



Highlands Historical Society



Summer 2024

To preserve and promote the rich heritage of Highlands

Highlands, N.C.

Prelude to Grandeur— The Beginnings of Old Edwards Inn



“There in the highlands, clear weather held for much of the time. The air lacked its usual haze, and the view stretched on and on across rows of blue mountains, each paler than the last until the final ranks were indistinguishable from the sky. It was as if all the world might be composed of nothing but valley and ridge.”

– Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*

Long before the Old Edwards Inn and Spa became a four-star resort with every amenity imaginable, people were flocking to Highlands to escape the heat in the summer and behold the glory of nature in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In Highlands’ early years, there were several boarding options competing for the dollars of weary travelers who longed for a respite - whether for a few days or the entire summer. Central House, located in the same building that is now home to Madison’s



Restaurant, was the first boarding house in Highlands.

Built in 1878, Central House was promptly exchanged by its original owner, John Norton, for Highlands House (now Highlands Inn) located directly across the street and owned by Joseph Halleck, who ran the boarding house for the next eight years. Eventually, Central House ended up in the hands of David Norton. He and his wife, Mattie, operated the boarding house for the next seventeen years. The Nortons and their family became well known for their generosity with guests and towns people. Norton built the Granite Store next door in 1893 where he served as the town’s postmaster. Later known as the Rock Store, its foundation serves as the first floor of the Old Edwards Inn today.

Unlike the inn’s lavish amenities today, Central House was typical of its time in the early 1900’s. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity. Guests of the eleven room house depended on wood stoves, kerosene lamps and a four-hole outhouse located out back. Ice, cut from a nearby lake, was stored in a building behind the house - a real treat for guests in the summer months.

In 1911, Central House was sold to Highlands’ police chief, J. Grover “Diamond Joe” Edwards, but it was his wife, Minnie Zoellner, who took charge of the property. For the next thirty-six years, she and her cook, Dolly McCall, prepared wonderful meals for guests which included her famous “big biscuits” with each serving. She also laid down the law with any unruly guests, demanding a proper sense of decorum when they offended her sensibilities. Over the course of her tenure as matron of the house, she raised two dormers in the main building and worked with architect Linton H. Young to design and build Hotel Edwards on the foundation of the Rock Store next door. The two buildings are the centerpiece of the Old Edwards Inn and Spa properties today.

The life of an innkeeper in the early twentieth century was anything but glamorous. With help from a few loyal workers, Zoellner served three meals a day, washed linens and towels, did laundry and ironed for guests, and made beds ready each night. Her days were long and her nights short. By the 1950’s Minnie’s health was failing

continued on page 2

continued from page 1



and the inn was turned over to others. After a succession of owners and managers, the inn lost much of its appeal and there was an attempt to turn the space into shops - the glory of the past seemed a far distant memory.

However, Rip and Pat Blanton bought the inn and restaurant in 1982 and, using historic photographs and materials, restored both of the properties to near their original glory over the course of the next several years. In 2001, Art and Angela Williams bought the properties and set the Old Edwards Inn and Spa on its

current course. Today, anyone would be hard pressed to find a more exquisite hotel property in the United States. Honoring its past while committed to the current demands of visitors to Highlands - who continue to seek a respite from the heat, and hustle and bustle of life “off



The Moccasin War

In 1885, Central House and its neighbor across the street, Highlands House, played an important role in one of the most interesting – and tragic – events in Highlands’ history. The Moccasin War resulted from a conflict between bootleggers from Moccasin Township, just across the border in Georgia, and townspeople from Highlands. With a conservative and temperate attitude, Highlanders were strongly opposed to the moonshine brought in to tempt the young men of Highlands.

A U.S. revenuer arrested two bootleggers from Moccasin and brought them to Highlands for safekeeping. Having no jail to hold them, he placed them under arrest in a room at Highlands House (now Highlands Inn) to await trial. After a formal declaration of war, a small army of 18 men wound its way up the mountain and made camp on the Central House property where they were confronted by local residents intent on enforcing the law – and Highlands’ notions of propriety. For three days the opposing parties took shots at each other from windows and trees across Main Street finally resulting in the death of one young man from Moccasin.

Swearing revenge – and reinforcements – the troops from Georgia withdrew down the mountain, later declaring no Highlanders would receive provisions or be allowed to pass through their community without being killed. Eventually, when provisions in Highlands ran low, Joel Lovin, a local teamster, took his wagon down the mountain and was confronted by the men in Moccasin. Mysteriously, he was allowed to pass and Highlands was restocked upon his return. Legend has it that he prayed his way past the bootleggers but the gun on the lap of the war veteran was more likely his saving grace. The war had come to a quiet and sober end.

Season Opening Celebration Rained In

The weather could not prevent the Historical Society from hosting its Season Opening Celebration - Mountain Music & Moonshine - on May 25th as over 60 people attended and toured the Prince House and Museum. Music was provided by Laney & Bishop and Moonshine Storytelling by Lee Lyons and Ron Leslie.



Ran Shaffner and “Moonshiner” Ron Leslie

No one left hungry as hotdogs were grilled and popcorn was popped. Despite the rain, a good time was had by all - even without any real moonshine!



Danielle Bishop and Colby Laney



President's Letter – Summer 2024

We are off to an exciting start to our summer season at the Highlands Historical Society. Our museum opened for the year on May 23rd and we expanded our hours of operation to include Sunday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00. Stuart Ferguson (Thursdays and Fridays) has joined Mary Jane McCall (Saturdays) as a docent and a group of enthusiastic volunteers have generously given of their time to be docents on Sundays. The museum has seen an uptick in the number of visitors as a result.

I would like to especially invite you to visit the museum this month as we open our new exhibit "Hosts on High - a History of the Hotels and Inns of Highlands." The lead article in this newsletter tells the story of just one of the important hotels that have made this industry the major means of commerce on the Plateau. For 150 years, Highlands has been a consistent destination for people who want to escape the heat of summer and experience the beauty of nature - and they all needed a place to stay. We are pleased to highlight some of those places.

Our Calendar for the remainder of the year is very full. Please make note of the many events that the 14th Annual Dazzling Dahlia Festival will bring to Highlands in August and September as described on the back page of this newsletter. In October, the Historical Society will host the Descendants Reception at the Fellowship Center in Highlands United Methodist Church and Walk in the Park at both Memorial Cemetery and Highlands Community Center. These two annual activities will focus on the people and families who have made Highlands the wonderful place that it is today.

The year has also come with its challenges. Following a thorough inspection of both the museum building and the Prince House, it is apparent that many repairs and upgrades need to be made - starting with the roof of both buildings. Steps have been made to address these repairs, but, as we all know, everything involving a hammer and a nail in Highlands costs more! Couple that reality with the Historic designation on the Prince House and major structural repairs will require major funding. That is where you, our loyal patrons, come in.

The center pages of this newsletter look back to the past year with a big thank you to those who have been major donors. They also look forward to the ongoing and anticipated building projects that are needed. The "Raise the Roof" Campaign is our push to make all of our contributors aware of the immediacy of our needs. Simply put, we are asking you to both continue your typical giving and designate something extra to help with our roof repairs. In combination with funds raised in this manner, we are seeking other grant sources to help with the long-term repairs that are needed. As ever, we will always strive to be good stewards with what you so generously provide.

Thank you for your past, present and future support of HHS. Now, come join the fun!

Fondly,

Tracy

Tracy Foor, President

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Highlands Historical Society's
 "Raise the Roof"
 Campaign 2024

Partner in our 2024 Capital Campaign to raise funds to repair the roof on our Museum and the Historic Prince House by check in the envelope provided or by donating online at our website: highlandshistory.com.

HHS HITS THE ROAD

The Historical Society took two of its exhibits to Waynesville this past spring and entertained visitors with Mountain Music & Moonshine. Visitors were invited to come up the mountain and visit the museum and historical village and several have already made their way to Highlands. Reaching out to other communities has increased the awareness of people outside Highlands to the unique opportunities to learn about our special community through the Historical Society's many offerings.



Peter Worthy mans the Still

Major Donors 2023-2024

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

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Renew your Membership for 2024

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 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.

We Need Your Support!

Calling all Highlands Descendants!

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

Highlands Historical Society invites you to the
2nd Annual Descendants' Reception

When: Saturday, October 12th

Where: Highlands United Methodist Church
 Faith and Fellowship Center

Time: 11:00 - 1:00

Join us for a light lunch and program "Your Story - Our History", featuring Amelia Golcheski from the Cashiers Historical Society. Please pre-register at highlandstrooplus@gmail.com for additional information.

HHS Hosts the 14th Annual Dazzling Dahlia Festival as Flower Power Takes Over Highlands

Tuesday, August 27th, 5:00 to 8:00
An "Elevated Woodstock" Party

This far out party will be co-hosted by HHS and the Davis Family Vineyards at High Country Wine and Provisions and Highlands Smokehouse. Dust off your 60's clothes, get your groovy on and come experience an elevated Woodstock in Highlands as we lean into Flower Power with music, libations, good food, an art show, auction and other fun surprises. Proceeds from this fundraiser will help raise money for the Ran Shaffner Scholarship fund and help support the HHS general fund. Tickets and sponsorships with VIP benefits are available at our website.



Thursday, September 5th,
5:00 to 6:30
Flower Power Poster Party at the Bascom

Join us as we celebrate Dazzling Dahlia's 2024 poster contest winner, Marina Tkach, and our youth winner, Nariah Godfrey, and their beautiful expressions of Flower Power. Cocktails and appetizers will be served and all are invited to this complimentary party co-hosted by the Bascom.

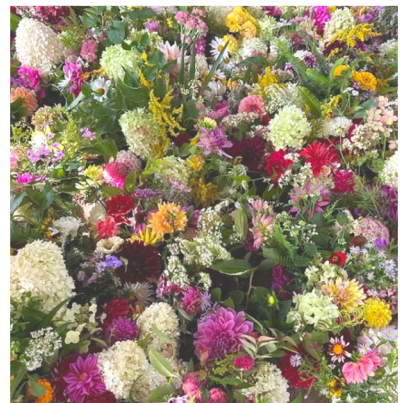
Friday, September 6th, 8:00 to 12:00
The Dahlia Depot at Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park

Calling all flower growers! Drop off your dahlias and other flowers at our tent in the Park for use in the vignettes and arrangements to be sold. YOUR HELP AND FLOWERS ARE NEEDED! We can use flowers of any type and greenery. All of the flowers used by the vignette designers are donated, so please bring as many as you can.



Friday, September 6th, 1:00 to 4:00 and
Saturday, September 7th, 10:00 to 4:00
Single Bloom Competition at the Bascom

See how your dahlia blooms compare to others as Garden Club of America judges award ribbons in both amateur and professional categories. All flower entries must be submitted on Friday from 8:00 -10:00 am at the Bascom. Costs to enter are: \$5 for one bloom, \$10 for three blooms or \$20 for up to eight blooms. Judging will occur by noon, Friday and the free show will be open to the public on Friday and Saturday. Come experience the incredible power of flowers and their awe inspiring beauty as over 400 dahlia blooms will be on display!



Saturday, September 7th, 10:00 to 5:00
The Dazzling Dahlia Festival

Flower Power will be in full bloom as Highlands is draped in dazzling floral vignettes. There is no charge to enter the vignette competition or view the stunning arrangements throughout town. Judging will occur online.



Saturday, September 7th, 10:00 to 4:00
Highlands Historical Village

The historical village will come alive with music, storytelling, docent tours of the museum and more. Come see what is new and old - all at the same time!

Saturday, September 7th, 6:00 to 9:00
Flower Power Concert in Kelsey-Hutchinson Park

Steel Toe Stiletto will get everybody dancing with their groovy sound and stage show. Co-hosted by HHS and the Dahliabolicals, this concert is a gift to the Highlands community. The Festival winners will be announced and Single Bloom Best of Show awardees will be recognized. The perfect way to cap off a perfect weekend celebrating the Power of Flowers!



Highlands Historical Society's Annual
A WALK IN THE PARK
Saturday, October 26th

JOIN US FOR A WALK THROUGH TIME AND HEAR STORIES OF HIGHLANDS' REMARKABLE HISTORY

ACTORS WILL PORTRAY SOME OF HIGHLANDS' MOST IMPORTANT HISTORICAL RESIDENTS

Hear the stories from James Rideout, Meta Norton Frost Hall, Helen Hill Norris, Spearfinger and other famous Highlanders.

Tickets are \$25.00 for adults, and children under the age of 12 are free. Tickets can be purchased at the Highlands Historical Society Museum on 4th Street, Thursdays-Saturdays 10-4 pm or Online at highlandshistory.com

Please pay careful attention to the information on your ticket. Performances from 2:00 until 3:30 PM will take place in Memorial Park. A final performance will begin at 5:00 PM in the Community Building. In case of poor weather, all presentations will take place in the Community Building.

SPONSORS NEEDED!
 We need sponsors for the Elevated Woodstock Party and others to join the Dahliabolicals. VIP benefits come with both! Help support this special weekend. If you are interested, send an email to highlandsdahlia@gmail.com.