

## Hazel Creek Before the Fontana Dam

By: Ruth Chandler

It was in the early 1930's. We had just come through the Great Depression. Times had been very hard. A rumor started going from house to house. "A dam is going to be built on the river near Fontana." It brought chills to the hearts of our mountain people. We could not imagine a body of water, wide enough and deep enough, to cover the road we had traveled all our lives.

Then came the biggest blow of all. Rumors of war were everywhere. We were told that the dam must be built to provide power for war materials. Surveyors started working on boundary lines. TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) people came to homes and started buying up property. Some still could not believe that this was a reality.

Work crews started cutting all the timber in the river basin. It was clear-cut to the high water line. It was the most devastating sight we had ever seen.

Many loved ones were buried in the cemeteries there. The TVA said they would remove the bodies to other cemeteries if relatives wished them to. Some were moved, but many were left. People were told that a road would be built to replace the old one (Highway 288), as soon as the war was over. We believed they were telling the truth, but you know the story. It has been over fifty years and we have no road. Our government hasn't kept its word. Many feel they were gyped out of their land and homes. I want to tell you about one family. The wife now lives in Hazelwood. They owned 1.7 acres with a good house on it. The high water would come to the edge of their garden. They were offered thirteen hundred forty-five dollars for .7 acres. And taxes had to be paid from this before the owner got any pay. They took the full amount for the taxes and a small lien. Then, tragedy struck the home. The husband was killed on a foggy rainy night when his car slid off the road between Bryson City and home. It could be said that he was the first casualty of the Fontana Dam. There were no trees or bushes to stop the car from going down the mountain. The mother was left with four children. Three under the age of twelve.

The TVA then came to buy the rest of her land. They offered her the sum of ten dollars (\$10.00) for the other acre. When she refused, she was told they would arrest her and take her to court. Of course they got the land, but she hasn't been paid the ten dollars – yet.

Many others got the same treatment. If they refused to sign the deeds a judge signed for them.

They promised to help people find a place to go and to help them get moved; no one seems to know of anyone who got help.

The cemeteries were left without care for many years, except what came from hunters and fishermen. Rev. Martin Cable, his brother Jack, Furman Farley, Thee Laney, his sons Ralph, Ted, and Gene, Ed Wright, Fred Chandler, and many others went back on fishing trips. They cleaned the graves the best they could and even had short Memorial Services for those we had left behind.

The TVA turned the land over to the Park Service in the late 40's. They were suppose to care for the cemeteries, but it was a sad sight when we started going back and found them overgrown with weeds and bushes, tombstones carried off by bears, others uprooted by the hogs, and some with groundhog holes in them. We finally realized this government had no intention of honoring its promise to us. It has gone to the Supreme Court, but they refused to help.

If you read your Asheville Citizen Friday, January 9, 1987 you saw the statement of our present congressman. His bill to designate all land surrounding Fontana Lake as WILDERNESS will be submitted to Congress just as soon as possible. Need we say more? The impact will not only be felt by the North Shore people, but everyone who lives near it will feel the effects.

We have assurances from the Southern Regional Director of the National Park Service that he will do all he can to help solve our problem of the two bridges. Will we keep believing that something good will happen for The north Shore?

We have a new Park Superintendent. We are hoping and praying that we will be able to work with him and that he will help us.

*(The above article was reprinted from the North Shore Historical Association, a news letter published in the interest of former Hazel Creek residents.)*