps \$24 to \$30 an acre went for at least \$100 an acre. By that point, much of the land sold as surplus was along or near the lakeshore, and people like Holloway certainly understand how that fact increased the value. But they believed that, at the very least, the former owners should have had first crack at buying back their land at a cost within reach of what the government had paid them in the 1940s.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of our interview, Holloway and his wife, Dot, lived on property that included a portion of his family's old farm, and Holloway had built the holdings back to about two hundred acres. Sitting in his backyard, approaching age ninety, he perceived the world as largely within the sweep of his hand. Most places he described were "just down the road here" or "over yonder." The boundaries reached a few miles to places like Lincolnton or McCormick, but not much farther. By orienting himself within this world of imagined borders that were mainly within his reach, he restored a measure of order in his mind on a landscape that the federal government had rearranged dramatically. His vernacular language and southern accent grounded him in that place, as part of his personality and means of communicating and ordering the world, providing an element of continuity along with all this change over the decades.<sup>8</sup>

Oral history methodology can reveal a counternarrative to official history, as Holloway does in sharing his memories of Clarks Hill Dam. The dam's advocates constructed an influential narrative in the early stages of the project, as well as once the dam was completed—a narrative residing primarily in the written record. In the oral record of narrators like Holloway, agriculture, farm life, and connections to the landscape appear much more vibrant than in the portrait crafted by dam advocates and the Army Corps of Engineers. Federal land agents wrote in 1942 that virtually the entire area within the proposed project's boundaries was in "extremely poor" condition for agriculture due to soil erosion. The corps also downplayed the human presence. For example, when considering a design that would inundate about eighty-seven thousand acres, the agency claimed that, "except for a very small percentage, probably not exceeding 5 percent open and adaptable to cultivation, the maximum area is sparsely [*sic*] tenant occupied, mostly colored, and restricted to not more than 50 families." The agency implied that relatively few people lived there and that most people who did were not a meaningful obstacle because they were tenants and they were black. Moving them off the land was "no problem of consequence," the corps concluded.<sup>9</sup>

The reality was significantly different in terms of the land occupancy, racial boundaries, and the state of agriculture, as seen in the stories of Holloway and others, and also in the written record. R. B. Williams owned about thirty acres east of Lincolnton that consisted of idle farm fields, pasture, and woodlands. According to the appraiser, "The area is not considered a very good farming area. The neighborhood is sparsely [*sic*] settled, mostly negroes." Outside of Lincolnton, A. M. Davis owned thirty-seven acres and lived in a house in fair condition that had five rooms and electric lights, in an area that was "mixed white and black," in the appraiser's judgment.<sup>10</sup> Wayne Goolsby owned 270 acres in a "mixed Negro and white neighborhood."<sup>11</sup> The 1942 assessment, which became part of the record before Congress in considering Clarks Hill Dam for approval, gave an incomplete view. The report painted the scene with a broad brush, which suggests that the government did not look closely at the place it meant to transform.<sup>12</sup> At midcentury Lincoln County had about 3,300 black residents and 3,200 white residents, while McCormick County had 6,500 blacks and 3,000 whites.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the corps relied on such data rather than a careful, rigorous assessment of the on-the-ground reality.

As oral history helps to reveal, personal memories do not concur fully with official statements that most of the land was degraded beyond much use. Learning a portion of these stories therefore gives a more complete picture of the land and people before the dam. Life on the acquired lands was richer than the government indicated. More people lived there; they were a more diverse group; they felt stronger ties to the land; and they saw more potential in it for the future.

For those who have known only Clarks Hill Dam and never experienced the landscape before it was transformed, the lake can seem natural, as if it has always been there. Lincoln County boosters sell their lakeside county as "Georgia's Freshwater Coast," while McCormick County is the self-proclaimed "Gem of the Freshwater Coast." Observers seized on this inland-sea image from the early days; for instance, an Atlanta reporter named Andrew Sparks wrote in 1952 that, with sparkling water stretching to the horizon, the lake looked to him like an ocean or a large sound on the coast.<sup>14</sup> "Almost by a miracle, this red river that rises in the Blue Ridge becomes a lake as blue as the mountains themselves when its water is penned up and slowed down," Sparks added, describing the reservoir more like a "miracle" of nature than a human-made facility that required manipulating the river and land on a large scale. Awareness of the landowners and residents, the homes and barns, the nonhuman environment, and the landscape they all formed already was fading by the early 1950s.<sup>15</sup> Narratives such as Holloway's refuse to forget what the land and life were like before the corps stepped in.

Oral history is a valuable means of discovering people like Joe M. Holloway Jr. as historical actors whose lives can enhance our understanding of the past. Holloway was a man beloved by his family, friends, fellow worshippers at

Double Branches Baptist Church, and fellow members of the Lincoln County Cattlemen's Association. He was a hardworking, God-fearing citizen of the South. But beyond the boundaries of Lincoln County, Holloway typically would not be viewed as an important figure. While his world expanded temporarily as far as New Orleans, California, and Central America during his army service, his life was intensely local, and appreciation for his character and contributions to the world was intensely local as well.

But the importance of Clarks Hill Dam resonated beyond the affected counties, and the experiences of people like Holloway emerge as more important when one examines how the project came about and what it meant for the people and the environment. His narrative helps meet the challenge issued to social historians more than twenty-five years ago in *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History*. Editor Olivier Zunz and the collection's authors urged social historians writing detailed, localized social histories to examine the connections between those histories and the larger, far-reaching changes of the times. "The role of social history is to connect everyday experience to the large structures of historical analyses and major changes of the past," Zunz argued. Asking "how people lived the big changes" is critical to revealing the two-way influences between changes in daily life and social structures and changes in the broader contexts.<sup>16</sup>

Applying this guidance to the Clarks Hill project prompts the question of which "big changes" were the most relevant. This means moving from the most personal changes, such as the loss of farmland and houses and the flooding of significant portions of the landscape that people had known on a daily basis, to the larger changes that include the dramatic expansion of the federal government's role during the New Deal and World War II. The most appropriate use of natural resources like land, rivers, and forests was the question at the center of many of these changes. Across the river in South Carolina, the federal government had turned some 120,000 acres of partly cut-over pine lands into a district of the Sumter National Forest in 1936 and established Fort Gordon five years later on the outskirts of Augusta.<sup>17</sup> In 1950 the Atomic Energy Commission and the DuPont company announced plans to build a facility to produce hydrogen-bomb materials south of Augusta, and the federal government went on to acquire some 250,000 acres for the Savannah River Site.<sup>18</sup> The federal presence grew outside of the Savannah Valley as well, from the Tennessee Valley Authority's steady reengineering of the Tennessee River to construction of military facilities across the South.

Also relevant were the fundamental changes in agriculture in the South between 1920 and 1960. The most intense time of change was during the middle decades of that period—when the corps planned and built Clarks Hill. The boll weevil, erosion and depletion of the soil, the Depression, New Deal farm programs, and the allure of industrial jobs during World War II helped push black and white southerners from farms and draw them to the cities of the South or



outside the region. By 1960 some nine million southerners had left the region altogether, while millions of others settled in southern cities and towns.<sup>19</sup>

Families like Holloway's were not blind to the decline of agriculture, from their own experience and those of farmers in the larger community. But the Holloways' place was larger than the subsistence farms of fifty acres or so, where many owners and tenants had struggled to feed their families and have more than a minimal existence. With larger holdings, the chances arguably were better of adapting and farming in some form, if the lake had not claimed a significant swath of their land. Families like the Holloways might have been able to decide, on their own terms, when and if to part with land from which they had drawn income along with a measure of their identity.

Closely connected to this decline was the ongoing campaign to industrialize in the New South by a range of people, including the proponents of Clarks Hill Dam, who viewed the Savannah River as a resource that had not been properly developed. In addition they saw the Savannah as a periodic threat to the riverside city of Augusta, and the impulse to prevent floods was an important thread in the arguments for Clarks Hill. The project therefore had its origins partly in the characteristics of the river itself, such as the force within water gathering and flowing downhill that could be both destructive and beneficial to human purposes. The origins also lay in the perceptions of the river and valley and the desires of the people who pushed for the dam.

Two of the most prominent and persistent advocates for damming the Savannah were Thomas Hamilton, editor of the *Augusta Chronicle* in the 1920s and 1930s, and Lester Moody, the influential secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Augusta in that era. In 1935 Hamilton insisted that Augusta was destined to become "the capital of an industrial and agricultural empire" through engineering the Savannah River. "Great warehouses and industries will be attracted to Augusta and our river front for miles will be an industrial beehive with barges loading and unloading," he proclaimed. Likewise Moody argued that damming the Savannah should proceed until people were "using every drop of it," especially for the benefit of Augusta.<sup>20</sup>

These notions were similar to the ideas promoted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who portrayed rivers as a critical means of spreading electricity to the people.<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt was eager to see engineering of rivers for human uses like power generation, although he wanted the government to keep control of this potential to a great extent. As president, he made many remarks similar to those in a speech in 1938 at Chickamauga Dam on the Tennessee River in Chattanooga, in which he cast the river as a "vagrant stream sometimes shallow and useless, sometimes turbulent and in flood, always dark with the soil it had washed from the eroding hills," before the Tennessee Valley Authority sought to establish human control.<sup>22</sup> To leave a major river undammed was to waste it. This view of the value of rivers contrasted sharply with the ways in which

Holloway, his friends, and other local residents valued the Savannah in its free-flowing state, as a local commons they could access at virtually no cost.

In the context of such big ideas and changes, Holloway's personal story in part was an ongoing quest to retain a measure of personal influence over his life in moments of encountering powerful people or forces. The federal government, for example, was both a negative and a positive force in his life. He was drafted but was fortunate to be assigned to a Signal Corps group that constructed power and telephone lines in Central and South America. The federal government acquired a big chunk of the Holloways' farm, but Joe earned money for several years in contracting with the corps to clear trees for both Clarks Hill and Hartwell reservoirs. He pointed out that he remained determined to "work for the other man" as infrequently as possible. In a sense he sought agency through "smaller" acts that helped him and his wife support their family and secured his reputation as a hard-working, honest man who was entrusted with the job of counting the Sunday offerings from Double Branches Baptist Church and depositing them at the bank on Mondays.

Compared to Holloway's experiences with Clarks Hill, the impact on the Reids, another family in that part of Lincoln County, was greater, and the family had a harder time dealing with the change. As construction on the dam proceeded in the early 1950s and the river's water started to pool over thousands of acres, four siblings in the Reid family in Lincoln County went into a paralyzing state of denial that they were being forced from their home and farm. Even after the federal government condemned the land and gained ownership, and as the water rose noticeably each week, the Reids—Milledge, Martha, Sallie, and Frances—made no move to pack up and find a new place to live. Larry Pinson was nearly thirteen in 1951, and he remembers that year very clearly as a time of both excitement and crisis. Of the Reids, who were his mother's aunts and uncle, he recalls, "They just could not bring themselves to believe that water was going to cover [their land] up and they would have to leave . . . Since they had never lived anywhere else, they just made no move to get out or to find another place to live. Their land had already been taken; it was no longer theirs. They would stand there and look out and say, 'Well, I just don't think it's gonna come on up here.'"<sup>23</sup>

But the water crept up relentlessly. Just as a nearby creek began to cover the narrow bridge on the road to their house, neighbors gathered and helped to carry out the Reids' possessions in a caravan of horse-drawn wagons, pickup trucks, and trailers hitched to farm tractors: the clock and mirror from the mantel of the main room and the worn rocking chairs from in front of the fireplace and on the porch. The Reids moved just a couple of miles into a rental house, where they had electricity for the first time. Martha died two years later at age seventy-seven; Milledge, Sally, and Frances lived into the 1970s.

In experiencing the larger changes of which Clarks Hill Dam was a part, the Holloways, Reids, and others were connected to two of the most dominant

themes in the history of America: the dispossession of homes and lands and the constant remaking of landscapes. They lived with the federal government's answers to the recurring questions in a democratic republic of where the proper balance lies between individual rights and the dictates of a perceived greater good, and how fairly leaders can implement that greater good once it has been determined.

## Notes

1. I use the name Clarks Hill Dam primarily because that was the name during the years on which I focus. For the project's history, see Henry E. Barber and Allen R. Gann, *History of Savannah District 1829–1989* (Savannah, GA: US Army Corps of Engineers, 1989); US Corps of Engineers, "Pertinent Data, J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake," fact sheet, December 19, 1997 (on file at Dam and Lake Visitor Center).
2. Lisbon was in Georgia, a former frontier town that no longer exists; see Charles C. Jones Jr., *The Dead Towns of Georgia* (Savannah, GA: Morning News Steam Printing House, 1878), 239.
3. A "croker sack" is largely a southern term for a sack made from inexpensive cloth or material such as burlap; see Franklin Burroughs, *Billy Watson's Croker Sack* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
4. The government's land-acquisition files give a view of the condemnation process, as does a January 21, 1949, memorandum from the Clarks Hill mapping section to the real estate branch of the Savannah District, Corps of Engineers, files for segments 4 and 5, box 8 of 45 (at Visitor Center); also see Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 427; William Baude, "Rethinking the Federal Eminent Domain Power," *Yale Law Review* 122, no. 7 (2013): 1741–43. Also see US Corps of Engineers, untitled fact sheet, on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam. Graves total found in *Lincoln Journal*, April 6, 1950; total number of properties acquired is an estimate based on the land parcel logbook on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam, which shows individual tract numbers running up to 2,799, although not every number between 1 and 2,799 was assigned to a parcel.
5. Dates for Joe and Lillian Holloway at "Lincoln County, Ga., Cemeteries, Double Branches Baptist Church," USGenWeb, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/ga/lincoln/cemeteries/double.txt>, accessed January 25, 2012.
6. John P. Drinkard Jr., "'Stolen' Land Sells High; Former Owners Didn't Stand a Chance," editorial, *Lincoln Journal*, June 1, 1961.
7. Drinkard, "'Stolen' Land Sells High; Former Owners Didn't Stand a Chance." For a description of some of the surplus tracts, see US Corps of Engineers, "Real Estate—Clark Hill Lake—Segment Index," a map dated December 14, 1949, and revised between 1965 and 1977 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).
8. Holloway passed away on September 29, 2009, about eighteen months after our interview.
9. US Corps of Engineers, "Real Estate Planning Report for Clark Hill Reservoir," October 1942 (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).
10. Acquisition file for Tract G-648, A. M. Davis (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).
11. Acquisition file for Tract G-644, Wayne Goolsby (on file at Clarks Hill/Thurmond Dam).
12. The figure of fifty families in the 1942 report was for the area to be flooded. That estimate therefore does not apply to the additional seventy thousand acres or so that the corps ended up acquiring beyond the water line. Nevertheless I contend that more people were living in the overall area of acquisition than the corps suggested before the dam project was approved. In looking at just a small portion of the overall area, I identified thirteen individuals or families that were required to move, both owners and tenants. I have not yet found a solid estimate for the number of displaced people.
13. US Corps of Engineers, "Master Plan for Development and Management Clark Hill Reservoir, Savannah River, Georgia & South Carolina" (Savannah, GA: Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, Office of the District Engineer, Savannah District, 1950), 26.
14. Andrew Sparks, "Georgia's New Ocean Builds Up behind Clark Hill Dam," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, September 7, 1952.

15. See also Lucy Hamilton Howard, "Childhood Influences of Tom Hamilton Played Role in CSRA Development," *Augusta Chronicle*, June 22, 1952; Earl L. Bell and Kenneth C. Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle: Indomitable Voice of Dixie, 1785–1960* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), 154–55; Barber and Gann, *History of Savannah District*, 426.
16. Olivier Zunz, ed., *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3–9.
17. Civil docket for US District Court, Augusta, July 23, 1942–April 17, 1947. NRC 00-03 #8, vol. 6, Federal Archives, Morrow, GA.
18. Kari Frederickson, "Confronting the Garrison State: South Carolina in the Early Cold War Era," *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 2 (2006): 349–52, 373–74. The possibility of a nuclear facility in the lower Savannah Valley was not on the horizon when Congress approved Clarks Hill, so the Savannah River site was not part of the argument for that dam. But the plans for Clarks Hill and Hartwell dams on the upper Savannah did make the Aiken County site more attractive for the nuclear facility, since the dams made the river flow on the lower Savannah more predictable.
19. Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xiv–xv, 51–68; Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.
20. *Augusta Chronicle*, October 29, 1959.
21. Franklin D. Roosevelt, speech in Syracuse, NY, October 23, 1928, annual message to the New York legislature, January 1, 1930, and speech in Syracuse, October 22, 1930, all in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Random House, 1938), 1:44–51, 91–92, 419.
22. Franklin D. Roosevelt, remarks at Chickamauga Dam, November 2, 1940, *ibid.*, 9:359–69.
23. Larry Pinson, interview by author, Lincoln County, GA, March 22, 2008.