

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1078

By Watson

A RESOLUTION to recognize the history of Caney Creek Village.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to recognize the unique history of this State and its communities; and

WHEREAS, Caney Creek Village serves as a testament to the progressive history of the this State's industrial past, having served the people of East Tennessee as a beacon of modernism in the early twentieth century; and

WHEREAS, Caney Creek Village's modern amenities included electricity, indoor plumbing, and running water; the town also had a one-room school house, a two-story hotel, concrete sidewalks, a tennis court, and a train engine; and

WHEREAS, in 1912, the village was established in Polk County, resting against the steep mountains along the south side of the Ocoee River, by the Tennessee Power Company to house the employees that worked on the second of the three Ocoee dam projects; and

WHEREAS, the first Ocoee dam, which created Tennessee's first artificial lake, is still operational today and is the oldest dam in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) system; the second Ocoee dam and its flume line, which may be the only operational flume of its size in America, and powerhouses still produce electricity; the final Ocoee project, dam three, also remains in operation; and

WHEREAS, from 1912-1943 Caney Creek Village thrived, attracting people from the surrounding areas who would travel either by water or by foot to visit the modern town; and

WHEREAS, the Watson Family, along with many other families, cultivated a storied history in the Ocoee area, in which Caney Creek Village played an indelible part; and

WHEREAS, William (Bill) Wheeler Watson, born March 27, 1879, and Bertie Ellen Cross, born February 3, 1906, were joined in holy matrimony on April 12, 1921, at Caney Creek Village by the railroad tracks with Reverend Daniel Hall ordaining; and

WHEREAS, over the next seventeen years, the couple, along with their seven children, a number that would grow to thirteen in the years to come, made regular trips traveling around the mountain and up the river from their home in Sylco, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, every trip to Caney Creek Village was memorable for the family members who made the voyage; Lane "Wad" Watson, born to Bill and Bertie Watson on October 23, 1932, remembers the family trips to the town fondly; he recalls his parents taking items along with them to trade or barter in the village for other necessities; and

WHEREAS, among Wad's favorite attractions in the modern town that was nothing like his home, were the trolley and the swinging bridge, which he would not cross without his mother by his side; and

WHEREAS, life in the village was starkly different from that of residents in surrounding areas; it was literally as different as night and day, as Caney Creek was one of only a very few towns in East Tennessee that had electricity; and

WHEREAS, families that did not live in a town with electricity used oil lamps when oil was available or made "pine torches" by placing a cured piece of pine in a metal bucket and lighting it, which provided just enough light to navigate through the house; and

WHEREAS, Caney Creek Village was recognized in *Ripley's Believe It or Not* as one of the only towns in America to never have a vehicle; residents had to park off of what is now named Highway 64 and cross the 150-foot suspension bridge into the village; and

WHEREAS, the village was closed when TVA took over in the 1940s, and the residents were forced to move out of the town and into the surrounding neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, on November 29, 1942, William Watson died as a result of an accident when a bridge collapsed over Sylco Creek near the Watson home place; two and one-half months later on February 10, 1943, the thirteenth of the couple's children was born; and

WHEREAS, Richard Clark Watson, the last of Bill and Bertie Watson's children, shares his memory of Caney Creek Village's influence on his family with his son, Representative Eric Watson; and

WHEREAS, through the retelling of our histories and taking pride in our roots, we pass along our stories and maintain our memories of places and times gone by; and

WHEREAS, the Watson family homestead and thousands of acres adjoining it and the Sylco cemetery, sometimes referred to as the Beckler or Watson Cemetery, where Bill and Bertie Watson's son, Henry, was laid to rest, are now owned by the U.S. Forest Service; and

WHEREAS, Billy Ray Watson's tribute to his beloved parents highlights the unique town's importance to local residents of that time: "From Caney Creek to Cookson Creek and all the water in between, they overcame great strife and lived their lives, symbolic as a king and queen"; and

WHEREAS, Caney Creek Village no longer exists as a town but is still alive in the minds of those individuals who experienced Caney Creek Village in its heyday; all that remains of the village that flourished in the early twentieth century are the cement foundations of the houses; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge the unique history of Caney Creek Village and the bountiful legacy it left behind; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize Caney Creek Village as an asset to Tennessee's heritage and as one of this State's great historical treasures.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.