

Asheville ^[1]

Asheville

by Lisa Gregory

Government & Heritage Library ^[2], 2010.

See also: [Pisgah National Forest](#) ^[3]; [Biltmore House](#); ^[4][Asheville](#) ^[5] (UNC Press)



View of the French Broad River above Asheville (Courtesy North Carolina State Archives)

^[6]Asheville, whose namesake is North Carolina governor [Samuel Ashe](#) ^[7], is located in [Buncombe County](#) ^[8] in Western North Carolina at the edge of [Appalachia](#) ^[9]. Situated in [thick forests](#) ^[10] along the [French Broad](#) and Swannanoa Rivers, the area was heavily traveled and settled by Native Americans, especially the [Cherokee](#) ^[11], before Europeans moved into the area after the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[12]. Originally called "Morristown," it was renamed "Asheville" and incorporated in 1797.

Expansion of the western part of North Carolina, including Asheville, remained slow until the [Buncombe Turnpike](#) ^[13] (1828) and [Western North Carolina Railroad](#) ^[14] (1880) made inroads to that part of the state. The area's remote but increasingly accessible nature contributed to its therapeutic use for those suffering from illnesses like [tuberculosis](#) ^[15].

In 1887, [George Washington Vanderbilt](#) ^[16] commissioned [Biltmore House](#) ^[17], built by [Richard Morris Hunt](#) ^[18] with landscaping designed by [Frederick Law Olmsted](#) ^[19] and surrounded by a sprawling 125,000 acre estate. The [Biltmore Forest School](#) ^[20], begun in part to train forest managers for the estate and nearby Pisgah Forest, was the first forestry school in America. The estate, which contributed greatly to Asheville's standing as a retreat and tourist destination, still draws large numbers of visitors today.



Thomas Wolfe Memorial (Courtesy flickr user larry wfu)

^[21]

In addition to its natural attraction as a destination along the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#) ^[22], Asheville also has a history of drawing artists to the area. The author [Thomas Wolfe](#) ^[23] was born in Asheville in 1900 and described a fictionalized version of Asheville in his first novel, [Look Homeward, Angel](#). ^[24] Other renowned twentieth century authors who found their way to Asheville include [William Sidney Porter \(O. Henry\)](#) ^[25], [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) ^[26], and [Carl Sandburg](#). ^[27] [Black Mountain College](#) ^[28], an experimental college designed to educate the whole student through living in a close-knit community, brought numerous artists, authors, and thinkers of the 20th century to the Asheville area during its brief existence (1933-1957).

With institutions like the [Southern Highland Craft Guild](#) ^[29] and a downtown district that still exhibits much of its original architecture, tourism and hospitality are some of Asheville's [chief industries](#) ^[30] today.

Asheville's estimated population:

1980: 54,022
1990: 61,855
2000: 68,889
2008: 78,313

Asheville's land area (square miles):

1980: 29.09
1990: 34.118
2000: 40.921
2008: 44.230

Data from the NC State Data Center:

References and additional resources:

"Asheville and environs: The built environment." #

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Image credits:

View of the French Broad River above Asheville. nd. OP_110. North Carolina State Archives.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/4821470718/> [6]

Thomas Wolfe home. 2004. Image courtesy of flickr user larry wfu. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/larrywfu/348226736/> [21]

Subjects:

[100 North Carolina Icons](#) [38]

[Cities](#) [39]

Authors:

[Gregory, Lisa](#) [40]

Origin - location:

[Buncombe County](#) [41]

[Asheville](#) [42]

From:

[NCpedia.](#) [43]

30 August 2010 | Gregory, Lisa

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/asheville> [2] <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/pisgah-national-forest> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/biltmore-house> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/asheville> [6] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/4821470718/> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/ashe-samuel> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/buncombe> [9] <https://www.arc.gov/about-the-appalachian-region/> [10] <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/compass/issue9/03distro.htm> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/cherokee> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/exploring-north-carolina-history> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/buncombe-turnpike> [14] https://www.carolana.com/NC/Transportation/railroads/nc_rrs_western_nc.html [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/sanitariums> [16] <https://www.biltmore.com/our-story/estate-timeline/> [17] <https://www.biltmore.com/> [18] <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000278> [19] <https://olmsted.org/> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biltmore-forest-school> [21] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/larrywfu/348226736/> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/blue-ridge-parkway> [23] <https://ncpedia.org/wolfe-thomas> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/wolfe-thomas> [25] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/porter-william-sidney> [26] <http://fscottfitzgeraldsociety.org> [27] <https://poets.org/poet/carl-sandburg> [28] <https://ncpedia.org/black-mountain-college> [29] <https://www.ncpedia.org/southern-highland-craft-guild> [30] <https://www.ashevillechamber.org> [31] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/spotlights/bmc> [32] <https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/141384321> [33] <http://digitalstatelibrary.ncdcr.gov/cdm4/results.php?>

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[34] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov> [35] <https://search.worldcat.org/title/north-carolina-gazetteer-a-dictionary-of-tar-heel-places-and-their-history/oclc/441211592> [36] <https://search.worldcat.org/title/encyclopedia-of-north-carolina/oclc/67727572> [37] <https://archive.org/details/ashevillebuncomb00sond> [38] <https://ncpedia.org/north-carolina-icons> [39] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/cities> [40] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/gregory-lisa> [41] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-8> [42] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-9> [43] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/ncpedia>