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Hoover Dike protects 'Big Water' (Lake Okeechobee)

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



HOOVER DIKE PROTECTS 'BIG WATER' (LAKE OKEECHOBEE)

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CLEWISTON ---- Okeechobee, as in Lake Okeechobee, is the colorfully descriptive name derived from two Indian words, meaning "big water."

The great body of water is a blessing to South Florida, but it also has been a curse. The lake went berserk twice in two years back in the 1920s when violent hurricanes roared into the Everglades section. National Geographic magazine described what happened to Lake Okeechobee after that mighty storm of 1928: "Fill a saucer with water, then sweep your hand through it and you will have some idea of the effect." The resulting flood killed between 1,500 and 2,500 persons. No accurate count was made, bodies were heaped in piles and buried.

Rushing here to the lake area was President Herbert Hoover, a shocked and saddened leader. According to an attractive marker on Hoover Dike here, (photo), the President "personally supported and was directly responsible for early Federal construction of Lake Okeechobee levees for the protection of life and property." Congress in 1960 designated the dike in commemoration of Hoover's "humanitarian efforts and interest in public safety, which permitted the safe development of the rich potential of this region."

Forty years in building, and costing more than \$100 million, the 112 miles of 35-foot high Hoover Dike protect the people and the new land. The quaint local historian, Lawrence Will, reports: "The old-fashioned virtues of courage, fortitude and perserverence have transformed the former trap of death into a great agricultural empire, furnishing beef, vegetables and sugar for the nation's table."

