

History of County and Town Has Statewide Interest and Significance

RETAIL BUSINESS ALMOST NORMAL IN WATAUGA AREA

Clyde R. Greene, President of Watauga Chamber of Commerce, Declares County and Town of Boone Almost Back to Normalcy Despite Recession; Comparative Figures for 1929-33-35

"There can be little doubt that Watauga county, although suffering somewhat from the recession, is by no means badly off but is instead almost normal so far as her retail sales go," says Clyde R. Greene, general manager of the Farmers Hardware and Supply Company. "Unfortunately we have no comparative statistics for the past two years, but certainly in 1935 when we made a careful study and analysis of our commercial life we were on the road back from the depression and the corner seemed to have rounded off a bit. Last year business was not as good as in 1935-36, but business men with whom I've talked and my own observation convinces me that this year will see Watauga county forge ahead commercially until we come very, very close to hitting the peak of 1929."

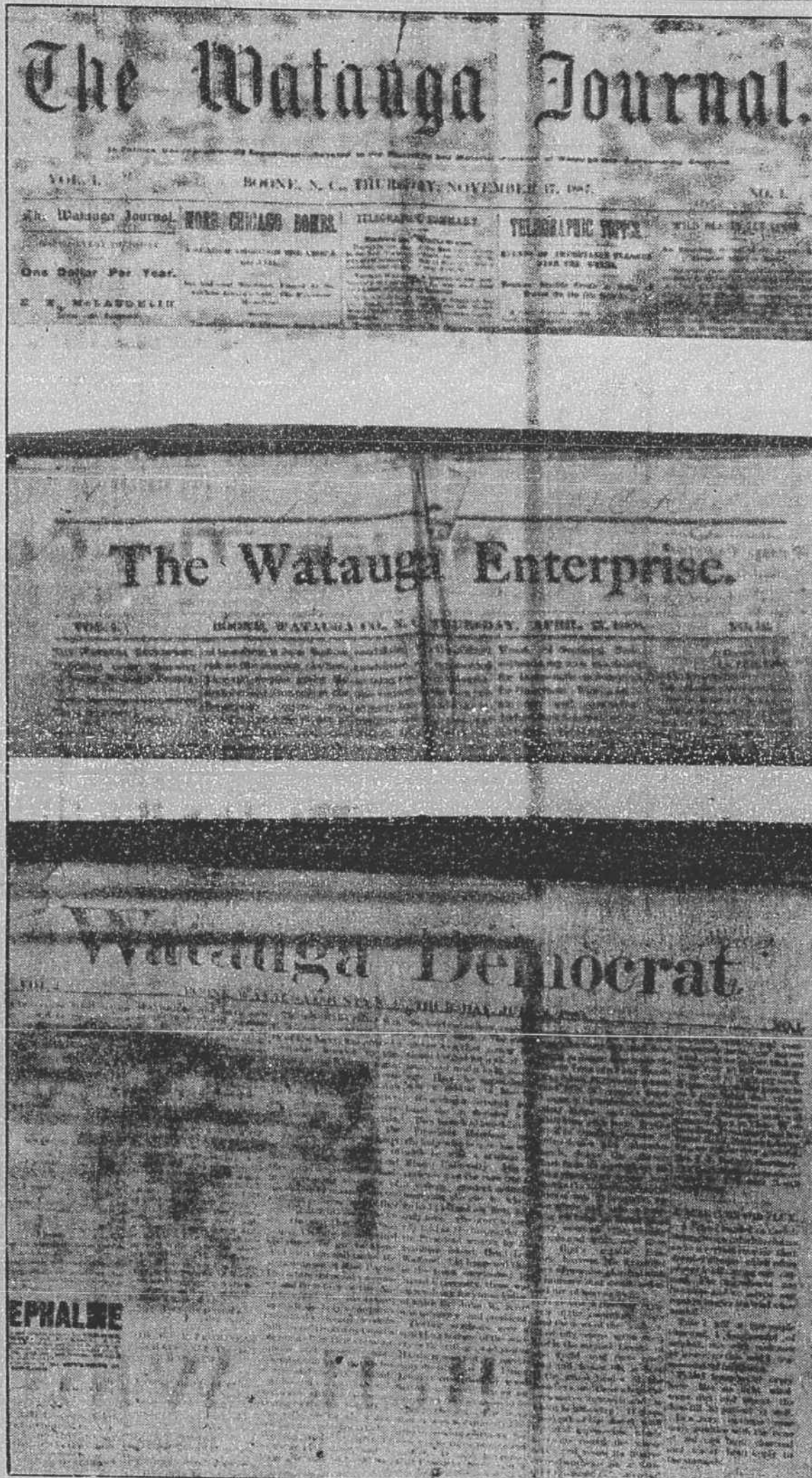
According to figures made available by Mr. Greene in 1929 the retail sales in Watauga county reached the staggering sum of \$2,012,000. This in a county whose year-round population does not exceed 20,000 is unusual indeed. That year Watauga county was 56th in rank commercially among the 100 counties of North Carolina. Of this retail sales total, \$187,000 was spent in Boone. That year the per capita spending in the county was \$132.54. The county had a total of 136 stores of which 49 were in Boone and the balance scattered throughout the county. Watauga businessmen admit that this was not a normal year. Indeed, it is highly probable in the opinion of many of these retail merchants that the figures for 1935, the last available, are more nearly representative of normal growth if compared with similar figures for 1933.

In 1935 Watauga county had a total of \$1,320,000 in retail sales. For that year the per capita spending in the county was \$87.00, and the county ranked 60th among the 100 counties. There were 141 stores with a total of 150 employees and an annual employee payroll of \$88,000. In this connection, Mr. Greene says: "Definitely I am sure a similar commercial census today would show that business is equal or better than in 1935. Although I dare not presume to say that too emphatically and would not hazard a guess as to the possible percentage of improvement."

If the assumption that the difference between 1933 and 1935 is an index of a normal trend toward normalcy then it is interesting to note that in this two-year period employees' payrolls in Watauga county is almost doubled. In 1933 there were 109 stores with a total annual payroll of \$46,000, a per capita expenditure of \$50.00, and the county was 78th on the index of commerce for that year. In 1933 the total retail business of the county stood at \$764,000.

Mr. Greene points out, "According to the 1930 census Watauga county ranks fifth among the counties of North Carolina in the number of persons owning their own homes. I think that should be generally known and an occasion for community pride. We were outranked then by Alleghany, Dare, Ashe and Carteret. It is my opinion that that fact accounts for the relatively small relief work necessary in our community ever during the height of the depression."

After a moment he went on, "Another fact I think should be known throughout the community, in both town and county, is that in 1935-36, according to the department of revenue, Watauga county had the greatest volume of retail sales west of the Blue Ridge and north of Buncombe county. If our people would keep these things in mind, co-operate fully (Continued on page five)



Sections of the front pages of the three oldest Boone newspaper files in existence. The Watauga Journal at top, was the county's first publication, the Watauga Enterprise came next, while a 45-year-old print of the Watauga Democrat appears at the bottom.

Boone's History Interesting as An Example of Growth Along Business and Cultural Lines

Starting in 1871 as the County Seat of an Isolated County Only a Few Years Old, It Has Grown to Be the Commercial Center of Resort Area With Expanding Business Each Year

Incorporated by charter from the state legislature in the Private Laws of North Carolina for 1871-72 with the first mayor, W. L. Bryan, and the first board of commissioners appointed under the charter, the town of Boone has shown consistent, steady and sound growth through the years. The first commissioners, appointed in the charter, were: J. W. Council, T. J. Coffey, Dr. J. G. Rivers, J. W. Hall and Col. J. B. Todd. The charter stipulated that these appointees were to hold office until their successors had been elected and qualified. It was

specified that the elections were to be held annually on a date set by either the state legislature or the county commissioners. An amendment to this charter was made the following year, 1873, but the exact details are unknown.

This charter set the limits of the town as "one mile east, west, north and south from the courthouse; then a line shall be marked out commencing at the terminus of the mile running east of the courthouse; thence to the terminus of the mile west of the courthouse; thence to the mile south of the courthouse; thence to the terminus of the mile east of the

courthouse, the beginning." From this it is clearly evident that the town of Boone had been established as the county seat well in advance of the incorporation as a town and that the courthouse was already built here. The city limits as indicated in the charter are far more expansive than those of today. It is supposed that the amendment of 1873 re-defined the city limits or gave the board of commissioners authority to do so. This amendment may also have changed the term of office of city officials from one year, as stated in the charter, to the present two-year term.

In any case the city officials of Boone were early concerned with improving the means of communication and transportation between the larger centers of population in the lowlands (Continued on page four)

Watauga County History Reveals Lively, Interesting People and Events Distinguishing County

Pioneer Background Rich in Material Which Stimulates Imagination and Legend; County Produced Able Local and State Leaders From Beginning

By RAUBE WALTERS (Director, 50th Anniversary Edition)

Covering only 314 square miles, 200,960 acres, Watauga county in northwestern North Carolina, has made rapid strides from an almost pioneer state to one of outstanding resort areas in the United States. This has been accomplished despite the almost inaccessible condition of its roads up until 1918; the limited internal capital for development of its natural advantages; and the relative sparseness of its year-round population. Roughly estimated, the permanent population of Watauga county stands at about 15,000 persons.

Rich with beauty and historic lore, Watauga county is situated in the division of the Appalachian mountains known as the Blue Ridge plateau, reputedly the highest settlement east of the Rocky mountains. With an average summer temperature of 76 degrees it offers every opportunity of development into a resort far beyond the present progress.

One of the last frontier sections of western North Carolina, it attracted a sturdy type of settler necessary to the pioneering of such a rugged county. Still almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon it is recorded by various writers that it was settled by immigrants from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and even from New England. John Preston Arthur, author of "A History of Watauga County," accepts this explanation of the early settlement on the authority of a letter of Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg, who visited the territory, now Watauga county, in 1753. The record of the visit of this distinguished Moravian prelate is perhaps the earliest record concerning this section of North Carolina to be found in the Colonial records.

Arthur goes on to cite a letter of the Royal Governor Johnston to the London Board of Trade on February 15, 1751, in which his excellency tells of the "Jersey Settlers" and reports numerous settlers flocking from Pennsylvania and other points "already overstocked." A part of this influx from the north probably resulted from the great Pennsylvania road "from the Yadkin river through Virginia to Philadelphia, distance 435 miles." This road ran from Philadelphia, through Lancaster and York counties of Pennsylvania to Winchester, Va., thence up the Shenandoah Valley, crossing Ftuanna river at Looney's ferry, thence to the Staunton river and down the river, through the Blue Ridge, thence southward, near the Moravian settlement, to Yadkin river, just above the mouth of Linville Creek, and about ten miles above the mouth of Reedy Creek."

Commenting on these facts, Arthur writes, "As to Southerners, all people north of Mason and Dixon's line are Yankees, there seems to be no doubt, if the best authorities can be trusted, that we are sons of Yankee sires." Later all historians note a considerable settlement of Germans, Hollanders, Swedes and some French Huguenots. Most of the settlers of German extraction came from Lancaster, York and Berks counties in Pennsylvania. This influx of Germans is commemorated probably in the naming of Dutch Creek Road, Dutch Creek Falls and similar names.

A number of historians have felt under compulsion to defend the residents of this section from misinterpretation. Something of this is indicated by Arthur's defensive sub-heads, "Scum or Salt?" and "Not the Poor Whites of the South." Certainly any objective study of the history and tradition of the mountain folk of northwestern North Carolina will convince anyone that they have been and are a proud, self-reliant, self-respecting people who have no need of such gratuitous defense or want it. These early pioneer conditions formed

in the residents of the mountains those qualities of character which are most highly prized as typically American. A fine type of neighborliness distinguished this early social and economic life and has persisted in a quality of friendly co-operation.

In these early days Watauga county was a part of Ashe county. Buncombe and Ashe were the first two counties established west of the Blue Ridge with Jefferson as the county seat of Ashe and Asheville as the county seat of Buncombe. Jefferson was the larger city but the construction of a railroad from Salisbury to Asheville, financed by an issue of bonds against the resources of the entire state, changed the balance of power. This and other events made it both economically and politically expedient to divide the counties into smaller administrative areas. One result of this was the formation of Watauga county in 1849 by act of the state legislature. It is now generally accepted that Watauga is a word of Cherokee Indian origin and means "Beautiful River." However there are still those who take exception to this philosophy and accept an earlier theory that the word predicated an early immigration of Asiatics by Bering Strait and may have derived from either Greek or Hebrew sources. Certainly the Cherokee Indian derivation of the name has a more general appeal and acceptance and the ancient quarrels of philologists trouble the modern Wataugans little. Before the creation of the county the section from which it was later composed was known as the Watauga Settlement and it seems only fair that this name should have carried over into the new political alignment.

In 1850 Watauga county's first court was convened by E. C. Bartlett, sheriff of Ashe county, and grandfather of Dr. B. B. Dougherty of Teachers College. Although no records are available there is a tradition that Dudley Farthing, Esquire, served as chief magistrate of this first court. Inasmuch as this tradition designates Farthing as chief magistrate, it is a reasonable assumption that this first court was constituted of a bank of judges after the practice of the lower county courts of Great Britain.

An amusing anecdote is preserved by word of mouth tradition concerning this first court. It is reputed to have originated with Dr. Dougherty who had it from his grandfather, Sheriff Bartlett. The first court was convened in a large barn on the old Hardin homestead near Boone. From this building the court is said to have been driven by a scourge of fleas which was not abated until a flock of sheep had been temporarily stabled there. Whether apocryphal or historic, this tradition is one that might very easily have been factual in a pioneer community such as Watauga county in 1850.

For a time there was no extensive division of opinion on the location of the county seat. Boone was selected over the bids of Brushy Fork and Valle Crucis because of the donation of fifty acres of land for a courthouse building by Jordan Council, Jr., and Ransom Hayes. Although at the time Boone had only a hundred citizens its destiny politically and economically was fixed the day it was chosen as the county seat of Watauga county. On this site was erected the courthouse which burned in 1873, with a serious loss of records. This fire makes determining exact historical data on Watauga county prior to 1873 virtually impossible.

Arthur gives a list of the members of the senate and house, for the period from 1850 to 1915. Indeed, his information on this score is probably both the most extensive and reliable of any now extant since he obtained his information from persons who lived through the period. When, in giving the names of superior court (Continued on page four)