




Small Towns Project  
Report on the Community Assessment  
**The Town of Marshall, North Carolina**

July 22 - 24, 1999

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 **RIVER + RIDGE**  
 **RAIL + ROAD**  
 **RICHES + ROOTS**




**Defining Elements of Marshall**

These six "R" words emerged as the HandMade in America Small Towns Resource Team, invited by the Town of Marshall, completed its intensive three-day assessment of Marshall and environs. These words help to define Marshall and offer guideposts for the revitalization of downtown and overall community development. These six words represent the assets and investments, history and future of Marshall. This *Report on the Community Assessment* will explain how to build on these elements; how to use them to the positive advantage of the community; and how to strengthen the civic and economic health of the community.

In over 100 interviews and conversations, over breakfast, lunch and dinner, on Main Street and back streets, in the nooks and crannies of Marshall, the Team listened. . . listened to a diverse group of people who care deeply about Marshall. . . listened for areas of common concern. . . listened for heartfelt desires and solutions. . . listened to stories and hopes for the future. The Team asked questions and observed; the Team participated and evaluated. This Report is a reflection of all that was absorbed, and subsequently enhanced by the knowledge and experience of the Team.

This Report outlines a myriad of carefully chosen choices. There is no formula here or final answers. Challenges are described; options are offered. How to address this array of choices is up to the Marshall community.

 **RIVER + RIDGE**  **RAIL + ROAD**  **RICHES + ROOTS**

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As one enters Marshall what comes into view? As the eye eases off the road to take in the surroundings, the presence of the river jumps into view, followed closely by an awareness of the ridge, the ominous, close mountain. Then the rail, parallel to river and road, comes to mind. These linear images frame and shape Marshall. They are immediate definers of the *sense of place* that is uniquely Marshall.

Buildings that represent community roots, spaces where the history of Marshall was enacted, punctuate these linear images. Buildings, one after another, unfold along the corridor that thankfully remains remarkably intact. These buildings hold the corporate memory of the county seat of a unique North Carolina county.

Yet roots are about more than buildings; they are culture, crafts, schools, neighborhoods, music and dancing, churches. Roots join people together over time and collectively make a statement about who the people are that live in a particular place.

All of these definers are your riches and more. They speak to the investment of time, hard work, and devotion given to preserving and conducting the functions of common life. Yet riches are much more. They are the invaluable relationships between people, certainly any community's most precious element. Your special care of each other, your energy for community causes, your inclusion of newcomers, your continuity across generations, your concern across divisions are how you have and will continue to vividly express your gratitude for those riches.

There is so much to celebrate about Marshall! Listed below are a representative few thoughts and comments from the Team about each of the theme words.

 **RIDGE**

- Coffee on a porch perched on the ridge, overlooking river, rail, and road.
- The close, ever-presence of the mountain.
- The perfect backdrop for a gem of a town.

✿ **RAIL**

- The railway whistle: “Most kids have never heard a train whistle.”
- The tracks that limit access to the river from the downtown.
- The Depot that anchors one entry into Marshall; its cabooses that has several potential uses.

✿ **ROAD**

- From drovers on the Buncombe Turnpike to today’s Main Street, the ribbon of connection.
- The challenge of linking the by-pass and Main Street.
- The passageway that organizes the living room – road, sidewalks, spaces, landscape, and buildings – of Marshall.

✿ **RICHES — and RELATIONSHIPS**

- The diversity of participants, ages 6 to 88, at the Depot on Friday night.
- The caring concern displayed for one another.
- Community history, music, crafts, dance, stories, buildings, and natural setting are worth their weight in gold. Exploit them. Use them to your advantage.

✿ **ROOTS**

- Three generations of Penland stories.
- “This must remain a real, authentic mountain town, not some theme park.”
- The intact historic fabric of the buildings.

These irreplaceable elements blend to create a town that has great potential in exploiting what downtown advocates call *sense of place*. Marshall has all the right ingredients. Marshall also has an array of choices. Do you choose to be the town where it’s said, “There’s no there, there?” Consider this: with a relatively small amount of effort compared to the payoff, Marshall can retain its character, improve its image, exploit its assets, rehabilitate its buildings and consequently restructure, diversify, and strengthen its economy.

Sound too good to be true? Read on. . .