

History of the Town of Columbus



The Town of Columbus, unlike most communities, towns or cities in western North Carolina, did not grow from its position as a crossroads, its proximity to a body of water or from a gradual accumulation of residents. Columbus was born overnight, deliberately carved from 100 acres of pure wilderness on what was then known as Foster Race path in the shadow of Fosters Mountain, known today as Chocolate Drop Mountain.

In 1847, the state legislature's first effort to find a county seat for Polk County was greeted by a public squabble. In 1855 the legislature, in creating Polk County, named three out-of-county men as Commissioners to locate the county seat at or within two miles of the geographical center of the county. They chose Fosters Race path, in the shadow of Fosters Mountain, as that site. The Commissioners were authorized to purchase, or receive by donations, a tract of land, not to exceed 100 acres, on which to locate a county seat.

Columbus was divided into 94 lots, with seven lots reserved for public, civic, and spiritual needs. Space for a public square was reserved by the Commissioners at the northern end of the perfectly rectangular 100-acre parcel. Streets were laid out, some as wide as ninety feet, and an auction was held on October 17, 1855 to sell the lots designated for public use. A total of 59 lots were sold, bringing \$16, 499 into the County coffers to be used to erect public buildings.

County records do not indicate an official date for the completion of the County Courthouse, but court records indicate that the Courthouse was in use by December 1857. That same structure, now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, remains in use as the County Courthouse today.

As the County seat began to take shape from the wilderness, the Town of Columbus needed to be incorporated. The General Assembly approved the Town's incorporation on February 2, 1857. The new Town was given corporate limits of only a half-mile square from the courthouse square - limits that have not been changed, except for voluntary annexations, to this day.

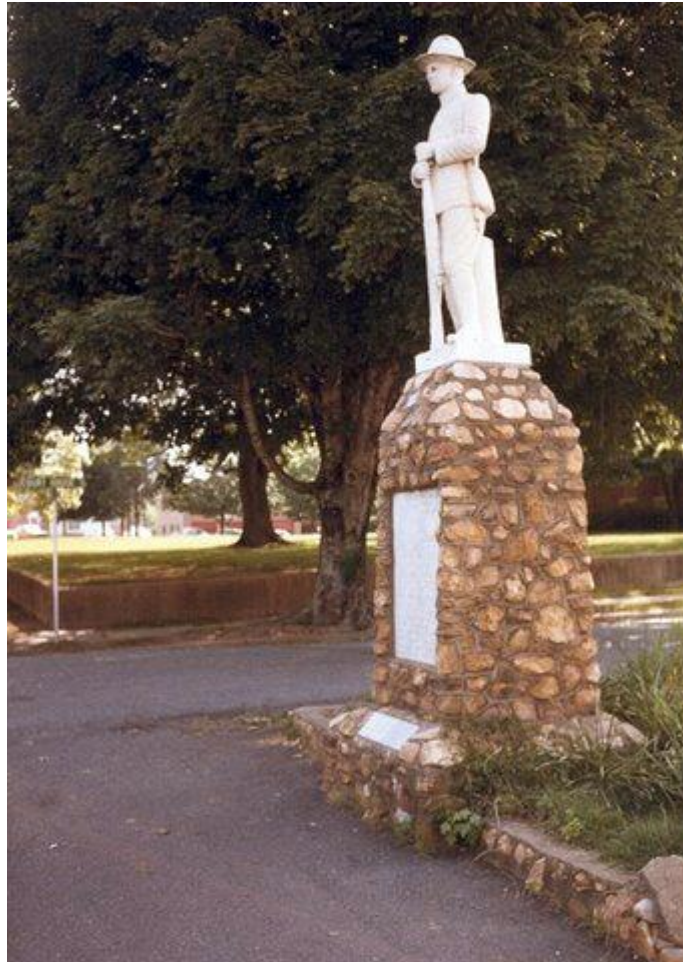
Physician, senator and farmer are some of the hats worn by Dr. Columbus Mills during the course of his 74 years. He spent most of his adult life in service to his beloved Polk County. Mills has been called the father of Polk County because he worked so tirelessly to carve the new county from Rutherford and Henderson Counties. In 1855 the North Carolina legislature named Columbus, the new county seat, in honor of Dr. Mills.

Polk County Courthouse



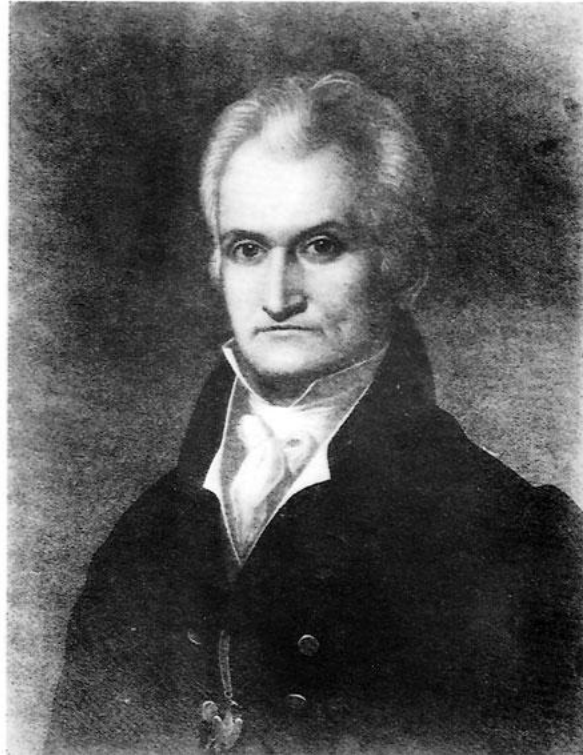
The courthouse was completed in 1859, four years after the county was formed. The builders were Ephraim Clayton and George Shackelford, and they were paid \$16, 836 for their work. The bricks were made from native clay and baked nearby. The design is Greek Revival style which was popular in North Carolina during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. Some of features are matching spiral stairs in the entryway, a cupola made of hand hewn lumber and a cast bronze bell which dates to 1858.

Polk County Doughboy



This marble statue, which stands facing west, was erected through the efforts of W.A. Cannon and the school children of Polk County. It is dedicated to the Polk County men who did not return from World War I. The statue stands atop a column of Polk County field and river stones. The infantryman stands with his '09 Springfield rifle, field gear, a knapsack slung over his shoulder, and a bayonet attached to his belt.

William Polk – County Namesake

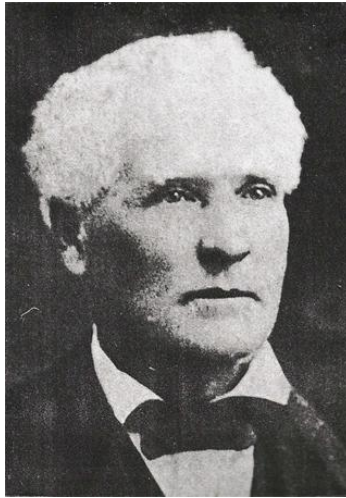


Polk County is named in honor of William Polk. He was born in North Carolina, in the area below what is now Charlotte. He joined the military at age 17 and achieved the rank of colonel. When Polk County was formed the legislature said,

“Whereas, the late Co. William Polk, of this State, was a meritorious officer in the Continental Line during the Revolution, and rendered distinguished services this General Assembly is desirous of testifying their respect for his name by calling one of the counties by his name.”

He was an active member of the board of trustees of the University of North Carolina, and a cousin of James K. Polk, the 11th president.

Dr. Columbus Mills – Town namesake



Dr. Columbus Mills, the *Father of Polk County*, was born in June, 1808 on nearby White Oak Plantation. He is known for his untiring efforts to establish Polk County, created from existing Rutherford and Henderson counties.

Dr. Mills became a physician and lived in Lynn. His home later became known as the Mimosa Inn. The original house burned in 1916.

He was elected to the state senate in 1846, and he also served in other state offices.

Dr. Mills led a long battle to create Polk County. He was a member of the General Assembly when Polk County was formed—both times.

Polk first became a county in 1846, but the act was repealed when the citizens were unable to determine a location for the county seat. It was to be named “Scuywicker” (English spelling, Skyuka).

When the county was formed the second time in 1855, the Assembly decreed that the county seat would be located within two miles of the geographic center and would be named “Columbus”, honoring Dr. Mills. The County Courthouse was completed in 1859.

Dr. Mills also served in the Civil War. He enlisted in Co. K, 16th North Carolina Regiment on May 20, 1861. He was promoted to surgeon on July 1. Dr. Mills resigned his commission in March 1863 and returned home. Local conflicts between Unionists and secessionists prompted Dr. Mills to move to Cabarrus County, South Carolina. He died December 10, 1882, and is buried in the churchyard of the Episcopal Church of the Advent in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Visitors to the historic County Courthouse in Columbus can read about Dr. Mills on a Civil War Trails Marker on the Courthouse lawn.