

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Western North Carolina Historical Association to host virtual Lit Café and outdoor outings.**

ASHEVILLE, North Carolina – “Just as the river belongs to no one, it belongs to everyone and everyone is held accountable for its health and condition,” Wilma Dykeman wrote of the famous river that flows through Asheville in her award-winning book, *The French Broad* (1955). Though sometimes mistaken for a romance novel about a French woman, in reality, the publication was the 40<sup>th</sup> book published in the “Rivers of America” series, and the first to mention water pollution in a short, but controversial chapter that Dykeman’s publisher tried to get her to remove.

On Thursday, September 10 from 2:30-3:30pm via Zoom, Dykeman’s son, Jim Stokely, president of the Wilma Dykeman Legacy, will discuss the research, writing, and legacy of *The French Broad* to kick off a new series of literature and history related programming spearheaded by the Western North Carolina Historical Association (WNCHA) and known as Lit Café. The cafes, held via Zoom until COVID restrictions are lifted, will continue through the fall and into the spring and feature authors and experts discussing local literature. The cafes are free for WNCHA members.

Not coincidentally, Dykeman’s first book was also the first book to win WNCHA’s Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award, which is annually presented to a book of any genre that embodies excellence in literature about western North Carolina or by local authors. October’s Lit Café will feature co-authors George Ellison and Janet McCue along with their editor, Francis Figart from the Great Smoky Mountains Association, discussing their biography of Horace Kephart, *Back of Beyond*, which won the award in 2019. In November, the awards committee will present the 2020 award in a special Lit Café presentation, in which each of the five – yet to be announced - finalists will read selections from their work.

In parallel with the Lit Cafes, WNCHA will also host socially-distanced outdoor experiences this fall. On Saturday, September 12, the historical association is partnering with Montreat College’s Outdoor Recreation Studies department to offer a guided paddle tour of a section of the French Broad which embodies Dykeman’s work. WNCHA’s Public Program Director, Trevor Freeman, will offer historic interpretation along the way. Suitable for any level of paddler (beginners welcome and encouraged!) proceeds from the paddle trip support WNCHA’s mission of education and preservation.

At the end of October, to complement Ellison and McCue’s presentation on Kephart, Freeman and UNCA History professor, Dan Pierce, who has written extensively on the Smokies, will lead a guided hike in Great Smoky Mountains National Park to see sites associated with Kephart, including his final resting place, to better understand the complicated figure who was a pivotal voice in the protection and creation of the park.

Of the programming, Freeman said, “Both *The French Broad* and *Back of Beyond* exemplify the history of interaction between humans - locals and newcomers - and the natural environment of Western North Carolina. What better way to understand these subjects and authors than to explore the rivers and peaks they studied and helped protect?”

Lit Café sessions are free to WNCHA members and available on a sliding scale of \$5-15 per meeting for non-members. After the event, these programs will be available as recordings for all registrants. The price varies for each outdoor program. For more details, and for mandatory pre-registration, visit [WNChistory.org/events](http://WNChistory.org/events) or call 828-253-9231.

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