

## **Backstory: Green Park**

Have you noticed that grand hotel off the Lenoir Turnpike/Highway 321? If you haven't yet had a chance to visit or stay at the historic Green Park Inn you might want to stop by to see firsthand an integral part of Blowing Rock's history. The hotel is located in the Green Park Historic District of Blowing Rock. The Green Park Historic District is a



national historic district and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The Green Park Historic District boasts some 46 buildings and several sites some of which include: The Blowing Rock attraction, Mt. Bethel Reformed Church, the James Ross Cannon House, the David Ovens Cottage, the

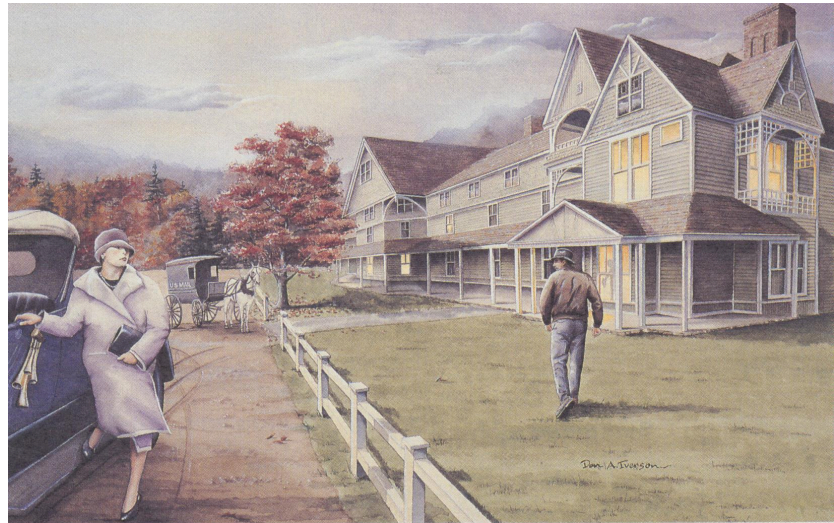
Blowing Rock Country Club Golf Course, the Blowing Rock Reception Center and Gift Shop, and the Green Park Inn. (Above image: The Green Park Inn circa 1920s).

Once a separate town, Green Park was annexed by the town of Blowing Rock in November of 1926 officially making it part of Blowing Rock proper. Green Park's story does not begin in 1926 but rather in the latter half of the 19th century. The first tourists to the Blowing Rock area were summer cottagers who were intrigued by the area's breathtaking views and mild summer climate. Some of the first cottages dedicated to these sightseeing visitors could be found in Green Park. It was only natural that this area would be the optimal spot for a grand hotel.

By the late 1800s Green Park and Blowing Rock were established vacationing destinations. The Watauga Hotel was the first hotel in the area, opening its doors to guests on July 1, 1884. On June 17, 1889 The Blowing Rock Hotel officially opened and by the summer of 1891 the "Grand Dame of the High Country", the Green Park Inn had opened its magnificent doors. The Green Park Inn was founded by the Green Park Company which consisted of three businessmen from Lenoir, headed by Major George Washington Findlay Harper, a veteran of the American Civil War. An April article from the *Lenoir News* stated, "The Green Park Hotel at Blowing Rock is finished on the outside and is an imposing looking building. Work is progressing upon it and it will soon

be completed and richly furnished. There will not be a finer hotel in the South. It will have 60 rooms, each of which will be furnished with an electric bell and with water from a complete system of waterworks. There will be fireplaces in every room.”

Situated on the Eastern Continental Divide, the original building for the hotel was over 73,000 square feet and consisted of three levels. The Green Park Inn featured a billiard room, bowling alleys, a shooting gallery, a tennis court, a ballroom, a restaurant, and interestingly enough the hotel also



housed the area’s first post office, complete with a telegraph for public use. The Green Park Inn attracted a wide variety of new faces to the Blue Ridge and was the place to stay for those visiting Blowing Rock. Eleanor Roosevelt, Annie Oakley, J.D. Rockefeller, Herbert Hoover, Calvin Coolidge, Margaret Mitchell, and English rock band The Smiths are among some of the famous names who stayed at the Green Park Inn. (Above image: A painting by artist Don Iverson of the Green Park Inn circa 1930s).

An employee of the Green Park Inn from 1916 to 1934, Vickie Sylvia stated, “We were all sort of backward hillbillies then. Hadn’t had a chance to meet people much. The hotel was all different then too. The guests came from the Carolinas, mostly from Charlotte. They came in the spring and stayed until fall. They brought trunks of clothes and some even brought nurses for their children. They didn’t zip up the highway then either.



People took the train to Lenoir and were met there by buggies, surreys, and hacks. Wagons would carry the luggage. It was a pretty slow and rough trip up the mountain in those days.” While the hotel was not nearly as easily accessible then as it is now it drew a multitude of visitors despite an arduous journey to get



to its doors. Thankfully the advent of the automobile and work on the turnpike (U.S. Highway 321) would open up Green Park and Blowing Rock to an even greater number of people as the 20th century progressed. (Above image: The Green Park Inn circa 1970s)

The Green Park Inn was an economic powerhouse for Blowing Rock and Green Park. The Inn's restaurant had its stock of beef supplied by area local, Will Craig. Various produce from Watauga County farmers ranging from fruit and vegetables to chopped wood and flowers were regularly brought in for the operation of the Inn and its restaurant. The hotel even briefly had its own farm for dairy and produce that was managed by the Inn's employees. The Green Park Inn was not just an economic boost for the local community but also a popular gathering spot due to its weekly dances (held every Saturday night!) and the Green Park area also hosted what would be the precursor to the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show.

In the 1920s the hotel underwent major renovations adding a three and a half story block to the south side of the building, the north block was detached and replaced with another three and half story block. While the original hotel was built in a Queen Anne architectural style (often called "Victorian style") these new additions were built in a simpler Colonial Revival style. Green Park Inn would also see additions and/or modifications in the late 1950s,



1977, and an extensive remodel and renovation in 2010. The most recent renovation to the Green Park was perhaps its most important since it has aided in the preservation of

this historic building. (Above image: The Green Park Inn as it is today. Image via GreenParkInn.com. Left image: A shot of the interior of the Green Park. Image via GreenParkInn.com). The Green Park Inn changed hands several times throughout its many years in operation and was placed on



the National Register of Historic Places on June 3, 1982. The hotel closed in May of 2009 and was foreclosed on later that same year. New York hoteliers and brothers, Eugene and Steven Irace purchased the Green Park Inn the following May and worked strenuously to modernize, refurbish, and repair the grand dame. These new owners made sure to work directly with the Blowing Rock Historical Society and the State Historic Preservation authority to make sure that Green Park retained its unique charm and history. On October 29, 2010 the Green Park Inn officially reopened its doors to the public once again. The hotel celebrated its 125th anniversary with a gala dinner and dance which hosted descendants of two of the original three founders for Green Park, the Harper family and the Bernhardt family.

The Green Park Inn currently boasts 88 guest rooms, a lobby, a library, a tea-room, two event spaces, a bar and restaurant, a fitness center, and a History Room which details Green Park's fascinating past and present. If you have the chance, a visit to Green Park is like visiting a piece of living history.



Also situated in the Green Park Historic District is the Green

Park Norwood Golf Course. In 1915 David J. Craig, L.P. Henkel, C.V. Henkel, and Rufus L. Patterson provided the 365 acres that would become this beautifully sweeping expanse of land. These men created a nine hole course which was expanded upon in 1922 to a full 18 hole course. In 1973 the Blowing Rock Country Club purchased the course and renovated the original holes. The Blowing Rock Country Club and the golf course operate annually May through October and notably its golf course is the only Seth Raynor golf course in all of North Carolina.



While Green Park is no longer its own town, this portion of Blowing Rock retains its own unique charm and history. The story of Blowing Rock cannot be told without the

story of Green Park. (Above image left and right: The golf course at Green Park. Images via [BlowingRockCountryClub.net](http://BlowingRockCountryClub.net)).