

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



HONORING THOSE WHO PIONEERED
THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS
OF GRAHAM COUNTY



www.HISTORYGC.org

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Tere Moore, Editor



Cheoah Beach Lake Santeetlah

NEWSLETTER


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WE 
VOLUNTEERS

GCHA meets the 1st & 3rd
Mondays of each month
(except holidays) at 5 pm
at United Community
Bank, 132 Rodney Orr
Bypass, Robbinsville.

We also have a
teleconference option.

Contact us for
 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 economic development in our area.

GCHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

EDD SATTERFIELD - PRES
CAROLYN STEWART - VP
LAVINA WEST - SEC'Y
TERRI PHILLIPS - TREAS
DOYLE BROCK
MAX BUCHANAN
JAMES CALHOUN
TERESA GARLAND
JACK B. WIGGINS

Raffle

WIN a YETI Soft Cooler and Lunch Bag



Purchase your Tickets at:

Hometown Tax Graham Co. Library
Southern Gals Farmers Market

Or Email: grahamcountymuseum@gmail.com

TICKETS: \$5.00 EACH OR 5/\$20.00

**Drawing to be held at the
Stecoah Harvest Festival**

October 15, 2022

Proceeds go to:

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



**Don't miss your
Chance to get your
Raffle Tickets before
the Celebration!**



GUN RAFFLE



BAR Mark III - 308



TICKETS: \$10.00 EACH OR 6/\$50.00



Purchase your Tickets at:

GCHA Booth at Farmers Market &
Special Events Hometown Tax
Lovin Equipment & Sales

**Drawing to be held at the Graham County
150th Anniversary Celebration**

AUGUST 2022

Proceeds go to:

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



GCHA MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve, interpret, and convey Graham County, regional, and Appalachian history through exhibitions and educational programs to showcase our history, making Graham County a desired historical destination.

Genealogy Corner

THE DENTONS ARRIVE IN GRAHAM COUNTY

by Leota Denton Wilcox

My Great-grandfather, John H.C. Denton, and family relocated from Benton, Tennessee to Graham County in 1879, only seven years after the formation of the county. They settled in what is now Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, lived in a fallen tree from October until May, built a cabin, cleared several acres of land, and had four more children.

Numerous stories have been written and published concerning his life as a real “mountain man”. He prospered in a modest way and became one of Graham County’s most substantial citizens.

The genealogy is as follows:

JOHN HAMILTON CHASTAIN DENTON (1840–1913) married **ALBERTINE TURNER (1843–1912)**

CHILDREN: Charles Zachary, Chalmers Forrest, **JOHN LLEWELLYN (CUB)**, Arthur Earnest, Margaret (Maggie), Mellissa Jane, Grover, Clare Mabel (May), Mary Eliza (Molly)

JOHN LLEWELLYN (CUB) DENTON (1870–1911) married **NANCY HOLDER (1871–1934)**

CHILDREN: George, Coleman, Horace, **VICTOR**, Alma, Vincent, Alta

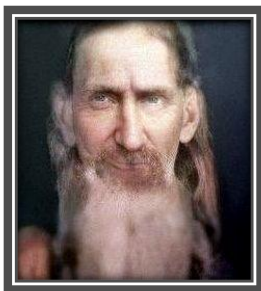
VICTOR DENTON (1900–1987) married **GRACE WEBSTER (1917–2009)**

CHILDREN: LEOTA DENTON WILCOX, Lona Rae Denton Kell



According to various descriptions, John Hamilton Chastain Denton (1840-1913) was a rough-and-tumble fighting man who stood between 6’3” and 6’5”, had hands like hams, was strong enough to wrestle a bull, wore a long beard, and kept his hair – which came down over his shoulders – braided in pigtails.

A Confederate veteran of the first Battle of Bull Run and the Siege of Vicksburg, Denton and his family came out of Tennessee. They crossed the Little Tennessee River at Calderwood and came into North Carolina through Carver Gap (just east of Deals Gap) to a place called Rocky Point. Here they cut poplar logs and rafted the river, then proceeded to chop their way to Stumpford. Denton went on until he reached the present Joyce



John H.C. Denton
Photo: Leota Denton Wilcox

Kilmer Memorial Forest. He told his horse, “*Whoa!*” and told his wife, “*We’ll settle here.*”

They first built a lean-to against a chestnut log and used rocks from the creek to make a fireplace just outside where they could cook.

They lived on the land’s fat, the bear, quail, deer and maybe a few ‘possums. After John cleared his first piece of ground and turned it to the plow and got his first crop of corn, he set to building a cabin with chestnut logs and shingled with split oak. It was waterproof and tight.



Denton Cabin - Photo: D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNCA

By 1886, he had a family of five boys and four girls.

In time, he cleared about 20 acres so he could raise more corn and have some room for livestock. He wanted an apple orchard, and having served the Confederate army in Virginia, he set out on foot for Virginia to fetch young apple trees. He made four such trips.

About 1907, while cutting timber on West Buffalo Creek, part of a tree fell, breaking Denton's left leg. It healed crooked, leaving him a cripple.

John died in 1913, at the age of 74. He and Albertine are reportedly buried, along with other family members, in the Denton Cemetery on Little Snowbird Creek.

Sources: *Graham County Heritage North Carolina Vol. 1*

Remembering one of WNC's biggest melees - by George Ellison - smokymountainnews.com

EDITOR’S NOTE: Leota Denton Wilcox is a valued and honored member of the Graham County Historical Association, as well as chairperson of several committees. Leota has left her indelible mark on preserving not only the history of her family through the Denton Family Museum, but also the history of Graham County. If you are interested in the Denton Family Museum, contact Leota via email at grahamcountymuseum@gmail.com.



Image created by Tere Moore

Although difficult to imagine today, trees were felled in our area that were large enough to live in.

GRAHAM COUNTY HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2022

*At the Heart of it All... we are doing what we do best...
Preserving the History of our Community!*



Join us on our Journey as we bring the past **BACK TO THE FUTURE**
Become a Graham County Historical Association Member Today!

EDUCATION IN GRAHAM COUNTY - CONT'D

The one- and two-teacher schools serving rural districts were incapable of competing economically with the larger facilities of towns and cities, and rural children were suffering the consequences. Consolidating several small districts into one pooled available resources and afforded less-populated areas the advantages of better-funded urban schools. The initiative saw many positive results, as school curricula expanded to include several new subjects and vocational opportunities, and many rural districts began offering high school courses for the first time.

All the early schools of North Carolina were subscription schools. Mr. N.M.E. Slaughter was one of the pioneers of the subscription school in Cheoah Valley. He came to the valley in the early 1850s. Another teacher was Sidney Rose. He taught subscription schools at the Old Mother Church.¹



Robbinsville Public School 1900

About 1876, Professor Lycurgus Mauney opened a school in the Courthouse in Robbinsville known as the Peabody Institute. This school could boast of a teacher

of music and elocution. Mr. Phidellia Harwood of Sweetwater Community loaned his piano to the Peabody Institute for these special classes. The county commissioners gave permission for use of the courthouse for instruction for a period of three months and renewed permission afterwards. Professor Mauney received no fixed salary but depended entirely upon the small subscription fees charged his pupils and the amount appropriated by the Peabody Board of Directors.

George Peabody of Massachusetts was an educational philanthropist who spent millions of dollars during the 1860s and '70s to improve educational conditions in the Southern states. The board provided that the community given aid should raise by subscription or otherwise twice as much as the Peabody appropriation.

Before 1890 there was a very small school house here in Robbinsville located about where the Old Masonic building now stands. In 1894 the School Committee for Robbinsville district realized the need for a larger school building and decided something needed to be done.

There were no public funds available at this time. School houses at that time in small settlements were built by subscriptions by citizens.

We the undersigned Citizens of the Robbinsville School-District in the County of Graham, do hereby and having promised and agree to pay to the Public School-Committee of the Robbinsville School District, and to their successors in office, the amount annexed, to each of our names, for the purpose of building a new school-house in the town of Robbinsville. Said amount to be due at the commencement of the work of said building.

W. F. Manney (Cash)	\$ 20.00.
J. M. S. Slaughter (Cash)	25.00.
J. L. Colvard (Sundries)	20.00.
H. W. M. Kelly (In Saw-Bill)	10.00.
H. H. K. K. K. (In Saw-Bill & Sawing)	25.00.
Robert Ayers (In Sawing)	15.00.
J. G. C. (Cash)	5.00.
J. B. C. (Cash)	5.00.
J. M. (Cash)	10.00.
J. J. W. (In Sawing)	10.00.
J. W. (Cash)	25.00.
J. W. (Cash)	10.00.
J. W. (Cash)	2.00.
H. F. M. (Cash)	10.00.
M. E. B. (Cash)	25.00.
J. J. D. (Cash)	5.50.
J. J. S. (In Sawing)	5.00.
H. C. H. (Lumber & Milling)	5.00.
J. S. S. (Cash)	5.00.
J. W. (Cash)	5.00.

Subscription List for Robbinsville School - 1894

In 1894 the Masons were holding their meetings in the general store of J.B. Walker. The Masons met with the Robbinsville School Committee and decided to put up a building with Masons occupying the second floor and the school first floor.



Former Robbinsville Public School & Masonic Lodge

In 1897 the building was finished; however, the building was used for a school before completion. Primary grades occupied one section of the building. It had no partitions; curtains were used as room dividers; painted planks used for blackboards.

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¹ *Our Heritage* - Margaret Freel

HISTORY OF GRAHAM COUNTY - PART VIII (cont'd)

The Robbinsville school used this building for a public school until 1909.

The requirements for a teacher's certificate in those early days were very meager requiring only an eighth grade diploma. However, the legislature of 1889 made provisions for a state teachers' institute of one week or more to be held in each county of the state. The institutes were not held in Graham County every year due to the small number of teachers, only every four or five years, and taught here in Robbinsville by T.A. Carpenter, John Harwood, Guy Houck, and Dr. Highsmith.

A visit from Dr. Smith to Graham County convinced him of the great need for a Mission school here. He obtained permission from the leaders of the county to buy land. In 1901 the Robbinsville Academy became a reality. Two of the many advantages of the school were free tuition and its admission to the school of pupils regardless of any religious denomination. The Robbinsville Academy was a prestigious institution with high standards, operating from 1901 to 1911. The Presbytery Board soon provided additional money for a girls dormitory. One of the first teachers to come to Robbinsville to teach in the Academy was Miss Helen Bales (later Mrs. Bruce Slaughter).



Presbyterian Church and School

In 1909 the school board decided to buy the Presbyterian school building, which was no longer in use as a school... Three grades were added at that time. The first graduation exercises were held in the Courthouse. Later the old school building was sold to J.J. Snider for a store.

By 1911 North Carolina had at last awakened to the need for a real public education system. The Presbyterians sold the Robbinsville Academy to the State Board of Education. The building served as the Robbinsville High School with a curriculum through the tenth grade until 1924, when the school was moved into a new building. In that year Robbinsville High

School became an accredited school with 11 grades and enjoyed the distinction of owning four school buses.

The minutes of August 4, 1924 states that four buses were purchased for transporting pupils for the school year 1924-25. The first drivers elected were Verlie Maxwell, Clyde Crisp, Barney Walters, and Bob Roberts. Evidently Verlie Maxwell did not accept, as the minutes of September 11, 1924 list Bob Roberts, Curtis Eller, Clyde Crisp and Barney Walters as the drivers, and they were to be paid \$40.00 per month. The bus drivers listed for the following year were Charlie Rogers, Willard Rogers, Robert Hyde, Willard Lovin, and Bob Rogers. The school had four buses to transport students from country schools. The buses were T-model covered trucks with bench seats. Windows had oil cloth curtains which could be rolled up or down, depending on the weather.²



Robbinsville's First Bus Drivers
(L-R): Clyde Crisp, Barney Walters, Bob Roberts

THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL HOUSE HILL

Graham County seniors can remember how beautiful the native rock school buildings were on School House Hill in the 1940s. All the buildings were built with native granite stone by local citizens, one rock at a time.

The two-story rock building was built about 1922 by county workers at a cost of \$25,000. Many taxpayers were critical of the school board for voting for a school bond drive to help pay for such a big school house. Tax payers said, "Never in the world would that big school fill up with students!"

Many former students remember very vividly and with great respect the late Helen Bales Slaughter, who emphasized "reason, children, reason" and "believe in yourselves."

Marion Morphew Ingram was everyone's first grade teacher. She made sure every child in her class learned their ABCs and numbers to 100 and also could read when they got through her first grade class. She was also a great historian.

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² GrahamCounty.net

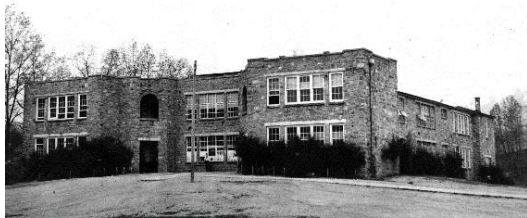
HISTORY OF GRAHAM COUNTY - PART VIII (cont'd)

The rock high school building was built about 1939 by Works Project Administration (WPA) workers.



Robbinsville Rock School 1924

Local men with pickup trucks hauled rock from country farms on Saturdays so WPA workers would have rock to work with on Monday morning. John J. Colvard and George Slaughter were among those who hauled rock every Saturday free of charge. The WPA workers who built the high school building about 1939 were paid \$1.25 per day.



Robbinsville Rock School with later additions

Two of the original rock buildings remain today, the Gymnasium and the Band Building.

The native rock gym was built around 1938 and the students loved having a nice big gym in which to play basketball and enjoy many other activities. The basketball and football uniforms were red, white and blue and the teams were called the "Blue Devils." Admission to games was a dime. The gymnasium is still in use by the current elementary school.



Rock Gymnasium

Rock Band Building

The rock lunchroom was also built around 1949 and was a great improvement over the old wooden lunchroom. In the 1940s lunch cost a dime or students could bring produce to exchange for a lunch ticket.

After a new lunchroom was built, the rock lunchroom was vacant for several years. In recent years it has been renovated with a nice stage and

kitchen. It is used for school activities as well as social events.

Post-War, The Robbinsville High School campus underwent major changes. The old elementary school building was deemed unsafe and was demolished. New structures were built and later expanded.³ The two-story rock school was torn down about 1969 and the rock high school was torn down in 1996.⁴



Old Rock High School and Current Elementary School



Elementary School Addition



New Robbinsville Middle & High School

GRAHAM COUNTY SUPERINTENDENTS

THOMAS A. CARPENTER 1903-1914 ~ J.H. MOODY 1914-1929, 1931-1941 ~ R.C. BARRETT 1929-1931 ~ F.S. GRIFFIN 1941-1953 ~ K.S. CLEM 1953-1955 ~ R. GUY SUTTON 1955-1959 ~ JAMES A. STANLEY 1959-1963 ~ KENNETH S. BARKER 1963-1969 ~ MODEAL WALSH 1969-6/1983 ~ LOWELL CRISP 7/1983-6/1996 ~ DONALD ANDREWS 7/1996-9/1998 ~ JOE DITMORE (Interim) 10/1998-11/15/1998 ~ DAVID DAVIES 11/16/1998-12/2002 ~ RICK DAVIS 1/2003-6/2008 ~ CLARK J. CARRINGER 7/2008-6/2013 ~ ANGIE KNIGHT 7/2013 – present.

Look for "History of Graham County - Part IX" in the next GCHA Newsletter

³ Robbinsville Comprehensive Survey Report - 2018

⁴ "The History of School House Hill" by Louise Huscusson Stewart

History Makes Great News

Denton was a man of the mountains

by Marshall McClung – transcribed from an article in *The Graham Star*



Forrest Denton was a well-known mountain man in Graham County

Any list of the true mountain men of Graham County would certainly have to include Forrest Denton of the Little Snowbird Community. Forrest was the great uncle of Leota Denton Wilcox and she was kind enough to supply me with information and a photo for this story. The Dentons have a family museum near Forrest's old home place on Little Snowbird that is certainly worth visiting. A phone call to a family member would be in order before any such visit.

Forrest Chalmers Denton was born in Polk County, Tennessee on October 28, 1875 and appeared in the 1880 census. He was named for two famous Confederate generals, James Ronald Chalmers and the noted cavalryman, Nathan Bedford Forrest. His parents were John Hamilton Chasteen Denton and Albertine

Denton. They are buried in the Denton Family Cemetery on Little Snowbird. The John Denton family is the only white family known to have lived in what is now Joyce Kilmer Forest. They lived in a large log until a cabin could be built.

Forrest had several brothers and sisters: Charles Zachery, John, Melissa, Mollie, Maggie Denton Brown, Clara Mabel "May" Denton Rice, Grover, and Arthur. The Denton family settled on Little Snowbird and Forrest lived with his two unmarried sisters Melissa and Mollie until their death. After the death of his sisters, Forrest continued to live in the home place alone having never married himself. At one time, the Dentons owned around 1,000 acres of land on Little Snowbird. Forrest looked after the large landholdings of Frank A. and Leonard Waldo of Buffalo, New York on Little Snowbird.

Forrest was a well-known figure in Graham County for many years, almost always dressed in duck back pants. I recall seeing him when I was a youth at Snider's store in Robbinsville where he would stock up on "light bread, saltines known as "soda crackers", and peanut butter. He was a

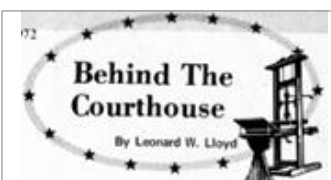
great hunter with a reputation for superb woods skills, and known to be an honest, hard-working man. He raised Black Angus cattle and used the area around Hooper Bald for summer grazing. Forrest was Graham County's first game warden and was known for his strict enforcement of game laws, so much so that he turned himself in for killing a bear out of season and paid the fine.

At one time, Forrest served as an agent for the Whiting Lumber Company from Delaware and owned by the British. Whiting held extensive landholdings in Graham County at one time. Forrest and Dave Swan were hired by a sportsman, George Gordon Moore, to build trails and log houses at Hooper Bald in connection with a game preserve in 1911. These buildings consisted of a large hunting lodge later known as "The Big House", and a caretaker's house later known as "The Burnt House" after it burned down. It was occupied by Garland "Cotton" McGuire, a caretaker for many years until 1939. The hunting lodge was 45 feet wide, 90 feet long and was roofed with split oak shingles called "boards".

Forrest continued to farm and raise cattle

until he was well up in years, checking on them once a day with his little bag of salt and walking stick.

On March 3, 1966, Forrest suffered a severe stroke, and died on March 7 at District Memorial Hospital in Andrews. He is buried in the Denton Family Cemetery on Little Snowbird a short distance from his home.



Excerpt from Article by
Leonard Lloyd – 1972,
The Graham Star

The old fashioned habit of visiting among Graham County families in the years gone by helped build great life long friendships and created an understanding among our people. We have long since given up the habit that once helped us to understand our neighbors. We have lost the close feeling that came from the visits. No one seems to have the time to "Go Home" with others, and yet, time remains the same down through the ages. The older people of our county had a better understanding of life and their neighbors than we have today. The world in which we live today could use some of the lessons from the past. The family visiting habit of long ago gave the people of that day a wonderful experience in kindness, friendship, helpfulness and good neighborliness. Such living was one of the many things of the past that is worth holding as a great memory of years ago.

Visit the GCHA Information Booth at these Events

FARMER'S MARKET & CRAFTS
 Every Saturday thru Mid-December
 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 80 Knight Street, Robbinsville



GRAHAM COUNTY

 August 2022
 Robbinsville, NC
 See grahamcounty.net
 for details

STECOAH HARVEST FESTIVAL
 October 15th
 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
 Stecoah Valley
 Cultural Arts Center



Become A Member

JOIN US TODAY


GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION

HELP US REACH \$200,000+ \$70,000 Pledged

THE GOAL!

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS		Membership Benefits
1-year	\$25.00	Membership Card Quarterly Newsletter Meetings and Committees GCHA Decal 10% discount on GCHA merchandise
5-year	\$100.00 (1 year free)	All 1-year benefits plus GCHA Short-sleeve Tee Shirt
10-year	\$200.00 (2 years free)	All 1-year benefits plus GC Centennial Book
Lifetime	\$1000 or more	All 1-year benefits plus memorial at Museum


Become a Member Today and proudly display your new GCHA Window Decal!



Send your payment:

- Through **PayPal** to grahamcountymuseum@gmail.com
- Drop off at **Hometown Tax**, 62 Tapoco Road, Robbinsville
- Mail to **GCHA, PO Box 1221 Robbinsville, NC 28771**

If you know someone who loves history like you do...



Gift a MEMBERSHIP!

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP / DONATION FORM

The work of Graham County Historical Association is greatly assisted by your generous support!

Membership Includes: Membership Card & Decal / Meetings & Committees / Quarterly Newsletter

1 year \$25.00	5 years \$100.00 (1 year free)
10 years \$200.00 (2 years free)	Lifetime \$1000 or more

Name _____

Company _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

* First \$25 of donation goes to 1-year Membership

Membership \$ _____ Donation \$ _____

One-time or Monthly Donation \$ _____

METHOD OF PAYMENT

Check | Money Order (Payable to GCHA)

 grahamcountymuseum@gmail.com

Credit Card: (All major credit cards)

Expiration Date _____

Cardholder's Name _____

Signature _____

I authorize GCHA to auto-draft my donation from my account

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 828.479.5008 / grahamcountymuseum@gmail.com
www.historygc.org /  GCHANC

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