

North Carolina Society of Historians

Multi-Media Award

Oral History Project of Bethel Rural Community Organization

Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us – DVD

(1) Nomination submitted by:

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(2) Name of Project: Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us

(3) Medium: DVD - Oral History

(4) Authors(s): Doug Chambers, Ted Carr, Evelyn Coltman, Malinda Messer, Historic Preservation Committee of Bethel Rural Community Organization

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(5) Description:

Bethel Rural Community Organization (BRCO) in Haywood County has two primary missions: Preserving the rural nature of farmlands and farm related activities in Bethel Community and promoting the collection of historical data and recognition of historic sites in Bethel and Haywood County. The Historic Preservation Committee has conducted a number of activities to promote the collection of historical data and to present living history events that showcase that information. The organization has, for the past seven years, conducted the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour which involves nine historical sites and dozens of volunteers who relay collected documentation about the sites in the area. Accompanying the tour, author Evelyn Coltman has written six books: *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain, Books 1 – 6*. Those written records of the history of Bethel Community where Cold Mountain is located earned Coltman the 2010 Barringer Award of Excellence from the North Carolina Society of Historians. In addition, the Historic Preservation Committee has begun a program of placing historic markers at sites in the community that are not eligible for state historic marker designation. This year, the committee has conducted an art contest to select three artists to begin paintings of historic sites in the area. These pictures will eventually hang on the walls of the historic Presbyterian Church, built in 1885, that serves as BRCO's home base. Procuring two major awards for Francis Mill, one of the sites on the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour, has also been a significant achievement for BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee. The group nominated Francis Mill

and Francis Mill Preservation Society for the Gertrude S. Carraway Award with Preservation NC. Tanna Timbes, head of the Francis Mill group, received that award in 2010. In 2011 the Historic Preservation Committee received a matching grant from Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to hire a consultant to write the National Register of Historic Places nomination for Francis Mill, a project that is near completion.

Perhaps the most demanding project ever undertaken by BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee has been putting together the oral history documentary about Bethel's history titled *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us*. Evelyn Coltman outlined the list of speakers for the project and assisted with one taping. Malinda Messer researched and wrote the introductory and other commentary spaced throughout the production. Messer also assisted with the videotaping of a number of the episodes. Ted Car assisted with most of the productions, providing technical support as well. The group hired local videographer, Doug Chambers of Doug Chambers Production, to film, choreograph, and edit. Writing, filming, lining up participants, and putting final touches on the production consumed several months and involved numerous individuals. BRCO is fortunate to have documented some of the impressive stories since some of the individuals involved have since passed away.

Walking in the Footsteps consists of eighteen segments with end credits and BRCO information completing the disk. Chambers designed that layout so that the viewer can readily transfer from one episode to another if only certain sections are to be watched.

In segment 1 narrator Charles Cathey introduces Bethel Community with its many names, including Pigeon Valley. He reads a poem by author Emma Mashburn which is accompanied by imposing views of the valley and the surrounding mountains.

Cathey, in section 2, discusses some distinctive historical information that is unique to Bethel. His narrative depicts the rural landscape and its significant agricultural setting and describes the general history of the area with poetic grace.

Set against a backdrop of the flowing waters at the forks of the Pigeon River, Charles Miller, considered a local scholar on the topic of the Rutherford Trace march, conducts a dramatic outline of each step of the military campaign against the Cherokee. In consuming detail, Miller, in scene 3, alludes to several diaries he has studied that outline the 1776 trek of Rutherford's two thousand troops.

In section 4, Charles Cathey again guides the discussion to the history of Bethel Academy, the Masonic Lodge, Woodrow train and mail station, and Colonel Joseph Cathey's mid-1800s store. The accompanying pictures from his own collection enhance the story with a time range from pre-Civil War to the 1970s.

Doris Cathey, in segment 5, conducts a tour of the Joseph Turner and Martha Anna Iva Killian Cathey House in which she and her family reside. Cathey's story of Martha Anna Iva's completion of the house after her husband died in the Civil War, the family ghost, and stories about the five generations of the Cathey family who have inhabited the oldest documented house in Bethel (1860) is accented with dozens of family photographs.

Part 6 is narrated by Dr. Mary Michal and Charles Trantham of Lenoir/Devon Acres, Haywood County's oldest continuing farm since 1806. Dr. Michal grew up on the property and relays the story of the Lenoir family history, their expansive land holdings, slaves, the extant historic structures, and the animals. Trantham discusses the Devon cattle that came to this country in 1623 and were brought to Lenoir/Devon Acres in 1849, making them the longest continuing herd of cattle in one location in Haywood County.

The Bethel Presbyterian Church chronicle in segment 7 is relayed by the Reverend Riley Covin and the Reverend Bill Terrell. Covin relays the Scottish connection to the development of Haywood County while Terrell brings the story of his personal relationship to the church. Bethel Presbyterian Church is Haywood County's Mother Presbyterian Church and ceased as a congregation after 175 years of existence in 2009. BRCO currently uses the historic structure as a community center for the organization.

Ted Darrell Inman, who passed away five days after the Inman Chapel (segment 8) and the Inman Family (section 9) were filmed, gives a nostalgic recollection of the development of the Universalist Church by his great grandfather, the Reverend James Anderson Inman (brother to Inman of *Cold Mountain* fame). The church was unique in the mountains with its social ministry and its extensive outreach programs. Inman describes, with great poignancy, his ancestor's role in the Civil War that led to his cousin Charles Frazier's book, *Cold Mountain*, about their distant uncle.

Another tragic Civil War story is conveyed by Sandy Boone, in portion 10, with his narrative about his great grandfather, R. A. Sentelle. Having suffered the loss of his father who was captured and executed, Sentelle went on to become an outstanding minister, school teacher, and the first superintendent of public schools in Haywood County. The story of this man of conviction, stamina, and determination is derived primarily from numerous diaries.

The Pingree Priestly Plott House, which once resided on hundreds of acres, has continued its hilltop watch over Bethel Community since 1887. In part 11, Jimmie Ellen and Richard Henson relay the history of the house from its post-Civil War era to its present occupation by their son and his family.

Francis Mill, in segment 12, has undergone a restoration project over the past eight years that earned it the Gertrude S. Carraway Award from Preservation NC in 2010. Tanna Timbes, fifth

generation mill owner takes viewers on an exterior and interior tour. In her speech, In addition to relaying interesting historical data about the Francis family, Timbes shows the milling process from every angle.

Ava Chambers discusses the original foot log that conveyed students across the Pigeon River from Love Joy Road to Lake Logan Road. In segment 13, Troy Hargrove gives a detailed description of the assembling of the bridge that replaced the foot log in 1925 by a local team of farmers and workers. Hargrove alludes to the decorative elements on the bridge that make North Carolina's oldest metal truss bridge in use, Truss Bridge #79, the only extant truss bridge in the state with decorative elements.

Calvin Filmore Christopher, though an important historical figure, is little known in his own county and hardly at all beyond the county's borders. Narrator Charles Cathey, with accompanying pictures, reveals the outstanding inventions of this man who should be recognized statewide as North Carolina's most prolific inventor who invented the air brake for trains, the computing scales (precursor of today's computing scales for food and gasoline), and one hundred other significant inventions. Berdine Hirschy and Win McNeil were fortunate to grow up beside the Christopher house and recall many personal details about the brilliant inventor in section 14.

The same two ladies, accompanied by Eula Rigdon, in portion 15, recall the look, the feel, and the life involved with the J.B. Rigdon General Store that was run by their family from mid 1930s until the late 1950s. The ladies reminisce about the store as a local meeting place for workers and school children during its heyday.

In section 16, Malinda Messer, with a backdrop of tombstones, connects her own ancestry of five generations to Bethel Cemetery, the most panoramic view of the surrounding mountains in Bethel. While the camera hovers over dozens of gravemarkers, the haunting background tune, "Go Wash in That Beautiful Pool," is sung by the late Dr. William K. McNeil, Bethel native who was folklorist at Ozark Folk Center for thirty years. The tone is set for viewers to reflect on the common end of all humanity.

Narrator Charles Cathey summarizes the focus of *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us* in segment 17. The school song, "Bethel the Beautiful," sung by hundreds of Bethel school children since the 1950s when the song was written by Band Director, Mr. Matthews, is ably sung by Bethel Elementary School fifth graders.

(6) If applicable, Dates Showing:

Because BRCO has decided to use the sale of the DVD as a fundraiser, primary showings have occurred at Cold Mountain Heritage Tour events. They have not been donated to local libraries for the same reason. The organization developed the production not only to capture the history of Bethel Community but also to sell the DVDs to raise funds for the many activities of the organization. The group has believed that numerous showings would discourage people from actually purchasing the DVD.

(7) Location: Cold Mountain Heritage Tours and segment portions at a Haywood County Historical & Genealogical Society meeting.

Please attach a statement of support for your entry.

The DVD, *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us*, captures the heart, the mind, and the soul of a community that has been called by many names: Sonoma, Pigeon Valley, Woodrow, and Bethel. Since the hero of the book and movie, *Cold Mountain*, was born, lived, died, and buried in Bethel rather than the mountain that dominates the landscape of Bethel Community, even the Cold Mountain name is readily associated with this community. Bethel's history is rich and worthy of study. Bethel is the location of the oldest human settlement in Haywood County, the first white settlement in Haywood County, site of one of the oldest trees in the county and third largest in the state, is home to the oldest continuing farm with the longest continuing herd of cattle in Haywood County, harbors some of the oldest extant dwellings in the county (including the oldest log cabin - 1821), has the oldest working metal truss bridge in the state, and was home to the first Superintendent of Haywood County Schools.

A challenge was mentioned at a Haywood County Council of Community Clubs meeting a number of years ago that each community organization should make efforts to collect, document, and put into written form the history of the community. Bethel Rural Community Organization, under the auspices of its Historic Preservation Committee, went beyond even the vision suggested by the County Council. Not only did the group's members collect and document the area's history in the form of six books but it also expanded the concept to include living history conveyed by dozens of tour guides during the seven Cold Mountain Heritage Tours. The ambitious group, still not satisfied that enough had been done to document the fascinating history of the area, decided to undertake the daunting task of developing a pictorial and oral history of the community in the form of a DVD. A viewing of the entire DVD allows the observer to realize the amount of creativity, research, documentation, organization, choreography, writing, narrative skills, technical expertise, and time that have gone into putting the project together. A local enterprise, Farm Bureau, was so impressed with

the production that it was willing to supply the thousands of dollars necessary to create adequate production of copies so that the project could grow from a vision to a reality. Such an accomplishment on the part of Bethel Rural Community Organization, its Historic Preservation Committee, videographer and producer Doug Chambers, and all other participants deserves the recognition that the North Carolina Society of Historians Multi-Media Award would convey.