

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



HONORING THOSE WHO PIONEERED THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS OF GRAHAM COUNTY



www.HISTORYGC.org

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Tere Moore, Editor



Yellow Creek Falls

NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS

Vision & Mission Statements	2
In Memoriam	2
GC Civil War Markers	3
GC in the Civil War	4
Bushwackers Terrorize	5
Fundraisers	6
Struggling Families	7-8
Kids in the Civil War	8
Folklore Weather Predictors	9
Mashed Potato Frycakes	9
Membership & Order Forms	10



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 economic development in our area.

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.

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In Memoriam



CECIL PATTERSON

May 3, 1952 - August 10, 2025

Cecil Patterson was a valued and respected member of Graham County Historical Association. He was passionate about our area's history, genealogy, and attended our meetings, either in person or by phone until his health no longer allowed him.

Cecil was born in Robbinsville, NC, on May 3, 1952 to Oscar and Geneva Patterson. He passed away peacefully on Sunday, August 10, 2025, after a battle with cancer.

Cecil is survived by his wife, Patti; sons, Tracy and Josh, and 8 grandchildren; brothers, Chester, Conway, and Cleve; sister, Carolyn; and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his sister Cheryl Ann and brothers Carl and Carl.

Cecil was a member of the Carroll Masonic Lodge in Carrollton, Georgia, a vice-president with Phillips and Jordan for many years, and a co-owner of Graham County Land and Patterson Brothers.

We will miss you, Cecil, and we are grateful for all that you have contributed to GCHA.

GRAHAM COUNTY CIVIL WAR HISTORIC MARKERS

On May 14, 1865, the First Battalion soldiers of the Thomas Legion finished signing their paroles and they viewed Whitaker roll them up, tie them, place them in a Haversack, and give them to Col. Kirk's Courier. *"And thus at 10 o'clock in the morning of May 14, 1865, our Civil War Soldier Life ended and our Every Day Working Life began,"* wrote John H. Stewart of the Thomas Legion.¹

This Graham County Civil War marker designates the exact spot where Maj. Stephen Whitaker of Thomas's Legion issued parole papers to Confederate troops at the site of Thomas's Store on Rhea Hill, where the last muster took place.

The placement of this memorial plaque was undertaken by Jeremy Wiggins as a senior high school project around 2010. The marker can be viewed on the hill between the Elementary School and the Central Office.



Photograph by Eric Reese

Civil War in Graham County Union and Confederate Raiders

INSCRIPTION

During the Civil War, Graham County (then part of Cherokee County) offered scant support to the secessionist cause, although both ardent Confederates and staunch Unionists lived here. The region was not financially dependent on slavery. Most families wished to remain neutral but were pressured into choosing sides and then suffered from both Union and Confederate raiders. Renegades or bushwhackers were especially troublesome here, where the rugged terrain offered a haven.

Confederate Capt. J.W. Cooper's Company H, 69th North Carolina Infantry, occupied Camp Cheoah on Rhea Hill, site of present-day Robbinsville Elementary School. Col. William H. Thomas's Legion, of which Cooper's company was a part, defended western North Carolina from Federal incursions. An engagement occurred here in November 1864 between Companies C and G of the 3rd Tennessee Mounted Infantry (U.S.) and Cherokee soldiers of Thomas's Legion. The 3rd Tennessee Mounted Infantry consisted largely of Confederate and Union deserters. Several Kirkland family members joined but later operated independently here as the Kirkland Bushwhackers under John Jackson "Bushwhacking" Kirkland. His band of outlaws terrorized the area, ambushing, robbing, and murdering innocent people.

After the principal Confederate surrenders in April 1865, Maj. Stephen Whitaker of Thomas's Legion issued parole papers to Confederate troops here at Thomas's Store on May 14. They were among the last troops in North Carolina or east of the Mississippi River to surrender, eight days after one of the last engagements in the east on May 6 at Hanging Dog Creek in Cherokee County.

CAPTIONS:

(lower left) Cherokee veterans of Thomas's Legion at the 1903 Confederate Reunion in New Orleans. Courtesy The Mountaineer; (upper center) William H. Thomas Courtesy North Carolina Office of Archives and History; Stephen Whitaker; (upper right) Union bushwhackers attacking Confederate cavalymen, engraving by Junius Henry Browne, 1865.



Photo by Don Morfe, 4/26/14 - erected by NC Civil War Trails on the site of Graham County Jail, across from Lynn's Restaurant

Editor's Note: Thanks to Rev. Eric Reese of Robbinsville UMC for inspiring this segment of the GCHA Newsletter

¹ <https://thomaslegioncherokee.tripod.com/whitaker.html>

GRAHAM COUNTY IN THE CIVIL WAR ²

North Carolina was slow to withdraw from the Union, but once withdrawn it gave unsparingly of its men and resources. The section of Cherokee County that would become Graham County in 1872 found itself with divided loyalties. Many believed strongly in the cause of the Confederates; others were equally devoted to the Union cause. Much bitterness existed within our own citizenry during the war and following the cessation of fighting. It was not a matter of North versus South but often neighbor against neighbor. The situation was further complicated by bands of bushwhackers who operated independently. Most notorious of the bushwhackers of this mountainous region was John Kirkland, known as "Bushwhacker" Kirkland.



John Kirkland



During the closing days of the Civil War Capt. Lyons made a raid through Graham County. The major encounter occurred near the Issac Carringer farm. Then the raiders, robbing and pillaging as they went, continued up Santeetlah to Robbinsville and cut back toward Tennessee by way of Stratton Bald.

In 1865, the Issac Carringer farm was located in the Snowbird Mountains in Graham County, North Carolina. The specific property was situated along the Santeetlah Creek, north of the town of Robbinsville

Confederate Army

Three small companies of Confederate Troops appear to have been raised at Fort Montgomery (former name of Robbinsville) in 1862

Captain Dewitt C. Ghormley's Company of Provost Guards, organized on July 4, 1862 by the election of Captain Ghormley, John Grant (father of Ben Grant of Andrews), First Lieutenant; Elijah Nelson, Second Lieutenant; and David T. Nichols, Second Lieutenant.

This Company, with certain additional men, was mustered in at Maryville, Tennessee, September 24,

1862, as Company F, Lt. Col. Wm. C. Walker's Battalion of Colonel Wm. H. Thomas' Confederate Legion. By order of Lt. General E. Kirby Smith, this Company was then transferred to and became Company K, Fifth Tennessee Cavalry, Confederate States Army.

Captain Thomas J. Cooper's Company, mustered in by Colonel Wm. H. Thomas (only white man ever elected Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) - Capt. Cooper later resigned by reason of his advanced age and ill health. He was succeeded by his son, Captain James W. Cooper, who was later a Murphy attorney. The Company was designated as Company H, Infantry Regiment of Col. Thomas' Confederate Legion. Other officers were Lieutenant Lafayette George and Lieutenant Eli Ingram.

Captain Nathaniel Matthew Eddington Slaughter's Company became Company F, 39th North Carolina Infantry of the Confederate States Army. Capt. Slaughter later resigned because of ill health (stomach trouble) May 22, 1863. Other Officers in Captain Slaughter's Company were Captain Andrew J. Cody, Lieutenant John W. Rhea (later Captain), and Lieutenant Joel A. Sawyers.

[For muster rolls of Captains Dewitt C. Ghormley, Thomas J. Cooper and Nathaniel Matthew Eddington Slaughter's Companies see www.grahamcounty.net.]

Also, many Confederate volunteers from the area in present Graham County served in Company D, 25th North Carolina Infantry, organized in 1862 at Valletown by Captain John W. Francis; in Captain Stephen Whitaker's Company E, of Walker's Battalion of Thomas' Confederate Legion, also organized at Valletown; in Captain George W. Hayes' Company A, Second North Carolina Cavalry, organized at Tomotla; in Captain Willis Parker's Company I, Infantry Regiment of Thomas' Legion, organized at Marble (Marble Springs); in Captain William C. Walker's first command, Company A. 29th North Carolina Infantry, organized at England's Point in the Ranger area of Cherokee County; and in Captain Hugh Harvey Davidson's Company A, 39th North Carolina Infantry, organized at Murphy.

Union Army

[For listing of Union Volunteers who were residents either before or after the War in present Graham County see www.grahamcounty.net.]

² Excerpts from www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/14-wars/wars.htm

Bushwhackers Terrorize the North Carolina Mountains ³

The area along the Tennessee and North Carolina boundary became a haven for bushwhackers, Civil War deserters, and others who found themselves on the wrong side of the law. Although desperate deserters could be dangerous to some, bushwhackers were known to ambush and rob unsuspecting people and sometimes murdered their victims in the process. Those outliers clashed with both Union and Confederate troops. One such engagement happened in present-day Robbinsville. At the time it was Cherokee County. Today it is Graham County, which was established in 1872.

Though not financially reliant on the system of enslavement like the central and eastern parts of the state, the predominant livelihood in Appalachia was farming and agriculture. Many families were struggling to survive on subsistence and wished to remain neutral during the conflict that divided the nation but found themselves pressured by those who either were staunch Unionists or Confederate ideologists to take sides.

An example of the depredations was provided by the following letter by Captain Nathaniel Green Philips of Company I, Thomas' Legion of Cherokee Indians and Highlanders. The letter is addressed to Colonel Cathey, (likely Joseph Cathey of Haywood County, N.C.)

*Valley Town, [Cherokee County] NC
Dec 24 1863*

Col Cathey sir the condition of this county renders it untenable the Yankies and Bushwhackers have Ruined it, & I will have to move my family out & as I will soon have to Return to the army I want to move them in to your county & my Father is a good miller & if you have a good mill he will take it, & he can bring as good a Recommendation as you may desire. I want a house & 8 or ten acres of land for my family & my father & mother want to go with me I hope you will try to help me I have been in the service nearly three years & my family has not got provisions to Do them a month & the frost & the Bushwhackers & Yankies has Ruined this County so it is impossible for them to stay here Let me hear from you by the first mail as what I do I must do promptly.

*Direct your letters to Valley Town
North Carolina
Yous Best
N.G. PhilipsC*

On November 18, 1864, *The Daily Progress*, a Raleigh newspaper, reported two incidents of bushwhackers terrorizing people in the mountains. The first notified readers that Capt. J. H. Bailey of the 58th NC Regiment was shot through the leg by bushwhackers in Mitchell County while visiting friends. The second happened in Watauga County: Readers were warned that the "*Bushwhackers are becoming very bold, robbing our citizens and shooting men occasionally.*"



During the same month in what is now Graham County, Company H, 69th North Carolina Infantry, occupied a site in present-day Robbinsville. Company H was part of Thomas' Legion, which was to defend the area from Union incursions. At the intersection of what is now East Main Street and Court Street in Robbinsville, Cherokee soldiers from Thomas' Legion and Companies C and G of the 3rd Tennessee Mounted Infantry... fought each other. The 3rd Tennessee Mounted Infantry consisted of Confederate and Union deserters.

One of the most infamous bushwhackers was John Jackson "Bushwhacking" Kirkland who, ironically, had served in the 3rd Tennessee Mounted Infantry for the CSA as a Second Lieutenant but deserted. "Bushwhacking John" and his gang terrorized areas of western North Carolina. John Jackson Kirkland was never held accountable for his atrocities. Though murder indictments were made against him, he was never arrested or even served papers.



³ Article by Leisa Greathouse; edited by Cheri Todd Molter

<https://nccivilwarcenter.org/bushwhackers-terrorize-the-north-carolina-mountains/>

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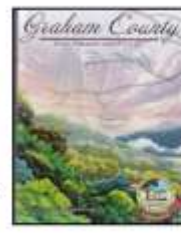
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STRUGGLING FAMILIES PLAGUE CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS ⁴

The American Civil War proved to be a trying time in our nation's history, and took a toll on Confederate soldiers in Western North Carolina who endured endless accounts of mental and physical abuse and were constantly plagued with guilt for leaving behind their families and farms that depended on them for survival. Not only were these men manipulated and dragged into military service, the government that forced them to do so fell short in supplying military equipment and payment for their time in the forces. As a result, desertion rates in the mountain region of North Carolina grew rapidly, as did the punishments that came as a consequence of this action. Due to the fact that daily life for a Confederate soldier was beleaguered with worries from home, inhumane living situations, as well as constant reminders that they were fighting for a cause that was not their own, it seems as though desertion in the mountain region of North Carolina was inevitable.

For Confederate soldiers in Western North Carolina, leaving one's family behind for battle became extremely difficult, and proved to be a trying experience while receiving letters from the home front. In a personal account of Confederate life in the army, William Dickson Carr describes in letters to his mother the horrors of being forced to stay away all night while having nothing to lie on but a gun, and speaks of countless episodes of sickness he undergoes. He recounts the pain of having a cold, cough, diarrhea, typhoid, pneumonia, and the mumps during this



period, and apologizes to his mother that he has been far too sick to write to her... how he and others in his troop slept in the cold rain for days

and had nothing to eat but scraps of raw meat.

One exchange in particular between Carr and his mother stands out when he pleads with her in saying "Mother this has been a cruel war. I don't like to be troublesome but if you have an opportunity I would be glad you would send me a box of something to eat. Our fare is pretty rough."

The longer the period goes between letters from home, soldiers' qualms become more intense and their concerns about the state of the war become few. Confederate soldiers in Western North Carolina soon found they were forced to decide if Southern independence was worth the effort if their families were starving, which for vast amounts of men in this area, the answer was no.

Through the examination of Confederate personal accounts, it's also shown that bushwhackers and bands of deserters caused immense turmoil for soldiers away from home. Not only were these men fighting against the Union, hunger, and the cold, they were also faced with bandits back home who were continuously attacking their families out of desperation.

Once individuals had either abandoned the war effort or avoided the conscript altogether, they were faced with the reality that the home front couldn't sustain them. In order to gain protection and to have a means of providing for themselves, Confederate deserters often banded together, which resulted in bushwhacking, as well as attacking families. Ironically, desertion gangs that became bandits caused even more abandonment in the Confederate army by soldiers who were trying to protect their families from these rebellious individuals. The seriousness of this situation gained magnitude due to the fact that those who were deserting or avoiding the conscript would take their weapons with them, thus were both desperate and armed.

For many soldiers, it must have been gut-wrenching to hear of those you know and love being attacked by former soldiers you had once fought alongside. One

Confederate officer's comments on bushwhackers and bands of deserters shows the degree of strength and anger these men



had built up in saying, "These men are not only determined to kill in avoiding apprehension, but their esprit de corps extends to killing in revenge as well as in prevention of the capture of each other". This account captures the desperation of those that deserted, and it would not have been above them to murder the innocent families of Confederate soldiers still away at

Cont'd Pg. 8

⁴ Excerpts from www.cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu

STRUGGLING FAMILIES PLAGUE SOLDIERS (cont'd)

war. Family and friends were most definitely more important to these men than the fight against the Union; therefore, confederate desertion in the mountain region of North Carolina where attacks such as this were happening should have been expected, so as they could defend those they loved.

By observing personal accounts from other soldiers like Carr, it becomes clear that families played a crucial role in a soldier's decision to leave their post. In a conversation between John Futch and his mother, the desperation of the home front is felt. Futch's mother speaks about the rising prices of everyday items such as corn and baking powder, and tells her son that the planting season has begun. By knowing that your mother, wife, children, and others are struggling with making ends meet, as well as having enough funds to provide basic necessities to keep them healthy, the minds of those like Futch and Carr were clearly in a different place. Futch's response letter creates the image of a young soldier in the snow that was longing to return to his family. To his wife, Futch says "*Marthy, I want to come home the worse I ever did in my life. I am very uneasy about you*". Wives stated that their young daughters and sons cried out from hunger pains and sickness from lack of nourishment. It was extremely difficult for a soldier to remain in his assigned post with constant reminders of how much his family needed him, so hard in fact, that Governor Vance began to stress to families to avoid including personal troubles in letters to their soldiers.

KIDS IN THE CIVIL WAR ⁵

When war broke out in 1861, kids across the North and the South said goodbye to their fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins, or joined the military themselves. As many as 20% of Civil War soldiers were younger than 18. That was the minimum recruiting age for Union soldiers, but many people willingly overlooked the law. The Confederacy set no minimum age. Many young soldiers enlisted as musicians – drummers, fifers, or buglers. In theory, musicians didn't fight, but once a battle began these kids often armed themselves to save their own lives or the lives of their friends.

It's hard to imagine the horrors teenage soldiers experienced. They charged through hailstorms of bullets while the bodies of their friends fell all around them. They listened as wounded men pleaded for their mothers, for a drink of water, or for death to come.

They assisted surgeons, standing by as they sawed off mangled arms and legs, often without an anesthetic. They endured the horrors of Andersonville, a Confederate prison in which thousands of Union men died of starvation and disease. They were killed in battle or suffered physical and mental wounds that they would carry for the rest of their lives.

Boy soldiers faced life threatening challenges on the battlefield. Musicians were more often than not unarmed and this could prove fatal should they come into close quarters with the enemy. A boy named Stockwell recalled, "*As we lay there and the shells were flying over us, my thoughts went back to my home... I thought what a foolish boy I was to run away to get into such a mess I was in. I would have been glad to have seen my father coming after me.*"

The youngest boys included Edward Black, an 8-year-old Union drummer boy, Benjamin Williams who was reported to be as young as 7, James "Jimmie" Vincent Johnston was described as 6.5 years old in battle, and George Penfield Bennett enlisted at age 9 and 7 days.



John Clem, 12 yrs old, Battle of Shiloh and Chickamauga

If the greatest horrors of the war occurred on the battlefields, civilians experienced their own shares of hardship. Families whose men went to war made up for their absence. Kids helped run family farms and businesses. They planted and harvested crops, chopped wood, and butchered animals for food. They drove horses, cooked, and cared for siblings. They wrote letters to their absent relatives, and prayed for them to come home safe. Many never did.

In the South, where most of the war's major battles were fought, civilian children endured even more misery. They huddled underground as bullets pierced the walls of their homes and artillery burst all around them. They stood by as their homes were turned into command posts or field hospitals. They tended wounded soldiers and watched them die. When the battles ended, their homes and farms were often in ruins, their fields and even their yards were littered with rotting corpses, their animals and their food crops were destroyed or taken by soldiers, and they faced disease and even starvation.

⁵ www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/grant-kids/

Mountain Lore Weather Predictors

The Farmer's Almanac, for the Winter 2025–2026 season, projects a "Chill, Snow, Repeat" pattern for the Western Carolina mountains, with temperatures slightly warmer than average overall, punctuated by cold, snowy stretches from mid-January to early February and late February. Above-normal snowfall is expected, with potential for significant snow events around late December and late February/early March, possibly extending winter recreation.

Based on Appalachian folklore and natural phenomena, residents of the Western Carolina mountains have historically used a variety of natural predictors to forecast the weather. While not scientifically reliable, many of these signs are based on astute observation of changes in atmospheric pressure, humidity, and animal behavior.

Plant-based predictions

- **Corn shucks:** If the husks on ears of corn are especially thick and tight, it signals a cold, harsh winter ahead. The same is said for an abundance of corn silk.
- **Onion layers:** The thickness of an onion's skin indicates the coming winter's severity. Thin skins mean a mild winter, while thick skins predict a tough one.
- **Fruit and nuts:** A large and abundant crop of wild nuts (like acorns and hickory nuts), persimmons, or berries (such as dogwood, holly, and sarvis berries) forecasts a hard winter.
- **Persimmon seeds:** Slice a persimmon seed in half to reveal the shape of the embryo inside, which will indicate the winter to come: *Spoon*, a snowy winter; *Fork*, a mild winter; *Knife*, a winter with biting, cutting winds.
- **Tree bark and moss:** If the bark on the north side of a tree is thicker than usual, or if there is heavy moss growth, a severe winter is coming.
- **Falling leaves:** If trees shed their leaves early, expect a mild winter. If they hold their leaves late into the season, a severe winter is coming.
- **Autumn flowers:** If fruit trees bloom in the fall, a harsh winter is believed to be on the way.

Animal- and insect-based predictions

- **Animal fur:** Animals growing thicker coats of fur than normal is a sign of a cold and rough winter.

- **Birds:** If birds are flying low, be wary of a coming snow. Large flocks of birds feeding on the ground during winter also signal colder weather.
- **Cattle:** The direction in which cattle face when lying down can indicate coming weather. Facing away from the wind suggests bad weather is approaching.
- **Rabbits:** If you see rabbits moving around during the day in winter, a heavy snow is likely on the way.
- **Squirrels:** If squirrels gather nuts in a hurry or build their nests low in trees, a harsh winter is approaching. If their tails are especially bushy, a bad winter is also predicted.
- **Hornets & Ground Bees:** Hornets' nests built high in trees indicate a mild winter, while nests closer to the ground predict a harsh one. Ground Bee nests found closer to the surface indicate a mild winter.
- **Katydid:** The first frost will occur exactly 90 days after the first katydid begins its song in summer.
- **Spiders:** An abundance of spiderwebs signals a dry spell ahead.
- **Woolly worms:** A wider black band means a heavier winter, while a wide brown band indicates a mild one. Blacker on its front end suggests worst weather is still to come, blacker on its rear suggests worst has already passed.

Country Kitchen

Mashed Potato Frycakes

- 1 C. whitesugar
- Add butter the size of an egg [about 2-1/2 T.]
- 2 eggs
- ½ C. sweetmilk
- 1 t. vanilla, 1 t. nutmegand cinnamon
- 1/2 t. salt
- 3-1/2 C. flour
- 1 C. mashed potatoes [mashed with milk]
- Add enough flour for a stiff dough, possibly more than the recipe calls for
- Fry in deep oil until golden brown, turning once.

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