

TOM CARPENTER

# Laurel Park

## From Resort Town to Enchanting Residence

The charming cottages and narrow curving roads of present day Laurel Park are gentle reminders of this town's lively past as a summer resort. Though a quiet, year-round, mainly residential community today, Laurel Park remains a captivating tangle of interesting little lanes, mature landscaping, thickets of rhododendron and attractive neighborhoods.

From the early- to mid-20th century, Laurel Park was known for its active summer schedule. Laurel Park Lake, the largest of the community's several lakes, had a beach, a waterslide and a pavilion with the second largest dance floor in the region jutting out over the water. Beginning in 1903, a special rail line brought summer residents from Hendersonville directly up Fifth Avenue to Laurel Park. In 1910, an incline railway was added to take tourists up the mountain to an observation deck with a spectacular view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. By the 1920s, Laurel Park even had its own casino.

The mid-1920s saw a real estate boom that started in Florida and rapidly spread to other resort areas including

Henderson County. Commodore J. Perry Stolz, builder of the famous Miami Beach Fleetwood Hotel, bought land atop Laurel Park, near the famed Jump Off Rock, and began construction on a 15-story Fleetwood Hotel in 1925. The next year, a devastating hurricane hit Florida. Commodore Stolz lost everything. Construction was halted.

*Above: The scenic drive up Laurel Park Highway ends at Jump Off Rock, with spectacular views of distant peaks.*

*Below: Operated by the Town of Laurel Park, Laurel Green features a flat walking loop, a gazebo and a playground.*



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**THE LEGEND OF JUMP OFF ROCK**

One of the most famous and visited sites in Laurel Park is Jump Off Rock with its hiking trails and striking mountain views. The tale behind the rock's name is that a young Cherokee maiden and her Cherokee chieftain often met at this ledge. When tribal wars called him away, they promised to meet at the rock upon his return. Every evening, the maiden climbed to the rock to watch for her lover. She often sent out plaintive notes of an Indian love call, but no answer came back. Returning warriors brought her the news of the young chief's death in battle. In the twilight, she climbed to the edge of the cliff—and jumped. The haunting notes of her love call hushed forever. Indian lore has it that on some moonlit nights, the ghost of the heartbroken maiden can be seen on Jump Off Rock.



Commodore  
J. Perry Stolz

*Construction on the Fleetwood Hotel near Jump Off Rock began in 1925 but was halted four years later. It remained unfinished for another six years until it was dismantled in 1935.*

In 1929, the Great Depression made efforts to complete the hotel hopeless. The unfinished building was sold to salvage in 1935.

As automobile ownership increased, people could vacation where rail lines did not go. Laurel Park began its transition from an active summer resort to a tranquil residential community. Though the beaches, the big lakes and the pavilion remained active through the 1970s, they too slowly disappeared.

Today, still lush and beautiful, Laurel Park is a coveted address in a county of premier communities. 🍎

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