

Jackson County History



COURTESY JCSO

Eleven years after Deputy Gene Ashe's death, a section of U.S. Highway 441 South was dedicated to Deputy Ashe's memory. This sign was unveiled on April 13, 2006 by members of Deputy Ashe's family, Sheriff Jimmy Ashe, and NCDOT Division Engineer Joel Setzer. The section of highway covers the same area where Deputy Ashe was found in his patrol vehicle following the chase that led to his death. Left to right; Nancy Buchanan, Millie Wood, Sheriff Ashe, Joel Setzer and Susan Shannon.

Remembering the service of Deputy Gene Ashe

On April 13 26 years ago, Jackson County Deputy Gene Ashe died of a heart attack, shortly after helping to pursue a member of a local militia movement.

After breaking off the chase, Ashe, 38, a 17-year veteran of law enforcement, was found in his patrol car at the intersection of U.S. 441 and Pumpkin-town Road, where he had suffered the fatal heart attack.

The chase started in Haywood County when a Waynesville officer attempted to stop a driver, Kim Lee Bonsteel of Franklin, for suspected driving while impaired.

The chase ended in Macon County with three officers injured.

Bonsteel claimed to recognize no government and to not be a United States citizen or resident within the jurisdiction of the United States.

The Waynesville officer stopped Bonsteel on U.S. 23-74. Bonsteel, however, refused to produce his driver's license and would not get out of his pickup.

Eventually, Bonsteel opened his window and handed the officer a folded three-page warning, claiming he was a civil-rights investigator and that anything the officer said or did would be documented and used against him.



Gene Ashe

He had signed the warning "John Doe by K.B."

The man drove away when officers broke the passenger window and attempted to pull him from the pickup. A Waynesville officer was cut by broken glass as Bonsteel left the scene.

Two Waynesville officers followed the pickup to the Jackson County line. At that point, the chase was picked up by Jackson County deputies, including Ashe, and a N.C. Highway Patrol trooper.

Bonsteel crossed the Jackson-Macon county line on Cowee Mountain. Ashe, as well as some of the other deputies, dropped out as Macon County officers took over.

Bonsteel was finally stopped in Macon County when he ran into a Franklin police car and a Macon County Sheriff's Department car.

Three officers were injured, none seriously. Bonsteel was convicted on 18 charges and sentenced to serve at least seven years in prison.

A section of U.S. 441 in Jackson County is named the Deputy Roy Eugene Ashe Highway in Ashe's memory.

Article courtesy the office of District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch, N.C. 43rd Prosecutorial District.

Looking Back

This week in local history:

70 years ago - April 19, 1951

- Jackson County's oldest citizen "Aunt" Jane Hatcher celebrated her 101st birthday.
- Those who served in the Spanish-American war were given identification cards in order to receive outpatient treatment.
- The Red Cross went to Western Carolina Teachers College in search of graduates or graduating seniors who would be interested in immediate jobs abroad with the Red Cross. Men would serve as assistant field directors and women would serve aides in military hospitals.

60 years ago - April 20, 1961

- 74 boys came to tryouts and were assigned to baseball teams in the age range of 13 to 15 years old with a capacity of 15 players on each team.
- The paving of the newly constructed section of N.C. 107 between Cullowhee and Rolling Green Motor Court was under way.
- Three seniors of the McKee Laboratory School were awarded the State Homemaker Degree. The girls who received the honor were Frankie Dills, Karen Vom Lehn and Irene Hinds. They were the first of the McKee school to have earned the degree.

50 years ago - April 22, 1971

- The \$1.25 million W. Frank Forsyth School of Business Building was dedicated at Western Carolina University.
- A 40-hour work week for Sylva police was adopted by the Mayor and Town Board; previously some officers were working six days a week with no holidays.
- Western Carolina University students worked on costumes for the upcoming production of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," a play about the Salem witch trials.

40 years ago - April 23, 1981

- Five-pound bags of oranges were on sale for \$1.89.
- 30 Jackson County teachers were told that there was no funding for their jobs and they would be out of work the 1981-82 school year.
- Western Carolina University's baseball team stood atop first place in the Southern Conference after a seven-game winning streak.

30 years ago - April 18, 1991

- The Cherokee Children's Home held their second annual auction to benefit the home.
- Western Carolina University brothers Todd and Matt Raleigh were the most prolific hitting brother act in college baseball during the 1991 season. Todd was a senior catcher, batted .338 with 11 home runs and 55 runs batted in. Matt was a junior third baseman, batted .397 with 10 homeruns and 41 RBIs.
- The Brevard Lady Devils downed the Smoky Mountain softball team, 5-2.

20 years ago - April 19, 2001

- Western Carolina University broke ground on an expansion of Hinds University Center. The project was a \$5.3 million project that added on 34,000 square feet.
- The 17th annual Tuckaseegee River Cleanup took place. While volunteers collected trash along the 22-mile river in a raft, railroad employees stopped the train at strategic places to help load the trash.
- The Webster High School Class of 1941, known as the "Pearl Harbor Bombers," celebrated their 60th class reunion.

10 years ago - April 21, 2011

- County officials gave the OK to purchase 14.7 acres for the greenway. The cost per acre was \$5,606.17.
- Smoky Mountain lady's softball team defeated East Henderson by a score of 9-2.
- WCU donated books to help lead a tutoring program at Scotts Creek School.



When All God's Children Get Together

A Celebration of the Lives and Music of African American People in Far Western North Carolina



Researched and Written by Ann Miller Woodford

"She has distinguished herself over many years as a fine historian and sensitive artist. Her work has been essential to telling the story of African Americans in far Western North Carolina. Without her 'heart work,' this important part of our region's history may have gone untold."

— Ralph Simpson, President of the WNCHA Board of Trustees

When All God's Children Get Together:

A Celebration of the Lives and Music of African American People in Far Western North Carolina



Curated by Ann Miller Woodford
In partnership with the Mountain Heritage Center, WCU
Sponsored by One Dozen Who Care, Inc.

WNCHA to honor Woodford

The WNCHA 2020 Outstanding Achievement Award will be presented to Ann Miller Woodford for her work preserving and promoting the history of African American people in far western North Carolina, on Tuesday, May 18 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Previously, Woodford was the 2018 Mountain Heritage Day individual winner named by Western Carolina University.

"It is an honor for the Western North Carolina Historical Association to present this award to Ann Miller Woodford," said Ralph Simpson, President of the WNCHA Board of Trustees. "She has distinguished herself over many years as a fine historian and sensitive artist. Her work has been essential to telling the story of African Americans in far Western North Carolina. Without her 'heart work,' this important part of our region's history may have gone untold. We hope this award will encourage others to learn more, and care more, about the diversity of all of Western North Carolina."

New this year, a \$1,000 prize, generously funded by the WNCHA Board of Trustees, will accompany the award.

"As an awards committee, we marveled at the work that is ongoing in Western North Carolina to offer a more complete history of our region," said Catherine Frank, Chair of the Awards Committee. "In this rich environment, the work of Ann Miller Woodford is indeed outstanding. As an advocate, historian, and artist, Miller Woodford makes visible the stories of 'seemingly invisible' African American people of western North Carolina. Her work, 'When All God's Children Get Together: A Celebration of the Lives and Music of African American People in Far Western North Carolina,' offers an



Woodford

account that is personal and well-researched, offering stories that are unique and representative. She encourages all of us to record the stories of our elders and to face the complexity of our shared past. We are honored that she will join the list of Outstanding Achievement Award winners."

The live Zoom webinar is free to attend and will include brief remarks from the Outstanding Achievement Award Committee Chair, Catherine Frank, WNCHA's Executive Director, Anne Chesky Smith, WNCHA's President, Ralph Simpson, and Ann Miller Woodford.

The webinar will also include the presentation of the Outstanding Achievement Award trophy and monetary prize as well as a 20-minute film adapted from one of Woodford's lectures about her publication, "When All God's Children Get Together: A Celebration of the Lives and Music of African American People in Far Western North Carolina."

An exhibit of the same name, curated by Ann Miller Woodford, is currently on display at WNCHA's facility, the Smith-McDowell House Museum in Asheville and runs through the end of June 2021. You can reserve a ticket to visit the exhibit at wnchistory.org.

Since 1954, the Western North Carolina Historical Association has presented its annual Outstanding Achievement Award to individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of our regional history. Recipients have included Sadie Smathers Patton, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Ora Blackmun, Johnnie Baxter, The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County, the South Asheville Cemetery Association, and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.

The Western North Carolina Historical Association is a nonprofit organization with a mission of preserving and promoting the history and legacy of Western North Carolina through interpretation, education, collection, and collaboration. For more information about WNCHA, call 828 253-9231 or visit www.wnchistory.org.

For a full listing of the winners since 1954, visit: <https://www.wnchistory.org/award/lifetime-achievement-award/>

For more about Ann Miller Woodford, visit her website: <https://annstree.com/>