

"Our mission is....to collect, preserve, protect and publicly display materials that are historically significant to Mitchell County...and to make its citizens aware of their heritage."

MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fourth Quarter 2015

We closed out our Events Season with a very successful Apple Butter Festival at the Creek Walk Park in Bakersville....we thought you'd enjoy some of the pix of our great day!





FRONTIER FOOD

**"To them who must plant
There is no season well-defined,
Only doing and planting and birthing
And burying."**

-- Gregory Dykes



For our recipe section this quarter, we decided to include a charming excerpt from a book, which we spied on Inez McRae's coffee table, entitled "Wayfaring Strangers" by Fiona Ritchie and Doug Orr. It discusses the difficulty that our early settlers encountered in growing and harvesting the available food sources in the rugged terrain of the Appalachians and concludes with an old Irish recipe for "Colcannon."

Centuries have passed since pioneer Scots-Irish settlers made their way into the mountain hollows of Appalachia and established their independent lifestyles. When roads and a cash and credit-based economy eventually followed them up into the hills, the need for their self-reliance largely disappeared. Today, people associate old recipes, preserving meats and vegetables, and harvesting wild plants with a childhood visit to granny. The domestic ways of the Scots-Irish pioneers and their neighbors are now found mostly in history books.

Oats were the dietary staple of 17th and 18th century Scots and Irish, and oatcakes, served with greens, were a popular accompaniment to all meals. Oats did not offer such a plentiful yield in the southern Appalachians, however, so the settlers had to adapt their diets and substitute corn as the main crop. Corn cakes or cornbread became standard with meals, supplemented with wild onions and garlic, nettles, dock leaves, sorrel, chickweed, chicory, and many other wild-growing greens. From the Cherokee, they adopted the habit of gathering wild angelica, branch lettuce, poke, ramps, and pigweed to eat with their cornbread, and they also cultivated native squash and sunflowers. The Cherokee also built V-shaped fish traps in the rivers, and the settlers used and maintained these into the 20th century. Cooked salads were served warm or cool, including potato-and- dandelion salad. Beans and potatoes were standard fare in mountain communities from all origins. German settlers introduced sauerkraut and the mountain word "salat." They also introduced the Scots-Irish to liver mush and liver pudding and, along with the English, imported their love of dumplings. The early Scots-Irish pioneers



had to produce everything themselves or gather it in the forests. Hog raising had long been practiced in Scotland, Ulster, and Pennsylvania. In the mountains, they continued mixed livestock farming, also keeping hens and cattle. A vegetable garden was a cornerstone of their smallholdings. Income might eventually be supplemented by male family members finding work down mines or in sawmills, but families had to be essentially self-reliant, making only rare trips to a general store or a trading post. They had crossed vast distance to clear the dense woods and build homesteads. Yet, like the ballads, some settlers held onto recipes they had carried and passed along since their days in Ulster, such as the following recipe for colcannon.

COLCANNON

2 onions

2/3 cup milk

4 large potatoes, boiled

2 parsnips, boiled

Salt and pepper

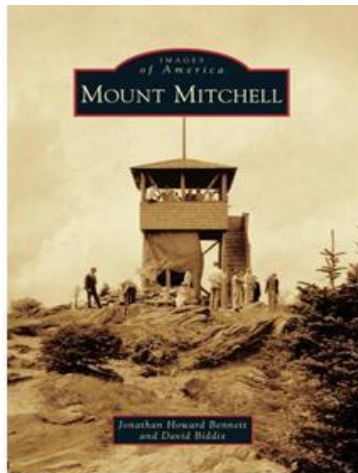
1 cup cooked shredded cabbage

1 tablespoon butter

1 tablespoon minced parsley



Cook the minced onions in the milk until soft. Mash the boiled potatoes and parsnips together, season with salt and pepper. Slowly add the onions and milk, beating well. Combine with the cooked shredded cabbage. Serve garnished with bits of butter and minced parsley.



2016

Please join us in April when we present our **FIRST EVENT** of the season! Our Board Member, David Biddix, has co-authored a new book, *Mount Mitchell*, with Jonathan Howard Bennett, and will tell us some of the amazing history of this magnificent mountain, which holds the title of highest peak east of the Mississippi at 6,600 feet!

"The fog that shrouds the mountain has been measured at times to be as nearly acidic as battery acid.....Thirteen years before he accidentally fell to his death, Elisha Mitchell remarked that the mountain would be "a comfortable place to die." · Mount Mitchell played a surprising role in the Battle of the Atlantic during World War II.....The first commissioner of NASCAR set a speed record for racing to the top of Mount Mitchell."

MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Hours: Weds. – Sat. – 10 to 4pm

MEMBERSHIP: Individual: \$20; Family: \$25