

Highlands Historical Society

Summer 2014

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

Highlands, N. C.

WHO WERE THE RAVENELS?

The Ravenel family has been a part of Highlands history for about 170 years. While Samuel Kelsey gets much credit for the founding of Highlands, he left the area after fifteen years, while the Ravenels and their descendents are still here. They have graced our town with generosity and a physical legacy.

As is well known, 100 years ago the Ravenel family left Sunset Rock as a gift to the town of Highlands. The walk to the top is only six-tenths of a mile and well worth the trip. The view offered from the top is of the town of Highlands and its special beauty. Driving is okay too, but the walk is pleasant.

How did the Ravenels become interested in Highlands? Quite by accident Samuel Prioleau Ravenel came to these mountains as an employee of Col. William Sloan to build a railroad to link Charleston, S.C., with Knoxville, Tennessee, and then Cincinnati.

Work on a tunnel through Stumphouse Mountain near Mountain Rest began in 1853.

In Prioleau's spare time he would ride into the higher elevations of the surrounding area, and he fell in love with it. In 1859 the S.C. legislature stopped funding the tunnel just 1,500 feet short of its goal. Then the War Between the States broke out, and Ravenel became a Confederate soldier.

After the war, in 1865, Prioleau met and married the widow of Thomas Parker, Margaretta Fleming Parker, also from Charleston. Thomas Parker had died in the Civil War and left his wife and two children. Margaretta not only lost her husband to the war, but her young daughter passed away from diphtheria five months after the war was over. Prioleau raised young Thomas Fleming as his own.

The Ravenels had four children besides Thomas

Parker. They were Prioleau, Jr., Marguerite, Clarissa, and Elise. The daughters had a summer residence built on top of Sunset and called it *Wolf Ridge*. The house is located high up on the rocks where the ridge runs north and south. The continental divide on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains drains the water on the east side into the Chattooga River and then to the Atlanta Ocean. On the west side it drains down the Sugar Fork River and into the Gulf of Mexico. The house commands a spectacular view of Horse Cove and the distant mountains.

Prioleau Ravenel started buying land in the Highlands area before he and Margaretta married. By the time he died in 1902, he and his wife owned 30,000 acres from Satulah to Sagee (which in Cherokee means "protected") and from Cashiers Valley to Whiteside Mountain, including Devil's Courthouse. They also owned Wildcat Ridge and most of the primeval forest between Bear Pen and Whiteside.

In 1879-80, they built *Wantoot*, which was the first

summer home in Highlands. It was located on the North end of Wolf Ridge and commanded a view of their home in Pendleton, S.C. *Wantoot* was named for their home in Charleston. When the house was sold to the Monroe family in 1914, the name was changed to *Playmore*.

In 1883 Mrs. Ravenel created the Islington Inn, located on South Fourth Street, and ran it for years. It was a popular inn for summer visitors, becoming in 1925 King's Inn, which burned in 1994.

Margaretta and her sister, Clarissa Fleming Burt, donated \$3,000 for construction of the first Presbyterian Church, which in 1884 Prioleau and Thomas Parker supervised. Believing that a town needed open spaces, Margaretta also gave the Church the lot to the west.

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The Ravenels on Sunset Rock ca. 1914

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Everyone here at the Highlands Historical Society is excited to be opening for the 2014 season. The museum and Prince House are open to the public on Saturdays from Memorial Day Weekend through October.

We have some new exhibits and some special events planned, so please check the Event Calendar on our website at www.highlandshistory.com and the newspapers. This year we are also offering special tours by appointment. You can schedule tours by emailing highlandshistory@nctv.com or calling Michael Thompson at 828-782-0549.

We especially want to extend a special thank you to all our members and contributors. Your donations and membership make the Highlands Historical Society possible. Those of you who have made especially generous donations this fiscal year, we want you to know that much of what we do for this community would not be possible without your benevolence.

With gratitude and welcome,

Ann Sullivan

NEW PHOTOGRAPH AT THE HHS ARCHIVES



Does anyone recognize this old house in Highlands?

Email us at highlandshistory@nctv.com.

Photograph courtesy of Walter and Mary Richardson Guyer

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RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

We hope you will do it now.

- Family \$50 • Individual \$35 • Sustainer \$100
- Business \$250 • Promoter \$500 • Preserver \$1,000
- Protector \$2,500 • Highlander \$5,000

And we hope you will add a donation, as many of you have done so generously in the past.

To join or renew membership by check or credit card, visit highlandshistory@nctv.com.

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THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL AND GALAX NEWS NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

Two of the most popular newspapers in Highlands during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s were the *Mountain Trail* and *Galax News*, published by the students of Highlands School. Ran Shaffner reports that they are now available for viewing online at www.highlandshistory.com. Select “Link to Old Highlands Newspapers” and discover the life of Highlands during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s through the eyes of two of its early newspapers as well as the Highlands School Yearbooks up to 1964. Many Highlanders today will enjoy the nostalgic trip into their colorful past, and for those who didn’t grow up in Highlands the articles and ads will provide a window into the town’s fascinating early years.

A BOTANICAL HISTORY OF THE HIGHLANDS PLATEAU

The Land Stewards of the Highlands Plateau in conjunction with the Highlands Historical Society have spent the past two years creating an exhibit of "A Botanical History of the Highlands Plateau: In the Footsteps of the Ancients."

Now on display at the Historical Society's Museum, the display begins with the creation of the Highlands Plateau 300 million years ago. It describes in stages the Cherokee view of the world, the life of early settlers, and the arrival of early botanists. It focuses on natural and man-made threats to the environment and the organizations that were founded to preserve our natural assets, including the Biological Station,



The Cherokee View of the World

Botanical Garden, Land Trust, Historical Society, Greenway, municipal boards and ordinances, and Land Stewards of the Laurel Garden Club.

For those who haven't the time to read the

labels for the 300-million-year history, there will be an audio-visual summary of it in less than seven minutes, and a brochure will be yours for the asking. The museum will be open on Saturdays until the end of October or by appointment. For anyone in love with the natural

beauty of the Highlands Plateau, the Land Stewards hope you will visit the exhibit and appreciate what has been accomplished over the years to protect and preserve its extraordinary biodiversity.

DAZZLING DAHLIAS FESTIVAL 2014

The fourth annual "Dazzling Dahlias" Festival dates have just been announced by the Highlands Historical Society for September 20, 2014. The event will be held at the Highlands Recreation Park.

Last year's event attracted over 300 entries from local amateur hobbyists, including some entries in the new childrens' category. The show highlights growers' favorite dahlias, which are entered and ribboned by an array of judges. Interested participants may drop off their dahlias at the rec park on Friday, September 19th, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. or on the morning of the show between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

This year's speaker will be local grower Ann



Maxwell. The time will be announced at a later date. The show will begin at the Rec Park at 1:00 and close at 5:00. In addition to the viewing of gorgeous dahlias, bouquets are also available for purchase.

All proceeds from this show benefit the Highlands Historical Society.

On September 18, 2014, a Dazzling Dahlias Patron Party will be held at the Hudson House at Highlands Country Club. The fare will be Mexican food, Margaritas, and Mariachi music. Mark your calendars, as seating is limited to 125 persons. Tickets are \$100 each. For more information on the Patron Party, visit www.highlandshistory.com or contact Judy Taylor at 828-526-8388.

AN INVITATION TO MEMBERS

Our old bench is back on the rebuilt porch of the Prince House, as well as two "new to us" rocking chairs! Room for at least four to watch the world go by and realize that sitting on the porch is a state of mind, not a place, in Highlands. All Highlands Historical Society Members are invited to come and sit on the front porch any time they would like. We don't have to be open; just come on up and "set a spell." Your houseguests, children, and grandchildren will be amazed that you can give them a sample of old Highlands life.



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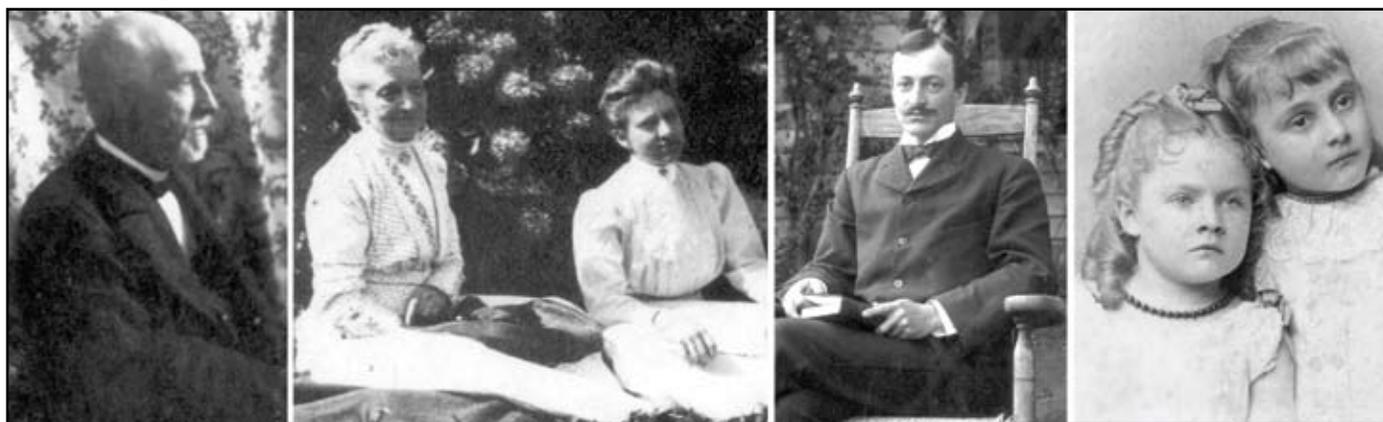
In 1890 the Ravenels built a carriage road to the top of Satulah. At that time the mountain was owned by the Macon Land Company. In 1892 Mr. Ravenel improved the Walhalla Road around Satulah at his own expense. His business at that time was making the locust pins used on telephone poles to attach insulators and wires. His operation was in Horse Cove.

When the Kelseys left Highlands in 1890 to start a new town in western North Carolina, Mr. Kelsey needed money to start the project. Prioleau Ravenel agreed to help him finance the town, which became Linville.

In 1901 Prioleau was instrumental in installing telephone lines from Victoria (now called Horse Cove) to Highlands. Then another line was installed

Benjamin Franklin. Marguerite led the Highlands Improvement Society as President when it bought the top of Satulah to protect it from developers, making it the first land trust in North Carolina.

Prioleau, Jr., was married to Frances Leftwich, a brilliant Bryn Mawr graduate and daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Her interests in Highlands were in preserving the natural beauty of the area and supporting her husband's efforts on its behalf. She studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and earned a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr. A world traveler, she wrote for a number of magazines, including the *North Carolina Review*. Her articles have been gathered in an anthology called *Women of the French Tradition*. She was greatly loved and admired by all who knew and missed her when she died in 1923.



The Ravenel Family: Prioleau, Sr., Margaretta, Marguerite, Prioleau, Jr., Elise, and Claire

to Cashiers. He had supported Kelsey's efforts to have railroad service, which was to be called the Highlands RR Company. When he died in 1902, he was praised by all for his independence, good nature, and culture.

The year that S. P. Ravenel, Sr., died, his son Prioleau, Jr., completed a turnpike from Highlands to Cashiers. Because his family had left him hundreds of acres of winding paths, roads, and a lake with varied scenery, he opened the property to the public. It was then known as Lindenwood Park, the present location of the Highlands Biological Station and Nature Center. In 1913 Prioleau sold large portions of land north and east of Highlands at low prices to the government for preservation as National Forest land. This particular land was vulnerable to burning and soil erosion as the headwaters of the Tennessee and Savannah Rivers and was in great need of protection and conservation.

Elise Ravenel married William Duane, a Harvard professor of physics who was a direct descendent of

In 1914 the Ravenel descendents decided to donate Sunset Rocks to the town in memory of their parents. The Ravenels had already contributed good roads, a lovely church, a popular inn, a public park, and other improvements to the town of Highlands.

As the years have gone by, other Ravenel descendents have been instrumental in saving the Highlands plateau for all to enjoy. Every year since the beginning of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust a Ravenel has served on the board, giving generously of their time, property, and talents. The youngest of the descendents, Clare Ellis, now a member of the Land Trust, wrote several articles for the local paper in the 1990s giving its readership the fascinating history of Satulah Mountain. Her articles and the passionate commitment of members of the Land Trust managed to raise \$600,000, enabling the bald of Satulah to be rescued from development.

From the start, the Ravenel family has been a driving force for the lasting benefit of the people of Highlands.