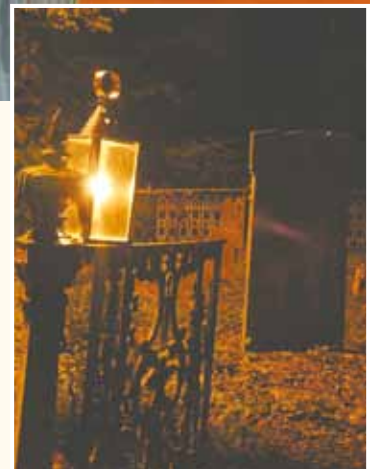




# The Spirits of Wilkes



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Everyone loves a good ghost story, especially if it's a story about a place you live or visit, if you frequent the North Carolina coast you have probably heard tales of Blackbeard's ghost lingering in his Beaufort home or lost soldiers returning to their posts at Fort Macon. The fact is wherever there is history there are spooky tales of lost spirits forever wandering between this world and the next.

In Wilkes County the Wilkes Heritage Museum offers several tours including a Candlelight Ghost Tour that walks through the historic buildings in downtown Wilkesboro telling spooky tales of residents that used to live in the area...and some that still might! The historic endeavors began in 1968 with the purpose of restoring the Old Wilkes Jail to its original 1860 condition and appearance, the jail now houses history rather than criminals and shows the trappings of life for convicts and the jailers who kept them, since this first project the museum has made it their mission to restore and preserve the history of the Wilkes area, ghost stories and all.

Since the old jail house, the Heritage Museum went on to restore 1779 home of Revolutionary War Captain Robert Cleveland who, along with his brother Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, successfully assaulted British troops at the Battle of King's Mountain. Benjamin was especially known for his swift brand of justice against king-loyal colonists who committed crimes against the community. Robert had several children which all lived in his two room cabin and a long line of 'great-great' decedents have come back to visit their ancestral home in western Wilkes.

After two hundred years of wear and tear the log cabin was in need of some T.L.C. and the Heritage Museum was ready for the challenge. The cabin was disassembled and moved to downtown Wilkesboro

where it was reconstructed just as it had stood on the homestead in all its antebellum glory, with a very small amount of renovations including washing and reusing the local mountain stones that stood as the chimneys and fireplaces since the cabin was built.

The Museum group went on to restore the 19th century Finley Law Office and the 1902 Wilkes Courthouse which has been the museums home since its completion in 2005. Each room in the old courthouse tells the story of Wilkes County from early settlement to wartime history to moonshine to religion. The museum also houses an original Junior Johnson race car in the racing exhibit that tells all about the history of stockcar racing in the area.

The Wilkes Heritage Museum tours also visit several historic churches, often the first thing built in a new settlement, churches held a lot more than Sunday service, often used as a town hall, a community center and a schoolhouse, historic churches offer an idea of early community life in the area.

The Candlelight Ghost Tours begin at 7:30pm, are approximately thirty minutes long and continue every thirty minutes until 9pm, the cost for the tour is seven dollars and they begin on the front lawn of the old courthouse at 100 East Main Street, Wilkesboro. If ghost tours have too much chill and thrill for your taste check out a daytime guided tour through the jail or Cleveland House, visit the courthouse and explore room after room of Wilkes history or discover the history of music in the Blue Ridge Mountains at the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame.

The Wilkes Heritage Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday for a small entrance fee of five dollars with special discounts for students and seniors and free for children under five years old. The next upcoming 'Ghost Tour' date is May 20th! Call about special tour availability and support a local non-profit! 336.667.3171