

**THE ROLES OF REUBEN B. ROBERTSON, SR. AND CHAMPION FIBRE COMPANY  
IN THE FIGHT OVER THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK<sup>1</sup>**

By Peter Thomson Robertson © 2022  
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This is an excerpt from a book I am writing about the three Reuben Buck Robertsons – Reuben B. Robertson, Sr., Reuben B. Robertson, Jr., and Reuben B. Robertson, III. They were, respectively, my grandfather, my father and my eldest brother. This piece focuses on the roles of Reuben Robertson, Sr. and the Champion Fibre Company of Canton, North Carolina in the fight over the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.



Reuben B. Robertson, Sr.

**INTRODUCTION**

***Reuben B. Robertson, Sr.*** Reuben Robertson, Sr. was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1878, the son of Charles Dumbreck Robertson and Cynthia Buck Robertson. After graduating from Yale University in 1900, Reuben obtained a law degree from the University of Cincinnati. He immediately began practicing law in his father's firm.

In 1905, Reuben married Hope Thomson, the daughter of Peter G. Thomson who had in 1894 founded what had become a very successful paper making company in Hamilton, Ohio, known as the Champion Coated Paper Company. Around the time of Reuben and Hope's marriage, Peter Thomson had decided he needed a steady source of pulp and timber to feed the paper company in Hamilton. He settled on the area in western North Carolina for this new venture in the then-small town of Canton and began acquiring timberlands in the area. Ultimately, Thomson acquired approximately 100,000 acres in the surrounding mountains. Thomson established a new company in 1906 to build and operate the pulp mill, the Champion Fibre Company. Thomson faced problems

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to Gerald Ledford of Etowah, North Carolina, a co-author of a series of books about logging in the North Carolina Great Smoky Mountains National Park ("If Rails Could Talk . . ."), for providing me with copies of Reuben Robertson correspondence and Champion documents relating to the fight over the establishment of the Park.

in acquiring rights of way for the logging operations and in the construction of the new pulp mill in Canton. He asked his son-in-law Reuben Robertson to go to western North Carolina in 1907 for 60 days to resolve these problems.

Reuben took his wife and one-year old daughter and settled in the Canton area. He never left western North Carolina and ended up working for the Champion companies for the rest of his career. Over the years, Reuben rose from the position of general manager of the Champion Fibre Company<sup>2</sup> to ultimately being elected as president of Champion Papers in 1946. Reuben Senior stepped down from that active management position in 1950 and was elected to the chairmanship of the Board. Reuben's son Reuben, Jr. took over the position of president in 1950.

***Champion Becomes a Large and Successful Operation.*** By the 1920s, Champion Fibre Company had become a major industrial operation in the region and was widely characterized as having the largest pulp mill in the United States. The company was also the largest owner of timberlands in the region, with nearly 100,000 acres in the mountains of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. Champion had been engaged in a program of continuous expansion of the mill since it started operations in 1908. In 1920, the company announced that it would construct a large finishing mill to make book paper in Canton, which would substantially increase employment at the mill. The mill already employed 1,800 people.

While the new addition was being constructed, the company announced that it had received a huge contract from the federal government to print seven million pounds of postal card board for printing post cards. The contract would result in the production of 600 million post cards. In an article about an increase of the capital stock of Champion Fibre Co., Peter Thomson was characterized as being "the postal card king of America." "Champion Fiber [sic] Capital Stock Made \$2,000,000," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 22, 1924.

The one hiccup in the mill's growing and successful operation was a strike in 1924. After a period of tension, Reuben Robertson, then the mill's general manager, brought the strike to a successful conclusion, and the efforts to unionize the Canton mill operations were stalled until the 1960s. Following his skillful handling of the strike, Reuben was promoted to the presidency of Champion Fibre Company.

## **THE FIGHT OVER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK**

This piece does not purport to be a comprehensive or definitive retelling of the story of the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. That job has already been done superbly in two books about the issue, "Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains" by Carlos Campbell and "The Great Smokies: From Natural

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1930s, Champion Fibre Company was merged with Champion Coated Paper Company to form Champion Paper & Fibre Company, which became known as Champion Papers. Ultimately, after a series of acquisitions and mergers, Champion Papers evolved into Champion International until it was sold to International Paper in 2000.

Habitat to National Park” by Daniel Pierce. Rather, this focuses more narrowly on the roles of Reuben B. Robertson and Champion Fibre Company in the fight over the creation of the Park.

***The Movement for the Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.*** In the mid-1920s, the movement for the establishment of a national park in the southern Appalachians was restarted after years of quiescence and quickly began to pick up steam. Following up on the efforts of private groups in each state, North Carolina and Tennessee established commissions to push for the national park, North Carolina in 1924 and Tennessee in 1927. The North Carolina General Assembly showed it was serious about the effort when, in 1927, it appropriated \$2 million in bonds for timberland acquisition.

In Tennessee, supporters of a national park formed the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association in 1923. Colonel David Chapman, a Knoxville owner of a wholesale drug company, joined the effort that year. Chapman had served in the Spanish-American War and was selected by Tennessee’s Governor to reorganize the East Tennessee National Guard during World War I. Chapman later became Chair of the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association and became the leading advocate in the state for the establishment of a Park. The state of Tennessee formally joined the effort to create a park with the passage of legislation in 1927 to appropriate \$1,500,000 to buy lands for the park. The legislation also established a seven-member Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission, with Col. Chapman named as its chair.

Over the years, Colonel Chapman and Reuben Robertson would become sometimes bitter opponents over the creation of the Park. Although the issue became heated in North Carolina, Robertson maintained friendly relations with the members of the North Carolina Park Commission and the other advocates for the Park in his home state. Undoubtedly, both sides in North Carolina recognized the importance of the Champion Fibre Company mill in Canton for the financial health of the region, and even the state.

In my view, Robertson viewed Colonel. Chapman as a grandstander, someone who was always seeking publicity for himself and not just looking for a fair resolution of the issue. In particular, Robertson intensely disliked the fact that sometimes the details of their supposedly private discussions were leaked to the press. When the issue of the acquisition of Champion’s timberlands was finally resolved in 1931, Robertson had high praise for the members of the North Carolina commission and nothing to say about the Tennessee commission members.

***Federal Government Action Establishing the Park Parameters.*** In January 1924, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work created a special committee – the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee – to look into the creation of a national park in the southern Appalachians. The Committee presented its report to Congress in December 1924, identifying the Great Smokies as a possibility for the establishment of a national park.

Pressed by the congressional delegations from North Carolina, Tennessee and

Virginia and the North Carolina and Tennessee Park advocates, Congress enacted legislation in February 1925 providing for the Secretary of the Interior to determine the borders of two national parks, one in the Smoky Mountains and the other in the Shenandoah mountains in Virginia and to receive offers of land and donations for the proposed parks. The legislation also authorized the Secretary to appoint a five-member commission (the Southern Appalachian National Park Commission, taking over from the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee that Secretary Work had established) to undertake an investigation of the possible Park boundaries. While the bill did not formally establish the parks, it was a clear signal that the dream of a national park in the Smokies would likely become a reality.

Secretary Work transmitted a report to Congress in April 1926 on two potential national parks as recommended by the Southern Appalachian National Park Commission – one in Virginia and another in North Carolina and Tennessee. After the House had approved a bill that included the recommended North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia sites, along with Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys took it up. On the second day of the Committee's consideration, the only significant opposition to the bill occurred when the Chairman read a telegram from Champion in which "the company emphasized the hardship that a national park in the Smokies would place on the company if it lost its primary source of timber, which 'can not be replaced.'" The telegram continued, "We do not oppose the park in principle, but feel a location could and should have been selected which would not have involved such serious industrial interference nor such tremendous costs of acquisition." Daniel S. Pierce, "The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park," p. 109.

The Committee proceeded to vote the bill out favorably over Champion's objections. The legislation also provided that federal development of the park was not to begin until the states of North Carolina and Tennessee had purchased 427,000 acres and presented the land to the federal government. The bill was approved by both houses of Congress on May 14th, and President Coolidge signed the Great Smoky Mountains National Park legislation into law on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

***The Champion Timberlands in the Proposed Great Smoky Mountains National Park.***

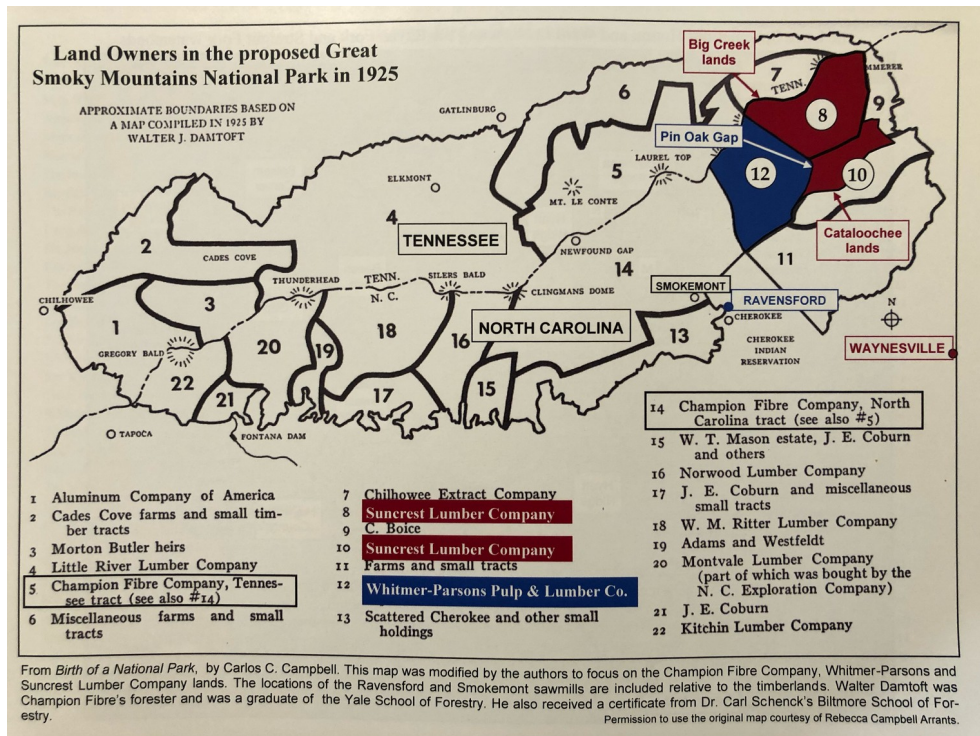
Champion Fibre Company owned 92,814 acres in the areas of North Carolina and Tennessee that were proposed to be included in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. According to Daniel Pierce in his book about the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park,

The Champion Fibre Company held the largest and most important of these properties [targeted for inclusion in the Park]. . . [T]he property contained what Park Service officials reported as 'the largest body of primitive hardwood timber and the heaviest stand of red spruce yet remaining in eastern America.'

"The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park", pp. 137-138 [quoting from a National Park press release of April 29, 1931].

Carlos Campbell had the following assessment of the importance of the Champion timberlands for the Park in his book: “This constitutes by far the largest tract in the park, but equally important is the fact that it is the very heart of the park, including all or part of the several highest peaks of the Smokies and the nation’s finest stands of virgin red spruce and virgin mixed hardwoods.” “Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains,” p. 80. Clearly, the acquisition of the Champion timberlands were absolutely essential for the establishment of the Park.

The map below shows the area of the proposed park, with the Champion holdings located in area numbers 5 and 14. The map is taken from “If Rails Could Talk . . . . Logging in the North Carolina Great Smokies – Vol. 5, Ravensford and Smokemont,” p. ix, by Gerald Ledford and Ronald Sullivan.



Champion lands ran approximately 18 miles along the North Carolina-Tennessee border.

***Champion Leads the Opposition to the Creation of Park.*** In 1925, Reuben Robertson began publicly opposing the creation of the Park on behalf of Champion and became the public face of the opposition. In a series of full-page ads placed in the Asheville, Charlotte, and Raleigh, North Carolina and the Knoxville, Tennessee newspapers in November and December 1925, the company, over Robertson’s signature, advocated for the establishment of a national forest rather than a national park, which would have allowed Champion and logging companies to continue to cut timber in those areas. The ads reminded readers that the company had 2,000 employees and 40 stockholders in western North Carolina, and that the livelihoods of the employees were threatened. As part of its argument in the ads, Champion said:

The acquisition for Park purposes of the virgin timber area of the Smoky Mountains involves problems that are difficult of solution because of the fact that these lands were purchased for specific industrial uses, and hundreds and thousands of dollars have been spent to make them available for these uses, through the building of many miles of railroads, through the construction of camps, of mills and of special process plants for handling the particular grades of wood located there.

These are not undeveloped and wild lands and though we met the Park advocates in the most cordial and cooperative spirit possible, the facts of high inherent cost of acquiring these lands will have to be faced. A casual examination of the area in question with reference to expenditures that have already been made in these developments, would convince any fair-minded person familiar with such things that the off-hand estimates being used in some of the Park bulletins are wholly inadequate and erroneous.

Lumber companies followed Champion's lead and ran their own newspaper ads opposing the creation of a national park soon afterwards.

Daniel Pierce relates this story about one rally put on by supporters of the Park in early 1926 that turned into an anti-Park rally thanks to the work of Champion and a lumber company:

In Haywood County, N. C., home of Champion Fibre and the Suncrest Lumber Company [another opponent of the Park], apathy seemed the least of the boosters' troubles. . . . [B]ooster[s] held a rally in Waynesville to raise its quota of \$30,000. The meeting did not go according to plan, as Champion and Suncrest employees packed the hall, took over the meeting, turning it into an antipark rally. W.J. Damtoft, Champion's chief forester, addressed the group and recounted the economic damage in lost jobs and lack of opportunity that the establishment of a national park would bring to Haywood County.

"Bat" Smathers, a lawyer for Suncrest [and for long periods also for Champion], turned the rally into something like a revival meeting, when he argued that the "forces of evil" inspired all of this talk about recreation and pleasure seeking. He gave his own unique interpretation of the scriptural example of Adam and Eve, who, he asserted, were corrupted by being allowed to live a life of ease in the Garden of Eden. He concluded his talk by pounding the podium and shouting: "This mad age of pleasure and recreation is carrying us to hell as fast as possible."

"The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park," pp. 102-103.-

Daniel Pierce, the author of a book about the creation of the Park, had this to say about Champion's role:

The Champion Fibre Company, the largest landowner in the Smokies, stood at the

forefront of the resistance. Champion actively lobbied the SNAP [Southern Appalachian National Park] Commission to forget the Smokies and allow the Forest Service to administer the land. Champion stood to gain tremendously from such an arrangement, which would enable the firm to sell its lands to the federal government at a profit, gain tax relief, and still have access to the timber and pulpwood necessary for its operations at low prices.

Daniel S. Pierce, "The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park," p. 82.

Robertson and Champion fought vigorously against the creation of the Park until 1928.

**Robertson Takes on the Tennessee Park Proponents.** Robertson wrote General Frank Maloney, vice president Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, on November 8, 1926 complaining about an article in a Knoxville paper referring to an "'understanding with the Fibre Company' to the effect that it is ready to negotiate for the sale of its property, either outright sale or on a basis which would permit cutting." Robertson's letter went on:

I would like to recall to your mind our conversation in Canton when I told you that the present time it was impossible for us to name any price on our property for the reason that our Directors felt that we could not consistently make any offer at all and that it would be necessary to figure on condemnation proceedings as the only feasible way of arriving at values that would be satisfactory to all concerned.

As I explained to you we do not want to be arbitrary or hostile in any way because we are fully aware that the movement for the park is back by a great [indecipherable word] unselfish effort. . . [A]t the same time we do not want you to feel that any kind of agreement has been reached when such is not the case.

I am sending a copy of this letter to [Commission Chairman] Colonel Chapman so that he will be fully advised.

It seems clear to me that Robertson wrote General Maloney instead of Colonel Chapman because he must have concluded that Chapman was responsible for the leaks to the press. Robertson's letter did not stop someone on behalf of the Commission commenting to the *Knoxville Journal* that "the Champion Fibre Company is now apparently friendly to the park interests, officials of the park say, and the arrangement of the terms is probably the only difficulty that will be encountered." "Attention Turned to Fibre Holdings," *Knoxville Journal*, November 24, 1926. It would take more than four years and the intercession of the Director of the National Park Service after Champion won a significant victory before a Tennessee jury to work out the "arrangement of the terms."

Robertson wrote a letter to Chapman directly on December 29, 1926, in which he made the arguments that Champion would make in the ensuing years that the company was entitled to "incidental" or "consequential" damages from the loss of its timberlands:

From published articles [Chapman was apparently leaking to the press again] it seems that you have again misunderstood our position in regard to the acquisition of The Champion Fibre Company lands in the Smokies.

As we have frequently pointed out, those lands were acquired by the company for the specific purpose of providing reserves of suitable timber for our plant here in Canton. Enormous expenditures have been made at Canton for the development of new paper mills and processed dependent on these timber reserves and these expenditures never would have been justified had we not owned these lands and felt they could be used to safeguard our output for many years to come.

In addition, many hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent in railroad construction, camp and mill development for the purpose of making the timber on these lands available for use as needed.

Under the circumstances our Directors have felt that it was simply impossible for us to enter into negotiations for the sale of these lands and we further feel that it would be thoroughly impractical for you to attempt to acquire them because of the tremendous cost involved in the proper compensation of the Champion Fibre Company.

You can readily satisfy the requirement of your National Park program without touching our lands; while it is impossible for us to acquire similar lands outside the Park area.

The suggestion regarding condemnation proceedings came originally from certain members of your Commission, the plan is certainly not advocated by us for the reason that the appropriation of our lands would be an extremely serious proposition to us and would necessarily have to be opposed by us by every legal and proper means at our command.

**Champion Opposes Park Legislation in North Carolina.** In 1927, the North Carolina General Assembly was considering legislation to make a \$2 million appropriation for the purpose of acquiring timberlands for the Smoky Mountains National Park. Two attorneys representing Champion were the only opponents to the bill before the Senate Committee on Appropriations. The company's argument, as it had been consistently, was that a national park would hurt the economic interests of the state and that a national forest would preserve the forests and still allow them to be available for economic uses through the cutting of timber. "Senate Committee Reports Favorably National Park Bill," *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 10, 1927. The Senate committee voted 14 to 6 to report the bill favorably. Robertson wrote Governor McLean urging him to stay neutral on the bill, but ultimately the Governor bowed to all the support for it and ended up signing it into law.

According to an *Asheville Citizen-Times* story about the legislative deliberations, one of the lawyers speaking on Champion's behalf "readily admitted that the primary interest of the Champion Fibre Company was in its reservoir of spruce that lies within the



boundaries of the proposed National park.” He told of the company’s investment of ten millions of dollars in its paper plant, of the employment it furnished for 1200 people, of its annual payroll of \$2,000,000, and he charged that ‘it would be dangerous for my client for this park to be established.’” “Senate Committee Approves Park Bill, 14 to 7,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 10, 1927.

**Robertson Sees the Handwriting on the Wall.** With the enactment by the North Carolina General Assembly of the 1927 legislation to provide funds for additional timberland acquisitions for the Park, Robertson saw the handwriting on the wall. He recognized that the creation of the Park was now a virtual certainty, and he decided on a more conciliatory approach with the North Carolina Commission. In 1928, Champion reached a voluntary agreement with the North Carolina Commission to discontinue logging and railroad activities in the area of the proposed national park in the 1926 federal legislation. The company decided to suspend logging in Tennessee as well.

Meanwhile, as the North Carolina General Assembly moved forward with an appropriation to provide funds to acquire timberlands for the Park, Champion made a little-noticed move to protect the future of its Canton operation. Robertson realized that the Park was most likely going to come to fruition in the area occupied by Champion’s largest source of spruce and that it was vital to provide for large, future supplies of hemlock in order to keep the Canton mill in operation in the event the spruce lands became unavailable. Therefore, he arranged for the purchase of a 50,000-acre tract of hemlocks in Graham County, North Carolina, approximately 80 miles southwest of Canton.

***Private Fundraising in North Carolina and Tennessee, State Appropriations, and the Rockefeller Foundation Contribution.*** In September 1925, the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association of Tennessee and Great Smoky Mountains, Inc. of North Carolina established an interstate committee to coordinate fundraising, with each state’s organization having a goal of \$500,000. These private funds, along with any public monies that North Carolina and Tennessee might appropriate, were necessary under the 1926 federal legislation providing for the creation of the Park in order for the states to be able to acquire the lands and then turn them over to the federal government when the minimum specified acreage had been acquired by the states. While the organizations had some success in obtaining private donations, they were not nearly enough to make the necessary land acquisitions. The states of North Carolina and Tennessee each made appropriations for land acquisitions, with North Carolina dedicating \$2 million in state bonds to the effort in February 1927 and Tennessee following suit in April 1927 with the enactment of legislation appropriating \$1,500,000 for Park land acquisitions. The North Carolina and Tennessee appropriation legislation also authorized the respective state commissions to undertake condemnation proceedings to acquire the Park timberlands in their states. While these state appropriations provided a strong financial base for the Commissions to make acquisitions, the funds were clearly not sufficient to complete the job.

Park advocates and the state Commissions became aware that John D. Rockefeller, Jr. might be willing to make a sizeable donation. This came about because Arno Cammerer, associate director of the National Park Service, had become a personal

friend of Rockefeller's and had been a guest in his home. Cammerer was assigned the task by his boss of approaching Rockefeller about supporting the effort to create the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. After investigating the situation, Rockefeller agreed to make a \$5 million donation from the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, which Rockefeller had set up in honor of his mother. An announcement of the donation was made jointly in North Carolina and Tennessee on March 6, 1928, with the chairmen of the North Carolina and Tennessee Commissions and Arno Cammerer named as trustees of the special fund established to match funds from other sources. With the availability of the Rockefeller funds, the state appropriations, and condemnation authority, North Carolina and Tennessee were now ready to go after the prize – the Champion timberlands.

***The Failed Initial Negotiations.*** After the receipt of the Rockefeller donation, Park leaders resumed negotiations with Champion for their property. Daniel Pierce said in his book that in July 1929 Champion made an initial offer for its holdings in North Carolina and Tennessee of \$9,063,099.75, which would have meant that the two commissions would have spent almost all of their funds for less than one-fourth of the needed land. "The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park," P. 138.

According to Carlos Campbell,

. . . [T]he wide differences in valuation still appeared irreconcilable. It became obvious that some third party would have to be brought into the negotiations. During a meeting in November, 1929, Mr. Robertson suggested that arbitration be used, but the Commissions doubted that they had the right to bind themselves to a decision reached by that method. Park officials suggested an alternative: that condemnation suits be filed, with the understanding that, if it should later become possible to do so, they could agree on a price and drop the legal action. At the close of the conference Colonel Chapman announced that his group's suggestion was to be used, by agreement of both sides; but Mr. Robertson denied having agreed to anything other than arbitration. Thus the meeting that was first announced as successful turned out a complete failure.

"Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains," p. 81.

The latest disagreement once again played out in the press thanks to Colonel Chapman leaking his view of the discussions, which were promptly denied by Robertson. The *Knoxville Journal* reported,

Plans for the acquirement of Champion Fibre company tract of 90,000 acres in the Smoky Mountain park area have been agreed upon by park officials and the Fibre company, Col. D. C. Chapman disclosed yesterday. . . .

Agreement on a line of procedure in the acquirement of the land was reached Thursday at a meeting in Asheville of North Carolina park officials, Col. D. C. Chapman, chairman of the Tennessee park commission and Reuben B. Robertson, president of the Fibre company.

“Agree on Huge Park Purchase,” *Knoxville Journal*, November 16, 1929.

The next day, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported that the reports emanating from Knoxville that plans for the purchase of Champion’s timberland had been completed were “emphatically denied . . . by Mr. Robertson.” “Robertson Says Champion Fibre Land Is Not Sold,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 17, 1929.

***The Tennessee Trial and Reactions to the Verdict.*** Robertson and Champion had been setting the table for its case in any condemnation proceeding for years. According to Daniel Pierce,

As early as 1925, Robertson had pointed out to North Carolina officials that, in addition, to land and timber, any appraisal of the property had to include railroad lines, logging camps, and saw mills. He also argued that any estimate of the property’s value should include compensation for the adverse financial impact on the Champion Mill at Canton, North Carolina, due to the mill’s dependence ‘on the particular products of Smoky Mountain lands for their continued and successful operation.’ Robertson particularly emphasized the value and irreplaceable nature of the red spruce on its holdings.

“The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park,” p. 138 (citing and quoting from a Robertson letter to State Senator Mark Squires a strong supporter of the Park and chairman of the North Carolina Commission of October 5, 1925).

The Tennessee Commission had expected that North Carolina would take the lead in starting condemnation proceedings against Champion. For whatever reason, the North Carolina officials did not pull the trigger as quickly as Tennessee expected. The ever-impatient Colonel Chapman therefore had the Tennessee Commission initiate proceedings against Champion in Sevierville, Tennessee in January 1930.

A five-person “jury of view” was empaneled, with two chosen by Tennessee and two by Champion and the fifth juror chosen by the other four. The trial began on November 17, 1930 and lasted for a total of 17 days over a span of almost two months. In its answer to the condemnation suit, Champion claimed a valuation of \$4,180,000 for its Tennessee timberlands. Each side presented a variety of experts to support its position. Champion’s experts valued their Tennessee holdings at between \$4,000,000 and \$7,000,000, although Champion’s lawyer acknowledged that their valuation claim was limited by the amount in its answer. The witnesses for Tennessee asserted that the Champion lands were worth between \$275,000 and \$800,000, claiming that it would be impractical to remove the timber from the rugged mountain terrain at a profit. Both sides presented experts from out of state as to the value of the spruce trees, the main item in contention.

**Post-Trial, Pre-Verdict Negotiations.** Carlos Campbell wrote that he met with Reuben Robertson and Walter J. Damtoft, Champion’s longtime chief forester, in 1958 to review their memories of the dispute. Campbell said Damtoft produced longhand notes he had taken of a meeting just after the conclusion of the Tennessee condemnation suit, the purpose of which was to try to reach a compromise value for the purchase of Champion’s timberlands in that state. Campbell summarized Damtoft’s notes:

The Damtoft notes stated that the purpose of the December 15, 1930 conference was to try for a compromise purchase of the Tennessee land. Mr. Robertson was asked to name a price that he would accept, to which he replied \$4,000,000, with a comment that considerable money had recently been spent – apparently referring to the cost of the Sevierville trial and the preparations for it.

Colonel Chapman was quoted as having said that he had recent information, apparently later than the testimony of the Commission's witnesses, from high authorities that had caused him to change his views. He went on to say that the maximum figure the Commissions would entertain would now be less than \$3,250,000 which had been previously been offered and refused. As he started to name the maximum figure he would consider, Robertson interrupted to state that the "irreducible minimum" was \$3,250,000. Chapman replied that it would be of no use to mention a figure of even one-half of that amount; whereupon Robertson indicated that he would submit to his board of directors "any serious offer" that the park would make, but would make no promise as to what the action of the board might be.

To this, the Colonel responded that the Commissions were in a position to offer \$1,500,000.

"For the Tennessee portion?" Mr. Robertson asked.

"No, for the entire boundary," Colonel Chapman replied.

Mr. Damtoft's notes state that at that point Mr. Robertson "blew his top," declaring that he would not think about submitting such a ridiculous figure to his board.

"Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains," pp. 84-85.

In her book about the creation of the Park, Margaret Lynn Brown states that after Chapman refused to pay more than \$1.5 million for the entire tract, "Robertson and Chapman nearly came to blows over the matter." "The Wild East," p. 96.

**The Verdict: A Big Victory for Champion and Reactions to It.** The result of the trial was a big victory for Champion. A verdict by a three-person majority of the jury was announced on January 16, 1931. The jury valued Champion's lands at \$2,325,000 for its Tennessee timber holdings (39,549 acres) and added \$225,000 "incidental damages" for the company's mill and railroad, or a total verdict of \$2,550,000. The minority valued the land and timber at \$1,250,000, with no "incidental damages." Robertson later said about the verdict: "I think some of them wet their pants over it!" Margaret Lynn Brook, "The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains," p. 96.

**Years-Later Questions about the Jury Process.** Years after the Tennessee jury returned its sizable verdict in Champion's favor, questions were raised about the fairness of the process. Daniel Pierce wrote the following about the jury process:

Park supporters immediately accused Champion of exercising undue influence on the jury. Arno Cammerer [Assistant Director of the National Park Service] wrote to Horace Albright, now Park Service director, that the jury had lacked supervision, with no judge present for the presentation of evidence; that Champion representatives had taken members of the jury to "places for entertainment purposes"; and that members of the jury "could read the papers and be accessible to anyone who wanted to approach them." Four years later, park supporters discovered how badly Champion wanted a favorable settlement in the case, when the federal government indicted Sevier County attorney Clyde Bogart [Bogart was a Sevierville attorney who had previously been employed by the Tennessee Park Commission to help select the jury in the Champion Fibre case] for tax evasion. Part of the income that Bogart failed to report included a \$15,000 check from Champion Fibre Company, dated during the time that the TGSPMC [Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission] had hired Bogart as a local legal expert to aid in jury selection and other matters related to the Sevier County case.

"The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park," p. 140 (citing a "Confidential Report for the Director" by Arno Camerer dated January 22, 1931; a communication from Colonel David Chapman to Camerer dated July 3, 1935; and a *Knoxville News Sentinel* story dated May 2, 1935).

Carlos Campbell wrote about these later developments as follows:

. . . [T]he Champion Fibre condemnation suit was brought back into the limelight some five years later by a development of a surprising nature. The Bureau of Internal Revenue, as the Internal Revenue Service was then called, in checking the 1931 tax returns of the Champion Fibre Company, learned that two payments totaling \$15,000 had been made to D. Clyde Bogart, a Sevierville attorney who had previously been employed by the Tennessee Park Commission to help select a jury of view in the Champion Fibre case. Court records show that the payments were made by Charles C. Benedict, an attorney of Cincinnati, Ohio, through the use of checks executed by Champion Fibre Company payable to himself and endorsed by him to Bogart. The information was brought out during the progress of a disbarment suit which was filed against Bogart on October 2, 1935, by Sevier County Magistrate Conley Huskey. Bogart was "suspended from practicing law in all courts of this state for a period of five years. . . ."

In his circuit court judgment Judge W. P. Monroe included the following statement: "The result was that the trial before the jury of view selected by an attorney accepting employment from the plaintiff and the defendant in the same case could be nothing more than a sham battle and a clear mockery of justice." Judge Monroe also held that the defendant, as charged had said to a prospective juror, "I may want a high or a low verdict."

“Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains,” pp. 89-90 (citing *Civil Minutes* of the Office of the Circuit Court Clerk of Sevierville, Tennessee).

It is hard to know what to make of these developments, and specifically whether they suggest some effort by Champion to tamper with the jury process. What is clear is that attorney D. Clyde Bogart had a serious conflict of interest in helping the Tennessee Park Commission to select jurors while also accepting payments from Champion around the same time for what services are not clear. It was that conflict of interest that led to his five-year suspension from practicing law. It may well have been the case that Bogart was simply extorting money from Champion by threatening to select jurors that were hostile to the company’s position (or to influence them after being empaneled) unless they paid him as well. That view is supported by the finding of the judge that Bogart had said to one prospective juror that he may have wanted “a high or low verdict.”

**Colonel Chapman’s Unhappiness with the Verdict.** Colonel Chapman was extremely unhappy with the trial result. He said that the verdict was a “stunning blow” to the Park movement and that if the verdict stood it would kill the Park movement. Chapman suggested that the state would appeal the verdict, and an appeal was filed the following week.

Robertson reacted to the appeal by announcing that Champion would resume cutting timber on its lands in Tennessee. In a long letter to Chapman that was run in its entirety by the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* on January 22, 1931, Robertson was clearly angry with Chapman’s response to the jury verdict. In the salutation, Robertson did not address Chapman as Colonel Chapman as he had in his earlier letters but as “Dear Sir.” Years of frustration over and anger at Chapman’s tactics seem to boil over in the letter:

Dear Sir:

Some three years ago, at the request of yourself and the chairman of the North Carolina Commission, we suspended operations upon our property in North Carolina and Tennessee, for the purpose of preserving the property for the benefit of the park.

We did this under the impression which we had received at the time that you were engaged in a bona fide effort to establish a National Park at the earliest possible moment, and that you were going to treat fairly and expeditiously with us for the purpose of arriving at a fair value to our property to acquire the same.

Our position then and now is that we did not want to put obstacles in the ways of the acquisition and establishment of this park. Altho [sic] it meant a sacrifice to this company in giving up a large part of the property which it had acquired for the purpose of safe-guarding the future of its pulp and paper mill operations, I felt that we should make this sacrifice in the public good, provided we were paid the reasonable value of our property.

It was with that thought in mind that we ceased the use of our property . . . ceased cutting our own timber, and have had to depend upon the purchase of such

lumber as we could get in the open market, involving costs far in excess of the costs of our own operations.

[After you rejected our proposal for settlement by means of arbitration], [y]ou elected to take your case to court and submit it to a jury . . . , which was your right. . . .

The jury has rendered a verdict. It is not my purpose to discuss whether I think the verdict might be too small or too high, but simply to state that it is the deliberate verdict of a jury selected in the forum which you choose [sic] to try the question, and represent their honest judgment as to value.

I now observe that you are making what I consider a very unfair attack upon the verdict, and are even threatening to dismiss your suit and start a new one, after we have spent the larger part of the year in progressing as far as we have progressed in this lawsuit.

This can mean but one thing, to my mind, and that is that it is your intention to delay this thing as much as possible, and to harass us and put us to as much expense as possible, and that, therefore, you and your Commissioners, as far as you represent them in your attitude, are totally unappreciative of the courtesies which have been extended to you by the Champion Fibre Co., of which the ceasing of operations upon the property is but one.

As you know, the preparation and trial of this case . . . has been an exceedingly expensive and wearisome proposition for both sides. The company has had, in its own defense, to expend large sums of money [in connection with the trial]. . . . The deterioration of our lumber operation and our railroad, by reason of this stopping of operations, has caused us losses running into many more thousands of dollars.

Now, in my view of this situation, and it being apparent that you are not in sympathy with our effort to arrive at an early valuation, and an early acquisition of it, we now notify you that we are going to treat the property as being our own in every respect, with the right to use it in our operations without regard to the wishes of your Commission, and are going to proceed, as soon as practicable, to utilize it for the purposes for which the lands were acquired.

We are giving you this positive notice for the reason that you have perhaps got the impression from our previous attitude that you have the right to dictate to us how we shall use our property. We have in a measure acquiesced in that attitude, since we thought that the Commission which you represent, and the Rockefeller Foundation [which had donated \$5 million to the North Carolina and Tennessee efforts to acquire the lands for the Park] whom you represent apparently, and whose money you are expending for this purpose, were wanting and intending to pay a fair and reasonable price for the property.

We have never thought, until recent developments seem to force the conclusion upon us, that the State of Tennessee desired to acquire any property for less than its value, or to take undue advantage of its position as a sovereign, and we have not thought that the Rockefeller Foundation would want to acquire property in this way and for less than its value, using the state's sovereignty as the means of acquiring it.

We are forced to the conclusion that we have been wrong in our view of your and their attitude.

It would appear from your newspaper discussions of this matter, which we have read, and in which we assume you were correctly reported, that in your present position you not only do not want to pay the value of our property, but that you do not have sufficient money left to pay for it. . . .

What you have acquired, so far as we have been able to determine, is a fringe, as it were, and certain cut-over and burned over lands . . . , the values of which you are undertaking in your newspaper propaganda to compare with our virgin forest which have frequently been described by you in the public press and by Mr. Albright [Director of the National Forest Service] in his recent article in the paper as being among the finest, if not the finest, in the world.

If it has taken more than \$3,000,000 to acquire the lands you have acquired, how could it ever be expected that the real heart of the Park, which includes, as you say, our lands . . . can be acquired for \$1,900,000 which you say in the public press is all that remains in your hands?

In this kind of situation, and judging the future by the past, it would seem that the establishment of the Park by you is a hopeless proposition.

We feel, therefore, that common business judgment dictates that we proceed to use our property in a sensible and reasonable manner, as we see fit, in the conduct of our own business.

In view of the fact that this whole question is one of great public interest and of the further fact that you have given your views quite freely to the press, we believe it is entirely in order to furnish to the newspapers a copy of this letter and we are following this plan.

Chapman responded to Robertson's letter with a threat to seek an injunction to stop Champion from removing timber from its Tennessee lands. Tennessee never did file suit seeking the injunction.

In an editorial, the *Greensboro* [North Carolina] *News* said Robertson had written a "sharp letter to the Tennessee park committee, and adds a decidedly bilious complexion to the business." "Does Not Look So Good," reprinted in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* on February 8, 1931.



It is not surprising given the much more cordial and less adversarial relationship Robertson and Champion had developed with North Carolina officials that he did not make the same type of threat in his home state to resume logging operations on the company's timberlands there.

Park supporters realized that if the same valuation was applied to Champion's North Carolina acreage, the total purchase price would approach \$6 million dollars for all of Champion's timberland in both states. Even with the Rockefeller funds, there would not be enough money to complete the acquisitions, as there were still other timberlands in North Carolina and Tennessee to be acquired.

***The Champion Lawyers.*** Following the victory with the Tennessee jury and with Tennessee having filed an appeal, Robertson recognized that further legal proceedings would drag the dispute on for perhaps years, and the North Carolina condemnation proceedings had not even begun. He apparently concluded that the time was right to obtain a negotiated settlement. To help achieve that resolution, he had brought on as one of Champion's lawyers one of the most renowned legal talents in the country, Charles Evans Hughes.

Hughes had been an Associate Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court from 1910 to 1916, when he resigned to accept the Republican nomination for the presidency. Hughes lost the presidential race to Woodrow Wilson. When Warren Harding was elected president in 1920, he appointed Hughes as Secretary of State. In 1925, Hughes resigned that position and returned to his lucrative law practice, where he was one of the highest-earning lawyers in the country. Unfortunately, not long after Champion retained him, President Herbert Hoover nominated Hughes to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

To replace Hughes, Robertson then turned to one of the other top lawyers in the country whose credentials were as impressive as those of Hughes, John W. Davis. Davis had served as Solicitor General of the United States under President Wilson. In 1924, the Democrats nominated Davis for the presidency, but he lost the election in a landslide to Calvin Coolidge. Davis then returned to his law practice. In the course of his 60-year legal career, Davis argued 140 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, 73 as Solicitor General and 67 as private lawyer. Hughes appears to have played a key role in achieving a settlement that was satisfactory to Champion.

In an interview with Carlos Campbell, Robertson said years later that Davis had been brought into the case in the hope that he could help to avoid further litigation, but with the realization that should the case go to the Supreme Court, Champion would need an attorney with such experience, ability and expertise. "Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains," p. 92. Robertson told Campbell that he expected Davis to make the case for the "incidental or consequential damages" that Champion insisted upon even though the Canton mill was miles from the company's timberlands.

***Final Negotiations and Settlement.*** The dispute got the attention of federal officials in Washington. In an article about the situation, the *Raleigh News and Observer* reported: "It is probable that the representatives of the North Carolina and Tennessee park bodies will be sent to Washington and New York for conferences with federal park

officials and directors of the Laura Spillman Rockefeller Foundation. "Champion Fibre Company Disturbs Park Advocates," January 23, 1931. The Secretary of the Interior and the Chairman of the National Park Board soon thereafter asked that the North Carolina and Tennessee Commissions to send a delegation to Washington to confer about securing the acreage in those states. The *Raleigh News and Observer* reported that "[t]he park question was recently brought to the fore by the threat of the Champion Fibre Company, of Canton, to go ahead cutting out timber unless some definite action developed quickly in the park situation," "Talk Speeding Plans for Smokies Park Site," February 17, 1931.

National Park Service and Rockefeller Foundation officials began to push for a negotiated settlement. Park Service Director Horace Albright had already been in touch with the North Carolina and Tennessee commissions and received their blessing to arrange a settlement conference in Washington. Albright invited all the parties to a conference at his office in Washington in April 1931. Over a three-day period, Albright mediated discussions among the parties and, eventually, got them to agree to a settlement.

A book about Champion's logging railroads reported as follows about the settlement conference:

During the conference, the exchanges between the Champion Fibre officials and the two Park commissions quickly became contentious and the conference almost ended. The Chapman-Robertson personality clash also added to the tense atmosphere. The accommodation that allowed the meeting to continue was to place the Park commissions in one room and the Champion Fibre officials in another. Mr. Albright and Mr. Cammerer [Assistant Director of the National Park Service] agreed to act as messengers and referees between the two groups.

Gerald J. Ledford and Ronald C. Sullivan, "If Rails Could Talk: Logging the North Carolina Great Smokies - Volume 5, Ravensford and Smokemont," p. 193.

On the third day, the parties reached an agreement. Tennessee and North Carolina committed to purchasing all of Champion's 92,814 acres of timberlands in the Great Smokies for \$3,000,000. Tennessee would pay \$1,000,000 for the 39,549 acres in its portion of the Park and North Carolina would pay \$2,000,000 for the 53,265 acres in North Carolina. Newspaper reports about the settlement said that the Champion acreage "contains what is conceded to be the largest body of primitive hardwood timber and the heaviest stand of red spruce yet remaining in eastern America." "Price Agreed Upon for Fibre Lands in Great Smoky Park," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 30, 1931. The members of the two state commissions considered the Champion timberlands the most important in the Park.

Afterwards, in a letter to Albright dated May 7, 1931, Robertson complimented Albright and Arno Cammerer on the "wonderfully patient, tactful, and fair-minded manner in which they conducted the negotiations." Quoted in Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*, pp. 141-142.

Robertson also wrote a letter to a member of the North Carolina Commission negotiating delegation in May 1931, in which he said: "While we are fully aware of the

fact that we accepted a price for our property far below its real value, still we feel that the negotiations as conducted by you were carried on the highest possible plane and with consummate skill.” Quoted in Willard Badgette Gatewood’s article in the April 1960 issue of *The North Carolina Historical Review*, “North Carolina’s Role in the Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” p. 180.

There was no such praise for the members of the Tennessee Commission. There was clearly lingering hostility by Robertson towards Colonel Chapman and his tactics throughout the process, from their first encounter through the settlement.

Reuben Robertson turned the deeds to the Champion timberlands over to the North Carolina and Tennessee commissions on May 8, 1931. It would take almost nine more years, with yet more litigation and the need for federal financial assistance from the Roosevelt administration, for the two commissions to acquire the remaining acreage required of the states under the federal Great Smoky Mountains National Park legislation. The formal dedication occurred on September 2, 1940, with President Roosevelt giving the keynote address.

#### **CHAMPIONS USE OF THE SETTLEMENT PROCEEDS AND PRAISE FOR THE COMPANY AND ROBERTSON**

In an editorial praising the settlement, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* said the “settlement . . . clears the way for the immediate development of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park project.” The editorial went on:

Of course the prime thing is the assurance that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, embracing the finest body of primeval spruce in this part of the world and the most magnificent mountain scenery in all Eastern America. This is an achievement of national moment. It is an achievement the significance of which will be increasingly appreciated as the years pass.

“The Park Lands Settlement And What It Means,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 30, 1931.

***Champion’s Reinvestment in the Canton Mill.*** Immediately following the announcement of the settlement, Robertson released a statement reporting that the company would continue to operate its Canton mill and that it would begin a modification and an expansion of it that would last approximately 5 years. There had been some concern that the loss of its large holdings of timberlands would cause Champion to cut back on its operations at the Canton mill – or even close it. In his statement, Robertson said that company had already ordered \$100,000 of new machinery. He added that Champion would take whatever amount it received for its timberlands “for the strengthening of the industry and the betterment of Western North Carolina,” according to a story in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. “Fibre Company to Expand At Canton,” May 3, 1931. In his statement, Robertson said,

Circumstances required the acceptance which stops far short of compensation. However, we have accepted the situation cheerfully and hopefully and without

any lingering traces of resentment. We have made as graceful a bow to the inevitable as we could. We are deeply grateful to all the members of the North Carolina Park Commission for the unfailing courtesy which they have shown us at all times. We will take pleasure in seeing that all of the funds which will eventually be paid to us will be used for the strengthening of our industry and for the betterment of Western North Carolina.

The *Citizen-Times* story about Robertson's statement went on to characterize the company as "one of the greatest industrial organizations in North Carolina and it ranks as one of the largest taxpayers in the state."

What stands out about Robertson's statement is that yet again he had high praise for members of the North Carolina Commission, but not a word about the members of the Tennessee Commission. That is not surprising in light of the fact that Robertson and the head of the Tennessee commission, Col. David Chapman, had had a contentious relationship from the beginning and through to the conclusion of the settlement conference.

Horace Albright wrote Robertson in a letter dated May 5, 1931, praising the expansion plans and Robertson's handling of the negotiations in Washington:

. . . It is very apparent that the news of your [expansion] plans, following close on the announcement of the purchase of the Champion Fibre Company's holdings in the Great Smoky Mountains area brought a great deal of happiness to the Asheville section. It undoubtedly will do much to revive the spirits of the people of western North Carolina.

I congratulate you on the fine spirit in which you approached the negotiations with the two park commissions and with us in connection with the sale of Champion Fibre Company's holdings. I particularly admire you for the fine attitude you assumed toward the whole affair on your return to Asheville. From every standpoint it was a pleasure to do business with you and Mr. Thomson and your associates. . . . I want you to know that Mr. Camerer and I feel most kindly toward you and Mr. Thomson and are happy to number you among our friends.

In October 1931, Robertson elaborated on Champion's expansion plans, announcing that the company was planning a \$1,000,000 expansion of the Canton mill, including \$500,000 for new machinery. "The decision to go ahead at this time may be properly interpreted not only as an expression of confidence in the ultimate restoration of normal business conditions in the country but especially as an expression of faith in the people and in the industrial opportunities of North Carolina and the south." "\$1,000,000 Expansion Program Planned by Canton Paper Firm," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 17, 1931. The Champion expansion included the installation of the largest book paper machine in the world. As a result of the expansion plan, the Canton mill was able to operate at full employment throughout the Depression. It also generated praise from North Carolina newspapers.

***Praise for Robertson and Champion.*** Shortly after the settlement was reached, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, which had vigorously supported the creation of the Park, adopted a resolution commending Reuben Robertson and Champion Fibre Company. The resolution read in part:

WHEREAS, the Champion Fibre Company has for a period of more than twenty years shown a spirit of cooperation and helpfulness in the upbuilding and development of Western North Carolina;

WHEREAS, Mr. Reuben B. Robertson, President of the Champion Fibre Company, and his Board of Directors, in a laudable desire to reach a speedy agreement initiated conferences and through compromise accepted a settlement at a considerable sacrifice to their company in order that the park project might be hastened; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Asheville Chamber of Commerce through its Board of Directors expresses its appreciation of the public spiritedness of Mr. Robertson and his associates, and the Board views their cooperative as a signal [sic] national and community service of far reaching benefit to the public. . . .

In a long editorial in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* that appeared on October 16, 1931, the paper had effusive praise for the company and for Robertson for the expansion plans, not just for the investment in the mill but also for their confidence in economic recovery. The paper had been one of the strongest advocates for the establishment of the Park among the state's newspapers and, as a result, had butted heads with Champion and Reuben Robertson for years over the issue. The Asheville paper wrote as follows about the announcement of the company's big expansion plans:

At any time the announcement of the Champion Fibre Company of expansion such as was made public yesterday would have been cause for great satisfaction in Western North Carolina. Its announcement now is tremendously significant.

When the Champion Fibre Company was called upon to surrender its immense holdings of timber in the area embraced in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park it was feared that this might have an adverse effect upon the operations of the industry which the company had built up to such important proportions at Canton. But the Champion Fibre Company, once the creation of the park was determined upon, cooperated with splendid spirit to bring the park to completion at the earliest possible moment. It accepted a very reasonable settlement for its holdings and set to work to ascertain how it could best use other materials in place of spruce.

Months ago the public was assured that the company was resolved to reorganize its activities to meet the changed conditions with which it was confronted. That it is now preparing to go ahead with its plans immediately is, as its president, Mr. Reuben B. Robertson, said yesterday an expression not only of its confidence in the ultimate restoration of normal business conditions in the country, but

especially an expression of faith in the people and in the industrial opportunities of this section.

Faced with a very confused condition in the paper and pulp markets, the Champion Fibre Company is meeting the situation by expanding its plant and installing the most modern equipment that is to be secured. . .

Through this new construction the Champion Fibre Company expects to be able to keep its employees and some additional workers in employment over the coming winter and spring. Its fresh investment of well over \$1,000,000 comes at a moment when it should prove of maximum value in helping to alleviate unemployment. It comes at a moment when it should prove an inspiration to those who have allowed themselves to become confused in their options towards the future.

. . . The expansion of the Champion Fibre Company, important in itself. It is still more important when it is interpreted, as it should be, as another evidence of the trend in development which is revolutionizing Western North Carolina.

No matter how long it may take the rest of the world to shake itself out of the existing depression, the next five years will be years of progress for Western North Carolina such as this section has never experienced before and such as few sections have experienced. We can expedite that progress greatly if we will and Mr. Robertson and the Champion Fibre Company have set the example of constructive faith.

“What the Champion Fibre Company’s Expansion Program Means,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 16, 1931.

The Raleigh *News and Observer* ran an editorial on Champion’s expansion plans in early November 1931, in which it said that the company’s decision to go ahead with its expansion represents “a faith and an example which ought to be contagious. . . The depression will not last. Its stay will be lessened by such evidences of faith as Mr. Robertson has manifested.” “Faith Justified,” *The News and Observer*, November 3, 1931.

It must have stuck in Col. Chapman’s craw that Robertson was receiving such favorable editorial praise for finalizing the sale of Champion’s timberlands for an amount below what he claimed was adequate compensation and for then reinvesting those proceeds back into expanding the Canton mill. The North Carolina papers and advocates had no such praise for Chapman.

## **THE BUILDING OF LAKE LOGAN**

One little-noticed side effect of the \$3 million payment for Champion’s timberlands was that it, in addition to providing the company with capital to reinvest in and expand the Canton mill, gave the company the funds needed to build dam across the West Fork of the Pigeon River at the old logging camp and sawmill at Sunburst. The

purpose of the large dam – 50 to 60 feet high by 540 feet long – was to regulate the flow of the river and provide a reservoir to ensure an adequate flow of water to the Canton mill during dry years. The plan for the construction of the dam, which was expected to cost \$100,000, was announced by Robertson in December 1931 and was part of the expansion program for the Canton mill that the company had previously announced.

The dam and reservoir were completed in 1932, and Robertson named the reservoir “Lake Logan” in honor of one of Peter G. Thomson’s sons, Logan Thomson who was also Reuben’s brother-in-law. At the time, Thomson was a senior officer of both Champion Fibre Company and Champion Coated Paper Company and had participated with Robertson in the settlement conference that led to the sale of Champion Fibre’s timberland holdings to North Carolina and Tennessee.

Over the years, Robertson acquired a number of cabins from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, had them transported to Lake Logan, and then assembled into what became a family compound called “Sit ‘n’ Whittle”. Robertson even engaged the services of a well-known local architect and builder to help in reassembling the cabins into the “Sit ‘n’ Whittle” compound. Later, additional facilities were added to make Lake Logan into a training and conference center for Champion employees, customers, and guests. “Sit ‘n’ Whittle” was often used by the Robertson family for vacations and to entertain important customers and other guests.



“Sit ‘n’ Whittle” at Lake Logan

The customers included Henry Luce, the founder of Time, Inc. (a large Champion customer), and his wife Clair Boothe Luce, who was elected to the House of Representatives in 1942 and was appointed ambassador to Italy in 1953.

In 1956, Robertson hosted Vice President Richard Nixon and Reverend Billy Graham for a weekend stay at Lake Logan.



Richard Nixon and Billy Graham at Lake Logan (1956)

After the Canton mill was sold by Champion to its employees in 1999, the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina ended up buying Lake Logan and now maintain it as a retreat and recreation center.

### **REUBEN ROBERTSON'S YEARS-LATER ASSESSMENT OF THE DISPUTE**

Reuben Robertson stated in an interview with Carlos Campbell years after the dispute that the loss of Champion's Great Smokies spruce timberland had turned out to be a good thing. He told Campbell that after the sale of the timberlands for the Park, the company's research scientists sped up their testing to determine if pine trees could serve as an alternate to spruce in making high-quality paper. Robertson added that experiments over a decade proved that the quality of paper using pine was acceptable to the paper-consuming public and at a satisfactory cost. He summarized the result for Champion:

The costs of growing and harvesting pine timber, in the Piedmont, are without a doubt, lower than the costs of growing and harvesting spruce in the Smokies would have been. In retrospect, we could say that what we considered a disaster thirty years ago proved to be 'a cloud with a silver lining.' As it turned out, we were 'kicked into prosperity'

Carlos Campbell, "Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains," p. 94.