

# Hickman County Times

Monday, March 16, 2009

## Lick Creek preserved in volume

What binds the communities of Little Lot, Primm Springs, Fort Cooper, Leatherwood, even Shady Grove together? Not just their long and self-reliant histories, it would seem.

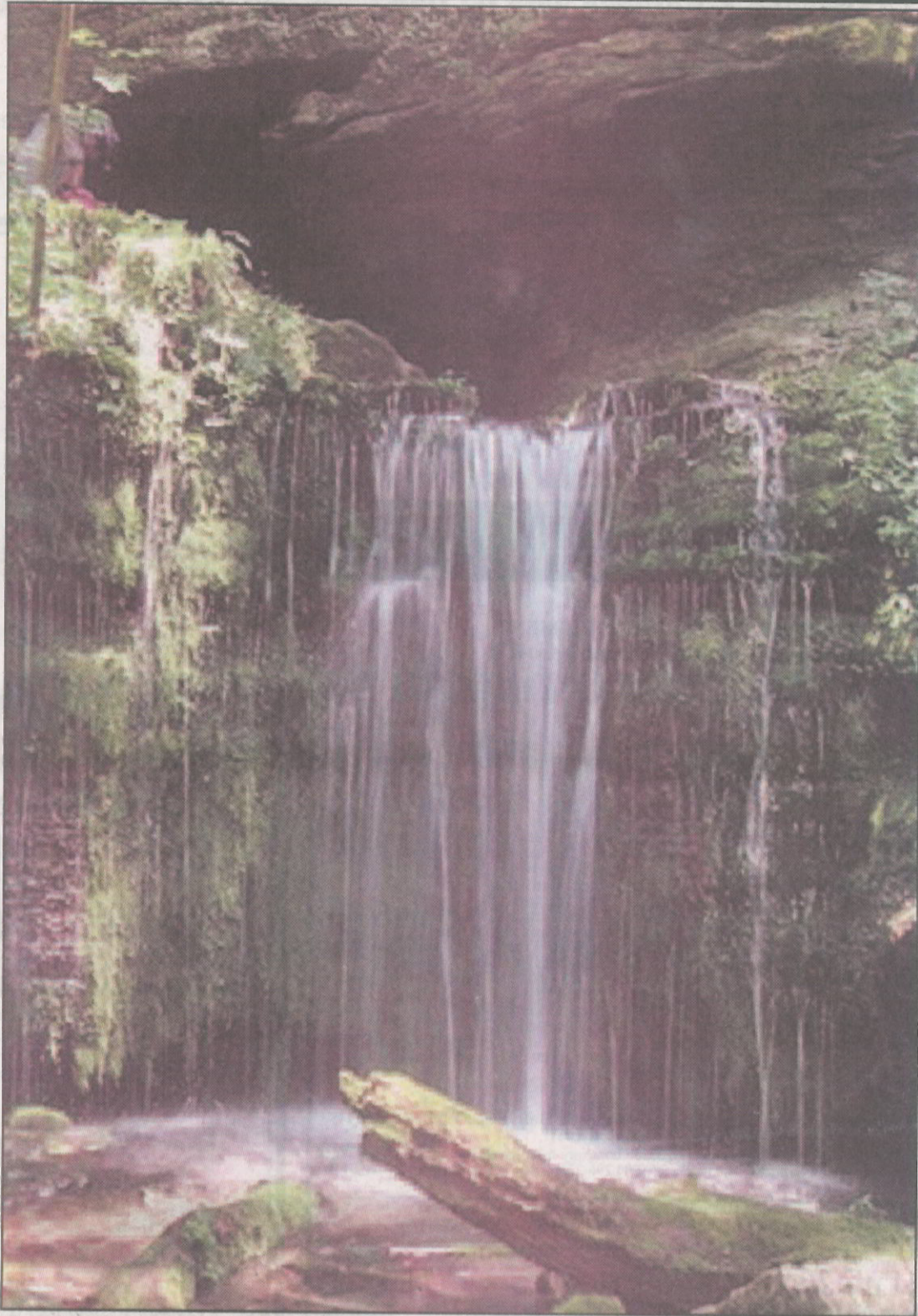
"True Tennessee: Natural and Cultural Resources of the Lick Creek Valley" explains that the eastern portion of Hickman County and a western portion of Williamson County was settled two centuries ago by folks who traveled by the only available road in the region — Natchez Trace — and stopped in these parts because of the water and the beauty.

What has followed is the development of a set of communities that depended not upon Centerville or Columbia or Nashville, but on themselves and each other, and the land.

"In contrast to European and early New England towns where farmers clustered houses in a central village surrounded by farm fields, people here arranged the land around the individual landowner whose house was situated apart from his neighbors, often in the middle of his fields and away from public roads," according to the study.

"On the practical side it offered privacy, self-sufficiency and formed the most elemental unit of Tennessee's predominantly agricultural economy. Philosophically, Lick Creek's small farms reinforced the long-standing national ideal championed by Thomas Jefferson and others of the independent farmer and a model of civic virtue."

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Panther Cave and falls.

Photo courtesy of LEE HUNTER

# Lick Creek valley

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In 88 full-color pages, the Land Trust for Tennessee publication makes the case that the overwhelmingly rural area has a variety of, in some cases, untouched resources that are worthy not only of maintaining, but also taking active steps to preserve.

"This book is really to establish a platform so that the Land Trust or anybody that cares about conservation can talk intelligently about planning — so that rural values are protected," said Doug Rodman, the director of the project and a forester for the Land Trust.

In the Lick Creek Valley's case, the watershed for that stream includes Panther Cave and Leatherwood Creek, among others; the Primm Springs Resort and the John Gordon House; the Greenbrier, White Oak and Little Rock Mills communities of Williamson County; as well as the Natchez Trace, moonshining, religion and the country store.

"It's pretty amazing that there are so many large farms, churches — that the land hasn't been divided much yet," says Rodman, whose research included interviews with several residents — Wesley Primm and brothers Bill and Jim McEwen among them — whose families have lived in the area for scores of years.

Of course, the Land Trust has found success here as advocates of permanent land preservation, and True Tennessee — like Duck River Highlands before it, two years ago — can be seen as another thrust in that direction.

A welcome thrust, Rodman says, because the new publication was funded entirely by those who live in the Lick Creek Valley or support its heritage. Without them, the multifaceted collection of its attributes likely would not have taken place, he said.

"If we don't help the people to understand what the possibilities are — we're not trying to measure our success by the number of acres preserved, Rodman said. "We're trying to help people understand why this area was

unique and worth conserving."

It's worthy of note that while Hickman County was established in 1807, it was in 1801-02 that the Natchez Trace opened, and that it was 1805-06 Capt. Gordon put in his Duck River ferry. The Trace, along with Piney River, provided the easiest access into Hickman County, until the arrival of autos and highways in the early 20th Century.

Residents in the Lick Creek area were not blessed with plentiful farmland — but the many springs and creeks allowed water-powered mills to be established that ran cotton gins, saws, grist and carding operations, along with grain and tobacco mills.

"In the Lick Creek Valley," the report notes, "every hamlet and hollow had its own grist mill, church, school, store and post office. People did not have to travel far to get what they needed."

One exception was Primm Springs, the resort that offered mineral baths, cooling springs, fine meals and a dance floor that drew city folks to the country from the mid-1830s to 1965 — and was a source of jobs in the area.

Another spotlight belongs to the moonshining industry, which may have provided one-fourth of the total income of working Hickman County residents in the 1930s, according to a 1934 TVA study. With ample water, the Lick Creek Valley was home to several stills.

The book includes an interview with Wesley Primm of Tatum Creek, who reports that in the 1940s he could make 75 cents a day working on a farm — but \$10 to \$15 a day making moonshine.

"It was all over the county; this was back in the time of the war, and before the war," he said. I got on the hill over here and I could see seven outfits runnin' at once. I tell ya, back in them Hoover days, it was rough; if it hadn't been for whiskey, a lot of people in Hickman County would've suffered."

True Tennessee is the second



Outside the old Shady Grove store.

Photo courtesy of JANET ROBERTS

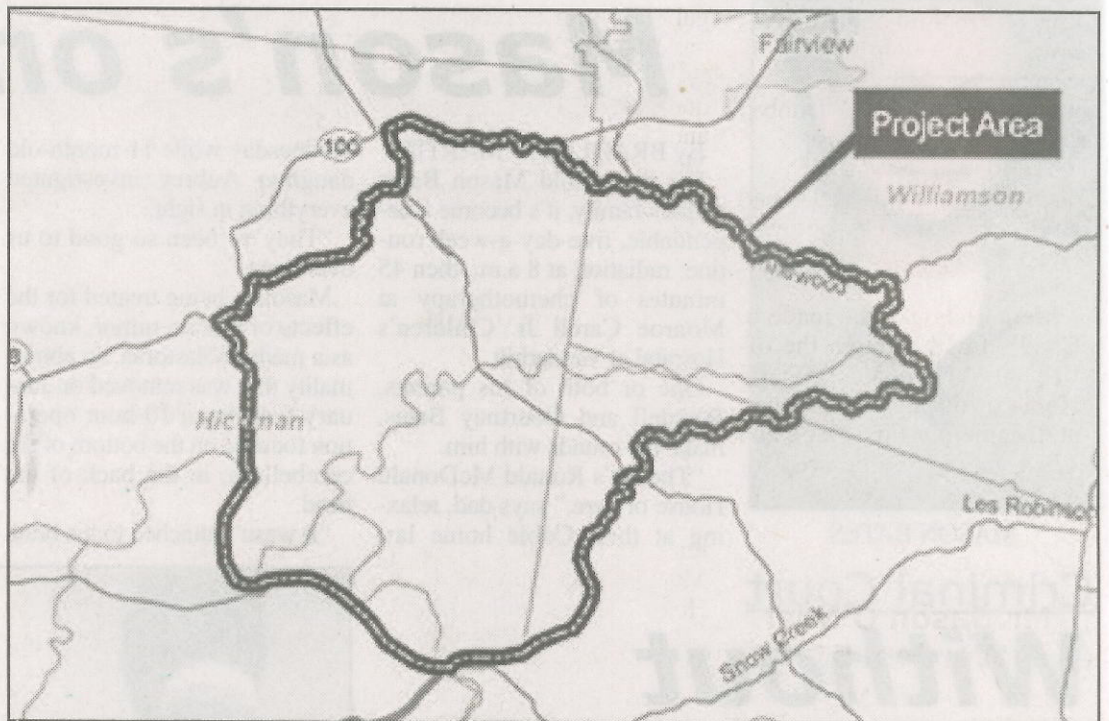
## Book is donated to libraries

“True Tennessee: natural and Cultural Resources of the Lick Creek Valley” is available for \$20 per copy through the Land Trust for Tennessee by calling 615-244-5263.

The book has been placed for review in both branches of the Hickman County Public Library System.

An excerpt may be available at [landtrusttn.org](http://landtrusttn.org).

Project manager Doug Rodman says a planned meeting to discuss the findings of the book, perhaps including a slide show, is being planned for the Little Lot Community on a date to be set, with as many as two more to be planned.



Lick Creek runs through the center of the project area

Map courtesy of THE LAND TRUST FOR TENNESSEE

Land Trust publication to deal with eastern Hickman County; two years ago, the nonprofit agency published Duck River Highlands.

Rodman says the Lick Creek study will be followed up this spring with a series of as many as three public meetings for folks in the area. The goal is to share the book as well as to determine what, if any, steps landowners may want to take to protect — or, in the case of de-

velopment, be prepared to protect — their communities.

In Maury County, he said, folks have developed a conservation district, working with the county government, “where they didn’t want commercial and multifamily development.” Encouraging the county to permanently maintain the A-1 Agricultural-forestry district designation may be worthwhile.

Historic goals also are available, including designation of ar-

chas on the National Register of Historic Places and seeking through the state an ecological inventory of the region. Promotion of tourism also might be worthwhile, as may be exploration of the conservation easement process. All of it, Rodman says is aimed at helping preserve

a historic set of resources.

“It’s kind of a hidden treasure almost,” he says, “I think because the roads are curvy and you could get lost back there — it’s off the beaten path.”

“It’s a story that can resonate in other parts of the state,” he says.