

Backstory: Main Street Through The Years

Main Street has always been the central hub for Blowing Rock. Though the street has transformed significantly since the town's formation in the 19th century. The street was



largely a mix of private homes and businesses following the first two decades of the town's incorporation (Blowing Rock was incorporated in 1889), but as the years went on and tourism continued to increase, a plethora of hotels, cottages, and businesses soon began lining Main Street. (Left image: A

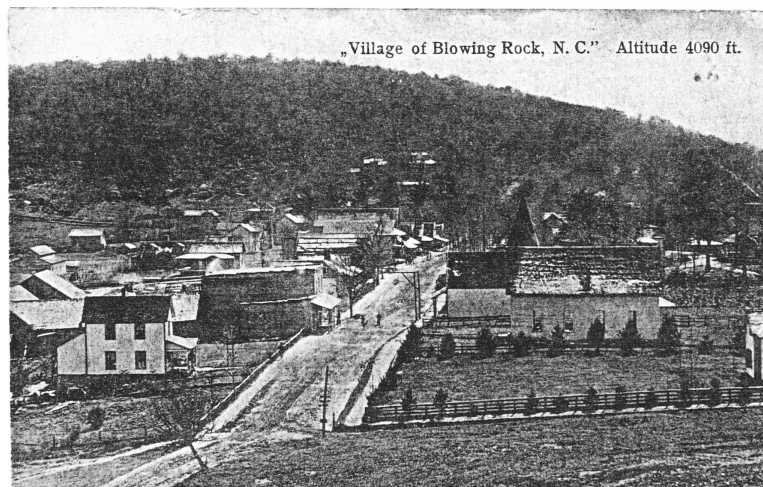
view of Main Street circa 1900s. Image below: Downtown Blowing Rock circa 1900s).

Blowing Rock's first inn, the Watauga Hotel, was founded in 1884 (where Memorial Park can be found today) and was the place to be for out-of-town visitors and quickly became a centerpiece for the village. The hotel was a two-story structure with several cottages built on either side of the hotel in 1888. The 1888 Museum on Main Street is the only surviving cottage from the

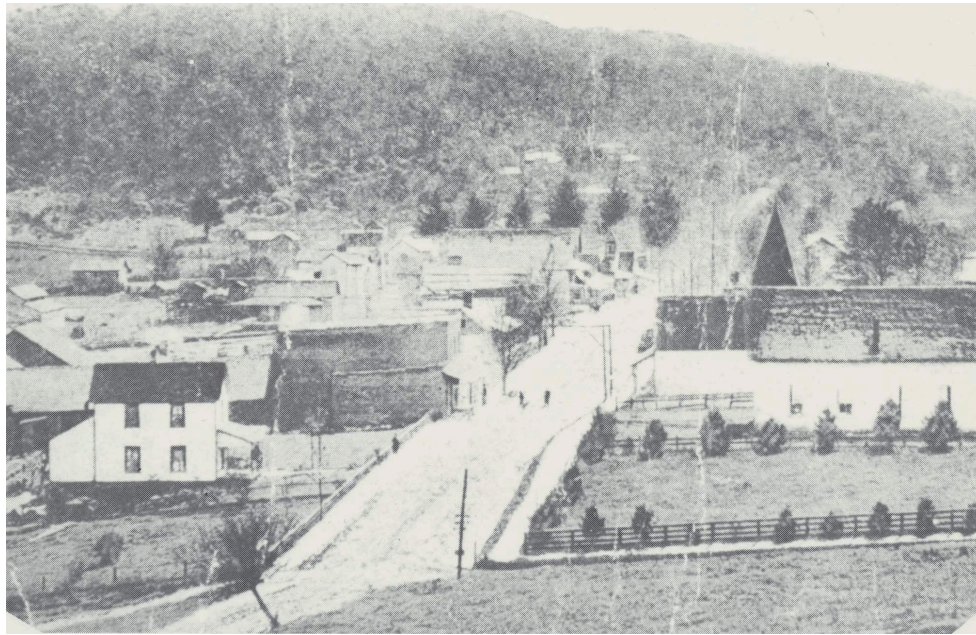
Watauga Hotel, which sadly burned down in 1906 and its reconstruction, the Watauga Inn, also tragically burned down in 1926. Many early buildings on the east side of Main Street were also unfortunately lost during a strong fire in 1923 which spread from Sunset Avenue to Morris Street.

With no existing fire department at the time, all

buildings that were in the path of the blaze were lost. Before the fire struck Main Street



one could find: Robbin's blacksmith shop, the Miller General Store, a livery stable connected to the Watauga Hotel in addition to several others, Craig's Grocery Store, Dr.

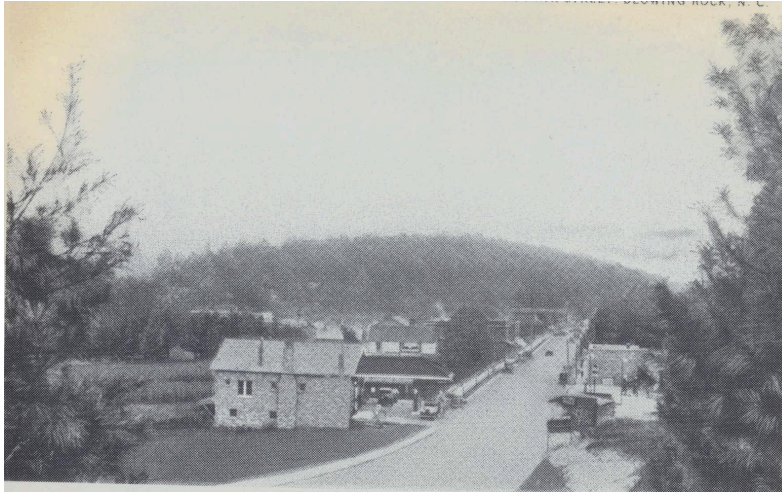


Rabey's Drug Store, Holhouser General Store, the Blowing Rock Bank, numerous boarding houses for summer cottagers, and a barbershop across from the Watauga Hotel to name just a few early Blowing Rock businesses and structures. Of course, multiple historic buildings still remain along this central street. The Martin house, the Schneck house, the Reeves house, Rumble Memorial Presbyterian

Church, Blowing Rock Methodist Church, St. Mary's of the Hills Episcopal Church, the 1888 Museum, and several historic cottage homes are just some of the historic buildings that can be found along on Main Street. The fire of 1923 led to an era of modernization for Blowing Rock with businesses largely choosing to construct with stone and brick to avoid another devastating fire. (Above images: Main Street circa 1890s).

One of the most significant changes to Main Street occurred shortly after Blowing Rock gained its status as a town in 1889. The notion of stock laws was a hotly debated topic

amongst cottagers and Blowing Rock residents throughout the 1890s. Proposed stock laws would force local farmers to keep their livestock fenced in rather than letting their chickens, hogs, and cattle roam freely, as was a common practice at the time. Enforcement of stock laws would force farmers with little land to look for work elsewhere



and demand that farmers with land spend a hefty amount of money on proper fencing. The lack of stock laws in Blowing Rock however led to Main Street being littered with manure and sometimes clogged with various roaming animals. The Ordinances of 1896 required farmers to fence in their livestock and this decision was again reaffirmed in 1900 and 1901

in township and county votes respectively. The decision to enforce stock laws would forever change Blowing Rock and Main Street and further paved the way for the village to transform from an agrarian community to a resort town. (Above image: Main Street circa 1910s. Image below: Cars lining Main Street circa 1930s).

Following the enforcement of stock laws, town officials decided it was time to clean up Main Street. In 1912 Mayor Sudderth enacted a building code requirement that any construction that would take within 30 feet of a public street needed licensing before building could commence. The building code was in response to a litany of ramshackle shacks and other deteriorating buildings that could be found along Main Street at this time. The mayor

had these dilapidated buildings condemned and compensated the owner's for their loss of property. Sanitation and road improvement remained hotly debated topics in



Blowing Rock. In 1915 sawdust sidewalks were introduced to the town's roads and in 1919 Mayor Grover Robbins attempted to improve the village's roads with the aid of a road work bond but a majority of the town were staunchly against the idea. A Charlotte visitor to Blowing Rock was quoted at the time as saying, "Maybe the infection [of progress] will someday reach Blowing Rock...But the day we know is far distant when



Blowing Rock will make "boast" of paved streets, for then a glory of the town would have disappeared. One pleasant occupation always provided for the visitors is the flopping down on some wayside bench or chair and

shaking the sand from the shoe. What would life amount to in Blowing Rock if that entertaining diversion should be withdrawn from the people? Why, lots of folks would get mad, say it is not the same old Blowing Rock at all, and swear to never go back there again." (Above image: Downtown Blowing Rock circa 1900. Below image: Folks enjoying Main Street circa 1970s).

Improvements to Main Street were made in 1924 when the road was widened and graded though this decision was also not an easy one for many villagers. At the time, Main Street was flocked on both sides with beautiful maple trees that had been planted in the 1870s. Widening Main Street would mean that the old maples would have to go but as automobiles had become more commonplace, updating Main Street was a necessity. As the 20th century went on and the popularity of the automobile only continued to increase,



road improvements to Main Street and other Blowing Rock roads were made making the town even more accessible for visitors and residents.



Main Street has seen many businesses come and go but at its heart it remains the same central hub of Blowing Rock that it has always been. (Top left image: Main Street during the Christmas season.

Image via VisitNC.com. Bottom left image: Savor Blowing Rock lines the busy street in 2019. Image via HCPress.com. Bottom right photo: People sitting on the benches at Memorial Park with a view of Main Street. Image via HighCountryVisitorsGuide.com).

