

# LAKE LOGAN VISITORS AND STORIES UNDER CHAMPION OWNERSHIP

by Peter T. Robertson

October 2022



## ORIGINS OF LAKE LOGAN

Lake Logan, a private retreat in western North Carolina southwest of Canton, was created by Reuben B. Robertson, Sr. in 1932. At the time, Reuben was president of the North Carolina operations of Champion Papers. He used part of the funds received from settlement with the states of North Carolina and Tennessee for the sale of Champion's nearly 100,000 acres of timberland in those states for use in the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to build the lake. Robertson had convinced the company's board to build a dam on the East Fork of the Little Pigeon River at the site of an old logging camp as a reservoir to ensure an adequate supply of water for Champion's mill in Canton. He named the lake for his brother-in-law and future Champion president Logan Thomson. Robertson also arranged for the transporting a number of old log cabins from the Park to build a compound known as Sit 'n' Whittle for use as a place for family vacations and for entertaining important customers, along with political and business leaders.

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*Lake Logan Aerial View*

John Parris, a longtime columnist for the Asheville Citizen-Times and a huge admirer of Reuben, Sr., wrote about Sit ‘n’ Whittle in a 1982 column:

Once the big room sounded with laughter and with song and the rollicking voice of a man who was a legend in his own time. The cabin itself was part of the man and he made it a place of joy and happy gatherings, and he called it “Sit ‘n’ Whittle.” . . . “Mister Reuben” made of it a place where a body could sit-‘n’-whittle, tell tall tales, forget whatever troubles that might nag the mind, sing the old songs, listen to the cry of the fiddles, the hum of the wind, or just do some restful settin’ with old friends. . . .

John Parris, “A Cabin Named ‘Sit-‘n’-Whittle,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 7, 1982.

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*Sit 'n' Whittle*

In the 1940s, additional buildings were added, including a dining hall and meeting facilities, which Champion used for employee meetings and training sessions and for entertaining important customers, as well as business and political leaders.

After Champion was acquired by International Paper in 2000, Lake Logan was acquired by the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina. The Diocese still operates Lake Logan as a retreat center. <https://www.lakelogan.org>

## LAKE LOGAN STORIES

There are many Lake Logan stories from the period when it was owned by Champion and used as a retreat for Robertson family, as a gathering place for company executives and employees, and for entertaining important guests. This tells just a few of those stories.

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**Famous Visitors.** Lake Logan had a number of famous visitors over the years when it was owned by Champion. Several of those were:

*Vice President Richard Nixon and Reverend Billy Graham.* Reuben Robertson, Sr., filling in for his son Reuben, Jr. as president of Champion while the younger Reuben served as Deputy Secretary of Defense, hosted Vice President Richard Nixon at Lake Logan for a weekend in August 1956. The Vice President flew into the Asheville airport on one of the Champion planes. He was accompanied by the Reverend Bill Graham, a resident of nearby Montreat, North Carolina for a weekend stay at Lake Logan as guests of Reuben, Sr. Reuben, Jr. was supposed to have accompanied the Vice President, but cancelled at the last minute, perhaps because it might not have been appropriate as a high government official to accompany Nixon on what was essentially a political campaign tour of western North Carolina. Reuben, Sr. was a friend of Reverend Graham's, as was the Vice President.



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*Reuben Robertson, Sr. welcoming Vice President Nixon and Billy Graham*

*along with Reuben's younger son Logan*



*Asheville Citizen-Times Story about Vice President Nixon's Visit to Western North Carolina*

Vice President Nixon “caught” his first trout during that visit at the customer pond near Seldom Seen cabin.<sup>1</sup> (Lollie Robertson, Logan Robertson’s eldest daughter, recalls that her sister Happy actually caught the trout, and it was put on the Vice President’s line for the photograph.)



*Vice President Nixon Showing Reverend Billy Graham the Trout he “Caught”*

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<sup>1</sup> The fish were so tame in the smaller customer pond that was near Sit ‘n’ Whittle that when I visited Lake Logan one fall I wanted to catch a fish but there were no hooks or bait so I created a

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*Reuben Robertson, Sr., Flanked by Vice President Nixon and  
Reverend Billy Graham at Lake Logan's Sit 'n' Whittle*

One of the great Lake Logan stories of all time occurred during the Vice President Nixon's visit. Reuben, Sr.'s 9-year old grandson Logan Robertson, Jr. was also present and was a great prankster. Another of Reuben, Sr.'s grandsons, Clark Carneal, was there as well, and he recently recalled (embellished somewhat by me) Vice President Nixon's encounter with Logan, Jr.:

Logan loved to collect tree frogs, snakes and all kinds of creepy, crawly things. He was very proud of his collection and was carrying some frogs in a fishing tackle box. When the Vice President stepped out onto the Sit 'n' Whittle porch after lunch, he encountered Logan, Jr. and asked him, "What's in the box, little boy?" Logan was happy to show his collection to the Vice President and promptly opened the fishing tackle box. The frogs, of course, jumped out. Nixon was startled and jumped back. Three secret

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service men jumped into action. One grabbed the box with Logan's collection, and the other two grabbed Logan's arms. Logan's feet did not touch the ground until they had carried him to the other side of the porch.

Clark also related a story about Billy Graham getting to “meet” one of Logan’s frogs. Reverend Graham was seated at the large wooden dining table in Sit ‘n’ Whittle enjoying a cup of coffee and speaking to someone on his left, while his cup of coffee was on his right. Logan snuck up behind Billy Graham's back and dropped a tree frog in his cup of coffee. Clark said that when he saw the tree frog hit Reverend Graham’s cup of coffee with a splash, he and Logan ran outside and down the side of the hill, never looking back and never knowing what happened after that.

*Florida U.S. Senator George Smathers and other Political Leaders.* U. S. Senator George Smathers of Florida also visited Lake Logan during the summer of 1956. Senator Smathers and his family had longstanding ties to the area.<sup>2</sup> He was one of numerous political leaders besides Vice President Nixon, who visited Lake Logan over the years.

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<sup>2</sup> Senator Smathers’s parents moved from western North Carolina to New Jersey and then to Florida where George grew up and eventually was elected to the U. S. House and then to the Senate in 1950. George’s parents maintained close ties to western North Carolina, with a vacation home in Waynesville. Reuben, Sr. had longstanding ties to various branches of the Smathers family in the area. When he first moved to western North Carolina, Reuben retained a prominent local real estate lawyer, James Bascomb (“Bat”) Smathers, to assist with clearing titles on property Champion was acquiring in the area. Roberson used Bat Smathers’s services for many years after. Another branch of the Smathers family, Pat and his son Zeb, have been prominent lawyers and political leaders in Canton for years, with each serving as Mayor of Canton.

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*Reuben B. Robertson, Sr. with Senator George Smathers*

In addition to Vice President Nixon and Senator Smathers, other famous political leaders who have visited Lake Logan include two other Vice Presidents – Hubert Humphrey and George H. W. Bush. North Carolina Governors Luther Hodges, Terry Sanford, and Dan Moore (who had been a Champion lawyer before he ran for Governor),<sup>3</sup> as well as Governors Robert E. McNair of South Carolina, Mills Godwin of Virginia, and Lester Maddox of Georgia during a meeting of the Southern Governor’s Conference were also guests.

*Prominent Business and Government Officials.* Other prominent guests at Lake Logan have included such business leaders as the founder and president of Time, Inc., Henry Luce, and his successor as president of the company, Roy Larsen.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a famous family story, but not at Lake Logan, involving Governor Moore, Reuben Robertson, Sr. and Reuben’s grandson Logan Robertson, Jr. The Governor was visiting Reuben at his house “Hopemont” on a mountain above Asheville. Suddenly, they were disturbed by a loud explosion. Logan, who lived below his grandfather on the mountain side, was using dynamite to clear tree stumps off his property. Reuben, Sr. sent someone down to get Logan to stop blowing things up while he was meeting with the Governor.



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Ralph Cordiner, the president of General Electric and a friend of Reuben, Jr.'s,<sup>4</sup> also visited Lake Logan to give a talk on leadership to Champion management personnel.

**Henry and Clare Booth Luce Visit to Lake Logan.** One summer weekend in the 1950s, Reuben, Jr. and his wife Peggy hosted Time president Henry Luce and his famous wife Clare Booth Luce for a weekend at Lake Logan. Time Clare Booth Luce was a writer and author, Congresswoman from Connecticut, and later ambassador to Italy.



*Clare Booth Luce, Henry Luce, and Peggy Robertson*

*in front of Sit 'n' Whittle*

*(photo by Reuben Robertson, Jr.)*

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<sup>4</sup> While he was Deputy Secretary of Defense, Reuben tapped Cordiner to head a committee he created to study military pay.

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*Henry Luce with Logan Robertson and Reuben Robertson, Sr. at Sit 'n' Whittle*

*(photo by Reuben Robertson, Jr.)*

In addition to Time magazine, Time also published Life and Sports Illustrated. Time was a large customer of Champion's and used its high-quality paper for these publications.

**Robertson Family Pranks, Hijinks, and Other Happenings.** Lake Logan was also the site of numerous and amusing Robertson family pranks and other happenings. The following are a few of those stories:

Reuben, Jr, his son Reuben, III, and Reuben's brother Logan Robertson were famous (or perhaps infamous) for their pranks on family members and friends. Some of the more famous of those pranks were played at Lake Logan and include:

*Snipe Hunts.* In a snipe hunt. the hunters are armed with flashlights to find, and burlap bags to catch, the elusive birds. In one famous hunt, Reuben, Jr. and Peggy Robertson were hosting a number of their friends and their children from Ohio for

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a visit in the summer of 1955. After dinner as evening approached, Reuben piled his children, the friends, and the friends' children in the Robertson's Jeep and drove up a rough mountain road, dropping people off on the side in groups to begin beating the bushes to find and bring back the snipe. One of the Robertsons' good friends had, for some reason, decided not to wear shoes for the expedition, not knowing what Reuben had in mind (probably thinking his good friend would pick him up later in the Jeep). Reuben had another plan. He raced down the mountain, leaving everyone scattered along the road, and went off to a local farmer who owned some rare, prized chickens. Reuben persuaded the farmer to part with some, which he brought back to Sit 'n' Whittle to be cooked for breakfast, claiming them to be snipe. Meanwhile, he left all the snipe hunters to make their way down the mountain road by foot, including Reuben's good friend (who was, needless to say, furious about being abandoned, barefoot on the mountain).

There were also a number of snipe hunts for the younger family members in the cemetery not far from Sit 'n' Whittle over the years. These were often hosted by Logan Robertson, Jr. and his cousin Clark Norburn. Logan and Clark would have the younger ones come to the cemetery where they were hiding, dressed as ghosts. They would jump out screaming and terrifying the youngsters.

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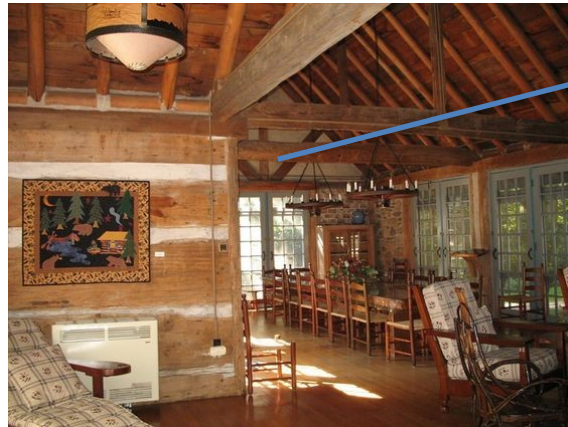
*Reuben, III's Pranks.* Reuben Robertson, Sr.'s sons, Reuben, Jr. and Logan, and his grandsons Reuben, III and Logan, Jr. were great pranksters. None was better than Reuben, III. A couple of his pranks at Lake Logan included the following:

The Nose-Dripping Moose. None of the Robertson was more famous for his pranks than Reuben, Jr.'s eldest son Reuben, III. In Sit 'n' Whittle, there is a long wooden, one-piece, poplar table used for meals for large groups. During the 1950s, there was a large moose head hanging over one end of the table. Reuben, III decided it would be amusing to tape ice cubes inside the nostrils of the moose. The Robertsons were hosting a number of their friends from Ohio for a week one summer. One of the guests was one of Reuben's best friends. Reuben had his friend seated under the moose, and the friend was shocked when drips started landing on his head from the moose's nostrils. Everyone roared with laughter, except Reuben's friend. See the picture below showing the dining table and the place where the moose head was located.

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Location of  
Moose Head

*Interior of Sit 'n' Whittle Showing Large Dining Table and Location of Moosehead*

Below is a picture of the long table with Reuben Roberson, Sr. in the foreground. A small portion of what is possibly the moose head shows in the picture, above the woman at the head of the table with a red arrow pointing to it. If it is the actual moose head, it is smaller than I remembered. It is entirely possible that the original moose head had become so moth-eaten that it was replace with the head of another smaller animal.



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The Bridge Jumping Episodes. In the 1950s, there was a trestle bridge, like one railroads used, over the river – the Little East Fork of the Pigeon River – that ran into and filled Lake Logan. Lollie Robertson, Logan Robertson, Sr.’s eldest daughter, recalls Reuben standing at the top of the bridge (perhaps 25-30 feet above the water) and yelling at passing motorists, “I can’t take it anymore, and I’m going to jump.” He would then proceed to jump off the bridge.



*The Old Bridge over the West Fork of the East Fork of the Little Pigeon River*

*from which Reuben, III Jumped*

*Dan Robertson’s Misadventures.* Reuben and Peggy Robertson’s second oldest son Dan was involved in two famous misadventures at Lake Logan. There was for many years a large waterwheel alongside the cabin (Shuteye Shack) just above and behind Sit ‘n’ Whittle and Honeymoon cabin. See the photo below with the waterwheel in the background, to the left of Sit ‘n’ Whittle, with Reuben

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Robertson, Sr. in the foreground and some notable guest. A couple of years ago,

Dan recounted to me what happened one time on the waterwheel:

Reuben and I used to play a game on the water wheel. We would shut off the flow of water from up stream. The water wheel would stop and then the game began. The objective was to get inside the wheel and see how high we could get it to go from one side to the other. The structure of the wheel was such that there was room enough to stand inside and ride the wheel from one side to the other. It didn't go very fast and was easy to hop on or hop off. The objective was to see how high we could ride it . . . hopefully without going over!! Well, I got so high it went all the way over with me. Evidently there was enough centrifugal force to keep me safely all the way around. I think it scared Reuben more than it scared me!!

Waterwheel



*Exterior of Sit 'n' Whittle Showing the Waterwheel in the Background*

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Dan's other misadventure occurred after the family went into Canton to go to the movie theatre. Before we left, the cook had made some pies with fresh, local fruit and berries. We were anxious to have some when we returned and scoured around the kitchen looking for the pies. They were not to be found. It turns out that the cook had put them on top of a top-opening freezer, and Dan didn't notice them when he opened the freezer to get out ice cream to go with the pie. The pies were ruined.

*The Infamous Food Fight.* In the summer of 1992, there was a large gathering of the Robertson clan at Lake Logan – more than 50 people attended. For some reason, a Thomson cousin – Maynard Thomson – was invited, along with his family. Maynard is a great-grandson of Peter G. Thomson. This was the first time any of the Thomsons has been included. As it turns out, that reunion has become the stuff of legends. It was most notable because of a large food fight that broke out at the outdoor barbecue the family held. At some point, someone started throwing items of food, and the initial target responded in kind. Shortly, many of the attendees joined in the melee. Since then there have two principal suspects suggested as the possible instigators. One was, naturally, cousin Logan Robertson. Even if Logie did not start the incident, he certainly was a vigorous participant. Unfortunately, Logan is no longer with us to take credit or to defend himself. The other suspect has been the Thomson cousin, Maynard. Maynard has vigorously tried to shift the focus of the discussion and blamed others as being the culprits. There has been discussion of some sort of trial at the next gathering to settle the



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matter. Elizabeth Shamblin, one of Happy Robertson's daughters, recently commented as follows about the food fight: "... [I]t was definitely Logan [who started it[,] [a]lthough Maynard is a plausible suspect.



Logan Robertson

*1992 Robertson Family Reunion before the Food Fight*

**Jousting Matches.** Activities of which we have only recently become aware were jousting matches on the Lake with the combatants in the Old Towne canoes. Pictures of one of those matches are below, with Reuben, Sr. serving as the referee in a rowboat in the background of the first photo below.



*Jousting Match with RBR, Sr. as Referee in the Background*

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*(Note that the Person in the Stern in a One-Piece is a Man)*



*Jousting Match Combatants Going at It*



*The Result of a Jousting Match*