

## INTERVIEW WITH DELIA WATKINS

R[Rhydon Atzenhoffer]-Could you please state your name for me please.

W-My name is Delia Ann Woodard Watlkins.

R- And you know that this interview is being taped

W-Yes

R-And do you know that this interview is being used for academic and historical purposes?

W-Yes

R-Now the first question is how long have you lived in Swain County?

W-83 years, I was born in Swain County, so I am going to be 84 years old on my birthday. I moved away but I have always come back to Swain County. I have lived here at this place for the past 30 years. I was born down on Proctor and that is in Swain County and when I was 3 years old we moved to Peachtree and that's in Swain County. My folks had a farm and that's where I grew up most of my life, and when they started the dam I think that was in 39, we moved to Epp Springs, that's where the school was, it was a one-room school, I went to a one-room school from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grades at Epp Springs, and then when I graduated from 7<sup>th</sup> grade I rode the bus which came from down Proctor and that way, I would ride the bus to Swain High, but my two younger sisters were still going to the one-room school house when they started building the dam, they were still going to the one-room school house and my Mom had to move us up to Lemons Branch after we moved from Epp Springs and so I remember everything about, I was 16 when they started building the dam, and all the people had to move out when they started the dam and the people went to Gastonia and different places. On Peachtree there was at least 20 families lived and they all had to be relocated and they didn't want to and there was this one family who stayed there until they had to make them, forcibly, make them move, they didn't want to move. It was a hardship on the older people especially who had never lived anyplace else, some of them had never been to Bryson City. The train went down there at Epp Springs and when I was a child about 10 or 12, old enough to, we would ride the train up to Bryson City, we would put a flag up and it would stop and we would ride the train to Bryson City, and it cost \$.5 cents to ride the train to Bryson City. So then the train would come up at 11:00 and you could come up to Bryson City and then at 12:00 o'clock you could go on the train at the old depot and you could ride the train down to Epp Springs and when you got there you would pull the cord and get off. My Mom would send me to the grocery store, Sneed's Grocery Store in Bryson City, she would make the list and I would ride the train to Bryson City and buy groceries and ride the train back home. And they had what they called Mail car that came up from Bushnell and it would come up and it looked kind of like a van and people would ride that up to Bryson City, otherwise, we would walk. I have walked many, many times from Epp Springs, I think from Epp Springs to Bryson City is about 4 miles, walking was how we traveled when I was growing up, We never had a car, my dad had a log truck, and when I was growing up at Peachtree, we had a team of mules and that's how we ride to town, the boys would bring out logs and acid wood and that's how; we raised all our food except like flour and sugar, and we rode with them and they would take out the logs for that. I had 3 sisters and 4 brothers were in my family. We raised everything, we had we raised corn, we had a cow, we had our own milk and always they butchered the pork

and kill a beef and so we had no electricity up there. I don't think we got electricity in the outskirts just in town and of course no telephones out in the country you had to go by mouth or whatever, you had to go from house to house. It was very interesting life for me. I enjoyed it and think about it now how different it is..... you would not let your 12 year old child get on the train to go anywhere by themselves because of how everything has changed.

R-I think the next real question is, in your opinion was there a kind of a general conscious of Swain County residents when the project was introduced to build the dam? Were they excited about it or were they worried about it?

W-The thing that I was told that it was to help the war effort. That was just before WWII. The things we were told was it was to help the war effort and whether the people understood what was taking place. I don't remember anything about it going to be a park. You know that they were going to take all the land and make it a park because of where we lived; they had no need for that land. It had nothing to do with the dam and we didn't have to use the road. I feel that they took a lot of land that they really didn't need and there was big farms down in the area and a lot of farming in the area and my folks had a 350 acre tract and my dad had a sawmill down there and sawed logs and lumber and we had a big apple orchard and they was about 4 families lived on our property in houses and I feel that they took a lot of land that they did not need. And on Cane Break, the Lollises had a lot of land on Cane Break and that was the hill next to us and Epp Springs was at the head of Cane Break and the Lollis people had big farms with cattle and everything and it was a; Swain County lost a lot of people and a lot of land that could be used for taxes.

R-Some people felt like it kind of boomed the town and brought a lot of jobs and some people thought it also crippled Swain County as well because the loss, some people lost all their land?

W-I really don't think it helped with jobs, except while they were building the dam. Now my husband, Raymond Watkins, he worked down there and before we were married and before he went into service but I don't see how it made many jobs, because all those people had to moved away from here and from 10 to 15 families on each little and there must have been 50 to 100 families because that was a big creek, and down at the other places Bushnell, Proctor and Silvermine and a lot of people who lived in that area, I don't see that it helped Swain County at all because there were a lot of people who had to move to other places like to Gastonia and Lexington and places like that to get work. My brother, Buford Woodard, he had a big truck that he hauled "for hire" and he said he moved so many of those families from down there to Gastonia and that area and they would cry, the mothers, because they were leaving their things and they had their cemetery situation too and they didn't want to leave that. That was hard on them. Now I was young and it didn't bother me that much, it just meant I would do a little less walking. Because when leaft Epp Springs my Mom moved to Lemons Branch and my Mom didn't get much money for her 350 acres either, that was one of the bad things. Can you imagine the value of that property now? I used to walk up to that property when I could walk, I can't walk like that now, but we used to go out to the "road to Nowhere" and walk back up to the old home place and of course it is park and we were not allowed to break a bush or do anything you know how it is up there. We would go up there ever so often my siblings when they would come home, they all went to the West, but when

they would come home we would go up there, but that is what some people say that if they had built the road it would be easier access for the people who are disabled and can't walk to get back to the old place. And personally, I think that it would have helped to make more, like going into Tennessee and that way, I think it would have been more profitable to Swain County, but it might have put more traffic on the roads.

R-I guess aside the fact that monetarily you got practically nothing for the land, were there any other incentives that you got, like you ought to help the war, or was there any other incentives or was it pretty much you have to sell now?

W-It was pretty much "you have to sell now". I think they led the people to believe that they were going to flood the area, but it never was flooded that far up, but it was flood on down but they go across to Proctor and other places to the cemeteries. It was, like I said I was 16, and I remember my Dad was dead, and I remembered my Mom saying that we had to, they I guess they called it condemning it, you had to take what money they were willing to give and condemn it, and they wouldn't say we will move you or anything like that or relocate you. Now they may have said that to some people and any other people I knew, I didn't hear of them offering any incentives, but the thing that we were getting that made us feel well any at all was that it was going to help us win the war to make more power at the dam to help win the war and the dam was supposed to make the power, but they didn't, I am saying, to the best of my knowledge they gave my Mom about \$3,500.00 and that was about a dollar an acre or something, but I don't know, for her property and they were supposed to pay extra for every fruit tree, but they didn't, because we had a big orchard. People came all around, the neighbors, came and got apples all the time. And we had our own water system, we had springs it was just clean water, I think they actually took the best of Swain County, as far as the farming and all that, and some of the people they though was ignorant, but they was not, they made their own living just like (lady bugs) we did, we did everything and raised everything that we needed except flour, sugar and salt; we raised our corn and took it to mill and raised everything and it was good.

R-I know that some of the things that I have read, when it comes to people who wouldn't leave or refused to leave, there were people come and threaten to burn their homes, if they didn't leave.

W-No, not to burn their homes, but I have never heard that, but I do know that there were families stayed until I guess the Sheriff or someone had to make them move out; and the road down around Bushnell may have been that you couldn't drive that far, but at Epp Springs where I lived you could always drive down there, the water never came up to where the road was ever under water down there. You know where we go down there to have our, that was the old Beasley place. They were some of the last people left and you could always drive down to Epp Springs, so they did take a lot of the land that was not necessary. And then if they had built this road that they said they would build, but they had already taken it in for the park.

R-Is there anything that the people did after taking of the land by TVA, was there ever any formal action taken by the people

W-Actually, there was nothing because they thought they would build the road, see they promised to build the road, I think it was in 1943, and we all thought the road was going to be built and nobody objected because they were going back to their old cemeteries and their old home places and all

R-So really actually, after the construction of the dam and reservoir, did the people have the animosity in them for having lost their land but they still believed the government was going to live up to their word and build the dam;

W-Actually they believed that the government and the TVA; am I right in this that the TVA bought the land and then they donated it to the Park, made the Smoky Mt., so that is why they say the TVA and the government promised to build the road; and I don't think the people thought it was going to be turned over to a National Park, I don't really think that most of them thought it was going to be flooded by the dam; so far as I don't remember any of the people saying after they got out; and it was maybe in 1945 when some of the people and a couple were still down there on Peachtree and Cane Break, I know two families that wouldn't get out and go; and they, I have heard this, but one man would not accept the money at all, I know he wouldn't accept it and he lived on Cane Break and he had a nice farm, so I can imagine what they offered him or gave for it but they put the money in the bank and whether he ever claimed the money, I don't know, but they did make him move out.

R-So truly in your personal opinion, the TVA and government over exerted their use of eminent domain when it came to taking the property because they took more than they needed to build the dam?

W-Yes I do, I really think they did.

R-And also they built the Town of Norristown, that really was the name before Fontana, did that in any means give any form of reconciliation to the people of Swain County but were they really more concerned with the road?

W-They were, I don't see how that town did any more for Swain County because it was on the other side of the, well you know where it is, it almost over at Tennessee, closer to Tennessee than North Carolina, and I don't think the people thought about that town actually, but they had to move out on this side of the river and there's a place, I don't know exactly where this place is, it was a little place called Japan, and I don't know where exactly this place is, because one of my brothers was buried there, but I think it's under water, but it was closer to that town Fontana Village down there, I have been there once, but I don't think that anyone would think that it would help this area of Swain County.

R-So I guess the next would be "what is your personal opinion when it comes to the '43 agreement on the road?"

W-I would really like to see the road for the sake of the people who want the road, but if we took the money that they say their going to offer and it was used for Swain County or the schools for the benefit, if people didn't get control of it and use it not for the benefit of Swain County, it would be a good thing, but I would like to see the road built, but I don't think in my life-time I'll see it built.

R: Do you think the people of Swain County still feel the affects of the project from the time?

W-I really do, a lot of people do, especially the ones who had to move farther out of Swain County because they couldn't make it here, I feel a lot people was sad and upset and a lot, at that time, a lot of the younger people had to go to war, and had to go to WWII, and they never got back to their home, and I know there was a lot of worry and things about that.

R-So I guess if you could sum up the lasting impression the US government and TVA had on Swain County, in maybe 30 seconds, what would you say?

W-I'd say they didn't live up to their promise

R-And is there anything else about the subject that you would like to tell me and that you feel that the people should know?

W-The only, like I say, they didn't pay the people for their property, they condemned the land and took it and did not pay even at that time, they did not pay what the property was worth, now some of the houses may not have been what they were, I know, did you get some of the pictures?

R-Not yet

W-Well they took pictures of the worse looking houses and it was not, and the people lived well because they raised their own food and everything. Like when I was born in 1926 and I never knew that we had a depression, because we had our own food and all that, so it was, and then like I said if you could imagine what that property would be worth these days, and I feel like most of the people and me and my family feel that we lost our heritage because we would have inherited the property if my Mom had not had to move out and sell the property, so I think we lost a lot of our heritage. The people and the road, I am sure that it will never be built in my lifetime. But I enjoy driving out to the tunnel and some people walk up through it and I have walked up to Noland, but like I say I can't walk much now, but I can ride out there and see where different things were.

R-I just want to say thank you very much for your time

W-And you are welcome I am glad to tell you what I know and I hope you will get a good grade on your paper

R-And so do I.

**END OF INTERVIEW**