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COHIST

The Founding of Carter Caves State Park:
How Governor Fields and the Kentucky Colonels
Entertained and Persuaded the Park into Existence

Hubert V. Crawford, MSSW
Morehead State University

Paul L. Crawford, Ph. D.
West Virginia State College

The year was 1946 and Carter Countians were beginning to revive interests in establishing a state park at Carter Caves in Carter County, Kentucky. Local citizens had tried prior to World War II to develop a state park at Carter Caves; however, their efforts failed, probably because of more vital problems facing the nation and the world.

Concerned individuals generally agreed that the cave area was an ideal location for such a park because of its magnificent scenic beauty. There are 1200 acres of undeveloped wilderness featuring several natural bridges and caves. Many native animals and birds make their homes among the multifloral mountains decorated by nature's own arboretum. The undisturbed habitat attracts nature lovers and scientists alike and visitors frequently return to the caves year after year.

After many abortive attempts to establish the Carter Caves State Park, a winning formula to reawaken interests in the park was developed. Once community interests were rekindled, local resources became the most significant factor in establishing the park. Rivalries between Olive Hill and Grayson, two small Carter County towns, had existed for several years; however, all Carter Countians worked together toward the common goal of developing a state park, an unusual example of cooperative community action. Many community minded citizens lent their

energies and efforts in this project.

Kentucky Governor Fields (retired) was unanimously chosen as chairman of the project because of his strong and enduring interest in a state park system. He originally conceived of a Kentucky State Park System during his term as governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. A plaque in the Caveland lodge commemorating Governor Fields' role in the Carter Caves State Park states: "The state park system was founded during the administration of William Jason Fields, Governor of Kentucky, 1923-1927." Ex-Governor Fields continued his interest and efforts in establishing Carter Cave State Park long after his term as governor. As chairman of the project he maintained an office over the First National Bank of Grayson, Kentucky with his brother, Forrest Fields, who functioned as project secretary.

Soon after World War II, Heman McQuire, President of the Grayson Rotary Club, invited Russell Dyche, Kentucky Director of State Parks, to Carter County to explore the possibility of establishing the Carter Caves State Park. Mr. Dyche was impressed with the revised plan to develop Carter Caves and subsequently gave his assistance and support throughout the endeavor. Goals set by Commonwealth of Kentucky were as follows:

(a) Carter County was to collect \$40,000 in donations in order to purchase the cave property, which was privately owned, (b) the

property deed was to be transferred to the Kentucky State Park Commission, (c) the general cave area was to be developed as a state park and (d) the park was to be known as the Carter Caves State Park.

A proposal for the purchase of the site was made to the land owners sometime between March and August, 1946. After the property transfer was made, proper and legal documents of ownership of the Carter Cave area were presented to Governor Simeon Willis in August of 1946. The Kentucky State Park commission soon thereafter took active responsibility for the development and operation of the Carter Caves as a Kentucky State Park.

Governor Fields, a native Carter Countian, was the leader and driving force behind the Carter Caves project. He knew how to develop a cohesive force among the local citizens to promote and to complete the project. His formula for motivating citizens to develop the Carter Caves Park combined public entertainment and eloquent persuasiveness. Governor Fields was well known as an eloquent speaker throughout the region, and large numbers of people attended jamborees conducted by The Kentucky Colonels with Governor Fields as the featured speaker. The Governor spoke with evangelical

fervor on the desirability of establishing the Carter Caves State Park, a project of great interest and concern. He also exerted some influence on the band, for at each program he requested a special song, "Kneel at the Cross," and the band responded with fairly good harmony and much enthusiasm. The large crowds regularly participated in the singing of this old and well known hymn.

Active members of the program at these rallies are identified as follows:

*Governor William Jason Fields was the featured speaker at the rallies and full-time chairman of the Carter County fund raising program for the development of the Carter Caves State Park.

BAND MEMBERS

- *Casper Dickerson -- Band Leader, Steel Guitar
- George Rice -- M.C.
- *Ernest DeHart -- Sp. Guitar
- Harold Crawford -- Sp. Guitar, Whistler
- Hubert Crawford -- Tenor Guitar
- *Ward Crawford -- Fiddle
- *Mack Webb -- Fiddle
- *Gerald Paynter -- Mandolin
- Chester DeHart -- Sp. Guitar
- Charley Coleman -- Sp. guitar

*Deceased

Frank Owens, Band Leader of Olive Hill High School, operated the public address system which was furnished by the Carter County Board of Education. A school bus called the "Cannon Ball Bus" was provided for transportation. Night rallies were conducted at several Carter County Schools: Soldier, Carter, Porter Creek, Lawton, Olive Hill, Pritchard, Hitchens, Carter City, Grahn, and Upper Tygart. Rallies also were held at Carter Caves and movie theaters in Olive Hill and Grayson. An amateur program concluded the series of rallies at the Tabor Theater in Olive Hill, Kentucky.

The following sources were researched for this article by Hubert Crawford, Professor of Social Work, Morehead State University, retired.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Grayson Journal Enquirer year 1946. Papers from the Grayson newspaper office and Kentucky Christian College Library.
2. Courier-Journal Magazing Section, July 2, 1950, p. 8.
3. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

Ward Crawford

Charley Coleman

George Rice

Heman McQuire

3. Interviews - Continued

Chester DeHart

Harold Crawford

4. Carter County Court House, Clerk's Office, checked deed and property transfer of the 1,200 acre cave area to State Park Commission.
5. Picture of Kentucky Colonels obtained from Chester DeHart-- copies made with band members added (who had been omitted). This is the only known photograph of this group.
6. The entertainment programs usually consisted of the several songs, often with audience participation, and with a concluding speech by Governor Fields. Typical songs on the program are listed below:

Kneel at the Cross

Johnson's Old Gray Mule

Bury Me Beneath the Willow

Mama Don't "Low No Music Playing Around Here

Sally Goodin

Durante's Hornpipe

Chinese Breakdown

My Blue Heavens

We Live in Two Different Worlds

7. Copy of Carter Caves State Park, Fund Raising Jamboree flyer, featuring Governor Fields and the Kentucky Colonels.

Kentucky



Hubert Crawford



Gov. William G. Fields
(SPEAKER)

Colonels



Harold Crawford



Earnest McHart



L to R- Mack Webb, George Rice, Gerald Paynter
Charlie Coleman, Chester McHart
Sitting- Casper Wickerson



Ward Crawford

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JAMBOREE

Olive Hill High School
THURSDAY, APRIL 4

7:30 P. M.
FEATURING

William Jason Fields, Governor of Kentucky
Speaker

and the

“KENTUCKY COLONELS”

*Come Out And Back The Drive For The
Carter Caves State Park, And Enjoy An
Evening Of Fine Entertainment*

ADMISSION - FREE