

Asheville ^[1]

Asheville

by Lisa Gregory

Government & Heritage Library ^[2], 2010.

See also: [Pisgah National Forest](#) ^[3]; [Biltmore House](#); ^[4][Asheville](#) ^[5] (UNC Press)



View of the French Broad River above Asheville (Courtesy North Carolina State Archives)

^[6]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.



Thomas Wolfe Memorial (Courtesy flickr user larry wfu)

^[21]

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:

"Asheville and environs: The built environment." #

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View of the French Broad River above Asheville. nd. OP_110. North Carolina State Archives.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/4821470718/> [6]

Thomas Wolfe home. 2004. Image courtesy of flickr user larry wfu. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/larrywfu/348226736/> [21]

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