



Richard D. Starnes. *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. xiv + 240 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1462-0.



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The New South Reaches into the Mountains

Over the past ten years or so a generation of historians has emerged that is helping present southern history in a more comprehensive context by tying highland areas of the South, either neglected by historians or treated solely within Appalachian historiography, to southern historiography. While building on the work of more established historians such as John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney, they are also beginning to break out on their own. Among them is Richard D. Starnes, whose *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* was published by University of Alabama Press as part of its Modern South series.

Before the publication of *Creating the Land of the Sky*, Starnes had already begun to establish himself among scholars examining southern identity and tourism.[1] In the process of doing so, Starnes became one of the first scholars to tie mountain North Carolina to the post-Reconstruction “New South” most famously touted by Henry Grady in his speeches and in the pages of the Atlanta Constitution.

Creating the Land of the Sky develops a detailed argument that tourism boosters in Asheville and other moun-

tain North Carolina towns largely set the agenda for the development of mountain counties after the terminus of the long-awaited Western North Carolina Railroad finally crested the Blue Ridge Mountains in the early 1880s. The work is both topical and chronological. Much of the book centers on Asheville, which appears to have been a town living in perpetual boosterism after the Civil War. Starnes sets the stage for his work with an overview of antebellum tourism in the mountains. He shows briefly how lowland southerners, escaping heat and disease, went to the North Carolina mountains and how they helped to create a resort industry that began to overshadow establishments built to accommodate drovers taking livestock south through the mountains on the Buncombe Turnpike. With this backdrop, Starnes is able to build upon the point made by previous scholars of antebellum Appalachia that the region had cultural and economic ties to the lowland South. He is also able to tie antebellum scholarship to the post-Civil War period, where he traces the growth of interest in a new industrialized South. For mountain North Carolina, Starnes argues that the arrival of rail service in Asheville brought about a strong movement to revitalize a tourism

industry interrupted by the Civil War. Even before railroad service came to Asheville, such individuals as druggist Edward J. Aston and others were working during the 1870s to bring in tuberculosis patients and other sufferers of respiratory ailments, touting the area's scenery and climate. At the same time, as vacations became increasingly popular nationwide, areas around Asheville saw a large influx of travelers arrive from the North and the South.

People also came to build summer homes. A turning point in the area's economy came when George Vanderbilt decided to build the Biltmore Estate outside Asheville in the 1890s. Starnes sets up the conflict between industry and tourism, arguing that mountain North Carolinians deliberately worked to bring in outside visitors who would buy land to develop, mine or log. The visitors came and sometimes stayed, but the growth of industry caused in part by tourism led to differing opinions over the appropriate economic future for the area.

As they sought to develop mountain North Carolina, boosters had to market the area to outsiders. Starnes builds an interesting dichotomy between "image and infrastructure," suggesting that such people as novelist Frances Fisher Tiernan and photographer Thomas H. Lindsay helped popularize the term "Land of the Sky" by presenting the mountains as a place of pristine beauty and rough-hewn rural folk contrasted with Asheville, a small piece of civilization amid the wilderness. He gives special importance to Tiernan's novel *Land of the Sky*, which originally appeared in serial form in 1875. Starnes argues that because prominent mountain North Carolinians took Tiernan's title as their own, in systematically trying to build the tourism industry, Tiernan's work had more to do with New South boosterism than with the "construction" of Appalachia. As these images made their way into the early twentieth-century and the Progressive Era, boosters were working to make sure that visitors had up-to-date accommodations in which to retire at night as well as roads that would allow them to travel there easily. Asheville got a more modern water works and electric streetcars. One highlight of this transition was the completion, in 1913, of the Grove Park Inn, the exclusive resort that also helped draw people with fewer means to the area. Another benchmark was the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Meanwhile, local leaders in Asheville worked to discourage the image of Asheville as a center for convalescents, effectively shutting down sanitariums.

A running theme in Starnes's work is that leaders in Asheville and other mountain areas often cared more about a growing tourist trade than they did about their own residents. As more and more people came to the mountains, and roads and parks were being built or set aside to serve them, residents and the timber industry were crowded off of the land, and many mountain residents were forced to find new homes and jobs. Starnes also notes that cultural changes and problems came to the area over the course of the twentieth century as crime rose and laws were changed to accommodate visitors.

Even though Asheville pushed itself toward bankruptcy and the Great Depression hit, the city still centered on tourism as the way out of its mess. Starnes shows how leaders in mountain counties pushed for state and federal support, a move that led to projects such as the Blue Ridge Parkway; yet in the end, these projects left the leaders unsatisfied. After World War II, mountain residents began more organized efforts to develop the tourism industry, eventually building theme parks to attract visitors they thought might not come for the scenic location alone. Starnes wraps up his argument with an overview of how demand for mountain crafts and glimpses of homegrown culture actually led to the creation of distortions about how mountain whites and Cherokees actually lived during the nineteenth century.

One interesting chapter deals with the development of the retreats Lake Junaluska, Montreat, and Ridgecrest as havens that steered away from the more worldly pursuits drawing people to Asheville and other areas. The chapter, along with the rest of the work, shows the large span of time and variety of subjects that Starnes had to cover. He uses a wide variety of sources creatively, culling hotel registers, promotional pamphlets, photographs, and period works. Additionally, he uses a good range of secondary sources covering southern and Appalachian history. A bibliographic essay at the end of the book helps center it within the pertinent literature.

One problem with the work is that mountain residents adversely affected by the tourism industry rarely come out of the woodwork until the final chapter. (Such information is often hard to find in the extant sources.) His final chapter on the effects of tourism on mountain North Carolina's longtime residents and on culture as a whole helps remedy this problem with discussions of the Cherokees and of the demographics of white and African American service workers, which end the work on a strong note.

A few other items may have provided nice touches.

Since some of the early portions of his work were spent addressing the growing tension between industrialists and tourism boosters over the future of mountain North Carolina's economy, a more detailed discussion of the climax of those tensions would have been welcome (though Starnes does provide some information about the timber industry). His discussion of the path to racial integration at faith-based retreats, such as Montreat, might have been juxtaposed with integration in the surrounding area to show that Montreat was ahead of the curve in mountain counties, which held on to segregation well into the 1960s. These critiques should not diminish the fact that *Creating the Land of the Sky* is a work that breaks new ground in tying post-Civil War mountain North Carolina to the New South. Starnes helps expand our knowledge

of New South boosterism throughout the South by placing hotels and resorts alongside the factories and staple-crop farms with which the term is usually associated. His work is a welcome contribution to western North Carolina history and other scholarship that bridges the historiographical gap between Appalachia and the South.

Note

[1]. See the introduction to Richard D. Starnes, ed., *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 1-14; and Richard D. Starnes, "The Stirring Strains of Dixie': The Civil War and Southern Identity in Haywood County, North Carolina" *North Carolina Historical Review* 74 (July 1997), 237-259.

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