

# MITCHELL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

FOURTH QUARTER 2018

The Board of Directors of Mitchell County Historical Society wishes the Season's Best to our friends and supporters, and as 2018 comes to a close, we also hope 2019 will bring wonderful things for us all.



## **OLD CHRISTMAS IN APPALACHIA**

If you read accounts of pioneer life in Appalachia, you may see mention of "Old Christmas." Early inhabitants of Appalachia celebrated Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup> rather than December 25<sup>th</sup>. On Old Christmas Eve, some believed, animals would speak and kneel in their stables to pray. Elder bushes, poke, and medicinal herbs, it was said, would burst into bloom. Young people celebrated with bonfires and serenading, and by shooting guns and firecrackers to ensure good luck in the new year. Celebrations the next day would be more sedate, with church attendance, perhaps, family meals, or visiting around the neighborhood. One Old Christmas tradition said that visits from 12 neighbors on Old Christmas brought a year's worth of good luck.

The calendar implemented by Julius Caesar in the first century BC made a 365 ¼ - day year standard. The Julian Calendar was used throughout Europe by the time Europeans began exploring and settling the Americas.

There were flaws in the Julian Calendar, however, and the calendar date wasn't matching up to the seasons. By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Catholic Pope Gregory XIII felt that it was time to modify leap years and get things back on track with the astronomical calendar — primarily so Easter would be restored to the time of the year it was celebrated by the early Church.

The Gregorian reforms removed ten days from the calendar so that October 4 1582, was followed by October 15, 1582. The revisions were accepted by France, Spain, and other Catholic countries. Protestants, however, saw the "theft" of 10 days a Catholic plot. Protestant nations such as Great Britain and Scotland didn't accept the Gregorian Calendar until 1752. "Fiercely independent and staunchly anti-Catholic," the Scots-Irish who had already begun settling the Appalachians opposed the new calendar.

"Christmas had long been celebrated... a couple of weeks after the winter solstice, and many people were not willing to celebrate Christmas on an earlier date..." writes Tony Blair, of the *Mountain Eagle*. Isolated in the mountains, generations of Appalachian pioneers celebrated Old Christmas 12 Days after the December 25<sup>th</sup> celebration date set by the new calendar.

## THE CLOUDLAND HOTEL

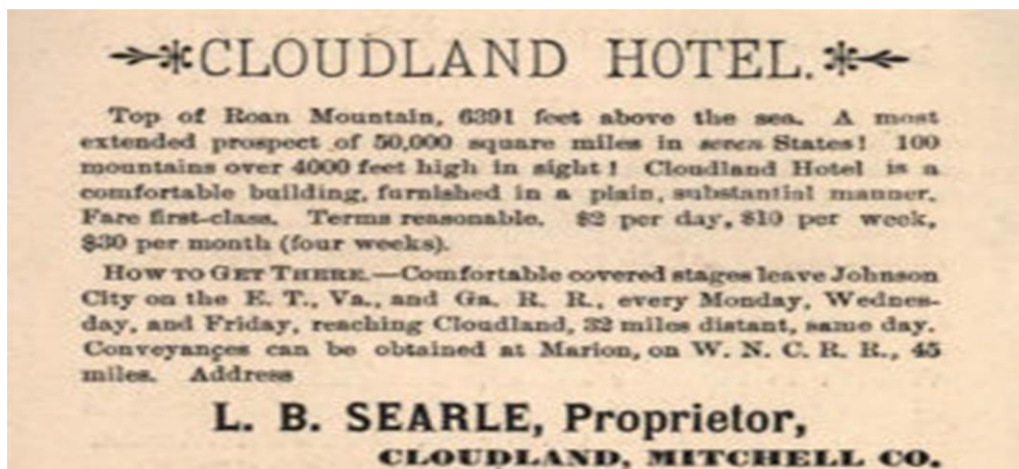


In 1885 Civil War general Thomas Wilder constructed a grand resort hotel atop Roan Mountain near a hunting lodge he had built after he came to the area following the war. The Cloudland Hotel opened to

great fanfare with plans to make Roan Mountain a destination for those seeking relief from the summer's heat and allergies.

Wilder had a home in Roan Mountain, TN, but he enjoyed summers atop The Roan and thought a resort there would be a big moneymaker. Not only was the Cloudland Hotel located at a high elevation with cooling breezes, it featured fine dining, games,

outdoor activities, and other amenities for guests, including 166 rooms with copper bathtubs, cherry furniture, and spring mattresses for the beds.



The Cloudland was built straddling the state line between North Carolina and Tennessee. In fact, the line ran through the dining room, and a table had a representation of it painted down its length. This made for some interesting times as Mitchell County was “dry” (no alcoholic beverage sales) while Carter County, TN, was “wet” (allowing alcoholic beverages). The Mitchell County sheriff would station himself strategically on his side of the state line, arresting anyone venturing over from the Tennessee side and charging them with public drunkenness.

The resort was the destination of visitors from the U.S. and Europe. John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, was a visitor in the 1890s and was most impressed with the environment of Roan Mountain and with the hotel. Letters penned by visitors reveal other famous persons and give us a picture of a world-class destination enjoyed by many.

Alas, the short summer season atop Roan Mountain combined with high maintenance costs on the building doomed the venture. In 1910, the Cloudland closed and its contents and exquisite woodwork were sold off or pilfered. The building eventually fell in, and a portion of it burned. Today, little evidence of the grand hotel remains on its location atop Roan Mountain.



**The 2018 Mitchell County Historical Society Christmas Ornament** celebrates the heyday of the Cloudland Hotel. It is decorated with a drawing of the famous resort that appeared in a newspaper advertisement in the 1890s along with a sprig of the famous rhododendron that appears in the largest naturally-occurring rhododendron gardens in the world atop Roan Mountain. A brief historical note is included on the back.



**The ornament is \$20 and can be ordered online or purchased at the MCHS office located in the Mitchell County Historic Courthouse in Bakersville during business hours (Wednesday-Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.).**

Mitchell County Historical Society also offers ornaments from prior years for sale at \$15 per ornament (plus shipping for online orders.)

Previous years' ornaments include Spruce Pine's English Inn, the Dellinger Mill on Cane Creek, historic Penland Post Office, Kona Baptist Church, the Railroad Depot in Spruce Pine, and the MCHS Museum in Bakersville.

These keepsakes are perfect for anyone with an interest in Mitchell County history. They are glass and come in a box to protect them during shipment and storage.

