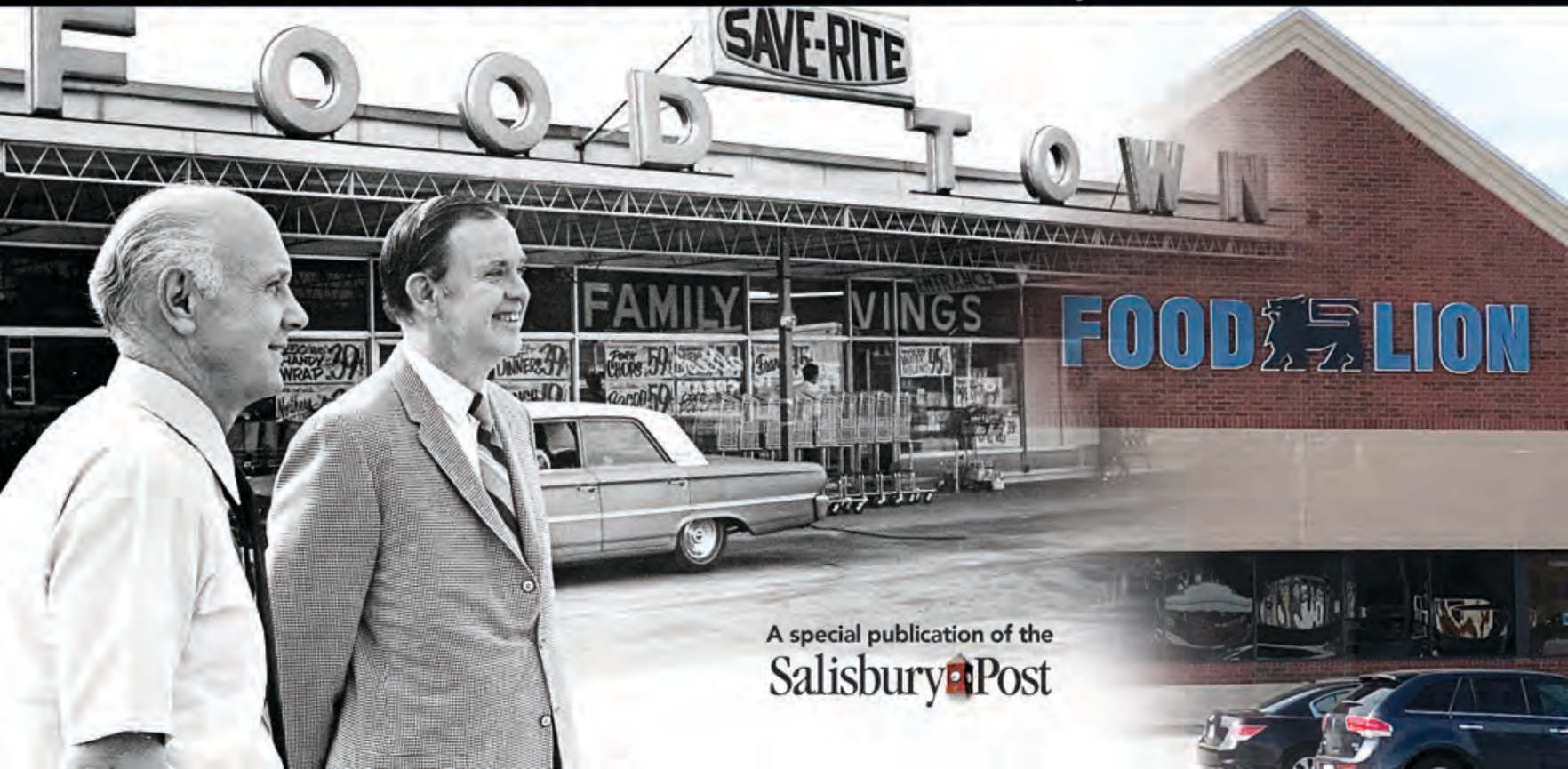
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PROGRESS EDITION 2023



OLD AND NEW



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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Now and then: Rowan County surges into the future, cherishes its heritage



John **Carr**

We hope readers will find this year's Spirit of Rowan our best to date. Certainly we are excited to bring it to you. Rowan County is at a rare moment in time. We are not only recovering, but our economic development and job growth are way ahead of where we were just a few years ago. That's something few would have expected, and even fewer can claim. The recent economic development news is so positive, in fact, it often sounds exaggerated: Millions of square feet of business development, businesses with household names like Macy's coming and more than 10,000 new jobs being created.

And at the Economic Development Council's recent annual meeting, keynote speaker Didi Caldwell of Global Location Strategies shed light on some trends that indicate there may be more to come. One comment that certainly made many ears perk up was that we did not need to worry about losing jobs to China — we lost them already. But tables have turned and now China is losing global market share, big projects and job growth. She pointed out that between 2008 and 2017 North America had 30 percent of the world's mega projects, but from 2018 to 2021 North America leaped to 53 percent of global market share, far outpacing all other regions, including China, which lost significant ground. She describes mega projects as those costing at least $1 billion in capital expense and creating 1,000 or more new jobs.

Bringing that home, North Carolina is a leading destination for many of these mega projects. We are fifth in the entire country in announced projects, and first in manufacturing projects. Even closer to home, Rowan County is considered one the hottest Charlotte area market, if not the hottest, for large projects. Proximity to a major airport, the interstate and Charlotte; not being in a hurricane zone; still being comparatively affordable; and offering an exceptional quality of life make a combination that is hard to beat. The local chamber of commerce and economic development officials have been saying this for years, and now that message seems to be getting through better than ever. All recent EDC goals have been surpassed with big margins.

As much as all of this is exciting, people have been coming here, raising families and staying here for generations prior to the current economic trends. Along with mother nature, it is Rowan families that deserve the majority of credit for making this a desirable place. Generations have worked tirelessly to improve the county they call home. Along the way, a lot of stories have been created, a lot of history made.

In this edition of the Spirit of Rowan, we focus of some of the lesser-known new happenings, such as the recent growth of downtown Landis and Rockwell, along with looking back at some of the lesser-know stories about Rowan's past that we think everyone here should know. Among the highlights are the Kepley Farmhouse, which has been standing since the early 1800s, how mill towns are reinventing themselves and the contributions that many women have made to Rowan's history.

Rowan County is a special place and we know we are lucky to be here. We hope you enjoy this year's Spirit of Rowan, and even if you have spent your life here, we hope you find a few stories that are new to you, and give us all the more reason we all like to call Rowan County home.

ROWAN AT A GLANCE

Population

(2020 U.S. Census)

- **Rowan County:** 146,875
- **Salisbury:** 35,540
- **Kannapolis:** 53,114
- **China Grove:** 4,434
- **Spencer:** 3,308
- **Landis:** 3,690
- **Granite Quarry:** 2,984
- **Rockwell:** 2,302
- **East Spencer:** 1,567
- **Cleveland:** 846
- **Faith:** 819

Gender, race and ethnicity

(2020 U.S. Census)

- **White alone, not Hispanic or Latino:** 68.18%
- **Hispanic or Latino:** 10.85%
- **Black or African-American alone:** 15.48%
- **Native American:** 1.02%
- **Asian:** 1.02%
- **Pacific Islander:** 0.05%
- **Other/mixed:** 4.12%

Land and water

- **Total acres of land:** 327,141
- **Land area in square miles:** 511.37
- **Population per square mile:** 287.2
- **Total acres of farmland:** 121,145 acres
- **Water surface of High Rock Lake:** 15,180 acres (Rowan and Davidson)
- **Shoreline total:** 365 miles (Rowan and Davidson)

Business and economy

- **Median household income:** $54,382
- **Total employer establishments:** 4,405
- **Work distribution:** 34% blue collar, 65% white collar

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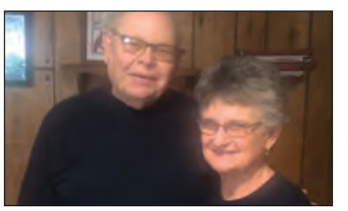
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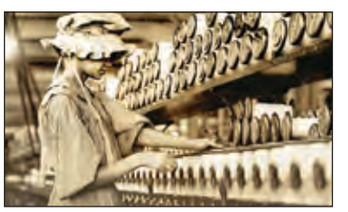
Local restaurants stick with tried-and-true formulas

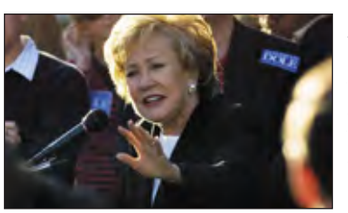
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A message from the Rowan County Board of Commissioners



Back Row: Craig Pierce, Judy Klusman, Mike Caskey, Jr. Front Row: Jim Greene, Greg Edds

The Rowan County Board of Commissioners is committed to serving and representing Rowan County through responsive and effective leadership. We are honored to serve our residents and guests and are working hard to provide a wonderful quality of life for all who live, work and play in our community.

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Leonard Hall takes care of the R. A. Clement School and does everything he can to make sure his organization gives back to the community, such as in the form of scholarships. (Chandler Inions photo)

A classroom is forever

A look inside the life of two historic schools

BY CHANDLER INIONS

chandler.inions@salisburypost.com

Breathing new life into a space that was once filled with the sounds of children playing and learning is proving a worthwhile endeavor for the people of Cleveland because the same places where they learned their multiplication tables are becoming community fixtures.

R.A. Clement School in Cleveland was built in the 1920s for Black children during segregation. Students went through the 12th grade. However, the last graduating class was in 1968.

The school was built as part of the Rosenwald Fund, which supported construction of more than 5,000 schools for Black students in the Southern states during the early 20th century.

After the school shut its doors, the West Rowan Neighborhood Center Advisory Council took it over and started using it as a community center. As the building aged, cracks and infrastructure issues began to reveal themselves. A repair budget was not always sufficient, but community members did what they could to keep the building in use.

Leonard Hall serves as the caretaker for the school today. For Hall, a former student, it's important to keep it going, if no longer as a school, at least as a fixture of the town he grew up in.

"Our forefathers put money into this place to get it built, and we need to try to keep it going," Hall said.

As the building has deteriorated, so,


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View from summit of Dunn's Mountain Park
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The former Cleveland Elementary School now serves as the West Branch of the Rowan Public Library system and its auditorium offers a space for the community to get together for events like a recent slow-cooker recipe swap, below. (Chandler Inions photos)

too, have its appliances. Community members have done what they can to get by.

"We have been using window units to heat and cool the building," Hall said. "We finally raised enough money to get central heating and air. We've been using the building all the time, but with the better system, we can heat and cool in the winter and the summertime."

The building continues to house events, which range from family reunions to birthdays to the occasional block party.

"We've had some pretty good music programs down here, too," Hall said.

Not far down the road is the Cleveland School, or what's left of it anyway. In 2019, the bulk of the old school was torn down.

Cleveland School originally served students in all grades before the construction of West Rowan High School, which opened in the fall of 1959. It then served as Cleveland Elementary School until the new West Rowan Elementary School opened nearby.

What was left standing, the school's media center and auditorium, has been converted into the West Branch of the Rowan Public Library.

To build the branch, Rowan County renovated and repurposed the media center and auditorium of the former campus. The media center became the main library space, complete with books, desktop computers and laptops. As for the auditorium, it is now suitable for hosting live performances and other entertainment, such as a recent recipe swap.

The library supervisor, Lyndsey Maloney, indicated a desire to see the library not just be a place where people came to check out written stories but to swap personal ones as well.

At the recipe swap, some Cleveland



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school alums, Connie Smith-Christy and Cyndi Allison, shared some memories and swapped old teachers' names.

"Back then, they would not have enough students to fill two classes," Allison said. "When I was in first grade, there were not enough for two classes, but there were too many for one, so I was in a first-second combination class. I did second grade classes in first grade."

She was in a regular second grade class the following year, so she had a leg up on her classmates.

Their fondest memory emanated from the cafeteria.

"They made everything from scratch, even the hamburger buns," Allison said. "That was the best food ever. You were sitting there trying to do your homework, and you could smell the yeast bread come wafting down the hall. They made homemade soup. They never did anything like those tater tots heated up."

Sometimes the simplest things in life are the ones that mean the most to you.

"When it was really hot, we got to go out and have an orange juice," Allison said. "The principal would bring the big tray out with all the little Dixie cups, and everyone would run over and get a frozen orange juice."

Students may not be roaming the halls at R.A. Clement School or the Cleveland School anymore, but if they are willing, they can still learn a thing or two with a visit.



Leonard and Darryl Hall like to keep their eyes on the former R.A. Clement School, serving as its caretakers. (Chandler Inions photos)

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Developers at the Empire Hotel intend to turn the large mezzanine and open floor space into a high-end restaurant. Other parts of the building will become apartments and hotel rooms. (Submitted photo)

Downtown living

Reinventing home in the heart of historic Salisbury

BY CHANDLER INIONS
chandler.inions@salisburypost.com

Downtown Salisbury is home to many restaurants, watering holes, parks and plazas. With the help of some local developers, it will be home to many more people in the near future too.

Several older buildings in the downtown area are being restored as residential spaces above the street-level storefronts. While they vary in size and scope, the developers' missions align to bring more people to downtown Salisbury while preserving history.

Josh Barnhardt is one of those developers. He recently renovated "The Salisbury," located at 121 W. Council St. The building is about 100 years old and was constructed by the Southern Bell Telephone Company. For many years, it was just offices.

The "Salisbury" now boasts 12 units, with six one-bedroom apartments and six two-bedroom units varying in size from 650 to 1,100 square feet, with four units on each floor. A lot of tenants are already moving in.



Barnhardt

Barnhardt indicated that he loves what he does for several reasons.

"It's really special seeing people make these spaces their home, especially seeing them fall in love with these spaces as much as I have," Barnhardt said. "I have several people selling their homes they lived in for 30, 40 or 50 years to move in and make it their new home, and they couldn't be more excited.

"When you get to the finished product and get to share with others, you really enjoy it, and it's worth all the hard work, stress and risk."

Barnhardt is working on projects around the region, but he's got another one just up the street from the Salisbury building, the old Empire Hotel on Main Street. While the Empire Hotel is older and significantly larger than the Salis-



Cora, left, and Bill Greene are reimagining the space in the top two floors of the Bell Block Building in downtown Salisbury. (Chandler Inions photo)

bury project, Barnhardt indicated that the processes are similar.

"As you start doing this, you figure out the looks that you know will work," Barnhardt said. "You start to put together the puzzle pieces that you know will fit. With every project, it is going to be unique. You try to figure out what the building is giving you."

Identifying those assets takes time, but finding out what they are early on, Barnhardt indicated, illuminates the path to the final product.

"A lot of times you have to walk through the building when it's wide open and spend time walking and thinking before you start to really find out what the space and the building are giving you to work with and then adapt to that," Barnhardt said. "With each project, you have to dig in and spend time in it to start to visualize what can work where."

When the Empire Hotel project is finished, there will be a restaurant, hotel rooms and about 40 apartments ranging in size and room counts.

Not far down the street from the Empire Hotel is the Bell Block building. It is being renovated to include seven two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments by Bill and Cora Greene.

The Bell Block Building is named for the sister of David Gaskill, a tobacco magnate from around the turn of the 20th century, who nearly became Salisbury's mayor. Its prominence and proximity to central downtown made it a popular location for business people.

"At the time, all the big-wigs had offices here," Bill Greene said.

The three-story 1898 Richardson Romanesque structure sits on the northeast corner of Main and Fisher streets. The granite exterior is enough to capture the attention of anyone who is just walking by, but inside lies even more to awe. A signature wooden staircase and high-wooden archways demand visitors' attention.

Rumor has it that when George Clooney visited Salisbury while filming Leatherheads, he was so enamored with archways inside the Bell Block building that he commissioned replicas for his Italian estate.

Although the building has been home to various storefronts, the two upper floors have been vacant for decades.

The Greenes love Salisbury and want to see the downtown flourish.

"It is kind of a vanity project for my wife and me," Greene said. "We are dedicated to downtown. And we really want to make it better."

While a passionate development team bolsters any project, it cannot run off of

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Left: *The Bell Block Building in downtown Salisbury will soon be home to seven apartments after renovations are completed.* ***Right:*** *A renovated kitchen space in the Salisbury building on West Council Street in downtown. (Chandler Inions photos)*

that alone.

"A lot of things have to come together to make something like this happen," Greene said. "It's a big project. It takes capital and imagination."

Greene has taken advantage of applicable tax credits that can be applied to projects such as his, and he also indicated that the city has been helpful in more ways than one.

"I'll compliment the city," Greene said. "For the last five years, the city has been very aggressive in putting incentives out because they know downtown living is working for many other communities. A lot of other communities have challenges doing that, so they have had a very focused incentive program."

With any project, especially a historic one, there will be challenges.

"I have seven units going in here," Greene said. "Reality is, I probably needed nine or 10 units for all the costs. But where I lost them was the common area with the beautiful stairwell."

He also indicated that splitting some of the apartments to get to that desired unit number would have compromised the quality of the apartments they were trying to create.

Since Greene's building and those that Barnhardt has been working on all fall under Salisbury's historic district, increased regulatory standards exist that can impact what they can do. It's also a benefit because of the historic preservation tax credits.

It makes a difference, and it makes these types of projects possible. These renovations are just some of the many that are transforming downtown Salisbury into a place where people don't just work but live, too, all the while preserving parts of Salisbury's history.

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Children crowd around a book mobile in China Grove. Before the Rowan Public Library system expanded to include its many branches, the book mobile serviced people living outside of Salisbury. (Submitted photos)

Reading into it

A look back at Rowan County's libraries

BY CHANDLER INIONS
chandler.inions@salisburypost.com

The Rowan County Library system may have the county covered nowadays, but like most things, it started out rather small.

In its early days, it hardly resembled a library at all but rather a collection of books shared among Salisbury's elite.

Kerr Craige and J. F. Ross organized the first library association open to the public in 1877. It lasted until 1881. The association's 23 books and 145 magazines were housed in the office of Dr. J. F. Griffith, a Salisbury dentist.

Shortly after that, a literary society was formed and headed by Rev. Charles Storch. In a letter, he wrote that the society had about 15 members.

"Their collection of books is good and during the years has become larger," the letter read. "Every month, the members meet to discuss the books they have read."

The current library system officially began through the efforts of the Traveler's Club, a study group that needed reference books and reasoned that others in the community might, too.

Under the sponsorship of the Traveler's Club, a library was opened in the Henderson Law Office at the corner of Fisher and Church streets.

Inspiration to make a permanent library came from an article entitled "How to Start a Public Library," which appeared in the March-May 1910 North Carolina Library Bulletin.

"Any town, however small, can maintain some sort of a library, provided there are a few people in the town who really want one and are willing to work for one," it read. "The best way to start a library is to 'start' one."



Edith Clark, right, was the first trained and certified librarian in the Rowan Public Libraries system. The third floor history room at the library's headquarters is named after her.



A bookmobile makes a stop in Granite Quarry at the Mary Ann Beauty Parlor. (Submitted photos)

At an Elks Lodge meeting in 1911, Mrs. James Moore set the wheels in motion. They selected a chairman and secretary that night to establish a library association. The Traveler's Club contributed $100 to the fund. U.S. Sen. Lee Overman also gave $100.

Early librarian Elizabeth Hedrick volunteered, but her successor Mary O. Linton became the first paid librarian soon after.

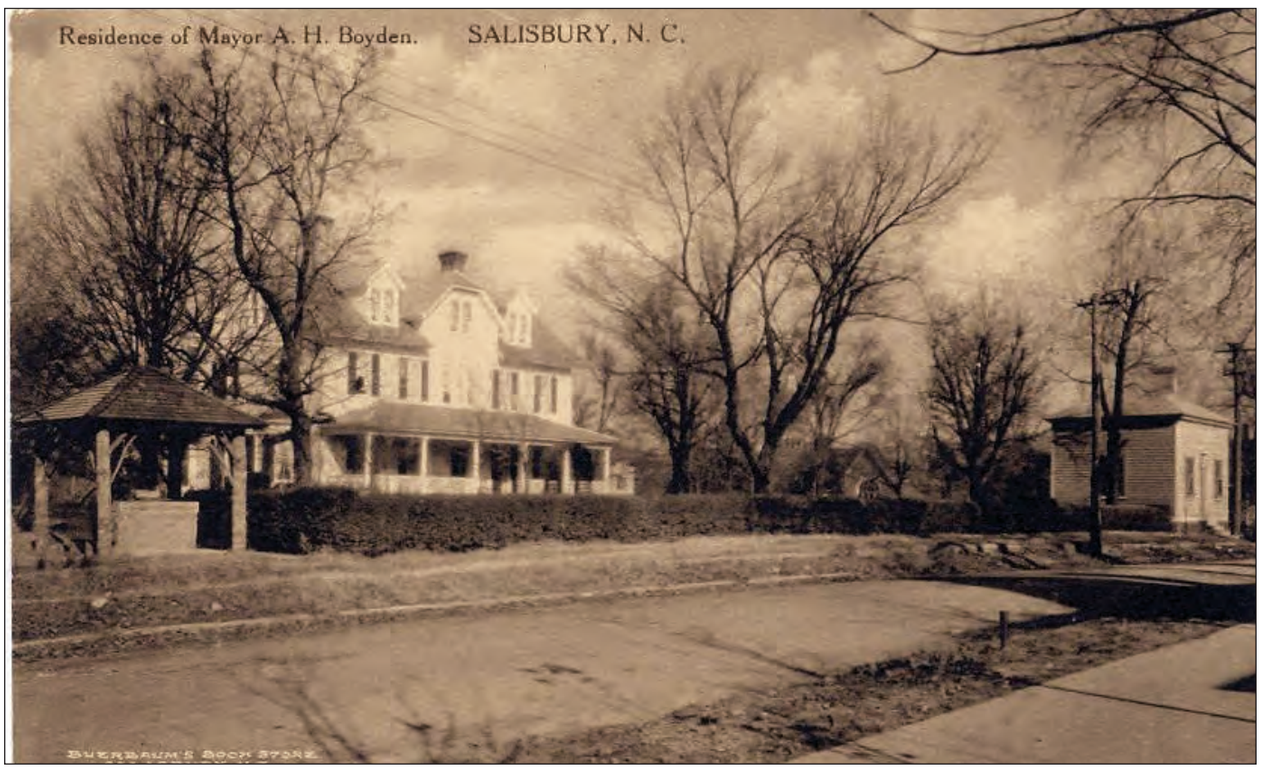
City and county financial support began in 1921 when those entities voted to include $300 for the library in their budget.

According to the North Carolina Library Bulletin, the number of volumes in 1920 was 2,215. It had more than doubled by 1934.

Edith Clark was the first professionally trained librarian. The third floor of the Rowan County Library headquarters is named after Clark. She had been a teacher in Salisbury public schools before accepting the public library position.

Clark's first task was to classify and catalog the roughly 5,000 volume holdings in the library. They had to close the library briefly while that task was completed.

It reopened in 1936 with three separate rooms; a reference and periodical room, a fiction room and a children's room sponsored by the Salisbury Junior Woman's Club.



This view of the Henderson Law Office and the residence of Salisbury Mayor A. H. Boyden shows where the first portion of the Rowan Public Library headquarters now sits.

New rules for the library were submitted at the July 1936 Board of Trustees meeting. Membership in the library would be for "white citizens of Salisbury who may qualify to register for voting."

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extending services to the Negro Civic League, saying the board would be glad to cooperate with them in any efforts to secure a branch for Blacks.

The first branch of the library in Salisbury was opened in 1937 and was designed for the use of Negroes.

In 1937, Rowan County borrowed a bookmobile from the N.C. Library Commission for September. The truck traveled to all sections of Rowan County, stopping at stores, homes, schools and filling stations.

Marjorie Beal, the director of the N.C. Library Commission, visited Salisbury to discuss possible plans for future libraries to service the county and city.

At that time, Rowan County had one book for every six people. Beal pointed to the limits to service because of the crowded conditions at the library. Members of the board recognized the urgent need for larger quarters.

A $100,000 bill for public libraries passed the NC. General Assembly, and each county got $900. At that time, Rowan County ranked seventh in wealth but 18th in its support of libraries.

Unfortunately, the emergence of World War II hindered the purchase of a permanent bookmobile and other developments that might have expanded library services to the county.

That is when Clark went into the various communities of Rowan to get their support.

In 1943, steps were taken to start several branch libraries.

A station library opened at Yadkin under the auspices of the Yadkin Community Club. The mayor of Spencer also met with library officials about a branch there. By October 1943, a branch was open in China Grove at the city hall.

With the war, no additional branches were opened until early 1945.

The Rockwell Civitan Club was the originator of the first county branch to open after the war. The first home of the branch was in the Holshouser Motor Company.

The much-anticipated bookmobile arrived in April 1948. It was a green Chevrolet truck equipped with shelves inside and out. It could hold around 500 books. The truck began its rounds in May.

A new branch in Landis was organized by the Civitan Club in 1949. Like its China Grove counterpart, that library was also in the town hall.

Unfortunately for Rowan County youth, the polio epidemic prevented children from coming to the bookmobile in 1948.

A new 10,000-square-foot library facility was opened in 1951 near the library's first home. The family of the late Burton Craig donated the property and substantial funding to help build a new library.

In 1954, the research papers of Mrs. J. Frank 'Mamie' McCubbins were donated to the library, firmly establishing the library as a significant genealogy research center. During the last 69 years, additional collections have been added, making Rowan Public Library's history room one of Southeast's premier genealogical research centers.

Interlibrary loans, where books are borrowed for library users from other libraries throughout the Southeast, began in 1955. Rowan Public Library was one of four pilot libraries in the state for the new service.

In 1969, the Rowan Citizens for Better Libraries was organized. The group spearheaded an effort that resulted in a complete renovation of the library in the early 1970s. The library also acquired adjacent property for future expansion. That expansion would occur in 1989 when the library headquarters grew to its current size of 47,500 square feet.

In the mid-1970s, an adult outreach service was established to extend library services to homebound persons and residents of care facilities.

The following decade would prove integral in the expansion of the library system.

The South Branch, the first full-service branch in the county, was established in 1982 in Landis. Two years later, the library system began providing microcomputers for public use.

The second full-service branch, the East Branch, was opened in Rockwell in 1986.

Automation came to the system in 1990, which improved circulation and catalog functional efficiency. By 1996, Rowan Public Library was offering access to the internet and developed a website. It was among the first five library systems in the state to do so.

In 2004, the library opened a new facility in China Grove called the South Rowan Regional Library.

The latest addition to the library system opened only a couple of years ago when the former Cleveland Elementary School's media center and the auditorium were repurposed to create the West Branch of the Rowan Public Library. It officially opened on June 1, 2021, bringing the library system to its current count of one headquarters building and three distinct branches.

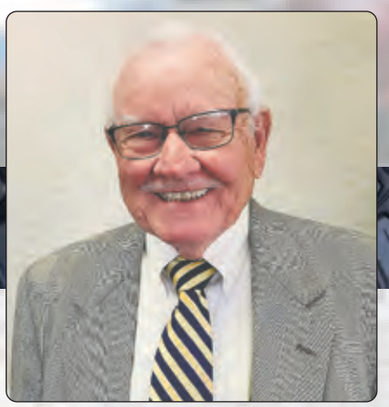
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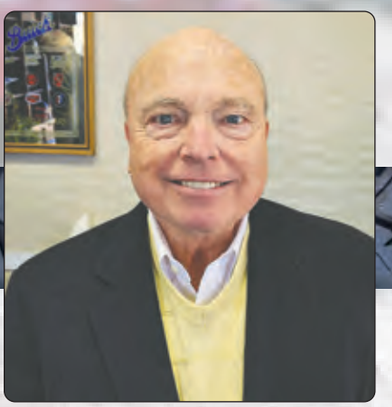
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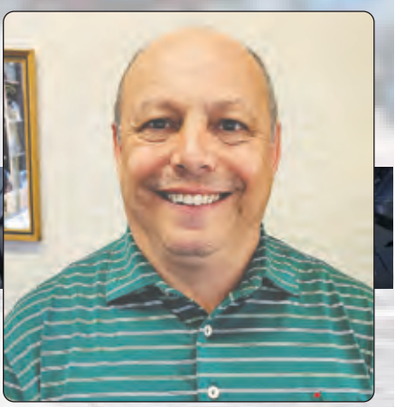
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With new businesses opening up, South Central Avenue in Landis is making a comeback. (Chandler Inions photo)

Discover Central Avenue

Small business owners revitalize Landis strip

BY CHANDLER INIONS
chandler.inions@salisburypost.com

Moments lost in time can be difficult to retrieve, but an economic rebound in Landis has revived a once barren Central Avenue into a destination for shoppers and conversationalists alike.

Looking at Central Avenue today, one can envision how it used to be thanks to a series of revived storefronts and the lively shopkeepers within.

"I remember when stuff was happening up here," said Chuck Freeze, owner of Chuck's Trains and Hobby Depot, located at 131 Central Avenue.

Freeze grew up in Landis and was around for the block's heyday.

"The post office was right here," Freeze said. "There was a doctor's office. The building I was in (previously) was an arcade at one point and a place where you learned macrame. Then where the hair place is, was Noah's, a five and 10-cent store.

"The sheriff's department was a library, and they always had something going on in there. The street had a lot of business back in the day."

Chuck and his wife, Deanna, began their business 17 years ago in a smaller Central Avenue storefront than they are in now. They were about the only business open on Landis' main drag for a long time.

The hobby depot had a saving grace, though, as their reputation for purveying hard-to-find items meant they did a lot of business online and catered to out-of-towners.

With bustling activity and regular foot traffic now, the Freezes have a reason for optimism.

"It's coming back," Freeze said. "I talked to an ex-alderman, and he said that in his lifetime, he didn't think this place would ever see a come-back."

Deanna Freeze added, "Everyone is so excited. The look on people's faces says it all. They walk in and are like, wow, this place has really turned around. As far as the whole area, people are happy to see it come back to life because it looked dead."

Fletcher and Gaines

Another part of the Landis rebirth has been Fletcher and Gaines Salon, located at 119 South Central Avenue. Owner Heather Mariano grew up in the area and graduated from South Rowan.

She started her career renting a chair at salons in Concord and Kannapolis and she credits a mentor during this stage in her career for "breathing life" into her dreams of salon ownership.

In 2017, while working there, Mariano did bridal work on the side. She called that business Sweet Magnolia Beauties. The business was booming, and she and her partner realized she needed more space.

"We had a God opportunity to come to Landis and open a studio called Sweet Magnolia Beauties," Mariano said. "I felt like I was meant to open something bigger and felt like God was putting me together with another business partner,



The mural in Landis pays homage to the businesses that once lined Central Avenue while also projecting a positive growth outlook for future businesses in the town. (Submitted photo)

and we opened a salon in Kannapolis called Maven (in 2020). It was great, but I felt like my heart was being pulled back to Landis."

She was only there a year and a half before selling her partnership in the business and returning to Landis. Some colleagues she made in Kannapolis followed her.

"We needed a name," Mariano said.

During this period in her life, Mariano's grandmother offered some advice.

"For arrows to be shot, they have to be pulled backward first," her grandmother said.

Feeling reassured that she was making the right choice, Mariano searched for a new name for the studio and looked over a list of possible baby names she had considered for her children.

"Fletcher was on top of Gaines on the list," Mariano said. "Fletcher means maker of an arrow, and gain means to increase, exceed or win."

A perfect fit for the name, Mariano laughed and said, "It's named after my Grandma without being called Lerline."

Mariano's stylists have built expansive clientele lists, drawing out-of-towners far and wide to Landis.

"People come in and are from Fort Mill or the other side of Charlotte," Mariano said. "We have someone come down from Virginia. Somehow we moved to a small town and got bigger."

She's thrilled with the move, though, because of the hometown atmosphere that Landis provides.

"If you have your door propped open because it's a nice day and the weather



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Fletcher & Gaines is one of the storefronts in Landis helping revitalize the previously popular stretch of road in the downtown area. (Chandler Inions photo)

is nice, people are going to walk in and say hey," Mariano said. "People pop in here to say they remember when it was X, Y or Z shop. Some people say they have lived here for so many years and just want to see what's new and going on."

Mariano indicated that the support goes all the way to town hall.

"The mayor (Meredith Bare-Smith) will be up here leaf-blowing in the middle of the night to prepare for an event we are having for the next day," Mariano said.

Whether in the market for gifts (Sweetest Beginnings), party goods (The Paper Factory), model trains (Chuck's), a haircut (Fletcher & Gaines) or just a warm cup of joe (Willowbrook Grounds), Landis has it all again.

Landis' latest coffee shop, Willowbrook Grounds, has provided connoisseurs with a new hangout. The space has become a popular meeting ground for friends looking to swap stories or for working professionals to get a mid-day caffeine reboot.

Before the store opened, its owner Torrie Jarrett, saw the relatively blank canvas of Central Avenue but could also envision the possibilities.

"I keep feeling like every time I drove through Landis, I just felt like, OK, it's going to be here," Jarrett said. "I am going to bring life back to Landis."

Patrons at Willowbrook are feeling the love.

Trisha Ritchie has lived in Landis for 21 years but is originally from Rockwell.

"The whole stretch has changed, and I am so glad it has happened," Ritchie said. "I will come and just hang."

When we caught up with Ritchie in mid-February, she was enjoying a green matcha tea but said she intended to try everything on the menu.

"It's good to see this happen," Ritchie said. "I think neighboring towns have grown. I kept thinking, when is it coming to Landis? Why do I have to go to Kannapolis or Salisbury? When this came to fruition, I thought yes. I hope it stays for the long haul."

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Download a printable copy of our 2023 Schedule of Events HERE (full page portrait) or HERE (landscape with calendar), and find out more information about each of these events by click on the listings below:

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The 1844 Kesler Newsom Kepley Farmhouse has undergone several renovations throughout the years. (Charlie Drape photo)

The test of time

The 1844 Kesler Newsom Kepley Farmhouse is still standing

BY CHARLIE DRAPE
charles.drape@salisburypost.com

In 1844, a two-story Federal style house with a central hall, two rooms on the first floor, two rooms on the second, an extended porch and two brick chimneys was constructed by an unknown builder in the western part of Rowan County near Dan Nicholas Park. It may look different now, but few would have thought that house would still be standing.

For almost 40 years, the house would remain in its Federal style, a popular type of architecture in the United States from 1785 to 1815. The White House is a perfect example of Federal architecture.

But the times were changing, and so was the architectural style of houses throughout the nation. Americans were tired of the Federal-style and craved something new.

So in 1883, the original house underwent a major renovation. Enter the Queen Anne style. Instead of the even, square shape of Federal houses, Queen Anne style was more asymmetrical with steeped roofs and a round or polygonal front corner tower.

According to a report created for the Rowan County Historic Landmark Commission, during the 1883 renovation "the west wall of the house and the chimney on the west wall were removed. The rooms on both floors were extended approximately eight feet. A two-story ell was added to the right side of the front elevation with an interior chimney built between the two rooms. A one-story ell was added to the left side of the rear elevation that contained a dining room and a kitchen separated by an interior chimney." An ell is a wing of a building perpendicular to the length of a main portion of a house, getting its name from the shape of the letter L.

But that wasn't the last chapter in the house's long journey.

In 1975, the North Carolina Department of Transportation announced "The Widening of Bringle Ferry Road" proj-

ect. NCDOT acquired most of the home's front yard for the project, so the house had to be moved approximately 150 feet south.

"They put beams underneath the house and they jacked it up and tore off the back porch then hooked it up to a big truck and just pulled it down the hill," said Bill Kepley, whose parents had purchased the house before the project.

Kepley was in his early 20s when his parents decided to buy the house and had started a company called "Restoring and Remodeling Consultants."

"My parents paid me to be the project manager of this and I drew the plans and helped them decide what the additions would look like and sort of help them pick out the wallpaper," Kepley said.

His parents had bought the house to restore it to its former glory because by the 1970s it had fallen into disrepair. They were trying to "really restore the house and follow the period architecture and style that it was done in and have more of an authentic house," Kepley said.

The renovations were completed in 1978 and Kepley's parents moved in that year. A garage was added to the house in 1985. They would spend the rest of their lives in the house until their deaths in 2022.



The farmhouse and the 1.57 acres property is a Rowan County historic landmark. (Charlie Drape photo)

In January, the Rowan County Historic Landmark Commission and the Rowan County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to designated the house, now called The Kesler Newsom Kepley Farmhouse, and the 1.57 acres it sits on as a Rowan County historic landmark.

The house is now listed for sale at tmrrealtyinc.com.



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Years ago, murals were seen as a creative and cheap way for businesses to advertise their products. (Charlie Drape photo)

The art of the matter

Rowan County has seen a mural explosion

BY CHARLIE DRAPE
charles.drape@salisburypost.com

It seems like you turn a corner in Rowan County and you'll run into a mural these days.

Drive through downtown Salisbury and you'll see one on local businesses such as Yummy Bahn Mi, a Vietnamese restaurant on North Long Street, or at The Fish Bowl, a bar off of East Innes Street. Or drive on U.S. 52 and you'll see a mural across from Rockwell's town hall. Take your car down North Main Street in China Grove and you'll see one on the side of the Grove Cartel Brewing Co. Cruise through Faith's downtown and you'll see one on the side of the old Faith fire house.

You get the point.

Murals have become a popular way for towns and businesses to show their uniqueness and have added to the beauty in the county. But they've come a long way.

At first, murals were simply advertisements. Before television and radio commercials flooded the airwaves, open walls on buildings were seen as a creative and cheap way for businesses to advertise their products. A garage, barn, warehouse or city high-rise all became canvases.

According to Terry Holt, chairman of the Rowan Museum board of directors and former history teacher, these ads really took off in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, especially when 32nd President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration as part of his New Deal program. Artists and painters were hired by advertisement firms to create large-scale ads on the sides of buildings for around $40. If they saw an open-wall on a building that they thought could be used for an advertisement, they would ask the business owner if they could paint a one.

"The business owner would ask, 'Well, what's it going to cost me,' and they would say, 'It won't cost you anything,' " Holt said. "And so usually the business owner would agree."

With the creation of electric signs, painted wall advertisements slowly faded from popularity. But that didn't stop the artists.

Graffiti emerged in the 1970s and became popular throughout the 1980s, especially in New York City, as artists took to abandoned buildings and subway trains to spray paint, wanting to have a freer and bigger space to show off their art. Early pioneers of graffiti, also known as street art, like Keith Haring and Jean Michael-Basquiat became some of the most notable figures in the art world during this time, going on to showcase their pieces in art galleries throughout New York City and the country. But views toward the graffiti started to shift. Some thought it was dirty and

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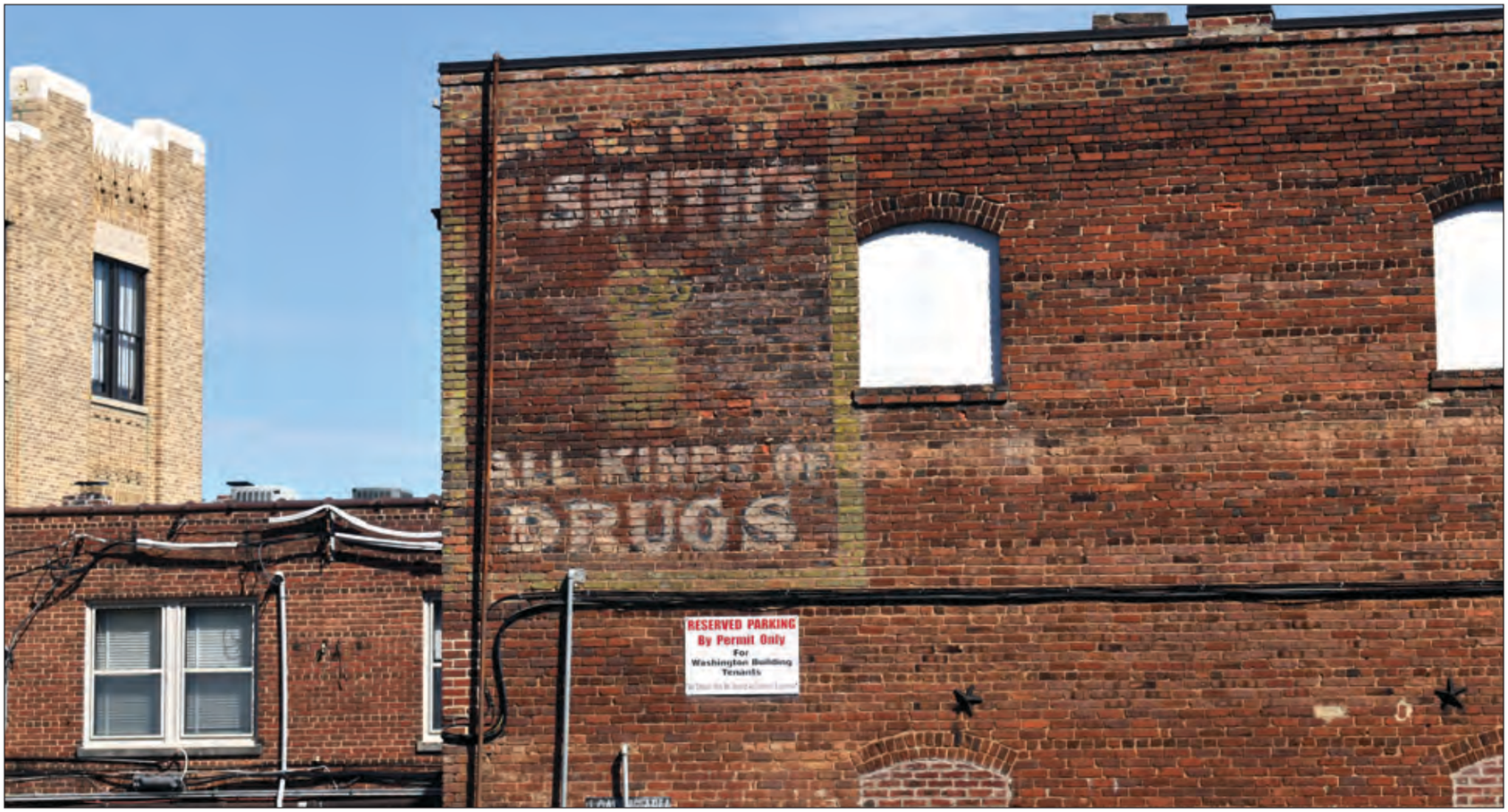
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Advertising signs on buildings were popular in the 1920s, '30s and '40s,. (Charlie Drape photo)



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wanted to clean it up.

"In New York City in the '80s they had a bad graffiti problem and they had a mayor who said, 'We need to stop this, we need to crush it,' so he made a point to put funding toward buffing all the graffiti and snubbing it out because it was kind of out of control and they did," said Shane Pierce, a local mural artist in Salisbury. Pierce is also known as Abstract Dissent.

Calling Pierce a "local mural artist" doesn't give the artist enough credit. A better title would be "the preeminent mural artist of Rowan County," because most of the murals you see around the county are his work. He credits the rise in popularity of murals in Rowan, and also around the country to three things:

• A British documentary called "Exit Through the Gift Shop," that follows anonymous street artist Banksy and others as they create art pieces in cities around the world became massively popular, being nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

• The rise of social media, which has made it easier for street artists to showcase their work, while also making it easier for fans to view it.

• Better and more controllable spray paint has been created that allows street artists to add more detail to murals. Pierce said the spray paint now could be used for "fine art."

When asked why he thought his murals have become so popular in the county, Pierce couldn't really say.

"I came up here and painted and people started asking for it. To me, I didn't know why they were making a big deal about it," Pierce said. "It's like there was a void in town and they were waiting for somebody like me to come fill it. It was the strangest thing."

Pierce only started spray-painting five years ago, an incredible feat if you've ever seen his work. He isn't exactly sure how many he has done in Rowan, but thinks it's upwards to dozens. The first mural he ever completed was in North Rowan Elementary and he has completed more for other schools.

The demand for his murals hasn't slowed down since he first started and it doesn't look like it will anytime soon. He said that the community has really come together and has supported his art and the murals you see all over the county.

"We all support each other now...I'm going to do whatever the town asks and try to be involved," Pierce said.

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The Organ Zion Lutheran Church in Salisbury is over 200 years old. (Brad Dountz photo)

Silent history

Cemeteries can tell a lot about who we are

BY BRAD DOUNTZ
brad.dountz@salisburypost.com

Cemeteries can tell so many kinds of stories: mysteries, romances and even horror. Seeing the names and dates, people can infer what happened to those who lived and died hundreds of years ago. They tell of a rich history that may seem like a missing puzzle piece that shows a glimpse of the average person who lived in Rowan County.

The Organ Zion Lutheran Church in Salisbury still has its original stone church that has been renovated over the years since it was completed in 1794. Next to it is the cemetery that has been around for just as long. Littered about are faded, worn down headstones that are barely legible. Across the street, the church has a cemetery that people can be buried in today, but the bygone cemetery is still there to act as a museum for Rowan County.

The graves go back as far as the Revolutionary War. The headstones are more simple, quaint and smaller compared to ones that are made now. It shows the passing of time as most graves are no longer maintained by the families due to a multitude of reasons. Keeping up the graves of a relative that someone never met may not be a priority. People still call the church to see if their ancestors are buried at the cemetery. There is also a website for people to search and see if any relatives are still there.

Back then, churches and cemeteries were more interconnected when compared to modern cemeteries that deal with funeral homes. People had to hand dig graves back then and do everything manually. In the middle of the cemetery, there is space with no headstones. This is because it is a mass grave where bodies were laid to rest and acts as a reminder to how far Rowan County has come in honoring those who have passed.

The Chestnut Hill Cemetery in Salisbury was established in 1888. Around





Above: *A child's grave at the cemetery is a gut-wrenching thing to see.* ***Right:*** *The graves at Chestnut Hill Cemetery are in higher quality compared to Organ Zion Lutheran Church. (Brad Dountz photos)*

10,000 people are buried there now with more than 100 people added every year. The city owns and operates it.

The headstones are in better condition than the ones at Organ Zion Lutheran Church, the reflection in the granite is still visible even on a cloudy day. A separate business across the street sells headstones and monuments but is not affiliated with the cemetery.

"Most of the plots in Chestnut Hill are already sold. We only have about maybe 200 spaces left," Cemetery Administrator Linda Davis said.

Davis says Chestnut Hill has to keep up with contemporary trends with how people wish to be laid to rest. "They say cremations are going to be the thing in the future, but we don't know. Right now, we're going back and forth," Davis said.

Columbariums at Memorial Park built were built to prepare for cremations to be displayed above ground. People can call Chestnut Hill directly to see if they can bury cremains there, but for full-sized burials a funeral home would need to make those arrangements. Overall, there are more options today if people want to be cremated or if they still want to be buried.

"A lot of people are going to cremations now instead of full-sized burials, now we're still burying a lot of cremains. If you're cremated you can be buried in the ground, you don't have to just not," Davis said.

Many of the plots at Chestnut Hill were bought many years ago but are left unused because those people's decedents have not committed to the same resting place as they did.

"Those were sold way back when, early 1900s and further. People back then thought that their family was going to stay in Salisbury forever. So if they had five kids, they bought an eight-grave plot thinking mom and daddy and five kids were going to be buried there. But as you know kids grow up and they move away," Davis said.

Maintenance at Chestnut Hill is key to being successful. Public Works helps mow the grass, trim the trees, collect leaves and trim hedges. The city also does an annual clean up toward the end of January. Salisbury says that can be hard because people do not always follow the guidelines of what is acceptable to place on the graves.

Luckily, workers don't have to dig the graves by hand anymore. Chestnut Hill has an excavator they use to dig the graves in only 30 minutes. The graves are actually only four-and-a-half feet instead of the presumed six.

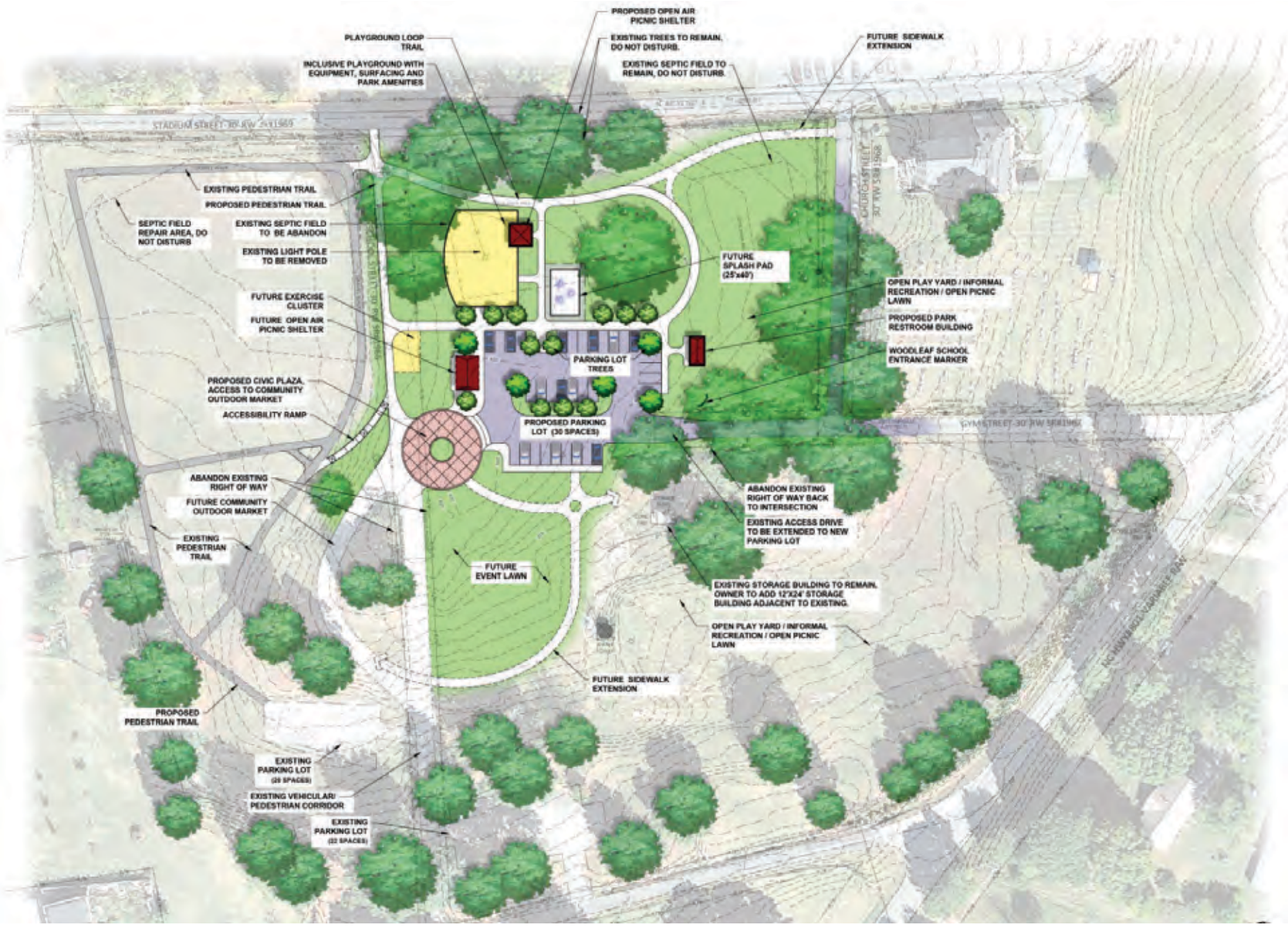
Chestnut Hill has no budget to repair headstones, so the older ones start to look like those at Zion Lutheran.

"We have some markers at Chestnut Hill that are broken, a lot of real thin ones like 1800s that are broken. What we try to do if they break, we take them and lean them against the base because those families are nowhere to be found," Davis said.

Cemeteries have always been prevalent in Rowan County. It may seem macabre to dwell on cemeteries and what happens to certain people years after they have been laid to rest. In fact, it's very important because after a while these graves show people now who populated Rowan County and how they chose to forever be a part of the area.



The grave of a Revolutionary War veteran is at the cemetery.



Plans for the new Woodleaf Park. (Submitted image)

Filling the void

Woodleaf Elementary to live on as park

BY CHARLIE DRAPE
charles.drape@salisburypost.com

Schools are more than just institutions for learning, they are institutions for a community.

How many people meet their lifelong friends at school? Or how many parents meet others because their children attended the same place? Or how many teachers build friendships with their co-workers?

When Woodleaf Elementary closed in 2017, it left a void in the Woodleaf community. So many residents had some sort of association with the school, whether it was former students, parents whose children went there, teachers or people who lived next to it.

"Woodleaf Elementary was the heart of Woodleaf," said Michelle Hastings, a former kindergarten teacher at the school. "They had a caution light, a BP gas station and the school. The school was the center of the community."

Hastings is still a kindergarten teacher, but moved to West Rowan Elementary, which is the new school the Rowan-Salisbury Schools system built when Woodleaf Elementary merged with Cleveland Elementary. But her connection to the school is more than the fact that she used to teach there. Her husband and both of his brothers are graduates of the school, as are her son-in-law and his grandpa. Hasting's mother-in-law also used to volunteer at the school.

Hastings said she was nervous on her first day of school so many years ago,

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(Submitted photo)

but remembers the support from the community really helped her settle in and feel comfortable. The support and involvement from the Woodleaf parents was much greater than her previous school in Ohio, where she is originally from and where she first started her teaching career. She quickly told herself that this was going to be home.

"The people there and the community made you feel like you were home," Hastings said. "There's so many connections and I think that's what was so painful about losing Woodleaf: all those connections that people had there."

Taking a second to think about it and then laughing to herself, Hastings told a story about her favorite memory: A small, black pig had gotten loose from a neighboring farm and was running around the playground while school was in session. So, Hastings and a few other teachers went into animal control mode. They chased the pig all around the school grounds until they finally captured him.

She also said the irreplaceable friendships she made were among her favorite memories.

"That was hard for Woodleaf to swallow, that their school was being taken away," Hastings said when the community first heard that the school was being closed. She said the last day before its closing was a tough one. It was a somber atmosphere, but the teachers had a little bit of excitement because of the move to a new school.

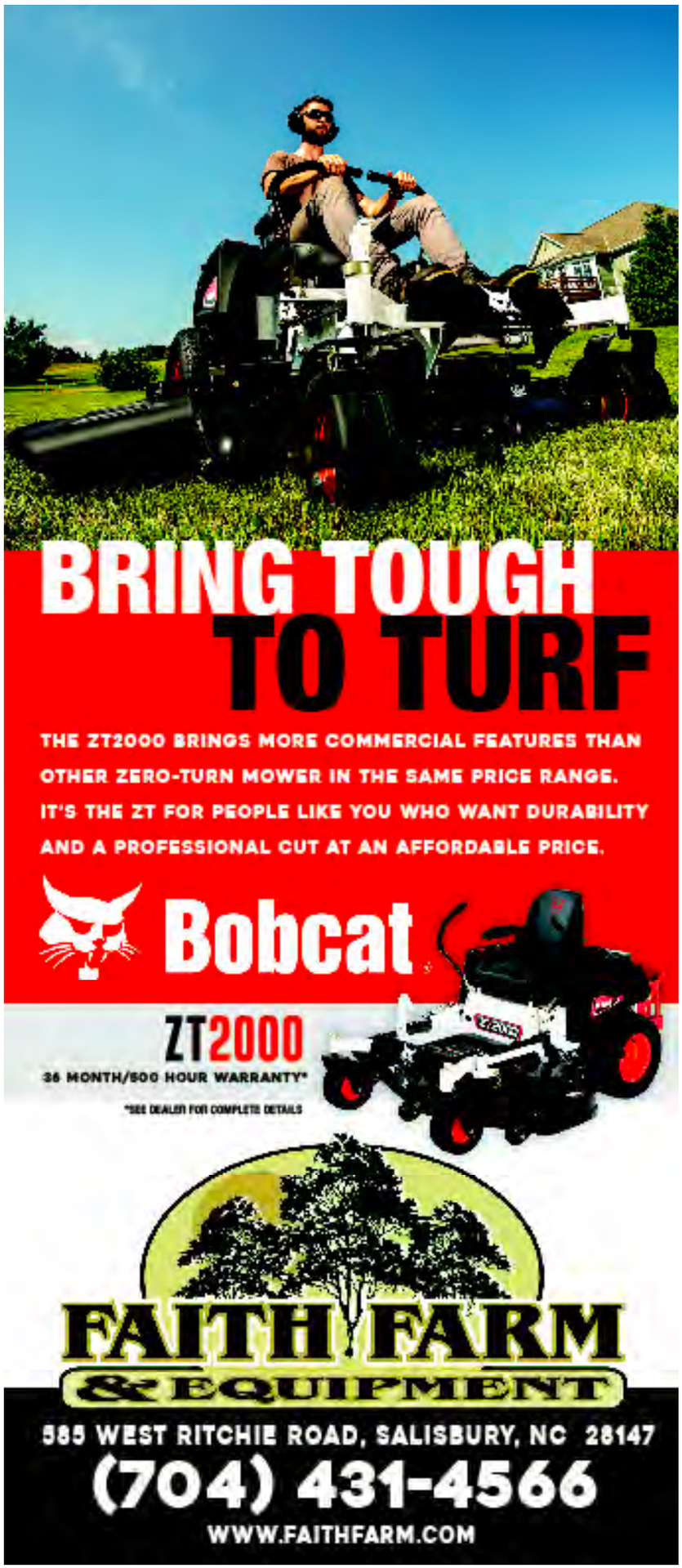
"I just miss being in the community," said Kris Wolfe, the former principal of Woodleaf Elementary from 2014-2019.

Wolfe is now the current principal of West Rowan Elementary. She also said she missed doing activities in the school's auditorium and gymnasium, which were the oldest buildings in the school and reminded her of the gymnasium that the University of Indiana's basketball team played in.

"The gym reminded me of the movie 'Hoosiers' because it was just that old-time gym," Wolfe said.

But with sad endings come new beginnings. The county is in the pre-stages of building Woodleaf Community Park on the school's former site. The park features include a playground for toddlers, a playground for older children, two picnic shelters, a multi-use field, an outdoor exercise area, a memorial orchard, a gazebo, an amphitheater plaza, a 1.2-mile walking trail that loops around the park, two parking lots and restroom facilities. Bids have opened for construction of the park and it is estimated to be completed within the next year or earlier, according to the Rowan County Parks and Recreation Department.

"In so many of our small, unincorporated communities, the schools are a major hub for activity for the residents," said Rowan County Commissioner Jim Greene, who spearheaded building the park. Bringing that back to Woodleaf was a major part of why the commissioners wanted to build the park.



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Gary's Barbecue is a classic American restaurant that has changed little since it opened. (Brad Dountz photo)

The best recipe

Local restaurants stick with tried-and-true formulas

BY BRAD DOUNTZ
brad.dountz@salisburypost.com

Simple food is often the best food. If it's made by someone who cares about what they serve, it's going to taste pretty good. More often than not, it's going to be delicious. There are countless restaurants in Rowan County that offer more than just a nice meal or dessert, but act as a consistent pillar in an ever-changing landscape.

Gary's Barbecue in China Grove has been open for over 50 years. When driving down the road it looks like a place that hasn't changed since it opened. Inside of the restaurant, the walls are lined with old signs and pictures that make customers feel like they've traveled back in time.


Ritchie

"I don't like change, but I'm getting used to it...I try to keep everything simple," owner Gary Ritchie said.

Ritchie is committed to staying the same as much as he can. He doesn't accept credit cards, only cash or checks.

"I started back in '71 and nobody ever used a credit card much back then and so I just hate change. I decided to leave everything the way it was," Ritchie said. They have settled on a compromise by having an ATM on the premises.

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Gary's has a retro feel that people of all ages can enjoy. (Brad Dountz photos)

turned over the years love the nostalgia and the fact the food still tastes like it used to without getting too expensive.

"I try to keep things reasonable. When we opened a hamburger was 15 cents and the barbecue was a quarter and a drink was a dime. Now things are drastically different because everything costs so much now," Ritchie said.

As time goes on, Gary's has become a place that people can rely upon for being there like it was when they were younger. Even as China Grove and Rowan County go through changes, Gary's is sticking to what they know.

"When we started here, China Grove had about 2,200-2,300 people and now it's probably about 5-6,000 and it's growing pretty quick now because they're building houses and businesses everywhere. I'm not sure how it'll affect the business, but I'm sure it will improve it, which is good the way it is. I like it the way it is, but whatever happens happens," Ritchie said.



Owner Melissa Utley is proud of the fact that Dairy Queen has stayed the same.

After eating some delicious barbecue, something nice and sweet is always a welcomed addition to a meal. Since the 1950s, the Dairy Queen in Salisbury has been another blast from the past that people can't stop coming to. All of the exterior still rocks a vintage design, but unlike Gary's, they started taking cards a few years ago.

Dairy Queen has been owned and operated by Robert and Melissa Utley for over 40 years. Just like Gary's, Melissa values that Dairy Queen has stayed the same even with Rowan County constantly developing and growing.

"I don't think it's changed much. We still have children and the smiling faces that are delighted to see you dip their ice cream cones. It's still a happy place," Utley said. "We've basically just stuck to what we're good at...80 percent of our products are the same as they were 40 something years ago...We try to keep everything the same...We are what we were 45 years ago."

Utley thinks the reason Dairy Queen has been such a popular spot is because it has been around for so long, people can't imagine their lives without it.

"The next generation and the generation after. We hear stories all the time, 'My grandfather used to bring me here and now I'm bringing my grandkids here!' It's kind of a generational favorite spot," Utley said.

Besides believing that Dairy Queen hasn't changed, Utley is adamant that it doesn't change going forward. Her brother has worked at Dairy Queen for most of his life and her kids plan on running it in the future.

"There's nothing like the feel of West Innes. You couldn't match it if you went and built a new one. It's the memories of people and people who come by and tell stories and pictures. You can't replicate that. We're very, very grateful to have been here for as long as we have been," Utley said.

Recently, Rowan County has gone through its own evolution to figure out what it's going to be for those living here in the long term. Luckily, people will always be hungry and Gary's Barbecue and Dairy Queen will always be there.



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The town of Rockwell recently built a new police station. (Charlie Drape photo)

Boomtown

Rockwell has seen steady increase of residents, businesses

BY CHARLIE DRAPE
charles.drape@salisburypost.com

Before the town of Rockwell was incorporated into Rowan County by an act of the North Carolina General Assembly in 1911, it was a large camping site in the 1800s for travelers who were making their way to the South Carolina coastline for salt.

The campers would hop off their horses, let them rest and set up their tents around a large rock well. That's how the town became Rockwell.

"It was a pretty place with great oak trees hewed out for the horses to drink from," said Mabel Kluttz in a 1953 bicentennial edition of the Salisbury Post. Kluttz, known as the "First Lady of Rockwell," was a highly regarded town historian.

Now the camping site has turned into an up-and-coming town of 2,200 residents and two of Rockwell's town aldermen are looking to make the future even better, while also reflecting on the time they spent growing up there.

Memories of Rockwell's past

Town of Rockwell Alderman Chris Cranford, 67, was born in Rockwell in 1955 and remembers the town for the simple pleasures it had to offer during his childhood. He remembers organizing games of football, basketball and baseball with his friends against other kids in town, and just generally always being outside, which is a joy Cranford said kids nowadays don't understand.


Cranford

"We had the best time, best environment as far as being a kid — better than they do today. We were out playing sports all the time and doing things and now they're doing this all the time," Cranford said as he mimicked texting on a phone.

He admitted that there weren't many places to go as far as restaurants or places to hang out, so most of his time was spent playing at Rockwell Park and eating dinners at home with his family. He also remembered going out hunting

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"I'll say it til the day I die: I lived during the best time for a kid to grow up in Rockwell," Cranford said.

Cranford was first elected as alderman in 2019 and said his main reason for running was because he wanted to see more people who were "born and bred in Rockwell." But although he is reminiscent of his childhood in Rockwell, he said he understands that growth is necessary for any town to survive.

"The world is bigger. It's the sign of the times, you've got to grow to be able to exist," he said.


Brewer

Alderman Dillon Brewer, 30, has seen that growth during his childhood in Rockwell and is set on creating more while he is on the board. When asked what he remembers about the town when he was a kid, Brewer said "a lot of empty lots." But in the last 10 to 15 years he has seen businesses like McDonalds, CVS Pharmacy, Sonic and O'Reilly's take up residence in the town.

As Cranford did when he was a kid, Brewer said his childhood days were spent going to the park, playing sports and spending days with friends and family.

Brewer was heavily involved in student government in middle school and high school. He was vice president of the North Carolina Association of Student Councils his senior year. Once he graduated, he went straight to work in the auto industry, but he always wanted to get back to helping with his community. He was elected as an alderman in 2021.

"I just wanted to take an additional step to serve my neighbors," Brewer said. "There's a lot of growth in certain areas that I thought I could help with in my community."

The new Rockwell

With new housing developments being built, the town's population is expected to double in the next 10 years to close to 4,500 residents.

The influx of people means more businesses will be setting up shop in the town. In fact, some have already. Bojangles has been approved by the board of aldermen, as well as The Morning Glory coffee shop. The Rowan-Kannapolis ABC Board is also building a new store. Brewer is hoping that even more businesses will see how thriving Rockwell has become and want to follow suit.

Rockwell residents also recently voted for a liquor-by-the-drink referendum in the November election. The referendum allows alcoholic mixed-beverages, such as margaritas, to be sold at restaurants in town. And to address the growing population the town also built a state-of-the-art police department located on U.S. 52.

More business in town is always a good thing, but Both Cranford and Brewer said they would like residents of the town to be more involved in community activities, which is something they have been working on as aldermen. To help new residents find out about community events, the town redesigned their website and launched its first "Town of Rockwell" facebook page, which gained 700 likes in three days.

"That's one of the things when I'm going somewhere, I want to look at their town's website or Facebook to see what kind of events they have," said Brewer, who helped spearhead the redesign of the town's website and create the Facebook page.

Brewer also helped create the first Town of Rockwell Cornhole Tournament last year, which he wants to become an annual event. There were 48 teams and around 200 people showed up. But that's just the start. The big event that is being planned for this summer is the "Rock the Park" festival which will feature live music, food trucks and vendors. There are also plans for a Food Truck Friday Festival where food trucks from all over the county will be able to drive in and sell to residents. Lastly, the town is planning to celebrate a home every month with a "Yard of Month" competition.

"We're just trying to do more events to bring a sense of community to Rockwell. It's something we've really been missing out on," Brewer said.

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Food Lion started out as a single grocery store in Salisbury and is now in 10 states. (Brad Dountz photos)

Investing in community

Food Lion's reach goes further than just good deals

BY BRAD DOUNTZ
brad.dountz@salisburypost.com

Ronnie Smith knows Food Lion like the back of his hand. As he should — his father co-founded it nearly 70 years ago.

"Truthfully, I've been with the company 66 years. I started when I was 11 years old. That was in 1957 when we opened our first Food Town store and I was too young to earn a salary. So my dad who, with Mr. Ketner, started the company, put me to work shining apples and I didn't get paid," Smith said.

In 1957, Ralph and Brown Ketner along with Wilson Smith, Ronnie's father, worked for Winn-Dixie in Salisbury. They were told they were moving their headquarters to Raleigh, but they all decided they didn't want to move. There was a building with space for a grocery store and they decided to start their own business.

The only problem was that they didn't have enough capital to get everything off the ground. In total, they had $60,000 to $65,000, but needed $125,000. In order to get the rest of the money, they reached out to everyone they knew in the area for help.

"They decided, 'Well, let's issue stock in the company.' The company didn't even exist, it was brand new," Smith said. They were selling shares in their company at $10 each. Most people laughed at them and said, 'No, we're not interested.' But they found enough people to raise the total $125,000. They did it."

Later, Food Town was bought by a company from Brussels, Belgium — the DelHaize Group. They wanted to expand beyond the state of North Carolina, but had a problem and also a solution.

"When that happened, we could not move into other states out of North Carolina because there was a Food Town in Memphis, Tennessee, there was a Food Town in another state and we were not able to use the name Food Town. So, we said, 'OK, the logo for the DelHaize company was a lion...and we changed our name from Food Town to Food Lion...We only had to change two letters and that



Ronnie Smith's (pictured) father, Wilson Smith, helped start Food Lion thanks to the help of local residents who invested in the company.

saved the company millions of dollars in signage," Smith said.

DelHaize invested $7 million for 49 percent of shares of Food Town. When that happened, things really got going.

"The stock that the few investors had purchased back in 1957 took off like a rocket...A stockholder that bought as little as $500 worth of stock way back when became millionaires," Smith said. "It lit a fire under this community and the stockholders got real excited. They would go to the Salisbury Post everyday and read the stock. The stock would start going up, up, up, up."

Most of the money that the original stockholders had was invested back into the community once they died. Catawba College, Novant Health, Rowan Helping Ministries, churches and foundations all received money from the original investors in Food Lion.

"So without that, this community probably would have not been able to grow and prosper like it's done. For that reason, I think people still look at Food Lion and say, 'Thank God it started right here in Salisbury, North Carolina,'" Smith said.

Smith is still involved with Food Lion to this day, working with Food Lion Credit Union and Food Lion Foundation.



Wilson Smith and Ralph Ketner in front of the first Food Town store in the Ketner Center in 1971. (Salisbury Post file photo)

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Food Lion's focus has always been to keep prices as low as possible. (Brad Dountz photo)

Smith says his father's work ethic was "ingrained" in him and that perseverance has been rewarded.

"If I worked with you in the office or the store I felt like you were part my family...The sacrifices that were made in the early, early days really paid off later on in the company," Smith said.

Food Lion is still driven to serve its community. Joey Williams is the director of operations of Food Lion in Salisbury/Rowan County. He has been with the company for over 40 years and oversees 23 stores. He describes all the ways Food Lion, not just as a company but as employees, have assisted in giving back in anyway they can.

"For me and my team, we volunteer whenever needed at Rowan Helping Ministries and what we try to do is when they have a need we send folks, volunteers to help prepare and to feed folks in the community in need," Williams said.

Food Lion supports the food pantry at Livingstone College and partners with Rowan Vocational Opportunities. Last year they donated $1 million for Second Harvest Food Bank and $125,000 to the non-profit Partners in Learning to build teaching kitchens.

"We do this because we truly believe that we are the communities that we serve. Our associates obviously live here and work in the towns and cities we serve and that is especially true here in Salisbury," Williams said.

Food Lion hasn't forgotten what it takes to be a success like it was back in the day. Low prices were a huge factor in their expansion and even though there is more local competition to deal with, Food Lion folks are not worried because the company retains the same values that it used to.

"Price is what made Food Lion and being there for our customers. We continually do everything we can to save where we can so we can reinvest in price to keep prices down. We know by doing that we keep our prices lower than our competition in most cases," Williams said.

Food Lion isn't afraid to adapt to how customers or the county think. "We're going to change when our customers tell us to change. We're trying to keep our stores updated and we're going to keep our prices down," Williams said.

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Downtown Salisbury and the rest of Rowan County has changed drastically over the years. (Brad Dountz photo)

Through the years

Growing up with Rowan County through the generations

BY BRAD DOUNTZ
brad.dountz@salisburypost.com

Terry Holt can still smell the burning. Back in 1964, Holt was just a kid when he was exposed to a Ku Klux Klan rally that took place in Rowan County and he still remembers it to this day.

"I remember going by on the school bus and smelling the kerosene soaking on the three crosses. People came and parked in our yard, put on their Klan robes, and walked a half a mile to get over," Holt said.

To paint a better picture of what that time was like, Holt suggests checking out "Klansville, U.S.A." a book about the Klan in the civil rights era, which shows a rally taking place in downtown Salisbury.

"If it had not rained a heavy rain on that day, there would've been dead people in the streets. There was a huge Klan rally here and a huge response rally and the police really just didn't know what to do. It was about to break loose and God said, 'OK, enough of this!' and it just torrential





Left: *Terry Holt and his wife Eunice at their home that used to belong to his grandmother. (Brad Dountz photo)*
Right: *Terry and Eunice Holt the day of their wedding.*



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down poured and sent everybody on his way. I sat beside one of the Klan members in church every Sunday," Holt said.

Holt, a retired teacher, has lived in Rowan County for most of his life. The only time he lived anywhere else was when he moved to Virginia for eight years for a teaching job. It can be easy to take for granted how far America has come since those days of unrest. Even something as innocent as getting a drink of water took on whole new dimensions a few decades ago. Holt remembers a time when he was at the store with his mom and witnessed a powerful scene.

"A little girl had climbed up on the water fountain to get water and just about the time she was drinking this woman clothes-lined her off of the water stand because she had climbed up on the 'colored' water fountain," Holt said. "I remember asking my mom, 'Why does the water have a color?' And her response was, 'Well for right now, son, it just does.' "

Holt was born on Mt. Hope Church Road. An only child, his parents both used to work at the Cannon Mills. Looking back at how important those mills were to so many people, Holt can't believe that they are gone now.

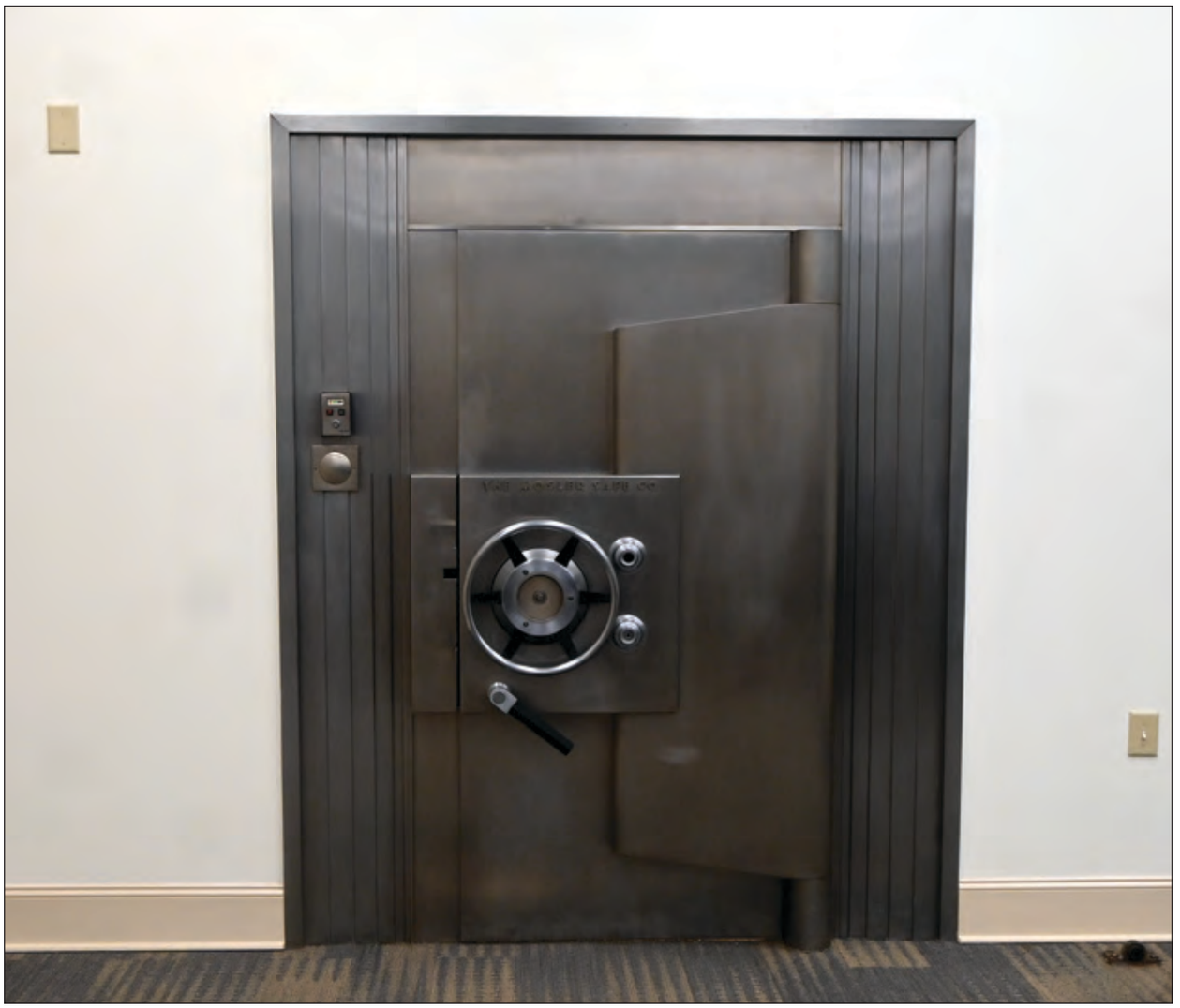
"I would never have thought in my life time that I would've watched the entire Cannon Mills torn down. My mom and dad made their living there. I worked there three years, partially in the summer. I never thought..."

One of the places that Holt and his friends always hung out at was "Dragging Town," in his words, "It was just a place for teenagers to run miles up on their parent's cars." He can personally attest to this.

"So, I'm in Dragging Town, I picked up a buddy of mine. We're just up and down, up and down. I got home and I'm asleep in the bed and my door comes open and I've never seen my dad this angry....He said, 'How in the world did you put 656 miles on that car in one day?'"

Holt can't help but notice all the changes to Rowan County since he was a kid. Like when all the big chains left Salisbury, he barely recognizes it anymore. " I remember eating at the Woolworth's counter...Watching China Grove change, the stores changed. I was there when the A&P store was still downtown."

Holt taught history and worked with the Rowan Museum once he retired. The past has always fascinated him no matter what kind of history came his way. He went to Mount Hope Church where his mom taught Sunday school while his father was Sunday school superintendent. The original church was built in 1865, but was later demolished. Holt couldn't help but go through the rubble to get a souvenir.



The safe that is still located in the city council chambers is one of the clear ways that show city hall used to operate as a bank. (Brad Dountz photo)

"I went down and got some of the bricks that had the initials in it, had the little trinity markings on it. So I have that remembrance of my home church."

He thinks back to bring into scope how far his family have had roots here in Rowan County. His sixth great-grandfather on his mother's side was a Hessian soldier who fought in the Revolutionary War, but deserted the military. He found his way to Rowan County where other Germans lived. His father's side, also from Germany, came here, too.

"They kept me here. Just those eight years in Virginia, rest of my life has been in Rowan County."

Jonathan Barbee, 24, has also lived in Rowan County his whole life. He is very active in the community, where he has been a member of Civitans, Leadership Rowan and Salisbury Citizens Academy. He attended Salisbury High School and Catawba College. Barbee has always cared about where he grew up and has appreciated how much it's improved.

"When other things started coming in, that became a central point for the community to actually hang out and stuff," Barbee said. "Locals like a walkable city. The idea is of the diversity of things which we can go to. We do want to see these things filled up."

Barbee can truly appreciate Bell Tower Green as a nice hub for residents to take in nice weather or be the de facto destination for fun events on weekends. All of the growth that has happened makes Barbee remember what the county was like when he was growing up not that long ago.

"I remember when Life Church and Juice Life used to be the Winn-Dixie," Barbee said. "We're maintaining the culture, doing responsible growth to make sure we're not letting it go by the wayside."

Barbee is also a part of the Rowan Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals organization. He thrives on being around like-minded individuals who share his need to do better for the community. The fact that it's younger people taking charge in this way is what makes Barbee so excited about it.

"To be able to have something like that and have people who want to share a bond with you that is self improvement, finding connections, how to better help an individual... I'm happy that there are other people in my demographic group that have that mindset," Barbee said.

Barbee will continue to do his best to make Rowan County live up to its full potential and be a place for future generations to call home.

"I love this place. I haven't learned enough to make me feel comfortable that I have to go outside the nest when there was such a rich history and qualitative things that we can do to improve before I end up leaving."

People who choose to stay in Rowan County have their reasons for doing so. Sometimes it's due to familiarity or a desire to see where it'll be going forward. It doesn't matter how old you are, Rowan County will always be home to those that love it.

— Looking back —



NC Transportation Museum volunteers Charlie Jarrell, C.E. Spears and Jim Mesimore work on a steam engine in June 1987. (Wayne Hinshaw photo)



Rowan County celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2003 with a parade in downtown Salisbury. (Jon C. Lakey photo)



East Innes Street from an earlier time. (Salisbury Post file photo)



Zesto Snack Shop on North Main Street. (Salisbury Post file photo)



Train depot in Rockwell. (Salisbury Post file photo)



Young mill worker at Kessler Mills, which became Cannon Mills. (Getty Images)

Run of the mill

Industry may have faded, but county identity remains

BY ELISABETH STRILLACCI
elisabeth.strillacci@salisburypost.com

Like many communities in North Carolina, Rowan County relied heavily on mill work to provide income as farming began to ease its way out the fabric of many lives.

Until about 1870, Salisbury was the largest town in western N.C., when all towns began experiencing industrial growth.

In 1887, James William Cannon founded the Cannon Manufacturing Company in Kannapolis. His goal was to produce a basic textile product instead of yarn or another intermediate material. Towels were produced under the name "Cannon Towels."

Like many large manufacturing companies, Cannon created an entire community for its employees, including hundreds of homes for mill workers, a company store, and, amazingly, a world-class YMCA facility, which had the largest membership in the world at the time. Cannon donated land and money for school construction and education. That year, the first school, McIver was opened.

Cannon erected stores, businesses and churches. In 1917, Cannon arranged a life insurance policy for all Cannon employees. This had never before been done for employees of a company.

In 1924, the company hit its stride, and in 1928, Charles Cannon organized nine textile companies into one large corporation, Cannon Mills. At least 300,000 towels were being produced each day, and it soon became the world's largest producer of textile products.

But the history of the textile mills had some hiccups. In 1889, a related cotton mill was opened in Salisbury with the specific goal of providing safe work "for white women and children, so they would not have to work with Black men or women," said Evin Burleson, director of the Rowan Museum. Blacks were



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Workers at Salisbury Cotton Mill

essentially permitted "just to work in tobacco factories, which were not especially clean." The cotton mill was a place for low-income women and children to work who needed to help support their families. White women from middle class families were still expected to stay home and care for families and homes after marriage. It was not until after World War II that Blacks were employed at the textile mills.

Also tied into the history of textile mills was the empty mill in Salisbury that became the only military prison in N.C. during the Civil War. Several weeks after North Carolina joined the Confederacy, Gov. Henry Clark was commissioned to construct a prison for incoming Union prisoners of war. An empty textile mill in Salisbury was selected. In May of 1862, nearly 1,400 prisoners were imprisoned, but by October 1864 the population of Northern war inmates had increased to about 10,000. The overcrowding and poor sanitation of the prison led to a death rate of over 25 percent, and 4,000 prisoners died during the prison's operation. Today, the Salisbury National Cemetery exists to commemorate the Union soldiers who lost their lives at the Confederate prison during its operation.

However, the mills were a huge part of the development of the entire county, and many residents still have memories of parents working in the mills, or spending some summers working there themselves.

"I worked (at Cannon Mills) for three summers because my parents worked there," said Terry Holt. He spent two of those summers working in the sewing room with his mother. His job was getting pieces to each seamstress for finishing, and "it was a challenge to keep up with some, they moved so fast." In addition, if there were special orders, the piecework would pay more, and Holt had to watch carefully to be sure he evenly distributed the higher-paying pieces among the workers. "Or I'd hear 'you gave her more than you gave me,' and they'd be mad for a bit."

"I remember working one summer there in the sewing room," said Amelia Hedges. "I was 17, and thought I might not like to go to college, even though I had a scholarship. So my father arranged for me to work there for a summer to see what my future might hold if I didn't get on with my education. I ended up with a lot of respect for the people that did that work all day. I did not have the fortitude to do it. I admire them."

Over time, labor overseas began to be cheaper, and in the 1970s and 1980s, the lower costs combined with less stringent labor laws meant manufacturing in the U.S. began to decline.

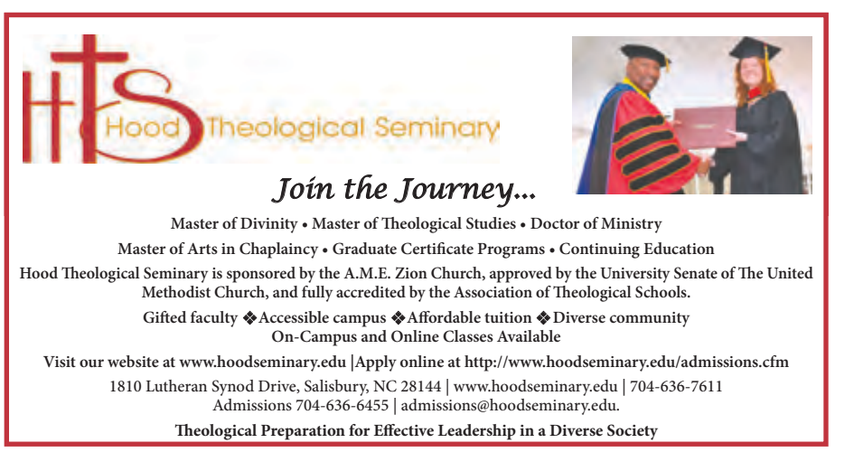
And a lot of people who had depended on those factories for providing for their families were worried — and looking at the idea of having to move to where there were still jobs. Some communities worried that they might not survive the loss of industry.

But survive they have, many reinventing themselves with revitalized downtowns, housing numerous small businesses and restaurants, and offering new or reinvented entertainment.

In addition, there have been some minor replacements, with some of the largest employers being Food Lion, Chewy, the VA Medical Center, Daimler, the Novant Health Rowan Medical Center and clinics, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, Rowan County, Gildan, Teijin Automotive, and soon, Macy's Distribution Center.

"There hasn't been a resurgence of jobs on the same level that factories provided," said Burleson, "but the communities are finding their way forward and thriving."







Sarah Reeves Johnston buried a soldier in her garden to save him from an unmarked grave.



Lula Marie Spaulding Kelsey was the first female mortician in NC and founder of the Salisbury Colored Women's Civic League.

Driving force

Women have played key roles in Rowan's history

BY ELISABETH STRILLACCI
elisabeth.strillacci@salisburypost.com

Rowan County has a feminine side.

In fact, the first leader historically documented in what is now Rowan County was a woman. Known today only as Guatari Mico, which was the term used by the Native American Wateree tribe for chief, she had 39 chiefs under her. She was the ruler discovered by the Spanish expedition of Juan Pardo in 1567, who changed the name from Guatari to Salamanca. Sadly, the actual name of the chief is not known.

Rowan County initially was a much larger territory, with an undefined western border. Rowan was the birth place of multiple N.C. counties, as numerous others were carved out of what was originally Rowan. In 1770, Guilford County was created from an eastern slice of Rowan and a western piece of Orange County. About a year later, the northeastern portion of the remaining Rowan became Surry County. In 1777, the most western portion of Rowan became Burke County. Following the Revolutionary War, the western part of what was left of Rowan became Iredell County. Then 1822, Davidson County was carved from an eastern section, and finally, in 1836, the portion of Rowan north of the South Yadkin River became Davie County, leaving the Rowan County on maps today.

The history books mention a number of men and relate numerous stories of male adventures and accomplishments, but as Rowan Museum Director Evin Burleson confirms, there "is no compilation of women in history, so to find their stories, we had to really work."

But there have been some standouts.

Sarah Reeves Johnston might have been the original liberal, by today's standards. Born in 1822 in Rowan, Johnston was a successful school teacher in her home county. But during the Civil War, she began taking care of all soldiers who needed it, regardless of whether they were Union or Confederate. Unfortunately, that branded her as a Union sympathizer, and all of her students were withdrawn from her classes. According to the history that still exists, she went so far as to bury soldier Hugh Berry of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in her back yard to keep him out of an unmarked grave. His body was later moved to the National Cemetery here in Salisbury.

In 1846, Frances Fisher Tiernan was born, and under the pen name Christian Reid, became a prolific author of 50 novels. Fisher took her pen name from Christian, a family name on her mother's side, and Reid on her father's. Her parents were Colonel Charles Frederick Fisher and Elizabeth Clarissa Caldwell. In 1870, she published her first novel, "Valerie Aylmer," and in 1876, published one of her most popular works, "The Land of the Sky."

In 1881, Lula Marie Spaulding was born, and when she moved to Salisbury to care for her ailing parents after graduating and becoming a teacher, she met

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U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole holds a rally at her state headquarters on Innes Street in Salisbury in 2008. (Jon C. Lakey photo)

William F. Kelsey and they married in 1907. Kelsey was a barber by trade but as a side business, had partial ownership in a funeral home. Lula took that on and became one of the first female licensed morticians in the state. She eventually owned three funeral homes in N.C., and in her spare time, became founder and president of the Salisbury Colored Women's Civic League in 1913, leading the organization for at least two decades.

Lula served as president of the State Federation of Negro Women's Clubs from 1942-46. In 1944, the N.C. Gov. Robert Gregg Cherry appointed a commission of five to organize a "training school for Negro delinquent girls," including just one woman — Lula.

In 1899, Alice Slater Cannon Guille, of the Cannon Mills family, was born, and she was one of the founders of the Rowan Museum, for which we rely on much of this information.

In 1919, Elizabeth Duncan Koontz was born in Salisbury, and in her lifetime had tremendous impact on education. It started early for her, the daughter of Samuel Duncan, the high school principal at Dunbar High School in East Spencer. He also taught at Livingstone College, serving as well as its sixth president. Her mother, Lena Duncan, was a teacher at Dunbar. So education was essential in the Duncan household.

Koontz's second job as a teacher was at Price High School in Salisbury, and in her long career she was a lifelong member of the National Education Association, serving as president of its largest department, the Association of Classroom Teachers during the 1965-66 school year, and in 1968, she became the first Black president of the NEA. In 1969, she was appointed by Richard Nixon as the first African-American director of the United States Department of Labor Women's Bureau.

She was a U.S. delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Woman in 1975, and counselor to the Secretary of Labor on women's programs. Koontz was the assistant state school superintendent in North Carolina in 1975 until she retired in 1982.

The year 1923 brought a political powerhouse to Rowan County with the birth of Jamima Demarcus. She broke through the invisible but very solid wall for women in politics, when in 1975 she became the first woman elected to the China Grove Board of Aldermen, and then in 1982, the first female elected to the Rowan County Board of Commissioners.

In an interview in 1982 when she was preparing to run for the commissioner's seat, she said, "We are more than half the population, and women have learned that what happens in government from the local to national scene affects them and their families. People are looking for qualified candidates now, whether they're male or female."

In 1936, Sen. Elizabeth Hanford Dole, wife of the late Sen. Robert Dole, was born in Salisbury. Although she did not make her adult home in Rowan County, she remained a proud native of her hometown and state throughout her life. During her lifetime she served as U.S. Secretary of Transportation from 1983-1987, Secretary of Labor from 1989-1990, and president of the American Red Cross from 1991-2000, and she ran for U.S. president in 2000.

In 1944, one of the best loved storytellers of our time was born. Jackie Torrence was born in Chicago, spent her first six years with her maternal grandparents in Second Creek, N.C., before being sent to live and start school in Salisbury with a spinster aunt.

Torrence told her first story at a library in High Point in 1972, and during a career that was sadly cut short when she died at the age of 60 in 2004, she became the matriarch of storytelling, and her appearances included at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tenn., on CBS' "Sunday Morning" with Charles Kuralt, on NBC's "Late Night with David Letterman" and on her nationally televised Halloween special, "The Teller and the Tale."

There are numerous other women who have had an impact on the history of Rowan County, up to and including today's leaders. East Spencer's Mayor Barbara Mallett will, at the end of her current term, be the longest serving mayor of her community. The hope is that in 50 years, when the history books look back on our time, the women will have their spot.



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Withorn & Wineka

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Melissa Darby Withorn and Bennett William Wineka were united in marriage on June 3, 2016, overlooking the El Yunque Rainforest, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. Officiant Cynthia Moss presided over the 5:30 p.m. ceremony.

The bride's parents hosted a fantastic reception that included authentic cigar rolling and a special Pleneros band with dancers.

The bride is the daughter of Gloria and Thomas J. Withorn Jr. of Marietta, Ga. She is the granddaughter of Jean "Dinky" Withorn and the late Thomas J. Withorn and Hazel and Ernest Hale.

Melissa is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Portfolio Center of Atlanta, Ga. She is an associate creative director at Public School, Atlanta, Ga.

The bride was given in marriage by her father and attended by four of her dearest friends, Laura Ritchie of Durham; Claire Conarro of Atlanta, Ga.; Lauren Hughes of Atlanta, Ga.; and Sarah Whitworth of Washington, D.C.

The groom is the son of Lindsay and Mark Wineka of Salisbury. He is the grandson of David Robert Alford III of Oak Ridge, Tenn., and the late Dorothy G. Alford and the late Nancy and Charles W. Wineka of Dover, Pa. Benn is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a local broadcast manager at INFORM. He was attended by four best friends, including Samuel Have Wineka of Falls Church, Va.; Kyle Conarro of Atlanta, Ga.; Benjamin Cox of Raleigh; and Seth Leonard of Raleigh.

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