

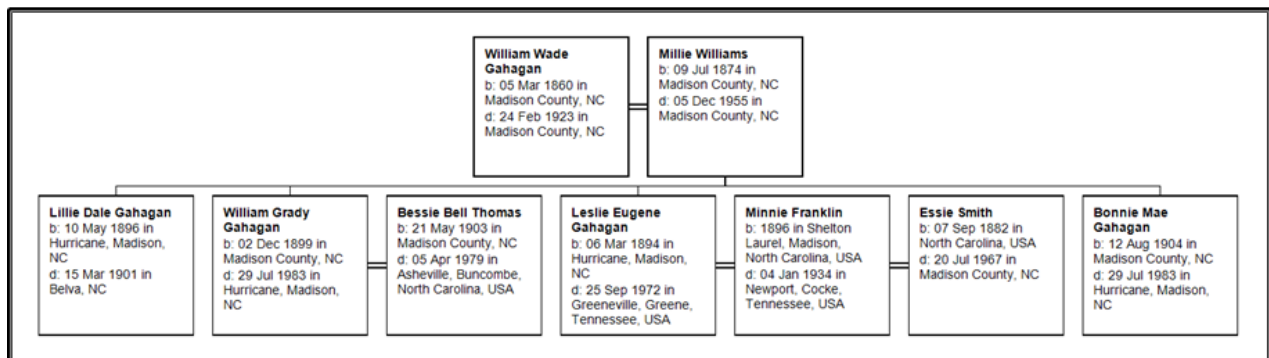
Gahagan, Part 2

William Wade Gahagan was born in the Laurel area of Madison County in March, 1860, the sixth of eleven children of George R.W. and Mary Gahagan. Wade, as he was known, grew up on the Gahagan estate in the house his father built though, unfortunately, in 1870 George R.W., the patriarch of the Gahagan family, died of natural causes at the age of 68. Wade went on to become a successful businessman, owning and operating the Gahagan Lumber Company with his mill located on the east side of the Laurel River, below the mouth of the Little Hurricane Branch near where the old road (well before highway 25-70) ran up the Woodson Branch to Walnut Gap. Though the mill site was long held by the Gahagan family, it wasn't until 1888 that this, and the future Bear River Lodge acreage, was granted specifically to William Wade Gahagan.

In August 1888 the eight surviving children of George R. W. Gahagan, along with four spouses, executed the so-called Gahagan partition deed, when the heirs of George R.W. mutually agreed on how to divide the extensive land holdings. The roughly 10,000-acre estate was split into ten tracts and assigned to the eight children (two of them receiving two tracts each). Of these, William Wade was assigned Tract 3 and an older brother, Andrew Jackson Gahagan, was assigned Tract 5. The approximate extent of these tracts, at least around Bear River Lodge, is shown in the figure to the right, which is a Google Earth image also showing the topography from the latest USGS quadrangle maps. Tract 3 includes what would later become BRL Phase 1 (light blue outline), while Tract 5 includes what is currently called BRL Phase 2 and some additional acreage west of Shelton Laurel Creek. The yellow 'M' shows the approximate location of Wade's lumber mill.



In 1893, at age 33 and just a few years after obtaining this land, Wade married Millie Williams, a 19-year old Madison County native. Over the next 11 years Wade and Millie had four children, though, sadly, only three lived to adulthood (Lillie Dale tragically died in a fire). A single-generation descendant chart for Wade and Millie is shown below.



Using hand-selected lumber from his own mill, Wade began construction of his house in 1901. Still a familiar landmark along highway 208, just a half mile from our own front gate, the house was built using



a variety of wood types, including oak, poplar, red ash, chestnut, holly, birch, yellow locust, pine and maple, much of which was used as paneling in many of the rooms.

The locust foundation beams are 18 inches thick and 16 feet long and much of the framing was in 3-inch thick hemlock.



Working on the house for only a few months each summer, it was finally completed in 1908.¹

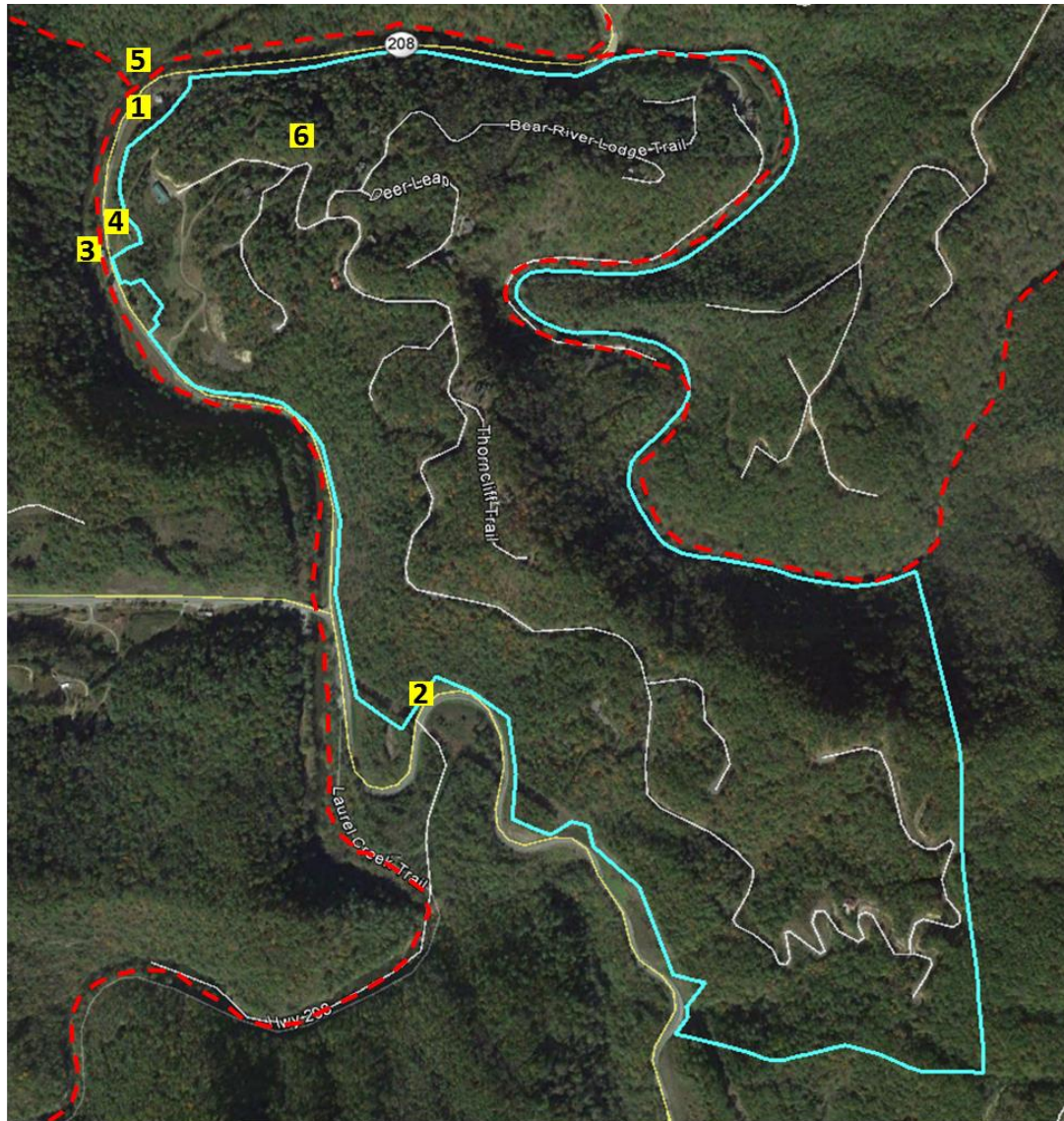
In the early part of the century, in order to gather timber, the loggers would build 'splash' dams along the creeks and once sufficient timber was gathered behind the dams, the structure would be dynamited, floating, sometimes destructively, the logs downstream to the mills. This was the case with the Gahagan mills, including one splash dam located in the bend of the creek across from the Wade Gahagan house, until about 1910 when the Madison County Railroad was formed and began laying narrow gauge track along the Laurel River drainage. The line began in Stackhouse on the French Broad River, ran along the river paralleling the Southern (now Norfolk Southern) line to Runion near the mouth of the Laurel River, then ran north along the river. Eventually the logging railroad extended along the Big Laurel all the way to Foster Creek, located in the eastern part of the County. That meant the railroad ran through what is now Bear River Lodge, and considering the topography, would have run along the entrance road, behind the Lodge and along what is now Riverview, crossing the creek into future Phase 2 before continuing further east (see map, next page). Additional lines also extended up the Little Laurel into Tennessee (current highway 208) and along the Shelton Laurel (Hwy 212) up and over the divide to near Flag Pond, Tennessee.

The railroad certainly helped Wade Gahagan as it provided relatively easy access to thousands of acres, and millions of board-feet, of virgin lumber. His personal success, however, was cut short when at the age of 62 Wade lost a long battle with declining health and passed away on February 24, 1923. By 1925 most of the lumber was cleared and activity on the railroad all but stopped. The rails and cars were abandoned for about 10 years before they were removed and sold for scrap in the late 1930s. Little remains today to remind us of those boom days almost 100 years ago, though an approximate location of the railroad line is shown on the map, based on oral history and selected historical maps.

While Wade tended to the lumber business, Millie is said to have run a general store in the area, believed to be on the east side of the highway, just before the Gahagan house. She ran the store for about 15 years, about the lifespan of the railroad, and used the train to deliver her stock from the Southern depot at Stackhouse. A small depot was also located on the Gahagan property, probably near where the small house is now located on the west side of the road.

¹ Though no longer on the market, this 2800-square foot, 5 bedroom, 1 bath home was last listed for \$449,000 in August 2016 though it was originally sold by the Gahagan family for only \$35,000 in 1994.

Of Wade's surviving children it's not known if either of the men took over the lumber business, but with the end of the railroad, that business likely dried up. The eldest son, Leslie, ran a plant nursery, the "Three Laurels Nursey", which, in the later years was located along Hwy 25-70, about a third of a mile south of the intersection with 208 (see map, below). William Grady was a forest warden and Bonnie, remained a homemaker in the house her father built, which has since become known as the Bonnie Gahagan house.



Historic sites in the Bear River Lodge area. 1. Wade (now known as Bonnie) Gahagan house. 2. Approximate former location of Leslie Gahagan nursery. 3. Approximate former location of train depot. 4. Approximate former location of general store, run by Millie Gahagan. 5. Approximate former location of splash dam and small mill. 6. Wade Gahagan Cemetery. Red dashes shows approximate location of Madison County railroad that existed ca. 1910-1925.

In 1939 the two remaining executors of Wade's estate, Millie and Leslie, conveyed to Bonnie Mae Gahagan, all of the land referred to in the 1888 Partition Deed as Tract 3. The reason the land went

solely to Bonnie is unknown. However, though the youngest child of Wade and Millie, she, too, was the only one that did not marry and have children and seemed destined to remain on her father's land.

The (now) Bonnie Gahagan house, pictured previously, has a storied past and may be best remembered by the locals as the scene of a grisly double murder on Friday night, July 29, 1983 when Grady, then widowed, and Bonnie were killed during an apparent robbery. The case was never solved. Many details of the case are presented by Mike Gahagan in his thoroughly researched Gahagan family history completed in 2014 and available at the Marshall Public Library². Following the murder, per the terms of the 1939 deed, all of the property owned by Bonnie, including the house, was conveyed to her heirs. Wade and Millie Gahagan, along with their three adult children and their respective spouses, are all buried in the Wade Gahagan Cemetery, located just to the northwest of BRL lot 12. The cemetery is specifically excluded from Bear River Lodge property but, except for the right-of-way, is entirely surrounded by BRL. The cemetery can be accessed on foot by going past the iron gate to the north of the stables and walking up the dirt road.

There are dozens of descents of Wade Gahagan, as both Grady and Leslie had several children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, though the only descendant that remained on the property was Freddie Henderson, who lived in the small house on the west side, and right alongside, highway 208. Freddie's father, Fred Henderson, married Mary Gahagan, one of Grady's four children. According to the tax records, this current structure, still owned by the Gahagans, was built around 1950. In recent years it's been Freddie, now in his 70s that has maintained the family cemetery.

Our property has a rich history, but the Bear River Lodge we all know and love has only taken shape over the last 15 years. That story in our next chapter...

² Much of the information presented in this chapter also comes from Mike Gahagan's family history, in which he devotes entire chapters to GRW Gahagan and each of his children, including William Wade Gahagan.