

Facts About Mitchell Co.

Mitchell County was formed in 1861 from Yancey, Watauga, Caldwell, Burke and McDowell. It was named for Dr. Eliza Mitchell, a professor at the University of North Carolina who was killed in 1857 on an exploring expedition on Mt. Mitchell.

The total land area embraces 140,800 acres, more than 50,000 acres of which are in forests. It has an average altitude of 2,500 feet, ranging from about 1,700 feet to over 6,300 feet.

Waters include the North and South Toe, the Toe, the Nolichucky Rivers and numerous creeks. The water is of excellent quality and abundance.

The county has a mean annual temperature of about 52.1 degrees, an annual rainfall of 51.25 inches, annual snowfall of just under 25 inches and a growing season of approximately 154 days.

Wet County Turns Dry

According to Jason Deyton's History, in early Mitchell "distilling, retailing and drinking spiritous liquors were common among all classes." Ministers in many instances were said to have made and sold whiskey, and it was considered right to convert the surplus corn, rye and fruit into this exportable form.

Aden Wiseman, a Civil War sheriff, is said to have sold 1,200 gallons of whiskey in the lowland towns, and with the proceeds he was able to discharge his share of the bond of an absconding former sheriff. There were 32 stills in the county in 1804, and their products were widely sold.

Mitchell was the first county in the state to vote for prohibition, and today it is one of our driest counties, both legally and actually.

Republican Stronghold

When the question of secession came up, the mountain sections generally were strongly against splitting the Union. The northern part of Yancey County was most pro-Union of all. This led to splitting Mitchell off from Yancey in 1861.

There were many fist fights in this turbulent period and not a single vote was cast for secession delegates to the convention. When war came, however, many citizens joined the Confederate Army.

When peace came, the divisions were even more distinct than at the beginning of the war, and it was some time before violent quarrels subsided.

Ever since, Mitchell has been strongly Republican.



Architect's Rendering Of The Cloudland Hotel, A Mammoth Landmark Of Its Day

Cloudland Hotel-A Wonder Of Bygone Days

By Tom Martin

Beneath the pavillion atop Roan Mountain where the Rhododendron Queen is crowned lies the foundation of one of the "wonders" of the Gay Nineties, a mammoth 268-room structure called the Cloudland Hotel, built by a Yankee mining tycoon, General J. H. Wilder.

The great white building could be seen from a hundred miles in any direction, and in its day it was the place "where the action was." European royalty, rich and poor, famous and near-famous came, according to hotel literature "up out of the sultry plains to the 'land of the sky'" to enjoy the magnificent views above the clouds where the rivers are born and to see the Rhododendron and other wildflowers on the Roan.

In its heyday the Cloudland could accommodate around five hundred guests, and was advertised as not only a luxury hotel but a spot in those pre-antibiotic days where one could get "exemption from Hay fever," and it was highly recommended in testimonials of the day:

"Dr. D. B. Goodwin of Pine Grove, Clark Co., Kentucky, takes pleasure in sta-

ting for the benefit of Hay Cold Patients, that he has escaped his annual on Roan Mountain, N. C."

Cost per day for the "hay fever brigade" as well as other visitors was \$2.50, with the season usually lasting from June until September. Children under ten years and servants stayed at half-price.

The hotel according to a company brochure was kept in "plain style," and was neatly and comfortably furnished with carpets on the floors and spring mattresses on all the beds. The bedrooms were heated by "hot air furnaces in the basement." Apparently in consideration of the hay-fever victims--the "dancing room" and kindergarten were also located in the basement to "keep down the noise."

Getting to the Cloudland was a bit involved by mid-twentieth century standards though Asa Gray, the noted botanist, referred to the Roan as the "most accessible of mountains." For a while guests traveled by carriage from a road that ran from Buladean to the Cloudland. The road was something of a "marvel" for its time as some of it was built on stilts along the bluffs.

Eventually a buggy road

was constructed on the Tennessee side, and the management advised guests to go by railroad to Johnson City, Tenn., and there take the "Cranberry (Stem-Winder) Narrow-Gauge Railroad to Roan Mountain Station, twenty-six miles from Johnson City, passing through Doe River Gorge, one of the wildest rides in the world." At the station guests stayed at another hotel until they could take a hotel-owned "hack" pulled by four horses along a winding road for twelve miles along the Roan to the Cloudland.

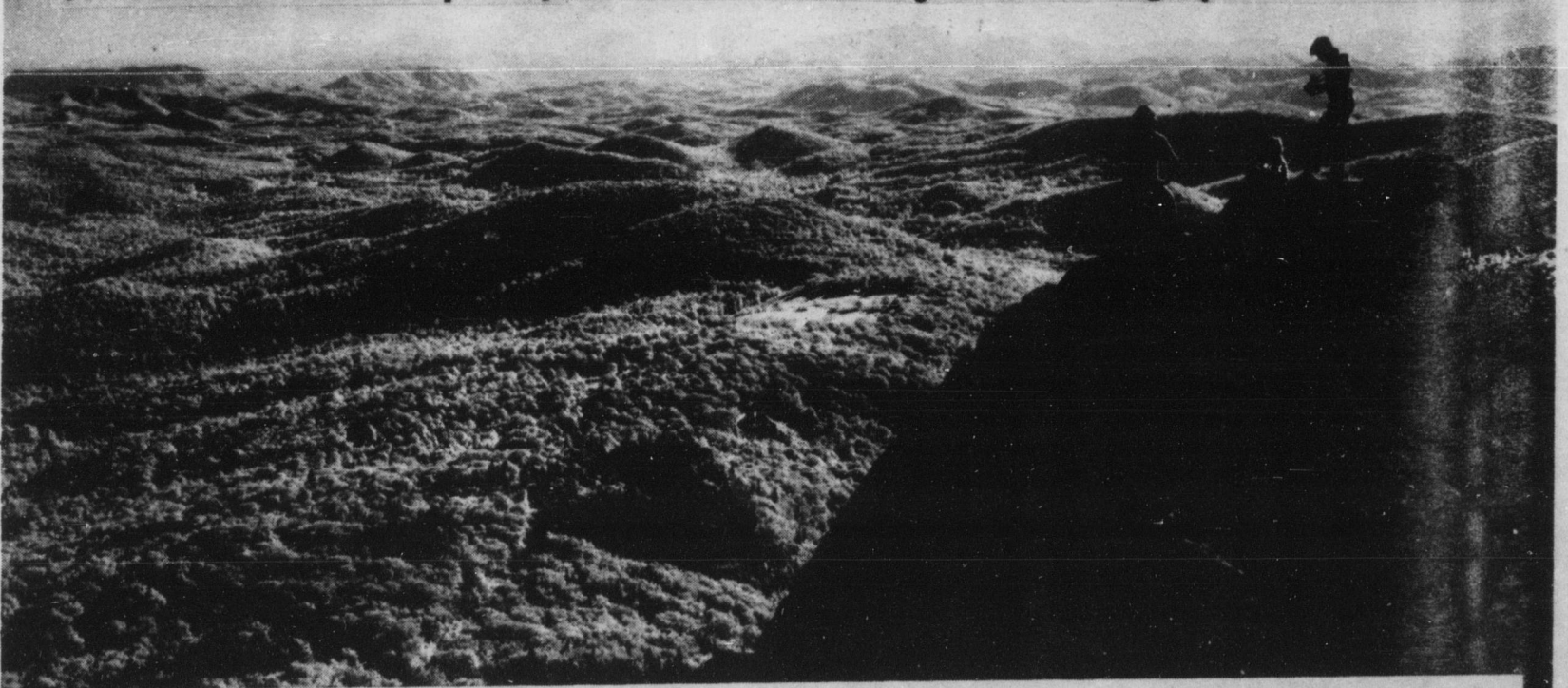
Hotel brochures and testimonials notwithstanding, the Cloudland was not a money-maker and was abandoned in the early 1900's, being sold off room by room and piece by piece. No one in the Mitchell area seems to know why the hotel failed after 25 years of operation. A testimonial from that era seems to provide a clue however, N. C. Blanchard, a member of the U. S. House of Representatives from Shreveport, La., writes: "I often recall with pleasure my sojourn at Cloudland... The place needs only to be extensively known to be more liberally patronized." In those days before the advent of the mass media, many people probably

had not heard of the grand hotel sitting on top of a mountain in a rather isolated county in North Carolina.

A by-product of the Cloudland's demise are the wondrous Rhododendron gardens admired by tourists and natives alike every June. Wilder's heirs sold off the Rhododendron atop the Roan to shrubbery dealers, but instead of dying out, the beautiful red flowers came back not in wild, scattered clumps, but in orderly garden-like patterns. By removing so many plants, the flowers were pruned and improved.

So, the Cloudland's gone along with the rustling of long skirts, the talk of the tycoons--and the wheezing of the hay fever unfortunates. Remaining are the Rhododendron and of course the Roan, and a description from a long-gone guest seems still one of the most appropriate: "The murmuring cascades dance down the steep sides of the mountain, adding music to the grand scene, the setting sun slowly lingering in the glowing west sheds its softened tints over the darkening valleys, and the cool night creeps up the blue mountains, as the twinkling stars come out in myriads..."

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