

Swain County and a little bit more: Thoughts on place and people through maps, photos and anecdotes (19th century focus)

For Mae Miller Claxton's WCU Literature Class

Don Casada
March 17, 2021

Presenter notes on some of the slides can be found [HERE](#)

Photo sources:

OPN: [Open Parks Network](#); Great Smoky Mountains National Park archives

TVA: [TVA Kodak Negatives Collection, Atlanta National Archives](#)

WCU: [WCU Special Collections](#) (various)

Others as noted

Evolution of counties, 1789-1872



In 1789, North Carolina ratified the US Constitution and ceded its lands in what is now Tennessee to the US Government. The state of Tennessee was formed in 1796.

The sequence of maps to be shown here come from a rootsweb.com site which is supported by Ancestry.com. No authorship is provided, but it is mostly quite well done.

<http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~george/countyformations/northcarolinaformationmaps.html>

1790



In 1789, North Carolina ratified the US Constitution and ceded its lands in what is now Tennessee to the US Government. The western portion of the state line, from the Pigeon River Valley (I-40) to the Georgia-Tennessee-North Carolina corner wasn't surveyed until more than three decades later by William Davenport, North Carolina State Surveyor. A copy of his notes, in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Service, were copied by Horace Kephart and are in Hunter Library's Digital Collections.

1803



The 1798 treaty at Tellico provided for a new boundary line. In 1802, Return Jonathan Meigs, colonel in the Revolutionary War and Indian agent, along with Thomas Freeman ran the Meigs-Freeman line from the NC/TN state line to the boundary established in the 1785 Hopewell treaty. The section in green above is intended to reflect the remaining Cherokee boundary in NC after the Meigs-Freeman line was completed. It is a bit off on the map; the superimposed green line is a better approximation.

1822



The reduction in the Cherokee territory occurred in early 1819, per a cession treaty which took place in Washington. The boundary line was the Little Tennessee River from the state line up to above the mouth of the Nantahala River, and then along the ridge dividing the Little Tennessee and Nantahala drainages to the state line. The 1819 treaty opened all of what is now Swain County to settlement except the lower Nantahala Gorge, including the location of the Talc mine.

1839



The last cession treaty affecting Cherokee lands in NC (and the rest of the southeast) was completed in 1835. Henderson County was formed in 1838 from the southern portion of Buncombe. The forced removal of the bulk of the Cherokees took place in 1838.

Cherokee County was established from Macon in 1839.

1851



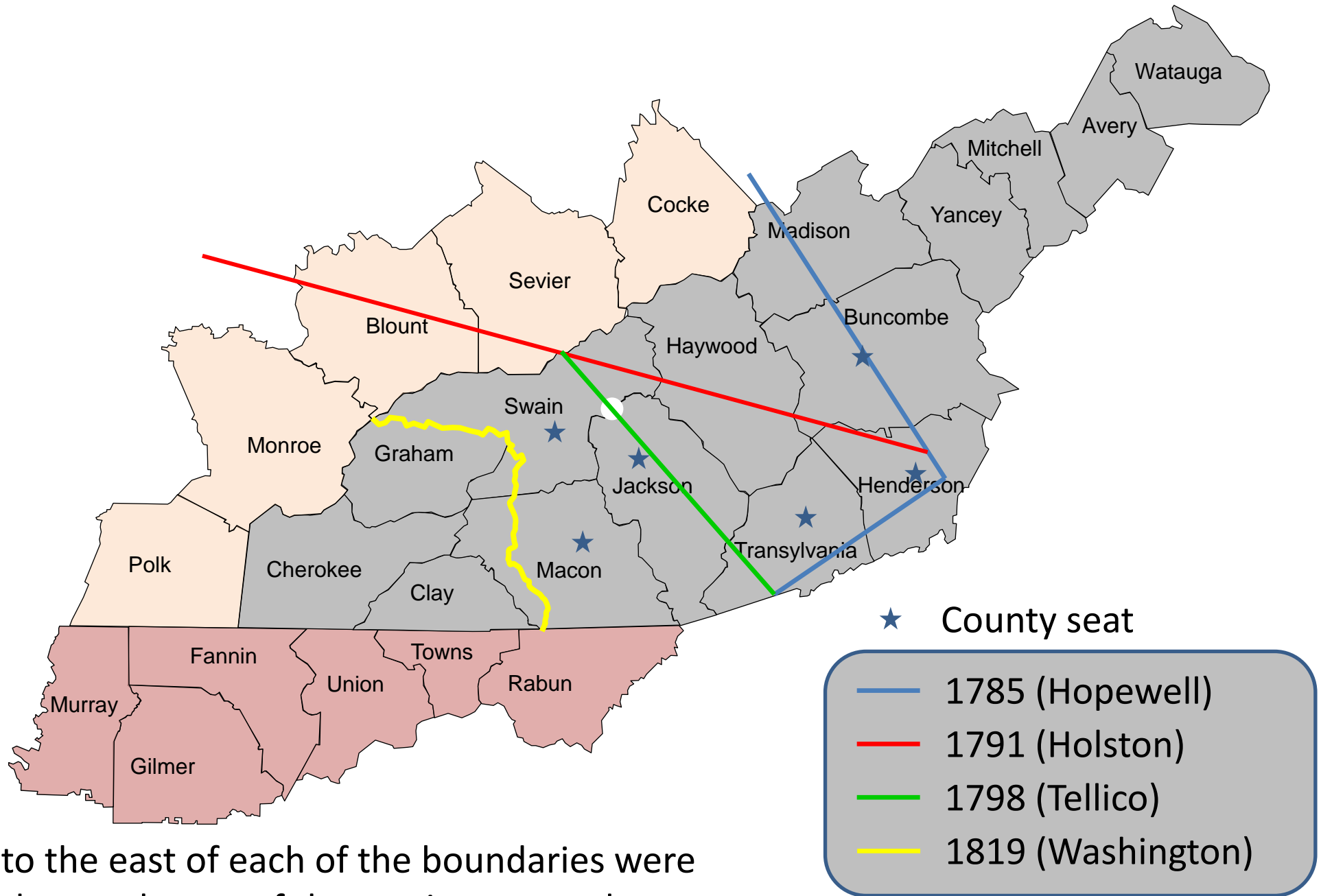
Jackson was formed from parts of Macon and Haywood Counties in 1851.

1872



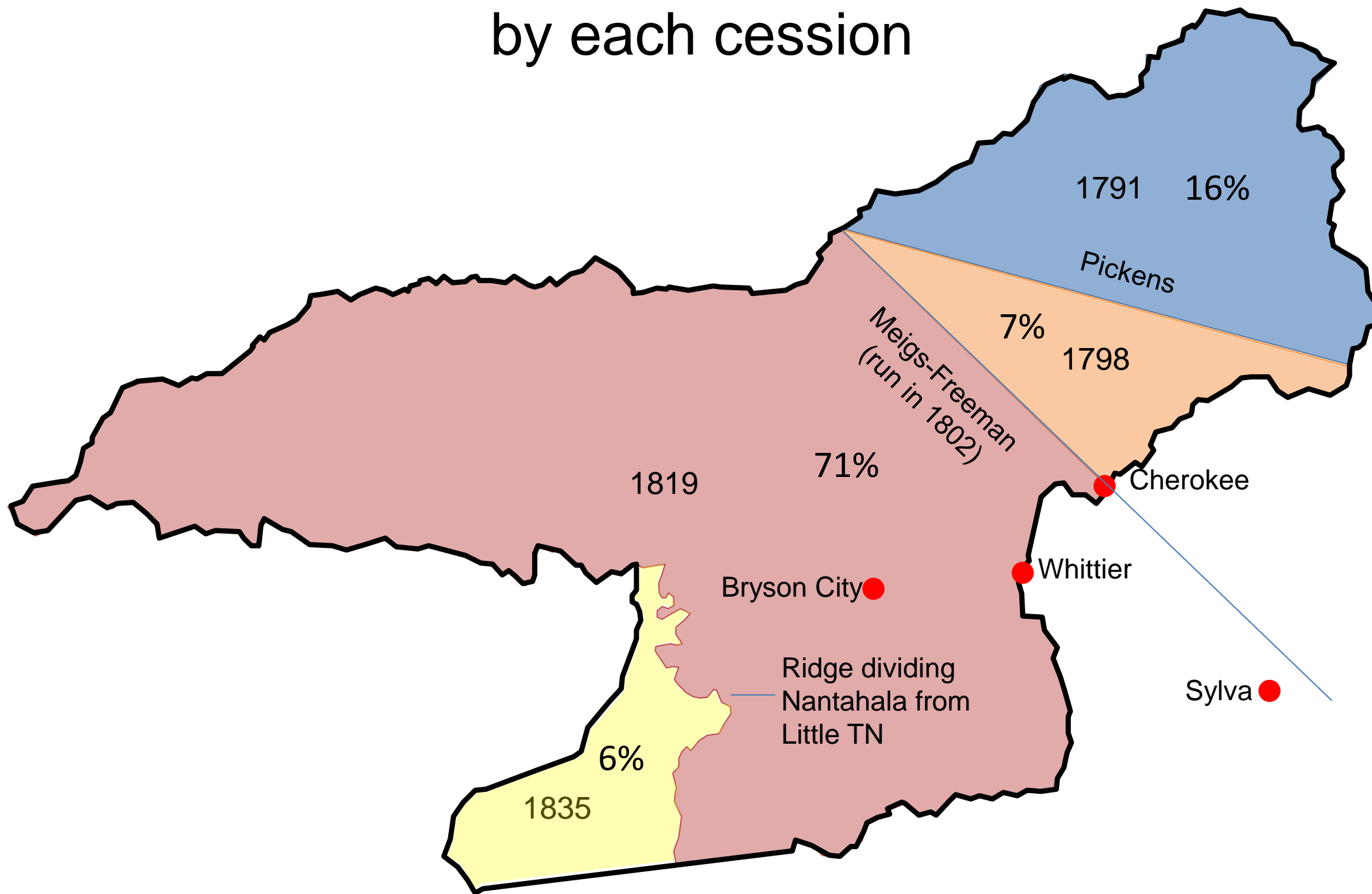
In 1871, Swain was formed from parts of Macon and Jackson; in 1872, Graham was formed from part of Cherokee.

Approximate Cherokee cession lines in North Carolina referenced to today's counties



Areas to the east of each of the boundaries were opened to settlers as of the cession treaty dates

Cession boundaries within what is now Swain County, with percentage of current area affected by each cession



The 1820 Love Survey followed on the heels of the 1819 cession treaty; it is telling about the relationship between place and people.

Love Survey, from Webster to Forks of the Tuckasegee

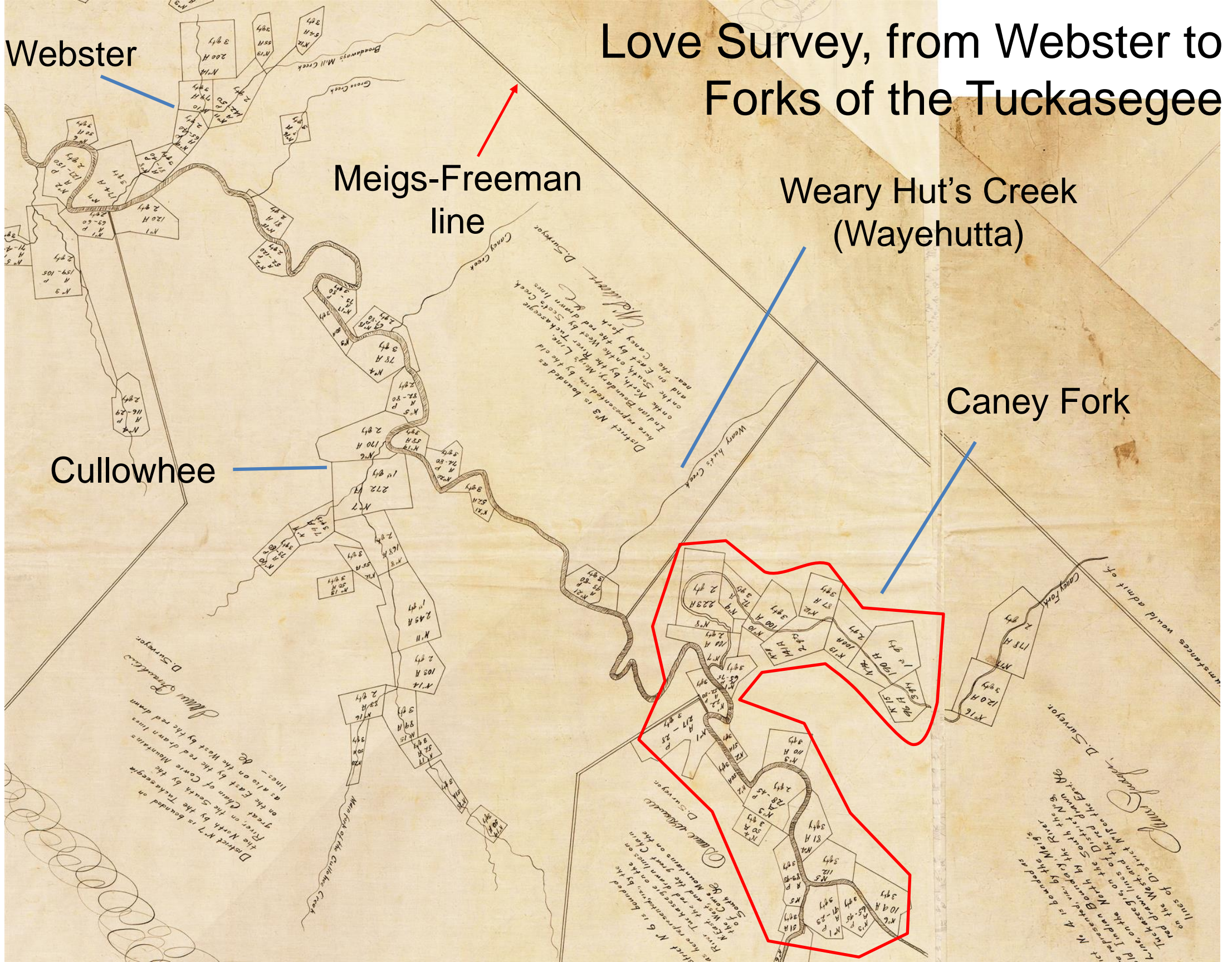
Webster

Meigs-Freeman line

Weary Hut's Creek (Wayehutta)

Caney Fork

Cullowhee



Google Earth view, Cullowhee to Tuckasegee

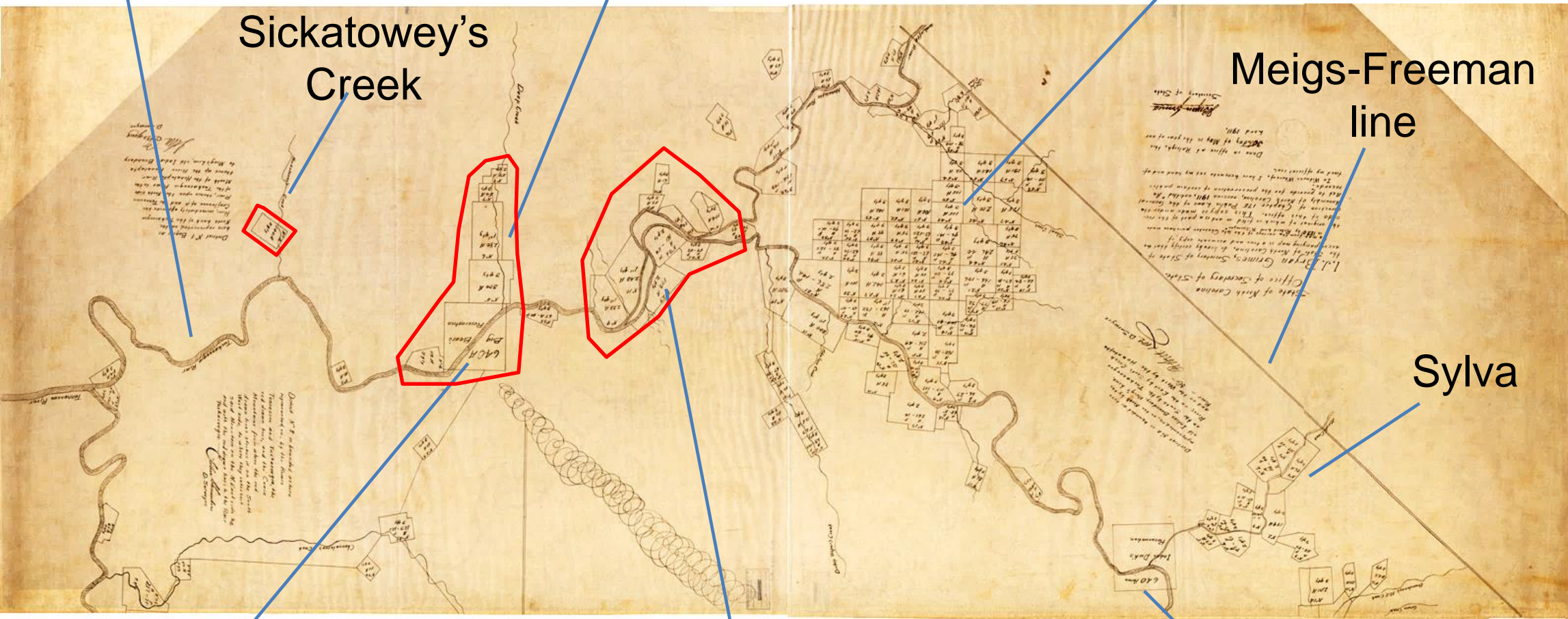


Northern portion of Love Survey: from Sylva to Bushnell

Virtually nothing
below Bryson City
was marked for sale

Deep Creek
bottomland

Qualla area –
several dozen tracts



Sickatowey's
Creek

Meigs-Freeman
line

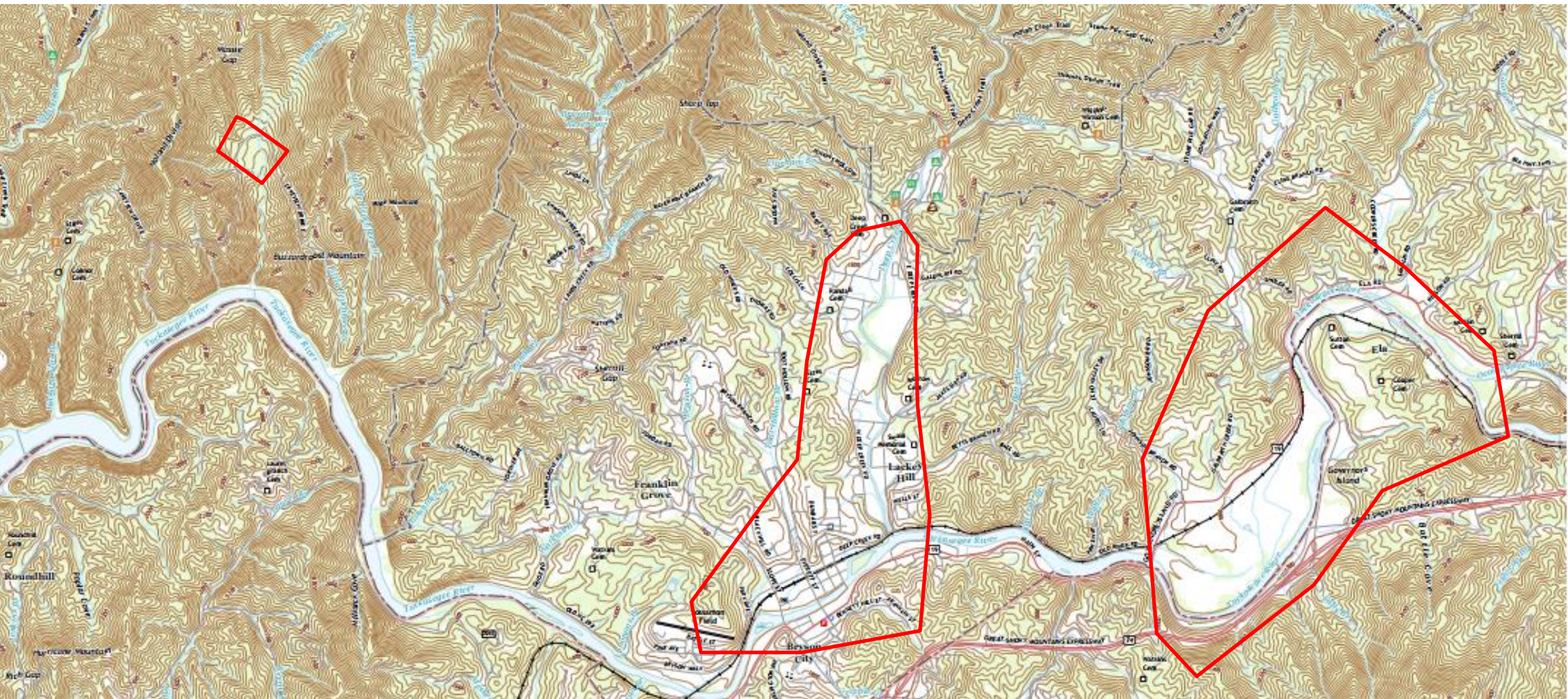
Sylva

Big Bear's
Reservation –
now Bryson City

Ela & Governors
Island – Kituwah –
highly valued area

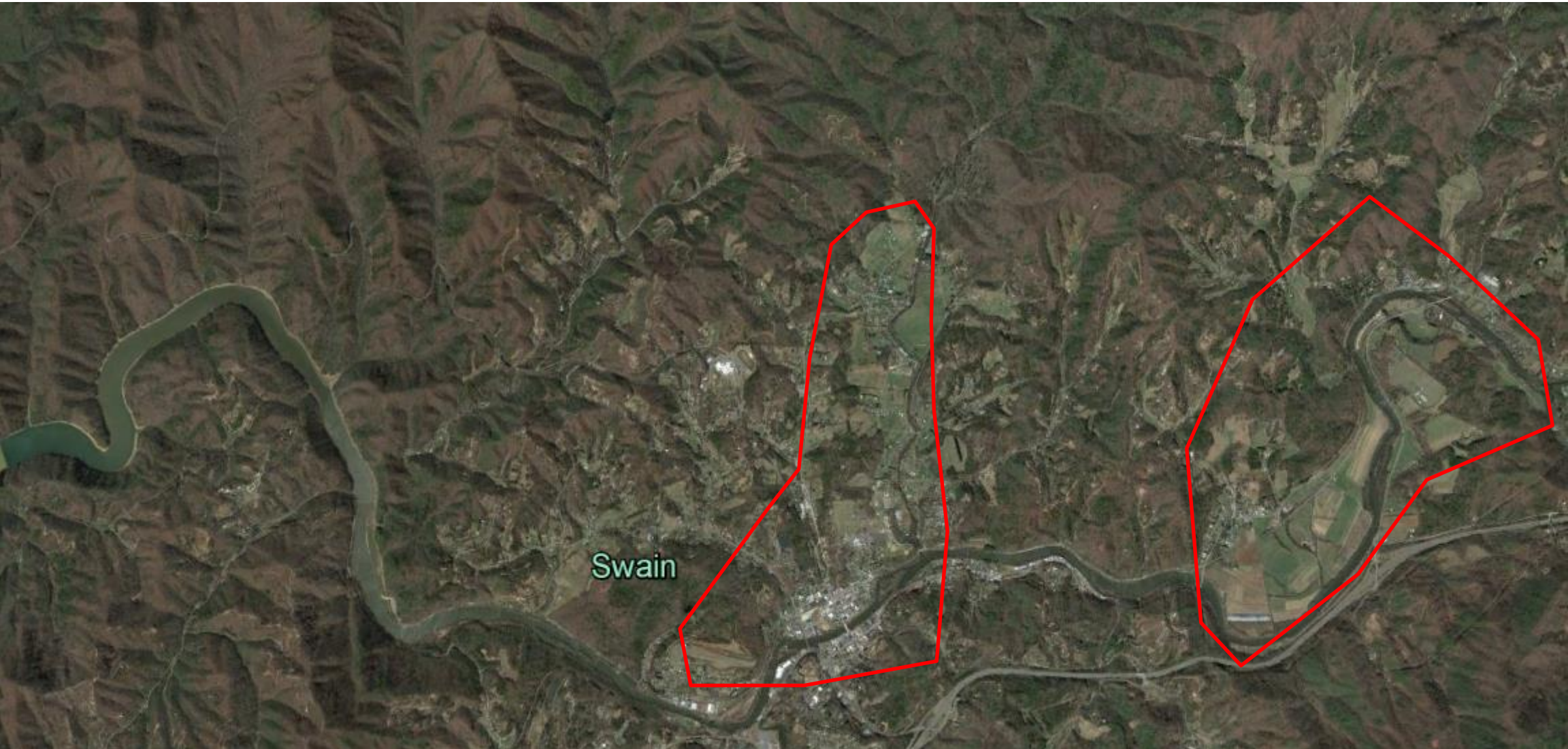
Indian Duk's
Reservation –
now Dillsboro

Segments of USGS Bryson City and Noland Quadrangles

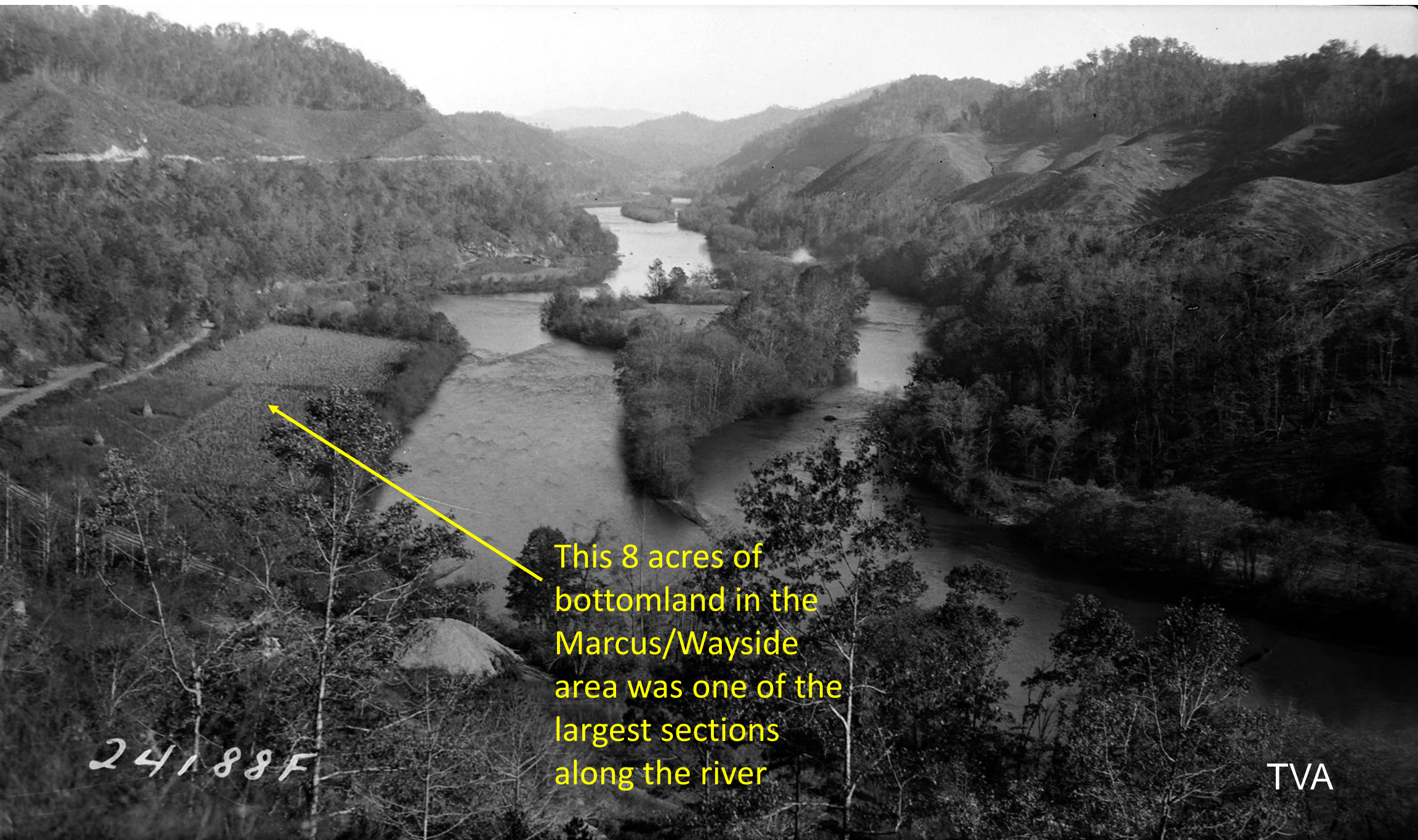


Along the Tuckasegee below Bryson City, there is precious little bottomland until the junction of the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee. Before Fontana, the land along the lower Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee Rivers, all the way to the state line, was gorge-like.

Google Earth view, Bryson City area



Looking up the Little Tennessee River from below Calhoun Island, pre-Fontana

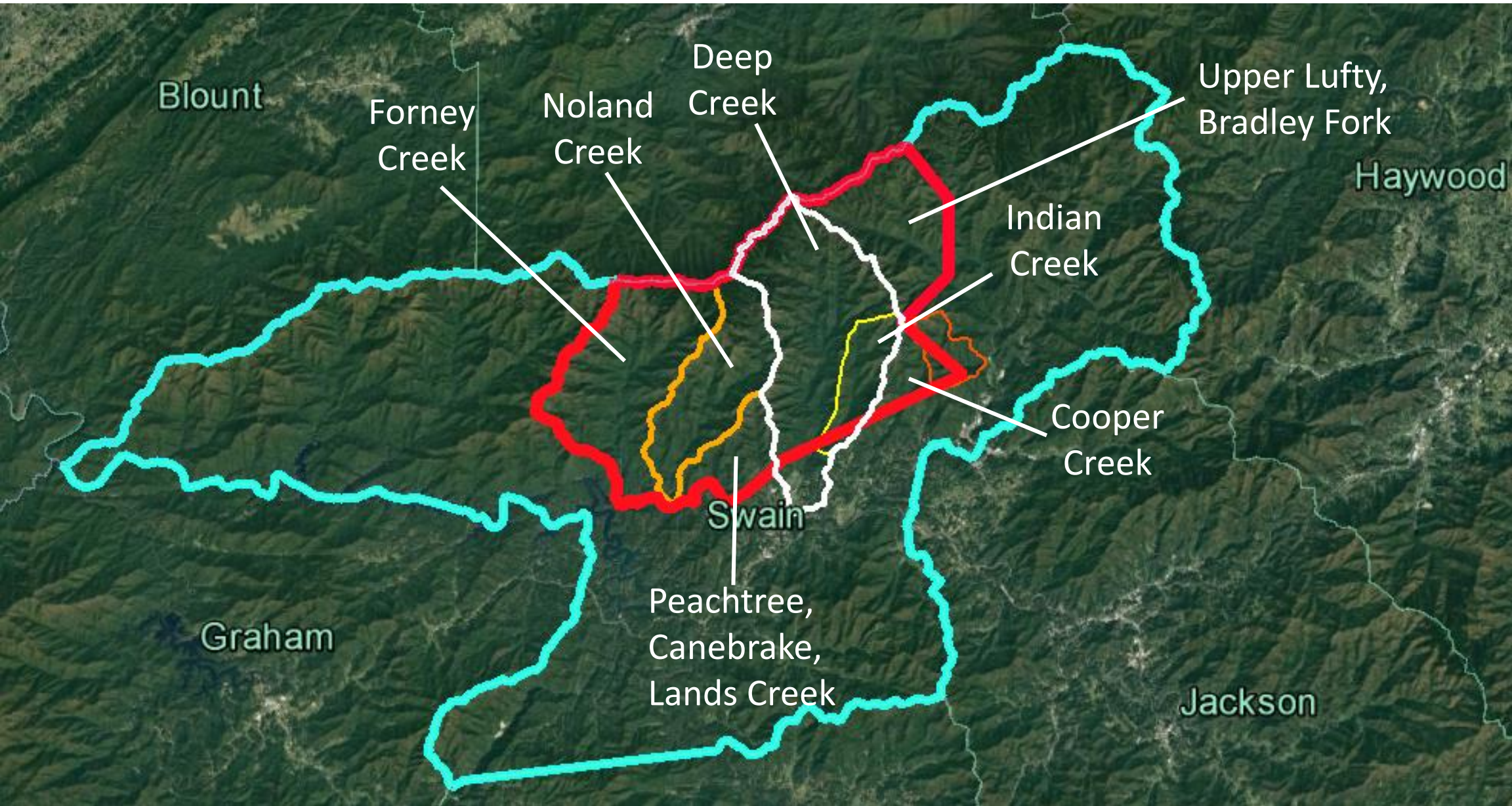


This 8 acres of bottomland in the Marcus/Wayside area was one of the largest sections along the river

24188F

TVA

Domination of land ownership by outsiders began early, and has – if anything – become more severe over time



Google Earth view: **Welch-Love-Battle 1859 50,000 acre land grant, including internal exceptions.**

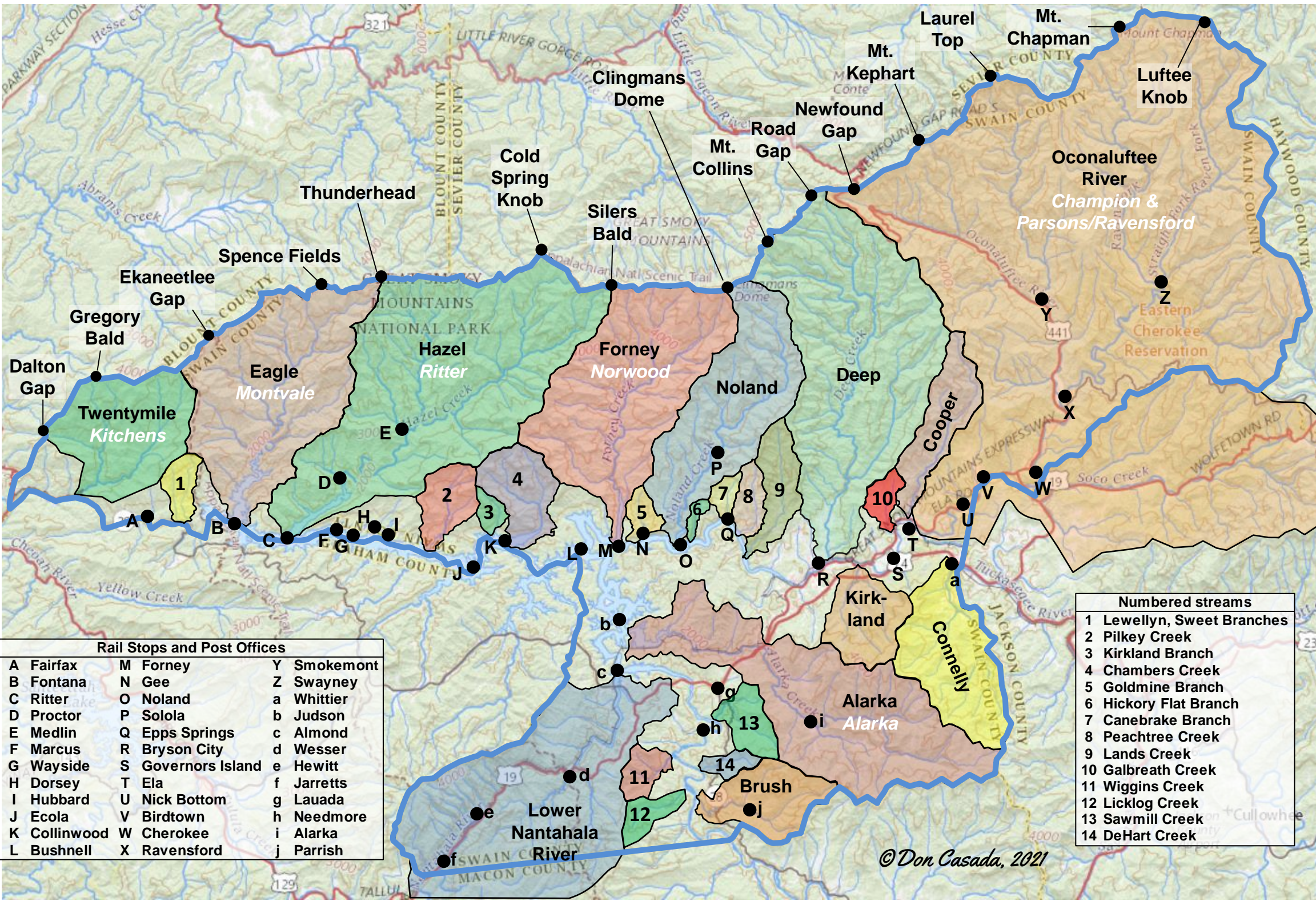
Selected photos from three areas to be used

Deep Creek

Bryson City

Nantahala

Swain County, by drainage, with rail stops and post offices noted



Rail Stops and Post Offices

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| A Fairfax | M Forney | Y Smokemont |
| B Fontana | N Gee | Z Swayney |
| C Ritter | O Noland | a Whittier |
| D Proctor | P Solola | b Judson |
| E Medlin | Q Epps Springs | c Almond |
| F Marcus | R Bryson City | d Wesser |
| G Wayside | S Governors Island | e Hewitt |
| H Dorsey | T Ela | f Jarretts |
| I Hubbard | U Nick Bottom | g Lauada |
| J Ecola | V Birdtown | h Needmore |
| K Collinwood | W Cherokee | i Alarka |
| L Bushnell | X Ravensford | j Parrish |

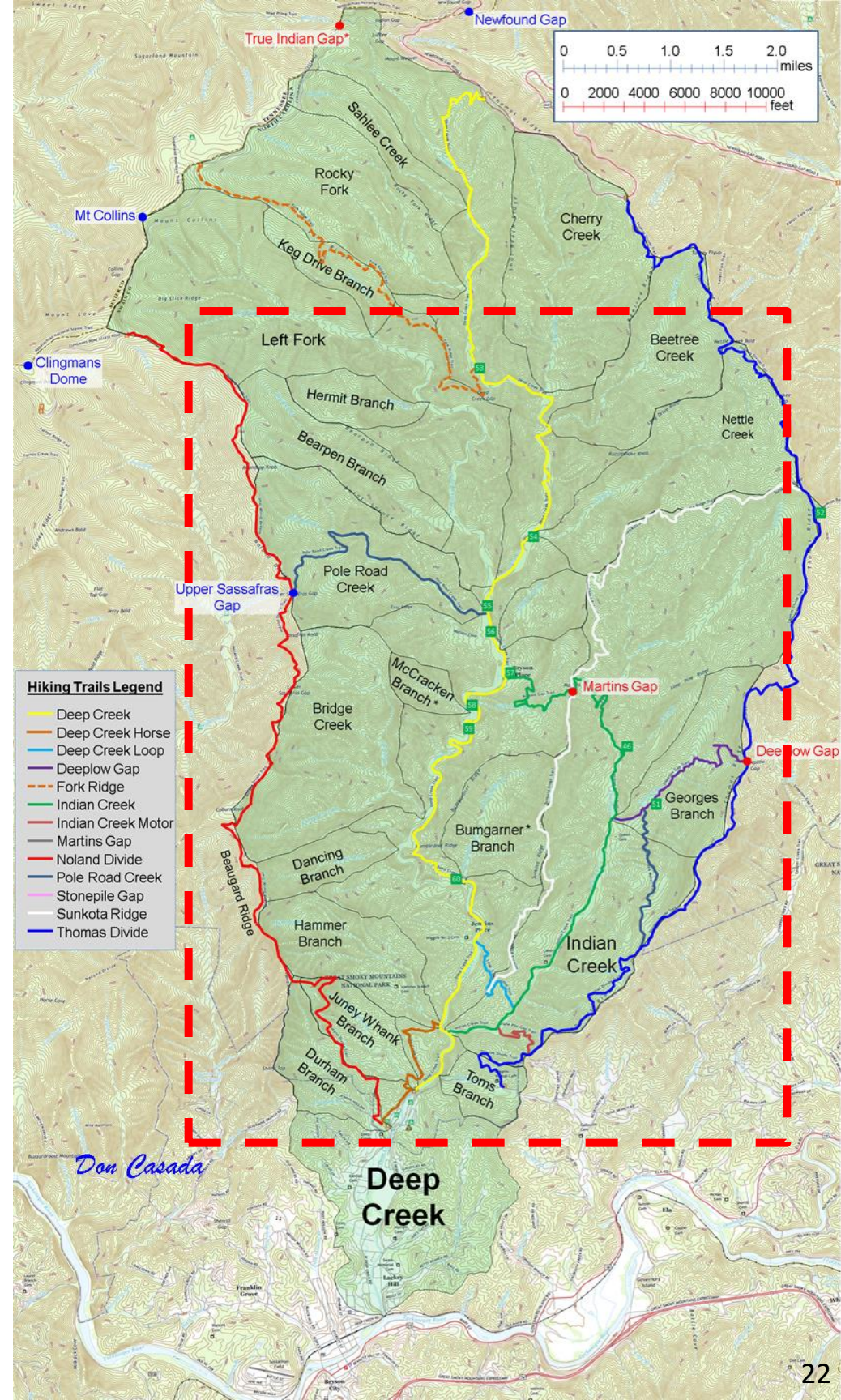
Numbered streams

- 1 Lewellyn, Sweet Branches
- 2 Pilkey Creek
- 3 Kirkland Branch
- 4 Chambers Creek
- 5 Goldmine Branch
- 6 Hickory Flat Branch
- 7 Canebrake Branch
- 8 Peachtree Creek
- 9 Lands Creek
- 10 Galbreath Creek
- 11 Wiggins Creek
- 12 Licklog Creek
- 13 Sawmill Creek
- 14 DeHart Creek

© Don Casada, 2021

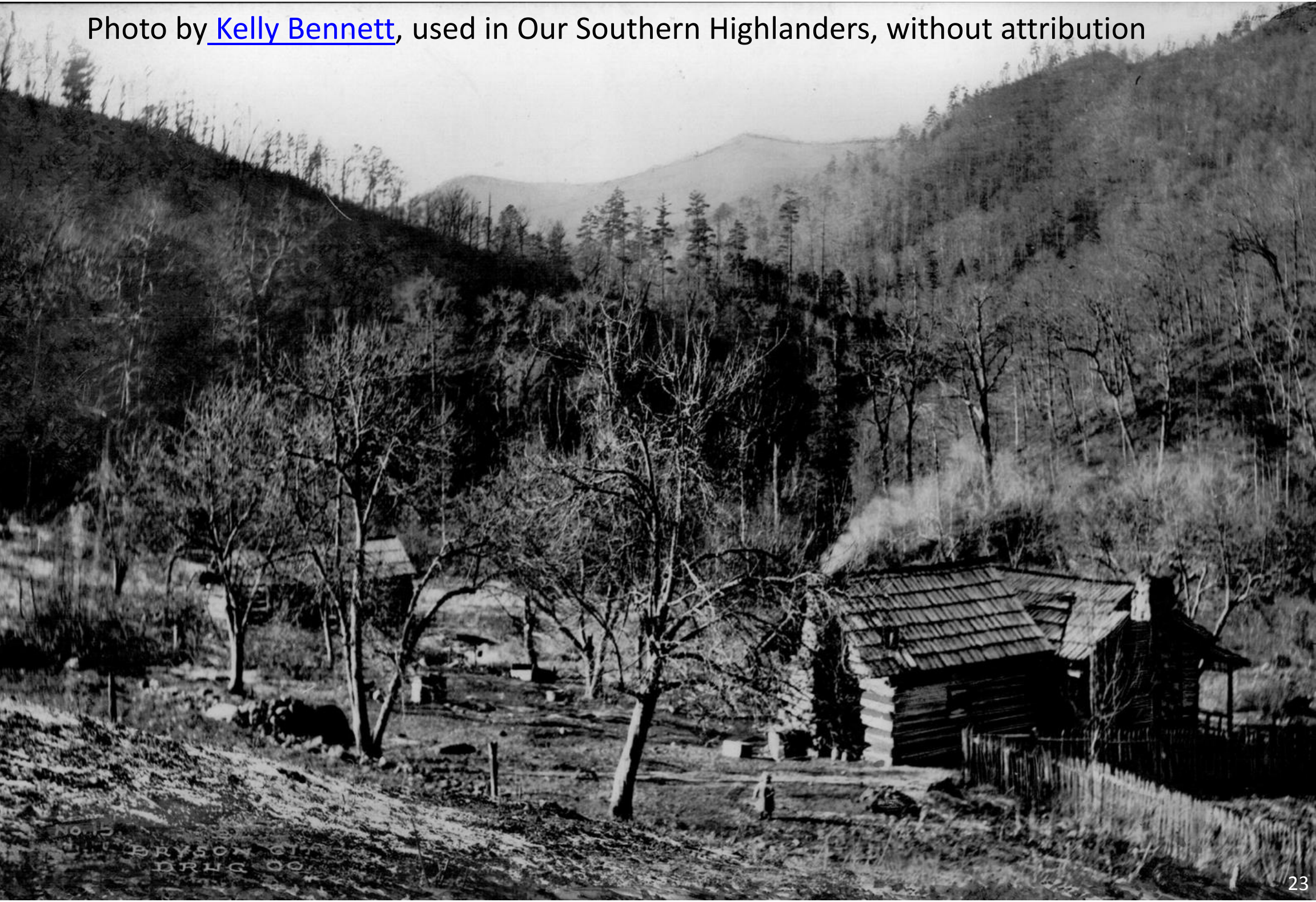
Part 1. Deep Creek

The Deep Creek drainage included a substantial Cherokee presence before and after white settler arrival. It, and the entire area north and east of the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee Rivers became legally available for settlement after the 1819 cession treaty.



Bryson Place Cabin, early 1900s

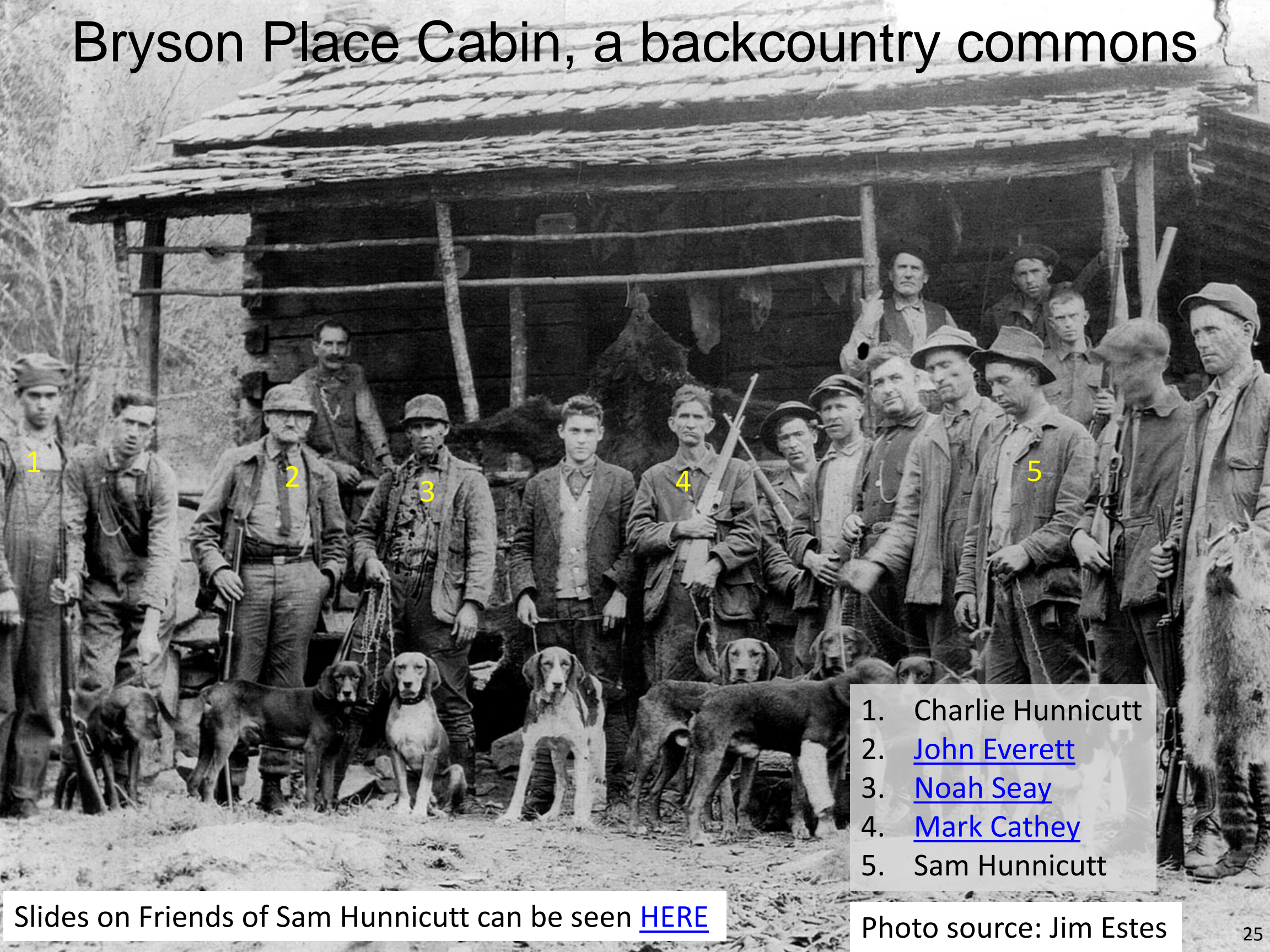
Photo by [Kelly Bennett](#), used in *Our Southern Highlanders*, without attribution



Words from a deed executed the same day that TD Bryson purchased the Bryson lands

1 State of North Carolina County of Swain
Know all men by these presents that we Wm L Hilliard
S L Love and R B A Love as executors of James R Love
and R B A Love and R D Welch for themselves by
their Agent E Everett have this day bargained and
Sold unto Kelly Chis-shi (Indian) (one hundred acres
of Land in the County of Swain and State of North
Carolina on both sides of Deep Creek above and
adjoining tract of land known as the Corn Tassel
place for the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars
paid to said parties of the first part by T D Bryson
the payment whereof is hereby acknowledged
Beginning on two Black Jacks on a ridge 40 poles

Bryson Place Cabin, a backcountry commons



1

2

3

4

5

1. Charlie Hunnicutt
2. [John Everett](#)
3. [Noah Seay](#)
4. [Mark Cathey](#)
5. Sam Hunnicutt

Slides on Friends of Sam Hunnicutt can be seen [HERE](#)

Photo source: Jim Estes

Civil War veteran Alfred W. Parris at the Sylva train depot. When Parris settled on Indian Creek after the war, it was still Jackson County.



Photo source:
Great grandson,
Wade Patterson

(Confederate.)

P 25 N. C.

Alfred Parris

Regt. Co. B. { 25 Regiment
North Carolina Troops.

Appears on a

Roll of Honor*

of the organization named above.

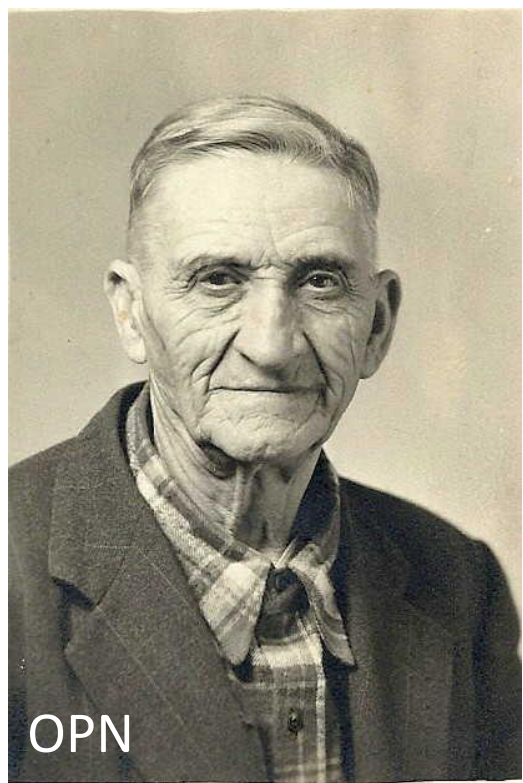
County Jackson

Date of entrance into service May 30, 1861

Age 20; Vol. or Conscript Vol

Died or discharged, and when _____

Remarks: Severely wounded
July 1, 1862 at Malvern
Hill.

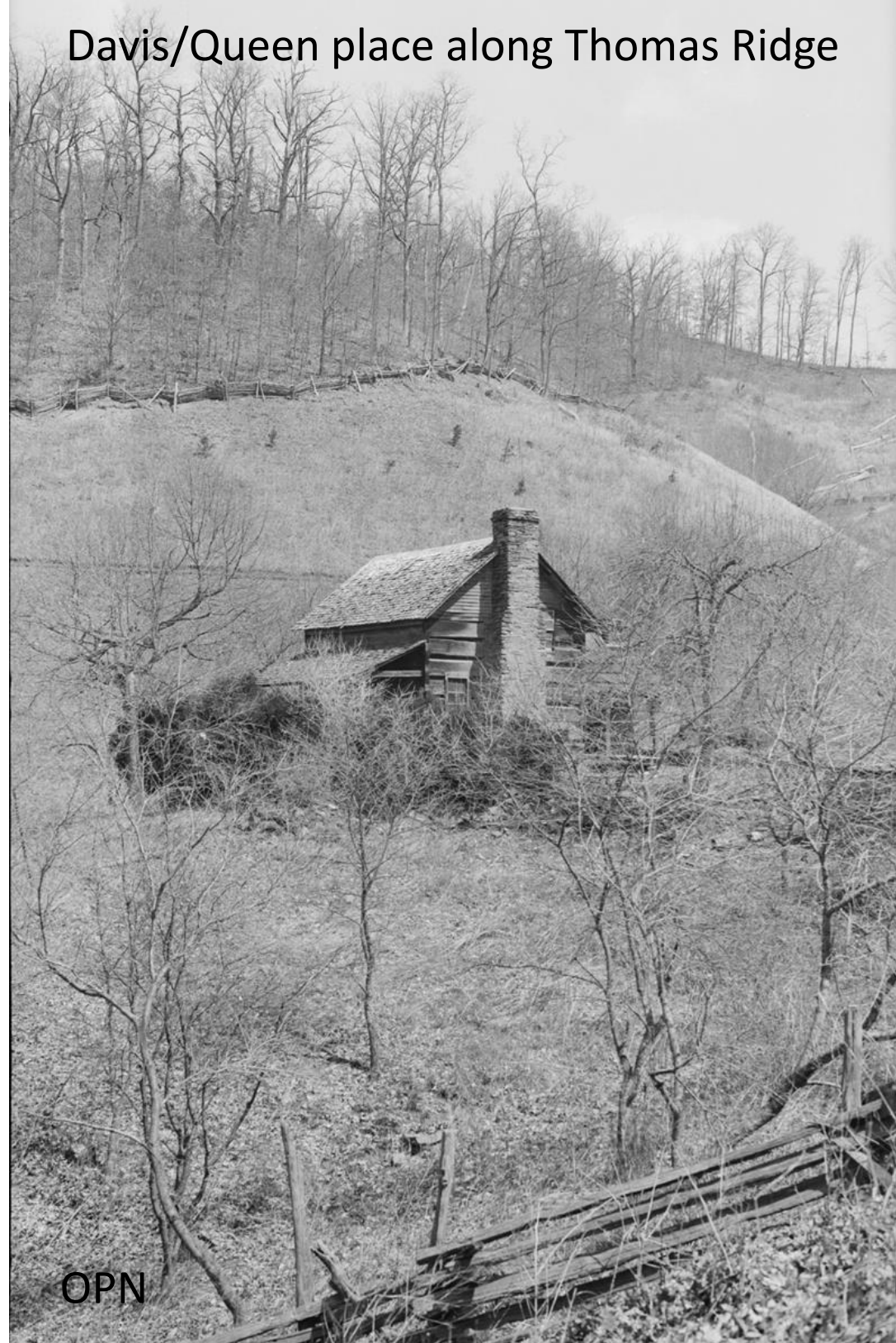


OPN



Ancestry.com

Davis/Queen place along Thomas Ridge



OPN



OPN

The Catheys of Indian Creek

Cathey family at their Indian Creek home: Mark at left; women are Rebecca (McCracken) and Nicie (Beck). Grady is at the right; one of the other men is Sam (grandfather of Sam Ainsworth, photo contributor).



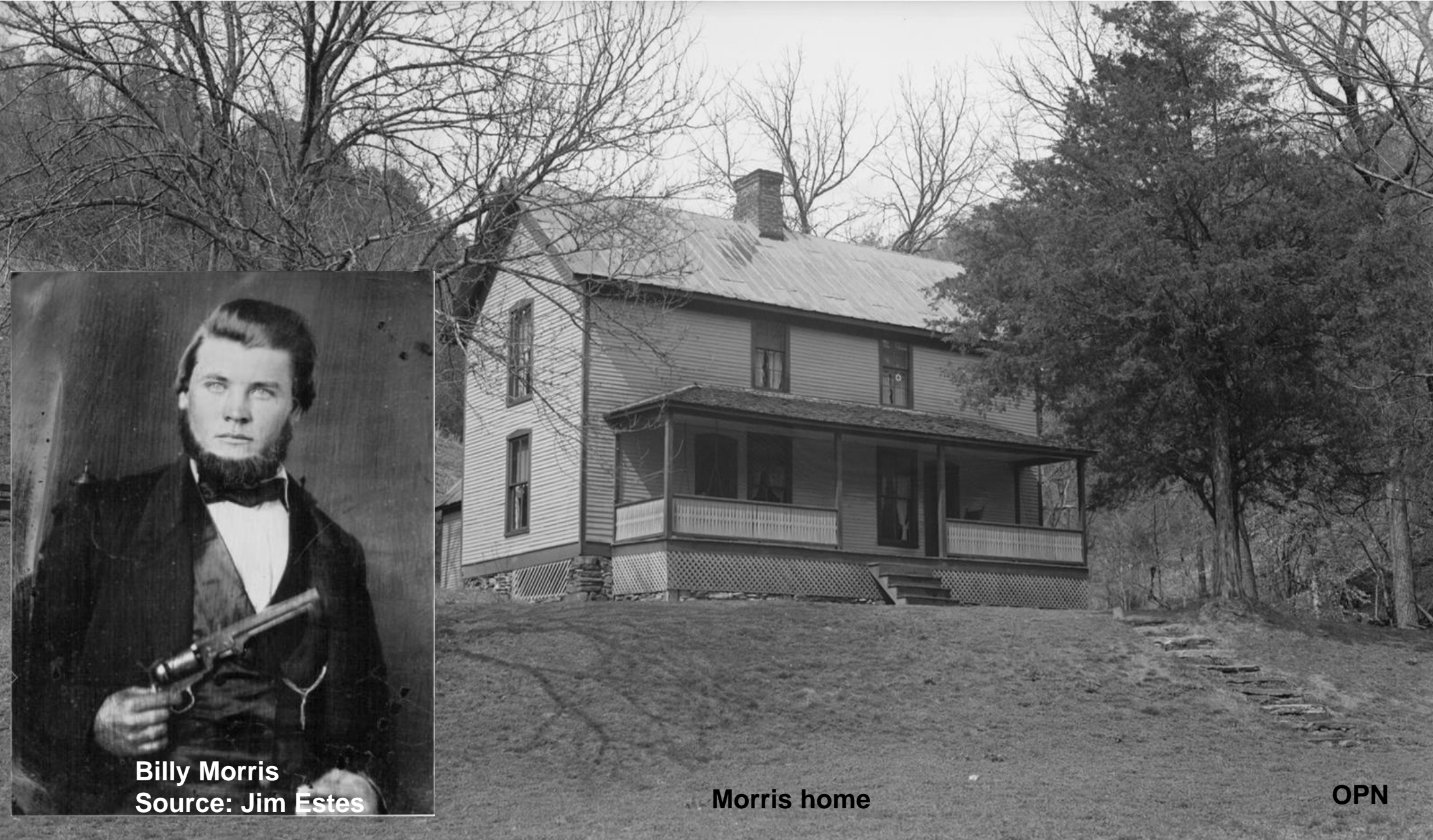
Source: Sam & Linda Ainsworth



Stearns-Grueninger
@ WCU

See more at [Mark Cathey's page](#) on the Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery site

Billy Morris of Deep Creek



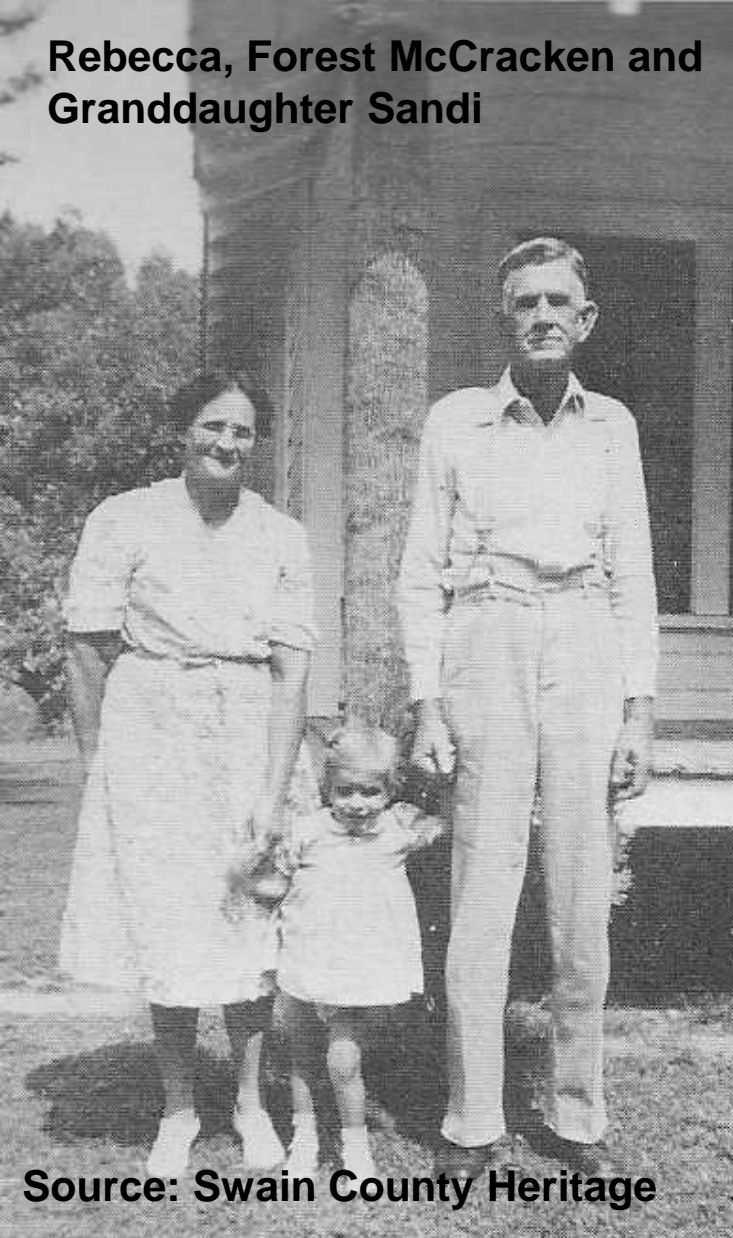
Billy Morris
Source: Jim Estes

Morris home

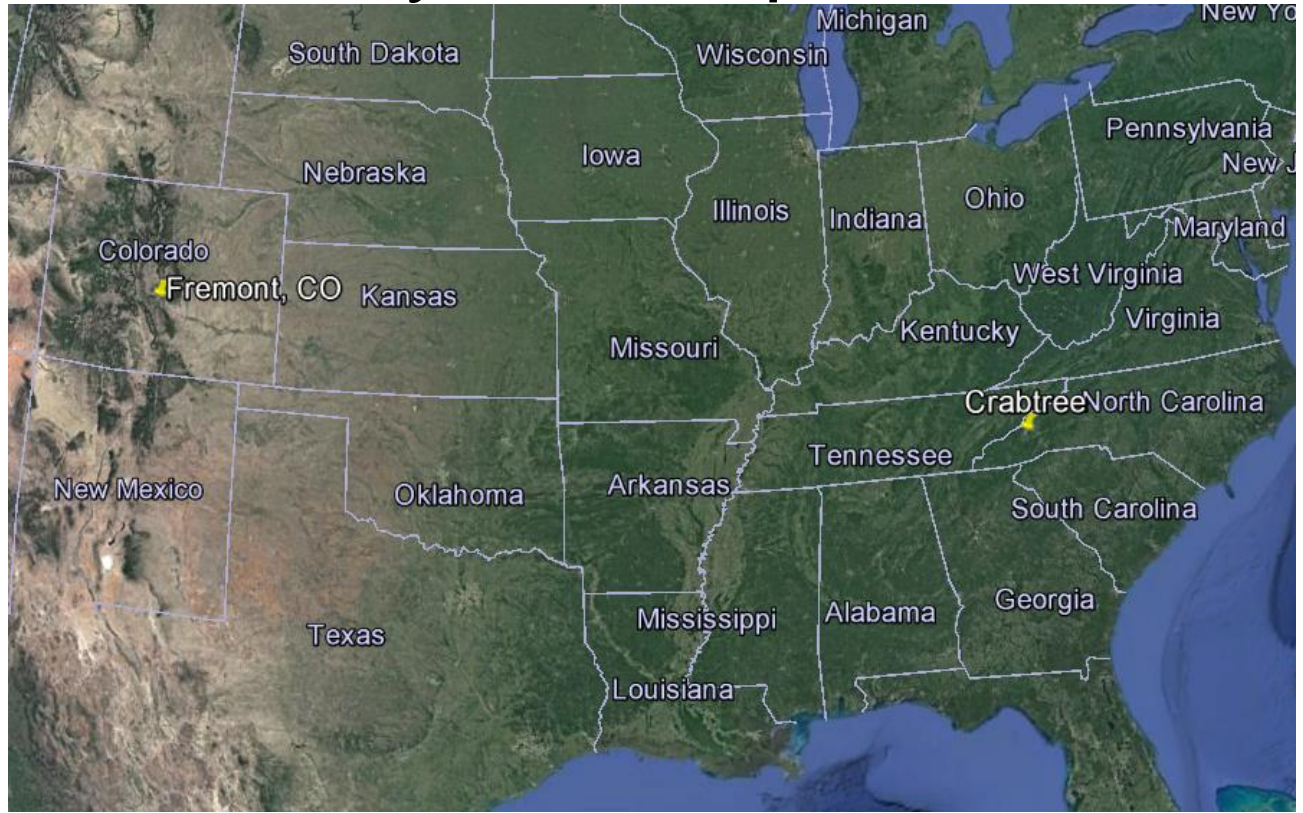
OPN

McCrackens, Morrises & Catheys of Deep & Indian Creek

Rebecca, Forest McCracken and Granddaughter Sandi



Source: Swain County Heritage



Part 2. Bryson City

Everett Street steel bridge, Bryson City, erected ~1892

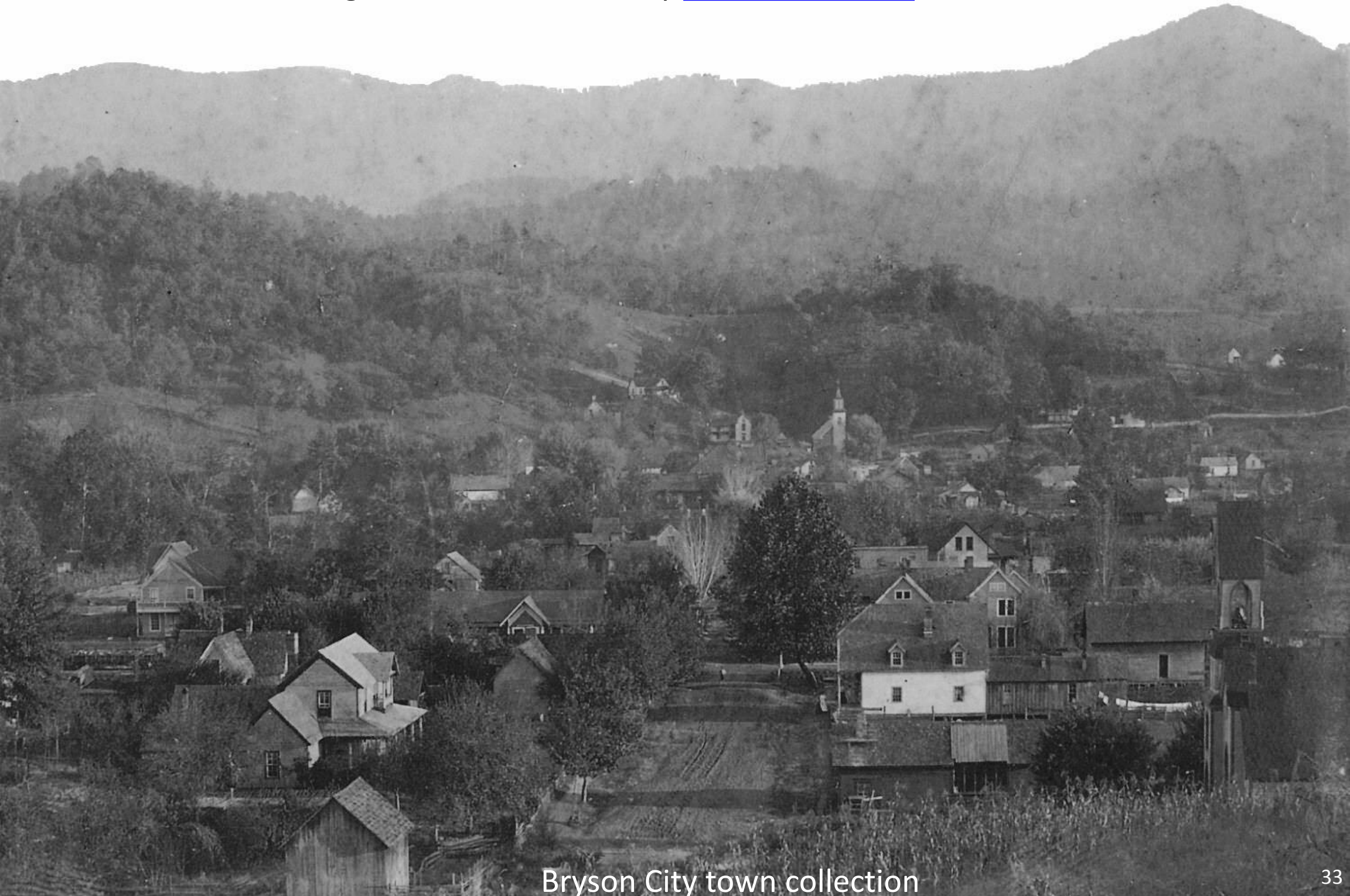


[Frank Fry Collection](#)

Everett Street named for [Epp Everett](#), first sheriff of Swain County

View to the south: Bryson City from Black Hill, ~1900

Photo taken from alongside the house built by [Dr. A.M. Bennett](#)



Meshed images; view from east end of what is now Hospital Hill



From Bryson City Centennial

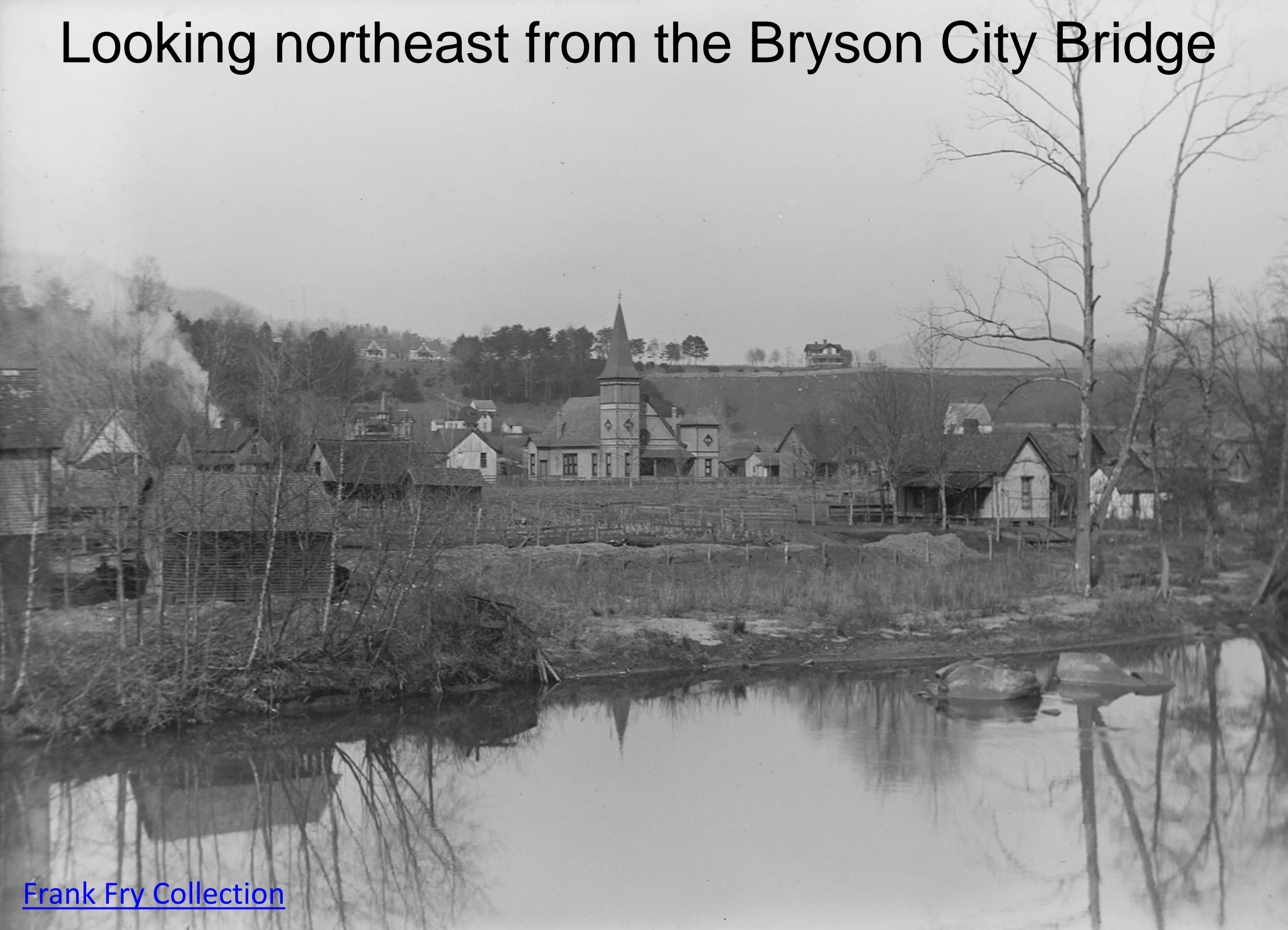
Part of a panorama from the BC Cemetery



Photo courtesy of Jean Douthit

Home #1 belonged to [Bland Wiggins](#) and [Jack Coburn](#). Home 2 belonged to [Sallie Keener](#) and [AJ Franklin](#)

Looking northeast from the Bryson City Bridge



View up Deep Creek from east side of Bennett Hill



Photo from WCU Kephart Collection; personal speculation is that it was taken by [Kelly Bennett](#)

Zoomed view of the rail trestle at the mouth of Deep Creek



Young [IK Stearns](#) below the Bryson mill dam, lower Deep Creek

The dam provided drive flow for the Bryson Mill,
owned by [Judge TD Bryson](#) and [Dr. D.R. Bryson](#)

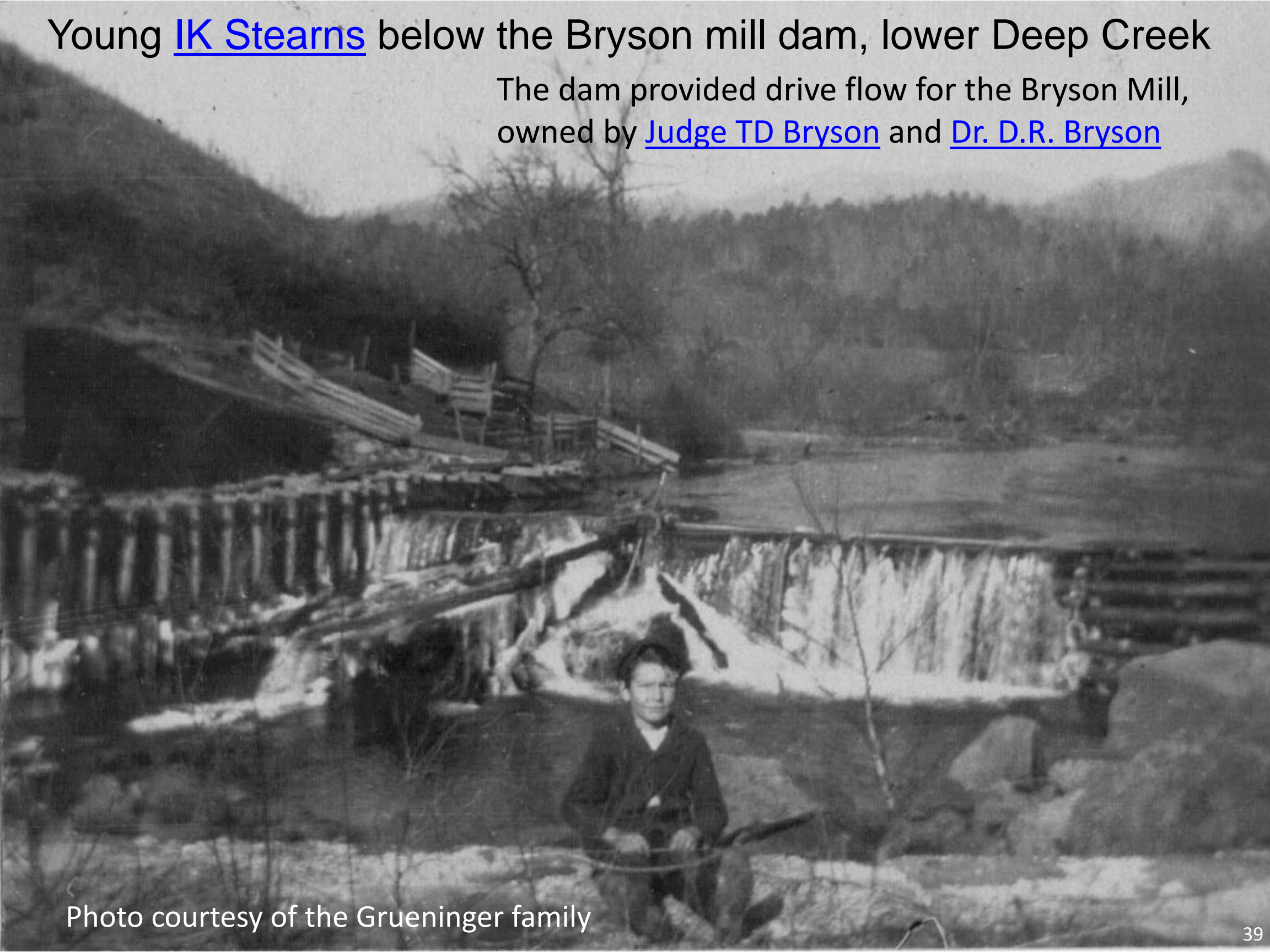


Photo courtesy of the Grueninger family

Bryson City Pump Works

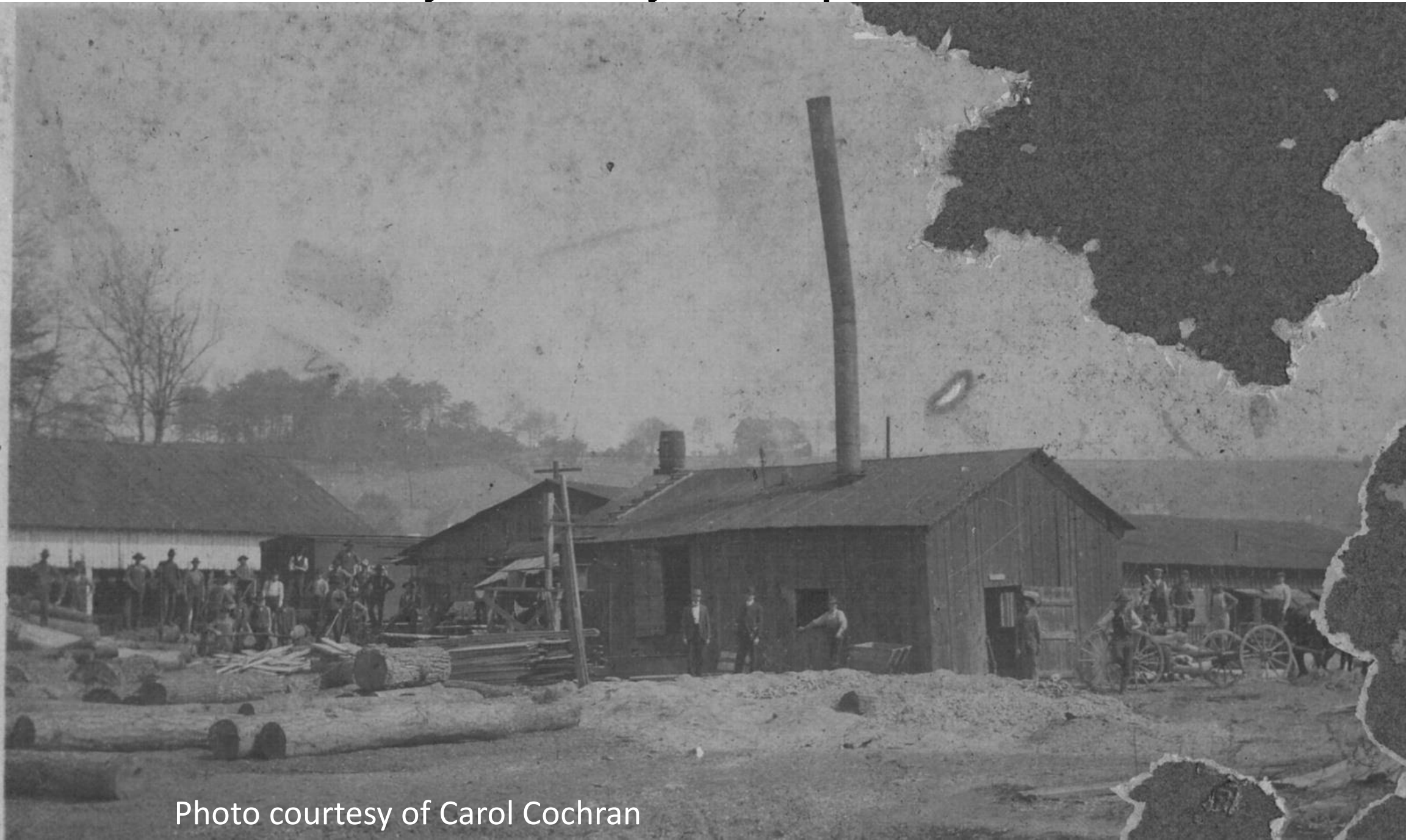


Photo courtesy of Carol Cochran

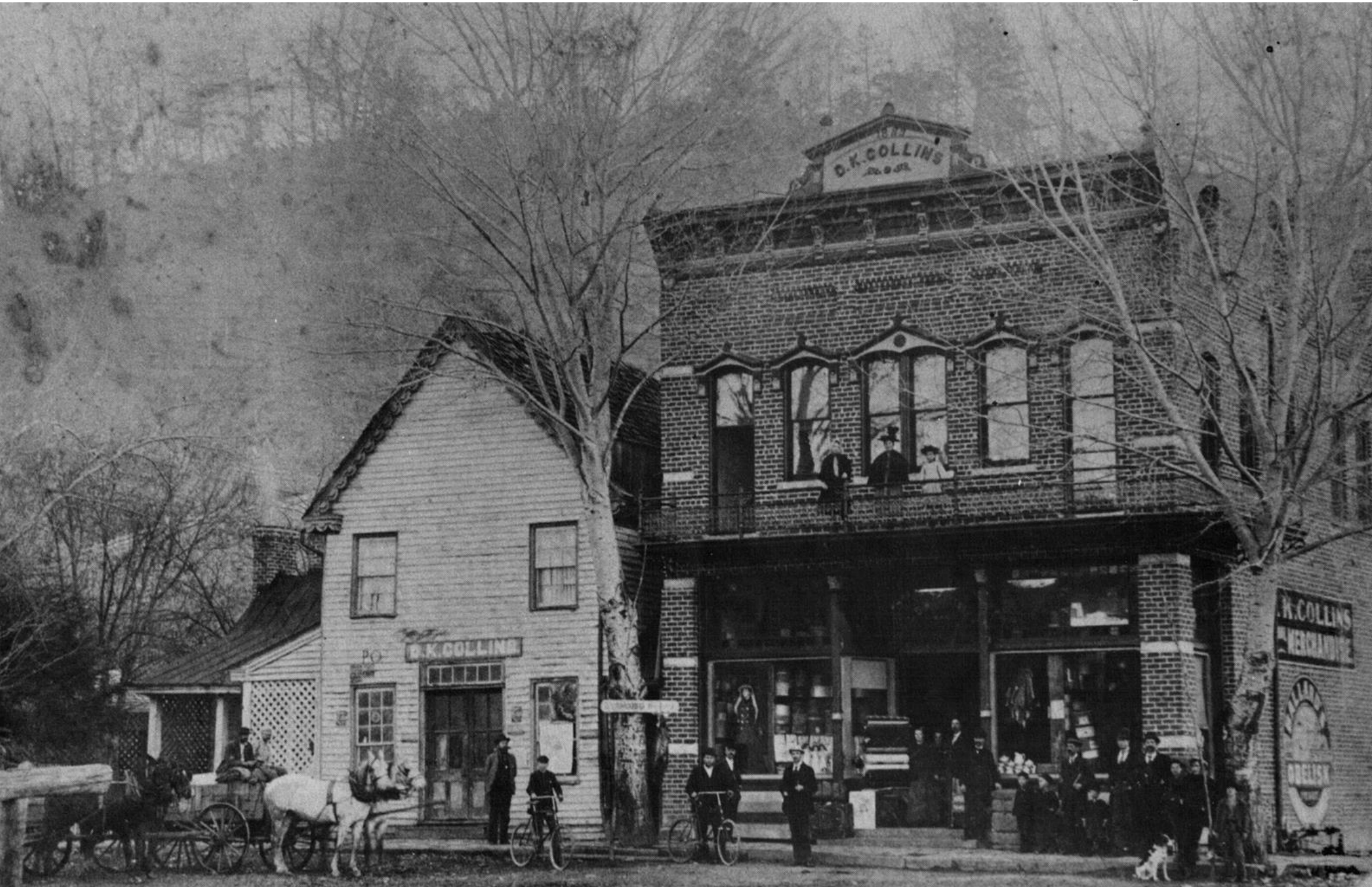
This is representative of industrial operations locally at the end of the 19th, early 20th century. Steam provided all motive power until electricity began to be available ~1912.

Some late 1800's news

Bryson City Times: The Bryson City Manufacturing company shipped 93,000 insulator pins this week. –J.H. Breedlove of Nantahala, brought a carload of pins here last week. (Asheville Citizen, March 16, 1895)



DK Collins store and home – on the square



From Swain County Centennial

David Kimsey Collins

HOMICIDE IN SWAIN COUNTY.—Bob Burchfield was shot dead on last Saturday night, by D. K. Collins, while the former was attempting to enter the corn crib of the latter; rather, when Burchfield found he was caught, he drew his navy and advanced on Collins, when Collins shot him. Burchfield was notoriously the worst character in all this mountain section. He had been once convicted of murder, but finally got out of it on some legal technicality, and had also just served out a term in the Albany Penitentiary for counterfeiting. Mr Collins is recognized by all his acquaintances as a gentleman.—*Asheville Expositor*.

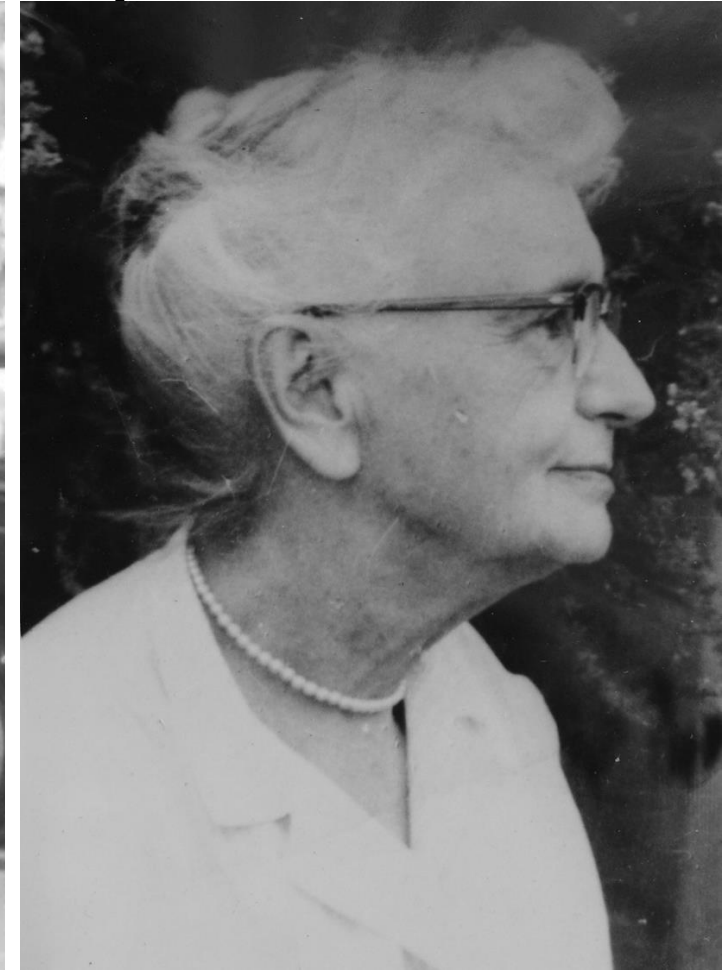


David Kimsey Collins photo
courtesy of g-g granddaughter Dawna Carlton

Outsiders who came, stayed and improved our lot



[Jack Coburn](#)
Kelly Bennett photo



[Marianna Fischer Black](#)
Black family photo

Jeremiah Shank, from Ohio, Jack Coburn, from Michigan, and Marianna Fischer Black of Illinois all came, set down roots and made this a better place. The same cannot be said of the timber companies who came, saw(ed), conquered – and left.

Alma Fry Wheeler double exposure



Frank Fry Collection

Alma Fry Wheeler, [Mattie Pender Fry](#), Emmett



[Frank Fry Collection](#)

Worley cabin at Hewitt



[Frank Fry Collection](#)

Hewitt School



Bryson City School, about 1910



Source: Black family collection

Hewitt School Building



[Frank Fry Collection](#)

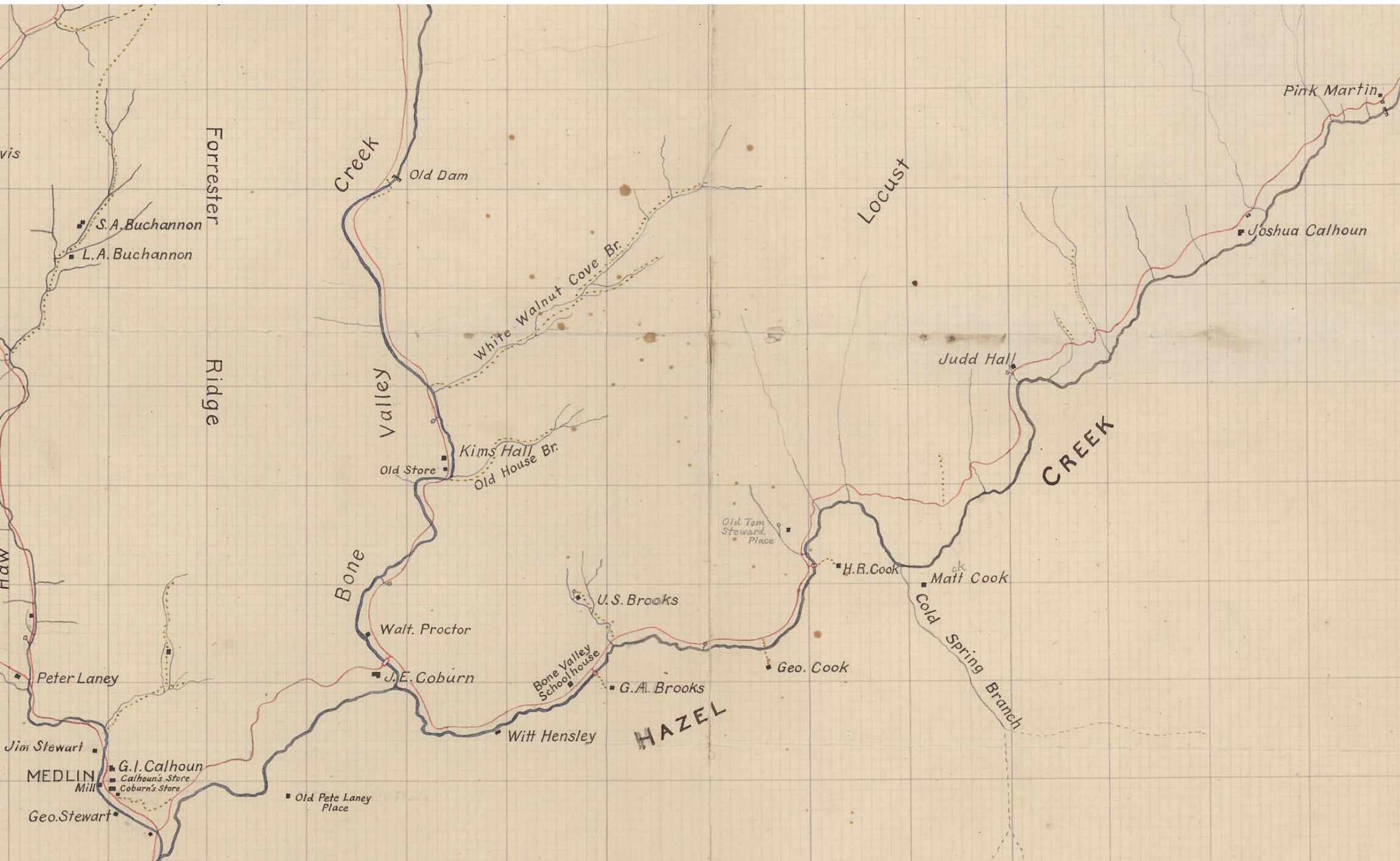
Railroad near Hewitt mine



Part 4. Hazel Creek

On the merits of primary sources

Section of map from [WCU Horace Kephart Collection](#)



These maps are extremely well done, and strongly suggest the hand of a surveyor such as FB Laney, of the NC Geological Survey, who was befriended by [Horace Kephart](#).

Research into the backgrounds of those named on the Hazel Creek area maps is revealing

- The overwhelming majority of those listed on the maps were not natives of Hazel Creek, but came from other areas of Swain County, other counties or other states.
- Many of the men served in the Civil War, and therefore traveled well outside of the area, including to other states.
- At least three men (Sam Buchanan, Pete Laney and Joseph Washington Welch) were taken POW during the Civil War
- The combination of the individual histories combined with the fact that the first white settlers arrived in the 3rd decade of the 19th century puts the lie to proposition in *Our Southern Highlanders* that “The mountain folk still live in the eighteenth century” and “the southern highlanders languished in isolation.”