

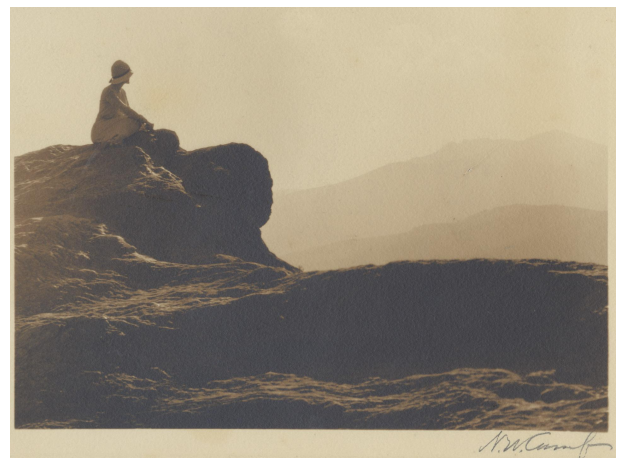
## Backstory: Tourism



Tourism has long been an important part of Blowing Rock's history. Many early tourists were brought into the town with the growth of the railroads in western North Carolina, which opened up Blowing Rock to the southeast. The nearest railway stop was in Lenoir but thankfully the Lenoir/Blowing Rock Turnpike and its later upgrade to US HWY 321 made the area even more accessible to countless others. In the 1800s many boarding houses were constructed throughout the town to support an influx of summer visitors during the warmer

months. The Martin House, built in the 1870s, could accommodate up to 14 boarders. Around the same time, Len Estes transformed a home his father, Lot Estes, had previously constructed on what would become the Chetola estate, into a boarding house. Len then went on to build multiple summer cottages for tourists. This resort would gain the name "Silverlake" and would become popular with tourists and locals. The Chetola property would change hands several times throughout its many years and has only continued to grow. No longer a simple boarding house with humble summer cottages, the current Chetola Resort has a plethora of lodge rooms, condominiums, restaurants, and activities for guests. (Above image: Grover Robbins, Sr. circa 1940s at The Blowing Rock. Image below: The Blowing Rock circa 1930s)

When you think of tourism in Blowing Rock one of the first names that should come to mind is that of Grover Robbins, Sr. Blowing Rock would be a much different town without Robbins' influence and his legacy is vividly evident to this day. Grover Robbins, Sr. (1886 - 1956) did a litany of things for Blowing Rock including but not limited to: establishing the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce in 1927, lobbying for the Blowing Rock memorial park land purchase in 1939, and establishing the Yonahlossee Theater in the same year. One of Robbins, Sr.'s most notable acts for the town is the establishment of The Blowing Rock Attraction. Robbins Sr. opened this infamous tourist attraction in 1933 and it has drawn a plethora of visitors ever since. The Blowing Rock offers visitors a beautiful view of the Blue Ridge from 4,000 feet above sea level. The rocky cliff-face got its name from the interesting phenomenon that this landscape creates. If lightweight objects are



thrown off the cliff-face they can sometimes return (this is of course not an invitation to throw things off the rock!) due to the rocky gorge walls creating a flume through which northwesterly winds travel through, sometimes propelling things upwards, most notably, snow!

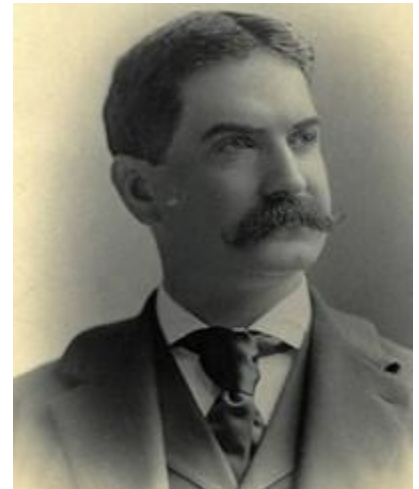
Blowing Rock had long been a popular destination for visitors but tourism became an established industry in the area during the 1930s with Robbins, Sr.'s involvement. Around the same time he was opening up The Blowing Rock attraction, Robbins, Sr. also was a prominent voice in making sure that the Blue Ridge Parkway ran through Blowing Rock. He knew how important the Parkway could be for tourism development in the area and lobbied hard to reroute the Blue Ridge Parkway from a proposed route through eastern Tennessee and instead proposed that it run through western North Carolina, bypassing both Blowing Rock and Asheville. In the present day, we know that this lobbying was hugely beneficial as the Parkway sees millions of motorists annually with multiple Blowing Rock attractions being some of the most popular mileposts on the scenic road.



Both Julian Price Memorial Park (milepost 297) and the Moses Cone Memorial Park (milepost 294) can be found off the Blue Ridge Parkway in the greater Blowing Rock area. These two parks are both beautiful in their own right and offer a wide variety of activities for visitors. Julian Price Memorial Park was established in 1960 and holds 42 thousand acres of forests, lakes, streams, and meadows.

Julian Price  
(1867 - 1946)

was an insurance executive from Virginia who acquired the land in the 1930s and 1940s. His wish was for the land to be preserved and its natural beauty appreciated for years to come. The land was donated to the federal government in 1952 and since its establishment as a park it has become a popular site of respite for visitors and locals alike. (Above image: Price Lake via NPS.gov. Right image: Moses H. Cone via NPS.gov. Image below: A view from Moses Cone



Manor via NPS.gov)



The previously mentioned Moses Cone Memorial Park was established on January 21, 1949. This estate once belonged to the historic Cone family. Moses H. Cone, also known as the "Denim King" and his wife Bertha Lindau Cone were staunch environmentalists and similar to Julian Price, they

too wanted to make sure the land they owned was preserved. The 3,516 acres of the Cone's estate was conveyed to the Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, NC following Bertha Cone's passing. The hospital then transferred ownership to the federal government and ever since 1949 the land has been under the protection of the National Park System. The park has long been a hotspot for tourists looking to ride horses, hike, shop, and to simply visit the historic house and grounds. Moses Cone Memorial Park continues to be a significant tourist destination for Blowing Rock proper.

Eight years after Moses Cone Memorial Park opened its gates another tourist behemoth would make its mark in Blowing Rock, Tweetsie Railroad. Locomotive No. 12 or "Tweetsie" (so-called due to the train's shrill whistle) was built in 1917 by Baldwin's Locomotive Works of Philadelphia.



The narrow-gauge locomotive ran on the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad (ET&WNC) but service was halted to Boone in 1940 due to severe flooding and the increase in modern roadways. Tweetsie was then purchased for use on the Shenandoah Central Railroad



in Harrisonburg, VA but was inevitably sold in 1954 to film-star Gene Autry due to destruction in the area from Hurricane Hazel. Grover Robbins, Sr.'s son, Grover Robbins, Jr. purchased Tweetsie from Gene Autry in 1955. Autry had planned to take Tweetsie out west to use as a prop in movies but was unable to transport it to California from its then

Virginia location. Autry sold



Tweetsie to Robbins, Jr. for one dollar who then brought it back to North Carolina and refurbished it. Tweetsie Railroad officially opened in Blowing Rock in 1957 making it North Carolina's first theme park. The theme park installed three miles of track for Locomotive No. 12 with guests getting to see a fun show throughout the ride's duration. Tweetsie Railroad has been a popular tourist destination since its inception and continues to be the highlight of many visitors' trips to the high country, young and old alike. (Top left image:

Transportation of a locomotive bound for Tweetsie

circa 1960s. Top right image: Tweetsie circa 1990s. Left image: A family from Wilmington, NC enjoying Tweetsie Railroad circa 1994)

Blowing Rock continues to be a tourism powerhouse not just from the sites listed here but also due to its charming nature, beautiful location, and welcoming people. Whether you're looking to ski at Appalachian Ski Mountain, canoe at Price Lake, ride a historic train around a mountain, hike through the hills and valleys off the Parkway, or simply shop along Main Street, there is something for everyone in Blowing Rock, making it no wonder why tourism here only grows. (Right image: Folks shopping along Blowing Rock's Main Street)

