

Dry Fork Social Club

A social center and dance hall was built along the creek on the M.H. Ferguson property, and it attracted not only Dry Fork residents, but black people from Bluefield, Tazewell, and from as far away as Pennsylvania. The Rocky Gap and Wolf Creek areas were already becoming popular with the people of Bluefield as a place to have a summer cottage, and many summer camps were springing up fueled by the coal boom. Every social, religious, and racial group seemed to have a place to gather away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Many places along the creeks had free access, while at some spots, small fees had to be paid to landowners. Still other picnic areas were reserved by specific groups. The Jewish people of Bluefield had their swimming hole along Wolf Creek near Hicksville. Locally it was known as the Jew Hole. The prosperous and scenic community of Upper Dry Fork became a center for the black population of the area. Mary Little remembers, as a little girl, traveling from New Jersey to Dry Fork to spend her summers.



“This nice, this big swimming pool, and they had ---it was a big building then, they had a restaurant, sort of in there. And there was picnic tables and stuff out there. People would come over here in the summer time and have, you know, picnics and stuff. And it was nice, a place to go hang out, the kids, and, you know, grown ups, who uh, wanted to go down there. And they had a juke box down there. And people would come over here all during the summer every day. On weekends some churches and stuff come over here for picnics. And it was just a fun place to be. Especially when you grew up in the city and you couldn’t do nothing, you know. It was just a fun place to be and spend the summer.”



There was a large concrete swimming pool, approximately sixty feet long and twenty feet wide and six feet deep. It was filled with the cold waters of Dry Fork. There was also a dance hall, grill, vacation cabins, and camp sites. The black population of the coal fields was growing and becoming prosperous. Dry Fork was a holiday destination. It also was a place where illegal moonshine could be gotten and this was part of the attraction, especially in the 1930’s. It was a family resort during the day, but by night it would occasionally become rowdy. Nate Charleton remembers, “Man, that place would be full. “ It had different owners over the years. Toward the end one man was making whiskey right by the road until he got caught. Benny Lockhart remembers the resort in its last years.

“Where you go up to Mr. Addair's they had a summer resort there. They had a big swimming pool, and all that stuff there you know. Well they just a bunch of em go there, sometime bout all the time. Had a few old shacks around there, four or five old buses they'd stay in, You know dance and ...Well, it was, it had a good smooth floor in it, but it was very cheap put up. Just made out of, old Doc Brown put it up. And he was a doctorin on the hospital and stuff there in Bluefield St. Mary's. And he just tore down a bunch of old houses over there that the city, give him. Brought em over here and built the dance hall, and built around two little old rooms out t'ere. And called it the Swimmin Hole. They had a nice big swimmin pool. Just had the creek dammed up ere. But they didn't have the creek dammed up they had it over this way toward the road, swimmin pool and piped the water in off that man Ferguson's. Great big pipe run the water in. See you wasn't allowed to dam a creek up.”

There were not many places in the South where black people could get together to relax and socialize. On a small scale it was a real resort for blacks in the region. Many blacks from the Mudfork section of Tazewell County first came to Dry Fork in this way. Several couples met here and eventually married. Children could swim and get a hamburger at the grill. Families had small cabins they would stay in during the summer and on week-ends. There was jukebox music to dance by. Eventually the dance hall burned down. Pal Saunders built another one on up Dry Fork Creek, but it fell off its pilings one night, and that was the last effort at keeping it alive. Benny Lockhart remembers the night they literally brought the house down.



“They had one up there along in bout 60's. Went up on the hill in next to what they called Sheep holler and built it. They just set up some poles, didn't plant em in the ground or nothin [illegible] I'd say the building was probably 12 by 20, maybe 24 foot long. Just put it up out of old what I call hog pen lumber. Put rough siding on it, and uh.. . they had two jukeboxes up er, and they had a few Saturday night dances. But one Saturday night they got a invited a whole big bunch from everywhere, colored people in there and they all got to getting in there dancing and a whoopin and a hollerin and having a big time. And it fell. Pole come right down in the road”

The ambulance came by and Doc Hagy hollered at Benny to come with him and help. Benny remembers lots of skinned limbs and bruises, but no one was seriously injured. Exactly when the swimming pool stopped being used is not known, but it still intact and it holds some water. The property has changed hands. The subject of the black resort needs to be further studied. Fortunately the two authors of this study have just been awarded a grant from the Virginia Foundation of the Humanities to do this research over the next year.