

## Town of Mars Hill Mars Hill, North Carolina

The earliest known inhabitants of what is now Madison County were the Cherokee Indians. The ambush and defeat of General Edward Braddock's army eight miles from Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh) on July 9, 1775 may designate a turning point in the stream of settlers migrating westward. Many people moving westward in search of available lands turned southward rather than confront Indian hostilities. The settlers, mostly Scots-Irish and German descent, pushed into North Carolina and East Tennessee.

The first white settler in the Buncombe County area came from the blockhouse at Old Fort in 1782. Samuel Davidson and his wife, child and female slave settled along the Swannanoa River. Those who settled present day Madison County probably entered the area around 1790. By the mid 1800s there were 10 families living within three miles of what is present-day Mars Hill, then called Pleasant Hill.

The Town of Mars Hill grew up hand in hand with education. In the mid-1800s there was not a school within a 25-mile radius of what is now Mars Hill. The nearest schools were in Burnsville in Yancey County and Asheville in Buncombe County. Most Pleasant Hill residents, who were all Baptists, sent their children to Burnsville, to attend Burnsville Academy, a Methodist school. Many of the families suspected instructors at the Methodist school of attempting to persuade their children into the Methodist faith. This was the impetus for a new school. Edward Carter, a father and owner of large tracts of land, was concerned enough about his children and his faith to initiate efforts to build a Baptist academy closer home.

In 1856, Carter's dreams became reality when the French Broad Baptist Academy opened to students. On February 16, 1859, the school was chartered by the North Carolina General Assembly as Mars Hill College, a name suggested from the Bible verse in Acts 17:22, "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill..." In 1862, the school had 35 students on its four-acre site. Today, the 180-acre college campus is home to approximately 1,250 students enrolled and is the oldest educational institution in western North Carolina.

The history of the Town of Mars Hill is inseparable from the history of the college. The town symbolized by the same name, grew up around the school. Teachers and students settled around the school and businesses followed to supply their needs. The Town of Mars Hill was officially recognized by the North Carolina General Assembly in February, 1893. At that time the incorporated town was placed in a 1,200-yard circle, the center of which was the northwest corner of the college building. The building's cornerstone remains in the same location today.