

Whippoorwill E-Comment

Number 29



January, 2005

Remembrances of Harland Sanders

I met Harland Sanders *before* he became internationally known as Colonel Sanders. In the summer of 1953, Libby and I were working at Cumberland Falls State Park, about 20 miles from Corbin, Kentucky, in the southeastern part of the state in the Kentucky mountains. Libby worked in the gift shop, and I was a state naturalist whose job it was to present lectures on birds and other wildlife and to lead lodge guests on daily nature field trips. I regularly led a motley amalgam of guests of all ages, from elementary school kids to slow-moving senior citizens whose health and appearance dictated my choice of trail to explore. With more older people, I chose mostly level paths involving very little climbing. I once gained statewide radio notoriety when I guided about 30, mostly senior guests, across the Cumberland River on a ferry to a distant area to view birds, spring wild flowers and even black bears. On our return trip we discovered that the ferry had broken down, and the only way to get people back on the proper side of the river was for them to climb the unfinished skeletal multi-arched structure of a stone bridge that was under construction. I feared that some oldsters might have heart attacks because of the severity of their climb, but many of them acted like mountain goats and made the hazardous trek better than did some of the younger people.

Harland Sanders owned a small motel and restaurant on US-25 in the edge of Corbin. The business manager of Cumberland Falls State Park often called him to order food for their lodge dining room. Many times, I heard such items as cases of eggs, a dozen country hams and 100 pounds of flour being ordered. I often rode with an employee in a pickup truck to drive into town to fetch our ordered

food items, and so met Harland a number of times. He was a crusty middle-aged guy who was a curmudgeon quite ahead of his time. He was always crotchety but friendly, and used very colorful language. He had already gained an unusually good reputation for the quality and quantity of food served in his restaurant, and regional people were driving some distance to dine there. Word of mouth advertised his delicious fried chicken dinners.

It was nearly thirty years later when I met him again. I had been flying in the Navy and attending graduate school and teaching in the interim. I was then teaching at Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky. Harland by then had assumed the white-suited persona of the internationally recognized Colonel Sanders, and was a multi-millionaire. I walked past the administration building one day where his white stretch chauffeur-driven limo was parked, and the back door was open. He was sitting in the back seat carving a big salami with a jack knife and was eating it for his lunch. The incongruity surprised me. He was on campus a number of times, and before long, Transylvania gave the old man an honorary degree during commencement exercises at a graduation. I learned that he secretly financed the entire college education costs of hundreds of students through the years. He demanded no public recognition of his generosity, and his request was honored. His appearance on stage was a hit with the academically garbed students queued up before him. Governor John Y. Brown gave the graduation address, and the old man fell asleep during his presentation. The students clapped and cheered loudly when they had to shake the Colonel to wake him up so he could be properly frocked, and solemn words of recognition were read concerning him and his multiple contributions to society. It was a memorable occasion.



E-Whippoorwill Comment is the electronic journal of J. Hill Hamon,
1515 Evergreen Road, Frankfort, Kentucky, 40601.
KyHamon@aol.com. An e-journal is within the capabilities of
anyone who has a computer and a word processor.