

# Highlands Historical Society

Summer 2010

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

Highlands, N. C.

## EARLY HIGHLANDS – PART TWO

The town of Highlands was founded by Samuel Kelsey and Clinton Hutchinson in 1875. Mr. Kelsey remained to develop and promote the town with vigor and enthusiasm, but his efforts brought only modest results. Access was difficult, accommodations were limited, and population was sparse. Growth was very slow in the early years.

Great hope and much exasperation were expended on the subject of a railroad which citizens believed would bring growth and prosperity to the town. Mr. Kelsey and others worked diligently in this cause and in 1883 organized the Highlands Railroad Company with subscribed capital of \$75,000. An engineer's survey was made to assess the feasibility of constructing a line to connect Highlands with a railroad that was expected to come from Cornelia to Dillard. A satisfactory routing was charted, and the engineer advised that a railroad could be built without undue difficulty. His report concluded with the words, "Gentlemen, build your railroad." But the line from Cornelia did not reach Dillard until 1905 by which time the money for the Highlands railroad was gone.

When the road from Walhalla was opened, supplies were brought to Highlands by horse and wagon, a journey that required two days under the best of circumstances. Believing this to be inefficient, two Highlands residents organized the Highlands Traction Company and sold stock to local citizens. They designed a tractor powered by an old steam engine that was expected to pull three wagons at the same time. When the tractor was finally assembled and put in service, three days were required to pull three empty wagons down the mountain to Walhalla. The wagons were loaded with eighty-two sacks of cottonseed meal, and the return trip began as

foul weather arrived. Three weeks later, the two drivers walked into Highlands, each with a single sack of meal on his back. That was the end of the Highlands Traction Company.

The *Blue Ridge Enterprise* began publication in Highlands in 1883, and the events chronicled in this local newspaper suggest that in many ways Highlands was typical of small town America at that time. A news item in the September 4, 1883 issue reported:

*The ringing of the school-house bell has been entirely dispensed with on account of the sickness of Mr. Grey and his wife who live but a few rods distant.*

An 1885 issue reported:

*Two wagons loaded with chickens, and a drove of eighty turkeys, passed through Highlands on the way to Walhalla on Sunday past.*

Also from the same era:

*Mr. Kelsey's cow was last Sunday unfortunately choked by part of a radish, and it was obliged to be killed.*

An advertisement in a June, 1883 issue promised:

*It makes no difference how long you have been sick, if you are troubled with indigestion, constipation, liver and kidney troubles, Hollister's Rocky Mountain Tea will make you well. 35 cents*

In 1890:

*The horse carrying the mail from Walhalla, Tuesday, ran away the other side of Pine Mountain. The road cart was smashed up, but the carrier, holding on to the horse and jumping off when the cart tipped over, escaped without injury.*

While Highlands was only a small rustic village

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*Street scene around 1890, courtesy of the Highlands Historical Society*

*Be Prepared. . . the meaning of the motto is that a scout must prepare himself by previous thinking out and practicing how to act on any accident or emergency so that he is never taken by surprise.*

~ Robert Baden-Powell

A few Sundays ago, the Historical Society was indeed prepared. Its walls were clad with Scout memorabilia, and its floor space was covered with photos, books and badges. The room soon filled with Scouts and Scouters. Their conversations, memories and stories soon helped complete the Scouting-in-Highlands exhibit at the Historical Society.

On July 18, the Historical Society hosted a reception that honored the 100th anniversary of Scouts in America as well as the long tradition of Scouts in Highlands. Thanks to the efforts of Sue Potts and many others, a wonderful Scouting-in-Highlands exhibit took place. It will be on display over the next month. Please take time to stop by.

Our summer season is quickly racing by, and it is hard to believe that our Home Tour is right around the corner on Aug. 7. Be sure to mark your calendars, as this year’s tour will feature some great homes in the Highlands Country Club area on Cobb and North Cobb Roads.

One last date to mark is our Dining-at-Lakeside event on August 18. The dinner will begin at 6:30 p.m., and proceeds from the dinner will go to the Historical Society. Remember to make your reservations, mentioning the Historical Society.

Finally, many of you will soon be receiving our annual solicitation letter. We could not continue our pursuit of preserving the heritage of this community without your support.

Thank you for your dedication to HHS!

Sincerely,



Eric NeSmith

**OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

Eric NeSmith, President  
Walter Wingfield, Vice President  
Carolyn Patton, Secretary  
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Linda New, Wiley Sloan, Allen L. “Buck” Trott,  
and Wade Wilson,  
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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.  
Highlands Historical Society  
Post Office Box 670  
Highlands, NC 28741-0670

**HAVE ANY OLD FAMILY QUILTS  
WITH STORIES?  
PLEASE CONTACT US!**

The Historical Society is partnering with The Bascom for their quilt exhibit later this fall.

We are helping The Bascom gather quilts with Highlands connections and stories to display at their exhibit from Nov. 13 to Dec. 18.

If you have any information, please contact us at [highlandshistory@nctv.com](mailto:highlandshistory@nctv.com) or call (828) 787-1050.

**VOLUNTEERS**

The historical society always welcomes volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering as a Museum docent (three hours on a Friday or a Saturday between Memorial Day Weekend and the end of October), please let us know!

Contact us today at [highlandshistory@nctv.com](mailto:highlandshistory@nctv.com) or call (828) 787-1050.

## TOURS OF HOMES AUG. 7

For more than 30 years, Ray and Diane McPhail dreamed of locating and restoring an old mill. A little more than 15 years ago, that dream became reality as the McPhails bought and restored the old Highlands mill.

Over a two-year period, they meticulously planned and restored the old structure, transforming it into their home on Lake Sequoyah. However, the McPhails did not stop there. All of the mill's working parts were restored, and if they so chose, the mill could once again operate today.

On the 23 acres surrounding the mill, the McPhails built a beautiful guesthouse and an artist studio for Diane. Each structure was also constructed using reclaimed materials, including the combination of an early 1800s barn with an 1830s dog-trot cabin for the guesthouse.

A tour of the McPhails' unique property is a true highlight of this year's Tour of Homes. Sponsored by the Highlands Historical Society, this year's Aug. 7 tour will feature homes in the Highlands Country Club area on Cobb and North Cobb roads. Along with the three structures on the McPhails' property, tour goers will also have the opportunity to visit

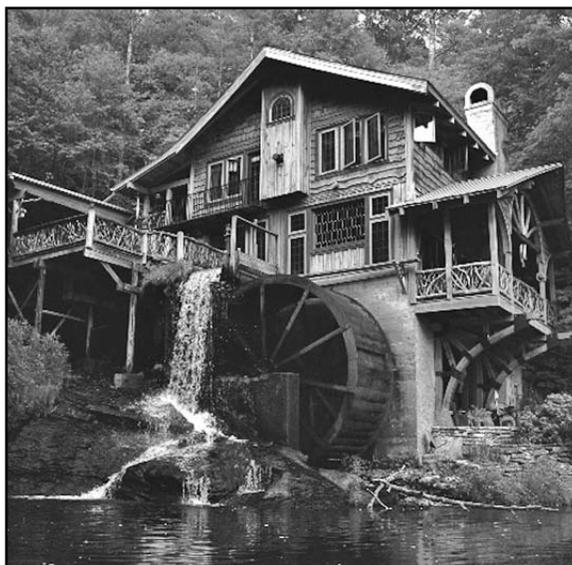
Cason and Nancy Callaway's "Apple Hill" cottage as well as Cynthia Mitchell's "Outabounds" home on Cobb Road. Both of these homes were some of the first built on this part of Highlands Country Club's golf course.

Invite your friends to come for the weekend and revel in the past of Highlands. The tour will run from

10 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Aug. 7. Shuttles will leave from the Highlands Community Building (next to the Ball Field) on the Cashiers Road. Tickets are \$40 each and may be purchased at The Highlander Newspaper or Cyrano's Bookshop before the event. Tickets may also be purchased when you catch the shuttle at the Community Building on the day of the event.

Funds raised by this event support the ongoing maintenance of the Historic Village, which includes the original Hudson Library and the Prince House (oldest home within the town limits).

Please come tour the Museum and the Prince House any Friday or Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. throughout the season. For more information, visit the Historical Society's web site, [www.highlandshistory.com](http://www.highlandshistory.com) or call (828)-787-1050.



*The Old Mill House*

## SCOUTING RECEPTION HONORS 100 YEARS

A reception honoring the tradition of Scouting in Highlands and the 100th anniversary of Boy Scouts in America was held at the Highlands Historical Society on Sunday, July 18. Scouters from across the Highlands area gathered to share stories and memories and view the Historical Society's new Scouting-in-Highlands exhibit.

Many of the current and past leaders of Highlands Scout Troop 207 are pictured here.

Front Row: Phil Potts, Pack 207 Committee; Rick

Demetriou, Troop 207 Scoutmaster; and Jose Jimenez, Pack 207 Den Leader. Back Row: Griffin Bell, Jr., Past



Pack 207 Leader; Tim Moseley, Pack 207 Den Leader; Mike Murphy, Troop 207 Asst. Scoutmaster; Bill Edwards, Troop 207 Committee Chairman; James "Jimbud" Rogers, Past Troop 207 Scoutmaster; Wade Wilson, Past Troop 207 Asst. Scoutmaster; and Tommy Chambers, Past Troop 207 Scoutmaster.

Over the next month, the new Scouting exhibit will be on display at the Historical Society.

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in some respects, it was progressive for a community of its size. Much of the early population had come from areas of the country that were more culturally advanced than the typical Appalachian village of the time, and they brought a variety of interests. A school was established in 1875, the first year of the town's existence, although the first teacher, Robert Campbell, "boarded 'round". Citizens organized the Highlands Union Sunday School in 1876. The Highlands Literary Society was organized in the earliest years of the town and in 1883 debated whether a neat, cross wife is more to be desired than one who is slack and good natured. The Hudson Library was established shortly after 1880 and was open every Friday at the recess of the Literary Society and from 2:00 to 3:00 each Saturday afternoon. The Highlands Amateur Orchestra, a "string band", made its debut in June of 1883 in a performance at the "M. E. entertainment." The local newspaper began weekly publication in Highlands in 1883, and the Highlands Improvement Association was organized in or before the same year. The Highlands Glee Club was singing away by 1883. The Highlands Scientific Society was organized in 1886 to study the natural sciences, and the Ladies Floral Society and the Horticultural Society were also established in these early years.

When the town was incorporated in March of 1879, the original corporate limits were centered at the post office in T. Baxter White's store on Main Street. They ran one half mile in each direction to contain one square mile. However, the town founders did not own all of the land within the town limits. They had bought little land on the mountains. It seems they did not believe that residents would care to drive their horse and carriage up a steep mountain when returning home after shopping in town.

Population of the town rose to three hundred by 1884, nine years after its founding, but the difficult access, farming failures, and limited accommodations discouraged many. Some left, and the number of permanent residents fell to 249 by 1900 and then 200 in 1905.

But by the 1890s, Highlands was increasingly recognized as a beneficial destination for an extended visit or for a summer home. As Samuel Kelsey and Clinton Hutchinson had intended, the benefits of a mountain climate had begun to attract visitors and summer residents. In 1890, William Rutherford wrote from Highlands to a former college classmate. He said,

*Your very welcome letter reached me at Athens just before I left for this place. My health has been poor for some considerable time, and I found it necessary to seek some higher altitude. This place is said to be higher above sea level than any place this side the Rocky Mountains being 3,817 feet. . . . The air is certainly*

*pure and so thin that rapid walking puts you soon out of breath. A doctor told me, on yesterday, that a stay of six months would rejuvenate any person, no matter what was the matter with him. It is certainly a most delightful summer retreat.*

The second wave had begun to arrive. Increasing numbers of visitors came in hopes that a stay in the mountain climate would improve their health. Others built summer homes.

Many of the summer residents were from the southern port cities of New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah and came to the mountains to escape the heat and fevers that plagued coastal towns in the South during the hot months of the year. The early permanent residents mostly built their home on the relatively level ground along the town's first streets, but many summer residents selected sites in the nearby mountains.

The first family to enjoy a summer home in Highlands was that of Samuel Prioleau Ravenel and his wife, Margaretta, from Charleston. They built their grand house on spacious grounds overlooking Horse Cove in 1880 and named it Wantoot, now known as Playmore.

Many more would follow. By 1905, permanent residents were still very few, but the number of summer residents was estimated to be 800. The town was on its way. A viable economy had developed and would provide the foundation for the active and enjoyable community that we know today.



*Presbyterian Church, courtesy of Randolph Shaffner*