

# Digging Deep Uncovers Hidden Gem

Who doesn't love a good story? But what makes for a good story? Undoubtedly, some will find the ensuing story captivating and mind boggling while others not so much. This month's article was slated to be about gem mining in Murphy, N.C., but as the saying goes, "the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray."

What started out as a pretty straightforward plan of attack for acquiring intel on a fun activity to do while in Murphy, N.C., for the day, ended up going amuck when Mother Nature intervened. Upon arrival into Murphy on this particular day, the sky was a brilliant lapis blue with big white cotton ball clouds the experts call cumulus, and it was hot! Imagine the surprise of learning that the night before heavy rains had flooded out the mining venues, as well as the Murphy River Walk, two great places to visit and from which to develop a story. Oh, no! What to do? Alas, have no fear, a visitor's center is near to save the day, *and* the story. And that is just what the Murphy Visitor's Center in the middle of downtown did. **Mary Ann Anderson**, information specialist, is indeed just that, an expert on all things Murphy. Not only did she know how to "sell" her own town and all the neat things to do within and around it, she knew how to keep a golden nugget of a story till the very end. That golden nugget changed the trajectory of this month's story from how to have an outdoor activity adventure in Murphy to that of an outdoor historical adventure.

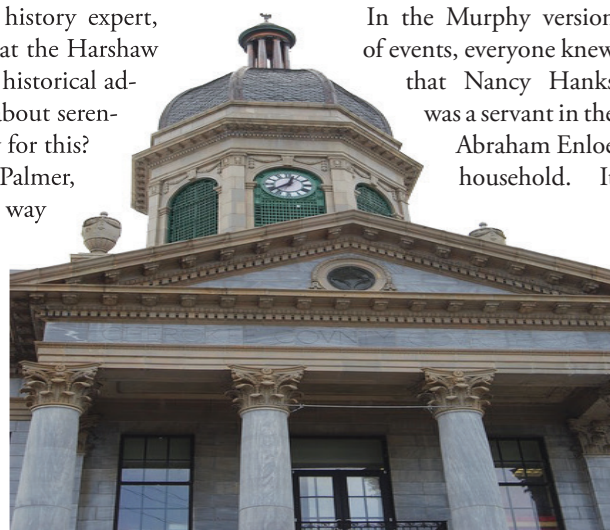
Murphy, aka The City of Flowers, is a

town in the county seat of Cherokee, N.C. It sits at the confluence of the Hiwassee and Valley rivers, and is the westernmost county seat in North Carolina, making it the closest to Tennessee to visit for some fun day-tripping adventure.

With Cherokee in the name of the county, it is a given that the town is bursting with Native American history: the Trail of Tears, the Unicoi Turnpike Trail and the legend of Tianusi, a giant leech that lived in the river. Toss in a little L&N and Southern railroad history, some TVA influence with the Hiwassee Dam, and easy access to outdoor activities, and it sure sounds a heck of a whole lot like Chattanooga, so why even bother with a trip to Murphy? Well, first, Chattanooga doesn't have that little golden nugget story, and second, it doesn't have a Mr. **Billy Ray Palmer**, local history expert, who just happened to be at the Harshaw Cemetery as this outdoor historical adventure got started. Talk about serendipitous! Okay, y'all ready for this?

According to Mr. Palmer, a long time ago, way, way back to the early 19th century, a wealthy plantation owner by the name of **Abraham Enloe** had moved just outside Bryson City in

*Cherokee County  
Courthouse*



what is now Swain County, N.C. Being the rich man that he was meant a big house and lots of servants, one of those being a laundry woman by the name of **Nancy Hanks**. Either of those names ring a bell? Abraham Enloe, Nancy Hanks? No? Not surprising, but it is these two names that lay the foundation for one eyebrow raising, yet, very entertaining story about **Abraham Lincoln**.

Grade school textbooks tell us the story that our country's 16th president was born in a log cabin in Kentucky on February 12, 1809 to **Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln**, but what if that weren't the case? According to some of the folks in Murphy, there's a whole lot more to the story of the birth of Abraham Lincoln than meets the eye with the grade school textbook version.

In the Murphy version of events, everyone knew that Nancy Hanks was a servant in the Abraham Enloe household. It

was also known that he had a particular fondness for her. Now, Mrs. Enloe apparently wasn't happy about the move to Bryson City and didn't care too much for the area, so she would often leave the homestead, escaping for extended periods of time with visits to her family's properties or going on shopping trips. What's that saying, "When the cat's away, the mice will play?" So when an unwed Nancy Hanks ended up pregnant one day, it sent the gossip mill into overdrive churning out talk that surely Mr. Abraham Enloe was the father of Nancy's baby. Upon returning home from one of her extended trips, Mrs. Enloe was met with the rumors and innuendo swirling about the young Miss Hanks's pregnancy. Needless to say, she was none too pleased about the situation and apparently raised an almighty fuss, demanding that her husband "do something" about it.

The "something" that Enloe apparently did was to pay a sum of money to a man, supposedly an itinerant, short, stocky man who worked at one of his grist mills, by the name of Thomas Lincoln to marry the pregnant Nancy Hanks and take her away to Kentucky to have her baby, a baby whom she would coincidentally name Abraham. Now, where this story gets a little murky is that there were numerous Nancy Hanks on record during this time in North Carolina and Virginia. No one knows for sure if the Nancy Hanks that was Abraham Enloe's

*Continued on page 17.*

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