



# Highlands Historical Society



Spring 2025

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

Highlands, N.C.

*(Note: Highlands turns 150 years old this year. The following is an editorial titled “Eight Years old To-day,” that was published on March 29, 1883 by E.E. Ewing, owner and editor, in the Blue Ridge Enterprise. The Blue Ridge Enterprise was Highlands first newspaper and was published from January, 1883 until January, 1885. The editorial is left unedited for syntax, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Paragraph breaks have been added for presentation. The accompanying photos were taken by photographer John Bundy that same year – 1883.)*

## When Highlands History Was New

“On the 29th day of March, 1875, a wagon loaded with farming tools, camp fixtures, provisions, etc. was stopped before a little log cabin and two tired and travel-worn men, with the aid of a North Carolinian proceeded to renovate the doorless and floorless domicile, that had for some years been occupied by a drove of mountain hogs. and to unload the store away their goods, put in order their camping outfit and prepare for work. The cabin was surrounded by a deadening of a few acres. Except this the country was an unbroken forest. And this was the beginning of Highlands.

On the town site there was no improvement except the log “Law House” still preserved on the grounds of the editor of the ENTERPRISE. The location for the town

had been selected with care as being the best point in the south-west Blue Ridge country for a summer resort and center of attraction for a community of farmers, fruit raisers, and health and pleasure seekers. But in many respects the outlook for a town was forbidding. It was 30 miles from a railroad and a very poor road to get to it, 20 miles from a store, no post office or mail route near.

The town site was covered with a heavy forest growth and much of it, and where some of our principal streets now are, was a dense laurel thicket that could hardly be penetrated by anything larger or less supple than a wild cat. We had our streets and roads to make, mills to build before we could get lumber, lands to clear, provisions all to haul till we could raise, and not least of all we had to establish confidence in the future success of the place.

If we have not done any great thing in eight years we have done something, and have overcome many obstacles that to the weak-hearted seemed insurmountable.

*continued on page 2*



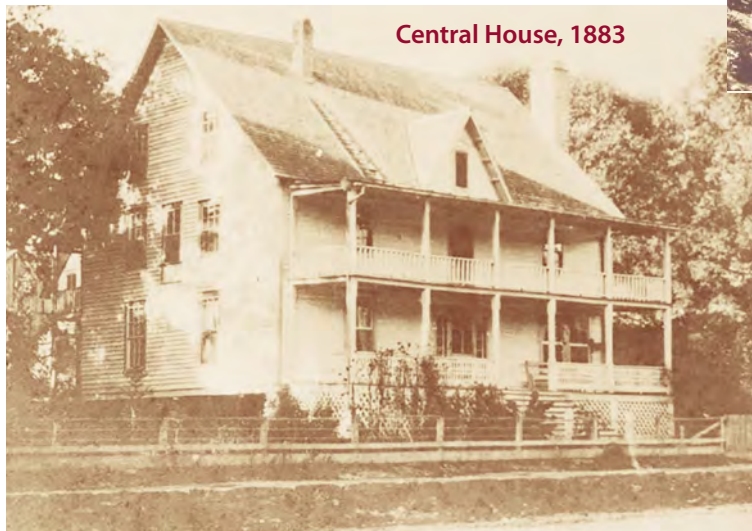
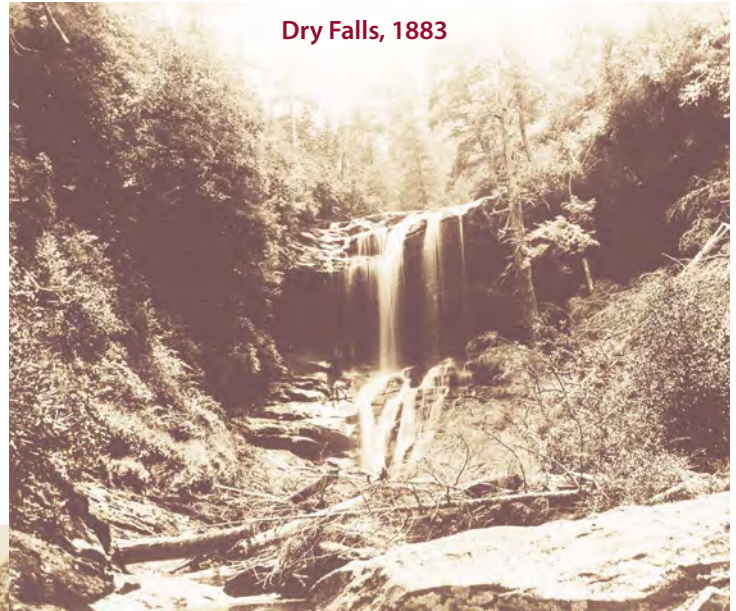
Main Street Highlands, 1883



*continued from page 1*

We now have a daily mail and on the 1st of July next shall have a good school established on a firm basis, churches and societies, and roads running in every direction from the village. We are beginning to get a good class of business and other buildings, and the advertising columns of the ENTERPRISE show that we have merchants, tradesmen and manufacturers to supply almost every want of a civilized community, but what is worth more than all else for our future is our live, go-ahead people who have gathered in from all sections of the Union.

The following states being represented in the village and vicinity: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pensylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illnois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota,



Nebraska, Kansas, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Delaware and Oregon.

During the last year we have made almost as much improvement as in all the seven years before and the prospects now are that during the next year there will be much more and better improvements made, and in addition to our other improvements in and around the village, we hope to make considerable progress on our Highlands railroad. The outlook for the eight year child is certainly encouraging. We trust it may grow strong and prosperous with increasing years."

## First Train to Highlands!

The Historical Society once again participated in the Highlands Christmas Parade this past December by bringing the first train to Highlands. It took the magic of Santa Claus to get a train up these winding mountain passages and he surely did not disappoint the big crowd gathered for one of Highlands most endearing events.







## President's Letter – Spring 2025

This year marks the Sesquicentennial (150th Anniversary) of the founding of the Town of Highlands in 1875. The lead article is copied from an editorial by E.E. Ewing from an 1883 publication of Highlands first newspaper, the Blue Ridge Enterprise, in which he reflects on the first eight years of Highlands. I imagine he would agree that Highlands has, indeed, “grow(n) strong and prosperous with increasing years.” I hope you enjoy his early perspective.

The Historical Society has many wonderful events planned to celebrate the anniversary. One of the activities planned is our Season Opening Celebration on May 24th to be held at the Historical Village which will include a living museum with “ghost” actors, art demonstration, bluegrass, free food and drinks, and much more. We will also host a Historic Homes Tour on June 21st which will include three of the most important homes in Highlands’ history. You can find more information about these events throughout this newsletter. You do not want to miss either one!

This Summer HHS will also collaborate with the Center for Life Enrichment to co-host several local historical presentations at the CLE ranging from the history of boarding houses like the Prince House, to the art of past artist, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and the historic art of current artist, Paul Arsenault, to the development of a neighborhood of homes in the sky - the Satulah Historic District. On September 27th, HHS will once again host its annual Descendants’ Reception which was canceled this past year due to Hurricane Helene.

Also, in celebration of the 150th Anniversary, HHS will debut two new audio tours. The first will open in May and will focus on the Prince House. The second will open in the Summer and will include seventeen of the most historic buildings in downtown Highlands. I would like to thank the Cullasaja Women’s Outreach for their funding of these projects and Nicole Freeman and other students of Western Carolina professor, Dr. Jessie Swigger, for their work on bringing them to fruition.

Two events are noticeably absent from our calendar. Walk in the Park will not be held this year - but will return next year - to give our “ghost” actors a break as they will be entertaining for other events. Also, the Dazzling Dahlia Festival has been “re-homed” at the Bascom and will no longer be sponsored and hosted by the Highlands Historical Society. Please read my letter elsewhere in this newsletter for the reasoning behind that move.

Though the Historical Society is closed for the season until May, you can continue to access the history of Highlands through our website at [highlandshistory.com](http://highlandshistory.com). There you can find links to many of our exhibits, including videos of the “ghosts” telling their stories from the most recent Walk in the Park event. You will also find additional information about the exciting schedule of events planned for this year to help celebrate the 150th Anniversary. Mark your calendars and come join the Highlands Historical Society in celebrating Highlands’ first 150 years!

Fondly,  
*Tracy*

Tracy Foor, President

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Highlands Historical Society presents its

## 2025 Season Opening Celebration

Saturday  
May 24th  
10:00 - 4:00

Live Music by  
Laney & Bishop  
with  
Charles Wood

Featuring:

- Art Demonstration by Paul Arsenault
- Living Museum featuring “Ghosts” from Highlands’ Past
- New Audio Tour of the Historic Prince House
- Free Hot Dogs & Drinks (while they last!)

Highlands Historical Village  
520 North 4th Street  
visit [highlandshistory.com](http://highlandshistory.com) for full schedule



The Highlands Historical Society wishes to thank the following organizations for their generous grants in 2024 to support the activities of HHS!

**The Laurel Garden Club** which helped fund landscaping around our new steps.

**Mountain Findings** which helped fund our Raise the Roof Campaign which assisted with roof repairs to both the Prince House and those to come this winter at the museum.

**Cullasaja Women’s Outreach** which helped fund our new audio tour of the Prince House and of historic buildings in downtown Highlands which will be available in 2025.

**The Highlands Chamber of Commerce** which helped fund the Dazzling Dahlia Festival.



## Raise the Roof Update

The 2024 Raise the Roof Campaign raised over \$17,000 for roof repairs to the Prince House and the Museum building. All repairs to the Prince House and the interior repairs to the roof of the museum building have been completed. The museum will receive a new set of shingles and have its gutters repaired this Spring. Thanks to director, Price Kloess, for his leadership in getting this work done. Thanks to everyone who has donated to this cause which will continue into 2025 as additional funds are needed.



## Renew your Membership

Thank you for your past gifts to HHS! We hope you will continue your support by renewing your membership by returning the enclosed donation envelope with your contribution. You may also renew online via credit card at [highlandshistory.com](http://highlandshistory.com) and using the **Donate** tab. Please note that you may now choose to designate all, or part, of your contribution to two special funds – the **Ran Shaffner Scholarship Fund** or the **“Raise the Roof” Capital Campaign Fund**. Any non-designated amounts will be placed in our General Fund.

**Membership Levels:**

**Individual \$35 Family \$50**  
**Sustainer \$100 Major Donor \$250**  
**Promoter \$500 Preserver \$1,000**  
**Protector \$2,500 Highlander \$5,000**

Your generous contributions make it possible for the Highlands Historical Society to “preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands for present and future generations” and are greatly appreciated!

## Historic Homes Tour

Saturday, June 21st

presented by  
the Highlands Historical Society

“Checonondah”  
photo by George Masa 1929

“Faraway”  
photo by George Masa 1929

“Wolf Ridge”  
photo by George Masa 1929

Join us in celebrating Highlands’ 150th Anniversary by touring three of the most historically famous homes in Highlands via shuttle vans.

**Space is limited - Visit [highlandshistory.com](http://highlandshistory.com) for ticket reservations and more information.**



# Dazzling Dahlia Decision

At our November board meeting, I brought a proposal to the HHS board to authorize board member, Kim Daugherty, to seek a new home for the Dazzling Dahlia Festival. I did not make the proposal lightly. Instead, it was based upon two primary concerns: the scale and success of the current festival and the mission statement of the Historical Society.

Thanks to the efforts of Kim and all of the volunteers through the years, the Dazzling Dahlia Festival has grown into a huge, multi-day event that brings many people to Highlands to witness the beauty of the dahlias and our town on display. However, that growth had begun to overwhelm the capacity of HHS to support the festival. HHS is a volunteer organization, with only two part-time staff members dedicated to other responsibilities, so the Festival was staffed by one energetic leader – Kim – and her over-worked team of volunteers. How she and her group pulled the festival off each year was a miracle, in itself.

The mission of HHS is “to preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands for present and future generation.” As the festival grew, most of the Dahlia events did not directly support our mission and most activities were, by necessity, hosted off of the HHS campus. So, after



some discussion, the board voted in favor of my proposal and Kim was given her charge – to “re-home” the Dazzling Dahlia Festival.

Kim quickly found the ideal new home for the Festival - the Bascom. Going forward they will take the reins of leadership and they have the built-in mechanisms in place to support the festival at the scale it has grown to. I have no doubt that they will continue to host a wonderful event each year that is loved by all who attend. In the end, a difficult decision by our board found a perfect result.

I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude to all of the many board members, volunteers and participants through the years who made HHS shine as a result of their efforts on behalf of the Dazzling Dahlia Festival. Most of all, I would like to thank Kim for her energy, enthusiasm and never-ending work on the Festival which has reflected the brightest light possible on HHS.

*Tracy*



## HHS and the CLE Collaborate

The Historical Society and the Center for Life Enrichment will collaborate to host four presentations this summer at the CLE. You are encouraged to attend these informative talks that will focus on local history:

- May 27th** Paul Arsenault presents Buildings Through Time
- May 29th** Dr. Elizabeth Engelhardt presents Boardinghouse Women
- June 20th** Tracy Foor presents Homes in the Sky – Satulah Mountain
- July 22nd** Eleanor Harvey presents A Reflection on Henry Ossawa Tanner



# Prince House Audio Tour to Open in May

There will be an exciting new exhibit when the Historical Village opens in May. The Prince House will include a QR-base audio tour where visitors can use their smart phones to access room-by-room audio descriptions of the house during the time it was operated as a boarding house by Elizabeth "Lizzie" Wright Prince, its namesake.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Prince House was built in 1877 and is the oldest surviving residence in Highlands today. The audio will feature historical descriptions of the house and interviews with Lizzie's daughter-in-law, Ruby Crowe Prince and grandson, James Prince, who tell of their memories of Mrs. Prince and her home.



# Walk in the Park a Success

Thanks to the efforts of committee chairs, Lee Lyons and Peter Worthy, HHS held a successful Walk in the Park event this past October that was attended by over 110 people. Eight different ghost actors portrayed some of Highlands most famous historical figures. Here, Ricky Siegel portrays Silas McDowell for a group in Highlands Memorial Park. Walk in the Park will take a break this year and be back in 2026 to entertain those who love to learn their history directly from those who made it!

Come join us in  
**Celebrating  
Highlands**  
first 150 years at the  
Highlands  
Historical  
Society

**Museum Hours of Operation**  
The Museum opens for the season on Thursday, May 22nd and will remain open thru October for these weekly hours:  
  
Thursday: 10:00 - 4:00  
Friday: 10:00 - 4:00  
Saturday: 10:00 - 4:00  
Sunday: 1:00 - 4:00  
  
Visit [highlandshistory.com](http://highlandshistory.com) or contact [hhs@highlandshistory.com](mailto:hhs@highlandshistory.com) for information.  
524 N. 4th Street, Highlands  
828-787-1050  
"Where History Lives in Highlands"

**Calendar of Events for 2025**  
  
May 24 - Season Opening Celebration  
  
June 21 - Historical Homes Tour  
  
July 4 - Historic Buildings Tour Opens  
  
September 27 - Descendants' Reception & Heritage Jamboree

