



MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Second Quarter 2018

2018 PROGRAMS

APRIL 16th at the Historic Courthouse in Bakersville – Our 2018 programs began with a discussion of *The Dreaded Thirteenth Tennessee Union Cavalry: Marauding Mountain Men*. The author, Melanie Storie, teaches American History at East Tennessee State University. Despite the snowy weather, a good audience turned out for Ms. Storie's examination of wartime experiences of Unionist soldiers from ETN and WNC.

MAY 21st at the Mitchell Co. Senior Citizens Center – NC Humanities Road Scholar Bob Plott shared the harrowing and hilarious true stories of the breed that his 3rd great-grandfather, George Plott, first brought to this country in the 1700s. Special guest Will Ritter also played traditional music for the audience.

JUNE 18th at the Historic Courthouse – Geologist Alex Glover, who presented the very popular 2016 program on the geology of the Toe River Valley, will join us again this year for an examination of the geology of the Toe River.

JULY 16th – at the Historic Courthouse – the topic will be the Cloudland Hotel, atop Roan Mountain on the NC/TN line, built in 1885 by General John T. Wilder. The Cloudland is the subject of the Historical Society's 2018 Commemorative Christmas Ornament, seventh in the series. Ornaments will be available for sale.

AUGUST 20th – Talented local musician Will Ritter will present a program on traditional mountain music. In 2015, Will thrilled the MCHS audience by playing several instruments and singing Appalachian music.

SEPTEMBER 17th – the final regular program of 2018 will find us in Spruce Pine, at the historic English Inn, to explore the story of Union Col. James M. Gere, who first came to Mitchell County during the Civil War as an escaped POW and later participated in the early Mica industry here.

NOVEMBER, date and time to be announced – TVGS hopes to present a program recognizing the fact that 11/11/2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

Don't forget also that MCHS will again sponsor the annual Apple Butter Festival. This year's date is Saturday, October 13th. Watch for more information to come.



Historical Society's McRae Scholarship Awarded to Amanda Biddix

Mitchell County Historical Society is excited to announce that Amanda Biddix is the recipient of its Third Annual Inez McRae Scholarship. Amanda, the daughter of David and Marsha Biddix of Spruce Pine, is a 2018 graduate of Mitchell High School. Her many academic achievements include a 4.75 GPA, three years of the President's Award for Academic Excellence, and membership in the National Honor Society. She participated in numerous extracurricular activities, including Marching Band, Concert Band, and Show Choir. She plans to attend UNC Chapel Hill, studying history and archaeology.

MCHS certainly applauds Amanda's talent for history. The past three summers she participated in the Joara Archaeological Field School near Morganton, where a Spanish fort established in 1567 by Juan Pardo is being excavated. Amanda has competed in National History Day and the National History Bee, and she won first place in the Mitchell County Historical Society's Annual History Bee, High School division, in 2018.

Of her compelling interest in historical enquiry, Amanda says, "One of the beauties of research is that conducting research almost always leads to more research. Once you enjoy the reward of finding one clue, you are



presented with another, and so you dive back into another book or paper or website that has more information. It's a never-ending cycle and one that never fails to intrigue me."

The scholarship honors Inez McRae, founding member, anchor, and guiding force of Mitchell County Historical Society. Inez taught school for many years in Mitchell County, so it is quite fitting that our annual scholarship bears her name. Inez currently lives in Winston-Salem.

The MCHS scholarship is awarded to a high school senior from Mitchell County who demonstrates an interest in Appalachian studies, including, but not limited to history, music, art, folk culture, and economic or community development. The student selected demonstrates a desire to pursue this interest at a higher educational level and express a desire to eventually live and work within Appalachia.



MITCHELL COUNTY'S FIRST GOVERNMENT

Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions were the governing authorities in North Carolina counties as early as 1670. "Pleas" referred to common law, while "Sessions" had jurisdiction over criminal cases such as misdemeanors and lesser felonies. The County Court, as it was usually called, consisted of Justices of the Peace recommended by the county's Assemblymen and appointed by the governor. Appointments were for life on good behavior, and at least three had to be present to hold court four times during the year (each quarter). Call sessions were held on certain occasions. The Court could try most civil cases and certain criminal cases, and it had jurisdiction over orphans and slaves.

For many years, the Court appointed nearly all the county officers, including sheriff, constables, rangers, inspectors, coroners, registers, surveyors, wardens of the poor, and various commissioners. It also levied taxes, saw to the probate of wills and the administration of estates, provided for widows, appointed overseers to maintain established roads and commissions to lay out new ones, regulated mills, bridges, and ferries, and granted licenses to distill or sell alcoholic beverages. Obviously, the County Court performed not only judicial function, but legislative and executive as well.

Records reveal that Mitchell's first County Court was held on Monday, 3 June 1861. The Minutes begin, "Be it remembered that a Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions is

this day opened and held for the County of Mitchell, at Eben Childs, under an Act of the General Assembly passed at the Session of 1860-1861.” Justices of the Peace prior to Mitchell’s formation, Tilmon Blalock, David Davenport, J.C. Green, W.W. Buchanan, T.M. Sparks, Levi Chandler, S.J. Buchanan, J.C. Howell, and J.B. Palmer, were present, as were newly sworn J.P.’s M.D. Wiseman, Leonard Gurley, Moses Young, and S.M. Collis.

The first order of business was to put in place county officers:

- J.H. Green – Clerk of Court, who was directed to purchase books for his office
- A.A. Wiseman – Sheriff
- Alfred M. Erwin of McDowell County – Solicitor
- John Ellis – Register
- W.G. Wiseman – Coroner
- Levi Chandler and J.B. Marler – Surveyors
- John C. Keener – Trustee

Sheriffs and other county officials were required to provide bonds; for Sheriff Wiseman, there were three \$10,000 bonds, with J.W. Wiseman, A. Wiseman, Thomas J. Wiseman, Leonard M. Gurley, J.C. Blalock, James G. Wiseman, and David Davenport as securities, while Clerk Green’s \$5000 bond was secured by Jesse Blalock, J.C. Green, T.M. Sparks, and Tilmon Blalock.

Minutes for the first governing body of Mitchell County adjourn with plans to meet “the 10th Monday after the 4th Monday in June 1861” at the Baptist Meeting House on Bear Creek.

Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions continued all powerful until 1868, when they were abolished by the new State Constitution. The void created at the county level was filled by the system of boards of Commissioners, much the system still used in North Carolina counties today. Usually popularly elected, Commissioners were assigned the power to levy county taxes and direct county finances as the County Court had done before.

MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HOURS: WEDS. – SAT., 10 TO 4