Asheville

by Lisa Gregory

Government & Heritage Library [3], 2010.


Asheville, whose namesake is North Carolina governor Samuel Ashe [7], is located in Buncombe County [8] in Western North Carolina at the edge of Appalachia [9]. Situated in thick forests [10] along the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers, the area was heavily traveled and settled by Native Americans, especially the Cherokee [11], before Europeans moved into the area after the Revolutionary War [12]. Originally called “Morristown,” it was renamed “Asheville” and incorporated in 1797.

Expansion of the western part of North Carolina, including Asheville, remained slow until the Buncombe Turnpike [13] (1828) and Western North Carolina Railroad [14] (1880) made inroads to that part of the state. The area's remote but increasingly accessible nature contributed to its therapeutic use for those suffering from illnesses like tuberculosis [15].

In 1887, George Washington Vanderbilt [16] commissioned Biltmore House [17], built by Richard Morris Hunt [18] with landscaping designed by Frederick Law Olmsted [19] and surrounded by a sprawling 125,000 acre estate. The Biltmore Forest School [20], begun in part to train forest managers for the estate and nearby Pisgah Forest, was the first forestry school in America. The estate, which contributed greatly to Asheville's standing as a retreat and tourist destination, still draws large numbers of visitors today.

In addition to its natural attraction as a destination along the Blue Ridge Parkway [22], Asheville also has a history of drawing artists to the area. The author Thomas Wolfe [23] was born in Asheville in 1900 and described a fictionalized version of Asheville in his first novel, Look Homeward, Angel. [23] Other renowned twentieth century authors who found their way to Asheville include William Sidney Porter (O. Henry) [24], F. Scott Fitzgerald [25], and Carl Sandburg. [26] Black Mountain College [27], an experimental college designed to educate the whole student through living in a close-knit community, brought numerous artists, authors, and thinkers of the 20th century to the Asheville area during its brief
existence (1933-1957).

With institutions like the Southern Highland Craft Guild [28] and a downtown district that still exhibits much of its original architecture, tourism and hospitality are some of Asheville's chief industries [29] today.

**Asheville's estimated population:**

1980: 54,022  
1990: 61,855  
2000: 68,889  
2008: 78,313

**Asheville's land area (square miles):**

1980: 29.09  
1990: 34.118  
2000: 40.921  
2008: 44.230

Data from the NC State Data Center:

**References and additional resources:**


Items related to Asheville, NC [32], from the Government & Heritage Library Digital Collections [33].


Image credits:


**Subjects:**

100 North Carolina Icons [37]  
Cities [38]

**Authors:**

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**Origin - location:**

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