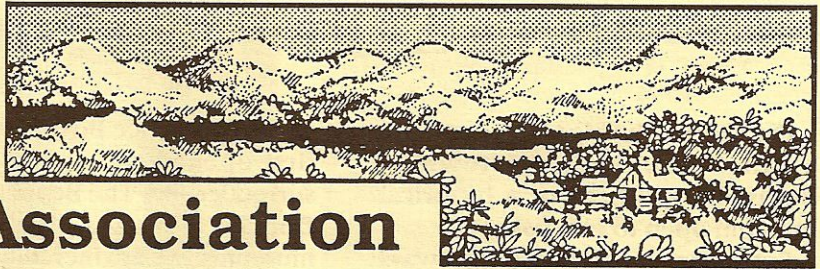


ESTATOE

Quarterly Newsletter

Yancey History Association



Volume XIII, No. 2

Preserving Our Appalachian Heritage

May 1998

Interpretive Historic One Act Presentations

May 29th and 30th "NANCE DUDE"

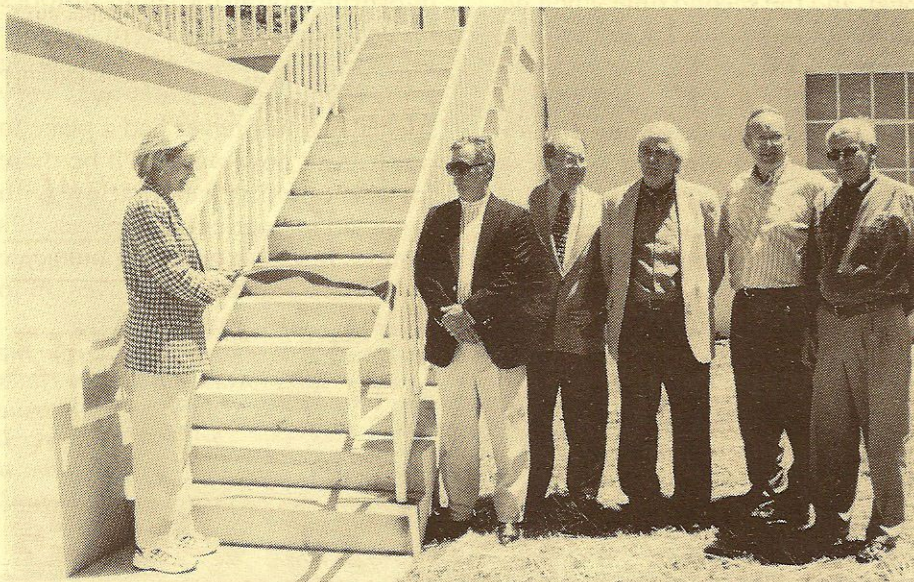
This poignant play, set in the mid to late 1800's, is based on a historical character as seen by Western NC playwright and storyteller, Gary Carden. At age 65 Nance Dude was sent to the state penitentiary for fifteen years for the death of her 2-year-old granddaughter. After leaving prison she spent the rest of her life scratching out a meager living selling pitch-pine kindling logs to tourists until her death at 104 years of age.

The play gives the audience an in depth look at the life of this common Civil War era woman who attempts to escape the drudgery of the time only to find herself caught between passion and evil. Mrs. Westall has appeared in numerous Parkway Playhouse and Burnsville Little Theater productions since her retirement from teaching Drama and English at Mountain Heritage High School. Directed by Bill Dryer.

June 26th and 27th "A FINAL FAREWELL"

The play, set in May of 1865, finds John Wesley McElroy preparing to make his final departure from the home that he built in the 1840's. Faced with possible retribution for his command as Brigadier General of the NC Home Guard, during a war that he personally opposed, McElroy reflects back on the happy times that included his family and his role in the formation and growth of Yancey County.

Lloyd Bailey has done the extensive research for this play. Jim Priesmeyer has written the play with editing support from a half dozen Theater friends. Jim will also perform the part of McElroy under the direction of H.F. Smith. Although usually found back stage or directing Jim has appeared on stage both professionally and as an amateur. There is no set Admission charge - Donations will be requested and greatly appreciated.



HISTORY ASSOCIATION MEETING

The next meeting of the Yancey History Association will be held on Saturday, June 5, at 6:30 p.m. The location will be the auditorium of the Bee Log Elementary School.

The topic will be the history of the group of buildings at Higgins, NC, in Egypt Township. As one travels down Cane River on Highway 19-W, there appears on the right, a remarkable complex of stone buildings, including the Holland Memorial Church, the Kirksedge Cottage, and the Markle Building.

Our guest will be Olen Randolph, who grew up in the area and saw the buildings being constructed.

The beautiful Markle building, erected in 1931, has served as a community center, school for handicrafts, public school (while the Bee Log School was being rebuilt following a fire), and a medical center.

The related crafts store has had some distinguished shoppers, including Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt.

Learn, as well, about the old water driven mill that stood on the river, and hear some amusing stories about events nearby.

As always, our meetings are informal and open to whomever would like to attend.

If anyone has information about this complex of buildings, and would like to share it at this meeting, they are welcome to do so.

Copies of old newspaper articles, and a brochure from the Markle Crafts Building will be distributed to those who are present.

Kaye Meyer from the NC Department of Cultural Resources cuts the ribbon opening the Museum portion of the Museum Visitor Center Complex. Jim Priesmeyer YHA Executive Director, NC State Representative Mitch Gillespie, John Doyle, YHA President, Yancey County Commissioner Billy Ray Bailey and Burnsville Mayor Marvin Holland.

A House Full Of History

By Perry Young

On May 15, the big white house on a hill overlooking the town of Burnsville will become a historical museum open to everyone.

But, to me, the old house has always been historic in the most poignant personal way. My father, who was not a sentimental man, would suddenly choke with emotion when I would ask him about the time his family lived in the house. Tears would come to his eyes as he recalled the death of his younger sister and older brother. He could not bear to talk about the death of his beautiful mother, Virginia Loretta Dellinger Young, in the front room of the old house. He was 13, his youngest brother was only six that fateful day October 10, 1904.

Three of them died of typhoid fever and the others apparently came close to dying. They had moved from the family home up on Bolen's Creek—a two story log house covered in clapboard siding, which still stands. Apparently they were trying to get away from the highly contagious disease which caused a slow and hideous death. But, sadly, the disease came with them to the big rented house in Burnsville.

After the death of the beloved mother of 13, the entire family moved across the mountains onto several hilltop farms in Woodfin, where Virginia Young's 53 grandchildren were all raised. They brought with them the mother's pedal organ and side saddle and a big calendar clock and the painful memories of the dread disease that had almost wiped them out. It is a mere footnote to the history of that old house, but to his credit, the new museum's director Jim Priesmeyer was fascinated with the details and wanted me to write down everything I knew about it. He is a rare historian who appreciates that real history is not just concerned with the exotic lives of the rich and famous, but also with the daily dramas of families like yours and mine.

Having worked for the N.C. Department of Archives and History

at the Zeb Vance Birthplace when it first opened and at the Civil War surrender site, The Bennett place, in Durham, I know a bit about house museums. We are incredibly lucky in Yancey County to have one of the most creative and imaginative museum programs I have ever heard of. With an extensive background in the theater, Priesmeyer plans to literally bring the past to life at the Rush Wray Museum of Yancey History. The museum bears the name of my cousin, the late owner of the NuWray Inn, Rush Wray, whose daughter gave the money to buy the old house more than 10 years ago—and without which we would never have had a museum in Burnsville.

Progress was slow and money was always scarce, but a steadfast group of local people held to the dream that we would finally have a place to showcase our history. In the spacious yard where my daddy played as a child, Priesmeyer will stage living history exhibits of everything from quilting and weaving to apple butter making. Inside the house, there are 30 different exhibit cases that will tell the area's history from the prehistoric native Americans to the house's most recent resident, Winnie Lou Wray. They have Thomas Wolfe's signature not once but twice in the old register from the NuWray Inn—once during his first visit home, eight years after publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*, and the second time when he was subpoenaed as a witness in a local murder trial.

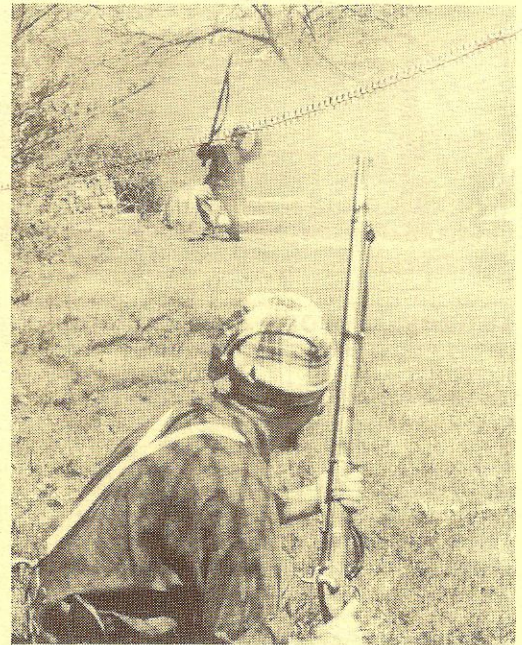
As people began to hear about it, they are taking pride in our history and donating all kinds of priceless furnishings and artifacts to the museum's collections. Recently, a Yancey farmer unearthed two prehistoric soapstone bowls, one of them 58 inches around, and these will be part of the museum's vast collection on the Native Americans who inhabited the area before the European settlers first crossed the Blue Ridge in the late 1700s. Ten years ago, these pieces would have ended up in Raleigh or Chapel Hill.

To me, the most exciting part of Priesmeyer's plan for the museum is series of original readings and plays that dramatize historic events, drawing on old letters and other documents. The museum will also serve as a home base for the re-enacted Company I, 58th North Carolina (Confederate) Troops. This is only fitting since the house's original owner was John McElroy, who held the rank of Brigadier General in command of the home guard that defended the area from the Union troops just over the mountains in Tennessee.

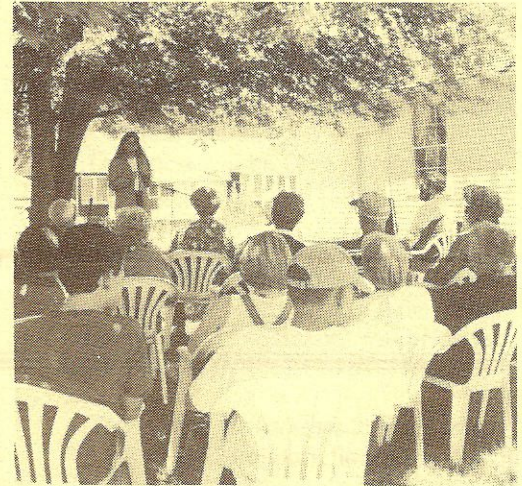
When Priesmeyer told me about plans to commemorate the "Battle of Burnsville," using the Confederate re-enactors, I cautioned him that there was also heavy Union support in the area. Not to worry, he explained with a knowing grin. He was way ahead of me. The history of that old house not only involved the area's most prominent Confederate, it was also the home of the most prominent Union man, Captain William Moore, after the war when Moore served as a state senator. And, you guessed it, even this aspect of our history will be featured in the exhibits at the Rush Wray Museum.

When I asked Priesmeyer if he'd be interested in what little I know about my family's stay in the house, he said, of course. In fact, he hopes to eventually have a reading room with information on all the family histories in that whole area. All of us who know and love Yancey have long known that our history was very special—we just never had a place to put it. And now we do. I'll be there for the opening celebration with some sad memories from my family's history, but with great joy and pride in the new museum that lives on to tell all our histories.

*Reprinted from the
Asheville-Citizen Times
April 23, 1999 issue
as "WNC history will
be kept alive at
Rush Wray Museum".*



On April 10th Museum Visitors listened to the story of the Battle of Burnsville and watched the reenactors from the NC 58th. (above and right) During the May 15th Opening the BR Boys played a wide range of traditional string instruments. Sheila Adams captivated her audience with stories and song. The new display cases sparked conversation and fond memories (below).



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Estatoee (es-to-toe-e)
Estootowie in early records. A Cherokee place name, shortened to Estatoe/ Estatoah, from which the name Towe or Toe River is derived.

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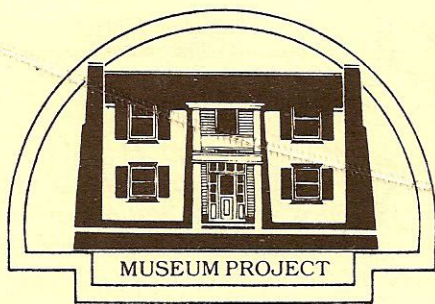
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Yancey History Association

Post Office Box 1088
Burnsville, NC 28714

Make plans now to see
"Nance Dude" May 29th & 30th
and
"A Final Farewell" June 26th & 27th
at The McElroy House
Saturday performances at 8:00 PM
and Sundays at 2:00 PM
(see details inside)