

Historical Sketch Of Black Mountain





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LAW SCHOOL

An interesting event in our pre-war history was establishment of a law school near the head of the North Fork of Swannanoa in 1856, by Judge J. L. Bailey. He in partnership with Judge F. N. Nash, had previously conducted a successful law school at Hillsboro, N. C. But after the death of Judge Nash, Judge Bailey invested in property on the slopes of Craggy and continued his school there till the beginning of the Civil War.

NEW SCHOOL BUILDING

By 1860 the one room log school house at Tabernacle was out of the center of our town and was too small to accommodate the needs of the growing community. So a larger and more comfortable one was planned. The location chosen was a grove at the corner of Montreat Rd. and US 70, at the edge of which now stands Williams Esso Station. E. B. and E. R. Kerlee, having donated the land, the building when completed was known as the Kerlee School House. This building, erected by voluntary gifts of materials and labor, supplied our needs for public hall and school until 1910.

THE FIRST POST OFFICE

Our town had no post office till after the Civil War. The nearest point of receipt and distribution of mail being at the place of Mrs. R. D. Alexander, 1/2 mile east of Swannanoa. Soon after the

war a post office was established in the dwelling now occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Howard B. Kerlee. Grey Eagle was the name of the office and Miss Martha Drucilla Kerlee was the first post mistress.

RAILROADS

Completion of the railroad from Old Henry Station into the Swannanoa Valley, marked the beginning of another epoch in the history of our community. Rails from near the Swannanoa Gap to Asheville were laid before the tunnel under the Gap was completed and upon them a few flat cars, one open-sided passenger car and a little locomotive rattled back and forth. That engine and those cars were needed on the west side of the Blue Ridge in order that work on the Swannanoa Tunnel might progress from both ends at the same time, and they were pulled over the crest of the Gap by convicts and oxen. This tunnel was under construction for several years and cost \$300,000. It also cost the lives of 160 people, most of them negroes and convicts. Sixty-six were killed in a single blast and seventeen were buried in a heavy slide. The other seventy-seven were not taken in quite such wholesale manner. In 1880 the line was open for through traffic. Richard Aldridge, Jack Edwards, and U. P. Terrell were the first engineers to pilot trains over the new extension to Asheville.

NEW NAME

The Black Mountains among which Mount Mitchell is the highest peak had been widely advertised throughout the state and nation by the tragic death of Dr. Elisha Mitchell in 1857 and also by the newspaper controversy prior to that date between him and Ge. T. L. Clingman, so this being the point where passengers expecting to visit those mountains would disembark. The railroad officials chose to call the depot Black Mountain. Uncle Sam soon gave the post office the same name and Grey Eagle became only a memory.

SAW MILLS

Agriculture and stock raising had from the time of the first settlers been the chief occupation. The axe and saw being used to supply domestic needs only. But with steam transportation available, there was created a market for the lumber in the magnificent trees of our virgin forest, and within a few years fields began to be neglected, herds of stock were allowed to dwindle, and the secluded mountain coves that had since the beginning of time known no voice or sounds but that of nature, were desecrated with the belch and screech of portable saw mills. Lumber supplanted agriculture and for thirty years these mills continued to rob our mountain sides of wealth it had taken nature untold centuries to supply. The payrolls from those primitive mills meant cash in circulation and soon a town began to form around the little railroad depot. Its growth was slow, but in 1893 it was granted a charter of Incorporation. Mr. T. K. Brown was chosen its first mayor. At that time and until 1910 the depot was the center of the business district. By 1915, Cherry Street had become the center, and by 1925 State Street had this honor thrust upon it, a distinction it continues to hold. Erection of a Band Mill one mile east of town in 1912 and


the building of a railroad to the Balsam covered Black's marked the doom of our last large boundary of virgin timber. During the nine years of this mill's operation 150 million feet of lumber was sawed and shipped. This timber was not taken from Black Mountain Township. But its value, standing or cut was more vital to this than any other township. Between 1880 and 1920, 225 million feet of lumber was shipped from the Black Mountain district.

REST AND HEALTH RESORT

As the gradual recovery from effects of the Civil War progressed, each year would bring increasing thousands of people to Western N. Carolina seeking relief from the humid heat in states further south. What these thousands wanted, Black Mountain had, and she became famous as a rest and health resort. Hotels, boarding houses and cottages were built to accommodate summer residents and visitors, while sanitoriums were erected to accommodate the sick.

GOMBROOM

Mrs. Florence S. Martin, soon after becoming the second Mrs. Zeb Vance,



traveled with him over Western Carolina seeking timber lands in which she could invest and the location of a retreat that might serve as a haven of rest for the senator during the summer recess of Congress. Finding the heavily forested estate formerly belonging to Judge J. L. Bailey was for sale, she purchased about 2000 acres of this tract. They selected a beautiful spot high up on the eastern side of Craggy Dome on which to build their sum-

mer home and chose "Gombroom" for its name. It was a beautiful residence when completed in 1884 and continued to be the Senator's retreat until his death. Many noted men and women have been guests there, and Gombroom was one of the most popular places of interest for tourists to Black Mountain district until the estate, along with all other lands on the head waters of the North Fork were taken over by the city of Asheville for the purpose of enlarging and protecting its water supply. (The name Gombroom was taken from Tre Velyan's Life of De Quincy and means An Imaginary Real or Kingdom of the Fairies.)

CONFERENCE CENTER

As early as 1905 the development of our town as a summer conference center began and by 1912, Montreat and Blue Ridge were permanently established. Many thousands of visitors from our country and hundreds from foreign countries pass through our street annually on their way to and from these assembly grounds, and through them the fame of Black Mountain has spread to the far corners of the earth.

FIRE AND FLOOD

Our most disastrous fire occurred in 1911, originating in a livery stable on the east side of Cherry Street and at the rear of Brown Motor Companies building. It spread to the store building on three sides till it consumed about half the town before it was extinguished. A few years after this, through the wise suggestion of Mr. J. N. Welch and the energetic leadership of Mr. R. E. Currier, a local fire company was purchased and insurance rates were lowered. The prompt effectiveness of this company's service has since been demonstrated many times. The year 1916 stands out as a most remarkable one in our history. That was the year of the unprecedented flood. Two weeks of continuous rain fall so

loosened the soil on our steep mountain sides, that in many places acres of it would slide down into the gorges like a volanches of lava, carrying trees and boulders on their crests and leaving destruction in their path. Railroad beds and bridges, highways and highway bridges were wrecked or swept away to such an extent that for a week our modern mountain community and its many thousands of summer visitors were as completely isolated as were the few pioneers, who first built their cabins here. There was no possible way to get either in or out except afoot, and the crossing of streams made even walking hazardous. Four page copies of Asheville papers, (pages about half the usual size) sold in Black Mountain July 17, 1918 for fifty cents each.

HUMAN SKELETON DISCOVERED

The discovery of a skeleton 1 1/2 miles east of town threw the whole community into a fever of excitement a few days in the Spring of 1917. While raking fire lines to protect his father's property from a forest fire, Mr. Earl Mease jerked out an old shoe from a pile of leaves beside a fallen tree. With the shoe were the lower bones of a man's leg. Earl immediately called to a brother, N. A. Mease who was also raking not far away, and together they carefully removed the bedded leaves from under the fallen tree and uncovered a complete human skeleton. It was entirely clothed and there were no signs of the body having been injured by man or beast. In pockets of the clothing were a cheap watch, some small change, a few beads and some pebbles that appeared to be sample of minerals. The clothing excepting shoes and buttons crumbled to dust at the slightest touch. The county coroner held an inquest, made many inquiries, but failed to find any clue that would lead to identification or reveal the cause of the man's death. The passing of several years brought no solution to the

mystery, so the bones were finally buried, at the rear of the building in which the Black Mountain Hoisery Mill which stood south of the railroad tracks on Sutton Ave. Many people and many things of interest connected with our history have not been given attention in this article for lack of space, but we must not omit some mention of the following: Mr. R. Gustavino, the Spanish inventor of the famous Gustavino Arch, built a home here in 1897 which the natives chose to call the Spanish Castle. He also erected a factory for the experimentation of the manufacture of ornamental tile. Since his death in 1908 the factory has gone to decay as has the Spanish Castle. The National Music Festival-Child of America an over optimistic imagination nearly doubled the post-master's salary in 1916, and brought mail here from all quarters of the globe, kept a crew of stenographers at feverish pace for several months, promised to bring all the Master Musicians of the world to Black Mountain in an annual conclave and carnival, suddenly became bankrupt, died in poverty and disgrace. The Klu Klux Klan, flourished for a couple of years, spreading itself like "A Green Bay Tree", took the root-rat, passed away, and lo, it could not be found! The Chamber of Commerce, born of worthy parents, brought up on milk of optimism, grew to young manhood. Then it became anemic from malnutrition, was chloroformed by the depression, has not wakened up. But of our early isolation, through fire and flood, in spite of political strife and bickering, Black Mountain Township has developed into a modern community with all the modern advantages and today with upward look and forward tread she accepts the challenge of the future, with calm assurance. As promised last week, this will be followed by many other more detailed "Sketches From Black Mountain."

Rustic 3-bedroom, 2 bath home available on North Cotton Ave. Garage and family room space in basement, lovely decks for relaxation. Plenty of storage area. \$33,000.00

Available soon, 3 bedroom tri-level in Sourwood Ridge. Buy now and choose your carpet colors. Fireplace, 2 baths, eat in kitchen. Finished family room. \$37,900

MONTREAT ROAD — Excellent older home with fenced rear yard. Walking distance to town. 2 or 3 bedroom, spacious living area. \$36,500

Scenic view drive, 3 bedroom home in quiet neighborhood. Excellent buy, loan assumption available. \$16,500.

Two story building with upstairs apartment furnished, have your business on ground floor or lease to present occupant. \$250.00 month lease income both units. \$24,400.00

North Park Lane — Two bedroom home in quiet neighborhood. Excellent for young couple or retirees. \$15,500.00

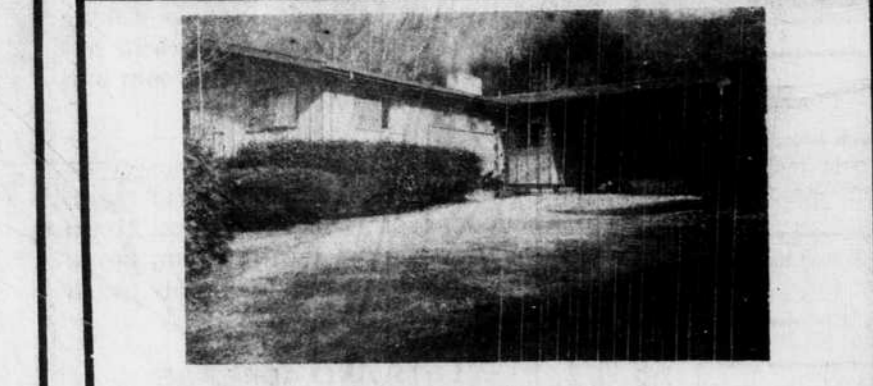
Ridgecrest — Two homes. One four bedroom, four baths, fireplace in master bedroom easy access to I-40. One three bedroom summer cottage. \$32,000.

Vacation home on two large lots. Very Private. 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, living room with stone fireplace. Completely furnished. Excellent condition. \$32,000.

MONTREAT ROAD — Ideal business location for small business or office. Also, can be used for nice residence. 2 bedroom, living room, dining, one bath. Large lot with garden space. \$20,300

GROVEMONT — This three bedroom older home has a formal dining room and a fireplace in the living room. It has a full basement and is located on more than an acre of property with a stream. \$29,950

McDOWELL COUNTY — This three bedroom home is located on two acres with two mobile home spaces. It is in a quiet neighborhood and has a garden space. \$30,000.



CHARMALDEE ACRES — Recently remodeled home has 3 bedrooms, 2 full baths, kitchen, dining room with beautiful fireplace in living room, and sun room for sitting. Partial basement for storage. Carport. Large lot is exquisitely landscaped. \$43,500.

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- LAUREL LANE — This is one of our larger homes with four bedrooms, two baths, living room and sunken den, both have fireplaces, formal dining room and basement. Secluded lot. \$49,500.
- INVESTMENT PROPERTY — A store building for retail services or duplex apartments. Two bedroom home in rear of building for rental income. \$31,000
- ON DEAD END STREET — This beautiful all brick home features 3 bedrooms, formal dining room, living room, large kitchen and family room with fireplace. The full basement provides excellent work shop and recreation area. The large lot has excellent garden area. \$36,500
- ESTATE SALE — Large, older home with excellent possibilities for remodeling - property consists of a small duplex and a small guest cottage - large garden space - excellent for investment purposes \$52,500
- SUMMERHAVEN — This furnished home is an excellent summer retreat with a large lot and much privacy. \$17,000



OUTSIDE CITY — Like new four bedroom, 2 1/2 bath home located on spacious lot. Extremely well planned and built. You must see to appreciate the many fine features of this exquisite home. Nearly 2 acres, all fenced. \$66,000

- MOUNTAIN CABIN — 2 bedrooms, furnished kitchen. Bordered by State road. Situated on 35 acres with trout stream and meadows. Secluded Owner Financing \$45,900
- OLD FORT — Nice remodeled cabin with 13 acres and stream ... 2 bedrooms \$26,900
- BROAD RIVER — This two bedroom cabin is completely furnished. It is an excellent summer home with a beautiful view for only \$21,900
- RENTAL PROPERTY AVAILABLE — INQUIRE AT OFFICE
- UNFURNISHED APARTMENT
- Spacious view and grounds. 2 bedrooms, large living room, fully carpeted, kitchen appliances furnished, ample parking. Only minutes from I-40 to Black Mountain. Convenient shopping. Meadow View Apartments. Call 669-7111 or 669-6630.
- ACREAGE & LOTS
- McDOWELL COUNTY — Two tracts of land with suitable farm acreage. One has 67 acres, one has 41 acres. Contact office for details.
- 5 Lots, Over 1/2 Acre each with beautiful view of the golf course, Craggies. Elevation 2,600 ft. \$6,000 each
- CHARMALDEE ACRES — Lot near top gives excellent view of Swannanoa Valley. 3,000 ft. elevation. \$5,500
- LOTS — Beautiful view of Mt. Mitchell from almost 1 acre - 5 minutes from town. \$7,500
- One Acre Lot in Hickory Ridge Estates. \$5,500
- Commercial Property at Swannanoa Interchange - contact office for details.
- INVESTMENT PROPERTIES — 27 tracts of land from 1 acre to 1,200 acres - suitable for development or long-term investments. See us now for your choice of over 3,700 acres of mountain property.



HIGH ROCK ACRES — Tremendous front and back views of the mountains...house has 3 BR's, 2 baths, large eat in kitchen, den, full basement, fireplace, secluded. \$44,100

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