

Henry Ward: “Sound Builder” For the Jackson Purchase

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Kentucky’s Jackson Purchase was home to a number of highly respected political leaders in the last century. No doubt the first who comes to mind is Alben Barkley, the Senate Majority Leader for President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s last three terms and Vice President following the upset victory in the 1948 presidential election that President Harry Truman and he secured in 1948. Clinton’s Harry Lee Waterfield, state house speaker from 1944-7 and lieutenant governor during Happy Chandler’s second term in the governor’s mansion and again during the administration of Governor Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt, and Noble Gregory, the First Congressional District congressman from Mayfield between 1937-58, also are worthy of special consideration for their service. However, Henry Ward, state legislator and longtime public administrator, exceeded all three of them in terms of his impact on public services in the Jackson Purchase over the course of his 35-year political career during which he was a leader in the fight for inexpensive public electrical power, first-class state parks, and modern highways.

Ward, born in 1909, was raised in Lone Oak, located near Paducah. His father, a farmer and dairyman, died in 1915 following a tragic accident resulting from the explosion of a gasoline stove.¹ His mother moved the family to Paducah, where she operated a boardinghouse, and Ward enrolled in Paducah Tilghman High School. Despite his diminutive size, Ward made the football team, but coaches encouraged him to concentrate instead on his studies. He graduated near the top of his class at and was active in the school’s debating society. His announced plan following graduation was to attend Yale, but Ward first began a long career in journalism first at the *Paducah News-Democrat* and then, after a merger of the city’s newspapers, the *Sun-Democrat*. As he later wrote: “opportunities for a poor boy depending on a widowed mother to secure a college education was (sic) limited.”² He rose quickly at the paper, in large part for his courageous

¹ “Gus A. Ward, of Lone Oak, Dies from Bad Burns,” *Paducah News-Democrat* (December 5, 1915); and “Ward Is Opposite of the ‘Symbol’ in Kentucky Politics,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 21, 1962).

² “Who’s Who at Tilghman,” *Paducah News Democrat* (March 3, 1928); and Henry Ward Manuscript – MS 10-25; “Recollections of 45 Years in Government,” unpublished 1974; Courtesy of Pogue Library, Special Collections and Archives, Murray State University Libraries, Murray, KY.

reporting on illegal gambling in the city. In 1933, too young to serve in the Kentucky general assembly, Ward ran successfully as a Democrat for state representative from McCracken County, and he started writing a daily *Sun-Democrat* column, “Seen While Roaming” (renamed “Ramblings” in 1943) that ran until he left the paper in 1948. His columns, which are used extensively by this article, enabled him to communicate to readers throughout the Jackson Purchase about those public issues that he pursued in the early years of his political career.

Ward campaigned as an independent Democrat wishing to avoid having to take a side in the great political battle in Frankfort over enactment of a state sales tax needed to fund New Deal relief programs in the Commonwealth that caused many Democratic lawmakers to enlist in factions led by pro-sales tax Governor Ruby Laffoon or his anti-administration enemies led by highway commissioner Ben Johnson and Albert Benjamin “Happy” Chandler, the young, ambitious lieutenant governor. Ward hoped the issue would have been resolved during a special session in fall 1933 before he took office, but he finally came off the fence to vote for the tax finally enacted during another special session held in summer 1934. Nevertheless, Ward remained independent during the 1935 gubernatorial race that featured one of the most contested Democratic gubernatorial primaries in the last century between Laffoon’s chosen candidate, Thomas Rhea from Russellville, and Happy Chandler. Ward joined fellow Paducahan, Senator Alben Barkley, President Roosevelt, and many other Jackson Purchase Democratic politicians in opposing Laffoon’s plan to hold a state nominating convention, which he could control. After Chandler took advantage of the governor’s trip to Washington that spring to call a legislative special session, the legislature passed a bill forcing a primary with a runoff in the case that no candidate received a majority of votes cast. The runoff, strangely enough, was held at Laffoon’s insistence, but it worked to his candidate’s disadvantage as, after Rhea, who finished first in the primary but fell short of gaining the majority, lost to Chandler, who campaigned vigorously on his pledge to repeal the sales tax, in the runoff. Ward supported the Democratic ticket in the general election, but he continued to present himself as an independent in the 1936 session.³

With the high turnover in the Kentucky general assembly in the 1930s, Ward, now in his second term, and with a personal style which many considered “cocky” (he later said that “self-

³ George T. Blakey, *Hard Times & New Deal in Kentucky, 1929-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 46-53.

confident” was more appropriate) was prepared to take a more visible role in the 1936 session.⁴ The issue that he chose to take on was removing tolls on Kentucky’s bridges. The legislature had passed in 1928 the Murphy Act that enabled the state highway commission to build intrastate bridges over the state’s major rivers to replace the many ferries. The bridges were funded by revenue bonds that would be retired by tolls on the bridges. The program was initially welcomed in the Jackson Purchase whose residents were affected more than any other region in the commonwealth by the many large rivers that they encountered as they traveled east in Kentucky. By 1936, the state had built bridges at Aurora and the U.S. 60 crossing over the Tennessee River and over the Cumberland River at Smithland and Canton. Soon, dissatisfaction set in as residents complained that the tolls, not scheduled to be removed for more than twenty years, were too high and caused out-of-state motorists to bypass the state thereby hampering tourism. Working with Paducah business and civic leaders, Ward brought the issue to legislators’ attention early in the 1936 session when he introduced legislation to earmark one cent of the state’s motor fuels tax to retire the bonds on state toll bridges. The *Paducah Sun-Democrat* editorialized in favor of the bill stating that Paducahans “will feel, and rightly, that the highway department is not playing fair with this section.” In short order, the Kentucky Free Bridge Association was formed in February 1936, and the *Sun-Democrat* promoted the free bridge program to readers throughout the Purchase by putting “Free Kentucky’s Toll Bridges” on its editorial page daily until 1944.⁵

Ward’s initial effort fell short in the 1936 session and may have in the short run actually hurt the free toll bridge campaign with other areas of the state by proposing to take money away from the highway program. The earmarking of highway funds soon gave way to a more sophisticated approach suggesting that lower bridge tolls would increase traffic and gasoline receipts. Though Ward and his allies made no inroads with Governor Chandler, who had not appreciated Ward’s recent “cracks” made against the governor that contributed to a tongue-lashing of the free bridge supporters as “agitators,” the Association found friends at the state highway commission where the chief engineer succeeded in convincing the highway commission to reduce tolls on the Eggner’s Ferry Bridge in September 1936 from 80 to 55 cents would not have an

⁴ “Independent Ward Builds Potential Base,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (July 23, 1936).

⁵ “Lions Ask State to Free Bridges,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 28, 1936); “Commerce Chamber Endorses Proposal to Pay for Bridges,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 29, 1936); “What’s News,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 2, 1936); and “Effort to Free Bridges of Toll Started by Paducahans,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 21, 1936).

adverse impacting on overall toll collections due to increased usage.⁶ The leadership at the highway department voiced support for reduced tolls. The free bridge movement gained a powerful friend in the Chandler administration when Robert Humphreys, a former lawmaker from Mayfield and one of Chandler's closest political allies, replaced Ben Johnson as highway commissioner in July 1936. Not long after assuming his new post, Humphreys said "many people favor freeing bridges but no one suggests a program that will work." This opened the door for Ward in the months before the 1938 session to sell the free bridge movement throughout Kentucky. With Jackson Purchase lawmakers' support, he travelled the state selling business leaders and lawmakers on the benefits of the program in terms of improved tourism. By the start of the session, he had the backing of the Kentucky Farm Bureau and the Kentucky Municipal League, despite opposition from eastern Kentucky. He wrapped up his tours with meetings in Frankfort with the governor and top administrative officials and leading legislators in December where Ward believed he had made progress in presenting the free bridge agenda. He concluded that "there is a great possibility ... that Governor Chandler will give his support to the plan to seek the best solution to the toll bridge problem."⁷

In fact, the toll bridge matter was included in the governor's state of the commonwealth speech at the start of the 1938 session, but to Ward's surprise Chandler dismissed the free bridge effort as having generated considerable "agitation" from supporters generated "in part by those selfishly seeking to place themselves in a favorable position in the public eye."⁸ Without Chandler's support, Ward's effort to address the toll issue legislatively failed on a 41-41 vote on the House floor in January 1938. This was the closest the free bridge forces ever came to a legislative solution. However, with backing from Robert Humphreys at the highway department, administrative initiatives cut tolls on the intrastate bridges and the Irvin S. Cobb Bridge, the badly aging Ohio River crossing between Paducah and Brookport, Illinois acquired by the state when

⁶ "Thanks Mr. Cutler," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 10, 1936); and Sharon Roggenkamp, author of forthcoming biography of Henry Ward, email to author, April 16, 2021.

⁷ "Seen While Roaming," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 17, 1937); "Continue Preaching the Gospel of Free Bridges," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 5, 1937); "Municipal Body to Help Fight for Free Spans," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 24, 1937); "Seen While Roaming," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 24, November 12, and December 1937).

⁸ "Chandler Offers 10-Point Program," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 6, 1938); and "Seen While Roaming," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 6, 1938).

private operators ran into financial difficulties and launched discounts for roundtrip crossings. These were met with considerable enthusiasm in the Jackson Purchase where the free bridge advocates felt vindicated in their belief that reduced tolls would encourage automobile traffic, reduce sectionalism, and encourage more tourism. Members of the Kentucky Free Bridge Association spread the word by automobile caravans throughout the Purchase and western Kentucky, as well as nearby towns in Indiana and Illinois, which featured speeches from Ward, whose schedule recently opened up after a hitch as Senator Barkley's campaign publicity director that ended with his defeat of Governor Chandler in the August Democratic primary, to advertise the relaxed tolls and invite residents to Paducah for a West Kentucky Day celebration in Paducah on August 29, 1938. The projected 10,000 participants was reduced to 4,000 due to rain, but their enthusiasm was hardly diminished as the crowd enjoyed a number of political speeches, including one from Lieutenant Governor Keen Johnson who recalled his rare trips to Paducah as a young boy growing up in western Kentucky gave him his first glimpses of a real city. Robert Humphreys impressed listeners when he proclaimed that "I do not believe that there is anyone in Kentucky who is more for freeing the bridges than I am."⁹

Ward and the free bridge advocates continued to press the issue in the administrations of governors Keen Johnson and Republican Simeon Willis. By the end of the Second World War, tolls were removed on the Irvin S. Cobb and many of the commonwealth's intrastate bridges, including the Eggner's Ferry and the bridge near Paducah over the Tennessee River and the Smithland and Canton bridges over the Cumberland. Thousands turned out for a ceremony that featured Governor Sampson at the Eggner's Ferry bridge broadcast to other crowds gathered to celebrate the removal of bridge tolls in late August 1945. By that time, Henry Ward was engaged in an even more difficult campaign fighting a very determined foe.¹⁰

Construction of Kentucky Dam, the largest and last of the Tennessee Valley Authority's dams brought challenges and opportunities of enormous consequences to the future of the

⁹ "Seen While Roaming," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 24, 1938); "What of Other Bridges," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 27, 1938); "Lenihan, Runge Arranging for Goodwill Tours," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (July 6, 1938); "Bridge Campaign Is Furthered by Goodwill Tours," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 12, 1938); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 29, 1938); and "Rain Fails to Dampen West Ky. Day Spirit," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 30, 1938).

¹⁰ "Thousands at Ceremony at Eggner's Ferry Marking End of Toll Bridges," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 26, 1945).

Jackson Purchase. Ward was an enthusiastic supporter of the dam, but others such as Calvert City's Luther Draffen, who was a driving force as a leader of the Lower Tennessee Valley Association in the successful fight for a "high dam" to achieve the navigational and flood control goals established for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and maximize the recreational and power potentials of the dam in the region. Political leadership was provided by Alben Barkley, First District Congressman Voris Gregory and, after his death, his brother Noble. However, it was Henry Ward who took the leadership role in Frankfort to secure the massive increase in cheap electrical power from the dam for Kentucky homes and businesses that kicked off a war between forces supporting the advantages of public power against the determined opposition from private utilities, most notably Kentucky Utilities. The war would be waged on two fronts: in Frankfort where passage of TVA enabling legislation would be required and at home where local communities, especially Paducah, would have to break free of KU's existing grip on providing electrical services. Ward was engaged as one of the strongest public power advocates both as a state legislator and as a journalist.¹¹

His interest in public power started early; a bill that he sponsored in his first session dealt with municipal utilities was defeated 40-36. He included the issue in his announcement for a second term in the legislature. His interest in public power increased once construction of Kentucky Dam commenced and interest in western Kentucky in accessing TVA power was voiced by Hickman, Mayfield, and Fulton in 1938. However, the private power forces scored a major victory in a December 1940 Kentucky Court of Appeals' decision that blocked an agreement for TVA to sell power to the town of Middlesboro. The agreement was a standard arrangement TVA used with municipalities in Tennessee and Alabama, but the court knocked it down on the basis that it would convey a number of municipal rights to a federal agency. Ward had unsuccessfully sponsored legislation in 1940 that might have satisfied the court's concerns, but it was soundly defeated by friends of private power. Following the Middlesboro ruling Ward wrote that "unless some plan could be worked out to get around the court's decision, it will stand as an effective bar against bringing TVA power to Kentucky." With the next legislative session scheduled more than a year away, Ward knew, based on his experience with the 1940 legislation, that passage of TVA

¹¹ Bill Cunningham, *Flames in the Wind* (Kuttawa: McClanahan Publishing House, 1997), 153-64.

legislation depended on a more sympathetic reception from Governor Keen Johnson and that the Kentucky Public Service Commission took a dim view of municipal power plants.¹²

Public power advocates organized themselves, at the urging of the Kentucky Municipal League, as the Kentucky Public Power League at a February 1941 meeting in Murray. Among those attending the organizational meeting were the mayors of Hickman, Mayfield, Fulton, Paducah, and Benton, along with a number of area legislators and Luther Draffen representing the Lower Tennessee Valley Association. Murray mayor George Hart was elected chair, but it was Ward who briefed the League on the upcoming legislative battle and took the lead by meeting with leaders on both sides of the issue prior to the 1942 legislative session.¹³

One development that would prove to be crucial in the upcoming battle was Henry Ward's abandonment of his independent status that he had held during the previous Laffoon and Chandler administrations by supporting Keen Johnson's legislative program. Ward and Johnson had much in common from their chosen careers in the newspaper field, and Ward appreciated the governor's administrative skills. He hoped that he might receive administrative backing in the upcoming speaker's race, but his strong stand on public power may have swayed Johnson against him. In November, Ward clearly indicated his interest in the speakership, but he warned that if the Johnson administration wanted "a man who will take his orders every morning and execute them without regard for whether they are right or wrong, if they insist that the Speaker use the office to hammer through the House measures and rulings that are not fair, then I am not interested." Although Ward was disappointed that he was passed over in the speaker's race, he took over the duties of majority leader Joe Robinson at the start of the session due to illness.¹⁴

Ward's new found influence paid off for public power advocates as the governor by summer 1941 reversed his 1940 opposition to a TVA enabling bill by indicating and directed the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) to work with Ward and the Kentucky Public Power

¹² "House Fails to Back Ward in His Utilities Fight," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 14, 1934); "Ward Seeks Re-Election as State Representative," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 30, 1935); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (October 3, 1938); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 20, 1939); "House Defeats Ward's Power Bill 53-27," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 6, 1940); "Decision Keeps T.V.A. Out of Kentucky Cities," *Louisville Courier-Journal* (December 21, 1940); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (December 23, 1940).

¹³ "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 26, 1941); and "League to Campaign for TVA Power in State Formed at District Wide Meeting at Murray," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 25, 1941).

¹⁴ "Legislature May Face a Lively Contest for Speaker," *Louisville Courier-Journal* (April 6, 1941); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 26, 1941); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (November 9, 1941).

League on legislation to enable Kentucky to take advantage of TVA electricity when Kentucky Dam would become operational in 1944. The PSC and its chair, former House speaker John Kirtley from McLean County, played a very complicated game in the TVA fight. The Kentucky Municipal League, which favored public power, was wary that the PSC hoped to secure control over municipally-owned utilities in the legislation, and Ward felt it had neglected to consult with TVA in the preparation of legislation. He convinced Johnson and leading lawmakers considering the administration's legislative program to hold back from filing the PSC-drafted TVA bill at the start of the 1942 session in favor of a general statement announcing support for allowing municipalities to contract for TVA power. Ward's criticism of the PSC and Kirtley was reflected at a mid-January meeting of the Kentucky Public Power League when its chair, Murray mayor George Hart, charged that Kirtley "has shown evidence of being very unsympathetic toward public ownership of utilities." By that point, Ward had taken control of the TVA bill and sought advice from TVA lawyers on the PSC draft before filing a revised bill at the end of the month.¹⁵

The House's consideration of the TVA bill was embittered as Ward took on Kirtley and the political influence of KU, led by its wily chair, R.M. Watt, aligned with other private power, coal, and railroad interests. Back in the Purchase, the *Paducah Sun-Democrat* stated that the future progress of the region rested on defeating Watt as Ward's TVA bill "would permit Kentuckians to obtain electricity at about half the price his company is selling it for." In this there was a binary choice, "KU or KY:" "the fight against the TVA bill is, purely and simply, the fight of a large corporation to retain special privileges; the political fight of a corporation barred from law from such politicking, to deny the people of Kentucky the right to obtain this modern necessity, electricity, at greatly reduced cost." During House committee meetings, Watt stated that passage of the TVA bill would "finish" private utility companies to which Ward responded that KU was not against the bill but TVA. However, the sharpest exchanges took place when Kirtley voiced his opposition to the bill on the second day. The bill's fate now hinged on whether or not Keen Johnson's position. The governor the following day disassociated himself from Kirtley, who he had appointed as PSC chair, by saying that Kirtley's only correct statement on the TVA controversy had been that his views did not represent those of the governor. Several days later, over a statewide

¹⁵ "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 5, 1942); "40 Delegates from 9 Purchase Towns Urge TVA Enabling Law," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 13, 1942).

radio broadcast, Johnson urged lawmakers to pass the TVA bill in strong terms. He told listeners that the bill would save rate payers at least \$7 million (\$116.1 million in 2020) annually and without it would effectively “raise a wall along the Kentucky-Tennessee line and keep out of Kentucky the advantages of cheap power.” The rebuke was so sharp that Kirtley immediately resigned, and the House approved the bill 85-10 with unanimous support from representatives in the First Congressional District. It was subsequently passed in the Senate and signed into law by the governor.¹⁶

Enactment of the TVA bill was followed shortly by TVA’s purchase of the Kentucky-Tennessee Light & Power Company to provide electricity service to Mayfield and Murray which, under the terms of the new legislation, quickly signed contracts with the agency for their electrical power. Hopkinsville, Russellville, and Bowling Green followed suit. Murray rate payers saved more than \$6,000 in the first six months as part of the TVA network with promises of greater savings once Kentucky Dam would come on the grid.¹⁷

Paducah was an entirely different story. City commissioners, offered an attractive deal by KU, had entered into a twenty-year franchise with the utility, but city commissioners, after passage of the TVA bill, immediately, with strong approval from Ward and *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, announced their intention to sever that relationship by buying out KU upon approval of voters. A long series of court battles and KU delays ensued, before voters finally were given an opportunity to vote on the establishment of a municipally-owned power plant in November 1960. At that time, voters, behind the campaign of the Citizens for TVA Power, led by upcoming young lawyer Julian Carroll, severed its relationship with KU in favor of a municipal power plant and TVA electricity by a lopsided 3-1 majority.¹⁸ Henry Ward, who had championed TVA power for Paducah, had long moved on to other matters.

Following a 1943 Democratic primary defeat for lieutenant governor, Ward had a brief respite from elective office. During this period, while he concentrated on his responsibilities as city

¹⁶ “KU or KY.?” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 3, 1942); “Verbal Clashes Mark Hearing on TVA Enabling Legislation,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 4, 1942); “Ward Asserts Johnson Back of TVA Bill,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 5, 1942); and “Johnson Asks OK of TVA Act; Kirtley Quits,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 11, 1942).

¹⁷ “Congratulations for the Good of All,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (April 16, 1942); and “Proof That a Tragedy Was Averted,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (January 14, 1943).

¹⁸ “Paducah Votes to Acquire KU,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (November 9, 1960).

editor at the *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, he also grew impassioned over the possibilities associated with Kentucky Lake, considered the nation's largest manmade lake, created by the impoundment of Tennessee River by the Kentucky Dam. He was named the secretary and treasurer of the Kentucky Lake Association, organized in November 1944, which sought public and private development of the lake. One of its earliest accomplishments was to bring state and TVA authorities together to reach agreement for a 1,200-acre state park near the Eggner's Ferry Bridge that became Kentucky Lake State Park.¹⁹ Once elected to the Kentucky state senate, Ward became sold on the role that state parks could play in expanding tourism in the commonwealth. On a visit to Kentucky Lake State Park in August 1945, Eugene Stuart, the secretary of the Louisville Automobile Club, said "I am impressed that west Kentucky is alive to the possibility of Kentucky park development." Two years later, he and Ward organized the Kentucky State Parks Association.²⁰

In the 1946 session, Ward worked to add \$400,000 to the state parks budget, most of which was to fund improvements at Kentucky Lake State Park, for the biennium. Vetoes by GOP Governor Simeon Willis trimmed that back to \$225,000, but Ward optimistically looked forward to making significant improvements to Kentucky Lake State Park, but delays in spending soured him on the administration's commitment to state parks improvement. Ward frequently chided the Willis administration in his *Paducah Sun-Democrat* columns. He feared that delay would result in money being returned to the general fund making it difficult for state parks supporters to request additional funding in the next administration, but the money was finally obligated for beach development and a seawall.²¹

More importantly, Ward feared that Willis' delays would seriously hamper the state's chances at a second state park at Kentucky Dam Village which had been home to TVA workers during the construction of the dam, and which included numerous buildings that would be useful in establishing a state park. With the new governor, Earle Clements from the western Kentucky town of Morganfield, Ward expected and received greater appreciation of Kentucky Lake for

¹⁹ "Kentucky Lake Ass'n Formed at Mayfield Meeting," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (November 23, 1944); and "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (May 30, 1945).

²⁰ "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 27, 1945); and "9-Man Park Body Is Suggested Here," *Louisville Courier-Journal* (May 17, 1947).

²¹ "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (December 11, 1946, January 16, 1947, March 8, 1947, April 28, 1947, August 20, 1947, and September 12, 1947).

expanding tourism. However, there was reason for the Paducahan to carefully approach Clements' support on the matter. After all, Ward had been a strong supporter of Harry Lee Waterfield, Clements' opponent from nearby Clinton, in the Democratic primary. In addition to sectional affinity, Waterfield had been a strong advocate for public power, but Clements had supported the "Moss Bill," first considered in the 1944 session, that Ward termed the "damnedest bill I have seen in a long time" would have crippled the TVA bill that Ward had worked so hard to pass and that Waterfield, House speaker that session, defeated by bottling it up in committee. Ward supported Clements in the general election, but on the Kentucky Dam project, he prepared the ground well by first securing unanimous support for it from his colleagues in the First Congressional District before pitching it to the governor at a late February 1948 dinner. The dinner was a success, and Clements later gave Ward a green light when he brought a proposal from TVA to a subsequent dinner to transfer Kentucky Dam Village properties that included 900 acres, a golf course, and airport for \$1 and the sale of buildings worth hundreds of thousands of dollars for \$30,000. Clements pledged to fund these assets from funds that he controlled, and Ward convinced lawmakers to add \$70,000 to the state parks budget for operations of Kentucky Dam Village State Park.²²

In a March 30 *Paducah Sun-Democrat* editorial, the paper complimented the work of the general assembly on state parks and coyly opined that "the future depends on what sort of administration is provided for the program." In fact, several days later Governor Clements announced that he had picked Henry Ward as the state's new conservation commissioner who, as part of his new responsibilities, would be in charge of the state parks system. Ward had at first been surprised by Clements' offer given his support of Waterfield in the previous year's primary, and he hesitated to give up the security of his newspaper position; but the governor convinced the paper to grant Ward a leave of absence. Finally, Ward received a pledge from the governor against undue political pressures and patronage politics. After his criticism of the Willis record on management of the park system, Clements had put Ward, as he said at the time, "on something of a spot" in that he must now either "put up, or shut up."²³

²² "Senate Delays Action on T.V.A Bill a Week," *Louisville Courier-Journal* (January 29, 1946); and "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 22, 1948 and March 8, 1948).

²³ "Future of Park Program Is Matter of Administration," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 30, 1948); "Ramblings," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (April 1-2, 1948); and Ward, "Recollections."

Over the course of his seven years of service during the administrations of Earle Clements and Lawrence Wetherby, Ward earned a reputation as the “father of the Kentucky state parks system.” The Kentucky Lake parks were leaders in terms of visits and park expenditures during his administration. Kentucky Dam Village State Park was opened for the summer 1948 season, and Ward and Governor Clements hosted the first of many tours during his seven years of park administration of the Kentucky Lake state parks in May. With an entourage of 150 Louisville area businessmen, the governor proclaimed that “at the edge of Paducah you have the greatest single attraction in Kentucky.” These tours brought scores of public officials, business leaders, newspaper editors, outdoor columnists, journalists and broadcasters across Kentucky and nearby states to observe what the state’s public parks, especially those on Kentucky Lake, had to offer visitors. Ward also encouraged the start of pre-session legislative meetings before the start of regular sessions held at the state parks. At the start, the sessions were split between Kentucky Lake and Cumberland Falls, but they soon were held jointly at Kentucky Lake (with exceptions during Happy Chandler’s second term), ending when the general assembly started meeting annually in the 1980s.²⁴

In fact, Ward improved the state park system rapidly especially at Kentucky Lake. At a Kentucky Lake Association dinner in May 1950, Clements and Ward announced plans to construct a \$600,000 50-room hotel at Kentucky Lake State Park that opened in March 1951. Kentucky Dam Village and Kentucky Lake State Parks were by far the biggest attractions in the state park system. Governor Clements boasted that visits at Kentucky Dam had jumped from 102,000 in 1946 to over 1.1 million in 1949, in large part due to Henry Ward’s efforts to convince state and federal authorities to build a highway over the dam.²⁵ A third park on Kentucky Lake, Cherokee Park was added as the state’s only state park for blacks in 1950 on 400 acres cut from Kentucky Lake State Park. It was considered one of the best segregated state parks in the south with a bath house, boat dock, picnic areas, and cottages. Ward said at the time, “the colored people of Kentucky are entitled to park facilities” and “they much prefer a park of their own.”

²⁴ “Henry Ward, 1909-2002; Legacy Included Parks and Highways,” *Lexington Herald-Leader* (October 9, 2002); and “Louisville Business Men Visit Purchase on Good-Will Tours,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (May 21, 1948).

²⁵ “\$400,000 Hotel to Be Built at Ky. Dam,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (May 24, 1950); and “Golf Course to Be Built at Park,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 27, 1950).

Cherokee Park closed following the passage of federal and state civil rights laws in the mid-1960s ending Jim Crow segregation in public accommodations.²⁶

Ward's accomplishments did not spare him from criticism, especially during the bitterly-fought 1955 Democratic primary race between his old foe, Happy Chandler, and Bert Combs, the choice of the administrative faction led by Earle Clements and Lawrence Wetherby.²⁷ Chandler, who focused his primary campaign mostly on Clements and Wetherby, demonstrated little appreciation for improvements in the state parks since he left office in 1939. He hinted that he would involve the private sector more in the operations of the parks and he slammed Ward for the practice of picking up the tab for visitors during their park tours. Ward, increasingly concerned that Chandler would undo the advances that he had worked so hard to secure, actively campaigned against the former governor by defending the benefits of the state park system and reminding voters of past Chandler ethical lapses when his swimming pool was built despite wartime rationing and what Ward termed "the whiskey deal" when Chandler took payments from a whiskey wholesaler while he was a U.S. senator.²⁸ Perhaps with an eye to gaining votes in western Kentucky, Governor Wetherby and Ward announced plans during the campaign for improvements at the Kentucky Lake state parks, most notably for a hotel at Kentucky Dam Village State Park. However, these plans were scrapped after Chandler defeated Combs by a modest 19,000 votes. The hotel was completed in the summer of 1962 during the Combs administration, with Ward present.²⁹

Following Chandler's inauguration, Ward went to Washington as director of legislative affairs for Senator Clements, but he returned to the state after Clements' defeat in the 1956 general election as director of the Louisville Chamber of Commerce. He was pressed back into the state service to replace Clements as state highway commissioner in August 1960. Clements

²⁶ "Cherokee Park on Kentucky Lake for the Colored," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 27, 1950); and Gerald L. Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John A. Hardin, eds. *The Kentucky African American Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 98.

²⁷ John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent: Kentucky Politics, 1930-1963* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 55-65; and George W. Robinson, *Bert Combs the Politician: An Oral History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 50-61.

²⁸ "Ward Challenges Chandler to Talk About Pool," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 9, 1955); "Ward Chides Chandler for 'Whiskey Deal,'" *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (July 3, 1955); and "Parks in Area to Get New Facilities," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 26, 1955).

²⁹ "Combs Calls New Lodge 'Symbol of Best Park System in Nation,'" *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (July 8, 1962).

resigned under a cloud of scandal related to a truck purchasing scandal that resulted in his breaking his close relationship with Governor Bert Combs. Ward at first resisted taking the position, which paid \$3,000 less annually than the Chamber of Commerce job and saying “I am not a candidate, I am not an applicant, and I am not available.”³⁰ However, he, in the end, gave in and held the office for the remainder of Combs’ term and three years of the Breathitt administration. In somewhat of a reprise of his stint as conservation commissioner, Ward’s tenure as highway commissioner was marked by great advances for the roads and bridges in the Jackson Purchase. His experience was timely as the Combs administration was in the middle of a campaign to pass a \$100 million bond issue for highways and parks on the November ballot. Ward was a highly visible part of the Kentucky Council for Better Roads barnstorming tour of the commonwealth on behalf of the bond issue in western Kentucky. He told the crowds that the commonwealth desperately needed \$90 million annually to provide the state’s 10 percent match of the federal interstate program. Its defeat “would mean that our roads would go to pot” as the state could not afford maintenance of its extensive state highway system. The bond issue passed easily.³¹

Ironically, Ward, who had been a leader in reducing tolls during the free bridge movement, now found himself once again on the spot as the central figure in a massive expansion of toll roads in the state. Kentucky had been relatively slow in planning and constructing interstate “superhighways” that President Eisenhower had encouraged. Ward saw no alternative but to devote \$22 million annually in order to receive the state’s share of interstate funding with its modest 10 percent state match. Speaking to a pre-session meeting of the general assembly at Kentucky Dam Village State Park in December 1963, he said voters must now “face the facts of life” meaning that with the state having no choice other than to secure its share of interstate funding, the state was in a bind unless more road money could be found. Given that Governor Combs had already pushed through a substantial tax increase in 1961 with the three-cent sales tax,

³⁰ Pearce, *Divide and Dissent*, 135-9 and 150-3; Robinson, *Bert Combs*, 121-37; and “Chamber May Offer Ward Leave,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 24, 1960).

³¹ “State Team Carries Plea for Passage of Road Bond Issue to District Towns,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (October 26, 1960).

revenue bonds which could be retired from tolls would be required. He asserted that the state had no choice: "we must go forward, or we'll go backward."³²

No superhighway roads had been approved for the Jackson Purchase before Combs took office in 1959, although there had been some movement for an interstate link between Nashville and St. Louis. No east-west interstate was under consideration through western Kentucky, but there was a commitment to build the Western Kentucky Parkway, a toll road to the vicinity of Paducah made during Clements' brief tenure as highway commissioner, but no firm decision had been made on the route. With the 1960 bond issue's passage, preliminary plans made by the administration for the parkway called for an interchange on I-65 at Elizabethtown that would follow U.S. 62 through Princeton. Business and political leaders from Owensboro and Henderson preferred a northern route, but Ward prevailed, and the 127-mile parkway was constructed to Princeton before the end of the Combs administration in December 1963.³³

The dispute over the Western Kentucky Parkway was minor compared to that over settling the route of I-24. When Ward took office, it was hardly a settled matter that I-24 providing a link between Nashville and St. Louis would even be built. If it was, there were a number of competing routes were under consideration, several of which bypassed the Jackson Purchase. Ward preferred a route that would follow the current route of I-24 by connecting with the Western Kentucky Parkway near Eddyville to cross the Ohio River near Paducah. There was a strong alternative camp represented by the Illinois-Tennessee-Kentucky (IDK) Association supported by vocal local leaders in Murray and Mayfield who wanted the road to pass closer to Murray and Mayfield. Ward's task was further complicated by the need to coordinate with authorities in Tennessee, Illinois, Missouri, and, at the end, Indiana. Final approval of the route lay with the federal Bureau of Roads, which early in the process set Nashville and Cairo, Illinois as "control points" which meant an Ohio bridge well west of Paducah. Ward encouraged the Bureau to reconsider the Cairo requirement in favor of a Paducah control point, but the Bureau complicated matters in telling the states involved that they needed to consider Evansville as the control point. That would have swung I-24 to a route well east of the Jackson Purchase, but Ward, by suggesting the Evansville

³² "Ward Says Additional Funds Required for Road Systems," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (December 17, 1963).

³³ "Lackey Lashes Gov. Combs Over Road Location," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 14, 1961); "Combs OK's Toll Road Bypassing Owensboro," *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer* (March 14, 1961); and "Parkway in Full Use," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (December 3, 1963).

route would set back completion of already planned improvements on U.S. 41 south of Evansville, convinced Indiana authorities to drop the Evansville I-24 route.³⁴

By this point, leaders in Paducah and Henry Ward eyed an I-24 route with a new \$12 million Ohio River bridge as an alternative to the not so gracefully aging Irvin S. Cobb bridge, but they would first have to sidestep an engineering study for the Bureau of Public Roads that recommended as the top of several alternative I-24 routes stretching from an interstate connection near Cape Girardeau, Missouri with a new bridge near Cairo that would have passed below and east of Paducah before turning south to Nashville. Ward, with the backing of Governor Combs, insisted on the Paducah control point and bridge, which was also supported by the other governors. The final plan, which they took to a White House meeting with President Kennedy in September 1963 and another meeting with the Johnson administration the following February, contained a new stretch of interstate from near Caruthersville, Missouri to Jackson, Tennessee with the only Mississippi River bridge between Memphis and Cairo. Looking back at what he had accomplished on routing I-24, Ward told an Associated General Contractors of Western Kentucky meeting in Paducah: "it wasn't such a bad job – getting the governors and highway engineers of four states, the Bureau of Public Roads and finally the President of the United States to agree with a little old country boy from out here at New Hope." Groundbreaking ceremonies for I-24, estimated to cost \$90 million for Kentucky's portion, took place in 1967, but it was only completed in May 1980, 22 years after it was first discussed at a cost of more than \$242 million.³⁵

Disappointed residents of Murray and Mayfield over the final I-24 route were not overlooked. Edward T. "Ned" Breathitt, the Hopkinsville former legislator and Combs' candidate in the 1963 gubernatorial campaign, announced in February 1962 that he favored a toll road for the Jackson Purchase that would be completed during his administration.³⁶ Construction of the Purchase Parkway toll road which linked ultimately Benton, Mayfield, and Murray with I-24 at

³⁴ "W. Kentucky Superhighway Route Talked," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 9, 1961); "Ward Says Old Proposal for I-24 Was Dead Issue," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 21, 1961); "Leaders Map Plans to Fight for Road Proposal," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 22, 1961); and "Indiana Link for I-24 Is Proposed," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 2, 1961); and "Paducah Gets Backing on I-24 'Area,'" *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 21, 1961).

³⁵ "4 Governors Finally Agree on 185-Mile Route for I-24," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 18, 1963); "I-24 Plan Is Reconfirmed by Representative of 4 States," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 9, 1964); and "Kudos for a 'Little Old Country Boy,'" *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (September 22, 1964); and "At Last, an Unbroken I-24 from Here South," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (May 22, 1980).

³⁶ "Breathitt Favors Highway for West Kentucky Counties," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (February 6, 1962).

Eddyville depended on voter approval of a \$176 million bond issue pushed through the general assembly in 1964 and easily approved by voters in November 1965 over the opposition of Happy Chandler and Harry Lee Waterfield, elected to a second term as lieutenant governor in 1963. Henry Ward was once again a leader in supporting the issue's passage. At the Fancy Farm picnic in August 1965, Ward told west Kentucky voters that the bond issue was not only vital for construction of the Purchase Parkway, but it also enabled the highway department to provide four-lane traffic on U.S. 45 from Lone Oak to Mayfield. Speaking later to the Paducah Rotary Club, he warned that defeat of the bond issue would be "tragic" for the region. Days after voters approved the bond issue, plans for the Purchase Parkway, which included a welcome center in Fulton that was never built, were given the green light. Although completion of the \$40 million Purchase Parkway did not take place during Breathitt's term, its opening in January 1969 gave the Jackson Purchase its first superhighway and, as Ward said, provided the final link to a commonwealth system of superhighways from the Purchase to the Big Sandy.³⁷

Before stepping down as highway commissioner, Henry Ward was also responsible for extensive improvements in the Jackson Purchase "arterial system" involving U.S. 45, 51, and 641 which handled traffic from I-24 and the Purchase Parkway.³⁸ But after six years, Ward was eager to toss his hat in the ring for one of the top elected offices in the commonwealth. He had considered running with Breathitt in 1963, but he decided against it as an inner ear disorder and physical exhaustion caused him not to run. As Breathitt cast about for an administration gubernatorial candidate to run against Happy Chandler, Ward's name again surfaced. Breathitt and many leaders in the administration faction preferred a second term for Bert Combs, but he was slow to accept the challenge due to family considerations and a possible federal judicial appointment from President Lyndon Johnson. Combs in the end decided against running, so Breathitt following the 1966 general election announced his support of Ward as the administration's candidate in the gubernatorial primary. Ward's campaign, building on his record as an administrator who had built

³⁷ "Study Shows Parkway Bonds Are Feasible, Ward Reports," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (March 29, 1965); "Parkway Provides Fulton Welcome Center," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (June 30, 1966); and "53 Miles of Safe Driving, Convenience," *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 29, 1968).

³⁸ "Breathitt Unveils 'Arterial System,'" *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (August 2, 1964).

the state park system and overseen the highway expansions in the Combs and Breathitt terms, touted himself as “The Sound Builder of Kentucky.”³⁹

Jackson Purchase Democrats had reason to be excited about the primary with two of the three major candidates being natives of the region, which despite its deserved reputation as the Gibraltar of Kentucky democracy had never had a governor from there elected. With the Breathitt administration’s backing, Ward easily defeated Harry Lee Waterfield and Happy Chandler in the May primary. However, he faltered in the general election campaign against Louie B. Nunn, a skilled campaigner who had lost to Breathitt in a close 1963 race, by a surprising 30,000 votes. For all that Ward had done to improve life in the Jackson Purchase, his victory margins there was a relatively dismal 9,312 edge that needed to be doubled to have a fighting chance against Nunn. While he carried each Purchase county, he won Fulton County by only 161 votes despite his work on the Purchase Parkway which ended there and Marshall County, despite all his efforts to make Kentucky Lake’s state parks the showcase of the park system and to build the area’s tourism industry, gave him an extremely slim 132 vote win. This defeat ended Ward’s political career. He returned to the *Paducah Sun-Democrat* in 1968 for a two-year stint as the only non-Paxton family publisher and died in 2002. Motorists might note his name associated with the I-24 Ohio River Bridge, a fitting tribute to his role in construction of that road and his fight for that bridge as an alternative to the Irvin S. Cobb Bridge. The Purchase would wait until 1975 to see one of its own elected governor.⁴⁰

³⁹ “Henry Ward Apparently Ned’s Pick,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (July 30, 1966); “‘Day of Decision’ Coming Soon in Race for Governor,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (October 31, 1966); “Ward To Run for Governor with Bert Combs’ Backup,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (November 11, 1966) and “Ward Commends Marshall People for Tourism Job,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (April 23, 1967).

⁴⁰ Election Returns, Kentucky State Board of Elections, CD requested by author, November 2011; “Key Purchase Counties Weak for Democrat,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat* (November 8, 1967); “Kentucky Owes Henry Ward,” *Paducah Sun* (December 13, 1992); and “Ward’s Honesty, Service Recalled,” *Paducah Sun* (October 9, 2002).