

Western Carolina University's
Mountain Heritage Award Nomination
2014

Nomination Submittal for
Bethel Rural Community Organization (BRCO)

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***Grants Received by BRCO are Highlighted in Blue**

***Awards and Recognition Received by BRCO are highlighted in Red**

***Other Supporting Documentation Enclosed**

Bethel Rural Community Organization (BRCO)'s Nomination for Its Role in the Preservation and Interpretation of Southern Appalachian History and Culture

Bethel Rural Community Organization (BRCO) is nominated for Western Carolina University's 2014 Mountain Heritage Award for its far-reaching, diverse, and successful efforts in two areas of preservation: farm/rural land conservation and historic documentation. While BRCO's five other committees perform tasks that benefit Bethel Community, the focus of this presentation is on the work of BRCO's Farmland Preservation and Historic Preservation Committees. The projects performed by these two BRCO committees are best suited for recognition by the Mountain Heritage Award with its emphasis on policies and procedures that serve to preserve and interpret Southern Appalachian history and culture.

Formed from the merger of two previous organizations, Bethel Community Organization (January 1991) and Pigeon Valley Citizens for Rural Preservation (February 2000), Bethel Rural Community Organization began operation in 2001. Bethel Rural Community Organization's incorporation date as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit was March 23, 2006. BRCO's mission is to coordinate local and regional resources to perform programs and projects that enhance the quality of rural life in Bethel Community. BRCO recognizes that the quality of rural life is preserved by retaining the farm lands that have enabled an agrarian culture to exist for over two thousand years in Bethel. Accompanying the focus on retaining sustainable agricultural lands and farming heritage, BRCO emphasizes the collection, documentation, and restoration of the architectural, cultural, and historical legacy of Bethel Community while simultaneously incorporating an educational component into both its farmland and historic preservation efforts.

The following documentation of the numerous projects, honors, and awards garnered by BRCO for years of efforts in preserving the historic and rural nature of the area lend substantial support for BRCO's selection for the 2014 Mountain Heritage Award. Specific **awards** and **recognition** will be in **red**, and **grants** will be highlighted in **blue**.

BRCO was awarded the WNC Council of Community Clubs highest recognition, Community of Distinction, in 2007 and 2013 for its farmland and historic preservation efforts, as well as for its benevolence work in the community. BRCO received the second highest award from the WNC Council of Community Clubs, Community of Promise, in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Farmland Preservation Committee's History and Projects

BRCO's philosophy of keeping farmland, rural areas, wild spaces, and water resources from succumbing to development and degradation continues a historical focus of the area that dates to Native American settlements in the Garden Creek section of Bethel. Native Woodland Indians lived in the area now known as Bethel as far back as 10,000 years ago, according to evidence obtained through a number of archaeological digs conducted in the Garden Creek section of Bethel. BRCO has collected documentation about the agricultural heritage of the community when both the Pigeon cultural phase (300 BC – 200 AD) and the Connestee Indian phase (200 AD – 800 AD) began cultivating seeds and grains and directed the change of native cultures as they transitioned from the hunter/gatherer stage to the agricultural phases of development. In approximately 800 AD, the Mississippi Indian culture known as the Pisgah phase, a maize-based native society, dominated the area that became Bethel. These Native American ancestors to the Cherokee who once inhabited Bethel respected the woodland, farmland, and water resources available to them from the Pigeon River and its tributaries and set the tone for farming to become the primary endeavor in the area. As white men settled the area, they noticed the farming potential also. Troops connected to the Rutherford Trace march against the Cherokee in 1776 remembered the beauty of what would later become Bethel and began to settle and farm the area in the late 1700s. Bethel has been, and continues to be, a land dedicated to farming and agricultural heritage.

Because of its appreciation for the pastoral history of the area, BRCO became concerned that the community would succumb to state and national trends and lose its historic farms and wild lands to development and urban sprawl. When BRCO's Farmland Preservation Committee formed, there were few resources available to non-profits seeking assistance in preserving rural landscapes. BRCO, with diligent

research and a willingness to spend innumerable hours of work, became a key organization that others in the state call upon when faced with the dilemma of ferreting out information about how to retain land for rural purposes. **The organization's Farmland Preservation Committee is considered a state leader in the area of farm, rural, wild land, and water conservation, having garnered local, state, regional, and federal grants to pursue its mission of placing farm and wild lands in conservation easements, not only in Bethel, but also in other regions of Haywood County.**

In an effort to document the importance of farming and land conservation in Bethel, the Farmland Preservation Committee, in 2005, developed a DVD titled *Land of Promise*. **The *Land of Promise* DVD has been viewed at programs by various governmental, civic, and non-profit organizations throughout Haywood County and beyond as a tool used by the Farmland Preservation Committee to educate about the history of farming, as well as farming's importance, in Bethel.** (DVD enclosed). The committee also produced a series of brochures designed to educate about Bethel's farming history and its land conservation focus. (Brochures enclosed). **Bethel's land and farming heritage preservation efforts are significant enough to have been the focus of study for the 2007 *To Keep and Preserve* ethnography in Anthropology document at the University of NC-Asheville.**

BRCO's Farmland Preservation Committee works to protect rural lands and waters in the Upper Pigeon River Valley of Haywood County. **The committee has utilized governmental and private resources to promote enhanced voluntary agricultural district programs and has directed assistance to local conservation easement projects.** To date, the Farmland Preservation Committee has enrolled over 1,100 acres into the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program. The committee has held a series of county-wide seminars on land conservation and sustainability projects. **In 2013, BRCO received Haywood Waterways Association's Pigeon River Award for the Farmland Preservation Committee's assistance with eight permanent land conservation easements totaling 268 acres of land, including 50 acres of floodplain and 12,000 feet of stream and river frontage. *The Mountaineer*, local newspaper, featured an article about the award.**

The Farmland Preservation Committee also initiated and provides financial support for the *Buy Haywood* program that promotes local agricultural products and continuation of a sustainable agricultural culture and heritage in Bethel and Haywood County. **BRCO is recognized as a funding source in the *Buy Haywood Agri-Tourism Guide* that has a 10,000 distribution.** (Buy Haywood Agri-Tourism Guide enclosed). **BRCO was also selected to contribute a blog for the *Buy Haywood* web site.**

BRCO was also instrumental in developing the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center in Canton, with Farmland Preservation members conducting some of the initial research about the project. In addition, the Farmland Preservation Committee has supported Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy's Forest Heritage Scenic Byway Program and the Appalachian Landslide Consultants, featuring programs by both agencies.

The Farmland Preservation Committee has helped secure numerous grants over a several year span to support rural conservation efforts. Grantors and other key partners include the Southwestern NC Resource Conservation & Development Council, NC Rural Economic Development Center, Pigeon River Fund, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, United States Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, and the Haywood Soil and Water Conservation District.

For the Farmland Preservation Committee's efforts alone, BRCO deserves recognition from the Mountain Heritage Award Committee. Projects adopted by the committee have conserved and sustained the historic value inherent in allowing land to remain in a natural pristine state; other committee endeavors have enabled tangible support for livelihoods that deliver food through husbandry. Because of the Farmland Committee's tax-saving easement programs several farmers are able to afford to remain on their land while continuing the historic practice of tilling the soil, a tradition that dates, in Bethel, to the native cultures who farmed the land as early as 300 BC.

Historic Preservation Committee's History and Projects

BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee has done more to collect, document, and make available the rich oral and documented history of its locale than perhaps any other community organization in the area. In addition, the committee's documentation has extended to other areas of Haywood County, thereby creating a more comprehensive understanding of Bethel and Haywood County history.

The committee began collecting history with its first project - the popular Cold Mountain Heritage Tour. This two-day tour, which existed from 2005-2011, featured ten historic sites in Bethel, expanding in separate years to Waynesville, Canton, and Clyde. Hundreds of visitors each year attended the tour. During its lifespan, BRCO's Cold Mountain Heritage Tour featured a total of twenty-five locations and utilized approximately one hundred docents and other volunteers each year. The histories of the families, architectural information, and significant data about each site were researched and documented in speeches delivered by docents at each location. ***The Mountaineer, Smoky Mountain News, Asheville Citizen-Times, and Greenville News featured articles for each of the tours.***

In 2012-2013, the Historic Preservation Committee took a break from the tour to research, record, and produce the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour CD. This tour allows auto tour visitation to nine accessible historic sites in Bethel. In addition, historical material is made available on the CD that was not included on the original Cold Mountain Heritage Tours. ***BRCO received a grant from Haywood EMC to produce the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour CD.*** The committee continues to sell the CD as an educational project and as a fundraiser for BRCO. (See enclosed brochure about the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour CD). ***The Mountaineer and the Asheville Citizen-Times featured stories about the CD.***

During the years the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour was ongoing, one member of the committee, Evelyn Coltman, researched each site on the tour and included information about each site in a book available for purchase during and after the tour. A total of six books, *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain, Books 1-6*, were written to accompany the tours. Members of the Historic Preservation Committee helped to print, assemble, and sell the books each year. The books include numerous, never-before-researched-or-published pieces of historical information. The books add 628 pages, 97 articles, of written oral and verified history to Bethel and Haywood County documentation. ***General Dynamics and private donors donated printing. In 2010, Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain, Books 1-6 received a state history award from the NC Society of Historians: the Barringer Award of Excellence.*** The committee continues to sell the books as an educational tool as well as a fundraiser for BRCO. (The 6 *Legends* books are available at WCU's Hunter Library). ***The Mountaineer had an article about the award.***

In addition to the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour and the *Legends* books, the committee outlined subjects, made appropriate contacts of individuals who knew the history of the area, wrote data, selected traditional music, and hired a videographer to produce an eighteen-segment DVD titled *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us*. Most of the sites/historical figures featured on the DVD had not been previously documented or recorded. ***BRCO received a grant from Haywood EMC for the Walking in the Footsteps DVD.*** Doug Chambers Production produced the DVD. ***BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee and several of its individual members were honored in 2012 with a state history award from the NC Society of Historians for their efforts: the Paul Green Multi-Media Award.*** The committee continues to sell the DVD for educational purposes and as a fundraiser for BRCO. (DVD copy enclosed). ***The Mountaineer featured an article about the DVD award.***

To continue historic preservation efforts, BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee, in 2012 and 2013, hired the services of three local artists; the group also secured art pieces from owners of seven

drawings/paintings/photographs to produce ten art pieces of historic sites/data in Bethel. John Rolland, photographer, photographed the prints, utilizing high-resolution giclee' techniques, in order to produce saleable 16" x 20" prints. Members of the committee sell the art pieces as an educational tool and as a fundraiser for BRCO. **In March of 2014 the TDA Visitors Center, and in June, the Haywood County Arts Council featured the ten art pieces in their respective shops. The Haywood County Arts Council also selected the art prints as a featured exhibition of its Mountain-Made series, its Art after Dark program, and its Appalachian Lifestyles Festival display.** The exposure of the art pieces, as well as the accompanying slide show about Bethel's past, allowed hundreds of visitors to learn about Bethel history. (Brochure enclosed). ***The Guide and Mountaineer* featured articles about the prints.**

BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee had received a grant from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) in 2011 to hire a historian to submit an application to the National Register of Historic Places for designation for the 1887 Francis Mill. BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee was overseer of the National Register application process. The Keeper of the National Register awarded the National Register of Historic Places designation to Francis Mill in 2013. *The Mountaineer* featured an article about the National Register designation.

The committee continued its affiliation with BRNHA by conducting extensive research for a submittal about Bethel's agricultural, Cherokee, and natural heritage. BRCO's historic home base, the 1885 Bethel Presbyterian Church, was chosen to be one of three sites in Haywood County and one of approximately seventy locations in the western region of NC to be placed on BRNHA's Heritage Trail. BRCO will become a part of the BRNHA Heritage Trail when the marker is erected in the fall of 2014.

Other Historic Preservation Committee Projects

- Continue to videotape segments of local history each year for a second DVD; five segments have been completed.
- Conducted a program at Bethel Middle School to educate eighth grade history and social studies students about Bethel's history. ***The Mountaineer* featured an article.**
- Reprinted, updated, and sold the 1992 book of collected history by Bethel eighth graders titled *Pigeon Valley*; donated proceeds to Bethel School Library. ***Mountaineer* featured an article.**
- **Designed the *Pigeon Valley Quilt Block* that details Bethel's historic names, enabling BRCO's home base, Bethel Presbyterian Church, to be placed on the Haywood County Quilt Trail (#40 on the Quilt Trail map; information about the quilt symbols/historic data selection for the quilt block is on Haywood County Quilt Trails web site). *Mountaineer* featured an article.**
- **Selected by the Haywood County Historical & Genealogical Society to present a program/slideshow that outlines BRCO's historic and farmland preservation achievements**
- **Developed a second slide show that offers insight into Bethel history; the production has been used at both the Haywood County TDA Visitors' Center and at the Haywood County Arts Council's Studio 86.**
- Held a series of discussions with NCDOT and community members to save and restore NC's oldest truss bridge. Truss Bridge #79, which is located in Bethel, was restored by NCDOT in 2013 at the urging of BRCO and community citizens.
- **Interfaced with NCDOT and community activists and received a private grant to conduct an aerial inspection to institute proper care for the several-hundred-year-old Osborne Boundary Oak Tree in Bethel. Arborists completed the aerial inspection and pruning in 2013. *The Mountaineer* featured an article.**
- Interfaced with NCDOT to collect seedlings from the historic Osborne Boundary Oak to sell as a means of obtaining future funding for an aerial inspection and treatment of the tree
- **Supplied supporting documentation to NCDOT/Cultural Resources Department for a state historic marker at Inman Chapel. Cheryl Inman Haney provided research and primary documentation. The marker was erected in 2011. *The Mountaineer* featured an article.**

- **Supplied supporting documentation to NCDOT/Cultural Resources Department for a state historic marker at Lake Logan, site of the early 1900s Sunburst Logging Village. Cheryl Inman Haney provided research and primary documentation. The marker was erected in 2013.**
- Developed a local historic marker program that features significant historic sites in Bethel that do not meet state marker criteria. The committee has placed markers at Osborne Boundary Oak, Bethel Presbyterian Church, and Lenoir's Creek Farm. ***The Mountaineer* featured an article.**



Lenoir's Creek Farm Historic Marker

- Overseer of a Girl Scout Gold Award project by Allison Cathey to document all gravesites at the 1854 Bethel Cemetery. The Gold Award was granted in 2009. ***Mountaineer* featured an article.**
- Overseer of an Eagle Scout project by Joey Rolland to conduct restoration of the 1800s Pigeon Gap Watering Hole/Spring atop Waynesville Mountain. **BRCO received a private grant to cover the cost of construction of a walking bridge at the Pigeon Gap Watering Hole/Spring and also provided labor for clearing the area of overgrowth so that the 1920s plaque and rock wall could be viewed.** The Eagle Scout project was completed in 2014.
- Provided directional and Eagle Scout project signage at the recently restored Pigeon Gap Watering Hole/Spring site at Pigeon Gap atop Waynesville Mountain
- **Two interviews by *Catch the Spirit of Appalachia* with Historic Preservation Committee member about BRCO's farmland protection and historic preservation projects will be placed in Western Carolina University's archival collection.**
- Provided grant funding for historic-related projects for the 1860 Cathey House and the 1902 Inman Chapel sites in Bethel. ***Mountaineer* featured an article**
- Provided grant funding for a 4th grade educational program to Francis Mill Preservation Society for a field trip at the mill where students learned about the history of mills, milling, and Francis Mill
- **BRCO nominated Tanna Timbes and the Francis Mill Preservation Society for Preservation NC's Gertrude S. Carraway Award for restoration of the 1887 Francis Grist Mill. The award was received in 2009. *The Mountaineer* featured an article about the award.**
- **BRCO's author of *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain, Books 1-6*, Evelyn Coltman, was one of several local authors featured by Blue Ridge Books in Downtown Waynesville Association's Appalachian Lifestyles Festival in 2011. All featured authors were recognized for their contribution to the collection and preservation of local history. BRCO's DVD was also recognized.**
- BRCO arranged for Preservation NC to conduct a 22-site architectural study of Bethel's historic structures worthy of salvation; the representative presented a program about his findings (2006).
- BRCO arranged for a 4-site tour by the WNC Cultural Resources Department of Bethel locations worthy of National Register nomination. (2010).
- BRCO consulted with the WNC Cultural Resources Department and a representative from Preservation NC concerning historically accurate restoration projects at BRCO's home base, the 1885 Bethel Presbyterian Church (2013).

BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee has developed numerous programs and conducted an extensive number of projects that indicate its dedication to preserving and interpreting Southern Appalachian history and culture while also educating the public about the history of the community

and Haywood County. * Bethel Rural Community Organization deserves the 2014 Mountain Heritage Award for the work of both its Farmland Preservation and its Historic Preservation Committees.

Mountain Heritage Award for 2014

Supporting Documentation Enclosed for

Bethel Rural Community Organization's Nomination

BROCHURES

Published by Bethel Rural Community Organization

Art Prints of Ten Historic Sites/Themes in the Cold Mountain Region of Bethel

Cold Mountain Heritage Driving Tour CD

Enhanced Farmland Protection for North Carolina Landowners

Protecting the Best of Bethel

The Rural Lands of the Upper Pigeon River Valley

Published by Other Organizations – Includes information about Bethel Rural Community Org.

Buy Haywood's Find Your Adventure 2014 Agritourism Guide

Haywood County Quilt Trails Brochure

DVDs PRODUCED BY BETHEL RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Land of Promise

Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came Before Us