

**NICHOLS, MARVIN CURTIS** (1896-1969). Marvin C. Nichols, engineer and authority on Texas water resources, son of Joseph Marvin and Cora (Curtis) Nichols, was born at Roanoke, Texas, on December 18, 1896. He attended Denton public schools, entered the University of Texas in 1914, and earned a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering in 1918. He was assistant county engineer of Caldwell and Rockwall counties from 1919 until becoming a graduate student at the University of Illinois in 1920. He earned a master of science degree in theoretical and applied mechanics in 1921 and moved to Amarillo, where he was assistant city engineer from 1922 to 1926 and acting city engineer in 1926-27. Nichols supervised extensive municipal improvements, including an enlarged water-well system. In 1927 he joined the consulting-engineering firm of John B. Hawley and Simon W. Freese<sup>qv</sup> of Fort Worth. He became a partner in 1928, and the firm's name was changed to Hawley, Freese, and Nichols in 1930. As the firm's primary consultant to Tarrant County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1, Nichols supervised construction of Lake Bridgeport (1931) and Eagle Mountain Reservoir<sup>qv</sup> (1932), the first large dual-purpose reservoirs in the United States to provide separate reservoir capacities for flood control and water supply.

In 1933 Nichols was appointed Texas representative of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. In 1935 he was named chairman of the Texas Planning Board.<sup>qv</sup> He participated with his firm in the engineering design of twenty-one military and war production facilities in Texas during World War II,<sup>qv</sup> including camps Hulen, Barkeley, Swift, and Fannin<sup>qv</sup> and a prisoner-of-war camp at Hereford. Nichols was responsible for design and construction supervision of the Pantex Army Ordnance Plant (*see* PANTEX, TEXAS) at Amarillo from 1942 to 1945 and helped oversee his firm's war jobs in Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In 1950 the General Services Administration appointed him chairman of a committee to reactivate government-owned magnesium plants in the United States and a nickel plant in Cuba.

Nichols's major concern as a professional engineer was the conception, engineering design, and construction supervision of difficult water-supply systems for cities and towns in the semiarid section of West Texas, from Fort Worth to New Mexico. As a member of the Texas Water Resources Committee beginning in 1953, he was instrumental in developing a long-range water policy for the state. He was appointed first chairman of the Texas Water Development Board<sup>qv</sup> in 1957 and served until 1963. He influenced the concepts and specific elements of the *Texas Water Plan* of 1968, which proposed construction of sixty-seven dams and reservoirs and redistribution of surplus East Texas water to the drier west. Nichols was the main planner of the proposed "Trans-Texas Canal," which was to convey surplus water from northeast Texas to the Panhandle, Trans-Pecos,<sup>qv</sup> and South Plains areas.

Nichols was president of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers in 1951 and was named Engineer of the Year by the Fort Worth chapter. In 1953 he was nominated by Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay for federal commissioner of the United States Bureau of Reclamation, but Nichols withdrew his name from consideration. He was elected president of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce in 1955. He received the Award of Honor from the Texas Section, American Society of Civil Engineers, in 1964. He was active with the Fort Worth Panther Boys Club for forty-two years as a director, officer, and committee member. He received the Boys Clubs of America's American Bronze Keystone Award in 1948, the Service Bar with three silver stars in 1957, and a second Keystone Award in 1965. He supported the expansion of Arlington State College from a two-year to a four-year institution in 1959 and played a role in the establishment of a graduate program in 1966. The Texas Water Conservation Association awarded him its 1968 Leadership Award for "outstanding leadership, magnificent accomplishments and unselfish service to Texas and to the nation in water resources development."

Nichols was a lifelong Methodist and a states'-rights Democrat. On May 3, 1919, he married Ethel Daveneille Nichols of Greenville. The couple had two sons. Nichols died at M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute in Houston on April 10, 1969. An honorary doctor of humanities degree was conferred on him posthumously by Texas Wesleyan College in June 1969. The Texas legislature approved a resolution to name a proposed dam and reservoir on the Sulphur River the Marvin C. Nichols Dam and Reservoir. Under the amended Texas Water Plan of 1984, Nichols Reservoir remained a potential project for future water supply in North and Northeast Texas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, March 19, April 10, 11, 13, 1969. Simon W. Freese and D. L. Sizemore, *A Century in the Works: Freese and Nichols Consulting Engineers, 1894-1994* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994).

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