

*"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

Third Quarter 2015

### DECORATION DAY

By Rhonda Gunter

**Much of the Mountain South still observes Decoration Day, a tradition since soon after the Civil War; most believe the custom was copied in the North and became our national holiday, Memorial Day.** Most often held in the summer, Decoration Day involves cleaning the cemetery and decorating the graves with flowers. If the graveyard is connected to a church, there might be a religious service, and there is often dinner on the ground. I remember very well Decoration Day in the Green Young Cemetery, held the first Sunday in September.



There were wooden benches under some pine trees, and preachers brought their sermons before the picnic meals were brought out. There's no longer preaching at Green Young, but many churches continue the custom, perhaps combining Decoration with their annual Homecoming.

Graves of the dearly departed may of course be cleaned at any time of the year, and flower arrangements brought to honor and commemorate those passed on, but there's a special effort the day before Decoration. My grandfather cleared the lichens off the headstones and made sure grass hadn't encroached on the markers at the foot of the graves. While he worked, he'd watch us kids and make sure we didn't get too raucous or trample across the graves as we played. That would not have been respectful of the dead.

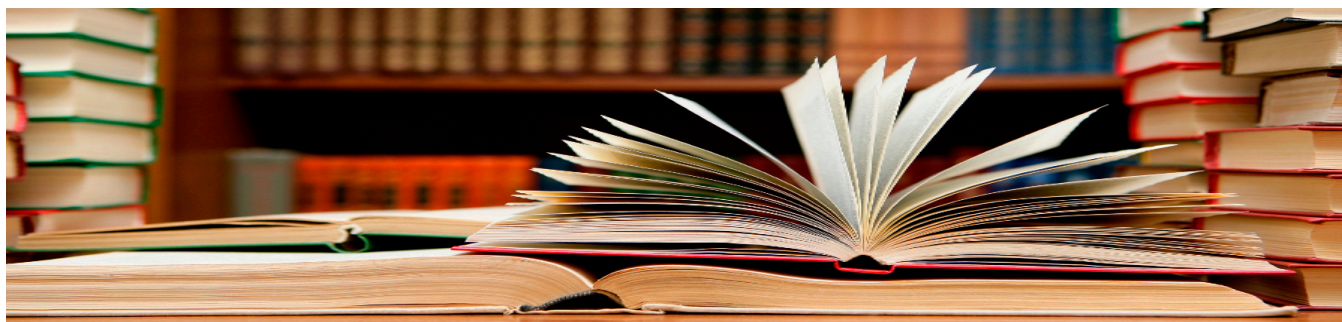
My grandmother's dahlias and gladioli were cut very early Saturday morning and placed in the cellar to keep them from wilting. Then late Saturday afternoon we'd take the flowers to the cemetery and decorate the graves of our loved ones. With the prettiest dahlias, I would make heart designs or crosses on my mother's grave. Another grave decoration custom in the past was flowers made of tissue or crepe paper, but this is no longer seen. And while my aunt still grows a few dahlias, most of the flowers we take to the cemetery are silk arrangements purchased from the florist. Because wreaths of artificial flowers on the graves make it difficult for the lawnmower, most flowers are in "saddle" arrangements atop the headstones.

My grandmother and my aunt would always say we had to make sure there were flowers for the graves of the great-uncles and great-aunts, and for "Tom and Harriet's two little babies that died." **(Con't. Page 2)**

Years later, when I got caught up with genealogy, I made sure a flower was placed on the grave of Reuben Young, my fourth great-grandfather. But too many graves in the cemetery, unfortunately, have no decoration at all – another sign that the older customs are dying out.

Like others in Mitchell County, the Mitchell County Historical Society maintains the time-honored tradition of Decoration Day; every September members gather to clean up the Old Bakersville Town Cemetery, on the hill above the Historic Mitchell County Court House. For many years this cemetery was allowed to remain overgrown, but chainsaws, weed eaters, and rakes were utilized to clear the graves of Mitchell County's esteemed forebears, including David Baker, for whom Bakersville was named.

**Although the Society now has a regular landscaping maintenance program in place, and no one has to bring their rakes or weed eaters, please join us on SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, AT 2:00 PM AT THE BAKERSVILLE HISTORIC CEMETERY FOR A MEMORIAL SERVICE TO CELEBRATE OUR FALLEN HEROES. Please call us at 688-4371 for more information.**



### ***A GENEROUS GIFT***

The Mitchell County Historical Society is the grateful recipient of a very generous donation from Mayland Community College. The Learning Resources Center had a change in its space requirements and weeded out its genealogy and local history collections – and MCHS was the beneficiary! Seventy-seven (77) boxes of books and journals, as well as nineteen (19) shelving units and some furniture, were packed up by the folks in the LRC, Debra, Eric, and Steve, and picked up by MCHS board members Randy McClellan and Bob Broadwater.

The Society has purchased PastPerfect, a museum-cataloguing software, and Board member Rhonda Gunter is working to get the books we received from MCC catalogued and organized. **It will take a bit of time, but before long the Vault adjoining the Society's office in the Historic Court House will be a great place to research your roots or the history of the county.**

Thanks to Dr. John Boyd, MCC President, and Jon Wilmesherr, LRC Dean, for your wonderful generosity. We are so happy you made it possible for these resources to stay in Mitchell County.

## The Spanish in Western North Carolina Revisited

*There was such a great response to our event with Dr. David Moore earlier this summer and further curiosity about the early Spanish in western North Carolina that we decided to present you with a further elaboration and explanation of this relatively unknown historical phenomenon.*

After they conquered the Aztecs in Mexico, the Spanish moved on to North America, which they called “La Floride.” Hernando de Soto explored between 1539 and 1543 from the Gulf of Mexico into the interior, likely passing through or very close to the Toe River Valley. From Santa Elena, a Spanish fort on the SC coast near today’s Parris Island, Captain Juan Pardo set out in another expedition to reach Mexico, but he made it no further than East Tennessee.

Pardo and his 120 men, in January 1567, found the Catawba Indian village Joara on Upper Creek of Catawba River and built a fort nearby. The structures erected were on Indian models, but larger and built with metal tools. Some buildings were used as barracks, and there was also a fortified area. Although only about 2% of the fort has been uncovered, it looks to be the most intact 16<sup>th</sup>-century European fort in eastern North America.

Pardo’s expedition had brought few supplies and relied on the natives for food; they likewise had no women with them, and likely expected the Indians to meet other needs. Joara doubtless grew tired of these demands. In May 1568, Fort San Juan was ambushed and all five buildings were burned; all the soldiers, by some reports, were killed, although some say one soldier, who had an Indian wife, survived.

Some information about the forts has come from Spanish documents, but the bulk of the information has come via archaeology. Since 1986, excavations have been made at what’s called the Berry site in Burke County, 8 miles north of Morganton on Hwy 181. More is being discovered about Fort San Juan and Joara every summer.

Dr. David Moore of Warren Wilson College shared some of these discoveries with the Mitchell County Historical Society when he presented “Discovering Fort San Juan: Sixteenth-Century Spanish Armies and Native American Chiefs in the North Carolina Piedmont,” to a packed room in Spruce Pine Library on Monday, 20 October 2015.

Over eighteen years, Pardo established 6 forts, 2 in SC, 3 in NC, and 1 in TN. These were the earliest European outposts in the interior of what would one day be the United States, pre-dating the 1607 settlement of Jamestown by the English. Had the Spanish attempts succeeded, the character of this nation might have been very different.



Excitement and preparation have begun for our Annual **APPLE BUTTER FESTIVAL** on **OCTOBER 24<sup>th</sup>!!** We have already had requests from local craftspeople to have a vendor table at our event.



If you would like to be a vendor at the Festival, please give us a call at 828-688-4371.

We will have music, food, crafts, and, of course, our **HOMEMADE APPLE BUTTER** being churned before your eyes! Please come and enjoy!!

**MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**11 N. MITCHELL AVE. – BAKERSVILLE, NC**  
**828-688-4371**

**[www.mitchellcountyhistoricalsocietync.com](http://www.mitchellcountyhistoricalsocietync.com)**  
**Email: [historicmitchellcounty.org@gmail.com](mailto:historicmitchellcounty.org@gmail.com)**

**Hours: Weds. – Sat , 10 to 4pm**

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

## RECIPES FROM GRANNY

### SUMMER SQUASH CASSEROLE

2 lb. squash

1 onion

1 green pepper, chopped

1 carrot, grated

½ pint sour cream

1 pkg. herb stuffing mix

1 stick butter

1 can of cream of chicken soup



Cook squash and onion; drain excess water. Melt butter and mix with stuffing and divide in half. Mix ½ stuffing with all other ingredients and pour into greased casserole. Place remaining stuffing on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.