

GRAHAM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Final Report

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LEFT: GH0027 Wilson-Quilliams House

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INTRODUCTION

In 2025 Audrey Thomas and Michael Ann Williams conducted a comprehensive survey of the historic architecture of rural Graham County under the auspices of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (HPO). The primary objectives of the Graham County Comprehensive Architectural Survey were to (1) update the documentation for previously surveyed properties and (2) identify new candidates for survey that are roughly 50 years old and older and document those properties most worthy of being recorded. Ms. Thomas and Dr. Williams identified new candidates for survey by driving Graham County's public roads in March and April 2025. The surveyors prioritized historic properties with high material integrity and/or design elements important to local history and culture; farmsteads with complexes of intact agricultural buildings and field patterns; buildings that serve as important community gathering places, such as churches and schools; buildings that housed major employers or other mainstays of the local economy; and properties associated with groups that have been underrepresented in published histories. As the survey progressed, the input of many local people allowed the surveyors to identify other properties meeting these criteria that were not obvious from the outset of the project.

Most fieldwork took place April to June 2025 and October to December 2025. To update the documentation found in existing survey files, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Williams verified the location of previously surveyed properties and made corrections to HPOWEB, the HPO's GIS web service, as needed. The surveyors also noted the existence or loss of previously surveyed properties and made notes about the condition, including changes

over time, of those properties still standing. The HPO's database and photographic record (and accompanying paper files) were updated for those properties accessible to the surveyors.

To create survey files for newly recorded properties, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Williams took digital photographs that meet or exceed the HPO's minimum standards using a digital SLR camera. Photographs were labeled according to the HPO's naming conventions, and contact sheets were printed for inclusion in the paper files. The surveyors created a database record for each property surveyed, and report forms printed from the database were included in the paper files. Site plans were drawn in the field or created later by labeling aerial photographs. The site plans, as well as notes taken during fieldwork and printed copies of research material reviewed in the office, were included in the paper files. USGS quadrangle maps were used during fieldwork, and information from the paper maps was later translated into data points in HPOWEB.

This report provides historic and architectural context for evaluating buildings and landscapes in Graham County. The report is not an exhaustive history of Graham County or its architectural heritage, but it draws connections between the social and environmental history of Graham County and the places that best convey its history. The authors relied upon archival material and, especially, the input of local people. On February 26, 2026, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Williams presented the results of the comprehensive survey, including Study List recommendations, to the National Register Advisory Committee. The properties approved for the Study List are listed in Appendix B.

The county seat of Robbinsville was not included in this survey. Robbinsville had been surveyed in 2018, and in 2021 a nomination for downtown Robbinsville was approved for the National Register of Historic Places. The Graham County Courthouse (GH0039) had been separately listed in 2007. Individuals interested in the historic architecture of Robbinsville should consult the survey report and nominations.[1]

A modest number of other properties in Graham County have already been successfully nominated to the National Register. The Charles Noden George House (GH0001), the only dwelling in rural Graham County placed on the Register, was listed in 1984. However, in 2002, the building was dismantled and moved to South Carolina.[2] Hydroelectricity has been a central part of Graham County's history, and all three major dam projects in the County—Cheoah (GH0047, NR 2004), Santeetlah (GH0062, NR 2004), and Fontana (GH0058, NR 2017)—have been listed in the National Register.[3] The Tapoco Lodge Historic District (GH0056), listed in 2004, represents both the development of hydroelectric resources and of tourism in Graham County.[4] Finally, the listing of Snowbird Mountain Lodge (GH0002) in 1993 also represents the development of tourism and

[1] Lisa D. Buckley and Elizabeth C. King, "Comprehensive Architectural Survey of Robbinsville, North Carolina," North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 2020; Sybil H. Argintar, "Robbinsville Downtown Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2021; Clay Griffith, "Graham County Courthouse," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2007.
[2] Douglas Swaim and Michael Hill, "Charles Noden George House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1984. When moved to South Carolina, the George House lost its place in the National Register. For more information about what happens when properties enrolled in the National Register are moved, refer to Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 60, section 14(b)(4) (2024).
[3] Philip Thomason and Teresa Douglass, "Cheoah Hydroelectric Development," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004; Philip Thomason and Teresa Douglass, "Santeetlah Hydroelectric Development," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004; Andra Kowalczyk and Philip Thomason, "Fontana Hydroelectric Project," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2017.
[4] Philip Thomason and Teresa Douglass, "Tapoco Lodge Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004.

recreation in the county.[5] Aside from the listing of the Charles Noden George House, no National Register listings represent the local rural architectural traditions of Graham County.

Graham County presents some challenging topography for an architectural surveyor. Even by western North Carolina standards, the county is mountainous and has relatively little level land. Over 60 percent of the land is now owned by the United States Forest Service, and only a few historic buildings have been preserved on these lands. Consequently, there are vast swaths of land, especially on the western side of the county, with relatively little to survey.

Another significant absence from the survey results must be noted. The Cherokee have played a major role in the history of Graham County, not only in the past, but in the present. Snowbird is a distinct community within the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) that survived somewhat physically isolated from the Qualla Reservation farther to the east. Among the most culturally conservative members of the Eastern Band, several hundred Snowbird Cherokee live on a checkerboard of land in Graham County.[6] While not wishing to overlook the significance of Cherokee history, it must also be recognized that cultural resources on Cherokee land are not under the purview of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, but rather the EBCI Tribal Historic Preservation Office. It

[5] Davyd Foard Hood, "Snowbird Mountain Lodge," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1993.
[6] Studies of the Snowbird Cherokee include Sharlotte Neely, *Snowbird Cherokees: People of Persistence* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991) and the recent PBS North Carolina documentary *A Sacred Thread*, 2025.

should also be noted that archaeological resources are identified and managed separately from architectural resources, by the Office of State Archaeology, and are not included in this survey.

Prior to this survey, two reconnaissance surveys that included rural Graham County had been conducted. In 1978, Roger Manley and Margaret Owen conducted a ten-county survey in far western North Carolina. Of the twenty-three rural properties surveyed in Graham County by Manley and Owen, almost half have disappeared, including all four examples of the Y-plan houses and two log dwellings. Several more will probably be gone by the end of the decade. In 1998, Michael Ann Williams and Kymberly Helbig conducted a short reconnaissance survey of rural Swain and Graham Counties. Of the twenty-five properties surveyed in Graham County in 1998, close to a third are now gone. To the extent possible, Ms. Thomas and Dr. Williams resurveyed all the properties documented in 1978 and 1998 and updated the survey files if new information was available.[7]

Of the remaining previously surveyed properties, beyond the Robbinsville and reconnaissance surveys, the majority are the result of federally mandated Environmental Review. Of these projects, the most massive is the Historic Architecture Survey, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System, completed in 2020, which recorded properties from Robbinsville to Stecoah.[8] Due to the recent nature of this survey, Ms.

[7] Roger Manley and Margaret Owen, "Far West Regional Survey Report," North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 1978; Michael Ann Williams, "Graham and Swain County Reconnaissance Report," North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 1998.
[8] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System, Robbinsville to Stecoah, Graham County, North Carolina," 2020. Prepared for the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT).

Thomas and Dr. Williams mostly did windshield resurveys of these properties, and they include reference to them in this report where relevant. The 2004 Environmental Impact Statement conducted by TRC Garrow includes discussion of timbering history and cultural landscapes along Fontana Lake.[9] Clay Griffith's 2013 survey of resources in Milltown, just west of Robbinsville, gives detailed information on the architecture owned by the Bemis Hardwood Company.[10] Finally, in 2019, a survey of historic resources at Fontana Village was conducted by Marvin Brown.[11]

When this survey began, over three hundred properties had been surveyed in Graham County over the past fifty years. What the county lacked was a comprehensive and integrated survey of the whole of the rural county. Especially underrepresented were agricultural structures and farm complexes and the variety of construction types used in rural domestic structures. A particularly important outcome was the recognition of a variant of single-wall "boxed" construction that utilized two layers of sawn planks nailed together. Geographically, the area around Robbinsville and the route between Robbinsville and Stecoah, as well as resources connected to hydroelectricity and tourism, near the dam projects, were previously well surveyed. Prior to this survey, other parts of the county were less well documented. Beyond new survey, an effort was made to resurvey properties,

[9] Paul A. Webb (TRC Garrow & Associates), "Cultural Resources Existing Conditions Report, North Shore Environmental Impact Statement, Swain and Graham Counties, North Carolina," 2004. Prepared for Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
[10] Acme Preservation Services, "Historic Architectural Resources Survey Report, Replace Bridge No. 11 on NC 143B over Long Creek, Graham County," 2013. Prepared for NCDOT.
[11] Marvin A. Brown, "Historic Structures Survey Report, Upgrade NC 28 from NC 143 to US 129 and Replace Bridge #9 over the Little Tennessee River, Graham County," 2019. Prepared for NCDOT.

especially those surveyed more than ten years ago, and update condition, as well as add any relevant historical information.

Many local people helped with our work. Special thanks to Amber Benton of Graham County Travel and Tourism, Carolyn Stewart of the Graham County Historical Association, Reverend Eric Reece of the Robbinsville United Methodist Church, Liz Velazquez of the Heart Center, and Mayor Diana Simon of Lake Santeetlah, as well as the many, many local historians and property owners who took time to share their memories and histories. Although they are too numerous to mention all of them, we offer a special thanks to Judy Carpenter, Ronnie Campbell, Harold Williams, Marshall McClung, Janice Panther, Revonda Williams, Clara Vee Denton Roach, Rob Hardy, and Lester Greene. We were met with an incredible level of hospitality and helpfulness in Graham County, and our work would have been far less rich without the willing contributions of all we met.

CHAPTER ONE:

GRAHAM COUNTY RURAL ARCHITECTURE, 1838-1888

Surprisingly little remains of the architecture of Graham County from the first fifty years of permanent white settlement following the forced removal of the Cherokee in 1838. Of the land put up for sale in the newly created Cherokee County, the northwest portion of the county had some of the least desirable land, both because of its inaccessibility and the limited amount of land suitable for cultivation. Well-to-do land purchasers instead chose land along the broad valleys of the Hiwassee and Valley Rivers in present-day Cherokee and Clay Counties. One of the first ministers to serve the region that is now Graham County reported that in 1840 there were only three white families settled there. In-migration picked up in the 1850s with a second wave of settlers, most coming not from the North Carolina piedmont or mountain counties to the east, but from the west.[12]

A small number of enslaved African Americans were brought into the region that would become Graham County. The slave census for 1860 in Cheoah, the most densely settled part of the region, indicates that there was a total of eighteen enslaved individuals, eleven belonging to members of the Sherrill family. The other seven were managed by Washington George on land owned by an absentee landlord, C. M. Hitchcock.[13] No known

[12] "Pre-Centennial History," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/01-precountyhistory/prehistory.htm, accessed July 9, 2026; Swaim and Hill, "Charles Noden George House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1984; Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report: Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," p. 3-1.
[13] Margaret Walker Freel, *Our Heritage: The People of Cherokee County, North Carolina 1540-1955* (Asheville: Miller Printing Company, 1956; Reprinted by Cherokee County Historical Museum, Inc., 2008), Appendix D. Citations refer to the 2008 edition.

structures associated with enslaved African Americans survive in Graham County. Little is known of the fate of the newly freed African Americans after the Civil War, but unlike in Cherokee and Clay Counties, there is no record of them staying on in the immediate region. Not until the era of dam construction in the early to mid-20th century did Graham County have a significant African American population, although many of these people were temporary workers who left after the dams were competed.

While it is known that the relatively well-to-do settlers in the newly created Cherokee County built houses of heavy frame in the era of early white settlement, log would have been the default method of construction for most white settlers. No known frame structures survive in Graham County from before the Civil War. Of course, the region that became Graham County generally lacked the more prosperous landholdings of its neighboring counties, but still it seems likely that at least some larger frame houses were built by early white settlers.

European-derived log architecture arrived in Graham County long before permanent white settlement, having been widely adopted by the Cherokee in the 18th century for the construction of domestic structures. Many of the Cherokee who eluded removal and stayed or resettled in Graham County continued to build and live in log houses into the 20th century, as did their white neighbors. The industrial census conducted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in the 1920s includes descriptions or photographs of a number of Cherokee log houses in Graham County, although none are known to have survived. These

images reveal that Cherokee log dwellings were largely physically indistinguishable from those occupied by their non-Cherokee neighbors.[14]

Traditional log dwellings can be difficult to date accurately. Graham County had no shortage of suitable timber, and the building technology changed little over the 19th century. The best documented log dwelling from the pre-Civil War era unfortunately was dismantled and moved from Graham County in 2002.[15] The Charles Noden George House (GH0001) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Although it has not been preserved in its original context, its history provides some basis for understanding log buildings in Graham County.

Charles Noden George, a War of 1812 veteran, was born in 1790 in Sullivan County, Tennessee. After marriage, George eventually moved his family first to Blount County and later Monroe County, Tennessee, to the west of present-day Graham County. In 1853, at the age of sixty-three, he purchased one hundred acres on Tulula Creek in what was then Cherokee County. There he built a single-pen, story-and-a-half dwelling constructed of hewn poplar logs with half-dovetail notching. The downstairs interior was partitioned into two rooms, and both rooms were sheathed with hand-planed, tongue-and-groove poplar boards. A fieldstone chimney was built on the uphill gable end of the structure, and a

[14] Of the 229 Cherokee households surveyed by the BIA in North Carolina in 1922 and 1923, roughly 50 percent of dwellings were wholly or partially of log. The records are housed at the National Archives, Southern Regional Office in Morrow, Georgia, RG 75 Bureau of Indian Affairs, Cherokee Indian Agency, Cherokee, North Carolina.

[15] Louise Huscusson Stewart, *Precious Memories of the Pioneers and Veterans of Graham County* (Catch the Spirit of Appalachia, 2008), pp. 167-169. The house was moved by Sonja Patterson Crisp, a descendent of Charles Noden George, to Pickens County, South Carolina. When moved, the George House lost its place in the National Register. For more information about what happens when properties enrolled in the National Register are moved, refer to Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 60, section 14(b)(4) (2024).

partial cellar was dug below the house on the downhill side. The structure would have represented George's fairly well-to-do status, and architectural evidence suggests that the exterior would have been weatherboarded soon after construction.

George's adult sons, Washington, Lafayette, and Jefferson, apparently followed their father in the move to North Carolina. His oldest son, Washington George, served as the manager for C. M. Hitchcock's 1,125-acre farm, where he oversaw seven enslaved individuals. With the advent of the Civil War, Charles Noden George returned to military duty at the age of seventy, a sergeant for Company D, the 25th Regiment of the North Carolian Infantry known as "George's Guards." In 1862 he was discharged due to disability. He died in 1869 and was buried near the house. In the 1870s, the house was sold off to Payton S. Colvard, who around 1900 added a log kitchen ell, which would have been entered through a door off the porch, to the rear of the house. Architectural evidence suggests that the kitchen would have been served by a cookstove, as there is no sign of an exterior chimney or an open fireplace.[16]

Another early log dwelling with connections to the prominent Colvard family, the Campbell-Colvard House (GH0032), also dates from before the Civil War. The house was built by Baxter Campbell (1817-1898), who was born in Carter County, Tennessee, and later moved his family to Cades Cove in Blount County, Tennessee. Similar to Charles Noden George, he purchased land in the Tallulah vicinity in the 1850s. He would later serve in "George's Guards" in the Confederate Army. The Campbell-Colvard House is similar to the

[16] Swaim and Hill, "Charles Noden George House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1984.

Charles Noden George House in that it is a single-pen, story-and-a-half log house built of poplar logs with a half-dovetail notch. The later kitchen is a shed, rather than an ell, addition, and overall, the house has slightly smaller proportions. The downstairs was not partitioned into two rooms. Baxter Campbell's son Alexander Hamilton Campbell married Mary Ann Colvard. The Colvard family moved into the house in the early 20th century and continued to own the house into the 21st century. The house was later covered in asphalt siding. When documented in the 1970s, it still had a wood shake roof. The house is still standing, although it is now overgrown and is hardly visible. It is now probably the oldest extant dwelling in Graham County.[17]

Dating from soon after the Civil War and also associated with both the George and Campbell families is the George-Campbell House (GH0038), another single-pen, story-and-half log dwelling with half-dovetail notching. The house is now partially covered with asbestos siding. The gable-end chimney has been replaced by a cinderblock flue. A boxed, shed-roof kitchen has been added to the rear, and part of the front porch has been enclosed. The house has slightly smaller proportions than the Charles Noden George House, and the hewn logs are somewhat smaller. Similar to the Charles Noden George House, the house has a cellar and an impressive stone foundation, rather than simple stone piers found under many log houses. Although it is in a remote site and is not lived in,

[17] Survey File GH0032 Campbell-Colvard House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. See also, "Baxter Campbell," Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/baxter-campbell-24-97yjcg, accessed July 9, 2026.

the house currently seems to be in about the same condition as when it was documented in 1979.[18]

Built by Jefferson George, son of Charles Noden, this house is located less than a mile east of his father's house on Tulula Creek. Born in 1836 in Blount County, Tennessee, "Jeff" George moved to what would become Graham County, North Carolina, with his family in the 1850s. He was a Confederate soldier and prisoner of war during the Civil War. After returning home from the war, he married Mary Elizabeth Young in 1865 and built the log house in Tallulah the following year. Both Charles Noden George and his son Jeff were teachers, as well as farmers. In 1886, Jefferson and Mary George sold the property to Alexander Hamilton "Buck" Campbell, the son of Baxter Campbell. Buck Campbell also served in the Confederate Army and married Mary Ann Colvard in 1869. According to family tradition, Buck Campbell earned the money to purchase the farm by digging talc in the Nantahala Gorge. Campbell's first wife died in 1891, and in 1896 Campbell married the twenty-year-old Mary Head. Already the father of ten children, Buck Campbell had ten more children by Mary. Buck's daughter Julia (by his first wife) married George Huscusson in 1907 and in 1921 bought a house (GH0010) and land from John and Mary Colvard just down the road. Buck Campbell died in 1930, but his widow continued to live in the log house until the early 1960s. Mary Head Campbell was the last living Civil War Veteran

[18] Survey file GH0038 George-Campbell House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. See also, "Thomas Jefferson George," WikiTree.com, https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/George-13218, accessed July 9, 2026.

widow in Graham County. A descendent recalls that the house did not have electricity when Mary lived there, but the small log house did contain a pump organ.

The George-Campbell House still has a few remnants of outbuildings and landscape features. Near the house are the remains of a large v-notched log smokehouse. According to family tradition, Buck Campbell lived in the smokehouse while waiting to move into the dwelling. There is also a two-seat outhouse, said to have been built by the Works Progress Administration. A spring is located below the house. The property also includes remnants of a log barn, which collapsed after a locust tree fell on it, and the remains of a long stone wall.[19]

The majority of surviving traditional log dwellings in Graham County are single-pen in plan, built of a single square or rectangular log unit. Most are one-story or one-and-a-half-stories in height. However, larger log houses, built of two units of log, were constructed throughout southwestern North Carolina. Generally, the two rooms were of roughly equal size, each served by a hearth. A double chimney might be located between the two units (forming what is known as a saddlebag plan) or two separate chimneys might be built at either gable end (creating what is known as a double-pen plan). In some cases, an open passage (often later enclosed) might run through the center of the house (known as a dogtrot plan). Until separate kitchens became common in the late 19th and early 20th

[19] Phone Interview with Ronnie Campbell, October 21, 2025. Site visit and interview with Janice Huscusson Panther, November 18, 2025. Stewart, *Precious Memories*, pp. 184-185, 190-192. Jefferson George to A. H. Campbell, 1886, Deed Book D, p. 733, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina.

centuries (often corresponding with the acquisition of a cookstove), one downstairs room would serve as a combination living room, kitchen, and bedroom, while the second room would be a parlor and bedroom. Most 19th-century log houses surviving in Graham County are constructed with half-dovetail notching, although v-notching and saddle-notching are common in barns and outbuildings.

One of the few larger 19th-century log houses surviving in Graham County is the Jesse Gunter Cabin (GH0059), preserved at Fontana Village. Built circa 1875, this one-and-a-half-story, double-pen house is built of poplar logs with half-dovetail notching. The house was built by Jesse Gunter with help from his brother Marion in Welch Cove in the 1870s. The property was later acquired by the Green family, and in 1942, Pleasant P. and Lucy Green sold the property to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). It survived both the transformation of the surrounding property to a workers camp during the construction of the Fontana Dam and later the creation of a private resort. In the 1960s, a number of changes were made to the structure, including the addition of a small storage room and a new porch. The windows, doors, and roof have all been replaced, and the structure now has modern concrete mortar between the logs. The house served as a gift shop and was renovated again in the 1980s to serve as a museum.[20]

Other, smaller log dwellings survive by being either museumized or repurposed. Unlike the Gunter Cabin, frequently the original history and date of the building is lost. One log dwelling that was also used as a gift shop and "general store" is the part of the Bear

[20] Survey file GH0059 Jesse Gunter Cabin, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

Creek Junction Village (GH0416) behind the Bear Creek Junction Depot (GH0030). The site was developed circa 1966 as a scenic excursion railroad and tourist site. The single-pen, half-dovetailed log dwelling, which was probably built in the 19th century, is believed to have been moved to the site from a nearby location in the 1960s. The depot and surrounding properties were eventually sold to private development. The Cable family acquired the log house and in the early 2000s added substantial additions including a kitchen and bedroom wings. The original logs can be seen on the front of the house and on the interior.[21]

A recycling of a different sort is found on Anderson Creek. Around 1930 Thomas Colvard moved a single-pen, half-dovetailed log house from Anthony Branch to its current location and converted it to a barn (GH0355). The front and back are covered with weatherboards, but the log construction is clearly evident on the sides. A ramp now leads to the loft space of the story-and-a-half former dwelling. The upper logs are unhewn and probably are replacements added when the building was moved. While the structure resembles a small, double-crib log barn, the center doorway and passage are far smaller than one typically used in a barn. A later two-story tobacco barn and a corn crib, both probably dating from the mid-20th century, sit alongside the converted log house.[22]

[21] Interview with Adam Cable, May 7, 2025. Interview with Mallorie Chamblin, May 7, 2025. A 1960s-era photograph of the Bear Creek Village Complex can be found at "Bear Creek Junction Bear Creek Village," Images of North Carolina, DigitalNC.org, https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/19820?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=-341,-44,2214,1146.
[22] Interview with Dennis Stewart, April 2, 2005.

Although dwellings of heavy timber framing are known to have been built fairly early in the period of early European American settlement in southwestern North Carolina, there are almost no documented frame structures extant in Graham County from the first half-century of white settlement. One possible exception is the massive two-story James Orr House (GH0050) on Orr Branch. The house has both an exterior-end stone chimney, as well as an interior stone chimney, suggesting that the house was extended at one gable end. The house has a central passage and, on the front façade, a two-tiered porch running the full length of the house. When first documented in 1979, the house was already deteriorated, and little is known of the history. The massing of the house suggests a mid- to late-19th-century date of construction. The house is still standing, but it is overgrown and is currently inaccessible.[23]

Another dwelling that is tentatively dated before 1888 is the Walker Cabin (GH0045) near Stecoah. Rather than frame construction, the house is apparently built of boxed or double-boxed construction, though it is weatherboarded on much of the exterior. Former owners described it as "plank on plank," and gave the possible construction date as 1880.[24] The house is a story-and-half in height and has a double-pen plan with a single exterior-end stone chimney. The house was acquired by Loma Linda Resort in 2015 and, after being extensively renovated, is now a rental property amidst a campground and live music venue.

[23] Survey file GH0050 James Orr House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.
[24] Bob and Lynn Shields, letter to John Horton, June 27, 1994, in Survey file GH0045 Walker Cabin, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. The date 1880 may be a bit too early. The Shields did not provide a basis for this date.

If the 1880 construction date is accurate, the Walker Cabin may the earliest documented example of vertical plank or "boxed" construction in Graham County.

One house type notably missing from the 19th-century Graham County landscape is the classic I-house, which is two stories tall, one room deep, and often has rooms on either side of a central passage. This house type is typically emblematic of agricultural prosperity in western North Carolina and more likely to be found in the broad river valleys. While 19th-century, center-passage I-houses may have been built in rural Graham County, they were probably few in number due in part to the lack of arable land. After 1888, the number of frame dwellings increased, though into the early decades of the 20th century, they mostly diverged from the I-house type in various ways, such as being one-and-a-half-stories, rather than two-stories, tall or having anomalous plans resulting from the expansion of smaller houses. Early 20th c. I-houses in Graham County commonly had only one exterior-end chimney.

CHAPTER TWO:

RURAL DWELLINGS IN GRAHAM COUNTY, 1888-1968

Until the 1880s, Graham County's rural architecture was predominantly, if not exclusively, log. In 1872, the North Carolina General Assembly created the new county, carving it out of the northern portion of Cherokee County. By 1884, the population in the county was still only 2,547 (including 212 Cherokee), with the new county seat of Robbinsville having only 102 citizens. However, the natural resources of Graham County would soon begin to attract the attention of outsiders. Even prior to the arrival of the timber companies, locally owned sawmills were growing in number.[25]

Despite the growing availability of sawn lumber, traditional log construction techniques remained in use well into the mid-20th century, fueled, in part, by a cooperative building tradition that provided free labor in rural communities. Even as the building of log dwellings declined in the early 20th century, traditional log construction was still a popular choice for barns and outbuildings. And, of course, many rural people continued to live in log buildings and modify them to fit changing needs and aesthetics.

By the 1890s, most people who built log houses would have chosen smaller, single-pen plans, as those desiring a larger house would most likely have opted for frame or boxed construction. Typical of the late-19th-century log houses, the A. M. Odom House (GH0049)

[25] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 3-1, 3-3; "Town of Robbinsville," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/04-townofrobbinsville/townofrobbinsville.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.

was documented in 1979 in the Lake Santeetlah area but was demolished sometime in the next decade. The probable builder, Allen Monroe Odom, was born in 1870 in Union County, Georgia, and moved with his family to Graham County. The house, probably built in the 1890s after Odom's marriage to Durance Stratton in 1893, was a small, single-pen, one-story log house with half-dovetail notching. The front of the house was covered with weatherboarding. A stone chimney on the gable end had partially fallen by 1979. A. M. Odom and his wife Dura both died in 1959.[26]

Also dating from the late 19th century, the Stewart Cabin (GH0054) is located on Santeetlah Creek in a remote section of the Nantahala National Forest on the western side of Graham County. In 1879 Arch Stewart obtained a land grant and moved his wife and ten children from Monroe County, Tennessee. A larger log dwelling built by Stewart on the banks of the creek was destroyed by a flood in 1895, and Stewart salvaged part of the original cabin and built a single-pen, story-and-a-half log house on higher ground. As with most 19th-century log houses in Graham County, the house is half-dovetail notched and has a massive stone chimney. Stewart died in 1909, and his children sold his timber lands to Gennett Lumber Company in 1922. Tom Patton occupied the dwelling for several years, and the structure is sometimes known as the Patton Cabin. In the 1930s, Gennett's land on Santeetlah was sold to the United States Forest Service.[27] A camping site is now located nearby.

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[26]Survey file GH0049 A. M. Odom House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. The file notes that the house was gone before 1998.
[27] Survey file GH0054 Stewart Cabin, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

A late-19th-century log dwelling that has survived in a greatly altered form is the Colvard-Huscusson House (GH0010). John Colvard built the house in 1899 just down the lane from the Charles Noden George House, which had been purchased by his father Payton Colvard in the 1870s. In 1921 the house was purchased by George Huscusson. Originally a two-room, story-and-a-half log house, this house was later covered with weatherboard siding and then in the 1980s veneered with local granite. Additions were built to the side and rear. The dwelling was the home of local writer and historian Louise Huscusson Stewart.[28] The house and its outbuildings are pictured on her gravestone in Bear Creek Cemetery (GH0417). Another example of a log structure veneered with local stone is the Floyd Crisp House (GH0252) in the Cheoah community.[29]

By the 1920s, the construction of traditional log dwellings had declined dramatically. As the availability of large timbers dwindled, builders of log dwellings often chose to use smaller unhewn logs and shallow saddle-notching. Four houses in Graham County exemplify this type of building. The first is the circa 1925 Stile House (GH0023) in Stecoah. Round logs often create rather large interstices, and, in this case, small stones were placed in the gaps (although the stones are mostly missing on one gable end). There are decorative shingles under the eaves and a modestly sized, exterior-end stone chimney. These touches suggest the influence of bungalow and log revival architecture. A rear log ell had once been attached to the house but has since been removed.[30]

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[28] Stewart, *Precious Memories*.
[29] Phone interview with Harold Williams, April 24, 2025.
[30] Survey file GH0023 Stile Log House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

Now located in a remote part of the Nantahala National Forest, the Swan Cabin (GH0453) was built in 1931 in a different location by Frank Swan. The Swan family had moved to the Wolf Laurel section of the Big Santeetlah Creek in the 1890s. Similar to the Stewart Cabin, their land was eventually sold off to Gennett Lumber Company and then to the United States Forest Service. Similar to other late log dwellings, the Swan Cabin is built of unhewn, saddle-notched logs. Larger than typical log dwellings of this era, the Swan Cabin has a double-pen plan with a massive stone chimney on one end. The cabin has been used to provide lodging for hikers and campers in the National Forest.[31]

Another late example of a traditional log house is the Buchanan Log House (GH0470), which dates from the 1930s, on Greens Creek. Moving from another log house nearby, Earl and Murriel Buchanan purchased the property in 1937 and were possibly the builders of the house. The double-pen house has unhewn saddle-notched logs and had an exterior-end stone chimney, now removed. A boxed kitchen was added to the rear of the house. The Buchanans cooked on a wood fire during this period. Although the Buchanans built another house in the 1940s, various family members continued to occupy this house until the 1970s.[32]

The final example of a transitional log dwelling is the Jenkins Log House (GH0394) on Upper Sawyers Creek. In the early 1940s, Wilbur and Nora Jenkins lost their home in Poison Cove to the construction of the Fontana Dam. They relocated to Sawyers Creek and

[31] Survey file GH0453 Swan Cabin, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. Marshall McClung, "Swan Stories," *The Graham County Star*, October 28, 2021.
[32] Interview with Lester Greene, December 3, 2025.

built a story-and-half log house of unhewn logs. Again, the interstices between the logs are wide and are now filled with cement. The corner notching is almost non-existent, and the logs are partially secured by metal spikes. The house does not have a chimney and probably was once serviced by a flue. About two decades after this house was constructed, the Jenkins built a new house (GH0393) across the road, a one-story stone-veneered house with side gables and a front-gabled bay. The log house was sold and later used as a storage shed. It was then renovated and is now a summer home.[33]

By the final decades of the 19th century, single-wall boxed construction became a structural alternative to log for rural builders of modest means in this region. A definitive study of this construction type in southern Appalachia has yet to be produced. Essentially the boxed house has corner posts, sills, and plates but lacks the studs and bracing typically found in late-19th-century framing. Instead, vertical boards, often roughly finished, are nailed to the minimal frame and form both the interior and exterior walls. Antecedents to this building type are found in early New England, where certain regions favored single-wall plank construction (in those cases the planks are pegged into the frame rather than nailed), but it is not known whether there is any direct connection. Two major factors influenced the adoption of boxed housing in southern Appalachia: the increased availability of sawn lumber and the growing number of individuals entering paid work away from the farm. Boxed houses were quicker to build than log houses, but they did require at least a modest outlay of cash (though often the actual construction was still done by the

[33] Interview with Nettie Jenkins, April 10, 2025; Interview with Bill Gordon, April 10, 2025.

free labor of family or community members). Boxed construction was also commonly used in various types of work camps, though the adoption of this technique for domestic structures seems to predate the widespread development of timbering and mining in western North Carolina. In Graham County, the earliest boxed houses date to the 1880s, the era of the river drives, but predating the establishment of the large timber camps. It is not known whether knowledge of this method of construction existed in the local building repertoire prior to the advent of the logging era.

Often log and boxed construction exist at the same site or even in the same structure. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, rural people often added separate kitchens to the rear of log houses, frequently at the same time as they acquired cookstoves. Quite often boxed construction was used for the addition. A more dramatic example of the mixture of the two methods of construction is found at the Wilson-Quilliams House (GH0027) on Beech Creek. The original story-and-a-half, single-pen log house was built by the Reverend John Fillmore Wilson (1856-1925), probably sometime after he married Zilpha Grindstaff in 1879. The massive yellow poplar logs were hewn relatively thin and were half-dovetail notched. The quality of the construction is indicative of the skill that local builders maintained through the 19th century. As Harold Williams, a neighbor who grew up nearby, noted, the local builders were "artistic in their work with an axe." Wilson may have planned to expand his house at some point, as the locust sills extend beyond the side of the house. Sometime in the 1920s or 1930s, Wilson's son-in-law William Timothy Quilliams added a second room, equal in size to the original, built of boxed

construction utilizing chestnut and yellow poplar boards. The house has not been occupied since the late 1940s or early 50s.[34]

By the early 20th century, rural builders in western North Carolina were more likely to use log construction for barns and outbuildings rather than dwellings. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find boxed houses paired with log agricultural structures. A good example is the story-and-a-half, double-pen Roy Farr House (GH0353) on Hares Creek. The construction appears to be boxed, covered with weatherboard siding. Across from the house is a v-notched, double-crib log barn, probably of the same age.

In some instances, separate log and boxed dwellings may be found on the same property. On the Huscusson Farm (GH0415), up the road from the previously mentioned log Colvard-Huscusson House, the Huscussons built a boxed "starter house" in 1939, when their eldest son married. The boxed house was later occupied by other family members, while the older log house continued to be occupied as well.[35] The boxed house is featured on the gravestone of Earlie Huscusson in the Bear Creek Cemetery. Similarly, Earl and Murriel Buchanan on Greens Creek built a new, front-gabled boxed house in the 1940s. The family moved into this larger house, but the 1930s log house continued to be occupied by family members.[36]

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[34] Phone interview with Harold Williams, April 24, 2025. Site visit and interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025; "William Timothy Quilliams," FindAGrave.com, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/60125537/william_timothy-quilliams, accessed July 9, 2026; "Rev. John Fillmore Wilson," FindAGrave.com, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/138785504/john_fillmore-wilson, accessed July 9, 2026.
[35] Interview with Janice Huscusson Panther, November 18, 2025.
[36] Interview with Lester Greene, December 3, 2025.

The Huscusson and Buchanan boxed houses illustrate the limited variety of forms of most boxed houses in western North Carolina. Older boxed houses tend to follow the same plans as log houses, though they are typically double-pen plans, either a saddlebag plan with a central fireplace or a two-room plan with an exterior-end chimney. (While the classic double-pen house has chimneys on either end, in Graham County there seems to be a preference for a single end chimney.) Both the Farr House and the Huscusson House are double-pen plans with a single chimney on one end. However, by the 1930s and 40s, many rural western North Carolinians broke from tradition and built boxed houses with front-gabled roofs. This change in preference is possibly due to the increasing national popularity of bungalow houses, though many of the boxed houses lack other stylistic elements associated with bungalows. The Buchanan boxed house is of this type. In most cases, boxed houses are easily identifiable by their exterior of rough-sawn vertical boards. Sometimes, but not always, the boards have battens covering the spaces between the vertical boards. However, as with log houses, some owners later disguised the construction with siding or veneer.

A surprising number of early-20th-century boxed houses survive in Graham County. A typical early-20th-century boxed house found in the former community of Brock on Sawyers Creek, the Cabe Boxed House (GH0005) is a one-and-half-story, double-pen dwelling. The single exterior-end stone chimney has been removed, so that the stones could be used in the construction of a stone wall at the Stecoah School. The Cabe House probably dates from the 1920s, built by Dilliard Cabe. The timbers for its hardwood floors are believed to have come from the mill at Hazel Creek. The Ritter Lumber Company, the

largest timbering operation on Hazel Creek, operated at that location from 1907-1927. The dwelling is still owned by the Cabe family and was later used to store hay and farm implements. A storage shed was added to one side. The current owner has worked to maintain the structure.[37]

A later example of a similar form is the circa 1942 Sam and Mattie Lail House (GH0371) on Pinhook Road. As with the Cabe House, the exterior is sheathed in vertical boards without battens. Rather than having a stone chimney, the house has a concrete-block flue at one end. The house is now occupied by the Lail's grandson, who wants to keep it looking like it did during his grandparents' time.[38] Just up the road is the circa 1937 Henry Millsaps House (GH0372), a story-and-a-half boxed house. This house is now painted and has been remodeled to serve as a B&B.

Other double-pen houses of probable boxed construction with exterior-end concrete-block flues exist along Yellow Creek in the northern portion of Graham County. The Wesley and Josie Turpin House (GH0399) has the classic double-pen configuration of two front doors, each with a window by its side. A single story in height, the dwelling is now covered with weatherboard on the front façade and sheathed in asphalt on the sides. Down the road, the Holcombe House (GH0397) is a story-and-a-half, double-pen house with an exterior-end concrete-block flue. A screen porch now covers the front. While the

[37] Interview with Jeff Cabe, May 8, 2025.
[38] Interview with Sammy Styles, April 4, 2025.

house has quite a rustic feel from the exterior, the interior has been renovated. Across the road is a log and frame barn, probably once used for tobacco.[39]

If boxed houses were a common choice for rural western North Carolinians of modest means during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a variant of boxed construction that has not been recorded elsewhere in surveys in western North Carolina also exists in Graham County. In this variant, prior to the walls being raised, a second layer of planks is nailed into the first, often with some form of paper layered in between the planks. This double layer provides some modest additional insulation and perhaps greater structural stability, although the construction still lacks studs and vertical bracing. "Double-boxing" has been identified in Kentucky and in at least one oral history conducted in Swain County from a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee but has not been identified in any other surveys in the region. What is distinctive in Graham County is how readily double-boxing is identified by owners, especially those whose families built the houses or who have a long history of ownership, as well as owners who have renovated their property. Several community members noted that double-boxing was exceptionally common in Graham County.[40]

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Walker Cabin (GH0045) near Stecoah is possibly one of the oldest boxed or double-boxed houses in Graham County. Family members assigned a date of 1880 to the house, though it possibly was built later in that decade. The

[39] Interview with Pearl Williams, April 10, 2025.
[40] Interview with Revonda Williams, October 26, 2026; Interview with Amber Benton, October 29, 2025; Interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025.

house at some point was covered with weatherboarding, but former owners described the construction as "plank on plank." The circa 1892 Sawyer Boxed House (GH0004), also the size and configuration of a typical boxed house, was surveyed as such in 1997. However, the current occupant, a direct descendent of the builder, confirmed that the house was double-boxed. As with many boxed dwellings in Graham County, the house is a variant of a double-pen plan, two rooms side by side with a single exterior-end chimney. When first surveyed in 1997, the exterior vertical chestnut boards were still evident, although the interior had already been modernized. The exterior now has horizontal boards (at a distance, it resembles a log house) and the interior is mostly knotty pine. However, the original interior chestnut paneling is still evident in the back room. The rear kitchen addition has recently been extensively renovated. The house is older than originally presumed in the earlier survey. I. W. Sawyer acquired the land on Lower Sawyers Creek in 1891, and the dwelling is believed to have been built by his father LouAllen the following year. The house is still owned and occupied by the Sawyer family.[41]

The Jesse Williams House (GH0377), located on the Left Fork of Beech Creek, also dates from the late 19th century. The dwelling is a story-and-half in height and has a saddlebag plan with a slightly off-center central stone chimney. The house has battens over the exterior vertical board. The interior has been renovated but has retained several of its original features, including the mantles. The upstairs is accessed by a boxed-in staircase and is half finished. In both upstairs rooms interior vertical boards can be seen

[41] Interview with Donna Sawyer, May 8, 2025.

nailed onto the exterior boards. It is one of the only surviving double-boxed houses in which the construction can be seen from the interior. A log corn crib with rough v-notching is also associated with the property.[42]

While the Sawyer House and Williams House are both similar in their plans to traditional boxed houses, other examples of double-boxed houses appear in forms more typically associated with frame houses of the era. An early example is the Orr-Phillips House (GH0383), believed to have been built by Davey Orr around 1889. A substantial one-and-a-half-story house with a single exterior-end stone chimney, the dwelling is now clad with German siding added sometime after the addition of a rear shed kitchen. While, without close inspection, the Orr-Phillips House might be identified as a frame house, above one of the front windows the underlying vertical planks can be seen. The inside walls are clad with wide chestnut planks, and the current owner identified the construction as double-boxed.[43] The classic two-story, single-pile I-house is relatively rare in rural Graham County, and a story-and-a-half diminutive version of this house type, often with a single chimney, seems to be preferred by the somewhat prosperous rural builder. It seems as if double-boxing also provided a more substantial alternative to single-wall boxed construction, but a cheaper alternative, especially in terms of labor, than full frame construction. A blacksmith shop once existed across from the house.

The Harve Grindstaff House (GH0472) on Beech Creek, built in the 1890s, also resembles a small, one-and-a-half-story version of an I-house. The house is covered with

[42] Interview with Ron and Mary Stevic, April 8, 2025; Interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025.
[43] Interview with Carl Lee, April 8, 2025.

weatherboards, and the central chimney is located behind the peak of the roof, where the rear-ell kitchen meets the main block of the house. The Grindstaffs once ran a gristmill and a blacksmith shop on the property.[44] The circa 1896 Sawyer House (GH0460) in Upper Tuskeegee also reads as an I-house, although it is only one-and-a-half-stories in height. The end chimneys are now concrete block. The house is weatherboarded, and a later front porch has been enclosed, extending the size of the front rooms. The current owners, who did extensive renovation, described the double-boxed construction and noted that cardboard was used between the two layers of vertical plank.[45]

Identified in 1979 as a frame dwelling, the circa 1914 Joseph Edwards House (GH0035) in Stecoah resembles a typical western North Carolina I-house with its central passage and two-tiered center-bay porch, a common configuration among late-19th- and early-20th-century I-houses. However, the house is only a story-and-a-half in height. Four gabled dormer windows give light to the second floor under the eaves. Based on the survey file, the house was restored between 1977 and 1979. However, it is now badly overgrown and the owner plans to demolish the house.[46] Built just four years later, the circa 1918 double-boxed Rogers House (GH0446) on Lower Mill Creek begins to show the influence of the Craftsman-style bungalow. The story-and-a-half dwelling is double-pile in depth, and the side gables are bracketed under the roof. The roof still has its galvanized steel shingles,

[44] Interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025.
[45] Interview with Kathie and Len Hatten, November 13, 2025.
[46] Interview with Joe Edwards, May 7, 2025. In the 1979 survey, the house was identified as a frame I-house. Survey file GH0035 Joseph Edwards House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

and the front of the house has a hipped-roof porch and a single hipped dormer above the porch.[47]

The Crisp-Shook House (GH0351) on Jutts Creek demonstrates even more dramatically the adoption of the bungalow form using double-boxed construction. The circa 1930s dwelling is a front-gabled, story-and-a-half bungalow with a front shed porch with wood piers on river stone. The porch, along with a dramatic stone retaining wall and landscaping, displays the growing enthusiasm for stonework (beyond chimneys) in Graham County during this era. Lewis and Helen Crisp Shook were the long-time owners of the house, which they purchased from Helen's brother Boyd Crisp, and the family later built a fishpond and an RV park behind the house. Mrs. Shook ran a clothing shop in the house. The house is still in the family and is well maintained, but not lived in.[48]

The ascription of double-boxed construction poses a puzzle in Graham County. This method of construction, although documented in eastern Kentucky, has not been recorded in western North Carolina.[49] However, a number of different property owners, either descendants of the original builder or owners, or individuals who had done renovation work on the property, or both, volunteered the information that the dwellings were double-boxed without any prompting questions about construction. It would be difficult for someone to recognize double-boxing from a cursory visual inspection of the exterior, and only in a few

[47] Interview with Revonda Williams, October 26, 2026. The house was renovated by Mrs. Williams. Her great-aunt Genevieve Rogers was the second wife of Charlie Rogers, the builder.
[48] Interview with Deborah Shook, April 2, 2025. Stewart, *Precious Memories*, pp. 128-130.
[49] Karen Hudson has documented double-boxed buildings at the Pine Mountain Settlement School in Kentucky. Email correspondence with Karen Hudson, November 13, 2025, February 11, 2026.

cases is the form of construction clear from the interior. Quite possibly other houses surveyed in Graham County as either frame or boxed houses were actually double-boxed, but either oral history was not available, or volunteered, or the physical evidence of double-boxing had been disguised by external and internal coverings.

Double-boxing seems to have existed in Graham County as an intermediate choice between frame and single-wall construction. It demanded the use of twice as much lumber as regular boxed construction to create both exterior and interior walls, but it streamlined the construction process and expense by eliminating the studs and smaller framing elements of standard framing. Many of the builders of double-boxed houses seem to have aspired to somewhat more substantial or stylish houses than their neighbors. At this point, however, it is difficult to assess whether Graham County is unique in western North Carolina in having double-boxed houses, perhaps the result of the influx of settlers coming from the west, or whether the construction type has not been adequately accounted for elsewhere in the region.

The construction of boxed and double-boxed dwellings declined dramatically before the 1950s. Single-wall construction was not conducive to the installation of electricity or indoor plumbing, both increasingly available to rural people of modest means by the mid-20th century.[50] A notable exception to the rule is the double-boxed Weaver Williams House (GH0473) built in 1968 on Beech Creek, just up the road from the Harve Grindstaff House. Harold Williams, who helped build this house, noted that Weaver Williams worked at a

[50] Although double-boxing is not, strictly speaking, single-wall construction, no space is left between the exterior and interior walls for the installation of electricity.

sawmill and could get the timber cheap, and with the help of family and community members, this simple single-story, side-gable dwelling was built with no labor costs at all.[51]

Ultimately, boxed and double-boxed construction was a product of both tradition and change. Widespread timbering, utilizing Graham County's most plentiful resource, brought cheap and readily available sawn timber and ushered many rural people into the cash economy. However, the traditional ethic of mutual aid continued to support community building practices into the mid-20th century. Rather than relying on specialists who needed to be paid for their labor, they "built what they knowed." Interviewed in 1984, Grady Carringer of Stecoah recalled, "You could go and buy lumber at some of these sawmills, they's in every cove, two or three down through this country. You could buy lumber to put you up a four-room house, for about thirty or forty dollars . . . There'd be crowd, be a bunch of people right in the country. They'd just come automatically, help you throw your house right up."[52]

By the turn of the century, rural builders in western North Carolina who wanted larger houses generally opted for frame construction rather than boxed or log. Double-boxing may be the exception in Graham County. Both the double boxed Orr-Phillips House and the Joseph Edwards House present themselves as I-houses, but in both cases their height is slightly less than two stories, with the second floor under the eaves. Some two-story, frame houses built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were built as

[51] Interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025.
[52] Interview with Grady Carringer, September 14, 1984, as cited in: Michael Ann Williams, "Pride and Prejudice: The Appalachian Boxed House in Southwestern North Carolina," *Winterthur Portfolio* 25 (1990):226-227.

substantial additions to frame houses. The John A. Cody House (GH0043), a frame I-house in Cheoah, is one of the few surviving rural houses in Graham County of this kind. Unusually, it has a hipped, rather than gabled, roof and a single off-center interior chimney. The plan suggests that the house may first have been built as a single-story, two-room-plan house that was later enlarged around the turn of the 20th century, creating a central-passage, two-story form.[53]

Other large frame dwellings were additions to log houses. In 1909 surveyor C. Z. Denton bought the 19th-century log Davis House on Slaybacon Road and about 1912 added a large two-and-a-half-story, frame house perpendicular to the log house (GH0374). The log house continued to be used as a kitchen, living room, and bedroom. More typically in western North Carolina, when an I-house is built connected to a preexisting log house, the log structure assumes the role of a rear-ell kitchen. However, in this case the older log dwelling joins the frame house at its gable end. The siting of the log house on a hill may have made the unusual configuration a more practical solution. The house was heated by two brick chimneys, one on the log portion of the house and the other an interior chimney within the frame portion.[54]

The Colvard House (GH0240) just south of Robbinsville is an example of a central-passage I-house built at the turn of the 20th century and later enlarged with stylish additions. Similar to other double-pen dwellings and I-houses built in Graham County

[53] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 24-1 to 24-16.
[54] Interview with Clara Vee Denton Roach, April 4, 2025.

during this time, the house has only one chimney, in this case, at the gable end. Around 1930, the house was substantially enlarged to the rear and updated in the Craftsman style with a hipped-roof front porch with tapered posts set on a river-stone balustrade, which wraps around two sides of the house, and brackets and exposed rafters under the roof.[55]

While most of the rural houses built in Graham County before 1920 follow traditional vernacular plans known throughout the Upper South, one small group of anomalous early-20th-century houses have been documented in Graham County. Unfortunately, of the four Y-plan houses documented in 1979, none now survive. Because they have not been documented elsewhere in western North Carolina and are so atypical of general regional plans, they were most probably built by a single builder or family of builders. Three of the examples were located in Cheoah, with a fourth one in Stecoah. The plan essentially consists of a three-wing house extending in a Y-shape from a central chimney or flue. The Molt Rice House was built circa 1909. and the other houses were probably about the same age. The four examples—the Molt Rice House (GH0053), the Stiles House (GH0055), the John Holloway House (GH0040), and the Jesse Crisp House (GH0033)—are all one-story with an attic or a story-and-a-half in height. All of the houses have porches between two or three of the wings. The only example in Stecoah, the Jesse Crisp House, had its central chimney removed by the time it was documented in 1979. It is difficult now to assess the merits of this plan among a limited number of owners, though the creation of a single chimney that could serve three wings may have been seen as an asset. However, this was

[55] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 9-1 to 9-10.

countered by the fact that the small central core made it difficult to move easily from one wing to another.[56]

One other rural, late-19th- or early-20th-century frame house in Graham County is also anomalous in plan and appearance. The circa 1900 Sherrill-Garland House (GH0041) near Robbinsville has an unusual complex form with two-story projecting bays at the center façade and on the gable end. From straight on, the house resembles a local, vernacular interpretation of the Queen Anne style, but the house is only a single pile in depth, giving it the sense of a false front or stage set. Wade Garland purchased the house in 1942, and it is still owned by the Garland family. It was occupied until 2024. The current owner believes that the house was earlier associated with the writer and local historian Margaret Walker Freel, who used it as a summer house, although the deed records do not show that she owned the property. Her father, William Walker, was a prominent businessman who built a substantial Queen Anne-style house in Robbinsville. When he relocated to Andrews, he built a second Queen Anne-style house in 1914 (CE0184).[57]

While variants of traditional double-pen and I-house plans persisted in rural Graham County well into the 1940s, by the 1920s popular styles were making inroads into the rural landscape. The most common of these in the first half of the 20th century was the bungalow, influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and the Craftsman style. Among

[56] Survey files GH0053 Molt Rice House, GH0055 Stiles House, GH0040 John Holloway House, and GH0033 Jesse Crisp House, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina. All four of these houses were documented in 1979.
[57] Interview with Kenneth Garland, May 28, 2025. The Walker House in Robbinsville is no longer standing.

the earliest in rural Graham County is the W. M. Bebber House (GH0405) on Panther Creek in the northeastern corner of the county. In 1919 William Mack Bebber purchased a previously logged six-hundred-acre tract of land and built the house the following year. The current owner believes it to have been a "kit house." The story-and-a-half frame house has many of the hallmarks of a classic bungalow, including an engaged porch with tapered posts resting on stone columns, a front-gabled dormer, and exposed rafters. The house is also notable for its decorative river stonework utilized in the foundation of the house and in the outbuildings and a striking retaining wall and front steps. Two outbuildings, connected by a stone wall, sit side by side next to the house: a latticed spring house with a stone base and a stone canning house.[58]

Once restricted primarily to the building of foundations and chimneys, stone masonry became increasingly popular in the building of houses and small-scale features in rural landscapes, an ironic choice, perhaps, considering the dominance of the timber industry in the local environment. While many a bungalow had stonework in its porch, foundation, or landscaping, other rural owners decided to either build bungalows entirely of stone or cover the buildings with stone veneer. A notable example of the latter is the circa 1936 Dock and Laura Williams House (GH0401) on Yellow Creek in the northern part of Graham County. Except for a side addition, every part of this one-story bungalow is clad in stone except the roof. Dock Williams ran a sawmill located across the road, which is now gone.[59]

[58] Interview with Kevin Riggs, April 23, 2025.
[59] Interview with Pearl Williams, April 10, 2025.

By the 1950s, some of the distinctive Craftsman-style elements of the bungalow fell away, but the enthusiasm for stonework continued. A good example of a later rural stone house is the Lacey Crisp House (GH0407) built on Panther Creek from stones from the nearby creek. This one-story, side-gabled stone house has a distinctive front-façade stone chimney aligned with a front-gabled bay at the entrance of the house. A small stone garage sits to one side of the house. Probably built in the early 1950s, the stonemason is said to be a man named Postell who had previously worked on Fontana Dam. The house now has a recent substantial addition to the side and rear and a deck on the front façade.[60]

Closer to Robbinsville, several bungalows are more directly expressive of the Craftsman style. Among the most notable is the circa 1930 stone-veneered Frank and Lenore Colvard House (GH0235) just south of Robbinsville on Tallulah Road (US 129). The Colvards owned and operated the Colvard Motor Company (GH0236) across the road, and their prominence may have helped popularize the exuberant use of local stone in building. Two other Craftsman-style bungalows are located further east, on Sweetwater Road, built of frame with stone foundations. Patton Gwynn Denton, son of C. Z. Denton, built his one-and-half-story bungalow (GH0264) with engaged porch and twin pillars around 1938. The slightly smaller Cody House (GH0263) also has twin pillars (although squared rather than round). Considering their proximity and location, the same builder may have constructed these two houses.[61]

[60] Interview with Mark Murphy, April 23, 2025.
[61] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 3-42.

Of the non-traditional or popular plans, bungalows tended to predominate in rural Graham County during the early to mid-20th century. At least one example of a variant of another plan popularly found throughout the United States, the American foursquare, exists in rural Graham County. While classic foursquares tend to be two stories in height, one- and one-and-a-half-story versions are common in the rural South. They also have hipped roofs and square proportions, and the interiors are typically laid out in four rooms. An example in Graham County is the circa 1938 house (GH0382) built by Rufus Varnell "Bunch" Waldroup on Ollies Creek. A shed-roof porch surrounds three sides, and the house now has a deck overlooking the creek.

By the 1950s, a new style of architecture dominated domestic middle-class building across the United States. While rural Graham County did not experience the postwar building boom to the same extent as more prosperous and urban areas of the country, the low, linear ranch house did become popular in the county in the 1950s and 1960s. As with the bungalow, the use of stone veneer was favored in local interpretations of this style, though extensive use of brickwork is also found. In Graham County, the greatest concentration of ranch houses is found within the county seat of Robbinsville; however, classic examples also are found nearby, especially along Tallulah Road, south of town, and along Sweetwater Road, east of Robbinsville. Some notable examples include: the John and Mattie Colvard House (GH0238), the J. Boyd Crisp House (GH0242), the Ted and Reba Jordan House (GH0239), the Phillips House (GH0244), the Millsaps House (GH0323), the John and Ruby Cody House (GH0261), and the Bob and Melba Edwards House (GH0277), all dating from 1950 to 1970. These dwellings generally demonstrate a slight association

with the midcentury Modernist style; however, as the ranch house found favor with rural people of modest means, a plainer, more stripped-down variation with a simple rectangular form predominated, perhaps suiting "the pragmatism of the mountain region."[62] Typically, ranch houses have integrated carports on one gable end (though often these are enclosed to add an extra room) and are often built without basements. However, sometimes mountain topography made it cost-effective to build a basement and garage on a lower level.[63] As is typical of Graham County, rural farmsteads often display a succession of dwellings, and log or boxed dwellings are often accompanied by a simple version of a ranch house.

[62] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 3-60.
[63] Ibid., 3-54. For a fuller exploration of ranch houses in Graham County, see 3-53-59, Ranch House Thematic Study.

CHAPTER THREE:

AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS AND FARMSTEADS

Although Graham County had less land suitable for agriculture than other counties in western North Carolina, small-scale farming helped sustain the lives of many rural Graham County residents during the first century of the county's existence. Although many have fallen into disuse, Graham County still has a large number of barns, corn cribs, and other auxiliary buildings for preserving or processing food, such as spring houses, canning houses, and smokehouses dating from the first half of the 20th century. Particularly notable is the large number of surviving log agricultural structures, especially barns.

Possibly one of the earliest extant log barns is also the most unusual for western North Carolina. The Jenkins Log Barn (GH0003) is a double-crib cantilever barn with rough v-notching probably dating from the late 19th or early 20th century. Cantilevered barns, which have a large gabled-roof frame structure atop a much smaller log base, are common in eastern Tennessee but rare in western North Carolina. A survey of cantilever barns conducted in the 1980s found 316 of these structures in East Tennessee, but only three in North Carolina. The survey found that the majority of cantilever barns were built between 1870 and 1915.[64] Graham County shares a northern border with Blount County, the location of approximately one-third of the surveyed Tennessee cantilever barns, and migration into Graham County from Tennessee was common, so it is likely that the Jenkins

[64] Marian Moffett, "Cantilever Barns," Tennessee Encyclopedia, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/cantilever-barns/, 2017. For the full study, see: Marian Moffett and Lawrence Wodehouse, *East Tennessee Cantilever Barns* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

barn was built by a Tennessee builder. The Jenkins Barn is a relatively diminutive example of the type and is a variant that is cantilevered only on the non-gable sides, rather than on all four sides. When the barn was first surveyed in 1997, one corner of the overhang had been enclosed with vertical boards.[65] In 2025 all four corners were enclosed, obscuring the characteristic overhang. Only closer examination reveals its unusual form.

Without additional oral and written documentation, log barns can be difficult to date. Most surviving log barns in Graham County appear to date from the first half of the 20th century. Among the youngest is the circa 1945 Ralph Matheson Log Barn (GH0021), a large double-crib barn with rough v-notching. Matheson bought Jeff Wiggins's circa 1910 saddlebag house (GH0022) and built the barn. The dwelling has since been torn down, but the barn is in good shape.[66] The Matheson Barn is fairly typical of log barns in Graham County. While the majority of log dwellings in Graham County are half-dovetail-notched construction, most barns are built of rough v-notching. An exception is the log barn (GH0375) on Old Sweetwater Road, which seems to have been extended from a half-dovetailed single-crib log structure. It is possible this barn, similar to the Colvard Log Barn (GH0355) on Anderson Creek, was created from a repurposed log house.

Log houses and log barns were often moved, added to, or repurposed. Among the largest log barns is the four-crib Rogers-Deaton Barn (GH0378) on Beech Creek. Dating from the early 20th century, the v-notching shows more skill than many of the later

[65] Michael Ann Williams, "Graham County and Swain County Reconnaissance Report," North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 1998.
[66] Ibid.

examples. The barn was originally built by Hiram "Harm" Rogers on the Left Fork of Beech Creek. Howard Deaton dismantled and moved the barn to its current location, by jeep, in the 1940s.[67] The upper half of the barn is clearly of a more recent date and has a gambrel roof, which is rare on log barns, especially in Graham County. Another massive log barn (GH0376) is located on Ernest Phillips Road in Cheoah. The barn has a double-crib plan but may have originally been built as a four-crib with the passageway on the gable ends later enclosed. (Typically, when a four-crib barn is partially enclosed, it is on the non-gable ends.) This barn has also been raised in height, in this case with additional logs. The upper logs are generally smaller than the bottom logs and are unhewn. A similarly sized large double-crib barn (GH0358) is located on Berts Creek. Each log unit of this v-notched barn is sub-divided by a log partition, creating a particularly deep four-stable barn. This barn is also notable in that one crib is partially built into a bank, giving easy access to the hay loft with a few stair steps on the exterior end.

While the transverse-crib plan, with a central drive extending from gable end to gable end, is generally the most common plan for frame barns in western North Carolina in the first half of the 20th century, the plan is exceedingly rare in log construction, unless the barns were originally four-crib barns whose sides have been enclosed. A notable exception is a large log barn (GH0361) on West Mill Creek. Probably a fairly late example of a log barn, the timbers are small and unhewn, and a shallow saddle-notch construction is used. Despite the relative roughness of construction, the barn is massive in size.

[67] Interview with Harold Williams, December 4, 2025.

Although the economy of Graham County in the first half of the 20th century was dominated by timbering and home builders began to abandon the use of logs in the construction of dwellings, logs continued to be used in the building of some barns in the first half of the 20th century. Perhaps because agriculture was relatively marginal, rural farmers were content to rely on traditional methods of construction that supported self-sufficiency. While log barns in western North Carolina are generally limited to the double-crib and the occasional four-crib plans, Graham County builders experimented with expanding the form, with large double-width double-crib barns, and in the one case, a log transverse-crib barn. As the growing of burley tobacco became popular in the 1930s, growers often adapted log barns for air-curing tobacco, including raising the height of their barns or adding frame additions. An example of the latter is the tobacco barn (GH0395) on Yellow Creek. The front half of the barn facing the road is a gabled frame structure, while the rear portion is built of relatively small unhewn logs. The owner, who lives across the road, recalled that there used to be twenty to thirty log barns along Yellow Creek Road.[68] Another surviving example is the Holcombe Barn (GH0397), a hewn log barn greatly expanded by a frame section and a new roof. Both of these barns are no longer in use and are in poor condition.

Smaller log cribs were also probably once common but have not survived at the same rate as the larger barns, except as part of well-preserved farm complexes. An exception is the McClung Corn Crib (GH0354), now located on Wiggins Creek. The corn

[68] Interview with David Russell, April 10, 2025.

crib, built of hewn logs and rough v-notching, had originally been built on Atoah Creek by Clyde McClung in the early 1920s. McClung's son, local historian Marshall McClung, moved the crib around 1970 to his home on Wiggins Creek. The corn crib is well preserved, although as with most surviving agricultural structures, the board roof has been replaced with metal.[69]

Frame barns became increasingly prevalent in the early to mid-20th century. As noted, transverse-crib plans became the most typical frame barns in western North Carolina. In much of western North Carolina, gambrel rather than gable roofs became generally preferred. With the end of open grazing, and the increase in cattle raising and dairying, the gambrel roof offered a more spacious second story for the storage of hay. However, in Graham County, while gambrel roofs are not rare, they are less prevalent than the traditional gable roof. Also lacking in Graham County are a large number of specialized agricultural buildings reflecting the commercial growth of enterprises such as poultry and dairy operations. Even with the most prevalent commercial crop, tobacco, local farmers seemed inclined to adapt traditional structures or plans, rather than build new barns specifically designed to air-cure tobacco. One of the distinct adaptations to air-curing burley was the addition of extra height on gabled-roof, transverse-crib barns.

Tobacco growing in Graham County predates the introduction of burley. An 1886 article in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reports that the first shipment of tobacco from Graham County reached the Buncombe Warehouse, crediting the growth of the "Western

[69] Interview with Marshall McClung, April 2, 2025.

Tobacco Belt" in part to the extension of the railroad.[70] No surviving buildings in Graham County appear to represent this early era of producing flue-cured tobacco. The late 1920s brought the introduction of burley to the county, and by 1936 fifteen farmers grew air-cured tobacco.[71] By 1938, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* estimated the total acreage of burley in Graham County to be two hundred acres.[72] By 1954 the paper reported that tobacco constituted 70 to 80 percent of farm income in Graham County, with 384.4 allotted acres dedicated to burley. While noting that Graham had one of highest yields in the burley belt, netting between $380,000 and $400,000 a year, the use of older barns was criticized: "This figure could be raised if farms had better barns to cure their tobacco in. Much discoloration and degrading of the leaf is caused by bad curing conditions in the barn."[73] By the 1970s, tobacco was beginning to decline. The Asheville newspaper noted in 1970 that tobacco was still the largest cash crop, but the total acreage was down to 285, and farmers were increasingly turning to high income per acre crops such as tomatoes, strawberries, and nursery crops. The marginal nature of agriculture in Graham County was noted, with the average size of farms reported as fifty acres, with only 4.5 acres devoted to row cops.[74]

While many of Graham County's tobacco barns were simply repurposed older barns or, if new, modest modifications of basic frame transverse-crib barn types, a few show more consideration of air flow in the construction of the structure. A notable example

[70] "Tobacco from Graham County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 20, 1886.
[71] "More Tobacco is Produced in Graham County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 11, 1937.
[72] "Graham Reports Best Burley in 10-Year Period," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, November 29, 1938.
[73] "Graham Nets $40,000 [*sic*] in Burley Sales," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* October 31, 1954. The newspaper title omits a zero from the dollar amount.
[74] "High Income Per Acre Crops Big in Graham County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 25, 1970.

(GH0370) is located on Lower Sawyers Creek. Although basically a transverse-crib plan, the apex of the gable roof is raised, allowing air to flow in the upper reaches of the barn. On either side of the open drive, there is room for stabling or storage of equipment, but most of the interior space is dedicated to curing tobacco with a network of long poles. The exterior horizontal boards are spaced to allow air flow into the barn, and the corners of each side have the decorative diagonal siding that is popular in Graham County.

Two mid-20th-century barns in Graham County are noteworthy for their size and use of bank construction. Both have gambrel roofs and are three stories in height. The Cable Barn (GH0419) on Lower Sawyers Creek has a stone foundation and stables on the ground floor. The non-gable side is built into a bank so that the second floor can be accessed easily (the width of the opening suggests that there may have been a ramp to drive into the loft area). While the barn has clearly been used for curing tobacco, as indicated by the network of poles, the rear gable end has a hood that probably once sheltered a pully to lift hay into the loft. Metal drums are still stored on the second floor, possibly used to aid in the curing of burley. A large, shed-roof addition with a concrete foundation is attached to the lower non-gable side of the barn, used to store equipment. Both the original barn and addition are covered in diagonal siding.[75]

Even more impressive is the large, circa 1970s barn on the Garfield Carringer Farm (GH0409) in Stecoah. As with the Cable Barn, the ground floor was used to stable animals, while the upper floors were used to cure tobacco. Two double doors are on the lower

[75] Interview with Donna Sawyer, May 8, 2025; Interview with Richard Pepper, May 8, 2025.

gable-end side, with a single-entry door between. A small row of rectangular windows is found on each side. The gable end is built into a bank, and a drive leads to double doors, which provide access to the second floor. The barn also has eye-catching diagonal siding on all four sides. The most distinctive aspect of the Carringer Barn, aside from its size, is that it is painted barn red with white trim on the windows and lower doors. Unlike in some regions of the country, barns are seldom painted in western North Carolina, and it is especially rare in Graham County. The barn is carefully maintained, although the family stopped producing tobacco in 2015.[76]

Another exceedingly large barn for Graham County is the Shuler Barn (GH0426) on Tallulah Road, south of Robbinsville. The circa 1950s large frame barn was built by Jack Shuler, a sheriff of Graham County and locally prominent in construction and contracting. The barn is significantly larger than typical farm structures in the county and at various times was used for tobacco, hay, cattle, and sheep.[77] The barn has a broad gable roof and three parallel drives from gable end to gable end. It is painted white.

While individual structures tell us much about the history of agriculture in Graham County, farm complexes demonstrate the intricacies of farm life as it changed over time. Generally, farm sites in southern Appalachia are characterized by a dwelling, a scattering of smaller single-use structures, and a larger barn. While outbuildings appear often to be rather randomly placed, smokehouses and canning houses are often situated close behind the dwelling, while spring houses, by necessity, must be placed according to access to a

[76] Interview with Andy Carringer, April 24, 2025.
[77] Interview with Edd Satterfield, October 17, 2025.

spring (though the location of the spring might also determine the placement of the dwelling). One example where two outbuildings are closely integrated into the construction and landscaping of the dwelling is the W. M. Bebber House (GH0405). The circa 1920 bungalow has a stone foundation and chimney and a striking stone retaining wall and stairs. Close to the side of the house, carefully aligned and attached by a stone wall, are a canning house and spring house. The spring house has a stone base and lattice work on the upper walls, while the canning house is built of stone.

Of a similar age, but more traditional in design, the Robert and Minnie Wiggins Farm (GH0357) is located on Berts Creek. Robert Wiggins married Minnie Holloway in 1919 and built the house in 1920. A story-and-a-half, frame, saddlebag house with a central stone chimney, the dwelling has several additions including a small room enclosing the end of the full façade front porch, a room on one gable end and a simple carport on the other, and the enclosure of a rear porch.[78] Except for the side addition, the foundation is made of river rock. A vertical-plank smokehouse sits directly behind the house, and across the field sit two well-built log agricultural structures. One, a log corn crib built of hewn logs and v-notch construction, has a vertical-plank addition on one end. Behind the corn crib is a large double-pen barn, also hewn with v-notching. Both these structures demonstrate the survival of traditional log craftsmanship into the 1920s. A later, derelict, log structure of unknown function is located lower on the farm. This flat-roof shed is built of small unhewn timbers joined with a shallow v-notch. As with many "pole" structures, nails are used to

[78] The rear portion of the dwelling has a stone foundation similar to the rest of the house, but the siding is different.

hold the timbers in place. The structure has now collapsed. Mid- to late-20th century additions to the farm include a large, frame, transverse-crib barn with several additions and two modern dwellings.

Another complex that demonstrates the evolution of building practices and preferences in Graham County is the Huscusson Farm (GH0415) near Tulula Creek. Along with the original circa 1899 log house, later veneered in stone, and the 1939 boxed house, there is an impressive array of outbuildings, including the remains of a corn mill, built of plank with a stone foundation, operated by George Huscusson. Next to the mill building is a log corn crib built of unhewn logs with shallow notching, now extended and covered with vertical planks. Closer to the boxed house sits a transverse-crib tobacco barn with a gable roof and diagonal siding on the lower half, a chicken shed, and a smaller, gabled-roof, transverse-crib barn. This "old barn" was used to house mules, which the family used to plow fields through the mid-20th century. The "upper barn," just up the road, is a gabled-roof, transverse-crib barn with diagonal siding on the lower half. It was used to house cattle and store hay.[79] The complex represents the continued transformations of a mountain farm owned by the same family for over a century.

Another farm complex that evolved over several generations of the same family is the Sherrill Farm (GH0425) on Tallulah Road. Michael "Pate" Sherrill (1865-1944) originally had a farm across the road and up the mountain. Around 1906, he moved down the hill and built a new house, recycling timber from his old house. The front-gable house has been

[79] Interview with Janice Huscusson Panther, November 18, 2025.

extensively altered and has newer wings on both sides of the house. Two early-20th-century log outbuildings still survive. The v-notched corn crib is close to the dwelling and has a side drive. A v-notched, double-crib log barn is located below the house, now on a separate tract of land. Similar to a number of Graham County log barns built in the early 20th century, the barn has two cribs on either side of an open drive running from non-gable to non-gable side.[80] Frame additions have been added to both non-gable sides of the barn. Pate Sherrill's son Albert added a large, frame, transverse-crib tobacco barn to the farmstead. An open side addition has been added to one of the non-gable ends. Behind the house is a river-stone retaining wall. There is also evidence of an apple orchard. This farmstead exemplifies the continuity and change of farm life on a property owned by a single family during the 20th century. Two transportation developments altered life for the Sherrills: the construction of the paved highway immediately to the front of the farm (circa 1922), which Pate Sherrill adamantly opposed, and the nearby construction of the timber railroad in 1925-26, which allowed the Sherrills to cut pulp wood for transport by train car.[81]

The Colvard Barns (GH0355) represent the various transformations of agricultural structures during the 20th century. Three barns sit side by side along Anderson Creek Road. The oldest structure is a converted, half-dovetailed log house, probably constructed in the late 19th century and moved to its current location from Anthony Branch. Sitting immediately next to the log structure is a tall, frame structure with a shallow gable roof,

[80] There is no drive extending from gable end to gable end, so this plan is better classified as a variant of the double-crib, rather than a four-crib barn. This "double-wide" double-crib is a common Graham County variant.
[81] Interview with Floyd Sherrill, October 17, 2025.

used to hang tobacco. It is unusual in that it has a double-crib plan (matching the converted log dwelling), rather than a transverse-crib plan more typical of frame barns used for curing tobacco. The third structure of the trio is a corn crib with a side drive under the gable roof. A mid-20th-century house sits below the three agricultural structures.[82]

One of the most complete and striking agricultural complexes dating from the mid-20th century is the Garfield Carringer Farm (GH0409) on Dry Creek Road in Stecoah. The Carringers grew and graded tobacco far later than many other farmers in Graham County, finally ending tobacco production in 2015. The story-and-half, frame farmhouse was built in the 1950s and has a full-facade front porch, now screened in, and a gable dormer above the porch. The house was extended on both sides by Carringer's sons. A smokehouse sits behind the dwelling. Along with the previously discussed circa 1970 three-story banked barn are several other agricultural structures painted red with white trim. These include a chicken coop, a hog pen, and a circa 1950s transverse-crib barn. All are arrayed along the creek that runs along the side of the farm. There is a stone spring house behind a late-20th-century house and a range of sheds including a large equipment storage shed. The farm complex also included an orchard, flower and garden plots, and a small family cemetery near the top of the farm.[83]

Despite the marginal nature of farming in Graham County, the area is rich in historic agricultural structures and farmscapes. Perhaps because there was relatively little pressure from the development of commercial agriculture, the landscape changed less.

[82] Interview with Dennis Stewart, April 2, 2025.
[83] Interview with Andy Carringer, April 24, 2025.

Log building persisted well into the early 20th century and was favored by many farmers who adapted and extended traditional plans. Throughout most of the 20th century, tobacco remained the primary cash crop, and farmers adapted older buildings, as well as traditional forms, to accommodate the air-curing of burley. Hallmarks of Graham County barn building include the building of larger log structures, the continued preference for gable rather than gambrel roofs, transverse-crib barns with additional height, and the general lack of specialized agricultural structures to accommodate commercial farming. Farmsteads, which demonstrate the evolution of building and farming practices, survive especially when the same family has owned the property for extended periods of time. Of the complexes discussed, all are either still owned by the families of the original builders or have only passed out of the family's hands in recent years.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE RURAL COMMUNITY

Formally created in 1872, Graham County has remained largely rural in nature. For most of its history, the county seat of Robbinsville, established after the formation of the county, was its only incorporated town. The other two towns, incorporated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, are closely linked to the county's history of hydroelectricity and tourism (see Chapter 5 for the histories of Fontana Dam and Santeetlah Lake). Perhaps particularly because of the remoteness of much of Graham County, small rural communities sustained local people for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Central to these rural communities would have been one or more churches, at least one store, mills and other small industries, possibly a post office and, prior to consolidation, rural schools.

Not surprisingly, early white settlers favored the same localities as the Cherokee whose lands they usurped, generally relatively level land along larger creeks and rivers. A number of rural communities in Graham County retain Cherokee place names. Perhaps the two rural communities that best reflect historical settlement patterns are Cheoah and Stecoah. While few, if any, structures survive from the 19th century, both places retain the sense of small, nucleated communities.

The Cheoah Valley was the home of about five hundred Cherokee at the time of the Removal. Cheoah Township became the site of much of the early non-Cherokee settlement, which included a small number of enslaved African Americans. Following the creation of Graham County, the new town of Robbinsville was established in the Cheoah

Valley. A few miles to the east, the community of Cheoah developed in the 1880s near the intersection of present-day Beech Creek Road and Ernest Phillips Road. The community established a Baptist church, followed by a school, post office, and Methodist church. Several flour mills and sawmills flourished in the Cheoah Valley during the late 19th century.

By the 1930s, a gravel road connected Cheoah to Robbinsville, and in the 1950s, this became the second paved road in Graham County. The newly paved Sweetwater Road (NC 143) was relocated slightly north of Ernest Phillips Road, but the old crossroads remains. Although most of the earlier structures are gone—including the mill and dam, the school, the Methodist Church, the post office, and a large store building—the agricultural community and Baptist church still provide an impressive pastoral view for travelers heading toward Robbinsville on the highway. Historic structures include the early-20th-century Shope House (GH0266) and the Floyd Crisp House (GH0252), a large double-crib log barn (GH0376), and two later frame barns. At the heart of the crossroads sits the circa 1949 stone Sweetwater Baptist Church (GH0012), one of the most impressive rural churches in Graham County and the community's only remaining institutional building.[84]

To the northeast of Cheoah and Robbinsville sits Stecoah, another intact rural community. Similar to Cheoah, Stecoah was a significantly sized Cherokee community prior to the Removal. By the 1840s, enough European American settlers had landed in the

[84] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 25-1 to 25-10. The report lists the Shope House as dating from 1900; however, another source and historic photograph indicate that the house was built at the site of the late-19th-century Methodist church, recycling materials from the church, sometime after 1924. Bobby M. Edward, "Historic Photograph of Three of Five Churches at Cheoah, NC," May 24, 1995. Reverend Eric Reece provided a photocopy of the photograph that has been included in the survey file for GH0012.

valley to build a church near the Little Tennessee River between the mouths of the Stecoah and Panther Creeks. In 1849 the Stecoah Missionary Baptist Church was established near what would become the heart of the Stecoah community.[85] As with Cheoah, relatively little of the built environment of the 19th century remains. Probably the oldest structure in the immediate region, located to the north of Stecoah proper on Stecoah Creek, is the Walker Cabin (GH0045), a circa 1880s story-and-a-half double-boxed structure. Other notable structures closer to the heart of Stecoah include the circa 1914 Joseph Edwards House (GH0035), a double-boxed dwelling, now derelict, with a two-tiered porch on its central bay, the circa 1925 log Stile House (GH0023), and the mid-20th-century Garfield Carringer Farm (GH0409) on Dry Creek. While most of the structures in Stecoah are built of wood (log, frame, or boxed), the buildings that give Stecoah its distinctive character are built of local stone: the circa 1918 Stecoah Grocery Store (GH0024), the 1931 Stecoah School and 1950 Gymnasium (GH0025), and the 1933 Stecoah Baptist Church (GH0026). Of these, only the church building continues in its original function. While Stecoah has a larger number of historic structures than Cheoah, it is also more developed and includes a greater amount of non-historic infill in the landscape.

As roads have improved in Graham County, the community buildings that anchor rural communities have lost their original function or disappeared altogether. Graham County once possessed close to two dozen post offices. Some, such as Japan, disappeared as the communities themselves vanished with the construction of Fontana

[85] "History of Stecoah Schools and Churches," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/07-stecoah/stecoah.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.

Dam. Others were lost with the consolidations of the 1950s, when post offices were discontinued at Yellow Creek in 1953, Tuskeegee in 1954, Cheoah in 1955, and Stecoah in 1958. After the 1950s, post offices existed only at Robbinsville, Fontana Dam, and Tapoco.[86]

The most persistent community structures have been churches. Even as other public buildings vanish from the rural landscape, a church (or two or three) often mark the site of a rural community. Until the mid-20th century, most rural churches were built of wood. Two notable exceptions are the Baptist churches at Stecoah and Cheoah, both built of stone. One of the oldest ongoing congregations in Graham County, the Stecoah Baptist Church was founded in 1849, and three previous structures served the community until 1933. Built of native stone, the current church is possibly the work of local stonemason Bill Crisp. While most historic rural churches in Graham County are plain in their appearance, the Stecoah Baptist Church is notable for its Gothic Revival-influenced tapered entrance tower and stepped parapet, and its extensive use of stained glass. A gabled stone addition was attached to the back of the church around 1950, and a separate frame and stone-veneered fellowship hall was constructed around 1990.[87]

While Stecoah Baptist Church predates the influence of federally funded construction projects, the stone-veneered Sweetwater Baptist Church in Cheoah has a

[86] North Carolina Postal History Society, Graham County Postmark Catalog, https://www.ncpostalhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/PostmarkCatalog_graham_county-20230413.pdf, accessed July 9, 2026.
[87] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 38-1 to 38-10. The report suggests that the construction of the church was influenced by "federal public building campaigns" during and after the Depression; however, the construction of the church, and the Stecoah School, predate the New Deal building projects.

direct connection. According to its cornerstone, the congregation was formed in 1873, and two frame churches served the congregation prior to the construction of the current church in 1949. In 1948, under the leadership of the Reverend Harvey Phillips, the congregation raised $1,800 to purchase the stones from a gymnasium built at Fontana during the wartime construction of the Fontana Dam. The gym was demolished and the stone moved to Cheoah, where a group of World War II veterans constructed the new church.[88] Behind the church is the original baptismal site. The baptismal font is now located behind the pulpit in the sanctuary. A hand-painted mural of Jesus walking on water sits above the font.

Considering the threat of fire in public buildings in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is not surprising that congregations may have preferred masonry construction. However, stone and brick were the exception, rather than the rule, until the mid-20th century. The oldest extant church structure in Graham County is the wood-frame Old Mother Church (GH0048), located on Fort Hill near the site of Fort Montgomery, just outside of Robbinsville. The site was originally associated with the Methodists, who met in a brush arbor nearby and later built a log church building. A cemetery was established on Fort Hill by the 1850s. In 1872 Abraham and Margaret Wiggins formally deeded the land to the Baptist congregation, who constructed the church circa 1875. The structure was originally known as the Cheoah Baptist Church and in 1924 was renamed the Robbinsville Baptist Church. After the congregation moved to downtown Robbinsville, the structure was

[88] Ibid., 26-1 to 26-7.

renamed the Old Mother Church in honor of its significance to the history of the Methodist and Baptist congregations in Graham County.

The simple frame church with a gable roof now has a mid-20th-century gabled entry with a bell tower and a steeple on top. Around 1950, the congregation reorganized and made repairs to the structure. Later repairs to the roof and structure were made in 1972.[89] In 2020, the church still had some original hand-carved pews and chestnut paneling. The exterior is now clad in aluminum siding. In the early 2020s, extensive renovations were made to the interior.

The cemetery surrounding the Old Mother Church is the largest in Graham County, containing over two thousand burials on twenty-seven acres. Ten acres are owned by the church, while the remaining seventeen acres are owned by the county. The oldest marked gravestone dates from 1856, although it is likely that the cemetery was used before that time. The oldest known cemetery in Graham County is the adjacent Methodist Mission Cemetery, which contains rows of uninscribed fieldstones. The gravestones surrounding Old Mother Church represent a range of styles from rough hand-carved markers to popular styles such as the Neoclassical.

While the Old Mother Cemetery is partially owned by the county, the majority of the cemeteries in Graham County are either organized by family or affiliated with a church. An

[89] "Old Mother Church Harbors Century of Graham Memories," *Cherokee Scout*, May 20, 1954. Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 17-1 to 17-13. The report dates the renaming of the church to 1969, but the newspaper article from 1954 clearly labels it the Old Mother Church. There is also some question about what repairs took place circa 1950 and what was done in 1972. While the steeple may be newer, the front addition and bell tower appear to be from the earlier date.

example of one that is both community and family-based is the Sawyer Creek Cemetery, which sits on a hill above the Sawyer Boxed House (GH0004) on Lower Sawyers Creek Road. The cemetery contains approximately 217 gravestones; many, but not all, individuals buried there are related to the Sawyer family. The oldest dated memorial is a hand-carved stone for Harvey Hedrick dated 1901. One of the most notable members of the community buried at this cemetery is Dr. George F. Brock (1848-1932), a Civil War veteran and a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives.[90]

One of the more unusual cemetery structures in Graham County is the frame grave shelter (GH0067) believed to be built circa 1894 to protect the graves of Thomas Jefferson Hooper, a Civil War veteran, and his wife Catherine Colvard Hooper on West Buffalo Creek. While grave houses are not uncommon in some parts of the South, including Tennessee, few are found in far western North Carolina. Among the oldest cemeteries in rural Graham County is the Santeetlah Cemetery-Jenkins Cemetery (GH0385), which includes approximately 162 memorials, some of them hand-carved.[91] The cemetery sits above the Santeetlah Baptist Church. It began as a Jenkins family cemetery (known as Jenkins Cemetery No. 1) but is now maintained by the Baptist church.

Cemetery decorations are a well-established tradition in western North Carolina, seasonally associated with church homecomings and decoration days, though individuals

[90] "Sawyer Creek Cemetery," FindAGrave.com, https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/48697/sawyer-creek-cemetery, accessed July 9, 2026.
[91] "Santeetlah Baptist Church Cemetery," FindAGrave.com, https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2508467/santeetlah-baptist-church-cemetery, accessed July 9, 2026.

may also maintain and decorate individual graves. One of the most notable decorated cemeteries (GH0367) in Graham County is at Cable Cove. At the time of acquisition by the TVA for the construction of Fontana Dam, the community consisted of fifteen houses, a school, and a church. Similar to the acquisition of land on the North Shore of Fontana Lake in Swain County, Cable Cove itself was not flooded but was acquired because of the flooding of transportation routes to the existing communities. According to the TVA, the principal route into the community was a river crossing by skiff across the Little Tennessee River.[92] Therefore, Cable Cove was likely tightly associated with the former communities on the North Shore. In the 1970s, families formerly associated with North Shore communities revived the tradition of decorating cemeteries now only accessible by boat due to the stalled construction of the infamous "Road to Nowhere."[93] It is possible that the Cable Cove decorating tradition similarly felt an intensification of this cultural tradition in response to the controversy.

Aside from the Old Mother Church, no other 19th-century rural church buildings survive in Graham County. Generally, in western North Carolina, early rural churches were plain front-gabled structures built of wood (log and later frame). By the early to mid-20th century, bell towers and front porticos became popular and, in some cases, were added to older churches. A representation of the quintessential early- to mid-20th-century rural church, the Sawyer Creek Baptist Church (GH0006) is a small, frame structure with a

[92]Webb, "Cultural Resources Existing Conditions Report, North Shore Road Environmental Impact Statement."
[93] See Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

pyramidal belfry. The main block of the church has been extended to the rear, and a small side ell has been added to the front. In the past twenty years, vinyl siding has covered the original weatherboarding. An Independent Baptist church, the congregation continues to meet on Sunday afternoons.

The majority of church buildings dating from the first half of the 20th century in rural Graham County have been substantially altered, if they have not been replaced altogether. Often older churches have received replacement siding or have been veneered in brick. Simple country churches have also been expanded to meet social and practical needs, with fellowship halls, Sunday school rooms, kitchens, and bathrooms as common additions. Typically, these extensions are accomplished through either freestanding structures adjacent to the church or ell additions. In the case of the Meadow Branch Primitive Baptist Church (GH0392) on the northwestern side of the county, the church was lifted about eight feet off the ground to create basement-level Sunday school rooms. The interior was remodeled, and the church has received a front addition and gabled portico and vinyl siding. Still, the church retains the exterior aesthetic of an austere country church.

While wood was the preferred construction material for churches up until the mid-20th century, during the second half of the century, a preference grew for masonry construction, especially brick or brick veneer. However, several smaller congregations chose concrete block, retaining the austere aesthetic of the rural church. The Atoah Freewill Baptist Church (GH0465) was established in 1898. The current mid-20th-century church, concrete block painted white, now has two rear-ell extensions and a front-gable

addition covered in vertical plank. As with many simple country churches, there is a belfry and, in this case, a cross on top. The Welch Cove Primitive Baptist Church (GH0421) also had several previous iterations. An early photo shows a plain weatherboarded structure with a hipped roof and notes that the structure also served as a school.[94] The current structure is concrete block, although the roof, front portico, and belfry appear to be newer. The church is now used only for special occasions. Also associated with Fontana, the Cable Cove Missionary Baptist Church (GH0367) sits within Nantahala National Forest on land originally acquired for the construction of Fontana Dam. The older church was frame, and similar to Welch Cove, also served as a school. The current structure is painted concrete block, with a small belfry.

One of the most interesting transformations of a simple concrete-block church is the Fontana Community Church (GH0474). After meeting for several years in the Fontana Theater, a non-denominational church was built in 1951 by community members still living in Fontana after its transition from a wartime construction camp to a resort. Early photos show a simple flat-roof, concrete-block structure, unpainted both inside and out. In 1955, a new frame wing with a gable roof and belfry was added, and the structure was painted white, giving it the appearance of a typical rural church of the era. After 2000, a stone veneer was added, the belfry and windows were enlarged, and the interior was modernized with stone and woodwork, giving the church the aesthetic of a contemporary place of worship. The church is now surrounded by a memorial garden, created in 2004, which has

[94] "Welch Cove Primitive Baptist Church and School," Images of North Carolina, DigitalNC.org, https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/19714?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=-510,-15,4845,2508.

become part of the church's identity. Built on land leased from the TVA, the church now functions primarily as a chapel.[95]

While rural churches continue to anchor rural communities, rural stores are a rapidly vanishing building type. The mountainous terrain and limited roads within Graham County once made local stores a vital necessity within rural communities. While a few survived into the 21st century, Graham County now has almost no independently owned rural stores. One of the oldest rural store buildings in the county is the Stecoah Grocery (GH0024). Built in 1918 by Dee Jenkins, a Justice of the Peace who was said to have held court in the store, it also served at one time as the Stecoah Post Office. Local stonemason Bill Crisp, who is also believed to have worked on the Stecoah Baptist Church and the Stecoah School, was one of the masons who constructed the store. The store operated through the 20th century and in the 1990s sold a limited amount of groceries and gas and also had videos and a game room.[96]

Another surviving store building that operated through much of the 20th century was the Walt West Store (GH0429) on Tulula Creek near Anthony Branch. West and his wife Mary Campbell West started selling goods from their wagon in 1906 and built the first store in 1909. As Mary West recalled in 1989, "We started in the goods business in 1906. Law, we spent most of our married life in wagons. Everything came to Topton by wagons, and all our

[95] Interview with Rob Hardy, December 5, 2025. Ruth Elliott, "History of the Fontana Community Church," photocopy of original history, 1967-1971. "Fontana Community Church" brochure. These materials are included in the survey file for GH0474.
[96] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 34-7. Survey file GH0024 Stecoah Grocery Store, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville, North Carolina.

merchandise had to come by wagon to here. The men would get up in the early morning so they could get over the trail and load up and get back by three or so, to unload their stuff into the store."[97] The family lived at the back of the store, and Mrs. West provided meals and lodging to men hauling timber. After the road from Topton (in Cherokee County) to Robbinsville was paved in the 1920s, the Wests built the existing front-gable store building, selling groceries, farm supplies, and feed.[98]

By the mid-20th century, concrete block became a preferred construction material for rural stores. Green's Grocery (GH0391) served the more remote communities near the Mountain View School in northern Graham County. The Green brothers sold groceries and dry goods, including clothes and toys, from their large, front-gabled, concrete-block store. The Green family also ran a small, concrete-block garage across Farley Branch Road, next to the family home, a weatherboarded double-pen house with a stone chimney on one gable end (GH0390). The store closed around 2009. Another mid-20th-century concrete-block store serving a relatively remote community is the Robinson Grocery (GH0467) in Snowbird. The ell-shaped building has two sets of gas pumps in front. The store was run by Jean Hooper Robinson, who operated it for thirty-six years. Her obituary claimed that "she never met a stranger" and "never let anyone leave her business or home hungry."[99] A metal

[97] "Mary West Can Remember the Hard Times With a Touch of Fondness," *The Asheville Times*, August 16, 1989.
[98] Stewart, *Precious Memories,* p. 140-141.
[99] "Jean Hooper Robinson Obituary," Townson-Smith Funeral Home, https://www.townson-smithfuneralhome.com/obituary/Jean-Robinson, accessed July 9, 2026.

structure attached to the rear of the store served as a Baptist Church for the Cherokee community.

Prior to the improvement of roads, small stores selling groceries, dry goods, and farm supplies were vital to the survival of the rural community. So too were a number of small, locally owned industries, especially grist mills and sawmills. By 1884, flour and corn mills existed in Cheoah, Yellow Creek, Stecoah, and Welch. Cheoah was also the home of the earliest sawmill.[100] Corn mills were especially ubiquitous in rural communities, with farmers often paying for the process of milling with a portion of the resulting cornmeal. A rare survival of a small, rural corn mill is found on the Huscusson Farm (GH0415) on Tulula Creek, run by George Huscusson across the road from his home. The mill was built of logs, roughly v-notched, and covered on the exterior with vertical boards.

The early commercial sawmills were soon overtaken by the timbering industry that dominated Graham County's economy in the early to mid-20th century. However, a few small, family-operated mills do survive. An example of a small sawmill, with the machinery housed in an open-sided structure, is the Stuart Mill (GH0381) on Greens Creek. The current owner of the mill built his house from lumber sawn at this mill.[101] A description of the life of an independent logger from 1974 notes the transition from mills turned by water to steam-powered mills run by a boiler fired by bark-covered slabs, to the more recent mills run by a diesel engine.[102]

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[100] "Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/GCHistory/02-grahamcounty/grahamcounty.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.
[101] Interview with Tom Buchanan, April 8, 2025.
[102] "DeHart, Independent Logger, Typical of Dwindling Breed," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 10,1974.

Until the consolidation of schools in Graham County, most rural communities would also have had a small school. In 1881 Graham County had seventeen public schools. Most would have been one-room schoolhouses. The last one-room school was at Cable Cove and was discontinued in the early 1940s when the land was purchased for the construction of Fontana Dam.[103] Small rural schools would have looked much like rural churches in the 19th century: simple, gable-front wooden structures. In some cases, churches and schools shared the same structure (and often preachers were also teachers). During the late 19th century, the Baptist church in Stecoah erected on the Joel Crisp Farm served also as a school, as did a Free Will church in Upper Stecoah.[104] In Cheoah, a Methodist church built circa 1888 served also as a school until 1914, when a separate three-room school building was erected between the Methodist and the Baptist churches. When the Methodist church was subsequently razed, materials were recycled for the construction of the home of teacher Sallie Rogers Shope.[105]

As roads improved, consolidation of smaller rural schools began. The first major effort at providing high school education for rural Graham County came in 1926 with the construction of the Stecoah School, after a prolonged tax battle. Described as "one of the best school buildings in Western North Carolina,"[106] the substantial stone building with its

[103] "History of Education in Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/10-education/educationhistory.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.
[104] "History of Stecoah Churches and Schools," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/07-stecoah/stecoah.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.
[105] A photograph from 1924 shows the Methodist Church, the school, and the Sweetwater Baptist Church (predating the stone church) under construction. Bobby M. Edward, "Historic Photograph of Three of Five Churches at Cheoah, NC," May 24, 1995. Reverend Eric Reece provided a copy of the photograph that has been included in the survey file for GH0012.
[106] "Stecoah's New Building one of the Best in Section," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 24, 1926.

parapet gables and dormer windows was a far cry from the modest frame structures that served the rural communities previously. Despite its solidity, the Stecoah School was destroyed by fire in 1930, and a new structure was built on the same footprint the following year. Aside from a few minor details, the rebuilt structure closely resembles the photo of the original school pictured in the 1926 article in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. The Stecoah School is one of the earliest stone schools surviving in far western North Carolina. Typically, early-20th-century stone schools in the region are associated with the federal building projects of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). However, Stecoah School predates the New Deal and the creation of the WPA in 1935. One of the more unusual aspects of the U-shaped school is the inclusion of a dedicated stage and auditorium with sloped, fixed seating rather than a combination auditorium and gymnasium. A later, stone-veneered, free-standing gymnasium was added in 1950. Enrollment at Stecoah swelled during the 1940s with the influx of families associated with the construction of the Fontana Dam and then tapered off. In its final years as a school, it served only elementary grades. The school was closed in 1994. The building now serves as the Stecoah Valley Cultural Arts Center and retains many of its original architectural details.

While the Stecoah School served the northeastern portion of Graham County for almost seventy years, another consolidated school was built to serve the northwest section. The school at Mountain View was opened in 1953, replacing smaller schools at Fontana, Rhymers Ferry, and Tapoco.[107] Built at a cost of $175,000, the brick school

[107] Emily Schuber Carr, "Three Schools Replace 33 Under Consolidation Plan, *The Asheville Times,* March 26, 1953. The article refers to the new school as "Rhymers Ferry," the same name as the closest school it replaced.

originally consisted of twelve classrooms and a cafeteria.[108] Initially only serving elementary grades, the school soon expanded to include high school. A freestanding gymnasium was added in 1957, and a science and home economics building was added in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, the school was honored for its innovative vocational education program focusing on mountain crafts.[109]

Mountain View closed in the late 1970s as part of the process of further consolidation, which would ultimately lead, with the closure of the Stecoah School, to the formation of a single school district in Graham County, located in Robbinsville. Mountain View School stood largely unused for thirty years until 2009, when the Heart Center, a spiritual and yoga retreat, opened. The original brick classroom building was torn down, but the cafeteria, gymnasium, and later science and home economics buildings survive. The new complex now includes cabins, yurts (one brought from Mongolia), an A-frame building, and camping sites.[110]

Graham County schools in the first half of the 20th century mostly served only white students. However, during the 1940s, a segregated school was created at Fontana to serve the children of African American dam workers. In 1942-43 the school had one teacher and served twenty-one students.[111] After the war, the African American population largely

[108] "Mountain View School," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* September 6, 1953.
[109] Mary Cowles, "Students Learn and Earn at Mountain View School," *Asheville Citizen-Time*, October 29, 1972.
[110] Interview with Liz Velazquez, April 9, 2025.
[111] Emily Schuber Carr, "Three Schools Replace 33 Under Consolidation Plan, *The Asheville Times,* March 26, 1953.

dispersed, and there are no other known schools in Graham County that served African Americans exclusively in the years before desegregation.

Cherokee students in Graham County were also largely schooled separately during the first half of the 20th century. As part of the "Indian New Deal," new modern schools were created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s to replace the often hated and overcrowded boarding schools. In 1934, a site was chosen for the new Snowbird Day School in Graham County.[112] The school provided education up to the eighth grade. In the 1950s, Robbinsville accepted Snowbird students at the high school level and eventually lowered that to seventh grade. The Snowbird Day School was closed in 1965, and the students were integrated into the Graham County public school system.[113]

Finally, prior to the improvement of the road system, rural communities in Graham County could not survive without the services of particular professionals, especially doctors and other medical specialists. Of the rural doctors, who often served a variety of communities on horseback, one of the best remembered is Dr. George F. Brock. Dr. Brock moved to Graham County from Buncombe in 1887. His practice, as well as the Brock Post Office, was located on Lower Sawyers Creek, across the road from the Cabe Farm (GH0005). Partially responsible for bringing modern health services to rural Graham County, Dr. Nettie Parrette and Dr. Dick Parrette set up practice in the mid-20th century. The

[112] "Sites for Two Indian Schools are Inspected," *Asheville Citizen Times,* January 22, 1934.
[113] Blanche Ghormley, "Strange Snowbird Success Story: Teachers' Efforts Emptied School," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* July 16, 1965. For information on an oral history project focusing on the Snowbird Day School, see: "Stories of the Snowbird Day School," UNCA Ramsey Library Video Production, YouTube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=051Xl-Ci4mo, accessed July 9, 2026.

first female doctor in the region, Dr. Nettie Parrette opened her office over the old drug store in Robbinsville in 1938, though her practice often involved riding horseback or driving over rough roads in rural areas.[114] Meanwhile, her husband practiced in Andrews and served in the Air Force. In 1947, the Parrettes built a clinic (GH0463) outside of Robbinsville on Snowbird Road. It was described in 1953 in these terms: "modern and well-equipped, the attractive white building has an average of 60 patients passing through its door every day." The 1953 article reported that over 120 babies were born at the clinic each year. [115] The Parrettes retired in 1980, and the rambling, weatherboarded structure is now in poor condition.

While it would be transformed in the 20th century by industrialization (mostly connected to forestry), hydroelectricity, and tourism, Graham County is still made up of a series of rural communities. As transportation improved, and various services became consolidated, certain types of buildings became obsolescent. Still, a sense of place and a variety of surviving structures representing these places remain preserved on the landscape.

[114] Skip Taylor, "Dr. Nettie Leaves Her Mark on Mountain Men, Medicine," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* December 29, 1981.
[115] Emily Schuber Carr, "Husband-Wife Doctor Team Serves People in Graham," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* July 19, 1953.

CHAPTER FIVE:

INDUSTRIALIZATION, HYDROELECTRICITY, AND TOURISM

Although land suitable for cultivation is relatively scarce, Graham County is rich in natural resources. For most of the 19th century, timber provided building materials and fuel for local communities, while water powered lumber and grist mills. By the final decade of the century, outside commercial interests were eyeing the potential of Graham County's resources.

During the 1880s, the Belding and Heiser lumber companies logged the western part of the county along Little Snowbird, West Buffalo, and Little Santeetlah Creeks, building splash dams at these locations. Timber was floated down to the Cheoah and Little Tennessee Rivers. Eventually the river drives were replaced by small gauge railroads. On the eastern side of the county, the Whiting Manufacturing Company extended railroad tracks from Panther Creek up to Welch Cove (present day Fontana). However, the two companies that would dominate timbering in Graham County were the Kanawha Hardwood Lumbering Company and the Bemis Hardwood Lumber Company.[116] Kanawha began operations in Graham County in 1899, building a narrow-gauge railway to Little Snowbird and creating the first hydroelectric plant in western North Carolina.[117]

In the early days of logging, timber companies bought timber rights from individual landowners. However, as timber boomed in western North Carolina, companies, many

[116] William L. Nothstein, "History of Logging in Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/GCHistory/11-logging/logging.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.
[117] Ibid.

based in other states, bought large swaths of land in the region.[118] The timber boom pulled many rural western North Carolinians into the cash economy, though the work was often seasonal in nature. While by the mid-1920s the boom was beginning to wane in much of the region, the Bemis Hardwood Company was just getting established in Graham County. In 1924, H. C. Bemis bought controlling interest in the Graham County Railroad, which was completed to Robbinsville the following year. Operation of the band mill began in 1927. Bemis also built the Buffalo-Snowbird Railroad, which transported logs from the Big Snowbird and West Buffalo watershed to the Bemis sawmill.[119] In the 1930s, Bemis was cutting its own timber in Big Snowbird, as well as buying timber from individuals bringing it into the mills by trucks. A glowing article in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* in 1938 noted that Bemis had brought prosperity to Graham County during the Depression, employing hundreds of men year-round.[120]

Architectural evidence of the logging era tends to be ephemeral, although much of the land once owned by the companies ultimately became part of the National Forest system or other public lands that now define much of the rural landscape of Graham County. Bemis, which became the largest employer in the county for much of the first half of the 20th century, is the exception. Architectural evidence of Milltown, built by Bemis to the immediate southwest of Robbinsville, survives in relative abundance. Surviving buildings (GH0031) from the plant itself include a 1927 two-story frame shop, covered with

[118] Webb, "Cultural Resources Existing Conditions Report, North Shore Environmental Impact Statement," pp. 41-42.
[119] John B. Veach, "The History of Railroading in Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/GCHistory/12-railroads/railroads.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.
[120] R. J. Miller, "Lumber Brings Prosperity to Graham County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 16, 1938.

corrugated metal, and other assorted sheds. Most are now in derelict condition. The original band mill was destroyed by fire in 1967. Although replaced by a modern electric mill, it has since been removed, along with the boiler house with its distinctive twin chimneys. The most intact building on the mill site is the Bemis Office Building, a 1927 one-and-a-half-story, brick-veneered structure with a clipped-gable hipped roof and flared eaves. The structure, which resembles a dwelling, has a symmetrical façade and a recessed entrance bay and central dormer. The structure displays elements of the Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles.

Milltown, and to some extent Robbinsville itself, acted as a company town to Bemis. The company supplied electricity for Robbinsville, as well as ran a commissary, and provided company housing and a community picnic ground (GH0124). Housing for workers was constructed along Snowbird and Milltown Roads to the south of the plant. A newspaper article from 1935 noted that forty-one families lived along a twenty-five-hundred-foot stretch of a single street in Milltown.[121] A small collection of ten houses (GH0016) survive along Milltown Road. Built in the late 1920s, these frame dwellings are largely one-and-a-half story, side-gabled structures with attached or engaged front porches. Bemis sold off its company housing starting in the 1960s. As is typical of company housing sold into private hands, the relative uniformity of the housing was lost as individual owners altered the original structures, making additions, reconfiguring porches, changing windows, and adding replacement siding. The picnic grounds and community

[121] "Dogs Outnumber Kids in Suburb of Robbinsville," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 24, 1935.

building were also sold, and the building was eventually enclosed and converted into a dwelling.

One domestic structure representing management survives in Milltown. Lionel Wilson worked for Bemis from 1927 until his death in 1965. In 1935 he became vice president and general manager and, in the final years of his life, served as company president. His circa 1948 house sits on a hill above the company housing. The one-story, brick-veneered house is a late example of the Colonial Revival style, with elements that indicate the coming popularity of the Ranch house. It is one of the most distinctive mid-20th-century dwellings in the Robbinsville area.[122]

After years of prosperity, the fortunes of Bemis began to change. In the 1960s the company sold its employee housing, and in 1971 Bemis sold its timber holdings at auction. The mill itself was sold in 1972 to Whitewater, Inc. and then transferred hands several times until it was closed in 1990. With the decline in both agriculture and manufacturing in the 1980s, Graham County had one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. In 1990, Bemis (which had reclaimed its original name) employed only sixty individuals.[123]

Another major attempt at establishing manufacturing in Graham County began in the 1950s near the Bemis Plant. Constructed in 1956, Fontana Mills (GH0464) was designed to manufacture high-quality carpets and rugs.[124] The building, by Robert and

[122] For a more detailed description of the historic structures in Milltown, see: Acme Preservation Services, "Historic Architectural Resources Survey Report, Replace Bridge No. 11 on NC 143B over Long Creek, Graham County."
[123] Julie Powers Rives, "Hard Times, Insecurity Dwell in Graham County," *News and Observer*, March 4, 1990.
[124] "A New Era for Robbinsville," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 2, 1956.

Company Associates of Atlanta, was built of structural steel with insulated brick walls and roofs. It had large central columns and a mezzanine balcony. Burlington Industries acquired the plant in 1960 to serve as a unit of Lees Carpets. The Fontana Plant ceased manufacturing carpets in 1971.[125] In 1973, Burlington reopened the site as a furniture plant, doubling the building's size.[126] In 1984 the plant was sold to Turner Furniture, who the following year sold it to Stanley Furniture.[127] By 1986 Stanley employed four hundred individuals. After massive layoffs in 2007 and plans for more expansion the following year, Stanley closed in 2014.[128] The plant was purchased by Oak Valley Hardwood, who by 2017 employed about twenty-eight people, mostly selling wood to China. In 2025 the plant was purchased by EcoKing, a Chinese-owned producer of biodegradable paper tableware.[129]

If timber-related industries dominated Graham County in much of the 20th century, water provided the force for another form of modernization. Early on, water had provided transport for early timbering, as well as the power to saw logs. However, from 1916 to 1945, three major hydroelectric dams were constructed in Graham County. The major impetus came from the Aluminum Company of America. Formed in 1888 as the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, Alcoa established a plant in nearby Maryville, Tennessee, with an eye toward establishing dams along the Little Tennessee River through a subsidiary division named Tapoco (Tallassee Power Company). Construction for the first dam, Cheoah, began

[125] "Burlington Phasing Out Fontana Plant," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 24, 1971.
[126] "Burlington Reopens Robbinsville Plant," *News and Record*, June 17, 1972.
[127] "Firm Seeks to Buy Globe Furniture Plant," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, December 9, 1985.
[128] "Will Closure of Plant Kill Town?" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 31, 2014.
[129] Will Hofmann, "Company to Invest $80M in Old Stanley Furniture Plant," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 27, 2025.

in 1916, in part to meet the needs of the U.S. military in World War I. As part of the construction, Alcoa built a construction camp near the worksite. The village of Tapoco included twenty-three houses, a school, a church, a swimming pool, and a playground. None of the original buildings survive, though Tapoco was later developed to provide accommodations for employees and tourists in the 1930s. The Cheoah Dam (GH0047) was completed in 1919 and at the time was the largest overflow dam in the world, serving as a model for the construction of many dams and powerhouses across the country. The classically detailed Cheoah Powerhouse retains much of its original architectural detailing and character.[130]

Demand for aluminum continued to surge during the 1920s. Alcoa's construction of a second dam began five miles upstream from the Cheoah Dam. The Santeetlah Dam (GH0062), begun in 1926 and completed in 1928, also had a Classical Revival-style powerhouse. In terms of its impact on the landscape of Graham County, the second dam was far more influential, creating Santeetlah Lake, which had a pool area of approximately 2,881 acres.[131] It should be noted that while construction of these two dams provided employment for some Graham Countians, the greater influence on industrialization and permanent employment was primarily in East Tennessee, where Alcoa operated. Instead, the localized influence of the dam was felt in the development of tourism and summer visitation.

[130] Thomason and Douglass, "Cheoah Hydroelectric Development," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004.
[131] Thomason and Douglass, "Santeetlah Hydroelectric Development," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004.

While the draw of Graham County for tourists has been its wild scenery, the history of tourism and summer visitation in the county is tied to both timbering and hydroelectricity. An early effort came in 1908 after the Whiting Manufacturing Company acquired a vast tract of land from the Great Smoky Mountain Land and Timber Company and Whiting authorized agent George Gordon Moore to establish a European-style shooting preserve at Hoopers Bald in a remote section of the Snowbird Mountains to entertain wealthy clients and friends. A 90 x 40-foot log lodge was built, as well as a four-room log house for the caretaker. Ultimately, animals, including wild boar, buffalo, elk, and Russian brown bear, were brought in on wagon trains and logging railroads. Despite the great effort, the site proved too remote, and many animals escaped the enclosure or were sold off. By the 1920s, only the caretaker was left.[132] One of the subsequent results of this venture was the establishment of a large population of wild boar in Graham County, which would attract sportsmen. An open season on boar was created in 1936.

Directly tied to the development of the two Alcoa dams in Graham County is the construction of a lodge and guest cottages at Tapoco (GH0056). In 1930, Alcoa built a two-story, brick-veneered Colonial Revival-style lodge and dining hall at the site of their construction camp, initially to house employees and company guests. The opening of the lodge coincided with the construction of a modern highway (now US 129) linking Graham County to East Tennessee. The completion of the road in 1931 brought automobile tourists into Graham County, and the Cheoah Dam became one of the sites of interest. Alcoa

[132] "Wildlife and Forest Resources in Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/GCHistory/17-wildlifeforest/wildliferesources.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.

developed its recreational facilities at Tapoco Lodge and around 1935 added seven guest cottages. In 1952 Alcoa added a Quonset hut to serve as a theater and dance hall. Alcoa continued to operate the lodge until 1996, when it was sold into private ownership.[133]

The creation of Santeetlah Lake and the completion of the highway linking Graham County to East Tennessee promoted the growth of tourism in the region. In 1932, *The Asheville Times* noted that tourists were beginning to "pour into" Graham County.[134] Two years later the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported that the tourist business had experienced its best year since the lake was impounded in 1928. The previous year all available tourist cabins had been full, and more were under construction. Tent camping was also available along the lake shore. The newspaper reported that cabins were more popular than hotels and boarding houses since families wished to rough it in the backwoods. They also noted that good roads made trout fishing accessible along the Big and Little Snowbird Creeks, as well as West Buffalo and Santeetlah Creeks.[135]

Summer homes became increasingly popular as well. In 1931, two Knoxvillians, Charles and Lenore Wray, brought property along the West Buffalo Creek where it formed part of the newly created lake. Charles Wray, an executive with Remington Arms, and Lenore Wray, an artist known for her etching, developed their property with a series of small buildings and orchards (GH0019). It is unclear which of the buildings already stood at the property when they purchased it. The land was formerly logging land that had been

[133] Thomason and Douglass, "Tapoco Lodge Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2004.
[134] "Tourists Begin to Pour into Graham County," *The Asheville Times*, September 26, 1932.
[135] "Cabins Popular with Tourists at Santeetlah," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 11, 1934.

purchased by Tallassee Power Company for the development of the lake. After the completion of the dam, the land was sold to M. J. Stewart, who in turn sold it to the Wrays.[136] A current owner believes that several of the structures were formerly part of a logging camp.[137] An article about Lenore Wray from the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* in 1931 shows a log boat house under construction.[138] This structure, now a dwelling, is the third in a series of five structures, all now summer houses, which line the road. It is possible that the first, second, and fourth buildings (from east to west) predate it. The first is a half-dovetail log structure, the second a double-boxed structure, possibly once a "chow hall," and the fourth is a low building clad in chestnut siding, which may have once been a bunk house.[139]

Charles Wray died in 1937 at the age of 53. The following year, Lenore Wray advertised the Joyce Kilmer Lodge, located "8 feet from the water edge of beautiful Lake Santeetlah." The lodge offered "delicious meals" on the American plan (three meals a day), with a rate of $3.50 a day for lodging and meals.[140] No record of how successful this endeavor was, or which buildings were utilized for the lodge, has been found. However, in 1940, Lenore Wray deeded part of the property to Florence Howard for $1, to be transferred

[136] Tallassee Power Company to M. J. Stewart, Warranty Deed, 1928, Deed Book 37, p. 444, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina. M. J. Stewart to Chas. N. Wray and Lenoir [*sic*] Wray, Warranty Deed, Deed Book 38, p. 607, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina. M. J. Stewart to Chas. N. Wray and Lenoir [*sic*] Wray, Warranty Deed, Deed Book 39, p. 112, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina.
[137] Phone interview with Ronnie Campbell, October 21, 2025. Site visit and interview with Ronnie Campbell, November 18,2025.
[138] Margaret Beaufort Miller, "An Apostle of Etching," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel,* November 29, 1931.
[139] Phone interview with Ronnie Campbell, October 21, 2025. Site visit and interview with Ronnie Campbell, November 18, 2025.
[140] Ad for the Joyce Kilmer Lodge, *Asheville Citizen-Times,* August 14, 1938.

after her death.[141] When Lenore Wray died in 1948, her obituary noted that she spent her summers at her lodge near Lake Santeetlah.[142]

In 1955 the property was purchased by J. D. Warrick, a local educator and school administrator. In the 1960s, the second cabin was sold to local businessman Ted Jordan. Eventually cabins No. 2-4 were owned by members of the Campbell family. In 1969 a final structure was moved to the complex when Betty Warrick Gilman moved a circa 1860 log dogtrot house from Old Fort, North Carolina, to the property. The dwelling has recently been used as a B&B, while the other structures are all summer homes.[143]

Among the most spectacular of the prewar tourist accommodations built in Graham County is the Snowbird Lodge (GH0002), built in a remote part of the northwest side of the county in 1940-41. Designed by Asheville architect Ronald Greene, the lodge was built for Chicago brothers Arthur W. and Edwin M. Wolfe, who planned to run the lodge in conjunction with tours of the Great Smoky Mountains originating in Chicago. The "Swiss Chalet"-style lodge mixes construction of local timber and stone, with one block constructed of saddle-notched chestnut logs and the other, German-sided frame

[141] Lenore Wray to Florence Howard, Warranty Deed, Deed Book 39, p. 112, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina.
[142] Obituary for Lenore Wray, *The Knoxville News-Sentinel,* April 14, 1948.
[143] Gustav Teichart and Florence Teichart to J. D. Warrick, Warranty Deed, Deed Book 555, p. 194, Graham County Register of Deeds, Robbinsville, North Carolina. Current members of the consortium who own the first cabin also believe that the property was once used as a girls' camp. This probably would have been in the early 1950s. Phone interview with Ronnie Campbell, October 21, 2025. Site visit and interview with Ronnie Campbell, November 18, 2025. Other owners of the various properties were also present.

construction. Surrounded on two sides by the Nantahala National Forest and on another by Cherokee land, the lodge has a majestic view of the Snowbird Mountains.[144]

Although the infrastructure created by industrialization enabled tourism, the growing effort to conserve natural resources in the interwar era drew tourists to the area. In 1920, the Nantahala National Forest was established, encompassing much previously timbered-over land in western North Carolina. In 1936, the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, one of the largest tracts of old growth forest in the eastern United States, was established in northwestern Graham County. The creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park during the 1930s in adjacent counties in North Carolina and Tennessee also drew visitors to Graham County. For more rugged adventurers, twenty-two miles of the Appalachian Trail (AT), completed in 1937, cross northeastern Graham County. Among the oldest trail shelters in the southern portion of the AT, the Cable Gap Shelter (GH0444), built in 1939 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, is a small, open-sided log structure with a wood-shingle roof.[145]

The United States' entry into World War II, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, delayed the continued development of tourism in Graham County, at least temporarily. Wartime would also bring one of the most profound alterations of the cultural landscape of the county. Alcoa had long envisioned another dam near the site of the Fontana Copper Company and settlement on the Little Tennessee River. In 1936, Fontana was part of the

[144] Hood, "Snowbird Mountain Lodge," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1993.
[145] "Cable Gap Shelter," Appalachian Trail Histories, https://appalachiantrailhistory.org/items/show/611, accessed July 9, 2026.

plan TVA submitted to Congress, and the construction of Fontana Dam was finally authorized on December 17, 1941. Construction began the next month. Over sixty-eight thousand acres were acquired in Graham and Swain Counties for the Fontana Project, and 1,311 families were relocated.

A massive influx of workers, at peak over six thousand, flowed into the Fontana Project. Although Graham County had virtually no Black community at the time, African Americans constituted 11percent of the population at the construction site. Originally workers were housed in tents, until dormitories and family housing were built (although many Black workers continued to be housed in tents). Accommodations and services soon included the needs of families, and the Village of Fontana was established a mile from the dam construction at Welch Cove. The facilities included a cafeteria, a community building, a recreation building, refreshment stands, a hospital, and a softball field. While the school at Welch Cove once incorporated all students into a one-room schoolhouse, the new Fontana School educated five hundred white students, while a separate segregated school was built for African American children.[146] The massive undertaking, with its 24-7 work schedule, attracted international attention, including a visit from French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, on his first tour to America.[147] The dam, built under wartime conditions, is still the highest dam in the eastern United States.

[146] Kowalczyk and Thomason, "Fontana Hydroelectric Project," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2017.
[147] "Built for the People: Fontana Dam," Tennessee Valley Authority, https://www.tva.com/about-tva/our-history/built-for-the-people/the-miracle-in-the-wilderness, accessed July 9, 2026.

The houses built at Fontana Village were one-story structures of four general types: permanent, temporary, demountable, and trailers. The permanent dwellings came in four floor plans, as did the temporary houses. The latter were all gable-front structures and, unlike the permanent structures, were set on woodblock footings.[148] Construction at Fontana and other TVA dams presaged postwar developments in commercial housing, including both onsite line-production used in the construction of tract houses, as well as the prefabrication of building material and dwellings. Of particular note was the design of the lightweight A-6 built by Schult Trailers. One hundred and four of these models were installed at Fontana. When Fontana was later transformed into a resort, these models were difficult to modify and were rented in their original condition at a cheap price, before eventually being sold or dismantled.[149]

While thousands of dam workers came from outside of Graham County, a large number of local individuals, those not serving in the military, worked at Fontana. Some, such as members of the Sawyer and Cabe families, who lived on Sawyers Creek, walked to Fontana to obtain employment.[150] In 1941, Graham County native Gwynn Denton joined the TVA engineering staff to work on the Fontana Dam. A successful engineer, Denton had previously worked on the road to Chimney Rock and the Graham County Courthouse, and in 1938 had built a Craftsman-style bungalow (GH0264) on Sweetwater Creek.[151] With

[148] Brown, "Historic Structures Survey Report, Upgrade NC 28 from NC 143 to US 129."
[149] Lance Holland, *Fontana: A Pocket History of Appalachia* (Robbinsville, NC: Appalachian History Series, 2001), pp. 147-153. For an examination of the significance of TVA's prefabricated housing, see: Marian Moffett, "Manufactured Housing: The TVA Experience," *Arris* 5 (1994):31-37.
[150] Interview with Donna Sawyer, May 8, 2025. Interview with Jeff Cabe, May 8, 2025.
[151] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 21-1 to 21-8.

attention paid primarily to the thousands of workers who poured into Graham County to build the "miracle in the wilderness," a more comprehensive study of the contributions of local people has yet to be written. Local individuals contributed hard labor and brought construction, engineering, administrative, and domestic skills with them to the job, and took away other skills after the completion of the dam.

The construction of Fontana Dam forever altered the vernacular landscape of Graham County. The TVA's report on "population readjustment" described the architecture of the impact area in Graham County in these terms: "The buildings are mostly box structures, constructed of rough timber and covered with boards split from native timber. Many of the families occupy log cabins, especially those in the more remote sections. Only two dwellings in the area to be flooded have ever been painted."[152] For the hundreds of Graham County families who lost homes and means of livelihood with the acquisition of land for the dam construction, times were hard. Able-bodied men were called off to war, and shortages made it difficult to obtain building materials. Wilber and Nora Jenkins lost their home on Poison Creek, which was acquired by the TVA but not inundated by the lake, and built a small log house on Upper Sawyers Creek (GH0394). Around 1960, they replaced this house with a larger stone-veneered house across the road.[153] The displaced were allowed to salvage materials from their old homes and, in some cases, moved whole

[152] Arnold James Hyde, "Stecoah Community, Fontana Area," Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Property Management Department Population Readjustment, 1944, Southern Appalachian Digital Collections, https://southernappalachiandigitalcollections.org/object/64581. Although the report is useful for photographs and data on structures in the impact area, it also contains a number of stereotypical comments typical of the time period.
[153] Interview with Nettie Jenkins, April 10, 2025.

houses. A one-and-a-half-story, double-pen, boxed house (GH0349), located on Gunter Gap Road near Stecoah, is believed to have been moved in the early 1940s from the flood zone by a Mr. Greene and Marty Jenkins.[154]

In some cases, buildings were salvaged and transformed in both appearance and function. The Panther Creek Baptist Church, established in 1866, has been rebuilt several times. At one point, it was located on a hill next to the cemetery but was later moved down to a lower point for improved accessibility. Unfortunately, that church ended up in the flood zone. Oliver Fred Bradshaw acquired the materials from the dismantled structure and in 1943 built a story-and-a-half bungalow (GH0408) on higher ground. Much older material is retained inside, including old-growth pine flooring and original beadboard on walls and ceilings. "A. G. M." is inscribed on beadboard, possibly from when the material was in part of the church.[155] The Panther Creek Cemetery (GH0411), with over five hundred markers, still sits on its place on the hill, although it is now a narrow peninsula above the Fontana Lake. The mid-20th-century, brick-veneered Panther Creek Baptist Church (GH0403) is now located on Upper Panther Creek Road.

The 10,670-acre reservoir created by the dam would transform both the natural and cultural landscape of Graham County. Returning servicemen often struggled with finding their relocated families and could not recognize the landscape of their former

[154] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 43-1 to 43-6.
[155] Interview with Judy Carpenter, April 23, 2025.

communities.[156] Meanwhile, the dam itself became a tourist attraction. In 1947 TVA added a Visitors Building to the dam site. Built into the bank, it is one of TVA's most notable examples of the Streamline Moderne style. An incline railcar transported visitors from the Center down to a view of the powerhouse, but it was discontinued for security reasons in 2001.[157]

Fontana Village itself transformed. Promising a "dam good time," former cottages were leased to visitors, and the growing resort offered outdoor activities and became a hub of the 1950s and early 60s passion for square dancing. In 1946, Government Service, Inc. (GSI) entered into a thirty-year lease with TVA for the use of Fontana Village. About one-third of the cottages and trailer housing units had already been removed by this time. By 1950, 275 of the Fontana cottages had been converted to guest facilities for the growing resort. The hospital was renovated into a fifty-six-room lodge. Through the 1950s and 60s, the resort advertised the repurposed accommodations, including the demountable houses and trailer houses, as "delightful, furnished" cottages. In 1987, Peppertree Resorts purchased GSI's interest in the resort and ultimately removed, stripped down to the frame, or dramatically altered most of the original cabins. In 1997 five of the A-6 trailer type houses still remained, and one survived until sometime after 2005. The hospital that GSI

[156] Tape recorded interview with Judy Carpenter, October 15, 2025; "History," The Proctor Revival Project, http://www.proctorrevival.org/Stories.html, accessed July 9, 2026.
[157] Kowalczyk and Thomason, "Fontana Hydroelectric Project," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2017.

converted to a lodge became a sales and administration building, and the Red Cross Building (GH0063) was removed sometime after 2005.[158]

While not much survives of the original wartime Fontana Village, some of the dwellings were sold off and transported to other parts of Graham County. Two former Fontana Village houses (GH0362) sit on Upper Sawyers Creek, moved probably in the 1970s to serve as vacation houses. The upper cabin has more extensive additions, including an addition to the rear and a big porch facing the creek. Quite a bit of the original interior paneling is still intact. The lower cabin, now painted green, has more of its original interior fittings, including light fixtures. Both cabins are one-story with low gable roofs, and both are now winterized.[159] Another cabin, also moved in the 1970s, is part of a small complex at the Stecoah Valley Camping Resort (GH0298), now the Kickstand Lodge. Unlike the gabled-roof cabins moved to Upper Sawyers Creek, this flat-roof dwelling appears to be an A-6, one of the trailer-type houses designed by the TVA.[160] In other cases, materials were recycled from the larger public buildings at Fontana, such as the stone taken from the gymnasium for the construction of Sweetwater Church (see Chapter Four).

As peacetime returned to Graham County, auto tourism grew. Highway 288 had been submerged by the lake and was rerouted. In 1954 a new section of road christened Highway 28 opened from Fontana to Almond, providing easier access to the growing resort

[158] Brown, "Historic Structures Survey Report: Upgrade NC 28 (Fontana Road) from NC 143 to US 129"; Holland, *Fontana*, pp. 206-219.
[159] Interview with Lori Harris, April 3, 2025.
[160] Richard Grubb & Associates, "Historic Architecture Survey Report, Corridor K, Appalachian Highway Development System," 40-1 to 40-3.

at Fontana. Automobile services grew as highways improved. As early as 1930, Frank Colvard built the Colvard Motor Company (GH0236) just south of Robbinsville. The facility, which included a DeSoto showroom, an automobile repair shop, and an Esso gas station, was located on US 129, Graham County's first hard-surfaced road. After the war, Colvard expanded his enterprise with two additional service bays on the south side of the building.[161] Small stores, gas stations and cafes also developed in Graham County along major tourist routes in the mid-20th century. On US 28, these included the circa 1960 Johnson Store (GH0475) near Fontana (later operated as Friendly Fields General Store), the circa 1955 stone-veneered Wolf Creek General Store (GH0303), the mid-20th-century Brown's Grocery (more recently known as Tsali Grocery) (GH0451) near the Tsali Recreation Area, and a circa 1960 service station and garage (GH0293) near Stecoah. Along with Colvard's, service stations along US 129 included the circa 1955 Topton Service Station (GH0428) and a circa 1955 service station (GH0233) on Tallullah Road, south of Robbinsville.[162]

After hydroelectric dams transformed rivers into sprawling lakes in Graham County, villages constructed to house dam workers became tourist resorts. A different adaptation of industrial infrastructure came in the mid-1960s with the creation of a scenic railway. The Graham County Railway from Topton to Robbinsville was incorporated in 1905 but was not completed until two decades later, after H. C. Bemis bought the controlling interest.[163] As

[161] Ibid., 8-1 to 8-11.
[162] Ibid., pp. 3-74 to 3-78.
[163] John B. Veach, "The History of Railroading in Graham County," GrahamCounty.net, https://www.grahamcounty.net/gchistory/12-railroads/railroads.htm, accessed July 9, 2026.

with most of the rail lines in the county, the railway was used primarily to transport lumber products. The GCR Railway was one of the last shortlines in the east to run gear-driven, steam-powered Shay locomotives.[164] However, by the 1960s, lumber was transported primarily by truck, and Bemis Lumber was no longer flourishing. Sponsored by Bemis and Fontana Village, the Bear Creek Scenic Railroad was built in 1966.[165] Bear Creek Junction included a reproduction of a historic railway depot (GH0030) built by the Southern Railroad in the 1880s in Scottsboro, Alabama. The depot was constructed under the supervision of Arnold Allen, maintenance superintendent at Fontana Village Resort. A railroad museum located at the site, dubbed "Railroad Town USA," featured historic railroad cars, including a dining car where luncheons were served to tourists.[166] Behind the depot, the owners constructed Bear Creek Junction Village (GH0416). A half-dovetail, single-pen cabin, which served as a general store that sold souvenirs and refreshments, was moved to the site. Behind the store was a log grist mill building, and on the other side was a single-crib log structure, whose function is unknown. Both of these buildings are built of unhewn logs with minimal notching and were probably constructed on site in the 1960s. The site also included a sawmill. The scenic excursion itself ran for an hour and forty-five minutes. The Bear Creek Railway ran to an existing overlook point of the Nantahala Gorge, where a new

[164] "Bear Creek Scenic Railroad," HawkinsRails.net, https://hawkinsrails.net/preservation/bcsr/bcsr.html#:~:text=he%20Bear%20Creek%20Scenic%20Railroad, Carolina%20mountain%20community%20of%20Topton, accessed July 9, 2026.
[165] "N.C.'s Nantahala Nat'l Forest Offers Scenic Forest Land," *Roanoke-Chowan News-Herald*, August 2, 1967.
[166] "Something Different at Bear Creek," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 7, 1966; "Junction Replica Is Opened: It's Old-Fashioned and Brand-New," *Greensboro Daily News*, July 3, 1966.

overlook building with a concessions stand (GH0350) was built in a style similar to the depot, with bracketed eaves and German siding.

Unfortunately, this tourist attraction was relatively short-lived. Management of the rail line changed in the early 1970s and then ran for a couple of years until 1975, when it was closed due to a bridge washout. In 1989, the Bear Creek complex was sold for residential development, and the depot was converted to a four-bedroom house. It still, however, retains many elements of its 1966 appearance.[167] The log "general store" was converted back to a dwelling and was greatly expanded after 2000.[168] The log gristmill still stands, although it has lost its waterwheel and now serves as a storage shed. Down the road, the Nantahala Overlook Building continued to serve tourists gifts and refreshments until the 1980s. It is now derelict and vandalized.

The postwar era brought an increase in both tourist attractions and accommodations. Harkening back to the era of the hunting lodges, the Blue Boar Lodge (GH0452), built by Fred Bruckman, a brewer from Cincinnati, opened around 1950 near Lake Santeetlah. Originally known as the Blue Boar Sportsman's Lodge, the one-story frame structure with eight rooms offered bare-bones accommodations to sportsmen interested in hunting Graham County's wild boar, as well as other wild game. Bruckman hired local men to lead the hunts. In the late 20th century, the lodge was transformed into a country inn with guest rooms with private baths. A 1953 article in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* noted the range of accommodations in Graham County, including the Snowbird

[167] Interview with Mallorie Chamblin, May 7, 2025.
[168] Interview with Adam Cable, May 7, 2025.

Mountain Lodge, the Tapoco Lodge, and the Blue Boar Sportsman's Lodge, as well as a number of cabins and cottages with facilities for cooking. By this time, Robbinsville also had two tourist courts and a couple of small hotels or tourist homes.[169]

Soon motels were also springing up in rural Graham County along the major highways. Around 1960, two motels were built on US 28, just east of Fontana, providing additional housing when the resort was fully booked, especially during Fontana's square dance heyday. Curley Lovin, a mechanic, first built a concrete-block house with a grocery and gas pump out front. He then built the first two units of the Fontana Motel (GH0366). Lovin sold the property to Carmel Crisp, who added two additional pairs of units. The small six-room, stone-veneered motel still provides accommodations, although in 1998 it was renamed the "Hike Inn" and now serves hikers, rather than motorists.[170] Located down the road is another, somewhat larger, stone-veneered motel of the same vintage. The Tuskeegee Motel (GH0363) has twelve connected guest rooms, as well as two freestanding buildings. One of these buildings, with a porte cochere, once had gas pumps and a convenience store. The other, with a front-facing gable, served as a restaurant. The motel is no longer in operation.[171] On US 28, the mid-20th-century, eight-unit Topton Motel (GH0427) (now Nantahala Motel) served motorists in the southern end of the county. Once painted pink, this L-shaped concrete-block structure, in the mid-1960s, advertised itself as "your nearest motel to Bear Creek Junction," touting its proximity to the scenic tourist

[169] "Robbinsville Has Many Fine Accommodations," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 31, 1953.
[170] Interview with Nancy Hoch, April 3, 2025.
[171] "Visitor, Sightseer, Vacationist, Sportsman – Graham County Has Something For Everyone," *Asheville Times*, June 24, 1979.

railroad.[172] Later, after the demise of the railroad, the motel instead decided to emphasize, with the growing interest in rafting and kayaking, its proximity to the Nantahala River Gorge. No longer a motel, the building now houses seasonal workers for a local rafting company.

Unlike the bigger inns and resorts, the small motels tended to be locally owned. Another, often locally owned, option was the construction of camping and RV parks. One such park located in Stecoah and dating from the 1970s is the Stecoah Valley Camping Resort (GH0298), which includes a worker's cottage from Fontana. The resort is now known as "Kickstand Lodge," reflecting the growing popularity with motorcyclists of the "Tail of the Dragon" on US 129 in nearby Tennessee and then continuing on to NC Highway 28 through Graham County. Catering to RV enthusiasts, the Shook family built an RV park behind the Crisp-Shook House (GH0351) near Jutts Creek off of US 129.[173] The Holder family built an RV camp on Upper Sawyers Creek that once included the Jenkins Log House (GH0394), which was used as a storage shed.[174]

Much of western North Carolina has been shaped by summer visitation, not only by tourists, but also those living in hotter climates seeking second homes. Graham County has been somewhat less influenced than other nearby counties by the proliferation of summer home construction until recently. A notable exception, however, was the development originally named Thunderbird Estates at Santeetlah Lake. In mid-1940s Kenneth Keyes, a real estate developer from Miami, acquired land on the lake from the

[172] "Something Different at Bear Creek," *Asheville Citizen-Times,* August 7, 1966.
[173] Interview with Deborah Shook, April 2, 2025.
[174] Interview with Bill Gordon, April 10, 2025.

United States Forest Service with the intent of building a forty-four-room stone and timber hotel, plus additional guest cottages. Keyes had already built a summer home on the lake in 1936.[175] Keyes' grand plans never materialized, and the property was sold in the late 1950s. In 1961 another developer bought the property and began building the Thunderbird Mountain Resort, which included a lodge that would feature square dancing, bingo, and movies, as well as a swimming pool and motel. The plans included the marketing of small, affordable cottages that could be purchased or rented. In 1961, fourteen prefabricated aluminum cottages were moved to the site, and thirty-eight were added the following year. The cottages were sold pre-furnished. The resort was opened for occupancy in 1962 and primarily marketed to buyers in Florida. By 1966, Thunderbird was also advertising "A Frame" cottages.

In the next two decades, the development changed hands several times and disputes arose with property owners over the maintenance of the water system. In 1989, the Town of Santeetlah incorporated. Finally, a new water system was the completed in 1995, and subsequently a new development, Lakeside Santeetlah, was opened.[176] The new development changed the nature of the community with substantially larger dwellings, many built right on the lakeside, rather than on the hills overlooking the lake. The Town of Santeetlah now consists of approximately two hundred houses. Most are summer

[175] "Keyes Will Build a 44-Room Hotel on Lake Santeetlah," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 14, 1946.
[176] "History," Town of Lake Santeetlah, http://www.townoflakesanteetlah.org/history.html, accessed July 9, 2026.

residences, but approximately forty are occupied year-round. The Thunderbird Lodge was demolished about 2015.[177]

Similar to Fontana Village, many of the original prefabricated houses at Lake Santeetlah have been removed, built over, or renovated beyond recognition. As of now, there is no detailed survey of the surviving 1960s-era cabins in Santeetlah. However, some are clearly recognizable. The Greene House (GH0455) is a circa 1962 two-bedroom cottage, approximately 960 square feet in size. Like many of the earliest models, the house is sited on a hill, rather than at the lake front, and has impressive views from its screened porch. The house still has many of its original features, retaining its aluminum exterior and interior panels, tile floor, and built-in wardrobe. The major change has been the installation of a dropped ceiling under the original vaulted ceiling. The circa 1964 Simon House (GH0456) is an example of the deluxe two-bedroom model. The house was renovated in 2016. Some of the original interior paneling is still intact, although the vaulted ceiling is now covered in knotty pine. The porch, with its dramatic view of Lake Santeetlah, is now enclosed as a sitting room, and a room has been finished below the original porch area. The siding is now vinyl, rather than aluminum panels. Some examples of the mid-1960s A-frame cottages also exist. Especially notable are the group of five clustered around a circle known as "Chalet Village" (GH0457).[178]

The early houses at the Town of Santeetlah contrast to many of the tourist accommodations and summer houses in Graham County in their use of prefabricated

[177] Interview with Mayor Diana Simon, November 12, 2025.
[178] Site visit and interview with Mayor Diana Simon, November 12, 2025.

components, especially lightweight aluminum panels, which more resemble the trailer-type housing at the workers' camps at Fontana than the deliberately rusticated nature of many mountain lodges and cabins. Modern log houses, some factory-built or "kit" houses, have become common in the mountains. A good example of a late "log cabin" is the Happ-n-so-Kabin (GH0458). The sign on the front reads, "Wayne Buchanan's Happ-n-so-Kabin, Built 1971." The foundation and steps appear to be older than 1971, and the logs may be older timbers that have been recycled. However, the cabin has shallow square notches, and the chinking is of cement. In contrast to rustic cabins are more modern innovations such as the use of geodesic domes (GH0387) at the Camp Gray Fox glamping site or the use of traditional structures from other cultures, such as the use of Mongolian yurts at the Heart Center, located at the former Mountain View School (GH0388).

Another trend now found in Graham County is the renovation of older, vernacular dwellings to serve as B&Bs, rental houses, or summer dwellings. The circa 1942 Jenkins Log House (GH0394), which accommodated a family removed by the Fontana Project, later became a storage shed for an RV park and then was renovated to serve as a summer house. Two larger early- to mid-20th-century farmhouses, which now serve as vacation rentals, are the circa 1932 Pink and Birdie Sawyer House (GH0368) in Tuskeegee, now part of "Hog Hollow Cabin Retreat," and the Henry Grant House (GH0424) near Tapoco, built by a veteran of the Battle of Normandy and a long-time mechanic for the Tallassee Power Company. The place is now known as "O'Henry's Getaway." Interestingly, boxed houses, often thought of as fragile and impermanent, have also found new life as renovated summer homes. These include the Jesse Williams House (GH0377), a double-boxed house

dating from the late 19th century on the Left Fork of Beech Creek, which was renovated as a summer house and is now a full-time dwelling; the circa 1937 Henry Millsaps House (GH0372) on Pinhook Creek, now operated as "White Wolf," a short term rental; and the Walker Cabin (GH0045), a circa 1880s boxed house near Stecoah, now part of the campground complex at Loma Linda Resort.

Among the most interesting vacation/recreational dwellings are the so-called "floating cabins" on Lake Fontana. The lake, created by the construction of the Fontana Dam, has approximately 240 miles of shoreline, mostly in Swain and Graham Counties. While the lake provided an attraction for tourists, access was somewhat limited for local residents of modest means, including those who were former landowners in the area acquired by the TVA. Most of the land surrounding the lake is public, part of Nantahala National Forest or Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and private land near the lake has become prohibitively expensive for most people. Sometime in the 1950s, local people began to build informal non-navigable houseboats moored on the lake. Many of the early ones were hand-built, although now there are an array of sizes and assemblages of both hand-built and prefabricated materials. A 1984 newspaper article described one such houseboat:

> J. R. and I visited the Millsaps' family shack, which floats on billets of plastic foam and is guided by cables as it floats up and down with the fluctuating lake level. It had six bunks, a large kitchen-dining area, and a marine-type chemical toilet. These

shacks once floated on logs or oil drums, but the Department of Interior now requires the plastic foam flotation, and is not issuing permits for more shacks.[179]

Of the approximately 350 "floating cabins" on Fontana, roughly half are in Graham County. The oldest tend to be along Panther Creek, near the Prince and Crisp boat docks, and at the mouth of Stecoah Creek, where mooring is available, but there is no commercial dock. There are also houseboats at Fontana Dock, but these are more likely to be commercially constructed.[180]

The non-navigable houseboats must have permits issued by the TVA, and mooring fees are paid to the various marinas where the boats are located. The TVA, however, has had an ambivalent relationship with the floating cabins. Efforts to prohibit further construction began in the 1970s but generally were not enforced. In 2016 the TVA decided to "sunset" the cabins, eliminating all of them within thirty years. Local outrage ensued, fueled in part by the ongoing anger over the broken promise of the "road to nowhere" in Swain County, an unfinished road which was to provide access to former homesites and to cemeteries on the north shore of Fontana Lake. Among those who would eventually testify to Congress were Laura Sneed, co-founder of Fontana Families for Floating Houses, and David Monteith, a longtime Swain County commissioner from a family that had been removed from the North Shore. With the support of local politicians, as well as the EBCI,

[179] Bill Miller, "Fontana Village: A Superb Mountain Playground," *Fort Myers News-Press*, October 30, 1984.
[180] Reviewing the Tennessee Valley Authority's Prohibition on Houseboats, 114th U.S. Cong. (2016), written statement of Laura Sneed, Founder, Fontana Families for Floating Houses, "Testimony: Floating Homes on TVA Reservoirs – September 2016," https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Sneed-FontanaFamilies-Statement-TVA-Houseboats-9-23.pdf.

the houseboat owners eventually won the day, and permission to keep the houseboats on the lake was signed into law in 2016 as an amendment to the Water Resources Development Act. There continues to be prohibition on new construction or the expansion of the footprint of existing houseboats.[181] Currently floating cabins are available to rent on sites such as Airbnb and VRBO.

[181] Jessi Stone, "TVA: No New Floating Home Construction on the Water," *Smoky Mountain News*, October 9, 2019.

CONCLUSION

Often defined by its lack of agricultural land and its abundance of wilderness, rural Graham County would not seem to possess much potential for a richness of architectural resources as they relate to agriculture and industrialization. However, survey work provides evidence to the contrary. While there is a relative paucity of surviving buildings dating before the creation of the county in 1872, Graham County is notable for the survival of traditional construction techniques in its agricultural structures and farmhouses. Log construction remained common for barns well into the 20th century. Perhaps because of the relative lack of success of commercial agriculture, there was little pressure on farmers to change their ways. Even with the one successful commercial crop, burley tobacco, farmers often pressed their older log barns into service, rather than build barns specifically designed to cure burley. Most Graham County log barns follow plans traditional in the Upper South, though often expanded in size. A unique example of a barn in the county is the one cantilevered barn with a log base and frame top, a form found in the hundreds in nearby East Tennessee, but especially rare in western North Carolina. However, examination of white settlement patterns in Graham County reveals that a constant stream of settlers came from Tennessee to the west, rather than the typical migration from the piedmont and mountain counties of North Carolina to the east.

While log dwellings were also common on rural farms in Graham County into the early to mid-20th century, especially noteworthy is the embrace of a particular variant of single-wall "boxed" construction, which utilized two layers of sawn planks. A significant

number of these dwellings still survive, but even more notable is the number of Graham County residents who expressed familiarity with this form of construction. It is likely that double-boxed houses are more likely to survive over time than the more fragile single plank construction, but architectural and oral evidence still suggests that double-boxed construction was a popular choice for rural builders in the county and represented an intermediary choice between typical boxed and frame construction. Although double-boxed buildings have been documented in Kentucky, none have been noted in other surveys of western North Carolina.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, timbering transformed the economy of western North Carolina. Notably, however, timbering tends to be ephemeral in terms of architectural evidence left behind from this form of industrialization. Late to the party, the Bemis Hardwood Company didn't enter Graham County until the 1920s, but it would go on to dominate the economy of Robbinsville and Graham County for over three decades. Considerable architectural evidence of Millville, just west of Robbinsville, includes remains of the mill plant itself, a collection of worker's housing, the company office, an executive's home, and the trace of the company's park for employees. In the post-industrial landscape, one of Bemis's rail lines was transformed into a tourist attraction in the form of a scenic railway. The attraction was relatively short-lived, but architectural remnants of the reproduction depot, the "village," and the observation deck/concession stand still remain.

The facilities for creating hydroelectric power also transformed Graham County with the construction of three dams, two built by Alcoa and one by TVA. The dams are all architecturally significant and represent considerable achievements in engineering. The

Cheoah Dam is both a notable example of a classically influenced industrial building and, when completed in 1919, was the world's highest overflow dam. The Streamlined Moderne-style Fontana Dam, completed in 1944, is still the largest dam in the eastern United States. Furthermore, the Fontana Project represents one of the greatest wartime mobilizations of a domestic workforce in United States history. The contribution of local people to the Fontana project, as well as the toll it took in terms of loss of communities and homes, is still not fully documented.

Finally, Graham County's contribution to the history of prefabricated housing might be noted. TVA's experimentation with semi-permanent, demountable, and trailer-style housing found its full expression at Fontana, where approximately six thousand workers and their families had to be housed in a remote site in short order. After the war, TVA failed to find a market for its prefabricated housing, as the American public no longer wanted to buy small and cheap housing.[182] A surprising embrace of prefabricated housing in Graham County came in the early 1960s in the form of small vacation cabins built of aluminum at Lake Santeetlah. A far cry from the expansive lodges which echoed traditional building in log or stone, or the rustic fishing cabins, these vacation homes provided affordable and modern housing to those who wanted lakeside living.

Graham County's architecture tells many stories: of persistence of traditional technology, of innovations and changes, and of families and communities adapting to, or resisting, change.

[182] Moffett, "Manufactured Housing," p. 37.

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APPENDIX A: FILES CREATED DURING THE 2025-2026 GRAHAM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Survey Site Number	Property	Location
GH0350	Nantahala Overlook	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0351	Crisp-Shook House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0352	Campbell Creek Bridge	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0353	Roy Farr House and Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0354	McClung Corn Crib	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0355	Thomas Colvard Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0356	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0357	Robert and Minnie Wiggins Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0358	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0359	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0360	Lock Phillips Log Cabin	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0361	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0362	TVA Cabins	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0363	Tuskeegee Motel	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0364	Tuskeegee Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0365	Cornett Log House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0366	Fontana Motel	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0367	Cable Cove Missionary Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0368	Pink and Birdie Sawyer Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0369	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0370	Tobacco Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0371	Sam and Mattie Lail House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0372	Henry Millsaps House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0373	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0374	Davis-Denton House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0375	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0376	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0377	Jesse Williams House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0378	Rogers-Deaton Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0379	Mountain Creek Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0380	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0381	Stuart Sawmill	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0382	Bunch Waldroup House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0383	Orr-Phillips House	Robbinsville vicinity

GH0384	Santeetlah Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0385	Jenkins Cemetery #1	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0386	Carringer Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0387	Camp Gray Fox Geodesic Domes	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0388	Mountain View School	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0389	Ira and Bertha Marcus House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0390	Green House and Garage	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0391	Green's Grocery	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0392	Meadow Branch Primitive Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0393	Wilbur and Nora Jenkins House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0394	Jenkins Log House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0395	Tobacco Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0396	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0397	Holcombe House and Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0398	Yellow Creek Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0399	Welsey and Josie Turpin House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0400	Beachard and Pearl Williams House and Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0401	Dock and Laura Williams House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0402	Pedestrian Swinging Bridge	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0403	Panther Creek Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0404	Floyd Cable House	Almond vicinity
GH0405	W. M. Bebber House	Almond vicinity
GH0406	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0407	Lacey Crisp House	Almond vicinity
GH0408	Oliver Fred Bradshaw House	Almond vicinity
GH0409	Garfield Carringer Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0410	New Born Missionary Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0411	Panther Creek Cemetery	Almond vicinity
GH0412	Lake Fontana Floating Cabins	Almond vicinity
GH0413	Holder House and Corn Crib	Robbinsville vicinity

GH0414	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0415	Huscusson Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0416	Bear Creek Junction Village	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0417	Bear Creek Missionary Baptist Church and Cemetery	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0418	Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0419	Cable Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0420	Sawyer Creek Cemetery	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0421	Welch Cove Primitive Baptist Church	Fontana Dam vicinity
GH0422	Wade Garland House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0423	Cedar Cliff Cemetery	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0424	Henry Grant House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0425	Pate Sherrill Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0426	Jack Shuler Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0427	Topton Motel	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0428	Topton Service Station	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0429	Walt West Store	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0430	Log Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0444	Cable Gap Trail Shelter	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0445	Crisp House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0446	Charlie Rogers House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0447	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0448	House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0449	Kirkland House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0450	Crisp House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0451	Brown's Grocery	Almond vicinity
GH0452	Blue Boar Sportsman’s Lodge	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0453	Swan Cabin	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0454	Town of Lake Santeetlah	Lake Santeetlah
GH0455	Greene House	Lake Santeetlah
GH0456	Simon House	Lake Santeetlah
GH0457	Chalet Village	Lake Santeetlah
GH0458	Happ-n-so-Kabin	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0459	Aldridge Sawmill and Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0460	Sawyer House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0461	Trout Raceway	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0462	Beasley-Panter House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0463	Parrette Clinic	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0464	Fontana Mills	Robbinsville

GH0465	Atoah Freewill Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0466	Zion Hill Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0467	Robinson's Grocery	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0468	George House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0469	Garland Barn	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0470	Earl and Murriel Buchanan Log and Boxed Houses	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0471	Colvard Motor Company & Frank & Lenora Colvard House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0472	Harve Grindstaff House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0473	Weaver Williams House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0474	Fontana Community Church	Fontana Dam
GH0475	Johnson Store	Fontana Dam vicinity
GH0476	Old Mother Church Cemetery	Robbinsville vicinity

APPENDIX B: GRAHAM COUNTY PROPERTIES ADDED TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER STUDY LIST ON FEBRUARY 26, 2026

Survey Site Number	Property	Location
GH0005	Cabe Boxed House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0012	Sweetwater Baptist Church	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0027	Wilson-Quilliams Log and Boxed House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0032	Campbell-Colvard House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0038	George-Campbell House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0043	John A. Cody House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0054	Stewart Cabin	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0064	Joanna Bald Fire Tower	Nantahala National Forest
GH0065	Wauchecha Bald Fire Tower	Nantahala National Forest
GH0067	Thomas Jefferson Hooper Grave Shelter	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0069	Little Tennessee River Bridge	Fontana Dam vicinity
GH0240	Colvard House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0272	Randolph-Stewart Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0347	Cheoah Historic District	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0349	Boxed House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0351	Crisp-Shook House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0357	Robert and Minnie Wiggins Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0368	Pink and Birdie Sawyer Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0371	Sam and Mattie Lail House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0377	Jesse Williams House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0383	Orr-Phillips House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0409	Garfield Carringer Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0412	Lake Fontana Floating Cabins	Almond vicinity
GH0415	Huscusson Farm	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0470	Earl and Murriel Buchanan Log and Boxed Houses	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0471	Colvard Motor Company & Frank & Lenora Colvard House	Robbinsville vicinity
GH0476	Old Mother Church Cemetery	Robbinsville vicinity