

REMAKING THE LANDSCAPE FOR RECREATION  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:  
THE IMPACT OF TIMS FORD RESERVOIR  
ON FRANKLIN COUNTY, TENNESSEE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the Tennessee Valley Authority's Tims Ford reservoir project and its impact on the residents displaced by the lake. Among the promised benefits of the lake was a surge in economic development and prosperity for the people of the area.

Using the records of TVA, oral histories, and newspaper articles as well as the primary documents, photographs, home movies, and ephemera collected and carefully preserved by residents, this thesis finds that while some benefit came from the project, it fell far short of supporter's claims.

This thesis adds to the scholarship on TVA and displaced communities. It also adds to the field of southern community studies. Tims Ford played a key role in TVA's post-war mission, and the lost communities of the Elk River Valley are an undeniable part of that story.

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## I. TRIBUTARY RIVER DREAMS: TVA'S NEW MISSION COMES TO FRANKLIN COUNTY, TENNESSEE

On May 18, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Tennessee Valley Authority Act into law. With the stroke of a pen FDR ushered in an era of unprecedented change for residents of the Tennessee Valley. Intended to bring relief to one of the most economically depressed areas of the country, TVA was given broad power to develop the Tennessee River and provide programs of regional uplift that would bring agricultural and industrial benefit to the Tennessee Valley. So began “one of the most exciting and innovative regional development programs in the nation’s history.”<sup>1</sup> Idealistic leadership at the agency felt that by engaging in grassroots administration, the people of the Tennessee Valley would be less resistant to their programs. TVA projects brought low-cost electricity, flood control, increased navigation, fertilizer, erosion control, and other programs beneficial to rural people. Their gratitude is well documented in Depression-era photographs and newspaper accounts that profile happy farm families enjoying the benefits of electricity and modernization.

FDR picked three of the best and brightest to act as the agency’s board of directors. The first appointee was Arthur Morgan, an engineer with expertise in flood control, who left his post as president of Antioch College to help FDR find and recruit the other two destined to lead the TVA. With Arthur Morgan’s guidance, the president chose Harcourt Morgan (no relation) for his agriculture resources management experience. The final appointee was David Lilienthal, the dynamic public utilities lawyer and regulator.

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1. 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), 4.

All of the agency's coordinating divisions, the general counsel, and controller reported to the three-man board of directors. Only a group of "general advisory consultants" had autonomy on the 1933 organization chart.<sup>2</sup> Each man brought with him a wealth of experience with large-scale projects.

Lilienthal envisioned low-cost power production as TVA's primary duty. Harcourt Morgan fell in line with Lilienthal's ideas, but Arthur Morgan disagreed. Morgan felt that the area was as much in need of "social and moral reconstruction" as feats of engineering.<sup>3</sup> The philosophical conflict between Arthur Morgan and Lilienthal was a source of heated contention. Overlapping areas of responsibility, divergent ideology, and contentious personal relationships meant that the early years were fraught with tension and divided loyalties. Arthur Morgan's and Lilienthal's differences came to a head in 1937 forcing FDR to ask for Arthur Morgan's resignation.<sup>4</sup> Lilienthal had emerged victorious. His place secure, he set the tone for the agency, ensuring that it would be in the "power business" first and foremost; all other TVA programs would take a back seat. From 1936 to 1941, TVA poured the lion's share of its resources into multipurpose development of the Tennessee River and its tributaries to produce power, increase navigation, and control flooding.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Aelred J. Gray and David A. Johnson, *The TVA Regional Planning and Development Program: The Transformation of an Institution and Its Mission* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 26.

3. Howard Segal, "Down in the Valley: David Lilienthal's TVA: *Democracy on the March*," *The American Scholar* 64, no. 3 (1995): 423.

4. McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 22-23.

5. Roscoe C. Martin, ed., *TVA the First Twenty Years: A Staff Report* (Kingsport, TN: University of Alabama Press and University of Tennessee Press, 1956), 7-11.



During World War II, the agency's power production focus turned from electrifying the valley for regional uplift to providing power for the war effort, most notably for Oak Ridge's super-secret activities in connection with the Manhattan Project. It also provided cheap power for Alcoa aluminum plants engaged in producing material for war machines. The contribution to the war effort helped solidify the agency's power production mission and its status. TVA entered the post-war era with a positive regional reputation, a large bureaucracy, and tremendous political power.

It was also under attack. In the 1950s, political attacks forced some fundamental changes to TVA's operation. Conservative politicians campaigned vigorously for dissolution of TVA in favor of private industry control. Budget cuts, Cold War suspicion of government-run utilities, and Congressional opponents such as Tennessee Senator Kenneth McKellar (a Democrat), created large hurdles for TVA to navigate in this decade. In 1955, Herbert Hoover's energy task force came out in favor of turning TVA's power operation over entirely to private industry.<sup>6</sup> Under Eisenhower the agency was unable to get the congressional appropriations that were its lifeblood. In 1959, the TVA Act was amended so that TVA became a self-financing organization; further expansion would have to be paid for through bonds issued on TVA credit. The federal government would no longer back TVA power projects with Treasury funds.<sup>7</sup> The amendment was a watershed event for the agency, forcing fundamental changes in agency philosophy.

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6. Sybil Thurman, ed., *A History of the Tennessee Valley Authority: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1982), 25.

7. William U. Chandler, *The Myth of TVA: Conservation and Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1933-1983* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1984), 117-18.

In the 1960s, TVA Chairman Aubrey “Red” Wagner urged the leadership of TVA to look for a “new mission” to justify seeking continued appropriations from the Kennedy administration. That mission would entail the building of dams on tributary rivers to create lakes for economic development and recreation.<sup>8</sup> The agency’s initial new-mission project was intended to be a dam across the Little Tennessee River at Tellico Plains. However, the idea of damming the “Little T” provoked local opposition and legislative roadblocks. While the Tellico project was stalled, Representative Joe L. Evins (D-Tennessee) interceded to obtain funding for a dam at Tims Ford, in Franklin County, Tennessee.<sup>9</sup> Almost by default, Tims Ford became the first dam built under TVA’s new mission. In 1965, J.C. Hundley penned an editorial in *Tennessee Magazine* touting the benefits of the project:

Tims Ford Dam . . . will be the first true multiple-purpose dam in the so called 'next phase' of TVA's great regional water control system- the taming and development of streams tributary to the Tennessee River . . . Its development is certain to become a showpiece in the orderly utilization of tributary streams.<sup>10</sup>

The Tims Ford Dam project was a model of TVA’s practiced dam building process, honed since 1933. From concept to reality, it took only eleven years to accomplish. Approximately half that time was spent planning, drumming up support, and acquiring funding. The Elk River Development Association (ERDA), a local group concerned with watershed resource management, was formed in 1959, but the majority of the boots-on-the-ground building activity was accomplished in a mere six years.

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8. Kenneth Murchison, *The Snail Darter Case: TVA Versus the Endangered Species Act* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 5.

9. Ibid., 21. At that time, Joe L. Evins held the powerful position of chairman of the Public Works Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. Tims Ford was in his district.

10. J.C. Hundley, “Volunteer Views,” *Tennessee Magazine*, July 1965, 23.

Congress approved funding in 1965, land acquisition was complete by 1969, the dam was finished in December of 1970, and by 1972 the dam was producing power.<sup>11</sup> The timeline, coupled with evidence of little organized local resistance and a high degree of boosterism for the project, gives the impression that the dam was accomplished with unquestioned local support.

My purpose here is to examine the motives behind ERDA's decision to campaign for a dam on the Elk River. What made the project attractive to TVA? What did project boosters expect from the creation of Tims Ford Lake? The project was not something just imposed upon the area. TVA and ERDA were co-agents of change. Local leaders actively pursued the project, placing their reputations and agency money on the line.

Nevertheless, the changes that the dam would bring to the area were deeply desired by some, but not all Franklin County residents. The fact that little organized effort was made to resist the dam does not mean that sentiment was universally in favor of the project. Even if a concerted effort to stop the project had been mounted, TVA had become a powerful agency and was unlikely to bend to any local pressure. In this climate, how did the dissenters express their opinions? How were they able to resist, negotiate, or mediate the drastic changes in their communities? How has lingering feeling found expression in the community?

I will also examine the real impact on the county in the years since the dam closed. Did the hoped-for benefits materialize? Did the construction of a slack-water reservoir cause any unforeseen problems? Did the feelings of those who campaigned so

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11. Tennessee Valley Authority, "Tims Ford Dam" informational pamphlet, Knoxville: TVA, no date.

vigorously for the project hold after the fact? Finally, I will examine the changes to the physical and demographic landscape. What replaced the communities that were inundated by reservoir waters? How has the tenor of life changed in the area? How have former residents memorialized their loss? Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the new developments on the shores of the lake are populated by newcomers attracted to second homes, leisure, or retirement. Has Franklin County become another old-timer vs. newcomer community where recent arrivals are disengaged, unwilling to commit to civic and social life of the area?

Tributary area projects, the construction of coal-fired steam plants, and the nuclear power program dominated the post-war years of TVA. During this time, TVA built lakes primarily for recreation and shoreline development. The key Depression-Era rationalizations for dam building—flood control, navigation and power production—did not justify tributary area dams. Neither power output nor navigation improvement were motivating factors for projects like Tims Ford.<sup>12</sup> Some flood control benefit could be claimed, but bottom-land farmers depended on those annual floods to enrich the soil where they grew their most productive crops.

Project boosters had every reason to expect economic growth from recreation and shoreline development coupled with an increase in industry and manufacturing jobs. An article published in the June 10, 1964, edition of the *Winchester Herald-Times*, quoted TVA General Manager L. J. Van Mol claiming that recreation would be a “major portion

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12. Erwin C. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth: The Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority 1933-1990* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 147.

of the benefits” of the project. He also called for a “high degree of local participation.”<sup>13</sup> TVA’s track record in boosting economic growth was well known and much lauded in the Tennessee Valley. In a letter to the editor of the *Monroe Citizen-Democrat* defending the Tellico project, TVA Chief Frank E. Smith asserted, “Since its beginning, TVA has had a basic responsibility to work with the people of the valley to stimulate economic development—and industrial growth is certainly a recognized part of this effort.” He also claimed that economic growth was at the “very heart of all of TVA’s activities.”<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Hatchett, President of the Cowan Commercial Club expected the lake project to attract industry to the county based on “facts verified by TVA research proving the project feasible.”<sup>15</sup>

In order to make these small dams pay for themselves and stimulate economic growth, TVA bought more land than was needed for inundation. The “large take” land purchase policy, which made shoreline development possible, was ultimately very profitable, and TVA and the local development association recouped the cost of the dam well before the payment was due. According to Tennessee Elk River Development Association (TERDA) employee George Reed, the agency had until 2014 to pay off its

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13. “Recreation Major Aim of Tims Ford Dam---TVA Head,” *Winchester Herald-Times*, June 10, 1964. Van Mol made his remarks at the annual meeting of the Elk River Development Association.

14. Frank E. Smith to Joe G. Bagwell, November 9, 1965. Albert Gore Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University (hereafter cited as Albert Gore Papers)

15. Kenneth Hatchett to Senator Albert Gore, June 15, 1965. Albert Gore Papers.

portion of the dam cost.<sup>16</sup> When the agency was dissolved in 1998, the State of Tennessee took TERDA revenue and paid the debt in full, sixteen years ahead of the deadline.<sup>17</sup>

According to the *Economic Impacts of Tennessee State Parks* study completed in 2010 by the University of Tennessee Institute for Agriculture, visitors to Tennessee State Parks like Tims Ford are likely to spend in excess of one hundred dollars per visit, a certain boon to the local economy. The economic benefit the area gained due to recreational use is hard to measure, but real nonetheless. On a hot summer day the lake is crowded with pleasure craft loaded down with recreational users. Though free access to the water can easily be obtained at the state park and public boat ramps, businesses like restaurants and convenience markets that cater to the more immediate needs of lake users dot the 250-mile shoreline, contribute to the local tax base, and provide employment for local people. The *Franklin County, Tennessee Chamber of Commerce Business Directory and Area Profile 2007-2008* claims that 40% of homeowners in the county are seasonal residents, no doubt attracted by scenic lake-side properties.<sup>18</sup> When in residence, these seasonal homeowners also contribute to the local economy by purchasing food, fuel, and the other items and services necessary to maintain a home.

The growth in manufacturing that county leaders were counting on never really materialized. Currently, lake-side land on which manufacturing businesses could be

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16. The Tennessee Elk River Development Association, formerly known as the Elk River Development Association. The name was changed by a 1963 state law which broadened the agency's powers.

17. George Reed, interview by author, Winchester, TN, May 9, 2008.

18. Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, *Franklin County, Tennessee Chamber of Commerce Business Directory & Area Profile 2007-2008* (Franklin County, Tennessee, 2007), 20.

located is limited. The shoreline land disposition plan created in 2000 by the TVA Board of Directors zoned 67.3 acres, divided among four different sites, for industrial/commercial use. By contrast, 815.1 acres were zoned residential development and access.<sup>19</sup> Quality of life may be a consideration for new industry wishing to come into the area, but it is unlikely that a man-made lake would be the deciding factor. According to a 1969 survey of 308 manufacturing companies located in Tennessee, factors like cultural atmosphere and local amenities that contribute to quality of life were considered “secondary factors” in the decision to locate a plant in a particular area.<sup>20</sup> Some new industries have located in the county, but job gains are offset by the closing of other plants. For example, two hat manufacturing plants closed in 1972, their facilities converted to carpet milling in 1974. American Standard expanded its plant in 1971 only to close the doors in 1976. Only Arnold Engineering Development Center (AEDC), the Air Force wind tunnel research facility in neighboring Tullahoma, saw continued steady growth in the 1970s, thanks in large part to its high-tech testing activities. In the first decade of the lake’s existence, the county only saw a 2% rise in employment in the manufacturing sector. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, there is little evidence that the coming of the lake was able to shield Franklin County from the decades-long hemorrhage in manufacturing jobs impacting the entire nation.

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19. Tennessee Valley Authority, “Tims Ford Reservoir Land Management and Disposition Plan Panel 1 and 2,” <https://www.tva.gov/environment/reports/timsford/map.pdf> (accessed December 30, 2012).

20. James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development 1936-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 213-14.

Tims Ford occurred at a time of great change for TVA, the region, indeed the entire nation. TVA's new self-financing rules were passed the same year that ERDA formed in the Elk River Valley. TVA needed a new mission, and the Elk River stood ready for development. Local leaders like ERDA's first president Joe Sir (from Fayetteville, Tennessee) injected their idealism into ERDA. Pro-TVA legislators like Sen. Albert Gore Sr. (D-Tennessee) and Rep. Joe L. Evins were well placed to ensure that appropriations came through. In a 1965 letter, Senator Gore assured ERDA President Bill Smith that he was "hopeful that funds to start construction of both Tellico and Tims Ford projects can be appropriated this year."<sup>21</sup> Gore was desirous that both projects get the green light, since his home state would reap the rewards. Joe L. Evins worked actively to ensure that appropriations for Tims Ford came through.<sup>22</sup> The actors in the drama were lining up in the wings.

Regionally, residents were reaping the benefits of defense industry spending. Huntsville, Alabama, a close neighbor to Franklin County, became a boom town in the 1950s and 60s with the arrival of Marshal Space Flight Center, Chrysler, International Business Machines, and Rockwell International among others. The town's population skyrocketed, and at times more than 70% of Huntsville's employment could be directly linked to space and defense industry.<sup>23</sup> A large federal investment closer to home also helped fuel projections for growth and development. AEDC, opened in 1950 on the

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21. Albert Gore to Mr. W. A. Smith, July 30, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.

22. Erwin C. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth*, 175.

23. Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 193-4.



outskirts of neighboring Tullahoma, Tennessee, attracted engineers and career military personnel to the area. It also provided good paying civilian jobs for some Franklin County residents.<sup>24</sup> Cold War fears and space race competition fueled growth and optimism in southern middle Tennessee and north Alabama.

Post war affluence and the rise of outdoor recreation were two other factors that made the project so desirable. Americans were traveling for leisure more than ever, and the government wanted to know what they were doing, how frequently they were doing it, and how to meet those needs in the present and in the future. *Outdoor Recreation for America: A Report to the President and to the Congress by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission*, commissioned in 1958 and published in 1962, provides a detailed portrait of outdoor recreation in America including anticipated growth and the types of activities that people found most attractive. Among the findings was the fact that “Most people seeking outdoor recreation want water—to sit by, to swim and fish in, to ski across, to dive under, and to run their boats over.” In the summer of 1960, Americans engaged in outdoor activities for recreational purposes on 4.4 billion separate occasions. By the year 2000, the commission projected the number of separate outdoor activities to reach 12.4 billion, a “threefold increase by the turn of the century.”<sup>25</sup>

In retrospect, TVA’s timing for this project was perfect. The United States as a whole was on the verge of a sea change in attitudes toward agencies like TVA. Tims Ford

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24. Arnold Engineering Development Center, “The History of AEDC,” <http://www.arnold.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-110405-006.pdf> (accessed January 17, 2013).

25. U.S. Congress, *Outdoor Recreation for America: A Report to the President and to the Congress by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission*, ORRRC Study Report 19, January, 1962, [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/anps/anps\\_5d.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anps/anps_5d.htm) (accessed June 17, 2009).

was accomplished just before the passage of environmental legislation that would deeply impact other tributary area projects. By the end of the 1960s and on into the 1970s, TVA would find itself in a morass of negative public opinion over its handling of another tributary-area project, the dam across the Little Tennessee River at Tellico. Kenneth Murchison's superb investigation of the controversy, *The Snail Darter Case: TVA Versus the Endangered Species Act*, explores the numerous stumbling blocks TVA encountered trying to get Tellico built. To this day, the Snail Darter is shorthand in the region for the way that something small can potentially derail a huge project. The Tims Ford project was completed three years before the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973. Though TVA was ultimately able to finish the Tellico dam, some feel that its reputation never recovered from the negative publicity generated during that time. Murchison claims that, "TVA's victory [at Tellico] was a costly one, and completion of the Tellico Dam effectively ended the 'new mission' projects designed to promote economic development."<sup>26</sup>

From 1959 to 1970, the United States went through some big changes. The environmental movement and a suite of environmental protection laws passed in the late 1960s and early 1970s provided legal might for the people who fought Tellico Dam. Civic action on the scale of efforts at Tellico is not readily apparent in a cursory examination of the events that surrounded the Tims Ford project. In part, this is due to the personal reactions of citizens rather than the larger causes of environmentalism. Dig deeper, however, and one finds that outspoken public action is not absent from the Tims Ford story. Opponents never gained the momentum or garnered the media attention that

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26. Murchison, *The Snail Darter Case*, 170.

Tellico protesters got, but some Franklin County residents did protest and form opposition groups. Their nascent efforts at organized public opposition foreshadowed the storm that TVA would face at Tellico.

As the field of Southern community studies matures, we are beginning to see the region as a place of complexity and diversity. Themes of poverty, racism, and lost-cause nostalgia are giving way to a more complicated narrative. The coal company town is no longer the site of downtrodden workers exploited by robber barons. Rather, it is a place of complex worker-management negotiation where corporate paternalism could work in the employee's favor.<sup>27</sup> The plantation house museum is no longer the sole property of those who would seek to whitewash the past; increasingly, it is a place where the painful legacy of slavery can be interpreted and healing can begin.<sup>28</sup> The questions I ask here of Tims Ford fit well into the current scholarship. For most of its history, TVA garnered the lion's share of credit for ushering the South into the modern era. Its projects were seen as necessary, the benefits far outweighing the costs. Some have now begun to challenge that narrative, questioning TVA's motives and results. Bruce Schulman's study, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the*

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27. See Karen Bescherer Metheny's *From the Miners' Doublehouse: Archaeology and Landscape in a Pennsylvania Coal Company Town* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007) and Peter Crow's *Do, Die, or Get Along: A Tale of Two Appalachian Towns* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

28. For examples of the challenges and success of changing the interpretation of slavery at historic sites and addressing these issues in the field of southern studies see the collection of essays edited by James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and Public History, the Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: New Press, 2006) and James Oliver Horton's article "Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America's Racial Story," *The Public Historian* 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 19-38. The aforementioned scholarship focuses on high profile sites like Monticello and Colonial Williamsburg, but some smaller venues have made significant changes in the last few years. For instance, Oaklands Historic House Museum in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Travellers Rest in Nashville have begun to explore slavery through the inclusion of new exhibits and revised tour scripts.

*South, 1938-1980*, is one such example. Schulman argues that the military build-up during World War II deserves most of the credit for the regional spike in industrial production.<sup>29</sup>

For a long time, material about TVA told one side of the story only. R.L. Duffus's *The Valley and Its People*, published in 1946 for middle school-age audiences, is one such celebratory narrative. It is replete with gorgeous New Deal agency photographs created primarily by photographers employed by the TVA, the Works Progress Administration, and the Rural Electrification Administration. The photographs of massive turbines at hydroelectric dams, noble laborers gazing into the distance, and the miracle of improved land and modern conveniences were intended to inspire hope and faith in federal programs.<sup>30</sup> Nowhere in the pages are there images of farmers forced to leave their homes. Books and articles written by TVA staffers and supporters tout the benefits brought to the region, neglecting to acknowledge legitimate concerns raised by the Army Corps of Engineers, private citizens, and non-TVA engineers.<sup>31</sup> Voices of dissent were discounted as sour grapes (the private utilities), or the grumbling of uneducated hillbillies too impoverished of spirit to know what was good for them.<sup>32</sup>

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29. 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), 94.

30. David Nye, "Redeeming City and Farm: The Iconography of the New Deal Photography," *European Contributions to American Studies* 18 (1990): 254.

31. The Army Corps of Engineers had been charged with "primary authority over navigable rivers" by an 1824 Supreme Court decision, *Gibbons v. Ogden*. It is understandable that it would claim expertise and experience in river management and that its recommendations for the Tennessee River would have merit. Karen M. O'Neill, "Why the TVA Remains Unique: Interest Groups and the Defeat of New Deal River Planning," *Rural Sociology* 67 no. 2 (June 2002): 169-70.

32. For particularly egregious examples of this attitude see Gordon R. Clapp's *The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) and the

According to former TVA Director Gordon R. Clapp, the high-dam approach was “a policy deprecated by many prominent engineers of that day.” Therefore, “In recruiting engineers to give life to this idea—multiple-purpose dams—those who believed in the feasibility of this approach were sought and found.”<sup>33</sup> In Clapp’s views, the concerns of other engineers were merely obstacles to be sidestepped. Public opposition to the building of Douglas Dam, built with great urgency in 1942 to meet war-time demand, only served to strengthen the resolve of TVA officials. “Perhaps above all, he [TVA chief Aubrey Wagner] believed in the lesson of the Douglas Dam story, that TVA should not surrender its autonomy to make sound professional decisions to anyone, whether politicians or public.”<sup>34</sup>

Since the Tellico controversy erupted in the early 1970s, there has been a shift in material written about TVA. While celebratory narratives like Sybil Thurman’s *A History of the Tennessee Valley Authority: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* are still easy to find, so are volumes that are critical of the agency. William Chandler tackles the most sacred of TVA’s sacred cows, the development of the Tennessee River, in his book *The Myth of TVA: Conservation and Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1933-1983*. McDonald and Muldowny’s *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area* challenges the rationale behind the agency’s initial foray into large-take land purchase. In *Prisoners of Myth: The Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority*

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Works Progress Administration Federal Theatre Project’s Living Newspaper play, “Power”, the script for which can be found at the New Deal Network website, sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, <http://newdeal.feri.org/tva/tva18.htm> (accessed December 4, 2008).

33. Clapp, *The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region*, 29.

34. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth*, 284.

1933-1990, Erwin C. Hargrove examines in great detail the burden created by TVA's Depression Era successes and how post-war leadership labored under the ideology created by the agency's founders.

Treatments of small, non-controversial, TVA tributary area projects are few in number. A smattering of articles, theses, and dissertations are to be found, but collectively, they represent a tiny portion of the body of work on TVA topics. Stephen Wallace Taylor's dissertation, "Building the Back of Beyond: Government Authority, Community Life and Economic Development in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley, 1880-1992," Ekem Amonoo Lartson's dissertation, "Participatory Planning at the Grassroots: The Tennessee Valley Authority's Tributary Area Development Program," John Sharp Fox's master's thesis, "Tennessee Valley Authority Land Policies: The Case of Meigs County, Tennessee," and Wayne Clark Moore's dissertation, "Farm Communities and Economic Growth in the Lower Tennessee Valley, Humphreys County, Tennessee, 1785-1980" were of particular use in the writing of this thesis.<sup>35</sup> A great deal of raw information such as archeological survey data and unprocessed artifacts from federally mandated salvage work languishes in libraries, archives, and university basements. Forty archeological survey reports from TVA projects are available for

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35. John Sharp Fox, "Tennessee Valley Authority Land Policies: The Case of Meigs County, Tennessee" (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1977); Ekem Amonoo Lartson, "Participatory Planning at the Grassroots: The Tennessee Valley Authority's Tributary Area Development Program" (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 1995); Wayne Clark Moore, "Farm Communities and Economic Growth in the Lower Tennessee Valley, Humphreys County, Tennessee 1785-1980" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1990); Stephen Wallace Taylor, "Building the Back of Beyond: Government Authority, Community Life and Economic Development in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley, 1880-1992" (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 1996).

ordering from TVA directly.<sup>36</sup> At least two Tennessee Division of Archeology reports were completed for Tims Ford, after the lake was created.<sup>37</sup> Some of the published material provides an interesting, yet ultimately unsatisfying, look at smaller TVA efforts. Patricia Ezzell's article "The Price of Progress: Lost Towns of Pickwick Reservoir," which appeared in *Alabama Heritage Magazine* in 2007, is one such example of an unsatisfying, nostalgic look back at an inundated community. In the opinion of one TVA scholar consulted for assistance with this thesis, the time has come for a hard look at TVA's tributary area programs.<sup>38</sup>

In the following pages, I intend to examine the effort that went into making Tims Ford happen and the reaction in the community. Naturally, TVA's considerable infrastructure and resources are a large part of the story, as are its policies and programs. But the real story is one of local politics and community. Resisting the temptation to frame Tims Ford as some kind of David versus Goliath tale is key to understanding what happened and why it happened the way it did. If it were not for the considerable effort of ERDA and other local forces, Tims Ford might never have happened. TVA required that there be a local mandate for the construction of a tributary area project. This mandate came in a 1963 state law that created the second iteration of ERDA, the Tennessee Elk

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36. Tennessee Valley Authority, "Archeological Reports," Map & Photo Records, [https://maps.tva.com/Scripts/MetaWeb/map\\_arch.asp](https://maps.tva.com/Scripts/MetaWeb/map_arch.asp) (accessed Friday, March 22, 2013).

37. Tennessee Division of Archaeology "Unpublished Manuscript No. 97-1," prepared by Michael C. Moore in March of 1997 was completed in advance of the creation of a golf course on Wiseman Bend along Tims Ford Lake. Tennessee Division of Archaeology "Survey of 45 Land Parcels at Tims Ford Reservoir, Franklin County, Tennessee," prepared by William L. Lawrence for the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, March, 2000, was written to assist with the TVA's Land Management Disposition Plan.

38. Wayne Clark Moore, private conversation, Nashville, TN, May 28, 2009.

River Development Agency (TERDA). By law, TERDA was “vested with legal powers to receive appropriations, enter into and carry out contracts, and perform other functions which can only be carried out by public agencies.” In a subsequent memo of understanding TERDA agreed to, “Accept primary responsibility for obtaining appropriate local financial participation in the area development program and in water control improvements which may be a part of that program.”<sup>39</sup> Moving forward, TVA would not have to shoulder the full cost of the project; the local development agency could become more deeply invested in the successful completion of the dam.

The desire of local leaders to bring the counties of the entire Elk River watershed fully into the economy of the New South precipitated big changes for the people of Franklin County. Many of the life ways from earlier in the century persisted into the 1950s and 1960s. Some farmers resisted mechanization, for various reasons, and to the casual observer their techniques seemed backward and unproductive. TVA analysts found it difficult to quantify the barter economy still thriving in the area. Labor, as well goods and services, were frequently traded with friends, family, and neighbors, thereby boosting production and quality of life. No cash exchanged hands in these transactions; therefore, no taxes could be levied and said activity could not be entered on a balance sheet. The barter economy gave citizens purchasing power outside the cash economy. It was a neighborly, convenient exchange with the added bonus of no sales tax owed. The Elk River Valley was an area in transition from a production-based rural economy, fairly self-sufficient, to fuller participation in consumer culture.

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39. Tennessee Valley Authority, “Tims Ford Reservoir Land Management and Disposition Plan Vol. II,” (June, 2000), 2-3.



The “make do or do without” spirit of the area still persists in small ways. Even now, with foodstuffs convenient, relatively cheap, and readily available, it is common to find back yards in the country graced with lush kitchen gardens. Visitors to area homes during the long growing season will find it difficult to leave without a bag full of tomatoes, squash, or whatever is ready for picking. Particularly among older people, any item deemed useful is saved, mended, recycled, and reused. Though residents of the area could not resist the tide that bore them along into an economy heavily dependent on cash, echoes of the past can be easily found.

This narrative is chronologically organized, and the story is divided into three parts. Part One begins in 1959 with the establishment of ERDA and ends in 1970 with the completion of the dam. The narrative in Part One focuses primarily on the rationale used by TVA and ERDA/TERDA during the planning phase. Anecdotal evidence, gleaned from oral histories brings a flesh-and-blood element to economic and demographic data and information from studies and reports by TVA and other federal entities, such as the Census Bureau.

Part Two covers the years 1971 to 1980. During those years Franklin County residents adjusted to the changes in their community. The impact of the altered landscape is explored through oral testimony and articles from the local newspapers. Public records and files from the TERDA office offer insight into the shoreline development that began in the 1970s. Planning for Tims Ford State Park, which opened in September of 1978, began almost immediately after the dam was finished. Newspaper articles and TERDA

records document the funding struggles, planning, and completion of the park project. As the decade drew to a close, Franklin County residents were poised to reap the rewards of their efforts and sacrifice.

The third and final portion of the narrative looks back over the entirety of the story. Here I will examine the way that residents resisted the dam, and the way they remember and preserve their inundated communities. I will also examine the changes in the community from 1980 to the present. Increased shoreline development, changes to the industrial landscape, and management of the lake's environmental resources dominate the final chapter. The state park underwent a period of expansion, building a golf course on new acreage. In this section, I examine the real impact of the reservoir on the county thirty years after its creation. Census data from 1950 through 2000 as well as information from the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and the Franklin County Industrial Development Board provide a clear picture of population, income, and a host of other factors that speak to the prosperity of the county.

Naturally, there are gaps and silences in the narrative. African Americans are conspicuously absent from the Tims Ford story. From mid- to late-twentieth century, the racial makeup of the county was overwhelmingly white. The antebellum population of African-Americans in Franklin County was approximately one for every three whites, but the black population declined steadily with the rise of Jim Crow and outmigration in the early twentieth century. In 1962, a scant 7% of farm operators in the entire seven-county

Elk River watershed were “non-white.” In 1990, census data marked the non-white population at a mere 8%.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, none of the oral history respondents is African-American; therefore, one potentially illustrative source is silent.

I was born and raised in Franklin County, Tennessee. The access to people and institutions that insider status grants certainly outweighs the negative aspects. Nevertheless, I am bound by literal and figurative ties of kinship to the people of the area. The temptation to portray the residents of the Elk River Valley as the victims of TVA’s aggression is great, but research does not support that narrative. In truth, the community was divided on the issue, but supporters far outnumbered detractors. Without sustained, active local support the project might never have happened, or it would have been less attractive to TVA, far from the “showpiece” J.C. Hundley raved about in *Tennessee Magazine*.

Finally, I have made heavy use of oral histories as a primary source. I am mindful of the fact that some of the respondents may be looking to the past with a heavy measure of nostalgia. Memory is a tricky thing, and these sources are not completely reliable for names, dates, and information of that nature. Fortunately, other records are readily available to confirm or contradict facts when needed. What comes through best in the oral histories is a sense of the rhythm of life in the community. Additionally, they provide invaluable information about the strong ties that residents had to the river, the landscape, and the patterns of life in a rural area.

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40. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories: Franklin County, Tennessee* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 1996), 18-19. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed: Its Agriculture* (Knoxville, TN: August, 1962), A-10.

Is Franklin County better off now than it was before the dam? The project brought some benefit to the county, but at a great cost. Residents who prized the rural, pastoral life were saddened by the destruction of natural beauty and productive farmland. Communities that had been in existence since the early years of the republic were destroyed for the march of progress. TVA no longer has the unrivaled power that it did from the New Deal Era through the 1960s. Thanks in part to greater public awareness and civic engagement, and to people like those of the Elk River Valley who refuse to let their communities be washed away, TVA leadership must answer for its blunders as well as take credit for its triumphs.

## II. FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY: PLANNING AND BUILDING TIMS FORD DAM, 1959-1970

In 1959 Clay and Louise Ervin owned 305 acres of land on Kline Ridge in Franklin County, Tennessee. They called it Elkmere Farm. They lived on the farm with their children, grew corn and other row crops, and kept horses, all very close to the Elk River. Perched as they were on a ridge overlooking Tims Ford, they had a front row seat to the building of Tims Ford Dam. On the eve of the Tims Ford Project, the Elk River Valley was a sleepy little rural area possessed of great natural beauty where families like the Ervins had every reason to expect that they might one day pass their farm on to their heirs. Clay enjoyed the rural, pastoral life that his riverside farm afforded. For him, work and play were intertwined. In an oral history interview he recalled some of the pleasures of life on the farm:

Well, of course, Pratt's Island ... I had that in corn every year. The slough was on the west side, the main part of the river's over here and lots, maybe once a week, we'd need to have fish for supper. I'd park my tractor and go over to the old crib over there and there's dead cobs there and I'd scratch around in those cobs and get me some worms get down there and wade the slough and get me a mess of fish and go home. Now I can't do that.<sup>1</sup>

The county's population in 1950 was 25,471, and the overwhelming majority lived in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 22% of the population made a living farming corn, cotton, hay, and other row crops. Sales of chickens, hogs, and dairy products made up

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1. Clay Ervin and Jim Wiseman, interview by author, Winchester, TN, June 4, 2008.

2. More than 21,000 of the 25,751 residents of Franklin County lived in rural areas. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1950 Census of Population, Table 5 Area and Population of Counties, Urban and Rural: 1930 to 1950* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952).

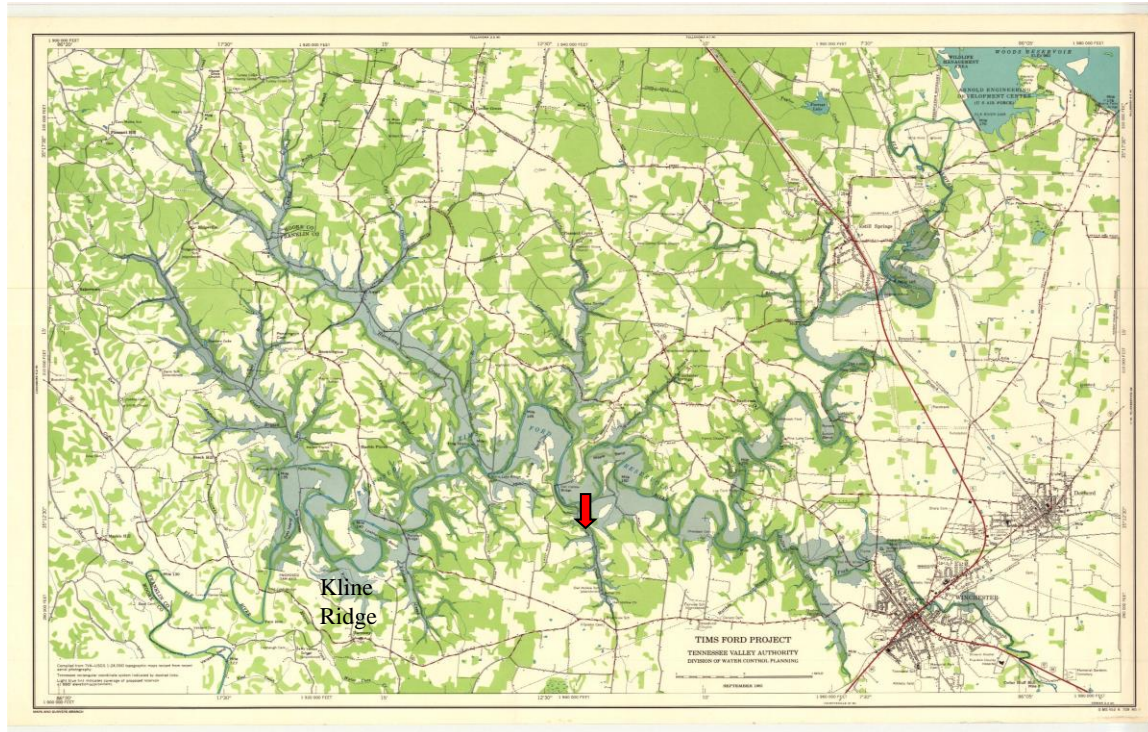


Figure 1. 1965 TVA Tims Ford Project Map showing Kline Ridge, location of Elkmere Farm. Arrow indicates a popular swimming hole identified by Joyce Brazier in her oral history interview.



Figure 2. Clay and Louise Ervin, 2008.

more than half of farm income. In 1962, approximately seven thousand county residents were engaged in full- or part-time farming. Farms in the Elk River watershed featured “agricultural incomes and basic agricultural resources ... better than average for the Tennessee Valley.” About 25% of employment was in small manufacturing firms, most of which produced clothing and textiles.<sup>3</sup> The University of the South, located at the southern end of the county on Sewanee Mountain, provided an academic library and outlet for county residents who might like to avail themselves of the rarified academic atmosphere. Arnold Engineering and Development Center built in 1951 on the outskirts of nearby Tullahoma, put engineers and rocket scientists into the local mix.

The Elk River brought nourishing alluvial soil deposits which made for productive bottom-land farming. It provided good fishing for overtaxed engineers and a recreational escape for serious-minded university students. Residents flocked to its cooler temperatures to escape summer heat. Oral histories reveal that those who lived near the river were deeply tied to its ebb and flow. They defined their communities and farms by the landscape that it created. Margie Higginbotham recalled that Owl Hollow School was near one of the creeks that fed into the Elk River. “The church was first and the schoolyard was one hundred, I don’t know, yards from it. And we would, the creek would come on down by that and when it got warm weather and when it was going to school, we got to go down and wade in that creek.” She remembered, too, the abundance of good spring water, “Our water came from a spring there and at that time they had a

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3. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, 9, 16-17, A-1, A-7-8, Elk River Watershed Employment Graph.

dipper in there and if you had a glass they would fill it right from the dipper.”<sup>4</sup> Natural features lent their names to homes and farms. “Our farm was the last before you got to the river, that’s why it’s called River Bend.”<sup>5</sup> Hollows and creeks were frequently named for the first white families that settled there or for natural water features, flora and fauna. Study of the TVA Tims Ford Project Map shows features named for local families, some of whom were interviewed for this thesis. Anderton Branch, Finney Hole, Kitchens Creek, Wiseman Branch and Acklin Bend are a few of the water features that were named for area families. Names like Boiling Fork Creek, Dry Creek, Owl Hollow, Hog Island, and Maple Bend impart important information about the natural area.<sup>6</sup>

Some oral history respondents viewed the river as an obstacle; others took the impediment in stride. In his interview, Clay Ervin recounted a hair-raising tale of his father-in-law rescuing a sow, her litter of piglets, and a newborn calf from a river island on an occasion when the “river got up.” “It wasn’t a barrier then, everybody had a boat. Matter of fact, some of the things that the old people did with their boats ... one false lick and they were all gone. They didn’t think anything about it.”<sup>7</sup> Marie Boswell’s family had a more cautious relationship with the river:

My dad worked so hard and had so much to do on the farm, he didn’t have time to fish and we weren’t allowed to go to the river ’cause we were afraid we’d drown

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4. Marie Boswell and Margie Higginbotham, interview by author, Winchester, TN, June 13, 2008.

5. Ibid.

6. Tennessee Valley Authority, “Tims Ford Project Map,” Division of Water Control Planning, September, 1965.

7. Ervin, Wiseman interview.



... We would go down and sometimes go wade but we had to be really careful. It was dangerous; it had swift water and it was dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

Pre-Columbian and Cherokee peoples had found the caves and rock shelters along the Elk a good place to live as game in the area provided an abundant food source. When whites and their African-American slaves came to settle in the area in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were naturally attracted to the free-flowing water, game, and fertile soil of the river valley. Franklin County was formally established on December 3, 1807. By the mid 1800s the area had gained a reputation as a healthful retreat for the elites of southern society. They came to “take” spring waters rich with sulfur, limestone, and other minerals. Visitors to Franklin County springs drank the water for its purported health benefits and enjoyed the river valley’s cooler temperatures in hot weather.<sup>9</sup> Before the Civil War, Dr. William Estill, for whom the town of Estill Springs is named, attempted to sell lots for building summer cottages near “his” spring. Parcels were sold, and a few cottages constructed, but the war and the death of Dr. Estill curtailed the project. Sometime in the 1880s, Moses A. Nelson built the first Estill Springs summer resort hotel, the Nelson House. By 1909, Estill Springs would boast five resort hotels.<sup>10</sup> Countywide, twelve or thirteen resorts and hotels catered to vacationers well into the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Boswell, Higginbotham interview.

9. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 10-11; B.C. Rauchle, “Famous Resorts of Franklin County,” *Franklin County Historical Review* XXVI (1996): 51.

10. William Byrom Dickens, *Estill Springs: Its History Until Incorporation* (Winchester, TN: Franklin County Historical Society, 1997), 37. The largest of these hotels, the Shelton House, could accommodate 150 guests.

11. B.C. Rauchle, “Famous Resorts of Franklin County,” 51.

The picture that emerges of mid-twentieth-century Franklin County is one of an area where white citizens could enjoy the benefits of the modern world—electricity, automobiles, and other conveniences—while still living and working in a rural place. The racial makeup of the county was overwhelmingly white; a scant 7% of farm operators were “non-white.”<sup>12</sup> The area benefited from the post-war economy in ways that other rural Tennessee areas did not. AEDC in Tullahoma employed locals as well as career military and engineers from all over the world. In 1964, the University of Tennessee Space Institute was established to provide graduate-level education to engineers and scientists. Built on the shores of Wood’s Reservoir in close proximity to AEDC, it offered students the opportunity to work closely with the formidable resources of the high-tech facility.<sup>13</sup> A reasonable commute to Huntsville, Alabama, offered employment at a variety of military-industrial sites, not the least of which was Redstone Arsenal. On average, in 1962, counties in the Elk River watershed spent as much or more on roads and public education per capita as did the other ninety-one counties in Tennessee.<sup>14</sup>

The 1960 census surveyed 6,884 Franklin County households. Of those surveyed, 64% had at least one automobile and 76% had a television. Nearby Giles county reported 60% of households having one automobile and 67% owning a television. Lincoln county

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12. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 18-19; Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, A-10.

13. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 74.

14. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, 29.

residents had 62% automobile ownership and 70% of households with televisions.<sup>15</sup>

Statewide the 1960 census showed that 57% of Tennesseans owned a car and 75% owned a television.<sup>16</sup> Nationally, only 60% of households reported one automobile owned.<sup>17</sup> By this one measure, Franklin County appeared to be fairing slightly better than other similar counties and better than or on pace with the state and nation. Although population loss due to out-migration was an issue for two of the seven counties in the watershed, Franklin County showed small population gains in rural and urban areas from 1940 to 1960. In contrast, Giles and Lincoln counties to the west experienced population losses of around ten thousand people from 1940 to 1960.<sup>18</sup> Franklin County gained 44% in urban areas, and 1.5% in rural areas over the same time period.<sup>19</sup> Residents had access to Emerald-Hodgson Hospital on Sewanee Mountain which was “for many years the only accredited

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15. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1960 Census of Housing, Volume I, States and Small Areas Part 7 Oklahoma-Tennessee* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1963), Table 30, Financial Characteristics and Selected Equipment, for Counties Outside SMSA's: 1960, pp. 44-69, Franklin County, pp. 44-70, Giles County, pp. 44-71, Lincoln County.

16. *Ibid.*, Table 6, Type of Fuel and Selected Equipment, for the State, Inside and Outside SMSA's Urban and Rural: 1960, pp. 44-9.

17. U.S. Department of Transportation, Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, *Journey-to-Work Trends in the Unit* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 2-2.

18. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, Elk River Watershed Population graph.

19. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1950 Census of Population*, Table 5 Area and Population of Counties, Urban and Rural: 1930 to 1950.

hospital between Nashville and Chattanooga.”<sup>20</sup> Political and business leaders in the county were proud of the area’s attributes and accomplishments, but they were eager for more economic development.

The Elk River Valley was not without problems and missed opportunities. Farms in the region were generally small and shrinking, and operated by older people. Most farms were less than 180 acres, and the TVA agricultural survey classified the majority as “low production, part-time, and part-retirement farms.”<sup>21</sup> The resort hotels and retreats that brought tourism money into the economy from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries had fallen out of fashion. Many were abandoned by 1950. Owners tried to transform the old East Brook resort hotel in Estill Springs into a boy’s and girl’s camp in the 1930s but faced stiff competition from well-organized Elklure Boy’s Camp and Riva Lake Girl’s Camp farther down the river.<sup>22</sup> Riva Lake Girl’s Camp celebrated its forty-eighth year in operation in 1969. It lost twenty-five acres to the lake, but as of 1996 it was still in operation as a year-round riding stable and teaching facility. Elklure Boy’s Camp, in operation since 1927, closed in 1968, a casualty of the reservoir.<sup>23</sup>

Part of AEDC’s contribution to the area was a man-made lake built by damming the Elk River. In 1952, the Army Corps of Engineers built a small lake in the northeast

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20. Established in 1899 as the University of the South’s infirmary, it served students and county residents as a hospital until it was replaced by a newer facility in 1976. Arthur Ben Chitty, “Sewanee: Then and Now,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 387.

21. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, A-4.

22. Rauchle, “Famous Resorts of Franklin County,” 55.

23. Betty Dement, “Riva Lake: Summer Place for 85 Girls,” *Tempo*, August 1969; Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 73; “Camp Elklure Assembly Call to Boys,” promotional material for fifteenth season. Unpublished, Tims Ford State Park historical collection, 1942.

corner of the county to provide cooling water for AEDC's wind tunnels, which are used for flight simulation and testing.<sup>24</sup> Wood's Reservoir offered free access for recreational use. In 1962, there were two public beaches, a public pool, and two dedicated picnic areas.<sup>25</sup> Area residents and frequent visitors knew the best fishing, camping, and swimming spots, and they needed little permission to help themselves to recreation on the river. In an interview conducted in 2008, Owl Hollow resident Joyce Brazier recalled how Franklin County residents would beat the summer heat by swimming at a spot near her house. During the interview she gazed at her old home place on a map:

My daddy used to grow watermelons right down in here. This was the swimming hole for the kids of Winchester and for all around. Sometimes they'd swim across the watering hole and get into these watermelon patches, which he really didn't care. You know, those are really fond memories for me.<sup>26</sup>

Christine Hopkins recalled similar experiences:

Right below Hopkins Point, right below my daughter's house there was a spot and there's a fresh water spring that comes into there. My mother-in-law says that was always known as the 'Cat Hole.' And they would come, the neighbors would come in supposedly and they would fish there."<sup>27</sup>

There was no need to ask for consent; insiders knew where to go. Good neighbors were allowed free use of the best spots, regardless of property lines, but it seems that there was little organized effort to revitalize tourism opportunities on the Elk River.

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24. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "National Priorities List (NPL) Site Narrative for Arnold Engineering Development Center (USAF)," Federal Register Notice: August 23, 1994. <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/npl/nar1439.htm> (accessed January 3, 2013).

25. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, Elk River Watershed Public Recreation Facilities map.

26. Joyce Brazier, interview by author, Pelham, TN, August 9, 2008. During the interview, Mrs. Brazier identified the swimming hole located at the mouth of Owl Hollow where Town Creek fed into the Elk River. See Fig. 1.

27. Christine Hopkins, interview by author, Winchester, TN, June 4, 2008.

Behind these pastoral scenes, community leaders worked on plans to change all that. The Elk River Development Agency was formed by “citizens from ten counties within the Elk River valley in Alabama and Tennessee” and chartered by Tennessee state law in 1959 “to plan, promote, and sustain a program for full development of the land and water resources of the Elk River Valley.” Membership and participation in ERDA was open to anyone residing in the watershed area.<sup>28</sup> ERDA’s area of concern was the Elk River Watershed, which comprised Franklin, Giles, Grundy, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marshall, and Moore counties in Tennessee as well as Lauderdale and Limestone counties in Alabama. By 1962 the agency had eight hundred members from the six Tennessee and two Alabama counties. Each of the counties contributed three members to the board of directors.<sup>29</sup> Key figures in the establishment of the organization were Joe Sir, a Fayetteville business owner and ERDA’s first president; Ben H. Wilkins Jr., president of Tullahoma-based Tennessee Overall Company; W.D. (Tut) Parham, Postmaster for the City of Tullahoma; and newspaper publisher Morris L. Simon.<sup>30</sup> The board was populated with acknowledged community leaders and men with a vested interest in the economic development of the area. In 1963, state law created the Tennessee Elk River Development Agency (TERDA):

[F]or the purpose of developing and effectuating plans and programs for comprehensive development including the control and development of the water

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28. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Tims Ford Reservoir Land Management and Disposition Plan, Volume II*, 2.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Morris L. Simon founded and/or published several newspapers: the *Tullahoma News and Guardian*, the *Fayetteville Elk Valley Times*, the *Manchester Times* and the *Winchester Herald-Chronicle*. Tennessee State Senate Bill No. SJR0039, 99<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, February 1, 1995.

resources of those portions of the Elk River watershed lying in Coffee, Franklin, Giles, Grundy, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marshall and Moore counties, Tennessee, and integrating plans, programs, and development activities with the overall economic development of the area described.<sup>31</sup>

The legislation gave the newly formed TERDA more muscle to accomplish its goals of Elk River Valley development.

In 1961, TVA offered its assistance to ERDA in realizing a “comprehensive program of resource development for the Elk River area.”<sup>32</sup> TVA, The University of Tennessee, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture created an inventory of agriculture resources, which, along with ERDA’s Agriculture Work Group, issued the *Elk River Watershed: Its Agriculture*, published by TVA in 1962. The *Elk River Watershed* report called for a “program for economic growth” comprised of four parts: “(1) expanded industrial development; (2) improved farm and forest management; (3) strengthening of local governments and institutions, and (4) further evaluation of the importance of water control and use to the economy of the area.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, TVA and ERDA were partners in the development of the valley from 1961 on. Curiously, dam construction is never explicitly mentioned in the report. In retrospect, the wording, “further evaluation of the importance of water control and use,” was code for dam building.

The report’s authors cite the previous ten-year growth of manufacturing employment in the area and plans by one quarter of the plants for future expansion as evidence of the growth potential in manufacturing. They placed a great deal of faith in the

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31. State of Tennessee, *Tennessee Code Annotated* (1955-1986), 64-1-301, Title 64, Regional Authorities, Chapter 1: River Basin Development Authorities, Part 3—Elk River Development Agency.

32. Tennessee Valley Authority, *Elk River Watershed*, foreword.

33. *Ibid.*, 1.

promise of increased employment, higher wages, and the “dominant role in the development program of the area.”<sup>34</sup> The report also praised the natural beauty and historic attractions as potential areas for “improvement and exploitation.” But, it cautioned that potential did not guarantee cash in the economy.<sup>35</sup>

Board members were firmly convinced of the benefits TVA development and manufacturing jobs could bring to the area. Working with TVA, they agreed to use the agency to help finance the project. ERDA president W.A. Smith wrote to Senator Albert Gore in the midst of the 1965 battle over appropriations for the project. In a “frank” letter to the senator he wrote:

We in the Elk River Valley realize that local participation doesn’t just happen or is necessarily automatic. It requires perfecting an organizational structure, planning, and hard work in getting ready and utilizing all opportunities as they are presented. To this end we have been working since 1959. As the Tennessee Elk River Development Agency stands ready now to sign the contract for local participation and in cooperation with the TVA to reimburse appropriated funds to the Treasury with the firm support and cooperation of the Elk River Development Association, City and County Governments, Chambers of Commerce, Civic Clubs, etc; the remark heard so often and pertinent now is restated. It makes a difference when you know who you’re doing business with.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, the stakes were high, and community leaders were anxious to take full advantage of development programs and federal appropriations. A May 26, 1965, a *Huntsville Times* article reported that TERDA and ERDA “expect early approval of their application for federal funds for two projects,” through the Economic Opportunities Act. The projects would fund hiring of staff to assist Elk Valley project development efforts

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34. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

35. *Ibid.*, 21 –23.

36. W.A. (Bill) Smith to Senator Albert Gore, July 26, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.



and to provide literacy and vocational training for “120 heads of households from rural areas of the Elk Watershed.”<sup>37</sup> A certain portion of TERDA/ERDA financing came from memberships as well as state (Tennessee and Alabama), city, and county funds. The agency also had the power to issue bonds and notes to raise money to buy land or construct facilities and improvements.<sup>38</sup> TERDA/ERDA leaders weren’t always explicit in describing where they would get the funds to reimburse TVA for a portion of the project cost. Before the dam was realized, they were banking on revenue from the sale of land for residential, recreational, and industrial development. They were certain the county would see a big benefit once a large recreational lake was a community feature. Community movers and shakers had invested their reputations by pitching the project at ERDA/TERDA meetings and community forums held at civic club meetings and at local churches. County Judge C.O. Prince wrote of the “[m]any long drives at night, thousands of dollars, and countless hours of valuable time by civic leaders of this area” that had been invested in the project.<sup>39</sup> Oral histories reveal that TVA representatives participated in informative meetings at area churches. “They, the men’s club of the Methodist church, invited TVA to come and tell ’em the benefits of the dam. I asked permission to come and tell ’em the other side and they would not let me. That’s the reason I’m not a member

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37. Times News Service, “River Groups Expect Early Funds Okay,” *Huntsville Times*, May 26, 1965.

38. “Agreement Reached,” *Florence Times Daily*, January 9, 1967; State of Tennessee, *Tennessee Code Annotated* (1955-1986), 64-1-309, Title 64. Regional Authorities, Chapter 1. River Basin Development Authorities, Part 3. Elk River Development Agency.

39. C.O. Prince to the Honorable Albert Gore, June 21, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.

40. Ervin, Wiseman interview.

of it.”<sup>40</sup> In his impassioned letter to Senator Gore, ERDA President Bill Smith stated that ERDA had been working to secure local participation since 1959. They had invested six years of groundwork, and the development association was liable for part of the cost of the project. Furthermore, ERDA had to face the ire of residents who were soon to lose their homes and communities. Franklin County residents were no strangers to eminent domain due to land acquisitions for Camp Forrest and Wood’s Reservoir.<sup>41</sup>

People like Clay and Louise Ervin who paid close attention to state and local news would likely have been aware that TVA had returned to its “large take” philosophy in 1960 with the damming of the Clinch River at Melton Hill in east Tennessee.

According to TVA scholar Erwin C Hargrove, “This [large-take] policy came to full expression in the Tims Ford, Tellico, Normandy, and Columbia dams of the 1970s.”<sup>42</sup>

Level of interest and information aside, Tennessee Valley residents were acquainted with the mission of the TVA. As of 1955, the agency had built twenty dams in twenty years on the Tennessee River and its tributaries, displaced fifteen thousand families, and purchased outright or acquired flowage rights to approximately one million acres of land.<sup>43</sup> TVA’s reputation loomed large over the region. As soon as the project began to gain momentum, the rumor mill was in full force. Resident Christine Hopkins and her

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41. 17<sup>th</sup> District J.P. Charles W. Chitwood claimed that the county lost 40,000 acres for the military base, and 5,000 acres for Wood’s reservoir. Charles W. Chitwood to Albert Gore, June 25, 1965, Albert Gore Papers. Camp Forrest, a WWII training camp and POW facility, was located near Tullahoma, Tennessee in southern Coffee County. Portions of the base spilled over into northern Franklin County. The base closed in 1946 and parts of the site were subsequently used to build the AEDC installation. Arnold Engineering Development Center, “Camp Forrest,” <http://www.arnold.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=12981> (accessed January 19, 2013).

42. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth*, 161.

43. Clapp, *The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region*, 22-23.

family heard of the project through unofficial and official channels. “It was a lot of word-of-mouth but seems like the best I remember, we received letters from TVA, TERDA that they were going to be seeking the land and so forth.”<sup>44</sup> Franklin County resident Jim Wiseman was a teenager when he first heard about the TVA dam. He was sitting in A. B. Rhoten’s grocery store in Awalt when someone told him that one day the town would be below sixty feet of water. “We had the biggest laugh ever that day. TVA had the last laugh, though.”<sup>45</sup>

TVA chief Frank E. Smith was convinced of the merits of the project. In a letter to the editor of the *Monroe Citizen-Democrat*, Smith stated that,

Over 50 percent of the economic benefits [of Tims Ford are] allotted to future development of the reservoir and shoreline for recreation purposes. In many respects, Tims Ford is a far more advanced example of the TVA concept of planning with local groups to best use reservoir lands for industrial and general economic development.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the optimism of the project’s supporters, the cost-benefit ratio for the dam was the same as for Tellico, a slim 1.4 to 1.<sup>47</sup> In other words, for every dollar spent on the project, a one dollar and forty-cent return was expected. Interestingly, the cost-benefit ratio for Tellico came under fire from several quarters, while no one seems to have questioned the same ratio at Tims Ford. In his book, *The Snail Darter Case: TVA Versus*

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44. Hopkins interview.

45. Ervin, Wiseman interview.

46. Frank E. Smith was incensed by criticism of the Tellico project, which encountered significant resistance from legislators and community members. The excerpt used here is taken from Smith’s blistering response to a critical editorial that appeared in *Nation’s Business*. Frank E. Smith to editor of the *Monroe Citizen-Democrat*, November 9, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.

47. Tennessee Department of Revenue Commissioner Donald R. King to Senator Albert Gore, July 28, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.

*the Endangered Species Act*, historian Kenneth M. Murchison is critical of the way TVA came up with cost-benefit ratios. He claims that TVA Chief Aubrey “Red” Wagner fully realized that flood control, navigation, and power generation alone were not enough to justify the cost of building tributary dams. Calculating the economic benefit of recreational use was difficult and subjective; re-selling land for development seemed to be the best way to make dams pay for themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Before World War II, local residents began to hear whisperings and rumors of TVA’s interest in the area. Franklin County native R.L. Spencer remembered a trip to see where TVA surveyors had marked a spot near Jolly’s Rock in the late 1930s. “They put a big old brass thing—‘TVA’—right at the base of that [tree stump]; this was the high water mark.”<sup>49</sup> Mr. Spencer’s memory correlates with TVA history:

In 1936 the TVA board submitted a report to Congress that called for the development of the best dam sites on the Tennessee River but also cited the need for smaller projects for water storage, flood control, and recreation on the river's tributaries. The Elk and Duck rivers were singled out as particularly promising sites.<sup>50</sup>

Even though TVA had had the Elk River in its sights since the very beginning, when the project was revisited in the 1960s, reactions were varied. Disbelief and anger were common. Positive feelings about the impending land acquisition were less prevalent.

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48. Murchison, *The Snail Darter Case*, 13-14.

49. William Renegar and R.L. Spencer, interview by author, Winchester, TN June 19, 2008. Mr. Spencer could not recall the exact year, but estimated it to be around 1938, certainly before World War II.

50. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth*, 133.

When asked whether people were upset or glad to hear of the coming lake, Mr. Spencer reported feelings to be: “Upset. People out Kline Ridge was upset ’cause they run them off.”<sup>51</sup>

Some residents responded with anger and activism. Louise and Clay Ervin kept informed about events in the community, and Mrs. Ervin’s job as an information officer at nearby AEDC allowed her to keep abreast of events reported in local newspapers. As the project gained momentum, the Ervins went to meetings, wrote letters, and kept scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, letters, and other related ephemera. Clay joined the Franklin County Resources Association, whose members stood in opposition to dam building. When asked about the land acquisition process, Ervin was not shy about expressing his opinion that, “[t]he people that TVA hired as their appraisers to me were the scum of the earth.”<sup>52</sup> Christine Hopkins still becomes emotional when she recalls a trip to Knoxville to plead for a portion of the family farm. According to Hopkins, at that meeting Aubrey Wagner told her and her husband that, “[y]our land is too valuable to us to let you keep it.”<sup>53</sup> According to newspaper reports, Awalt residents Arnold C. Parks and Auburn Tucker were told the same thing regarding property that was to remain above

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51. Renegar, Spencer interview.

52. Ervin, Wiseman interview. Clay Ervin and Louise Ervin, “Tims Ford Dam and State Park Scrapbooks, 1962-1980,” Tennessee State Library and Archives, Microfilm 1807

53. Hopkins Interview.

the fill line. In a *Nashville Banner* article, Parks expressed his frustration at the relocation process: “There is no way in the world you can make a good deal when you are forced to sell under one man’s terms and buy under another’s.”<sup>54</sup>

Not all valley residents were as angry or vocal, however. Some seem to have taken TVA money and displacement in stride, creating opportunity for positive change. Virginia Platt used the money that TVA paid for her home to improve circumstances for her family. The five-member Platt family lived in the abandoned Owl Hollow School building with no running water, and “it [the building] had too many problems, so really the dam helped us out a lot, by selling out.”<sup>55</sup> Joe Byrom, another Awalt resident, transitioned from working for others in a stable to owning one of his own. His mother expressed contentment with relocation, citing the difficulty of rural life. In Awalt, her six children had to traverse a swinging bridge to get to school, and poor roads prevented easy access to the sick and dying.<sup>56</sup> Some people, though reluctant to give up their homes, could see the benefits, at least in retrospect. Marie Boswell spoke about the boon to the county saying, “Well, it’s given a lot of people entertainment ... and it’s increased the population a lot in the county. Of course the county is getting more taxes out of it. I guess there is something good out of everything.”<sup>57</sup>

From the beginning, TVA had broad powers to take land for whatever purpose it deemed necessary. The Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 gave the agency the

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54. Judy Root, “Awalt: A Community of Destiny,” *Nashville Banner*, January 27, 1969.

55. Virginia Platt, interview by author, Winchester, TN, May 16, 2008.

56. Root, “Awalt: A Community of Destiny.”

57. Boswell, Higginbotham interview.

power of eminent domain and condemnation. Beyond that, though, the open-ended language in Section 22 of the act gave TVA license to take “adjoining territory” for “proper use, conservation, and development.”<sup>58</sup> Those words could be (and were) interpreted in many different ways. Prior to 1968, land purchases could play out in one of two ways. TVA appraised a property, made an offer, and the owners accepted and relinquished title to their land, or, TVA made the offer and owners refused the price. If owners refused to sell, the land was condemned and a “declaration of taking” allowed TVA to take possession without having to incur the time and expense of a jury trial. The system TVA had in place was swift and efficient. According to historian Wayne Moore, “TVA’s own economists estimated that the agency’s condemnation power enabled it to obtain land at roughly 60% of what it would cost a private buyer.”<sup>59</sup> The 40% savings was possible in part because of TVA’s powers of condemnation. Private buyers, attempting to put together a large amount of acreage for an industrial site or development are often at the mercy of sellers who might hold out for a higher price. TVA saved money by forcing sales.<sup>60</sup>

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58. *Tennessee Valley Authority Act*, Public Law 17, 73<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (18 May 1933), sec. 3 (h) (i), sec.

59. Wayne Clark Moore, “Damming the Valley: Taking the Land ... to Supply Industry with Power,” *Southern Exposure* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 34.

60. *Nation’s Business*, “Now Uncle Sam’s a Real Estate Speculator,” November 1965, 48.

61. TVA/TERDA Land Acquisition Records, Tennessee Elk River Management office, Winchester, TN.

TVA began buying land in 1966, and, as of January 1, 1969, 571 tracts of land had been acquired by TVA/TERDA for a total of 17,447 acres. There were only nine condemnations, which seems like a small percentage of the total sales. However, residents whose land fell within the project area were faced with only two choices. They could take TVA's first offer or refuse it and face condemnation proceedings. Those who chose condemnation proceedings engaged in a more protracted experience, the end result of which was the same, sale to TVA. The small number of condemnations suggests that most chose the path of least resistance. Almost all of that land was in Franklin County; only a few acres were in neighboring Moore County.<sup>61</sup>

Between 1966 and 1969, the people of the valley began the process of leaving their homes and saying goodbye to their neighbors and communities. Much like other remote, rural places, the communities that formed along the Elk River in Franklin County were tight-knit and proud of their self-reliance. A thriving barter economy supplemented the cash in circulation, and exchanges of labor and equipment were common among community members. Oral history interviewees R.L. Spencer and William Renegar had vivid memories of trading a portion of ground corn for grinding service at a local mill. "You took a sack of corn out there [to the mill] and they'd give you a sack of meal. It wasn't as big a sack when you went back."<sup>62</sup> Many families traded extra eggs for staples or even a special treat. Interviewee Joyce Brazier remembered that, "[t]here used to be a peddler come through and you could swap your eggs to him for sugar. I remember one

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62. Renegar, Spencer interview. The interviewees weren't clear as to the location of the mill, but based on the context and the location of their homes, it was likely near Kline Ridge.

63. Brazier interview.



thing mother got was some sort of pudding mix and remember that was the best pudding I'd ever tasted."<sup>63</sup> Each small community had access to a store, a grammar school, and at least one church. The store, the school, and the church formed the nexus of community life. The assessment of rural Appalachian communities offered by authors Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny, in *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area*, could easily be applied to the people in question here. The authors sum up rural life this way: "If life ... was too often characterized by harshness and deprivation, those very characteristics bred values of self-reliance and communal cohesiveness and a sense of self which transcended the poverty of the region."<sup>64</sup> Jim Wiseman, who grew up on a farm near Marble Plains, offered this assessment: "Before TVA in this area life was hard, but fair. After TVA, life was hard."<sup>65</sup>

As the construction of the dam drew to a close, nostalgic feature articles began to appear in local newspapers. *Tempo* magazine, a features supplement that appeared monthly in the *Tullahoma News*, printed "Steam Engine Saws Last Log in the Hollow" in April of 1968. "Taking a Last Look at Tims Ford Caves" appeared in the February 1970 edition of *Tempo*. The dramatically titled "Awalt: A Community of Destiny" ran in the January 27, 1969, issue of the *Nashville Banner*. The full-page spread featured photos of

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64. McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 26.

65. Ervin, Wiseman interview.

66. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 16.

67. Betty Dement, "Steam Engine Saws Last Log in the Hollow," *Tempo*, April, 1968, 8.

places soon to be lost and quotes from residents. The articles play familiar notes of sadness and regret juxtaposed with the determination of hearty people to make the best of the situation.

When the dam closed at the end of 1970 and the water began to rise, two small communities were lost to the rising water. One of those communities was Owl Hollow, located on Town Creek, the waters of which fed the Elk River. Water at one time provided power for two productive gristmills, a carding mill, and a woolen mill with twelve looms.<sup>66</sup> World War I Veteran John Boswell ran a steam-powered sawmill in the hollow. Two churches, Owl Hollow Church of Christ and Bethel Methodist, provided for the spiritual needs of the people.<sup>67</sup> Owl Hollow had likely seen its heyday when water-powered mills were widely used in the area, but as of the late 1960s it was a place of little growth. Owl Hollow School was marked on TVA's map as "abandoned" and of the four mills previously mentioned, only Mr. Boswell's sawmill was still productive in 1968.

Awalt, significantly larger in population, had also left its boom years behind. Established in 1821, it was located in the northwest corner of the county straddling three creeks, tributaries of the Elk River. Water power, provided by Fall Lick Creek, Big Hurricane, and Little Hurricane Creek, was crucial to the industry and identity of the community.<sup>68</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth century, the community had a general store, a buggy factory, telephone office, barber shop, and blacksmith. A flour mill utilized the water power of Awalt's famous creeks. From 1948 to 1968, however, only one business

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68. Root, "Awalt: A Community of Destiny."

still operated in Awalt. For that twenty-year span A.B. Rhoten's store and Awalt Methodist Church were the center of community life.<sup>69</sup> Once home to two health-spring resorts, Plyant Springs and Miller's Springs, the folklore of Awalt's glory days persisted into the modern era. Local legend held that Miller's Springs Hotel housed Frank and Jesse James for one notorious sojourn. When the hotel burned in 1886, the event lent a new name to the landscape; after that, the place was called Burnt Springs.<sup>70</sup> The remoteness of the area made it a favorite location for Franklin County moonshiners, too. Plentiful water, secluded hollows, and prohibition made distilling illicit whiskey a profitable venture for a time.<sup>71</sup>

A third community, Marble Plains, was not covered by water, but a significant portion of property that made up the community was purchased using the shoreline development, large-take philosophy. Smaller than Owl Hollow and Awalt, Marble Plains was nevertheless similar in structure. A community store operated by J.D. and Bobbie Spencer stood within walking distance of Sylvanus School and Marble Plains Baptist Church.<sup>72</sup> Like its sister communities, Marble Plains had suffered in the modern era. In Bobbie and J.D. Spencer's interview they recalled that the community didn't get electricity and dial telephones until 1944. Prior to that they only had, "country

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69. Ibid.; Anna Trawick, "Awalt: A Nostalgic Memory and Farewell," *Franklin County Historical Review* 1, no.2 (June 1970): 7.

70. Root, "Awalt: A Community of Destiny," and Sarah Jones, "James Boys and Bullets at Awalt," *Tempo*, August, 1968. In this article colorful Awalt resident Edgar Allan Poe relates the legend of the James boys. He claims that his grandfather rented them good horses, which they almost rode to death, and that they used trees for target practice. According to Poe, the identity of the outlaws was only discovered when they wrote the hotel owner a letter identifying themselves.

71. Jones, "James Boys and Bullets at Awalt."

72. Renegar, Spencer interview.

telephones” with “eight people on the line.”<sup>73</sup> A tornado destroyed Sylvanus School in 1952, and it was never replaced.<sup>74</sup> During the land acquisition process, much of Marble Plains was depopulated, destined to become Tims Ford State Park.

Communities that remained “high and dry” were also affected. A TVA projection map created in 1965 (fig. 1) clearly shows how fundamentally the county landscape was about to be altered. Roads that residents had traveled all their lives would soon dead end in a lake. Communities that used to have a direct route to Winchester or Tullahoma had to find new paths to take around the lake or over bridges. Several newspaper clippings appear in Clay and Louise Ervin’s scrapbooks that report drivers plunging into the lake, often because they forgot about the altered road or warning signs were not present. Though the places that were lost were remote and easily characterized as past their prime, they were still an important part of the collective identity and cultural landscape of the county.

On December 1, 1970, Tims Ford Reservoir began to fill. The rising waters ushered in a new era for the residents of the Elk River Valley. Though they had long been aware of the inevitability of the project’s completion, the closing of the dam was truly the point of no return. On that day in December of 1970, the spillway was shut and water that would normally flow on down the river began to back up behind the dam to create Tims Ford Reservoir. Clay Ervin went to the river with his Polaroid camera. He took sixteen photographs the day that TVA closed the dam. The snapshots show the rising waters covering a vastly altered landscape. Under an overcast sky, muddy water backed up over

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73. J.D. and Bobbie Spencer interview by author, Winchester, TN, July 2, 2008.

74. Franklin County Historical Society, *Family Histories*, 72.

roadbeds, bridges, and land stripped of structures. The photos are not particularly pretty to look at or evocative in and of themselves; their significance lies in their depiction of a unique event. Why did Clay take the photos? By 1970, he and his family had lived in close emotional and physical proximity to the dam project for almost eleven years. Perhaps he wanted to document the final day of that period of his life. Among the documents, newspaper articles, and ephemera that the Ervins collected were photographs and home movies of dam building activities and heavy equipment arriving by train. When asked about his motivation for all the collecting, he replied, “I don’t know why we started it, except when we got started on all this we needed proof, we need to know what we’re talking about when I go somewhere in rebuttal to TVA’s people and so that’s what started it.”<sup>75</sup> He lost property, neighbors, and community to the dam. Maybe watching the water rise provided him with a sense of morbid completion. From that day forward Clay and the others who chose to remain in the area would have to learn the new landscape and become accustomed to fundamental change.

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75. Ervin, Wiseman interview.



Figure 3. Photograph taken by Clay Ervin the day the dam was closed and the reservoir began to fill. Courtesy of Clay Ervin.



Figure 4. Water rises under a partially dismantled bridge. Courtesy of Clay Ervin.

### III. TRIUMPH AND TORPOR: THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF SHORELINE DEVELOPMENT 1971-1980

At 10:00 a.m. on September 11, 1971 a crowd of about a hundred people gathered to bid on house lots in the first subdivision to be built on the shores of the new Tims Ford Reservoir. The sale had a festive atmosphere with a mid-day break for lunch and a band concert. Governor Winfield Dunn, Congressman Joe L. Evins, and other dignitaries who had been boosters of the reservoir project were invited to pound the gavel on sales of the first lots in Dripping Springs. Less than one year after the closing of the dam, TERDA was able to offer up forty-six lots sized one acre or less, with curbed streets and underground utilities.<sup>1</sup> It was time for the investment of planning, labor, capital, and sacrifice of the past twelve years to start paying dividends for the people of Franklin County and the entire Elk River watershed. Thanks to the sale, TERDA officials now had their first concrete proof of the profit potential of lakeside development. According to former TERDA chief Bill Davis, the forty-six lots up for sale that day went for an average of five thousand dollars each. At the initial offering, twenty-five lots sold. By the end of the week three more were purchased. The agency realized \$150,200.<sup>2</sup> In 1966, a mere five years earlier, TVA paid Dave P. Tucker \$26,000 for his 111-acre farm.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ervin and Ervin, "Tims Ford Dam Scrapbooks," Development ad found in Vol. 5; "28 Home Sites Sold in Tims Lake Area," *The Herald Chronicle*, September 16, 1971.

2. Bill Davis, interview by author, Winchester, TN, 2008; "28 Home Sites Sold in Tims Lake Area," *The Herald Chronicle*, September 16, 1971. Bill Davis's memory is fairly accurate; the average price for the first 28 lots was \$5,364 according to the numbers in the article. The highest amount paid for a lot was \$8,100.

3. TVA/TERDA Land Acquisition Records.



In addition to the subdivision, plans were also in the works for a three-million-dollar marina and resort area. The first development of its kind on the lake, the Holiday Marina project was to offer a hundred covered boat slips, a service area, a store selling snacks and bait, a beach, and campsites for travel trailers. The developers laid claim to ninety-eight acres in the Fall Lick Creek embayment area, and by September 1971 construction was already under way. The same year, Jack Daniel Distillery in neighboring Moore County bought thirty-two and a half acres to use as a recreation area.<sup>4</sup> The prevailing mood among county officials, business people, and TERDA was decidedly optimistic. The County Court, Chamber of Commerce, and local banks teamed up to cash in on that optimism. They created an “industry-seeking and economic development” organization called Greater Franklin County Incorporated.<sup>5</sup>

Early in 1971, ERDA published a tabloid newspaper insert titled *The Next Ten Years – Elk Watershed*, which was included in nine local papers in the Elk River watershed. The ebullient articles had titles like “Model Area for Living, Working Future Aim for Lower Elk Area” and “Elk Leaders See Bright Future.”<sup>6</sup> The publication predicted 1.8 million lake visits annually and a “major jump in growth” in industry. The

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4. “\$3 Million Resort Area Planned for Tims Ford,” *The Herald Chronicle*, September 16, 1971.

5. “Filling of Tims Ford Lake in 1971 Opens Door on New Era for Area,” *The Herald Chronicle*, December 30, 1971.

6. Elk River Development Agency, *The Next Ten Years – Elk Watershed*, February, 1971, 4, 24. ERDA was concerned with the entire watershed area, including the parts that crossed state lines into Alabama, therefore they oversaw publishing of the tabloid instead of the Tennessee arm of the agency.

most ambitious plan outlined in *The Next Ten Years* was something called the Elk Concept, “a general plan for making the triangular shaped area between Fayetteville, Pulaski and Athens (Alabama) a pilot area for living and working.”<sup>7</sup>

The seven-point plan called for creation of population “clusters” of around 2,500 residents strategically placed in the triangle, with larger populations of around 7,500 planned for Ardmore and Frankewing near Interstate 65. Upgrades of existing communities, a full range of urban services, retention of scenic beauty, and an undeveloped flood plain along the Elk were key points in the plan. The final point of the plan was a call for no zoning laws so that growth would be “natural, rather than artificial.”<sup>8</sup> The Elk Concept promoted in the TERDA publication was the brainchild of Fayetteville businessman Joe Sir, a staunch supporter of the dam project from the beginning. Sir typified the high hopes and big dreams of those who worked so diligently to see the dam built. Nevertheless, *The Next Ten Years* called him a man “with somewhat of a reputation for utopian dreaming,” implying throughout the article that the Elk Concept might be too much of a dream to become reality.<sup>9</sup> The proposed project sounded like it would create lovely communities but failed to address what would really bring people to live in them other than some vague ideas of “growth” that had yet to materialize and jobs that would be created by building the communities themselves. The Elk Concept was addressing a need that did not yet exist for people who had yet to move into the area.

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7. Ibid., 4.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Furthermore, the call for “natural” growth free of zoning laws seems at odds with the planned community concept, and the whole idea seems untenable in retrospect.

In spite of the upbeat tone from TERDA and community leaders, some deep dissatisfaction was in evidence. In a letter to the editor of the *Herald Chronicle* published in March of 1971, Huntsville, Alabama, resident Kenneth M. Grant questioned, “What justification, economical, ethical, or otherwise can be advanced for not giving the parties removed from their property by TVA edict first choice at repurchase of this prime property at the price originally paid the owner?” Grant also expressed concerns about the “checks and balances” in place regarding shoreline development.<sup>10</sup> The public debate about how the land would be used, how much would be retained by TVA, how quickly development would proceed, and who would have access to commercial and residential development was just beginning to heat up. By the spring of 1972, the debate began to boil over. Winchester resident L.J. Morris opined in his letter to *The Herald Chronicle* that:

The public is not being encouraged to use Tims Ford Lake but they are being discouraged. Numerous interested people have already come and found no housing, no campgrounds, no eating facilities, no gas and oil accommodations, etc. They return to their homes out of state or county to tell others. Is this encouraging others?

He went on to express frustration with [T]ERDA’s “buck passing” and overreaching plans saying area residents were not interested in an “Opryland or Disneyland type of accommodation.”<sup>11</sup> More than a year had passed since the lake reached full pool, and

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10. Kenneth M. Grant, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Herald Chronicle*, March 18, 1971.

11. L. J. Morris, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Herald Chronicle*, March 23, 1972. Since TERDA and ERDA worked so closely and across state lines, residents frequently used the names of the agencies

Franklin County residents were losing patience with TERDA and TVA. On March 25, 1972, community members acted on their frustration by forming the Tims Ford Action Group (TAG), a “citizen’s organization . . . with the aim of attempting to speed up development of the Tims Ford Lake shoreline.”<sup>12</sup> One small point seemed to embody the aggravation of residents. Fifteen months after the completion of the dam, boaters could find no place on Tims Ford Lake to buy gas. Why, community residents wondered, was this simple service not yet available to sport fishermen and skiers? In the pages of *The Herald Chronicle*, the editor took a critical stance, perhaps for the first time. A long time booster of the dam project, the local paper now issued a call to action in its April 13, 1972, editorial. The article reiterated community complaints about slow responses from TERDA and multi-million dollar plans at the expense of basic services, and called for “officials and private citizens alike [to] work together” to clear the air and find answers at a public forum.<sup>13</sup>

Members of the Tims Ford Action Group met with TVA and TERDA officials April 13, 1972, at a Franklin County junior high school. One of the men representing TVA was John S. Barron, Tributary Area Development Director. The meeting, with about a hundred concerned citizens in attendance, provoked a “stormy” debate with panelists guilty of “shouting and arm waving” in response to audience questions. The issues of delays and obstacles to planning, slow approval, and bureaucratic runaround

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interchangeably. Mr. Morris misidentifies the agency here, but he is addressing TERDA’s actions, not those of ERDA. Opryland was a popular Nashville attraction in the 1970s. The amusement park featured roller coasters, flashy country music shows, and other theme park attractions.

12. “Tims Action Group Asks Forum April 13,” *The Herald Chronicle*, April 6, 1972.

13. “It’s Time to Proceed,” *The Herald Chronicle*, April 13, 1972.

from TERDA seemed to rankle the audience the most. Officials were hard pressed to mollify the crowd. Private campground developer Mrs. Charles Scarborough voiced her doubts about the benefits of the lake, concluding her remarks with a blistering reproach: “TVA has taken most of the land me and my husband ever owned, but Holy Hannah you’ll never get another inch of it.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the golden vision of a few years prior was losing its shimmer. A small article in *The Herald Chronicle* in June of 1972 proclaimed that fuel was now available at three locations on Tims Ford.<sup>15</sup> The larger development issues would continue to loom, but in this case, it seems that public action did net a small win for TAG.

Much of the former community of Marble Plains, named for a long exploited and abandoned marble deposit, remained above water after impoundment. A good deal of the gentle, rolling land once situated on a bluff above the river had been purchased during land acquisition. It was not destined for residential housing development, however. Plans for a state park to be built over much of the defunct community got underway before the lake filled. One account claimed that TERDA and TVA included state park plans as far back as 1965.<sup>16</sup> A real commitment, beyond dreams and hypotheticals, did not appear until much later. TERDA, TVA, and the Tennessee Department of Conservation crafted a joint agreement in March of 1969 to evaluate the reservoir’s suitability as a state park site. The findings were positive for park development on a site near Lost Creek that

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14. “Issues Aired by Panel on Tims Ford Lake Progress,” *The Herald Chronicle*, April 20, 1972.

15. “Gas Now Available on Tims Ford Lake,” *The Herald Chronicle*, June 1, 1972.

16. “Tims Ford Park to Open to Visitors on Friday,” *The Herald Chronicle*, August 31, 1978.

featured an adequate amount of land, suitable terrain, scenic beauty, and good roads.<sup>17</sup> In 1970, TERDA deeded 413 acres to the Department of Conservation, a substantial signal that park planning would be a priority on the state and local levels.<sup>18</sup> That commitment was affirmed early in 1972 when the legislature appropriated \$44,000 to plan the new park. A number of attractive features for day use and overnight camping were to be built in four phases; the amenities would be needed for the 368,823 visitors projected to arrive annually. Although the planning money didn't materialize until two years after the completion of the lake, some thought had obviously gone into the process in the interim.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of 1972, tensions over park development were rising. The editorial page of *The Herald Chronicle* chastened TERDA's Bill Smith and staff for slowing development "unnecessarily because of delaying tactics" due to the agency's refusal to sign off on the park plan. TERDA had authority over development, even though money for the park was coming from the state budget. In the language of the 1963 Tennessee State Law that created TERDA, they were given power to "develop and carry out a unified comprehensive program of resource development for economic growth of the area." Additionally, "all agencies of the state of Tennessee [were] authorized and directed to extend their cooperation and lend assistance to the agency [TERDA] in the formulation

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17. Office of Strategic Planning and Division of State Parks, *Tennessee State Parks Management Plan: Tims Ford State Park*, Section D—History (October 2001), 4. Lost Creek provided the southeastern boundary of the Marble Plains community.

18. Tennessee Conservation Department, "Tims Ford State Rustic Park," Informational brochure, no date.

19. "\$44,000 Is Voted To Plan Tims Park," *The Herald Chronicle*, April 30, 1972.

and implementation of a development program.”<sup>20</sup> TERDA, it seemed, was determined use its power to consider all options carefully regardless of community pressure. The Department of Conservation was frustrated, too, since it had already made a substantial planning commitment.<sup>21</sup> In January 1973, a *Tullahoma News* editorial questioned TERDA’s motives and accused the agency of “dilly-dallying” and “downright obstruction.”<sup>22</sup> Since the previous September, the agency still had made no movement toward project approval.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it came to light that TERDA was considering a contract with a Colorado firm for shoreline development up to and including the entire ten thousand acres under TERDA jurisdiction. The 1,172 acres identified as prime park property would be under control of a two-year old firm called Real Estate Affiliates (REA) out of Aspen, Colorado.<sup>24</sup> The news did nothing to staunch the complaints of foot dragging and overarching planning which sounded very similar to the ones voiced by Franklin County citizens a year prior.

A TERDA board meeting scheduled for February 8, 1973, at which the members were slated to decide the fate of the state park proposal, had to be postponed as several board members could not attend, and high attendance for the controversial vote was crucial. *The Herald Chronicle* reported that the board was slated to vote on approval of

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20. State of Tennessee, *Tennessee Code Annotated* (1955-1986), 64-1-301, Title 64.

21. “More State Park Delay,” *The Herald Chronicle*, November 9, 1972.

22. “Approve State Park Plan,” *Tullahoma News and Guardian*, January 30, 1973. The editorial goes on to raise serious questions about the firm’s compensation, salaries, and TERDA chief Bill Smith’s role in the project. It also accuses TERDA of abandoning its mission to represent public interest.

23. “State Says Elk Agency Delays Tims Park Plan,” *The Herald Chronicle*, September 7, 1972.

24. “Tims Chief, Firm Work Out ‘Unique Relationship’ for Development,” *Tullahoma News and Guardian*, January 31, 1973.

state park plans and a proposal “also to continue negotiations with a private consulting firm for development of other agency lands.” The article went on to say that opinion was divided on the board between the state park and “additional studies” from the Colorado firm.<sup>25</sup> Only a few board members seemed to be supporting the outside developers. When the *Herald Chronicle* reporter polled the board via telephone he found “seven firm votes [for the park], and two more leaning strongly in that direction.” Only two board members expressed support for Real Estate Affiliates of Aspen, Colorado.<sup>26</sup> At the rescheduled director’s meeting later in the month, tempers ran high when the Colorado firm’s offer came up for discussion. J.B. Patton, a member of the board representing Coffee County, seemed vehemently opposed to the Colorado company’s plans, stating: “There is no way I would ever vote for such an open-ended proposal.” Patton objected to the absence of salary caps for REA personnel and their outsider status. He stated with certainty that there were other groups interested in development “a lot closer to home than Aspen, Colorado.”<sup>27</sup> The REA proposal deserved criticism and scrutiny. Among its provisions

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25. “ERDA Board Delays Vote on Tims Ford State Park.” *The Herald Chronicle*, February 15, 1973.

26. *Ibid.* At this time, there were 13 acting TERDA board members, and the reporter was able to get 11 of them on the record.

27. “Elk Directors Approve State Park Development on Tims Ford Lake,” *The Herald Chronicle*, March 1, 1973. Mr. Patton also accused a fellow board member of “weasly words” when he questioned him about the lack of salary caps for the developers.



was complete control of at least two thousand acres and “possibly the whole ten thousand acres around the lake owned by TERDA.” In return, the firm offered no tangible assets other than its “expertise in real estate development and management.”<sup>28</sup>

On February 21, 1973, TERDA voted unanimously to deed 1,010 acres to the State Department of Conservation for the long-awaited park. During the discussion at the meeting, chairman Judge Taylor Crawford “called attention to a thick stack of letters from area chambers of commerce, state legislators, and others—all of which urged the board to approve the state park.”<sup>29</sup> The state’s chief park planner expected construction to begin on phase one in the summer of 1974 with the first phase of the park functional the following year. The board voted to take no further action on private consulting firms until the next board meeting. The few dissenters on the TERDA board bowed to internal and external pressure, and talk of bestowing such a large contract to the out-of-state real estate developers disappeared from the headlines.

A year later, it was Republican Governor Winfield Dunn under fire for delaying funds to build the park. The project had received a recommendation from the State Building Commission, and the Department of Conservation had already hired an architect.<sup>30</sup> Governor Dunn omitted park funding from his budget proposal, but state legislators got to work and “shifted funds from other areas” to ensure that the money could be found. The Winchester newspaper suspected “political favoritism” since two

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28. Bill Carbine, “Tims Development Pact Could Be Firm’s ‘Windfall,’” *The Herald Chronicle*, February 1, 1973.

29. “Elk Directors Approve State Park Development on Tims Ford Lake,” *The Herald Chronicle*, March 1, 1973.

30. “Fund Tims State Park,” *The Herald Chronicle*, February 7, 1974.

parks removed from the governor's 1974 budget were in Democratic districts; the three parks in Republican districts made it through with their plans intact.<sup>31</sup> By March, Democrats flexed "majority muscle" in the state legislature to secure the inclusion of a \$2.1 million appropriation in a comprehensive budget amendment. The state expected to spend \$8.5 million to build a park on land donated by TERDA.<sup>32</sup> By the end of 1974 park building had commenced in earnest. In December, *The Herald Chronicle* reported that work had begun on installation of utilities and roads. Due to rising development costs, the state legislature, acting on recommendations to Governor Dunn from Commissioner of Conservation Granville Hinton, appropriated \$1.9 million more during fiscal year 1975-1976. State funds accounted for \$1.4 million of the total, and surplus from the initial \$2.1 million appropriation and five hundred thousand dollars in federal funds from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation made up the difference. This time, things appeared to be moving more smoothly. Commissioner Hinton claimed there wasn't a problem with funding; he was "certain the money [would] be recommended by the governor and appropriated by the legislature."<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the optimism did not hold, and the park project encountered more delays under Governor Ray Blanton. Park supporters must have read headlines in early 1975 with a sense of weary foreboding. A *Herald-Chronicle* article dated March 13, 1975, "'No Response' on Tims Funds," reported that legislators had no answer from the

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31. Ibid.

32. "Legislature Okays Tims Park Funds," *Tulahoma News and Guardian*, March 15, 1974.

33. Ibid.

governor regarding a budget amendment to finish phase one of the park. In response to a slump in the national economy, the state budget was trimmed to “‘bare bones’ . . . with few if any new programs included.” Legislators hoped to finance the park through bonds and another five hundred thousand dollar federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation grant.<sup>34</sup> Blanton came through later in the year, signing bond measures and freeing up the Department of Conservation to begin awarding contracts.<sup>35</sup>

A host of dignitaries were on hand on a rainy day late in March of 1976 to break ground at a dedication ceremony for the park. TVA, TERDA, and the State Department of Conservation were well represented. Joe Sir was on hand, as were several local judges and legislators. Ironically, the deluge forced the ceremony inside Marble Plains Church, one of the few remaining landmarks of the former community the park displaced.<sup>36</sup> Years of delays had finally come to an end with a positive outcome for park boosters. The construction of the park was also a victory for public access. Although contracts to build numerous access points and mini-parks with picnic tables to accommodate lake visitors had been awarded by 1971, the park as planned would take recreational use to a higher level.<sup>37</sup> The ceremonial spade of dirt represented a real commitment to the people of the

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34. “‘No Response’ on Tims Funds,” *The Herald Chronicle*, March 13, 1975.

35. “Blanton Signs Bond Bills for Tims Park,” *The Herald Chronicle*, June 19, 1975.

36. “Tims to Be State’s Largest Rustic Park, Says Allison,” *The Herald Chronicle*, April 1, 1976.

37. Elk River Development Association, “Numerous Recreational Facilities Planned for Elk Watershed Area,” *The Next Ten Years*, 36.

area, that regardless of private development, free or low-cost recreational facilities, cabins, camping facilities, and other amenities could be had at one place on Tims Ford Lake.

The old model of neighborly, community access to water for recreation had disappeared when the shoreline came under TVA/TERDA control. Residents were obliged to wait for plans, approvals, and red tape before new facilities were constructed, an alien experience for most. Winchester resident L.J. Morris's letter to the editor summed up the frustration of would-be developers who felt stonewalled by TERDA:

Many individuals have contacted the management of ERDA about business interests on the lake, buying property and helping to develop, but most of them throw up their hands after listening to the: Proceeding cautiously, preliminary studies, future plans, on the agenda, we promise, and all the other excuses presented to them.<sup>38</sup>

By July of 1974, the agencies had made progress in providing six improved boat ramps for lake access and "numerous unimproved ramps" for launching small boats. Only two commercial recreational facilities, a marina and a campground, were present on the lake by mid-1974.<sup>39</sup>

The park's progress was not all smooth sailing after the ground-breaking ceremony, however. Construction fell nine months behind schedule when a major subcontractor defaulted on the project. Davis Concrete Co., owned by Alton Davis, a crony of notorious governor Ray Blanton, was awarded a nearly two-million contract and subsequently failed to produce results. The contractor issue pushed the opening from

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38. L.J. Morris, "Letter to the Editor," *The Herald Chronicle*, March 23, 1972.

39. "Tims Dedication Set for Thursday," *The Herald Chronicle*, July 4, 1974.

September of 1977 to May 13, 1978.<sup>40</sup> The May date also came and went, with still no park opening. The final delays were blamed on slow delivery of equipment and furniture and poor weather that curtailed planting and seeding.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Labor Day weekend 1978, Tims Ford State Park welcomed its first visitors. Small businesses near the lake serving boaters and fishermen must have rejoiced at the new attraction after all the delays. The crowd was expected to be large; all twenty cabins were booked at the new park, ready to receive their inaugural lodgers.<sup>42</sup>

While the park was a boon to the people and businesses of the county, it was only a small piece of the lake's promised potential. Throughout the planning and building process, supporters had touted the spike in industrial employment that the lake would surely bring. The 1970 census showed 21.7% of Franklin county households had incomes below the poverty level with 11.4% receiving public assistance.<sup>43</sup> County leaders looked to the new lake to begin a new period of prosperity. Unfortunately, the industrial boom that Franklin County hoped to reap in the wake of the lake's completion never really happened.

In 1971, promising signs from three Franklin County employers were tempered with two disappointments. The American Standard facility in Huntland began a \$137,000

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40. David Fox, "Blanton Job Appointee Defaulted State Project," *Nashville Banner*, March 24, 1978.

41. "Opening of Park is Delayed Again," *Tulahoma News and Guardian*, November 18, 1977; "Tims Park to Open Friday to Visitors on Friday," *The Herald Chronicle*, August 31, 1978

42. "Tims Ford Park To Open to Visitors on Friday," *The Herald Chronicle*. August 31, 1978.

43. U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

expansion in production and personnel; Wilton Corp. “reported steady growth” in Winchester; and the Genesco plant in Cowan touted an increase of more than 65%.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, a hoped-for Munsingwear shirt plant failed to open in Decherd. The seemingly recession-proof Arnold Research Organization (ARO), the company that provided contract staffing for the AEDC facility, laid off one hundred workers.<sup>45</sup> All of the businesses that expanded were established in the county before the lake opened, and Tims Ford generators had yet to begin producing electricity, so the expansions and upticks in the manufacturing picture in the county in 1971 can hardly be attributed to the opening of the lake.

In its year-end wrap up in December of 1972, *The Herald Chronicle* summed up “major fluctuations” in Franklin County industry. ARO was able to recall workers but six hundred jobs were lost when Koracorp Industries closed two hat factories in the county. Genesco’s shoe plant in Cowan put 425 more workers on the payroll, Tayco, a mobile home manufacturer, opened its doors in Huntland, and Lanier Clothes opened a plant expected to eventually employ five hundred people.<sup>46</sup> So, a small net gain in jobs made residents cautiously optimistic. Regardless, none of the aforementioned industries could claim much relationship to the lake. ARO had access to a lake of its own, and Genesco

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44. “Filling of Tims Ford Lake in 1971 Opens Door on New Era for Area,” *The Herald Chronicle*, December 30, 1971.

45. *Ibid.*

46. “Fluctuations in Industry Highlighted Franklin News Stories in 1972,” *The Herald Chronicle*, December 28, 1972.

and the mobile home manufacturer were on the opposite end of the county. One new company could claim a lake connection. Venture Boat Company relocated from Atlanta to set up shop in Decherd.<sup>47</sup> Was this the first sign of a boat-boom in the county?

Things appeared to be on an upswing in 1973. The county's economic development agency, Greater Franklin County Incorporated, was so encouraged by 1973's industrial gains and a 7% drop in countywide unemployment that it announced a shift from "industry search" to encouraging businesses designed to attract and serve tourists, an obvious effort to capitalize on the economic potential of the lake. In the year in question, E&B Carpet Mills took over the old Hat Corp. facilities; Brockton Sole and Plastics began building a factory near Cowan; and ARO benefited from an increased budget, courtesy of the United States Air Force, which enabled it to add 150 more employees.<sup>48</sup>

In January of 1975, *The Herald Chronicle* reported that the manufacturing picture in the county was "fairly stabilized," indicating that the county had felt the struggle to retain jobs and attract companies. The best news in 1974 was a sizeable \$58.4 million expansion at Arnold Air Base, \$8.1 million for the University of Tennessee Space Institute (UTSI), and the opening of the new Brockton Sole and Plastics plant in Winchester. Wilton Corporation expanded again, and the community of Estill Springs passed a bond issue to attract a Tyson facility.<sup>49</sup> Things might have been "stable" and

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47. Ibid.

48. "Industrial Development, New Park Plans Top '73 News Events," *The Herald Chronicle*, December 27, 1973.

49. "Industrial, Educational, Recreational Progress Made Here in '74," *The Herald Chronicle*, January 2, 1975.

looking up early in 1975, but it seems Franklin County was learning a hard lesson regarding the attractive limits of the lake. Environmental policy analyst William U. Chandler's analysis rings true in this case:

The remaining benefits of TVA reservoirs, recreation, flood control, and power, are probably irrelevant to the attraction of new industries. Factories can be located out of flood plains, and power lines can be stretched over great distances. Although recreational lakes may be an attraction for management and employees, the quality and availability of schools and housing are probably more powerful considerations.<sup>50</sup>

Newspaper reports from 1975, 1976, and 1977 continued to track moderate growth in industry. Employment stability seemed to be the best the county could do in the mid 1970s. The year 1975 saw "no great strides" in industrial development, and in 1976 American Standard closed its sink plant in Huntland. Also in 1976, 1,400 union workers at ARO went on a six-week strike over wage disputes.<sup>51</sup> However, construction at ARO, UTSI, Tims Ford State Park, and new county schools helped stabilize the employment picture. At the close of 1977, unemployment for the month of December was at 4.5%, only slightly higher than the state average.<sup>52</sup>

At the close of the decade, Franklin County citizens were most concerned with a \$1.5 million bond issue for the hospital and a tax-rate hike. A new manufacturing plant was set to open in Cowan, and the Franklin County Industrial Board had succeeded in

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50. Chandler, *The Myth of TVA*, 70.

51. "Elections, Tims Park, New AEDC Unit Get Top '76 News Billing," *The Herald Chronicle*, December 30, 1976.

52. "Groundwork Is Laid in 1977 for Future Growth in Franklin," *The Herald Chronicle*, December 29, 1977.



creating an industrial park. The first tenant of the park was to be Lanier Clothes of Decherd, which wished to build a warehouse on the site.<sup>53</sup> Aside from the river of federal money that continued to pour into construction, research, and development projects at ARO, the county's industrial gains for 1979 seem relatively small.

In 1979, 27% of Franklin County residents were employed in the manufacturing sector. In ten years, employment in manufacturing had increased only a little more than 2%. Unemployment in the county was 9.3%.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, Franklin County did not see the “major jump” in industry predicted in 1971 in *The Next Ten Years – Elk Watershed*.<sup>55</sup> It seems that Franklin County saw much the same outcome that the Tellico project experienced. According to Kenneth Murchison, “[Tellico Dam] went into operation, but it never stimulated the economic development that the TVA had predicted ... and it exposed raw political power rather than rational analysis as the basis for the agency's agenda.”<sup>56</sup>

Ten years after the completion of Tims Ford Dam, census data shows the poverty gap smaller than it was a decade before. By 1979, 13.1% of families in the county came in under the poverty line, a substantial improvement over the 21.7% reported in the 1970 census. Unfortunately, the number of families on public assistance rose from 11.4% in

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53. “Hospital Bond Issue, Bank Robberies Top Franklin News,” *The Herald Chronicle*, December 31, 1979.

54. U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983); U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1973).

55. Elk River Development Agency, *The Next Ten Years*, 4, 24.

56. Murchison, *The Snail Darter Case*, 174.

1969 to 24.8% in 1979.<sup>57</sup> While the number of families with incomes below the poverty line declined, the families on public assistance rose significantly, indicating that the poor of the county got much poorer in the intervening years.

Lakeside land values were on the rise throughout the 1970s. TERDA reported that 223.2 acres in the Owl Hollow embayment area appraised at \$165,500 in 1972. The agency was set to sell the land for private development at auction December 8, starting the bidding at the appraised amount.<sup>58</sup> By comparison, TVA/TERDA paid the Boswell family \$69,200 for 233 acres in 1969.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, sales in Dripping Springs Subdivision continued, but as of May 1972, eleven lots were still available.<sup>60</sup> However, this did not prevent the start of the subdivision's second phase in mid-1973. The development planned sixty-four more lots in the Phase II section. The builders hoped to be able to offer the lots for public auction in the spring of 1974.<sup>61</sup> Eighty-five lots in the Pine Bluff Cabin Site went under the hammer in April of 1974. The lots in the new second home development were appraised from \$1,500 to \$8,000.<sup>62</sup> The lots in both the subdivision and the cabin site varied in size from less than one acre to a little more than an acre. At a public sale in June 1978, cabin sites garnered from \$3,100 to \$19,200.

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57. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

58. "Plan Major Development on Tims Ford Reservoir," *The Herald Chronicle*, November 2, 1972.

59. TVA/TERDA Land Acquisition Records.

60. TERDA Staff, "Tims Ford Shorelines," *The Herald Chronicle*, May 18, 1972.

61. "Dripping Springs Second Phase To Be Developed," *The Herald Chronicle*, July 26, 1973.

62. "To Auction Cabin Sites on Tims Lake," *The Herald Chronicle*, April 4, 1974. Reserve prices were put on the lots; opening bids could be no lower than TERDA minimums.

Subdivision lots in the Taylor Creek West development went for \$12,600 on the low end to \$18,000 for the choicest sites. Average subdivision lot and cabin lot prices had doubled since the first sale in Dripping Springs seven years earlier.<sup>63</sup>

Not only was the sale price of land on the rise, rental rates were climbing too. Much of the farmland bought by TVA/TERDA remained undeveloped in the mid 1970s. Rather than let the land lie fallow, the agency allowed farmers to lease the land for grazing and row crops. In the fall of 1975, lease rates on pasture land jumped from an average of \$2.94 per acre to \$5.14 per acre. Row crop land went from an average of \$8.71 per acre to \$13.06 per acre.<sup>64</sup> After the price jump took effect, lease rates appear to have remained fairly stable for the next few years. According to a bid sheet from a 1979 auction of agricultural land leases, average prices were at \$6.17 per acre.<sup>65</sup> Renting land back to farmers also took some of the land management burden off the agency. Regulations changed with the price hike from one-year leases to three-year terms. TERDA felt that longer leases would encourage farmers to maintain the land rather than stripping it of its usefulness.<sup>66</sup>

Public opinion of the lake and ensuing development matured over the decade. The starry-eyed optimism of the early years faded to a more realistic vision of the lake's true

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63. "Tims Lots Sell for \$280,900," *The Herald Chronicle*, June 29, 1978.

64. "TERDA Will Raise Prices on Tims Farm Land Leases," *The Herald Chronicle*, October 23, 1975. Price hikes were to go into effect in January of 1976.

65. Clay and Louise Ervin, Tims Ford Scrapbooks. Record of Bidding, July 28, 1979. Clay Ervin leased 134 acres on Kline Ridge for the minimum bid of \$5.25 per acre.

66. "TERDA Will Raise Prices on Tims Farm Land Leases," *The Herald Chronicle*, October 23, 1975.

potential. Residents in the watershed were also learning the limits and trade-offs of the dam and TVA water management. Creation of the dam did not solve natural flooding problems; it merely replaced them with a set of man-made headaches. In a letter to Clay Ervin late in 1973, TVA Land Branch Chief I.M. Pitts announced plans to survey “low-lying areas downstream along the Elk River [which] have been experiencing an increased frequency of flooding as a result of water releases during normal power generation operations.” He went on to say that the agency might be seeking additional flowage easements.<sup>67</sup> The message was clear; completion of the dam did not mean the end of TVA involvement or of eminent domain fights in the area. Heavy rains in October of 1975 pushed lake capacity to the limit, and water levels rose to within four feet of the dam’s flood gates. The high waters ultimately forced round the clock generation that damaged land and crops downriver.<sup>68</sup>

A fight with TVA over land condemnation unrelated to the flooding issue cropped up long after the dam was complete. Winchester native Don Carson had fond memories of fishing the river with his father and grandfather; in 1973 he purchased 4.7 acres below the dam to use as a fish camp and weekend place for his family. There he installed a mobile home and deck and enjoyed his dream retreat. When, in 1975, TVA contacted Mr. Carson seeking his property for river access, he refused to sell. Early in 1976 notification of condemnation proceedings and an order to vacate the property by May 1 arrived.

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67. Clay and Louise Ervin, Tims Ford Scrapbooks, I.M. Pitts to Clay Ervin, November 8, 1973.

68. “‘Turn Off’ River to Curb Flooding,” *The Herald Chronicle*, October 23, 1975.

Carson's dismay certainly sounded familiar to those who lost their land in the 1960s. "It's not right. It's just not right that they can come in and take a man's land that he has worked and paid for just because they want to."<sup>69</sup>

Some who had previously supported the project wholeheartedly changed their positions dramatically. In a shocking turn of events, Fayetteville businessman and dam supporter Joe Sir flipped his position of boosterism 180 degrees in the mid 1970s. Quoted in a no-holds-barred article published December 5, 1975, in *The Tennessean*, Sir said, "From here on I see my only relationship with TVA as that of an adversary."<sup>70</sup> Sir was angry that TVA refused to build a second reservoir to handle flooding that occurred downriver during power generation. According to Sir, TVA was "flushing out the Elk River like a toilet."<sup>71</sup> If someone like Sir, who had been in on the project since 1959, who had received the highest praise from supporters, and who suffered vehement objection from opponents of the dam, could turn a cold shoulder to TVA and TERDA, how could the public continue to have high hopes for the lake?

Lake access is abundant in the Tennessee Valley. "As a result [of dam building] Tennessee now has more shoreline than all of the Great Lakes combined."<sup>72</sup> Lake and park visitor numbers fluctuated depending on who was doing the projecting. *The Herald Chronicle* claimed that the lake was within "easy reach" of five hundred thousand people

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69. Charles Sons, "Fisherman's Dream Could Face Rude Awakening," *Nashville Banner*, February 3, 1976.

70. "Flushing Elk River Like a Toilet, Says Sir," *The Tennessean*, December 5, 1975.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Zygmunt J.B. Plater, "Reflected in a River: Agency Accountability and the TVA Tellico Dam Case," *Tennessee Law Review* 49, no. 747 (Summer 1982): 2.

within a fifty-mile radius thanks to “good roads and modern highways.”<sup>73</sup> ERDA’s projection, in *The Next Ten Years*, was for 1.8 million lake visits per year. Franklin County transportation task force member Judge Roy Tipps, seeking money from Congress for road improvement in 1975, claimed that TVA had projected three million visitors to the area.<sup>74</sup> The benefit of annual lake visits may have been exaggerated “given the large number of reservoirs the TVA had already constructed on the Tennessee River and its tributaries.”<sup>75</sup> The same *Next Ten Years* article that predicted 1.8 million Tims Ford visits acknowledged the recreational opportunities available at nearby Guntersville, Wheeler, and Woods Reservoirs. Actual Tims Ford Lake visitor numbers for 1971 were estimated to be seventy-three thousand; the lake had a long way to go to meet numbers in the hundreds of thousands, never mind millions. Guntersville, in existence since 1939, brought more respectable numbers, racking up 5,358,000 visits in 1971.<sup>76</sup>

Visitor projections for the park were a little more realistic. The heaviest users were predicted to be the five hundred thousand people living in a fifty-mile radius of the lake. Stage 1 of the master plan, when complete, was projected to bring in 186,470

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73. “Tims Area Planning Vital, McBride Says,” *The Herald Chronicle*, January 28, 1971.

74. “Seek to Upgrade Tims Ford Roads,” *The Herald Chronicle*, January 16, 1975.

75. Murchison, *The Snail Darter Case*, 13-14.

76. “Tims Ford Visitors 73,000 Last Year,” *The Herald Chronicle*, July 20, 1972. Guntersville Lake is also near sizeable population centers in Hunstville and Decatur, Alabama.

visitors. Numbers were expected to rise as other phases of the park brought more amenities. The master plan predicted 368,823 visitors annually following the completion of Stage 4.<sup>77</sup>

Much was made of the area's scenic beauty before and after the creation of the lake. The state park site was chosen in part because of the pleasing vista. The many coves and arms of the sprawling lake created 250 miles of shoreline, allowing residential developments to build on peninsula land forms that would maximize lots with lake views and water access. Residents soon learned, however, that the lake would not always be at full pool, with a pleasant view. The assessment of Fontana Lake in the off-season is true of Tims Ford:

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 ... 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.<sup>78</sup>

A state of equilibrium had been reached by the end of the decade. Residents of the county were becoming used to the lake, development was proceeding at a reasonable rate, and a new generation of residents was beginning to form its own connection to the new landscape. Large scale plans like the state park and the privately owned Holiday Marina came to fruition. Others, such as the plans of REA from Aspen, Colorado, and a high-end

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77. "\$44,000 Is Voted to Plan Tims Park." *The Herald Chronicle*, April 10, 1972.

78. Taylor, "Building the Back of Beyond," 189. The TVA director compared Fontana Lake to Tims Ford in "Tims Area Planning Vital, McBride Says," *The Herald Chronicle*, January 28, 1971. Fontana is close in size but is more remotely located than Tims Ford.

223-acre campground at Owl Hollow with “fly-in” facilities, never saw the light of day.<sup>79</sup> By year’s end in 1979, the lake, the park, and shoreline development had faded somewhat from newspaper headlines. In the *Herald Chronicle*’s news roundup for 1979, neither the park, nor the lake, nor development, are mentioned at all. The lake’s economic potential had been overstated but its impact had not. The physical landscape and fundamental identity of the area had been forever altered. The transition was easier for those who did not have to bear the emotional toll of displacement. For the majority of county residents, the successful completion of the first phase of the state park gave area residents new points of pride. From the opening of the state park in 1978 onward, Franklin County would be known as a community with the lake and the park at its cultural center.

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79. “Plan Major Development on Tims Ford Reservoir,” *The Herald Chronicle*, November 2, 1972.



#### IV. RESISTANCE, REMEMBRANCE, PRESERVATION: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

While planning and development struggles are documented in the pages of the local newspaper, the emotional and tangible impact of the changed landscape is less easily tracked. Since human settlement, the river had been a constant presence in daily life. People managed the river valley with fords, trails, roads, and bridges, but the inescapable fact of the river remained relatively unchanged. People were *used* to the ebb and flow, the twists and turns, the bluffs and gravel bars of the Elk. The river figures heavily in the narrative of community history. A cold snap during the winter in 1940 caused the river to freeze over with ice thick enough to support the weight of cars. The river became a playground for Marie Boswell and her friends who tested the ice with the blast of a shotgun and posed for photographs standing mid river. The frozen river story surfaced in several oral history interviews. It was the stage for truly memorable events in the valley.<sup>1</sup> Historian Karen Bescherer Metheny explains the impact of landscape this way, “Landscape is both the context of daily life and a force in shaping that existence. Like material culture, landscape shapes and reflects the identity of those who inhabit the land, who manipulate its appearance, who construct its meaning. Indeed, the use of the land is integral to the formation of identity.”<sup>2</sup> For many Franklin County residents, a large part of that identity had been stripped away. Place names remained, a

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1. Boswell, Higinbotham interview.

2. Metheny, *From the Miners' Doublehouse*, 205.

ghostly reminder of the farms, creeks, springs, and hollers that lay beneath the placid lake surface. The names of the points and coves on Tims Ford Lake were reminders, too, of the families who had lived on the land for generations.

The Tims Ford Dam project had a momentum that moved events forward with seemingly few roadblocks or little resistance. Nevertheless, some residents did not go quietly from their homes, nor did they keep quiet once the lake became a reality. Clay and Louise Ervin documented their own activism and resistance, but they were not alone in expressing their true feelings about TVA. Some attempted to enlist the support of their elected representatives. A moving letter in Senator Albert Gore's constituent files illustrates the emotional impact of displacement. The letter, printed in labored block capitals on lined notebook paper is rife with poor grammar and spelling, but the point its author makes is valid:

I hate to bother you with my troubles, I know you have heard Tims Ford untill you are sick of it. The back waters from it will cover most of my farm. A lot of us people would have our homes left of top of the hills if we could keep them. But Mr. Wagner the head of TVA says he wants to be sure E.R.D.A. is going to capture the ful benefits from this Tims Ford Dam before he will build it. Is Mr. Wagner a dictator over the Tennessee valey. Why should they take our homes and up lands that the water dont couver to resel to make money on to help pay for the dam. Is the federl governmnet in that bad a shape.<sup>3</sup>

Another pair of residents wrote to the senator with similar sentiments. Mr. and Mrs.

Claude and Leona Holder sent a neatly typewritten two-page letter of dissent to Washington:

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3. James C. Mitchell to Senator Albert Gore, June 16, 1965, Albert Gore Papers.

[W]e own 217 acres of land along Elk River and we definitely DO NOT want our land and that of our neighbors destroyed by this lake of water. The people who have endorsed this so enthusiastically do not own this land and have no motive except to gain from those of us who will lose.<sup>4</sup>

Despite such local opposition, the senator was a strong supporter of TVA in his home state. The appeals of those who did not want the lake fell on deaf ears.

After the dam was completed, resistance to TVA was still in evidence. The disrupted landscape caused some trouble for the agency. A series of letters in Clay and Louise Ervin's scrapbooks document a protracted fight with TVA over water quality issues. The Ervins claimed that water from the lake had corrupted the spring that had been their potable water source for three generations. They wrote to their state representatives and filed a lawsuit against the TVA, and in October of 1971 they won a \$2,060 settlement.<sup>5</sup> The Ervins were not finished with TVA; they were unable to stop the dam's construction, but going forward they were determined to hold the agency accountable for its actions.

Flood control was supposed to be one of the benefits of the dam. In actuality, the dam did help control naturally occurring floods, but water released during power generation caused man-made problems for those downriver. A heavy rainfall can tax the storage capacity of the reservoir and, eventually, stored water has to be released. A small group of people affected downstream protested at the dam dedication ceremony on July 4, 1974. Though none on the dais acknowledged their presence, their signs protesting downriver flood damage provided a poignant backdrop to the backslapping and

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4. Claude and Leona Holder to Senator Albert Gore, June 28, 1965. Albert Gore Papers.

5. Ervin and Ervin, "Tims Ford Dam and State Park Scrapbooks, 1963-1980."

congratulatory speeches. One sign read “Maybe TVA should be dammed.” Another proclaimed, “Please, Lord we don’t need another dam! We can’t afford the one we got!”<sup>6</sup>

Resistance from the citizens of the Elk River Valley was unlike the organized, sustained effort in evidence at Tellico. They did not have the advocacy of intellectuals and lawyers who bolstered support for those who tried to prevent Tellico Dam from seeing completion. They missed by a matter of a few years the legal backing of environmental laws that might have prevented the damming of a free-flowing river. Here, resistance was more personal. People contacted their elected officials and expressed their disapproval in other small ways. They wrote letters to the editor of local papers expressing their opinions and taking dam supporters to task. They made personal contact with TVA officials to plead their case. When the dam became *fait accompli*, they kept a close eye on construction, the ensuing development of the lands they had lost, and the new landscape. Though they were unsuccessful in stopping the dam from being built, their efforts provided a quiet counterpoint to the overwhelming tide of support that brought the project to fruition.

For many years, those who were displaced and otherwise affected by Tims Ford had little outlet for their memories and feelings outside the safe confines of family and friends’ confidence. Were it not for the thirtieth anniversary of Tims Ford State Park in September of 2008 and the desire of then-Park Manager Mike Robertson to see the milestone commemorated, the people of the Elk River Valley might still be waiting to make their voices heard. Mike contacted the public history program at Middle Tennessee

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6. David Pace, “Candidates and Protesters Present at Tims Dedication,” *Tullahoma News and Guardian*, July 10, 1974.

State University (MTSU) in the fall of 2007 to seek help in planning and conducting an oral history community heritage project to be incorporated into the park's new visitor center and programming. He wanted to use the oral history project as a key part of a "heritage day" celebration where community residents could come, share stories and photographs, and learn about the new historic interpretation initiative. Mike understood very well that some of the oral history respondents might still be angry and emotional over their lost land and, to his credit, wanted to get the whole story. He had already contacted the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) and spoken with Assistant State Archivist Dr. Wayne Moore, who expressed interest in providing a home for the transcripts and recordings at the conclusion of the project. John Froeschauer, Tennessee State Park's Interpretive Specialist for the Middle Tennessee Region, was also on board to help with research and preparation. I first heard about the project in Dr. Rebecca Conard's Public History Seminar and was intrigued by it, since I am a native of Franklin County. After meeting with Mike and ranger Monica Johnson, who had volunteered to take on some of the work, fellow graduate student Albert Whittenberg and I agreed to work on it as an Advanced Project in Public History in the spring semester of 2008.

Tims Ford State Park was not created around some historic site of special significance. It is known mostly for the free access it provides to fishing and water sports, its well-maintained campgrounds, and public golf course. In the thirty years since it opened in the fall of 1978, there has been very little effort to include historical interpretation. Prior to the beginning of this project, minimal effort had been made to reach out to residents who used to live on park property so that the location of their

homes and outbuildings could be mapped for interpretive use. In 2007, a new walking trail was cut to an old home site, the former location of the Spann family home. In 1994, then-Park Manager Bob Rees, Regional Interpreter John Froeschauer, and Seasonal Naturalist Shane Farnor conducted an oral history interview with a man named J.C. Weaver, who lived at the park entrance and farmed land that is now underwater or included in the boundary of the park. Park Manger Mike Robertson's efforts started to change that. Going forward he saw the park as a repository of community history and a place where those displaced by the building of the lake can come to share, remember, and preserve. It can also be a place where visitors new to the area or uninitiated in the story of the displaced community can come to learn what lies beneath the lake surface.

I started conducting oral history interviews in the summer of 2008. As I began contacting potential interviewees, a common theme emerged. Many were willing to talk, but few, Clay Ervin being a notable exception, were eager. Interviewees were happy to help but expressed disbelief that they would have anything interesting to say. In every case, that idea proved to be completely unfounded. For many of the interviewees, it took some convincing that their life experiences on the river might be of interest to others. When I connected the interview process to an educational purpose—a graduate student, working toward a thesis project—it gave interviewees a satisfactory reason to be of help. As we talked, they warmed to the subject, frequently bringing out old photographs and art works to help me understand the people and places in their stories. The interviews and research gathered in that summer became part of a Heritage Day celebration at Tims Ford State Park on September 9 and 10, 2008. The event featured an exhibit that focused on

the lost communities, a picnic for oral history respondents and their families, activities for children and a scanning and digitization station for residents to bring in documents and photographs (see Figures 5-7). After Heritage Day, the display was set up at the Franklin County Library so that more area residents could view the materials. There was also an oral history recording area where residents were able to sit and share their stories. Funding for Heritage Day was provided in part by a grant from Humanities Tennessee. In November of 2009, recordings of oral history interviews with fifteen respondents and corresponding transcripts, numerous photographs and several home movie reels were transferred to the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA). Inclusion of these materials in the TSLA collections will ensure that they will be cared for and accessible to researchers.

Many of the respondents interviewed during the research phase of the Tims Ford State Park community history project spoke about the impact of the landscape. Interviewees often used their hands to trace in the air their minds-eye journeys down the paths and landmarks of their remembrance. Some residents relocated near the new lake, but the altered landscape remains alien to them. When asked if and how they use the lake, many responded that they do not visit often. The fishing is unfamiliar, the boats and watercraft are noisy and obtrusive, and the memories of loss are too disturbing. Christine Hopkins married into a family that had inhabited the area for five generations. When the



Figure 5. Heritage Day exhibit displayed in the recreation building at Tims Ford State Park.





Figure 6. Large graphic banners, artifacts, and maps enhanced the Heritage Day exhibit.



Figure 7. A picnic for interviewees and their friends and families was one of the highlights of the Heritage Day celebration.

family had the honor of naming the subdivision built on their old farm they chose Hopkins Point. The name carried a double meaning for Christine who wanted to make a *point* about population removal.<sup>7</sup>

The Shasteen family declined to have their family graveyard removed from the hill that is now called Devil's Island. The graves remained high and dry, so they saw no need to disturb eternal rest. The big bluff at Devil's Step is now a boat ramp. Bridges in use for generations were submerged and replaced with longer, modern structures built to span larger expanses of water. Residents also had to school themselves in the use of new transportation routes. One young marine learned his lesson the hard way. Home on leave after a tour in Vietnam, Decherd native Gary Whitt ran afoul of the lake one night in July of 1971 when he took a once-familiar route only to find his car sinking in Tims Ford. Fortunately, the young man escaped injury and the newspaper noted that the road was "completely void of precaution sign warning drivers of the approaching water."<sup>8</sup>

Marie Boswell, a community resident and oral history respondent summed up her feelings about the new landscape, while acknowledging the positive and pleasant atmosphere of the state park site:

I haven't been over there for a long time because I knew it would be sad. Because it was my home place. But I finally did and it's pretty over there and I don't know any use for the lake. Because I don't care about getting in a boat in it and I'm certainly not going to swim in it because it's too dirty. I guess people enjoy it and I'm glad other people do. It's giving them entertainment and the golf course has people who love to play golf, which is nice. And it's a nice place to walk. I have to say that. I live near the park and trails over there are great so every day I can I

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7: Hopkins interview.

8. "Driver Escapes As Car Plunges into Lake," *The Herald Chronicle*, July 29, 1971.

will try to walk over there, I'll sometimes go two to three miles sometimes. That's only way I guess I really enjoy it. They're wonderful over there.<sup>9</sup>

Marie's feelings are not uncommon among the displaced residents. Anger, resentment, sadness are at odds with the feeling that the lake brought economic and quality-of-life benefits to the area. Dam boosters and planners made their case well, leaving it to displaced residents to make their own separate peace with decisions beyond their control. Marie and her neighbors knew many uses for the Elk River. The new lake, however, is foreign to her.

Tims Ford Reservoir stretches across the north end of Franklin County. The map shows the undeniable effect on the landscape. A drive around the 250 miles of Tims Ford shoreline today shows more than sixty separate residential developments and sixteen points of public access.<sup>10</sup> A substantial amount of shoreline is still held in reserve, in part to manage the pace of development around the lake. The reality of the lake is fully integrated into the identity of Franklin County residents born since the late 1960s. Those of us in our forties and younger see beautiful vistas as we traverse the bridges that cross the water, with little thought to the lost landscape. It is almost impossible for us to imagine the county before the lake. For older generations, however, the sight of large expensive homes clinging to steep waterfronts where goats used to roam feeding on blackberry brambles brings a rueful laugh.

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9. Boswell, Higginbotham interview.

10. Tennessee Valley Authority and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, "Tims Ford Reservoir Land Management and Disposition Plan: Final Environmental Impact Statement," June, 2000, 10; Tennessee Valley Authority, "TVA Recreation Viewer," [http://recreation.tva.com/ext\\_cl.aspx](http://recreation.tva.com/ext_cl.aspx) (accessed January 25, 2013).

Franklin County leans heavily on the lake and the state park. Photographs of Tims Ford appear prominently in promotional material created by the chamber of commerce, and on real estate brokers' web pages. The lake and the park have become fully enmeshed in the identity of the area. Residents have learned, too, that the reservoir requires constant attention if it is to be maintained as an attractive feature of the community. In 1997 TVA took action to repair a leak in the earthen dam. The hole in the dam had been leaking since 1970, and in October of 1996 it was reported to be thirty-five feet wide, leaking hundreds of gallons of water a minute.<sup>11</sup> TVA engineers attacked the problem late in 1997, initiating a record low draw down, draining the lake to sixteen feet below normal winter pool. Then they drilled approximately 150 holes down into the earthworks, into which they injected cement-based grouting. The leak was not fixed however, but it slowed the leakage from seven thousand gallons per minute to one thousand gallons per minute.<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, Clay Ervin was one of the vocal residents who petitioned TVA to fix the leak in the dam. The leak flooded some of the property still in his possession. TVA settled with him by buying the flooded property, but refused to pay damages.<sup>13</sup> By his account, TVA was reluctant to tackle the problem, even though it had known of the leak since the lake filled. After repeated calls to TVA, he finally took the fight to the news media. Only then did TVA respond by sending engineers to assess the leak.

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11. "Winchester: TVA to Plug Tims Ford Leak," *Nashville Banner*, June 19, 1997.

12. "TVA Engineers Using Grout to Attack Leakage into Woods from Tims Ford Dam," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, December 17, 1997; Max Moss, "Tims Ford Work is on Track," *Nashville Banner*, December 11, 1997.

13. Ervin, Wiseman interview.

The record low lake level also revealed the disregard some have for the reservoir. According to an account published in the *Knoxville News Sentinel*, “The reduced water level has led to a cache of stolen goods for police. More than a dozen guns, a bicycle, parts from an automated teller machine and at least one car engine were found once the mucky lake bottom was exposed.”<sup>14</sup> Explorers and artifact hunters, however, saw the draw-down as a boon. Lakeside residents James and Vicki Milam decorated their Christmas trees from year to year with fishing lures lost by unlucky fishermen. In 1997, they found enough lures to fill two trees. They also went exploring in caves that are normally covered by waters.<sup>15</sup> Interviewee Billy Bailey remembered the way in which the draw-down exposed features not seen since the lake filled:

They pulled the lake down real low in order to fix a leak on the other side of the dam and one day they did that you could see a lot of the old roadways and a lot of the old springs that people used to use water from, you know. Especially down in Owl Hollow there, you could see a boiling spring out there, it was as big around as this room is.<sup>16</sup>

In the early years of development and planning, TVA officials and others repeatedly called for careful consideration to avoid the area becoming populated by “rural slums.”<sup>17</sup> The emphasis was more on making attractive, profitable developments rather than the impact on the environment. A shift occurred during the last two decades of the

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14. “TVA Engineers Using Grout to Attack Leakage into Woods from Tims Ford Dam,” *Knoxville News Sentinel*, December 17, 1997.

15. Max Moss, “Tims Ford Work is on Track,” *Nashville Banner*, December 11, 1997.

16. Billy Bailey and Bobby Keel, interview by author, May 16, 2008, Tims Ford State Park. The interview was conducted in the recreation building at the park, the room Mr. Bailey referenced is large, a spring of that size would certainly be an impressive site.

17. “Development Association Asks TVA to Locate Town Sites,” *The Herald Chronicle*, December 30, 1971.

twentieth century, however. The desire to create and maintain clean, attractive developments did not disappear, but consciousness of the need to protect the natural habitat of animals and to keep the lake healthy rose to join the narrative. The lake is a draw for sport fishermen, but its water quality is suspect. According to TVA critic William U. Chandler, the oxygen levels at Tims Ford in the early years of the lake's existence were below the minimum of five milligrams of oxygen per liter that aquatic life needs to survive.<sup>18</sup> Conditions have not improved in the recent past. TVA operates two water monitoring stations on the lake, one near the dam and one in the middle of the reservoir. The agency began gathering data on a two-year cycle in the early 1990s. From 1994-2010, the water quality has consistently ranked in the "poor" range with oxygen levels below two milligrams per liter, and some areas "completely devoid" of oxygen for extended periods. Poor oxygen levels negatively affect bottom life, but heartier species of fish like bluegill and spotfin shiner seem to be doing fine.<sup>19</sup> In addition to water quality monitoring, TVA has invested in the health of the tail waters. Two large air blowers inject air into water as it flows through the dam, and an oxygen injection system of perforated hoses near the dam provides additional oxygen injection when needed.<sup>20</sup> In 2008, the agency changed the way it releases water from the dam in order to protect six

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18. Chandler, *The Myth of TVA*, 156. "Cherokee and Tims Ford Reservoirs fall below 1 milligram of oxygen per liter of water for more than two months per year."

19. Tennessee Valley Authority, "Tims Ford Reservoir Ecological Health Rating," <http://www.tva.gov/environment/ecohealth/timsford.htm> (accessed January 21, 2013).

20. Tennessee Valley Authority, "Water Quality Improvements at Tributary Dams," [http://www.tva.gov/environment/water/rri\\_triblist.htm#tims\\_ford](http://www.tva.gov/environment/water/rri_triblist.htm#tims_ford) (accessed January 21, 2013).

species of endangered mussels, while preserving trout populations downriver. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, TVA added warmer water to flowage released into the Elk for the mussels, carefully preserving the colder temperatures that trout need by manipulating flow rates, specifically by “reducing high flows and mixing cold and warm water.”<sup>21</sup>

The story of the 1980s to the present is one of expanded development, more organized civic action, greater attention to careful planning, and compromise between the natural environment and the desires of the human population. Propelled by vocal public opinion, a changing political landscape, and compliance with new legislation, TVA and TERDA have learned, over time, to be more responsive to the wants and needs of the community. The agencies were also compelled to comply with federal environmental laws. Those efforts can be tracked in water quality reports, shoreline management plans, and revised regulations for shoreline residents. Easily decipherable reports can be accessed on the TVA web site. The state park is fully invested in caring for its surroundings. Tennessee state parks, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation, are considered to be among the best in the nation.<sup>22</sup>

Local residents, some new to the area, some with family trees that go back generations in the county, have formed a local action group to keep the lake clean and livable. The Tims Ford Council, founded in 1995, “by a group of homeowners concerned

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21. “TVA to Help Mussels, Trout by Mixing Warm, Cool Water,” *The Tennessean*, June 28, 2008.

22. Department of Environment and Conservation, “Tennessee State Parks Selected Best in Nation,” <http://www.state.tn.us/environment/parks/goldmedal/> (accessed January 23, 2013). Tennessee state parks were voted best in the nation in 2007, beating out gold medal finalists Georgia and Utah.



about decisions and issues being made by county, state and federal agencies that directly affected them and their property,” takes on tax issues, water quality and other lake matters.<sup>23</sup> Interviewees Jim Wiseman and Clay Ervin refused to join the council, even though they own homes in lakeside developments. To Jim, the council embodied the hypocrisy of those who would buy homes on land taken by eminent domain, only to restrict access. When asked to join he responded, “Wait a minute, I can’t do that. I saw people have their land taken so there could be a lake. And I say now I think what you want me to do is help you keep other people from being able to buy a lot on the lake like you did.”<sup>24</sup> Christine Hopkins was active with the group, feeling that since the lake is here to stay, she should be invested in keeping development in check and water quality high:

‘Cause you can lose a lake real quick and anybody that doesn’t believe that they need to go into some of the states and see the lakes that have been lost because people got too greedy, they tried to develop it too much, too fast and it was taken over because of this greed by erosion, environmental issues, and a lot of things that you will lose the quality of a lake.<sup>25</sup>

Christine, Clay, and Jim all expressed similar opinions about TVA, population removal, and the death of their communities, but their feelings about how to manage the new landscape diverged.

Tims Ford Lake is an attractive, exploitable feature of the county but it never brought resort hotels, tens of millions of visitors or some of the more outlandish

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23. Tims Ford Council, “Membership Committee Report,” <http://timsfordcouncil.org/member.htm> (accessed January 25, 2013).

24. Ervin, Wiseman interview.

25. Hopkins interview.

projections of early boosters. Currently, its most sizeable shoreline features are the numerous residential developments and the state park. These have brought visitors and seasonal residents to the area, but recreational use failed to reach the more optimistic projections of TVA officials and enthusiasts like Joe Sir and Representative Joe L. Evins. The lake also failed to insulate the county from larger economic forces. Franklin County was not immune to recent recessionary woes. The unemployment rate in the county for November of 2012 was 6.4%, better than some counties in the state but far higher than neighboring Lincoln County's 4.8% rate.<sup>26</sup>

Development missteps continue to haunt the area as well. A high-profile golf course designed by legendary golfer Jack Nicklaus was added to the state park in 1999. The course, designed by the "Golden Bear" and given the clever "Bear Trace" moniker, was one of five placed in state parks to stimulate visitation to parks in rural areas. The courses get high marks from golfers, but they created a financial burden for the state when the private company charged with running the courses and repaying twenty million dollars in taxpayer funds was unable to make them profitable.<sup>27</sup> In the 2006-2007 fiscal year, the Bear Trace course at Tims Ford State Park ended up \$79,381 in the red.<sup>28</sup>

In oral history interviews, those displaced from Owl Hollow, Marble Plains, and Awalt often spoke of fairness. Land owners had no leverage in forced sales; they were unable to negotiate higher prices, and few chose to seek legal redress. They resigned

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26. United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Local Area Unemployment Statistics Map," <http://data.bls.gov/map/MapToolServlet> (accessed January 28, 2013).

27. Trent Seibert, "State Takes Over Golf Courses in the Red," *The Tennessean*, January 2, 2006.

28. Anne Paine, "Failing Golf Course Could Cost Taxpayers," *The Tennessean*, December 19, 2007.

themselves to the inevitability of removal, but did not easily reconcile with the way in which it happened. Many of those interviewed would find familiar the sentiments of “The Song of Cove Creek Dam:”

But when Mr. Roosevelt got elected,  
 He came on down to Muscle Shoals,  
 He will built (sic) us a power plant at Cove Creek,  
 Just for the sake of flood control ...  
 They say this TVA is just a project;  
 It's the best dear thing the South has ever owned,  
 If it's bringing in so much more money,  
 Why can't they give us more for our homes?<sup>29</sup>

The huge impact of a reservoir the size of Tims Ford adds another layer to the pain of lost communities that is unique to projects of this nature. When land is taken through use of eminent domain to create a public park, the land is still recognizable. People can drive by the old home place and share memories. When water covers an entire community, it obliterates the land, causing the landmarks to fade into memory, intangible to those who never experienced them. Where does that leave the people who once called these communities home? TVA and TERDA worked hand-in-hand to dam the river with little acknowledgement of negative community impact. It is only through public history projects and research, working in tandem with conscientious public officials, that these residents can have a place of communal memory—a way to speak out about their lost homes, businesses, and communities.

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29. Edwin Capers Kirkland, “TVA, Roosevelt, Scopes Trial in Mountain Songs,” *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* L: no. 3 (Fall, 1984): 103.

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## NEWSPAPERS AND TABLOIDS

*Florence Times Daily*

*The Herald Chronicle*

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*Nashville Banner*

*The Next Ten Years—Elk Watershed*

*Tempo*

*The Tennessean*

*Tullahoma News and Guardian*

*Winchester Herald-Times*

INTERVIEWS AND PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

\*Bailey, Billy and Bobby Keel. Interview by author. Tims Ford State Park. May 16, 2008.

\*Boswell, Marie and Margie Higginbotham. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. June 13, 2008.

\*Brazier, Joyce. Interview by author. Pelham, TN. August 9, 2008.

Davis, Bill. Interview by author. Winchester, TN 2008.

\*Ervin, Clay and Jim Wiseman. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. June 4, 2008.

\*Hopkins, Christine. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. June 4, 2008

Moore, Wayne Clark. Private conversation. Nashville, TN. May 28, 2009.

\*Platt, Virginia. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. May 16, 2008.

\*Reed, George. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. May 9, 2008.

\*Renegar, William and R.L. Spencer. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. June 19, 2008.

\*Spencer, J.D. and Bobbie Spencer. Interview by author. Winchester, TN. July 2, 2008.

*\*Denotes oral history interviews whose transcripts and recordings are housed at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.*

April 4, 2008

Dollie Boyd, Dr. Albert Whittenberg & Dr. Rebecca Conard  
Department of History  
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Re: Protocol Title: "Tims Ford: A Lake, A Park, A People"  
Protocol Number: 08-285 **Expedited Research**

Dear Investigator(s):

I have reviewed the research proposal identified above and determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 Category 6. Approval is for one (1) year from the date of this letter for **30** participants.

According to MTSU Policy, **a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants**. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to provide a certificate of training to the Office of Compliance. If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers and their certificates of training to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project. **Any changes to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.**

Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 as soon as possible.

You will need to submit an end-of-project report to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date. Please allow time for review and requested revisions. **Your study expires March 25, 2009.**

Please note, all research materials must be retained by the PI or **faculty advisor (if the PI is a student)** for at least three (3) years after study completion. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tara M. Prairie  
Compliance Officer