

Interview with Troy and Edna Whiteside

R[Rhydon Atzenhoffer]: Can both of you state your nam

T: Troy Whiteside

E: Edna Duvall Whiteside

R: And you both know that his conversation is being taped

T: Yea, I do

E: Yea

R: And are you ok with this interview being use for academic and historic preservation purposes

T: Oh, Yes

E: Yes

R: All right, so how long have each of you lived in Swain County

E: All my life, that's 75 years

T: I come here when I was 6 year old and started to school herein Bryson City in first grade

E: So that would be 68 or 69 years because he is 74

T: Anyways, talking about Bryson City, I used to ride with a man from Macon Co that owned a furniture store down in BC during the time Fontana was going on and being built and he said that he was closing his store and as he was coming out and shut the door and from where he was standing he could see three fist fights going on in BC at the same time it was a little was little boom town and all these boys from up in the hollows was come down and learned how to drink beer and scrap and it was a time when ever you wanted to work if you wanted a job everybody had something to do and making money and nobody had never made any money before in this area and big-big boom time in BC was because the dam was being built and Nantahala Dam was being built roads was being changed and everybody who wanted to work, had work to do.

R: In you opinions what was the general consensus of SW Co residents when the product was introduced where they happy about it, were they opposed were they happy for jobs

E: The people in the area from where I was raised, see I was raised near the Nantahala Gorge, that's the upper part of where the lake come, and the people was not happy about it, of course at that time during the war they was willing to do anything to keep the country going for a war, but they wasn't because they was loosing too much land and the government didn't pay the price for the land, I mean they would send in like 3 adjusters and they would say the land was worth so and so and so and so, and they had to take it, they didn't have a choice, and things like that they weren't happy with, but it was just progress and you can't fight it and they knew the country needed more power and they needed the dam for that purpose, but the people was unhappy because they was towns and whole settlements being relocated and that's always bad, I mean, how would Bryson City feel right now if they say we're going to build a dam and everybody in Bryson City was going to find somewhere else to live, even if they got half-way decent prices, which they didn't for the property, where would they go? And at that time there wasn't the transportation and resources to pick up and move that there is now, and it was a real hardship on a lot of people.

T: But on the other hand there was a big time for people where I lived didn't realize or didn't care maybe, but I can remember the people living around here was working and making dollars who had never had the opportunity to make dollars before and was really happy, and my daddy who moved over here from Canton and moved here and he was a person who did iron work and all kinds different kinds of construction work, and he was pleased to have plenty of work to do

and Uncle Hershel he had work to do and every body who lived around here was able to bring a lot more money to the house than ever before and mostly hunting equipment that they could buy they needed and cars they needed and doing things like that and buying more land and stuff, people could start expanding, the dams and roads, and all that, everybody who wanted to work, could work and make dollars.

E: But on the other hand, that was good people working for people around the area, but the people right involved, they was too busy trying to figure out where I am going and what I am going to do, they didn't gain a lot.

T: Oh yea, that was a bad time, oh yea, that was a sad time for them, a real sad time.

E: I knew several people who went off to service, I can tell you a family who lived down on the river, you know Gilchrist, you know Bobby or Robert Gilchrist, his uncles, he had about three uncles and cousins that was in service and was called into service and when they came back where they lived they couldn't find nothing but water, and it affected them, as long as they lived

T: That was a sad feeling to come back home from war and find water

E: And so there's two sides to it, like the road problem, there's two sides to it, and it helps some people, but a lot of the families I knew moved away from here and never came back, just like his family moved to Belmont, and he came back after he was grown, but the rest of them never came back, and a lot of them never settled, a lot of them just drifted, they didn't have a home place.

T. Besides the fact that everybody was busy making dollars that's also when they did get the dam finished and backed the water up, people my age was excited about the amount of fish they was to do and all at once there was more fish to catch than there had ever been, why a little boy like me could go to the river with a little ole pole, in about a half of day I could catch a pretty good string of fish, because I don't know where they came from or how come them to be there, but all at once there was fish in every little cove where the lake came up and everybody caught fish that wanted fish.

R. Do you think it gave a tourism boost in the area or was it more kind of the locals trying to take advantage of the situation?

E. Later on the tourist, but now see during that time it was in the second world war, and you there wasn't much tourist because everything was rationed and you only got so much gas and so much of everything, and you didn't have people traveling like you do now and this area wasn't a tourist areas, the lake helped later on it become a tourist attraction, but the lake was built strictly for the power because the tourist industry hadn't come in this area at that time. I remember that you only got, my dad was lucky because he drove an A-Model Ford and it didn't take much gas, and you only got so much gas stamps per month, and he worked at the Nantahala Power & Light Company up Nantahala he started up there when they was building the dam and you only used your gas to go back and forth to work, because that's all the gas you got.

R. What were some of the incentives that were offered or promised, I know a lot of people talk about the adjusters came in and only got what they got for their land, some people I talked to were supposed to get better power rates for the area, or

E. Or get power, at that time we didn't have power, we didn't have electricity at my house, it was several years before we got power at my house, and they was promised, but another thing about the way they paid them, they would get three people out of the community or county to come and adjust around the area and if a guy put a big price on the property, they wouldn't call him back to work, they only took and used people over and over who gave them a low estimate on the property.

T. There's no doubt they got less money for the property than it was worth, and there's no doubt they took more land than should have been taken but...

- E. They took a big parameter around and they'd say that you have to sell this and you will have to let us have it because there will never be a way for you to get in to it. Now my grandfather who was Jim Wright owned a house and lot where we called the Almond Boat dock is just above the school house and they was a whole community and he had a house and lot and he rented it out to the school teachers and stuff and he was told that he had to sell because they'd never be a road to and the only way into it was by boat, but the road in to it, goes to the boat dock right now is a state road, goes right by and touches the edge of his property, the lake don't, the lake ain't near close to it, but at time, times were different back then, you didn't get lawyers and go to court like they do now, especially because the country was in a too big uproar with the second world war and if you objected to some of this you was not a good citizen because it was all to try to win the war because we was in trouble, it wasn't like it is now you didn't have all these protestors, everything was for the country and for the solders and for the benefit of all and you don't have that now, I am afraid.
- R. Where there any prominent community members that stood up at any point, I know we talked about not formal protestors, but where there any community leaders at the time who were trying to be advocates for the people.
- E. Ahhhh not that I know of.
- T: Not that I know of that was well organized to complain, about everybody had to take what they got and not complain
- E. If anybody did object or said anything, everybody would say "you're not a good citizen" "you're not a good citizen" because we got to get that dam built and we've got to have power in order to make all this stuff you've got to have for this war
- T: There wasn't no doubt that it had to be put there, and I think that it wasn't managed well to take the land the lake didn't cover, but it had to be done, because that was part of winning the war was to have the aluminum it took, the dam had to be built to get the aluminum out on the Little Tennessee.
- E. Another thing wrong on the other hand, showing how things can change, they took all that land and it was always going to be government land, and then they turned it over to the Forest Service and then the Forest Service traded that land to some big developers for some big land above Alarka, what is it they call it up there
- T: Big Laurel
- E. Big Laurel, and the whole thing is developed now and they's houses down there and that's the way life happens when you live to be in your 70's you see things, but they was told that there would roads in there, there would be no way to get to the land but by boat that they may as well sell it out and that it would always be Forest Service or government land, but it is not.....
- R. Were there any other actions besides people being accused of being bad citizens and that were taken when people refused to leave?
- T: There was time when the people got their checks for their land, they wouldn't cash their checks or wouldn't spend, there was people who wouldn't settle, that I don't know what ever happen to them, but there were people that didn't settle for their land, it was maybe covered in water or taken,
- E. But they had to moved, they were forced to leave
- T: Some of the people would not sign their deeds away, they just held out, I don't know their names, but most of them took what they had to do and went on.
- R. I have heard that some of the people, the government put the money in the bank in their names, and pushed them out anyway.
- E. Right, Right, I can't think of the name, it's been so long, the guy was a school teacher and he lived on the Almond Road,

T: Woods?

E. No.

R. What were the feelings of the Swain Co people afterwards, were they still really upset, because

E. Not really because most of them left out and left Swain County, and as Troy said it brought in the fishing and the stuff like that and it was at the end of the war and of course it was at the end of the second world war and even though some didn't have any place to come back to but so many of the families had moved away from here but the general public would just settle back to make a living, but the Road, and the deal with the Road, to my knowledge the deal with the road never come up, there was for years there I didn't know anything about that Road deal, it was I guess kind of pushed aside that there was other government things going on there, and there was for years that there wasn't said much about the road, then they decided to build the road and started it, and then they run against so many environmental problems and stuff and everything, and that's when some of the families that had been displaced at that time, said we've got to have our road

T: It become a fight then

E. And there was several years that there wasn't much said about it

R. I think that was early 60's , I believe construction started in 1962

E. Yea, see this was in the late 40's and it was in the early 40's when all this came about and they because they had the school down there in 44 I believe it was 43 the spring of 44 was the last year they had school down there, every body was just kinda tried to get settled other places and tried to live and there wasn't much said about the road, or I didn't hear that much until they started the road and a lot of people hollered about it.

T: But there was some good times after the war, on account of the fact that they started a program for the GI's to be in farm work, like a guy could come out of the service, my Dad did this, and they could farm and the government paid him \$90.00 per month and helped him with a lot of information and things like that to do good farming, and in this area a lot of people was on what they called the GI Bill they worked their kids and run their little farm and that's when we started farming this place here and buying a little more land and doing the things you gotta do to prosper.

R. In your personal opinions do you feel that the TVA and US government over exerted their use of eminent domain in order to get land from residents in Swain County?

E. I feel that they should have been able to get the land that they needed but I don't think they should have gotten as much as they did and I believe they should have paid more for it.

T: Yea, I think so

E. Yea I believe the government needs what it needs, you know one person can't hold up a whole project that's going to help hundreds of people, I don't believe in that, we was taught that way, people believed at that time that way, you didn't have all these little protest that you do now, it was important that and what was best for the majority.

T: You didn't hear much about the snail darter back then

E. No you didn't hear that you can't do this because the bird lovers or tree huggers don't want you to do nothing, it was what was best for the people and that is why there wasn't as big protest back then.

R. So what today is your opinion on the 1943 Agreement in concerns with the road, if you had your way would you have a road built or would you rather Swain County have a settlement and be able to invest that for the community?

E. But really I don't know, I believe that in one way I feel like if the road was promised, you know if you promise something, that is what you gotta do, but the way things have changed since then, I don't know that the road would gain that much or would help those people that much and I am kind like the government, I don't quite know what to do about it.

T: And it would also put a big burden on the Smoky Mountain National Park, because it would take a lot more people to keep game poachers and people who gets hung up on the wilderness and it would be a better thing for Swain County if they had a road there, I don't know if it would be, I might be, but if government is going to pay them as much as it would take to build a road, it would be amazingly how big a hunk of money it would take to build a road down there, that far, but if I had to choose today and they said Whiteside you got to make a plan, I'd say well we'll take this hunk of money and put it in a trust fund in such a way that it can't be took away by the Judges and politicians and help Swain County in such a way that it can be a thriving county, we're a poor county and it would keep us from being a poor county, and it would be a better and thriving county to live in if the government would go ahead and pay the money it would be the right thing to do, because the government can't hardly afford to build the road and the park service can't hardly afford to let them built the road, that's what would hold them back.

E. But on the other hand when you think about fairness, no matter how much money Swain County got, there is no way that you can compensate to the people who lost their land, they are not here in Swain County, 75% are not here, or their ancestors, or their children are not here

T: Some went to Waynesville, Hickory

E. Gastonia

T: Oregon, some went to Michigan to make cars

E. There is no way that you can compensate the actual people or their families, there's very few, like I said I am 75 years old, and I was in the third grade the last they had school down there, I didn't have no land, my family had land, but I didn't have any and most of the people are dead and gone.

R. Some people today they talk about, there is a huge loss of heritage because of the life style that people who lived on the 44000 acre tract because some of the people were self-sufficient farmers and hand their own saw mills, do you or Swain County people still feel the affects of the Fontana project as far as heritage loss standpoint in today's society?

E. Not a whole lot, because not only them but the people who lived in this community and the Alarka Community had those same situations, but they don't have them today, you know what I mean, they was a big sawmill on Alarka that brought in a lot of money and everything, but with depression and all, you know, time changes, and it is wonderful to have your heritage, but if the Fontana Dam had not been build, it wouldn't be like that now, it would be like all the rest of the areas, it would be divided up in to little towns and some big towns and everything and it wouldn't be the same kind, but it would be a wonderful life I guess, but not

T: But on the other hand if the Fontana Dam had not been built and the people who was living down there and their children was living down there now and they decided to sell a little piece of land that the government gave \$5.00 per acre, would bring \$20,000.00 per acre now, and their children would have been able to sell an acre for \$20,000.00 and back then they was paying them from \$5.00, I'd say that if you looked it up, they probably was none of the land brought over \$20.00 per acre

E. If that much

T: Most of the land the FS bought didn't bring more than \$8.00 per acre. And some of the people that didn't live near Fontana caught on to fact that they could sell their lands, maybe a guy had 100 acres of land and the Forest Service would buy up his land, and he'd bunch up his little furniture and his kids and hire a truck to take him down to Gastonia or somewhere and get to work in cotton mills.

R. If you could sum up the last impression of the US Gove and TVA Swain County in 30 seconds based on events from the 30's and early 40's what would you say?

E. I'd have to say that in most cases they did what they thought was best at the time, it is easy to say that this wasn't right and that wasn't right, but the country was at war and all, and this had to be done, I'd say they did as good as they could have done, because there wasn't much money either as far as the government's concerned because they wasn't going in to debt like the government does today, and a lot of the government money was going toward the war, and I don't really don't think that they were trying to cheat the people that much, I think they had a job to do, and they had to get it done. How about you Troy?

T: Yea, I'd go along with that. It feathered down that where the people who was buying the land had to look good and make themselves look good and make their job look good and some of them were selfish and took advantage of what they could to make their selves look good, and little stuff that happened

E. And anyway, that's today's world, and everything, but I don't think they really meant to, they just had a job to do and they had to do it----just like Troy when we met, lived in Aiken SC and they moved out big towns down there in that area, and I guess a lot them felt bad, but it just had to be done.

T: Yea,

R. Is there anything else about the subject that either of you would like to share?

T: No, but you have asked some good questions and I'm glad we talked about it.

R. Well I appreciate both of you so much for your time, and with that I'll go ahead and stop the tape.

T. The reason you asked so many good questions, you're not that smart, you got them wrote down!

Laugh