

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HENDERSON COUNTY

Southern hospitality, peaceful summer evenings, beautiful environment, a strong economy – these characteristics and more make Henderson County, North Carolina, home. Parents want to raise their children here and retired folks want to enjoy their work-free days here.

A Rich Heritage

Henderson County's flourishing history can be traced back to its settlement in the eighteenth century by William Mills and his wife Eleanor who made their home in the Fruitland area, where they reared their family of seven children. Each year, Mr. Mills planted hundreds of fruit trees, and seeing them thrive, his neighbors began imitating him. Thus William Mills became the father of the county's apple industry, the forerunner of the multi-million dollar production of today.

As in many other areas of Western North Carolina, the county's history has close ties to agriculture. In fact, agriculture was the primary livelihood of most of Henderson County's residents during the eighteenth century. Their major crops were corn, wheat, rye, grass, potatoes, cabbage, and, of course, the king of crops - apples. Another source of revenue for many settlers came from early tourism. Prior to its incorporation in the early 1800's, the Hendersonville-Flat Rock area became a popular summer resort for wealthy South Carolina planters and dwellers who wished to escape the intense heat, insects, and diseases of the Low Country.



Historic Johnson Farm



7th Avenue Depot

Early on, eight townships provided leadership within Henderson County. The county's townships were: Hendersonville, Blue Ridge, Green River, Edneyville, Mills River, Hoopers Creek, Crab Creek and Clear Creek. These townships were active and became the foundation for the county as we know it today. Prior to 1879, dusty dirt roads maintained by township residents provided the only means of transportation. Many of the roads were first built in the period between 1800 and 1840. At that time the county was rural and sparsely populated by people living primarily off the land. However, this soon changed with the introduction of the railroad. The railroad brought a degree of urbanization and industrialization to

Henderson County by making it easier to travel and to ship products. Railroads became the basis for additional settlement, the provision of jobs, and the creation of stores, businesses, and industries. The railroad also brought seasonal visitors, which was the beginning of a long-lasting travel and tourism industry.

Henderson County Government had its official beginning in 1838 when it was formed from Buncombe County. The county was named in honor of Judge Leonard Henderson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. July 15, 1905 was a momentous occasion for Henderson County. On that day, W.F. Edwards, general contractor, presented the keys of what is now known as the *Historic Courthouse* to the Board of County Commissioners. This courthouse was occupied by government agencies until April 1995, when a new courthouse was opened on Grove Street in Hendersonville.

Judge Mitchell King donated fifty acres of land from his summer estate for the county seat, Hendersonville, in 1841. Hendersonville was incorporated 6 years later on January 7, 1847. As is the case today, the City of Hendersonville was the hub of activity for the county in these early days.

Portrait of Henderson County Today

The county's history provides a good backdrop for describing the county of the recent past and the present. Much of what made the Hendersonville/Flat Rock area popular in the early 1800s makes it so today. Henderson County continues to be recognized as a summer community. This reputation has expanded such that the county has become a retirement haven. However, with a diverse and strong economic base made up of manufacturing, retail sales, agriculture, tourism, and service trades, the county attracts people of all ages with interests ranging from career advancement and educational opportunities to peaceful surroundings for summer vacations.

The county's close ties to agriculture have also supported its prosperity. Henderson County continues to be North Carolina's largest apple producer and is the home of the North Carolina Apple Festival each year. Other agricultural industries within the county also continue to prosper. Many of the county's landowners are committed to continuing agriculture both because of its tradition and because of its importance to the economic diversity of the community.

Henderson County

Henderson County is led by a commissioner / manager form of government. A full-time county manager administers the policies established by a five-member Board of Commissioners and manages the routine operations of the County's departments. The County employs approximately 667 full time employees and additional part-time and temporary staff for a variety of departments. The county boasts a strong volunteer sector within government. Many such volunteers have retired to the area and have a desire to become involved in their new community. The county's total population was 89,173 according to the 2000 US Census. The county's municipalities are essential in maintaining the well-balanced and diverse economic base of the community.

City of Hendersonville

The City of Hendersonville encompasses 5.7 square miles on a plateau about 2,200 feet above sea level. The City's population was 11,530 according to the 2002 Population Estimates from the 2000 US Census. Hendersonville has



Angel at Oakdale Cemetery

been named the "City of Four Seasons" for its distinct seasonal weather patterns.

Downtown Hendersonville was registered in the National Register of Historic Places in March of 1988 for its historical significance and its efforts in restoring historic homes. It is also the stage for the North Carolina Apple Festival. Numerous other events are held throughout the year in Hendersonville, many of which are sponsored by the County's Travel & Tourism Department.

The "Wolfe Angel," which inspired the book [Look Homeward Angel](#) by Thomas Wolfe, is located at the Oakdale Cemetery in Hendersonville.

Hendersonville is the county seat and was incorporated January 7, 1847. The City is led by a manager / council form of government. A full-time city manager handles the



The seal of Henderson County, designed by U.C. Everall and officially adopted in 1981, features symbols of the county's past, present, and future. The seal is filled with a sky blue field upon which is superimposed the geographic boundary of the county. In the center of the seal a red apple is mounted, symbolizing what has historically been one of the county's major industries. In the center of the apple is a sketch of the Historic Courthouse, which was built in 1904.

routine day-to-day operations of the City, and a four-member council and mayor set the City's policies. The City's budget for fiscal year 2003-04 totaled \$19,814,510 with a tax rate of 43 cents per \$100 property valuation. The City employs approximately 195 full-time employees and 41 part-time employees.

Town of Fletcher

Fletcher borders Buncombe County on the northern section of the county and encompasses 5.71 square miles in land area. The 2000 US Census states Fletcher's population as 4,770. Fletcher was incorporated in June of 1989 and is led by a manager / council form of government. The Town employs a full time manager who oversees the day-to-day operations of the Town, and a four-member council and mayor sets the Town's policies. Fletcher's budget for fiscal year 2003-2004 was \$ \$3,819,909 with a corresponding tax rate of 25 cents per \$100 property valuation.

The Town of Fletcher is a progressive community which includes many of the county's manufacturing companies within its boundaries. Because of its central location within the county, much of Henderson County's recent growth in housing is attributed to Fletcher.

Town of Laurel Park

The Town of Laurel Park, which lies at the southern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains just west of Hendersonville, encompasses 2.71 square miles of land area. Laurel Park identifies itself as a mostly-residential community and boasts of its magnificent views from Jump Off Rock which overlooks the Mills River Valley.

The Town was incorporated on February 28, 1925 and had a population of 2,017 according to the 2000 US Census. Laurel Park operates under a manager / council form of government. The manager serves as the chief administrator and handles the day-to-day operation of the Town. A four-member council establishes the policies for the Town. The Laurel Park budget was \$1,484,000 in fiscal year 2003-2004 with a tax rate of 30 cents per \$100 property valuation.



Jump Off Rock

Village of Flat Rock

The Village of Flat Rock was incorporated in April of 1995. The Village had a population of 2,682 according to 2000 US Census information. Flat Rock encompasses

7.96 square miles. The administration and government of the Village of Flat Rock is vested in a governing body composed of a Town Council consisting of 6 members headed by a mayor. The Council has the power to tax but has chosen not to do so. The operating budget for the Village for fiscal year 2003-2004 was \$576,000.



Carl Sandburg National Historic Site

Flat Rock is widely known for having the Carl Sandburg Home, or *Connemara*, in its midst. *Connemara* was the last residence of Carl Sandburg, nationally renowned poet, biographer, folksinger, and lecturer, and it is now a National Historic Site and Landmark operated by the National Park Service. Another significant attraction in Flat Rock is the Flat Rock Playhouse, which is North Carolina's State Theater. The Playhouse offers a variety of comedies, dramas, and musicals for its audience.

Town of Mills River

The Town of Mills River was incorporated on June 24, 2003. The estimated population at the time of incorporation was 6,511. It encompasses approximately 22 square miles, making it the largest municipality in the county in land mass. The Town operates under a manager / council form of government. Mills River identifies itself as a farming community and contains the source for Henderson County's drinking water supply. The operating budget for fiscal year 2003-2004 was \$1,175,502 with a tax rate of 7 cents per \$100 per property valuation.

The City of Saluda

The City of Saluda has a year round population of 565, of which only 4 are counted in the Henderson County population. The North Carolina Downtown Development Association, when presenting a report on Saluda in 2003, noted Saluda's "unique mix of businesses, scenic beauty, high quality of life, small town atmosphere and friendly people." Saluda has a mayor and town council form of government. The operating

Figure B.1 Henderson County Municipalities



budget for fiscal year 2003-2004 was \$590,454 with a tax rate of 50 cents per \$100 property valuation.

A Look Ahead

The county's future lies in the hands of its citizens, leaders, and government. The preceding pages have given a very brief description of the building blocks that make Henderson County the progressive community that it is today. There are many aspects that have contributed to the county's success over the years. The county's well-balanced and diverse economy made up of agriculture, manufacturing, retirement, and tourism has fostered its growth and development. As in the past, continued progress will depend on the quality of life and land use decisions that are made by today's leaders.

