

# Liberty! Tennessee's Official Outdoor Drama Enters Fourth Decade on High Note

By Jon Ruetz, Producer

A number of dignitaries and guests were at Sycamore Shoals State Park on July 11 to celebrate opening weekend of the outdoor drama Liberty!. Before the show, Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives Kent Williams presented Sycamore Shoals State Park with a General Assembly resolution designating Liberty! as the Official Outdoor Drama of the state of Tennessee.

"Sycamore Shoals Historic Area hosts what is unquestionably the state's finest outdoor drama," said Williams. "As it begins its 31st year, it is a great pleasure for me to present this framed copy of the resolution to the park. We look forward to many more years of continued success. This park and its success is vital to the entire region, just as Sycamore Shoals was two centuries ago. We are seeing impressive growth in tourism and many other related areas because of what is happening here."

Last year more than 300,000 people visited Sycamore Shoals. This season the park will host more than 60 re-enactments, musical concerts and special events, including the acclaimed Native American Festival in

June and the 9th Annual Celtic Festival held in September.

US Representative Phil Roe followed Williams to center stage with a Congressional resolution honoring the drama and its volunteers and supporters. While reading the statement that he gave in Washington from the floor of the House of Representatives earlier in the week, he asked that all

contributing their time and efforts to Liberty!."

Nat E. Hyder, president of the Friends of Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area, said the recognition was "a milestone that we share with many who have helped us reach this plateau. Volunteers, people who genuinely and completely love this park, are its lifeblood. They sew, clean, cook,

plant and build. And that's before the huge cast ever arrives to begin rehearsal. Liberty! is our flagship program but, in truth, every activity, every re-enactment, every presentation and every story told here is about one thing: remembering, and honoring, an extraordinary group of people. We want to teach the great lessons from the 18th century and, in so doing, we learn more about ourselves and our country," Hyder said.

FSSSHA Vice President Jim

Bishop, whose tireless work to support the park and the drama for 25 years has earned what Hyder believes is the most respectful sobriquet available – the glue that has held us together – said the words of the resolution "ring true down through time. This is a wonderful night. It is the



(L-R): Dustin Goforth, Liberty! cast member; US Congressman Phil Roe; TDEC Assistant Commissioner Mike Carlton; Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives Kent Williams; Sycamore Shoals State Park Manager Jennifer Bauer and State Parks' East Tennessee Regional Manager Herb Roberts gather at the park's statue of the Overmountain Man before a performance of Liberty! at Sycamore Shoals.

veterans stand and be recognized. Roe said, "First it is appropriate to remember the sacrifice of the most important volunteers, the citizen soldiers that are central to this story and to the story of America. I want to congratulate and sincerely thank all of the volunteers for honoring our great state by

## Liberty!

reaffirmation of the importance that Sycamore Shoals has played in the birth of our nation. The events that took place here shook the earth and forever changed the political landscape in our country.”

Dr. Paul Gabinet adviser to the FSSSHA board of directors agreed. “We are fortunate to have such a program, to bring great renown to the park and all the other activities that take place here. We are able

to entertain audiences and help them continue their education about frontier life and history and incorporate that interest in the many re-enactments and story-telling events we host.”

Park Manager Jennifer Bauer summed it up, “It’s an honor for Sycamore Shoals to be home to this meaningful drama, and a great thrill that our major public outreach holds this designation. Liberty!

defines who we are and why we are here. The drama has become well-known and brings so many people to the park who might not otherwise even hear about it and the many activities we have for people of all ages. While this was one of our best seasons ever, I’m confident Liberty! will be stronger and even more popular in 2010.”

## ‘Liberty! Worth Every Mile, Every Minute for Father Son Duo from Greene County

Taylor and Ron Moorefield love liberty, in every sense of the word. The father-and-son duo are an integral part of the cast of Liberty!, and put their time and money behind their love, driving more than 100 miles each way for rehearsals and performance and that’s if they take the “short” route, which is littered with municipal red lights. But the miles mean nothing to the Moorefields. “We’re proud to be a part of Liberty!. It’s worth every mile, every minute,” says dad Ron.

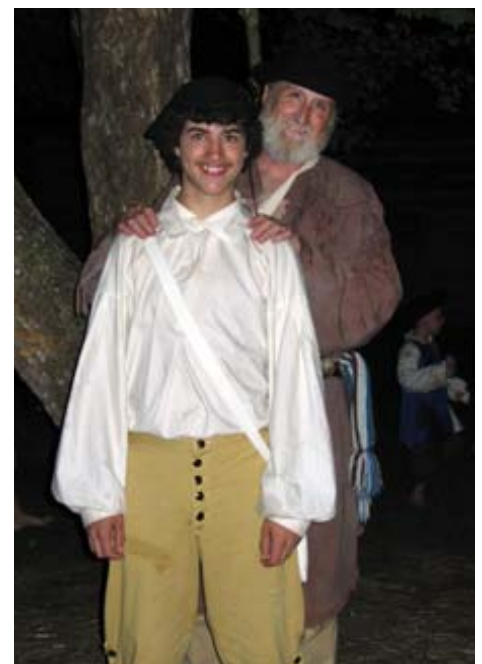
Taylor made his debut at the Fort Watauga Amphitheater in 2004, portraying a young pie thief who just can’t pass up the smell of a fresh cobbler cooling in one of the cabin windows. Over the next several seasons, he played a variety of roles. This year he is taking on a new challenge, portraying Valentine Sevier, the younger, supportive brother of John, who rose to prominence in the settlement, went on to rise to the rank of general, become the first governor of the state of Franklin and the first governor of the state of Tennessee. “One of the most enjoyable things in my life is to walk out there and be a part of the drama,” said Taylor. “I look forward to it during all the months we are not performing.”

Ron started out as a chauffeur for his son and then graduated to walk-on player himself. “I was scared to death the first time I went out to say lines but I knew that I had to try it. I wanted to be supportive, but I was terrified,” he said. Ron managed to overcome his stage fright and now happily and exuberantly portrays Julius Caesar Dugger, one of the founding fathers of Watauga Association.

Taylor, on the other hand, is perfectly comfortable in front of an audience. He has traveled widely and performed as a musician and singer with the Highlands Youth Ensemble. He began his vocal career at a young age, first as a member of the Mountain Empire Children’s Choral Academy and then singing three years with the East Tennessee Children’s Choir.

Ron is a firm believer in quality education. “This is a great learning experience for all these young people. They are developing many types of skills that will be valuable to them later on in life and learning how to work together.”

All of the Moorefields, including Taylor’s mother Sarah, and his brother Chris, have performed in the drama, no doubt spurred on by the family enthusiast. “I love acting,” Taylor said with a wide smile. “I love the people here.



Ron and Taylor Moorefield have portrayed a variety of roles in Liberty! since joining the cast.

The script, the stories, all of it.” Taylor’s contagious enthusiasm is shared by his father. “I really love the stories. They never get old to me. I am honored to be a part of this, of keeping it alive and thrilled that it has been going on 31 years. I want to see it go on 31 more years. These stories are so important, for everyone. Without those determined people, there wouldn’t be a Tennessee. Maybe not even a country. We owe them the best we’ve got.”

## Good Right Turn Brought Sellars to Liberty!

Allen Sellars read about Liberty! and knew somehow he had to be part of it. Having read about auditions in the newspaper, Sellars said, "It was Sunday after church, turning left, I would go home, turning right would take me to Elizabethton." Sellars turned right into Liberty!. His audition was so good that Sellars was asked to take on the challenging role of family and settlement patriarch John Carter, whose experiences and exploits frame a great deal of the history on which the drama is based. Carter and fellow settlement leaders William Bean, James Robertson, Zachariah Isbell and a young John Sevier were chosen by their contemporaries to be the first commissioners of the Watauga Association. Signed by more than 150 men in the late spring of 1772, the articles forming the association are considered the first example of a free and independent government on American soil, coming four years before the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

The thought of a 100-mile round trip just to be in a play might dissuade lesser men, but Sellars makes the journey from his home in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. A native of the very same Washington District that Carter helped organize – now known as Washington County – Sellars' father worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority and his family moved a lot. Sellars graduated from high school in Tampa. It's been more than 40 years since Sellars last worked on the stage, while taking a drama classes at Johnson Bible College in Knoxville. "I actually directed a play while I was a student but that was a long time ago," Sellars says

with a laugh. And though he loved theater, he decided upon a different direction for his life, going on to earn a master's degree in education from East Tennessee State University and a master's in theology from Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City and then serving in the ministry for several years.

When he heard that the renowned Crossnore School needed an assistant athletic director – and the mountains of home beckoned – Sellars jumped at the chance. "I'm amazed at what those people accomplished here. It would have taken so much longer for the America we know to get here, to expand, and for a settlement with free government to have existed without their determination and hard work. This experience has caused me to be much more aware of where we have all come from, of the extraordinary gift we have been given. I'm so grateful that I've had the chance to explore and learn about all of this."

One of Sellars' favorite aspects of portraying Carter is bantering with Elizabeth, Carter's wife, portrayed by Buffy Greene. "It's great fun and she does it so well. I really enjoy that," he said. He also looks forward to the action that comes with the dramatized attack on Fort Watauga by militant elements of the Cherokee Nation, led by Old Abram and the famed Dragging Canoe. "I'm thrilled with all of it. Learning how to react, to stay in character – stay in the scene. To be what your character should be. Carter wanted desperately to be free. He brought his family here and I think he was a tough old bandy rooster. But he had love and respect. I think he was very protective of his children, of all



Allen Sellars portrays John Carter, one of the first commissioners of the Watauga Association.

the children in the settlement. I think he would have even felt that way to some degree about Dragging Canoe, who was the son of his dear friend, Attacullaculla, the legendary Cherokee chief the settlers nicknamed the Little Carpenter because the pieces of the treaties he negotiated fit together so well." said Sellars. "There is no doubt in my mind that his heart was completely in what he was doing."



Carter banters with his wife, Elizabeth, portrayed by Buffy Greene.

## Acting Runs in the Family for Grandson and Grandfather Team

Many families throughout Northeast Tennessee have helped tell the stories of Liberty! at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area, but none with more gusto and joy than the grandson grandfather team of Brady and Buck Rogers of Gray. The Rogers' adventure began three years ago when Buck brought Brady to a re-enactment at Fort Watauga, where the drama is staged. "One of the men invited Brady to stay and watch. Brady followed him everywhere, most of the day. He was so taken with it." A short time later, Brady walked into his grandfather's house and matter-of-factly announced that he had read about auditions for the play. "I'm going to go, and you're going to take me," he said. And that, as they say, was that.

Brady breezed through auditions, immediately landing the role of the youngster whose agile fingers are the bane of all the frontier women who slave over a hot fire. It is well known in the settlement that no pie, of any flavor, can safely cool on a windowsill – or anywhere else – when the Sneakthief is on the prowl. Brady loves acting and his enthusiasm has earned him more lines in a role that expands to meet the needs of the young historian and performer.

Buck soon realized that his grandson's interest and zeal was going to change his own involvement. "He just will not miss practice – absolutely not. And I thought, since I'm going to be here anyway, I might as well just take a role too," Buck said with a grin. Buck now stars alongside his grandson, as Jacob Brown, the frontier leader whose land purchase led to the establishment of Jonesborough, Tennessee's first town, and the expansion of settlements down the rich, wide Nolichucky Valley.

In addition to the play, Brady and Buck have loaded up their specially made Liberty! cart and appeared in several parades. Their devotion also led to Brady's gift of a sizable bell that is used throughout the drama to signify important events in the settlement. Brady has been encouraging many of his classmates at Boones Creek Elementary School to come and join him in the drama. "I tell them: You should come and do this. You'll have a lot of fun and you'll learn a lot about history."

Brady said his goal is to portray John Sevier in the drama. B.K. Marlowe, who currently holds the role of Tennessee's illustrious general and first governor, blanched when told of Brady's



Buck Rogers and his grandson Brady pose by the bell Brady donated to Liberty!.



interest, and declined to comment. "I'm sorry but I don't have time," Marlowe said, glancing quickly over his shoulder. "I think I need to go study my lines."

"This is a great experience for the kids, of course," said Buck. "After you've been here for a little while, you realize how lucky you are to be a part of it. It's a close and good time for every one of us."



The cast of Liberty! is already looking ahead to the 32nd season which begins July 2010.

