Elevens 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 and friends, but also by citizens of far western North Carolina who admired his service and dedication to his community.

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 hoping 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 Pembroke 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, who was fleeing during a traffic stop. The chase ended in Macon County with three officers injured, none seriously.

Bonsteel crossed the Macon-Macon county line on Cowee Mountain, Ashe, as well as many of the other deputies, dropped out as Macon County officers took over. Bonsteel was finally stopped in Macon County when he ran into a forest. The chase ended in a Macon County Sheriff’s Department car. Three officers were injured, none seriously. Bonsteel was convicted of first degree 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 Fugate Highway in his memory. Article courtesy of the office of District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch, N.C. 43rd Prosecutorial District.

The WNCHA 2020 Outstanding Achievement Award will be presented to Ann Miller Woodford for her lifetime work preserving and promoting the history of African American people in far western North Carolina. Woodford had been active in the WNCHA for 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, this important part of our region’s history may have gone untold. We hope that this award will encourage others to learn more, and care more, about the diverse history of the region. This year, a $5,000 grant will be awarded to the WNCHA Board of Trustees, will award the company 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 WNCHA Board of Trustees. “At this rich moment in time, a fine historian, and artist, Miller Woodford makes visible the stories of so many invisibly invisible African American people of our neighbors. 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 account that is personal and well-researched, offering stories that are unique and representative. These stories are the stories of our elders, and to face the complexities of our history, we need to recognize their contributions.

“Today we elevate her contributions to the Outstanding Achievement award. The WNCHA is a nonprofit organization with a mission of preservation and promotion of our regional history. Recipients have included Sadie Smathers Patton, Mary O’Lora Blackmon, John Baxter, The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County, the South Asheville Cemetery Association, and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.

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