

Highlands Historical Society



HIGHLANDS
NORTH CAROLINA

Summer 2025

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

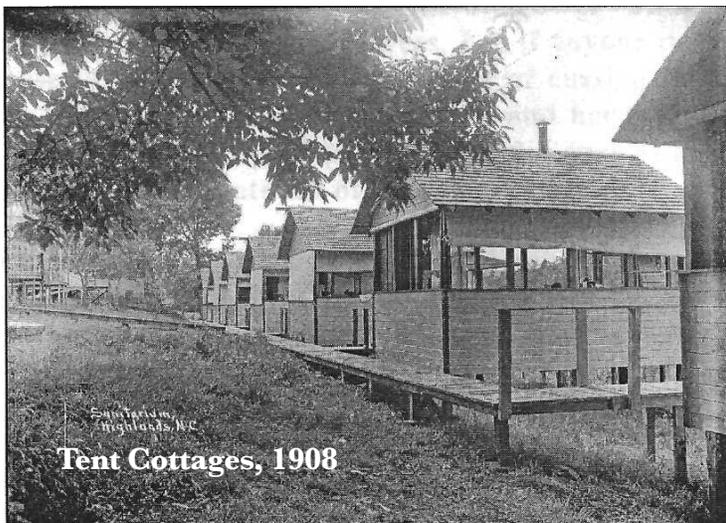
Highlands, N.C.

The Fight Where Strength Was Won

Most people familiar with the history of Highlands know the story of Dr. Mary Lapham. She first came to Highlands in 1893 from Michigan for a period of rest and recreation from her job in her father's bank. She loved it so much that she stayed over three years and bought property on Satulah Mountain on which to build her home, which came to be known as "Faraway." Before leaving, she noticed a need for medical care, especially for women. Determined to do something about it, she went to Philadelphia and studied at the Women's Medical College, graduating in 1901.

She then traveled to Vienna and Switzerland for advanced training. In Switzerland, she studied the new Swiss treatment called pneumotherapy, which involved collapsing the lungs one at a time in order to cure patients of lung diseases such as tuberculosis. Upon her return to Highlands, she began a medical practice out of her home, which she soon enlarged to house patients, a dispensary and her office. But soon, her desire to use her expertise in thoracic medicine caused her to expand her practice beyond the residents of Highlands.

Dr. Lapham believed that the clean fresh air of Highlands was the perfect climate to aid in the treatment of lung disorders and, in 1908, she bought a three-story home located where the Highlands Recreation Park is located on North 4th Street. The house was enlarged by the addition of two wings and 60 open-sided, one room tent cottages were added to the property - all connected by an extensive boardwalk to the main building.



Bug Hill, 1910

Sanatorium
Highlands,
N.C.

The hospital was formally called the Highlands Tuberculosis Sanatorium. She referred to it as "the San" for short, but locals dubbed the hospital "Bug Hill" and the name stuck. Nobody who lived in Highlands ever became a patient. Patients came from throughout the South and points North to be cured in Highlands, which founder Samuel T. Kelsey had once proclaimed had "the most perfect climatic sanitarium in the world," long before Dr. Lapham had built her hospital. She went about proving him an honest man decades later as patients - many of whom had been told they were on their last leg - came by train to Lake Toxaway and, from there, were transported to Highlands in the Sanatorium's two-horse Babcock ambulance.

Bug Hill became a little world unto itself with residents decorating their open air cottages like their own homes - inside and out. Patients would stay for months at a time - all seasons - with many taking up residence for several years. The hospital even became a social center for patients and townspeople who gathered in the lobby for card games, music and lively conversations which always rung with laughter and good humor. There were lavish Christmas parties and, in the summer, patients lounged on the verandah on long canvas deck chairs with "steamer rugs" draped across their legs. The food was so good that locals often came to dinners to partake in the squab pie and other specialties.

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The motto of the “San” was “This is the Fight Where Strength is Won.” Many patients exemplified the motto as they recovered from the ailments that brought them to Highlands. One such patient was H.M. Bascom, who came to Highlands with one lung and, as a consequence, health insurance companies turned him down as a bad risk. Bascom became Highlands second mayor and spent the last 61 years of his life “regaining his health” and contributing to Highlands’ growth. Another was W.S. Davis who arrived from Georgia on a stretcher, having been told he would last no more than a few weeks. He became an early founder of many of Highlands’ early business ventures and lived to be 90.

However, no patient who came to Bug Hill exemplified that fight more than Sarah Story Duffee. Born in Culloden, Georgia in 1891, she married Jessie Duffee in 1909 and, two years later, gave birth to a daughter, Vivian. Two months after Vivian’s birth, Jessie died suddenly. In 1914, Sarah was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sought treatment in Highlands at the San, which she had read about in local periodicals. With the help of family savings, she arrived at Bug Hill on October 18th, 1915. Sarah lived in one of the tent cottages that she coined “Kildare Kot” after a favorite poem. She described it this way, “They call them tents, but I love to think of mine as ‘my house.’ I have put out some pictures and little things to make it feel like mine; and I guess I am near happy as any lunger.” Patients at the Sans referred to themselves as “lungers” as a way to describe their common medical conditions.



Separated from her daughter, her time in Highlands was filled with ups and downs as the disease battled her unceasingly. Sarah’s many letters to friends and family provide glimpses of her struggles and fortitude to overcome the disease which ravaged her. Writing to a cousin the following May, Sarah wrote “I am grateful to you for writing . . . because I was so anxious about you. Life is so very hard for me that I can hardly bear it hard for others - and it is good to be relieved about you.”

When not gardening outside her tent, or engaged in endless games and animated conversations with her fellow patients, Sarah was a prolific writer and contributor of poetry and prose to regional periodicals. One of these was *The Silver Clarion*, a publication of John Milton Samples, of Macon, Georgia. Sarah became the *Clarion*’s greatest contributor in volume. While rehabilitating at Bug Hill, the editors of the *Clarion* asked her to accept a place on its editorial staff and she accepted with expressions of delight. She filled the role of editor and contributor for the short time that she had left. One of her most poignant poems, entitled “My Sweetheart”, is set out in the side bar to this article.

The ravages of her disease took Sarah Story Duffee’s life on January 30, 1919, at the age of 28, over three years after her arrival in Highlands. Ironically, she had outlasted the Sans by almost a full year. In February of 1918, while Dr. Lapham was overseas on a Red Cross mission during World War I, the sanatorium she had built ten years earlier, burned to the ground. All that remained were the tent cottages that housed the patients. Dr. Lapham’s loyal nurse, Bernie Durgin had 25 of the tents moved to her family property on Chestnut Street where she continued to run a treatment center for the next few years. Sarah Story Duffee was one of those patients until her untimely death following years of a “Fight Where Strength was Won.”

My Sweetheart

Oh, I've a lover, true as gold:
So very constant he,
That tho' our love is two years old,
He's ne'er away from me.

We're living in a tony cot,
Just room for him and me,
And tho' he's strong and I am not,
We live here peacefully.

How I have longed for many a day
To climb Satulah bold,
But ere I accomplish that, they say,
Our love will have grown cold.

I'm sure that it would break my heart
To have to say “Goodbye”.
I'm certain on the day we part,
That I shall surely die.

Now would you like for me to put
His name where you can see?
His name I will not write it out, but
His initials are T.B.

-Sarah Story Duffee
Highlands Camp Sanatorium
Feb. 21, 1916





President's Letter - Summer 2025

Most of us have spent some time camping in our lives. For me, most of my camping experiences occurred before my body let me know that a comfortable bed was much preferred. The feature article in this newsletter speaks to a time in Highlands' history when people lived in a tent in order to improve their health. In many ways, the tent cottages described were much like today's "Glamping" (or glamor camping), but they were the result of far more serious circumstances. I hope that you enjoy reading about one of Highlands' more unique historical events and about a wonderful young woman who did her very best to make a tragic situation uplifting, for herself and others.

Summer also marks the time when we thank all of you who have contributed to the Highlands Historical Society in the past year. Though we only list those who are "Major Donors" or above, due to space limitations, we want to thank each and everyone of you who have made a donation. You have truly made our mission - "to preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands to present and future generations" - far more attainable and we promise to be good stewards of your gifts.

This newsletter also provides a look back at several events that have already taken place and I hope that you have had an opportunity to participate in one or more of those events. The first Ran Shaffner Scholarship was awarded to Highlands School student, Finneaus Garner at the Highlands School Awards Assembly on May 12th. He was one of many excellent applicants and the committee had a difficult choice in narrowing their selection to just one student. The Season Opening Celebration was a perfect way for HHS to begin the year-long recognition of Highlands' 150th Anniversary. The Historic Homes Tour was a highly successful fundraiser which gave guests the opportunity of touring three of the most historic homes in Highlands that are situated high among the clouds. Thank you to Chuck and Pam Auster, Bill and Julia Grumbles, Ray and Diane McPhail and Will and Karen Stolz for opening their homes.

We have also collaborated with two community partners to host several events which connect Highlanders to their history. One of these was our collaboration with the Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau where we have hosted children and teens on our campus to introduce them to Highlands' history. The other is our collaboration with the Center for Life Enrichment where we have co-sponsored several presenters whose focus was local history.

Upcoming, we have two opportunities that you do not want to miss. The first is an Historic Buildings Tour which is now in place in downtown Highlands. Grab your smartphone and a map from the HHS museum or Chamber of Commerce and treat yourself to a walking tour featuring 17 of the most important historical buildings in downtown Highlands. As you have the opportunity to stretch your legs, you will learn the fascinating history of these important places - some of which are now gone, but certainly not forgotten.

Our last major event for 2025 - as we continue to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the founding of Highlands - is the Descendants' Reception and Highlands Heritage Jamboree. On September 27th, all of Highlands will come together to celebrate our past and hear stories from those who best remember the history that we now seek to preserve.

My personal history with Highlands marks its 10th Anniversary this year. I am humbled to know and represent, through HHS, those who can trace their personal history to Highlands much further back through the years. I hope that each of you can look to the Highlands Historical Society as a faithful caretaker of that history.

Fondly, *Tracy*

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In Memoriam



The Highlands Historical Society mourns the passing of Bill Lands, of Gastonia, North Carolina at the age of 72. Bill contributed his artistic spirit to the publishing of this newsletter for many years and his creativity and passion will be missed greatly by all who worked with him.

Major Donors 2024-2025

Thank you to all of our contributors who have supported HHS in the past year. These generous donors/grantors have each contributed \$250 or more to help promote and preserve the rich heritage of Highlands. Please forgive any omissions!

Greg & Laura Alby
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Renew your Membership

Thank you for your past gifts to HHS! We hope you will continue your support and renew your membership by returning the enclosed donation envelope with your contribution. You may also renew online via credit card at highlandshistory.com and use the **Donate** tab. You may choose to designate all, or part, of your contribution to two special funds - the **Ran Shaffner Scholarship Fund** or the **"Raise the Roof" Capital 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

First Ran Shaffner Scholarship Awarded



HHS Awarded the first annual Ran Shaffner Scholarship to Finneaus Garner, at the Highlands School Awards Assembly on May 12th. Pictured here are board members, Kim Daugherty and Carlton Cole with Finneaus.

HHS Starts the Celebration!



Season Opening Celebration a Big Hit

HHS held its Season Opening Celebration on Saturday, May 24th and over two hundred visitors came to celebrate Highlands' 150th Anniversary. There was great music, food and art. The CLE was on hand to promote their collaborations with HHS and guests toured the museum and took the new Prince House audio tour. The highlight of the day were the ghosts of Highlanders past, shown here on the front porch of the Prince House.

Book Signing Well Attended

After a presentation on her new book, Boardinghouse Women at the CLE on May 29th, HHS hosted a book signing and reception for Dr. Elizabeth Engelhardt at the Historical Village. Pictured here on the steps of the Prince House are Dr. Jessie Swigger, Tracy Foor, Dr. Engelhardt and Millie Coleman. HHS collaborated this year with the CLE on four presentations of historical topics ranging from boardinghouses of the South to the art of Henry Ossawa Tanner, America's first internationally recognized African-American artist.



Boys and Girls Club Takes a Tour

HHS has partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau this summer to host students at the Historical Village. Pictured here are students starting "the Hunt for Highlands History" which took them all over town as they learned about the history of Highlands.

Historic Homes Tour a Great Success

HHS hosted a tour of three of Highlands most historic homes on June 21st where guests were greeted by the "Ghosts" of the original owners. Pictured here are Marguerite Ravenel (portrayed by Trish Foor) and Henry Sloan (portrayed by Harry McDonald). The fundraiser brought HHS over \$10,000 profit.



Looking Ahead to Upcoming Events

CLE Collaboration Continues in Celebration of 150th Anniversary



HHS and the Center for Life Enrichment continue their collaboration with Eleanor Harvey's presentation *Henry Ossawa Tanner: America's First Internationally Recognized African-American artist and His Connection to Highlands* on July 22nd. Pictured above is *Mountain Landscape, Highlands, NC, c. 1889*, by Henry Ossawa Tanner. HHS also sponsored *Brushstrokes of Freedom: An Artistic Journey Through 250 Years of Independence* by Paul Arsenault, *Boardinghouse Women* by Dr. Elizabeth Engelhardt, and *Homes on High - the Satulah Mountain Historic District* by Tracy Foor earlier this summer.

Calling all Highlands Descendants!

Can you trace your families' roots to Highlands back at least 100 years?

Highlands Historical Society invites you to the

3rd Annual Descendants' Reception

When: Saturday, September 27th

Where: Highlands Community Building
869 North 4th Street

Time: 11:00 - 1:00

Join us for a light lunch and program: "Creating a Family Story"
Special Music by Carol Criminger Grantham
Featured Family Stories and Tales

Please pre-register at highlands100plus@gmail.com
for additional information.

Historic Buildings Audio Tour



In Celebration of the Founding of the Town of Highlands in 1875, by Samuel Kelsey and C. C. Hutchinson, the Highlands Historical Society has produced a walking tour of 17 of the most important buildings in Highlands' history. Go to the HHS website to download a map or pick up a brochure at the Historical Village or at the Highlands Chamber of Commerce.

Bring your smart phone to scan the QR Code on the plaques found at each location to learn about the original owners of these historic sites and what has made each such an integral part of Highlands' history.

Descendants' Reception to be Held on September 27th

The Historical Society will host its 3rd Annual Descendants' Reception on Saturday, September 27th from 11:00 to 1:00 at the Highlands Community Building. Last year's reception was forced to be canceled due to hurricane related conflicts, so there is a great anticipation for this year's event in celebration of Highlands' 150th Anniversary. Later that day, the Town will be hosting its Heritage Jamboree at Kelsey Hutchinson Park with special music and events.

The theme "Creating a Family Story" will promote how every family can produce a quality video which relates the history of the family through stories and photos to be shared today and passed down to future generations.

Advanced registration is strongly encouraged at highlands100plus@gmail.com.