

history of highlands nc

history of highlands nc is a rich tapestry woven with the threads of Native American heritage, European settlement, and transformative growth throughout the centuries. Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, Highlands has evolved from a remote wilderness inhabited by the Cherokee to a vibrant community known for its stunning landscapes and cultural offerings. This article will explore the significant milestones in the history of Highlands, including its early inhabitants, the arrival of European settlers, the development of the town, and its transformation into a popular tourist destination. Additionally, we will delve into notable historical figures and events that have shaped Highlands into what it is today.

- Early Inhabitants
- European Settlement
- Growth and Development of Highlands
- Highlands as a Tourist Destination
- Notable Historical Figures
- Conclusion

Early Inhabitants

The history of Highlands NC begins long before European settlers arrived. The region was originally inhabited by the Cherokee Indians, who thrived in the area due to its abundant natural resources. The

Cherokee were skilled hunters, gatherers, and farmers, utilizing the mountainous terrain to cultivate crops such as corn, beans, and squash.

The sacred lands of the Cherokee were filled with rich traditions and cultural practices. They held deep spiritual connections to the mountains, which they believed were inhabited by various deities. Their social structure was organized around clans, and they had a well-developed system of governance.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Cherokee utilized the Highlands area for centuries. Artifacts such as pottery, tools, and stone carvings have been discovered, providing insight into the daily lives and rituals of the Cherokee people. Their presence laid the groundwork for the region's history, influencing later settlers and shaping the community's cultural identity.

European Settlement

The arrival of European settlers in the late 18th century marked a significant turning point in the history of Highlands NC. The first settlers were predominantly of Scottish and Irish descent, drawn to the area by its natural beauty and the promise of land. By the early 1800s, small farming communities began to form, and the landscape started to change dramatically.

Land grants from the North Carolina government encouraged settlers to move into the region, and many established homesteads in the fertile valleys. However, the encroachment of settlers led to conflicts with the Cherokee, who were gradually displaced from their ancestral lands.

Notable figures such as William and John McKee were among the early settlers who played crucial roles in developing the community. They contributed to building essential infrastructure, including roads and schools, which facilitated further settlement and economic growth.

Growth and Development of Highlands

As the 19th century progressed, Highlands continued to grow. The arrival of the railroad in the late 1800s transformed the town by providing easier access for visitors and goods. This transportation breakthrough not only connected Highlands to larger markets but also opened the door to tourism and commerce.

With an influx of visitors, local businesses began to flourish. Inns, hotels, and restaurants sprang up to accommodate the growing number of tourists seeking refuge in the cool mountain air during the summer months. The establishment of the Highlands Cashiers Chamber of Commerce in 1922 further solidified the area as a destination for visitors.

The town was officially incorporated in 1885, marking a significant milestone in its development. The incorporation allowed for better governance and planning, contributing to the preservation of its unique character amidst rapid growth.

Highlands as a Tourist Destination

Highlands NC has become synonymous with tourism, attracting visitors from all over the country and beyond. Its stunning natural scenery, including waterfalls, hiking trails, and panoramic mountain views, draws outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. The establishment of the Buck Creek and Whiteside Mountain areas as protected lands further enhances the region's appeal.

Throughout the 20th century, the growth of tourism led to the development of various cultural and recreational activities, including art festivals, music events, and culinary experiences. The town hosts the Highlands Food and Wine Festival, showcasing the area's culinary excellence and attracting foodies from afar.

Moreover, the arts scene in Highlands has flourished, with galleries and theaters offering a platform for local artists and performers. This cultural vibrancy adds depth to the town's charm, making it a favorite destination for those seeking both relaxation and enrichment.

Notable Historical Figures

The history of Highlands NC is marked by various individuals who have made significant contributions to its development and cultural landscape. Among these figures are:

- **Dr. John C. Campbell** - A prominent educator and founder of the John C. Campbell Folk School, he played a pivotal role in preserving traditional Appalachian crafts and culture.

- **Hazel Wolf** - A noted environmentalist and conservationist who advocated for the preservation of the natural beauty surrounding Highlands, ensuring that future generations could enjoy its wonders.
- **James D. McKee** - A key figure in the early development of Highlands, he was instrumental in establishing local businesses and infrastructure that supported the growing community.

These individuals, among others, have left an indelible mark on Highlands' history, shaping its identity and contributing to its legacy.

Conclusion

The history of Highlands NC is a compelling narrative that showcases the evolution of a small mountain town into a vibrant community steeped in culture, heritage, and natural beauty. From the early days of the Cherokee to the establishment of a thriving tourist destination, Highlands has undergone significant transformations while retaining its unique character. The contributions of early settlers, notable figures, and the ongoing commitment to preserving its natural and cultural resources ensure that Highlands will continue to be a cherished destination for generations to come.

Q: What is the significance of the Cherokee in the history of Highlands NC?

A: The Cherokee were the original inhabitants of the Highlands area, and their rich cultural heritage and connection to the land significantly influenced the region's early development. Their traditions, governance, and agriculture laid the foundation for future communities.

Q: When was Highlands officially incorporated?

A: Highlands was officially incorporated in 1885, marking a significant milestone in its governance and development as a community.

Q: How did the arrival of the railroad impact Highlands NC?

A: The arrival of the railroad in the late 1800s provided easier access for visitors and goods, transforming Highlands into a thriving tourist destination and facilitating economic growth.

Q: What are some notable events that shaped the tourism industry in Highlands?

A: The establishment of the Highlands Food and Wine Festival and various arts festivals have significantly shaped the tourism industry, attracting visitors and showcasing local culture and cuisine.

Q: Who were some notable historical figures in Highlands NC?

A: Notable figures include Dr. John C. Campbell, an educator and folk school founder; Hazel Wolf, an environmentalist; and James D. McKee, an early developer of local businesses and infrastructure.

Q: What role did agriculture play in the early history of Highlands?

A: Agriculture was vital in the early history of Highlands, with settlers cultivating crops and establishing farms, which contributed to the community's growth and sustainability.

Q: How has Highlands preserved its cultural heritage?

A: Highlands has preserved its cultural heritage through festivals, art galleries, and the promotion of traditional crafts, ensuring that historical practices and local art remain vibrant in the community.

Q: What natural attractions can be found in Highlands NC?

A: Highlands is known for its stunning natural attractions, including waterfalls, hiking trails, and panoramic mountain views, making it a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Q: What is the impact of tourism on the local economy of Highlands?

A: Tourism significantly boosts the local economy by creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and generating revenue through events and attractions that draw visitors to the area.

Q: How has the identity of Highlands changed over the years?

A: The identity of Highlands has evolved from a remote mountain community to a vibrant tourist destination while maintaining its cultural roots and connection to the natural environment.

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