

BLUE RIDGE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA
SIGNAGE APPLICATION



Blanton/Reece Log Cabin – 1821 – Bethel Community

BETHEL RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

www.bethelrural.org

JULY 31, 2012



Interpretive Signage Application

Date: July 30, 2012

Name:	Evelyn Coltman, Chair, Historic Preservation Committee – Agricultural Heritage, Cherokee Heritage, Historic Heritage George Ivey, Former Chair, Farmland Preservation Committee – Agricultural Heritage, Natural Heritage Barbara Eaffaldano, President, Bethel Rural Community Organization – Map Design, Easement Release Form
Organization:	Bethel Rural Community Organization
Street Address:	664 Sonoma Road, Waynesville, NC 28786
Mailing Address (If Different)	P O Box 1333, Waynesville, NC 28786
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Designated direct contact for this Project (Name & Contact Info)	Evelyn Coltman (828-648-3226)

Provide a brief summary of your sign’s story and location (including landowner name for sign location). Include which of our 5 Heritage Themes will be highlighted: Agricultural, Cherokee, Craft, Music, and Natural. You may want to weave more than one theme into your story. Are you a ‘Year of the Mountains’ site (see page 5 for criteria)? (use additional sheet, if necessary).

SEE ATTACHED PAGES FOR SUMMARY.

Attach to this application: a map of your selected sign location, as described on page 7.

If selected you agree to: submit signed easement form ((Page 8); submit sign materials that match our specifications (Page 9); sign the Commitment Form (Page 10); and pay sign/maintenance fees.

Bethel Rural Community Organization

July 30, 2012

Signature

Organization

Date

Please mail completed form with original signature to:
Melinda Young, PO Box 295, Columbus, NC 28722; 828-407-0702; BRNHA.melinda@gamil.com
195 Hemphill Knob Road, Asheville, NC 28803
www.blueridgeheritage.com
(828) 298-5330

BETHEL RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION (BRCO) MISSION

The mission of Bethel Rural Community Organization (BRCO) is to locate and coordinate local and regional resources to perform programs and projects that enhance the quality of rural life in the Bethel Community of Haywood County, North Carolina. The BRNHA sign for BRCO will spotlight the organization's mission statement of concern for resources and programs that draw awareness to the necessity of retaining a rural way of life in the community, thus reinforced by the organization's attention to programs that promote farmland and historic preservation.

BETHEL RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PROGRAMS

If BRCO is selected to receive a marker, the group has determined that the sign should be located at the historic (1885) Bethel Presbyterian Church, owned by the Western Regional Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, USA, but leased until 2030 by BRCO as a community center. The church, with its striking chestnut sanctuary interior, classrooms, and kitchen/dining hall, serves as the home base for BRCO to perform its varied agenda. Programs include farmland preservation, historic preservation, Cold Mountain Heritage Tour, food pantry, providing monetary assistance to those in need in Bethel, and clothing/education/ food/recreation/scholarship projects for local schools. The community center is used by a variety of organizations as well as individuals needing space for meetings, reunions, dinners, parties, and weddings. In addition, the facility serves as a location for BRCO meetings, Haywood County Council Development Clubs meetings, gatherings focused on educational projects, programs, and seminars as well as community dinners sponsored by BRCO. The group maintains a lease arrangement of the church sanctuary and dining hall with a local congregation, Encouraging Word Baptist Church.

BETHEL RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION – SIGN ELIGIBILITY

BRCO's sign is eligible under 3 categories: agricultural heritage, Cherokee heritage, and natural heritage. The ensuing discussion captures the reason for all three designations.

AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

Two primary areas of focus for BRCO are farmland preservation and historic preservation. Regarding farmland preservation, BRCO is recognized statewide as a leader in garnering resources and support for placing farmlands, forests, and natural areas into conservation easements so that farms and significant local spaces will be subject to protective status into the future. BRCO's Farmland Preservation Committee utilizes government and private resources to further its cause. The organization is a leader in Haywood County's Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program, provides donations and grants to help fund conservation easements to protect working farms and forests from development pressures, encourages protection of the family farm when more lucrative offers are available, initiated efforts to establish the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center (presently operating in Canton), and started and continues to support the "Buy Haywood" program to help market local farm products – everything from produce to nursery plants to trout to Christmas trees, and more. To date, BRCO's Farmland Preservation Committee has supervised the transfer of 230 acres of farm and forest land into easement protection in Bethel alone while also enrolling more than 1,100 + acres into the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program.

BRCO is also providing leadership in preservation of agricultural lands by overseeing similar conservation easement projects in areas of Haywood County outside of Bethel. In order to facilitate interest in land preservation, BRCO's Farmland Preservation Committee has, for several years, held several county-wide seminars in which land owners throughout the county have been instructed on means and methods for conserving their property by putting lands into protective status. Other training sessions have focused on land sustainability projects in the community. One seminar, for example, allowed attendees to visit several sites in Bethel to view a rain garden established at BRCO's home base (Bethel Presbyterian Church), Bethel Middle School's use of rain barrels to supply water for the school's greenhouse, Bethel Elementary School's environmentally sustainable design and flood mitigation strategies, and a local nursery practicing eco-friendly approaches to sustainability.

Paralleling BRCO's interest in land protection, the organization is also concerned that needy local residents have access to local agricultural products. BRCO's food pantry distributes fresh produce, canned, and dry products each month to a number of worthy families in the community. The organization also provides vouchers for these individuals to purchase fresh, locally grown produce at local farms and markets.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to BRCO's concern for agricultural and natural heritage issues, the organization's vision also extends to preservation of historic sites and collection of important research and oral data from Bethel's past. The Historic Preservation Committee is

gratified when the opportunity arises to merge the organization's interest in agricultural heritage with its emphasis on historic preservation. Recent archaeological digs of a Native American site in Bethel, Garden Creek, have highlighted the fact that agriculture has been a part of Bethel Community for thousands of years. The Pisgah phase of the Mississippi Indian culture (see Cherokee section) were the first people to cultivate farmland in the rich alluvial soils of the area. The first white settlers, like their Indian predecessors, appreciated the fertile land that provided a perfect setting for developing horticulture.

BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee, mindful of the rich agricultural heritage of the community, has included agricultural sites on the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour, an annual tour of historic sites in the community. Visitors on the tour have toured Lenoir/Devon Acres Farm and Francis Mill, two agriculturally/historically significant sites. Lenoir/Devon Acres is of agricultural/historical importance because it is the oldest continuing farm in Haywood County (1807) with Haywood County's longest continuing herd of cattle - Devon cattle which were brought to the farm in 1849. Francis Mill is noteworthy because the site reveals the area's agrarian connection and because the mill has been restored by Francis Mill Preservation Society to become a working mill once again. The books, *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain*, Books 1 – 6, compilations of local history that focus on the area's people/locations have been collected, written, and sold by BRCO Historic Preservation Committee members. Books 3 and 6 included 5 sections on the history of Lenoir/Devon Acres. Articles about Francis Mill are included in Books 1 and 4.

The DVD, *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came before Us*, a project developed by BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee, includes interviews with Lenoir/Devon Acres Farm owner, Dr. Mary Michal, as well as Devon cattle owner, Charles Trantham. A different segment in the DVD includes an interview with Francis Mill owner, Tanna Timbes.

Another occasion in which BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee has been able to spotlight Francis Mill's role in merging agricultural and historic concerns is a recent grant from BRNHA to research, write, and nominate Francis Mill to the National Register of Historic Places. Examination of historic documents, as well as interviews with descendants of the family-owned mill, have resulted in greater clarification of the role of mills in local agriculture during the formative years of the Haywood County. There is a chapter on Mills, Millers, and Milling in *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain*, Book 4.

CHEROKEE HERITAGE

Bethel Community was formerly inhabited by ancestors of the Cherokee, making it the location of the oldest human settlement in Haywood County. Several significant archeological digs have occurred in Bethel at the Garden Creek site south of Canton where Native Americans, according to the Garden Creek historic designation, inhabited the location as far back as 10,000 years ago in 8,000 BC. Four separate digs have involved investigation of the Garden Creek Native American settlement area:

- 1880 – Mann Valentine and the Valentine Museum of Richmond, Virginia**
- 1915 – George Heye and the Museum of the American Indian and the Heye Foundation**
- 1965 – Research Laboratory of Anthropology of the University of North Carolina**
- 2011 – Combination of several anthropologists and students including those from the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, the Research Laboratories of Anthropology of the University of North Carolina, archaeologists from the National Forest Service of North Carolina, and Tim Horseley, a noted British geologist.**

The Garden Creek site is thought to encompass three Indian mounds and two villages on twelve acres. The focus of the latest dig was to determine if the area was a permanent settlement or a ceremonial ground. The site also reveals clues about the particular Indian cultures involved with the location:

Woodland (Pigeon Culture and Connestee Culture):

The Woodland Indians typically lived in wooded areas, and their livelihood, tools, and food came from the woodlands which they inhabited. Roughly, three time phases of Woodland Indians existed: early – approximately 100 B.C. – 1 B.C., middle – circa 1 B.C. – 500 A.D., late – generally between 500 A.D. – 1000 A.D. Woodland Indians existed in the gap between the hunter/gatherer cultural phase of subsistence and the agriculture-based, mound-building phase of the later Mississippi Indian cultures. Pottery style is the main feature that distinguishes the three phases of Woodland Indians.

The Woodland Indian Pigeon culture, though information about its history is somewhat murky, developed in the Garden Creek area between 300 B.C. and 200 A.D. Whereas Woodland cultures in other areas used sand as a tempering agent for their pottery, Garden Creek's Pigeon Indians used quartz. Pigeon pottery typically is decorated with stamped-checked designs with a lovely iridescent sheen on the pottery interior. Pottery was often used for trading, and the Garden Creek Pigeon phase pottery is similar in design style to that of Woodland people in Georgia, South Carolina, and eastern Tennessee.

Other important distinctions of the Pigeon culture involved burial customs and dietary practices. Pisgah Indians developed distinctive ceremonial burial procedures. Though typically a hunter/gatherer society, Pigeon Indians began to rely on cultivated crops as dietary staples.

The Connestee cultural phase of Woodland Indians occurred in the second half of the Middle Woodland period (approximately 200 – 700 or 800 A.D.). The Garden Creek site in Bethel, particularly Mound #2, has provided the bulk of information for archaeologists concerning the Connestee people. Like their predecessors, Connestee Indians made distinctive pottery, though they shifted from using quartz, so valued by Pigeon Indians, to the use of sand. Unlike the distinctive checkered pots and vases of the Pigeon people, Connestee pottery surfaces were plain, brushed, or decorated with parallel lines embedded by using carved paddles.

Connestee people also began the practice of mound construction at the Garden Creek site, a practice atypical of Connestee in other locations. Mounds at Garden Creek apparently served as a public gathering place, probably for ceremonial and religious purposes, rather than for burial sites, as was true of many Native American people.

What is significant about the Connestee phase is that there is substantial evidence that these Indians traded with other Indian tribes, particularly the Hopewell Indians of Ohio, a trading network referred to as the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. Artifacts belonging to those distant tribes have been traced to the Garden Creek site in Bethel. The trading advantage held by Garden Creek Connestee Indians was due to the abundance of mica in the area. The capability of bartering thin, shining sheets of mica elevated the stature of the native Connestee people as trading partners. Garden Creek archaeological studies have revealed valuable information about interactions and trading arrangements among early Indian tribes that were connected through ancient trade routes.

Occurring prior to the maize-based agricultural focus of the later Mississippi Indian culture, the Connestee Indians cultivated small grain seed crops rather than corn. This blending of hunting/gathering traditions with the practice of cultivating crops makes the Connestee Indians a transitional culture.

Mississippi (Pisgah Culture).

The Mississippi culture was a mound-building Native American culture that flourished from approximately 800 A.D. to 1500 A.D. The territory of the Mississippi Indian cultures extended throughout the Midwestern, Eastern, and Southeastern United States. These tribes were maize-based communities that developed widespread trade networks.

Pisgah was an archaeological phase of the South Appalachian Mississippian culture of native people that occurred in parts of northeastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northwestern South Carolina. The phase covered a territory of 14,000 square miles between

approximately 1000 or 1250 to 1500 A.D. with villages ranging from a quarter of an acre to 6 acres.

The Pisgah culture Indians were most common in western North Carolina along the French Broad and Pigeon Rivers. Alluvial valleys where soil is suitable for horticultural practices made the location suitable for cultivating crops that were important to the diet of these Indian ancestors of the Cherokee. The Garden Creek dig reveals information about the social, ceremonial, and political elements of the Pisgah culture. Researchers believe the Garden Creek area served as a central town involving political and ceremonial activities.

There is evidence in several other locations in Bethel that Native Americans had a presence in the area. The Garden Creek site, however, is the one garnering the most attention and scientific probing.

NATURAL HERITAGE

Bethel Community and surrounding lands share a number of important natural features and related designations that attest to the area's significant natural heritage:

- The Blue Ridge Parkway, a designated "All-American Road" and the most popular unit of the entire National Park System, curves gracefully along the area's high southern border.
- The area's mountaintops include Pisgah, Black Balsam, and Cold Mountain, the peak made famous by Charles Frazier's novel and subsequent movie.
- The National Audubon Society has designated the high elevation areas as an "Important Bird Area" for their vital support for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity.
- The area's headwaters are blanketed by Pisgah National Forest, including two popular wilderness areas - Middle Prong Wilderness and Shining Rock Wilderness.
- US Highway 276 along the East Fork of the Pigeon River and NC Highway 215 along the West Fork of the Pigeon River form part of the Forest Heritage Scenic Byway.
- Hunters and fishermen are attracted to the area's healthy populations of wildlife and trout, including a section of the East Fork of the Pigeon River managed by Trout Unlimited for catch-and-release.
- Lake Logan, on the West Fork of the Pigeon River, was the subject of a large land protection effort involving community leaders, state agencies, and conservation groups, protecting a total of 4,400 acres.
- The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program has located a grand total of 82 rare species and natural communities in the area, including the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel (*Alasmidonta raveneliana*), wavy-rayed lampmussel (*Lampsilis fasciola*), Eastern hellbender salamander (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*), and olive darter (*Percina squamata*).
- The area includes more than 13 miles of streams that have earned North Carolina's "High Water Quality" rating; meanwhile, none of the local streams are rated as impaired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- The State of North Carolina has bestowed Water Supply III status on the area, a designation reserved for less than 5% of the state's lands.
- Alluvial soils are those that are rich in minerals and may contain gravel, sand, silt, and clay. Formed from a process involving running water, alluvial soils are rich, fertile, and suitable for sustaining various types of crops. The lush alluvial soils of the Bethel area attracted the first husbandry cultures, ancestors of the Cherokee, to the area thousands of years ago; this same fertile land continues to provide productive soils for the fields of today's farmers.

HISTORIC HERITAGE

Even though Historic Preservation Heritage does not fit into the five categories of focus of BRNHA, the emphasis on historic collection and preservation within BRCO is worthy of mention because historic preservation activities have brought much tourism traffic as well as attention to the community. BRCO's emphasis on honoring, collecting, and preserving the significant history of Bethel is evident in the number of publications and video collections produced by the group. Since Cold Mountain is located in Bethel, Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* book and movie initiated an intense interest in the local topography, culture, and stories of Bethel. Tapping into that interest, members of BRCO's Historic Preservation Committee have collected first-hand historical documentation about Bethel and surrounding areas, enough to fill six books: *Legends, Tales & History of Cold Mountain*, Books 1 – 6. The books received the Barringer Award of Excellence from the North Carolina Society of Historians in 2010. A DVD produced by the Historic Preservation Committee, *Walking in the Footsteps of Those Who Came before Us*, collects interviews of local people who have knowledge of the history of the community. This 2008 DVD has been nominated for the North Carolina Society of Historians Paul Greene Multi-Media Award (winner will be announced this fall). The committee produced the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour for 7 years, allowing hundreds of visitors to tour significant agricultural/historic sites in the community. Some of the information from these tours has been documented and collected into a CD, *The Cold Mountain Heritage Tour*, which will be released at the end of 2012. The Historic Preservation Committee is also starting to film and produce segments for a second DVD which will be a several-year project. All of the books, DVD, and CD are available through BRCO's web site www.bethelrural.org.

CONCLUSION

Pigeon Valley, an alternate name for Bethel, the Pigeon River which meanders through the farmlands and valleys of Bethel, and Pigeon Gap, the entrance into Bethel from the north, are all named for the once abundant Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) which flocked to the area by the billions but became extinct in 1914. Unwise use of habitat and deliberate destruction of the species through hunting resulted in the extermination of the most prolific bird ever to inhabit the planet. Bethel Rural Community Organization is mindful that agricultural and natural heritage areas, archaeological and historic sites, oral history and collectible documents and records are all subject to that same human tendency to use resources imprudently and destroy valuable sites and data. The mission of the organization, therefore, is to keep, preserve, and restore so that these valuable pieces of our environmental and human memory do not suffer the same fate as the Passenger Pigeon. A sign designation from BRNHA would enhance BRCO's mission and would allow others to appreciate the fulfillment of that mission.



**BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BETHEL RURAL COMMUNICATION ORGANIZATION HEADQUARTERS
664 SONOMA ROAD
WAYNESVILLE, NC 28786**

**BLUE RIDGE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA SIGN WILL BE LOCATED ON THE LEFT CORNER OF THE CHURCH
SIDEWALK AND PARKING LOT WITH A FLOWER BED CREATED AROUND THE SIGN**

("X" MARKS THE LOCATION SELECTED FOR THE SIGN)



BLUE RIDGE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA SIGN

WILL BE SITUATED AT

BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

664 SONOMA ROAD

(INDICATED WITH RED "A")