



MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Second Quarter 2017



Historical Society's McRae Scholarship Awarded to Samantha Fortner

Mitchell County Historical Society is excited to announce that Samantha Fortner is the recipient of its First Annual Inez McRae Scholarship. Samantha, the daughter of Larry Scott Fortner of Bakersville and Sheila Howe Fortner of Hendersonville, NC, graduated from Mitchell High School in 2017 at the top of her class. Superlative academics were not Samantha's only achievement; she participated in student government, several sports, and extracurricular activities, as well as working and volunteering in the community. She plans to attend Wake Forest University and hopes to be an elementary teacher.

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, but came back for the Rhododendron Festival, at which Samantha met her for a chat and a photo opportunity.

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.



RIOTS IN BAKERSVILLE?

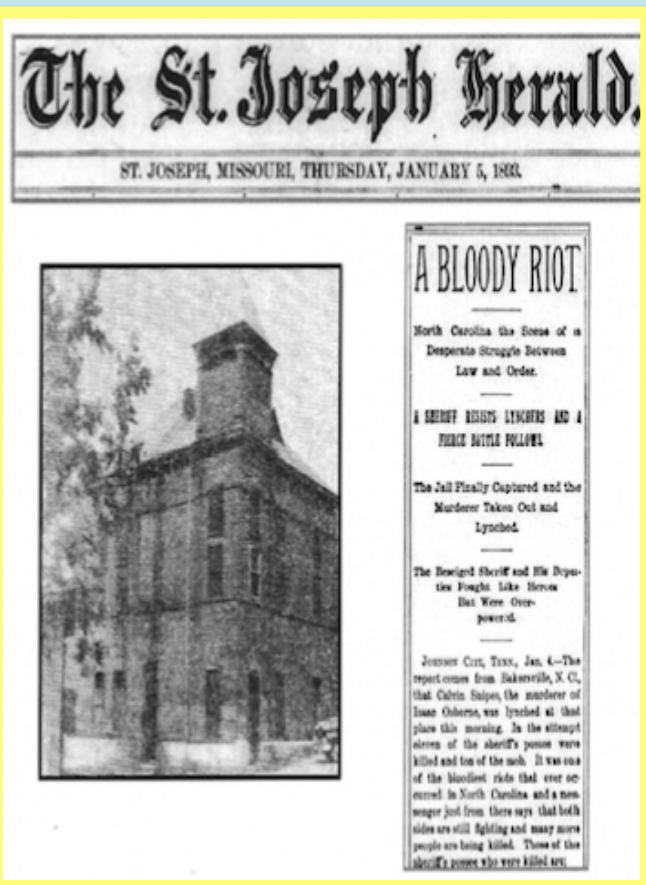
The terrible riot that took so many lives in Bakersville, NC, on January 3, 1893, is rarely mentioned today. Perhaps few even know about it, and those that do just want to forget that awful time. Maybe their relatives were among the mob of “over 500 angry men bent on revenge.” The mob completely overpowered the brave men in law enforcement who killed some 25 of them. But they were no match and after 7 of their number were killed those remaining were not able to keep Calvin Snipes, who had murdered Isaac Osborne, from being taken out into the dense woods and hanged. A posse was formed and 25 more men were killed.

The details above, recounted in the *St. Joseph Telegraph*, went viral, as we would say today, and were included in dozens of newspapers coast to coast. The story even made the *London Times*. While the story was widely circulated, the major reason it is not often discussed today is that the entire episode was a fabrication! Fake news!

Sensation-hungry media were quick to grab onto the story about the “bloodiest battle since the Little Big Horn.” Within 2 days, however, many reporters, to their shock and dismay, discovered that the entire story of “the Riot in Bakersville” was actually “the libelous account by the Bakersville fake.”

The following information about the perpetrator of the hoax is from newspapers of the time. *The Bakersville News* reported: “We have been convinced that no less an individual than J. Wallace Hyams is responsible for the libelous account the Bakersville fake above alluded to.”

J.W., as he was known, was born in Bakersville in 1873, the son of W. S Hyams, Clerk of the Superior Court of Mitchell County. He attended well known private schools in NC, eventually “receiving a most thorough



English education." He studied law with T.A. Love in Bakersville (1892-93) and "would have applied for license to practice law in 1893, but for his tender years."

In January 1893, it was reported that J. W. became City Editor of the *Johnson City Daily Comet*. However, the *Daily Comet* reported 1/24 that "the world's champion liar who victimized the press of the whole country...has skipped the town, leaving his hotel in the lurch to the amount of his board. The report current that he was at any time, and in any way, connected with the *Daily Comet* is untrue," Four days earlier it was reported under the heading, "Good!" that "the originator of the purported Bakersville riot is wearing a sore head tonight, the the result of a fight with Captain H.F. Perry in which Hyams was badly whipped."



In 1894 J.W. became Editor and Proprietor of the *Bakersville Enterprise* and apparently redeemed himself. He was married to "the beautiful and accomplished Nellie G. Bateman of Virginia," and had a son, Carl Gibbons Hyams, born December 1894 and died 3 months after his father. J.W. died on 1/1/1895 and was buried exactly 2 years to the day his elaborate hoax supposedly took place. Father and son are buried in the Historic Bakersville Cemetery.

The Bakersville Enterprise, 1/2/1895, offers this account of his death: "Mr. J. Wallace Hyams, editor and proprietor of the *Bakersville Enterprise*, died at his residence on Hill street, Bakersville, N.C. on January 1st, 1895 at 2:30 p.m. after a painful and lingering illness of several weeks with typhoid fever...buried from the M.E. Church at Bakersville on Jan. 3rd, at 2 p.m. by the Rev. Mr. Anderson, his pastor, attended by a large concourse of mourning friends and relatives. Mr. Hyams was a most brilliant young man, just arrived at manhood's estate." Another newspaper called him a "talented young editor."

From the 5/9/1895 *Morganton Herald*: "Our contemporary, the *Bakersville Enterprise*, has started up again, Good Luck to it." The new editor S.J. Turner, turned editorship over to James Britt in 1896.

If you would like to read more about the so-called riot and its fabrication, locate K.B. and S.R. Whitson's book, *Red Hill: The Untold Story of the Whitson Brothers and the Murder of Kit Byrd*. Copies may be found in the MCHS research room, the Mitchell or Spruce Pine Library, or are available from the authors at 322 Farmer Hollow Road, Clinton, TN 37716.

The Mitchell County Historical Society is pursuing a complete history of Mitchell County newspapers and their editors. We greatly appreciate feedback or additional info about Editors Hyams, Turner, or Britt or J.W.'s wife, Nellie Bateman. Please contact Dr. Daniel Barron at 828-284-1914 or drdanbarron@gmail.com. MCHS is dedicated to the preservation of our county's history. We welcome comments, picture identifications, or questions. Please contact us at 828-688-4371, by email at mitchellnchistory@gmail.com, or visit our website at <http://mitchellnchistory.org>



Plan now to attend the Mitchell County Historical Society's annual APPLE BUTTER FESTIVAL scheduled for Saturday, October 21st. More than 20 vendors of crafts and delicious food will set up at the beautiful Creek Walk in Bakersville, NC. And speaking of delicious, MCHS will also have our apple butter – fresh-made on the site! – for sampling and purchase. We'll see you then!

Mitchell County Historical Society

(located in the Historic Courthouse)

Hours: Weds. – Sat. 10 to 4

POB 651 - Bakersville, NC 28705

828-688-4371

Email: historicmitchellcounty.org@gmail.com

Website: mitchellnchistory.org