

From the Beginning

By Pat Johnson

Asheville Harmony Village (AHV) in West Asheville sits on a hill overlooking Old Haywood Road. Eons ago these lands formed mountains, valleys and rivers. In short, it was a wilderness of trees and paths created by large animals such as buffalo and elk roaming from one feeding ground to the next. Indians followed the paths also searching for food and sometimes camped beside them. Gradually the paths became mountain trails for the Cherokees and later for the settlers and pioneers. One path well documented by Dr. Gaillard Tennent in *The Indian Path in Buncombe County* runs very close to our current Old Haywood Road. (See map in slide show).

Improved Roads and Settlers

After the Indian wars, more settlers came and roads improved but travel remained difficult. Western NC remained isolated and remote for many years. Still as more settlers came, the year 1787 saw the founding of Asheville but the west side of the French Broad River was still wilderness and rugged mountains. By 1792 the legislature had enacted laws creating Buncombe County. Encompassing most all of the present day western NC counties, it was commonly referred to as the “State of Buncombe” or simply “Buncombe”.

Buncombe Turnpike

In 1828, a turnpike road from Saluda Gap by way of Warm Springs (later called Hot Springs) to the TN line opened. Spanning 75 miles running along the east side of the French Broad River, it gave access to western NC for commerce and development. Thriving trade resulted when farmers in KY and TN drove hogs, cattle, other stock and fowl down the turnpike to SC and GA plantation markets. A series of inns and “stands” offered food and overnight accommodations for men and animals. Known as the “drover road”, it lasted until the railroads opened after the Civil War.

Sulphur Springs

The Indians knew of some springs west of the French Broad that had curative powers and they shared this belief with the settlers. One day Sam, a slave and Dr. Robert Henry found the series of springs. Testing out to be sulphur, the water tasted cold and pleasant but had a slight rotten-egg odor. They were known to be excellent for dyspepsia and increasing the appetite. (See pictures in slide show.) Reuben Deaver, Dr. Henry’s son-in-law built a wooden hotel above the springs in 1834 that could accommodate 200 guests plus servants and carriages. This complex became the catalyst for Asheville becoming a resort town. Others with TB or breathing problems also came here thinking the fresh mountain air would help them. After it burned down in 1861, Edwin Carrier built a larger brick hotel in the same location called Carrier’s Springs and later Belmont Hotel. It too burned down in 1892.

West Asheville

Edwin Carrier, a lumber tycoon purchased 1200 acres on the west side of the French Broad River and built 2-story brick buildings along Haywood Road as well as laying out streets with close residential lots but still big enough for vegetable gardens, fruit trees and arbors. In 1880, it had 4 miles of water front running along the French Broad River east and south. Incorporated in 1889, it was a separate town from Asheville until 1897 and then again from 1913 to 1917. Haywood Road became the gateway to the west since it was the only road heading west toward the GA

line. Later new bridges and roads directed traffic away from it. Today Haywood Road and West Asheville still boast a 1950s Main Street feel where residents walk to restaurants, stores and services. Unpretentious and comfortable, it offers homes for “just folks”, the thrifty, salt-of-the-earth type of middle class people who make good neighbors.

Railroads in Western NC

The Civil War left Buncombe drained of economic resources with rundown farms, homes in disrepair and lost stock. So the late 1860s were a time of starting over. Great engineering skill and hard labor from incarcerated men brought the railroad across the Blue Ridge and into the mountains. Completed in 1880, it marked the beginning of another era. Population increased and farm value rose significantly. Asheville boomed but much natural beauty was lost due to clear cutting of the forests. To this day much debate continues on finding the right balance for developing and building on one hand and protecting our beautiful mountains and forests on the other.

The Indian Path Revisited

Obviously with all the development and improved roads for wheeled vehicles, the old Indian path fell into disuse and can hardly be found today. The choice of Asheville as the county seat rather than the more desirable land along the path also added to its demise. Legend notes this choice had to do with a well-known distillery on the west side of the French Broad River. Gradually the path grew into a forest except where locals used sections of it as farm roads.

Asheville Harmony Village Site

At the northern end of the current Old Haywood Road, stands a marker for Sulphur Springs located southeast near Asheville School. A little further south and east of the other end of the road lies the remains of the old Indian path. In April 1885, R. B. Taylor purchased a large tract of land including the AHV site and possibly the old path. At one point, the land housed a blacksmith shop along with a home, fields and other farm essentials. Bessie Ballard bought it in 1921 and raised her granddaughter, Linda Branch and her brother there. (Linda’s mother died when she was 2 years old.) As small farmers, they raised chickens and vegetables selling what the family didn’t need to local markets.

In 1941, Robert Taylor and Russell Murphy established Taylor and Murphy Construction Company on this land. Located today at 1121 Brevard Road in West Asheville, the general contracting firm specializes in site preparation, heavy highway and bridge construction as well as civil structural aspects of industrial, retaining wall and railroad construction.

The property changed hands again in 1966 when Hilda Ballard purchased it. It remained with her until 2005 when Linda and Herbert Branch became the next owners. In spring 2008, developer Art Carter obtained the site from the Branches and planned to build small houses for seniors wanting to downsize.

AHV Development

In April 2008, Kathy Beveridge, a local realtor contacted Mr. Carter about considering Co Housing for his site. Marianne Kilkenny, Jean Marie Luce and others encouraged this idea. Win Holcomb became our “green” consultant and efforts to start a new Co Housing development

began in earnest. Franz Staugler , Pat Collins, Carol Kendig and Pat Johnson among others joined in to work with the developer in making numerous adjustments to ensure the best possible use of the land. We wanted to save trees and not disturb the land unnecessarily. We also began drafting a mission statement and core values for our life together. We listed the new community in the Intentional Directory databank and in local alternative newspapers and magazines. While meeting weekly at Greenlife Grocery Café to chat, inform and gather input from prospective members, we shared our vision of this new Co Housing community. We were fortunate to get a \$500.00 grant to further advertise our forming group from Elder Spirit Community in Abington, VA. We are deeply grateful to all who have contributed to this project.

In September 2008, Jean Marie Luce led a blessing ceremony for the site. We asked for good fortune, luck and favor for all involved with this project including the land, animals, plants workers and humans who have joined us and those who will join us in the future. After clearing the underbrush, the site was ready for our fire circles that began in October 2008. Once more, adjustments to better suit the land topography were needed so that we don't need to bring in any fill for the site. Now we're ready to start construction and the developer will built units as they are reserved. We held our first focus group to get feedback on our final preconstruction plans on March 19, 2009.

We've explored the timeline history of a rich, varied and beautiful landscape. From the Indians to the settlers and on to the rich tycoons and all others in-between, we've seen how enduring this land and its people are. I'm inviting you to explore becoming the next pioneering settler and help write the next chapter of an ongoing legacy near an ancient path first traveled by animals and Indians. The wheeled vehicles will continue to roll along and farm roads still dot the vicinity. Together we can create new life on the hill overlooking Old Haywood Road near an old Indian path in Buncombe County, North Carolina. Why not join us on this exciting new adventure?

References

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