



# Putting "Loafing Streams" to Work: The Building of Lay, Mitchell, Martin, and Jordan Dams, 1910-1929

*Harvey H. Jackson*

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This is the story of the human effort that went into completing one of the most complex feats of engineering in Alabama history, the building of four major hydroelectric dams by the Alabama Power Company.

Between 1910 and 1930 the Alabama Power Company built four major hydroelectric projects: Lay Dam (1914), Mitchell Dam (1923), and Jordan Dam (1929) on the Coosa River and Martin Dam (1926) on the Tallapoosa River. When the turbines began spinning and electricity began to flow from the power houses to farms, towns, and cities, Alabama moved from the 19th into the 20th century.

Constructed in remote areas of the state, the dams were unique projects, yet they all had elements in common. The company had to build transportation networks to get men and material to the sites. Workers, skilled and unskilled, black and white, were recruited, brought in, housed, and fed. When wives and children joined the men, worker camps became towns, with schools, churches, medical clinics, and recreational facilities. These towns were at once a reflection of their culture--and a look into a future that electricity would make possible.

*Putting "Loafing Streams" to Work* is the story of life in the towns and on the jobs. This story will help us better understand the impact of Alabama Power's early activities and how Alabamians responded to the forces of industrialization.

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