

Buchanan, Harry Eugene ^[1]

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by George Myers Stephens, 1979

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Harry Eugene Buchanan, mountain region ^[2] leader and moving picture theater official, was born in Sylva, the son of Marcellus and Laura Belle Leatherwood Buchanan. He obtained his early schooling in Jackson County ^[3] and then attended Preparatory School of Trinity College and, in 1914–15, The University of North Carolina ^[4].

Starting at age seventeen as an agent for the Southern Railway ^[5], Buchanan afterward went into timber operations and opened a motion picture theater in Sylva. In Hendersonville, to which he moved in 1932, he was manager of the Carolina Theater. He was for many years legislative representative of the North Carolina Theater Owners Association, of which he was a director and at one time president.

Before leaving Sylva, Buchanan organized and became first president of the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club and also served as mayor. Another Jackson County ^[3] interest was the institution that later became Western Carolina University ^[6], where a dormitory was named in his honor in 1958. He was an active Democrat ^[7] and a member of the Methodist church ^[8]. In Hendersonville he helped organize the Western North Carolina Fair and the Chamber of Commerce. He was Henderson representative in developing the Asheville ^[9] and Hendersonville Airport ^[10] at Fletcher, and at the time of his death he was president of the Carolina Motor Club. He served in the state senate during 1967–68 and on the state Highway Commission ^[11] during Governor William Bradley Umstead's ^[12] administration.

Of lasting benefit to the region and particularly to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians was his leadership in establishing the outdoor drama Unto These Hills ^[13]. This project was launched by Western North Carolina Associated Communities, a regional development organization Buchanan had served as president. Chartered in 1948 as the nonprofit Cherokee Historical Association ^[14], this corporation raised sufficient funds through donations to build Mountainside Theater at Cherokee. As chairman, Buchanan went to Raleigh for legislative help and secured a matching amount. Opening in 1950, this outdoor drama played in its first quarter century to over three million people. An adjoining project opened later as Oconaluftee Living Indian Village ^[15], and its annual attendance soon approached the count at the theater. During these years, Buchanan, as chairman and active leader, won strong support from nearby communities, from tribal chiefs and councils, and from U.S. Indian Service officials. All agreed that his skill and faithful work were the chief reasons for the success of the venture.

Buchanan's marriage to Pearl Long of Sylva in 1923 produced four children: Sara (Mrs. Charles W. Porter of Hendersonville); Jean and Pearl of Nashville, Tenn.; and Harry E., Jr., of Atlanta, Ga. Buchanan was buried in Keener Cemetery at Sylva.

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Additional Resources:

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[24]

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