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HAYWOOD 250

Let Freedom Ring

Haywood County Liberty Trail

EXPLORE PEOPLE, SITES AND EVENTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR ERA - PAGES 15-18

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A SIGHT TO BEHOLD

Founding document display honors freedom and heritage

By Becky Johnson

A stunning, large display of the nation's founding documents now crowns the lobby of the Haywood County Justice Center, paying homage to the bedrock of American freedom and democracy.

Echoes of Haywood County's own heritage are reflected in the artistic design. Barnwood salvaged from four local barns frame the larger-than-life documents.

"History is supporting history," said Commissioner Brandon Rogers. "This was not something ordered from a catalog. It was imagined, designed and built right here in our own community."

Mounted to two-story windows and basked with warm internal lighting, the display evokes the sense of sunlight streaming through the parchments.

The unique founding document display features the ingenious design of local architect Randy Cunningham and the craftsmanship of Tim Sisk.

"I started searching for farmers that were willing to let me into their barn and take lumber," said Sisk.

Four families with a long Haywood County lineage came forward: the Ensley, Caldwell, Boyd, and Messer families.

Sisk prowled through their barns, sizing up rafters and eyeing the siding, to amass an inventory of barnwood. Then the long-process of fabrication got underway.

"I took it back to my shop, pulled all the nails out, cleaned it all, ran it through my planer, air stacked it for a few months to make sure it was really dry, ran it back through the planer again, to have a resource of usable material," recounted Sisk.

Tim Sisk salvaged wood from the historic barns of four Haywood County families to build the frames for the founding documents mounted to the windows in the soaring foyer of the justice center.

Sisk's craftsmanship is equal parts rustic and refined. The frame looks like it was fashioned from sturdy timbers, but are in fact hollow columns, the seams concealed by his expert joinery.

The marriage of wood from four old barns means multiple wood species are represented: red oak, white oak and maple, stained with English Chestnut.

The display is two-sided, making it equally visible from the outside, allowing for public viewing at all times.

"It's just a perfect year for us to unveil this as we celebrate our 250th anniversary as a nation," said Commissioner Tommy Long.

> *"These documents are more than historic texts. They remind us that liberty requires responsibility, that power rests with the people, and that democracy is something each generation must carry forward. This display is not simply about the past — it is about preserving these principles for the future. It is about making sure the next generation can see, read, and understand the words that shaped this nation."*
>
> *— County Commissioner Chairman Kevin Ensley*

A pivotal moment

The unveiling of the Founding Document display was held on April 12, 2026, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Halifax Resolves — when North Carolina became the first colony to declare its independence.

"This is something none of the other colonies had yet dared to do," said Sharon Hinshaw, chair of Haywood's 250 Committee. "They were risking not only their reputation, but their family's safety, their property, and even their lives. It was the moment the dream of independence became an official pursuit and reminds us that independence is not inevitable, but it is deliberate. It requires determination, sacrifice and a willingness to stand firm in the face of uncertainty."

Sleuthing out ancestry

Revolutionary War lineage is prestigious, but more common than you think

By Becky Johnson

Sharon Hinshaw has an unusual Post-it note on her computer: "Be careful of rabbit holes."

But as a professional genealogist, Hinshaw's reminder is a bit of an oxymoron. Going down rabbit holes is her stock and trade.

"That's exactly why I love it so much, the detective work," she said.

Hinshaw is happy as a pig in mud prowling through stacks of old records in the basement of a rural county courthouse.

"You take your magnifying glass, you take your dirty clothes, you take your lunch — and expect to be there a long time," Hinshaw said.

Hinshaw has a knack for teasing out threads of long lost family lineage in land records, marriage bonds, and birth and death records.

"If you're lucky, they're well organized. Otherwise, it's page by page," she said.

The real gems are family Bibles — and even better, the old journals of circuit-riding preachers.

"They're like a treasure trove. Those are the people who actually married everyone, they're the ones who buried people, and they would record that in their own journals," Hinshaw said.

Hinshaw traces her own roots back to the earliest families who settled Haywood County — the Rogers family of Fines Creek on one side, the Chambers on another, with a generous dose of Catheys to boot.

"If you've lived here for centuries, you're related one way or the other," Hinshaw said. "You feel like you belong to these mountains. It's the strangest feeling actually. You just don't feel right when you're not here."

She was roped into genealogy as a teenager by her grandmother, Valerie Chambers, who took Hinshaw along on expeditions to courthouses and cemeteries.

"We went up into these coves, some of these old cemeteries that are hard to find. We had so much fun. That started my love of genealogy — and I've done it ever since," said Hinshaw, who turned her hobby into a professional side gig 15 years ago.

The demand for her genealogy services has skyrocketed coinciding with America 250. Genealogy has taken center stage among those searching for direct lineage to a Revolutionary War soldier — the litmus test for entry into Daughters of the American Revolution or Sons of the American Revolution.

Hinshaw provides her services for free to any woman interested in DAR membership, serving as Registrar for the local Hugh Rogers chapter of DAR. If you have the slightest inkling of a Revolutionary War veteran in your ancestry, or even if you have no idea at all, Hinshaw will do her level best to trace it as a pro bono service.

"I've got three big applications that I'm having to start from scratch with," Hinshaw said of her latest inquiries.

Indeed, the local DAR chapter has seen a record number of new members — and as a result a fever-pitch of genealogy work for Hinshaw — since excitement around America 250 began percolating last year.

"It's becoming a big, big thing with the America 250 push. I could physically feel the building of interest," said Hinshaw, who's also the chair of the Haywood 250 committee.

Hinshaw traces her own DAR lineage through her Cathey line to William Cathey, who was on the Rutherford Expedition that came though Haywood County in 1776. *(See article on page 9).*

The Catheys later inter-married with the Rogers family, who claim Revolutionary War ancestry through Hugh Rogers — for whom the local DAR chapter is named. Hugh Rogers marched with the Overmountain Men in the battle of King's Mountain, where he met his future wife, Nancy Thorton, who fetched water for the men. *(See story on page 13.)*

Hugh Rogers had 12 sons, so by now, many generations later, there are hundreds of Hugh Rogers descendants running around in Haywood County.

"They were very prolific," Hinshaw said.

She occasionally has checked the ancestry of a Rogers' friend out of curiosity.

"And I would find immediately that they're connected to one of Hugh Rogers' sons, but they didn't have a clue they were related to a Revolutionary War soldier," Hinshaw said.

To learn more about the local DAR chapter and begin the journey of tracing your own Revolutionary War lineage, contact Hinshaw at sangel15@bellsouth.net. A massive database of DAR ancestors can be found at www.dar.org/research/genealogy-resources.

Sharon Hinshaw, active member of the Hugh Rogers Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, is an expert at tracing Revolutionary War ancestry.

Spirit of '76 lives on in Haywood County's Liberty Tree

By Becky Johnson

When the Rutherford Expedition came through Haywood County in 1776, the muster of 2,400 militiamen passed by a young black oak tree in the Pigeon River Valley that would later become Bethel.

Now over 300 years old, the tree still stands.

"We call it a witness tree because it was a witness to history, in this case the Rutherford's march," said Carol Litchfield, a leading Haywood County historian.

But the tree, known as the Osborne Boundary Oak, began to show troubling signs of decline. So in 2010, the Bethel Rural Community Organization launched an effort to propagate the witness tree. Luckily, squirrels burying acorns under the tree had already laid the ground work. Steve Sorrells, then-owner of Cold Mountain Nursery, dug up some of the squirrel-planted seedlings and nurtured them in his greenhouses.

One of those seedlings was gifted to the Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which in turn planted it behind the Shook-Smathers house in Clyde, built by Jacob Shook in the late 1790s.

Like many of Haywood County's earliest settlers, Shook was on the Rutherford Expedition and would have marched past the witness tree 250 years ago.

Carol Litchfield and the Haywood County Liberty Tree

"We wanted to bring the little seedling home to Jacob's home," Litchfield said.

Now a sapling, the tree was formally dedicated as Haywood County's Liberty Tree this year. In honor of America 250, each county in the state was called to plant a liberty tree — harkening to the Boston Liberty Tree that was a gathering place for revolutionaries but was symbolically cut down by the British.

The little Liberty Tree in Clyde has proved its mettle— surviving Helene in 2024 when flooding from the Pigeon River enveloped it.

"It's steadfast, it's resilient, and it grows stronger every year," Litchfield said. "So what better qualities could you ask for in a Liberty Tree?"

At the dedication ceremony, aptly held on Arbor Day, Sharon Shook, a direct descendent of Jacob Shook, led a prayer over the tree.

"May the strength and resilience of our Liberty Tree continue to inspire Haywood County residents and visitors for generations to come," Shook said.

1776 mural links Waynesville to the country's founding

By Sarah White

A three-story mural tucked along Wall Street in downtown Waynesville shows two sides of Waynesville's history — the founding of the town and its connection to the founding of the country.

"It binds 1776 and the town's founding in 1810 to the present, proving that history doesn't live behind us, it lives through us and beyond us," said Alex McKay, an expert on all things to do with Waynesville's history.

The mural was commissioned to celebrate both the town's founder and its namesake. On one side, Colonel Robert Love — an American Revolution War veteran — surveys the land that he would later donate and name Waynesville in 1810.

On the other side, a portrait of General "Mad" Anthony Wayne captures the Revolutionary War hero for which the town is named. He stands larger than life, with a fearless expression — illustrating why Love admired him as a leader.

Sarah White

Waynesville historian Alex McKay stands in front of the historic Wall Street mural that depicts the town's founder and namesake.

"It's our founder, our time period, our place, and our namesake," explained McKay.

Love served under Wayne during the Revolutionary War, gaining respect for the General's unshakable resolve and commitment to his country. After the war ended, Love began acquiring land in Western North Carolina.

Like Love, many of the first pioneers in Haywood County had served in the Revolutionary War. But the making of a nation was just getting started, and they struck out to make their homes and settle the virgin country of the new nation.

In total, Love collected 100,000 acres between the French Broad River and the Balsam Mountains — but something about Waynesville's low-lying ridge captured his heart. Eventually Love built his house on that land, creating the foundations of the town that thousands would eventually call home.

"That moment, frozen in paint, reminds us that towns aren't born by accident. They're built by people who plant a flag in nothingness — not for themselves, but for generations they will never meet," McKay said.

Created by artist Rafael Blanco, the mural titled "1776" showcases the founding spirit of both the country and the town.

"This mural is not just decoration; it is a declaration — a reminder that Waynesville was born from vision, sacrifice, and the courage to imagine something that did not yet exist," McKay said. "We honor the founder who struck the spark, the general whose name we carry, and every generation that kept that flame alive."


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The Rutherford Expedition

Campaign secured the frontier for patriot forces, but cost the Cherokee their lands

By Becky Johnson

On the eve of the American Revolution, the Cherokee people had a war of their own brewing inside a council house on the banks of the Little Tennessee River at Chota in spring of 1776.

A message had come down the mountains from tribes up north, who had already declared their allegiance to Britain in the coming conflict, and wanted Cherokee to do likewise — in hopes of creating a united force along the western frontier against the colonists.

But the Cherokee elders and women counseled neutrality.

"They wanted to stay out of the fighting. They were saying 'Don't do it,'" according to Andrew Denson, director of Cherokee Studies at Western Carolina University. "But there's a segment of younger men, the fighters, who are convinced this is the opportunity to begin pushing back against the settlers."

Conflicts between the Cherokee and settlers had been intensifying in recent years, as colonists pushed deeper into Cherokee lands. A British treaty supposedly drew a line between the Cherokee and colonists that neither were supposed to cross.

"There weren't very many people then in what's now Buncombe and Haywood County — very few, maybe half a dozen. You couldn't just come in here," said Earl Lanning, a Haywood County historian and expert on the Revolutionary War era.

But encroachment by settlers led to frequent skirmishes along the Appalachian frontier.

"Settlers were pushing into Cherokee hunting territory. So there were frequent raids by the Cherokee against those settlements and often skirmishes between the two," said Hayden Burris, likewise a local historian of the era.

Denson described it as a powder keg.

"Cherokee people are experiencing more and more pressure and beginning to feel hemmed in," Denson said. "On both sides, you see people eyeing each other really suspiciously, and so it's already an atmosphere in which people are anticipating violence."

This painting "War Council at Shooting Creek" depicts General Griffith Rutherford, William Lenoir and Joseph Winston, along with two Catawba scouts and a rifleman. Painting by Robert Connell, courtesy of Earl Lanning

Younger Cherokee saw their opening and won out.

"They are convinced that now is the time to get back some of some of their land," Denson said.

And so British officers from Charleston, who were present at the Chota delegation, carried word back that the Cherokee were secured as allies.

Mounting an assault

That news spread quickly through the patriot-leaning colonists — setting the stage for what would be known as the Rutherford Expedition.

Lanning, one of the chief historians of Rutherford Expedition, has spent his lifetime piecing together the story from diaries, muster rolls and military records. Lanning is convinced the success of the Revolutionary War hinged on taking the Cherokee out of the battle. After all, recruiting native people to join the colonies' side in conflicts wasn't a new tactic.

"During the French and Indian War, the French had the Indians on their side," Lanning said. "In the American Revolution, the British had to have the Indians."

The Patriot colonists couldn't let that happen — not only for the cause of independence, but in their own ongoing fight over territory.

"There's real terror on both sides. Backcountry settlers are very worried that Native Americans are going to use the war as pretext to destroy their settlements," Denson said. "And then Cherokees are terrified of the aftermath of those attacks."

In late August 1776, a muster of 2,400 men, most on horseback gathered in Old Fort to launch a campaign against the Cherokee middle towns of Western North Carolina — making it the largest militia action of the Revolutionary War.

"They stopped here in Haywood County, along the Pigeon River in and then again along Richland Creek, before marching over into what was more densely populated Cherokee land further west," Burris said.

The Cherokee fled in advance of the column, which sacked 36 Cherokee villages over the course of two weeks in September 1776.

"They would take whatever crops and cattle they could before they burnt the towns to try

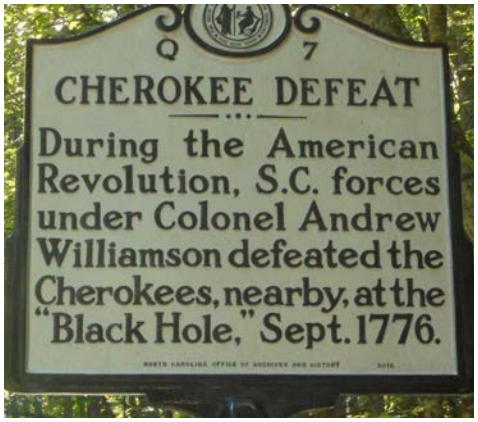
Continued on next page

The Battle of Black Hole

WNC's most notable Revolutionary War skirmish

By Sarah White

While militiamen with the Rutherford Expedition encountered no resistance from Cherokees on their march through WNC, a separate column marching up from South Carolina was ambushed in the Battle of the Black Hole — the most significant Revolutionary War battle in the region that left more than a dozen dead.



The column under command of Colonel Andrew Williamson was en route to meet up with Rutherford. But a band of Cherokee lay in wait for the men to pass through what's believed to be Wayah Gap, near present-day Franklin. They charged from all sides in a surprise attack.

"It was an ambush for certain, it was not something that they were anticipating," explained Hayden Burris, historian and vice president of the Western Waters chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Diaries from the battle confirm at least four Cherokee and more than 10 militiamen were killed in the fighting, with nearly 20 more militiamen left wounded.

"They were far extended from their fortified bases in colonial territory, and so with the dead and the wounded, it forced them to turn back," Burris explained.

Arthur Fairies, whose diary provides most of the information we have today of the Battle of Black Hole, wrote of the journey through the mountains and his captivation with the land.

"He described it as 'little inferior to the mountain of Ararat,' where Noah's Ark nestled," Burris said. "I think it's quite a profound statement that the mountains were a land of opportunity for these people, but it also came at a very high price for the indigenous people who had lived here for much longer."

To commemorate the battle, the SAR will hold a reenactment on September 12, one week before the anniversary of the Battle of Black Hole on September 19. Visit ncssar.org/chapters/western-waters..

Ruterford

continued from page 9

and push the Cherokee further westward onto the other side of the Appalachian Mountains," Burris said.

The Rutherford Expedition succeeded in securing the critical western frontier for the Patriots.

"North Carolina officials reported that 'We're pretty sure Cherokee aren't going to give us any trouble for a while, because they're going to have to figure out how to feed themselves,'" Denson said.

The following year, the Cherokee withdrew their allegiance to the British.

Returning as settlers

Men on the Rutherford Expedition who passed through Haywood County returned after the war to settle the expanding frontier of the new nation, occupying what had been Cherokee lands.

So that begs the question: Was the Rutherford Expedition a pretext for a land grab? Denson said right or wrong, the fear of Cherokee siding with the British had been real.

"The sense of threat that inspires the expedition was not an illusion," Denson said. "They feared they would be fighting a war against the British, and in their backyard Native American forces would be moving against them, and they'd be fighting over two fronts."

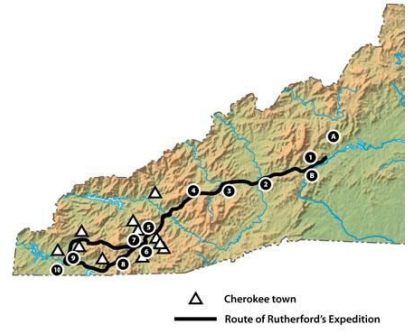
But nor does that mean it wasn't a land grab.

"Some of the people on those expeditions became the founders of settler communities in these lands that were opened up by violence," Denson said. "Separating the question of land from the glorious cause, those are wrapped up together."

A complicated history

The Rutherford Expedition poses a conundrum when viewed through a modern lens. On one hand, it is seen as a vital necessity in the war for independence. But likewise, it's hard to celebrate the taking of Cherokee land that followed.

"There might be some in the region who are quite proud of their ancestors' accomplishments, and then there will be others who are quite critical," said Burris, who claims an ancestor of his own on the Rutherford Expedition. "I think both viewpoints are equally valid and we should talk about it. Not to say which one was better, but to teach it and preserve it."



This map roughly shows the route the militiamen took through WNC on the expedition.

Twenty years ago, few in WNC, let alone the rest of the country, knew about the Rutherford Expedition. It was difficult to talk about for both sides.

"The Revolution for many Native peoples ends up being a really, really devastating experience," Denson said.

But a trio of Haywood County men — Earl Lanning, Charles Miller and Garrett Smathers — believed the history shouldn't be erased. They spent decades fighting to gain recognition for the Rutherford Expedition, which their own ancestors were part of, even commissioning an author to write a book about it.

They also roped Joe Sam Queen into becoming a Rutherford historian when he served as a state senator in the 2000s. They made their case by showing Queen a map brochure produce by the state department of archives and history.

"What do you see out here in Western North Carolina? Nothing. There was nothing," Queen said, who still has that map today. "The largest militia action of the war — the absolutely pivotal campaign that took the Cherokees out of play and secured the western frontier — is left off of the damn story."

So Queen joined them in working for historic recognition of the Rutherford Trace.

Today, as America celebrates its 250th anniversary, it's natural to feel conflicted about the tragic outcome for Native people who would lose their lands to the colonists, Denson said.

"It makes the commemoration of the American Revolution kind of a tricky topic," Denson said. "As Americans, quite rightly, we have a very positive view of the Revolution because of the magnificent political principles that are the heart of our civic life."

Settlers living along the frontier were already in conflict with the Cherokee over territory, and viewed the Cherokee allegiance with the British as a further threat. This illustration by David Wright shows one such early homesteader.

But the liberty and freedom Patriots fought for came at the expense of those same ideals for Native people.

"And I don't think you can resolve those. You just have to kind of hold them in tension," Denson said. "Those contrasting stories are both true, especially if you're living here in Western North Carolina, a place that was the part of the Cherokee homeland."

Joe Sam Queen of Waynesville is a pre-imminent historian of the Rutherford Expedition. Here, he's deep in preparation for a talk on the campaign at the national convention of Sons of the American Revolution being held in N.C. in July.

Overmountain Men

How a ragtag muster of militiamen changed the course of the Revolutionary War

By Becky Johnson

For days, Thomas Lytle and his nimble band of militiamen had been riding ahead of the Overmountainmen, scouting the foothills of the Appalachians for signs of the British. The mission: find and stop Major Patrick Ferguson's troops from rallying with Cornwallis.

But Ferguson was on the move. And so were the Overmountain Men, making their way over the mountains from Tennessee, their ranks swelling as farmers-turned-militia picked up their long rifles and joined the march.

"These are moving chess pieces. They don't know where anybody is. But they've got Lytle as their best man, staying out of sight and riding like hell to find Ferguson," said Joe Sam Queen, a Waynesville descendent of Revolutionary war ancestry.

While Lytle was looking for Ferguson, getting word back to the moving column of Overmountain Men was no easy task.

"But both columns are moving, and all this is happening on horseback in the wilderness with no damn communication. So, they have to have a little luck," Queen said.

And that luck finally came. As the Overmountainmen emerged from the southern foothills, scouting parties encountered two women at an inn.

"They'd sold a bunch of eggs to the damn British, and they say, 'Well, we know where he is, he's up there on King's Mountain,'" Queen said. "They're not 100% sure where Kings Mountain is, but they've got some men who have hunted there and think they can find it."

Time was of the essence; however, as Ferguson was now just a day's ride from joining Cornwallis.

"If he woke up in the morning and decided to leave, they knew they'd lose him and would have wasted their whole damn time," Queen said.

But the Overmountain Men had overshot Cornwallis, making it all the way to Cowpens, South Carolina — 30 miles to the south of Kings Mountain. The Overmountain Men were now 2,000 strong, too many to change tack in a hurry.

"So they selected 900 of their best horses and their best men with their best rifles, and they started riding. This was a flying army, riding hard 30 miles at night in the rain," said Queen, the chair of the local Western Waters Chapter of Sons of the American Revolution.

The muster

The two-week journey of the Overmountain Men began in late September 1780. The Revolutionary War had been concentrated in the north, but was now heating up in the South.

Becky Johnson

Joe Sam Queen references brochure materials about the Battle of Kings Mountain while telling the story of the Overmountain Men.

And for the colonists living in the foothills of North Carolina, the conflict had become personal, with sparring between the Patriots and Loyalists.

"We have a civil war going on in the South. The Loyalists are burning Patriot houses and stealing Patriot cattle. And the Patriots are doing the same to the damn Loyalists," Queen said.

Ferguson, imbued with braggadocio, made a fatal error by throwing down the gauntlet with an ultimatum.

"Ferguson wrote a letter saying if the colonists didn't capitulate, he was going to come over the mountain with 1,110 men, and burn your cabins, hang your leaders, and lay the sword and fire to you," Queen said. "So they said, 'Well, hell, we'll just take that challenge.'"

Outraged, the Patriots mobilized a campaign to spread the word through every cove and holler of a coming muster.

"They take that actual letter by horseback, and every place they stop, another rider goes up the road," Queen recounted. "They decided, 'We're not waiting for Ferguson to come to us. We need to go to him and stop him in his tracks.'"

Militiamen mobilized quickly, tapping the same network from the Rutherford Expedition four years prior.

"The militia leaders who were on the Rutherford Trace were leaders on the frontier. So when they got a challenge, they called their men forth," Queen said.

The rallying place was Sycamore Shoals, near present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee. On Sept. 25, 1780, a muster of 1,000 men began marching southward.

"As they marched over the mountain, each place they passed, they were joined by more men," Queen said, their ranks eventually swelling to 2,000.

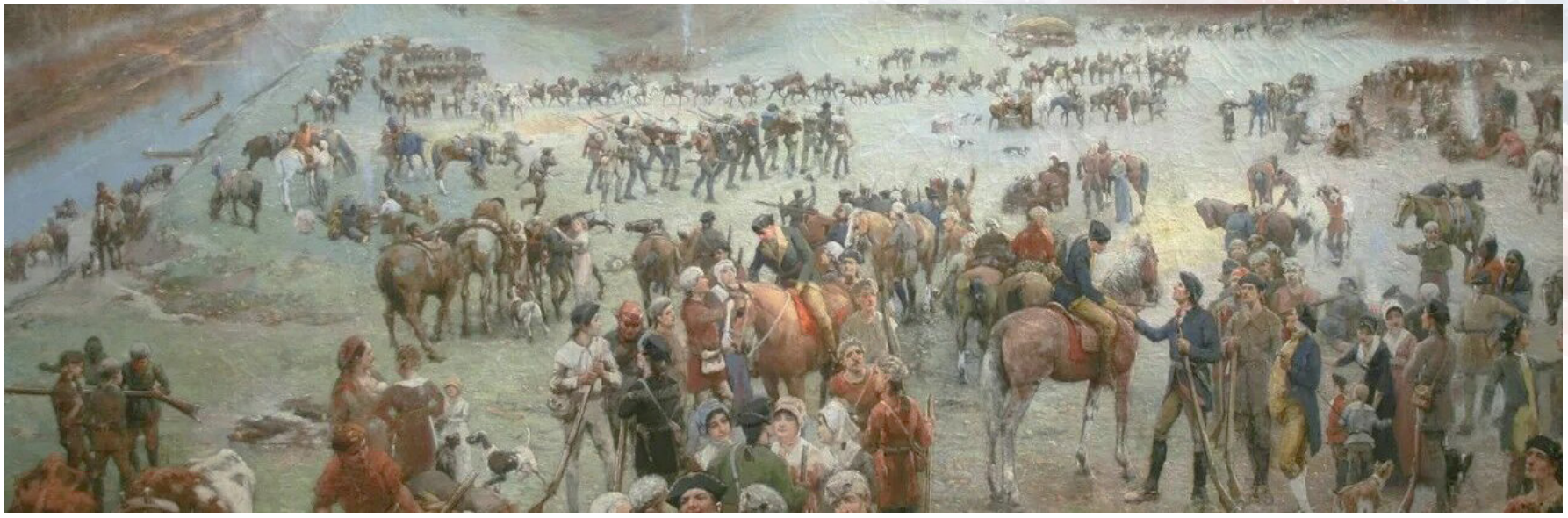
A Revolutionary War love story

When 16-year-old Hugh Rogers joined the Overmountain Men, he became smitten with the daughter of a colonel who was fetching water for the men in gourd.

"They were all exhausted, and so she was walking along, giving the soldiers water and helping where she could. She was apparently very fetching, because she was mentioned in more than one of their diaries," said Joe Sam Queen, a noteable historian on the Overmountain Men and Batttle of King's Mountain.

The girl who caught Roger's eye was Nancy Thornton, daughter of Colonel John Thorton, who lived near King's Mountain.

Rogers traveled back home with his father after the battle, but didn't forget Nancy. He later returned and asked Thorton to court his daughter. They marry in 1789 and move to Haywood County around 1800, settling in Fines Creek. They had 12 sons, accounting for the prolific number of Rogers in Haywood County today.



Gathering of Overmountain Men at Sycamore Shoals, painted by Lloyd Branson, 1915.

The battle

On the rainy night of Oct. 6, at last with solid intel on Ferguson's whereabouts, 900 of those 2,000 mounted up and rode toward what would live in history as the decisive Battle of King's Mountain — a critical turning point in the Revolutionary War.

"They had their rifles in blankets to keep them dry, and they're just riding the piss out of their horses. They get there about noon, and since it's been raining, they don't raise any dust and they don't raise much noise," Queen said.

Ferguson made a grave miscalculation when choosing King's Mountain to camp for the night.

"He said, 'This is a damn good place. It's the top of the hill. I've got a clear view. They cannot assail me up here. I'll have the high ground,'" Queen said. "Wrong. It was just the opposite."

While the top of King's Mountain was open, the base was surrounded on all sides with a wood line — ideal for the type of warfare the Patriots excelled at due to years of skirmishes with the Cherokee over land.

"They had an Indian style of war — which was with long rifles behind trees and stealth," Queen said.

Using the wood line as cover, the Overmountain Men surrounded the base of King's Mountain.

"The British came down the hill shooting with their muskets. They miss them all, so then they run with their bayonets," Queen said. "The militia regiment lowered their arms and let their volley off, and it just wipes out the first line."

The British retreat back up the hill, before launching another attack with similar results, and retreat again.

"Every time, the Overmountain Men close in more and the noose kept getting tighter," Queen said. "They got to where they had them in a fish bowl."

In a little over an hour, the British surrendered. Ferguson was killed.

"Ferguson absolutely underestimated the kind of warfare and the kind of marksmanship the patriots had," Queen said.

The Battle at King's Mountain, won due to the rugged determination and spirit of the Overmountain Men, proved a turning point in the war.

"If they hadn't found him, if Ferguson had gotten away, if we didn't have that victory, he would have joined Cornwallis," Queen said.

Instead, without the reinforcements of Ferguson's, Cornwallis abandoned his campaign in Charlotte and retreated to South Carolina.

As Thomas Jefferson would later write: "The victory at Kings Mountain was the joyful annunciation of that turn of the tide of success, which terminated the Revolutionary War with the seal of our independence."

Haywood Connections

Many of Haywood County's earliest pioneers marched with the Overmountain Men, including descendants of Thomas Lytle. Mackie McKay of Waynesville is among those who count Lytle as a several-greats grandfather.

Lytle's wife, Suzannah, was also a Revolutionary — standing up to British officer Banastre Tarleton, known for his ruthless dealings with patriots, who rode up on to their farm in McDowell County looking for Lytle. When Suzannah said Thomas wasn't there, Tarleton drew his sword, smacked her beaver hat off of her head, scooped it up by the point of his sword and rode off.

Haywood County Liberty Trail

Discover sites in Haywood County with ties to the Revolutionary War era

Journey back in time along this self-guided tour to learn about the people, places and events on our own soil that shaped our nation's path to independence. The American Revolution is entwined with Haywood County's origin story. Many of our earliest pioneers were among the ranks of Revolutionary War veterans, whose indelible spirit defined both our human and physical landscape for generations to come.

This tour resulted from the volunteer efforts and financial support of the Haywood County America 250 NC Committee and Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Clyde

1. Museum of Haywood County History and historic Shook-Smathers House | *178 Morgan Street*

Jacob Shook, a soldier with General Rutherford's Expedition that came through Haywood County in September 1776, later settled here in 1796. While added to over the years, a portion of the original house remains, making it the oldest frame house still standing west of the Eastern Continental Divide. It is home to the Museum of Haywood County History, open for docent guided tours.

Behind the house is a sapling designated as the Haywood County Liberty Tree in 2026. This tree grew from a seedling produced by the 300-year-old Osborne Boundary Oak in Bethel, a tree that "witnessed" Rutherford's march in 1776.

2. Grave of Jacob Shook | *Intersection of Melody Street and Pleasant Hill Road*

The grave of Jacob Shook, an American Revolution War veteran, is located at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, along with graves of his descendants. Like many of Haywood County's first pioneers, Jacob Shook returned to the virgin country after the Revolutionary War to make a new life in what was then the nation's western frontier.

Jacob Shook forged a homestead out of the wilderness, had 11 children with his wife Isabella, and gave rise to the settlement that would later become Clyde, living to the age of 90.

Sponsored by the Haywood County America 250 NC Committee and Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Waynesville

1. Founding Documents | *285 N Main Street*

A stunning display of the nation's founding documents — The Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights — crowns the lobby of the Haywood County Justice Center, paying homage to the bedrock of American freedom. Barnwood salvaged from barns of the Ensley, Caldwell, Boyd, and Messer families frame the larger-than-life documents, with warm internal lighting that evokes the sense of sunlight streaming through the parchments. Installed in April 2026 coinciding with America 250, the two-sided display funded by community donations is visible from both inside and outside.

2. Monument honoring Revolutionary War veterans buried in Haywood County| *285 N Main Street*

Just outside the entrance to the Justice Center, a bronze tablet mounted to a boulder names 10 American Revolution War veterans buried in Haywood County. It is likely not a complete list, but were those known at the time in 1922 when the Dorcas Bell Love Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected the monument. There were no white settlers in what's now Haywood County at the time of the Revolutionary War. Some of those listed were militiamen who served in the Rutherford Expedition or with the Overmountain Men in campaigns of the Carolinas that were pivotal in the fight for independence — and settled Haywood County after the war.

Sponsored by the Haywood County America 250 NC Committee and Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

3. 1776 Militia Rifleman | *215 N Main Street*

On the left side of the Historic Haywood County Courthouse, a bronze statue depicts a militiaman paying tribute to those who fought and died in the American Revolution. Gunsmith and historian Earl Lanning, a Revolutionary War descendant tracing his roots to Haywood County's founders, designed, fabricated and donated the statue. The statue was unveiled on July 4, 2019.

The largest militia campaign in the Revolutionary War passed through Haywood County in 1776 — 2,400 men, more than half on horseback, camped nearby at Sulphur Springs. The Rutherford Expedition was aimed at suppressing the formidable force of the Cherokee, who had sided with the British.

4. 1776 mural | *131 Wall Street*

An enormous mural a block off Main Street in downtown Waynesville tells the origin story of the town's founding — one that dates to the Revolutionary War.

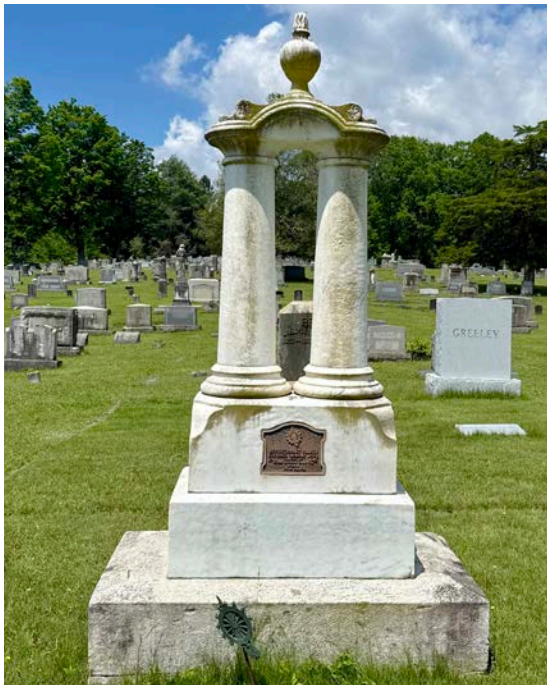
On the left, the town's founder, Robert Love, overlooks the rolling green ridges that would become Waynesville. On the right is General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, Love's commanding officer during his service in the American Revolution.

Wayne's nickname came from both his brashness and bravery — a temperament that led him to many battlefield victories. When Love donated land for the county seat, he suggested that the town be named Waynesville in honor of General Wayne.

5. Green Hill Cemetery | *90 Hillview Circle*

Green Hill Cemetery, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is the final resting place of Waynesville's founder and Revolutionary War veteran Colonel Robert Love. Love joined the war in Virginia in 1776 at the age of 16, serving along the western frontier of what's now Tennessee.

Not far from Love's grave is a relatively new marker memorializing Colonel William Allen, also an American Revolution War veteran. When Haywood became its own county in 1808, Love served as clerk of court and was prominent in the affairs of Haywood County for more than thirty years thereafter.



Sponsored by the Haywood County America 250 NC Committee and Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Canton

1. 1776 Garden | *11 Pennsylvania Avenue, Canton*

A 1776 garden located behind the Haywood County Public Library in Canton depicts types of vegetables and herbs that would have been growing in colonists' gardens or colonial gardens in 1776. This garden was patterned after a 1776 garden as described in The Old Farmer's 2026 Almanac, along with notes from Thomas Jefferson's gardening diaries.

2. Grave of Thomas Abel | *Across the street from the library*

Locust Field Cemetery is home to the grave of Thomas Abel, an American Revolution War veteran who served in Virginia.His burial place is marked by a rough-hewn headstone, along with a nearby monument placed generations later by the Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution that bears the inscription "First settler of Haywood County." He allegedly settled here in 1782, after witnessing the surrender of British General Cornwallis at Yorktown, according to testimony of his wife, Elizabeth, when applying for a widow's pension in 1839.

Two other American Revolution War veterans, John Messer and George Hall, are purported to be buried in the cemetery.

Bethel

1. Osborne Boundary Oak | *3475 Pisgah Drive*

This 300-year-old black oak growing alongside N.C. 110 witnessed Rutherford's march as the legion of militiamen passed through the Pigeon River Valley. The spirit of this witness tree lives on in a sapling propagated from an acorn and planted at the Shook-Smathers house in Clyde, where it now bears the official designation as Haywood County's Liberty Tree.

The Osborne Boundary Oak, while declining in health, is growing adjacent to highway N.C. 110 by present day Jeffrey Lane.

2. Rutherford Expedition

A muster of 2,400 militiamen — the largest of the Revolutionary War — passed through the Pigeon River Valley en route to a campaign against the Cherokee, who had sided with the British. Over the course of a few weeks in September 1776, the Rutherford Expedition destroyed the crops, livestock and food stores of 36 villages, neutralizing the formidable threat the Cherokee posed along the western frontier.

The expedition crossed the river north of the bridge on Sonoma Road, continuing along a route consistent with present-day U.S. 276 over Pigeon Gap. This arduous effort of animals and men created the Rutherford Trace.

Sponsored by the Haywood County America 250 NC Committee and Hugh Rogers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Skirrets, tansy and turnips
Canton Library garden pays homage to 1776

By Sarah White

A 250-year-old practice is taking root in the Giving Garden at the Canton Library.

This summer, the garden beds tucked behind the library are filled with vegetables and herbs that the revolutionaries would have eaten.

Typically, the garden grows a variety of edible plants to give away at the library, said Director of the Canton Library Jennifer Stuart. But when a member of the local historical society suggested giving the garden a makeover for America250, Stuart started digging.

"That was what kind of planted the seed in my brain," Stuart said with a grin.

Now, with some assistance from volunteer master gardeners and the Haywood County Extension Office, Stuart is growing root vegetables, peas, squash and more — all things you could've found in a kitchen garden in 1776.

"Turnips, radishes, a lot of the root vegetables were common, and an herb called tansy was really common," Stuart said. "There's some things that are still the same that we would recognize today, and there's some things that are new, and no one has heard of," Stuart said.

For example, if you've never heard of skirrets, now's your chance to learn about a new vegetable.

"It's similar to a carrot or a parsnip," Stuart explained.

Taking notes from Thomas Jefferson's gardening diaries and other colonial resources, Stuart learned the ins and outs of late 18th-century household gardens. As the plants grow this summer, she hopes visitors will glean something from the historic planting practices.

Jennifer Stuart (left), and Dale Treadway pick peas off the vines growing the 1776 garden at the Canton library.

A storybook walk through the garden will teach kids about growing peas, now and 250 years ago. Take a visit to the garden to walk through the processes, types of plants, and strategies that the country's founders used.

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HAYWOOD 250

250th ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

How the Kentucky rifle won the Revolution

By Aarik Long

Earl Lanning, an eighth-generation Haywood County native, has been quietly preserving the history of the long rifle and its role in winning the American Revolution for decades — both as a historian and collector.

Lanning's own collection of historic long rifles include those he's built himself and those he's restored — including many that can still shoot over two centuries later. His passion for the long rifle also inspired respect for the men who carried them in the Revolutionary War, particularly in the South where the long rifle, not the musket, was the weapon of choice.

And that weapon, in the hands of both the soldiers and militiamen, is what won the war in Lanning's book.

"The South has been left out of the history books on the Revolution. The Yankees started it, and we finished it down here. We won the Revolution in the South, but boy, you can't get anybody to admit that," Lanning said. "All you hear is Lexington and Concord. Well, hell, that was nothing but a big shooting match. We had war down here, boy."

Lanning, who fell in love with the early American firearms as a child, has a personal connection to the rifles. His fifth great-grandfather, John Lanning, was on the Rutherford Expedition — a campaign through the mountains against the Cherokee, who had sided with the British.

Lanning's great-grandfather would have used the same types of rifle that Lanning now builds and collects during his time on the military campaign. He was also among Haywood's earliest pioneers who returned following the expedition to settle the wild frontier.

"A lot of the earliest settlers in Western North Carolina were the veterans of the Rutherford Expedition, because, hell, they were all hunters and frontiersmen and, boy, I mean, this was prime country up here for hunting and fish and all that," Lanning said.

Aarik Long

Earl Lanning shows off a Revolutionary War-era rifle made by John Phillip Beck, who Lanning describes as "the greatest Kentucky rifle maker in America."

> *"The rifles made in the mountains were often plain and unadorned but singularly and collectively were the most amazing pieces of folk art the world has ever seen. It is hard to imagine that the skill of a wood carver, silversmith, blacksmith and a master engraver could be mastered to such a high degree by people with very basic tools and material." — Wayne Bryson in his book Longrifles of the Blue Ridge*

Legacy of the long rifle

Lanning has been collecting Revolutionary-era rifles for 70 years now and can tell you anything you want to know about them.

The rifle was the unsung hero of the Revolution, according to Lanning. Muskets were the weapon of choice up North, but they weren't as effective.

"A musket is smooth-bore. They don't have any rifling that stabilizes the twist. The spinning bullet is much more stable than the one that doesn't have it," Lanning said. "Up to 50 yards, a musket's pretty good, but beyond that, it doesn't do too hot. Now, these rifles, there've been people killed at 400 yards."

And the smiths who made the rifles were among the most popular in their towns.

"The gunsmith was right up there with the doctors and the lawyers in the community and their importance, in some cases more so, because you couldn't live without one of these rifles," Lanning said.

Many of the gunsmiths of the time were German or Swiss immigrants. The guns were a variation of what they had been making in their home country that had a shorter barrel.

"We developed this over here in America, that long barrel," Lanning said.

Highly sought by settlers moving into the western frontier, the gun became known as the "Kentucky rifle."

A thing of beauty

The rifles gained repute for their simplicity and effectiveness. That simplicity has allowed the weapons to continue working 250 years later.

"You'd be amazed at how good these shoot. By God, it worked pretty damn good," Lan-

David Wright

The early American patriots were frontiersmen at heart, making the rifle the perfect choice for both hunting and defense. This image by David Wright titled 'Long Knife' is found in Wayne Bryson's book Longrifles of the Blue Ridge.

ning said. "I've killed deer deader with one of these than I ever did with a 30-aught-six."

Loading one of the rifles is similar to loading a musket — put the powder and a lead ball in and then use a ramrod to push it down, something Lanning says a good rifleman could accomplish in 30 seconds.

The rifles used a flintlock system, in which black powder was placed in a flash pan on the side, which the flint would ignite when the trigger was pulled. That would then ignite the black powder inside the rifle and fire the gun.

There's not a whole lot that can go wrong with such a simple design.

"I have had less misfires with a flintlock than I ever did with a percussion (the firing system between flintlock and modern cartridges)," Lanning said.

Preserving the history

While simple, the long rifle involved intricate craftsmanship. Lanning knows from firsthand how tough they are to make.

"I make dead ringers, or sometimes I make my own design. I'm probably the oldest flintlock rifle maker in America. I'm making my last one right now," Lanning said. "There wasn't but about maybe 10 or 12 guys making them whenever I started."

He's built more than rifles, as well. Lanning is an artist at his core, having created the "1776 Militia Rifleman" statue on the lawn of the Haywood County Historic Courthouse. His goal was to showcase the unsung connections of Haywood County's heritage to the Revolutionary War militiamen who settled the territory.

"All my life I'd wondered why somebody didn't do something about the Revolutionary War here," Lanning said of his inspiration behind the statue. "The Revolution gets further away all the time."

Preserving the history of American Revolution-era rifles has been Lanning's life mission — in part due to a promise he made to Joe Kindig Jr, one of the all-time premier experts on American, way back in 1971.

"I sat on the side of his deathbed, and promised him I'd try to continue the presentation of the rifle being an American art piece, and I've done that ever since," Lanning said.

Militiaman Statue

Earl Lanning has been a long-time champion of the role of the American rifle and the militiaman in the American Revolution.

In 2019, he unveiled a statue on the front lawn of the Haywood County Historic Courthouse called "1776 Militia Rifleman." Lanning had covered the production costs, as well as doing the work himself — just asking the county to provide a place for the statue to live. A program printed at the time by Lanning read, "This monument is dedicated to all the armed services that fought and died in the American Revolutionary War. These men represented the first American veterans who freed America from British tyranny. All American wars after the Revolutionary War have been fought to preserve America's freedoms. These militiamen were the predecessors to today's National Guard." The statue remains standing on the courthouse lawn today.

Settling the Frontier

How the Revolutionary spirit shaped Haywood County's land and people

By Becky Johnson

Before Lewis and Clark, before the Oregon Trail, before the California gold rush or Transcontinental Railroad, the nation's western frontier stretched along the seemingly impenetrable Appalachian mountains. And here, in what would eventually become Haywood County, lies the origin story of western expansion, one that is inextricably linked to the American Revolution.

Before the Revolutionary War, British treaties with the Cherokee prohibited white men from settling here. But they did anyway, pushing into Cherokee land with ever-intruding farmsteads.

Prior to 1776, they hadn't made it much farther than the foothills. Old Fort marked the edge of white settlements, which is how the town got its name.

"The white settlers were here totally illegally and encroaching upon the Cherokee's land. So they were building forts to protect the settlers," said Sharon Hinshaw, chair of the Haywood County America 250 N.C. Committee who traces her roots to the earliest settlers.

As conflict with the crown embroiled the colonies, the Cherokee sided with the British, recognizing them as the lesser of two evils. But to the colonists fighting for their independence, the Cherokee's allegiance with the British posed a formidable threat along the western front.

The Rutherford Expedition mustered 2,400 men at Old Fort to wage a crippling march against the Cherokee, sacking their towns and destroying their food stores.

The men on that expedition laid eyes on the virgin countryside of Haywood County for the first time in September 1776, and when the war was over, some began to make their way back and settle the frontier.

Three of the Four Sharons: Bramlett, Shook, and Gardner stand in the Shook House.

"For years the mountains were seen as a barrier," said Sharon Bramlett, an expert in early Haywood County history. "But once you get past the first ridge, you can see all the farmable land that is actually here — the Swannanoa Valley, the Pigeon Valley, the French Broad Valley. That's what drew them here. They saw that it was a profitable place to raise a family and have a farm."

It wasn't just men on the Rutherford Expedition, but other Revolutionary War veterans — both militiamen and enlisted soldiers — staking their claim in a new nation.

"I think a lot of them were following valleys. When they followed the valleys, they found wonderful land, really good fertile land," Hinshaw said.

Meet the Sharons

The keepers of this early history rest in part with the Four Sharons: Sharon Shook, Sharon Bramlett, Sharon Gardner and Sharon Hinshaw. Plus, their trusty comrade in arms, Carol Litchfield, who's been anointed an honorary Sharon.

The Four Sharons and Carol are expert local historians. They can rattle off family trees, talk at length about where the pioneer families migrated from, which coves they each settled, where the various family trees cross through the generations.

And when the historical record gets murky, they're known for lively debates on what we know to be true versus family lore.

"I keep everybody straight with their historical facts," Bramlett said.

They are involved with the litany of organizations working to preserve and promote Haywood County History: the Museum of Haywood County History, a.k.a. Shook-Smathers House, the Haywood County Historical and Genealogical Society, the Hugh Rogers Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution — and of late,

Standing in the home of her ancestors, Sharon Shook ponders what brought them to Haywood's corner of WNC.

the Haywood America 250 Committee.

Getting the record straight

Jacob Shook is one of Haywood County's best known early settlers, and best known Revolutionary War veterans — due in part to the Shook-Smathers house that's still standing after two centuries.

After serving in the Battle of Cross Creek in eastern North Carolina in spring 1776, Jacob Shook was part of the fateful Rutherford Expedition against the Cherokee in fall 1776.

20 years after passing through Haywood, he returned with his wife and the beginnings of his family — eventually amassing land holdings of 1,500 acres along the Pigeon River, which became the foundation for modern-day Clyde.

"Jacob would never build this house here if he hadn't been on the Rutherford Trace and seen this beautiful frontier," Gardner said.

For the record, the Rutherford Expedition didn't come through Clyde where Shook settled.

"He marched through Bethel, but he still liked the Pigeon River Valley," Litchfield said.

"I wonder if he kind of walked by here," Shook said, raising her eyebrows at the other Sharons, knowing such postulation would likely get their goat.

But as a living Shook descendant, the

Carol Litchfield dives into the layout of the Shook-Smathers House, pointing to different areas on a scale model of the historic home."

only one among them carrying the last name, she's soon forgiven.

"There's a lot of wishful thinking," Bramlett quipped.

Wishful thinking. That's Bramlett's polite way of calling out invented parts of history, where the gaps of what we know and don't know are filled in with conjecture. Even when it comes to the artifacts adorning the Shook-Smathers House house today, Bramlett is a stickler for what was actually there during Jacob Shook's time.

"We've only got one thing in the house that we know for sure was in the house during Jacob and Isabella's time, and that's

Frontier continues on page 26

Sharon Gardner points to the many artifacts preserved from the early days of the Shook family's time in Haywood.

the..."

"...Granny Shook platter!" the Sharons and Carol said in unison.

And then there's the story of the long-long lost family Bible, which straightened out a long-held misconception of when Jacob Shook actually settled here.

"It goes all the way back to WC Allen who wrote the 'Big Red Book,'" Bramlett said.

"The Annals of Haywood County," Shook clarified.

This book, which covers Haywood county's history from 1808 to 1935, pronounced Jacob Shook's arrival as 1786.

"Well, I always thought that was a little bit too early," Bramlett said.

But it had been written in the famous "Big Red Book," so it stuck. Until a family Bible by one of Jacob Shook's sons, David, was donated to the museum by a descendent.

"One day we were down here working, and Sharon and I were rearranging the display, and I said, 'You know, we really ought to open this Bible up,'" Bramlett recounted. They did so gingerly, taking care with the home-sewn cloth cover.

"People used to keep all their records in the family Bible. Well, somebody had sewn in some blank pages, and they were just full of information about the Shook family," Bramlett said.

Including the words: "Jacob Shook came to Pigeon in the spring of 1796." Not 1786 like the Big Red Book claimed.

"Since it belonged to his son, his son would know when his father came," Gardner said.

"Of course, I played the devil's advocate, and said, 'Well, maybe he was wrong and wrote down the wrong date.' On my grandfather's tombstone it has the wrong date on it," Shook said, with a slip of a grin.

Bramlett took the bait.

"The first official United States census in 1790 showed he was still located near the town of Morganton then," Bramlett countered.

So 1796 it is.

Moving in

When Jacob Shook staked his claim in 1796, it wasn't exactly kosher. The Pigeon River marked the boundary of Cherokee territory, but in 1796, Jacob crossed the river anyway and began to build a farmstead.

"There were no Cherokee here, there weren't in 1776 either. So you can imagine, Jacob comes over and says, 'Well, nobody's here. I want this land, I'm just going to come,'" Litchfield said. "They weren't allowed to have land recorded until 1798, but as soon as he was able to get it, he must have made his way over to the Buncombe County Courthouse."

He officially recorded his land deed in early 1799. Haywood County was still part of Buncombe, and wouldn't become its own county until 1808.

Shook's same story was playing out across what would become Haywood County.

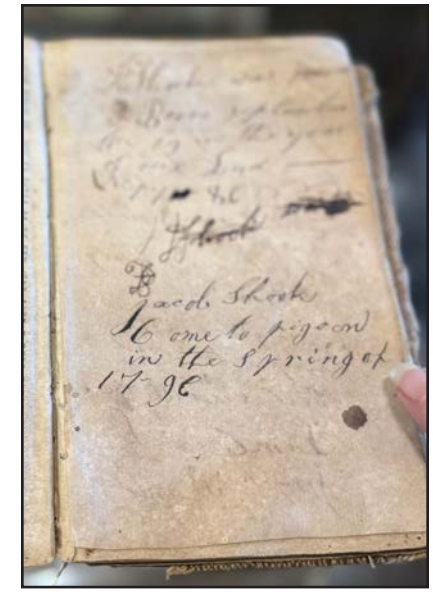
Once the territory officially opened up, speculators quickly amassed vast holdings, and sold off parcels to settlers looking for land to forge a new life.

"All those early land speculators, and the American Revolution veterans, they were all connected," Litchfield said. "The land speculators were trying to unload their land and make money, and all these people were wanting land."

Among them was Robert Love, the founder of Waynesville — a Revolutionary War veteran and land surveyor who ended up with 100,000 acres stretching all the way to the Balsams.

With the same spirit that drove our ancestors to declare their independence 250 years ago, farms and towns were forged from the wilderness.

"Every time the generation passes, the land is divided, and you get a small piece of that pie. They knew that they were being squeezed out," Bramlett said. "So that's one thing that encouraged people to move west."



Th Shook family bible sits on display in this historic house of David Shook, one of Jacob's sons.

Carrying the torch

SAR leader brings passion for history to younger generations

By Sarah White

As a boy, Hayden Burris was regaled with stories of the 1776 Rutherford Expedition and the militiamen who returned after the war to settle what would become Haywood County. His grandfather, Charles Miller, was one of the county's most influential historians of that early era. Years later, and after his grandfather's passing, he would take up the mantel of as a flame keeper of local Revolutionary War history — including his Papaw's spot as vice president of the local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Hayden Burris and Joe Sam Queen, Western Waters chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution

Ironically, Burris had never attended an SAR meeting when he was asked to fill the role — but his family lineage spoke volumes. He still remembers that call from Joe Sam Queen, chair of the Western Waters chapter of SAR, shortly after Burris graduated from Western Carolina University in 2025.

"Joe Sam said, 'we have unanimously decided we want you to be the vice president, if you want to be,'" Burris recounted. "I was always very close with my Papaw. He really instilled within me that sort of passion for history."

Burris was honored by the opportunity, and immediately said yes. Surrounded by men who were for the most part two generations older was daunting at first for the 23-year-old Burris. But he quickly came to feel at home.

"I feel that I am one of them, even though it is always strange when you're the youngest person in any room," Burris said. "They do really want to see a younger generation step into their shoes and take up what they started."

Luckily, that's a challenge he's willing to accept. In his year with the SAR, he's not only learned the ropes of the organization, but he's worked to connect with younger people who share a passion for preserving and spreading history.

For him, the SAR is not just about remembering the past. Burris sees it as a way to bring to life the ideas that the nation was founded on — and he thinks people of any generation can get behind that.

"It's not so much a matter of preserving and teaching the history, but it's embodying those ideals of the revolution — life, liberty, pursuit of happiness," Burris said. "Regardless of what your ideology is, I believe that there's always younger people who are wanting to make the country into what they believe it should be."

Sarah White

Hayden Burris

As he and the SAR chapter are gearing up for America 250 celebrations, Burris has been pondering the significance of the anniversary and what it means in today's world.

In his masters program, Burris is studying voting rights in Cold War era rural Tennessee. So, as he looks back on the founding of the country, he's also reckoning with the fact that many people in America's history have not had access to the same rights and ideals that the revolutionaries fought for. To him, the anniversary is not just about celebrating one moment in time — it's about continuously carrying forward the founders' intentions, for all Americans.

"When people ask me, 'what does America 250 mean to you?' I say, it's 250 years of a commitment to try and make the nation what you want it to be. That was in the preamble — to make a more perfect union," Burris said. "It's not so much that we want to focus on just the revolution as a singular entity, but what came out of it."

Want to join the SAR?

Sons of the American Revolution can trace their ancestry back to someone who fought for American independence in the Revolutionary War. While prestigious, the lineage isn't as rare as you might imagine — especially if your kin go back a few generations in Haywood County. Even if you aren't from here, or don't know if you have a Revolutionary War ancestor, geneology experts with the Western Waters chapter of SAR will trace your roots. Contact Mike McLean at 828-275-4057 or memclean@aol.com.

250 Years & Counting

What does the Declaration of Independence mean to you today?

When the Declaration of Independence staked our claim as a free nation, more than a year had passed since the shot heard 'round the world. The signers were just as bold and brave as the militiamen in the field. For once the words set sail, there would be no quarter, no retreat from treason.

The radical document enumerated 27 grievances — "a long train of abuses and usurpations" with the aim of "absolute tyranny" over the colonists. Many of those injustices, still raw despite victory, turn up 11 years later in the Bill of Rights — ensuring fair trials, impartial judges and juries, representation, guardrails on power, limits on military force and sundry other truths we now hold to be self-evident.

"Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are inalienable rights specifically enumerated in our Declaration of Independence — bedrock principles for which so many lives have been dedicated over the course of our nation's history.

Liberty, specifically, can be easily eroded over time without due attention to its preservation across the spectrum of political agendas, the application of constitutional practices in law enforcement, and limiting governmental conduct in the affairs of our citizenry to the extent of only what is necessary.

Human nature, without restraint, tends toward power and the potential for corruption, which demands that honorable men and women protect and defend our bedrock principles in every way possible. This always comes with a personal cost, defined by hardship and sacrifice. We should seek to honor the generations before us who have paid that cost, and in respect of their sacrifice, commit to future generations our own best effort, so, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, our nation '...shall not perish from the earth.'"

— Haywood County Sheriff Bill Wilke

"Liberty is the cornerstone of the inalienable rights addressed in both the United States and North Carolina Constitutions. All people are afforded liberty to live as free, law-abiding citizens unobstructed by government overreach. This includes freedom to worship, gather and speak openly. Until one acts in a manner opposed to the laws of either state or national standards, then liberty can be restricted in the form of judicial intervention. This too holds the inalienable right of liberty to be honored, cherished and respected even during the pursuit of justice for someone who has been wronged.

Liberty affords due process with fair, unbiased and consistent applications of the law for both the victim and the accused. This duality of applications then not only affects those that the law protects but also those who ignore and violate our statutes therefore, liberty consistently serves all without bias, prejudice or favor. Evidence of this clearly defines the reason we, as a society, must always keep sacred those individual rights afforded to all citizens through the Declaration of Independence."

— Jeff Haynes, Haywood County Clerk of Courts

"I believe God led Jefferson, Adams, Franklin and the other nation's leaders to draft a document defining the specific terms of independence and freedom that have allowed the creation of our most wonderful nation on this planet.

I am reminded of our freedoms when I hear of the choices parents have to send their children for an education. I am reminded of our freedom to worship when I hear of a young couple going to another country as missionaries...but don't mention their names or destination because they may be tracked down and jailed. I am reminded of our freedoms when I go to a Board of Elections meeting and hear how many places and how many hours and how many days are being made available to accommodate voters.

I thank God for bringing our forefathers together to form the perfect union."

— Ted Carr, Bethel

"When I got married and started traveling outside America, it really opened my eyes to the liberty we have. No fear of going hungry. No dread of a midnight raid on our home. No worries going to the polls on election day. Liberty means living in a country that is able to shelter, feed, clothe and employ its people; and to care for those that fall through the cracks.

I thank God for 1) the founders He guided in their efforts to preserve a form of government that would treat all persons fairly and provide methods of redress when it failed; and 2) the military that continues to defend this country."

— Pat Carr, Bethel

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"Each and every one of us has our own American story. Each is unique. Yet all bind us together as one nation, under God. For me, the phrase 'Sweet Land of Liberty' is both a blessing and a challenge. Ours is the oldest and shortest written Constitution of any major government in the world. It endures because it lays the strong foundation for our government, delineates the three branches to prevent tyranny, accommodates change, and serves as a sort-of reset button when things get off track. The challenge is in assuring that all these remain true.

I vote in elections because we function as a nation 'of the people, by the people, and for the people, with the consent of the governed.' I listen respectfully to others, even when I disagree with them. As an American, I support our right to free speech and assembly. As a veteran, our military and its mission are part of my American identity. As a retired healthcare professional, I believe in patient rights. We have so very much to be proud of as Americans. We must protect this to continue as the 'Sweet Land of Liberty.'"

— Constance Daly, Hugh Rogers Chapter of Daughters of American Revolution and United States Veteran

"For me, liberty is not simply about preserving what America has been, nor even about defending what America is today. It is about pursuing what America can become. Our nation's founders created a system built on the belief that every person possesses inherent dignity and the right to pursue happiness. They established laws not as barriers to opportunity, but as a framework that allows people the freedom to improve their lives, chart their own course, and believe what they want.

Whether in a courtroom or a town hall, that ideal remains the same. Liberty means that the smallest voice carries the same worth as the loudest. Equality is not optional but is a demand of the American promise.

Both local government and the legal system exist because of the freedoms and demands asserted in the Declaration of Independence and protected by our Constitution. It is my job to be the advocate of fairness and respect, and that all are entitled, under the law and by principle, to have their American life and liberty protected."

— Zeb Smathers, Canton Mayor and defense attorney

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Did you know? *Five facts about the Declaration of Independence*

1. On June 11, 1776, the Second Continental Congress named five men — who became known as the Committee of Five — to draft the Declaration of Independence. While Thomas Jefferson was the principal architect, the committee also included John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman.

2. It was presented to Congress on June 28. After intense editing and revisions, the final version was ratified on July 4 and promptly taken from the Philadelphia meeting house to the nearby print shop of John Dunlap. He worked all night and into the morning of July 5 to produce the large, single-sided sheet, known as the Dunlap Broadside.

3. About 200 copies were made. Today, 26 copies remain. The original rough draft has been lost.

4. In 1989, an original Dunlap Broadside was found hidden behind a picture a Philadelphia man bought at a flea market for $4. It later sold for $8.1 million.

5. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were hidden at Fort Knox during World War II, two weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

250 Years & Counting

"The Declaration of Independence makes it unequivocally clear that we are all created equal with certain unalienable rights — including the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As a Superior Court Judge for the State of North Carolina, I am entrusted with safeguarding these fundamental rights within our judicial system each and every day.

In criminal proceedings, I diligently strive to ensure that the constitutional rights of all parties are protected. This responsibility extends both to individuals accused of crimes who are entitled to due process and a fair trial, and to victims of crimes, whose voices deserve to be heard and respected throughout the judicial process.

In civil cases, where there are legal disputes among citizens, the court serves as a forum for the fair resolution of conflicts. It is my duty to ensure that every litigant receives equal access to justice and that each case is adjudicated with impartiality.

I have the distinct privilege of presiding over trials where citizen jurors fulfill one of the highest responsibilities of civic engagement. My role requires me to make certain that jurors are free as possible from bias, sympathy, or preconceived ideas as to the facts or law in a case. Only through such impartial deliberation can confidence in our judicial system be preserved.

Through the fair and impartial administration of justice, I strive to uphold the enduring principles of equality, liberty and individual rights, which are articulated in the Declaration of Independence and enshrined within our Constitution."

— Roy Wijewickrama, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge

"Liberty is the freedom to live, speak, worship, work, and pursue one's goals without undue oppression or interference from the government or other outside forces.

Like all military recruits, I took an oath to defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. This oath is to the Constitution, not to a specific leader or regime. Although its legal obligation ends with service, veterans view its moral commitment as a lifelong dedication to the nation's values.

In 1775, the Boston Liberty Tree that served as a gathering place for patriots was cut down by British soldiers, attempting to destroy a symbol of colonial resistance. But their spirit was not broken then, and still lives on today. As part of America 250, the local Hugh Rogers Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated a new Liberty Tree — a seedling from a 300-year-old tree in Bethel, carrying forward a symbol of the American Revolution that represents unity, freedom, and resistance to oppression."

— Effie Atkinson, Regent of the Hugh Rogers chapter of DAR, retired nurse and US Air Force Veteran

"My life has been defined by a dual commitment to defense and public service, a journey rooted deeply in the principles forged on July 4, 1776. The Declaration of Independence boldly proclaimed that all people possess unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments exist solely to secure those freedoms. As a Major in the United States Army Reserve, I have walked the path required to keep that promise alive.

Securing liberty often demands standing on the front lines of its defense. My three deployments to the Middle East in support of the Global War on Terrorism were direct expressions of that duty — confronting global threats to ensure our democratic experiments endure safely at home.

Today, that shield takes a different form with two unique vantage points: as an officer the Army Reserve and on the civilian side for the National Park Service. In uniform, I ensure the warfighter has the vital resources needed to maintain global readiness. Out of uniform, I safeguard the literal landscape of our freedom — preserving the historic sites, open spaces, and natural heritage that all citizens have an equal right to enjoy. It is a continuous loop of service, defending the nation abroad and sustaining its treasures at home."

— Samantha Cahill, Waynesville VFW Post Commander

"My views on freedom and liberty have been positively shaped by service in the US Army and as a police officer. I have had the honor of defending our freedoms, Constitutional rights and local citizens on foreign soil and right here in Western North Carolina.

We live in the greatest country in the world, where we are allowed to exercise our rights to free speech, liberty of political beliefs and religious freedoms without fear of prosecution. I am grateful

for the opportunity to help protect, serve and defend the liberties of all citizens.

I have witnessed the resilience of Waynesville and Haywood County citizens during two hurricanes, Covid, protests and other serious issues over the past 6 years. Without our liberties and freedoms, this would not have been possible."

— David Adams, Waynesville Police Chief

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Did you know? *July 2 is the day we declared independence*

Despite July Fourth being our national holiday, we technically declared our freedom from England on July 2, 1776.

That's the date Continental Congress passed a "Resolution for Independence" — the legal act of separation. The Declaration of Independence, then went through revisions and edits all day July 3 and most of July 4 before being ratified. It was taken next door to a printing press that evening, but the timely process of type setting meant the 200 copies weren't actually printed until the next morning of July 5. It wasn't signed until Aug. 2 to be sent to England, where it was eventually received in November.

John Adams thought July 2 would become the national holiday.

"The second day of July....will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forever more," Adams wrote in a letter to his wife Abagail on July 3, following the historic vote.

The letter also alluded to the long road ahead.

"I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory," Adams wrote.

250 Years & Counting

"On the first Tuesday, after the first Monday of every November, there is a group of our neighbors who are up before dawn and who will work that day until after the sun sets. They are there to enable anyone who has the right to vote and who chooses to do so to cast their ballot.

These people are the bedrock of our democracy, and while they often have different political ideologies, they put those aside and perform a tedious task with honor and impartiality — working together for a very noble task to ensure each and every election is conducted in accordance with election laws.

Although not perfect, our democracy has afforded each of us an opportunity to self-govern. Many generations have had the opportunity to live their lives in freedom, but it must be protected regardless of the differences in political ideologies that we have had and will continue to have.

Americans would benefit greatly from some old-fashioned self-reflection. I often wonder how many times societies and cultures believed they were superior and that their way of life would endure forever, and yet they are gone."

— Robert Inman, Haywood County Elections Director

"Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

With this phrase, the soul of American democracy was born in the hallowed Declaration of Independence. We rejected the crown's "absolute rule" and decried a litany of grievances that included "suspending our own Legislatures" and "dissolving Representative Houses."

But the first printed copy of the Declaration didn't include the names of the signers who had commited such a treasonous act. It wasn't until six months later, in January 1777, that the founding fathers commissioned a printing press to publish a signed copy bearing their names for distribution far and wide through the colonies.

Still today, a free press, later enshrined by the Bill of Rights, remains foundational to democracy.

A free press holds government accountable to the people. A free press plays a vital role in our checks and balances on power. A free press informs the electorate — without which "consent of the governed" is not possible.

— Becky Johnson, editor of The Mountaineer

Did you know? *The Declaration of Independence included one woman's name*

The first signed copy of the Declaration of Independence was printed by Mary Katharine Goddard, editor and publisher of the Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser.

While 200 copies were printed in July 1776, they did not include the names of the signers, as doing so was a treasonous act. But in January 1777, Continental Congress passed a resolution to print "an authenticated copy" bearing the names of the 56 signers to be distributed throughout the colonies.

Goddard's printing press was steps away from their meeting house in Baltimore, where Congress had relocated due to British presence in Philadelphia. She was among a small but vital cohort of colonial publishers whose printed word influenced the course of the revolution. She had been reprinting works like Thomas Paine's Common Sense, publishing editorials that "spoke out against tyranny" and recounting news from the battlefields — even serving as post master to keep the printed word flowing despite British censorship.

On what became known as the Goddard Broadside, she included these words at the bottom of the page: "Printed by Mary Katharine Goddard," making her the only woman whose name appeared on the Declaration of Independence. — *By Josie Ostendorff, excerpt from Hugh Rogers DAR essay contest*

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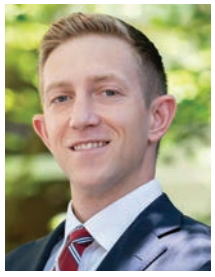

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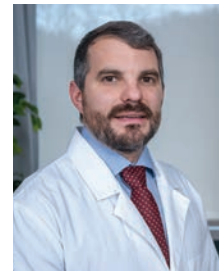

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