

A View from Lillydale Campground

By Darren Shell

The peaceful little island on the point of Lillydale Campground is as serene as anyplace on Dale Hollow. Campers from all over the country drag their tents and equipment out onto the island and enjoy the comforting sights of 360 degrees of lake surface views. Almost always, there is a light breeze to cool the hot summer temps on this tiny peninsula/island in the middle of Dale Hollow. It has been a beloved place for many campers over the years...and for many others in many different walks of life as well. I thought I might share a 360 degree history of this wonderful little point in the campground. This story is for all of you who find this place inviting...enchanted...even homey. Let's take a look around.

If we had just pitched our tent on the northern most section of this point, we would easily be able to see both far upstream and downstream of the Obey River. We would also be gazing across the lake to Trooper Island and the mouth of the Wolf River. In fact, in the late 1800s, the Lillydale community was known as Mouth of Wolf. But thanks to an aspiring young teacher and a couple of spirited young ladies by the name of Lily Gilliam and Sally Dale, this warm community renamed itself for these two gals. Their inseparable friendship gained them a collective name...Lily Dale. And because of this community's love of these young ladies, the name Lillydale finally hit the maps.

Now that you know how this place was named, let's look deeper. Picture this point with no water other than the juncture of these two rivers. Everywhere you look would be pasture land...miles of it. This long and winding valley was rich with farm fields stretching along its watery banks. It's hard to imagine this point before the lake. It just looks like it's always been this wonderful. But nonetheless, this quaint community existed long before our billions of gallons of water rested here. For instance, to your far right would be the giant Hwy 53 Bridge, stretching across the Obey. It was completed just before the Corps was forced to demolish it during the creation of the lake. Its huge pillars still cast eerie shadows in the murky depths of Dale Hollow. And even farther beyond that, was a steamboat landing. Really! Captain Armstrong kept a landing here for the steamboat trade that managed to navigate the shallow waters of the Obey, far upstream from the busy Cumberland River. This spot was as far as any steam ship would dare to travel. Many other boats navigated it, but the waters became much shallower beyond here.

The Lillydale Post Office operated just to the right of the two islands directly in front of us. Its mossy foundation often reaches the surface in the fall when the water drops its level. Much of the Phillips family were mail carriers for years.

Let's now look straight forward toward the rock bluff. There was once a shallow and rocky place in the river here known as the Gamewell Ford. It is said that this is

where this lake's namesake perished. Mr. William Dale (Dale Hollow) drowned at this location (mile marker 16 of the Obey), losing his life to the river he loved.

Behind us is TN Hwy 53, meandering its way from Willow Grove to Lillydale and then beyond to Byrdstown (via Star Point). Hwy 53 was the largest and best-paved road in the area. Portions of its chip-and-sealed surface still reside beneath the Corps sign on the Jouett Creek point. The foundation to the old Harrison School is there as well...plus over one hundred moved cemetery graves. Those sunken holes still line the shore there in row after row.

But before I leave you and move on to some other historical tale wedged deep within my mind, I want to tell you about the people that loved this spot before us. I want to tell you of who has called this place home...long before we tourists graced these shores. This very spot has housed many special folk. Let's start with the earliest.

The Native American Indian used this point for centuries. The juncture of these two rivers was a natural life source for the Indians. Fish and many other animals used this section of river, thus drawing the Indians to this ideal home spot. Artifacts washing ashore here have proven their existence. They, too, loved this spot.

There are other artifacts ashore here, too. The Hatcher family called this place home for many years. Bricks and blocks from their house still reside where the Corps knocked them down. They are piled on the northern-most point, facing old Lillydale just as they have for decades. Those artifacts are interesting, but there are yet other tell-tale signs of the Hatcher family here, also. There are two special trees.

The trees I am talking about are rarely noticed. There are two that stand side by side just behind the pile of home rubble. They are Cypress trees. Dale Hollow has no natural Cypress trees. What few live on our shores have been planted here by early inhabitants. These two trees were special. They were planted for a reason. They were planted for shade...shade for four Hatcher family members laid to rest. Four unknown graves were moved from here in 1942. Another 26 were moved from one hundred yards farther south. Although none had headstones with markings, it is known that most of these souls were Hatchers. I can see why they might have wanted to be buried here. It must have been beautiful in its day. But those souls are gone now. And so are their graves. They were moved to higher ground, and we lake lovers now occupy their land. Those two trees still reside here, and I mention them now as a testimony to those who came before us. I mention all of this in respect to what existed before this lake came along.

Although, when I sit on this shore and look out over this lovely body of water and view the waves splashing its shores, I still feel some of old Lillydale all around me. I hear steamboats tooting their horns. I still see horse-drawn plows being pulled along the river. I smell the fires burning in the hearth of the old church down by the river...or maybe its just marshmallows roasting on campfires in the campground. I don't care...it's

one and the same for me...old and new swirling together in the Lillydale current. And this spot...this placid old home place... is a wonderful place to be.

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