

FACTS ABOUT CUMBERLAND FALLS

Williamsburg Commercial Club

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Facts About Cumberland Falls

PREFACE

The following pages were compiled under the direction of the Williamsburg Commercial Club and is endorsed by some of the official and business and professional men of Whitley and McCreary Counties without any attempt to make it a popular petition.

INTRODUCTION

So much has been published that is untrue and misleading about the power development at Cumberland Falls that the Commercial Club of Williamsburg and business men of Whitley county have decided to set out certain facts in relation thereto, and we invite your unbiased reading of same.

LOCATION

Cumberland River Falls are on the line between Whitley and McCreary Counties. On a straight line they are about twelve miles below Williamsburg, but as the river winds the distance is twenty-five miles. The entire watershed above the Falls drained by Cumberland River contains about 2000 square miles. The Falls proper are less than sixty feet high, but from a point a thousand feet above the Falls to the level of low water below is about eighty feet. During high water the narrow gorge below the Falls so fills up with water that the Falls proper are lessened by more than half that distance. The channel below the Falls for miles is between parallel rows of cliffs and filled with massive boulders, so that the roar of these rapids can be heard many times farther than that of the Falls proper.

ELEVATION

Along the Cumberland River a short distance below Williamsburg the bottom and valley lands disappear and the River passes first between rugged foothills and then into deep rough gorges and finally between parallel rows of cliffs, and then no more level bottom lands border upon the Cumberland until it reaches the level of the limestone formation at Burnside in Pulaski County, Kentucky. The distance from Williamsburg to Burnside on straight line is about thirty miles, but as the river winds the distance is sixty-eight miles. The elevation of the River at Williamsburg is 910 feet and at Burnside 585 feet above sea level, so that there is a total of 325 feet fall in the River between these points.

For many years this entire section of the state has tried to

induce capital to harness this tremendous but wasted power and put it into the service of the state.

LANDS TRAVERSED

Between Williamsburg and Burnside the Cumberland River cuts its way down through the conglomerate sandstone and lower or Western Kentucky coal measures to the limestone levels. For more than fifty miles along the River there are only a very few skirts of level land anywhere between the cliffs and the River. There flows into the River from either side scores of streams, some of them only a few miles long and others of considerable length. These either cut their way through these sandstone formations and enter the river through like rough gorges, or in case of many of the smaller streams, pour into the river over cliffs in picturesque beauty. Some of them are much higher and more scenic than Cumberland Falls but they are now wholly inaccessible. For miles on either side of the River and between these side streams the country, made up of sharp sand ridges separating deep rocky gulches, is non-arable and largely uninhabited, and is of little value at present, the original forest timber having been removed.

HISTORY

For more than twenty-five years diligent effort had been made to interest capital in Cumberland river power development. Early in 1923 the H. A. Mansfield Engineering Company associated with certain business men in Indianapolis made application to the Federal Power Commission for two power dams on the Cumberland River and one on the South Fork River. About that time the City of Louisville was in some sort of controversy with its gas and electric company, and the city had made application to the Federal Power Commission to grant it a permit authorizing the construction of a power dam at the Falls of the Ohio and also in connection with it a permit to build a dam at Burnside in the Cumberland. The Louisville Courier Journal under date of February 1, 1923, discussing this application of the city for such permit said:

“Harnessing the Cumberland River as a subsidia-

ry power producer in connection with the utilization of the Ohio Falls for power purposes was termed the best plan by Maj. Gen. W. L. Sibert in an address before the Kiwanis Club at its luncheon meeting yesterday at The Tyler.

Discussing the proposed plan to operate a steam plant as an auxiliary to tide over the periods of flood and low stage of water, General Sibert said there was no occasion to waste coal on such a plant. The arrangement involving the Cumberland River, he said, would be ideal, developing as it would 75,000 to 100,000 horse power and not involving the flooding of farm lands.

With a dam 180 feet high the fall of the Cumberland would be 150 feet even at flood time. A sixty-mile pool would result from the dam. This subsidiary could be used, he said, when the Ohio River was out of its banks or was running unusually low.

Mayor Huston Quinn introduced the speaker.

"That use of the Cumberland and the Ohio for power, rather than the Ohio and auxiliary steam power, would be more practical, in the matter of cost, is the contention of General Sibert. That seems probable, as steam plants are costly and the gorge through which the Cumberland runs is so narrow that a dam above Burnside would not have to be long.

The Ohio River gives Kentucky a northern water front of 800 miles. The Cumberland, nearly 700 miles in total length, is seen, perhaps, to have a navigable length of 500 miles in Kentucky and Tennessee. If the potential power of the two streams should be developed as General Sibert suggests, as a single project, the use of the two rivers in conjunction would be a red-letter event in the history of Kentucky."

The Indianapolis men organized the Cumberland-Hydro Electric Power Company, a Kentucky Corporation, in which name the application for preliminary permit was made. Again we quote from the Courier Journal of February 28, 1923

"An application, conflicting with that of the City of Louisville, for water power development at Burnside, Ky., on the Cumberland River, has been filed

with the Federal Power Commission by a group of Indianapolis business men, it was announced today.

The Indianapolis men applied for a preliminary permit for three large projects on the Cumberland River, of which that at Burnside is one. Three power houses, with about 125,000 combined horsepower, would be built to generate electric current.

The Indianapolis men, seeking the Cumberland River permit, include J. H. Aufderheide, Henry A. Mansfield of the Mansfield Engineering Company and S. A. Tescher.

They propose to build three dams, one 180 feet high two and a half miles above Burnside; one ninety feet high at the top of Cumberland Falls and the other, on the south fork of the Cumberland about two miles above Burnside. The first dam would create a pool, extending approximately forty miles to Cumberland Falls. The Cumberland Falls dam would create a pool extending to Williamsburg"

The article from which the foregoing are extracts concludes by stating that there was a ninety-day truce between the city and the Hydro-Electric Company before the Commission was to consider the rival claims and that the engineers were making surveys on the Cumberland, and concludes:

"These engineers will collaborate and will get at the real facts on which assumptions have been made. If the Cumberland plan is too expensive for the city's consideration it may result in ceding rights to the Hydro Electric Company, and by the same token, the company may withdraw in favor of the city. The point is that the exact engineering facts are not now known to either party, but they will be when the joint investigation is concluded, and the successful competitor will have the advantage of the other's expert survey. Should the city withdraw, it would still have complete data to aid it in fixing rates."

PUBLIC HEARING

O. C. Merrill, Executive Secretary of the Federal Power Commission, advertised extensively a public hearing for August 10, 1923, at Burnside, Kentucky, to consider Preliminary

Permit Project 389, which was asking for authority to build these Cumberland River dams. This hearing was given the widest publicity and the meeting was attended by United States Senators and Kentucky and Tennessee Congressmen and an immense crowd of other interested parties. It was the overwhelming sense of the meeting that the development would add greatly to this section of the state and would be a step in flood control of the lower Cumberland. The Preliminary Permit was promptly granted to the Cumberland-Hydro-Electric Power Company.

CONFLICTS SETTLED.

While the surveys were being made and facts ascertained the apparent conflict of interests in the development of the Ohio Falls at Louisville and the Cumberland River were reconciled, and the application of the City of Louisville and allied interests there was withdrawn. It is reliably reported that the Cumberland-Hydro Electric Power Company made the exchange of power indicated in the February press, that the development now under construction at the Ohio Falls in stages of the river when flooded would receive excess power from the Cumberland river, and likewise the Cumberland river development and mountain coal fields would receive excess of power generated at Louisville during the three months of extra low water in the Cumberland. This is the development referred to as the **RED LETTER DAY FOR KENTUCKY.**

GOOD FAITH

Backed by the Preliminary Permit from the Federal Power Commission and solicited apparently by the Government Engineers to enlarge the plan so as to take in the entire Cumberland River, the Cumberland-Hydro-Electric Power Company has expended in surveys and engineering work an immense sum. It has purchased in fee the tracts of land including and surrounding the Cumberland Falls, has incurred the expense of core drilling the underlying rock formation in all that territory

to ascertain whether there are subteranean cavities or crevices and upon purchase, surveys and expenditures there has paid out on this project \$340,000.00 according to press publications.

LICENSE APPLICATION

After the matter had been investigated sufficient to show that the project would pay interest on the enormous investment and after this concern had made such financial connections that would insure the sale of the securities necessary to build such enterprises, application was made for the License which is the final authority to proceed with their work. To the granting of this License objections were made to the building of the Falls dam upon the ground that such dam would destroy certain scenic beauty in that locality. An agitation was then started and numerous societies were solicited to file protests with the Power Commission denying this company the final License. We have never observed a single statement in the press suggesting in any way that if this business project by the Federal Power Commission should be denied the right to conclude that which it had undertaken on its warrant that common honesty would demand the repayment of these expenditures incurred in good faith.

INTEREST GENERAL

Very few people in Kentucky have seen Cumberland Falls. Fewer still know the real needs of the citizens living in that locality. Numerous societies, organizations and clubs have protested against what they term spoliation and destruction of scenic beauty at the Falls. But some of the societies who have gone into the public press have given honest investigation to the claims of all parties interested. The Committee appointed by the Round Table of Louisville made an exhaustive study of the situation; and the Committee consisting of P. M. Brown, Thos. E. Basham, Eugene Stewart and Blakey Helm in an exhaustive report published May 9, 1926, among many interesting things says:

"Assets of Power.....The only economical asset

which Cumberland Falls has, is for power purposes. The dam will probably cost \$6,000,000. After it has been built, the chief engineer says, it will require annual operating expenses of \$27,500.00; taxes on dam and power plant of \$75,000; and taxes on power lines of \$7,500. The proposed dam would provide 80,000 kilowatts, or about 40,000 horse power, according to the chief engineer for the power company. Industries are scarce in Kentucky and if all this power should be used by new industries, it would supply factories on a fair estimate as made by U. S. District Engineer, Harold C. Fiske of Chattanooga, paying labor \$13,800,000 a year."

STATE PARK OR POWER

The "Electrical World" under date of January tenth publishes under the above caption an interview with O. C. Merrill, Executive Secretary of the Federal Power Commission upon the Hydro-Electric site at Cumberland Falls, Kentucky, part of which we take the liberty of quoting by reason of its public interest.

The reported exercise of the option of the Cumberland Hydro-Electric Power Company, owned by the Insull interests, upon the hydro-electric site at Cumberland Falls, Ky., which has had much newspaper notice, has led O. C. Merrill, executive secretary of the Federal Power Commission, to issue a statement in clarification of the status of that company's application for a license to build a hydro-electric plant there.

If the company does not dispose of the site for park purposes and persists in its application, Mr. Merrill says, "it will be necessary for the commission, when the reports from the War Department have been received, to determine whether the public interest will be better served by the approval of the application for license or by its refusal. The question does not rest wholly on the relative advantages from the public standpoint of power development or park

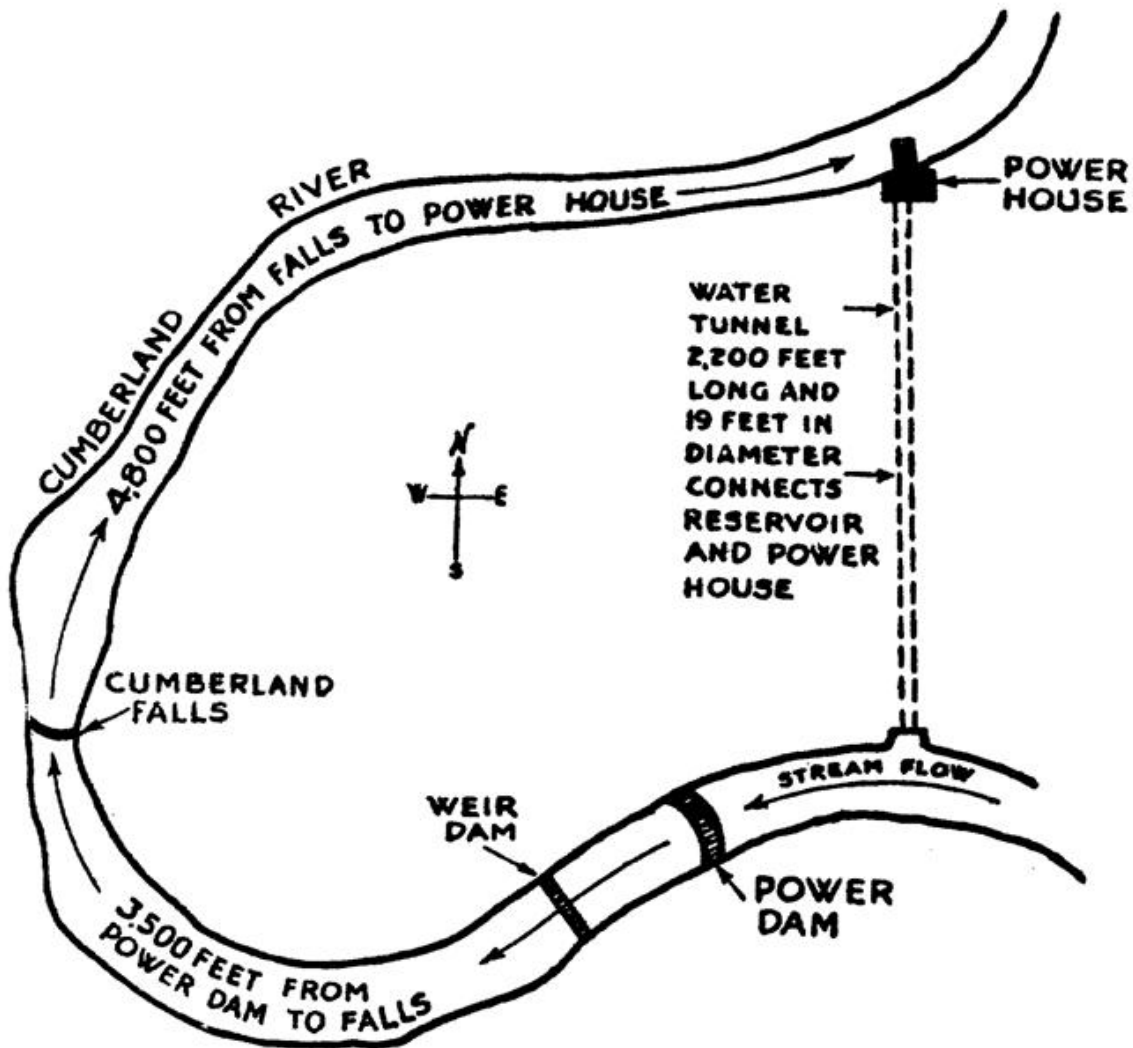
development of Cumberland Falls. It would be possible to develop the power and to retain in large degree the scenic value of Cumberland Falls and the adjacent lands. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the interests of the local communities and to the fact that a development of the magnitude proposed would, by creating taxable wealth, produce revenues in certain Kentucky counties which under existing circumstances find it difficult to secure sufficient means for providing adequate road and school facilities.

The Cumberland Falls, Mr. Merrill goes on to explain are situated at the center of a horseshoe bend in the Cumberland River. The plans of the company propose the erection of an 80-ft dam about three-fourths of a mile above and out of sight of the falls and the diversion of waters of the river thru a tunnel across the narrowest part of the bend to a power house about one mile below the falls and likewise out of sight of them. No construction work is proposed at or in the immediate vicinity of the falls, but they would be affected by and to the extent that the waters of the river are diverted through the proposed tunnel.

A preliminary permit was issued by the commission to the company on March 4, 1924, there being no objection raised at that time based on injury to scenery and no proposal for a state park. These came later, along with many requests for approval of the project, particularly from organizations and residents in the counties which would be benefited by its construction.

FALLS NOT DISTURBED

As stated by Mr. Merrill the improvements consisting of main dam,, cushion dam, tunnel and power house are all out of sight of the Falls. The following diagram reduced from actual survey has been widely published in the state press and is inserted here.



It will be observed that this improvement leaves the Falls untouched. The License will require that there shall flow over the Falls during dry season at least twenty cubic feet of water per second. Actual tests show that in dry summer weather the flow is sometimes as low as five feet per second. For at least eight months in the year the amount of water used in the turbines would have no perceptible effect on the Falls.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOW

According to the press reports Government engineers recommend the building of several other dams in the Cumberland and tributary streams in order to control all flood waters in the Cumberland. The largest of these dams to be at the mouth of Wolf Creek thirty miles below Burnside. Another plan is to build a dam at Burnside, but no matter where built it will bring slack water to the foot of the Falls. When the Cumberland project is completed there will be 150 miles of fresh-water lakes which will contain approximately 70,000 acres and will be the rival of Reelfoot Lake as a fishing resort. The banks of these lakes will in time be lined with summer homes and access to all of the scenery along the river will be made easy by motor boats.

CLEAN LAKES

These Cumberland River lakes will be an added attraction far greater to tourists than the Falls proper. The opposition has published widely that there will be no clean and beautiful fresh-water lakes, but mere foul ponds and one editorial refers to them as SEWERS; that they would be filled with dead snags and rotting timber not only unsightly but a menace to health and reference has been made to the Herrington Lake at Dix Dam from which the timber was not cut before being flooded. Dix Dam was not a Federal project. In order to refute this false propaganda we sent the following message to the Executive Secretary of the Water Power Commission:

(Telegram)

“Williamsburg, Kentucky., January 14, 1928—Hon. O. C. Merrill, Executive Secretary, Federal Power Commission, Washington, D. C. Opposition to Power Development of Cumberland Falls and along Cumberland River have published widely that the ponds created by dams would be unsightly and filled with dead snags and rotting timber from overflowed forest-covered banks. Wire us with privilege of making public your answer whether the license from the Power

Commission, if granted, would require the clearing away of timber from the areas to be flooded.
(Signed) WILLIAMSBURG COMMERCIAL CLUB

(Telegram)

“Washington, D. C. January 14,—Williamsburg Commercial Club, Williamsburg, Kentucky—Regarding telegram 14th, Licensees are required by condition in license to clear reservoir area of timber etc. Copy of usual conditions relative to clearing mailed today. (Signed) MERRILL.”

The printed conditions mentioned in telegram provide:

Article— The licensee shall in the interest of public health cut and remove or destroy to the satisfaction of said district engineer all brush and trees from that zone within and adjacent to the area to be submerged hereinafter called Contour A and shall remove and destroy all floatable refuse or other materials within said Contour B which is 15 feet horizontally from and outside of the area to be submerged.

We are told the Cumberland River can be developed for power purposes without the Falls. That is as practical as it would be to ask a theatrical company to put Shakespeare's Hamlet on the stage with Hamlet left out. The opponents say that the Wolf Creek dam should be built first. That development will require an Act and an appropriation of millions by Congress as navigation will have to be cared for there. The upper dam or two dams cover only cliffs and bluffs, gulches and boulders. The Wolf Creek proposed dam floods 31,000 acres including some of the best river bottom farms in Kentucky and the City of Burnside

PURPOSE

We hold no brief for the power people. The property holders, business men and tax payers of this section want this development because it will add when the entire project is completed a hundred and forty million of taxable capital within our state, practically all drawn from abroad, and will give to the counties along the Cumberland River many thousands in return by way of local, state and school taxes, not taking

into consideration at all the great industrial developments which would follow in the Cumberland Valley and the state at large by reason of this large power development. It harnesses a mighty and heretofore destructive giant and brings into the service of the state and nation value and power which, all through the past has stood idle, a tax dodger in time of peace and a slacker in time of war.

BETTER DAYS

It is to be regretted that our state with its wealth of coal and timber and rolling bluegrass farms, truly declared by traveler and poet to be the fairest land the sun shines on, stands so low in water power and industrial development. Our resources are shipped to other states and with them also go out our young men to prepare and fit these products for the market. At this particular time our people of every political faith are talking about a better day in our state and great investment of industrial capital within her borders. A distinguished citizen of our state has recently well said that all we need to induce capital to invest here, build industries and give our young men employment at home is to make Kentucky a pleasant place to live, and a reasonably profitable place to invest money.

This section, and we think in the entire state, most needs better paying working places for the worthy poor rather than loafing places and playgrounds for the idle rich.

A PARK TOO

Just now our people throughout the entire state are greatly aroused and are intently interested to acquire at Mammoth Cave the 70,000 acres which the Government requires before it will accept or improve a National Park. We favor that movement heartily. We also favor a Park along the Cumberland River, State or National, and we think it should include not two hundred or two thousand acres but at least twenty thousand acres including these proposed lakes in river and side streams and the territory bordering thereon throughout the river gorge above Burnside. If the facts were presented as they really exist to that noble and generous Kentuckian now

in exile in New Jersey, we think his generous offer would be available for this larger park with its lakes and water falls and power dams which would be the most scenic and beautiful section east of the Mississippi, Mammoth Cave not excepted.

CONCLUSION

1 Cumberland Falls dam is the keynote of a development project which contemplates investment of from two to three hundred million dollars on the Cumberland River nearly all of which will be in the State of Kentucky. If the issual of the License by the Federal Power Commission is prevented for the Cumberland Falls dam, then the entire project fails.

2 Whitley County has outstanding its limit of road bonds and a floating indebtedness of more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The building of this dam and power house will give us at least thirty thousand dollars a year additional taxes for county purposes alone and will likewise add to school and state taxes.

3 The building of the dam carries with it the construction of twelve miles of standard railroad and the construction of at least one hard surfaced road 15 miles long to Falls and gives water transportation for the entire distance along the river between Williamsburg and Burnside.

4 When these several dams for power and storage in the Cumberland and side streams are completed under the plan outlined by Government Engineers there will be no more floods in the lower Cumberland River, but as this stored up water is fed out through turbines it will give a uniform flow of water for transportation throughout the year, and will be one important step in flood control in the Mississippi Valley.

5 Self determination has always been given the highest consideration among free people. The people who own the property which is to be developed and overflowed and the business men along the upper Cumberland want this industrial development and their wishes are entitled to receive the greatest respect as to what they do with their own property.

6 During the period of construction along the Cumberland River several thousand men will find profitable employment for a number of years and after that this entire section of the state by reason of taxes derived on this enormous development can build better roads, have better schools, enjoy lower cost of power for industrial development, and have more factories, coal mines, cheaper lighting and heating, and last, but not least, give profitable employment to many thousands of our young men at home and will draw from outside sources large investments of capital in such enterprises, giving us that red letter day in Kentucky.

7 It would enable our poor farmers along the river struggling for support upon sterile, rocky and worn-out lands to sell these relatively waste lands to be submerged at far greater prices than the owners could sell same for to anybody else, thus enabling them to go elsewhere and buy productive farms.

We submit these facts for your careful reading and solicit your hearty co-operation in bringing about this great development in our section and in the state at large.

WILLIAMSBURG COMMERCIAL CLUB

By T. B. MAHAN, President.

A. T. SILER, Secretary

Commercial Club and President, Bank of Williamsburg

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WOLFORD JONES, Circuit Clerk	T. C. PERKINS, Cashier Farmers Bank & Trust Co.
L. P. LAY, Judge, Whitley County Court.	T. SCOTT SILER, Cashier Bank of Williamsburg
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M. M. CRISCILLIS, Sheriff	N. A. ARCHER, Secy. & Treas
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