

Historical Society Visits "Trail Branch"

History Reviewed Widespread interest in the old community of "Trail Branch," on Lower Sandy Mush Creek, resulted in a record attendance at the quarterly meeting of the Madison County Historical Society on Saturday. The meeting was held on the spacious front porch of the house built in the 1880's by Jack Gudger as a private home, and is located within calling distance of the site of the famous Gudger's Mill, the store, blacksmith shop and post office. Dr. and Mrs. Harry Ditmore accompanied guests throughout the house. Mrs. Ditmore is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Ramsey who purchased the property from the Gudgers in 1903. Many of the original furnishings remain, along with heirloom spreads, crochet work, a quilt pieced with velvet and two family portraits. The house was decorated throughout with the kind of flowers and plants known and grown in all country gardens. Of special interest in the family sitting room is a fireplace made from soapstone quarried on the same farm. Facts about the illustrious Jack Gudger family were contributed by Joe Morgan who has done extensive research on this family: a son, James Madison Gudger, served as a U. S. Congressman as did his daughter, Kathryn Gudger Langley; Hezekiah, another son, served as Ambassador to Colombia and to Panama and later became Governor of Panama; a daughter of Hezekiah, while in Panama, met a young Army officer named Eichelberger whom she married. He became a General in the Pacific Command during World War II, and later Commandant at West Point. Francis Gudger married Marjorie Rambeau, Hollywood actress, and spent most of his adult life in California. Capt. Emmett, a son of James Madison' Gudger, married Genevieve Walsh, daughter of Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana. A great grandson of Jack Gudger, Herman Gudger Nichols of Beavertown, was at the meeting at Trail Branch where he had spent many childhood days and nights. Herman Gudger, prominent Asheville attorney, was a son of Hezekiah Gudger; millstones from the old Gudger's Mill at Trail Branch are a part of the landscaping at the historic McDowell Smith house on Victoria Road in Asheville, the ancestral home of Mrs. Hezekiah Gudger. R. H. Ward, father of Misses Nevada and Margaret, and Mrs. Ethel Ward Roberts, ran the store which housed the iverville post office, and he was also postmaster. The storekeeper enjoyed a most prestigious standing in the community as described by Jessie James Bailey who followed Mrs. Ethel Ward Roberts's own story of Life at Trail Branch. She described in poetic prose the sounds, sights, smells and goings-on such as the traditional "Infair", sparking her story with the kind of humor long recognized as a family trait. Their father instilled the importance of getting an education, and this family has made an out-standing contribution to the teaching profession in western North Carolina. Jessie James Bailey, colorful and beloved Madison County figure, best-known for his fearless diligence as a county sheriff, told of the coming of his family to this area in 1840. James Jefferson Bailey established his home near the French Broad River at the Buncombe County line, known to many as Bailey's Bend. Mr. Bailey knew personally the families at Trail Branch and spoke of the

general good conduct of all who lived there. His scrapbook contained mail with the Trail Bench postmark. Joe Ballew was the miller, Mrs. Ballew ran the hotel, Mrs. Ballew providing music with her piano playing. Silas Wilson was the blacksmith. Mrs. Zeke Goforth was the postmistress after the post office was moved into the Trail Branch House. Mrs. Ditmore called attention to the irregular boarding of a certain section of the wall on the porch that had once been the post office "window." Zadock Ramsey was the first Ramsey to settle in the community and he chose for his wife, Sylvania Teague. This was about the time the county was formed, during the 1850's. Many of his descendants attended the meeting on Saturday. Mrs. Ditmore, present owner of the Trail Branch site, stated that the future lies with the Carolina Power and Light Company's decision to build a nuclear plant. If this site should be selected, the house is expected to be under 100 feet of water.

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