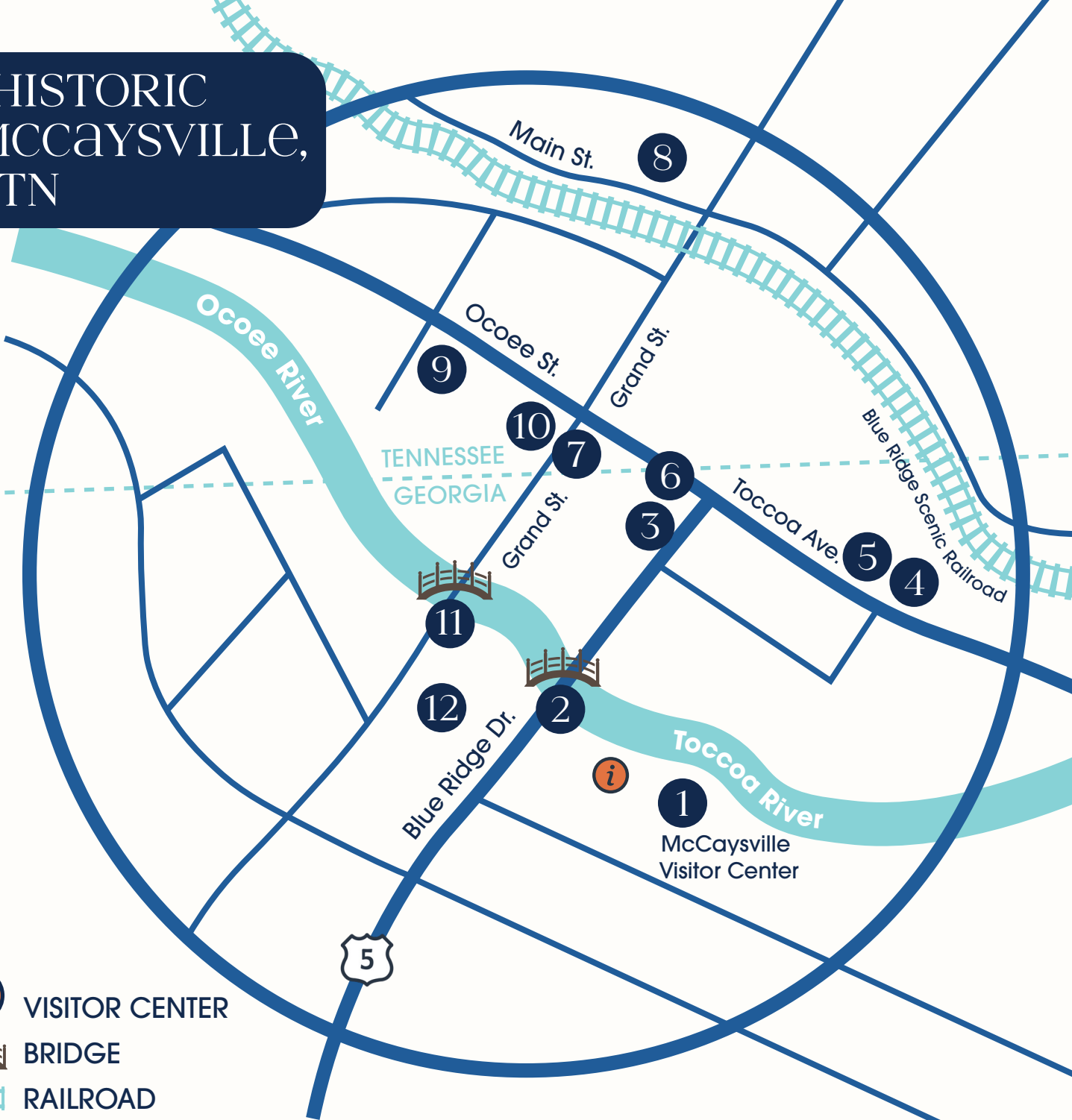


# 9 COPPER BASIN HISTORIC HERITAGE WALK: MCCAYSVILLE, GA & COPPERHILL, TN

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-  VISITOR CENTER
-  BRIDGE
-  RAILROAD

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McCaysville, Georgia, chartered in 1904, sits on the Georgia-Tennessee state line, directly adjacent to its twin city, Copperhill, Tennessee. Visitors can stand in both states simultaneously on the famous Blue Line, making for a unique photo opportunity. The intertwined histories of these towns trace back to their original names; Copperhill was first known as McCays, while McCaysville was originally called Hawkinsville. Their development was shaped by early settlers H.T. McCay and Aaron Matthews, who purchased land on opposite sides of the river and operated a ferry at the location of the present-day Old Steel Bridge, alternating monthly in its operation.

The area's history is deeply connected to the discovery of copper in 1843 near what is now Ducktown, Tennessee. A prospector searching for gold instead uncovered brilliant red crystals, later identified as copper. By 1847, the first shipments of copper ore—90 cakes in total—were transported along rugged trails to the nearest railroad hub in Dalton, Georgia. The copper industry quickly grew, and in 1899, the Tennessee Copper Company established smelting operations near McCays (now Copperhill), leading to rapid industrial expansion and employment for tens of thousands of workers. However, open smelting techniques and extensive timber cutting for fuel devastated the landscape, leaving the surrounding hills barren and lifeless - earning the region comparisons to a moonscape. Efforts to restore the environment began in 1939, when the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) partnered with the Tennessee Copper Company on a large-scale reforestation project, which successfully revitalized the area's ecosystem.

Among the significant structures in the region is the Kimsey Junior College, built in 1933. Featuring Collegiate Gothic architecture, it was considered the finest school facility in Tennessee at the time and was the only architect-designed structure in the Copper Basin. Funding for its construction came from a 10-cent-per-ton royalty on copper ore extracted by the Tennessee Copper Company. However, due to its remote location and the financial hardships of the Great Depression, the building was never used for its intended purpose as a college. Instead, it later served as a high school and elementary school before undergoing restoration and earning a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

For those interested in the region's rich mining heritage, the Ducktown Basin Museum provides an in-depth look at the industry that shaped the Copper Basin. Located on the historic mine site, the museum occupies what was once the headquarters for the Tennessee Copper Company and Cities Service mining operations from 1899 to 1975. The site includes 16 original buildings and outbuildings, many of which date back to the height of the mining boom. Visitors can explore artifacts, historical photographs, and exhibits that document the lives of miners and their families. Outside, larger industrial relics are displayed, and a collapsed, water-filled section of the Burra Burra Mine remains visible from a fenced viewing area.

### **1. McCaysville Visitor Center**

53 Market Street, McCaysville, GA  
Built in the 1940's as a workshop with an apartment upstairs. Explore the Visitor Center exhibits while learning about the mining history of the Copper Basin and the towns of McCaysville and Copperhill.

#### **\*Side Trip**

#### **Toccoa River Park/McCaysville City Park**

Market St, McCaysville, GA  
Located at the edge of the Toccoa River is a great place for the kids to play on the playground, families to picnic, feed the ducks, and for the pups to play in their own dog park. Park can also be accessed by a short walk from the Visitor Center.

### **2. Concrete Bridge**

Blue Ridge Dr, McCaysville, GA  
Built in 1936 just over the Toccoa River, this bridge offers the perfect spot to snap a photo of the Old Steel Bridge.

### **3. The Blue & White Pure Station**

10 Blue Ridge St, McCaysville, GA  
The old "Blue & White" gas station on the corner was built in 1936. Inside you'll see the devastating flood line that designates the high-water mark from the 1990 flood. The Ocoee River damaged 90% of the business district with 8 feet of floodwaters, even reaching the second story of some buildings.

### **4. Train Depot**

76 Toccoa St, McCaysville, GA  
The Blue Ridge Scenic Railway offers a round-trip journey from Downtown Blue Ridge to McCaysville for a short layover to enjoy all that the town has to offer. The rail line is more than 100 years old, but the last passenger train ran in 1960. Blue Ridge Scenic Railway began in 1998, reviving the route as a heritage railway.  
For tickets and more info - [www.brscenic.com](http://www.brscenic.com).

### **5. The Masonic Lodge**

76 Toccoa St, McCaysville, GA  
The McCaysville Masonic Lodge #232 was established in 1896 according to the seal on the building, still used by the Masons today. Built in 1949-1950.

### **6. The Blue Line**

Toccoa Avenue and Blue Ridge Dr., McCaysville, GA  
The state line between McCaysville, GA and Copperhill, TN, has been in dispute for years, and even the blue painted line through the town is not definitive. However, the Blue Line is a great place to get your picture taken with one foot in Georgia and the other in Tennessee.

### **8. The Maloof Building**

111 Ocoee St, Copperhill, TN  
Standing at the corner of Grande Avenue & Ocoee Street in Copperhill was once the home of Jones Drug & Confectionary Company's Ice Cream & Candy Parlor.

### **9. Copperhill City Hall**

160 Main St, Copperhill, TN  
Built in the 1920's on the corner of Grande Avenue and Ryder Street. Not only is this City Hall, it's also the Hiwassee River Rail Adventure passenger train, which runs from Etowah, Tennessee along the Hiwassee River, River Gorge and Rail Loop. Ticket information, call 877-510-5765.

### **10. The New York Café & Hotel Building**

121 Ocoee St, Copperhill, TN  
Built between 1925 and 1926, the establishment catered to both men and women, offering dining and lodging in a time when Copperhill was a bustling industrial town. The café served regular dinners for 50 cents, making it an affordable yet refined dining option for residents and travelers alike. The hotel provided modern amenities for its time, including steam heat, a telephone in each room, and access to showers and baths - features that set it apart from many other lodgings in the area.

### **11. The Abernathy Building**

113 Ocoee St, Copperhill, TN  
The current Abernathy Building is built on the site of an earlier building that was destroyed by fire in 1916. The building housed a furniture store on the first and second floor in 1925 where they sold furnishings, hardware, dynamite, caps, and fuses. On the top floor was a funeral parlor owned by Luther Abernathy.

### **12. The Old Steel Bridge**

Grand St & Bridge St  
The original steel bridge was built in 1911 on the site of an old ferry. The current steel bridge was built in 1920-1921 over the Toccoa River in Morganton before the construction of Lake Blue Ridge. It was taken apart, stored, and rebuilt across the river in 1936, at the same time the concrete bridge across the way was built. Once you cross the bridge, you cross the state line from Georgia to Tennessee. The bridge also marks the transition from the Toccoa River to the Ocoee River, which is also the feeder to the Ocoee rapids.

### **13. Riverwalk Shops**

100 Blue Ridge Dr, McCaysville, GA  
The buildings which make up the new Riverwalk Shops were once occupied by The A & P Grocery Store, Williamson 5 & 10, Hampton Hardware and John Jabaley and Sons Clothing store, which opened in 1949. Stores closed and a significant amount of repairs were needed before reopening after the flood of 1990.