Resorts- Part 2: Resorts of Western North Carolina [1]

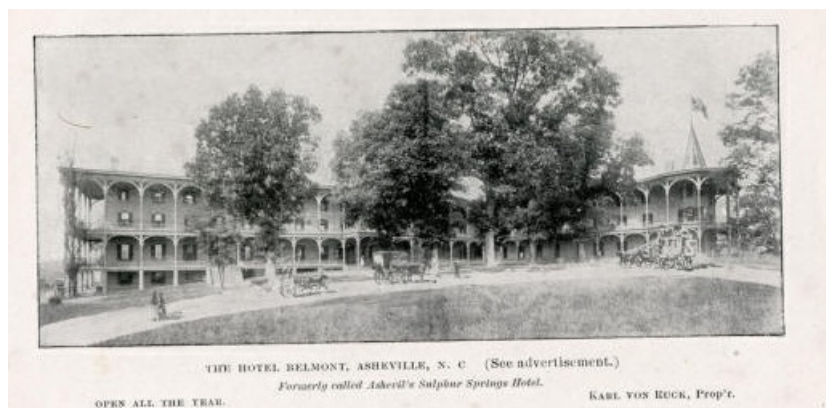## Resorts

by Virginia Gunn Fick and Richard D. Starnes, 2006; Revised November 2022.
Additional research provided by David Stick.

See also: Andrews Geyser [2]; Carolina Hotel [3]; Grove Park Inn [4]; Hot Springs [5]; Outer Banks [6].

Part 1: Introduction [7]; Part 2: Resorts of Western North Carolina;Part 3: Piedmont and Coastal Resorts[8]

Asheville Sulpher Springs [Hotel Belmont] Souvenir of Asheville or the Sky-Land, p. 71] Ramsey Library, UNCA. Image courtesy of Western North Carolina Heritage.

Part 2: Resorts of Western North Carolina

The Sulphur Springs Hotel [9] near Asheville was typical of North Carolina'santebellum [10] resorts. Its chief attraction was a mineral spring of purported medicinal value, but the hotel also offered guests gourmet food and drink, carriage rides to take in mountain scenery, a grand ballroom, and an orchestra of free black musicians. Enslaved people served as cooks, bellmen, waiters, and laundresses. Perhaps the most important attraction was the company of other white elites. Early resorts became seasonal centers of high culture where the gentry interacted, providing a social outlet that women, who often felt isolated on family plantations, particularly appreciated. Similar resorts developed at Shocco Springs [11] in Warren County, [12]Kittrell Springs in Vance County[13], and other locations.

After the Civil War [14], the size and number of North Carolina's resorts grew. An expanded rail network and the burgeoning Victorian consumer culture created the access and the means for new visitors to enjoy the state's resorts. Asheville [15] became the largest of North Carolina's mountain resort towns. The 75-mile Buncombe Turnpike, completed in 1828, linked Asheville to South Carolina and Tennessee, but not until the long-awaited penetration of the mountains by the railroad in 1880 did the city begin to develop as a resort. A 24-hour train trip brought guests from such faraway points as New York, Chicago, or New Orleans.

Asheville reportedly was visited by 30,000 tourists in 1886, and in 1893 it was given top honors inGeorge H. Chapin's book, *Health Resorts of the South*[16]. An 1892 promotional brochure for the city listed such hotels as the Hotel Belmont, the Oakland Heights, the Swannanoa, the Grand Central, the Oaks, and the Glen Rock, plus boardinghouses for the less affluent. The Kenilworth Inn, completed in 1890, stood in the middle of a 160-acre park that looked down on the rapids of the Swannanoa River and across at some of the area's highest peaks. Even grander and catering to the well-to-do was the Battery Park Hotel [17], built in 1886 by Col. Frank Coxe of Pennsylvania. It offered such luxuries as an elevator, room bells connected to the desk, public and private baths, a telegraph office, a ten-pin alley, a movable stage for theatricals, billiard rooms, and even a dark room for photographers. Later Asheville hotels included the grandly rustic Grove Park Inn [4], built in 1913 at the foot of Sunset Mountain byE. W. Grove [18] of St. Louis, using some of the fortune he had made selling the popular tonic Bromo-Quinine [19]. Among those who stayed at the Grove Park in the early years were businessmen Thomas Edison [20], Henry Ford [21], and Harvey Firestone [22]; Presidents Herbert Hoover [23] and Woodrow Wilson [24]; and writer F. Scott Fitzgerald [25].

West and south of Asheville, despite the hazards of stagecoach travel over rough roads before the Civil War, other resort towns were established. One was Warm Springs (later Hot Springs [26]), 37 miles west of Asheville by way of the Buncombe Turnpike. The springs were discovered in 1785 by members of the Tennessee militia skirmishing with Cherokee [27] warriors. Word spread, and those suffering from gout, rheumatism, sciatica, or neuralgia came for the benefits of the warm mineral water. In the 1830s, James Washington Patton [28] built the hotel that bore his name. The Patton Hotel had a porch with 13 columns representing the original colonies. After the Patton burned in 1884, a group of northern businessmen built the Mountain Park Hotel, which featured bowling, billiards, tennis, a swimming pool, riding

stables, theatrical performances, a ballroom, and a golf course that may have been among the first in the Southeast.

Another antebellum resort town, also situated on the Buncombe Turnpike, was Flat Rock in Henderson County [29]. Because of accessibility from the south, Flat Rock was developed by wealthy families from Charleston and Savannah seeking respite from the heat and diseases of the lowlands. The town became known as Little-Charleston-of-the-Mountains. Highlands, about 50 miles to the west, was like Flat Rock in two respects: it was equally accessible from the south and it was founded by people from outside the state. A decade after the Civil War, Samuel Truman Kelsey of New York and Clinton Carter Hutchinson of Kansas came to the area after traveling several weeks from Atlanta. The original name of the site was Kelsey's Plateau, which was changed to Highlands in 1875. To accommodate visitors, Central House (later Old Edwards Inn) opened in 1878. It was followed in 1880 by the Highlands Inn, a three-story hotel with 30 rooms and a double piazza extending the length of the building.

One of the grandest of the post-Civil War mountain resorts outside Asheville was the Haywood White Sulphur Springs Hotel [30] in Waynesville. In 1878 Colonel and Mrs. W. W. Stringfield converted a large home, built before 1830 by the Love family, into a hotel. Though the hotel burned in 1892, it was rebuilt as a three-story brick building with 45 rooms, situated in a landscaped park of around 50 acres. It featured wraparound verandas and an observation tower on the roof so that guests could take in the view.

Lake Lure [31] is a spectacular 1,500-acre man-made lake in Rutherford County [32]. With Chimney Rock [33] nearby, the Lake Lure region became one of North Carolina's most popular resorts of the 1920s and 1930s. A century earlier, the area was already well known. In Hickory Nut Gap in the shadow of old Bald Mountain, the rustic and romantic Esmeralda Inn [34] had been built around 1840 as a stagecoach stop on the trail from Asheville to Rutherfordton. The inn became the setting for several silent films, including *The Heart of the Blue Ridge* [35] (1915), starring Clara Kimball Young. Its celebrity guests included movie stars Mary Pickford [36], Douglas Fairbanks [37], Clark Gable [38], and Lew Wallace [39], author of *Ben Hur* [40], who finished the novel while occupying Room 9 at the inn. Destroyed by fire in 1917 and again in 1997, the inn was rebuilt both times, and in 1987 the site was the location for the shooting of the film *Dirty Dancing* [41]. Tryon, located in the thermal belt due south of Lake Lure, also drew celebrities such as Sidney Lanier [42], Margaret Culkin Banning [43], and F. Scott Fitzgerald, as well as other notables such as David Niven, Mrs. George Marshall, Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, and Lady Astor.

Up the Blue Ridge, nearly 100 miles north of Asheville, is Blowing Rock [44], a residential resort whose name derives from a legend that tells of two Indian warriors who fought over the chief's beautiful daughter. The stronger of the two threw the other one over the edge of the rock. The maiden, realizing that the vanquished was the one she truly loved, prayed to the God of the Winds to spare him. In answer to her prayer, he was caught by the wind and lifted to safety. From that day forward, according to the legend, a wind always blows up onto the rock from the valley below, returning objects thrown from it and even causing the snow to fall "upside down." The Green Park Inn [45], dating from the late nineteenth century, became the first "grand" hotel in Blowing Rock and in 2006 was still in operation. By the mid-1930s, Blowing Rock had become a fashionable resort town.

The Esseeola Inn and Golf Club [46] was established in Linville by Hugh MacRae [47] in 1888. Located at the foot of Grandfather Mountain [48], the inn offered guests not only golf but also cool weather, beautiful scenery, ox races, and dancing by cloggers. The original inn burned in 1936 and was replaced by the Esseeola Lodge, which remains one of the region's most popular resorts. Farther north and east on the Appalachian chain is Roaring Gap, developed as a summer resort by Hugh Gwyn Chatham [49], who said his father had discovered the site while riding through the mountains to buy wool for his mill in Elkin. The Roaring Gap Hotel, with 30 rooms and four nearby cottages, opened in 1894.

Not all mountain resorts sprang from a desire to enjoy better health or worldly diversions. North Carolina became an important center for religious resorts during the last decade of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, the state was home to the summer retreats of the southern Presbyterians (Montreat [50]); the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Lake Junaluska [51]); and the Southern Baptists (Ridgecrest [52]); and several others would emerge in subsequent decades. These resorts became centers of missionary activity, ecclesiastical training, civil rights reform, and other church-related training.

Although stricter land-use regulations have been established to preserve the natural beauty of the region, North Carolina's man-made and natural mountain attractions continue to draw thousands of tourists each year. A number of hotels, bed and breakfasts, golf resorts, and other establishments have been developed, affording a wide variety of services and easy access to spectacular vistas, hiking trails, cultural events, craft shopping, and other mountain activities.

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Sydney Nathans, *The Quest for Progress: The Way We Lived in North Carolina, 1870-1920* (1983).

Alan D. Watson, *Wilmington: Port of North Carolina* (1992).

Additional Resources:

Asheville's Rise as a Resort Destination: https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/asheville/resort.htm [53]

Sulphur Springs Hotel, NC Historical Marker P-53: https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=P-53 [9]

Shocco Springs, NC Historical Marker E-21: https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=E-21%20-%20SHOCCO%20SPRINGS [11]

Kittell Springs, NC Historical Marker G-42: https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=G-42%20-%20KITTRELL%27S%20SPRINGS [13]

Image Credit:

Asheville Sulpher Springs [Hotel Belmont] Souvenir of Asheville or the Sky-Land, p. 71] Ramsey Library, UNCA. Image courtesy of Western North Carolina Heritage. Available from # (accessed August 31, 2012).

Subjects:
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