

Early History of Swain County a Broken Promise

This story of the North Shore, Swain Co. people is one that can never be forgotten because it tells what Swain County has lost and how our citizens have lost faith in our Federal Government.

I have listen to people tell how their Dads and Mothers went to their grave saying our Government will not lie to us. They will keep the Contract they made us.

Remember the people who were hurt the most were the people with the least voice.

THESE MOUNTAIN WERE STOKEN

In the Early 1800's early pioneers began moving to lower Swain County because of land availability, this land was rich with resources needed to farm and raise a family. In almost every Hollow there were springs with crystal clear water for drinking, timber to build homes was plentiful also timber was needed all over the U.S. to build our nation. There was also jobs in timber every thing needed to live was here. So people started to move here from all over. Life was hard but good, a man could live work and provide for his family and help provide timber for his nation.

Later Copper was discovered which provided even more jobs. More and more people began to move in lower Swain County so in the early 1900's railway was needed to ship timber and copper. This was done with several local companies moved to the North Shore people began to move farther and farther back in to the mountain, so more settlements was establish.

RHYMER FERRY----FONTANA----EAGLE CR.----RITTER----HAZEL CR.----CABLE BR.----FAIRVIEW----WEST PACE BR.----CALHOUN BR.----JIM MITCHEL BR.----HARRISON HERRON BR.----PILKEY CR.----DORSEY----JAPAN----ECOLA----SUTTON BR.----KIRKLAND BR.----CHAMBERS CR.----BUCK EYE BR.----MANDY WELCH BR.----BUSHNELL----FROG TOWN----HOOT OWL HOLLOW----MONTEITH BR.----GUNTER BR.----GINNY BR.----FORNEY CR.----JOHN COLE BR.----GOLD MINE BR.----NOLAND CR.----HICKORY FLATS----CANE BREAK (Epps Springs)----PEACH TREE----LAND CR. to name a few.

By the mid 1920's almost half of Swain County lived on the North Shore of the river, almost half of Swain County jobs. Some of the settlements begin to form town ship, also CHURCHES----SCHOOLS----POST OFFICE----HOTELS (boarding houses)----STORES----TRAIN DEPOTS----SIDE TRACKS----FERRYS----HUNTING LODGESS----DOCTORS----MID WIFES----HOSPITAL (Fontana)----BLACK SMITHS----ORCHARDS----GRIST MILLS----GAS STATIONS----and SAW MILLS.

Jobs were plentiful then the Great Depression hit, times were hard on everyone but families pull together and pull through troubled times. Nowhere did anyone on the north shore starve to death or commit suicide.

Then some people decided that a National Park was needed to protect our mountains, so in the 1920's Congress started working on the first National Park which took almost half of the north shore around 170,000 acres. Some citizens were proud their land had been chosen to become a National Park, others were forced to sell.

School children and private citizens raised money to help buy the first park. It took almost 14 years for the Park to become a reality. Some citizens were bitter because they had worked hard for their land so they could have something to hand down to their children. But the first National Park was dedicated in September 2, 1934. A statement was made by President Roosevelt that Swain County had gave enough, no more shall be add to or taken away to the Park.. BUT

In 1941 T.V.A. needed land to build a power plant (a dam) to supply power for Oak Ridge Tennessee and to help create a bomb and help end World War II, so land was taken again by the Federal Government (T.V.A.) the citizens of the North Shore were patriotic to our Government. Then a second Park was created in early 1940's which took another 44,110 acres of Swain County. This would be the rest of the North Shore of Swain County, a total of 217,5654 acres of Swain County land has been taken by the Federal Government for the National Park. Fontana Dam only needed around 12,000 acres for the Dam project. Hundreds of family had to move or were forced to move with and average of \$7.00 per acres for there land. Some land was taken for back taxes, some received nothing. Remember this came only nine years after the President came to Swain County and said no more land will be taken from Swain County.

Over a thousands graves had to be moved and over 1200 graves still remain on the North Shore of the Park.

School, Churches, Towns and Jobs lost, also half of Swain County tax base gone because of National Park.

The National Park Promise in 1943 that a road would be built back to the North Shore after the war, well the war has been over for 60 years still no road for Swain County back to our heritage.

Some citizens of the North Shore that was forced to move still has anger toward our Government. Imagine you have worked all of your life your father and grandfather has also. Then your on Government the one we all love and are willing to fight and die for came to your home and tells you we need your home land everything you and yours have work for.

T.V.A. wants to build a dam at Fontana to create power at Oak Ridge Tennessee, to build a bomb which will help end world war II. This is what the people were told, our mountain people being very patriotic was willing to do anything they could to help end the war.

The National Park people told the citizens of Swain County and said we will make you another promise a contract if you will, we will build you a road back to your heritage and your cemeteries, so everyone can enjoy these mountains. We have weighty 60 years and still no road. How would you feel? I have talk to many old timers about their homes on the North Shore, I cry with them, I hurt for them. I listen to them tell of the hard times they had but how they enjoyed their way of life. They talk about their family how they together would get up at day break go to the field and work all day. They always looked forward to supper. Their wife or mother would have bake home made pies, cornbread, green beans they caned and fried chicken, fried potatoes.

It seems to me they had something we all need today, the closeness of family, time for each other integrity and a closeness to Church and GOD. When one needed help, neighbors would help each other. Then a mans word was his bond, A hand shake a contract. Our on leaders of our County might not have understood the consequence of the 1943 agreement.

Christmas---- from 1800's to 1943 was not like Christmas today, family would gather together on Christmas Day have dinner, gifts would consist of home made items, a real treat was fruits, nuts and candies for the children.

School---- most children had to walk to school, 2.4 miles was the longest distance the state law required a child to walk but many walk 3 even 4 miles by choice to school.

Meats---- Most family raised there on meat, chicken, cattle, hog's, they raiser there crops and saved there seeds from year to year.

Fresh Milk---- came from their on cows, they would make their on butter from milk using a churn. Their refrigerator was of a mountain spring close to the house, drinking water also water also from the same spring.

Bath Room---- was a little building a ways from the house often called a (Jon).

Church---- was often for a gathering place, most families lived far apart so Church was where most family and neighbors would get together.

Black Smith---- Most communities had a black smith shop this man could fix a plow, sharpen a axe, shovel or know how to make items that would be used on a farm, even make horse shoes and shoe the horse. Some family would make there on shoe for themselves

Women---would often gather together and make quilt for themselves there family or maybe even a newlywed gift or a new baby, maybe a house raising, most women would make some of the family clothes also.

Canning----was something most household would do, every summer if not by choice by necessity. This was one way vegetables could be kept all winter, also some meat was canned.

Grist Mills---- most communities had at least one, some house holes had a small mill. Mill were used to grind corn to make meal, also wheat to make flour.

Electricity---- very few family had electricity so lights were from oil lamps or candles. Heat in the house was from a fire place or wood or coal burning stove. Meals were cooked on wood stove winter or summer or a fire place. Wood was essential winter and summer.

Transportation was walking, wagon or sled, cars were almost nonexistent most roads from 1880' to 1930's were hand dug so wagon or horse back was common. Later better road came and more cars. Trains were common one ran from Bryson City to Fontana daily. Almost every hollow had roads to homes, trains ran up most creek where sawmill were.

Side Tracks---- is were local loggers brought there logs to load on trains in early 1900's they had to be skidded and loaded by hand later some citizens had log trucks. At one time logs had to be peel before you could sale the logs.

Ferries---- Early history of the North Shore shows not to many bridges so ferries was constructed at certain places on the river where people could ride across or goods could be brought across to other communities.

Water Tank---- one water tank was at Sutton Branch, another at Water Tank Branch. This was where the train could fill up with water then steam was created to move the Train to Fontana, and back to Bryson City.

BY DAVID MONTEITH