



Practitioners and Advocates of Health Care Buncombe County 1865-1930





My name is Kelly Genova Dunbar, and I have worked as a public school teacher for over 14 years in Buncombe County. I currently teach American History at Charles D. Owen High School. I received my MA in American History from Pace University in 2021 and the following research was taken from my masters thesis titled, ***Pioneers in Community Building and Racial Uplift: Black Women in Buncombe County 1865–1930***

My study asks how Black women in Buncombe County from 1865 to 1930 navigated institutionalized racism and marginalization to successfully advocate for and provide social services for their communities.

Their Legacies



“In 2019, 98.6% of women in the United States gave birth to children in hospitals according to the CDC.” – The Museum of African American History and Culture

Nonetheless, these kinds of services were not always available prior to 1930 and even after in rural areas like Buncombe County.

For over a century, African American midwives provided, protected and empowered Black motherhood.

Through the legacies of **Tempie Avery, Mary Stepp Hayden, and Annie Daughtery** we see how Black women intentionally sought out ways to gain influence and become agents of change in a time period of intense racial and gender discrimination.



Before Emancipation

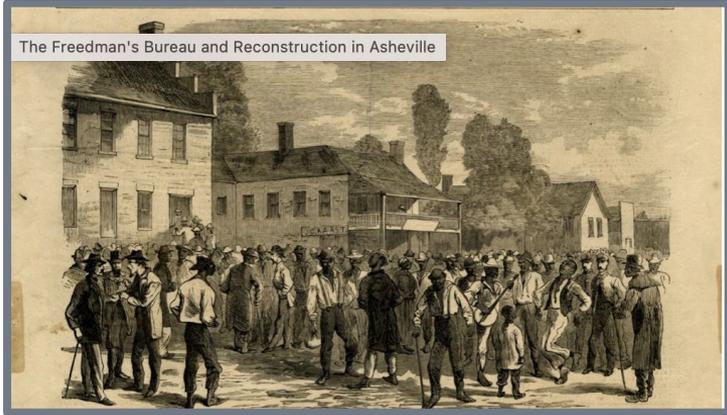


- Before emancipation enslaved midwives provided health services to the enslaved community. Their practices and traditions carried on after 1865.
 - African kinship traditions (collective responsibility)
 - Apprenticeships
 - Matriarchs of the community
 - “Mother” to the children they delivered
 - Often spent weeks before and after supporting the mother and child.

“The Life of Kate: Enslaved Midwife, Fieldworker, Wife & Mother” – mountvernon.org



After 1865



Asheville During Reconstruction, Print Courtesy of Pack Memorial Library

- Fusion politics in Buncombe County 1868 (the development of a biracial Republican party)
 - Steven E. Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains*.
- By 1870 Republicans abandoned the Black electorate and the KKK became active in Buncombe County.
 - Black communities lost political power and therefore access to important services like health care that were provided by state and local governments.
- The role of midwives became very important to the health of rural communities in Buncombe County.

After 1865 (Asheville)



This sketch appeared in the Oct. 7, 1922, edition of The New York Age

- **Mission Hospital** opened in 1885 with 5 beds. Second public hospital in the state.
 - In 1900 a segregated ward opened in the basement of Mission. It had 18 beds for African American patients.
 - No beds for African American women in need of obstetric care.
- **Blue Ridge Hospital and School of Nursing** opened in 1922 with the support of the Asheville African American community.

Tempie Avery

1823?-1917



Photo of Tempie Avery Courtesy of Pack Memorial Library

- Born enslaved and became a famed midwife and herbalist in Asheville.
 - Enslaved to Nicholas Woodfin (largest slave owner in Buncombe County)
 - Known by white society as “Mammie” she was self employed and acquired her own land in 1868. (Montford Community Center)
 - In the Asheville Directory she is listed as one of three “sick nurses”
 - Letters from Eliza Woodfin Holland recall her relationship with Ms. Avery.
 - Served as a liaison between the white and Black communities until her death in 1917.

After 1865 (Swannanoa)



Photo Courtesy of Swannanoa Valley Museum. Visible in the background is the George Washington Stepp House built in 1904. (Currently Louisa's Kitchen)

- In rural Swannanoa medical care was difficult to obtain for poor whites and African Americans.
 - No local hospital
 - Doctors only treated white patients and were expensive
- Midwives became the birthers and healers that treated the Black community and poor whites.



Mary Stepp Hayden

1858-1956

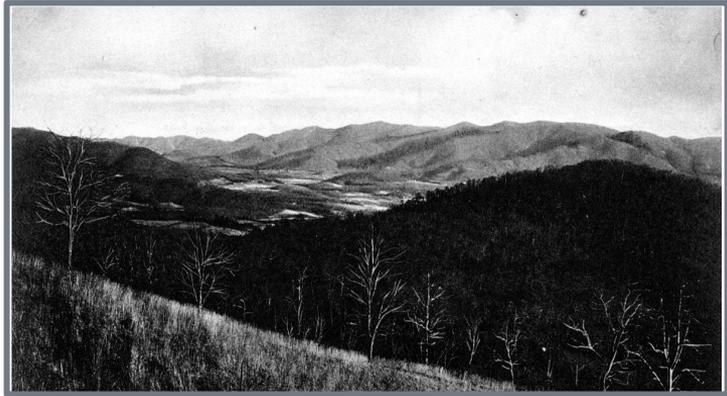


Photo Courtesy of Swannanoa Valley Museum

- The Swannanoa Valley had an economy based on small farming and a few hotels. It did not boast a plantation economy but slavery was still prevalent.
- **Mary Stepp Hayden** remembered the Emancipation Proclamation being read to her from the Stepp Plantation in 1863.
 - However like many enslaved people living in the region, many were denied their freedom even after its passage.
 - Mary who was five at the time the war ended remembered, “Mammy took us and left that place.”

Mary Stepp Hayden

1858-1956



Mary Hayden, about 1919, with her daughter-in-law Hattie Payne Burnette and two of her oldest grandchildren, Lorenzo and infant Juanita. Courtesy Mary O. Burnette.

- **Mary Othella Burnette** in her memoir, *Lige of the Black Walnut Tree* published in 2021 reflected on the life of her grandmother Hannah as a newly freed slave.
 - [She] had to face a “hostile unknown world of independence empty handed.”
 - **Hannah Stepp**, Mary Hayden’s mother was a skilled midwife and healer and was able to financially support their family after they left the Stepp Plantation. Hannah passed her skills onto her daughter Mary.



Mary Stepp Hayden

1858-1956



- By the 1880s, **Mary Stepp Hayden** was known as “Aunt Mary Hayden” to the community.
 - Poor whites and Blacks relied on her medical services and often used a barter system as payment.
 - Hayden was an essential part of crafting a self-reliant community in Swannanoa.
 - By 1900 Swannanoa had several white doctors in the valley, but Hayden made calls to those who couldn’t afford a doctor or get one in time.

I understood that people who were ignored by the government and had no protection from the laws of the land had to survive by looking out for one another. – Mary Othella Burnette

Siloam, Greene County, Ga. (vicinity). Midwife going on a call, carrying her kit, c. 1941. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Annie Daugherty

1888-1959

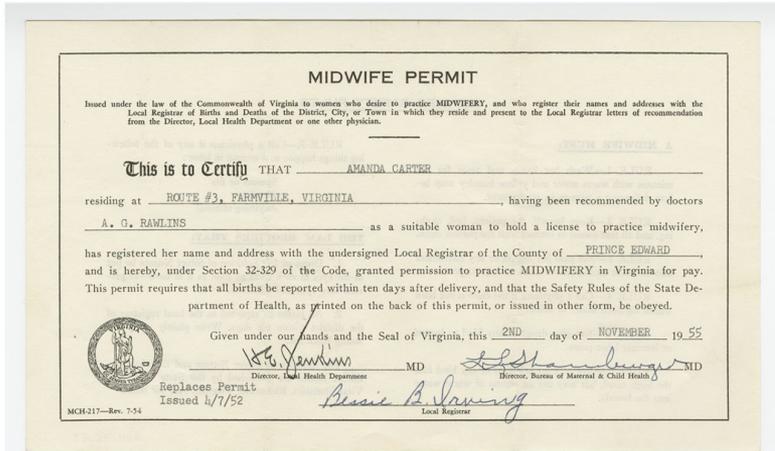


Photo of Annie Daugherty Courtesy of Anne Chesky Smith and the Swannanoa Valley Museum

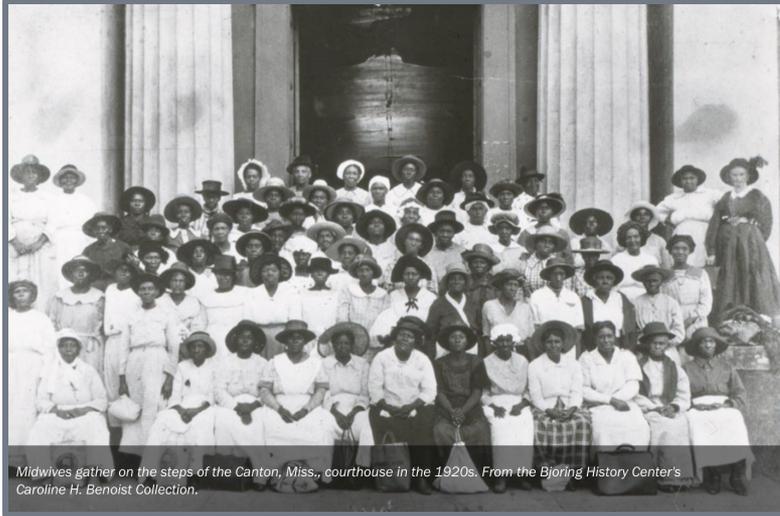
- **Annie Morehead** married **Benjamin Daugherty** in 1900 and shortly after began her practice of providing vital care to mothers in the Swannanoa community.
- Her granddaughter describes her as a midwife without bias dedicated to her practice.
 - *“Getting up in the middle of the night in snowstorms, riding mules...”*
- She lived in High Top in Black Mountain and was a Sunday School teacher. Her work connecting her to the community and its development.

Community Health Care Challenged

- By 1922 there were more Black doctors and nurses living in Asheville.
 - 15,000 African Americans living in Buncombe County
- Midwives helped to fill the gaps in care
 - Childbirth death rates studies in 1920 unfairly targeted midwives.
 - Sheppard –Towner Maternity Act and Infancy Protection Act passed in 1921.
 - Imposed strict guidelines on lay midwives and required licensing programs to be set up.



Community Health Care Challenged



- Licensing programs were restricted to those that were “elderly or unfit” and were places where racism prevailed.
- Still Mary Hayden and Annie Daugherty continued to fill a critical role in their communities.
- State outlawed the use of herbs and poultices for treating illness.



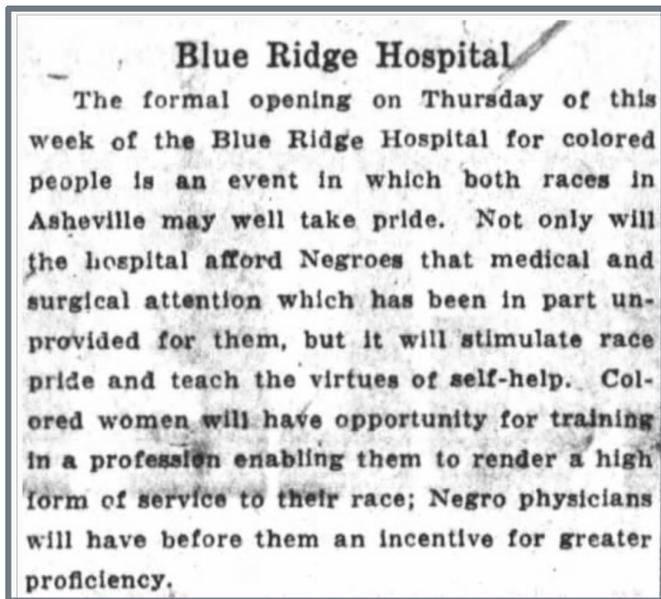
Continued Perseverance 1900-1930



Asheville Citizen-Times, Asheville, North Carolina
15 Jan 1928, Sun • Page 32

- Challenges to midwifery and the continued lack of access to proper health care led to the formation of female led Black self-help organizations and interracial cooperation.
 - “Loyal Blue Club” and Hospital Guild
 - “National Negro Health Week”
- **The Blue Ridge Hospital and School of Nursing** opened in 1922 and was funded entirely by the Black community.

Continued Perseverance 1900-1930



Asheville Citizen-Times, Asheville, North Carolina 25 Sep 1922, Mon •
Page 4

Heritage of Black Highlanders Collection, UNC-Asheville
Ramsey Library Ruby Woodbury Hilton



“As a rule the colored nurse is better qualified by nature to minister her own race, with her there can be no thought of prejudice.”

–Nurse Ruby Woodbury – Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Nursing School

- The hospital and school of nursing became a liaison between the Black community and the white dominated field of medicine.



Continued Perseverance 1900-1930



Mary Hayden, 84, with her granddaughter, Mary O. Burnette, about 1942 and two of Hayden's great-grandchildren. Courtesy Mary O. Burnette. Swannanoa Valley Museum

- Black professionals and lay midwives were challenged by attempts to halt the changing racial hierarchy.
 - Licensing Boards and bias towards lay midwives
 - Funding for hospitals and nursing schools.
 - Reformers targeted midwives for high infant mortality rates
 - Lay midwifery outlawed by 1970
- Blue Ridge Hospital and School of Nursing closed in 1930.
- Mary Hayden and Annie Daugherty continued to serve their communities.
 - **Mary Hayden** became the first African American registered midwife with the Buncombe County Health Department.
 - **Annie Daugherty** continued to practice despite racial and economic barriers.