

BLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



For almost fifty years a railroad ran from Narrows, VA up Wolf Creek to Suiter in Bland County. In future editions of the BCHS newsletter there will be more information about this slice of Bland County history. There will be more details about the history of the railroad, its effects on the inhabitants along the route, and other related businesses and Camp Obediah. The following account is a very brief history of this railroad written by a Rocky Gap High School student in 1992.

John Dodson

The Railroad in Bland County

For thirty-two years in the early 1900s, folks in Bland County had a taste of what other people had experienced for many years before. From 1914 to 1946, a railroad track stretched from Narrows to Suiter, Virginia. The railroad helped create new jobs, citizens were able to sell their goods to distant markets, and it was a gateway to other parts of Virginia.

At the turn of the century, Narrows was in need of a new industry to stimulate its economy. In 1903, Lees and McVitty of Salem, Virginia agreed to build a tannery. Tan bark from white oak and hemlock would be used to tan leather. At that time, the largest industry in Bland and Giles County was timber. Therefore, Lees and McVitty constructed three miles of railroad track up Wolf Creek to haul timber to the tannery.

New River, Holston, and Western Railroad Company continued the railroad all the way to Rocky Gap in 1912. This came about because of a purchase by W.M. Ritter Lumber Company called Buck Horn Timber. The railroad was built to Suiter in 1914, when Mr. W.E. Mingea, Jr., of Abingdon, Virginia, owner of all the Big Survey in Bland County, built it to help the lumber and bark industry. In 1919, it was sold to Norfolk and Western Railroad Company.

During the railroads first several years, the train ran five days a week. After much of the timber was hauled out it reduced its run to three days a week. The trains hauled an assortment of goods including cattle and sheep, manganese, general freight, and the mail. Gene Davidson said, "For the holidays ... we shipped turkeys. Usually went to Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. We picked the turkeys, bled them, and I don't think we dressed them." He also remembered his family receiving living room furniture from a mail order catalog by the railroad.

The train also pulled one passenger car. Mrs. Mabel Pruett used to ride the train home from boarding school. She said, "Well, it was always exciting to ride the train, and to stop at the stations and see the people that came to meet the trains."



Depot at Bastian

There were twelve stations from Narrows to Suiter. Beginning from Narrows, they were: Talmash, Penvir, Bridge No. 2, First Ford, Chappel, Niday, Round Bottom, Rocky Gap, Novis (South Gap), Hicksville, Bastian, and Suiter.

During the time the trains ran, there were two post offices on Wolf Creek.

The post office at Round

Bottom was managed by Booker Pilliam. He managed the post office and a small store there. Later, that post office was moved about four miles down to Niday where it was managed by Bill Wonsley. Mrs. Pruett remembered that "most of the farmers would come down there to pick up the mail and stand there and talk for hours at a time."

With the advent of big trucks to the area, it became cheaper and easier to haul freight by truck and the train reduced its run to three days a week. The trains hauled an assortment of goods including cattle and sheep, manganese, general freight, and the mail.

Stephanie Hamilton RGHS class of 1993

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fall is upon us and we have been working together to help preserve the history of our beautiful Bland County. We have been reflecting on the old and the new ideas for the growth of our organization. The Bland County Historical Society is now open on Saturday mornings 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM or by appointment. We are here for our citizens and patrons making our history alive, preserved, and important.

Our Board of Directors have been training and working diligently to grow and expand the local history for our citizens and youth. Our last news letter was mailed to over 180 individuals reporting on happenings across the County.

Please consider joining the Bland County Historical Society so you can make a difference in the preservation of our history. We need your knowledge to continue our history.

Have a wonderful fall and our next news letter will be the Winter edition. Have a great fall season!

Sincerely,
Rachel Havens
President Pro Tem

2026 OFFICERS

Rachel Havens - President Pro Tem
Mary Bowen - Vice President Pro Tem
Julia Stephens - Secretary Pro Tem
Kathy Sue Havens - Treasurer

BOARD MEMBERS

John Dodson - Lorree Waddle
Tony Mitchell - Randy Newberry
Molly Thompson - Melinda Litton Sue
Ellen Tate

COMMITTEES

Newsletter - Sue Ellen Tate
Tony Mitchell - John Dodson

Calendar - Mary Bowen - Molly
Thompson - Randy Newberry - Rachel
Havens - Tony Mitchell

Caves of Bland County

The Bland County Historical Society is excited to welcome Ed Devine of the VPI Cavers Club as our guest speaker. The cavers club has been a longtime visitor to Bland, starting in the late 1940's. Their primary relationship has been with "Buddy Penley" and his family continuing today. Although many other groups have visited, the VPI club have been the most frequent visitor. The spelunkers came for the enjoyment of exploring but also mapping the caves and collecting for scientific purposed. This presentation will provide information about the Skydusky Valley Cave System with pictures of their findings. We believe this will be an exciting afternoon fro anyone curious about the caves. The public is invited to attend.

Time: September 12 at 1 PM
Central Church
22 Point Pleasant Road (Route 604)
Bland, Virginia

Map Quest Directions
<https://mapq.st/4ym9F7N>

Mountain Glen



*OH I LIVE IN A HOUSE AT THE TOP OF THE HILL
WHERE THE CLOUDS ARE DRIFTING BY
AND EACH FLOWER IN THE GARDEN THERE
LIFTS ITS SMILING FACE TO THE SKY*



*THE KISS OF THE SUN FOR PARDON
THE SONG OF THE BIRDS FOR MIRTH
ONE IS NEARER GODS HEART IN A GARDEN
THAN ANYWHERE ELSE ON EARTH*

On June 13, 2026, the Bland County Historical Society convened at Mountain Glen Farm, a historic estate nestled in Ceres, Virginia. The ancestral home of Misses Nita and Nell Hudson, two retired educators, this distinctive property has been meticulously maintained by its current owners, Brad and Amy Harden. The meeting lived up to its promise to be an exciting experience, with attendees able to admire the home's original furnishings and heirlooms, which date back to the mid-19th century. Many thanks to the Hardens for allowing us to visit their historic home.

Article and photos courtesy
Elmer Beardshaw

Help us to identify this photo taken at
Hamiltons Cave near Mt. Zion church.
The only name legible *on the back* is
Miss Haller.

Courtesy Parke Bogle



Petition of Jackson J. Obenchain & 30 others citizens of Giles Co Asking that a new county be formed of parts of Wythe Tazewell and Giles.

To the honorable the Legislature of Virginia
 your petitioners the undersigned Citizens of the
 State of the County of Giles residing within the
 bounds of the proposed New County (mentioned below)
 respectfully make known their wishes and petition
 your honorable body for a redress of grievances. Your
 petitioners beg leave to represent that they labor under
 considerable inconveniences in consequence of having
 to travel a long distance to get to their Court house
 They therefore pray that a new County be formed
 of parts of Wythe Tazewell & Giles Counties bounded
 as follows, to wit, Beginning on the top of Walker's
 little mountain at the line between Wythe and
 Putnam and running northward with said line &
 the top of Walker's big mountain thence Eastward
 along top of same to a point opposite the mouth
 of Brimbley Creek thence northward to the top of
 East River Mountain two miles east of the Tazewell
 & Giles line so as to leave Madison Blaine in the County
 of Giles thence with top of said mountain westward
 to a point opposite George Steele on Ches. Lick thence
 square across to top of North Mountain and westward
 along same so far as to include the settlements on
 Wolf Creek thence across to top of Garden Mountain
 and with same Eastward Southward & Westward to a
 point opposite the Smyth County line thence with
 said line to top of Walker's big mountain thence Eastward
 along same to a point opposite the head waters of Walker's
 little Creek thence square across to top of Walker's little
 mountain and Eastward to the beginning.

Jackson J. Obenchain
 John S. Atchwood
 R. A. Morton

To the honorable The Legislator of Virginia your petitioners the undersigned citizens and voter of the county of Giles residing within the bounds of the proposed New County mentioned below respectfully make known their wishes and petition your honorable body for a redress of grievances . Your petitioners beg leave to represent that they labor under considerable inconveniences in consequence of having to tread a long distance to get to their courthouse They therefore pray that a new county be formed of parts of Wythe Tazewell & Giles counties bounded as follows to wit. Beginning on the top Walkers little mountain at the line between Wythe and Pulaski and running northward with said line to the top of Walkers big mountain. Thence Eastward along top of same to a point opposite the mouth of Kimberling Creek, thence Northward to the top of East River Mountain two miles east of the Tazewell & Giles line so as to leave Madison Allens in the county of Giles. Thence with the top of said mountain westward to a point opposite George Steel on Clear Fork, thence square across to top of Rich Mountain and westward along same so far as to include the Settlement on Wolf creek. Thence across to top of Garden Mountain and with same Eastward, Southward & Westward to a point opposite the Smyth County line. Thence with same line to top of Walkers big mountain. Thence Eastward along same to a point opposite the headwaters of Walkers little creek and Eastward along same to the beginning.

The Library of Virginia is a wonderful resource for historical information and research. Many treasures reside there just waiting to be explored.

<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/collections>

Petition to the Virginia General Assembly to create a new county 1859.

J. E. Mitchell
 John Mustard
 John Williams.
 Thoms, J. B. Smith
 James Tally
 John W. Hancock
 Isaac A. Irvine
 James Thompson, Flat Top
 Wm. H. Taylor
 Philip Bellon
 John A. Burtis
 Los Welford
 Jacob McVie
 James A. Diamond
 Harry Thompson
 Samuel W. Hays
 Robert, S. Davis
 Jeyuel Robinson
 John W. Hays
 James M. Hays
 Adair Hays
 John C. Cracker
 James H. Mustard
 Wm. T. McKill
 Wm. H. Hays
 John Burtis
 John Smith
 Jacob Parley

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Much appreciation to the Bland County extension Service and the Bland County Home Demonstration Club 1971 for sharing the recipes below.

DUMPLINGS FLUFFY - Mrs. Harry S. Bird

2 Tablespoons salad oil	1/2 cup Milk
1 cup all purpose flour	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder	

Sift dry ingredients together into mixing bowl. Combine milk and salad oil. Add all at once to dry ingredients, stirring just till moistened. Drop from tablespoon over bubbling stew. Cover tightly, let mixture return to boil. Reduce heat (don't lift cover). Simmer 10 to 12 minutes.

BROCCOLI CASSEROLE - Zareda Earnest

2 boxes of frozen broccoli	1/4 lb. Crackers (1 sect of the box)
1 1/2 sticks of butter or margarine	1/2 lb. Cheese

Cook broccoli in unsalted water until tender. Crumble crackers and mix with one stick of margarine (melted). Place in greased casserole, starting with a layer of crackers, add broccoli then chip cheese and 1/2 stick butter on broccoli. Add remaining cracker crumbs on top and bake approximately 15 minutes in a 350 degree oven.

To Mrs. Harry S. Bird a well known and beloved teacher in the county and Zareda Earnest considered one of the founding members of the Bland County Historical Society.

*Thank You
BCHS*

CONTACT US

In order to help control costs we have discontinued our service with our previous phone and internet provider. Our new number is 276-613-5350. Please leave a message and we will respond during normal hours . And watch for our new Facebook page (a work in progress) on our website where we will take questions and share our historical collection. Email us at info@BlandCountyHistSoc.org where one of our volunteers will respond more rapidly.

Volunteerism

The use or involvement of volunteer labor, especially in community services.

Would you want to volunteer your time to help uncover and preserve our county history ? We are looking for members to help with the various duties required to have a modern and informative organization. Students too can assist using their volunteer hours on or off site. Do you have an article or story you wish to submit to be published in our quarterly newsletter ? Can we assist with your research ?

WEBSTORE

Have you visited our web store ? We have over 20 items listed from our gift shop ! From books to Afghans, ornaments to hats - we have a nice selection from which to shop from the comfort of your home. We will be adding more items as time allows.

*Bland County Historical Society
PO Box 416
Bland, VA 24315*