
Background

History of Cedar Mountain

The purpose of the following section is to provide a brief history of the Cedar Mountain area and highlight land use patterns and traditions that have shaped this community into what it is today.

Located north of the South Carolina and North Carolina state line, Cedar Mountain lies roughly 10 miles away from downtown Brevard.

Arrowheads, pottery shards and marker trees are evidences that the forests of Cedar Mountain were hunting and gathering grounds for the Cherokee into the early 1800s. The deer and turkey were plentiful. European pioneers began moving through Cedar Mountain in the late 1700s and building homes in the early 1800s. They, and the area known as Cedar Mountain, became entangled in the boundary dispute known as the Walton War. Cedar Mountain was a part of the 12-mile wide strip of land known as the Orphan Strip. The land was given to Georgia by the Federal government in 1802 but by 1811 North Carolina governed the area after an independent survey of the 35th parallel confirmed that the land was a part of NC.¹

Land grants from the 1830s reveal the names of settlers living along the waters of the upper Little River and the headwaters of the Green

River. Micajah Smith Thomas owned much of the acreage along the Little River in today's DuPont State Recreational Forest and lived there with his family. By 1860 he had built the large Buck Forest Hotel, the Little River Turnpike to the hotel and established the first Cedar Mountain Post Office in the hotel. This area was known as Cedar Mountain until the post office was moved after the Civil War. A grist mill was built at Hooker Falls and families with names of Moore, Hamilton, Heath, Hefner, Jones and McGaha are listed on the 1840 census.²



Other families arrived in Cedar Mountain, traveling up the Green River Road and establishing a settlement in the Blue Ridge area, at the end of Reasonover Road. Blue Ridge Baptist Church, according to church records, was established in 1836 on land donated by James Burns, an early

¹ McCrary, Mary Jane. Transylvania beginnings: A History, Southern Historical Press, 1984.

² Tinsley, Jim Bob. Land of Waterfalls: Transylvania County, NC, self-published, 1988

landowner. Schools were built, at different times, near Laurel Creek, Burnt Mountain, Mine Mountain, and the Little River Bridge.³

The Jones Gap Turnpike from SC was built in the 1840s and became another conduit into Cedar Mountain and to the Caesar's Head Hotel. The



Johnstone or French Broad Turnpike offered travelers and drovers access from Brevard and through the Dunn's Rock and Loftis communities. Drovers from Tennessee and NC traveled these turnpikes, as well as the Little River Turnpike and Green River Road, with their pigs, cattle, sheep, turkeys, and other animals on their way to the SC markets. Travelers came to the Caesar's Head Hotel and then on to the DeGower Hotel on the Johnstone Turnpike about two miles from the state line. This Victorian style hotel was built in 1884 and was destroyed by fire in 1891. Parties that had traveled from Caesar's Head to the DeGower would then often continue to the Buck Forest or Thomas Hotel and enjoy the waterfalls of Little River. This tourism benefitted the community in

the mid to late 1800s, providing income for local carpenters, farmers, cooks, guides, contractors,

etc. Newspapers in SC often shared the reports of these trips. The Branson Business Directories of these years report that farming was the main occupation in Cedar Mountain with the occasional merchant, blacksmith, wheelwright, grist or saw mill operator

and postmaster listed.⁴

The general stores, post offices, churches, schools, and chapels were located on or near the turnpikes that brought traffic through Cedar Mountain. After the Civil War, families from SC came to Cedar Mountain seeking the clean air and water for health issues such as tuberculosis and many of them built summer residences that are still visited in the summer by their descendants. Hwy 276 or the Geer Highway was built in the late 1920s and early 1930s, leaving only glimpses of the old turnpike road. It provided faster and more comfortable travel through the community, over Caesar's Head to Greenville, SC and into Brevard.⁵

Nestled along U.S. Route 276, Greenville Highway, Cedar Mountain has long been

³ Stinson, Vera Jones. *Stumbling Blocks Were Stepping Stones in Appalachia*, self-published

⁴ Branson, L. (Levi), (1890). *Branson's NC business directory*, Raleigh, NC, 1890

⁵ Stinson, Vera Jones. Interviews, 2011

recognized as a convenient retreat from the harsher piedmont area weather for upstate South Carolina residents.⁶

Transylvania County has always hosted seasonal visitors due largely to the favorable climate and pristine natural recreation alternative, and Cedar Mountain traditionally served the community in a similar fashion. While not as popular as the Lake Toxaway or Dunn's Rock areas before the Civil War, following the War Between States summering in Transylvania County become a popular vacation alternative again and Cedar Mountain began to draw its fair share of visitors.⁷

As a result of its proximity to North Carolina's southern border, most of Cedar Mountain's visitors, and part-time residents where from Greenville, Spartanburg, Aiken, and Charleston, South Carolina.⁸ With an elevation above 2,000 feet, these South Carolinians found the summer climate of the quaint mountain community much more hospitable than the harsh South Carolina summers.

The community continued to grow, catering to their visitors and part-time residents through the 19th and early 20th century with the construction of smaller homes along Greenville Highway as well as along the highway's subsidiary

rural roads. The homes built in the community were traditionally smaller than those vacation homes found in Lake Toxaway and other vacation communities in Transylvania County. Owners of these homes would often leave the residences in their families passing the properties down generation by generation.⁹



Being established as a true summer destination, the community became an optimal location for those interested in opening summer and seasonal camps of all kinds. Evidence of the earliest documented campers to the area comes in an issue of the Sylvan Valley News dated August 20, 1909. Organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America and Upstate South Carolina Y.M.C.A branches would use the area for organized camping trips through 1910s and 1920s. The first

⁶ Laura Phillips-Deborah Thompson - Transylvania County Joint Historic Preservation Commission in Association with Marblehead Pub. – 1998

⁷ Thompson, Marcy. "Cedar Mountain: A True Summer Community – Cedar Mountain NC." Picturing the Past Blog. April 7, 2014. Accessed June 13, 2020. <http://nchistoryroom.blogspot.com/search?q=cedar+mountain+>

⁸ Thompson, "Transylvania County"

⁹ Thompson, "Transylvania County"

traditional summer camp, Camp Comfort, in the area operated from 1922 through 1926.¹⁰



Other traditional camps to the area included Camp Burgiss Glenn, the Elks Camp, Harmony Farm, Camp Socareda among others. Other camp establishments that would not be considered traditional to today's standards that were popular in the area included those that were provided by employers for their employees. The owners of textile mills such as Vitor Monaghan Mills, Piedmont Mills, and Judson Mills would acquire property to establish a cost-effective retreat for their millworkers and families. These mill camps operated from the mid-1920s

throughout the early 1950s and Camp Reasonover, owned by Victor Monaghan Mills, would eventually be sold to the South Carolina Education Association in 1954 to serve as a camp for teachers and students up until 1969.¹¹

One of the well-known boys and girls camps in the community, Summits Camp, sat on 1,400 acres and would eventually be purchased by DuPont to serve as the location for the largest industrial growth seen in the small mountain community to this date.¹² At its peak production DuPont employed more than 1,500 hundred people and sat on 10,000 acres that spanned into neighboring Henderson County.¹³

The property for the plant was originally purchased in 1956 to serve as the location of the first full-scale silicon plant in the United States, the climate and clean fresh air was ideal for the materials production. Unfortunately, demand for silicon dropped drastically shortly after the plant opened, so ownership transitioned the facility into the production of photographic materials, such as x-ray film, in the mid-1960s. Making these products the plant prospered for more than two decades, but as the digital age changed the world, the need for the products the plant produced became more sparse.¹⁴

¹⁰ Thompson, Marcy. "Cedar Mountain Has Been Home to Several Camps." Picturing the Past Blog. July 6, 2015. Accessed June 13, 2020.

¹¹ Thompson, "Cedar Mountain: A True Summer Community"

¹² Thompson, "Cedar Mountain Has Been Home to Several Camps"

¹³ Thompson, Marcy. "DuPont Started As Silicon Plant." Picturing the Past Blog. April 14, 2014. Accessed June 13, 2020. <http://nchistoryroom.blogspot.com/search?q=cedar+mountain+>

¹⁴ Thompson, "DuPont Started As Silicon Plant"

With the drop in demand, DuPont sold the Cedar Mountain facility to Sterling Diagnostic Imaging in 1996. Sterling's ownership of the plant was however short lived, being sold just a few years later to the Agfa Corporation and the doors to the plant were closed for good in 2002.¹⁵



While under the ownership of Sterling Diagnostic Imaging, the state of North Carolina purchased more than 7,000 acres of the remaining DuPont property that DuPont had not sold in the deal with Sterling. This property would become the DuPont State Recreation Forest. Desiring to add highly popular parts of the forest that were included in the Sterling deal, the state of North Carolina also sought to buy property that included Bridal Veil Falls, High Falls and Triple Falls. Sterling chose to instead sell those highly valuable parcels to the Cliffs Communities to be developed as a

high-end residential community that would limit access to the popular natural attractions to residents of the gated community.¹⁶

Urged on by local conservation groups, local political figures, and members of the Transylvania County community to protect this property and maintain public access, Governor Hunt entered negotiation with The Cliffs. After negotiations proved unsuccessful, the state of North Carolina acquired the properties by means of invoking eminent domain in October of 2000 and the popular sites were included into the DuPont Recreational Forest.¹⁷



Today, the forest is home to more than 80 miles of trails that hikers and bikers across the world will travel to enjoy. The DuPont State Forest has become a crucial part of the Cedar Mountain community hosting more than 1,000,000 visitors each year according to Lucia Gerdes, Board President for the Friends of DuPont Forest .

¹⁵ Thompson, "DuPont Started As Silicon Plant"

¹⁶ Thompson, "DuPont Started As Silicon Plant"

¹⁷ Thompson, "DuPont Started As Silicon Plant"

In more recent history, The Cedar Mountain community has become a home to several residential and retirement developments. The Stones Lake Road area contains both summer and year-round homes as well as Faith Chapel, which held its first service in 1938. Sherwood Forest, a part of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, was developed in the early 1960s. In 1939 the Robin Hood Inn was built by Ted

Snyder in the area now known as Sherwood Forest and had a successful season but was destroyed by fire in 1940. More recent residential developments that take advantage of Cedar Mountain's climate and beauty are Sequoyah Woods and Idlewild

As was the case after the Civil War, Cedar Mountain is appealing to those looking to escape into a rural and beautiful natural atmosphere away from the more urban lifestyle or hostile climates.¹⁸

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¹⁸ "The History of Friends of DuPont Forest." Friends of DuPont Forest. Accessed June 13, 2020. <https://www.dupontforest.com/about/history/>