

Cashiers Historical Society History

THE BEGINNING

Although Cashiers boasts a long and colorful history and various groups and individuals had collected historical records over the years, until the mid 1990's there was no official organized effort to preserve the history of Cashiers.

The genesis for founding a group took place on the porch Ms. Julia Tolbert's house (across from the Zachary-Tolbert House) one day in the mid 1990's, when the late **Dan Moore, Ann McKee Austin, Jane Nardy, Alberta Zachary** and others gathered to brainstorm the idea of starting a historical society.

Soon after, a **kick off fund raiser was held at The Hanks House** in November 2006. Enthusiastic response to the event convinced the founders that indeed the time was right to launch the group. In 1996, **The Cashiers Historical Society was formed** as an affiliate of the Village Conservancy, a 501 c3 non profit organization dedicated to supporting projects to preserve and enhance the village character of Cashiers.

SAVING THE ZACHARY-TOLBERT HOUSE

About this same time the opportunity arose to save a significant North Carolina landmark when **Robert Red (Bubba) Tolbert** came forward in 1996 to ask for help in finding a new owner for his family property which was rapidly falling into disrepair.

CHS founder Ann McKee Austin spearheaded the effort to find a buyer for the house, and undertake its restoration.

The House was considered significant for a number of reasons:

It was built by Mordecai Zachary, son of one of Cashiers' founding fathers, Colonel John Zachary.

The House is a rare example of Greek vernacular architecture.

The 1850s House had been preserved intact, and had never been "remuddled" as historic preservationists would say. It had never been electrified, nor had plumbing been added.

Moreover, the original furniture made by the owner Mordecia Zachary was still in place, along with pieces added by the Tolberts in the 20th century, a situation almost unheard of in historic preservation.

At last in 1997, buyers came forward -- **Tom and Wendy Dowden**, who purchased from Bubba Tolbert the main house, kitchen dependency and surrounding acreage.

The Dowdens agreed to donate the House on approximately one acre of surrounding land to the Historical Society if the group could demonstrate it was capable of raising the funds to restore the house.

Meanwhile, the CHS received a grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to fund a **Condition Assessment Report** to verify the House was indeed worthy of protection, and eligible for National Register of Historic Places status.

Ellen Pratt Harris AIA, a preservation architect and principal of Harris Architects in Brevard, was engaged to conduct the Report which was completed in 1998. Positive conclusions spurred the Board to continue in efforts to restore the Zachary-Tolbert House and establish the Cashiers Historical Society as a resource for the community.

Harris, along with historian and genealogist **Jane Nardy** also completed the National Register nomination, and that designation was received in 1998. The **National Register of Historic Properties** is the nation's honor role of historically significant properties.

One of the most serious problems was that the House was resting on the ground and much of the foundation had seriously deteriorated. The restoration plan involved raising the House up approximately eight feet off the ground to repair the foundation and then setting it back down on large foundation stones.

The restoration was completed in 2001 and the Zachary Tolbert house was opened to the public on a limited basis, pending completion of on-site restroom facilities.

THE SOCIETY MATURES

Next the CHS negotiated with the Dowdens to acquire approximately four additional acres surrounding the historic Home thereby protecting five acres of the historic Highway 107 corridor and opening up the opportunity to construct a Visitors Center and a Trail System around the property.

A Master Plan was produced in 2005 containing recommendations for future site development.

A successful capital campaign raised funds to build the **Dowden Pavilion**, a Visitors Center containing an office, restrooms, catering kitchen, and a large open Pavilion for community gatherings.

In 1998 the first **Cashiers Designer Showhouse** was held. This annual event is the major source of operating revenue for the Historical Society, and is a well established event in Cashiers' summer calendar. It brings many parts of the community together including interior designers, landscapers, volunteer guides, and many others. The Cashiers Community Council also receives financial support from the proceeds of the Showhouse.

Concurrent with restoration of Zachary-Tolbert site, other programs were developed expanding the Society's contributions to the broader community:

Founders Day has become a popular annual educational event, with demonstrations of old time crafts and skills for local 3rd and 4th grade students.

The annual "**Music On The Grounds**" is an open air concert that attracts folks from the entire community.

The **Jan Wyatt Symposium**, named in honor of the former CHS President and Board member who began this program, has held yearly scholarly gatherings on subjects of local interest including:

- 2005 William Holland Thomas
- 2006 Wade Hampton III
- 2007 William Bartram
- 2008 Southern Plain Style Furniture
- 2009 Traditional Mountain Music

The Village Heritage Award, begun by Ann Austin, is awarded annually to a historic building in the downtown commercial district that has been restored and adaptively reused as a contemporary business. Past awards have been given to:

- 2004 Alexanders Garden
- 2005 Viewfinders building
- 2006 Laurelwood Shopping Center
- 2007 Zonnie Sheik cottage
- 2008 Tommy's Coffee Shop

Heritage Apple Day, generally kicks off the new season and honors the important role of apples in 19th century mountain life.

Throughout the season, **History Rambles** to local sites of historic interest are organized & led by historian Jane Nardy.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

In 2008, the Historical Society took an active role in the formation of the **The Village Council**, a voluntary association of community non-profit, civic, business, and government groups that is moving forward with a village path system as well as other village planning initiatives.

Recently the restoration of the **Zachary-Tolbert House Kitchen Dependency**, the last major component of the Master Site Plan, was completed. In addition, with the cooperation of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, an Interpretive Nature Trail was established that threads the surrounding woodlands.

Also in 2008, the CHS hired its **first Executive Director, Timothy Osment**. Under Tim's leadership the Cashiers Historical Society and the Zachary-Tolbert House Museum are reaching new levels of professionalism and service to the local community and to the wider preservation movement in Western North Carolina.

Most recently the CHS has begun The Cashiers Historical Society Circle of Volunteers with Volunteer Coordinator, **Vicky Robson** at the helm. Vicky and others are gathering together folks that share a love for their community and want to recognize its history and preserve its beauty and uniqueness.

Today the Cahiers Historical Society has grown to an organization with over 600 members and is recognized as one of the most active civic organizations in our region.

