



**WORKERS LINED UP** with eight Department of Interior trucks in front of a workshop (above) at Sappa Park back in the 1930s, when the park was being built. Raymond Tally (below) fished off the concrete dam at the park after the lake filled up.

## National agency developed park east of Oberlin

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Sappa Park, now owned by the City of Oberlin, was the first park in Kansas developed by the National Park Service.

Gary Anderson, a history buff and member of the Sappa Park Committee, said in the past few years a box of information was donated to the Last Indian Raid Museum about the park. He said volunteer Carolyn Burtis catalogued the pictures and organized notebooks of old newspaper articles.

This winter, Mr. Anderson said, he started looking through that information. An exciting thing he discovered, looking through the pictures and articles, is that Sappa Park, about a mile east of Oberlin, was actually developed by the Park Service.

Part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan to help get the country out of the depression, he said, was the building of parks which would later be turned over to the state.

In 1935, said Mr. Anderson, the development of Sappa Park started with Ernest Nichols as the construction architect.

The Park Service was to develop the 480-plus acres, excluding the dam, which was built by the Works Progress Administration. Congress put together the Civilian Conservation Corps to hire young, unemployed men to do the work at the park and other similar sites.

During a presentation at the first Oberlin City Council meeting of July, museum board member Dick Carman showed pictures of the work being done from his computer.

Mr. Anderson said before the government bought the land, the J. Paddock farmstead was located where the primitive campground is now at the park. That house was moved to town somewhere, he said.

During the park development, a nursery was built on the north side and some of the trees are still there. In the fall 1935, work started on the dam.

The first part of the park included picnic grounds below the dam. A picnic area was located down the hill on what is now the Lower Berm Trail. Pictures show it landscaped with a parking lot, picnic area and campground.

Across from Herb and Carol Shirley's house was a huge buffalo wallow.

There's a picture of the Park Service headquarters at Sappa Park, he said, although he's not sure where it was. Several stone waterways built then still exist.

A National Park Service crane was used to help build the dam. Going through the pictures, there was a bathhouse at the lower picnic area and an incinerator, which can still be seen today. The workers also built a stone wall around the lake bed and three-foot bridges.

Mr. Anderson said the Park Service operated the area from 1935 to 1939. The dam took about four years to build, because the area kept flooding.

Twice during the building of Sappa Park, President Roosevelt intervened and saved the project.

In 1937, newspaper articles said that the plans for the new bath house were designed to meet National Park standards. That same year, said Mr. Anderson, it was reported that Congress thought the government was spending too much money on these projects and work almost stopped.

Oberlin banker Elwood Brooks, who later became the state banking commissioner and a prominent Denver banker, went to Omaha to meet with the Park Service. The decision to stop the work was reversed.

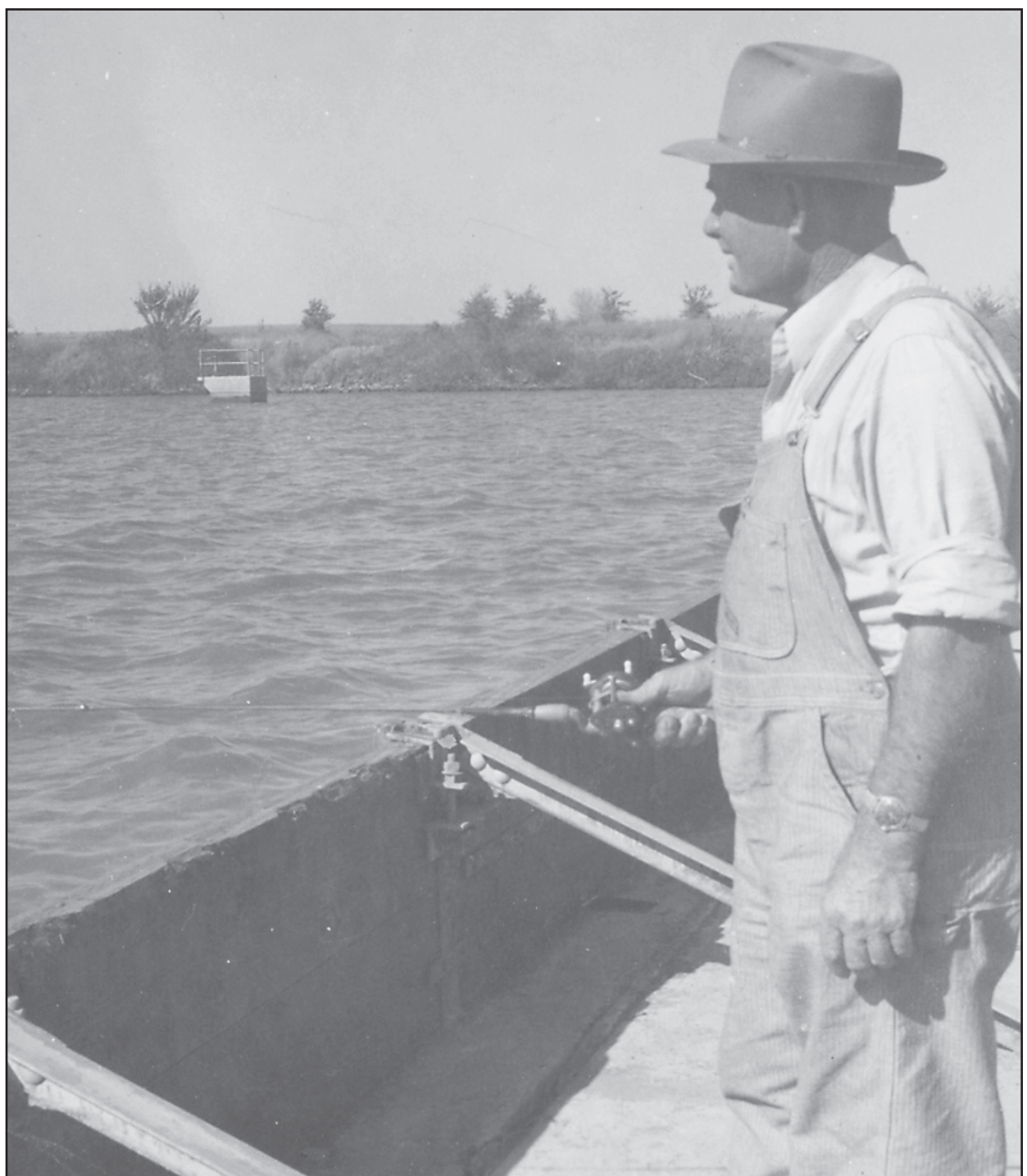
Mr. Anderson said he never realized that there were two dams at the park. The first is the cement dam blocking Sappa Creek. The second, or auxiliary dam is an earthen dam which the road is built over.

Dedication of Sappa Park, he said, was postponed until 1939.

Recently, he said, he talked with Sen. Jerry Moran, who is on the Appropriations subcommittee for National Parks. He said Rep. Moran's understanding is that the Park Service was never supposed to operate these parks, but the creek kept flooding, delaying completion of the dam.

While 600 parks were authorized, said Mr. Anderson, less than 25 percent were completed.

The Park Service history might make Sappa Park more significant, he said. Maybe some day a sign can be put up stating that it was the first built by the Park Service in Kansas.



**THE CONCRETE-FACED DAM** at Sappa Park (above) took about four years to build, as the creek kept flooding. Charles Kiefer (below) and a friend rode in a motor boat on Sappa Lake after the dam was finished.

