

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



HONORING THOSE WHO PIONEERED THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS OF GRAHAM COUNTY



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Volume 10, No. 2

April 2026

Tere Moore, Editor



America's 250th Anniversary

NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Vision & Mission Statements | 2 |
| Board of Directors | 2 |
| Welcome Abbigale West | 2 |
| Murals of Graham County | 2 |
| America 250 | 3 |
| Native Azalea Festival | 4 |
| Feeding the Family | 5-7 |
| GC Heritage Festival | 8 |
| Adversity to Diversity | 9 |
| Membership & Order Forms | 10 |



Appalachian Trail Vista

GCHA meets the 1st
Monday of each
month (except
holidays)
at 5 pm at
United Community
Bank
132 Rodney Orr
Bypass, Robbinsville

Contact us for
telephone call-in
information.



GCHA VISION STATEMENT

To maintain a heritage center located on Main Street, by focusing on education, history, and community activities, to assure that Graham County's place in history will be secured for future generations. Participate in the revitalization of downtown Robbinsville, NC, and promote cultural tourism and

GCHA MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to preserve, interpret, communicate, and celebrate the unique culture and rich history of the Southern Appalachian Region and Graham County, North Carolina through exhibition, demonstration, and education. Vital to this mission is our establishing and maintaining a Cultural Heritage Center located on Main Street in Robbinsville, North Carolina, that would further economic development by contributing to the revitalization of the historic downtown area, promoting cultural tourism, and showcasing area artisans and their work.

GCHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

EDD SATTERFIELD – PRESIDENT

CAROLYN STEWART – V. PRESIDENT

LAVINA WEST – SECRETARY

TERRI PHILLIPS – TREASURER

MAX BUCHANAN

JAMES CALHOUN

EMERITUS: TERESA GARLAND, JACK B. WIGGINS, DOYLE BROCK

WELCOME ABBIGALE WEST



Abbigale West, granddaughter-in-law of our very own Lavina West, joins Graham County Historical Association as its new Website Administrator.

Abbigale is 29 years old and attended Western Carolina University for Graphic Design and Fine Arts. She is also a local stained glass artist.

She has lived in Graham County for 7 years, and worked at Kin Cafe for 2.5 years.

We are so grateful to have this hard-working wife – married 5 years this year – and mother of one volunteer her precious time and professional expertise to help us enhance our social media presence.



The **Snowbird Cherokee Matriarchs Mural**, located at 128 North Main Street in Robbinsville, celebrates the contributions of Snowbird Cherokee women to their community and tribe. This significant piece honors 11 matriarchs from the Snowbird Community, highlighting scenes depicting traditional skills like basket making, beadwork, soap making, and storytelling. This beautiful mural was created by Nikki Nations, Lou Jackson, Jack Teesateshie, and Tony Rattler.

The **Ronnie Milsap Mural**, located at 9 South Main Street in Robbinsville, honors the Grammy-winning country music legend. Ronnie Milsap was born in Robbinsville and remains the county's most famous native. He personally visited the mural during a trip home to have a portion of the highway dedicated in his honor.

The mural was created by artist Scott Nurkin as part of the North Carolina Musician Murals Trail, a project celebrating homegrown musicians across the state.



AMERICA 250



On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.

To find local events visit:

<https://www.america250.nc.gov/events-experiences/calendar>

KEY REVOLUTIONARY WAR EVENTS IN NC

- ✦ **May 20, 1775: The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence** is reportedly signed, one of the first declarations of independence from British rule.
- ✦ **August 14, 1775: The Tryon Resolves** are signed, marking early organized resistance.
- ✦ **February 27, 1776: Battle of Moores Creek Bridge:** Patriot forces crush a Loyalist uprising, preventing a British invasion of the state and earning the nickname "Lexington and Concord of the South".
- ✦ **April 12, 1776: The Fourth Provincial Congress produces The Halifax Resolves**, authorizing NC delegates to vote for independence.
- ✦ **1776: The Cherokee Expedition** takes place, where NC militia destroy Cherokee towns aligned with the British.
- ✦ **June 20, 1780: Battle of Ramsour's Mill:** Patriots defeat a larger Loyalist force near modern-day Lincolnton.
- ✦ **October 7, 1780: Battle of Kings Mountain:** Though technically just over the border in SC, this fight was driven by North Carolina/Tennessee "Overmountain Men" and destroyed loyalist support in the region.
- ✦ **February 1, 1781: Battle of Cowan's Ford:** British troops clash with NC militia while crossing the Catawba River.

- ✦ **March 15, 1781: Battle of Guilford Courthouse:** A pyrrhic victory for British General Cornwallis, whose army suffered devastating losses to Nathanael Greene's forces, forcing a British retreat to the coast.
- ✦ **May 7-11, 1781:** British troops occupy Halifax.
- ✦ **1781:** Major James Craig occupies Wilmington for the British.
- ✦ **September 10, 1782: The Battle of Sugartown.** Once the Continental Congress proclaimed independence in 1776, and fighting ensued between the united colonies and the crown, the British began encouraging the Native American Nations, including the Cherokee, to fight the colonies while supplying them with ammunition to do so. Late in the summer of 1782, a group of regular soldiers from General Andrew Pickens' Brigade of South Carolina diligently pursued marauding bands of Cherokee who had been raiding frontier settlements in western North Carolina.

Led by Major Daniel Bryson, these soldiers pursued one of these bands into the area where Western Carolina University is now located, over the Cullowhee Gap and down into Elijay. The Cherokee fled through the area where the Sugarfork and Cullasaja streams merge finally moving to an area which had been the site of an old, previously destroyed Cherokee village called Sugartown. That area became the battlefield on September 10, 1782, where the Native Americans made their last stand.

Fierce fighting ensued. Though a significant number of Native American warriors were said to have been killed, only one colonial soldier died during that battle, Corporal White.

Source: Highlands Newspaper, Vol 11, #27, July 3, 2014

Local Organizations



Daughters of the American Revolution

Battle of Sugartown Chapter
Franklin, NC

<https://www.ncdar.org/BattleOfSugartown/>



Sons of the American Revolution

Blue Ridge Chapter, Asheville, NC

<https://www.ncssar.org/chapters/blue-ridge/>

Visit the Graham County Historical Association's Booth at the



FLAME AZALEA FESTIVAL

2026 Robbinsville, NC

SAT JUNE 20 ~ 10 AM – 6 PM

Robbinsville High School, 301 Sweetwater Rd, Robbinsville, NC

The annual Flame Azalea Festival is a family friendly, jam-packed day of arts, crafts, live music, food, and more. Shop for native flame azaleas, watch glass blowing, take in Cherokee demonstrations and so much more.

Admission is free, though donations to Graham County Fire & Rescue are encouraged and appreciated.

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

<https://grahamcountytravel.com/flame-azalea-festival/>

STAGE SCHEDULE

10:00 am Opening Ceremony
10:15 am Jacob Goins
11:15 pm Warriors Of Anikituhwa
12:15 pm The Sundown Band
1:30 pm Pickers Anonymous
2:45 pm Foreign Landers
4:30 pm Chatham County Line



ALL DAY ACTIVITIES

Food Truck Court
Antique Tractors
Community Jam Tent
Free Face Painting
Barrell Train
Glass Blowing
Nature Printing
Natural Dyes
Sensory Play
Critters in the Creek
Live Animals
Cherokee Pottery
Outdoor Educational Activities

Feeding the Family for Early Settlers

Food preparation in the rural western North Carolina mountains at the end of the 1800s was a relentless, labor-intensive, and entirely scratch-based process. It was a central component of a self-sufficient, agrarian lifestyle, largely falling upon women and children, and involving long hours of labor for daily meals and intensive preservation efforts.

During the early 1800s, cooking dominated the time and energy of the average housewife. Most fruits and vegetables were grown on the farmstead, and families processed meats such as poultry, beef, and pork. People had seasonal diets. In the spring and summer months, they ate many more fruits and vegetables than they did in the fall and winter. During those colder seasons, families found ways to preserve their food.¹

The three main ways of curing (the process of preserving food) during this time included drying, smoking, and salting. Each method drew moisture out of foods to prevent spoiling. Fruits and vegetables could be dried by being placed out in the sun or near a heat source. Meat products could be preserved through salting or smoking. A salt cure involved rubbing salt into the meat, which was then completely covered in salt and placed in a cool area for at least twenty-eight days. During this time, more salt was constantly added. When the meat was no longer damp, it was



Meat Smoking in Smoke House Using different kinds of wood for the fire, such as hickory or oak, could produce different tastes.

A typical day on the farm began very early. Women rose and built the fire based on the meals planned for that day. Families who could afford to have detached kitchens – kitchens in buildings separate from the house – did so for several reasons. The kitchen often was hot, smoky, and smelly. Most North Carolina

families did not have the resources for a separate kitchen, though, and the hearth provided the center of home life and family activity. With no ovens or electricity, women prepared meals on the hearths of brick fireplaces. They used different types of fires and flames to prepare different types of food. For **Open-Hearth Cooking** example, a controllable fire was used to roast and toast, while boiling and stewing required a smaller flame. This required constantly splitting and hauling wood, maintaining a controlled fire, and handling heavy, hot equipment.



To use all of the fire's energy, families shoveled coals and ash underneath and onto the lids of Dutch ovens. Standing on three legs and available in a wide



Dutch Oven

array of sizes, the cast-iron Dutch oven was one of the most important tools found on the hearth. It was used to prepare several types of food and allowed cooking from both the top and the bottom. Dutch ovens evolved into woodstoves, common in homes of the later 1800s and early 1900s before most people got electricity at home.

Preparing meals was not just a matter of starting a fire for cooking. Almost all food was prepared from raw materials. This included milking cows and churning butter. Milk had to be brought in from the family dairy cow and cream and butter made from it.

After someone brought in the milk, it usually sat out for about an hour. The cream rose to the top, separating from the milk. Women placed this cream into a butter churn and beat it until it hardened, first into whipped cream and eventually into butter! Then there was the milling of corn, baking bread daily, and cooking beans and stews that often simmered all day.



Churning Butter

Cont'd Pg. 6

¹ <https://www.ncpedia.org/culture/food/cooking-in-the-1800s>

Feeding the Family... (cont'd)

Spices, such as nutmeg and cinnamon, and seasonings like salt and pepper had to be ground up with mortars and pestles.



Every family member contributed to the production and preparation of meals. Men and boys spent most of their time outdoors. Chores included working crops in the fields, feeding larger livestock, and hunting. Diets included wild game, such as deer and turkeys. Women and girls worked mainly in the kitchen and fed smaller livestock.

When it came time to butcher animals, families joined with their neighbors to share the workload and the meat. Pork was the staple meat in the Southeast until the 1940s. Hogs proved more manageable than their much larger counterparts, cows. The taste of pork also improved with curing. Neighbors often gathered

in the fall, using the time to get their work done but also to catch up, sharing news and gossip. What began as a chore turned into a social event.



Community Hog Killing

This was also the case at harvesttime. Neighbors pitched in to bring in crops such as corn and wheat. After the work was done, everyone might celebrate with feasts, bonfires, and dancing.

Because there was no refrigeration, preserving food for the winter was crucial, relying on drying, smoking, and salting. Hog killing was a major winter task involving the whole family and neighbors, where pork was cured with salt for weeks or smoked over hickory/oak fires. Fruits and vegetables like apples, beans, and pumpkins were dried by hanging them from rafters or in the sun. The late 1800s saw increased use of canning in Mason jars, a labor-intensive process. Sorghum was grown, crushed, and boiled down to make molasses, a staple sweetener.

Besides childcare and housework, women were responsible for cooking, gardening, tending small livestock, and food preservation. Many women also helped with field work (hoeing corn, harvesting) and produced extra food to sell, such as butter or chickens.

Children contributed to everyday chores, including gathering food, tending animals, and, in some cases, working as hired help for other families.

Nancy Holder Denton's 100-year-old recipe for curing meat courtesy of Leota Wilcox.

CURING MEAT

1. For 100 pound of meat, use 8 pounds of salt, and two pound of brown sugar.
2. Mix the ingredients thoroughly. Rub the cure well into the surface of the meat using care to see that it is well worked into the shoulder and around the bones in the top of the shoulders and ham.
3. If the meat is thoroughly cold, it may be packed away in a clean hardwood box with the skin side down. Pack the hams in the bottom and then the shoulders and the put the bacon on top, with the top pieces skin side up. Have just a little surface exposed to the air as possible. Store in as cool a place as possible.
4. Overhaul and rub again with the cure at the end of seven days. Rub once again in 14 days. Light bacon and boneless loins will be cured enough in 14 days. A good rule is to allow two days in cure for each pound in a piece of loin or bacon and 3 days for each pound in a ham or shoulder. For example, a 7 pound piece of bacon would remain in cure 14 days, a 10 pound ham 30 days.
5. After removing the meat from the cure, wash in warm water and then soak in clean water a short time to remove the excess salt. The length of time in soaking depends on the length of time in cure.
6. Hang the hams and shoulders by the shank end and bacon with two strings to retain shape.
7. After drying for two or three days smoke with hardwood, preferably green hickory.

Cont'd Pg. 7

Feeding the Family... (cont'd)

HOME GROWN AND MADE FROM SCRATCH

Corn bread, home grown vegetables that were then canned, biscuits and gravy, stews, rabbit, chicken and dumplings and apple desserts – these are the foods commonly thought to be of Appalachian origin.

Growing up in a rural Western North Carolina mountain county on a small farm meant ninety-five percent of everything eaten was from the farm. These farms boasted huge gardens and farm-raised cows, pigs and chickens.

Family farms meant sharing labor. Women and children worked together to pick, snap, boil, and can fresh produce. Neighbors helped each other in tough times. Meals were simple and homemade be it venison, squirrel, rabbit or hog, pies or preserves.

TRADITIONAL AND FORAGED FOODS

Pioneer recipes from the Western North Carolina mountains are rooted in self-sufficiency, utilizing simple, homegrown ingredients, preserved foods, and foraging, often cooked over open fires or wood stoves. Core staples include cornmeal, beans, pork, and apples, reflecting a culinary tradition influenced by Cherokee traditions and European settlers.

Leather Britches

Green beans are a Southern cuisine staple, but have you ever heard of leather britches, or shuck beans? Before winter came, Appalachians would preserve green beans by stringing them on threads and hanging them outside or behind a wooden stove until they shriveled, appearing like leather britches. They could be stored on the strings or in a flour sack in a dry area until needed. They would typically be rehydrated and slow cooked with meat for a rich, hearty meal, like the recipe here.²

4 cups leather britches or 2 teaspoons salt, or salt to
shuck beans taste
Lean salt pork or thick sliced
bacon, cut in 1-inch pieces
(1/4-1/2 cup)

Wash beans thoroughly, cover with water, and soak overnight. Place bacon in a large Dutch oven and add the drained beans. Cover with water and bring to a boil. Lower heat to simmering and cook until tender, about 4 hours. Add salt if desired, uncover, and cook about 2 hours longer. You may need to add more water while cooking to prevent scorching.

Ramps

Ramps are a wild onion/leek native to Western North Carolina's mountain forests, prized as one of the first spring greens (March-May) to emerge.

Traditionally, they provided essential, nutrient-dense nutrients, particularly vitamin C, helping early residents overcome winter diet limitations. They are deeply rooted in Appalachian and Cherokee culture, historically used as a "spring tonic" for overall health, a treatment for colds, or a poultice for bee stings. Ramps have a strong, pungent garlic-onion flavor. They are often foraged in high-altitude, shaded, moist areas. They are traditionally eaten raw or fried with bacon, bacon grease, and potatoes.

Poke Sallet (Pokeweed Greens)

Poke Sallet is a favorite dish of mountain folks whose tastes run to natural foods. Of all the wild greens, it's the best known and the most sought after.

Mountain women begin picking poke as soon as the young sprouts shoot out of the ground in the spring, and they kept right on picking it and serving it until the sprouts grew old and tough.

Poke is best when the sprouts are white and tender with just a little tuft of green leaves at the top. You've got to pick it with a sparing hand because the root is a deadly poison.

To eat it you must first parboil it three times, extracting any poison there might be. With the first boiling, the water turns red. You pour that off, put in fresh water and boil it again. And then you pour that off, put in water again and boil it a third time. You can serve the sallet as it comes out of the pot. Eat it with vinegar poured over it. Some like it best when it comes out of the pot, gets cut up and stirred into a greased frying pan with eggs.

Wild Greens Medley

Any combination of Chickweed, Ramps, Stinging Nettle, Yellow Rocket/Wintercress, Dandelion, Violets, Sochane, Branch Lettuce, or Garlic Mustard became a tasty wild greens medley.

Wild Mushrooms

Western North Carolina mountains host a diverse array of native mushrooms, thriving in the region's humid, hardwood forests. These include: Chanterelles, Chicken of the Woods, Lion's Mane, Hen of the Woods, Morels, Indigo Milk Cap, Beefsteak Fungus.

Native Berries, Small Fruits:

Black Raspberry/Blackcaps, Blackberry, Blueberries & Huckleberries, Serviceberry/Juneberry; Mountain Ash, Mulberry, Elderberry, Pawpaw, Persimmon, Southern Crabapple.

Nuts: Black Walnut, Butternut, Shagbark Hickory, Hazelnut.

² <https://www.mgmnc.org/blog/2026/01/04/leather-britches>
GCHA NEWSLETTER

GRAHAM COUNTY 2026 HERITAGE FESTIVAL



July 3rd – 5 pm to 10 pm & July 4th – 10 am to 10 pm

86 KNIGHT STREET, ROBBINSVILLE, NC

Gathering of People, Crafts, Games, Food, Music by Various Artists, Fireworks. Veteran's Celebration, Lil' Miss and Mr. Firecracker contest, Watermelon Eating contest, and so much more. Vendors will be Outside and Inside the Gym.



Visit the Graham County Historical Association Booth inside the Gym

From Adversity to Diversity

The Strength of our Ancestors Prevailed

MAKING DO

At the root of dozens of shared customs was shared scarcity. East and west in rural North Carolina, those who "come up poor" were the majority. Rural ingenuity enabled thousands of farming families to live on their own resources with little cash income. "Making do" involved the women of a household in the production of their own soap by boiling lye and animal fat. It meant plucking geese or chickens to make downy feather beds for the grown-ups, stuffing corn shucks or straw into bed-ticks for the young. "Getting by" meant a large garden and as much cropland as could be spared given over to raising one's own food: corn, wheat, sweet potatoes, orchards, milk cows, hogs, goats. And it meant knowing how to salt the meat and preserve the fruit and vegetables. "Making do" meant feed-sack blankets to keep in the warmth on snowy nights, quilts crafted from colorful scraps of cloth, rugs woven of bright yarn. It meant clothing sewn at home—and then patching and more patching, so "it got to where we couldn't tell where the clothes left off and the patches began." It meant a knowledge of folk medicine: how to use snake oil to lubricate childbirth and how large a dose of calomel to give the grandchildren each spring "to cleanse them out," as well as how much was healthy and how much would "take your teeth out." It meant relying on community midwives or "granny women" to deliver babies.

Whether they owned their land or worked someone else's, North Carolina farm families rarely relied on their own resources alone. Sharing was a vital feature of country living. While the crops were growing, a family "caught up" on its work might help neighbors and relatives with theirs. In times of need—illness, death, accident, debt—family members contributed food and support to each other. Many of the young continued to choose their mates among close neighbors and to reside in home communities that abounded with cousins and kin. Family ties and well-worn footpaths known to those in the community provided links and grassy highways from home to home. Sundays would see the members of each community gather at a neighborhood church in their Sabbath best.³

³ <https://www.ncpedia.org/waywelived/rural-north-carolina-1870-1920>

WHERE TO FIND A SPOUSE?

Finding a spouse in rural Western North Carolina during the late 1800s was a community-centered process, largely dictated by geography, family ties, and shared labor. Due to difficult mountain travel, potential spouses were typically found within close-knit, neighboring communities at:

- **Church Gatherings:** Neighborhood churches were primary meeting places, where young people socialized in their "Sabbath best".
- **Community Work Events:** Social life was intertwined with labor. Courtship often took place at barn raisings, house raisings, corn shuckings, and quilting bees.
- **School Events:** Schoolhouses served as gathering places for community socials.
- **"Sparking" or Visiting:** Young men would visit a young woman at her home, a practice known as "sparking," often overseen by parents and siblings.
- **Camp Meetings:** Large, religious revival meetings lasted several days and acted as major social events that drew people from different communities.

COURTSHIP CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

- **Community Supervision:** Courtship was rarely a private affair, as community oversight ensured social norms were followed.
- **Handmade Gifts:** Because resources were limited, men often showed interest by hand-carving "love spoons" for their beloved, showcasing their ability to provide through craftsmanship.
- **Musical Courtship:** Young men would often show their affection by playing the dulcimer and singing to their sweetheart in front of family members.
 - **Quilting Games:** Young women would play games, such as placing a cat in the middle of a newly made quilt and shaking it, to predict who would be the next to marry.



