*Note: I’d like to first thank everyone for reading and thinking about my work this week. Any thoughts or suggestions you might have are greatly appreciated. I’ll take some time during the talk to contextualize this chapter in my larger dissertation, but I thought it’d be helpful to briefly do that here as well.*

*My project looks at the response of policymakers, social scientists, and rural people to dramatic changes in the rural economy, particularly in farming, during the post-WWII period that caused significant rural outmigration and unemployment. In response to this “rural crisis” there emerged a variety of rural development programs that I’m placing into two broad tracks: “nonfarm” rural development, which focused on channeling federal investments into ailing rural towns to create jobs outside agriculture, particularly in manufacturing and tourism; and “farm reform,” which aimed to regulate and reform the increasingly large scale farm economy to make it better work for farmworkers, renters, and small farmers. Taken together, I think these two tracks suggest two conclusions. First, there was a much more concerted and robust response to rural problems than past scholars shown, and it was one that focused on reviving rural areas and not simply moving people out of troubled rural communities into cities. This revival involved a reimagining of the place of rural America in an increasingly urban society. Second, the responses to rural decline reflect an attempt to redefine the boundaries of postwar liberalism by expanding the responsibility of the federal government for addressing structural economic shifts like those occurring in rural America.*

**From Farm to Tourist Trap: Tourism as Rural Development**

by Doug Genens

In the 1950s, federal policymakers and rural people began looking for ways to revive rural communities in the midst of crisis. Traditional rural industries, particularly farming, mining, and timber, could no longer support rural economies. As a result, outmigration from rural towns dramatically reduced population levels, and many of those who did not leave faced high levels of poverty and job precarity. Chapter two examined the emergence of nonfarm development policy at the federal level as the primary method of mitigating this rural crisis. Policymakers created programs that provided loans and grants to rural towns seeking to build a new economic base in “nonfarm” industries. They believed rural towns could be saved, but also assumed that the traditional rural industries were no longer viable. Chapter three looked at a key aspect of nonfarm development: infrastructure projects and industrial attraction efforts. With modern infrastructure and manufacturing jobs, many hoped that rural towns could be given a new lease on life. This chapter continues the story of nonfarm development by examining tourist-based rural development projects in Georgia, Missouri, and California. Proponents of nonfarm development saw tourism as a potentially beneficial industry for rural areas that saw jobs in traditional rural jobs disappear.

However, tourism also differed from infrastructure projects and industrial attraction. While local businessmen and civic leaders boasted about the features of their small towns and their suitability for industrial development, tourism projects encouraged a different sort of engagement with rural identity. Tourism projects often put a highly idealized notion of rural life at their center. Rural tourism relied upon, and helped perpetuate, idyllic visions of rural life and its past, while attempting to profit from them in the present and future. While rural tourism projects sought to revitalize rural America, they functioned, ideologically and practically, to make rural America subservient to the consumer desires of non-rural America. Tourist projects thus commodified rural culture and history as a rural development strategy and, when they succeeded, turned towns into tourist attractions.

In essence, tourism as rural development asked people to sell a “rural lifestyle” to non-rural people. This emphasis on lifestyle echoed developments in rural sociology discussed in chapter one. Many rural sociologists had long seen rural culture as intertwined with farming, However, dramatic shifts in rural economies caused many to question whether an identifiable “rural” still existed and if urban-rural differences had collapsed. By the mid-1970s, some rural sociologists began to conceptualize a rural “lifestyle” that functioned independently from farming. For some, a rural lifestyle became linked to living in a sparsely settled place coupled with a conservative morality. Others observed people living in low-density areas and earning most of their income from nonfarm jobs, but still keeping small farm plots in order to maintain a connection to the outdoors and sense of self-worth associated with farm labor. Rural tourism reflected this shift. Although a rural community may no longer be grounded in farming, it still might offer a “rural” experience to urban or suburban travelers. Thus, as some worried about a diminishing “rural” America, tourism helped maintain a sharp rural-urban distinction.

Tourist development projects in rural California, Missouri, and Georgia ultimately promised more than they could offer. While creating jobs served as their primary purpose, tourist-oriented development often fell short. As critics pointed out, tourism provided relatively few employment opportunities, particularly when compared to factories that might offer hundreds of jobs at a single plant. Other tourist projects proved difficult to implement and functioned in a significantly reduced capacity. More significantly, the character of these projects meant they had to contend with nature and defenders of the environment who were increasingly vocal and powerful by the 1970s. Regardless of their success, these projects reflected a distinct image of rural progress rooted in visions of the past.

**The Idea of Rural Tourism in the Federal Government**

Advocates of nonfarm development at the federal level envisioned tourism as a key component of rural revival. One of the main expositors of rural tourism’s function was USDA Assistant Secretary John Baker, who served during the 1960s. Baker framed the problems faced by agricultural communities as in part a problem of too many farmers. New machinery and highly productive farms rendered many farmers unnecessary.[[1]](#endnote-1) While farms might be overpopulated, he did not imply that rural America also had too many people. On the contrary, Baker claimed that “rural recreation…stands to become one of our best cash crops.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Surplus farmers might produce rural experiences for tourists, and Baker believed a hungry market existed. The increased prevalence of white-collar work created both affluence and the time to enjoy leisure activities.[[3]](#endnote-3) These people wanted to enjoy their leisure time in rural places, and Baker believed rural people should “cater to their needs and desires.” Rural communities should provide “a congenial natural environment” in which “mind, body, and spirit” could be rejuvenated.[[4]](#endnote-4) Baker thus tapped into an old dichotomy that positioned cities against the supposedly revitalizing rural environment.

Baker’s boss, USDA Secretary Orville Freeman, also used concern over surplus in the farm economy in his rationale for rural tourism. For Freeman, one of the central agricultural issues facing farmers revolved around overabundance: “American cropland is producing more food and fiber than we can consume, export for dollars, or use effectively in the Food for Peace program.”[[5]](#endnote-5) Like Baker, Freeman also worried about the lack of recreational opportunities for the burgeoning white collar middle class, and argued that the “answer to one can be found in the solution of the other.” Demand for outdoor recreation could be met on privately owned farm and ranch land, and in the process curtail the agricultural surpluses that tanked commodity prices. Thus, Baker and Freeman framed rural tourism as a solution to deep issues plaguing the farm economy. Rural tourist development would not shift resources away from rural America but make better use of them in order to wrench the most productivity from rural land.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The USDA spread these ideas of rural tourist development to farmers in the same way it shared with them the latest techniques in agricultural production: research bulletins. In *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, for example, the USDA cited statistics from the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, created by Congress in 1958 to study trends in recreation and tourism. The commission projected a dramatic upswing in outdoor-related tourist activity. Its report stated that over 130 million people took part in seventeen different outdoor activities and spent close to ten billion dollars. By 2,000, the commission projected that Americans would spend over forty-five billion dollars.[[7]](#endnote-7) To hard-pressed low-income farmers, these numbers might have been particularly appetizing.

The USDA’s bulletin provided specific advice to rural landowners in order to effectively capitalize on these seemingly lucrative tourism trends. Farmers and others needed to appeal above all to urbanites and suburbanites. The USDA portrayed these people as strained by the rat-race of white-collar work, and as alienated from fresh, open rural space. Rural recreation would allow them to escape from “the pressures of crowded city life” and to “relive in some small way” the rural past.[[8]](#endnote-8) Farmers, for example, might turn portions of their farm into a sort of bed and breakfast that would provide visitors with “simple country living,” and an opportunity to partake in outdoor activities characteristic of rural life like hunting and fishing. Moreover, they might even be given the opportunity to harvest crops.[[9]](#endnote-9) They should further work as hard as possible to “keep the natural beauty and character of the rural landscape.”[[10]](#endnote-10) The USDA ultimately encouraged rural people to recreate their landscapes to meet that expectation. These ideas for rural tourist development reflected less the reality of rural life, which could be just as physically and psychologically taxing as urban life, than in a romanticized version of it, and therefore maintained a sharp rural-urban dichotomy.

The USDA put a lot of money behind rural tourism. The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), for example, became a major vehicle for financing rural tourism within the USDA. In 1965 alone, it provided 570 loans to individuals, private associations, and local governments at a total of $20,199,049.[[11]](#endnote-11) The Soil Conservation Service, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, and the Forest Service, all bureaus within the USDA, contributed to the mission of tourist development as well.[[12]](#endnote-12) This ample financing ultimately served as a “carrot” that made the transition from agriculture to tourism easier for cash-strapped farmers.

The Area Redevelopment and Economic Development Administrations, housed in the Department of Commerce, also pushed tourist development as “an alternative for depressed areas.”[[13]](#endnote-13) The Area Redevelopment Administration (ARA), for example, encouraged rural areas to reimagine their resources and landscapes in a new light, particularly in the Appalachian and Ozark Mountain areas. For these places, the things that had previously impeded their economic development, namely “isolation, mountainous terrain, river gorges, and variegated flora and fauna,” should be seen instead as potential stimulants for rural tourist development.[[14]](#endnote-14)

The Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) interest in funding handicraft projects further encouraged the transformation of rurality into a commodity. An EDA-funded study by Charles Counts, the craft consultant for the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts, articulated the reasons why handicrafts should be assisted by the EDA. First, a growing market existed for such products, fueled by middle class tourists. Travelers increasingly wanted to purchase objects unique to the place they visited. Counts believed handicrafts could be particularly marketable because, in a mass production and consumption society, they allowed the affluent consumer to “express his own individuality.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Second, Counts argued that handicrafts could be adapted to a variety of “different circumstances and economic settings.” In other words, no matter the rural area, someone living there probably knew how to make something that reflected the area’s culture and that could be sold to tourists.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Counts, however, understood that the use of handicrafts as a tool for rural development would require certain changes in the behavior of rural people. Counts defined a handicraft product as an “authentic expression” of a “rich cultural heritage” that reflected the “time, the place, the man, and the method by which it was made.” Such characteristics, however, would not be enough. While rural people may have been producing handicrafts for generations, they had not necessarily been selling them to outside markets. Counts believed that EDA-funded handicraft projects must also therefore educate rural people on how to improve their product design and quality, as well as how to market them.[[17]](#endnote-17) Here, Counts’ suggestions were informed by an understanding of rural people that portrayed them as almost pre-capitalist. Their traditional culture supplied them with some skills modern society found useful, but they needed help developing them for a consumer market. EDA assistance, then, would further integrate rural people into the market and teach them market-based skills.

The development programs of the Commerce and Agriculture Departments created an important framework within which rural tourist development would occur. They provided federal assistance to ailing farmers and rural towns that encouraged them to view their surroundings and skills in a different way. Regardless of the particularities of the tourist project, such development positioned the future economic progress of rural towns in relation to the consumer tastes of the burgeoning tourist marketplace. However, the implementation of tourist projects in Missouri, California, and Georgia did not often conform to these broader ideas.

**Attracting Tourists in Southern Missouri**

In Missouri, a major element of postwar rural development policy revolved around helping rural people take advantage of the tourism possibilities created by man-made lakes in the Ozarks. In 1931, the Union Electric Company constructed the Bagnell Dam for the generation of hydroelectric power. The dam’s construction yielded a large reservoir known as the Lake of the Ozarks. In 1951, the Army Corps of Engineers also constructed the Bull Shoals Dam, which created Bull Shoals Lake, and seven years later it finished the Table Rock Dam, which yielded Lake Taneycomo.[[18]](#endnote-18) Taken together, these dam projects laid the groundwork for the Ozark’s transformation into the site of major tourist activity it would become by the end of the century.

These dams signaled a broader rural transformation in southern Missouri. Table Rock, for example, was constructed near the border between Missouri and Arkansas. It created a 43,000-acre reservoir that aimed to help the surrounding area with flood control and power generation.[[19]](#endnote-19) Many farmers who owned rich agricultural land needed by the Corps to construct the dam sold their land immediately while others, who resisted what seemed to them the end of their way of life, fought the Corps in court but eventually lost.[[20]](#endnote-20) Proponents of the dam formed the Table Rock Booster’s Association, and framed their support in terms of development. They chastised farmers as clinging to an old way of life in opposition to progress. For them, the dam benefited the common good, reflected the “changing times,” and served as a “death rattle of a passing age.” They especially wanted the dam because it would bolster recreation prospects for the area.[[21]](#endnote-21) Dam supporters were ultimately on the winning side of history, and its completion reflected the decreasing prominence of traditional rural industries in the Ozarks. It was within this context that the tourism projects of the Commerce and Agriculture Departments took shape in the southern Missouri Ozarks.

Local development experts played an important role in shaping the implementation of local tourist projects. Don Thacker and Wayne Thomas, both born in small town Missouri and educated at the University of Missouri, conducted a series of surveys throughout the Ozarks in 1962 designed to elicit community feelings on a variety of issues. Thomas and Thacker worked for the university’s extension division, which had long provided agricultural advice and other services to local farmers. Thacker and Thomas, however, were part of a new “community development” section of extension linked to the university’s recently created Department of Community Development. As discussed in chapter one, this department played a key role in pushing nonfarm work as a solution to rural decline. Moreover, some of its key faculty developed a vision of rural development that saw it reaching toward the creation of a cluster of small, modern towns that would decentralize and decongest population and industry.

Thacker and Wayne designed the surveys to be useful to local leaders undertaking nonfarm development projects. When asking about Ozark tourism, the men found some support. One resort owner in Reed Springs, a town near Table Rock Dam, believed his home town should “concentrate on becoming a resort town with plenty of tourist attractions… This is Reeds Spring’s chance to grow…or forever stay behind.”[[22]](#endnote-22) For this business owner, tourism meant leaving behind the legacy of the Ozarks as a “backward” rural area. Others, however, saw that Ozark legacy as key to Reed Spring’s tourist development. One resident believed the town could do more to meet tourist expectations and capitalize on “its only asset,” its image as an Ozark Mountain town. This resident told the development agents that the tourist hopes to meet a “sure ‘nuf hillbilly” but often left disappointed because “all the town folks duded-up, hoping they’ll be taken for tourists, rather than natives.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Much like pamphlets created by the USDA or the EDA, rural people engaged with traditional conceptions of rural identity, and thought about ways it could be used to build a tourist economy.

Yet the residents of Reeds Spring who “duded-up” suggested that many resisted the notion of becoming a tourist commodity. Indeed, residents of the Missouri Ozarks gave a variety of reasons for opposing tourism. Thacker and Thomas asked Reed Spring’s residents whether or not they supported remodeling the downtown to make it look as it did in 1880. Only thirty percent supported the idea. One resident stated that the town has to cater to more than just tourists: “We still have the local people to think about – it is not the tourist trade entirely that keeps Reed Spring going.” Another resident agreed, telling Thacker and Thomas that “we need more industry and attractive buildings…we don’t need 1880, we need 1962.”[[24]](#endnote-24) These residents rejected the idea that development should be oriented around serving tourists. Further, they opposed the notion put forth by proponents of rural tourist development that small towns needed to turn to the past and commodify rural stereotypes in order to maintain their communities.

Ozark residents surveyed by Thacker and Thomas not only rejected the social and cultural implications of tourist development but opposed it for economic reasons as well. Many Branson residents surveyed supported “industry or more employment at a living wage” and believed tourism would provide neither.[[25]](#endnote-25) According to one resident, “industrial development would provide steady year-round income…[the] tourist trade is seasonal [and] fluctuates according to the national prosperity.”[[26]](#endnote-26) Another expressed dismay with the seasonality of tourism and the low wages it provides local residents. At the same time, however, this resident did not want to turn the clock back toward the era when small, low-income and marginal farmers populated the region. Instead, this person wanted jobs for southern Missourians that could “increase their purchasing power…[and] give the ambitious younger people a chance to stay here and obtain the standard of living which they can earn in a larger city.”[[27]](#endnote-27) The statements suggested that Ozarkers were not backward-looking rural people clinging to an idyllic past. Instead, they had an economic vision of jobs that could provide steady, high wages that allowed them to stay in their communities. They believed their towns could be both rural and modern.

Despite this opposition, tourist-based projects became important features of nonfarm Ozarks development. In 1959, Thacker and Richard Prewitt, also a rural development agent, developed a deer hunting program for farmers in Taney County that would help them turn farm land into a hunting ground. Thacker and Prewitt picked Taney County because, according to the Missouri Conservation Commission, the “kill,” i.e. the number of deer shot each season, was among the highest in the state.[[28]](#endnote-28) Farmers rented their land to individuals or hunting clubs, and some provided camping or other lodgings. Thacker and Prewitt hoped the program would help farmers boost their yearly income by turning marginal farm land into more productive hunting land. They also believed it would complement the developing resort economy at nearby Table Rock Lake. Deer hunting season fell in the colder fall and winter months when Missourians would not be looking for water-based recreation. Thacker and Prewitt believed the program would stimulate offseason tourist spending by bringing hunters to Taney, while also assisting the county’s farmers who might not otherwise benefit from the tourism.[[29]](#endnote-29)

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the program transformed between 13,000 and 30,000 acres of land, depending on the year. At its height, it turned a space just over twice the size of Manhattan into a deer hunting zone.[[30]](#endnote-30) Farmers typically charged ten to twelve dollars per person, and most farmers participating in the program leased land to anywhere between eight to twenty hunters per season.[[31]](#endnote-31) In 1961, the program expanded to include an experiment in attracting more deer to Taney County. Farmer Clell Smithson offered two, two-acre plots of land as the “demonstration” plot. In cooperation with the local agricultural experiment station and the rural development agents, Smithson plowed, seeded, and fenced his land in an effort to attract more deer and in turn entice more hunters.[[32]](#endnote-32) The experiment, as well as the program, appears to have fizzled out by the following year. It perhaps ended because it could not offer farmers adequate returns for their troubles. At most, farms might make two hundred dollars in a season. Nonetheless, the program reflects the way nonfarm development envisioned a new rural economy and could transform, even if only temporarily, farm land into tourist land.

Thacker found slightly more success in organizing an Ozark handicraft league known as the League of Ozark Mountain Arts and Crafts (LOMAC) in 1959. The group had its origins in the work of Leonard Shelton, who moved to Reeds Spring from Iowa in the 1930s. Shelton enjoyed the Ozark tradition of “whittling,” or turning soft pine into a variety of objects. One day, as Shelton told it, he whittled a small, cup-shaped depression into a block of pine and sold it to a tourist for fifty cents. Realizing he could make money, especially when “the tourists got thick,” Shelton turned the age-old local practice into a money maker. Shelton inspired others in the Missouri Ozarks to begin selling their handicrafts to tourists and they found “excessive demand” for their goods. In 1957, Thacker helped them organize what would become an annual arts and craft show for local artisans to sell their work. The shows were relatively successful so, two years later, they created LOMAC to solidify and build upon their labors.[[33]](#endnote-33)

LOMAC’s organizers hoped to protect the Ozark heritage embodied in local handicrafts. However, wanted to do more than just preserve “old-time native arts and crafts.”[[34]](#endnote-34) One LOMAC supporter wrote that, in the Ozarks, women still “possess the talent and the time for quilting,” and men, “disdaining machines,” still made tables and chairs by hand.[[35]](#endnote-35) An important undercurrent, then, of Ozark handicraft organizing was the preservation of a gender system in which women worked in the home and a man’s masculinity was still grounded in skilled labor. In spite of this gender traditionalism, women dominated LOMAC’s board of directors. By 1962, Ozark women occupied all its staff positions as well as the presidency.[[36]](#endnote-36)

While LOMAC sought to safeguard old traditions, it also commodified them. LOMAC walked the same fine line as promoters of Appalachian culture who sought to preserve, study, and profit from their mountain traditions.[[37]](#endnote-37) LOMAC hoped to “widen the market for artists and craftsmen” and to help them turn “artistic hobbies into a profitable way to make a living.”[[38]](#endnote-38) In other words, LOMAC wanted to integrate people into the marketplace by having them sell things they never before sold. Ozark artisans found this opportunity appealing, and within a year of the group’s founding it grew from 17 to 123 members who paid dues to the group by giving it a percentage of their sales.[[39]](#endnote-39) LOMAC’s leaders created a market for its burgeoning membership by linking them to local festivals that attracted both tourists and Ozark natives. In April 1960, for example, LOMAC set up a handicrafts bazaar at “plumb nelly week” in Branson, a festival that celebrated traditional rural culture. Attendees experienced an “old-fashioned” street auction, contests for hog calling and “biggest bare feet,” and a beauty contest.[[40]](#endnote-40)

LOMAC also established travelling handicraft shows that allowed members to sell their goods to both rural and urban markets throughout the state.[[41]](#endnote-41) These shows displayed a wide range of Ozark handicraft talent, with LOMAC members offering everything from hand-woven baskets, to leather goods, to paintings and pottery. By the mid-1960s, however, evidence of LOMAC handicraft bazaars becomes thin and the group appears to have dissolved. As with the deer hunting program instigated by Thacker and Prewitt, LOMAC struggled to help Ozark artisans sell their goods. At one show, artisans made as little as three dollars.[[42]](#endnote-42) This is not to suggest, however, that LOMAC operated without impact. LOMAC presaged a turn away from mass produced goods and a celebration of handmade crafts that would only grow through the late twentieth century. Locally made goods can still be found at Ozark festivals and in small town gift shops, and other Ozark-based handicraft collectives form in LOMAC’s wake.[[43]](#endnote-43) The ultimate significance of both the deer hunting program and LOMAC is their reflection of a broader tendency to turn traditionally rural experiences and culture into a modern way to make money.

Perhaps the most ambitious tourist-based rural development scheme in Missouri occurred just east of the Ozarks proper in a small farming and mining town on the Mississippi River known as Ste. Genevieve. Founded around 1720, Ste. Genevieve is one of the oldest European settlements west of the Mississippi. Philip Francois Renault, a wealthy Parisian banker who also directed the mining operations of the Royal Company of the Indies, founded the town. Renault arrived in the area because of its extensive mines, particularly rich in lead, and became a pioneer of lead mining in the region. Renault, of course, did not work the mines alone, and he arrived in what would become Ste. Genevieve with twenty miners and around five hundred Caribbean slaves. Further, Renault did not find an empty landscape. A variety of Native American tribes, primarily the Peoria and Kickapoo, but also the Missouri, Osage, Kaskaskia, Shawnee, and Ottawa, populated the region and became important trading partners for the settlers.[[44]](#endnote-44)

Mining dominated Ste. Genevieve’s economy until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when agriculture replaced it as the most important sector. Its position on the Mississippi River and trade with Native Americans also cemented its status as a bustling colonial trade outpost. However, by the mod-nineteenth century, the growth of St. Louis increasingly relegated Ste. Genevieve to a minor trade role and ensured it would remain a small river town.[[45]](#endnote-45) By 1961, the shrinking mining sector and generally poor agriculture resulted in an unemployment rate over eleven percent, well above the national average of 7.5 percent.[[46]](#endnote-46) Local leaders saw few prospects for reviving the local economy. Within this context, they looked to the town’s past as a French colonial, and then American, small rural river town. So-called “heritage tourism” appeared to be the best route out of economic decline, and local leaders put the town’s centuries old housing stock at the center of their efforts.

While the turn toward rural tourism in Ste. Genevieve would begin in earnest in the postwar period, its roots lay in the 1930s. As part of a public works project for unemployed architects funded by the National Park Service, Charles Peterson photographed and indexed Ste. Genevieve’s historic buildings. He discovered many of the town’s oldest structures, particularly those formerly occupied by the rural elite, were still being used. Now, however, the town’s working-class residents lived and conducted business inside of them. Peterson’s work laid the groundwork for future appreciation and preservation of these buildings. In his 1935 speech at Ste. Genevieve’s bicentennial celebration, Mayor Harry J. Patrequin lauded the town’s “quaint atmosphere” and encouraged visitors and townsfolk alike to “turn away from the monotony of the everyday and to make this visit, in the nature of a pilgrimage to a shrine of history.”[[47]](#endnote-47) The language used by Patrequin foreshadowed rhetoric that would be employed in the postwar years by the town’s tourism boosters.

The local chapter of the Colonial Dames of America, a voluntary organization made up of women with familial roots dating to the pre-revolutionary era, made the first effort in home preservation. In 1949, the Dames purchased the home of Louis Bolduc, which had been put up for sale two years earlier in an effort to clear the land for a gas station. Bolduc was not a particularly important French colonial figure, but he was one the wealthiest. Bolduc was involved in lead mining, the merchant trade, and owned slaves who worked his plantation. Over the next decade, the Dames restored the home with the help of architectural and local historians. The restoration work peeled away of years of modern additions, including partitions and floors, and involved the construction of a stockade fence typical of the French colonial era.[[48]](#endnote-48)

The house’s popularity, which opened for visitors in 1958, inspired other wealthy residents of Ste. Genevieve to begin purchasing and restoring historical properties. Bernard and Vion Schram exemplified this pattern. Bernard was a former St. Louis reporter turned “dime-store” novelist, while Vion descended from one of Ste. Genevieve’s oldest and wealthiest French families. During the 1940s, the couple travelled the South Seas. In Tonga, they were “adopted by a tribal family,” while in Australia “they hunted with an aboriginal snake tracker.” The couple’s interest in “traditional” ways of life stayed with them when they returned to Ste. Genevieve in the 1960s. They purchased and restored the home of Jean Baptiste Vallé, the town’s last commandant appointed by Spain in 1804, and a large landowner with major stakes in lead mining and fur trading.[[49]](#endnote-49) The Schrams, Bernard in particular, would go on to be major promoters of historic preservation and heritage tourism in Ste. Genevieve.

Efforts to create a more organized rural tourist economy in Ste. Genevieve began with the creation of a “Tourist Bureau” in the town’s Chamber of Commerce in 1964. The Bureau received a $30,000 research grant from the EDA the following year to study the possibilities of recreating Ste. Genevieve’s rural colonial town to attract tourists.[[50]](#endnote-50) The Bureau contracted the plan’s development to the St. Louis firm Allied Engineers and Architects, which in turn hired Charles Peterson, who documented Ste. Genevieve’s historic buildings in the 1930s.[[51]](#endnote-51) Peterson, along with project manager and economist Lee Carter, crafted the proposal.

The firm’s plan, released in 1966, called for a dramatic reimagining and reconstruction of Ste. Genevieve.[[52]](#endnote-52) Its most ambitious element called for the creation of a “restoration area” in the town’s center in which the roughly twenty historically significant buildings would be located. Most of these buildings had formerly been homes of the planter, merchant, and mining elite. This area would be the center of tourism and provide visitors with an experience of “historical authenticity” and an “authentic street scene” that reflected the town’s rural colonial heritage.[[53]](#endnote-53)

However, attaining authenticity required a lot of work. Many of the buildings identified for their historical importance were outside the proposed restoration area and would therefore need to be relocated. Because the buildings had been more or less in use since their construction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they would also need to undergo substantial remodeling in order to reflect their original historical context. Peterson and Carter also wanted to beautify the town with new landscaping, install gas street lights, move power lines underground, and resurface downtown buildings in an effort to make the town square better resemble its rural past. Finally, the two men envisioned the creation of an open-air market that resembled those of old Ste. Genevieve. The market would sell local produce as well as locally-made handicrafts.[[54]](#endnote-54)

While the plan also aimed to make Ste. Genevieve a more “efficient place for those who live there,” many aspects of it signaled a major disruption in the daily lives of locals. For example, it labelled some buildings within the restoration area “visually distracting” because they did not fit the rural colonial aesthetic and called for their demolition or relocation. Many of these buildings included small businesses owned by residents that played important roles in modern daily life, including hardware stores and auto repair shops. Further, Peterson and Carter called for some streets to be turned into one-way roads, and for those streets to permit horse-drawn carts in an effort to bolster historical authenticity. Ultimately, the Tourist Bureau and the St. Louis contractors they hired imagined a radical reconstruction of the town to meet the needs of tourism. By literally pushing people and their businesses out of the town square, rural tourism boosters put the needs of locals at the periphery. Ste. Genevieve would no longer be a town functioning in the present, but a town that lived in the past for the benefit of tourists.[[55]](#endnote-55)

A narrow understanding of Ste. Genevieve’s colonial history underpinned this plan. Peterson and Carter wrote that, before the arrival of Renault in the 1720s, the area was “essentially uninhabited.” The Mississippian culture met its demise in the mid-Sixteenth Century, leaving the area free for European settlement. Some remained, however, and the French settlers kept “the savages in friendship and alliance.” If the men obscured Native American history, they minimized slavery as well. They called slavery a “jarring note” and wondered what the colony would have been like without those “unfortunate people,” suggesting that the ideal Ste. Genevieve would have been all white. Peterson and Clark ignored the fact that black slaves outnumbered white settlers two to one and played an essential economic role. Slavery aside, they believed life in Ste. Genevieve must have been “very pleasant” and that its people did not strive “for personal gain.”[[56]](#endnote-56) This assumption erased the reason for the town’s founding, to supply France with minerals, and its position in an imperial network of conquest and accumulation.

The EDA replicated this idyllic vision of the town’s history. In its monthly journal *Economic Development*, it described Ste. Genevieve as a place outside of time. Its description of the Ste. Genevieve project stated that the “rapid growth of St. Louis saved Ste. Genevieve from ‘modernization’ and preserved many of the old buildings in the town.”[[57]](#endnote-57) The town’s supposed backwardness was spun into a strength, and its lack of modernity would offer visitors an authentic glimpse into rural life.

Ultimately, the plan hatched by Peterson and Clark, and the EDA’s description of it, reveal a number of tensions. First, their desire to create an “authentic” experience of rural life conflicts with the plan’s need to radically restructure Ste. Genevieve. Peterson and Clark had to “manufacture” the town’s rural authenticity. Further, their authentic version of Ste. Genevieve reflected the position of the wealthy rural elite and ignored the needs of people currently living there. Most importantly, in downplaying the presence of slavery and Native Americans, Ste. Genevieve’s boosters gave up any pretense of “authenticity.” Thus, the work required to make Ste. Genevieve a place for heritage tourism suggested that it was not lost in time and history. The present needed to be replaced to make room for the past.

This grand plan ultimately did not become a reality. Its cost, estimated at $7.3 million and financed by a mixture of federal, state, local, and private sector dollars, exceeded what local leaders considered feasible.[[58]](#endnote-58) The proposal did, however, spur the creation of the Foundation for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve, which promoted preservation and tourism. Its small budget could undertake only limited building restorations, but it did promote the *Jour de Fete*, an annual festival that celebrated the town’s French rural past. The idealization of the town’s history in Peterson and Clark’s plan suffused the festival, which involved tours of old homes, art shows displaying local pieces, and a transformation of the town square that involved businesses displaying “antiques of a bygone era” and townspeople dressing in “costumes of eighteenth century Ste. Genevieve.”[[59]](#endnote-59) Festival goers also participated in “la Guignolee,” a French peasant tradition transported to North America that had young men dig into pieces of cake in search of beans. The man who found his bean first got to take the woman of his choice to the “King’s Ball,” the community dance that capped off the festival.[[60]](#endnote-60)

Perhaps just as important to the plan’s demise was indifference or hostility on the part of many Ste. Genevieve residents. Peterson and Clark’s plan, for example, only promised to create, at best, twenty-five jobs by the late 1960s.[[61]](#endnote-61) Such a dramatic plan that created so few jobs did not stir sufficient local interest. The editor of the local newspaper stated that many questioned the economic benefits of heritage tourism, and claimed that it only benefitted certain businesses and homeowners.[[62]](#endnote-62) Schram, who became president of the Foundation, stated that locals rarely participated in preservation efforts, and that the group had to “look for outside angels to pull our bacon out of the fire.”[[63]](#endnote-63) The townspeople’s response to the *Jour de Fete* also indicated ambivalence about historical preservation. TheFoundation nearly called off the festival in 1969 because of public indifference and did so in 1975 when townspeople used the occasion to not celebrate the town’s past, but to drink in public.[[64]](#endnote-64)

This attempt to revive Ste. Genevieve by returning to a manufactured past reveals important limitations within rural tourism as a development strategy. Its projected job creation would hardly deal with the structural economic decline of rural areas like Ste. Genevieve. It also illuminates tensions surrounding the rural past and rural identity. In order to revive the rural economy, tourism at best mobilized and propagated a narrow vision of the past. This largely incorrect view of the area’s rural history, one whose use did not support the people of Ste. Genevieve, could not provide a stable foundation for the rural future.

**Damming Rural California**

While tourism projects in Missouri operated on a relatively small scale, not all did. In Siskiyou County, California, which borders Oregon, tourist development efforts centered on the construction of a large dam, recreational lake, and camping facilities known as Box Canyon Dam. The construction of the dam on the Sacramento River in Siskiyou both reflected and helped enact a larger shift in the rural economy of northern California away from extractive industries and toward the service sector. By the early 1970s, a study of Siskiyou’s labor market noted that tourism made up one of the top three industries in the county.[[65]](#endnote-65) Rural northern California would be prized less for its timber and mining resources, and more for its capacity to supply tourists with rural experiences.

Siskiyou made up part of the “Northern Interior” of California, which includes all the counties north of Sacramento and east of the coast. This area stood out in a rapidly urbanizing state. It was California’s least inhabited area, with an average density of ten people per square mile, and held only two percent of the population.[[66]](#endnote-66) Within the Northern Interior, Siskiyou was one of the least populated counties, with a population of 31,500 in 1956.[[67]](#endnote-67) Weed, its largest city at the time, had a population of 3,223.[[68]](#endnote-68) While the county lacked in people, it made up for it with its national and state forests, as well as mountainous terrain.

The Economic Development Administration encouraged rural California counties like Siskiyou to take advantage of these natural features. Indeed, a major push for tourist development within Siskiyou County and the Northern Interior more broadly came from the federal government. One EDA funded study on “trends and investment opportunities” in California tourism urged the state’s towns to take advantage of the burgeoning tourist economy. In 1966 alone, the study reported that fourteen million out-of-state visitors spent over two billion dollars, while in-state travelers spent 250 million dollars on one day trips. The report projected that both figures would continue to grow throughout the 1970s.[[69]](#endnote-69) The report framed the Northern Interior counties as well-suited to take advantage of this recreational tourist boom.

While the EDA supplied tantalizing figures and offered federal support, developments at the local and state level also cleared the way for tourism. Efforts to create a statewide water plan in the 1950s provided one major boost. Known as the California State Water Plan, policymakers wanted to build a network of dams and water agencies that could better control, distribute, and conserve the water supply. Policymakers particularly wanted to distribute water from northern counties to the south, especially the southern and western portions of the San Joaquin Valley. The Burns-Porter Act, which would fund this plan with the issuance of $1.75 billion in general obligation bonds, became the vehicle for this plan. The strongest support emerged from the San Joaquin Valley and most of southern California. In contrast, northern counties heavily opposed the bill, but were ultimately outvoted and the bill passed in 1959. In 1960, legislators added the Davis-Grunsky amendment to the act, which allowed in part for state water project funds to be expended on recreational dams and reservoirs.[[70]](#endnote-70) This amendment opened the way for public financing of the Box Canyon Dam.

Though many northern Californians opposed the water plan, Box Canyon proved quite popular among northern state legislators. Randolph Collier and Pauline Davis played a particularly important role in shepherding the project. Collier represented rural Siskiyou County in the state senate from 1938 to 1976. Elected as a Republican, he switched party allegiances in 1959 and ran as a Democrat for his remaining years in office. Collier supported large state infrastructure projects, reflected best in his co-authorship of the 1947 Collier-Burns Act, which funded freeway construction in the 1950s and 1960s.[[71]](#endnote-71) Davis, also a Democrat, represented all or part of twelve northern rural counties in the state assembly from 1952 until 1976. Her actions there earned her the nickname “Lady of the Lakes” for her strong support for the construction of recreational lakes in her district. As co-author of the Davis-Grunsky amendment, she not only secured funds for recreational reservoirs, but also for rest stops along California’s freeways to provide services for those traveling to lightly settled parts of the state.[[72]](#endnote-72) State-funded projects, boosted by public-works minded liberals, thus laid the groundwork for Siskiyou tourism.

Local political elites in the Box Canyon area also all supported and endorsed the project. The local governments in Siskiyou, including Mt. Shasta, Yreka, and Dunsmuir, the three major towns in the county, supported the project for its potential ability to reverse the county’s economic troubles.[[73]](#endnote-73) The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors similarly endorsed the project as well.[[74]](#endnote-74) Members of the Siskiyou County business community also threw their weight behind the project. Chambers of Commerce in Weed, Scott Valley, Dunsmuir, and Mt. Shasta passed resolutions in favor of the dam.[[75]](#endnote-75) Sportsmen’s groups including the Siskiyou Consolidated Sportsmen and the Dunsmuir Rod and Gun Club, as well as the local International Woodworkers of America, supported the Box dam.[[76]](#endnote-76)

Not all sportsmen supported the dam, however, and some joined California’s growing environmental movement to oppose it. D.J. Bressi, chairman of the California Fly Fishing Unlimited Conservation Committee, believed the dam would do “long range damage” and destroy “one of the few remaining unspoiled streams.”[[77]](#endnote-77) California’s Sierra Club also opposed the dam’s construction. Club member Bryce Whitmore feared the dam would destroy “one of the most beautiful river areas in the state.”[[78]](#endnote-78) More than just a concern for the natural beauty of rural northern California informed the Club’s opposition. An element of fiscal conservatism surfaced as well. Sierra Club member Bill Siri, for example, called the project a “not very subtle raid on our public funds.”[[79]](#endnote-79) Whitmore agreed, and believed it was “immoral for the state or federal government to be financing such ‘recreation areas.’”[[80]](#endnote-80) Whitmore also seems to have been concerned that the Box Canyon project would affect his livelihood. Whitmore, along with his wife Mary, owned a river tour company that frequently operated on the Sacramento River.[[81]](#endnote-81) Ultimately, opposition to the dam did little to thwart its construction. The opposition was not well organized and did not, or could not, expend much effort to oppose the dam.

Moreover, Siskiyou County faced a serious economic crisis resulting from changes to its rural economy that bolstered the efforts of the dam’s supporters. From the entrance of California into the union in 1850 to the middle of the twentieth century, mining, timber, railroads, and, to a lesser extent, agriculture, comprised the Northern Interior’s economy. By the mid-1960s, the amount of harvestable timber in the region declined as a result of decades of intensive lumbering, which “left many areas unproductive.”[[82]](#endnote-82) Tennant, a Siskiyou County timber town had 1,500 families at its early twentieth century peak. By the 1950s, however, one description called it a “ghost town” as a result of the timber industry’s demise. The mining economy, too, faced similarly steep declines.[[83]](#endnote-83) Finally, before the 1950s, many found employment working for Southern Pacific as locomotive mechanics. The railroad scaled back operations dramatically in the area in the 1950s, resulting in huge job losses.[[84]](#endnote-84) In Dunsmuir, a small town in Siskiyou, railroad employment dropped from 1,258 in 1950, to twenty-five in 1964.[[85]](#endnote-85)

Tourism appeared as an enticing solution to these problems. While opponents of the dam saw in it threats to fishing, fiscal responsibility, and personal financial well-being, the dam’s supporters above all saw it as a way to bring jobs to a severely depressed rural county. Collier called Siskiyou “urgently in need” of new jobs that he believed Box Canyon could provide.[[86]](#endnote-86) While Siskiyou’s traditional rural industries declined, he argued that its “mountainous and attractive country” could meet the “rapidly increasing demand” for tourist sites.[[87]](#endnote-87) Collier also pointed to the threat that the declining economy might have on Siskiyou County’s valuation and argued that recreational development would bolster its finances.[[88]](#endnote-88) A feasibility study by the California Water Resources Board argued that “the money brought into the area by the thousands of visitors to the project area would give this portion of Northern California the ‘shot in the arm’ it so vitally needs.”[[89]](#endnote-89) Estimates of how big that shot would be varied. Collier predicted that the project might create 152 new jobs.[[90]](#endnote-90) William Warne, director of the Water Resources Board, was more optimistic, and believed the project would create 250 new jobs in the area, and boost retail sales by over five million dollars a year.[[91]](#endnote-91)

Much like Missouri’s tourism projects, embracing Box Canyon and the potential infusion of tourism jobs involved a reevaluation of Siskiyou’s rural environs and economy. The EDA, for example, envisioned Siskiyou as part of a network of rural “vacation growth centers.” These centers would contain a nucleus of facilities organized around, for example, a dam and reservoir that could provide “comfortable accommodations” in rural areas.[[92]](#endnote-92) The study maintained that the formation of vacation growth centers would “establish new travel and vacation habits” that would bring urban and suburban Californians to rural areas with more regularity. Each vacation center would have a complex of cabins and a general store from which daily necessities could be purchased, as well as the types of items needed for hiking, swimming, boating, and fishing. The study ultimately reflected a reassessment of the economic benefits of the natural environment in rural California. The elements that made Siskiyou a potentially profitable tourist center were outdoor activities frequently associated with rural life. Rural landscapes would be valued less for extractive purposes and more for their ability to provide tourist experiences.

Collier thought about Siskiyou County and the Box Canyon Dam in similar terms. Collier saw the declines and transformations in Siskiyou’s traditional industries as permanent and believed it would need to reorient itself toward a new economy. According to Collier, the “answer is recreational development.”[[93]](#endnote-93) Indeed, the state senator imagined the touristic possibilities of the dam as a way to complement nearby recreational projects and create a full-time tourist economy in Siskiyou. In particular, Box Canyon would supplement the ski resort at Mount Shasta completed in 1958. Much like Box Canyon, Collier played a critical role in guiding this project to completion. Collier helped secure state highway funds to improve road access to the project, and then served as president of the Ski Bowl Corporation, the private entity that operated the resort.[[94]](#endnote-94) Collier claimed that visitors to the ski resort boosted the surrounding towns and that creating a dam at Box Canyon would open up “year ‘round” recreation and tourist possibilities.[[95]](#endnote-95) Visitors could ski in the winter and swim, camp, and fish in the summer.

While the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors planned the dam project, state and federal dollars funded the project’s entire cost. Figures hovered initially around $7 million, but the final price totaled $9.1 million (about $70 million in 2019).[[96]](#endnote-96) Collier pointed out frankly that “local money is not available to build the [dam]” and that it would need to rely especially on federal and state sources.[[97]](#endnote-97) Collier and Davis lobbied hard within the state legislature to secure additional state funds. As a result of their efforts, they secured about $4.5 million in Davis-Grunsky funds.[[98]](#endnote-98) For federal funding, supporters initially turned to the ARA. In 1963, Collier and Michael Hennessey, the attorney for Siskiyou County’s board of supervisors, crafted an application for Siskiyou County that requested a grant of just under $1 million dollars from the ARA.[[99]](#endnote-99) Because the ARA expired before dam construction began, the county turned toward the EDA, which ultimately contributed $4.6 million to the project.[[100]](#endnote-100)

It is worth commenting on the relative ease of acquiring land for the project, particularly because it contrasts so sharply with the experience of Georgia discussed below. The reservoir and dam area occupied over 2,200 acres of forested and mountainous land. About forty acres of the project fell within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and the county received a federal permit to operate in the park. Similarly, the county leased a portion of land owned by the city of Mt. Shasta.[[101]](#endnote-101) The county purchased the rest of the project’s land from private owners using federal and state funds. Most of the purchases appear to have gone smoothly, though one state report on the project noted that some land speculation had occurred since the project was announced.[[102]](#endnote-102) This speculation perhaps accounts for some of the increases in the project’s total cost. The county also had to bring one landowner to court to acquire their land, but this lawsuit ultimately did not hinder the project’s implementation.[[103]](#endnote-103)

Upon the completion of construction in 1969, the Box Canyon Dam received generally positive reviews in the press. Siskiyou County leased the concession rights to a private firm called Shipstads Land and Recreation Corporation, which paid the county ten percent of earnings.[[104]](#endnote-104) The firm constructed a main park area containing 245 campsites, a 180 seat amphitheater, 50 picnic sites, an 8 acre beach, and a marina with 20 boat spaces.[[105]](#endnote-105) Donald Culpepper, writing for the Long Beach *Independent*, described the area surrounding the lake in picturesque terms, praised the modern facilities, and noted the ease with which he caught fish in the “crystal blue water.”[[106]](#endnote-106) For Culpepper, the rural beauty contrasted sharply with the urban grit of Los Angeles, and he told his readers the region would “drive you out of your smog-filled head.”[[107]](#endnote-107) Culpepper’s article therefore neatly captured the sensation that promoters of rural tourism hoped to create. Visiting a rural area would provide tourists with a distinctly “rural” experience that could rejuvenate their urban bodies and minds. Moreover, the concessions Culpepper so enjoyed highlighted the public-private character of postwar nonfarm development. While public funds wholly financed the project, a private business operated its attractions.

Yet the ideal landscapes described by Culpepper ultimately did not attract as many visitors as originally hoped.[[108]](#endnote-108) By 1970, for example, estimates suggested that the dam would receive as many as 100,000 “visitor days,” while the real number only reached 59,000. Between 1970 and 1973, the average overnight usage of the 245 campsites was only thirty four percent. Most of those visitors came from the Bay Area and Sacramento. Some blamed the problem on the 1970s fuel shortages, which made the trip’s costs more burdensome.[[109]](#endnote-109) While supporters of rural tourism in Siskiyou might see its detachment from urban life as a major draw, the remoteness of Siskiyou County proved too much for the average tourist.

If the lake did not attract as many tourists as originally hoped, its construction seems to have spurred land and home sales around the project. By the early 1970s, advertisements began to appear in newspapers from California’s metropolitan areas, particularly Los Angeles and San Francisco. Classifieds advertised land in “beautiful Mt. Shasta” with “gentle rolling land, forested steams,” while others noted the “spectacular valleys and mountain views.”[[110]](#endnote-110) Much like the tourist project that made land in Siskiyou more appealing, these advertisements put the rural environment at their center.

A new “rural” subdivision also attempted to take advantage of the Box Canyon project. The new development, known as Mt. Shasta Forest, would be on land owned by a major California landowner and developer named S.V. Hunsaker with design assistance from Albert Rosen and Donald Plehn of Dynasonics Corps. Hunsaker and Dynasonics had worked together on a previous housing project in Kern County, California called Quail Mountain. Located in the Tehachapi Mountains, the land had formerly been used as a cattle ranch until Hunsaker bought the land for housing development. Though the project would replace the ranch, Rosen stressed that the rural character of the area would remain intact, telling one newspaper reporter that the project would preserve the atmosphere of a working cattle ranch.”[[111]](#endnote-111) Each lot would be at least 2.5 acres, for example, in order to allow for “ample room to roam and play.”[[112]](#endnote-112) The Quail project thus echoed many of the features of rural tourist development more generally: the homes replaced a formerly functional rural industry with an “experience” of rural life. This project, though never aspiring to be part of an urban environment, further reflected the use of western imagery in the development and incorporation of the San Fernando Valley into Los Angeles.[[113]](#endnote-113)

Similar principles undergirded the Mt. Shasta Forest development. Hunsaker began promoting the project in 1967, in the middle of Box Canyon’s construction. In a San Francisco *Examiner* advertisement announcing the project, Hunsaker called the project a “private preserve” that would contain no industry or commercial establishments, only a “spread of lovely land.” This land was, in Hunsaker’s words, “back-to-nature.”[[114]](#endnote-114) According to Plehn, one of the project’s assets was not just the beauty of the land, but the proximity to Siskiyou’s tourist and recreation developments, including the Ski Bowl and Box Canyon reservoir. By 1970, around six hundred 2.5-acre plots had been sold and developed for single-family homes in the project.[[115]](#endnote-115) Like Quail Mountain, Mt. Shasta Forest’s advertisements reflected the use of stereotypically rural imagery by nonfarm tourist projects in order to spur new development.

Despite the lack of early success with Box Canyon, Siskiyou County grew dependent upon the tourist trade it generated, evidenced perhaps best by the calamitous flood that struck the county in 1991. In July of that year, a Southern Pacific train derailed at a nearby bridge, and spilled 19,000 gallons of herbicide, much of which seeped into the water. A “toxic plume” hung in the air, pushing visitors out with its scent of “rotten eggs and sulfur.”[[116]](#endnote-116) The pesticide killed off hundreds of thousands of fish, as well as much of the plant life surrounding the water.[[117]](#endnote-117) Around 700 people fell ill as well, with some experiencing nosebleeds, miscarriages, and the peeling away of their skin.[[118]](#endnote-118) Joe Kimsey, a local bait shop owner, called the people claiming sickness “goddamned hippies. If you were to check the welfare records, and the people who say they’re sick, you’d see it’s the same ones.”[[119]](#endnote-119) Joe Fisher, the president of Dunsmuir’s Chamber of Commerce, agreed, stating that claims of illness came from “a whole lot of unemployed people and people on welfare who are ‘sick’ and looking for a settlement.” Area resident Jim Youngblood believed that local business and civic elites downplayed health problems because they did not want to “hurt the image” of the county and undermine its tourist trade.[[120]](#endnote-120)

Concerns about the tourist economy proved real. The spill decimated the tourist economy that had developed around Box Canyon Dam. One resident told reporters that “a lot of us make our living because of tourism…what else are we going to do?”[[121]](#endnote-121) Ron McCloud, a hardware store owner, said tourism was “the only thing going for us,” and that after the crash he had not “sold a fishing rod.”[[122]](#endnote-122) While business owners like McCloud received a settlement from Southern Pacific to cover lost revenues, many still sought to revive the moribund tourist trade. McCloud gathered 600 signatures on a petition to restock the lake immediately, and the Dunsmuir Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution calling for a similar revival of the local fishery.[[123]](#endnote-123) The California Department of Fish and Game, however, wanted to let the area recover more naturally, with a deliberately planned reintroduction of fish.[[124]](#endnote-124) Iy December 1993, Fish and Game relented to the demands of the business community, and agreed to stock a portion of the river by the dam with hatchery fish by the spring of 1994 so that “Dunsmuir’s beleaguered business community” would have “something to lure vacationing families after three years of empty restaurants and vacant motel rooms.”[[125]](#endnote-125)

Box Canyon Dam and Lake Siskiyou embodied the main features of tourism as a rural development strategy. Recreational tourism appeared to county and state officials as a way to combat the economic decline experienced in Siskiyou as timber, railroad, and farming jobs disappeared. Yet tourism offered a new way, however inadequate, to earn a living from the land: selling a “rural experience” in the wooded, mountainous terrain of northern California. Lake Siskiyou promised an opportunity for urban and suburban travelers to partake in outdoor, rural activities. However, much like the tourist projects in Missouri, Lake Siskiyou did not live up to its promises of providing a new economic base.

**From Swamp to Lake in Rural Georgia**

While the construction of Box Canyon Dam in Siskiyou County unfolded more or less according to plan, proponents of rural development and dam construction in Alma, Bacon County did not fare as well. This section continues the examination of rural development in Alma from the previous chapter, and focuses on the fight over the construction of a dam and recreational lake between the late 1960s and the 1980s. A close examination of this project, known as the Lake Alma project, in southeast Georgia is instructive for a couple reasons.[[126]](#endnote-126) Lake Alma revealed a conflict over what the rural meant, and what rural recreational tourism would look like. Further, it exposes tensions within the political structure of rural development. Its adherence to federalism allowed some measure of local input, but it also created room for conflicts within and between the various levels of authority. The introduction of the Environmental Protection Agency, backed by an ascendant environmental movement, exacerbated these tensions and thwarted efforts to turn Alma into a tourist destination.

The Alma-Bacon County Model Cities Commission, created in 1967 by the city of Alma, was composed of local officials and businessmen who oversaw the planning of rural development projects in Alma. While the commission targeted infrastructure, housing, and manufacturing as key elements in Alma’s revival, tourism served as another significant plank in the group’s development agenda. The proposed Lake Alma formed the center of those plans. Local demand for a recreational lake dated back to the mid-1950s.[[127]](#endnote-127) The lake’s design called for the damming of Hurricane Creek, a swamp just east of Alma, with a twenty-eight-foot-tall dam built from about 412,000 cubic yards of earthen material.[[128]](#endnote-128) The completed project would yield a recreational reservoir roughly seven miles long filled with over 1,400 acres of water.[[129]](#endnote-129)

L.W. Taylor, the manager of Bacon county’s electric co-op and the director of the commission, believed the Lake Alma project had several virtues. Taylor first of all believed the environment surrounding the lake was “uniquely suitable” for a recreational lake.[[130]](#endnote-130) Moreover, the project would fill what he believed was a dearth of outdoor recreation and tourism in the region. Taylor believed the U.S. was increasingly becoming a “playing, sporting, relaxing country,” but that the Alma area did not have the facilities to take advantage of the tourism boom.[[131]](#endnote-131) Lake Alma would fill the void and, in doing so, contribute to Alma’s broader development goals. Taylor argued that the lake would not only serve a regional tourist market, but help Alma attract industry as well. Taylor argued that the “industrialist” is concerned about quality of life for “himself, his family, [and] his employees,” and that such a lake would set Alma apart from other small rural towns.[[132]](#endnote-132) Taylor’s analysis thus reflected a particular prescription for the rural future: rural habitats, in this case a swamp, could be transformed into regional tourist destination. In doing so, Alma would be integrated economically and socially into an increasingly affluent, leisurely society.

While interest in Lake Alma dated to the 1950s, lack of funds stalled any movement on the project for over a decade. With the infusion of federal funds into Alma in the late 1960s, many in the community finally believed the lake would get built. In 1969, with money from HUD’s Open Spaces program, which provided grants to cities for the purchase of land for future development, Alma began the process of land acquisition in the area surrounding Hurricane Creek[[133]](#endnote-133) In 1971, HUD released additional funds to conduct a feasibility study for the Lake Alma project. When the study determined the project’s feasibility, HUD provided more money to begin preliminary engineering work at the site to prepare for the dam construction, and a grant of $290,000 to purchase more land. This grant covered half of the cost of land purchasing, with the made up from local funds.[[134]](#endnote-134)

Support for the Lake Alma project remained relatively high throughout most of its history. Local, county, and state government officials supported the project, as did the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers, and a major portion of Alma and Bacon County residents.[[135]](#endnote-135) Many supporters stressed the project’s economic benefits. Alma Mayor Tessell D. Mullis argued it would greatly increase economic activity in Bacon County and operate with a sort of multiplier effect on the area’s service economy.[[136]](#endnote-136) Liston Elkins, a city council member in the neighboring town of Waycross, thought the project would turn southeast Georgia into a “destination area for tourism.”[[137]](#endnote-137) Supporters also stressed the project’s environmental soundness. Leon Kirkland, the director of the Game and Fish Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, argued the project’s land was of “very marginal quality for environmental purposes.”[[138]](#endnote-138) Others saw Hurricane Creek as a “dinky, unattractive stream that smells bad in the summer, breeds mosquitos and cottonmouths, and is useless as a recreational asset.”[[139]](#endnote-139) Thus, proponents of Lake Alma believed that transforming a seemingly marginal, unpleasant swamp into a recreational attraction would act as an economic boon to the region without sacrificing either the beauty of health of the land.

Despite the wide-ranging project’s support, a powerful opposition emerged in 1973 that put Lake Alma in a sort of purgatory from which it would never escape. Organized opposition arose in response to the Bacon County Board of Commissioners’ decision to condemn 2,522 acres of land owned by thirteen Alma residents who resisted selling their property for the lake.[[140]](#endnote-140) In order to be eligible for HUD funding, the town needed to have the “signed options” of the thirty eight landowners whose property made up significant portions of the project by June 30, 1973. As the date neared, only twenty-five landowners had signed. HUD extended the deadline into September to give Alma more time to reach agreements with landowners. Supporters of the project worried that it would be undermined by recalcitrant landowners, and they pressured the commission to use its right of eminent domain to secure the land. By the end of August, the commissioners decided to condemn the remaining acres of land “under heavy pressure” from residents.[[141]](#endnote-141) A month later, a group of Alma landowners formed the Hurricane Creek Protective Society and filed a suit against Bacon County, Alma, and HUD to stop the project.[[142]](#endnote-142) This suit would be the first of many that plagued the project and prevented it from coming to fruition.

At the center of the opposition stood Delano Deen. Deen worked as a professor of chemistry at South Georgia College, located in nearby Douglas.[[143]](#endnote-143) Aside from the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, of which he served as president, Deen worked with the Georgia Wildlife Federation, the state-level chapter of the National Wildlife Federation. Deen’s family had been landowners in Alma for decades, and when Deen’s father passed away he inherited that land, which had been used primarily for the cultivation of tobacco.[[144]](#endnote-144) Deen had built his home overlooking Hurricane Creek, a home that he and his brother built using timber from the surrounding forest. The county commissioners ultimately condemned over a third of Deen’s land, that which most closely abutted Hurricane Creek, for eight four dollars an acre.[[145]](#endnote-145)

Deen’s opposition to the project reflected his family’s long history of farming in rural Georgia, from which a particular understanding of rurality arose. Deen evoked the rhythms of farm life that oscillated between hard work and enjoyment of simple pleasures when he wrote to his cousin Floyd that it was “only a short time ago” that the two worked the tobacco fields, “thumped” watermelons, and ate homemade ice cream together. Deen continued with this theme when he wrote of his father’s love of fishing in the swampy creek after he finished with the farm’s “necessary chores.” The swamp provided his father a quiet refuge that helped to “lighten the load especially in times of frustration.” Deen’s own excursions into the swamp taught him to “love its mystery.” Although now a chemistry professor and not a farmer, Deen saw farming and an almost primordial appreciation for nature as linked. The development of Hurricane Creek would sunder that relationship and way of life.

Deen also opposed the project on environmental and economic grounds. He believed the Lake Alma project would destroy both the habitat for much of the area’s wildlife as well as the wetlands necessary for the filtering of waste created by Alma and surrounding farms.[[146]](#endnote-146) Deen also questioned whether the project would truly benefit all of Alma and the surrounding area, as the Model Cities Commission claimed. Deen saw the project as “welfare for the rich,” and its primary beneficiaries would be “landowners and businessmen, and those financially well off enough for water skiing and golf.” The area’s poor would receive little in the way of well-paying jobs. Indeed, Deen believed the project would “accentuate race and class disparities in access to amenities.”[[147]](#endnote-147) Deen argued that the project would not “stop outmigration of people, bring in industry, or cause Alma to flourish,” and often pointed to similar projects in rural towns that failed to stimulate the broader economy.[[148]](#endnote-148) Deen therefore challenged the very basis of postwar development and its vision of a new rural economy.

In fact, this mixture of environmental advocacy and skepticism of federal spending echoed throughout much of the opposition’s rhetoric. Some, like Zell Miller, Georgia’s Democratic lieutenant governor, took a populist approach. Miller questioned the need to spend $3 million of taxpayer money for some “rich folks who want to build homes around that lake to waterski.”[[149]](#endnote-149) At a fish fry organized by Delano Deen, Miller told the audience he opposed the lake because it would “make a few wealthy individual folks richer” by constructing a “wasteful and destructive dam.”[[150]](#endnote-150) William McCarthy, an economics PhD from the University of Georgia and collaborator with Deen at the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, ditched Miller’s populism for small government conservatism. McCarthy considered himself a “born again convert to the free market process” and believed the lake would give “our environment…a medical mastectomy” and called the project a “free lunch.” Alton Cauley, a resident of Bacon County, believed that “we should be “improving the environment instead of trying to destroy it,” and questioned the efficacy of federal spending in creating jobs.[[151]](#endnote-151) Thus, Lake Alma knit together an unlikely mix of rural romanticizers, populists, environmentalists, and free market proselytizers.

Despite the skepticism of federal activity evidenced by many of Lake Alma’s opponents, the EPA and the requirement that all federally funded projects undertake an environmental impact statement (EIS) proved to be their strongest weapons. The first lawsuit launched by Deen and the other landowners affected by the eminent domain decision ended out of court in 1974 with an agreement between the city of Alma and the plaintiffs that the former would conduct an EIS for the project. Alma’s city council voted unanimously to spend $85,000 to hire a Louisiana-based consulting firm named Gulf Research Institute.[[152]](#endnote-152) Completed in 1976, the EIS found that the project would result in some “temporary displacement and elimination” of wildlife, but that overall it would improve water quality and increase the diversity of habitats. Moreover, the project would stimulate “increased economic development,” though only six to ten full time jobs would be created.[[153]](#endnote-153) The EIS ultimately supported the pro-lake contingent more than its opponents, but its job creation estimates undermined their more hopeful projections.

Nonetheless, after reviewing the 1976 report, the EPA advised HUD that funds not be released for Lake Alma. Barbara Blum, the EPA’s deputy director, saw the project as “unsatisfactory from a standpoint of environmental quality.”[[154]](#endnote-154) Following the announcement by the EPA, the Department of the Interior came out against the project on environmental grounds as well, and HUD ultimately assented to the opinions expressed by both departments and decided to withhold funds.[[155]](#endnote-155) HUD’s decision deeply upset local supporters of the project in Alma and Bacon County. Mayor Mullis called HUD’s decision “unjustified” and told a reporter that “we find our local government controlled by the bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.”[[156]](#endnote-156) In response, in September 1977 Alma and Bacon County launched a lawsuit against HUD to force it to reverse its decision. Mayor Mullis commented on the lawsuit, stating that “when HUD in Washington has made up its mind, you just have to go to court to get them to listen to you.”[[157]](#endnote-157)

Shortly after filing the suit, the city dropped it when both sides reached an agreement that Alma would apply for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers under section 404 of the Clean Water Act.[[158]](#endnote-158) This particular provision regulated the discharge of earthen material into wetlands areas for the creation of dams and set in motion a series of public hearings on the project. In Alma, 600 people attended a hearing that stretched from 7pm to 2:30 am, with 90% registering support for it. In response to the outpouring of public support, HUD agreed to release the funds if the Corps approved the section 404 permit.[[159]](#endnote-159) Then, in early 1978, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Interior Department also said it would support Lake Alma if the local government agreed to create several “green tree reservoirs” in the project area covering just under 200 acres. These reservoirs were supposed to mitigate the displacement of wildlife caused by the creation of the dam by providing new sources of food and shelter.[[160]](#endnote-160)

Both Alma and the Corps agreed to the reservoir plan, and the Corps issued the permit in August 1980.[[161]](#endnote-161) Delano Deen decried the plan as woefully insufficient and maintained that at least 7,500 acres of new habitat would need to be created, not 200, to mitigate the project’s effects. While the Corps oversaw the 404-permitting process, the Clean Water Act vested the EPA with final veto authority, which it had yet to use. Shortly after the Corps issued the permit, EPA administrator Eckhard Beck came out against the decision, but did not issue a formal veto.[[162]](#endnote-162) The project sat in bureaucratic limbo for another year until the new EPA administrator appointed by Ronald Reagan, Anne Gorsuch, issued a statement in October 1981 that supported the Corps’ decision to issue the 404 permit as long as Alma implemented the reservoir plan, and stated that the Lake Alma project “conforms with federal environmental standards.”[[163]](#endnote-163) While Gorsuch’s decision appeared to finally clear the way for the project to begin, it set off another decade of litigation that would finally kill the project.

Partnered with the National Wildlife Federation and the Georgia Wildlife Federation, Deen and the Hurricane Creek Protective Society sued the Corps, HUD, and Alma and Bacon County in 1982 in the U.S. District Court for Southern Georgia in a final attempt to block the project. Most importantly, Deen and the plaintiffs argued that the inclusion of the reservoir plan into the broader Lake Alma project so altered the project that a new EIS would need to be completed. Further, because the reservoirs would themselves alter the environment, they required their own, separate EIS investigations.[[164]](#endnote-164) The Georgia court disagreed with the plaintiffs, who then appealed to the Eleventh District Court in 1983.[[165]](#endnote-165) The appeal was successful, and the Corps and Alma began working on an updated EIS, which was released in 1987. The new EIS defended the project on environmental grounds by arguing that the reservoirs would effectively mitigate destruction to wildlife habitats, and on economic grounds by arguing the lake would fill a recreation and tourist need in the area and stimulate further economic development.[[166]](#endnote-166)

Unsurprisingly, the National and Georgia Wildlife Federations, along with Deen and the Hurricane Creek Protective Society, vigorously criticized the new EIS. So, too, did the EPA, which reversed Gorsuch’s stance on the project. The groups reiterated their previous critiques of the project, and focused on its economic and environmental consequences.[[167]](#endnote-167) In September 1988, the EPA issued its “final determination,” which forthrightly vetoed the issuance of funds and permits to build the lake.[[168]](#endnote-168) Shortly thereafter, HUD informed Alma that it would no longer be releasing funds for the construction of Lake Alma.[[169]](#endnote-169) Following this development, Alma and Bacon County sued the EPA in the District Court for Southern Georgia, and asked the court to overrule the EPA’s final determination.[[170]](#endnote-170) The court upheld the EPA’s decision in 1990, and the city of Alma never appealed, effectively ending the project to turn Hurricane Creek into a tourist destination for Alma and Bacon County. In 1992, the state of Georgia passed a law that allowed counties to sell land back to landowners who lost their property as a result of condemnation and eminent domain. Over the next few years, Bacon County quietly sold back the over 2,000 acres it had originally condemned for the purposes of the project in 1973.[[171]](#endnote-171)

Tourism as a means of rural development and job creation ultimately left a mixed record. At its most successful, as in the case of Box Canyon, jobs were created, but not nearly enough to make up for the much larger structural shifts that left rural areas economically depressed to begin with. Further, tourist development put forth a vision of the rural that encouraged rural places and people to reorient their economy toward serving the needs of suburban and urban people. Rural tourist development put rural people and places in a subservient position. This subservience was built in part upon a highly idealized understanding of the rural past. As we have seen, though, this vision of rural development often did not sit well with many of the non-civic and business leaders in rural towns, who either resisted with their indifference toward tourist projects or fought back with their own vision of what rural development might look like. Nonetheless, the idea of tourist development that emerged in the postwar years as a solution to rural decline lives on, as any visitor to a small town with a refurbished business district can attest.

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