

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Development of Tourism in the Beautiful Sapphire Country:
A History of the Toxaway Inn, 1903-1947

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During the summer of 1912, Clara Bell of Tryon, North Carolina wrote the following request to the Toxaway Inn, "Can you give me a room for two people, all your usual reasonable rates, from next Friday, July 5th, for an indefinite time. Am anxious to see Toxaway and if the altitude agrees with my health, would like to stay some time."¹ The Toxaway Inn was located on the shores of Lake Toxaway. It was one of the first artificial lakes created in the mountains of western North Carolina.² During the early twentieth century, wealthy travelers such as Ms. Bell flocked to the resort from all parts of the eastern seaboard. Letters sent to the Toxaway Inn from interested visitors poured in from Tennessee, Ohio, New York, Virginia, Florida, and all parts of North Carolina.³

The arrival of northern investors in Transylvania County during the 1890s forever changed the history of the area. Such men joined together in 1896 to form the Toxaway Company, in order to collaborate in their efforts to bring the to industry to the area. The name "Toxaway" is Cherokee for "red bird," and the area of Transylvania County in which the Toxaway Inn existed was named after a Cherokee chief that once lived there.⁴ The group soon realized that the natural scenery and desirable climate of the area would make an ideal haven for tourism. According to their first mortgage, the Toxaway Company's purpose was to develop a series of, "valuable hotels and other buildings" in Transylvania and Jackson counties.⁵ They also intended to construct, "dams across the streams on said property and create artificial lakes thereon and otherwise beautify and improve said property."⁶ The group's first step was to provide a reliable system of transportation for travelers, which was accomplished by extending

¹ Clara Bell to the Toxaway Inn, June 28, 1912. The Toxaway Inn Ledgers and Correspondence Collection, The Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Transylvania County Library, [hereafter TTILCC]

² Jan C. Plemmons, *Ticket to Toxaway*, (Florida: The Drummond Press, 2004), 48.

³ TTILCC.

⁴ "Toxaway In Cherokee Language: Red Bird," *Transylvania Times*, 28 June, 1976.

⁵ Transylvania County Mortgage Book 2, 375.

⁶ Transylvania County Mortgage Book 2, 375.

the railroad to Transylvania County. After building a luxurious resort in which to house potential visitors, the Toxaway Company employed every mode of advertisement possible to attract guests with a visitor-friendly image. The group crafted its image to fit in with the long-established, regional images of western North Carolina through marketing the area's natural scenic beauty, healing environment, recreational activities, and boasting all the comforts and conveniences of civilization surrounded by a vast wilderness. Through the efforts of the Toxaway Company to construct the appropriate infrastructure and image needed to sustain a tourist industry, tourism flourished in Transylvania County during the early twentieth century.

There are a number of scholarly sources that trace the history of western North Carolina, but few that focus exclusively on the development of tourism in the region. Richard D. Starnes' book, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina*, provides the best modern and in-depth study of the development of tourism in the western part of the state.⁷ Starnes asserts that the two key elements in establishing the area as a regional tourist economy were image and infrastructure. The foundation of the tourist industry in the region relied upon its image as a place of healing and relaxation. As to infrastructure, Starnes argues that the combination of railroad and highway construction, establishment of state and national parks, regional attractions, and famous resorts were essential elements in the development of tourism.⁸

Numerous studies regarding the development of western North Carolina's infrastructure focus on the arrival of the railroad. Burke Davis's, *The Southern Railway*, delivers a thorough and scholarly history of the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad.⁹ Davis traces

⁷ Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

⁸ Starnes, 4.

⁹ Burke Davis, *The Southern Railway* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North

the railroad's history from when it was just an idea being tossed around by progressive state leaders in the 1820s, to its final arrival in Asheville in 1880. Daniel Pierce's work, *The Great Smokies*, is a historical overview of the Great Smoky Mountains development into a national park and provides insight into the effect humans have had on its environment.¹⁰ In one chapter Pierce discussed how the construction of the railroad played a vital role in the development of the tourist industry through making the region easily accessible to the outside world. Pierce also explains how local and regional leaders came to realize the long-term benefits that tourism provided as opposed to the short-term gains of the timber industry. Gary Franklin Poole's, *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina*, includes a detailed account of Transylvania County's railroad history.¹¹ A 1917 work published by the Southern Railway Company titled *The Floods of July, 1916*, presents a close study of the hurricanes that caused the demise of the Toxaway Inn the region during the summer months of 1916.¹²

Equally significant in the study of western North Carolina's infrastructure, are studies focusing on the improvement of the region's roads. Anne Mitchell Whisnant's *Super-scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*, provides an in-depth account of how the birth of the automobile in America influenced tourism and the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway.¹³ Whisnant's work contributes a chapter to the history of the Good Roads Movement. She asserts that this nation-wide push for improved roads was related to the, "surging automotive tourism in the 1910s and 1920s."¹⁴

Carolina Press, 1985).

¹⁰ Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

¹¹ Poole, Gary Franklin. *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina*, (Tennessee: Over the Mountain Press, 1995).

¹² *The Floods of My, 1916* (The Southern Railway Company, 1917).

¹³ Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Whisnant, 14.

Another important aspect of western North Carolina's historiography includes the study of popular images used to market the area. Logan Hampton Brown's thesis, *An Historical Examination of Tourism Marketing Imagery in Western North Carolina and its Impacts on Cultural Interpretation of the Landscape*, traces the development of the image tourism boosters in western North Carolina wished to portray to the rest of the country.¹⁵ This source provides a historical context in which imagery was used in developing tourism. Logan Brown claims the foundation of the tourist industry was built upon, "...particular regional images unique to western North Carolina," such as its healing climate, natural beauty, and the last remaining wilderness east of the Mississippi.¹⁶ Margaret Lynn Brown's environmental history of the Great Smoky Mountains, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains*, explains how the "wilderness" image of Appalachia was created.¹⁷ She argues that local leaders strove to present "rustic" images of the area in order to boost tourism efforts.

Historiography pertaining to the history of Transylvania County and the Toxaway Inn provide general information about the resort's existence, but fail to examine how the foundation of the local tourist industry was constructed. Mary Jane McCrary authored *Transylvania Beginnings: A History of Transylvania County*, but does not include any significant information about tourism in the early twentieth century.¹⁹ Jan C. Plemmons' *Treasures of Toxaway* is the first edition in a series of two on the history of the Toxaway Inn.²⁰ Plemmons provides

¹⁵ Logan Hampton Brown, *An Historical Examination of Tourism Marketing Imagery in Western North Carolina and its Impacts on Cultural Interpretation of the Landscape*. Masters Dissertation, (Appalachian State University, 2001).

¹⁶ Logan Brown, iv-v.

¹⁷ Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000).

¹⁸ Margaret Brown, xiii-xiv.

¹⁹ McCrary, Mary Jane, *Transylvania Beginnings: A History* (South Carolina: Southern Historical Press, 1984).

²⁰ Plemmons, Jan C, *Treasures of Toxaway* (Houston, Texas: AAAA Printing and Mailing Service Inc., 1984).

information about how the Toxaway Company was formed and a history of the hotels and resorts they constructed during the early twentieth century. In 2004, Plemmons published her follow up book, *Ticket to Toxaway*.²¹ The focus of this book deals more directly with the history of the Toxaway Inn through its years of operation and the history of Lake Toxaway to the present. However, in this study the author will examine how factors such as infrastructure and imagery were needed to establish tourism in Transylvania County and ensure its success through focusing exclusively on the Toxaway Inn.

During the early nineteenth century, leisure travel in western North Carolina began to boom. The earliest tourists to visit the mountains of western North Carolina consisted mainly of the planter aristocracy from South Carolina and Georgia. Such wealthy travelers poured into the area seeking refuge in the cool mountain climate from the greatly feared "fever season" that

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existed during the summer months in the Deep South. As more wealthy families began spending their summers in the mountains, it gradually became the annual social norm of the South's planter aristocracy. Tourism in the mountains was unique due to its visitors long periods of stay. Logan Brown claims, "Vacations were, for reasons of time, not something done over a weekend." These early tourists either bought property and built large comfortable summer homes or made arrangements to move entire households into resorts for the summer.²⁴

During this era resorts and resort communities in Western North Carolina thrived. Tourists were attracted to luxurious resorts where they could comfortably spend the summer enjoying the beautiful natural scenery, healing climate, or participating in the numerous

²¹ Jan C. Plemmons, *Ticket to Toxaway* (Jacksonville, Florida: The Drummond Press, 2004).

²² Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 4 and 13.

²³ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 13-14.

²⁴ Logan Brown, 14.

recreational activities available.²⁵ According to historian Richard Starnes, "At these early resorts, the wealthy mingled, took in the natural attractions, engaged in faddish treatments for various diseases, and generally were entertained in a manner accorded to their station."²⁶ In Henderson County, Flat Rock became one of the first seasonal communities settled mainly by

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the wealthy of Charleston, South Carolina. This "Charleston of the Mountains" became popular in an age before marketing, when advertisement was conducted through word of mouth. Logan Brown explains, "Marketing and advertising avenues for western North Carolina were practically non-existent as the area was just developing and was so inaccessible as to be of less political and economic interest to piedmont and coastal Carolinians."

The North Carolina mountains first tourist attraction was its, "...celebrated health benefits."²⁹ Studies of the history of tourism throughout the country reveal that the earliest tourists, "...went to nearby spas and mineral springs to soak in or drink the waters. This was done on the pretext that this was good for you—perhaps curing an ailment, perhaps maintaining one's health."³⁰ By the late eighteenth century, drinking mineral water became a "fashionable indulgence" of the wealthy, and was widely practiced throughout western North Carolina.³¹ The cool and comfortable climate of the region made it an ideal area for recovering from certain illnesses such as tuberculosis and yellow fever. Health sanitariums, one of the major

²⁵ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 10.

²⁶ Richard D. Starnes, ed., *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 3.

²⁷ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 14.

²⁸ Logan Brown, 15.

²⁹ Logan Brown, 1.

Thomas Weiss, "Tourism in America before World War II," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 2 (2004), 293-294. ³¹ Weiss, 293-294.

foundations of tourism in the area, were in demand and advertised the healing affects of the

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clean air, mineral springs, and hot springs.

In the years after the Civil War, tourism grew into an important Southern industry that had a pronounced effect in western North Carolina. According to Starnes, "Resorts took their place alongside the spindle, the sawmill, and the forge as the economic tools that reshaped the region after the Civil War."³³ This boom in the tourist industry in the western region of the state was made possible through the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, a major improvement in transportation that made the isolated region easily accessible to the rest of the country.

Railroad construction in western North Carolina was long and difficult to accomplish. Burke Davis claims, "North Carolina was probably the first southern state to hear the call of the railroad age-and one of the last to heed it." Progressive state leaders of the nineteenth century such as Archibald Debow Murphey and later Governor John Motley Morehead, "took up the railroad cause" and constantly pressured the state legislature for improved state transportation systems.³⁴ John Preston Arthur asserted that although it had been "generally supposed" that originally the railroad was planned in 1855 to extend from Salisbury to the Tennessee state line, it was actually first chartered in 1852.³⁵ The construction of the railroad faced "insurmountable difficulties" and was not completed until the postwar era. It was not until October of 1880 when the line finally reached Asheville, then only a village of 2,600.³⁶ Asheville remained the leading city for tourism in the mountains until the railroad pushed further into western North Carolina

³² Logan Brown, 1.

³³ Starnes, *Southern Journeys*, 3-4.

³⁴ Davis, 113.

³⁵ John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History From 1730 to 1913* (Asheville, North Carolina: The Edward Buncombe Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1914) 469.

³⁶ Davis, 196-197.

counties.³⁷ As railroad development increased with the growth of the timber industry, local and regional leaders recognized that logging would only provide short-term economic gain while a tourist industry could be an, "endless productive economic resource."³⁸

In Transylvania County, the tourist industry was not established until the late nineteenth century. This was quite possibly due to the fact that the area had remained part of the outskirts of Buncombe and Henderson counties until 1861, when Transylvania County was officially created.³⁹ From the late 1890s to August of 1916, the Toxaway Company tremendously influenced the development of the area through its efforts to capitalize on the highly successfully tourist industry that had already been developing throughout the western part of the state. Of its many hotels, the Toxaway Inn was the most popular and successful of these resorts during its existence. It catered to elite guests such as Harvey Firestone, R.J. Reynolds, Thomas Edison, and George Vanderbilt.⁴⁰ From its opening in 1903, the Toxaway Inn boasted that there was never a dull season during its operation.

The Toxaway Company recognized that in order to successfully establish tourism in Transylvania County, the necessary infrastructure needed to sustain it would have to be constructed. The first step in this process was to provide a system of transportation that could efficiently move travelers in and out of the area. According to Jan C. Plemmons, "In the early days of Transylvania County there were very few roads and transportation was only by horse or oxen drawn vehicles. An attempt to bring the railroad to Brevard began in the early 1890's but ended in bankruptcy."⁴¹

³⁷ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 6.

³⁸ Pierce, 33.

³⁹ McCrary, 25 and 31.

⁴⁰ Toxaway Inn Hotel Register, 5 June, 1906, The Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Transylvania County Library, HPC Box 20 and Plemmons, *Ticket to Toxaway*, 56.

⁴¹ Plemmons, *Treasures of Toxaway*, 2.

J. F. Hayes, an entrepreneur from Pennsylvania, made the dream of a railroad running through Transylvania County a reality.⁴² Hayes, a founding member of the Toxaway Company, desperately needed the railroad to be completed in the county to allow for the development of tourism. In 1898, Hayes and Associates purchased the failing railroad and established the Transylvania Railroad Company.⁴³ The purchase included all twenty-two miles of existing track, bridges, trestles, and buildings complete with all existing furnishings. Also included in the purchase were two locomotives, one first-class passenger car, one combination passenger car, three boxcars, and one flat car.⁴⁴ Hayes immediately made plans to build a ten-mile extension of the railroad from Brevard to Rosman in 1899.⁴⁵

The following year an important agreement was made between the Southern Railway and the Toxaway Company. The railroad was extended ten additional miles to land owned by the Toxaway Company in Transylvania and Jackson counties. The deal allowed the Southern Railway to take over the passenger and freight traffic of the Transylvania Railroad Company. In addition, the Toxaway Company promised to build at the terminus of the tracks a lake with at least fifteen miles of shoreline and construct a hotel on the shores of the lake for no less than 50,000 dollars.⁴⁶ In 1903 the railroad was extended from Rosman to Lake Toxaway.⁴⁷ Later, in January of 1906, the Southern Railroad Company leased the Transylvania Railroad Company for an additional fifty years.⁴⁸ Tourists could travel to Lake Toxaway comfortably in private sleeper and parlor cars.⁴⁹ The Southern Railway also provided three different departure and arrival times from either Asheville or Hendersonville. Visitors could adjust their traveling schedules to arrive

⁴² Plemmons, *Treasures of Toxaway*, 2-3.

⁴³ Poole, 68.

⁴⁴ Transylvania County, Records Deed 16, p.98.

⁴⁵ Poor's Manual of Railroads 1898, p.481.

⁴⁶ Plemmons, *Ticket to Toxaway*, 5-6.

⁴⁷ Arthur, 483.

⁴⁸ Transylvania County, Records Deed Book 23, p.276.

⁴⁹ ITBSCTILT.



(Figure 1.0)

at Lake Toxaway by 8:10am, 12:20pm, or as late as 9:10pm.⁵⁰ Guests of the Toxaway Inn could conveniently use the hotel's private train station

upon their arrival or ⁵¹ departure/

The Toxaway Company constructed Lake Toxaway, an artificial lake with a shoreline with the required minimum of fifteen miles, to satisfy their agreement with the Southern Railway. The lake was located 3,060 feet above elevation and appeared, "natural and as old as the surrounding hills." An image in an advertisement featuring a picture of the lake exemplifies its natural appearance (see figure 1.0).⁵³

The existence of the lake was made possible through construction of an earthen dam along the Toxaway River.⁵⁴ The dam cost approximately \$50,000 dollars for the Toxaway Company to build.⁵⁵ It was built between, "two hills whose



j bases touch," in a V-shape (see figure 1.1).⁵⁶ The top of the V was 485 ft long and twenty-two feet thick. The bottom tapered down to 100 ft long and

260 feet thick.

Engineers building the dam

(Figure 1.1)

⁵⁰ "Lake Toxaway The Beautiful" The Southern Railway, 1916, The Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Transylvania County Library, HPC Box 20.

⁵¹ ITBSCTILT.

⁵² "A Visit to Lake Toxaway: Good Roads, Good Teams, Beautiful Scenery and a Very Enjoyable Outing," *Sylvan Valley News*, 8 May, 1903.

⁵³ *Community Life in Western North Carolina*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 28804.

⁵⁴ "The Toxaway Dam Secure," *Sylvan Valley News*, 4 September, 1903.

⁵⁵ "Great Dam Broken By Flood Waters," *The New York Times*, 14 August, 1916.

⁵⁶ "A Visit to Lake Toxaway: Good Roads, Good Teams, Beautiful Scenery and a Very Enjoyable Outing," *Sylvan Valley News*, 8 May, 1903 and *W.B. McEwen and Carolina Nichols McEwen Collection*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 28804.

⁵⁷ "The Toxaway Dam Secure," *Sylvan Valley News*, 4 September, 1903.

constructed a number of features to ensure its safety. The dam was built on top of a concrete base with a stone retaining wall at the bottom, a spillway, and a break-water, "to overcome the effects of the waves..."

Despite the many precautions taken in the construction of the dam, there were still many who were concerned about its safety. Most concerned, were citizens of South Carolina who lived just a few miles beneath the dam. The newspaper in Brevard responded to the many complaints about the Lake Toxaway dam by claiming, "The people of upper South Carolina should be thankful that the Toxaway Company have built the dams that make some of the various lakes in the Sapphire Country." The article claimed that during recent heavy rains, the dams had helped control flooding rivers and also served as a reservoir to, "retain the surplus waters of large rains."⁵⁹ A man from Anderson, South Carolina, "visited the much talked of dam at Lake Toxaway," to inspect it personally. He concluded, "I have no dread whatever of the break in the Toxaway lake dam, even if such a thing should happen."⁶⁰

The summer season of 1912 opened with many new improvements, including hydro-electricity. A hydro-electric plant was, "installed below the huge dam that forms the lovely lake." One newspaper article explained, "The water that has heretofore run to waste, has been harnessed, and 300 horsepower is generated and used for the varied purposes of lighting the hotel, and running the new laundry."⁶¹

⁵⁸ "A Visit to Lake Toxaway: Good Roads, Good Teams, Beautiful Scenery and a Very Enjoyable Outing," *Sylvan Valley News*, 8 May, 1903, and "The Toxaway Dam Secure," *Sylvan Valley News*, 4 September, 1903.

⁵⁹ "Should Be Thankful," *Sylvan Valley News*, 26 June, 1903.

⁶⁰ "The Toxaway Dam Secure," *Sylvan Valley News*, 4 September, 1903.

⁶¹ "Toxaway Inn Opened Monday," *Gazette News*, 28 June, 1912, Lynn Harding Lake Toxaway Collection, The Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Transylvania County Library.

In compliance with the Southern Railroad contract, the Toxaway Company constructed the Toxaway Inn. Built on the shores of the lake (see figure 1.2), was the, "magnificent hotel, large enough to entertain 500 guests, and built under the personal supervision of one of Pittsburgh most eminent architects."⁶² The inn had a total of 490 rooms, which all had spectacular views of the lake and mountains.⁶³



Guests had a variety of choices when selecting a room to stay in. Rooms came with an option of single or double beds and guests could request a room with a private bathroom for an extra five dollars per day.⁶⁴ In order to ensure that the resort promoted an image that was,

(Figure 1.2) "modern in every respect,"

the Toxaway

Company equipped the hotel with amenities such as electric lights, steam heat, large stairways, and two elevators.⁶⁵

Western North Carolina has a long and rich history of imagery that was generated to attract visitors to the area. The earliest were natural images, born through the experiences of drovers, botanists, and explorers who wished to create, according to Logan Brown, "... organic images that served to capture the interest of, and inform, the region's first tourists." The experiences of these outsiders served as the foundation of the area's image.⁶⁶ These early travelers, mostly speculators and traders, were interested in the area's resources and native

A Visit to Lake Toxaway: Good Roads, Good Teams, Beautiful Scenery and a Very Enjoyable Outing," *Sylvan Valley News*, 8 May, 1903 and *W.B. McEwen and Carolina Nichols McEwen Collection*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 28804.

Razing of the Toxaway Inn Starts in Transylvania," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, 27 April, 1947.

⁶⁴ TTILCC.

⁶⁵ A Visit to Lake Toxaway: Good Roads, Good Teams, Beautiful Scenery and a Very Enjoyable Outing," *Sylvan Valley News*, 8 May, 1903.

⁶⁶ Logan Brown, 73.

plants. For example, in the late eighteenth century William Bartram and Andre' Michaux were two of the first people to ever conduct botanical research in the area. Bishop Francis Asbury, a traveling Methodist preacher, also made his way through the mountains. All of these men kept detailed accounts of their experiences in journals that described western North Carolina as a place of bountiful natural beauty as well as a, "restful, restorative, uncommonly beautiful

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vacation spot."

In the late nineteenth century, local color writers romanticized the area as the only remaining wilderness in the eastern United States. Writer Frances Tiernan dramatically influenced western North Carolina by creating the popular regional nickname, "The Land of the Sky."⁶⁸ Through their stories, writers like Tiernan popularized socio-cultural images of Appalachia as a land of log cabins, split rail fences, and mountain crafts.⁶⁹ These man-made images were vital to the survival of the tourist industry: "To say that the tourism industry depends on the perpetuation of such vestigial imagery is an understatement, for without it the industry would not exist as we know it today."⁷⁰

Western North Carolina's image was spread and expressed through the many different modes of advertisement that were used to attract tourists to the area. Logan Brown asserts, "Most businesses intended to do two things with their advertisements; to inform and to attract." Through the efforts of advertisements the early images of the region were cemented in the minds of travelers and western North Carolina was represented as the nation's, "unexplored backyard,

⁶⁷ Logan Brown, 74.

⁶⁸ Logan Brown, 31.

⁶⁹ Logan Brown, iv.

⁷⁰ Logan Brown, v.

or playground."⁷¹ In Transylvania County, the Toxaway Inn made efforts to consistently portray the same imagery of the surrounding region.

Word of mouth advertisement was one means of marketing used to advertise the Toxaway Inn. It was one of the oldest means of advertisement, but also one of the most effective.⁷² Wealthy travelers shared with each other where the best places to eat and stay were. Even though it was one of the oldest modes of advertisement, it remained effective into the early twentieth century. In July of 1912, Thomas Bratten of Ohio included the following in his request for rates and reservation of a room, "Myself and another gentleman are coming to Asheville on the tenth and hope to spend at least two in weeks in that vicinity. We have heard much of Toxaway and upon further inquiry of friends in Asheville we may decide to spend most of our time at your place."⁷³ Mr. Bratten's letter reveals that the elite of this time operated their own unique system of advertisement through recommending the best places to stay to their peers. Word of mouth advertisement spread by the wealthy was essential to the reputations of western North Carolina's resorts.

The letter Mr. Bratten sent to the Toxaway Inn reveals personal correspondence as another important advertising tool. When potential visitors from various parts of the country became interested in visiting the area, they would write to the inn to gain information about weekly rates or request a reservation. A collection of the Toxaway Inn's correspondence with patrons during the summer of 1912 reveals that the resort issued a standard letter of response explaining weekly rates as well as taking advantage of the opportunity to advertise the resort's most appealing characteristics. The activities listed included tennis, boating, fishing, and the announcement of a golf course that would be completed by the next season. The resort also had,

⁷¹ Logan Brown, 44-45.

⁷² Logan Brown, 2.

⁷³ TTILCC.

"many miles of good roads" and a "new boulevard" built around the lake perfect for horseback riding and driving.⁷⁴

Correspondence was also used to promote the classic regional images of western North Carolina. The standard letter of response stated the Toxaway Inn was, "...one of the most beautiful resorts in America and can easily be said to be the Switzerland of America."⁷⁵ Statements such as these serve to create a romantic image of western North Carolina as a mountain paradise easily comparable with the Swiss Alps of Europe. Ultimately, correspondence was a very important means of advertisement because in addition to answering the requests of potential visitors it allowed for the Toxaway Inn to boast of its most desirable features.

Formal advertisement promoting tourism emerged with the arrival of the railroad in the western counties of the state. According to Logan Brown, "The new businesses supported by the railroad brought growth and competition to those providing tourist services, and with that came the need to advertise more aggressively." The styles of advertising during this period did not vary significantly. All forms of advertisement targeted the wealthy.⁷⁶ Luxury, promise of modern conveniences, good service, and wealthy visitors were "hallmarks of the period's advertisements."⁷⁷ The Toxaway Inn played an active and consistent role in the standard advertising of the time. The Toxaway Company published numerous brochures, travel guides, newspaper advertisements, and post cards promoting the luxurious accommodations, recreational activities, and the healing, desirable climate of, "The Beautiful Sapphire Country."

⁷⁴ TTILCC.

⁷⁵ TTILCC.

⁷⁶ Logan Brown, 43-44.

⁷⁷ Logan Brown, 77.

The Toxaway Inn was also heavily promoted by the railroad because it was an important destination on the Southern Railway's line. The Southern Railway Association was a conglomerate of the South's rail lines and was, "... a dominant force in marketing western North Carolina's tourism industry" due to its monopoly of the region's railroads. The Southern Railway published its own brochures including Lake Toxaway as one of the stops. Advertisements published by the railroad for Lake Toxaway could be found as far away as New York City. In 1914 an ad in the *New York Times* listed Lake Toxaway, located in the "Beautiful Sapphire Country" of North Carolina, as one of the leading resorts in the area that could be conveniently reached by the Southern Railway.⁷⁹

Advertisement of the Toxaway Inn consistently promoted the area as easily accessible. The Southern Railway played a large role in supporting this image. Advertisements repeatedly explained that reaching The Beautiful Sapphire Country was, "easily accessible by the superior modern transportation service of the Southern Railway." The tracks that ran through western North Carolina were described as a "... marvel of American railroading." The Southern Railway promised its passengers, "speed, safety, comfort, convenience and luxury."⁸¹

The Toxaway Company employed a variety of images to attract tourists to Transylvania County and the Toxaway Inn. Natural images praising the beauty of the landscape were commonly used to describe the area. The Toxaway Company actively promoted the area in which the Toxaway Inn was located as "The Beautiful Sapphire Country." This title was Transylvania County's local version of the region's well-known nickname, "The Land of the Sky." A travel brochure published by the Toxaway Company explained the name:

⁷⁸ Logan Brown, 50.

⁹ "The Marvelous Mountains in the Land of Sky," *New York Times*, 25 March, 1914. ⁸⁰

"Autumn and Winter in the Land of the Sky."

⁸¹

"Autumn and Winter in the Land of the Sky."

That section of Western North Carolina known as the BEAUTIFUL SAPPHIRE COUNTRY, beginning with a plateau, with Lake Toxaway and lying on the south side of the Blue Ridge, extending to and beyond Lake Fairfield, and including Lake Sapphire, and Sapphire proper, has been known, for a number of years, by the tourist public, as one of the most attractive sections of the mountains of the South.⁸²

The 1905 summer brochure was titled, "The Beautiful Sapphire Country." It consisted of photographs promoting the natural scenery of Lake Toxaway, the surrounding mountains, views from mountaintops, and waterfalls. The brochure stated the defining natural characteristic of the area as the, "combination of mountains and lakes found nowhere else in the South."⁸³

Advertisements for the "Beautiful Sapphire Country" were also published in the Transylvania County newspaper. In 1906, the *Sylvan Valley News* described the area as having "Gorgeous Mountain Scenery" at elevations ranging from 2,250 to 5,000 feet high. The ad also promoted the "three magnificent lakes" that graced the beautiful Sapphire Country for providing, "Every imaginable amusement, both indoor and outdoor."⁸⁴

Many advertisements supplied readers with lofty descriptions of the landscape and suggested that the area was an unexplored and remote wilderness. An advertisement published by the Southern Railway provides such an example, "Surrounding the lake is a region of rugged mountain scenery, of beautiful water-falls, of purling cascades, of picturesque trails and drives—all entrancing to the beholder."⁸⁵ Such natural images could be found on postcards featuring the

⁸² "Toxaway Inn, Lake Toxaway, North Carolina" The Toxaway Company, 1911, Carol Grotnes Belk Library, Appalachian State University, [hereafter TILINC]

⁸³ "The Beautiful Sapphire Country" The Toxaway Company, 1905

⁸⁴ "The Beautiful Sapphire Country" *Sylvan Valley News*, 21 September, 1906.

⁸⁵ "Autumn and Winter in the Land of Sky." *Southern Railway (U.S.) Passenger Traffic Dept.* (From University of North at Chapel Hill, 2002.) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/landofsky/landofsky.htm> (April 2007).



(Figure 1.3)

area (see figure 1.3). One brochure included a passage from a Henry Longfellow poem referring to the area's isolation, "'Come, wander with me,' she said, 'Into regions yet untrod; And read what is still unread In the manuscript of God'." Statements such as these were meant to create images of the area as wild and untouched during

an era when eastern cities were beginning to boom and land was quickly being consumed by urban sprawl. In their efforts to promote the natural imagery of the area, the Toxaway Company included in their advertisements ways that guests could enjoy the natural scenery around them.

Outdoor activities were always included in advertisements. The Southern Railway stated, "Both the lake and the mountain brooks afford excellent trout-fishing, while the opportunities for horse-

back riding, mountain climbing, and boating are unsurpassed." The Toxaway Inn called the area a "sportsman's paradise" due to the 28,000 acres of land the hotel owned that was carefully

patrolled and maintained. Men could take in the natural scenery while hunting or fishing.

Patrons could experience, "excellent trout fishing for brook trout in streams about 50 miles in

length, and bass and California trout in its lakes." Hunting privileges were extended to male patrons in the fall, "from November 1st on, deer shooting is the chief attraction, while good bags of ruffed grouse and wild turkey are often made."⁹¹

Outdoor activities for women and children were also included in advertisements. Women could enjoy the area's flowers in the Toxaway Inn's gardens. Advertisements listed when local

⁸⁶ L.C. Le Compte Postcard Collection (1910-1977), D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville 28804.

⁸⁷ "In The Beautiful Sapphire Country: Toxaway Inn, Lake Toxaway" The Toxaway Company, 1908, Carol Grotnes Belk Library, Appalachian State University, [hereafter, ITBSC TILT}

⁸⁸ "Autumn and Winter in the Land of Sky."

⁸⁹ TILING

⁹⁰ "The Joy of Living", The Rowell Bosse North Carolina Room, Transylvania County Library, HPC Box 20.
[hereafter "The Joy of Living"]

⁹¹ "The Joy of Living."

plant life such as Azaleas, Dogwood trees, Mountain Laurel, and Rhododendron would be in bloom.⁹² Two years after its opening, The Toxaway Inn provided a "Nature's Kindergarten" for the children of patrons to participate in. The class was taught by a highly qualified and experienced "kindergartner" from New York who believed that, "Nature, beautiful, tender and kind" was the basis of all learning. The class offered children from cities who were, "deprived of the opportunity to gain information by association with things of nature" a chance to create a close relationship with the natural environment around them.⁹³ Classes were held outdoors (see figure 1.4), "...under the trees, anear the birds, and among the flowers and rocks."⁹⁴



THK CLASS. Natiu-
KiiHiiTearlen on the. l.»!»*., / TTSITX* / Inn.

(Figure 1.4)

One hallmark of the area that had been attracting tourists to western North Carolina for over a century was its moderate climate. Advertisements published by the Toxaway Company and the Southern Railway never failed to remind their readers of the cool comfortable summer climate and mild winters offered by the mountains. Advertisements boasted that the area was the ideal place for guests all over the country to vacation, "Summer is perfection-altitude correcting

⁹² TILING.

⁹³ "The Beautiful Sapphire Country," The Toxaway Company, 1905. [hereafter "The Beautiful Sapphire Country"]

⁹⁴ "The Beautiful Sapphire Country."

latitude so that visitors from both the North And South can meet here on common grounds.. ,"⁹⁵ In its efforts to attract visitors during the off season, the Southern Railway stated the climate throughout the year was "delightful" and "No more gorgeous spot can be imagined than Lake Toxaway in the autumn and early winter" as it was becoming a year-round resort.⁹⁶ The climate was also often praised for its healing benefits. Advertisements described it as mild and invigorating with air that was, "pure, dry, and bracing..."⁹⁷

The Toxaway Company encouraged the healing aspects of the area in their advertising efforts. Advertisements promoted the Toxaway Inn as, "an unequalled health resort," on account of, "its altitude and climate." The pure and dry air had the ability to ease, "asthma, hay fever and

bronchial troubles." The Toxaway Inn also lured in visitors from all parts of the country who sought the healing effects of the so-called "Toxaway Springs". A brochure described the spring as having "very fine tonic water" consisting of sulphur and iron. It was located at the foot of the

lake, a short walk from the inn. Local residents were left puzzled at the fact that the Toxaway Inn advertised having "natural mineral water with excelling curative properties." The truth was bared when the Toxaway Company rebuilt the dam in the 1960s. Engineers found a sixty-foot hole at the bottom of the lake full of scrap iron. A pipe was found running from the "rusting metal cache through the old dam." Out of this pipe once flowed the fake "Toxaway tonic."¹⁰⁰

In order to appeal to the wealthy, who were the only class with means to travel for leisure at the time, the Toxaway Inn constantly promoted its image as a modern resort with all the luxuries one could ask for. The Toxaway Inn boasted that it was, "unquestionably one of the

⁹⁵ TILING.

⁹⁶ "Autumn and Winter in the Land of Sky."*

⁹⁷ ITBSCTILT.

⁹⁸ ITBSCTILT

⁹⁹ "The Beautiful Sapphire Country" The Toxaway Company, 1905.

¹⁰⁰ "Mystery of Toxaway's Mineral Spring Bared" *Transylvania Times*, 30 June, 1975.

finest equipped resort hotels in America, modern in every sense."¹⁰¹ It was described as, "...an elegant, thoroughly modern structure, equipped with everything for the comfort and convenience of its guests..,"¹⁰² The modern equipment of the resort included elevators, steam heat, electric lights, and sanitary plumbing.¹⁰³ The resort was also very large, accommodating guests in up to five hundred rooms, which were spacious, finely furnished, and equipped with private baths. Large windows allowed for breathtaking mountain and lake views.¹⁰⁴ Guests could also effectively communicate with their homes and businesses by using the long distance telephone connection or Western Union wire.¹⁰⁵ Easy access to the outside world was an important feature in such a geographically isolated region.

The Toxaway Inn advertised itself as place to spend an action-packed summer vacation by offering a wide range of entertainment. The resort claimed that guests could, "spend an indefinite time here with never a dull moment."¹⁰⁶ There were a variety of indoor and outdoor activities offered. Visitors could spend their time rowing, sailing, paddling, or swimming in the lake. Other popular outdoor activities included horseback riding, tennis, and bowling.¹⁰⁷ The Toxaway Inn also offered a variety of entertaining indoor activities. For men who wanted to enjoy the outdoors, but were not interested in hunting or fishing, time could be spent playing golf. Beginning in the late 1890s, golf became a popular sport in the resort communities of

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western North Carolina as a popular new attraction. The Toxaway Inn offered a nine-hole golf course, "...that seems to have been especially prepared by nature for the sport."¹⁰⁹ Indoor

¹⁰¹TILINC.

¹⁰²ITBSCILT.

¹⁰³TILING.

¹⁰⁴TILING and "Autumn and Winter in the Land of Sky."

¹⁰⁵"The Beautiful Sapphire Country."

¹⁰⁶TILING.

¹⁰⁷TILING

¹⁰⁸Logan Brown, 41-42.

¹⁰⁹"Lake Toxaway: The Switzerland of America" 1916, Transylvania County Library, HPC Box 20.

entertainment was also available to patrons of the resort. According to one advertisement, "Spacious dancing floors and good music are attractive features at the Toxaway Inn."¹¹⁰

The financial success of the Toxaway Inn fluctuated during its existence. John Preston Arthur recorded in his history of the area that the Toxaway Inn had its, "greatest success in the years 1904-1907."¹¹¹ However, evidence from the local paper, the *Sylvan Valley News*, suggests otherwise. From 1904 to 1906, the Toxaway Inn was managed by the Toxaway Hotel Company,

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but still owned by the Toxaway Company. In 1907 the Toxaway Hotel Company, "lost its rights under the ten year lease from the Toxaway Company," due to poor financial management and faced possible bankruptcy.¹¹³ The Toxaway Company reassumed responsibility for the Toxaway Inn for the 1907 summer season, which carried on as usual, and was not visibly affected by changes.¹¹⁴ Over the next three years, the Toxaway Inn continued to operate without any mention of financial struggle.

The Toxaway Inn continued to fluctuate in financial stability during the latter half of its existence. Evidence of instability arose again in 1910 when a newspaper article listed the Toxaway Company as wishing to sell 12,582 acres of land for 1,356 dollars.¹¹⁵ Rumors began to circulate that the Toxaway Company was soon going to be sold, including word that the famous Duke family could be potential buyers.¹¹⁶ In 1911, the Toxaway Company was sold to E.H. Jennings, a Pennsylvanian businessman, who made the purchase on the steps of the Transylvania

¹¹⁰"Lake Toxaway: The Switzerland of America."

¹¹¹ Arthur, 506.

¹¹² "Hotel Lease Forfeited: Hotels of the 'Beautiful Sapphire Country' Once More in the Hands of the Toxaway Company," *Sylvan Valley News*, 19 April, 1907.

¹¹³ "Hotel Lease Forfeited: Hotels of the 'Beautiful Sapphire Country' Once More in the Hands of the Toxaway Company."

¹¹⁴ "Toxaway Hotels to Open June 1," *Sylvan Valley News*, 10 May, 1907.

¹¹⁵ "Sale of Lands for Taxes," *Sylvan Valley News*, April 1910.

¹¹⁶

"Personal," *Sylvan Valley News*, 30 April, 1910.

County courthouse.¹¹⁷ This purchase included a total of 27, 910 acres of land and all of the

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existing buildings upon that land. Therefore, the Toxaway Inn was for the first time in its existence under new ownership. Jennings was already one of the largest investors in the Toxaway Company at the time of the purchase, but his motives for taking control of the company are left to speculation.

It is known, however, that when Jennings assumed ownership of the Toxaway Company, he took great efforts to improve the Toxaway Inn. It was estimated that a total of \$75,000 was spent on making improvements before the beginning of the 1912 season. As previously mentioned, one of the greatest improvements was a hydroelectricity plant built beneath the dam. A new road around the lake was constructed and, "made of sand and clay after the most modern and approved methods of road building."¹¹⁹ Other improvements included the construction of forty new bathrooms, having the entire hotel "repainted both inside and out," and the addition of

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"electric cooking arrangements" in the kitchen. Perhaps one the greatest improvements made was the addition of a nine-hole golf course, which was a sport rapidly growing in popularity at the time.¹²¹ The Toxaway Inn's correspondence collection dated from 1912 is further proof of good management skills.¹²² Through the combined improvements that Jennings implemented at the Toxaway Inn, the hotel was once again on the path to success.

However, in the summer of 1916 the unthinkable happened. Heavy rains from multiple tropical storm systems plagued the area and caused mass flooding in western North Carolina during the summer of that year. The storms brought huge amounts of rain that fell rapidly.

¹¹⁷ "Toxaway Property Sold at Auction," *Sylvan Valley News*, 4 August 1911.

¹¹⁸ Transylvania County Records Deed Book 31, 67-89.

¹¹⁹ "Extensive Improvements and Additions for Lake Toxaway Hotel Property," *Sylvan Valley News*, 3 November, 1911.

¹²⁰ "Extensive Improvements and Additions for Lake Toxaway Hotel Property."

¹²¹ "Extensive Improvements and Additions for Lake Toxaway Hotel Property."

¹²² TTILCC.

According to a Southern Railway publication, "All previous 24-hour records of rainfall in the United States were exceeded." Across the southeast, a total of eighty people were killed and the United States Weather Bureau estimated twenty-two million dollars in property damage.¹²³

Transylvania County suffered greatly from the destructive floodwaters. The railroad line extending from Hendersonville to Lake Toxaway suffered from, "slides and washed-out fills and trestles on practically every mile of line."¹²⁴ According to the local newspaper, "Torrential rainfall of Saturday night followed on Sunday morning by landslides and unprecedented height in rivers, which took a heavy toll in lives, crops and other property, leaving destruction in the death-dealing trail of the floods.. ." ¹²⁵ A total estimate of the damage done to the roads and bridges in the county was uncertain because, "In many places tons of earth and rock mixed with forests, rest where once were good roads."¹²⁶ In the same month, two dams in Hendersonville collapsed, "releasing hundreds of tons of water," and fears of the Lake Toxaway dam breaking began to arise.¹²⁷

On the evening of August thirteenth, "The great dam at Lake Toxaway broke... sending a great wall of water down the valley toward western South Carolina."¹²⁸ Remarkably, early warnings and the, "comparatively uninhabited section" in which the water was released

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prevented any human fatalities. The only loss of life attributed to the lake's flood waters was that of a, "forty dollar mule."¹³⁰ The damage caused by the bursting dam did however take its toll on the inn's future. Millionaire guests that had been visiting the Toxaway Inn boarded trains

¹²³ *The Floods of July, 1916*. The Southern Railway Company, 1917, 7.

¹²⁴ *The Floods of July, 1916*, 4.

¹²⁵ "Landslides and High Waters Destroy Lives and Property," *Sylvan Valley News*, 21 July, 1916.

¹²⁶ "Landslides and High Waters Destroy Lives and Property," *Sylvan Valley News*, 21 July, 1916.

¹²⁷ "Floods in Four States: Unprecedented Rains Follow Hurricanes on South Atlantic Coast," *New York Times*, 17 July, 1916.

¹²⁸ "Great Dam Broken By Flood Waters," *New York Times*, 14 August, 1916.

¹²⁹ "Great Dam Broken By Flood Waters," *New York Times*, 14 August, 1916.

¹³⁰ "Big Toxaway Dam to be Rebuilt is Belief," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, 17 August, 1916.

in mass exodus never to return to the area again. A newspaper article explained the sad condition of the resort, "With the chief attraction gone, there is little left to detain the visitors."¹³¹ A small channel was left where previously a beautiful mountain lake had been located (see figure 1.5)^m



(Figure 1.5)

It was generally believed by the citizens of Brevard that the lake would be restored.¹³³ Tolvin Miller, a resident of Lake Toxaway who participated in the construction of the Toxaway Inn and the dam explained,

Yes, after the lake went out I had an idea it would come back. We kept the name of the place-Lake Toxaway. 'I'm going to put that lake back' said R.G. Jennings back in '16 after the last of the cases against him for flood damages was over, but he died.¹³⁴

In 1927, "there was speculation on the reopening of the inn and considerable remodeling was done to the huge structure, but the depression which soon followed prohibited the opening." The

¹³¹ "Big Toxaway Dam to be Rebuilt is Belief," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, 17 August 1916.

¹³² *EM. Ball Photographic Collection (1918-1969)*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville 28804.

¹³³ "Big Toxaway Dam to be Rebuilt is Belief," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, 17 August, 1916.

¹³⁴ "84-Year Old Tovlin Miller Reminisces," *The Transylvania Times*, 29 July, 1965.

Toxaway Inn stood empty until 1947, when it was torn down.¹³⁵ The closing of the Toxaway Inn stifled the tourist industry in Transylvania County for forty-five years, but it did not exterminate it forever. In the 1960's another group of outside investors bought the property and developed what had remained into the present Lake Toxaway community.

The tourist industry in Transylvania County was founded upon the infrastructure and imagery produced by Toxaway Company members. The financial support of these investors made efforts to improve the infrastructure of the county such as the railroad, the Toxaway Inn, and Lake Toxaway possible. As businessmen, members of the Toxaway Company also understood the need for aggressive advertisement to attract wealthy travelers to the area. The advertisement the company promoted capitalized on already founded regional images such as natural scenic beauty, outdoor recreational activities, the healing environment, and the luxurious accommodations offered by the Toxaway Inn. Without the combination of the appropriate imagery and infrastructure, the tourist industry in Transylvania County would have ceased to exist. More importantly, the creation of the "Beautiful Sapphire Country" resulted in the construction of a foundation for tourism that would be built upon in the future. In the 1960s, a new generation of investors rebuilt the lake and established an exclusive second home community that continues to thrive to this day.

¹³⁵ "Razing of Toxaway Inn Starts In Transylvania," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, 27 April, 1947.

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