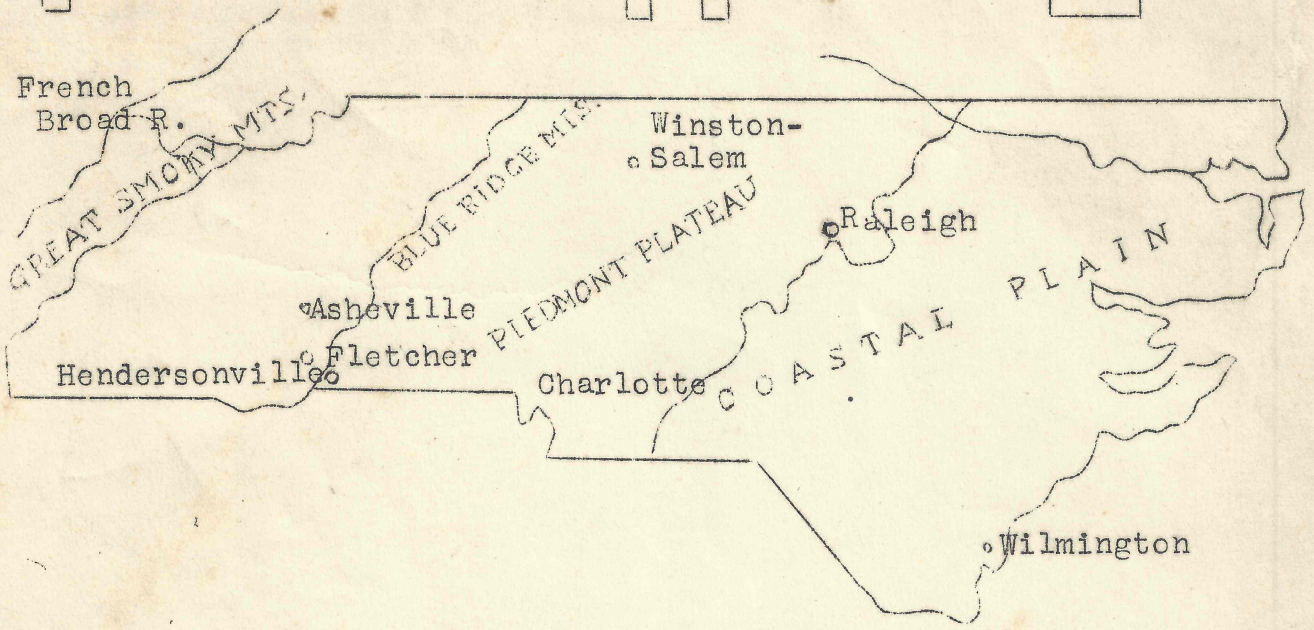
# Fletcher NewsLetter




ASHEVILLE AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL
and MOUNTAIN SANITARIUM

Fletcher, North Carolina

Vol. 2, No. I January 1934

A desire that our friends should know somewhat of our Southern home and appreciate it, even as we love it, has prompted this number of the NEWS LETTER.

## -- OUR STATE --

During the golden age of discovery, an expedition sent out by Sir Walter Raleigh first touched the shores of what is now North Carolina. Three times Raleigh sent out colonies, none of which were successful. The famous baby, Virginia Dare, was born in one of these colonies. The name of our state capital is a memorial to the attempts of the gallant Sir Walter. North Carolina was one of the original thirteen states. She was among the first to be aroused by the tyranny of the King. In May of 1775, more than a year before the Declaration of Independence was signed, at a meeting at Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, the Carolina colonists declared themselves free and independent of British rule. North Carolina furnished troops for the Continental Army, and was invaded by the British. At Kings Mountain, on the line between the two Carolinas was fought the Battle of Kings Mountain, one of the decisive battles of the Revolution. The colony became a state in 1789.

North Carolina opposed secession, but disapproving of Lincoln's call for troops to coerce the seceding states, withdrew in May of 1861 She furnished double her number of troops to the Confederate army and sustained heavy losses. The state was readmitted to the Union in 1868 and went through bitter political struggles during the period of Reconstruction.

NOTICE
The white population of North Carolina is 99% native American. They are the descendants of pioneer ancestors.

EDUCATION--In the last twenty-five years, public school expense has increased from $590,000 to $35,000,000. Compulsory school laws require every child to attend school. Fine, large, well-equipped consolidated schools are taking the place of the one-room, one-teacher school. The largest institution of higher learning in the state is Duke University at Durham.

"The State of North Carolina has practically everything. All she needs is a press agent. ..... She has within her as complete an assortment of natural attractions and natural glories as is to be found in any set of state boundaries this side of the Pacific slope. ..... Going by what these two eyes have seen, I proclaim these two things; namely, that North Carolina is today the foremost state of the South in material progress, in public spirit, in educational expansion, and in optimism of outlook. I doubt whether among all these United States, there is a single one, of anywhere like population, area, and per capita wealth, which in this last decade has put up more school houses, laid more miles of paved road, and by city, county, and state, voted more bond issues for sanitary sewage systems, municipal water works, and power plants than North Carolina has."

Irvin S. Cobb-----

THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

This park was assured in 1928 when $10,000,000, raised by state appropriations, private gifts, and public subscription, was paid for it. It comprises one half million acres of the Great Smoky Mountain area, quite equally divided between North Carolina and Tennessee. The richness of this great forest region is a source of wonder and admiration to everyone who traverses it. Here by their isolation has been preserved the wild life of the mountains. Here in their primeval majesty, are the last great hardwood forests of America. From these peaks, many of them more than a mile high, one looks out upon a sea of mountains. Good roads opened this great park to tourists the past summer.

"A STATE MOST PEOPLE HAVE A SLEEPING CAR KNOWLEDGE OF . . . . . If invalids who go down to Florida every year for their health would leave the train at North Carolina, they would find a climate where the very air is a tonic.....cool breezes, and the medi-

cine of a pine-laden air, with a panaromic grandeur not to be excelled!
Irvin S. Cobb------

North Carolina ranks fourth among the forty-eight states in the amount of taxes paid to The Federal Government.

## ROADS EVERYWHERE

A few years ago North Carolina entered upon a stupendous road-building program. Every county seat in the state is connected with every other county seat by paved road. In total mileage of paved road we are exceeded by only one other state. Travelers like our roads!

## A BIT OF LOCAL HISTORY
## - FLETCHER -

From just what date to begin a history of any part of Western North Carolina, it is hard to know. The late historian, Dr. F. A. Sondley, believes that De Soto visited this vicinity in the sixteenth century. We have never thought of De Soto coming as far North as this, but so carefully has Dr. Sondley collected the data which he submits to establish his conviction that no one has ever challenged its accuracy. Be that as it may, the history of our community, we know, is as old as the nation itself. Just who the very first settlers were, they left no chronicle to tell us. That they probably came down from the Virginia colony seems evident.

The first known pioneer of our section was William Fletcher, who came from Virginia with his wife and eight boys, during the Revolutionary War. Their sojourn here was somewhat brief. Lured by reports of greater possibilities farther west, they pushed on into the Chattanooga Valley, finally settling in Northern Alabama. The sons were soldiers, two of whom were killed at Kings Mountain. Another son, John Fletcher, returned to this section and bought a piece of land, east of Fletcher village, in what was at that time Burke County, whose county seat was Morganton. This place now belongs to Mrs. Josephine Cushing, a grand-daughter. On the hill near the site of the original house, tall pines and hemlocks guard the graves of this pioneer family as the years glide on. It was for his son, Dr. George W. Fletcher, that our village is named. He it was who, about 1856, built the old Fletcher House, which still stands, a quaint reminder of by-gone days. Nine of his family of eleven children lived to maturity, several of whom still live in this community, active in community interests and enterprizes.

The old house, which is a landmark, was once a wayside inn, popular with traders going South with their cattle, hogs, and horses. Sheds were provided in the yards for the accomodation of the stock. Once or twice a year, two teams of eight oxen each were yoked to loads of produce, hams, turkeys, grain, corn, and woven woolen cloth, and driven to Charleston, S. C., the nearest market of the time. The return load was made up of calico cloth, sugar, salt, coffee--the winter's supply of groceries--and a few small luxuries. This journey started in early October to get to Charleston for the Thanksgiving market.

The old Howard Gap Road, which ran through the village, and which now crosses our school campus, was the main line of travel between Cincinnati and the South. It was one of the first roads into the mountains. Soldiers of the Revolution travelled this historic road. In pioneer days the covered wagon was a common sight; there was no railroad in Fletcher until about forty years ago, at which time there was but one house, the afore-mentioned Fletcher home. The nearest post office was Shufordsville, now Arden.

The deed of the Daniel Blake place bears the date of 1833. The Blakes were a Charleston family who moved into this locality at an early date, and contributed in various ways to its development, as did also Alexander Robinson, and other Charleston families who brought to the stern, rugged life of the mountains the wealth and culture of the Old South. On the beautiful Blake Estate, near Fletcher, the old Blake home still stands, surrounded by trees that Gifford Pinchot described as the most beautiful of their kind in America.

Another family who have contributed greatly to the section were the C. W. Beale family of Philadelphia. Both writers, and widely travelled, Mr. and Mrs. Beale brought to their home at Arden, art and literary treasures of value. Their home was a center of the social life of the time. Woodrow Wilson was entertained at Beale House two summers, once with his mother, and later, in 1885, with his bride. Theodore Roosevelt and his daughter, Alice, also spent one summer there. The destruction of this place by fire in 1922 was an irreparable loss. Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Beale still live in the community. Best known to us is Mrs. Margaret Beale-Fletcher, who brings to us dramatic scenes of the rapidly vanishing life of the mountains.

Other pioneer families there were, strong, courageous, intrepid souls, who carved out of the Carolina mountains our community as we know it: the Lannings, Lances, Sumners, Youngbloods, Baldwins, Russells, Garrens, Claytons, WEstfeldts, Hutchinsons, Sorrells, and others. Three generations of most of these families have lived in this section. Space forbids me to mention them in detail, but they have all contributed to the development and enrichment of the beautiful community that we proudly call our home.

## - OLD CALVARY -

One of the out-standing beautiful, historic landmarks of our locality is Old Calvary Episcopal Church, dedicated in 1859 on land donated by the Daniel Blakes. Up to the time of its erection, church goers of Fletcher section were obliged to go to St. Johns in the Wilderness, ten or more miles away. At a dinner party in Mr. Blake's house, the need of a church was discussed, and a fund created, from which the church was built. The building was used as a barracks for Confederate Soldiers during the war between the states. On the quaint old stones in the church yard are names closely associated with the growth and development of the section. The church is well preserved, and still beautiful. Rev. E. R. Neff is now the rector.

## - BUCK SHOALS -

The home of the noted lecturer and humorist, Edgar Wilson Nye, familiarly known as "Bill Nye", is a beautiful place on the French Broad River. Here more than thirty years ago came the famous writer to give Western North Carolina its first press publicity. "North

Carolina", he wrote, to the northern newspapers, "is one dark blue expanse of climate. ..... Under its whispering pines, along the rhododendron bordered Swannanoa or French Broad, and down through the thousand mountain brooks you will find enough climate in twenty minutes to last a week."

Buck Shoals was built in 1890. To this beautiful home came such guests as James Whitcomb Riley, John Fox, Jr., and other celebrites. But the jovial, friendly humorist, who so quickly endeared himself to the community, was not permitted to linger long. He died in 1896, and was buried at Old Ca lvary, where his grave is appropriately marked with a huge boulder of native granite.

With the death of Mr. Nye, Buck Shoals passed out of the family, and is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Thompson.

## - CHRIST SCHOOL -

This splendid neighbor school of ours, a school that dares to announce its objective "to make manly boys", stands largely as a memorial to a woman's vision, courage, and energy. When Mr. Thomas C. Wetmore, a native Carolinian, married Miss Susie Allen, grand-daughter of Alexander Robinson, an early settler from Charleston, they were united in their dream of a school for mountain boys, land for which was donated by Mrs. Wetmore from her father's estate.

Mr. Wetmore died in 1906. Mrs. Wetmore has been associated with the school during the 34 years of its existence. Her name and that of Christ School are almost synonymous. She has raised funds, lectured, planned, organized, and promoted. Nor are her efforts confined to the school. She has reached out to her neighborhood in sympathy and helpfulness. She supports a community nurse, maintains a dispensary at the school, gives away clothing, and fosters mountain industries.

Another outstanding character connected with this school was Rev. R. R. Harris, who took up ministerial work in 1907, presiding over church and school until his death in 1933. Father Harris was deserving of the warmth of affection in which our community held him. We revere his name, and honor his memory. His son, David Harris, is now head-master of the school.

## - OUR PLACE -

A land grant, yellow with age, written in a quaint, old-fashioned hand, lies before me. The ink has faded on this old grant, which in the sixteenth year of our independence conveyed to Robert Pendleton one hundred acres of land, for the consideration of ten pounds. The detached seal of the State of North Carolina is tied to the document. Another deed shows that the place, with additional land granted by the state, passed into the hands of Robert Pendleton in 1799. It became the "Byers Place", as it was long known, in 1865, when Mr. Pendleton sold it to Francis C. Byers. Three generations of the Byers family lived here before it was deeded to Mrs. Martha E. Rumbough for a school property in 1910. Mr. Zeb C. Byers of Hendersonville, a grand-son of the pioneer of the family, tells us that the Emancipation Proclamation freed seven slaves, the property of his grand-father, on the place. His father, J. R. Byers, built the farm house, familiarly known to us as "The Big House" in 1885, the first fire being kindled on its hearth by Mr. Zeb Byers himself, then a boy, on Christmas Eve of that year.

--M. M. J.

## "THE FRIENDLY ROAD"

Leaving the highway at thebig sanitarium sign near Naples, let us leisurely walk out the mile and a quarter to the sanitarium, pausing to chat a bit with the friendly folk who live along the roadway, or hailing a good neighbor as he passes.

Mrs. Liles, who runs the tiny post office at Naples, comes out on the porch to greet us with her usual friendly smile, urging us to come in and visit a bit. A brave little soul is she, struggling asshe has through the years to rear her family of boys and girls.

The white house on the left stands empty, and we wish Mr. and Mrs. Oren Lancaster were there again--this was their home for years. He is the manager of the Farmers Federation at Fletcher, and a friendly family were they. A few yards beyond we wave a greeting to Gus Byers as he comes from the driveway of his little brown house on the left. Mr. Byers, careful and trustworthy, drives the school bus. He and his good wife with their many relatives have long been neighbors, and good ones.

Travellers of this friendly road would not want to miss a chat with Mr. Lancaster as he walks toward us from his new brick bungalow he is just finishing in order to be near his daughter, who lives in the white house on the left, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Claude West. For fifteen years Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster lived in the corner house adjoining the school farm. Throughout the years, patients, nurses, teachers, and students have become acquainted with this good family. We shall miss them from the old home, but are glad they will still live near us.

It will be well worth our while to step aside from the road to the left at the sign "Priscilla Gardens". Ahead of us stands the attractive brick cottage of Judge W. H. Toomer. On retirement from a successful life in the practice of law in Jacksonville, the judge built a home in our mountains. Climbing up the slope and stepping upon the veranda of his comfortable home, we understand why he chose this site. A panorama of unsurpassed beauty lies before us. We congratulate the judge for the site he has chosen, and welcome him to our neighborhood of friendly folk.

We pass the Robert Wynn home, where we wave at Mrs. Wynn, with her fine little brood of four, and go on around the bend to the neat farm home of Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Burge. For thirty-two years these thrifty souls have farmed the strip of land lying either side of the road. Here the corn seems to grow taller, the apples from his orchard are larger and sweeter, and even the cows seem more contented than elsewhere.

The large stone house, scarcely seen from the road, tops the hill at the right. This has long been the Hilford home.

We wave a greeting to the Melton family as they are busily at work in their garden plot, and also to Mrs. Guy Wynn. The Wynns have been in our neighborhood less than a year, but already they have shown that they qualify for a place on the Friendly Road.

And, now for ourselves, we are at the end of the trail, and the sanitarium is in sight. But the Friendly Road goes on and on, winding and ever winding through the hills of Carolina, where all the roads are Friendly Roads.

--E. B.

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** To all our friends who read this sheet, we send greetings **
** and sincere good wishes for the New Year. **
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