

LINK OF OLD ROAD STIRS MEMORIES

Lenoir-Blowing Rock Turnpike Carried Traffic Of Olden Days

By NANCY ALEXANDER in Lenoir News-Topic

The old man stood high on the mountain looking down the narrow shaded lane running between the overhanging trees. His shoulders were bent with the weight of the years that had sprinkled the pepper and salt into his hair.

There it lay—or, at least, all that remained of it—the old turnpike that once ran between Lenoir and Blowing Rock, the road that had opened the way to Boone, Tennessee and the back country.

His vision blurred and he remembered, as a child sitting by the fireside while the coals spit snow on long wintry days, listening to his grandfather weave tales, in the linsley-woolsey of time, of years when there wasn't a road between the valley and the mountain—only a rough trail.

For almost a hundred years after the first pioneer came struggling up the mountains, walking beside their ox drawn sleds hauling their meager household supplies over the twisting torturous trail winding between the great gnarls of twisted rhododendron, that was all there had been—just a little path clinging to the great peaks.

After the settlers built their cabins among the hills the path widened a little as they made annual trips down to the valley driving before them herds of horses, cattle, and hogs, and flocks of turkeys, geese, and other fowls to market, some going as far as Columbia and Charleston and other distant markets.

ing merry, joyous times. But for the most part of the year they lived in isolation. The road was too narrow for even a wagon to travel it. About the only way a person could make his way out was on foot or by horseback.

And then there were recollections of his grandfather reminiscing of leading men of the time—men with foresight and vision, who saw the great necessity for a link between the lowlands and the mountains—men like James Clarence Harper, Samuel Patterson, Edmund Jones and others, with belief in the future and dreams beyond their years, who envisioned a road up the mountain, and set about to build it.

The Blowing Rock Turnpike was incorporated in the Legislature of 1845. His grandpa said the road was a good one for those days. It took a long time to build, but when it was finished it was like cutting an opening in an impassable stone wall.

There had been a stage coach route started soon after that. On good days, grandpa said, the folks liked to ride on top with the driver, who impressively and skillfully cracked his long whip across the heads of the straining horses.

A toll gate—part of the time here had been two—was operated

to help pay the expense of the upkeep on the road, which required work most of the time. Mr. Harper had president and superintendent of the turnpike until his death. Later the Lenoir-Watauga Turnpike Company had operated it.

When the pike was opened—that was when the first Caldwell folks started building summer homes on top of the mountain—they'd pack up at the first of the summer, spending days getting ready, loading wagons high, and then take all of one day to make the trip.

Before that the mountain land had had no value. The lack of a road had made it impossible for people to enjoy the summer coolness and the magnificent views to any great extent.

Not long after the road was completed there had been built beside it at Patterson, the first cotton mill in the western end of the State and people came from the mountains to get thread for their looms. Then, too, they started hauling from the hills wagon loads of cabbage, apples, and chestnuts to the markets in the fall.

The section of trail before the old man ran beneath the gray skeletons of ancient chestnut trees, where he remembered buggies of rosy cheeked young people, bundled in warm clothing, coming up the mountains to gather the brown glossy nuts in the fall and carry them home by the sackfuls to roast beneath glowing coals.

—how they'd set out in spanking

fine pace down the pike. He remembered the great wagons and tugging straining horses pulling the materials for the Cone mansion from the railroad in Lenoir.

That was in the days when the Abernethy, Henkel, and Robbins stables ran hacks from the train to the old Blowing Rock Hotel. The trip had taken about three hours each way. Sometimes the rough road had caused accidents.

Not far away he could see the bend in the road where down below the cool, clear spring, now overgrown and forgotten in the weeds, was once the stopping place for all travelers.

Then there were the days when the first touring cars had chugged, huffing and puffing, up the pike. Slower than molasses in January they'd been, though folks had thought them mighty fast then.

The road in those days was high in the middle with the car tracks lower. A body could hardly pass another car in lots of places, sometimes a person had to back a good distance, frightening the passengers nearly to death, along the high precipices—there were no road shoulders in those days, only the steep mountain sides along the pike.

Times had changed and now the mountain sides where a man years ago wouldn't dared have placed a cabin, were filled with low modern, picture windowed houses.

There had been two roads constructed since the day of the turnpike, but it was the turnpike that had first drawn prosperity to the hills. Down below where the wide modern highway abruptly ended the old trail, sleek modern cars were traveling faster than the wind, so that folks now days missed the real beauty of the hills in the little coves and valleys and springs that once delighted travelers of the old turnpike.

Recreation News

By JACK GROCE Schedule for July 11 through 17 is as follows:

Thursday, July 11—1:30-3:00, Little League, teams 3 and 4; 3:00-4:30, Little League, teams 1 and 2; 5:45-7:30, Adult softball—Boone Boys vs. Vilas, IRC field; IRC vs. Baptist, Dormitory field.

Friday, July 12—1:30-3:00, Little League; 3:00-5:30, County Pony League game, Blowing Rock at Boone; 5:45-7:30, Adult softball—Rutherford vs. Presbyterians, Dormitory field; Oak Grove vs. Methodist, IRC field; 8:00-10:30, Teen Canteen. (Wear your Bermudas).

Monday, July 15—1:30-3:00, Little League; 3:00-5:00, County Pony League game, Blowing Rock at Boone; 5:45-7:30, Adult softball—Vilas vs. Mt. Lions, Dormitory field; Sportsman Club vs. Boone Boys, IRC field; 8:00-10:30, Teen Canteen.

Tuesday, July 16—1:30-3:00, Little League, teams 1 and 3; 3:00-4:30, Little League, teams 2 and 4; 5:45-7:30, Adult softball—IRC vs. Methodist, Dormitory field; Oak Grove vs. Baptist, IRC field.

Wednesday, July 17—1:30-3:00, Little League; 3:00-5:30, County Pony League game, Bamboo at Boone; 5:45-7:30, Adult softball—Rained out games.

Standings table with columns W, L, IRC, Boone Boys, Oak Grove, Methodist.

Table with columns Vilas, Presbyterians, Rutherford, Mt. Lions, Baptist, Sportsman Club.

Zionville News

Mrs. John Weidinger and Miss Judy Weidinger of Detroit, Mich. have returned home after a week's visit with Mr. and Mrs. E. N. Norris at Bethel.

Miss Diane Triplett of Charlotte is spending a few weeks with her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Triplett of Zionville. Week end visitors were Mr. and Mrs. Boice Triplett and family of Charlotte.

Mr. Frank Wilson of Cleveland, Ohio spent the week end with his family on Route 2, Boone.

Miss Hettie Greer has returned to her home in Zionville from Blowing Rock Hospital.

Mr. and Mrs. Clayton South of Torrance, Calif., are visiting Mr. and Mrs. Clay Pennell and others in the county.

Mr. Ross Bumgardner has returned to the home of the Rev. and Mrs. R. C. Eggers after spending some time in Baltimore, Md. with Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Nelson. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson accompanied him for a weeks visit.

NEWS ABOUT OUR Servicemen

CARROLL PROMOTED WASHINGTON, D. C. — The Navy Department announced the promotion of Eugene Carroll, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie J. Carroll of Route 1, Boone, N. C., to radioman second class, USN, while serving aboard the destroyer USS Sole.

The promotion followed successful completion of a Navy-wide petty officer examination conducted last February.

DEMOCRAT ADS PAY

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TRAFFIC DEATHS OFF Fatalities from traffic accidents in the cities of the nation during May were off six per cent from a year ago, according to the National Safety Council. The national reduction in traffic deaths was only 2 percent, however. The May total of 3,100 deaths compared with 3,170 in May 1956.

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