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Building the Back of Beyond: Government Authority, Community Life, and Economic Development in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley, 1880-1992

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Stephen Wallace Taylor entitled "Building the Back of Beyond: Government Authority, Community Life, and Economic Development in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley, 1880-1992." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

James C. Cobb, Major Professor

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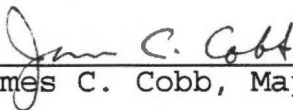
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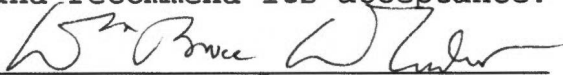
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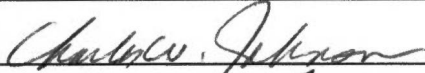
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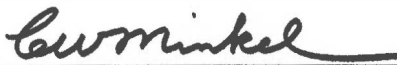
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Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

BUILDING THE BACK OF BEYOND: Government Authority, Community
Life and Economic Development in the Upper Little Tennessee
Valley, 1880-1992

A dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen Wallace Taylor

May 1996

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DEDICATION

For Maggy, without whose support this work as it now exists
would have been impossible.

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Those who have assisted me in refining the idea that became this manuscript are far too numerous to list, but some deserve special mention. My major professor, James C. Cobb, provided invaluable assistance through insightful criticism at many points along the way. The other members of my committee, Dr. Bruce Wheeler, Dr. John Gaventa, and Dr. Charles Johnson, also provided substantial insights which have shaped the present work. Dr. Michael J. McDonald provided a great deal of encouragement during the early portions of my research, and helped me focus on the key issues facing the study region. My fellow graduate students in the history department provided a forum in which I could try out new ideas and refine my approach. Kitty Manscill and Annette Hartigan of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park tirelessly dug through the massive collections in their custody in order to facilitate my research, as did Mary Ann Bailey and Michael Rogers of the National Archives Southeast Region. The staff of the TVA Corporate Library and the Cultural Resources Program provided expert assistance, as did George Frizzell of the Special Collections department at Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, and the Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University. Ben Lea of the North Carolina Political Broadcast Archives at Pfeiffer College provided uniquely valuable insight as well as access to his own research materials. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, my family provided both encouragement and thoughtful criticism which helped me keep the project in perspective.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the relationships among government authority, community life, and economic development in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley. This area saw extensive growth during the first quarter of the twentieth century because of the exploitation of its timber and mineral resources. These industries introduced transient families into the area, contributing to the fragility of the economic and social structure. These transient families, like the longtime residents, embraced the regular paychecks industrial employment offered, and willingly participated in the exploitation of the area's resources, sacrificing long-term sustainable growth for the short-to-medium-term security of a cash income.

Following that period of rapid growth, the founding of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the construction of TVA's Fontana Dam cut off access to much of the area's resource base and displaced many residents from their homes, disrupting the already tenuous threads holding the area's communities together. Both transient families and longtime residents again adapted to the changing economic conditions by seeking whatever short-term financial security they could obtain.

After the completion of the dam in 1945, residents found their economic options even more severely curtailed. Tourism provided the sole opportunity for escaping the poverty which a half century of extractive growth could not eliminate. By the 1990s, several communities in the Upper Little Tennessee had begun to use tourism as a means of economic growth, but their growth paled by comparison to neighboring counties adjacent to the National Park.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	PATTERNS OF PEOPLE AND PLACE	1
2.	BOOM (AND BUST)	27
3.	TWO SUITORS	55
4.	TVA MOVES INTO THE BACK OF BEYOND	79
5.	WORK, LIFE AND WAR IN THE BACK OF BEYOND	111
6.	REBUILDING THE BACK OF BEYOND	158
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	191
	VITA	204

LIST OF TABLES

1. AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY: PERCENT OF TOTAL INCOME IN 1940
 42
2. HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES, 1940: PERCENT OF ALL DWELLINGS SO
EQUIPPED 43
3. HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES, 1940: PERCENT OF RURAL NON-FARM
DWELLINGS SO EQUIPPED 43
4. HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES, 1940: PERCENT OF ALL OCCUPIED
DWELLINGS SO EQUIPPED 43
5. HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES, 1940: PERCENT OF OCCUPIED RURAL NON-
FARM DWELLINGS SO EQUIPPED 44
6. PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH SPECIFIED AMENITIES, 1940
(SWAIN COUNTY) 45
7. PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH SPECIFIED AMENITIES, 1940
(GRAHAM COUNTY) 45
8. PERCENT OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS WITH SPECIFIED AMENITIES,
SWAIN AND GRAHAM COUNTIES, STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, AND
UNITED STATES, 1940 45

LIST OF FIGURES

1. POPULATION, SWAIN AND GRAHAM COUNTIES, 1880-1990 . . 19
2. POPULATION IN UPPER LITTLE TENNESSEE, MARKET VS.
NONMARKET AREAS, 1880-1990 21
3. POPULATION IN UPPER LITTLE TENNESSEE, FARMING VS.
EXTRACTIVE TOWNSHIPS, 1880-1990 22
4. LAND OWNERSHIP, SWAIN COUNTY, 1958 175
5. NUMBER OF FAMILIES RECEIVING AFDC AID IN GRAHAM
COUNTY 184
6. NUMBER OF FAMILIES RECEIVING AFDC AID IN SWAIN
COUNTY 185

CHAPTER 1.

PATTERNS OF PEOPLE AND PLACE

In Southern Ladies and Gentlemen, Florence King describes the eminent Boston social scientist, Dr. Jonathan Latham, out to win the Pulitzer in "regional studies." Latham struggled to understand the South using only two books: Gone with the Wind and The Mind of the South, with selected passages highlighted, of course. Latham's experiences in the South sometimes reinforced the stereotypes in the books, and sometimes confounded them. Emotionally and intellectually exhausted by trying to figure out what the South was all about, Latham finally resolved his confusion by catching a plane back home.¹

Dr. Latham's counterpart trying to understand western North Carolina would probably carry Horace Kephart's Our Southern Highlanders, with similarly mixed results. Kephart left a cozy librarian's job in St. Louis in search of a mythical pioneer lifestyle, and believed he found it in the woods of Swain County, North Carolina, in a solitary place he lovingly called "the Back of Beyond." Kephart's meticulous description of the physical environment provided academic students of the region with excellent maps and sketches of the flora and fauna of the area. His notebooks pres-

¹ Florence King, Southern Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), 14-24.

ent a fascinating and detailed natural survey of the region. His objective descriptions of the physical world of western North Carolina aside, however, the romantic individualism and rugged lifestyle of which Kephart wrote is a popular, but misleading stereotype of the region. Just as Margaret Mitchell's romance of the plantation South helped shape popular images, Kephart's backwoods adventures helped mislead readers into seeing Appalachia as isolated and romantic. His best-known works aside from Our Southern Highlanders are several treatises on backcountry camping and a guide to sporting firearms, and he was an extremely important figure in popularizing the idea of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.²

This study examines a portion of the same region as Our Southern Highlanders: the upper portion of the Little Tennessee Valley in North Carolina, principally Graham and Swain counties, in the heart of Kephart's "Back of Beyond." Where necessary, information from the surrounding counties of Jackson, Macon, and Haywood has been used to supplement the available materials from Swain and Graham counties. This region constitutes a socioeconomic and cultural unit.

² Horace Kephart, Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and a Study of Life Among the Mountaineers (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), xi-xlvi, 28-74, 265-349; Carlos C. Campbell, Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains: An Unprecedented Crusade which Created, as a Gift of the People, the Nation's Most Popular Park (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1960), 30, 36, 140, 141.

Its economic activities, primarily mining, timbering, subsistence agriculture, and later tourism, differentiate this area from the rest of North Carolina, and its distinctive patterns of cultural activity have caused it to be treated as a unit for study purposes by scholars ranging from Howard Odum to Michael Ann Williams.³

Western North Carolina is a mountainous region. The Blue Ridge Mountains, with which Odum identified the entire region, are one of many sub-chains of the Appalachian Mountains which dominate the western quarter of the state and may well be, geologically, the oldest mountain chain on Earth. Most of the area's natural vegetation is birch, maple, and hemlock forest, and chestnut trees flourished until a turn-of-the-century blight killed off most of them. Mountain laurel thrives near even the smallest streams. Muskrats, squirrels and raccoons feed on the blueberries, blackberries, and nuts growing around them. The highest peaks harbor plants otherwise known only much farther north.⁴

³ Howard Odum, Southern Regions of the United States (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 153-173, 311-313; Michael Ann Williams, Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), passim.

⁴ J. Wright Horton, Jr., and Victor A. Zullo, eds., The Geology of the Carolinas (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991), 9; Carlos C. Campbell, Great Smoky Mountain Wildflowers 3rd. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 3-7; Carson Brewer, A Wonderment of Mountains: The Great Smokies (Knoxville: Tenpenny Publishing, 1981),

The rock which forms the mountains is varied. Deposits of copper, iron, and lead are interspersed with occasional pockets of precious stones, especially rubies and sapphires. Rock formations tend to be unstable, and in times of heavy precipitation slides are common.⁵

Heavy precipitation itself is common too. The area receives more rainfall than any other location in the southeastern United States. The rain provides needed moisture for the lush vegetation of the area, but also contributes to the erosion of topsoil.⁶ That topsoil generally ends up deposited in the narrow river valleys below the peaks. Small rivers such as the French Broad, the Pigeon, the Little Tennessee, and the Hiwassee drain the slopes of the mountains.

The Little Tennessee rises west of the town of Franklin in Macon County, near the Georgia border. A few miles north, it is joined by the Nantahala River near Almond. The river continues generally north, then makes a sharp westward bend at its confluence with the Tuckaseegee.⁷ Thus redi-

passim.

⁵ Odum, Southern Regions, 35-39; Tennessee Valley Authority, Fifty Inches of Rain: A Story of Land and Water Conservation (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1939), 27.

⁶ Odum, Southern Regions, 295; TVA, Fifty Inches of Rain, 27.

⁷ Sometimes spelled "Tuckaseegee" or "Tuckasegee," not to be confused with Tuskegee (or "Tuskegee") Creek, another tributary of the Little Tennessee. In the case of variant

rected, it continues west to the Tennessee state line, then turns west-northwest before joining the Tennessee River near Lenoir City, Tennessee.

The valley of the upper portion of the Little Tennessee is particularly narrow. Good "bottom land" in the flood plain was a precious commodity for those who intended to farm it, and the bottom land of the Nantahala and Tuckasee Rivers was among the first claimed by white settlers after the United States government ordered the Cherokees removed to what is now Oklahoma.⁸

The white settlers who arrived in western North Carolina did so expecting that they would be able to make a decent living. Some built large farms on which slaves were used, but far more built smaller farms of fifty to one hundred acres. The bottom land was too scarce and too widely scattered to provide for all the needs of an agricultural enterprise, so farmers tended to reserve it for the most profitable food crops such as corn and wheat. The hilly land above the rivers frequently rose at such an angle that

spellings in local use I have tried to identify and utilize the most common.

⁸ John C. Inscoe, Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 13. On the Cherokees who stayed behind, the works of John Finger, particularly The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819-1900 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984) and Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) are extremely informative; see also Sharlotte Neely, Snowbird Cherokees: People of Persistence (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

large-scale planting was impractical, but some food crops could be grown there nevertheless. The higher lands were also useful for grazing cattle and sometimes sheep. Hogs could forage for themselves in the woodlands above the fields, woodlands which also provided firewood and occasionally lumber or logs for constructing a home.⁹

Small-scale farming could not provide the growing population of the region with enough income to keep up with the market economy which swept most of the nation in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Little surplus production was available to provide cash for the purchase of manufactured goods or other items which could not be made, grown, or done without. The market ties which held larger mountain farmers in close relationships with the rest of the South often had little influence over the operators of the area's smaller farms, with the result that western North Carolina, like adjacent mountain regions, did not speak with one voice in the conflict which tore the nation apart in the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹

In the aftermath of the Civil War, with most of the

⁹ Inscoe, Mountain Masters, 11-23.

¹⁰ On that economic shift the most important recent work is Charles G. Sellers, The Market Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Inscoe, Mountain Masters, 211-257; Gordon B. McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 4-61.

South prostrate from the collapse of the slave economy, western North Carolinians found themselves for the first time identified as a separate sort of people. Many of them had supported the Union position in the war. Clearly they were not "typical" southerners; just as clearly, they were not Yankees. As the rest of Americans struggled to understand these people who did not fit into the neat categories of "southern" and "not southern," the concept of "Appalachian otherness" came into currency. Appalachians, some observers contended, were pure, unspoiled frontiersmen, remnants of colonial life preserved intact by the supposed isolation of the mountain coves in which they dwelt.¹²

A number of reasons have been posited for flatlanders' sudden concern with the mountaineers. Of these the most important is the redirection of the reform impulse. After abolition, and particularly after Reconstruction, reformers sought common ground upon which a new American culture could be built. Reform-minded evangelists and secular progressives saw the supposedly isolated mountaineers as worthy ancestors whom the rest of the nation had passed by. Studying these remnants of the pioneer past would help the nation return to its roots. Furthermore, the benefits of modern technology could be applied to the older culture, permitting

¹² Henry D. Shapiro, Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 3-31.

the establishment of the continent-wide cultural unity the reformers sought.¹³

Those who developed the resources of the region would have provided plentiful targets for reformers, especially after 1890. Mining and timbering companies from other parts of the nation would extract the wealth of the region rapidly, providing a temporary source of income for residents while damaging the landscape. Yet many, perhaps most, residents welcomed the arrival of the companies that paid in actual cash, every week, unlike their struggling farms, providing the material comforts and necessities to which they like the rest of America were increasingly becoming accustomed. Paradoxically, the romanticized focus on Appalachian "otherness" and "isolation" popularized by Kephart and others reached its zenith after the region had already settled on a definite type of extractive relationship with the "outside world."¹⁴

In The Promise of the New South, Edward Ayers contends that one of the most important developments in southern life in the thirty years after Reconstruction was the rapid growth of very small towns, villages of less than 2,500

¹³ Shapiro, Appalachia on Our Mind, 32-58.

¹⁴ Shapiro, Appalachia on Our Mind, 157-185. An appropriate analogy for this process is the transformation of the image of the West in American popular culture as the reality of the frontier faded away; see Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950).

inhabitants. These towns served as marketplaces for local goods and as points where local culture, economy, and politics intersected with the larger currents of the nation as a whole. Railroads and, after 1900, usable highways provided the mechanism for this intersection in most southern areas. The fortunes of entire communities rose and fell with their role as marketplaces.¹⁵

In the upper Little Tennessee, the town of Bryson City sprouted in the 1880s as just such a market center. The town, which served as the seat of Swain County, provided a jumping-off point for the timber industry's entry into the economy of southwestern North Carolina. It also published the area's only weekly newspaper for a time. As new inventions enticed Americans toward a machine-age popular culture, Bryson City provided the only automobile dealers and service facilities, the only photography studios, and the only movie theaters within a twenty mile radius.

Other villages arose with more modest missions. Some twenty miles downstream from Bryson City, in the Forney Creek township of Swain County, lay Bushnell. Initially, the site of Bushnell offered few advantages beyond its easy access to the Little Tennessee and Tuckaseigee Rivers. Neither of the rivers were commercially navigable, but logs could be floated to a sawmill in even these fairly shallow

¹⁵ Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55-109.

streams. Bushnell's population swelled to nearly 1,000 persons after the arrival of a railroad spur built in the late 1880s by the Western North Carolina Railroad, soon to be absorbed into the Southern Railway. Bushnell became a center for transferring goods from the railroad's main line to the Fontana spur, where they would reach backcountry dwellers.

Almost immediately, the Fontana spur became a two-way route. Copper mines on Hazel Creek and Eagle Creek provided good-quality copper ore for shipment across the mountains to Copperhill, Tennessee, and excellent timber grew in the area as well. The community of Fontana thus grew rapidly on both sides of the Little Tennessee, about twenty miles west of Bushnell. Founded by the Montvale Lumber Company in 1902, Fontana originated as a makeshift logging camp. By 1907 it had moved to a more level site and encompassed a school, a community recreation center, a modest hotel, a church, and a company store. The nearby copper mines soon attracted miners with the skill to identify and dig out the commercially valuable ore. While the mines, the center of the village and most of the timber were located in Swain County, many of the miners lived across the river in Graham County. Some residents considered Fontana and Fontana Mines as separate communities, but most traveled the two miles or so

between the two at least occasionally.¹⁶

Between Bushnell and Fontana, the timber industry built the town of Proctor. Situated a few miles up Hazel Creek from the Little Tennessee in Swain County, Proctor existed primarily to provide the Ritter Lumber Company of Columbus, Ohio, with as much old-growth timber as the company could sell. Proctor grew rapidly enough that at its peak during World War I it rivalled Bryson City in population and amenities. As a by-product of its logging operations, the Ritter company even established a passenger railroad to connect Proctor to the Fontana spur, giving residents easy access to the rest of the South by way of the Southern's main line connection at Bushnell. Proctor also harbored a few miners who worked the Hazel Creek copper mine.¹⁷

South of Proctor and Bushnell, in Graham County, lay the mountain township of Stecoah. Unlike Proctor, Bushnell, or Fontana, the name Stecoah denoted not so much a village as a region containing several small communities, including Brock, Tuskegee, and Japan. These communities differed from those of Swain County in that they lacked railroad connections to local market centers. In particular, members of the fifteen or so families of Japan traded more readily

¹⁶ Lucile Kirby Boyden, Village of Five Lives (Fontana Dam, North Carolina: Government Services, Inc., 1964), 10-42; Helen Cable Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

¹⁷ Boyden, Village of Five Lives, 30.

with merchants in Bushnell and Almond, across the river in Swain County, than with those in their own county seat of Robbinsville, across the Unaka Mountains.¹⁸

Robbinsville was founded in 1872 so that the newly created Graham County would have a seat of government. The site seems to have been chosen arbitrarily, and one widely circulated legend claims that the courthouse was built next to a moonshine still where the surveying party had stopped for refreshment. The town served as a market center for that portion of the county not already accustomed to trading across the river in Swain County, but grew much more slowly than Bryson City. Robbinsville's growth depended somewhat upon the timbering and mining activities in Yellow Creek township, in the northern part of the county, and repeated corporate bankruptcies hampered the development of those resources. The town's greatest population growth came in the 1920s, coinciding with the construction of new highways through the county, the opening of the Graham County Railroad, which connected with the Southern at Topton, and the establishment of the Bemis Lumber Company's sawmill. Robbinsville never served as a major tourist destination, but it succeeded modestly as a wayside rest stop while developing its extractable natural resources mostly with local capital. For many years the Bemis Lumber Company of Rob-

¹⁸ Arnold Monteith, interview by Bill Landry, October 28, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

binsville served as the county's largest and frequently only industrial employer, and also operated Graham County's only rail line.¹⁹

The twin farming communities of Almond and Judson, in southern Swain County's Nantahala township, contrasted sharply with the extractive settlements at Proctor and Fontana or the slow and undirected growth of Robbinsville. Two miles apart on the banks of the Little Tennessee a few miles south of Bushnell, the two villages bore a much closer relationship to Bryson City than their downstream counterparts. Here, fertile bottom land made agriculture possible, and occasionally profitable. The presence of economically feasible agriculture gave these communities a sense of permanence not shared by Fontana or Proctor. A few storekeepers and other entrepreneurs, as well as farmers, prospered in Almond and Judson. Almond was briefly incorporated in the early twentieth century, but lost that status after the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) began purchasing land in the area. The village's population, which peaked at 148 in the 1920 census, dwindled rapidly thereafter.

There were other communities in the upper Little Tennessee. Some, like Epps Springs, consisted of a few houses, a store, a church, a school (often the same building as the church), and perhaps a post office. Others such as Ritter

¹⁹ Boyden, Village of Five Lives, 18-19; Graham County Centennial, Inc., Graham County Centennial, 1872-1972 (Robbinsville: Graham County Centennial, Inc., 1972), 36-38.

were merely loading stops along the Fontana spur or the Southern main line. Communities were not defined by city limits, nor even by geographic barriers. In the absence of defined villages such as Proctor or Bushnell, people continued to identify their homes by the location of the nearest body of water--"up Hazel Creek" or "on Goldmine Branch," complicating the process of studying the movements, the living and dying, that make up their history.

Just as they may lack defined geographical boundaries, communities may not have the same name throughout their history. Helen Cable Vance remembered that the area around her home--which she called Little John Cable Cove--was known both as Fairview and Fairfax. The nearest store and post office were at Wayside, however, and she remembered having attended church in several different locations around Proctor.²⁰

Anywhere three or four families lived might be considered a community, and might be named after one or more of those families. Any inhabited place big enough, or important enough, or imaginative enough in name to appear on a map might receive the appellation of "community" as well. But such a broad definition results in an unwieldy problem even within the small area covered by this study. Practicality demands the use of a functional definition of commu-

²⁰ Helen Cable Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, video recording, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

nity. This definition of community depends on the presence of institutions which formalize the relationships among residents, because these institutions form the nucleus of an organic culture which can be passed on to the next generation. It excludes groups centered on the activities of one family alone. In the upper Little Tennessee, churches and schools, stores, and railroad stops provided gathering places where people could exchange goods, goodwill, and information; the existence of these institutions, close to one another, indicates the presence of a community. Post offices, often located in stores, gave official sanction to the presence of a community. Post offices served their communities by linking them to each other and to mail-order companies such as Sears and Montgomery Ward.

Taverns and even pastures could serve as gathering points as well, though, and the young men who herded cattle up on Siler's Bald and Andrews Bald came from Hazel Creek, Noland Creek, and Forney Creek watersheds.²¹ Some stopped at the Spence Place²² for illegal spirits, meeting their counterparts from Tennessee in the process. Does this type of behavior signal the existence of a community among the

²¹ Seymour Calhoun, interview by Mary Lindsay, January 28, 1976, audio cassette, Great Smoky Mountains National Park; George Monteith, interview by Mary Lindsay, January 28, 1976, audio cassette, Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Lawrence Crisp, interview by Mary Lindsay, January 28, 1976, audio cassette, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

²² Sometimes called the "Spencer Place."

herdsmen? That depends on how often they met, and on the permanence of the relationships they formed there.

Bushnell, Proctor, Fontana, Almond, Judson, and Stecoah were clearly places where people lived and worked together, where they raised children, and where they expected to remain for some substantial period of time. They contained schools, churches, stores, and other institutions. In other words, these places, even if their fortunes ebbed and flowed, fit the functional definition of a community. In this sense, communities are places with a culture, places where there is some common "past" to interact with the "present."

Membership in a community can be defined by less formal, but nonetheless habitual, activities. In this sense, playing checkers in front of the same general store every Thursday, as Thad Calhoun and his neighbors did at Bushnell, is as much a form of community ritual as a school graduation, a baptism, or a funeral is. The physical structures themselves play only a supporting role in this definition of community. The activities which define a community may continue in altered form after the physical structures of that community have disappeared. The well-documented reunions of the inhabitants of the now-inundated village of Loyston, Tennessee, or ordinary family reunions held at state parks, function to reinforce the existence of communities whose original reason for existence--commonality of

place or ancestry--no longer applies. Such ritual behavior links past and present, and also reinforces social roles within the community--deference to one's ancestors, for example.²³

In the upper Little Tennessee, whites first settled into communities wherever they could find a convenient site for the extraction of wealth from the immediate area. Originally, farms occupied the good bottom land of the narrow river valleys, and people tended to identify where they lived by the body of water on which their farms' success depended. The area's oldest agricultural families formed a small core of people who were firmly attached to the area emotionally as well as economically. As the vast extractable resources of the area became economically important, transportation came to govern the growth of communities. Fontana grew up where the Little Tennessee River met Eagle Creek, where timber and copper could be profitably removed. Proctor, a few miles up Hazel Creek from the Little Tennessee, provided enough water and enough land to be a convenient site for locating a sawmill. Bushnell sprouted at the confluence of the Tuckasee and Little Tennessee, and also served as the connecting point where the Fontana rail spur connected with the Southern Railway main

²³ Bryson City Times, March 4, 1932; Marshall Wilson Photograph Collection, Tennessee Valley Authority Department of Cultural Resources, Norris, Tennessee; Patricia Duane Beaver, Rural Community in the Appalachian South (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 1-3.

line from Asheville to Murphy. With the new communities came new inhabitants who developed a different sort of connection to the area.

Writing of a different group of southerners in Black Culture and Black Consciousness, Lawrence Levine stated that

[c]ulture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and the present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation.²⁴

Residents of the upper Little Tennessee valley communities exhibited these characteristics of a living, creative, adaptive culture throughout the period covered by this study. Many residents of the upper Little Tennessee Valley, far from stuck in time and space, moved about so frequently that their connections to a particular family dwelling or "ancestral homeplace" lasted no more than a generation.²⁵ Furthermore, entire communities came and went as industry and employment did.

Population ebbed and flowed with the growth and demise of industry. As Figure 1 demonstrates, census counts show some fluctuation, with a dramatic peak in Swain County in the 1920 census and a somewhat more gradual parallel rise for Graham County. But the census figures tell only part of

²⁴ Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5.

²⁵ Michael Ann Williams, Homeplace, 115-136.

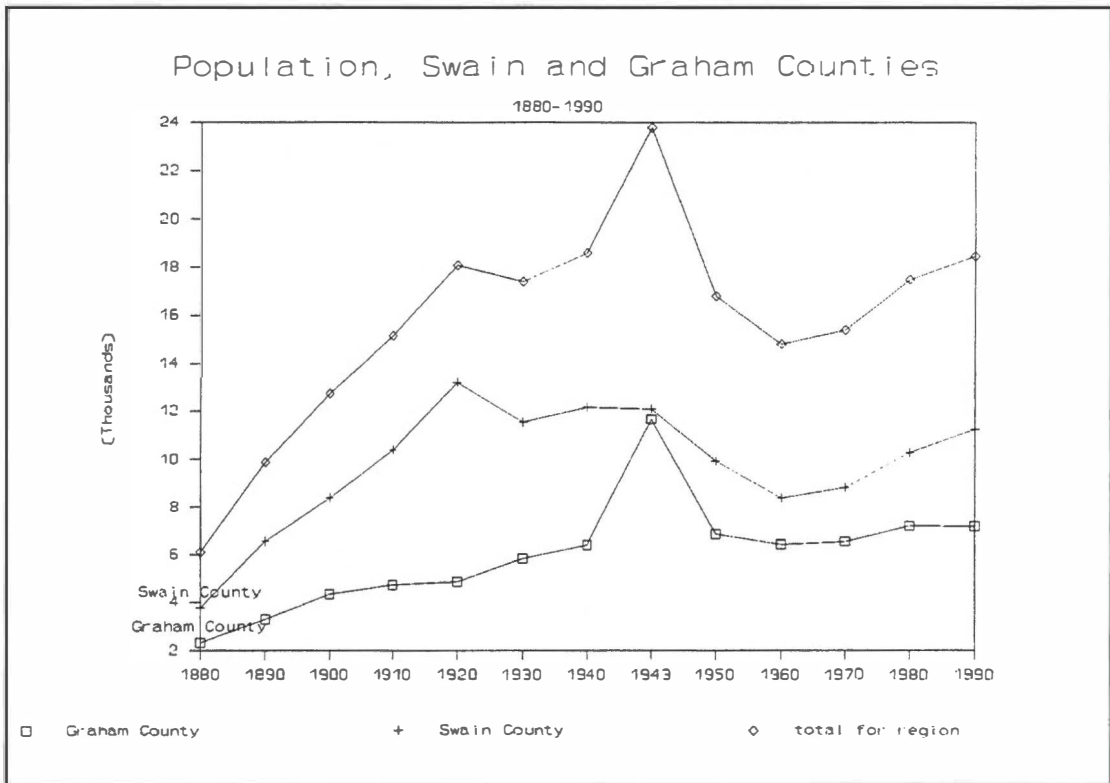


Figure 1. Population, Swain and Graham Counties, 1880-1990. 1943 figures are from North Carolina State Planning Board, North Carolina Basic County Data, 1946; others from U.S. Census of Population.

the story. Many family members, driven to desperation by the difficulty of obtaining employment in the area and driven to frustration by the difficulty of supporting themselves on poor land, left home to take jobs in the cotton mills of the Carolina piedmont, only to return to their mountain homes in a few years when the stifling atmosphere of the mills became intolerable to them. Whole families sometimes made this move back and forth several times. Charlie Calhoun remembered these families as "people that needed a job," and added that they were "not much different" from his family. Indeed, Calhoun's family itself had relo-

cated several times, migrating from Bushnell to Proctor, then to Fontana. Clarence O. Vance recalled that he and his family followed Vance's father to Hazel Creek from Avery County, in northwestern North Carolina, when the father, previously employed by the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad, took a job with Ritter Lumber Company.²⁶

The mobility of these families and others like them renders census figures somewhat unreliable for the mountain region. Aside from the difficulty census takers may have had in reaching the deep mountain coves, the movement of the population makes an accurate count even more challenging. Families sometimes did not stay in one place long enough to be counted. At any given time, the census numbers may reflect the population of the region, but there were more people who called these mountains "home" at some point in their lives than any census is likely to have recorded.²⁷

Despite the unreliability of census figures, some general observations are possible through careful analysis. As Figure 2 shows, the townships of Cheoah in Graham County and Charleston in Swain County, each home to its county's

²⁶ Charlie Calhoun, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videorecording, Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Clarence O. Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videorecording, Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Jacqueline Dowd Hall et al, Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 37, 39-40.

²⁷ Florence Cope Bush, Dorie: Woman of the Mountains (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), passim; Williams, Homeplace, passim.

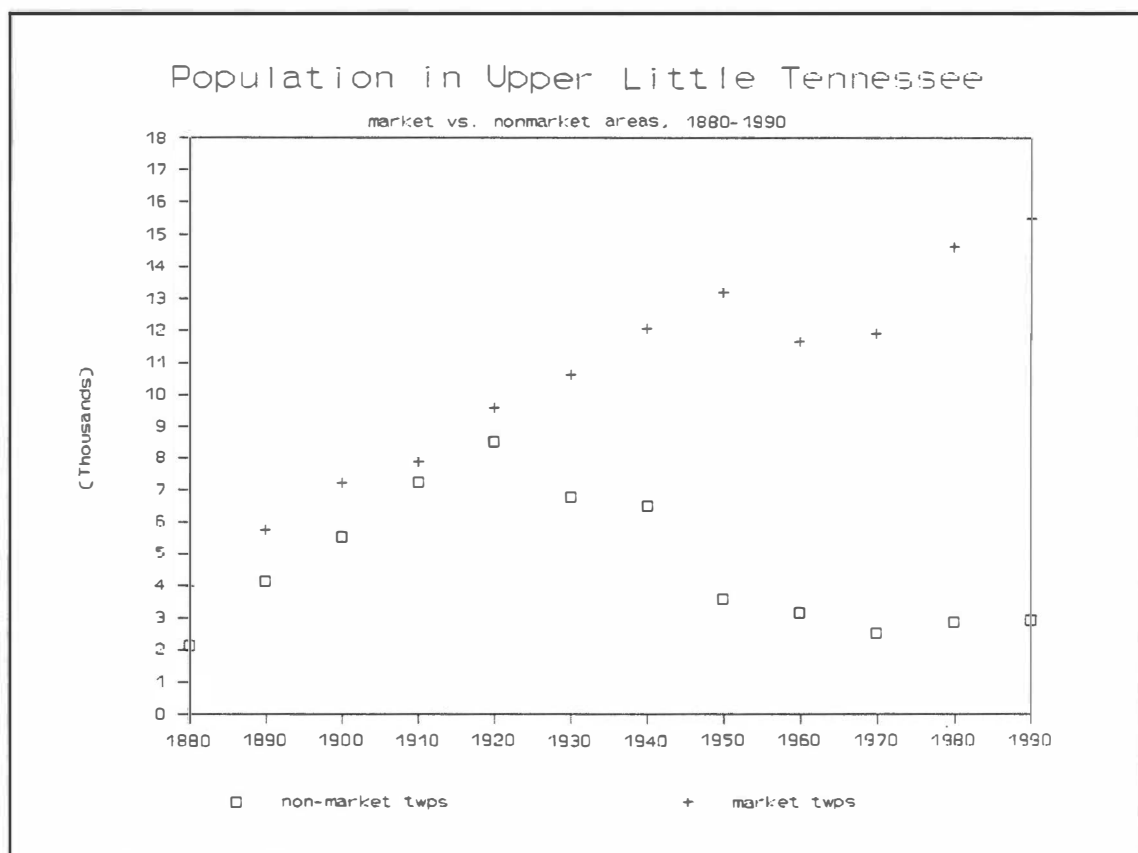


Figure 2. Population in Upper Little Tennessee, Market vs. Nonmarket Areas, 1880-1990. See text for definitions. Data from the U. S. Census of Population.

largest town and principal market center, grew fairly steadily from 1880 through 1940, dipped in the post-World War II period, then resumed their growth.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, other townships experienced wider swings in population, with those engaged primarily in the extractive activities of mining and timbering--Forney Creek in Swain County and Yellow Creek in Graham County, both adjacent to the present-day site of Fontana Dam--facing the most rapid rise and fall. The townships of Stecoah in Graham County and Nantahala in Swain County, both upstream of the best timberlands, generally depended upon farming for

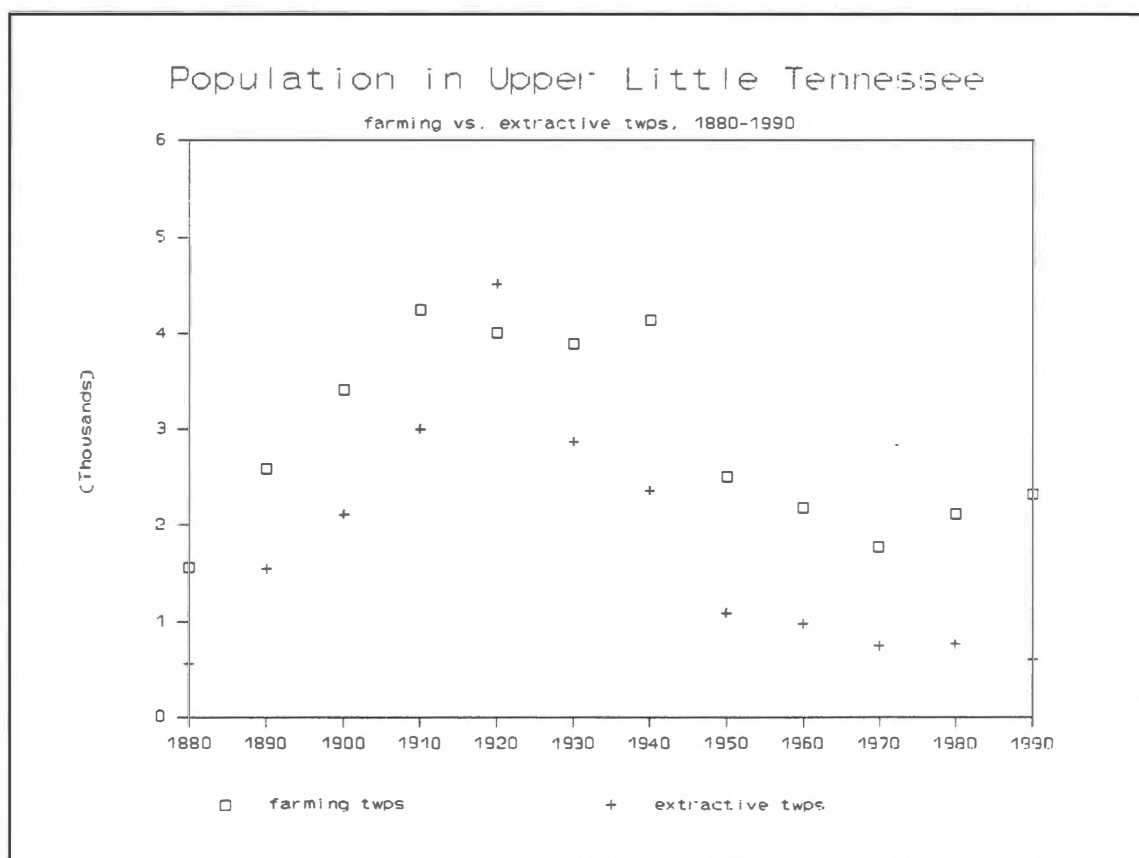


Figure 3. Population in Upper Little Tennessee, Farming vs. Extractive Townships, 1880-1990. See text for definitions. Data from the U. S. Census of Population.

most of their economic activity. Nantahala township included the most fertile bottom land in either county and was thus rather successful as a farming area, while Stecoah lagged well behind. The farming townships grew in step with the rest of the area through 1910, but began an unsteady decline soon afterward, only beginning to recover after 1970.

While this region shared the turbulence of its economic cycle with the rest of the New South, the area's land use patterns differed from those of the lowland South. The most common forms of land tenure in the area were ownership and

cash rental. There were few black residents at any point in either county's history, but those who did live there found land ownership feasible. There were almost no absentee-owned "managed farms" in the area. Finally, fewer than half the region's population fit census definitions of "farming" households.

The census bureau's rigid delineation between farming and nonfarming families is misleading. Most families grew food crops on their land regardless of their census classification. This agricultural activity could range from a small vegetable garden for canning all the way up to a full-scale farm of several hundred acres. While the small vegetable garden, if less than three acres, would not count as a farm, those who cultivated more than that might be considered farmers whether or not they grew anything for sale. Just as nonfarm families frequently grew crops for subsistence, farm families frequently sought income from outside sources, especially temporary employment. While, in a good year on good land, a good farmer could make a fair living in the area, good years and good land were not always abundant, and a bit of cash saved from mining or timbering work could make a difficult winter easier. In the larger communities, such as Almond and Judson, some farming families found the resources to construct large, comfortable homes with electricity furnished by small generators. These communities, situated on good bottom land, provided a moderately stable

environment for agriculture. Communities such as Bushnell, Proctor, and Fontana, on the other hand, grew up around extractive industry and could provide little more than a garden plot for supplementing the income of day laborers. For residents of these areas, cutting pulpwood could provide a bit of extra cash with which to purchase items which could not be grown, scavenged, or improvised. Whether or not a household qualified as "farming" in census terms depended largely upon whether the head of the household had been able to find any other employment.

What people of this region did was to "get by," whatever that might require at the moment. "Getting by" might require taking employment in local industries, such as mining and timbering, or working for the Southern Railway. It might also require growing vegetables or cutting pulpwood. It might even require leaving one's family behind and working elsewhere for a period of time. The initial glamour of a regular wage-paying job in Gastonia or Kannapolis textile mills frequently wore off as the dingy, crowded conditions and the regimentation of the company whistle grew tiresome. So when it was possible to do so, many longtime residents of southwestern North Carolina seem to have preferred to live at home and "get by" even in hard times.²⁸

The region offered limited opportunities for them to do

²⁸ Jacqueline Dowd Hall et al, Like a Family, 37, 39-40.

so. Small businesses such as stores and sawmills provided both farming and non-farming families with needed goods, as well as occasional supplementary employment. Successful stores sprang up at Deals Gap, Fontana, Proctor, Bushnell, Japan, and Stecoah. Store owners sometimes owned more than one such enterprise, and their enterprises were often scattered among the small communities of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and northern Georgia. Stores changed ownership frequently, and sometimes simply vanished when the owners became frustrated with the economic or political climate of a site, perhaps because their limited inventory could be so readily disposed of or consolidated with that of another store.

Aside from small stores and the occasional sawmill, illicit tavern or boarding house, most small businesses took root in the area's towns, Bryson City and Robbinsville. Bryson City, at least, included a substantial business class among its leaders. Bryson City, in many ways the economic hub of the region, provided the area's only bank, photography studio, movie theater, restaurants, service stations, and hotels. Residents of the outlying communities traveled frequently to Bryson City, but those living outside the established communities seldom did so.

These patterns of population change and economic activity suggest strongly that the unchanging Elizabethan culture described in Our Southern Highlanders is misleading. The

upper Little Tennessee Valley was no stagnant backwater bypassed by the development of the New South; indeed, it participated actively in the formation of that New South.

As Ayers points out:

Although railroads, stores, and towns came into sudden prominence throughout the South, each place had its own local chronology. Any given year would find some places in a buoyant mood as a railroad approached or a new mill opened, while others, bypassed by the machinery of the new order, fell into decline. The arrival of a railroad could trigger many consequences: rapid population growth or population decline, a more diversified economy or greater specialization, the growth of a city or the death of small towns.²⁹

The Little Tennessee valley in the 1870s and 1880s participated as fully as other rural southern regions in the attempt to recruit "outside" industry, capital, and attention and quickly became as dependent on these outside factors as did the rest of the New South. The arrival of the railroad spur in Bushnell in the 1880s promised an influx of jobs to the region, as did the arrival of the Ritter Lumber Company in Proctor and the various mining interests on Hazel and Eagle creeks half a generation later, and ALCOA a few years after that.

²⁹ Ayers, Promise of the New South, 7.

CHAPTER 2

BOOM (AND BUST)

When Horace Kephart arrived in the headwaters of Hazel Creek in 1904, he saw no roads or railroads there, although a railroad did cross the creek near its mouth. But the mountains which he supposed served as a natural barrier did not do so in the minds of those who crossed them regularly. Residents herded cattle up to the crest of the Smokies regularly, and sometimes drove them over the mountains to market. Waysides such as the Spence Place or the Hardin Farm provided many travelers with overnight accommodations and entertainment, the former serving up a popular homebrew while the latter served as "a focal point for everything that happened."¹ Families regularly crossed back and forth between Cades Cove and Proctor, and one Little Tennessee resident, Helen Cable Vance, noted that as a child she had been to Maryville, Tennessee, more often than to Bryson City, North Carolina, despite the mountains and the great distance involved. Vance's family had occupied the same small cove since 1835 and, as she remarked, "We weren't near

¹ Roy "Bonehead" Meyers, interview by William F. Alston, August 14, 1976, audio tape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Carson and Alberta Brewer, Valley So Wild: A Folk History (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1975), 237.

as isolated as people think we were."² For Vance and other residents of the upper Little Tennessee valley, a great deal of living and dying happened between Kephart's arrival and the Great Depression. The upper Little Tennessee was about to live through its most impressive boom years yet. Towns would grow, roads would be built, and thousands of people would move in. The Ritter Lumber Company of Columbus, Ohio already owned much of Kephart's beloved "Back of Beyond," and large-scale commercial logging began on Hazel Creek in 1909.

Some communities in the upper Little Tennessee actively sought physical accessibility after 1880, recognizing that connections to outside markets and services would provide the economic resources necessary for survival. They initially achieved that goal on a small scale by building cable-operated ferries and footbridges connecting places like Bushnell and Fontana to tiny settlements across the Little Tennessee in Graham County. By the end of the 1920s Bushnell, Fontana, Proctor, Robbinsville, Almond, Topton and Bryson City had railroad access for passengers and freight. State highway 288, which ran parallel to the Little Tennessee from Deals Gap to Bryson City, gave Bushnell, Fontana, and Proctor a much-needed but poorly surfaced connection to a new federal highway which ran from Knoxville to Robbins-

² Helen Cable Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

ville.

The Good Roads Movement of the Progressive Era found significant support in the press of western North Carolina towns. Residents of the Little Tennessee Valley fought to attract state and county highway dollars from the first days of the Good Roads Movement. "Charity and Children" even argued that good roads were a moral issue. Good roads would make it easier for families to get to churches more often, and would also enhance the ability of circuit-riding ministers to service their flocks more regularly.³

Most boosters of the Good Roads Movement sought improvements for more secular motives, though. The Jackson County Journal put it succinctly: "As roads are built you will see this county go forward by leaps and bounds."⁴

Swain County lagged behind the rest of the state in road construction. The Jackson County Journal noted that:

For some time the roads of Swain County have been a standing Joke; but the proposed Atlanta-to-Asheville highway and the prospect of its not touching Swain have brought the people of that county to the realization . . . that in improving the farms, in opening the mines, in working up the timber, in exploiting the potential wealth of a county you must first improve the highways

³ Quoted in Jackson County Journal, October 10, 1913. An excellent treatment of the Good Roads Movement, particularly in North Carolina, is Howard Lawrence Preston, Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

⁴ Jackson County Journal, September 11, 1913.

⁵ Jackson County Journal, March 19, 1915.

Clearly, Swain County needed good roads in order to attract and keep industry. Residents of Bushnell, Fontana and Proctor began agitating for a better road to Bryson City as early as 1913, and they got it by allying themselves with ALCOA, which had recently begun buying up land along the river's banks. Swain County, with state assistance, built that road above the pool level of a dam ALCOA had planned to build at Fontana.⁶ The construction of North Carolina Highway 288 and of U.S. Highways 19 and 129 improved the region's access to Asheville and Knoxville, and further served to connect the tiny villages of the area to regional trading centers at Robbinsville and Bryson City.⁷

Competition among counties for good roads was the rule. Optimism and fear often worked together to produce strong public sentiment, as the Jackson County Journal pointed out

⁶ Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Property Management Department, Population Readjustment Division. "Proctor Community, Fontana Area," submitted by Rome C. Sharp, p.4. Hereafter cited as "Proctor." Another example of the intertwining roles of politics and industry in developing a transportation network for the area comes from TVA population readjustment worker Arnold J. Hyde. In his background report on the history of the region, Hyde noted that Stecoah was "practically isolated from Robbinsville" before the highway linking the two was completed in 1927. According to Hyde, a great deal of "controversy and application of political pressure" accompanied the decision to build the road. Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Property Management, Population Readjustment Division. "Stecoah Community, Fontana Area," submitted by Arnold J. Hyde, p. 2. Hereafter cited as "Stecoah."

⁷ Jackson County Journal, August 28, 1914; October 23, 1914; October 30, 1914.

in 1919: "The time has come when we must have better roads or we will be practically left off the map."⁸

The new roads and railroads were among the most obvious changes to the landscape of the region. Change was afoot in other dimensions of the life of the upper Little Tennessee as well. By the dawn of the twentieth century land tenure in the region no longer followed the "yeoman owner-farmer" pattern of the nineteenth century. The North Carolina Exploration Company and various timber companies owned much of the land. Absentee owners also held many tracts, while groups of heirs living in the area contested claims over much of the rest. In 1910, ALCOA began buying up land in the area in anticipation of building a dam at Fontana, but many residents stayed on and lived as tenants on their former land.

Because of the question of land ownership, it is very difficult to trace patterns of short-distance migration. Most of the farming families listed in the census said they "owned" their own land, but such ownership did not necessarily imply legal title to that tract. Many "owners" owned the land in the common-law sense of having occupied it for several years, having made improvements, having harvested produce or timber from it, and having paid no rent. They considered the land theirs, although the legal title might belong to some individual, group of individuals, family or

⁸ Jackson County Journal, January 24, 1919.

corporation whose claim was not clearly defined in the minds of those who actually occupied that particular tract.

Lacking the necessary cash for starting their own businesses, and hampered by the difficulty of obtaining good productive farmland, many families in the upper Little Tennessee found that their best chance for survival was to work for wages. Most employment opportunities involved working for the large companies developing the region's natural resources: minerals, timber, hydroelectric power, and scenic beauty.

Mining provided employment for a number of residents in Graham and western Swain County. Copper, in particular, provided a potential source of wealth for the region. The ore was of higher grade than that found in Tennessee's famed Copper Basin, but because it was situated in deeper rock strata and in more difficult terrain, mining companies operated in the region only when the demand for copper was high. The Adams-Westfeldt mine on Hazel Creek operated intermittently from 1899 to 1943, as worldwide copper demand warranted and the legal situation permitted.⁹ But while

⁹ Boyden, Village of Five Lives, 30; John Preston Arthur, Western North Carolina: A History, 1730-1913 (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards and Broughton, 1914), 412-414, 561; Horton and Zullo, The Geology of the Carolinas, 323. The Hazel Creek mine was the centerpiece of a legal battle between two gentlemen named Adams and Westfeldt, each of whom claimed to have discovered the rich copper ore there. Legal wrangling frequently prevented the ore from being extracted. According to Great Smoky Mountains National Park records, the North Carolina Exploration Company was still demanding compensation for the loss of its mines due

the profitability of mining was uncertain, the optimism of the area's boosters was not. The Bryson City Times asserted that the opening of the new Fontana mine at Eagle Creek in 1923

goes to prove that when the forests of Swain County have been denuded of their luxuriant growth of timber, valuable deposits of mineral will be found under the surface . . . that will add materially to the wealth of our county. The development of this new industry will be watched with deep interest and hailed with delight.¹⁰

Timbering was a more reliable source of employment than mining, but it was nonetheless seasonal and irregular even in the best of times. Timbering and mining both created a small number of jobs in subsidiary industries, especially railroading. Ritter Lumber Company built the Smoky Mountain Railroad, which ran branch lines up all the major tributaries of Hazel Creek, carrying goods and mail to the inhabitants of the logging camps and of course also carrying timber down to the sawmill at Proctor.

Those who moved to the area seeking employment in these extractive industries tended to look to their employers for more than just a paycheck. Clarence O. Vance, who grew up

to the park and the Fontana project as late as 1972. Park Service consulting engineers insisted that operating costs would render the mines unprofitable even at four times the known ore deposits. See report from Robert O'Brien, Resource Management Records, Box III, Folder 12, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

¹⁰ Bryson City Times, April 13, 1923, reprinted in Jackson County Journal, April 20, 1923.

in Proctor, remembered W. M. Ritter as a benevolent employer who genuinely cared about the people who worked for him.

"We felt like a family," he remarked. Ritter provided the school and church buildings, as well as a community building. Ritter hired a company doctor to deliver babies, assist the sick and tend to injured workers; single men paid one dollar a month for his services, and families paid just fifty cents more. Each Ritter-owned home at Proctor had a fenced garden, and the company provided land for residents to range cattle and hogs. Board sidewalks built by Ritter lined the unlit streets of Proctor. Mail came on a Ritter-owned Smoky Mountain Railroad train each afternoon around five o'clock, and residents gathered at the Ritter commissary to collect it, picking up a few groceries on credit at elevated company store prices while they were there. Ritter brought temporary houses for families up to the outlying camps on log cars.

Ritter's paternalism extended beyond the necessities of life; the company provided entertainment as well as sustenance. At Proctor, residents from all over western Swain County converged to watch silent movies shown with a projector owned by Ritter, run by electricity provided by Ritter. Each Christmas, Vance's father drove a Shay steam engine pulling a train up the Smoky Mountain Railroad line to each lumber camp, carrying toys and candy provided by Ritter to the children of the area. Electric lights shone

in Proctor homes for a few hours each evening, courtesy of Ritter, and Ritter even provided notice that it was bedtime by flashing those lights fifteen minutes before the power was turned off. All in all, within the boundaries of company town life as Vance described it, "We lived pretty good."¹¹

Timbering operations often cut trees indiscriminately, moving on when they had harvested most of the profitable "crop." By the time the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established, much of the quality timber had been cut, and logging companies had already begun to disappear from the economic picture along the north shore of the Little Tennessee. Sawmills continued to operate elsewhere in southwestern North Carolina, with Bemis Lumber Company in Robbinsville finally succumbing only in 1982. Throughout the twentieth century, residents continued to cut pulpwood on private tracts and sell it for whatever cash it would bring in Bryson City as a supplement to their other income. The incautious cutting by the large companies contrasted with the selective cutting local residents practiced. Sometimes residents reacted negatively to the behavior of the lumber companies, as when the Norwood Lumber Company of Forney Creek was nearly blown up by "persons unknown" who planted a large quantity of dynamite under the lumber camp

¹¹ Clarence O. Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

clubhouse and under the house of the head salesman.¹²

Southern Railway and its subsidiary, the Tallulah Falls Railroad, provided employment for a number of residents, as well as transportation for themselves and their products. Railroading played a significant part in the economy, and Southern was particularly vulnerable to charges of rate gouging, inefficient scheduling, and promoting the region's population decline. Southern fought back with traveling exhibits focusing on the railroad's promotion of scientific agriculture and by lauding the region's pure Anglo-Saxon labor stock, but eventually was forced to expand service and stop offering "colonist rates," one-way special rates for people leaving the South. The relationship between community leaders and the Southern remained tense for years.¹³

Early attempts to develop western North Carolina's vast hydroelectric potential focused on small-scale projects. The Toxaway Power Company and Nantahala Power and Light Company each built small dams to serve residential and small business customers. Local newspapers urged the development of these resources on a larger scale:

¹² Jackson County Journal, July 2, 1915.

¹³ Jackson County Journal, May 16, 1913; October 10, 1913; September 24, 1915; January 31, 1913; October 3, 1913; July 25, 1913; February 27, 1914; July 10, 1914. For other examples of promotion of the region's white labor force, newsletters published by Ritter Lumber Company are particularly interesting. Western Carolina University's Hunter Library maintains a collection of these in its Special Collections Room.

We of this section have very naturally fallen into the habit of developing [scenic resources] to the partial exclusion of others that are equally, if not more, important It is in harnessing the never failing and everabounding supply of power that flows ceaselessly down the mountainsides and through the valleys, and turning with it the busy wheels of industry ¹⁴ . . . that our towns are to become industrial centers.

The Jackson County Journal foresaw problems with hydroelectric power as a strategy for economic development. The editor objected to a proposed dam on the French Broad River, saying that other streams had greater potential for developing hydropower, and this dam would flood the best farmland in western North Carolina.¹⁵ Similarly, the Journal expressed reservations regarding a proposed hydroelectric development on the Hiwassee River, this time arguing that the electric power would be used to benefit Tennesseans, while North Carolinians would bear the cost by sacrificing their best farmland.¹⁶

The cost of electricity is a major factor in the cost of manufacturing aluminum. Locating an aluminum plant near a major metropolitan area would raise the cost of that area's electric power substantially. So in the absence of a statutory rate ceiling, large-scale aluminum production must take place where there is little competition for the available electric power. In the minds of ALCOA founder

¹⁴ Jackson County Journal, January 29, 1915.

¹⁵ Jackson County Journal, June 29, 1923.

¹⁶ Jackson County Journal, November 2, 1923.

Charles Martin Hall and his compatriots, the natural answer to the problem was to locate near sources of undeveloped hydroelectric power and control the development of that power. Beginning in 1910, the company bought up large tracts of land along the Little Tennessee from Maryville upstream as far as Bryson City. By 1928 the company had completed Cheoah and Santeetlah dams in Graham County.¹⁷

The Jackson County Journal's warnings about the development of the Hiwassee River were equally applicable to the lower Little Tennessee. The number of North Carolinians ALCOA employed in the upper Little Tennessee was negligible after the construction phase of these projects, as most of the long-term jobs created were located at ALCOA's plants at Calderwood and Maryville, Tennessee, far enough away to make travel difficult.

Whether they lived in communities or in isolated coves, residents of the Little Tennessee area looked to outside interests such as ALCOA or Ritter for employment whenever practical, because they were sufficiently acquainted with hard times to expect them at any time. Additional cash could purchase improvements for the farms of Almond and Judson, or roofing materials or a radio for the non-farm households of Bushnell or Proctor, or a squirrel rifle for the cove-dwellers of Noland Creek. When outside employment

¹⁷ Charles C. Carr, ALCOA: An American Enterprise (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1952), 85-105.

was in short supply, they simply "got by" on the products of the garden, with a few eggs and perhaps a foraging hog or two providing the winter's "savings account."

In this environment, the Great Depression, which forced much of the rest of the nation into economic hardship, represented nothing more than another set of "hard times." In the words of one commentator, for most of the South "things just sagged a little more than usual" during the Depression.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the period from 1926 to 1940 marks a fundamental turning point for the upper Little Tennessee, because it replaced one economic structure with another which depended on different sources of income. The timber and mining companies tied wage-earners to the national market for raw materials, and ultimately to the manufacturing sector of the national economy. That sector's near collapse in the Great Depression helped hurry a transformation already in the making. If anything, the Little Tennessee's residents were probably more hopeful than much of the rest of the nation, as the Good News of the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park encouraged hopes for a new savior, the great god Tourism, whose arrival was imminent. But the transition would be far from painless.

Mining entered a crisis as global demand for copper

¹⁸ Fran Hensler and Paul Keyserling, eds., "One-Third of a Nation: the Depression in the South," narrated by James Dickey, television documentary produced by WJWJ-TV, Beaufort, South Carolina, for South Carolina Educational Television and the Public Broadcasting Service.

collapsed. The Fontana and Hazel Creek mines could still provide good ore, but the cost of transporting that ore to a smelter in Tennessee made them unprofitable except in peak demand times, when copper was needed badly even if it meant taking a loss on the production costs. Fairly good ores were left in the ground as foreign imports produced with low-cost labor undercut local production. The Bryson City Times bemoaned these conditions:

From a strictly local standpoint such conditions seriously threaten the economic progress of much of the extreme Western part of this state--Swain and Graham counties and contiguous territory are rich in copper deposits, a latent resource that could and should mean prosperity for the people of these sections. At the present time its value is zero because it is utterly impossible, in the opinion of economists, to produce copper from these mines with American labor at [the same cost as the imports.]¹⁹

The timber industry faced a different set of obstacles by the 1930s. Logging companies had clearcut large areas in Graham, Swain, Jackson, and Haywood counties, leaving nothing but trash behind. There simply was not much good timber left in the area.²⁰ The purchase of land for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park put an end to new logging contracts in much of Swain County in the late 1920s, but

¹⁹ Bryson City Times, May 27, 1932.

²⁰ Interview with Granville Calhoun by John Parris, in "Only the Dead Remain at Medlin," Asheville (N.C.) Citizen, March 8, 1968. Parris quotes Calhoun as saying that there were only 15 million feet of lumber left for cutting when Ritter Lumber Company pulled out of the Medlin-Proctor area in the late 1920s. At the rate of nearly 10 million feet per year which Calhoun attributed to the Ritter concern, the supply would have been exhausted in a year and a half.

much of the accessible forest had already been cut by then. Again, the difficulty in transporting resources out of the area meant few companies would fight the ban--there was plenty of good timber to cut in the western United States. A few small sawmills continued to operate in the area, but these provided small incomes for their owner-operators, and little for anyone else. Those living on wooded land often cut pines for pulpwood, much as they might gather mushrooms or berries for sale, but there was not much hardwood left for lumber.

The agricultural economy was all that remained for many families. Agricultural production in the region included corn, vegetables, tobacco and livestock. These were primarily for local consumption, with a small amount of tobacco grown for cash. As Table 1 demonstrates, cash crops represented less than one-fifth of the value of agricultural production in Graham and Swain counties in 1940, compared to nearly three-fourths of the value of agricultural production in North Carolina as a whole.

Table 1. Agricultural Economy: (percent of total income in 1940)²¹

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U.S.
livestock.....	5.2	6.4	2.8	22.6
dairy products.....	2.4	0.9	3.6	14.3
poultry products.....	2.3	1.7	3.0	7.1
field crops.....	5.0	7.5	62.3	31.6
vegetables <u>for sale</u>	0.2	---	1.4	2.6
fruits and nuts.....	0.2	0.1	1.1	3.8
forest products sold...	3.9	3.0	0.9	0.5
used by farm households	80.2%	80.2	24.1	14.5

Clearly, farming in the region operated at or near subsistence level, with 80.2 percent of the value of agricultural production being consumed on the farms themselves. But to presume that this was a true subsistence economy would be a grave error, because it would omit the fact that 27.9 percent of households in Swain County and 35.4 percent in Graham County were classified as "non-farm" in 1940. Indeed, the Depression-era farming economy itself is an aberration in the history of this region. The Bryson City Times noted in 1939:

Western North Carolina is not a farming country, never has been, never will be. Farming is followed not for cash, but as existence farming, for home consumption. And for years our farmers have had to depend on logging jobs, sawmilling, sales of timber products for their tax moneys, shoes and clothing, coffee, sugar and the hundreds of necessities of life. . . . Logging jobs and road building have gone with the winds. . . . Western North Carolina counties have no factories, no payrolls, and today the building of factories and employment is

²¹ Data from North Carolina State Planning Board, North Carolina Basic County Data (Raleigh, N.C.: State Planning Board, 1946), vols. 1 and 2. All categories, definitions, and bases are taken from these two volumes. A dash indicates no data available.

on a standstill all over the nation.²²

Many residents, in good years, had relied on mining and timbering employment on a seasonal basis for their income, and of course the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps employed a number of area residents. The cash this introduced into the households meant that families could afford amenities lacking in the farm homes of the area. Tables 2 through 5 below demonstrate the difference in amenities between Swain and Graham Counties and the state and nation as a whole.

Table 2. Household amenities, 1940 (percent of all dwellings so equipped)²³

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U.S.
electric lighting.....	19.2	16.2	54.4	78.7
running water.....	22.1	18.1	39.1	69.9
indoor private toilet.....	14.8	12.0	30.3	59.7
private bath facilities.....	14.3	11.7	24.6	56.2

Table 3. Household amenities, 1940 (percent of rural non-farm dwellings so equipped)

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U.S.
electric lighting.....	47.6	30.1	68.0	77.8
running water.....	50.8	32.1	39.7	55.9
indoor private toilet.....	39.9	23.1	30.0	43.2
private bath facilities.....	38.2	22.4	25.8	40.8

²² Bryson City Times, August 17, 1939.

²³ Tables 2 through 5: Data from North Carolina State Planning Board, North Carolina Basic County Data (Raleigh, N.C.: State Planning Board, 1946), vols. 1 and 2. All categories, definitions, and bases are taken from these two volumes.

Table 4. Household amenities, 1940 (percent of all occupied dwellings so equipped)

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U S.
mechanical refrigerator.....	9.2	9.0	28.2	44.1
radio.....	38.5	41.7	61.8	82.8
central heating.....	2.3	0.6	7.8	42.0

Table 5. Household amenities, 1940 (percent of occupied rural non-farm dwellings so equipped)²⁴

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U.S.
mechanical refrigerator.....	25.4	16.3	34.5	38.7
radio.....	56.2	44.7	67.6	79.0
central heating.....	6.8	1.0	5.0	27.0

Nonfarm households in Swain County were more likely than rural non-farm households elsewhere in North Carolina to have running water, indoor toilets, private bathrooms, and central heating. Only in electric lighting, mechanical refrigeration, and radio--all things which depended on the availability of electricity--did they lag behind the state average. Graham County's non-farm households, however, remained less well-equipped than the state average in all seven areas.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 below provide an indication of the difference in the material standard of living between farm and non-farm households in the upper Little Tennessee valley.

²⁴ Tables 2 through 5: Data from North Carolina State Planning Board, North Carolina Basic County Data (Raleigh, N.C.: State Planning Board, 1946), vols. 1 and 2. All categories, definitions, and bases are taken from these two volumes.

Table 6.²⁵ Percent of households with specified amenities, 1940 (Swain County)

	non-farm	farm
electric lighting.....	47.6	5.9
running water.....	50.8	8.5
indoor toilet.....	39.9	3.0
private bathroom.....	38.2	2.9
mechanical refrigerator.....	25.4	1.7
radio.....	56.2	30.2
central heating.....	6.8	*

Table 7. Percent of households with specified amenities, 1940 (Graham County)

	non-farm	farm
electric lighting.....	30.1	7.6
running water.....	32.1	9.1
indoor toilet.....	23.1	5.0
private bathroom.....	22.4	4.9
mechanical refrigerator.....	16.3	4.6
radio.....	44.7	39.9
central heating.....	1.0	0.4

Table 8. Percent of farm households with specified amenities, Swain and Graham Counties, State of North Carolina, and United States.

	Swain	Graham	N.C.	U.S.
electric lighting	5.9	7.6	23.4	31.3
running water	8.5	9.1	6.9	17.8
indoor toilet	3.0	5.0	4.1	11.2
private bathroom	2.9	4.9	4.1	11.8
mechanical refrigerator	1.7	4.6	11.9	14.9
radio	30.2	39.9	46.4	60.2
central heating	*	0.4	0.8	10.1

Farm households, then, lacked many amenities, not just in Swain and Graham Counties but in North Carolina and in the entire nation. Still, the disparity between the level of amenities in farm households and that in non-farm households

²⁵ Tables 6 through 8: Data from North Carolina State Planning Board, North Carolina Basic County Data (Raleigh, N.C.: State Planning Board, 1946), vols. 1 and 2. All categories, definitions, and bases are taken from these two volumes. An asterisk (*) indicates a value of less than 1.0 percent.

is striking. The availability of cash for purchasing such items accounts for the difference, because both farm and nonfarm households were susceptible to the same advertising and the same general social forces.

Nonfarm families in the Little Tennessee became accustomed to the availability of these items, and clearly the only way to keep such items accessible was to keep cash flowing into the area. They did not have to look far to see the results of the inability to attract more industry. The loss of timber and mining income, in combination with competition from trucking, caused the railroad town of Bushnell to fade from its once-prominent position. As the community withered economically, its image as a commercial center withered too. The Bryson City Times' Bushnell correspondent seemed proud of its survival of "hard times," prompting a bit of ridicule from the other communities of Swain County. The paper printed the following sequence of "news and gossip":

Bushnell correspondent (February 26, 1932): "The depression has not reached Bushnell yet through the sticks. This is a fat chance to get thin."

Bushnell correspondent (March 4, 1932): "Mr. Thad Calhoun has practically worn out the porch of W.S. Calhoun Store. He has been sitting there playing checkers for several weeks. He has defeated everyone in our community playing checkers, and challenges anyone in Swain county. . . . [T]he depression has not reached Bushnell yet . . . [but] people are having a dickens of a time to keep the wolf from the door."

Bushnell correspondent (August 12, 1932): "Since Bushnell has kept silent for a long time we've decided to tell folks that we still exist back in the sticks. The

depression has knocked us down and patted the breath out of us."

Fontana correspondent (September 2, 1932): "It is indeed pleasing to see quite a number of our towns and villages represented in the 'Local News.' . . . We at least know that the hard times have not quite wiped us out of existence. If so, many people still visit there [sic] friends, but still there is a number that do not say a word. I wonder what has become of Bushnell. . . . If you want us to know that you are still there you must tell us so."

Bushnell correspondent (September 9, 1932): "Hello folks, here we are. Everybody seems to think that we are existing not [sic], but we sure are."

Judson correspondent (September 16, 1932): "We think now that Bushnell is an industrious and busy little town. Perhaps the people down there have been working as well as visiting their friends."

By 1939 the WPA Guide to North Carolina described the village of Bushnell as composed of about 75 "entirely Nordic" inhabitants, ". . . anachronistic individualists who [forsook] all the comforts of civilization and [preferred] the wild freedom of the border," people who spoke a blend of Elizabethan, Chaucerian, and pre-Chaucerian English, the people whom Kephart had called the "Roundheads of the South."²⁶ The authors of the WPA Guide seemed to accept without question the notion that the region had been utterly static. As it was depicted in the guide, Bushnell had lost not only its economic strength and its cultural vigor but its history as well.

²⁶ Federal Writers' Project of the Federal Works Agency, Work Projects Administration, North Carolina: A Guide to the Old North State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 443-444.

In the absence of timber, mining, and railroading, what other options remained for the economic aspirations of residents? Their salvation would require a steady source of cash from outside the region. Some pinned all their hopes on the sale of the region as a tourist attraction, while others placed more emphasis on attracting industries that would stay than on weekend visitors who would drop a few dollars.

Western North Carolina's towns competed fiercely with one another for tourist attention and revenues, especially after the opening of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The closest town to the park's boundary was Bryson City, with a population of approximately 1,600. The Bryson City Times trumpeted the town's claim in words that seem to echo the "Manifest Destiny" rhetoric of a century earlier:

We understand that Waynesville is now calling herself the Gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The park is certainly not wanting at all for gateways, and is beautifully blessed with such. . . . If Asheville and Waynesville are the Gateway to the Park, Bryson City is bound to be the ENTRANCE. . . . Why the row about the GATEWAY? The park is in a fixed position, so are the towns near it. . . . We are not fighting for the Gateway to the Park. We know that what Nature bestowed upon us cannot be taken away, regardless of the wrangle. While others are calling themselves the GATEWAY, we sit back and listen for we realize that WE are the only Natural Gateway, in other words, we are the ENTRANCE.²⁷

Community leaders took to the airwaves to perform the essential service of "boosting" the town's image and promoting

²⁷ Bryson City Times, March 18, 1932.

its virtues. Dr. (later State Senator) Kelly Bennett proclaimed over Asheville's WWNC radio:

Bryson City is fast becoming a tourist resort. . . . There are charming drives . . . good fishing, and the primeval forest of the Smokies comes within six miles of the town. . . . [When ALCOA's 400-foot Fontana dam is built] it will be a second Niagara Falls.²⁸

Larger towns such as Waynesville (population 2,940 in 1940) and Asheville (51,310) could provide more amenities for tourists but were located much farther from the park. While the major highways passed through mile after mile of dramatic and beautiful scenery, they connected the population centers to each other and not to the park area. While there was certainly much else to see in western North Carolina besides the park, the routes left Bryson City, whose only claim to tourism was its proximity to the park, out in the cold. Highway access to the park was poor on the North Carolina side, with Swain County having only gotten its first paved federal highway in 1927. Additionally, the highways that did exist in the park area were in danger of abandonment because they were inadequate for the projected traffic. Furthermore, Swain County suffered from a large bonded debt for the roads it had built, and the national park removed much good land from the tax rolls. With 57.7 percent of its land left non-taxable because of the Park, the Cherokee Reservation, and the Nantahala National Forest,

²⁸ Bryson City Times, November 11, 1932, address by Dr. Kelly Bennett of Bryson City on WWNC radio (Asheville)

the county was unable to provide the resources to develop its own infrastructure. Thus constrained, community leaders sought relief from the state and the federal government.²⁹

Of course, Swain County was not the only area petitioning the federal government for help in developing the scenic resources of western North Carolina. Precious federal highway funds provided a source of conflict, just as they provided a potential for growth. One community paper chastised Asheville for its aggressive attempts to become a regional hub, describing that city's attempt to manipulate the routing of U.S. highway 25-W as "exactly [the attitude] of a spoilt child." There was only so much highway access to go around and Asheville was demanding more than its fair share.³⁰

The more prescient community boosters recognized the destructive effect of the competition. An editorial in the Waynesville Mountaineer advised:

It seems that if the different cities and towns of Western North Carolina would talk less about which one of them is the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and use that same energy in getting tourists to the park, it³¹ would benefit all concerned considerably more. . . .

The competition among towns for the title of "Gateway to the Smokies" prevented any coordinated development effort,

²⁹ Bryson City Times, September 9, 1932.

³⁰ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, May 12, 1932.

³¹ Reprinted in Bryson City Times, March 25, 1932.

leaving the region ill-prepared to benefit from the anticipated influx of tourist dollars. But a lack of planning compounded the negative effects of competition. One small-town newspaper editor complained that his fellow residents were unable even to maintain a functioning chamber of commerce to promote the town's possibilities as a tourist center. He wrote:

Haven't we any aspirations to ever progress and become any more than a little town, gaining nothing, and aspiring to nothing? The main thing as we see it, is that the majority of the county have absolutely no foresight. They cannot seem to visualize the fact that we have right here within our midst one of the greatest opportunities ever had before [namely, the park].³²

Many within the towns did in fact aspire to "better things." Self-styled progressive editors in Franklin, Sylva, Waynesville, and Bryson City hailed tourism as a means of improving the region's economic position. But some saw that tourism alone would not provide the base for economic development. Hydropower was the key to industrialization. Tourism would, however, pave the way for it by making the area more accessible and popular with those who could industrialize it.³³

Considering the potential of the region as both an industrial site and a tourist mecca, the Great Depression was not all gloomy for western North Carolina. In certain segments of western North Carolina society, especially the

³² Bryson City Times, March 25, 1932.

³³ Jackson County Journal, January 29, 1915.

more "progressive" middle class of the towns, the Great Depression was actually a time of great hope for improvement. The growing utilization of hydroelectric power, along with new roads which would draw tourists into the Great Smoky Mountains, gave many the impression that western North Carolina would soon enter its golden age.

The region's inhabitants fought valiantly to keep the economic depression from becoming a psychological one as well. The Bryson City Times complained that residents sometimes seemed immune to good news. Celebrating a momentary economic upturn, the paper editorialized:

It has become almost a habit. . .to discuss nothing but hard times. It has been customary for the majority of the people to think of anything other than hard times for such a long time that it is indeed interesting to notice that in our own town during the past two months that business has increased in a number of the business places from 15 to 25 percent.³⁴

Faced with the collapse of industry and the uncertainty of the future, residents resolved to survive. Not only would they survive, but they would retain their sense of humor, especially at the expense of politicians and other "city folks." A letter from a student at Proctor High School recounts an incident in that community's life which illustrates a remarkable disdain for self-important visitors:

September 21 was a big day for Proctor. Its people had the honor of welcoming to their bosom three important men from the metropolis of Bryson City. . . . We the

³⁴ Bryson City Times, September 2, 1932.

people stuck away in the secluded part of Western North Carolina have hardly any opportunity to learn the things that larger places find so important to their welfare. The three gentlemen from Bryson City, namely, Messrs. John Randolph, by the way he desires a seat in our coming legislature; Jonah Seay, who is running for sheriff; and Walter Hughes. They attended the prayer meeting and stayed until the people had finished their services, you could tell they were getting impatient by the way they wiggled in their seats, finally their time came to say a few words. Each one talked loud and long on his own good qualities. The boys growing impatient of hearing such long speeches stepped outside the building mounted³⁵ on a stump and organized a new political party. . . .

The election returns from that autumn demonstrate a willingness to persevere and a faith in the political system.

Proctor was almost evenly split between Republican and Democratic candidates in 1932, except in the race for the U.S. House of Representatives, where the Republican candidate garnered a strong majority. By contrast, Bushnell was narrowly Democratic across the board, and the more prosperous farming community of Judson was strongly Republican. The more dependent a community had been on industrial employment before the Depression, the more likely it was to support Roosevelt for president. Most importantly, turnout was heavy.³⁶

Despite the Depression, then, residents of southwestern North Carolina remained involved in their own destiny. They did not passively accept economic stagnation, but aggressively sought remedies for both short-term and long-term

³⁵ Bryson City Times, October 7, 1932.

³⁶ Bryson City Times, November 11, 1932.

economic problems. Their search for these remedies would place them amid a debate over private property rights and national economic planning when ALCOA and TVA revealed rival visions of the economic future of the Little Tennessee.

CHAPTER 3.

TWO SUITORS

Each new industry recruited to the upper Little Tennessee was hailed as a new economic Messiah. Southern Railways, various mining and lumber interests, and private hydroelectric developments, as well as tourism, each received a welcome appropriate for a conquering hero who would banish the region's fears and insecurities. Government was no different from private industry in this sense. Residents expected the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to generate millions of tourist dollars to lift the area out of the economic doldrums.

The Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), which began life as the Pittsburgh Reduction Company in 1887, arose from the efforts of Charles Martin Hall to design a commercially viable process for producing pure metallic aluminum from bauxite and other ores. Hall received a patent on his process in 1886. Fortified by investment from the Mellon family, Hall's company grew rapidly and established a near-monopoly on aluminum production. Prosecuted under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1912, the company agreed to stop its attempts to restrict access to the critical ores but admitted no violation of the law.¹

In addition to the ore, Hall's production process

¹ Carr, ALCOA: An American Enterprise, 23-83.

required large amounts of electric power. By 1940 the aluminum industry was the nation's largest industrial consumer of electricity. ALCOA began focusing its attention on acquiring hydroelectric power sites because it was easier and more efficient to transport the raw materials than to transmit the electricity over long distances. The company's first purchase of hydroelectric power came from the Niagara Falls Power Company, but further expansion in New York proved problematic. The diplomatic difficulties associated with damming the St. Lawrence River at Massena, New York, encouraged the company to investigate other possible sites. The Little Tennessee River seemed ideal for ALCOA's purposes, because of its tremendous flow and its location near a cheap labor supply.²

By 1930, ALCOA owned approximately two hundred miles of shoreline along the Little Tennessee and its tributaries, and Fontana was potentially its most lucrative hydropower site. Original ALCOA plans called for two dams in the immediate area, but by the 1930s the company had settled on a single 450 foot high dam at Fontana. The company had not developed the site, though, which left some dissatisfied with ALCOA's intentions. The editor of the Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian wondered in print: "Who knows but that the plans of this company are to hold some of their power sites merely to maintain their throttle grip on this

² Carr, ALCOA: An American Enterprise, 85-95.

entire section, without any intention whatsoever of development in the next generation?" Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes also accused the company of trying to control the nation's ability to produce aluminum by holding onto the Fontana site.³

The ideological background accompanying the ALCOA approach was simple. Corporations had long pursued the private development of vast natural resources. Railroads had built vast commercial empires around the land given to them by congressional act. Mining companies had purchased large tracts for the purpose of extracting wealth from under the ground. Lumber companies had bought up entire forests and made money by transforming them into board-feet. In keeping with these long-accepted concepts of land tenure, ALCOA assumed that since it owned the land around the river, it owned the rights to the water and its energy. The company had discovered the potential of the river, it had developed it already with several dams, and it sold electricity generated at those dams to private residential and business customers in western North Carolina through its wholly-owned subsidiary, the Nantahala Power and Light Company (NPL). NPL had been the primary supplier of electric power for much

³ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, October 18, 1934; testimony of I. W. Wilson, Vice President in Charge of Operations, ALCOA, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 902-903.

of southwestern North Carolina since 1929, and its other plants would be affected by the operation of a dam at Fontana; so it seemed logical that the company would develop the Fontana site. Moreover, ALCOA was the only industrial concern in the area large enough to use all the power which would be produced at Fontana. The decision when, or if, to develop that resource belonged to ALCOA management.⁴

The Tennessee Valley Authority came from an altogether different ideological tradition. Its origins lay in the Progressive Era reform movements which focused on improving society by empowering individuals. According to the Progressive mindset, the key to empowerment is freeing the individual from corrupting influences. An individual becomes corrupted when another individual or corporation controls or limits the available choices. Thus, monopolies, large landowners, and private utility companies all constrained the freedom of the individual and held coercive power. In the eyes of many Progressives, the South provided a uniquely powerful example of how coercive institutions such as United States Steel, the crop-lien system, planta-

⁴ A basic principle of hydroelectric power is that the amount of power produced depends on the amount of water flowing through the turbines. Dams store water in order to maintain as even a flow as possible, so that the power supply will not fluctuate. In a system of dams, the storage function of upstream dams determines the amount of power which can be produced further downstream. This meant that Alcoa and TVA, both of which had dams downstream from Fontana, would eventually have to reach some sort of agreement concerning the maintenance of water flow from the upper reaches of the Little Tennessee into the Tennessee River.

tion agriculture and the one-party political system could impoverish a region rich in natural resources.⁵

The Great Depression added urgency to the situation. In creating the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933, the United States Congress gave the agency wide-ranging responsibility for promoting the economic development of the entire Tennessee Valley through multipurpose dams which would facilitate navigation, enhance flood control, and generate hydroelectric power. Industrial and residential customers could then purchase electric power from TVA at low cost. TVA's mandate was not only to provide economic relief and cheap electricity; as it was conceived by Franklin Roosevelt, George Norris and Arthur Morgan, the agency was supposed to showcase the potential of centralized planning for economic development. Roosevelt wrote that TVA

should be charged with the broadest duty of planning for the proper use, conservation and development of the natural resources of the Tennessee River drainage basin. . . . Many hard lessons have taught us the human waste that results from lack of planning. . . . It is time to extend planning to a wider field, in this instance comprehending in one great project many States directly concerned with the basis of one of our greatest rivers.

This in a true sense is a return to the spirit and vision of the pioneer. If we are successful here we can march on, step by step, in a like development of

⁵ Progressivism has provided historians with much to study. On the methods employed by Progressives, see John Whiteclay Chambers, The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900-1917 (New York: St. Martin's, 1980). On Progressivism in the South, see Dewey Grantham, Southern Progressivism: the Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1983).

other⁶ great natural territorial units within our borders.

The legislation which created TVA provided for a three-member board of directors in which the roles of board members were not clearly defined. Roosevelt chose Arthur E. Morgan, a former college president from Ohio, as Chairman. Morgan admitted to having "the prophetic urge" to convert his fellow human beings to his way of thinking. A lifelong hypochondriac, he pursued moral perfection in himself and others with an almost neurotic doggedness, and frequently complained bitterly of his own failures. One observer wrote of him that "[t]he combination of religion and science produced a perfectionism in which scientific method was guided by moral certainties."

A mostly self-taught engineer, Morgan believed in the importance of the individual will. Like many other Progressive Era thinkers, he focused on the moral perfectibility of the individual as the key to perfecting society. He believed that all right-thinking individuals would ultimately reach the same conclusion, but that not all individuals were equally prepared to make major decisions. Thus, he never

⁶ William U. Chandler, The Myth of TVA: Conservation and Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1933-1983 (Washington, D.C.: Environmental Policy Institute, 1984), 5; Erwin C. Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth: The Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1933-1990 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19-26 (quoted matter from page 20). The best work on the origin of TVA as a public agency is Preston John Hubbard, Origins of the TVA: The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932 (New York: Norton, 1968).

shrank from the opportunity to expound upon the reasoning behind his views, but those who disagreed with him (and there were many) after he had patiently taught them what was right were somehow not "operating in good faith." This did not make Morgan the ideal manager, and his former associates at Antioch College warned his colleagues at TVA that his administrative skills desperately lacked direction. He often spouted nonsequiturs which caused those around him to question his judgement as well as his social skills. Morgan's ever-active imagination was his greatest asset as a planner and his greatest liability as an administrator.⁷

Morgan and Roosevelt together selected the other two members: H. A. Morgan (no relation) and David E. Lilienthal. H. A. Morgan was a professor of agriculture and later president of the University of Tennessee. He grew up in Louisiana and became well-known among Tennesseans for his understanding of the relationships among water, soil, land

⁷ Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 24-25, 37; John Ferris, interview by Charles Crawford, University of Memphis, quoted in Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 33. Ferris recalled that Morgan once introduced a talk by then-Vice President Henry Wallace, proceeded to look very interested, and afterward remarked that TVA should develop a three-legged chair to be manufactured in the Tennessee Valley. As Ferris remarked, "There is something odd about a state of mind that could produce results like that." On the relationship between individual will and the Progressive Era, the best synthetic work is John Whiteclay Chambers, The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900-1917 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980). On the relationship between Progressivism and the New Deal, see Otis L. Graham, An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

use, and agricultural production. People and nature depended on each other, and the different parts of nature depended upon each other as well, in what he described as a "common mooring." He is generally regarded as the father of TVA's "grass roots" approach, by which term he meant consultation with the existing power structure. He organized TVA's agricultural programs around land-grant universities in what some saw as an unseemly delegation of responsibility. More than the other directors, H. A. Morgan understood the subtleties of political and social relationships in the South, and he ably worked within those relationships, often being unwilling to "rock the boat" on controversial issues.⁸

Lilienthal, a smooth and eager young attorney from the Midwest, had served on Wisconsin's Public Service Commission for two years and learned a number of subtle strategies for dealing with public utilities. He took charge of legal matters and the agency's power distribution program. Lilienthal's decision-making style involved confrontation between conflicting ideas--a style which grated on A. E. Morgan's paternalistic sensibilities and his craving for consensus. But Lilienthal was a gifted spokesman, and he took the lead in proclaiming the mission of TVA after A. E. Morgan's departure. Much ink has been spilled over the personal and ideological conflicts between these two men, but they shared a distrust of monopolistic corporations.

⁸ Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 26-28, 33-41.

Lilienthal was not the idealist A. E. Morgan was, but the two men shared a sense that their work at TVA could provide a new direction for the entire nation. Lilienthal's version of that mission incorporated much of the utopian rhetoric of A. E. Morgan's vision, in a toned-down form. Lilienthal seems to have realized both the appeal of the reform impulse and the reckless appearance A. E. Morgan gave that impulse. Lilienthal thus became the public figure most closely identified with TVA in its early years, and his book TVA: Democracy on the March became a milestone in the articulation of the TVA mission.⁹

One principle which united Lilienthal and the two Morgans was that the TVA should be above political matters. Technical decisions would be based on technical criteria only, and personnel decisions were made on qualifications alone. TVA built Douglas Dam in eastern Tennessee over the vehement objections of Tennessee's own Senator Kenneth McKellar. Harcourt Morgan's insistence upon working within the existing channels of power, however, made TVA a force which effectively reinforced the oligarchic tendencies of the institutions connected with those channels.¹⁰

The refusal to accede to the political process resulted

⁹ Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 28-30, 35-36, 38-47, 49-56; Howard Segal, "Down in the Valley: David Lilienthal's TVA: Democracy on the March," The American Scholar vol. 64, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 423-427.

¹⁰ Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 56-59.

in a TVA that was politically neutral, but it also created problems of accountability. The agency may have been above politics, but it was also beyond the reach of politics. If TVA was not accountable to Congress, and if it was, as the TVA Act said, "clothed with the power of government, but possessed of the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise,"¹¹ then it represented the worst of both government and private enterprise in the minds of some. For Arthur Morgan, the least democratically-minded of the three directors, however, it was a tool for checking the power of monopolies and for uplifting southern society through guided development.

Hydroelectric power, of course, was the centerpiece of A. E. Morgan's notion of guided development. But that development mission, shared largely by the other directors, also encompassed erosion control, flood control, the promotion of scientific agriculture, the production of fertilizer, the use of locks to improve navigation on the Tennessee River, and even public recreation. In all these endeavors, control of the flow of the Tennessee River and its tributaries formed the basis of development.¹²

The Little Tennessee provides a larger share of the

¹¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, quoted in Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 20.

¹² Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 30-33, 38-41 and passim; Roy Talbert, FDR's Utopian: Arthur Morgan of the TVA (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), passim.

flow of the Tennessee River than any other tributary; so the manipulation of its flow would determine the amount of power which TVA's dams further downstream could produce. A. E. Morgan saw ALCOA's existing control of the Little Tennessee's flow as a potential obstacle to TVA's (and his own) development goals. He distrusted the near-monopoly ALCOA held on the nation's aluminum supply, so he naturally feared that ALCOA would try to use its control of the Little Tennessee to gain special considerations from TVA. This distrust set the stage for a battle between TVA and ALCOA for control of the Fontana site.¹³

From A. E. Morgan's point of view, the narrow, deep valley of the Little Tennessee could provide a great deal of water storage, which the agency could use to guarantee a steady supply of hydropower during the dry season and control the usual spring floods in the Tennessee and lower Little Tennessee valleys, especially at Chattanooga. Furthermore, TVA's development plans for the dams along the Tennessee depended on being able to provide large industrial customers with a steady electric power supply. ALCOA's control of the Little Tennessee could impede TVA's success throughout the Tennessee Valley, because an upstream dam controls the water level and the amount of power produced at dams further downstream. Morgan wrote:

Whoever controls the Little Tennessee River to a very

¹³ Talbert, FDR's Utopian, 29-33.

considerable degree will dominate the TVA as to its power policy and as to its navigation policy and as to its flood-control policy. . . . If the Little Tennessee is administered independently of the rest of the system, whoever so administers it will have a coercive power over the administration of the river system as a whole.¹⁴

ALCOA, then, could potentially jeopardize the entire concept of the "electric valley," and if it so desired, destroy TVA in the process. The Fontana project became Morgan's pet platform from which to win a major victory over TVA's detractors, and it had the added bonus of one-upping ALCOA's highly visible near-monopoly. It also provided Morgan a chance to showcase his engineering talent and that of his staff, perhaps restoring some of the prestige he had lost in the boardroom through personality and ideological conflicts.

Morgan relished his role as the board's visionary. ALCOA stood in the way of his vision. Morgan's propensity for hyperbole made the stakes seem high: either ALCOA's claim based on property rights must yield to Morgan's position that the river was a "great natural resource" not subject to private control, or ALCOA would press that claim so far that TVA's control of the Tennessee River itself would be in jeopardy. In his memoirs published in 1974, he stated that he feared ALCOA might claim title to the rain falling on its land, argue that the rain belonged to the company even after it became runoff, and ultimately demand a share of the agency's income from power sales all the way to

¹⁴ Morgan, Making of the TVA, 110.

the Ohio River. TVA control of the site, by contrast, could benefit both the agency and ALCOA, if TVA were allowed to operate the ALCOA dams for greatest system-wide efficiency. TVA could show off its engineering talent and provide electricity for valley-wide economic development, and ALCOA would have access to all the electric power it could use.¹⁵

Morgan considered it his moral duty to oppose ALCOA's "socially unwise" claim and prevent the waters of the Little Tennessee from being "appropriated as a source of private gain."¹⁶ Of course, ALCOA chairman Arthur V. Davis vigorously defended the investment his company had made in the Fontana site and elsewhere along the Little Tennessee:

We . . . engineered out 104 miles of this [Little Tennessee River]. . . . We have had for twenty-five years, from ten to seventy-five engineers, all the time working on this engineering development and we have plans which comprise developments which completely and absolutely utilize the entire flow of the stream. There is no possible conservation plan which could be devised which would be superior to ours. . . . And whatever development could be made or ever would be made on this river would be exactly the same as ours. . . . With all this money spent, with twenty-five years of record behind us, with all this engineering data, with our plans so completely laid out for the future, we submit that we are entitled to proceed with our development, which we bought with our own money.

¹⁵ Morgan, Making of the TVA, 106.

¹⁶ Morgan, Making of the TVA, 106-107.

¹⁷ Testimony of Arthur V. Davis, chairman of Alcoa, Hearings Before the Committee on Military Affairs, 74th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), vol.2, 662, 664; (Quoted in Morgan, Making of the TVA, 110-111).

Both participants fought hard to obtain control of the Fontana site. Davis even planted an ALCOA employee in the office of TVA director David E. Lilienthal for the purpose of "extract[ing] confidential information from TVA files."¹⁸ TVA, for its part, successfully petitioned Congress for an amendment to the TVA act that would explicitly recognize the agency's authority to coordinate "unified control" of the water resources of the Tennessee River and its tributaries to achieve maximum power production and flood control benefits.¹⁹

For all the ranting and raving over private property rights and the virtues of private enterprise, Morgan's battle with ALCOA failed to determine the fate of the upper Little Tennessee. Lilienthal's training as a lawyer and bureaucrat placed him at odds with Morgan's idealism, contributing to a power struggle between the two men that delayed the resolution of the Fontana negotiations by several years. The TVA board of directors, meeting without A. E. Morgan at Lilienthal's urging, broke off negotiations with ALCOA over the Fontana site in June of 1936 and declared that "no further communication is to be had with Congress concerning authorization to construct the Fontana Dam." At least one observer described this as a "point of no return" in the relationship between Morgan and Lilienthal. Because

¹⁸ Morgan, Making of the TVA, 112.

¹⁹ Morgan, Making of the TVA, 108-111.

of the personal enmity between Lilienthal and Morgan, in June of 1936 ALCOA appeared to have a clear opportunity to take advantage of the Fontana site.²⁰

This did not, however, mean that TVA would no longer negotiate with ALCOA for the sale of electric power. Morgan deplored Lilienthal's willingness to decouple power sales from the Fontana negotiations. He wrote:

We had one bargaining point, and that was that the Aluminum Company needed power. They owned the Fontana damsite, which we very much needed. They needed power so much at that time that they had indicated their willingness to sell us the Fontana damsite and to take their pay in secondary power, and let us operate. . . the rest of their plants. . . . Now, if we sold them power and met their other needs for power without getting control of the Fontana site, we were giving away all of our bargaining power, our power to get control of that very critical damsite.²¹

Morgan believed that agreeing to sell power to ALCOA without involving Fontana meant capitulating to ALCOA's monopolistic practices.

The rapid rise of Nazi Germany as a visible threat to Europe sparked calls for increased defense preparedness in the United States. This in turn created a demand for faster

²⁰ Excerpt from minutes of meeting of Board of Directors, 6/2/36, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702, National Archives Southeast Region, East Point, Georgia; Thomas K. McCraw, TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-39 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), 87-89, 123; Joseph Swidler, interview by Charles Crawford in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

²¹ Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 75th Congress, Part 1, July 19, 1938, 372; quoted in Morgan, Making of the TVA, 114.

construction of aircraft, which in turn placed a burden on the nation's aluminum supply. This only added to ALCOA's impetus to build the dam at Fontana. It also increased the potential rewards and lowered the potential costs, because the federal government needed aluminum badly for defense. ALCOA did not hold a true monopoly over the production of aluminum, but it did own the vast majority of the nation's bauxite reserves and aluminum production capacity, and thus controlled a major portion of the nation's defense program.²²

Accusations of malfeasance flew right and left. Officials of Reynolds Metal Corporation and Kalunite, Inc., accused ALCOA of trying to block their access to aluminum technology and government contracts. Kalunite president Frank Eichelberger alleged that ALCOA had placed a number of officials from the Office of Production Management (OPM) on its payroll in order to secure a monopoly on the nation's aluminum production for defense contracts. Senate Chief Counsel Hugh Fulton also accused ALCOA of concealing its true production capacity and dragging its feet on developing the Fontana site in an effort to force the federal government to pay for the construction of the dam. ALCOA operations chief I. W. Wilson attributed delays in expanding the company's production to a lack of available electricity, and blamed OPM for failing to allocate additional electric power

²² Carr, ALCOA: An American Enterprise, 247-261.

to the company. Truman, often annoyed by the technical jargon and evasive language ALCOA witnesses frequently used, lost patience with the incessant bickering. He complained:

You know, this committee is trying to find a way to get aluminum. . . . We would be willing to buy aluminum from anybody. If we could get it. I don't care whether it is the Aluminum Company of America or whether it is Reynolds or Al Capone. . . . What I am trying to get at is, how far is the Aluminum Company of America willing to go under²³ this emergency to help this government get aluminum?

Under the provisions of the Federal Power Act of 1921, the Federal Power Commission (FPC) took responsibility for insuring that industries received the necessary electricity to keep people and assembly lines working. The commission required licensing prior to the construction of any dam which might affect interstate commerce. Was the Little Tennessee a "navigable" river subject to such regulation? Boats did haul grain in the lower portions of the Little Tennessee occasionally, albeit only when spring rains raised the water level. There were also small boats operating

²³ Testimony of Frank Eichelberger, President, Kal-unite, Inc., Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 7, 2126-2137; testimony of G. R. Gibbons, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 802-813; testimony of I. W. Wilson, Vice President in Charge of Operations, ALCOA, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 899-908, 915-922, 910.

around Fontana, of which the Vivian was the best known. But a series of canyon rapids near the state line prevented the sort of commercial boat traffic between the two states that would qualify as "interstate commerce." Nonetheless, the FPC ruled that the river was a "navigable waterway" subject to its jurisdiction.²⁴

An agreement between TVA and ALCOA in October of 1940 provided that ALCOA would develop the Fontana site with its own money, secure any relevant licenses from the FPC, and operate the dam within TVA guidelines for flow downstream.²⁵ But the licensing agreement proffered by the Federal Power Commission gave the government the power to take over the facility after fifty years of operation if it chose to do so. ALCOA balked, not wishing to risk shareholder investments. ALCOA's reluctance to sign a contract which might require it to hand over a major asset--its largest dam to date--is understandable, even given the fifty year grace period and the uncertainties of business cycles. But the nation's indirect involvement in the war in Europe placed the company under great pressure to produce aluminum on the government's terms. Upon hearing ALCOA's negative reaction to the proposed licensing agreement, the commission

²⁴ Brewer and Brewer, Valley So Wild, 252-254.

²⁵ Testimony of J. A. Krug, Manager of Power, TVA, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 936-938.

charged:

[ALCOA admitted] that the project should be speedily built for purposes of national defense [but] Notwithstanding the public interest, ALCOA, through its subsidiary, in effect demonstrated that in its national defense effort it was unwilling to accept the reasonable limitations on unearned increment in the value of its power project provided by Congress in the Federal Power Act. . . . The refusal of ALCOA's subsidiary to construct the Fontana project, when required to obtain a license, indicates that not even the urgent demands of national defense can alter its apparent determination never willingly to submit. . . to the duly enacted requirements of federal law.²⁶

The Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian put it more simply: "ALCOA is being petulant and stubborn."²⁷ Stung by the criticism but still seeking the best possible financial arrangements, ALCOA reversed its position and agreed to seek a license, if the Reconstruction Finance Corporation or some other government agency would agree to fund the construction.²⁸

This maneuver, intended to preserve ALCOA's strong financial position and avoid the potential problem of excess capacity after the war, backfired. An indignant Senator

²⁶ Testimony of G. R. Gibbons, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 806; Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, March 13, 1941.

²⁷ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, March 13, 1941.

²⁸ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, June 19, 1941; J. A. Krug to I. W. Wilson, June 20, 1941, in TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702, National Archives Southeast Region; see also Brewer and Brewer, Valley So Wild, 250-251.

Harry Truman concurred with H. A. Morgan and TVA Power Manager J. A. Krug that if the dam was to be built with government funds, it made sense that the government, specifically TVA, should build it and operate it in the public interest. These men felt that ALCOA had acted in bad faith by seeking government financing, and that by doing so the company had abrogated the agreement reached in October of 1940.²⁹

TVA was back "in the game" now. Lilienthal shrewdly backed ALCOA into a corner and forced the company to sell the site to TVA in return for a guaranteed power supply which amounted to about twenty percent of the company's electric power needs in 1941. TVA would control not only the Fontana dam but also ALCOA's dams along the Little Tennessee in order to extract maximum electric power year round throughout TVA's power system. If ALCOA refused, the company would be seen by the public, as it already was by some members of Congress, as an exploitative monopoly obstructing the defense of the nation. ALCOA's financial maneuvering and the global political situation had restored the bargaining position Lilienthal had voluntarily given up

²⁹ Testimony of I. W. Wilson, Vice President in Charge of Operations, ALCOA, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 913-916; Morgan, Making of the TVA, 117; Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, July 10, 1941; Harcourt A. Morgan to I. W. Wilson, February 24, 1941, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702, National Archives Southeast Region.

in 1936, and ALCOA chairman Arthur V. Davis accepted the TVA proposal with minor amendments in June of 1941.³⁰

Residents of the upper Little Tennessee had appreciated the hydroelectric potential of their region, and even celebrated it, for a long time. Many had welcomed ALCOA's involvement in the region's economy. But they understood how fleeting prosperity could be, and in the context of the Great Depression their support for the construction of a dam at Fontana depended less on who did it than on how quickly it could be begun, and on who would benefit from the money and jobs that came with it.

Both TVA and ALCOA fought for public opinion. ALCOA instigated a petition drive against TVA in 1934 in order to pressure the agency to back down.³¹ ALCOA's supporters focused on the potential of private enterprise in their appeal. The editor of the Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian wrote:

The impression is unmistakably given [by the petition drive] that if the TVA will get out and stay out, the Mellon crowd [who support ALCOA's claim] will turn loose millions of dollars on these [hydroelectric projects proposed in western North Carolina but as yet undeveloped], put thousands of men back to work and add many millions of dollars to the taxable values of

³⁰ Testimony of G. R. Gibbons, Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, 77th Congress, 1st. Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pt. 3, 796; David E. Lilienthal, The Journals of David E. Lilienthal: Vol.1 The TVA Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 350-354.

³¹ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, October 18, 1934, November 15, 1934.

Macon, Swain and Graham counties, whereas the TVA, should it come into this territory, would greatly diminish tax valuations, supplying nothing in its place, and send taxes sky-high on all privately-owned property. . . . Many people of Macon, Swain and Graham counties are being hoodwinked into the idea that should TVA³² come into these counties it would bankrupt all of us.

The impression the Press editor described would not die quickly. Perhaps TVA could have built the dam without the support of community leaders, but to do so would have complicated the process tremendously. Community leaders in the region's principal town, Bryson City, actively sought the construction of the dam, by whatever agency would do so. Many residents, while lukewarm about TVA and about government ownership in general, eventually accepted the notion that a TVA dam was better than none, and resolved to work with the agency rather than against it. Five years after the petition drive, the editor of the Bryson City Times wrote:

We of the Times . . . realize that from the county's standpoint we would derive much more benefit from this construction [of Fontana Dam] if the Nantahala Power Company was allowed to build the dam. Our valuation for taxation would be doubled, which in turn would solve many of our vexing problems. But on the other hand, Fontana dam basin is situated in the Tennessee Valley Authorities [sic] great development and it is our opinion that TVA is going to build Fontana Dam, regardless of what we of Swain County think about it. As we see it, if we fight TVA, we not only lose our lands from taxation but TVA will not feel like promoting the various projects and helpful developments in Swain County that it is promoting in all the other

³² Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, October 18, 1934.

communities surrounding [us].³³

Ironically, the fight TVA and ALCOA waged was over the opportunity to "export" the benefits of this natural resource. During the most heated negotiations among ALCOA, TVA and the Federal Power Commission, ALCOA held out to the public a "carrot": if the company were allowed to build the dam, it might result in a new plant to be built near Andrews, in Cherokee County.³⁴ Despite this possibility, ALCOA's main production facilities were located at Calderwood and Maryville, Tennessee, far downstream from the Fontana area. The company withdrew the offer "for transportation reasons" less than a week after the OPM announced that TVA would build the dam at Fontana.³⁵ On the other hand, TVA control of the site would mean that the electric power and the industrialization it was supposed to foster would go downstream into eastern and even central Tennessee, again well beyond any direct economic benefit to the Fontana area itself.

Once TVA acquired the Fontana site, a new series of hurdles would present themselves before construction could begin. TVA needed congressional authorization for construction projects, as well as congressional funding. Such fund-

³³ Bryson City Times, March 2, 1939.

³⁴ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, October 17, 1940.

³⁵ Franklin Press and Highlands Maconian, July 17, 1941.

ing would not come until after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Faced with a sudden wartime emergency, Congress authorized the construction of Fontana Dam, along with Douglas Dam on the French Broad River east of Knoxville, on December 12, 1941, and preliminary work began immediately. Surveyors, core drillers, and reservoir clearance crews descended on the upper Little Tennessee quickly. Construction officially began on January 1, 1942, and the Little Tennessee River and its people instantly became a critical part of the nation's defense operations.

CHAPTER 4

TVA MOVES INTO THE BACK OF BEYOND

Fontana Dam required more effort than most previous TVA projects. The remote location, along with the treacherous nature of the only road near the dam site, meant the agency would have to build not only a dam, but access roads, bridges, telephone lines, and a railroad spur. Furthermore, the relatively sparse population could not provide an adequate labor supply. TVA had to bring workers in from other areas, eventually taking responsibility for transportation, housing, food, and even recreational programs for 5,000 to 7,000 workers.

The construction phase of the Fontana project required TVA to purchase more land, build more roads, provide more subsidiary services during construction, recruit more workers and provide more housing than it ever had. Once the dam was completed, TVA also exercised more regulatory power over private property, both individual and corporate, than it had in connection with any other project. In taking on these responsibilities, TVA set itself up as a regional development agency, a role it was ill-prepared to play while providing for the nation's wartime needs.

Ironically, then, despite the departure of A. E. Morgan, the Fontana project required the TVA to assume the level of responsibility he had had in mind for it all along,

but because the agency's mission had changed, the resulting policies would diverge greatly from his original intent. The people who designed the dam, the people who managed the construction of the dam, and the people who acquired the land for the dam celebrated the national goals of victory in the war, preservation and conservation of forest resources, and promotion of the TVA itself, often with little more than token concern for the long-term future of the residents themselves.

TVA employed people from different backgrounds in management positions. Their attitudes toward the local residents ranged from sympathy to contempt, but all shared a sense that the area's past proved its people's inability to take care of themselves. A look at some representative executives from the agency helps clarify the internal tug-of-war which shaped its policies toward the upper Little Tennessee and its inhabitants.

John I. Snyder was a real estate analyst who left Dun and Bradstreet to become TVA's assistant general solicitor in 1933. Concerned by corporate land acquisition projects which often saw the last holdouts receiving many times the appraised value of the property, Snyder implemented a non-negotiable settlement strategy. TVA had to convince the property owner that the project was worthwhile and necessary, that "we understood [their sacrifice, and] that we were prepared to pay them the price which we felt exceeded

the actual market value of the property." Once this was accomplished, Snyder felt, property owners would see the wisdom of cooperating with the agency. Landowners could accompany appraisers to make sure everything of value was accounted for. TVA would allow them to stay on their land until it was actually needed, and would give them ample notice so they could clear the property of any improvements, crops, or other valuables. "Landowners who dealt voluntarily with us had considerable advantages," he noted somewhat cynically.

Of course, many landowners, guided by previous experience with Ritter Lumber Company, ALCOA, and other buyers, refused to sell, encouraging TVA to initiate condemnation proceedings in court. TVA appraised property for condemnation at market value, with no allowance for inconvenience and no time allowed for salvage. So fighting TVA acquisition was difficult, and many found that fighting a condemnation order ate up all the money they received for their property. Snyder would later trumpet his own success by stating that 90 percent of all the land TVA had acquired had been obtained through voluntary purchase. He sneered at the "landowner protective associations" which formed in almost all reservoir areas to extract a maximum price from TVA. "I recall that our buyers took great pride when they were able to purchase the land owned by an officer of the protective

association," he remarked years later.¹

In contrast to Snyder, Dick Niehoff came from an environment which encouraged him to resent privilege and despise poverty. Niehoff's background was thoroughly infused with the social gospel. Born in Illinois, he grew up poor. As a graduate student he studied human behavior while working for the YMCA. His immediate reaction upon entering eastern Tennessee was one of shock. "[The poverty] was all spread out in front of you to see and one would have had to have been blind not to. I had read about it [but] . . . I was not aware of areas in the United States that had so many problems." Niehoff guided many of TVA's educational programs through their formative period.²

John C. McAmis grew up in rural Greene County, Tennessee, and studied agriculture at the University of Tennessee under H. A. Morgan. He worked in TVA's readjustment office during the construction of Norris Dam before becoming director of agricultural relations. McAmis saw himself as a champion of the individual and frequently struggled in vain against what he saw as excessive land acquisition by the agency. His study of families displaced by the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park revealed a story of

¹ John I. Snyder, interview by Charles Crawford in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

² Richard "Dick" Niehoff, interview by Charles Crawford in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

tragic proportions. The culture of sharing produce, milk, and other items among neighbors had gotten them through hard times before the park, but the loss of their neighbors had cost them both materially and psychologically. In his work at Norris, and later at Fontana despite a different title and responsibilities, McAmis sought to minimize this sort of trauma by improving the quality of land under cultivation and thereby compensating residents for the lost economic cushion formerly provided by their neighbors.³

George Gant's background, like that of McAmis, permitted him a level of sensitivity to the region's needs, but his intellectual approach to those needs gave his work a distinctly different, less agrarian flavor. Gant grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, where his father owned a small publishing firm. He received a Ph. D. in history from the University of Wisconsin in 1933, and became assistant to the education director of the Civilian Conservation Corps. By February of 1935, he had moved to TVA's Social and Economic Division as a research assistant, a post he soon exchanged for that of assistant chief of the Training Section. From there Gant moved up to become assistant director and later director of personnel. In that role, he supervised training programs, often administering them through local school authorities as

³ John C. McAmis, interview by Charles Crawford, in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

H. A. Morgan had done with agricultural programs.⁴

Gant's insight into Appalachian life was unusual, but not unique. When asked if he had been surprised about the living conditions of people in eastern Tennessee, he displayed compassion tempered with intellectual detachment:

Yes, although not as horrified as some. Now I saw some pretty slum like places in the mountains but I also saw some very comfortable places . . . where the people were happy and warm and well-clothed and well-fed, so that I did not generalize quite as much about the mountain people . . . as some others did.

Gant recalled that TVA was not always welcomed by local people, and that some TVA employees worsened the negative reaction of many inhabitants through their arrogance.

"Sometimes our people didn't think that the counties were quite as aggressive [as they should have been]. . . in putting on model programs, and I'm sure the counties on occasions felt that our people were somewhat meddlesome," he noted.⁵

Gant refused to accept the notion that the Fontana area was somehow particularly isolated. "The roads there were not bad, but it took awhile to drive [from Knoxville]," he remarked. But despite his understanding of the complexities of the region, on the whole Gant viewed rural life as dull

⁴ George Gant, interview by Charles Crawford, in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

⁵ George Gant, interview by Charles Crawford, in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

and unstimulating. He used his authority to encourage recreational programs under the general heading of "personnel relations." He described the purpose of these programs as "to give a little more life and interest and excitement and enthusiasm to some of those rural communities which had had . . . bad times during the depression." He recognized that TVA's presence in the region disrupted many normal community activities. His goal was not to minimize the disruption but to make the disruption productive.⁶

Other TVA policies were more cautious, if not more constructive. In order to maintain amiable relations between TVA and the local population, and in order to address the population's concerns about the impact of the dam, TVA employed a Population Readjustment Division in its Department of Reservoir Properties. This division carried the responsibility for helping residents relocate. Population readjustment, broadly defined, included scheduling relocation, helping residents find suitable new homes and land, and sometimes interceding with other TVA departments and even other governmental agencies on behalf of residents. The purpose of population readjustment was to minimize the impact of TVA's arrival on the lives of residents, not necessarily to better their circumstances.

Reports generated by the Population Readjustment Divi-

⁶ George Gant, interview by Charles Crawford, in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," audio tape, University of Memphis Special Collections.

sion serve as the primary record of TVA's actions regarding population readjustment. These reports were written by the TVA officials who were in closest contact with the population, and represent the "best" information TVA decision-makers received. Not surprisingly, the often flawed assumptions about the population evident in these reports, coupled with the preexisting image TVA management had of the area, affected TVA relocation and redevelopment policies.

The belief that communities lacked organization caused TVA to emphasize counseling individual families rather than depending on the uncertain support of local leaders and organizations. The yeoman owner-farmer stereotype, coupled with H. A. Morgan's insistence on not altering the region's social structure, meant that TVA would compensate landowners rather than land users for the property the agency took. Paternalists assumed that including transient residents in the readjustment process was a necessary prerequisite for solving the region's long-term economic problems, while cynics assumed the transients were a permanent and unavoidable feature of the region's socioeconomic structure, an obstacle to their goals, but both agreed that subsuming the transient culture into the readjustment process was the most effective way of making the problem disappear.

The population readjustment reports helped to perpetuate stereotypes of the "Appalachian way of life," stereotypes promoted by Kephart and others of his day. Ignorant

of the subtleties of the region's social and economic life, outsiders from TVA tended to see the mountaineers as either the romantic, sturdy pioneers of Our Southern Highlanders or the benighted, isolated Elizabethan throwbacks described in the WPA Guide. The ambiguous policies of TVA arose in part from the ambiguity of these contradictory stereotypes.

The tangible evidence of good access, at least for the large communities, did not fundamentally alter the impression the readjustment workers had. The isolation of which they spoke had as much to do with their perceptions of local attitudes as it did with the presence or absence of roads and trains. Arnold Hyde was a native of Graham County, but his description of the mountain residents indicates he did not consider himself part of the mountain culture. He wrote of "foot paths leading across the mountains into deep coves [which] serve as the only access for many families, who upon finding a cold spring, constructed a cabin with no thought given to the inconvenience of the location."⁷ He criticized the residents of the remote and mountainous Stecoah area for indolence and their apparent unwillingness to work together:

A majority of the homes are in extremely poor condition, which not only reflects something of the economic condition of the family but reflects in many instances the lack of pride as well as initiative in making necessary improvements on the farm. . . . Often the chickens roost in the shade trees in the yard and the pigs run loose around the house. The toilets are

⁷ "Steocoah," 3.

placed over open streams, and flies breed unmolested around the house and barnyard. All of these insanitary practices point to the reluctance of the mountaineer to make modern improvements and develop a cooperative community spirit.

The message here is that the mountain lifestyle is the epitome of backwardness. For Hyde, "progress" was inevitable, and the sooner the mountaineers embraced it, the better off they would be. TVA's philosophy of grass roots bureaucracy had guaranteed that people from the immediate area would find suitable employment with the agency, but the demands of the population readjustment jobs were such that only the educated few could qualify, and those educated few were also of course those best acquainted with the values of the "outside world." Any reluctance to accede to the spirit of that outside world would mean consignment to perpetual stagnation and poverty.

Hyde understood that each community had its own structure and dynamics. Writing about Almond and Judson, he praised local community leaders for trying to keep the community together in the face of an uncertain future, noting that:

[During the 1920s] many families sold their property [to ALCOA] and moved out. Some sold and then rented, becoming tenants of the [Nantahala] Power Company. A few remaining land owners, who refused to sell, endeavored to keep the community spirit alive. The progress of the community has apparently been retarded by the wide-spread belief that Fontana Dam would eventually be

⁸ "Stecoah," 2-3.

constructed.⁹

Hyde's colleagues also bemoaned a lack of community spirit and organization of the sort found in larger towns. Rome C. Sharp complained that TVA's readjustment work in the Proctor community was made more difficult by "the definite lack in the community of fraternal or social organization, and the clannish attitude of the natives."¹⁰ He summed up his impressions of Proctor as follows: "[This region presents] a unique picture of community decadence and disorganization."¹¹ He recommended that the Population Readjustment Division emphasize counseling individual families, rather than addressing community organizations to gain support, as TVA had done with other projects.

Despite their complaints about a lack of organization in the area's communities, readjustment operatives sometimes too easily accepted the romantic image of Kephart's lost frontiersmen. They sometimes wanted to see the local inhabitants as rugged individualists, pioneers from a previous time. Hyde wrote approvingly that five families in the Almond-Judson area had shown the initiative to obtain electric power for themselves by building their own small hydro-

⁹ Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Property Management Department, Population Readjustment Division. "Almond-Judson Community, Fontana Area," prepared by Arnold J. Hyde, 2. Hereafter cited as "Almond-Judson."

¹⁰ "Proctor," 1.

¹¹ "Proctor," 1.

electric plants.¹² Still, as Sharp noted, the independence of many mountain residents was often more symbolic than real. He quotes Jonathan Daniels' comments on a New Deal experiment elsewhere in western North Carolina:

Maybe the experiment interrupts a process which would at last drain them to the towns where they would be closer to relief but, unskilled as they are, no nearer to independence in jobs where there are already more men than employment. Even in a guarded dependency they may be better off on the little pieces of land so many of them love so much.¹³

TVA workers differed on the importance of educating the residents. Sharp relied on Daniels' book Tar Heels for a romantic, if not very optimistic picture of attempts to "educate" these residents:

Federal agencies had been active already, and successfully, in mitigating the illiteracy in the cabins in the coves beyond the ends of the roads in Swain. It was grand to be able to read and write, but on the edge of the preserved forest primeval--among the pioneers--for all but a sixth of the people,¹⁴ literacy meant only ability to sign a relief receipt.

Hyde strongly differentiated among residents based on their attitudes toward education, describing those with whom he agreed as "progressive." His report on Stecoah outlined the difficulties TVA and other organizations often encountered in attempting to convince residents of the advantages of education, observing that ". . . there yet exists among the parents a lack of understanding and

¹² "Almond-Judson," 3.

¹³ "Proctor," 6.

¹⁴ "Proctor," 5.

appreciation for the advantages offered in the field of education." Hyde then identified several of what he called "underlying causes for the indifferent attitude toward school and community progress." These causes were (1) educational "deficiencies" (his word) among the parents; (2) lack of proper medical care; (3) the long distances children would have to travel over rough terrain to get to a school bus; (4) parents' inability to afford the necessary clothes and school supplies for their children; and (5) failure of the school officials to incorporate vocational courses, which Hyde said "would attract and interest the practical minded mountaineers."¹⁵

Hyde assumed education and progress were one and the same. He associated education with decreases in both feuding and moonshining. He noted approvingly that with TVA's help the curriculum at Stecoah's school had been revamped to include vocational programs by 1944. TVA had also helped construct a new building for shop classes and home economics had been built with materials salvaged from demolished buildings in the reservoir area, in hopes of attracting the attention of these same "practical minded mountaineers."¹⁶ Perhaps Hyde would not have approved of the fact that a school at Proctor accepted an uncertified teacher in the 1942-1943 school year on the grounds that

¹⁵ "Steocoah," 2.

¹⁶ "Steocoah," 4.

"she lived there, and it was the last year of that school anyway," but his "practical-minded mountaineers" might have.¹⁷

The practical-mindedness of these mountaineers provided TVA with some of its most difficult problems. Contrary to the popular perception that mountain society was static and that its people were too attached to unproductive land, Sharp recognized that the residents of the upper Little Tennessee were prone to moving about and setting up house-keeping wherever there was employment. He described those living in Proctor in dehumanizing language which nonetheless captures the mobility of the population. He wrote, "[Remaining residents are a] residue of the more prosperous periods of lumbering and mining operations carried on in this community," and cited population statistics to prove that the population fluctuated with the utilization and exhaustion of the natural resources of the region. Sharp's understanding of the connection between population change and the availability of jobs in the area eventually persuaded his superiors to include the transient families in the readjustment process.¹⁸

Both Hyde and Sharp understood that residents were as

¹⁷ Arnold Monteith, interview by Bill Landry, October 28, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

¹⁸ "Proctor," 1; John K. Bailey, "Shack Development Control, Fontana Area," TVA internal report from Reservoir Property Management Department, Population Readjustment Division, May 1, 1944, 3-22.

willing to change crops as they were to change locations. Hyde noted that farmers received more cash from the sale of timber products than all other agricultural products combined. But he foresaw burley tobacco, which had recently been introduced into the region, as the cash crop of the future for the area, once timbering was no longer viable.¹⁹ But despite his optimism about the future of tobacco farming, he still considered the farming families a step behind the rest of the population. He wrote:

The standard of living varies considerably. Families living in the villages of Judson and Almond are progressive and make a fair living, but a majority of those in the more isolated regions are existing in a state of poverty. The farm homes, as a rule, are in a poor state of²⁰ repair and are furnished with bare necessities. . . .

While some TVA operatives assumed that poverty in the region was a constant, Hyde showed a better understanding of the region's turbulent history. Here again, though, his negative attitude toward the region's status in the 1940s is apparent in his description of a once-important community structure: "An old abandoned Methodist Church building at Judson serves as a stark reminder of the more progressive days when Methodists lived and worshipped among the native

¹⁹ "Almond-Judson," 4. While the Great Smoky Mountains National Park prevented taking the last of the timber along the north shore of the Little Tennessee and its tributaries, the area along the south and west shores, from Judson west into Graham County, continued to be logged.

²⁰ "Almond-Judson," 3.

Baptists."²¹

Both Hyde and Sharp recognized the shifts in the population of the area. These shifts in population took two distinct forms. One type of movement was the localized movement of the so-called original families. While many of these families occupied the same community for many years, many of the dwellings in the region in 1940 were less than ten years old. This type of mobility is a recurring theme in Hyde's and Sharp's population readjustment reports. The impermanence of structures dominated the area's housing picture even before the irresistible pull of war jobs lured many from northern Georgia and eastern Tennessee to set up makeshift homes along, or even directly over, the Little Tennessee River near the construction site.

The second type of population movement TVA officials saw was the influx of so-called "transient households." The development of these spontaneous settlements near the construction site created problems for TVA. Project Manager Clarence E. Blee initially opined that TVA should not attempt to bear responsibility for these transient households,²² but his assessment was eventually amended, and the population readjustment reports do include these households. These new settlements nearly doubled the case load

²¹ "Almond-Judson," 5.

²² C.E. Blee to W.T. Hunt, March 21, 1942, cited in Bailey, Shack Development Control.

for population readjustment workers, and the buildings often turned up on land TVA needed to control for construction purposes. Moreover, the abysmal lack of sanitation and the inadequate supply of drinking water created health hazards which could spread throughout the work force and delay the construction of the dam. TVA initiated "community health education programs" and voluntary typhoid immunization in an attempt to stem the spread of disease. Education was TVA's most powerful weapon against illness, just as it was against poverty. TVA policymakers saw the mountain dwellers as victims of their own ignorance, and the agency's educational programs were an opportunity for the improvement of material conditions.

The degree to which TVA officials understood the impact of the project on area residents depended upon their distance from those residents' experiences. Chief Engineer T. B. Parker blithely assumed that "because the rugged terrain makes farming difficult and unproductive, little of the land that will be flooded is of agricultural value."²³ By contrast, Hyde's reports on Stecoah and Almond-Judson readily and perceptively acknowledged that the loss of agriculture would destroy the way of life to which the residents had become accustomed. He elaborated further in his report on

²³ Tennessee Valley Authority Water Control Planning Department. "Possible Development of the Fontana Project on the Little Tennessee River: A Reconnaissance Report," submitted by T.B. Parker to Gordon R. Clapp, August 29, 1941, 4.

the twin communities of Almond and Judson:

The loss of the fertile bottom land, even though the acreage is small, will cause radical changes in agricultural methods. The extremely rugged nature of the adjacent lands makes it impossible for farm families to re-establish homes on the steep, unproductive land above the reservoir margin.²⁴

Hyde understood that, regardless of the importance of agriculture to the economy of the region, it provided many individual families with a sense of security which could not be expressed in dollars and cents. He nonetheless insisted that the benefits of the project would be substantial:

The changes brought about by the program of the Authority have offered new opportunities to dissatisfied families, who realize the futility of the struggle with poverty in their present environment. The individual not only will be freed from restricted circumstances, but the community as a whole will profit by the advantages afforded by the creation of Fontana Lake.²⁵

Like his colleagues, Hyde saw his job as improving the material condition of the area as a whole. In the process, he hoped to ensure that those individuals whose lives TVA changed would adopt the more prosperous lifestyle he associated with progress. His residence in the area provided him with a greater sense of the history of the region, but his "progressive" sympathies helped formulate a readjustment style that focused more on TVA goals than on the needs of the area as perceived by its residents.

The process of "freeing the individual from restricted

²⁴ "Almond-Judson," 6.

²⁵ "Stecoah," 5.

circumstances," in the minds of Hyde and his superiors, often meant evicting families from communities with which they had maintained close ties, even if their residence there was intermittent. Similarly, in practice, "benefiting the community as a whole" meant not only attempting to convert the as yet elusive tourist dollar into an enhanced material quality of life, but also radically altering the community's structure, dispersing its population, and permanently disrupting its trading patterns. According to this view, these people who had "gotten by" on so little for so long lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to decide for themselves what was to be done in their community; their divergence from the "progressive" patterns of the so-called "outside world" was proof enough that they needed the assistance of the federal government in the form of employment, education, and relocation.

TVA, of course, assumed the responsibility for providing that assistance. That decision created unforeseen difficulties for the agency. In any hydroelectric project, land purchase and the removal of residents can present major problems, including disputes over ownership, the value of land and buildings, and the amount of assistance for relocation residents expect. TVA had already relocated residents for other projects, but Fontana presented new challenges. Wartime shortages and the difficulty of synchronizing the construction schedule with the agricultural schedule

augmented the already formidable difficulties associated with removal. In addition, land for relocation was scarce, and those who rented their homes received no financial help for relocation from TVA. Furthermore, land often changed ownership several times between TVA's surveys and final acquisition. The widely held belief within TVA that land ownership was stable contributed to the agency's inability to bring the project together as seamlessly as anticipated.

The case of the family of Andy Chickleele illustrates some of the difficulties valley residents encountered when attempting to abide by TVA plans. Chickleele, a Cherokee man living near the community of Japan in Graham County, had been employed by Southern Railway for nineteen years, an unusually long term of employment for anyone living in the Little Tennessee area. A TVA caseworker noted approvingly that the family spoke English well and that "the children refuse[d] to converse in the Cherokee language."²⁶ White neighbors fondly remembered his insistence that his children obtain a college education.²⁷ The family lived on land attached to the Eastern Band Cherokee Reservation, which they held by "possessory right" according to the Cherokee

²⁶ Tennessee Valley Authority, Fontana Case Files, Reservoir Property Management Division, Population Removal Records, Box 136, Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia. "Andy Chickleele, G-38." Hereafter cited as Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chickleele."

²⁷ Arnold Monteith, interview by Bill Landry, October 28, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

constitution. In addition to that tract, they owned some land and a house outside the reservation. The reservation land would be flooded by the dam, and the other tract would be cut off from road access.²⁸

The caseworker described the family as "exceptionally friendly" and cooperative, noting that they often served as interpreters between TVA officials and other Cherokees. Mr. Chicklee offered no protest when asked to move, but did express a desire to remain in the same general area so that he could continue working for the Southern Railroad.²⁹

After traveling to Waynesville in an unsuccessful attempt to secure appropriate land, he asked both TVA and the Cherokee Nation for help in relocating. Chief Jarrett Blythe of the Cherokee Nation offered him a location on the reservation, which Chicklee refused because it was too remote. The Extension Service Office soon found Chicklee another farm near the town of Cherokee which was within his financial means and of appropriate size, and Chicklee intended to purchase it, as soon as he received payment from the Cherokee Nation for the house he had built on reservation land.³⁰

A seemingly simple process became a bureaucratic nightmare as Chicklee's attempts to relocate were thwart-

²⁸ Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chicklee."

²⁹ Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chicklee."

³⁰ Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chicklee."

ed. In March of 1944, the Cherokee Council offered Chicklee and his son-in-law \$2,500 for their interest in the reservation property. They declined, stating that they needed more money in order to buy a comparable farm elsewhere. Planting time came and went. Chicklee and his son-in-law, who had intended to occupy a new farm together, split over the issue of compensation, with the son-in-law demanding that the tribe purchase them a farm and Chicklee preferring a cash settlement so he could select and purchase a farm.³¹

As Chicklee eventually found out, before compensation could be made to him for the improvements to the reservation land, the money had to be appropriated to the Indian Land Office by the United States Congress. The tribal council could not act. According to the TVA contract, signed by the Secretary of the Interior, Chicklee had to leave the home on the reservation by September 1, 1944, but without being paid for his improvements he could not afford to buy another home.³²

Finally, in January of 1945, Chicklee accepted the Cherokee Nation's offer of \$1,200 for his improvements and rented a house on TVA property near the Almond community, itself about to be inundated. Even then, the condition of the access road leading out of his reservation home delayed

³¹ Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chicklee."

³² Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chicklee."

the family's relocation for another eight days.³³

Chicklelee's son-in-law, Game Walker, fared even worse. Walker refused the \$1,200 offered by the Cherokee Council, arguing that he had a two-thirds interest in the property. Walker and his family moved to a rented farm near Almond, but left a stove and some chairs in the reservation home, refusing to surrender the home completely until a settlement could be reached. The anonymous TVA caseworker's terse closing entry reads as follows: "At a later date, by some means, Mr. Walker's house and household goods caught fire and burned down. This case is closed and no follow-up is suggested."³⁴

The L. W. Ammons family of Judson faced another set of obstacles. Mr. Ammons felt attached to the land; his wife felt tied down to it. The family occupied 270 acres they did not legally own, land which would be cut off by rising waters. The actual owners of the property were "all scattered throughout the United States." The Ammons family did legally own an adjacent tract, but it was inaccessible by road and did not have a house on it.³⁵

³³ Fontana Case Files, "Andy Chickleelee."

³⁴ Fontana Case Files, Reservoir Property Management Division, Population Removal Records, Box 136, Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia. "Game Walker, G-39." Hereafter cited as Fontana Case Files, "Game Walker."

³⁵ Fontana Case Files, Reservoir Property Management Division, Population Removal Records, Box 136, Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia. "L. W. Ammons." Hereafter cited as Fontana Case Files, "L. W. Ammons."

The TVA caseworker reported that Mrs. Ammons

stated that she had to do all the work around the place. . .[and] expressed a desire to get out of that hole and hoped that the TVA would buy their property so Mr. Ammons would have to move. He has lived here all his life, she stated, and wishes to continue living here the rest of his life.³⁶

The family cultivated 10 of their 270 acres with one ox, yielding what the TVA caseworker described as "small returns for a maximum amount of land."³⁷

Their home was located on property owned by the McGaha family heirs, where the Ammons family had lived for ten years since Mr. Ammons purchased some sort of dubious license to occupy it from his brother. The family paid no rent, timbered the land without paying "stumpage" to the McGaha heirs, and built several structures; thus, they considered that they owned the property, despite the lack of legal title. TVA's definition of "ownership" followed the strict legal interpretation:

The contract for the purchase of tract FR-743 was closed on December 20, 1943. The McGaha heirs received the net sum of \$2,398. Mr. Ammons, the only occupant of the tract, received no part of the purchase price.³⁸

The Ammons family did legally own an adjoining piece of land which was unimproved, and the family eventually moved to that tract. Mr. Ammons followed the common local prac-

³⁶ Fontana Case Files, "L. W. Ammons."

³⁷ Fontana Case Files, "L. W. Ammons."

³⁸ Fontana Case Files, "L. W. Ammons."

tice of purchasing several structures in the area for salvage and reusing the materials in the construction of his new home.

On March 1, 1944, Mr. Ammons requested that TVA lease him several tracts of land near Judson so that he could plant a crop. He had been informed that he must vacate the land on which he lived by May 1 of that year, and continued to negotiate for the chance to remain there until the completion of an access road, but he was unwilling to gamble on planting a crop there. TVA granted the lease on the Judson tracts, some of which the agency had already purchased by TVA from their owners for reservoir impoundment. TVA expressly denied liability for damage to any crops caused by rising water levels.

In effect, Ammons gambled that he could produce a good crop on the land before TVA would get around to flooding it--that the previous owners had sold out too soon. He was right. Ammons' fly-by-night approach to agriculture may seem unorthodox, but like the other residents of the area he was accustomed to having to work around whatever circumstances he might have to face. Ammons was no stoic, static mountaineer from the forest primeval; he might be better compared with the southerners who, sensing an opportunity for self-preservation amid the turmoil of Reconstruction, sought alliance with so-called carpetbaggers and the Union army. In short, he was a survivor.

Ammons even accepted employment from TVA--moving supplies for the construction of the very road which would open up access to the land he owned. That access became one of the most difficult problems for Ammons. TVA had originally told him to move from his home by December of 1943. That date of possession moved to May of 1944, then to November of 1944. During this time TVA kept Ammons from using this land for agricultural purposes, and had instead leased him land for such purposes at a lower elevation. The agency finally canceled the leases on that land in September 1944, and Ammons finally completed and moved into his new home in February of 1945 upon completion of the access road.

Families which had been in the area for generations often agonized over the need for relocation, but the non-farming residents of the deep mountain coves seldom had such strong emotional ties to their land. They often depended upon seasonal or irregular employment and had so few possessions that relocation was an easy and frequent task. Bill Fuller, one such resident, told a TVA worker that when the time came for him to move, all he would have to do was put out the fire and call the dog, and he did not have a dog.³⁹

Another case, that of the Missionary Baptist Church in Fairfax, illustrates some of the ways the constant turmoil

³⁹ Fontana Case Files, Reservoir Property Management Division, Population Removal Records, Box 136. "Bill Fuller." National Archives and Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia.

characteristic of the region affected the readjustment process. The church was organized during the summer of 1943 by five men who declared themselves trustees of the church. The church building had previously been used as a saloon and "was outstanding as a place of ill repute over a period of many months" before the trustees converted it to higher purposes. Andy Reid, the operator of the saloon, received \$100 plus a \$25 monthly rent for the use of the building. When TVA contracted for the purchase of the land,⁴⁰ a controversy arose over ownership of the building. Andy Reid's right to the property was contested by Robert L. Cabe,⁴¹ Sr., one of the trustees, who claimed that he had purchased the building from Reid. The court ruled that Cabe owned the building, and he began dismantling it for salvage within a few days. The church moved its operations to a grocery store building owned by Erskin Harrell on land leased from the Cable Heirs sometime in November 1944, and upon the expiration of the lease in May 1945 the church apparently disbanded.

⁴⁰ According to Fontana Case Reports, "Missionary Baptist Church," the church building was located on the "A. W. Reed place on the Coburn heirs property." It is not clear whether this is the Andy Reid who owned the building when it was a saloon, nor is it clear whether Reed (Reid) owned or claimed ownership of the land. Ownership of buildings was often separate from ownership of the land on which they stood, and this complicates the reconstruction of the events just as it complicated TVA's plans.

⁴¹ Cabe is not to be confused with members of the various Cable (with an "l") families of the area.

Typically, religious institutions serve as conservative forces that link the activities of the present to the traditions of past generations. The temporariness of the Missionary Baptist Church demonstrates the turbulence of the area's social structure under the stress of the wartime homefront. Indeed, the profit motive seems to be the primary element of continuity in the upper Little Tennessee. The fragile churches, schools, and other community institutions of the "permanent" residents of the region were still more stable than the colonies of makeshift shelters that housed temporary or "transient" residents. TVA estimated that over half of the households in the area in 1944 contained transient workers.⁴²

The homes of transient families ranged from rough-cut log houses to cheap prefabricated chipboard crates "manufactured" in Bryson City and sold in kit form to newcomers. These homes occupied locations chosen more for their immediate convenience than their physical stability. A number of them occupied the flood plain in the immediate vicinity of the dam, and had to be moved frequently to avoid incurring the wrath of TVA construction foremen. Others were placed on land rented out by opportunistic absentee landowners. A few were even placed on parallel logs crossing the narrow river valley, with a hole cut in the floor to serve as a

⁴² Tennessee Valley Authority, Division of Reservoir Properties, Final Report, Population Readjustment, Fontana Reservoir, TVA Corporate Library, Knoxville, 5.

makeshift privy.⁴³

TVA attempted to control the growth of shantytowns for several reasons. The uncontrolled construction of dwellings made reservoir clearance difficult and complicated the process of moving materials around the dam site. Furthermore, many of these shacks occupied land TVA needed immediately. Also, TVA officials did not want the responsibility of relocating transient occupants after the completion of the dam. Finally, the lack of safe water supplies and sanitation in these dwellings contributed to the spread of diseases and made it difficult to provide adequate facilities for longer-term workers.⁴⁴

TVA's success in controlling these spontaneous settlements was limited. Simply ordering the premises vacated would solve the immediate problems of crowding and transportation, but did nothing to guarantee a safe water supply or make the reservoir area easier to clear. Moreover, TVA already faced serious labor shortages. Banning all temporary dwellings would only aggravate that problem. TVA found the solution in a combination of strategies: inspection of all temporary dwellings and the demolition of those found lacking in sanitation; accelerated taking of properties needed for the construction process itself; negotiating with landowners for the construction of a private trailer

⁴³ Bailey, "Shack Development Control," 3-22.

⁴⁴ Bailey, "Shack Development Control," 3-8.

camp at Proctor; and providing better access to a wider range of TVA-provided housing for workers, including larger tent camps, demountable houses, and dormitories.⁴⁵

To build the dam as quickly as possible, TVA had to provide ways to move people, construction equipment and materials, and information to the dam site. This was particularly difficult in the case of Fontana because of the rugged terrain and the lack of major towns in the area.

Fontana Dam, conceived as a showcase for regional planning, quickly became a "rush job" because of the wartime need for aluminum. Planning emphasized expediency rather than the reform goals of the A. E. Morgan era. Construction materials and equipment came from various sites. Many items, especially worker housing, were "recycled" from other TVA projects, notably those along the Hiwassee River. TVA constructed telephone lines so that information could be relayed quickly between Fontana and TVA headquarters in Knoxville, sixty-eight miles away over rough terrain. TVA also built temporary roads, rail lines, and bridges to make sure materials could be delivered quickly. The temporary nature of these facilities meant that they could be constructed rapidly and cheaply. It also meant that they would not provide the infrastructure necessary to enable the region to profit from the electric power generated at

⁴⁵ Bailey, "Shack Development Control," 3-22.

Fontana.⁴⁶

Bryson City, the region's largest town, served as a base of operations for population readjustment, reservoir clearance, and other land management tasks. It housed Fontana's largest personnel office for some time. The town also provided many support services such as housing and medical care for workers, to supplement those available at the dam site over thirty miles away. Until the construction village was completed in 1943, workers had to travel to Bryson City for movies, haircuts, laundry, a heated room, or a restaurant meal. Because of these connections, transportation between Bryson City and the dam site was very important to the timely completion of the dam.

TVA and civic leaders attempted to pressure Southern Railway into providing rail service between Bryson City and Fontana using the old Bushnell-Fontana spur which the railroad had abandoned upon closure of the mine at Eagle Creek. Southern refused, saying it did not have the equipment or facilities to do so. Eventually Smoky Mountain Stages, Inc., contracted to provide bus service to Maryville and Knoxville, Tennessee, instead. The bus ride from Knoxville to Fontana averaged approximately two and one-half hours. This reduced the problem of getting workers to the dam, but TVA officials continued to press for rail service

⁴⁶ Tennessee Valley Authority The Fontana Project: TVA Technical Report Number 12, 199, 207, 152-153, 237-244.

in order to use the Bryson City labor supply more fully.⁴⁷

These transportation arrangements alone did not provide TVA with a steady enough supply of labor to maintain its construction schedule for Fontana. Many workers continued to live in tents or boxes on private land in the area, while others commuted weekly over difficult roads from as far away as Maryville, Tennessee or Young Harris, Georgia, until tire rationing made that impossible.⁴⁸ The difficulties these workers faced, the expectations TVA had of them, and the resulting tensions reveal much about the character of the area's residents and their response to the wartime boom economy.

⁴⁷ Bryson City Times, December 17, 1942, January 7, 1943, March 26, 1942, April 2, 1942, April 16, 1942; Gordon R. Clapp to H. Aydelott, March 1, 1944, J. H. Aydelott to Gordon R. Clapp, March 17, 1944, Gordon R. Clapp to [J.] H. Aydelott, March 28, 1944, C. E. Blee to W. C. Fitts, April 8, 1944, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 317, National Archives Southeast Region, East Point, Georgia; Bryson City Times, June 11, 1942; Gordon R. Clapp to John L. Rogers, April 29, 1943, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 317, National Archives Southeast Region, East Point, Georgia; Charles E. Lex to Departmental Travel Clerks, December 17, 1943, in TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702, National Archives Southeast Region, East Point, Georgia.

⁴⁸ Bryson City Times, November 12, 1942.

CHAPTER 5

WORK, LIFE, AND WAR IN THE BACK OF BEYOND

TVA needed a large work force in order to keep up with the wartime construction schedule. The estimated peak work force of 7,000 full-time employees at Fontana exceeded the entire population of Graham County in 1940. Many of these jobs would go to trained workers whose skills were in short supply in the region. Wages at Fontana, like wartime wages elsewhere, seemed quite high after the region's retreat to a near-subsistence economy during the 1930s. Residents of the area saw the dam, and the wartime economy, as an opportunity to make money.¹

The opportunity for wartime construction jobs lured many from the surrounding counties of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee to apply for work at Fontana, despite the difficulty of getting to the job. The roads leading to the dam site could not handle large numbers of commuters, and their gravel surfaces quickly wore out rationed tires. TVA's attempts to arrange daily transportation for workers succeeded only near the end of the project, just as improved housing facilities at the site made transportation a less critical issue.

The initial attraction of a paying job with TVA wore

¹ Charlie Calhoun, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

off for many. Wages in wartime jobs rose rapidly, and some workers moved from job to job in search of the best paycheck. TVA had to compete with private industry throughout the nation for labor resources. TVA found it especially hard to keep workers at Fontana because of the remoteness of the location and the initial absence of adequate housing and facilities. Because it was hard to maintain a large work force, TVA had to recruit workers from White and Habersham Counties in northern Georgia, more than three hours' drive away over difficult roads.²

TVA's recruitment of workers stressed the importance of the project and the comfortable facilities available. In an eight-page recruitment pamphlet entitled "Work at Fontana Dam," TVA emphasized the cooperative atmosphere of the job site. The agency promised clean, racially segregated cafeterias, comfortable if small houses, and abundant amenities. These promises helped reassure white workers that the agency had no intention of experimenting with racially integrated living conditions. The pamphlet also implicitly reminded them that they would be expected to work as a team with, though not necessarily alongside, black and Cherokee workers. By stressing the fact that the electric power generat-

² Gordon R. Clapp to [J.] H. Aydelott, March 1, 1944, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 317; TVA Announcement of jobs available in Reservoir Clearance work, January 2, 1942, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 440. National Archives, Southeast Region.

ed at Fontana would be essential to the war effort, the pamphlet maintained a careful balance between the segregationist traditions of the South and the manpower demands of the war, largely in accord with Roosevelt's overall racial policies.³

From its inception in 1933, TVA voluntarily instituted a racial quota system in order to insure nonpreferential hiring practices. A. E. Morgan and his personnel director, Floyd Reeves, intended the system to be race-neutral. They based their hiring policy on the percentage of African-Americans in the immediate area of each project, so that African-Americans would be a large part of the work force at Wheeler, Chickamauga and Muscle Shoals, but not in the mountainous area surrounding the Norris, Appalachia, and Hiwassee projects. TVA resisted hiring African-Americans at several projects by saying that the small numbers involved did not justify the cost of constructing separate facilities for the two races. Privately, also, many TVA officials expressed profound reluctance to challenge the prevailing racial climate by providing integrated housing, and feared violence if they did so. The refusal to challenge prevail-

³ Tennessee Valley Authority, "Work at Fontana Dam," 1-8. On the division of labor by race in the South, see David Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Roosevelt's racial policies are well documented in William E. Leuchtenberg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) and Harvard L. Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

ing racial norms is consistent with H. A. Morgan's insistence on working within existing southern social, political, and educational institutions, and as one historian noted, TVA was fighting for its very existence throughout this formative period.⁴

After TVA refused to hire black workers at Hiwassee Dam because there were so few in the area, the NAACP and some members of the Roosevelt administration pressured the agency to guarantee that all projects would include black workers. After 1941, Executive Order 8802 required TVA and all other government agencies and contractors to "fully use all manpower regardless of race." The agency responded by increasing the percentage of black employees in its work force.⁵ This policy affected Fontana more than other projects because Fontana required the importation of a large work force in order to meet urgent needs for electric power in the aluminum industry. Additionally, TVA would eventually have to provide large amounts of electricity to the Clinton Engineer Works less than one hundred miles away at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where top secret research made the construction of atomic weapons possible.

The upper Little Tennessee had occasionally provided

⁴ Nancy Grant, TVA and Black Americans: Planning for the Status Quo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), xxx, 20-23, 48-49, 54-57; Hargrove, Prisoners of Myth, 54, 101.

⁵ Grant, TVA and Black Americans, 56-60.

black families with housing and employment. A few black farmers had maintained homes on Peachtree Creek in Swain County, and Ritter Lumber Company had recruited black workers to meet the extraordinary production demands of World War I. ALCOA, too, had brought in black workers for the construction of Cheoah Dam, itself a World War I project. But the area's black population had mostly disappeared by the 1930s. Black residents were scarce; those with the skills TVA needed were especially so. In keeping with the revised quota system, the personnel department projected it would hire ninety-six to one hundred black laborers from outside the mountain area for specific, mostly skilled jobs at Fontana.⁶

Like other black TVA employees, those at Fontana found mostly lower-echelon jobs. Whites and Cherokees resisted black participation in the project because they saw the imported black workers as "outsiders." Cherokees, in particular, had fought hard for access to jobs at Fontana and did not want "imported" competitors.⁷

TVA's George Gant remembered whites as willing to work

⁶ Grant, TVA and Black Americans, 60-61. The area's black population experienced a sharp decline between 1910 and 1925, and never rebounded. According to Clarence O. Vance, Ritter Lumber Company removed its black employees from the Hazel Creek area following some "racial problems" after World War I. See Clarence O. Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 15, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

⁷ Grant, TVA and Black Americans, 61; Finger, Cherokee Americans, 105, 110.

with members of other races. Living among those other races was another matter. "I think there was some tradition that Negroes did not spend the night in that [Graham] county," he recalled. Indeed, rioters singled out the black workers' sleeping quarters for special treatment. A mob nearly burned down the black dormitory the first night it was occupied. After that, many black workers left. TVA dispatched additional security officers from other camps, and those officers guarded the remaining black workers for over a week.⁸

Racial strife was not the only source of morale problems at Fontana. The continuing memory of the Great Depression, shortages of desired foodstuffs, the lack of adequate housing, the mix of mountain residents and urban professionals, difficulties in traveling, the unrelenting pace of construction, lack of desired services, and serious health hazards all contributed to a sense of frustration among workers.

Federal attempts to maintain morale met with mixed results. Jo Serra wrote to the Bryson City Times, expressing frustration with the seemingly endless onslaught of morale-boosting plans:

⁸ George Gant, interview by Charles Crawford; Grant, TVA and Black Americans, 60; see also Gordon R. Clapp to T. B. Parker and L. N. Allen, July 14, 1942, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 442. Unfortunately no other records of this event have been preserved by TVA.

Everybody that bobs up with a new idea or new scheme, and edges it onto Uncle Samuel's payroll, says it is for Morale. How we have got along so far without experts on morale, is hard to savvy. And Mr. George Washington, how he ever got up the courage to cross the Delaware without the help of a psychologist, or a toe-dancer, or a poet, to bolster him, is also a big question. Today you can hardly turn around without trampling on a Govt [sic] uplifter of some stripe But maybe some good will come of it. If a toe-dancer can make Congress show its teeth . . . then I guess it is money well spent.

Presumably without Serra's approval, the uplifting projects continued. One of the most important was education. TVA educational programs for adults emphasized practical matters such as scientific agriculture. Reading programs sought to eradicate poverty by eradicating illiteracy. The agency's apprenticeship program, an adjunct to its adult education strategy, provided accelerated training in jobs TVA needed to fill.

TVA educational policies reflected the dichotomy between the desire for reform from above and the awareness that rapid changes in social structure might not be welcome. The agency provided additional money to existing schools in Swain and Graham counties to offset the sudden increase in number of pupils, but otherwise exerted only limited influence over the operation of those schools. The agency sponsored the establishment of vocational programs, for example, but did not attempt to influence the academic curriculum.

But Fontana Village was a very different environment

⁹ Bryson City Times, March 5, 1942.

from Proctor, Bushnell, and the other communities of the Little Tennessee. The agency built Fontana Village in order to attract and keep professionals and skilled workers who would not willingly live in the tent camps and dormitories. The professionals who lived in the village brought their families and sent their children to school there as well. Because the parents expected their children to follow in their footsteps, learning skills and pursuing a higher education, the schools TVA built at Fontana Village employed the latest pedagogical theories. TVA officials hoped the schools would provide a laboratory for demonstrating successful techniques which would then be copied by the existing schools.¹⁰

Fontana school staff members believed that in a good school, students would "face and freely discuss genuine personal and social problems." They would initiate, plan, and evaluate their own activities. "Mutual help" and cooperation would replace competition in academic activities. Students would seek their rewards in the value of the activities themselves, not in grades or other external measures of progress. They would criticize and revise their own curriculum to meet their evolving needs.¹¹

Students at the Fontana schools, ideally, would be "as

¹⁰ Eunice Bailey et al, Two Years of the Public School at Fontana Dam, Welch Cove, North Carolina, by the Teaching Staff and Selected Students (n.p., n.d.), 1-5.

¹¹ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 5.

much concerned with learning how to get knowledge . . . as with the knowledge itself." Hands-on study of natural processes would be augmented by standardized or "scientifically developed" lessons and tests. They would learn by doing, and the things they did would emphasize marketable skills. Although most high school students at Fontana expected to enter either the military or college, most also learned woodworking, homemaking or other appropriate skills.¹²

The students learned good citizenship through helping out with the war effort, economizing wherever possible and making substitutes for scarce manufactured goods. They collected scrap iron, tin cans, old tires, and paper items. Boys made menu card holders, wooden puzzles, ash trays, and walking sticks. Girls fashioned Christmas decorations of pine cones and branches, and made washcloths and blankets. Children of all ages competed in the sale and purchase of war bonds and stamps, and the ninth grade math class learned accounting by managing the bond drives.¹³

Budding third-grade botanists received a hands-on education when the school principal gave the class a greenhouse. The greenhouse was located twenty-five miles away, and the students took responsibility for relocating it. Each student proposed a site for the greenhouse and wrote an

¹² Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 5.

¹³ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 6.

essay defending the proposal. The group solicited and received the assistance of the eighth-grade class in disassembling, moving, and reassembling it, and managed to conscript quite a few of their fathers as well. The third graders made sure the fathers knew what was expected of them, when they were expected and so on. They also washed and polished the glass, studied gardening, and experimented with different types of seeds.¹⁴

The youngsters settled on lettuce, eggplant, tomatoes, cabbage, and peppers for their greenhouse produce, and many raised them at home as well. They kept the greenhouse unlocked, and visitors were welcomed. The greenhouse provided produce for sale, with the profits going for school equipment and more seeds. In addition, it provided a stimulus for a beautification project which took root in the homes of the village at the insistence of the students.¹⁵

Given the overcrowded conditions and frequent disease outbreaks in the area, it is no surprise that health and safety issues occupied the minds of students and teachers alike. A rigorous program of physical education emphasized variety while giving more credit for more strenuous exertion. A group of boys organized themselves into a safety patrol, while high school girls served as "student teachers" by watching over the younger pupils. Third-graders joined

¹⁴ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 9-10.

¹⁵ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 9-10.

the Junior Red Cross. Students and faculty worked together to stage a benefit to help victims of infantile paralysis. Films and field trips emphasized health and hygiene. Safety on the construction site formed an interesting part of the curriculum for many students and, indirectly, for their parents as well. Even venereal diseases were openly discussed.¹⁶

From third grade on, students worked as library assistants, logging in new books and keeping the library neat. Promoting "reading for fun," the library emphasized reference books and current materials. One measure of the trust school administrators had in the students is that even costly, scarce encyclopedias could be checked out.¹⁷

One sixth grade class became fascinated by ancient Greece. With a little encouragement from teachers, they researched the subject thoroughly, eventually planning a Greek banquet with authentic food, music, and athletic events. Parents were invited; presumably they applauded politely.¹⁸

Fifth through seventh grade students initiated the formation of a school store which would provide students with needed supplies. The students not only kept the finan-

¹⁶ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 21-22, 17-18, 14-15.

¹⁷ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 24.

¹⁸ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 13.

cial records of the store, but filled out orders for more supplies and wrote checks to suppliers, learning valuable real-world lessons in the process. They also operated a "milk room" where all students could purchase milk. Again, students took responsibility for ordering milk, washing and returning bottles, and keeping records.¹⁹

In a class on "modern problems," high school students examined the electoral process in detail. The class sponsored a mock partisan election for "Mayor of Fontana High School." Eighty-seven students registered to vote. President Roosevelt likely would not have been pleased with the outcome, as the students selected a Republican for the job.²⁰

High school students built a workshop, which they used to build desks, bookcases, and cabinets for the school. But the workshop provided more than furniture. Students worked off stress by fashioning gifts, toys, sleds, and rowboats. The gift of a handmade keepsake, a rabbit box or a milking stool could ease the pain of friends leaving the area as their parents finished their jobs at Fontana.²¹

Parents seldom missed student activities despite their own hectic schedules. School plays, skits, news broadcasts, dialogues, recitations, and interviews reached the entire

¹⁹ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 12.

²⁰ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 27-28.

²¹ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 16-17.

construction site through the public address system installed in 1944. Fathers and mothers working on the dam could hear their children's voices and could rest assured that they were safe, happy, and healthy, and that they were learning useful things. Project Manager Fred Schlemmer described the broadcast of school activities over the public address system as one of the most important morale boosters at his disposal.²²

One class project which began as a lesson on pets eventually integrated lessons in accounting, carpentry, and elementary capitalism as well. One first grader brought a hen for "show-and-tell." The hen tried to set, so the children bought eggs for her to incubate. Two cents' admission to their staging of "Little Black Sambo" and "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" was each adult's contribution to the initial egg purchase.²³

The hen hatched ten chicks, which the children fed on food scraps from home. In due time, three of the resulting fryers were sold to buy feed for the rest. With so many hens now laying, the geometry class had to design and build a henhouse. By this point, eggs could be sold for feed money. At Christmas, members of the school staff bought the chickens, providing money for more hens and some needed

²² Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 15, 1-3.

²³ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School . . ., 7.

school equipment. Reading, writing and arithmetic assignments pertained to the chickens, and "sex education came easily and naturally" as the students learned the basics of animal husbandry.²⁴

Presumably the production of poultry was no accident. Like most other Americans during World War II, workers at Fontana experienced difficulty obtaining enough food, especially meat, to satisfy their appetites. TVA chairman David Lilienthal personally appealed to the Office of Price Administration for extra rations for those working on the Fontana project. Prentiss Brown, administrator of the OPA, declined to provide additional supplies despite the project's priority rating from the War Production Board. Brown referred the matter to the office of Archie M. Palmer, also of OPA, who had already rejected the request. Palmer passed the request on to other OPA officials, who in turn offered a partial solution in the form of an increase in general rations, but declined to give Fontana any special consideration.²⁵

Even after the increase in meat supplies, rationed meats were limited to one meal per day. Administrators dining at Cafeteria Number One ate an average of two fish meals and four chicken meals per week, while the larger

²⁴ Bailey, Two Years of the Public School, 7-8.

²⁵ David E. Lilienthal to Prentiss Brown, May 8, 1943; Marguerite Owen to Gordon R. Clapp, May 13, 1943; Marguerite Owen to A. S. Jandrey, May 19, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 314.

Cafeteria Number Two for laborers served three fish meals and five chicken meals per week.²⁶ An average of three meat or cheese sandwiches per month, containing one ounce of meat or cheese, was provided in packed lunches. A TVA report noted that the 2.8 pounds of rationed meat provided to Fontana employees each week before the revised order compared well with the 2 to 2.25 pounds allowed for average civilians, but went on to observe that average civilians had access to restaurant meals to supplement their rations. The new ration order increased Fontana's average to four pounds per week, considerably more than the "normal civilian average."²⁷ By July 1943, Fontana workers consumed nearly twice the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables OPA considered necessary for the diet of a healthy adult, and meat supplies were ample. Additionally, workers averaged four eggs per person per day. Clearly, by the summer of 1943, protein, fat, and cholesterol were abundant at Fontana.²⁸ J. Ed Campbell reported that in July of 1943, workers at Fontana consumed "enough food to load 226 1-1/2 ton trucks

²⁶ Fish and chicken, while excellent sources of protein, were not considered "meat" by rationing boards or by consumers.

²⁷ "Summary of Adjustments in Meat Ration Points and Use of Meats at Fontana Cafeterias." TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 314.

²⁸ Jesse L. Harris to J. Ed Campbell, July 24, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 314.

which would form a caravan two miles long."²⁹

Food and other supplies for Fontana workers generally came from Tennessee. Athens, Tennessee's Mayfield Creamery provided dairy products and ice to the cafeterias.³⁰ Brown Greer & Company of Knoxville took responsibility for making a variety of bakery goods available to workers.³¹ Hartman Beverage Company, also of Knoxville, carried root beer to quench workers' thirst.³²

There are several reasons North Carolina suppliers do not appear on this list. First, TVA awarded food supply contracts to large suppliers which could provide the full list of items requested, and small suppliers often could bid on only part of a contract. Second, such large suppliers tended to locate near major markets and trade routes. The Tennessee Valley was such a location; the mountains of western North Carolina were not. Third, large Tennessee

²⁹ J. Ed Campbell to Arthur S. Jandrey, September 13, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 639.

³⁰ Gladys Burkhart to C. H. Garity, November 13, 1943; Leona LeRoy to W. J. Hagan, Jr., April 29, 1944; Leona LeRoy to W. J. Hagan, Jr., November 1, 1944; Leona LeRoy to W. J. Hagan, Jr., May 11, 1945; W. J. Hagan to Gordon R. Clapp, October 29, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 151.

³¹ W. J. Hagan to Gordon R. Clapp, June 8, 1944; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 576.

³² Gladys M. Burkhart to C. H. Garity, September 8, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 112.

businesses were located closer to the Fontana site than businesses of corresponding size in North Carolina. Asheville, the nearest major city on the North Carolina side of the mountains, was ninety miles away, while Knoxville, which was also larger than Asheville, was only sixty-eight miles. Even if North Carolina suppliers of sufficient size could be found, they would incur higher transportation costs than their Tennessee counterparts.

Difficulty in transportation also affected TVA's labor supply. Because of difficulty obtaining reliable and safe transportation to and from work, many TVA workers moved into the dam area. Some found clean, secure housing for themselves and their families in the community of Fontana Village. Others found substandard housing in the many trailer camps and shantytowns hastily assembled near the construction site. All who moved into the area found crowded conditions and a lack of privacy.

In contrast to Norris, TVA's earliest construction village,³³ Fontana was never intended as a model community. Fontana Village more nearly resembled a wartime camp, with trailers and prefabricated homes dominating the landscape. While it lacked the extensive facilities provided for the Army's secret city at Oak Ridge, Fontana Village did offer a

³³ Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny, TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982, 215-235.

few community services and comforts, including a school, a small shopping area, a bank and hair styling shops.

In addition, from July of 1942, TVA contracted with the Nantahala Regional Library Board to provide library services. TVA's Mary Utopia Rothrock recalled that the library she organized at Fontana provided a vital service. "It would expand their experience, you know? Just like a movie expands your experience." She admitted that she sometimes looked down on the mountain people as being uninterested in literature. But the residents surprised her. She recalled an encounter with a barber at Fontana Village. She had heard that he read a lot, and casually asked what sort of books he liked to read. Embarrassed, the barber shyly admitted it was a work of poetry. Expecting to find some lightweight doggerel, Rothrock was startled to see A. E. Housman's A Shropshire Lad on the barber's shelf. Others with humbler tastes would ask for "a book I can practice reading out of." She attributed the energy with which residents devoured the books to the constant stimulation of the construction schedule. "They came into a stimulating environment and they made use of it to expand their horizons," she explained.³⁴

³⁴ M. G. Chambers to W. L. Sturdevant, February 2, 1945; Gordon R. Clapp to M. G. Chambers, February 3, 1945; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 135; Mary Utopia Rothrock, interview by Charles Crawford, in "An Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority," University of Memphis Special Collections.

Despite the availability of library services, the primary information source for many was the Knoxville News-Sentinel. Unlike those who had lived in mountain areas most of their lives, many of the professionals and skilled workers found the area isolated and sorely lacking in cultural attractions. Because many of the professionals at Fontana came from Knoxville, the newspaper was their primary link to their hometown. When the newspaper announced that it could not continue circulation in the area because of paper shortages and transportation costs, TVA's General Manager complained loudly, appealing to the paper's sense of patriotic duty and reminding the business manager of the persistent labor shortage at Fontana. The implication was clear: without news from the outside world, pressure from the work was so intense that workers would be unable or unwilling to stay on the job.³⁵

While on the job, workers at Fontana lived in a variety of housing. Some who lived in the area already continued to live with their families, as TVA intended. Others, especially those recruited from outside regular commuting distance, lived in TVA-constructed tent camps at Bee Cove and Gold Mine Creek, or in "demountable" dormitories brought in from other TVA projects, or in shanties or trailers on private land near the construction site. Many found rooms

³⁵ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, May 30, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 165.

for rent in Bryson City.³⁶ Relatively few lived in the family-oriented housing of Fontana Village until the project was nearly completed. Regardless of the type of housing employees used, they lived in cramped conditions, perhaps a bit too close to their neighbors for total comfort. In the trailer camps and tent camps, fresh water supplies were inadequate.³⁷ Dormitory facilities provided somewhat better conditions, with communal bathrooms replacing makeshift privies. Even in the village area, houses were spaced as closely as possible, for the sake of efficiency, and the walls of the cheaply-made cottages were thin enough that even with windows closed, one could hear one's next door neighbor's every activity.³⁸

One could also disapprove of it. TVA employees came from many different backgrounds. Fontana Village housing was reserved for families of those who expected to stay in the area for the duration of the project. In practice, this meant that professionals and skilled workers lived there, while unskilled laborers primarily resided in the surrounding area. Lower-echelon employees often derided the manage-

³⁶ Bryson City Times January 15, 1942; February 26, 1942; March 5, 1942; April 16, 1942.

³⁷ Bailey, "Shack Development Control," 3-22.

³⁸ Ed Hochnedel and Ralph Harmon, interview by Carolyn B. Roberts, TVA Oral History Interviews, 1980 TVA Retirees Reunion Tape, May 16, 1980, TVA Oral History Interviews, Box 1, National Archives, Southeast Region.

ment neighborhoods of Fontana Village as "Silk Stocking Row."³⁹ The expectations of middle class urbanites contrasted sharply with the more expressive lifestyles of rural laborers. Transient workers moving into formerly self-contained communities contributed further to a sense of dislocation among the more settled residents.

The influx of transient residents greatly expanded the market for illegal spirits, and the "disorderly houses" which sprang up to serve that market created disturbances that the agency would ultimately be forced to control. One Proctor resident, Mrs. Hattie Gunter, complained about an establishment where violence was encouraged:

There were two men starting to fight, a third man, cousin of the two was trying to make peace[.] Mr. Messer shot the innocent victim in the ankle and he was unable to go to work for several days. Last Sunday night a similar incident happened. Some fellows were fighting and the third was trying to make peace[.] Mr. Messer jumped on him [and] beat him with a gun on the head[,] and he lost a lot of blood. This thing has gone far enough. Every up-right and decent citizen will sign a petition that this place of business be closed. Some terrible disaster will happen if it isn't closed.⁴⁰

Demurring on the grounds that TVA did not yet technically control the site of the objectionable operation, reservoir property management officials referred the issue to the local sheriff's office, resulting in a few raids on the

³⁹ Lance Holland, personal communication with Stephen W. Taylor, July 1, 1994.

⁴⁰ Hattie Gunter to TVA, August 19, 1942. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 107.

business. The problem persisted. Even after the agency purchased the land, TVA attorney Herbert E. Hudson advised against trying to shut the business down directly. Instead, J. Ed Campbell of the population readjustment office relied upon the removal of shantytowns in the area to deprive the proprietor of his clientele, a strategy that apparently succeeded.⁴¹

TVA attempted to provide recreation opportunities that would preserve order and stability and would enhance worker productivity. Those who lived at or near the dam site during the week of April 29, 1945 could enjoy such films as "Thunderhead, Son of Flicka," "Woman in the Window," "I'll Be Seeing You," and "Song of Nevada," shown in the TVA theater. They could attend church at either of two "community churches" served by guest ministers, or borrow books from the TVA library. Young girls could attend meetings of the Brownie Scout Troop. Adults could take advantage of the opportunity to attend a dance at the Community Building and sway to the sounds of Coy Tucker and his orchestra. Men and women could participate in the softball league during the daytime, and roller skate to music in the evening.⁴²

⁴¹ Herbert E. Hudson to J. Ed Campbell, November 11, 1942; Herbert E. Hudson to J. Ed Campbell, January 12, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 107.

⁴² Fontana Dam Recreation (newsletter), April 27, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 750.

These opportunities served the entertainment needs of those living in the camps or at Fontana Village, but failed to reach many of the transient workers living in outlying areas or in the towns. For these mostly unskilled laborers there was little planned recreation, and they resorted to more traditional means of entertaining themselves, namely drinking and carousing. Early in the project, the Bryson City Times reported a dramatic increase in alcohol-related accidents, fights, and disorderly conduct as the result of a lack of adequate recreation at Fontana. One editorial summed up the situation nicely:

Bent-up nerves must have some relaxation. . . There are a great many young girls and some young men working for TVA who have no gardens to work, no homes to look after. These people need after-hours recreation. Our own boys and girls also need good well-regulated recreation.⁴³

After this editorial was published, TVA and the Bryson City Lions Club worked together to provide adequate planned recreation for the Fontana employees living in Swain County. But not all local residents were willing to accept the notion that a lack of planned recreation was the source of the alcohol problem. One news report, describing a raid on a tavern at Deals Gap, near the dam, blamed the rise in alcohol consumption in the area on "racketeers of Knoxville, Maryville, and Georgia. . .who evidently are reaping big

⁴³ Bryson City Times January 18, 1943; April 1, 1943. Quoted material from Bryson City Times, April 1, 1943, emphasis added.

profits from the workmen at Fontana."⁴⁴

Drinking also contributed to other disorderly behavior. Three Fontana workers from Hiawassee, Georgia, were convicted of setting multiple forest fires in Graham County. One of them confessed that they had "had a beer or two at Topton [North Carolina]." When asked why they set the fires, another replied simply and somewhat drunkenly, "I wanted to see the woods burn."⁴⁵

The Brewing Industry Council responded with an image campaign urging people to "Buy your beer only in reputable, decent places."⁴⁶ Faced with attacks on their retail outlets, breweries retaliated by describing drinking as "an American pastime" and stressing moderation. One advertisement read:

The other day we were talking about George Washington--who besides being a great general was a surveyor, a farmer, and a wise statesman. 'And he made mighty good beer too' says Grandma Hoskins. 'His private recipe's in the New York Public Library'

Now Grandma Hoskins knows her history--and she told us how other famous men believed in beer and moderation. William Penn, for instance, who had his own brewery, and James Madison, who 'urged the manufacture of beer in every State of the Union.'

When the dark years of Prohibition came along, they proved how right those early American statesmen were--that no law ever takes the place of moderation.

They were right about a lot of things--Wash-

⁴⁴ Bryson City Times, February 25, 1943.

⁴⁵ Bryson City Times, May 28, 1942.

⁴⁶ Bryson City Times, May 28, 1942.

ington and Madison and Penn--and the others who founded America. And from where I sit they were certainly right about moderation too.⁴⁷

Moderation of any sort was in short supply at Fontana. The dam itself was to be the highest east of the Rocky Mountains, and the construction schedule required round-the-clock labor. Workers maintained an extraordinary pace. One employee recalled that many office employees served as reserve officers. While draft deferments were available for some long-term employees, "[TVA] didn't get them for these real young fellows who had just come to work and were really pencil pushers." Asked how workers coped with the constant turnover, he replied, "We hired some and in a few months we'd lose most of them. . . We just worked harder, that's all."⁴⁸

Motivational posters and billboards were essential to maintaining morale and productivity in the harsh environment of the construction site. Posters advised that "slacking off" was tantamount to treason, that war bonds were essential for victory, and that the dam was as much a part of the war effort as the movement of troops. One often-reproduced poster featured a smiling, aging, bespectacled worker in a hard hat and overalls. Its caption advised:

⁴⁷ Brewing Industry Council advertisement in Bryson City Times, February 25, 1943.

⁴⁸ Donald Mattern, interview by Carolyn B. Roberts, 1980 TVA Retirees Reunion Tape, May 16, 1980, TVA Oral History Interviews, Box 7, National Archives, Southeast Region.

WE ARE BUILDING THIS DAM
TO MAKE THE POWER
TO ROLL THE ALUMINUM
TO BUILD THE BOMBERS
TO BEAT THE BASTARDS

The poster's logic was easy to follow, and the motivational message was clear. Despite such messages, however, TVA did experience substantial morale problems, especially absenteeism and the aforementioned heavy drinking. In a speech at a rally in March of 1943, Chief Engineer C. E. Blee noted that over thirty thousand employees had been through the hiring process in order to maintain a work force of 5,600. He bemoaned the extremely high rate of turnover, and cited a rate of 500 absentees some days--nearly ten percent of the work force--as a major hindrance to the completion of the project.⁴⁹

A lack of communication between labor and management exacerbated morale problems, fostering rumors which jeopardized the project's completion. In a dispute fueled by rumors of a promised wage increase which did not materialize, the carpenters' union staged a walkout. One carpenter complained to Senator Robert Reynolds that a promised 15 percent raise to cover increased cost of living never mate-

⁴⁹ Bryson City Times, March 11, 1943.

rialized, and that carpenters did more work and more dangerous work than did any other "craft" workers. TVA officials in Knoxville apparently did not respond to the carpenters' union's complaints to this carpenter's satisfaction, and refused to admit union representatives to a wage conference.⁵⁰ George Gant took the position that federal laws required that they pay the prevailing wage in the Tennessee Valley area as a whole. According to this logic, then, the agency would be breaking the law to pay carpenters any more than \$1.25 per hour, and that no increase had been promised or would be forthcoming. TVA's George Gant made the agency's position clear and public, using patriotism as a bargaining tool:

The TVA knows that carpenters at Fontana understand the law, the general agreement, and the urgency of the Fontana war project. The TVA assumes that those who continue to work at Fontana will accept their responsibility under the law and the general agreement and help meet the Fontana schedule to provide power requested by the War Production Board and the War Department. Those who do not accept this responsibility⁵¹ are requested to advise the Personnel Office at once.

TVA's strategy for dealing with morale problems and preventing the spread of rumors involved the manipulation of information and control of the physical environment. Beginning in February of 1944, shortly after the carpenters'

⁵⁰ Henry R. Holtzclaw, Sr. to Sen. Robert R. Reynolds, January 19, 1944, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 118.

⁵¹ George F. Gant, "Announcement to Carpenters at Fontana Project," January 15, 1944, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 118.

incident, TVA officials established an elaborate public address system for

the development of contentment, happiness, and satisfaction in all employees; the promotion of job enthusiasm and interest; the increase of safety consciousness; the stimulation of production; the reduction of absenteeism; the elimination of employee turnover; the purchase of war bonds; [and] the promotion of acceptance⁵² of citizenship responsibility to the war effort.

The system operated twenty-four hours a day, six days a week. Officials directed the programming at the worksite, rather than residential and recreation areas. Musical programming aimed at relieving tension was interspersed with official announcements, short editorials, safety slogans, health reminders, advertisements for war bonds, news broadcasts, educational programs and game shows, as well as programs produced by schoolchildren. Recreation officials recorded local talent shows for rebroadcast during each shift. Visiting dignitaries, ranging from the Governor of North Carolina to the President of the American Federation of Labor, used the P.A. system to address workers. All regularly scheduled programs were tightly scripted, to prevent any negative messages from inadvertently reaching workers. In an emergency workers could be paged or warned as needed. A poll conducted by the Personnel Department noted that 93.6 percent of workers surveyed considered the

⁵² "Fontana Dam Public Address System," unsigned report dated July 20, 1945, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702.

P.A. system "beneficial to the job."⁵³

Apparently the system served its intended purpose. At the annual Labor Day rally in 1944, AFL president William Green used the system to applaud the efficiency of labor-management relations at Fontana and encourage workers to remain productive. Like other motivational speakers, Green reminded workers at Fontana that they were working to make "power and munitions to win the war." He concluded:

I need not tell you that the war is not won, that your job is not finished even though power is scheduled to flow so soon. And I won't trouble to exhort you to work hard and stay on the job. Why shouldn't you work hard and stay on the job? This is your country and mine that is fighting! We are not spectators at a tragic spectacle involving players on a screen. This is our war! Our liberty is at stake! The fate of organized labor is in the balance! It is our world that must be saved!⁵⁴

At the same rally, Samuel E. Roper also cautioned workers not to mistake Labor Day for a victory celebration. He reminded workers that "what you are doing at Fontana is so essential and so important to the winning of this war that you should not lose a moment's time We still have a big job to do."⁵⁵

⁵³ "Fontana Dam Public Address System," TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702.

⁵⁴ Labor Day 1944 speech by William Green, delivered through electric transcription to the Fontana audience. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702.

⁵⁵ Labor Day 1944 speech by Samuel E. Roper, delivered at Fontana Dam. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 702.

Like the voices of one's neighbors and fellow workers, like the reminders of wartime shortages, and like the demands of the job itself, the voice of the P.A. system--the voice of TVA--was never completely absent. Workers at Fontana experienced the presence of federal government authority tangibly. TVA was everywhere in Fontana Village and neighboring areas, using its influence to shape work habits, living conditions and leisure activities as no government entity had done before in this area. Long-term residents responded to this influence much as they had to other outside influences: through accommodation and enterprise.

Long-time residents of the upper Little Tennessee had faced economic uncertainty so regularly that they became accustomed to it. Moreover, they developed a way of coping with it. That way was to seize every economic opportunity presented to them, as individuals and as a community. Thus, in addition to the enterprises already mentioned, landowners established trailer camps and rented shacks to incoming workers. Many towndwelling residents took in boarders, sold bag lunches, and assembled packing crates into portable houses for workers. Hoteliers and restaurateurs made attempts to cater to the commuter by offering "home-cooked" meals and bag lunches.⁵⁶ One, the Dickey Hotel, even added "ethnic specialties" such as chicken chop suey, creole rice

⁵⁶ Bryson City Times, November 19, 1942.

and "Italian spaghetti" to its usual menu in order to attract the supposedly more adventuresome palates of the professionals and managers who came to the area.⁵⁷ Andy Reid's tavern and other locally owned roadhouses also found a ready market among the workers at Fontana. The proprietors of these businesses certainly were not strangers to capitalism.

In Fontana Village and the surrounding area, TVA and local residents worked together to provide needed services to workers. The agency established rent levels based on area norms, earning a profit on most of the facilities it provided. Local concessioners obtained the opportunity to earn a substantial income from monopolies on essential services. As an indication of the sales volume possible in these conditions, beginning in January of 1943, the Burrus and Barefoot Drug Store at Fontana Dam agreed to pay TVA 5 percent of the estimated \$5,000 to \$8,000 monthly gross income as rent.⁵⁸

Female employees at Fontana would have been in dire straits without the services of Lula Roberts. Roberts operated a dressmaking shop in Store Building A at Fontana. Her 128 square foot space cost seven dollars and fifty cents

⁵⁷ Bryson City Times, January 21, 1943.

⁵⁸ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, January 22, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 42.

per month, of which three dollars went to cover the cost of electricity.⁵⁹ The other \$4.50 went to TVA for rent on the facility. TVA workers welcomed the service, and Roberts made money by providing it.

Because of the temporary nature of the project, TVA sometimes found it difficult to find contractors to provide services in locations considered unprofitable. After much searching for an appropriate licensee, TVA permitted S. R. Thompson to set up a grocery and general store for the workers housed in the tent camp at Bee Cove. TVA furnished buildings and provided housing for members of Thompson's family who would assist in running the eight hundred square foot store. TVA estimated that the store would gross \$2,000 per month, and the license provided that Thompson would pay two percent of the gross as rent. TVA's Reservoir Property Management director stated that the license would enable the agency to fulfill its obligations to employees without incurring a loss.⁶⁰

In some cases, TVA agreed to forego any profit from rent, because the services to be provided were considered essential. Ruby Hood contracted to operate a post office at Fontana Village. The post office concession cost Hood

⁵⁹ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, April 6, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 198.

⁶⁰ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, April 26, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 235.

twenty dollars per month. This rental fee went primarily to cover TVA's costs for utilities, since the authority considered the post office a necessary service. The fourth-class facility occupied some seven hundred forty-four square feet in the village store building, and was officially named Welch Cove in honor of one of the oldest families in the area.⁶¹

J. D. Moore, formerly of Sylva, North Carolina, operated a tire recapping service at the dam. This service was particularly important to commuting workers, given the wartime rubber shortage. Moore was an experienced tire recapper who owned his own equipment--equipment which was scarce at the time--so TVA was anxious to help him establish his business. He initially agreed to pay TVA five percent of the gross income from the business, but requested and received a reduction to two percent of gross because he found that his operating expenses were several times higher than they had been at Sylva.⁶²

One enterprising soul even made a career by providing needed services to multiple TVA sites in turn, becoming a sort of professional "camp follower." Robert L. Sutton, who had operated the barber shop for Hiwassee Dam's construction

⁶¹ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, June 8, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 118.

⁶² L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, August 5, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 161.

camp through 1940, contracted to provide the hairstyling services for both men and women at Fontana Dam in 1942. He paid ten dollars a month per chair in rent. Sutton also maintained a shoe repair shop and laundry service at Fontana beginning in 1943. He paid forty-five dollars per month for this concession, including all the TVA electricity he could use. Sutton later expanded his facilities, offering hair styling services and laundry pickup at Welch Cove (Fontana Village) as well as at the dam site. The entrepreneur discontinued laundry service in October of 1944, but continued his shoe repair and hairstyling services, asking for reduced rent because the businesses did not provide the expected income.⁶³ In this case, even the availability of a monopoly on these services did not make them profitable enough for Sutton.

Sutton's hair styling operations did not accommodate black workers. John D. Swaggerty operated a separate barber shop in the Negro Community Building for these workers, occupying a diminutive 120 square feet. Swaggerty paid the same rate per chair as Sutton and operated under the same rules for utilities and equipment despite far lower potential sales volume.

As some tried to use the increase in population to make

⁶³ L. N. Allen to Gordon R. Clapp, August 14, 1940; July 24, 1942; March 3, 1943; July 1, 1943; February 17, 1944; January 1, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 227.

money, others saw the boom as a chance to increase their political power. In the weeks leading up to the 1944 elections, local officials of the Democratic Party saw an opportunity to capitalize on the influx of population by embarking on a voter registration drive, encouraging temporary workers to register as residents of Graham County. This, predictably, resulted in a strong protest from J. Bluford Slaughter, County Accountant and a major figure in the local Republican Party. Slaughter alleged TVA management complicity in this drive, and threatened "a lot of unfavorable publicity" when the State Board of Elections met to decide the issue. He expressed particular dismay that "there has even negroes [sic] registered and not a negro, but one in this County and he has never even offered to register."⁶⁴

TVA General Manager Gordon Clapp replied that the Authority was not engaged in voter registration, and reminded Slaughter that North Carolina law provided a means to challenge voters' qualifications, both at the time of registration and at the polls. He further challenged Slaughter to produce more specific allegations so that TVA could investigate, and discipline the individuals involved if needed. He concluded by reminding Slaughter that TVA employees who were otherwise qualified "should not be disfran-

⁶⁴ J. Bluford Slaughter to Gordon R. Clapp, November 2, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 210.

chised because of their . . . employment."⁶⁵

The timing of Slaughter's accusations--less than a week before the general election--indicates that he may have been trying to lay the groundwork for challenging the results of a correctly predicted Democratic victory in the local contests. It is impossible to discover how many TVA temporary employees actually voted in Graham County, or how many of them voted Democratic, but no challenge was actually filed with the state election commission.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Gordon R. Clapp to J. Bluford Slaughter, November 7, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 210.

⁶⁶ Kim Crisp, Supervisor, Graham County Board of Elections, interview by Benjamin J. Lea, director, North Carolina Political Broadcast Archives, June 19, 1995, summarized in personal communication to the author. Graham County, home to one of the more powerful Republican organizations in North Carolina during this period, strongly supported incumbent Democrat Zebulon Weaver in the 1944 congressional election. Weaver, who served uninterrupted from 1930 to 1946, usually faced serious opposition in Graham County. That county had narrowly gone Republican in 1928 and in all of the midterm congressional elections since 1932, suggesting that local Democrats benefitted from a "coattail effect" in presidential election years. Weaver won Graham County by 455 votes in 1944, his largest margin ever in that county, but hardly a landslide. In the 1944 senatorial race, Democrat Clyde Hoey defeated his Republican opponent by an almost identical 459-vote margin in Graham County, while two years earlier Democrat Josiah Bailey had lost Graham County by fewer than 100 votes. Democratic gubernatorial candidate R. Gregg Cherry won Graham County as well in 1944, by 462 votes. The very similar margins here indicate that a party-line vote is at least possible in these 1944 contests, and Arnold Monteith recalled later that straight-ticket voting was the norm among Bushnell families. But both Democratic and Republican candidates did gain substantial numbers of voters in 1944 compared to either the midterm 1942 election or the 1940 contest. Probably the new voters were mostly Democratic because of their ties to TVA, and many previously Democratic voters supported Republicans in 1944 because of

Despite, or perhaps because of the tremendous economic changes the project produced, most residents accepted the TVA presence in the area. But TVA lost much of this support over its handling of land acquisition issues, especially the acquisition of 44,400 acres on the north side of the reservoir area. This area, collectively called the north shore land, was located above the high water mark of the reservoir, and thus would not be flooded. But the project would destroy North Carolina State Highway 288, a twisting gravel road which ran along the northern shore of the river. This would leave residents of the north shore communities of Proctor and Bushnell as well as those of the isolated coves along Hazel Creek and Noland Creek completely without road access.

In previous TVA projects, the agency had offered to replace any roads inundated or rendered useless. But because labor and other resources were so scarce during the war, the War Production Board refused to allocate the necessary workers and materials for the construction of a road which was not directly necessary for the war effort. So TVA officials had to find some other means of making amends for the loss of the road. Gordon R. Clapp proposed settling claims for the loss of access directly with the individuals affected, and making no attempt to provide a replacement road. The other alternative was for TVA to acquire the land

TVA's growing unpopularity among non-employees.

and compensate the state and county, rather than the individual landowners, for the loss of the road. This latter approach, which the agency adopted, is characteristic of what Bruce Schulman describes in From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt as the "triumph of place over people,"⁶⁷ and is consistent with H. A. Morgan's policy of working within the existing governmental institutions whenever possible. It also conforms to TVA's usual policy of compensating the legal owners of property rather than the direct users.

TVA officials negotiated a settlement involving Swain County, the State of North Carolina, and the National Park Service. The settlement called for TVA to purchase the north shore land and turn it over to the National Park Service for inclusion in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The land had actually been included in the proposed Park boundary in 1926, but had not been purchased because of a lack of funds.⁶⁸ The acquisition of this land would absolve both TVA and the state of any responsibility for replacing the outdated road with one constructed to equivalently minimal standards of safety and durability, because there would be no residents needing road access. Upon

⁶⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 206.

⁶⁸ The land for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was purchased with private donations rather than federal appropriations. The Great Depression caused potential donors to disappear.

receiving the needed funding from Congress, the Park Service would assume responsibility for replacing the old road with a new parkway as part of its master access plan for the Smokies, giving Swain County a means of attracting tourists to compensate for the lack of property tax revenue. TVA would pay \$400,000 into a trust fund to be administered by the state for the retirement of the debt Swain County had incurred in building the original road.⁶⁹ The state would pay to construct a connecting road from U.S. Highway 19 to the park boundary, where it would intersect with the park road. TVA would purchase the land at "fair market value," but would consider that the four-party agreement satisfied its obligation to replace the road.

The state pushed for the land to be transferred to its ownership rather than to the park, so that the land could be used as leverage to guarantee that the park service would build the new road. TVA officials resisted this position, partly because they did not approve of placing political

⁶⁹ Highway 288 had been constructed under the old road system, in which townships took responsibility for building and maintaining their own roads. In 1931, the North Carolina Legislature abolished all local township and county road boards and placed all public roads under the jurisdiction of the State Highway Commission. While the state took on the responsibility for maintaining the road from that moment forward, the debt incurred in constructing the road in the first place remained as part of the general bonded debt load of Swain County. William C. Fitts to Gordon R. Clapp, February 22, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 386. On the origins and development of the old township system, see Cecil Kenneth Brown, The State Highway System of North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931).

pressure on another federal agency.⁷⁰

Residents of the Noland and Lands Creek areas, operating partly on the basis of misleading rumors and encouraged by the law firm of Black and Whitaker, both members of which were longtime Republicans, embarked on a petition drive aimed at forcing TVA to reconsider the acquisition of the north shore. Of the sixty-six petitioners associated with the Black and Whitaker petition of June 29, 1943, TVA identified only eighteen owners of affected land. Many petitioners from Lands Creek apparently incorrectly believed that their land was included in the north shore acquisition. Residents of these two areas also asked TVA to replace only their portion of the road, from Bryson City to Noland Creek. TVA General Manager Gordon Clapp's reading of the petition suggested to him that "the petitioners may be interested not so much in retaining the ownership of their land as in turning them [sic] over at a good price." In any event, the state and the county, not the individual residents, would receive the financial compensation from the loss of the road. This left a sour taste in the mouths of many residents, a taste which remained even fifty years later, despite Congressman Zebulon Weaver's contention that "90 to 95

⁷⁰ Gordon R. Clapp to Files, January 29, 1943; William C. Fitts to Percy B. Ferebee, January 30, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 386.

percent of the people in Swain County will favor this arrangement."⁷¹

One particular parcel of north shore land provided TVA officials with substantial difficulty. The 4,500 acre tract owned by Philip Rust, of Granogue, Delaware, did not fit the usual pattern of north shore residents. Rust maintained the land, which bordered on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as a private retreat and preserve. One area resident recalled that members of the Rockefeller family visited the Rust property. Rust's preserve included extensive forest plantings, including non-native species. He maintained a staff of four wardens who took responsibility for fire protection as well as animal welfare. He actively encouraged the preservation and propagation of wild animal species, and maintained a trout stocking program. He operated a weather station and a fish hatchery, as well as a thirty mile network of trails connecting to those of the Park System. A private electric plant provided electricity to the house, nursery, garages and barns. Rust's property served much the same function as the adjacent national park in many respects, and park visitors received free access to the property.⁷²

⁷¹ Zebulon Weaver to Gordon R. Clapp, November 6, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 386.

⁷² Thomas W. Alexander to David E. Lilienthal, March 22, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 202.

Rust's attorney requested that the property be exempted from the north shore purchase, because of its unique facilities, and because Rust had been "a good neighbor" to the national park. Also, the delays in taking the property of the North Carolina Exploration Company and the North Carolina Mining Company gave Rust the impression that those properties had been granted exceptions from the buyout, and he wanted one as well.⁷³

Rust initially challenged TVA's right to take the property, just as other north shore residents did. He later dropped the challenge, but continued to dispute TVA's appraisal of his land. Rust claimed the property as improved was worth as much as \$273,500, while TVA's figures ranged from \$40,000 to \$61,000. To bolster their case, TVA officials requested and received copies of the Rust family's federal income tax returns from 1933 through 1945 from the IRS. TVA ended up paying nearly \$100,000 for the Rust property, which was then incorporated into the boundary of the Park.⁷⁴

⁷³ Albert W. James to Marguerite Owen, December 29, 1943; John I. Snyder to Marguerite Owen, January 6, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 202.

⁷⁴ David E. Lilienthal to Henry Morgenthau, February 4, 1944; Henry Morgenthau to David E. Lilienthal, February 23, 1944; John I. Snyder to Gordon R. Clapp, May 5, 1944; Thomas J. Griffin to William C. Fitts, May 5, 1944; Gordon R. Clapp to John W. Snyder, November 15, 1946; Joseph C. Swidler to George F. Gant, September 18, 1947. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 202.

Despite the legal expenses incurred in settling the Rust lawsuit and other acquisition problems, TVA's official press release described the north shore agreement as "an example of the social and economic benefits that may be obtained when agencies of a region work together with mutual confidence and vision in the solution of their joint problems." While officials denied that cost was a primary motivation behind the settlement, TVA did save \$125,000 compared to the estimated cost of replacing the road. The agency could also trumpet its patriotic efficiency to the press: "The savings of materials, manpower, and equipment at a time when they are needed in the war effort are substantial."⁷⁵

As with the north shore land, TVA approached the purchase of Graham County's Cable Cove area haphazardly. Cable Cove measured approximately 1,400 acres, of which the U.S. Forest Service owned about one-third. The area contained thirteen closely grouped homes described by Chief Conservation Engineer Neil Bass as "slightly better than average for the mountain section."⁷⁶ TVA's Department of Regional Studies estimated the cost of restoring highway access to the area at \$46,000, substantially more than the appraised value of the land. The state and county, TVA argued, would

⁷⁵ TVA press release, October 30, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 386.

⁷⁶ Neil Bass to Raymond Leonard, November 19, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 613.

save money by not having to provide schools and road maintenance to the area. The land would be transferred to the U.S. Forest Service, which TVA officials believed would promote recreational developments to benefit the entire area.⁷⁷

Many Cable Cove residents, like those of the north shore, felt that TVA officials had misled them, because TVA's original plans for improving their road access had been made known. But TVA's John I. Snyder indicated to Gordon Clapp that in his opinion the road issue mattered very little because "there is only one broken-down automobile in the Cable Cove area." Evidently Snyder saw little reason why anyone who was not already in the cove might ever wish to enter it, and doubted that those already there would ever be able to leave.⁷⁸

The purchase of Cable Cove created other problems in turn. The Cable Cove School District's only facility was included in the TVA purchase, leaving four families in neighboring Poison Cove without school facilities. The purchase of Cable Cove also cut off Poison Cove's primary access--a footpath described by TVA officials as a "fairly

⁷⁷ Neil Bass to Raymond Leonard, November 19, 1943; Howard Menhinick to C. E. Blee, November 24, 1943. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 613.

⁷⁸ John I. Snyder to Gordon R. Clapp, May 23, 1944. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 613.

good trail"--leaving only an old wagon road with a 25-percent grade and a privately owned road in poor condition as alternatives. TVA, following a suggestion by Graham County School Superintendent Floyd S. Griffin, purchased all 450 acres of land in Poison Cove as well. The cost of surveying and purchasing Poison Cove was approximately \$10,000, while the agency estimated the cost of providing a new tertiary-standard road for access at four times as much. Again, the forest service would take over and manage the land.⁷⁹

As these examples show, TVA never developed a coherent policy concerning the acquisition of land in lieu of replacing access roads. While serving as director of TVA's Agricultural Relations Department, J. C. McAmis bitterly deplored the "piecemeal manner in which [access problems] have been handled in [Cable Cove and Poison Branch]." He noted many inconsistencies among cost estimates and definitions of areas under consideration. He also reminded his colleagues that had they heeded his initial recommendation that a road be provided for Cable Cove, the Poison Branch problem would not have arisen. He made a point of stating that TVA needed to consider the future uses of any land at issue before deciding that acquisition was cheaper than replacing access, and raised the issue of the maintenance costs the Forest

⁷⁹ Floyd S. Griffin to H. E. Hudson, August 7, 1944, December 13, 1944; Thomas J. Griffin to H. L. Freund, April 6, 1945; C. E. Blee to H. K. Menhinick, April 16, 1945; C. E. Blee to Gordon R. Clapp, May 8, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 613.

Service might incur as a result of accepting TVA-acquired lands.⁸⁰

Indeed, both TVA officials and area residents had failed to predict the future and prepare accordingly. The economic boom TVA's construction project brought to the area was temporary. The traditional culture readily accommodated that temporariness. When construction was complete and the boom was over, the area continued to attempt to capitalize on the only resources it had left.

But those resources had changed permanently. Agriculture, formerly a source of comfort and food in difficult times, lost its viability because the good land was under water. Mining was no longer an option either, because the waters of Fontana Lake now covered the roads and railroads which made the mines accessible. The expansion of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park provided opportunities for development of tourism, but made the extraction of the area's remaining mineral wealth impractical, if not impossible. Timbering was already dead on the north shore, and nearly so elsewhere in the area, although one small sawmill persisted in Graham County until the 1980s. The electric power produced at Fontana went to Tennessee to make aluminum and, ultimately, nuclear weapons. The one resource the residents of the upper Little Tennessee still controlled was

⁸⁰ J. C. McAmis to Neil Bass, April 27, 1945 and June 14, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 613.

access to the scenic beauty of the region. Here, too, they would find the extent of their control unsatisfactory.

CHAPTER 6

REBUILDING THE BACK OF BEYOND

With their already limited control of the region's extractable resources now gone, residents of the Little Tennessee Valley came to depend on TVA and the National Park Service for a sense of direction for future development. Neither agency provided that sense of direction. TVA officials saw their mission encompassing the entire Tennessee Valley, and declined to commit any resources that would compromise the agency's system-wide goals in the name of local development of a small corner of that region. The park service saw its mission as national rather than regional or local in scope, and proved reluctant to promote any sort of growth which would compromise the park's value as a wilderness paradise.

While business leaders in Bryson City had promoted the Fontana project as a way to cure the region's chronic economic ills, TVA officials generally left the direction of postwar economic growth in the hands of other parties. This policy constrained the growth of private enterprise in the area in the name of scenic beauty, but did little to guarantee the marketability of that beauty. Furthermore, TVA's own needs for power production and flood control hampered the development of profitable tourist facilities. In other words, TVA exercised both too much and too little influence

over the region's unsteady growth as a tourist center.

The original dam reservation was much larger than the amount of land TVA needed for operation of the dam after the war. TVA retained possession of land on both abutments of the dam, far enough downstream to protect the agency against claims arising from erosion from the emergency spillway. Much of the remaining land was deeded to the U.S. Forest Service for management. The forest service would be responsible for future development of parking areas, picnic areas, and extension of public utilities into the transferred area. TVA obliterated its own temporary dirt roads, scarifying their surfaces and in some cases planting tree seedlings to block the roadbed, in an attempt either to restore the area to a wilderness state or to absolve itself of any responsibility should someone be injured while attempting to use the road for automobile travel.¹

TVA designed visitor facilities at the dam to enhance the site's attractiveness to tourists. The access road curved to hide the dam until one had almost reached it, heightening the drama of the 480-foot face. The air-conditioned visitors' center also offered a dramatic view of the face of the dam, and provided a gift shop and separate restrooms for black and white visitors. The interior of the powerhouse was designed with visitors in mind, in a style

¹ Howard K. Menhinick to Gordon R. Clapp, June 10, 1946. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

which combined Gothic and Modern idioms, with starkly plain surfaces illuminated by giant honeycomb-like windows and a tremendous amount of open space which removed any sense of scale from the viewer. Paved parking lots gave visitors at both the top and bottom of the dam a convenient stopping place. By 1960 an incline railway provided an opportunity not merely to see the top and bottom of the dam but to travel vertically along its face.²

With the dam built and many of the workers going back to their own homes, the population swell associated with the construction phase of the project subsided. The permanent staff of the dam would require only 38 houses. Except for the facilities required for the operation of the dam itself, Fontana Village became a white elephant for TVA. The agency demolished some of the buildings, while others would be reused at other TVA projects or sold as surplus lumber.³

Chief Engineer C. E. Blee and Project Manager F. C. Schlemmer originally planned to rent the site as a convalescent center for veterans. But H. A. Morgan suggested instead that the facility be turned into a tourist site.

² John H. Kyle, The Building of TVA: An Illustrated History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 86-91; Walter L. Creese, TVA's Public Planning: The Vision, the Reality (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 183-193; blueprints of original visitor facilities, TVA Cultural Resources Department, Norris, Tennessee.

³ J. Ed Campbell to Gordon R. Clapp, October 3, 1944; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

Newton Drury, of the National Park Service, also expressed early interest in obtaining the site as a recreation center, but by September of 1944 Drury made it clear that the park service could not assume responsibility for the village. He suggested that the North Carolina State Department of Conservation and Development might be interested in turning the area into a state park.⁴

Private developers as well as public officials envisioned that the Fontana Village complex could serve as a corporate retreat, a resort community modeled on Gatlinburg, Tennessee, or even a "modernized Chautauqua" catering to the elite of Chattanooga. Officials of American Express and Bankers Trust Company considered, but rejected, the idea of purchasing the site, and one official suggested Standard Oil or Southern Railway as possible buyers as well. But TVA needed to be able to house its three dozen or so workers near the dam at low cost, and selling the village would make that difficult. The agency chose to retain ownership of the village and lease it to a nonprofit organization, so that it could minimize its own costs and maintain some degree of control over the maintenance of the site. As a byproduct of the agreement, TVA could claim that its decision would keep Fontana Village an affordable vacation destination for

⁴ C. E. Blee to H. K. Menhinick, August 23, 1944; F. C. Schlemmer to C. E. Blee, August 21, 1944; H. K. Menhinick to Newton B. Drury, September 5, 1944; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

middle-class families.⁵

The organization TVA chose to operate Fontana Village was a non-profit corporation called The Welfare and Recreation Association of Public Buildings and Grounds (WRA), which changed its name to Government Services, Incorporated (GSI) to reflect its expanded responsibilities to the federal government as a result of the contract with TVA. The corporation had previously operated cafeterias in government buildings and managed recreation facilities in the public parks in the nation's capital. Its managers had no experience operating a resort on the scale envisioned for Fontana Village.⁶

The agreement with WRA provided that TVA would take responsibility for converting the village to recreational use, renovating the school for use as a cafeteria, constructing a sewage disposal plant, and painting the houses before the property was transferred to WRA. These obligations totalled an estimated \$263,000. TVA would also supply

⁵ J. Ed Campbell to Gordon R. Clapp, October 3, 1944; Dana Milligan to [Gordon R. Clapp], May 26, 1945 (quoted); J. Ed Campbell to Frederick Storrer, July 10, 1945; J. Ed Campbell to George Stillman, August 3, 1945; J. Ed Campbell to Dana Milligan, June 1, 1945; H. K. Menhinick to Dennis L. Harmon, January 24, 1945; Dennis L. Harmon to H. K. Menhinick, February 9, 1945; H. K. Menhinick to Dennis L. Harmon, February 13, 1945; David J. Gothold to David E. Lilienthal, June 7, 1945; TVA Office of the General Manager's Administrative Files, Box 674.

⁶ H. K. Menhinick to Gordon R. Clapp, April 30, 1945. TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

raw water for treatment and electric power for distribution. WRA would assume responsibility for maintaining the houses, collecting rents, and providing "adequate year-round community services" such as police and fire protection, water treatment, sewage disposal, and electric power distribution. WRA would also have the right to operate a souvenir stand in the visitors' building at the dam.⁷ The leasing of the development to a non-profit corporation meant that access to the facilities would be less expensive, for TVA and for the general public, than if they were operated by a for-profit concern. But it also deprived Graham County of the opportunity to make money directly from rentals, because there were no profits to tax.

Early visitors to Fontana complained about the quality of the services offered by GSI. Knoxville's Judge D. C. Webb and his party found that a boat ride which was supposed to last an hour lasted only half that, but the operator charged the judge for the full hour. Webb also related the story of another visitor overcharged by 20 percent for the three days he spent in a rental house in the village. Yet another visitor, L. S. Moody, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Augusta, Georgia, correctly anticipated the village's rustic ambience, but was surprised to find that

⁷ H. K. Menhinick and J. Ed Campbell to Gordon R. Clapp, April 30, 1945; F. W. Hoover to J. Ed Campbell, October 20, 1945; Gordon R. Clapp to TVA Board of Directors, October 23, 1945; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

his rental cottage lacked a stopper for the sink, and that the expected soap and towels were not available. Moreover, there was no toilet paper to be found anywhere in the village, and only one ice pick. The food in the cafeteria lacked quality, and prices were high. The steep unsurfaced driveways constituted a safety hazard, in Moody's opinion. Most significantly, he noted that "the employees of Government Services . . . seemed to be inexperienced and not qualified to know what should be done to correct the conditions which we thought were perfectly apparent to anyone." TVA responded by forwarding Webb's and Moody's complaints to GSI with a stern warning that the company needed to avoid such problems in the future.⁸

As the recreational role of the village matured, though, TVA took a less active role in its management. TVA kept watch over the quality of the water and available fishing, managed the dam and water recreation facilities, made sure that local businesses did not disrupt the desired rustic atmosphere, and otherwise left well enough alone. The job of promoting the area as a tourist site fell to

⁸ D. C. Webb to James P. Pope, July 15, 1947 and July 18, 1947; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 249; L. S. Moody to Gordon R. Clapp, September 4, 1947; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 161; James P. Pope to D. C. Webb, July 21, 1947; J. Ed Campbell to D. C. Webb, August 5, 1947; TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 249, National Archives Southeast Region; O. A. Fetch to L. S. Moody, September 25, 1947, TVA Office of the General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 161, National Archives Southeast Region.

others. Indeed, some of TVA's own policies interfered with that promotion. The operators of a service station at Stecoah found that the agency would not permit them to place a sign advertising their business on TVA-owned property. They accused the agency of favoritism and antipathy toward private enterprise:

It has been brought to our attention that recently you caused Mr. J. B. Moody of Moody's Motel to move a sign of his which was located in the vicinity of our own sign. It appears that Mr. Moody was in a position, as a TVA employee and service man for certain of your equipment, to retaliate and cause you to reverse your actions. In view of this situation we are unable to visualize TVA upholding such an act of discrimination, Furthermore, we believe, but do not know, that TVA would not "stoop" to focus their attention upon matters of this nature except through your suggestions and appearant [sic] undue influence with their department involved. We further believe, but do not know, that your actions in this matter are motivated by your desire to see no one except Government Services, Inc., prosper from the seasonal tourist business in this area.

The resulting contest of wills pitted TVA management against the needs of a small business, placing Fontana Village resident manager O. A. Fetch in the middle. Fetch, not wishing to antagonize his neighbors and well aware that they and he depended on tourist traffic for their livelihood, attempted to reach a compromise which would permit the signs. But TVA's Director of Reservoir Properties, J. Ed Campbell, felt the signs should be removed, and his decision was final.⁹

⁹ Crisp and Cable to O. A. Fetch, July 23, 1956; J. Ed Campbell to A. J. Wagner, October 4, 1956; Maxwell A. DeVoe to Crisp and Cable, October 11, 1956; TVA Office of the

Power production demands and springtime flood control necessitated that the water level of Fontana Lake be lowered in the autumn months. This practice left bare, unforested, muddy shorelines which marred the scenic vistas available to "windshield tourists." When maintenance was needed on the dam, the annual drawdown began earlier and lasted longer, significantly detracting from the value of the area as a tourist attraction during what would otherwise have been the peak of the tourist season.

The scarred landscape was exacerbated by attempts to provide road access. Such access would prove to be one of the most difficult problems with promoting Fontana Village as a recreation destination. The agreement between TVA, the North Carolina State Highway Commission, Swain County, and the National Park Service distributed responsibility for providing a highway along the north shore--a replacement for highway 288--between the state and the park service. Since most of the north shore land had been given to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the park service received the lion's share of responsibility for building the new road as soon as Congress funded it.¹⁰

The park service immediately encountered problems at-

General Manager, Administrative Files, Box 674.

¹⁰ F. W. Cron to H. J. Spelman, June 11, 1946, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 1, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Asheville Citizen-Times, February 24, 1952.

tempting to satisfy its end of the bargain. During the war, while park service crews surveyed what eventually became Park Route 9, the Army Corps of Engineers had done some preliminary construction on a temporary "pioneer road" along a different route, but abandoned the project because of labor shortages elsewhere. The fragments of old highway 288 and the pioneer road served a crucial purpose by providing firefighting access, and completing that access became a priority among park service officials. The park superintendent realized that the construction of the pioneer road had already scarred the land and recommended that the park consider making it a substitute for the promised North Shore road. The resulting study found the pioneer road unsatisfactory in both cost and scenic value.¹¹

The park service lacked jurisdiction over non-park lands. Since the eastern park boundary lay two and a half miles from the nearest road in Bryson City, park officials could not justify any construction on that end of the proposed route until the state of North Carolina had fulfilled its responsibility for building a connecting route to the boundary.¹² Construction thus focused on the other end, and by 1949 the park service had completed a small access

¹¹ F. W. Cron to H. J. Spelman, June 11, 1946, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 1, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

¹² H. J. Spelman to B. P. McWhorter, June 10, 1952, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 2, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

road from the dam into the park. Less than a mile in length, that access road connected the dam to a few small cemeteries on the north shore but offered virtually no recreation possibilities beyond its eventual incorporation into the Appalachian Trail.

Seeing no rapid construction of the promised park road, some of Swain County's most prominent citizens, led by no less than attorney T. D. Bryson, Jr., descended from the founding family of the county seat, and Dr. Kelly Bennett, whose rousing address over WWNC radio in Asheville had heralded the coming of "a second Niagara Falls" with the arrival of the park and the dam, began to suggest that the land be returned to the county for development as a hunting preserve or recreation center. On February 24, 1952, Congressman Monroe Redden formally proposed that Congress return the land to the county. The Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, a Knoxville group which had played a pivotal role in establishing the park, fought Redden's proposal vigorously, as did the Department of the Interior. Bennett, chairman of the North Carolina Park, Parkway, and Forest Development Commission, initially supported the measure but rapidly distanced himself from it once it became apparent that Redden did not intend to push for its passage. The congressman agreed to drop the proposal if Congress would appropriate ten million dollars to complete the North Shore road immediately. Congress did no such thing, but the

proposal died in committee anyway.¹³

Another factor which undermined support for the north shore road project resulted from state initiative. In the early 1950s, the state highway commission embarked on a massive roadbuilding program under governor William Kerr Scott. In the division containing all of the southwestern part of the state, roads were difficult to build because of rugged terrain. Under the leadership of highway commissioners L. Dale Thrash and H. M. Buchanan, the division tried to catch up by improving existing roads. So-called "county roads," actually state-maintained secondary routes, received much of the commission's attention.

The most expedient means of obtaining a road from Bryson City to Fontana in this political climate was to straighten and pave existing county roads. But any such route through Swain County would cross park service lands. The logical alternative was to improve existing routes through Graham County, outside the park boundary. The new route, designated North Carolina 28, explicitly replaced the remnants of old highway 288, which was removed from the state maintenance system. By the mid-1950s, the two points--Bryson City and Fontana--were thus already connected

¹³ T. D. Bryson to Monroe M. Redden, October 3, 1950; Newton Drury to Monroe M. Redden, November 8, 1950; Management Records, Box VI, Folder 1, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Asheville Citizen-Times, February 24, 1952; Knoxville Journal, February 26, 1952; February 27, 1952; April 9, 1952; Knoxville News-Sentinel, March 28, 1952.

by a decent two-lane paved road, as TVA and the park service had intended when planning the replacement of old 288. State highway location engineer R. Getty Browning described the expenditure for the north shore route, including the state's portion, as "an unjustified extravagance, notwithstanding the ironbound three-way agreement." Browning proposed that the state and the park service could both benefit from reconsidering the 1943 agreement, and that perhaps the park service might offer to contribute some money toward the improvement of other roads and tourist facilities in the area in lieu of building the north shore road, an idea which park service director Conrad Wirth liked as well. Wirth opined, however, that the park service could not do so without congressional authorization, since the lands in question were not under park service jurisdiction. Environmentalists petitioned Congress to authorize such a transfer of funds, to no avail.¹⁴

From the point of view of both the park service and

¹⁴ Minutes of the North Carolina State Highway Commission, December 10, 1943, February 1, 1944, July 19, 1944, March 23, 1945, June 20, 1945, November 28, 1945, April 24, 1946, June 27, 1946, November 27, 1946, July 29, 1948, September 30, 1948, December 2, 1948, February 24, 1949, July 28, 1949, February 1, 1951, March 1, 1951, July 7, 1951, December 20, 1951, March 26, 1953, July 30, 1953, October 30, 1953, April 1, 1954, September 9, 1954, August 2, 1956, microfilm reel S.55.4p, North Carolina State Department of Archives and History; Edward S. Zimmer to Regional Director, Region One, November 21, 1952; Conrad Wirth to Edgar L. McDaniel, Jr., March 9, 1953; Dan Hale to Senator Styles Bridges, January 19, 1953; Management Records, Box VI, Folder 1, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Browning, the state highway commission had obviated the need for a new road by constructing the new state highway 28, which ran more or less parallel to the south shoreline of Fontana Lake. Furthermore, the south shore road provided an excellent view of the Smokies, while any north shore route would have provided only views of the lake--certainly a mixed blessing during the fall and winter months.

Redden's successor in Congress, George A. Shuford, continued to push for the construction of the north shore road, despite the protests of park service director Conrad Wirth that it was now redundant. Wirth pointed out that the state had not yet constructed its connecting route to the park boundary, and that any park service construction on the Bryson City end of the route would be useless. Shuford responded by proposing to the state highway commission that it fund the new connecting route immediately, and the commission agreed. Thus, by 1959, the two and a half mile state route connected Bryson City to the park boundary, where the pavement abruptly ended. Bryson City had one and a half routes to Fontana, at tremendous financial and scenic cost.¹⁵

Conservationists continued to fight the north shore

¹⁵ Conrad Wirth to George Shuford, January 24, 1957; Hillory A. Tolson to W. H. Rogers, May 21, 1957; Hillory Tolson to George Shuford, May 21, 1957; George Shuford to Conrad Wirth, May 8, 1957; Management Records, Box VII, Folder 3, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

road, and gained the support of key officials in the park service. In 1960, Acting Secretary of the Interior Elmer F. Bennett sought but failed to gain the approval of Governor Luther Hodges for the abandonment of the 1943 agreement on the grounds that the south shore road constructed by the state made the park route unnecessary. Reflecting the governor's business background, Hodges' reply recognized the weaknesses inherent in the north shore road proposal, but reaffirmed the binding nature of the contract between the federal authorities and the state.¹⁶

The National Park Service saw the Fontana North Shore Road, designated Park Road 9, as part of a larger issue: the development of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park as a whole. In the early years of the park, Tennessee community leaders had worked to ensure that their side of the park was easily accessible and heavily promoted, and it naturally followed that the Tennessee side would have more substantial accommodations for tourists.¹⁷

The North Carolina side of the park did not benefit from the same sort of unified development strategy. While

¹⁶ Elmer F. Bennett to Luther L. Hodges, April 26, 1960, Management Records, Box XIII, Folder 6, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Asheville Citizen, September 3, 1960.

¹⁷ Campbell, Birth of a National Park. . . ., 12-24; see also John Thomas Whaley, "A Timely Idea at an Ideal Time: Knoxville's Role in Establishing the Great Smoky Mountains National Park," master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1984.

the Western North Carolina Associated Communities (WNCAC), formed in 1946, helped promote "specific projects of general value to the entire area, economically, socially, educationally, and aesthetically," that organization steadfastly resisted efforts to make the park the primary tourist destination in western North Carolina. The communities that had once fought over which one could be the park's "gateway," or the "entrance," now strove to prove they had other things to offer in addition to the park. Bryson City would find precious few allies in its attempts to turn the park into a local moneymaking enterprise. WNCAC relentlessly lobbied for the completion of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The organization also promoted the Cherokee Reservation as a tourist attraction offering a unique cultural experience. The immensely popular Oconaluftee Indian Village, a living history center, opened in 1952, and the outdoor drama "Unto These Hills," which began educating and entertaining capacity crowds in 1950, both enjoyed substantial support from WNCAC. Bryson City, unlike Cherokee, had little that was genuinely unique to attract tourists visiting either the park or other attractions in the Smokies.¹⁸

Just as it lacked distinctiveness, Bryson City lacked the advantages of location. The federal highway through the

¹⁸ L. Alex Tooman, "The Evolving Economic Impact of Tourism on the Greater Smoky Mountain Region of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1995, 210-212, 239-259.

park, U.S. 441, connected Gatlinburg to Cherokee, bypassing Bryson City. Attempts to have N.C. 28 redesignated as U.S. 441-W, thus attracting a share of the Knoxville and Atlanta traffic, failed. Moreover, while N.C. 28 provided excellent access from Bryson City to Fontana Dam, most of its length was in Graham County. While this detail may at first seem meaningless, it gains significance in light of the extremely small tax base in Swain County, which, as Figure 1 shows, withered largely because of the formation of the Park. A new road within the park would itself be immune to development, but would funnel traffic around the western half of the park directly into Bryson City, where tourist development could proceed and provide a needed injection of revenue. The state road, on the other hand, could host plenty of taxable development along the way, and as long as it remained the only way around Fontana Lake, Graham County would get the tax dollars generated by tourist traffic. From the national perspective, the two roads were interchangeable, except that one was inside the park and not yet built, while the other was outside the park and already built. But from the local perspective the state highway did not satisfy the needs of Swain County's politicians or its business class.¹⁹

Following Governor Hodges' refusal to consider the

¹⁹ Henry Wilson to Stewart Udall, May 9, 1962, Management Records, Box VI, Folder 5, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

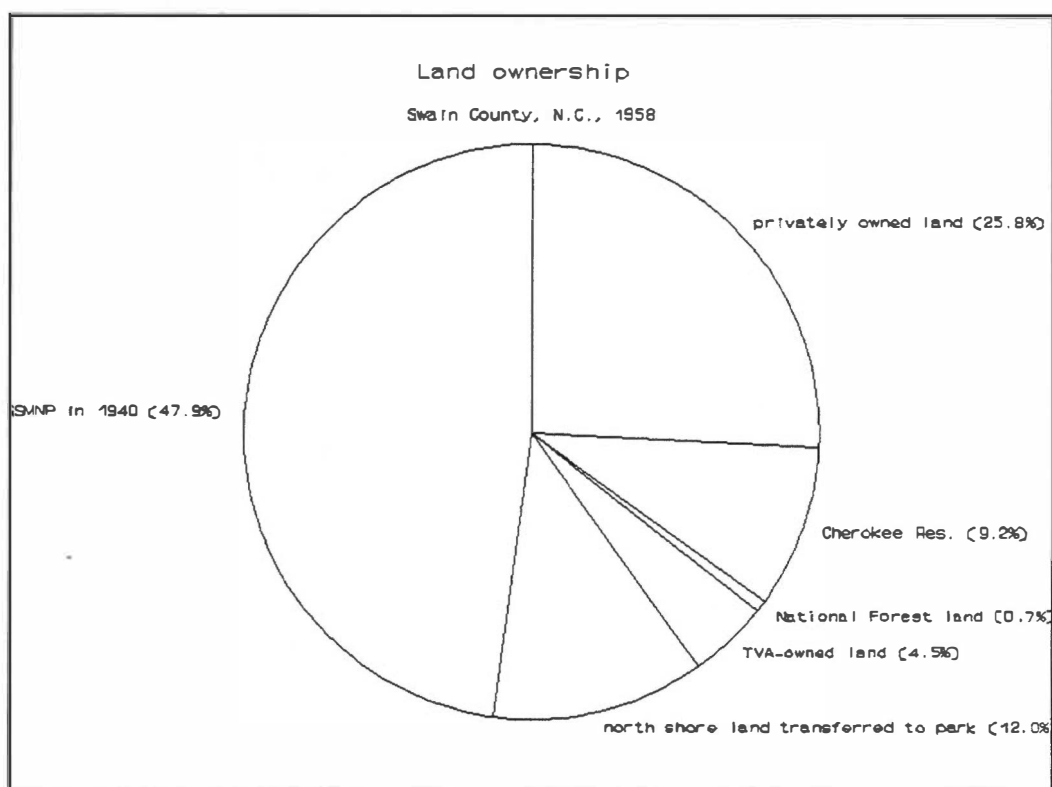


Figure 4. Land Ownership, Swain County, 1958. Federal government agencies hold nearly three quarters of the land in Swain County, leaving little available for taxable development.

issue settled, the park service did begin constructing the north shore road at the eastern end, where the state connector had been completed in the late 1950s. Park service officials initially envisioned building the road only as far as Goldmine Branch, approximately three miles into the park boundary. Their aim was to demonstrate to Swain County that it would be better to use Bryson City as a jumping-off point for activities within the park than to construct a through road within the park boundary. So certain were park officials that their vision of the north shore would work that they even spent scarce park service funding to survey an

alternate route for the road which would make construction beyond Goldmine Branch impossible.²⁰

Plans for both routes called for the road to end in a recreation center with a marina and campground, but Goldmine Branch proved an unsuitable location for these facilities, so the road--following the original 1944 survey route--was continued as far as Monteith Branch, thought to be more suitable for development. Park officials again hoped to create some attraction that would convince Swain County that the north shore parkway would be more destructive than constructive to the local economy. The Monteith Branch project would have provided four hundred picnic sites, six hundred campsites, a fifteen hundred foot boat ramp, a campground store and marina store, and horseback riding facilities. This area would have provided the only major water recreation site in the park itself, making it potentially a very active tourism area.²¹

Problems quickly appeared with the north shore develop-

²⁰ Perry Abbott to J. L. Obenschain, February 4, 1960, J. L. Obenschain to F. W. Cron, February 5, 1960, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 5; Elbert Cox to Conrad Wirth, June 8, 1962, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 7; Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

²¹ Fred Overly to [Elbert Cox], August, 19, 1960, Management Records, Box XIII, Folder 10; Fred Overly to Elbert Cox, January 20, 1961, Elbert Cox to [Conrad Wirth], February 6, 1961, Thomas Vint to Elbert Cox, April 20, 1961, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 6; George W. Fry to [Elbert Cox], January 6, 1964, Management Records, Box VI, Folder 10; Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

ment plan. The Monteith Branch site would have required a gravity feed for drinking water, and the nearest electric power lines were two and a half miles away. These inconveniences would have made it unattractive to many tourists. Moreover, the access road--the north shore road--proved to be far more difficult and expensive to construct than originally anticipated. The road was cut through unstable rock which decomposed upon exposure to air. The roadbed crumbled almost as soon as it was cut, necessitating many additional hours of cut-and-fill activity for what Park Service personnel saw as dubious improvements in the stability and quality of the road.²²

The park service temporarily halted construction of the north shore road several times because of these stability problems in the underlying rock. In January of 1964, after about seven and a half miles had been completed, a series of massive and nearly fatal landslides caused a public panic. Despite the panic, a five mile section at the eastern end of the north shore route was opened for public use in October of 1965.

The construction of this road, as far as it went, visibly scarred the landscape, upsetting environmentalists.

²² Fred Overly to Elbert Cox, March 2, 1962; Report of the Technical Committee for the Inspection of the Bryson-Fontana Road Construction, Great Smoky Mountains, April 25, 1962; Eric Erhart, "Inspection of Great Smoky National Park Project 9A1"; Eugene R. DeSilets to Robert G. Hall, April 12, 1962; Management Records, Box VII, Folder 7, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

After 1966, the park service placed all future development of the north shore--recreational facilities such as the Monteith Branch campground, as well as roads--on indefinite hold. Tourists, predictably, stayed away, preferring the rapid development of the conveniences they expected on the Tennessee side of the park. Thus the park service, like TVA, proved unable to develop the area's resources in ways that would profit the economy of Swain County. Local people have come to refer to the unfinished park road as the "Road to Nowhere."²³

Park service officials hoped to soothe the worries of Swain County by offering alternative road systems which would promote careful development of the North Carolina side of the park. A number of development proposals involving the North Carolina side of the park received consideration from the park service during the 1960s. Among these were a "loop road" which would encircle the park, providing an entrance at Bryson City but cutting off the present U.S. 441 through the park; a second road over the mountains connecting Bryson City to Townsend, Tennessee; a low-traffic road running inside the park from Fontana Dam to Bryson City (essentially a more primitive "jeep" version of the long-

²³ Smoky Mountain Times, April 26, 1962; April 18, 1963; Alfred H. Barker, Jr., to J. A. Todd, January 28, 1964, Management Records, Box VII, Folder 10, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; George W. Fry to Regional Director, October 1, 1965; Management Records, Box VII, Folder 11, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park;

promised North Shore road); and even a transmountain rail system with stations at Townsend and Bryson City. None of the alternate development proposals ever went beyond the planning stages.²⁴

Even before the north shore road debacle, many North Carolina leaders blamed their Tennessee counterparts for "hijacking" the development of the park for the benefit of Tennessee. Certainly, Tennesseans pushed harder for the creation of the park, and campaigned more aggressively for its development in the 1930s. But what began as political oneupsmanship on the part of Tennessee leaders eventually evolved into simple expediency. Strategies for the development of the North Carolina side of the park were sidetracked by efforts to maintain the "rustic" or "backcountry" atmosphere, and by the high cost of any major changes in the park's infrastructure.²⁵ Park Service officials maintained contact with the Wilderness Society, the Isaak Walton League, and the National Wildlife Federation, and those groups influenced both park policy and congressional action despite the fact that one 1985 survey indicated that only 5.7 percent of visitors to the park intended to use day hiking facilities, 0.4 percent intended to fish, 0.3 percent

²⁴ "Transportation Concepts: Great Smoky Mountains National Park," (anonymous internal report) 1-48, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Library.

²⁵ "Transportation Concepts, Great Smoky Mountains National Park" 12-44.

participated in horseback riding, and 0.6 percent went tubing.²⁶

Ironically, much of the territory celebrated by environmentalists as "primeval wilderness" was the same territory nearly destroyed by the logging and mining companies one or two generations earlier, before the formation of the park. In the intervening years, nature had reclaimed the area to the point that many of those protesting the road believed it would cut through virgin forest. The north shore road became a symbol for the struggle between developers and conservationists. If taken at face value, the hyperbolic language used by both sides would convince the reader that the park service intended to build the New Jersey Turnpike through a forest where dinosaurs still roamed free and human footprints had never been seen, and that the park service was full of unscrupulous carpetbaggers who would sell their own grandmothers and then refuse to deliver the goods.

Despite the heated rhetoric and the undoubted environmental consequences, the craving for the north shore road voiced by Swain County's business leaders was understand-

²⁶ The Wilderness Society, "A Special Memorandum to Members and Cooperators," May 20, 1966, Vertical File, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Library; miscellaneous correspondence, Management Records, Boxes VI and VII, Archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; John D. Peine and James R. Renfro, Visitor Use Patterns at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Research/Resources management Report SER-90, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Southeast Region, Atlanta, Georgia, 41.

able. The majority of the park's visitors since its inception have been "windshield tourists" who travel through on Newfound Gap Road (U.S. Highway 441), perhaps stopping for a picnic or photo opportunity at one of the many scenic overlooks on their way through, and these people are better served by the plethora of hotels, lodges, shopping centers and fast food restaurants of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, Tennessee north of the park than by the smaller array of facilities of Cherokee, North Carolina, at the south entrance. A 1985 survey indicated that 44.2 percent of summertime nonlocal park visitors had spent the previous night in Gatlinburg and 21.3 percent in Pigeon Forge. The communities on the North Carolina side of the park attracted far fewer visitors; according to the same survey 11.2 percent spent the previous night in Cherokee, 1.1 percent in Bryson City and only 0.2 percent at Fontana Village. Similar patterns prevailed with autumn visitors, except that Bryson City dropped from 1.1 percent to 0.6 percent of the nonlocal visiting population.²⁷

Robbinsville draws even less tourist traffic than Bryson City. Located about 15 miles from the park boundary on twisty U.S. Highway 129, the town boasts one fast food restaurant and only a few small tourist facilities. Robbinsville has carved a minor niche for itself by catering to

²⁷ Tooman, "The Evolving Economic Impact. . . ," 93, 247; Peine, Visitor Use Patterns, 83.

the presence of that twisty federal highway. Motorcycle enthusiasts periodically swarm the area to ride the road they call "The Dragon."²⁸

The absence of any substantial tourist development at Bryson City and Robbinsville is in marked contrast to the relatively prosperous tourist industry at Cherokee, a few miles northeast. Cherokee has become something of a success story by reservation standards, as the Cherokee people have adapted readily to the demands of tourists. Selling questionably authentic "Indian crafts" and toy tomahawks made in Taiwan has provided some of the Cherokee people with lucrative but seasonal income. The people of Cherokee have not hesitated to promote images of Native American heritage, some of which are quite unflattering. Why? Because, as one Cherokee man who made a living by "chiefing" (posing in "Indian" garb for photos with tourists) pointed out, their "product" sells.²⁹

Gatlinburg, across the Tennessee line, developed an image as a "Swiss-looking" town in the mountains, a community of chalets and ski slopes. Pigeon Forge has become the discount shopping capital of the Smokies, offering several outlet malls and an amusement-park ambience. Indeed, one 1995 survey noted that the malls, rather than the mountains,

²⁸ Tooman, "The Evolving Economic Impact. . . ," 285-294; Knoxville News-Sentinel, July 6, 1995.

²⁹ Finger, Cherokee Americans, 98-117, 159-163.

drew the largest number of visitors to Pigeon Forge.³⁰

The boom residents anticipated from the park, the dam and the road never arrived in the upper Little Tennessee. Swain and Graham County tourism has lagged behind the many other destinations in the Smokies, hampered by vague and conflicting policies and by the lack of infrastructure. Industrial development, too, has been slow to arrive in the upper Little Tennessee. The region as a whole has experienced a gradual improvement in its standard of living, but many individuals live in poverty in this area once touted for its inexhaustible natural wealth. With the natural resources nearly gone, the people of the region continue to "get by," just as their ancestors did for years before the upheaval brought by TVA's plans. But they have fewer resources than ever with which to do so.

The overall standard of living in Graham and Swain Counties seems to have risen somewhat since World War II. The number of motor vehicles registered in Graham County nearly doubled between 1965 and 1975. The number of families receiving public assistance has dropped substantially. As Figure 2 demonstrates, 158 families received AFDC in Graham County in 1966; by 1976 that number had dropped to 51. Swain County experienced a similar drop, but not as steadily nor as drastically, as shown in Figure 3. The

³⁰ Tooman, "The Evolving Economic Impact. . . ," 84-92; Knoxville News-Sentinel, July 20, 1995.

number of recipients of assistance to the aged increased in both counties, however, perhaps due to an aging population; the average white Swain County resident was over 40 years of age according to the 1990 census.

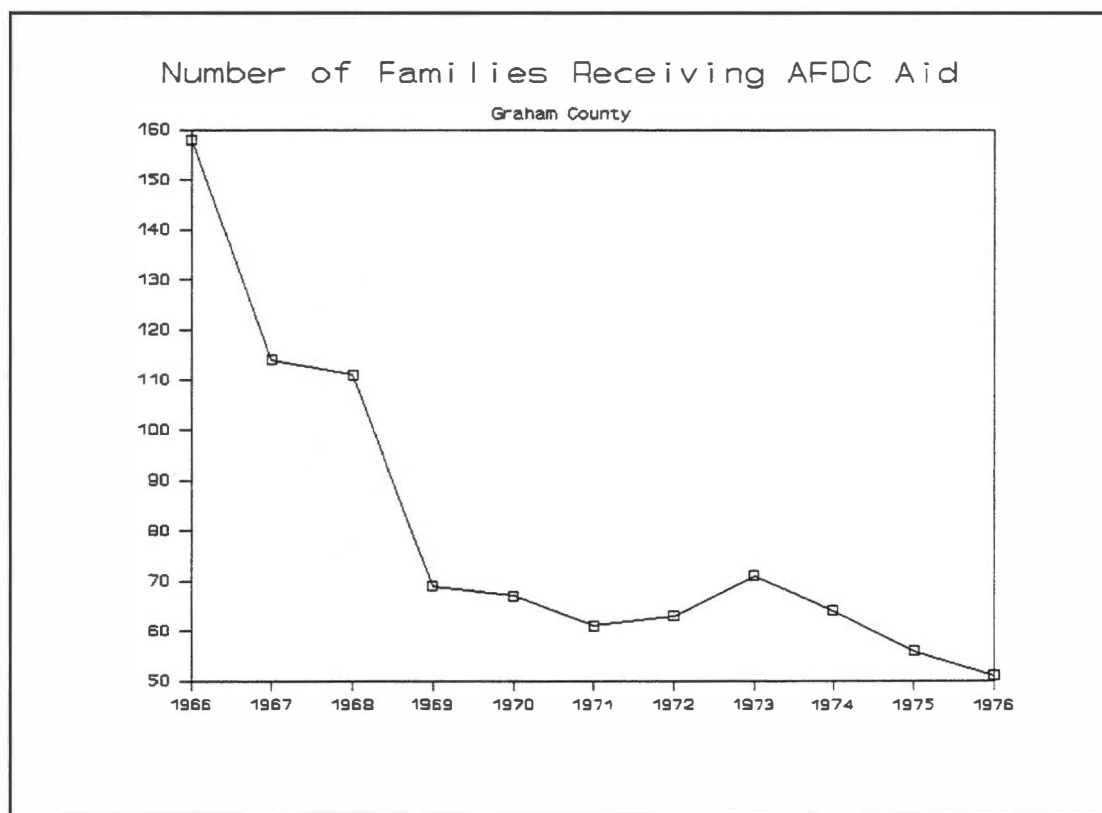


Figure 5. Number of Families Receiving AFDC Aid in Graham County. Data adapted from Profile North Carolina Counties 5th ed. (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of State Budgets, 1977).

Despite the improvements in the standard of living in both counties, the area's population remained poor. Graham and Swain occupied positions near the bottom in most rankings of economic activity among North Carolina's counties.

The sharp contrast between the relative stagnation of Graham and Swain counties and the rapid economic development of Tennessee's Sevier, Blount and Cocke counties caused the

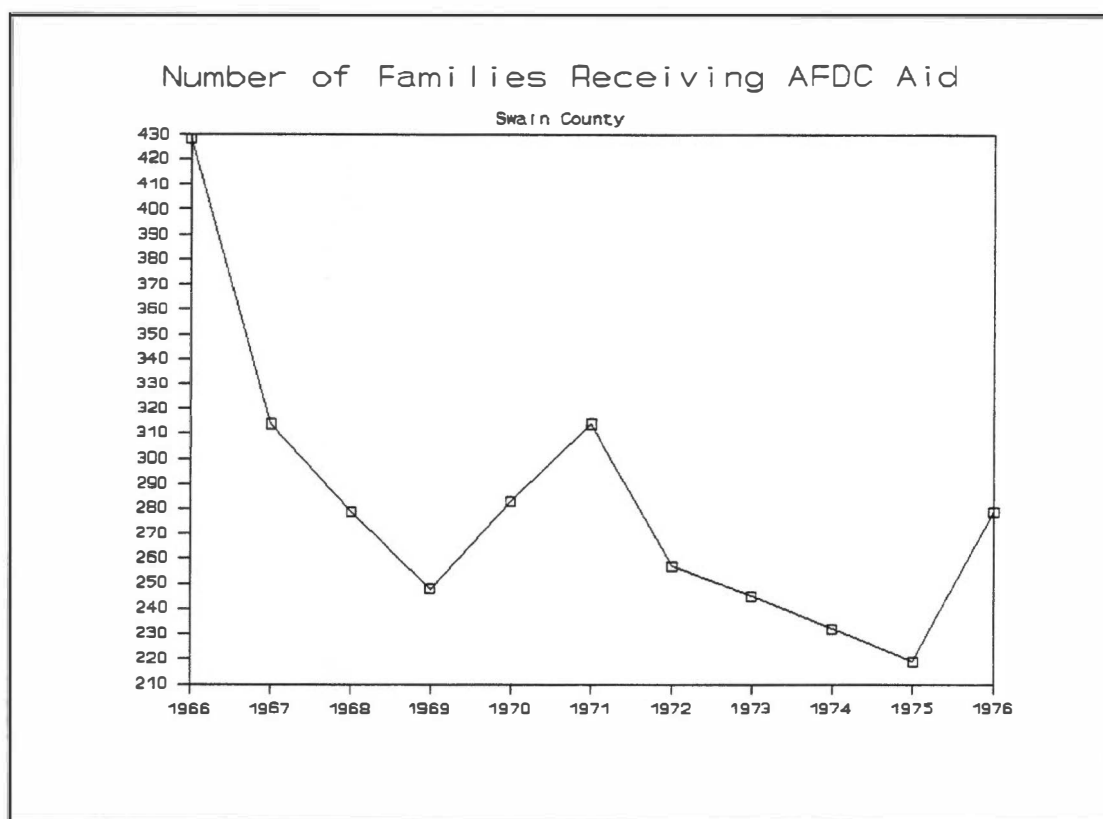


Figure 6. Number of Families Receiving AFDC Aid in Swain County. Data adapted from Profile North Carolina Counties 5th ed. (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of State Budgets, 1977).

former to nurse a sense of grievance against the latter. A group calling itself Citizens Against Wilderness (CAW) called repeatedly for the full development of the North Carolina side of the park along the lines of the existing Tennessee development. The existence of this group, and the rhetoric it employs, indicates that residents of the area have not lost the ability to respond creatively to their circumstances. The group operates from Bryson City. The Citizens Against Wilderness share a sense that they have been victimized by the TVA and the park service. In particular, they focus on the sense of lost economic opportunity

arising from the rapid development of the Tennessee side of the park. Like their ancestors who called for the full development of hydroelectric power, mining and timber resources in the area, they seek outside investment to restore their "rightful share" of the prosperity the rest of the nation enjoys. Borrowing loosely from theories of underdevelopment, they bemoan the fact that Tennessee receives most of the economic benefits of the park, and they see environmentalists' attempts to preserve the rest of the Smokies intact as a ploy to keep their region poor and unhappy. While avowedly nonpartisan, the group has lavished support on Senator Jesse Helms since 1988 in return for his attention to their demands for a settlement of the road issue. "He is the only man who stood between the people and the wilderness, and he stood up for us against great odds," explained CAW president Linda Hogue. "Senator Helms is one of the few great statesmen who has the old-fashioned integrity and guts to stand up for what is right," she added.³¹

As access to water had defined communities for those who came to Hazel Creek, Goldmine Branch, or Epps Springs, access prevented by water now defined a community for those forced to leave. Perhaps the most important cultural development in the area since the completion of the dam is the

³¹ Asheville Citizen-Times, January 3, 1992, January 14, 1989, January 15, 1989; Smoky Mountain Times July 27, 1989, August 31, 1989, September 21, 1989, January 5, 1989, January 12, 1989.

formation of the North Shore Cemetery Association. The association serves as a surrogate community for all those whose ancestors were buried in the north shore area. Their members, notably president Helen Cable Vance, seize every opportunity to gain attention for their causes: preserving the area's cemeteries, obtaining road access to those cemeteries, and publicizing a selective recollection of the area's history which focuses on economic development while ignoring the inherent instability and temporariness of that development.³²

The National Park Service provides this group with water and jeep transportation to the North Shore cemeteries so that participants can decorate the graves of ancestors buried there. Their decoration ceremonies frequently include speeches concerning what they see as their victimization by the "federal government," by which they seem to mean the National Park Service and the TVA. This sense of victimization and displacement ties the members together, and the annual decoration ceremonies at each cemetery seem to cement their historical identity as the people who gave up their land for the nation, just as rituals of school and church attendance helped cement their identity as members of

³² Waynesville Mountaineer, February 22, 1984; Smoky Mountain Times, March 29, 1984; Asheville Citizen, December 18, 1985, July 29, 1986, September 3, 1986; Asheville Citizen-Times, May 3, 1987; Asheville Citizen, May 14, 1987.

a geographically defined community fifty or sixty years earlier.³³

This graveyard political action committee has worked closely with every candidate for the area's House seat since the 1960s, and has found a warm audience in both Democratic and Republican candidates. Every few years, their representative in the House introduces legislation calling for a road to the North Shore cemeteries, based upon the 1943 agreement. No longer is the road supposed to be for economic development, nor even for access to the park as a whole. It is merely a means of visiting the dead more conveniently. "It's not too much to ask, to be able to go back home, is it?" asked Helen Cable Vance rhetorically.³⁴

Because of the formation of the national park, a region characterized by rapid economic oscillation became an economically depressed "nature museum," a monument to a past lifestyle which is often overly romanticized by the reminiscences of those who remember it as their own childhood. The environmental and economic depredations of mining and timber companies and the failed reform attempts of the federal government gradually turned Kephart's "Back of Beyond" from

³³ Asheville Citizen, July 29, 1986, May 3, 1987, August 27, 1987; Knoxville News-Sentinel August 27, 1987, September 20, 1987.

³⁴ Asheville Citizen-Times, October 3, 1987, February 26, 1988; Asheville Citizen, June 26, 1988, March 10, 1987, March 12, 1987; Maryville-Alcoa Daily Times, March 28, 1984; Helen Cable Vance, interview by Bill Landry, April 25, 1989, videotape, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Library.

a misperception into a reality. Vance's desire to "be able to go back home" both confirms and challenges the modern understanding of Kephart's vision.

Today, Fontana Dam sits isolated amid the wooded highlands of southwestern North Carolina. The dramatic scenery does not prepare the visitor for the sudden appearance of the giant monolith just around the next curve. Its face is blemished, like a fence in need of whitewashing. Its harsh postmodern architecture is a stark monument to a bloody war, and to the Cold War which followed. The dam still attracts the curious, because of its size, its remoteness, and its history. The labor expended in its creation has not gone unnoticed, and the giant metallic generators in their massive powerhouse grimly evoke memories of a fearful, busy time. The scene is not exactly beautiful, except to the technocrat, but it is certainly powerful.

In the late spring and early summer, fishermen and boaters dot the shores of the lake behind the dam. A serene beauty seems to radiate gently from its shimmering waters amid the sounds of Smoky Mountain wildlife. It is a beautiful place, no matter its origins. But in the late summer or early autumn, the lake level drops to reveal muddy banks and bare shorelines, and very little recreational activity remains. Reminiscent of a strip mine at low water, it is too remote to be an industrial site and too bare to belong to a national park known for its biodiversity. The entire

Fontana site becomes a scene of neither hustle nor tranquility, but a sort of ragged and unsettled graveyard for one variety of the American way of life.

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