

INTERVIEW WITH COMMODORE CASADA

R[Rhydon Atzenhoffer]-Now, Commodore, please state your name.

C-Commodore Casada

R-And are you aware that this interview is being taped and that it will be used for academic purposes and historical purposes?

C-It's OK

R-How long have you lived in Swain County?

C-95 years

R-And in your personal opinion, what was the general conscious of the people when they first heard about it and building of the Fontana Dam?

C-It was like any other question, there were two sides to it. Some people looked forward to it because there would be good jobs after a while and others were against it because they wanted to keep things as they were and I would say that it was an even split on each side. Discussions you heard sometimes got off track was off the subject, but all in all I think the general public here wanted the dam for different reasons. They wanted it in a different way, they wanted it build by NC people but it was no way to do that, so TVA was it and I think people very well agreed to it.

R-Did you know any people, especially friends or family, who were affected by the building of the dam?

C-I'd have to set on that, I can't remember right on hand a name. But the first thing that comes in my mind was our Chairman of our County Commissioners was on the committee and maybe I should not say this like this, but it was nosed around a little bit, and he had some money in his pocket after that because they moved to California after that when that agreement was made, I won't call the name, that's ok not to name it,

R-that's OK. Now other than that, how did most people in the county seem to be affected, you say that people didn't earn a lot of jobs in the county, would you say that caused a lot of animosity in the town?

C-I wouldn't say it caused a lot, but it caused some.

R-So what did the people seem to loose or gain from the dam?

C-You can't hear much about that from the conversations, there were two sides, that was an unknown topic I guess back in those days and in those early days, there hadn't been that much strong topic then, either way.

R- What about as time progressed in the early years when the people realized they would have to relocate how did that start to show affect on the community?

C-That started animosity, they were against almost any thing that was going to tear up their way of living.

R-Do you think that kind of damaged the heritage of those people, having been self-sufficient?

C-I guess the old way of saying it was they got their feelings were hurt. They felt like they were not having much of a part of it, they were just being pushed, they just had to go as somebody else directed. I don't know why I would have a feeling on it, but that's the way I felt about it, I guess I wouldn't like to be pushed around it, but I would like to have been led.

R-Other than the road that eventually became the agreement, what were incentives why the people had when they had to move because of the dam?

C-Since I didn't know many of those people who lived down in that area, I had very little conversation with anybody down there, it was just a mute subject as far as I was concerned.

R-What about people in the Town of Bryson City itself, how did many of the people feel the about building the dam, you know who may have had friends and relatives who had to move because of the dam

C-They were thrilled because people who lived around here could get jobs building the dam. They had trailer parks up there, I think they may have had 30 or 40 trailers in there, because people down there building the dam had to have places to sleep, and homes around here would take people who worked on the dam in. Of course a lot of the workers lived here, but I think there were about 40 trailers in the park just right up the road and sometimes it became sort of touchy about the subject, they didn't see eye-to-eye.

R-Do you think it was due to those people coming in and had jobs and rather than the local people?

C-All the people had a job down there that wanted one but they had to have a number of people and had to have some place to put them, so I guess the little trailer park was one way of handling that, it was a good little community, they had a policeman up there, he didn't work all the time, but he kept an eye on it, in fact he came down carrying Jim, he was about three years old, and some how Jim had gotten away from his mother she was busy, and Jim had managed to get up in the trailer park wondering around. Gomer Martin picked him up in his arms and brought him back down to us. I guess I wasn't here at the time, but it was good to have a friend near to help with our wayward son.

R-How did the influences of the new people come in, how did it influence the local Businesses?

C-It was a good boost, I can't say it was a great boost, but people who were merchants and people who had businesses who catered to outside people, it helped them I guess.

R-Where there any people in the Town of Bryson City who never wanted them to build the dam.

C-I am sure there was but I was never in a conversation, and didn't hear anyone express their feeling on it.

R-And how did most people in the Town feel once the dam was complete?

C-I would say that we were satisfied with most things, but there is one other thing that a lot of people begin to think that it wasn't the right kind of agreement and we should have got a lot more money out of it and there was a lot of discussion on it.

R-Do you feel in your own personal opinion that TVA and the government over exerted their use of eminent domain to gain more and more property that they needed for the construction.

C-I think it is almost a given fact that almost anywhere they start to take property and domain where the property, very few people have a kind word for that action, some do but not many.

R- So what is your personal opinion of the '43 agreement so far as how you believe the town was affected by not building the road where the residents of Proctor and places like that, that they could go back to their areas?

C-I think that road would have been very little benefit to anybody. You don't believe it, just look at the Cherehala Highway, that was supposed to be a big boom to all the people in Western North Carolina, and it makes a few dollars to Andrews and Robbinsville, but

that's all, and I believe a lot of people including me felt that this road wouldn't have benefited us very little if any, and I have said that openly and have been challenged, because I couldn't see that road was going to help and going to benefit to the local people around here, but there might be somebody put up a little service station here or some little business that would profit, but all in all, I don't feel it would help us.

R-Do you feel the people in Swain County still feel the affects of the Fontana Project today?

C-The Fontana project?

R-Yes

C-There's a certain feeling that it's settled now, what's done is done, and my feelings is that in some ways, I liked the way it was, I think if something stays just exactly like it is, eventually it will rot; and the actions of the TVA, we received some of the actions of them, but all in all it was probably just Bryson City, North Carolina.

R-What do you believe, I know you said that you don't believe the road would really have benefit the town, but with regards to the controversy today, do you feel to have it left alone and take the settlement, or would you rather them build it?

C- So far as anyone having any power one way or the other, I think that it is a dead issue and the decision has been made apparently, and that's it. I think that if we get that money, we are supposed to and I hope we do, that would be a big boost to this county, and they owe the county, no doubt about that. There's a lot of sacrifices made and maybe one or two against it. But all in all I guess I'm satisfied.

R-If you could sum up the lasting impressions of the US government and TVA on Swain County in a few seconds, what would say?

C-I guess I haven't thought about it. At the time it was after John and I was living at Hazelwood at that time from 1930 to 40 and I boarded with some people from Tennessee and after that the town was built TVA established, I heard them talk about the rates that they had to pay for electricity, and it was nothing just practically a gift but that ended in just a year or two maybe less than that, of course their cost went up like ours. But for a few years the people living in that area, their costs of power according to the people I talked to would have been about 20% of the costs for our power, a lot cheaper.

R-Are there any other stories that go along at that time that you feel free to share?

C-I know there are bound to be stories, but I don't remember one right now. But wouldn't have any affect on what we are talking about. I know some people in Hazelwood who lived over in East Tennessee and their power was nothing to what we paid. This is aside, one of the fellows I boarded with, most of the time we worked a half day on Saturday, and it was Friday evening, and we only had one bathroom for the boarders and there was about a half-dozen boarded there, and there was one guy a big heavy set, no personality, and he hardly said nothing, and he always got up from the table the first one and he would get up and I happened to come out of my room when he came out of the bathroom, and he stuck his head out of the bathroom and started running to his room and there was a linoleum on the floor or something there, and about the second step his feet just went up on the air, and he just set there, I thought he was hurting, but I laughed.

R-I guess is there anything else, as far as anyone in the community, after the dam was built, who was advocates for the people?

C-I imagine there was during that day, you just didn't hear much excepts boats going up and down the lake, instead of having opinion about wrong or right. Oh you still find some that fuss up a storm about the land, but there's a lot of people who started enjoying it, fishing and boating everything.

R-Do you think it gave a tourist boost to the area?

C-Yea, Yes I do. I don't think they tried to make any boost in advertising for tourism, and the word gets around, anything that amounts to much, people will come to see what they can see.

R-I thank you very much, Commodore, I think that's everything I have,

C-I am sorry that I could not have contributed more

R-No that's OK

C-There's mistakes but they are only human and if you get 80 years old but you forget and I guess that is not the most important thing I have forgot. Some of us out there sit out there and rimiest and some of the time I try to tell youngsters about the days when I was growing up; there was a place up here on Hospital Hill and it was called Pine Hill at that time, and it was just covered with pines, small ones and it was the type with a lot of branches, and we'd play follow the leader going through those branches, some falls but no broken bones, and I wish I could get up there now, because we had a lot of fun and that's all that area up in that area. And we had a baseball park up there and they had a fair and I came by there and some boys were up there and the old dressing room they had for the fair had a door to it and somebody had driven 20 penny nails to hang their clothes on and they were shooting at those trying to drive those nails up and nobody was hitting their nails on the head and I did it, I got one of their guns and hit it, and then I gave the gun back like that was an every day affair for me. (laugh) If I had another chance, I probably couldn't have hit another one.

R-Thanks Commodore.

C-Sorry I could contribute any more.

R-That's OK

THE END OF THE INTERVIEW