

## **Backstory: From Mountain Village to Resort**



What began as a largely agrarian community has turned into an idyllic resort village. Blowing Rock was not always the bustling destination that it is today. In fact, until the late 1800s/early 1900s Blowing Rock was a particularly difficult place to travel to thanks to the rough Appalachian terrain and the lack of roadways and railroads in the area. This of course would all drastically change following the American Civil War (1861 - 1865). (Left image: A Blue Ridge vista circa 1910s).

## ***A Mountain Village Nestled in the Hills***

Moravian Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg led a survey party to the Blowing Rock area in 1752 and wrote of the arduous journey, "Arrived at the top at last, we saw hundreds of mountain peaks all around us, presenting a spectacle like ocean waves in a storm." Spangenberg is noted as the first European visitor to Blowing Rock but unfortunately having

arrived with his party during a harsh winter the group would elect not to stay in the mountain town. The "first family of Blowing Rock" would not arrive in the area until some forty years later. In the 1790s the infamous Greene family settled in Blowing Rock. Edmund



Greene's home stood where the Green Park Inn can be found today and by the mid 1800s the Greene family had well established their place in the town. Other families such as the Bolick's, the Coffey's, the Hayes', and the Storie's settled in the Blowing Rock area soon after the Greene's. (Above image: A view of downtown Blowing Rock circa 1890s).

In 1874 William Morris bought Amos Greene's property and built what would be Blowing



Rock's first boarding house for summer visitors. Around this same time Len Estes began to further develop his family's property (modern day Chetola) and erected multiple summer cottages for guests on the Estes estate. Other boarding houses were soon to crop up as summering in Blowing Rock became an ever popular notion. The summer visitors were often referred to as "cottagers." These cottagers sometimes had second homes constructed in Blowing Rock

often consisting of two to three stories with enough room to house the cottager's family and servants. Historian Barry M. Buxton notes that life for the cottagers was "both rustic and refined. A cottager could wear fine clothes to a social gathering, but only after first bathing in a tub. The servant who prepared the cottager's meals and waited on him at [the] table also shared his privy out back.

Deprivations may be least resented when they are universal, and Blowing Rock summers offered more than enough pleasure to offset the inconveniences." (Above image left: Blowing Rock's first hotel, the Watauga Inn, circa 1910. Right image: An example of a quaint Blowing Rock cottage. Date unknown).



Blowing Rock was of course not just made up of summer cottagers. The year-long citizens were a variety of laborers, shopkeepers, and small farmers. The census of 1880 shows 62 households in Blowing Rock with 47 of these being farmers or farmhands. As one may assume, farming in Appalachia is quite different from farming in North Carolina's piedmont or coastal plains. Farms in the High Country are generally much smaller (as is the case with the Blowing Rock area) due to the rough terrain and soil quality. Hogs were the cash crop of choice for many Blowing Rock farmers.



## ***A Resort Town in the Land of Sky***

“The village of Blowing Rock consists of a series of detached hotels, cottages, and dwellings, stretching along the winding roadway a distance of two miles...From the dizzy altitude of this precipice, the view is grandly beautiful, beautifully grand. It is not surprising that this so-called ‘Land of the Sky’ should exert an irresistible fascination on those who have once yielded to its attractions. The return from Blowing Rock to Lenoir is like a return from fairyland, or the exploration of a new, untried, and beautiful world.” - Excerpt from the July 1897 edition of the *S.A.L. Magsmagundi*

With the construction of the Lenoir-Blowing Rock Turnpike and the Western North Carolina Railroad (with a stop nearby in Lenoir) in the



1880s, Blowing Rock was now more accessible than ever. The turnpike and the railroad opened up the High Country like never before and what had once been a cozy summer cottage town quickly evolved into a tourist destination. Grand hotels soon began to pop up alongside the boarding houses and summer cottages such as the Watauga Hotel (opened on July 1, 1884), the Blowing Rock Hotel (opened on June 17, 1889), and the Green Park Inn (opened in June of 1891). (Above image: The Green Park Inn circa 1910s).



Due to the large increase in tourism, settlement, and the growth of the village, in 1889 the General Assembly incorporated the town of Blowing Rock. Incorporation, new governance, and the growth in tourism led to one of the biggest debates in Blowing Rock’s history, whether farmers should or should not fence in their livestock. (Left image: Oxen pulling a wagon down Main Street in Blowing Rock circa 1890s).

As previously mentioned, hogs were the cash crop of choice for many local farmers (hogs continue to be a major industry for North Carolina farmers) but you may be surprised to learn that it was commonplace for farmers to let their livestock roam free during the spring and summer seasons. Chickens, cows, and pigs were a common sight along Main Street and such a common sight that cottagers, tourists, and merchants who supported the tourism industry began to demand for strict stock laws. Visitors were tired of the manure that littered the streets and felt that the free-roaming livestock detracted from the beautiful village. The 1890s saw a massive growth in the stock law movement with proponents advocating for farmers to fence in their



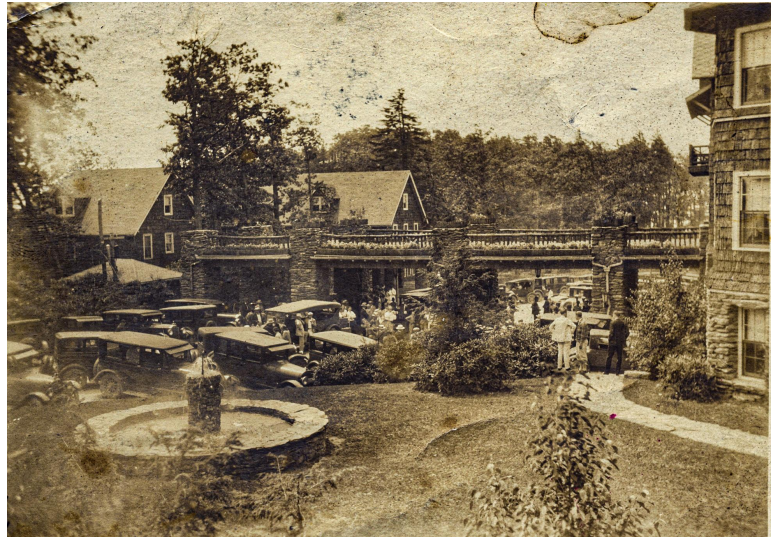
livestock and put a stop to the roaming tradition. This movement caused many Blowing Rock farmers to look for work elsewhere. The Watauga Democrat issues from the 1890s often displayed letters from former Blowing Rock-based farmers who had made new lives for themselves out west in states like Oklahoma, Idaho, Montana, or Oregon. Those who stayed behind realized their best bet for economic survival was to get involved in local politics, leading to the formation of the Farmers Alliance. The Farmers Alliance worked across North Carolina to improve conditions for farmers and to advocate on their behalf. In 1890 the Watauga chapter of the Farmers Alliance had a total of 700 members (composed of 193 women and 507 men). (Above image: A few Blowing Rock farmers circa 1910s. Below image: A view of downtown Blowing Rock in 1898 from Boyden's Hill).



The steep cost of erecting proper fencing was one of the major hurdles for many Blowing Rock farmers who opposed stock laws. One area farmer wrote in 1892, "...[The stock law] will hurt the poor man who has no land. He will be forced to move, or keep no stock, for the pasturing would



soon break him up. Let me say in conclusion that if the people in town want their incorporation law, let them have it as the law directs, and not ask the people to fence up an entire township to keep hogs off the sidewalks.” The Ordinances of 1896 required farmers to restrain their livestock and this decision was again held up in a township vote in 1900 and a county vote in 1901. While enforcement of the stock law was loose at first it eventually became the norm to see Main Street filled with horse and buggy, people, and later automobiles rather than hogs and sheep. It may seem obvious that a stock law would eventually be passed in Blowing Rock but for those farmers who lived through the change it was a shocking upset and a sign of the town embracing itself as a tourist destination. (Top right image: Mayview Manor circa 1920s. Bottom right image: Mayview Manor circa 1930s).



By 1900 the town had grown significantly. The 1900 census lists a total population of 805 with 166 households. A majority of the households still listed themselves as farmers or farmhands (101 to be precise) but a great many professions could now be found in the mountain village such as: shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, clerks, a photographer, druggists, teamsters, and a jeweler to name a few. As the 1900s progressed so too did Blowing Rock. Its status as a resort town would only continue to grow with the opening of the grand Mayview Manor in 1921 and the growth and expansion of the Chetola Resort throughout the 20th century.



With its mild summers, gorgeous sweeping mountain views, grand manors, and quaint cottages it seems as though it was inevitable that this Land of Sky would become the resort destination we now know it to be. (Left image: Chetola Resort circa 1990s).