

SPIRIT OF ROWAN

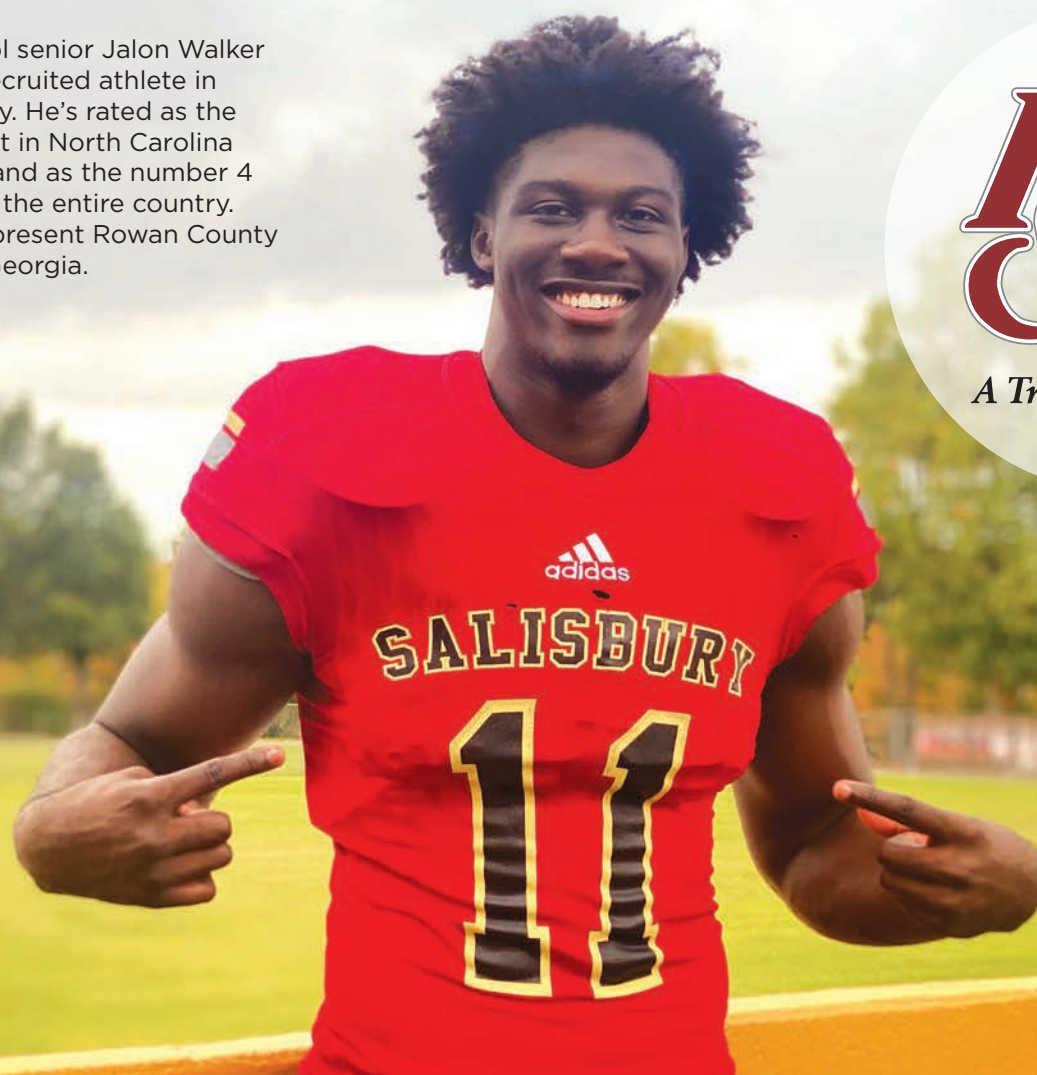
PROGRESS EDITION 2022

LETTERS FROM ROWAN



A special publication of the
Salisbury Post

Salisbury High School senior Jalon Walker is the most heavily recruited athlete in Rowan County history. He's rated as the second-best prospect in North Carolina in the Class of 2022 and as the number 4 outside linebacker in the entire country. Jalon will proudly represent Rowan County at the University of Georgia.



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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Economic springtime

As this is being written, grass remains brown and deciduous trees are still bare. It's changing quickly though. Already daffodils are in bloom. Magnolia and redbuds are covered in pink blooms. While we will likely still get a cold snap, winter is fading away, and garden centers are gearing up.

Pretty soon the planting, trimming and tending of gardens will be going full bore. If you are lucky enough to have a neighbor or friend with a garden, you may be gifted the best produce that is more than the owner can eat.

Rowan's economic outlook is similar in our view. Already, we see new business blooming. It is time to look forward



John Carr

because there seems to be a lot more coming our way.

Rod Crider, president and CEO of the Rowan Economic Development Council, noted a slew of activity in a recent presentation. The still-secretive projects in the works were eye-opening. Five projects, with codenames Rabbit, Tailwind, Excelsior, Whale and Bishop, could result in over 4,000 jobs and \$2.6 billion in new investment. Yes, billion. The projects range from the 40-job, \$10.5 million Excelsior project to 2,500-job, \$584 million project Rabbit. They are not yet locked in and that crop may still need some careful tending, but the potential is fantastic.

This is on top of a successful 2021 which saw 284 jobs and over \$33 million in investment — all of which had to be planned and put into motion in some of

the darkest days of the pandemic. That is an impressive show of faith and confidence in Rowan County, and we thank those organizations for choosing to come to Rowan.

Yes, we seem to have a bit to crow about, but this isn't the whole story of Rowan County. In this year's Spirit of Rowan, we present stories for each letter of the alphabet. Many stories are about iconic Rowan topics, but some you may not have thought about in a while.

Many of us have not given a lot of thought to Millbridge Speedway or how China Grove got its name. We all know Gold Hill really does have gold, but do we know how big a deal it was before the quest for gold shifted to the West?

Another economic boom many have forgotten was the quarry era. Our famous pink granite stands out in a num-

ber of downtown locations we pass regularly. You will also read about the history of Food Lion's founding. This may well be the most storied business undertaking in Rowan's long history.

Companies choosing Rowan as a place to invest and set up shop have lots of options. Good, competitive options. Yet, many still chose to be here. It is probably safe to assume the efforts of the economic development officials have a lot to do with it. We like to think Rowan has a special sauce as well. In these stories, we hope to have touched on a few of things that make Rowan unique.

Most of all, we hope you enjoy spending some time with Spirit of Rowan, and maybe even are reminded of some things you have forgotten, or even learn a few new things.

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

(U.S. Census estimates)

- **Men in Rowan County:** 72,556
- **Women in Rowan County:** 74,319
- **White alone, not Hispanic or Latino:** 79.4%
- **Hispanic or Latino:** 9.4%
- **Black or African-American alone:** 16.9%
- **American Indian and Alaska native:** 0.6%
- **Asian alone:** 1.2%
- **Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander:** 0.1%
- **Two or more races:** 1.8%

People

- **Births in Rowan County:** 1,548 (2019)
- **Deaths in Rowan County:** 1,634 (2019)

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

- **New commercial building permits in 2021:** 36
- **New residential building permits in 2020:** 651
- **Median household income:** \$49,842
- **Per capita income in past 12 months:** \$25,630
- **Persons in poverty:** 14.4%
- **Total employer establishments in 2019:** 2,682
- **Total annual payroll of all employer establishments:** \$2.19 billion

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On the cover: Blocks represent the ABCs of Rowan County, as seen at Bell Tower Green at night. Photo by Andy Mooney, Salisbury Post.

A message from the Rowan County Board of Commissioners



Back Row: Mike Caskey, Jr., Judy Klusman, Craig Pierce

Front Row: Greg Edds, Jim Greene

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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African-American Heritage Trail highlights Black history, culture

BY NATALIE ANDERSON
natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Though it only scratches the surface, the African-American Heritage Trail has highlighted historic places, leaders and experiences in the lives of Black Rowan Countians for more than 20 years.

The project was established in 2000 with the support of Livingstone College and the Rowan County Convention and Visitors Bureau. It has since been expanded to denote 20 sites in downtown Salisbury, 24 across Livingstone College's campus and 11 scattered throughout Rowan County.

Downtown sites highlight notable people such as Joseph Ballard, a blacksmith and politician born into slavery and freed with Emancipation, along with Harry Cowan, a Baptist minister who established 49 churches across the state. One marker recognizes the achievements of Wiley Immanuel Lash, the city's first Black mayor, a political activist and humanitarian. William Valentine is honored for owning a barber shop that marks Salisbury's oldest extant commercial structure, the Innes Street side of the building at 101 North Main St.

A marker on the 120 block of West Innes honors integration at historic movie theaters following protests from Livingstone students in 1962.

One site commemorates the office of World War I veteran and dentist Lee Clarence Jones at 118 North Lee St., which was once known as Roseman's Grocery. Historic Black churches are also recognized, including Mount Zion Baptist, established in 1867; Soldiers Memorial AME Zion Church, established in 1865; Crown in Glory Lutheran Church,



Soldiers Memorial AME Zion's church pews in 2006. (Salisbury Post file photo)

established in 1971; and Dixonville Baptist Church, destroyed during urban renewal in the 20th century. Salisbury's first Black public school, Lincoln School, along with the adjacent Dixonville Cemetery, are also recognized along the trail.

Other Salisbury locations along the trail include Oak Grove-Freedman's Cemetery, the Rowan Museum, the "Crossroads: Past and Present" mural along the 100 block of West Fisher Street and the Historic National Cemetery on Government Street.

The Mowery block, spanning from 113 to 119 East Fisher St., is honored on the trail for a history of Black businesses operating in the area since erected in 1902. Those businesses include the Noble and Kelsey Funeral Home, Mowery Tailor Shop, Union Drug Store and doctors' offices. Additionally, the Negro Center at 223 East Fisher Street honors the Negro branch of the Rowan Public Library and currently houses the Noble and Kelsey Funeral Home.

Markers across Livingstone's cam-

pus honor the school and Union Hill district, which were both part of the Frohock plantation established in 1761. The trail notes that when Union Gen. Stoneman invaded Salisbury in 1865, soldiers camped nearby in what's now known as Union Hill.

Markers on Livingstone's campus also highlight Lash and his family's homes, along with the Duncan Family Home built in 1917 for Samuel E. Duncan Sr., who led the school's math department. Additionally, the trail recognizes the homes of other notable Livingstone faculty, including William O. Ferron, James E. K. and Rose Douglass Aggrey, Pinkey A. Stevenson, John C. Dancy and Joseph Charles and Jennie Smallwood Price.

The trail also recognizes the Monroe Street School, the J. C. Price High School, Moore's Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Oakdale/Union Hill Cemetery and Miller Recreation Center.

Across the county, the trail marks the North Carolina Transportation Museum

in Spencer. A number of schools are included, such as the R. A. Clement School in Cleveland, the Dunbar High School in East Spencer, the Shuford Memorial Elementary School in Granite Quarry, the gymnasium at the old Aggrey Memorial High School and the Elizabeth Duncan Koontz Elementary School in Salisbury.

The Gilliam Family Farm and Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury are in Salisbury. In Landis, notable sites include Sandy Ridge AME Zion Church and museum, and both the White Rock Community of Granite Quarry and the Village of Gold Hill are marked.

Two decades later, and the trail is still being viewed today.

Gretchen Witt, supervisor of the Edith M. Clark History Room at the Rowan Public Library, said patrons continue to print copies of the brochure that includes a map and description of all the sites. The brochure can be picked up free at the Rowan County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 204 E. Innes St.

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Barn quilts bring meaning, color to western Rowan County



Elsie Bennett at West Rowan Farm Home and Garden on Sherrill's Ford Road. (Salisbury Post file photo)

BY BEN STANSELL

ben.stansell@salisburypost.com



"Mildred's Star" on the smoke house at the Henry C. Corriher home place on Corriher Springs Road. (Salisbury Post file photo)

Elsie Bennett knew the feed business wasn't going to sustain her 100-plus-year-old general store.

Looking for a way to rejuvenate the Bear Poplar shop, Bennett found an answer in art.

When Bennett's "mentor" Adele Goodman mentioned her desire to bring barn quilts to Rowan County, Bennett saw an opportunity.

"After a lot of prayer and thinking on it and thinking on it and meeting Adele, I said, 'Why don't we start teaching a barn quilting class?'" Bennett said. "We taught one class and the community loved it."

Quilt patterns have likely been painted on barns in America dating back to colonial times, but the modern barn

quilt movement started with Donna Sue Groves in 2001. Groves painted a quilt block on her family's Ohio tobacco barn to honor her mother. The idea caught fire and started a country-wide trend that is still growing today.

Bennett and Goodman taught their first barn quilt class in 2017 at West Rowan Home and Garden.

"From there, it just kept going," Bennett said.

Bennett has helped make Rowan County a barn quilt destination by adding colorful motifs to buildings throughout the rural countryside.

Her first big barn quilt was a colorful 12-foot-by-12-foot design at Patterson Farm. Others soon followed and in 2019, West Rowan Home and Garden set the record for the largest barn quilt mural in the country with a 504-square-foot

design on its outer wall.

Rowan County temporarily lost the record to oversized barn quilt murals elsewhere, but regained the honor when Bennett and the town of Cleveland unveiled a 1,000-square-foot mural composed of 160 pieces on the side of the Cleveland Fire Department in October.

"It kept the title here in Rowan County for now," Bennett said.

While the Cleveland Fire Department has the largest barn quilt mural in the county and country, the single largest barn quilt square in Rowan is on the side of Carolina Malt House.

Coinciding with the unveiling of the Cleveland Fire Department mural was the launch of Cleveland's barn quilt trail. The 2.6-mile walking trail showcases 60 quilts. Barn quilt designs range from animals to patterns, but almost all of them

carry significance.

"Barn quilts are more than painted wood," Bennett said. "You can really use art to tell a story, engage people and start conversations."

Bennett doesn't plan on developing another record-breaking barn quilt mural anytime soon, but she does want to keep growing the barn quilt trail. She is currently working with a company to develop a map handout that will help people navigate the trail.

"I would love to help promote tourism through art in Rowan County," Bennett said. "It's a passion of mine because I feel God is using me to make a difference, brighten the world and tell the stories within my community."

Bennett sells barn quilt calendars and take-home barn quilt kits at her store, in addition to assorted inventory.



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C

How China Grove earned its distinct name



The China Grove Roller Mill. (Salisbury Post file photo)

BY BEN STANSELL

ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

The very name of the town seems to beg the question.

Why is it called China Grove?

Chartered in 1889, the southern Rowan County town is named for the grove of Chinaberry trees that once stood near the old train depot. Although the exact reason why the non-native trees were planted is unknown, the shade their branches provided was likely appreciated by travelers on hot summer days.

The Chinaberry tree is native to Pakistan, India, southeast Asia and Aus-

tralia. The tree can grow up to 50 feet tall with a large spreading canopy and is said to exude a pleasant fragrance. The light yellow berries produced by the tree are toxic to humans and other animals, but are eaten by some birds.

The Chinaberry was likely introduced to the United States in the 1700s or 1800s as an ornamental tree. The trees are still cultivated in some nurseries today, but are now classified as an invasive species in the southeastern United States because they spread quickly, can crowd out native plant species and have few ecological competitors.

An exact number of Chinaberry trees planted near the train station was not recorded, only that it was a “grove,”

defined as a small group of trees. The grove eventually died, its few remaining trees lasting until the early 1900s. The train depot was dismantled in 1974.

People not native to the China Grove area might recognize the town’s unique name thanks to The Doobie Brothers. The band’s 1973 hit “China Grove” climbed to No. 15 on the Billboard Hot 100 and has remained popular since. Lyrics to the catchy, easily recognizable tune were actually written about a fictional town in Texas, but that doesn’t stop China Grove residents from singing along when the song is inevitably played at town gatherings. Doobie Brothers band member Tom Johnson didn’t know it when he wrote the song, but there is an

actual China Grove, Texas, that happens to be near San Antonio.

Rowan County’s China Grove has promoted its distinctive name in its branding. The “I” in the municipal logo is the trunk of a colorful Chinaberry tree and the town’s official motto is “come grow with us.”

“It is definitely a unique name and I love the name of China Grove because of it being unique and I think China Grove is a unique town,” Mayor Charles Seaford said.

Although the old train depot and the original grove of Chinaberry trees are no more, there are said to be a few Chinaberry trees still standing in China Grove.



Dan Nicholas' generosity sparked vision for county's top park

BY JOSH BERGERON

josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com



Nicholas

Dan Nicholas could sell ice to an eskimo, but he had a tough time giving away a park to county government.

Nicholas was a Salisbury-born businessman and entrepreneur in the days before websites and smartphones. He found success in ventures ranging from ice cream to fuel. In the 1950s, Nicho-

las worked with another Salisbury man to import horses from France to create a racing stable here. But the idea for his longest-lasting legacy found its spark at a Roanoke, Virginia, park.

While in Roanoke in the mid-1960s, Nicholas watched kids playing on the slides and swings as well as how an animal zoo generated big smiles on the faces of children there. He came home,

found 100 acres on Bringle Ferry Road and tried talking to the Jaycees, city of Salisbury and county government about it.

The Jaycees couldn't afford to take on the project. The city of Salisbury didn't want to talk about a park outside of the city limits. Nicholas first offered 100 acres, but state planners said that wasn't large enough for proper development. So, he purchased an option on 200 more. The county finally accepted the deal in the late 1960s after Nicholas

invited commissioners to a steak dinner to make the presentation.

"Dan Nicholas is probably the only man in town who ever had to pay somebody to take something for nothing," wrote then-Salisbury Post reporter Ned Cline.

The park opened Aug. 2, 1968, more than a year after the county accepted the land and about two years before Nicholas' death.

See DAN, 14

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*People spend time walking on trails and fishing at Dan Nicholas Park.
(Salisbury Post file photo)*

DAN

Continued from 13

Rowan County Tourism Director James Meacham says the park today is a key part of the local economy.

"Seeing close to 700,000 visitors per year, the park offers a large number of unique attractions and events for families," Meacham said. "It is rare to find a park in the state as versatile as Dan Nicholas, and we are honored to promote it to both visitors and residents alike."

Phyllis Cornelison, who worked for the county from 1985 to 2016, usually handled the park's budget and remembers its early days. Many of the amenities were in place when she started, including a mini golf course, paddle boats, some picnic shelters, outdoor theater and part of the nature center.

"But it was nothing like it is today," Cornelison said.

Just as the park is a key tourism draw today, Cornelison said it was popular in its earlier years, too.

"We didn't have anything remotely

like that around here," she said. "We had people come from everywhere, all different counties, to make reservations, for shelters, for family reunions and things like that."

Bob Pendergrass, who works today as the county's animal services supervisor, was an early employee of the park — working weekends at the campground in high school in the late 1970s. It was his first job. And while it was one that prevented him from hanging out with other people on the weekends, it wasn't too bad.

During the school year, he went into work on Friday and worked and slept at the campground until Sunday. During the summer, he went in on Thursday and left on Sunday. He kept the campgrounds clean, took money, confirmed reservations and responded to camper requests.

Today, Pendergrass says the county is lucky to have Dan Nicholas Park and that it has exceeded initial expectations.

"Everybody always knew it was a diamond in the rough," Pendergrass said.



As the summer heat begins to climb, The Water Plaza at Dan Nicholas Park becomes a popular spot for park visitors to come and cool off, if just for a few minutes. (Salisbury Post file photo)



Eagle Point Nature Preserve is 'a neat place to go'

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP
carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Eagle Point Nature Preserve has been fulfilling its mission for more than 20 years. The park, about 180 acres, is a passive preserve that keeps the natural environment at the fore. Its only amenities are trails, picnic tables, canoe access and a portable toilet.

Rowan County says the preserve is home to a number of wild animals, including barred owls, varieties of egrets, king-

See **EAGLE**, 16



Parts of the Eagle Point Nature Preserve overlook High Rock Lake. (Andy Mooney photo)

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EAGLE

Continued from 15

fishers, great blue herons, white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, raccoons and the titular bald eagles that fish in Goldeneye Cove.

The park opened in 2001. The county acquired the first 100 acres in 1998 via purchase from Neal Sansovich and was placed under a conservation easement with what would become Three Rivers Land Trust.

Rowan County Animal Services Director Bob Pendergrass said the additional 80 acres was originally under a long-term lease with Alcoa, but last year that property was given to the county.

Pendergrass was involved in the creation of the park. He was the county nature center supervisor at the time. He said the land that hosts the preserve is rocky. So, the idea to make it part of the county park system was raised.

"It came about as a result of an opportunity," Pendergrass said, adding places like the preserve make a difference for wildlife.

Pendergrass said Jim Foltz, county parks and recreation director at the time, was good at rallying people to

support projects. The department created a presentation for people who would support the project. Pendergrass noted Fred and Bill Stanback were supporters.

"The funds were raised fairly quickly to acquire the land," Pendergrass said.

A professor at Catawba College performed an ecological survey on the property and the county decided to limit the development to just provide access to the park and some walking trails to highlight the natural aspects of the area.

There are some plant identification signs on the "plant loop" trail. Pendergrass said one year an Eagle Scout project created a guidebook for plants and nature walks at the property. He said over the years those have continued.

The preserve was named Eagle Point because of the bald eagle sightings, but Pendergrass said it was not created specifically because of the presence of the eagles. The eagles are a success story of species recovery efforts. The species was reclassified from endangered to threatened in 1995 and removed from the list entirely in 2007.

"It's a neat place to go," Pendergrass said, adding it is one of his favorite projects he has been involved in.



Eagle Point walking trail. (Andy Mooney photo)



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Food Lion started as 'little bitty' grocery store in Salisbury

BY NATALIE ANDERSON
natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Philanthropist Ronnie Smith says there's no way his father, Wilson, and fellow Food Lion founders Ralph and Brown Ketner could have known their "little bitty store" in Salisbury would reach the impact it has today.

"They never ever dreamed it would become 'one of the largest and most successful and fastest-growing grocery store chains in the nation,'" Smith said. "They were thinking, 'Maybe we'll have one store. Maybe we'll have two.'"

The three founders had a history of working in the grocery business. The trio worked in Glenn Ketner's grocery stores until they were merged with more than a dozen Piggly Wiggly stores across eastern North Carolina and then sold to Winn-Dixie in 1956. The trio used the synergy among them to put up half of the \$125,000 needed to start their own grocery chain comparable with the Winn-Dixie chain.

The other half was raised and put up by community members, which included teachers, bankers, doctors, mail carriers and mill workers. Then, on a bitterly cold day in December 1957, they opened the first 15,000-square-foot Food Town store in the west end of Salisbury. A second location was opened a year later to survive the price war among other Salisbury grocery stores.

A decade later, Food Town opened more than a dozen stores and closed or sold nearly 10. But Ketner, who was the company's president at the time, decided to take a gamble on a new concept that has defined the chain and its culture ever since: offering the lowest food prices in North Carolina.

"I'd rather make five fast pennies



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

than one slow nickel," Ketner said years after making the successful gamble.

In 1983, the store name was changed to Food Lion in order to expand to states where Food Town already existed. By the early 1990s, the chain grew to 800 stores, exceeding the growth rates of other retail giants such as Walmart and Winn Dixie and placing it among the nation's top 10 grocery chains. Today, the chain operates more than 1,000 stores across 10 states in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

In 1974, Belgium-based Delhaize Group acquired Food Lion. In 2016, Delhaize Group and Netherlands-based Ahold merged into Ahold Delhaize, the

conglomerate that owns and operates Food Lion today.

But Food Lion's reach stretches beyond the grocery industry. When one thinks of Food Lion, they can also think about Catawba College and the Rowan Regional Medical Center, Smith says. The Smith Family Foundation, founded by Wilson Smith, contributed millions of dollars to a capital campaign that ended in 2008 to improve the hospital. Additionally, philanthropic families such as the Hurleys have used Food Lion stock to fund campaigns for Catawba College, a private university.

Food Lion's charitable efforts over recent years have been focused on programs and initiatives tackling food inse-

curity. Food Lion annually contributes to local charities, such as the Rowan County United Way and Rowan Helping Ministries, and to larger programs like the American Red Cross and the Children's Miracle Network. Since 2000, it has partnered with Feeding America to reduce food waste and donate hundreds of millions of meals to local communities. The Food Lion Feeds Charitable Foundation, a nonprofit founded in 2001, has supported more than \$10 million in hunger-relief initiatives, primarily targeting at-risk children and feeding agencies.

"And all of that started right here in Salisbury, North Carolina," Smith said.



Gold Hill boasts a rich mining heritage

BY BEN STANSELL
ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

California might be the state most Americans associate with gold mining, but North Carolina experienced its own golden age before prospectors flooded west. Gold Hill was in the thick of it all. In 1799, 12-year-old Conrad Reed discovered a 17-pound gold chunk in Little Meadow Creek in Cabarrus County. His finding was the first documented discovery of gold in the

See GOLD, 23



Hikers check out the 1840s Gold Hill Powder House, which is a stop on the Gold Hill Rail Trail. The Historic Gold Hill and Mines Foundation offers several hiking tours of the trail each year, but the trail is accessible to the public year round. (Photo submitted)

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High Rock Lake a vital part of Rowan County

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

High Rock lake is an iconic part of Rowan and Davidson counties for recreation, economic development and manufacturing.

The reservoir was created in 1929 as part of a dam project of the aluminum manufacturer Alcoa. When it was constructed, it was the largest reservoir in North Carolina. It was named for nearby High Rock Mountain.

It is one of a series of dam projects built to supply electricity to the Alcoa's smelter in Badin, which closed in 2007.

Alcoa held onto its hydroelectric project on the Yadkin River until 2016, when it was sold to Cube Hydro, which was later acquired by Canadian firm Ontario Power Generation. High Rock Dam currently operates under Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, a subsidiary of OPG.

Norman Ribelin has been a contract surveyor for the project since 2005. Ribelin said he measures the dams every year to make sure they are not moving.

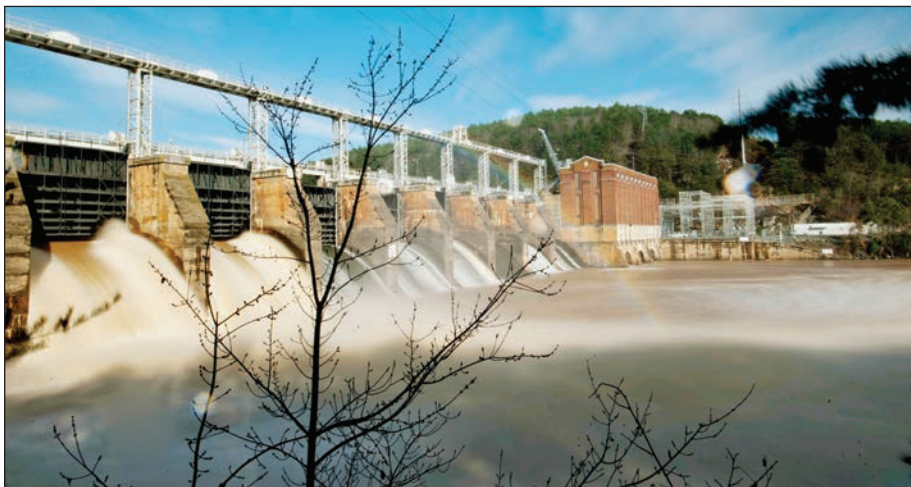
Ribelin said engineering requirements for the dam are federally regulated because the Yadkin flows beyond state boundaries.

"They require a certain amount of monitoring to establish the stability of the structures," Ribelin said.

Functionally, Ribelin said, High Rock is the first lake in a system and serves as a sediment trap.

Ribelin said much of the original equipment at the dam had been in use until recently, but in 2019 Eagle Creek installed some upgrades aimed at improving the environmental impact of the dam.

The company added an aerating turbine and valve to the dam to improve the



dissolved oxygen level of water passing through the dam, which improves conditions for wildlife in the water. A federal laboratory also tested a new water quality monitoring system.

There is more to the lake than the engineering and industrial efforts that created it in the first place. The Rowan County Economic Development Council says the 15,180-acre lake has 365 miles

High Rock lake is an iconic part of Rowan and Davidson counties for recreation, economic development and manufacturing. (Salisbury Post file photos)

of shoreline.

The lake has become a hub for recreation and real estate. It is known for its quality fishing and homes now dot the shore of High Rock and it hosts events throughout the year.

Notably, it hosts the Rowan County Chamber of Commerce's annual Dragon Boat Festival. The free admission event brought out 25 teams to compete in 2021.

The lake has also hosted the Bassmaster Classic several times. The major tournament has rotated through venues since its inception in 1971.

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View from summit of Dunn's Mountain Park



Interstate 85 expansion continues to spur development

BY NATALIE ANDERSON
natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Historically, Rowan County's proximity to transportation routes such as the Yadkin River and the N.C. railroad have played a major role in its economic viability.

Today, interstate widening in Rowan and Cabarrus counties continues to factor into the county's ongoing economic prosperity.

In December 2014, the North Carolina Department of Transportation and then-Gov. Pat McCrory unveiled a 10-year Transportation Improvement Plan, which included the widening of I-85 in southern Rowan County to eight lanes. That project effectively removed the "bottleneck" many had come to endure when commuting between Charlotte and Greensboro.

The interstate expansion for Rowan and Cabarrus counties began just north of Exit 55 and extended about seven miles northeast through Kannapolis and the U.S. 29 connector in China Grove. From there, the interstate just north of Moose Road was extended more than six miles to Exit 68 in Rowan County.

Rowan Economic Development Council President Rod Crider says the expansion is a major factor in many taking a stronger interest in the county.

"Everybody knew that the bottleneck we used to have was an issue for people's perception of distance and time to Charlotte in particular," he said.

The more than 13-mile, eight-lane stretch that was expanded in Rowan and Cabarrus counties ultimately shaved off about 25% of the travel time to Charlotte, Crider said.

The interstate expansion aided the



area's ability to reach other markets. In addition to its central location in the state, Rowan County is also well-nestled between major cities such as Miami and New York City or Washington D.C. and Atlanta, Crider said.

The interstate expansion has been a key factor for economic developments in Rowan County, such as the 700,000-square-foot fulfillment center for online pet retailer Chewy.com on Long Ferry Road, for example. Crider said interstate projects help further facilitate the movements of goods and people and open a labor pool for potential developers. He also sees now as an opportune time to benefit from the current trend toward e-commerce and the

Construction on I-85, just north of the Dale Earnhardt Boulevard exit in Kannapolis in 2017.

demand for speedy delivery of goods.

Crider said developments are being planned for every exit in Rowan County at this time except Exit 76, which leads straight to Innes Street in downtown Salisbury and is already bustling with commercial activity. In September, county commissioners approved a tax incentive agreement to bring a 675,000-square-foot distribution or manufacturing facility to Webb Road, which will be called the "I-85 Commerce Center."

Additionally, commissioners also signed off on a tax incentive deal in January to construct an e-commerce fulfillment center in the southern area of the state, near Exit 68 in China Grove. If Rowan County is chosen, it will be the largest jobs announcement ever because the project proposes the creation of 2,500 full-time and 2,600 seasonal part-time jobs.

In February 2022, Rowan's Rep. Harry Warren stated he and Sen. Carl Ford, who represents Rowan and Stanly counties, would be advocating for the creation of an interchange at McCanless Road and I-85, connecting East Spencer and High Rock Lake for future development.

GOLD

Continued from 18

United States and kicked off the exploration of other potential gold mining sites nearby.

In 1823, the federal government conducted a geological survey to identify other gold deposits in the region. The survey determined the highest probability of discovering rich gold deposits was in the vicinity of eastern Rowan County, said Vivian Hopkins, vice president and director of education for the Historic Gold Hill and Mines Foundation.

Studying that survey, farmer Andrew Troutman made the first discovery of gold in Gold Hill in 1824. The first vertical underground mine, called Barringer Mine, was constructed a year later. Neither the Troutman discovery nor the Barringer Mine drew significant attention to the town, Hopkins said. It wasn't until 1842 when London-based Gold Hill Mining Co. dug the Barnhardt mine that Gold Hill became a boomtown.

The Gold Hill Mining Co. constructed 24 mines in southeastern Rowan County, according to a map drawn



Miners and employees of Gold Hill Mining Company gathered together in Gold Hill in the 1890s. (Photo courtesy of Vivian Hopkins)

in 1884 by Joseph J. Newman for the company. The Barnhardt and Randolph mines were the two most productive. The Randolph Mine was one the deepest in the Southeast, stretching 850 feet into

the ground. The two mines produced an estimated \$6-9 million in gold. Historians estimate \$12-15 million in gold was extracted from the Gold Hill mines altogether. Millions more was likely lost due

to inefficient recovery methods.

Gold mining operations largely ceased in Gold Hill in 1915, but the town's rich mining heritage is still alive today. Gold Hill has harnessed its history to become a tourism destination. A walking trail through the 70-acre Gold Hill Mines Historic Park takes visitors to several of the former mining sites. At the Randolph Mine, an enclosed bridge provides a peak at what was once one of the most productive mines in the region.

The Historic Gold Hill and Mines Foundation has produced a self-guided tour booklet and trail brochure, which is available at the Montgomery General Store. The store, built in 1840, offers customers a chance to enjoy old fashioned candies, long-neck sodas and Hershey's ice cream, all in a historic setting. Live bluegrass music is played at the store on Friday nights.

"(Gold Hill) is a rare authentic gem unknown to many in Rowan County or across North Carolina," Hopkins said. "It doesn't take much 'digging' to find the influence of our gold mining industry at Gold Hill in every aspect of North Carolina's economic development."

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J.C. Price's legacy still alive today

BY NATALIE ANDERSON
natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Even though Salisbury activist Joseph Charles Price died at the early age of 39, his impact in the community continues to be felt today.

Without him, there may not be the Livingstone College we know today, says J.C. Price American Legion Post Commander Ollie “Mae” Carroll.

Price was a Black educator, orator and civil rights leader born in Elizabeth City in 1854 to a free mother, Emily Pailin, and a slave father, Charles Dozier. When Dozier was sold and sent to Baltimore, Price’s mother married David Price and passed along the surname. The family moved to New Bern during the Civil War, where Price enrolled in St. Andrews School. Less than a decade later, Price would go on to teach at a Black school in Wilson before resuming his own education. He set out to study law at Shaw University in Raleigh before transferring to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania to study ministry in the AME Zion Church, a Black church established in the late 1700s.

Soon after his ordination, and at the age of 28, he worked with AME Zion Church and members of the Salisbury community to establish Livingstone College and served as its first president. The school was originally called Zion Wesley College but was changed to honor African explorer and missionary David Livingstone in 1885.

Price’s impact extended beyond Salisbury and North Carolina as he would soon be recognized on a national scale. In 1888, then-President Grover Cleveland asked Price to serve as minister to Liberia, though Price declined because he said he felt he could do more for his people by remaining in Salisbury. Two years later, he was elected president of both the



Joseph Charles Price (Salisbury Post file photo)

Afro-American League and the National Equal Rights Convention and named chairman of the Citizens’ Equal Rights Association, though conflict among those groups would soon lead to their end.

Fast forward more than two centuries, and local American Legion Post 107 named in Price’s honor continues

to uphold his legacy. It was first established in 1922, with the Joseph Charles Price Post Auxillary organized in 1934. One particular effort Carroll says would make Price proud is the establishment of an at-risk school in 1986, a partnership with Livingstone College. Carroll said 12 computers were donated to the school,

which operated for several years with Black and white instructors.

“Nobody had ever seen anything like this (at the time),” Carroll said. “We changed the whole atmosphere and came up with something that J.C. Price would be proud of, I feel.”

Though funding and decreasing membership and participation has prevented the Legion from hosting a number of annual events, about 48 plaques on the walls of the building located at 1433 Old Wilkesboro Road highlight impacts across decades. Legion members continue to provide scholarships for students attending Boys State and Girls State, for example. Additionally, they annually host an Easter Egg hunt and Christmas festivities and participate in small projects to honor Memorial Day week, including-feeding local students. The Legion Post also donates annually to the Central Children’s Home in Oxford and the United Negro College Fund.

“It’s nothing to the magnitude of what we used to do, but we do choose a small project during Memorial week,” Carroll said.

In 2009, the Legion Post made history when its queen, Ticora Jones, took the crown during Faith’s Fourth of July celebration. She was the first and only Black woman to be recognized with such honor, Carroll said.

In 2010, the J.C. Price High School was recognized as a landmark in the National Register of Historic Places. The school closed in 1969 and was the first one established for Black students in Salisbury. Members of a national alumni association with chapters spanning several states continue to raise money for scholarships and keep the school alive despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“If it hadn’t been for him, we may not have Livingstone College,” Carroll said. “He gave us a great foundation.”



Storied Kerr Mill poised for a water wheel replacement

BY BEN STANSELL
ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

Constructed by Joseph Kerr around 1823, Kerr Mill was for years the primary source of flour, cornmeal and feed for Kerr's western Rowan County plantation and its surrounding neighbors.

The grist mill, located next to Kerr Creek in what is now Sloan Park, is a two-story, gable-roof brick building with a water wheel in the rear. The mill is

one of several that gave name to Mill-bridge, which was by some accounts the first settlement in Rowan County. The mill was operated by the Kerr family for several decades after its construction, but it was sold to James Samuel McCubbins in 1872. McCubbins and his partner, John Harrison, transitioned the mill into a steam engine-powered roller mill in the late 1880s.

The mill changed hands several more times and was eventually purchased by James W. Sloan in 1908. He sold it to his nephew, James Andrew Sloan, in 1927.

James A. Sloan and his wife Carrie gifted the mill and surrounding property to Rowan County in 1973. Kerr Mill was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and is now the centerpiece of Sloan Park, which opened to the public in 1983. The mill has long been out of operation, but was working for more than 100 years.

The original water wheel used at the mill was lost and has not been recovered. But in 1989, Keith Yount built a replica wheel for the park at his Sherrills Ford Road construction company. When the

new wheel was placed on Kerr Mill, it was so well balanced that the wind turned it for about 30 minutes, according to a Salisbury Post article published at the time. Time and weather took a toll on the wheel over the years, causing the wooden blades to break and fall apart. Parks and Recreation Director Don Bringle said Sloan Park visitors have often inquired about the wheel over the years, advocating for its repair or replacement.

See KERR, 26



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KERR

Continued from 25

A restoration effort started in 2018, but no progress came. The county renewed plans to revitalize the wheel last year. The project was awarded to C&R Millwork, a company based in Gold Hill. The restoration of the wheel will be more of a rebuild, since the interior metal hub is likely the only salvageable piece. Bringle said the wooden part of the wheel will have to be rebuilt entirely, likely with a more durable, water and weather resistant lumber such as cypress.

C&R plans to begin work in late spring. The project will cost Rowan County about \$40,500. Having a functioning water wheel will be worth the price, Bringle said.

“It will basically bring character back to what Kerr Mill is all about,” Bringle said.



Men observe the water wheel at Kerr Mill just after it was installed in 1989. The replica wheel was constructed by Keith Yount and mimicked the original water wheel that propeled the mill in its early days. The replica wheel has been damaged by time and weather over the years and a project to replace it is underway. Salisbury Post file photo.

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Livingstone part of historic first Black college football game

BY PARIS GOODNIGHT

paris.goodnight@salisburypost.com

History was made on a snowy December day in 1892.

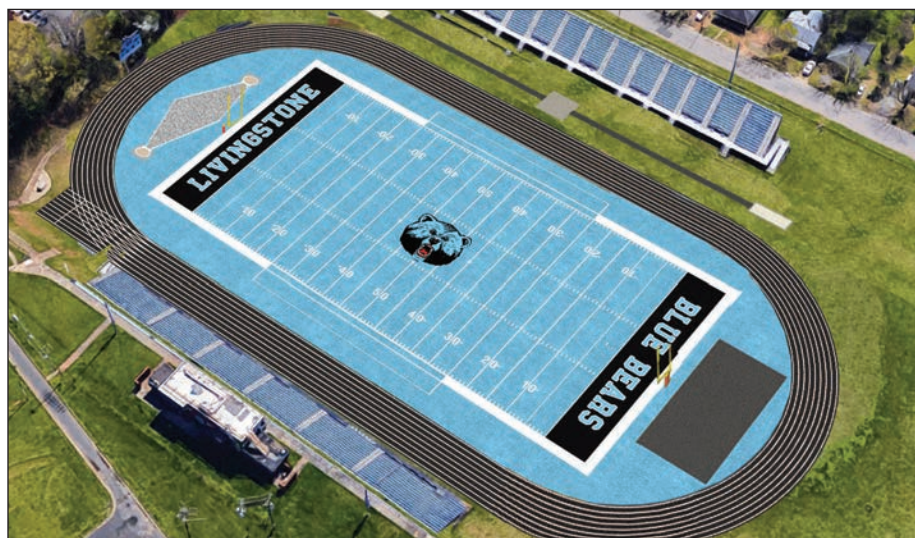
Two groups of men gathered on the front lawn of the Livingstone College campus and — despite heavy snow from a recent storm — played the first game of football between Black colleges in American history.

Things have changed since that first game on the lawn. Last year, Livingstone began work on a \$2.8 million project to upgrade its facilities so when Johnson C. Smith University arrives for the next matchup in Salisbury, it will be in a newly remodeled stadium with a field converted from grass to synthetic turf in Livingstone blue.

For the original game, team members had to come up with money to purchase a regulation football. The players equipped their street shoes with cleats, removing them after practice, while the young women of the Livingstone's industrial department made uniforms for both teams. Players from Biddle Memorial Institute, now Johnson C. Smith, traveled by horse and buggy to Salisbury.

The game featured two 45-minute halves. W.J. Trent, who later became the longest-serving president of Livingstone College, was on the original Livingstone team and scored its only touchdown on a fumble recovery. However, no point was awarded as snow had covered the field's markings and referees argued that the fumble was recovered out of bounds. That gave Johnson C. Smith the victory 5-0.

A celebration of that historic game between Livingstone and Johnson C. Smith is marked every year as historic Black colleges gather for football. In



Above: The Livingstone Blue Bears take the field during a game against St. Augustine's University last year. (Salisbury Post file photo) Left: Rendering of Livingstone's new field with blue turf. (Submitted image)

2009, the schools revived the tradition and now play a Commemorative Classic game at Livingstone each year. Local

proclamations named the week of Oct. 29 through Nov. 4 as Commemorative Black College Football Week. In 2017,

Gov. Roy Cooper proclaimed the September through November football season as the 125th anniversary of Black college football in North Carolina.

That first football game led to a lot of opportunities for a lot of people, including Pro Football Hall of Famer Willie Lanier.

"Livingstone College is where it all began," Lanier said last fall when he came to Salisbury. "What occurred on Livingstone's front lawn nearly 130 years ago paved the way for people like me."



New lights will spotlight racing activity at Millbridge Speedway

BY PARIS GOODNIGHT

paris.goodnight@salisburypost.com

During COVID-19 pivoting, Millbridge Speedway was forced to split racing night from just Wednesdays to add Tuesday nights for younger drivers. But the premier dirt track for Outlaw Karts and Micro-Sprints found it so successful that it will continue that format for this year, which opened the 2022 sea-

son earlier this month.

Owners Jeremy and Ashly Burnett now have about 13 years of running the track just off N.C. 150. Though Outlaw Karts and Wednesday nights are the track's mainstay, they also have Saturday racing and have broadened offerings to include competitions in Legend cars, micros, lawn mowers and Mini-Cup cars.

Since so many of the people involved at the speedway are also involved in NA-

See MILLBRIDGE, 35



Millbridge Speedway is home to racing for karts, Outlaw Karts, Micro-Sprints, Legend cars and Mini Cup cars. (Andy Mooney photo)

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At 120th anniversary, Noble & Kelsey moving into fourth generation

BY JOSH BERGERON

josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com

Adrianna and Kimberly Kelsey's childhood memories of their family's business, Noble & Kelsey Funeral Home, aren't too different.

"As I child, my memories were just going up there with my mom when I came home from school and just hanging out and following the guys around," Adrianna said. "... It was a family owned business that basically helped raise me in a sense."

At 9 years old, Kimberly remembers traveling to the funeral home after school, too.

"From 9 until the age of 16, I was up here every day, Monday through Friday and maybe on Saturday," Kimberly said.

Today, Kimberly is the chairwoman of the funeral home and Adrianna, her daughter, is vice president and community relations director. They represent the third and fourth generation of the Kelsey family, respectively, to work at the business.

Since 1902, Noble & Kelsey Funeral Home has been committed to excellence, Adrianna says. The funeral home plans to celebrate its 120th anniversary this year with a commemoration at 223 E. Fisher St. in Salisbury. Plans are still being finalized.

The business started 120 years ago with a partnership between two men whose names still grace the funeral home. Stephen Noble worked for other funeral homes and owned horses and a wagon. William Kelsey Sr., Kimberly's grandfather, was a local barber. William saw the potential for keeping the burial of African Americans within the



Black community as part of the partnership, states the book "Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920" by Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore. When the two began, embalming wasn't a common practice. Relatives laid the dead on a "cooling board," the barber "dressed" the body and the burial took place the same afternoon or the next morning, Gilmore wrote.

While William saw the business as a side project because he enjoyed being a barber, wife Lula Kelsey realized the future potential of the funeral business and went to embalming school, becoming one of the first female licensed morticians in the state.

Noble & Kelsey's first location was

The first location of Noble and Kelsey Funeral Home in the 100 block of East Fisher Street in Salisbury in spring 1927. From left to right is Stephen Noble, William F. Kelsey Sr., Lula Spaulding Kelsey and William F. Kelsey Jr. (Submitted photo)

in the 100 block of East Fisher Street. It moved into its current location, a former Black library and agricultural building, because it needed more space. It's the second-oldest Black funeral home in the state of North Carolina.

A.R. Kelsey, Kimberly's father took over ownership of the business in 1946, and Kimberly officially joined the funeral home's leadership staff in 1994 after spending years as a teen and

young adult helping out with operations. After graduating from Salisbury High School and Winston-Salem State University, she worked elsewhere — at IBM in Charlotte, the Internal Revenue Service and for a hospital in Richmond, Virginia — before she decided the funeral business "was really in my blood," she told the Post in a 1994 article.

She received her license to practice about two months after the death of her father and was reissued A.R. Kelsey's license number in her name — No. 7.

Kimberly expresses excitement about Adrianna's energy about community relations and that the business is staying in the family.

"She is pumped up," Kimberly said.

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Odd facts from Rowan County



There is a rumor of a horse buried under the Presbyterian Session House next to the Bell Tower. (Andy Mooney photo)

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Did you know Rowan County used to stretch to the Pacific Ocean?

In theory, at least, Rowan County was a slice of frontier before the map of the United States looked anything like it does today and before European colonists understood what lay beyond the Tennessean frontier.

Rowan County was so large in the 18th century the first land records in Tennessee were recorded in the county. For much of its history, North Carolina

was not divided into the 100 counties wedged into its borders. The last county was not created until 1911, when pieces of Caldwell, Mitchell and Watauga counties were combined into Avery.

According to a book recording abstracts of deeds in Rowan from 1753 to 1785, some of the deeds at the time were not recorded until years after land changed hands. In addition to Tennessee, 27 counties were formed out of what used to be Rowan County at the time.

Here are some other odd facts about Rowan County:

- There is a rumor of a horse being buried under the Presbyterian Session

House. This is not correct. The Chambers name is most closely associated with the Utzman-Chambers House, but Maxwell Chambers specified a family grave site in his will and the Session House was built over it. There are 10 graves for the Chambers family, but no equine.

- Spanish explorers were in the area from 1567-1568. This was the first recorded appearance of the Europeans in what would become Rowan County. This was the expedition of explorer Juan Pardo and it established a Catholic church.

The buildings of the Pardo expedition in the area are lost to history and the area was settled by the English many years

later. Rowan County was incorporated in 1753 and named for Matthew Rowan, the British governor at the time.

- Salisbury was a hub for wagon making for the Continental Army in the area during the American Revolution.

- Spencer Shops inspired the name for the town, rather than the other way around. Completed in 1896, the steam locomotive repair station was named for Southern Railway President Samuel Spencer. The town was not incorporated until 1905. At one point it was the railway's largest repair depot, but was phased out as diesel engines supplanted the steam models serviced at the shops.

MILLBRIDGE

Continued from 31

SCAR, the midweek events give youngsters time to race while their parents can see them before they head out to weekend events on the bigger circuits. Over the winter, Ashly Burnett said the track usually had one race a month, just so the kids don't forget the skills they've picked up during the regular racing season, which runs to October.

Millbridge Speedway offers racing for 5- to-13-year-olds (Beginner Box Stock and Box Stock) on the Tuesday night lineup. Those 9 to 14 race Box Stock and Intermediate, while the open series includes teens and adults. Basically, drivers from 4 to 40 are competing at the 14-acre site just off NC 150.

Burnett says wait until you see the lighting changes as new LED fixtures are going in to replace stadium lighting that hadn't been updated in years. She also lamented the fact that crowds of people are coming to the track from the Mooresville side of N.C. 150, but she feels like she's losing the connection with people coming from the Salisbury side.

"Where else can you go for \$15 and see NASCAR stars and walk right up to them?" she asked, mentioning someone like Kyle Busch, who would be there to witness the younger generation of racers sharpening their skills at the dirt track before heading out for his own Cup Series race on a bigger track.

Millbridge Speedway's adult tickets are \$15, kids 7-12 are \$10 and those 6 and under get in free. The speedway will also continue this year as one of seven tracks with races being shown on DIRTVision under a subscription package.



Cars zoom around Millbridge Speedway as part of a back-to-school event that raised money for Food for Thought. (Salisbury Post file photo)

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Adding ice cream was a sweet treat for Patterson Farm

BY PARIS GOODNIGHT
paris.goodnight@salisburypost.com

Folks at Patterson Farm were busy over the winter getting ready for this year's growing season and regular crowds coming back to take advantage of all they have to offer.

Michelle Patterson, the farm's director of fun and market and tour organizer, said some of the adaptations during the pandemic like offering a curbside pickup option will likely continue and the time ticketing requirement for picking your own strawberries will also be in effect.

See PATTERSON, 43



Patterson Farm sells its strawberries only a few hundred feet from the field in its market, as well as in grocery stores up and down the eastern seaboard. (Salisbury Post file photo)



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Quarries: Rowan County's history is set in stone

BY BEN STANSELL

ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

When German immigrant Michael Braun was in need of building material to construct his home in eastern Rowan County, he didn't have to go very far.

Thanks to ancient geological processes that occurred millions of years ago, Rowan County has a rich cache of stone, particularly granite. Braun tapped into that supply when he used granite quarried from about a mile away to build his Old Stone House in the 1760s. The home is the oldest in Rowan County and among the longest standing in the Piedmont region.

Braun wouldn't be the last to tap into the county's stone stockpile.

Quarrying was happening in Rowan County before the Civil War and continued in the early 1900s when the area's unique, rose-colored granite, dubbed "Salisbury Pink" or "Balfour Pink," became a sought-after material for memorials and paving stones. Granite mined by the Harris Granite Quarries Company was used to build roads in cities like New York and New Orleans.

Granite quarried in Rowan was also used in construction of the Whitney Dam, which started around the turn of the century on the Yadkin River. The ambitious effort brought skilled stone cutters from England, Italy and other European countries to quarries in Rowan, but ultimately went bankrupt before it was finished.

The town of Granite Quarry has long been the epicenter of rock extraction in Rowan County.

"By far the most concentration of quarries, be it abandoned or currently active, are around Granite Quarry itself," said Norman Ribelin, a land surveyor in Rowan County.

Some quarries around the town have been repurposed while others have been abandoned or filled in with groundwater over time. Polycor sells Salisbury Pink from its quarry near Dunn's Mountain.

Granite Quarry isn't the only place in Rowan County where rock has been unearthed. Even in western Rowan County, known for its fertile farmland, quarrying occurred in some capacity. Rose LaCasse, a Mount Ulla historian, has seen evidence of small-scale granite quarrying near Bear Poplar.

Quarrying is still a major part of Rowan's economy today.

At its Gold Hill quarry, Vulcan Materials extracts a metamorphic rock that's crushed and used primarily in construction activities. About half of Vulcan's rocks go right next door to Stalite's plant, where it is heated to make a lightweight aggregate. The Gold Hill quarry, about 150 acres of which are currently being quarried, provides over \$18 million in economic impact annually.

"You can't build without a rock, so when you have a resource nearby that can provide the rock you need, it's a big advantage," said Denise Hallett, manager of government and community relations for Vulcan Materials.

At its 450-foot-deep Woodleaf quarry, Martin Marietta produces stone aggregates used to construct roads and homes. The company also operates a quarry near Kannapolis.

The rocks quarried in Rowan have become critical in the development of North Carolina's infrastructure.



Above: Vulcan Materials Company's Gold Hill quarry, where the company extracts rock that is turned into aggregates and used in infrastructure projects. (Photo courtesy of Vulcan Materials Company)



Left: Quarry in Granite Quarry, (Salisbury Post photo)



Rosenwald Schools educated Black children in the early 20th century



One of the entrances, and an original water fountain, at the R.A. Clement School in Cleveland. (Carl Blankenship photo)

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP
carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

There is some disagreement between sources on how many Rosenwald schools were built in Rowan County, but the best answer appears to be five.

The schools were among more than 5,000 projects built with some funding from the Rosenwald Fund, which was part of a partnership between Sears president Julius Rosenwald and educator Booker T. Washington.

Their purpose was to provide education for Black children in the South in the early 20th century, where segregated public education completely lacked

equality or necessary funding.

Some lists on file with the state show only three of the schools in Rowan County, in Cleveland, north Spencer and Rockwell, but Fisk University's database of schools lists five and includes funding breakdowns for how much was contributed locally and by the fund for each school.

Tom Hanchett, a Charlotte-based historian who has written extensively about Rosenwald schools, told the Post that Fisk's list is likely more complete. Hanchett said neither list had reason to inflate or deflate the number of entries and it is likely the database in Nashville received more information about schools after the initial list was created in Raleigh.

The schools in the Fisk database include a four-teacher school in Bear Poplar

built 1930-1931, a four-teacher school built 1929-1930, a two-teacher school in north Spencer with no date in the database, a one-teacher school in Rockwell with no date in the database and a 16-teacher school in Salisbury built 1931-1932.

One of the schools, R.A. Clement, is being restored by a local association dedicated to its preservation and is a designated national historic site. The school's report to be placed on the national registry cites five schools in the county as well. The main building of the school is in its last stages of restoration.

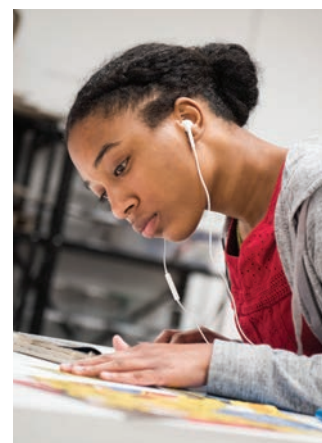
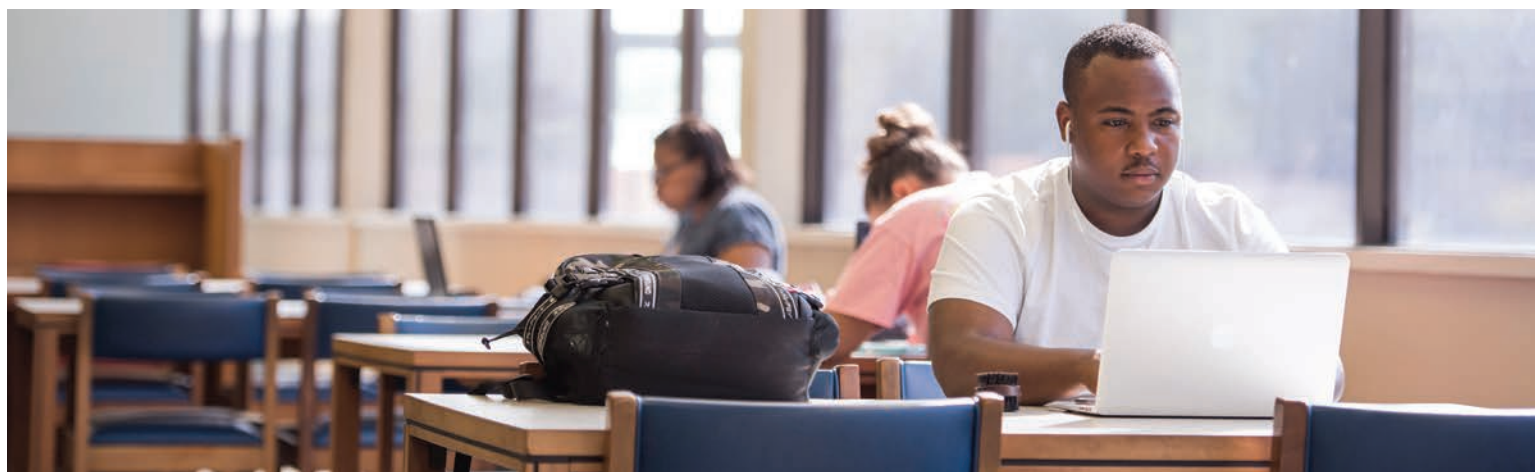
Angelo Franceschina, a contractor with an interest in restoring Rosenwald schools, has been working with the association on the project since the early 2000s.

Association member Leonard Hall attended the school. He remembers being there in first grade, moving between the buildings, basketball games and graduation exercises.

"This is part of the community," Hall said.

Local educator Catrelia Hunter also attended the school and has fond memories of attending there. She said it was a supportive environment and noted many alumni went on to become notable educators as well.

The original J.C. Price High School building is still standing in Salisbury as well. It was originally housed in Monroe Street School, which is being restored by Livingstone College with the help of grant funding.



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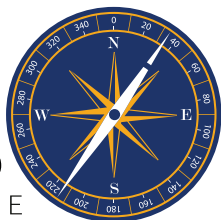
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PATTERSON

Continued from 36

“We’ve learned it enhances the experience, so it’s not so crowded,” she said.

Reservations can be made online at visitpattersonfarm.com, where you can also check the timing of what’s being grown. Michelle says they’ll know about 30 days out when the season will start, all according to Mother Nature’s way of telling you when the time is right.

One of the biggest draws was when they started making ice cream to sell at the market, which opens April 1 on Caldwell Road.

Randall Patterson is president and director of field operations for Patterson Farm. With 70 acres dedicated to three varieties of strawberries, it is one of the largest such farms in the state. During growing season, which stretches from mid-April until mid-June, the farm expects to harvest roughly 1.4 million pounds of fruit from approximately that many strawberry plants. Tomatoes have long been the farm’s most prevalent crop, but the gap shrunk in recent years as both bell peppers and strawberries made up ground.

When speaking with Michelle in mid-February, they were busy with seeding peppers. The farm also grows sweet corn and pumpkins.

Besides attending conferences over the winter months, Michelle said the farm operation depends on things like Reemay to keep plants blanketed from the cold before warmer weather arrives and the growing season kicks into high gear.

Douglas Patterson, vice president of Patterson



Randall Patterson checks his strawberry blooms at Patterson Farms in 2018. (Salisbury Post file photo)

Farm, offers the best advice for recently picked strawberries is to refrigerate them immediately so they’ll stay fresh longer. Of course, the quicker they’re eaten after being picked, the better, he said.

The Patterson family has been farming for over 125

years and members held a celebration of their history at the site of the original James A. Patterson Farm on Patterson Road in 2019.

Patterson Farm has become one of 65 farms, restaurants, wineries and breweries from Rowan County listed on the Visit NC Farms app, which was developed by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in 2020 as a way to connect local vendors with consumers.



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Spencer Shops were the heart of the town before it existed

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP
carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Spencer was an important place more than 120 years ago, before the town even existed.

“The new shops near Salisbury, N.C., will furnish long-needed and adequate facilities for maintaining the rolling stock used on the main line and branches between Washington, Richmond, Pinners Point and Atlanta,” a 1896 report from Southern Railway stated. “The total cost of these shops will be about \$250,000, of which about one-half had been expended prior to June 30, 1896. The land, 168 acres, was purchased in March 1896 and the work of construction was begun immediately thereafter. The plant will be in operation by Sept. 15.”

An excerpt from a report in 1897 described the completed shops as “new, of modern design, and well equipped.” The buildings had heating and electric lighting. Many of the shop’s machines were pneumatic.

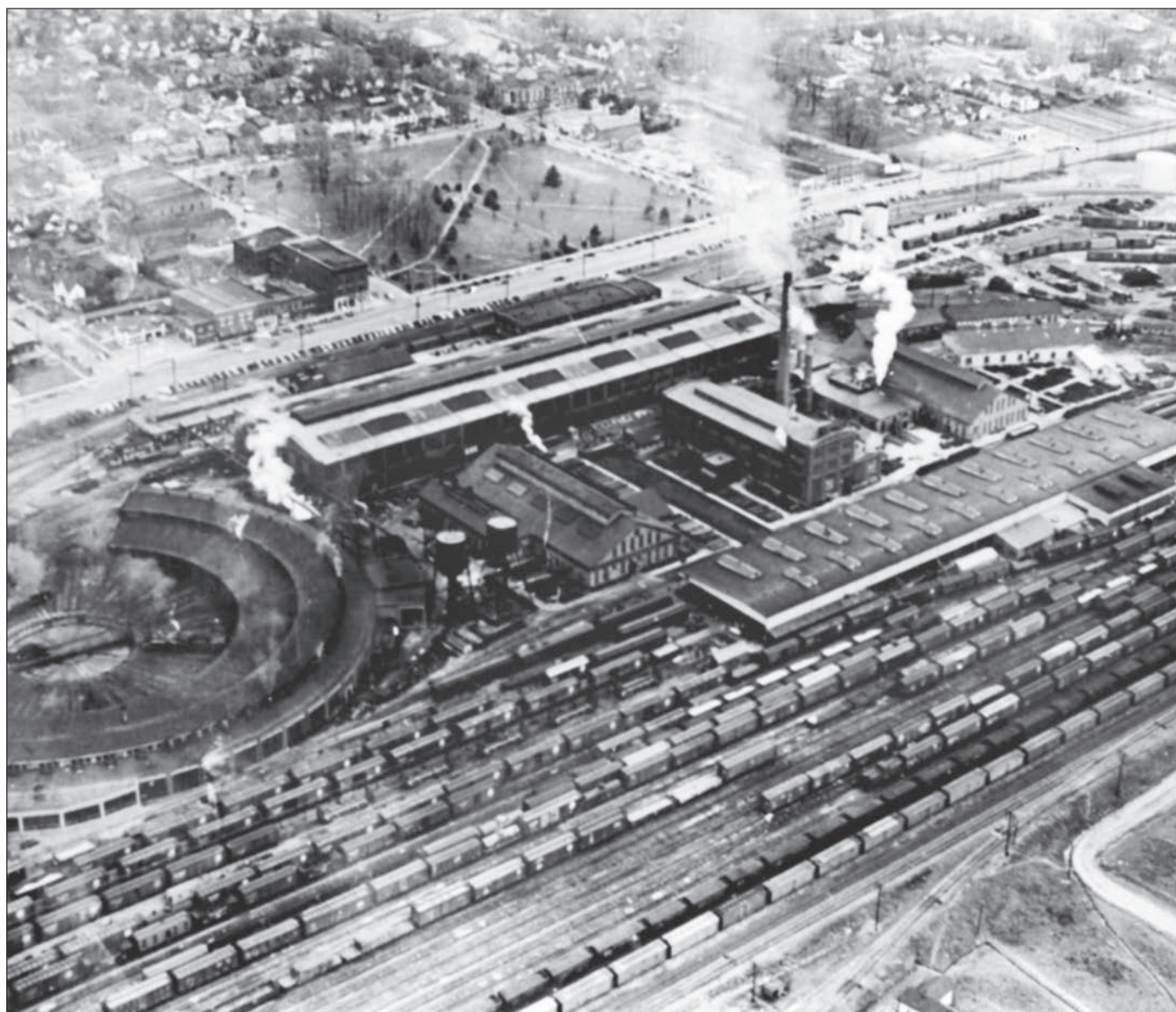
The shops would become Southern’s largest steam repair station. Spencer itself was not incorporated until 1905, and it took the name of the shops, which were named after Southern President Samuel Spencer.

In 1938, the Post ran what were labeled as the “first pictures ever made of the interior of Southern’s great shops at Spencer.” The story was about local Kiwanis Club members touring the shop.

The shops were the foundation of Spencer. Post archives include photos of men who worked for Southern parading on the day Japan surrendered and ended World War II on Aug. 15, 1945.

In 1939, the Post reported the Southern Railway was the biggest industry in the county.

The Post reported there was an explo-



sion at the shop in 1908 which killed and injured several people. The explosions shook houses in Salisbury.

The end of the shops would be slow. The mid-20th century saw diesel engines begin to replace steam locomotives. Work began to slow at the shops and in 1979 the shops closed completely.

According to Post archives, the shops were being equipped to handle diesel en-

Spencer Shops in the mid-1940s showing roundhouse to the left and the freightyard and other shop buildings in foreground. Town of Spencer is in background. (Salisbury Post file photo)

gines in the 1950s.

What used to be the core of heavy industry in the county has now been pre-

served as the N.C. Transportation Museum and has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The museum still prominently features antique rail cars and hosts train ride events throughout the year and is celebrating its 45th year. It currently hosts an exhibit about what it was like to be a brakeman during the move from steam to diesel-powered engines.

T Trading Ford carried travelers across the Yadkin



*This sketch shows Trading Ford from the Davidson County side in 1849.
(Artwork by Benson J. Lossing)*

BY JOSH BERGERON
josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com

Before cars zipped over Interstate 85 or the Wil-Cox bridge carried two lanes of U.S. 29, a similar spot was used by travelers to cross the Yadkin River on horseback, wagon or by foot.

That spot, known as Trading Ford, is

roughly in the area where bridges cross the Yadkin River today. Not unlike major highway intersections or interstate exits, civilization found a place near the banks of the Yadkin River at Trading Ford, said Ann Brownlee, who leads the Trading Ford Historic District Preservation Association.

Today, there are gas stations and con-


See TRADING, 51

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Mount Ulla's rich farmland may only be rivaled by its history

BY BEN STANSELL

ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

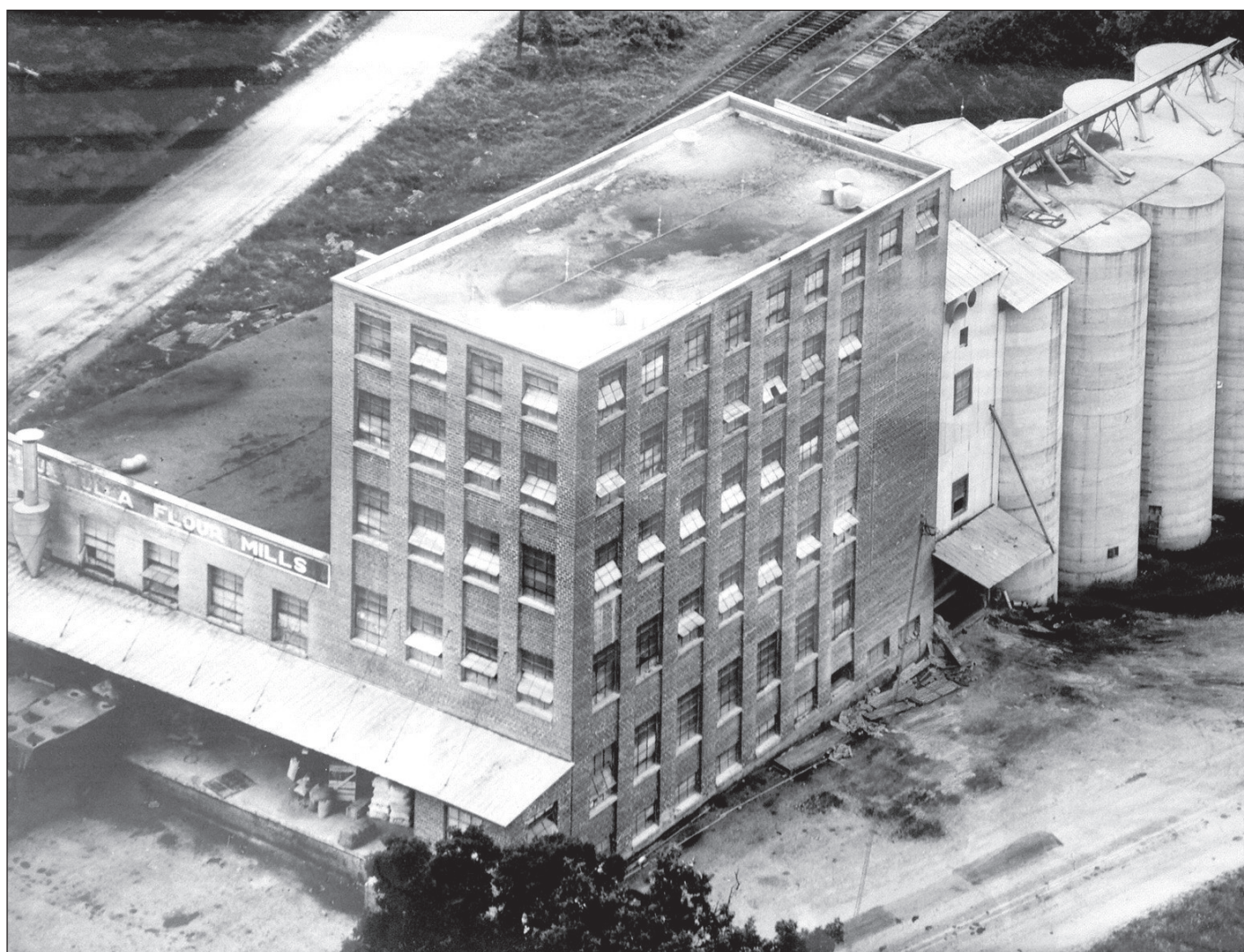
In 2005, Davidson County Broadcasting applied to build a large radio tower in rural Mount Ulla. The close-knit community rallied against the tower, eventually winning the battle.

The radio tower was never erected, but the proposal did catalyze the creation of the Mount Ulla Historic Preservation Society. Since then, members of the group have worked to document and preserve the community's rich history.

Located in western Rowan, Mount Ulla is the smallest of Rowan County's 14 townships by population. The present day Mount Ulla Township encompasses more land than the smaller, historic Mount Ulla community. Unincorporated areas including Bear Poplar and Millbridge are now within the Mount Ulla Township but were once their own distinct communities when the main methods of transportation were horse or foot.

Settled by Scotch-Irish in the mid-1700s, Mount Ulla is likely among Rowan County's oldest communities. There are several theories regarding Mount Ulla's unique name. Perhaps the most popular version of the tale credits A.Y. Lockridge, a minister at Back Creek Presbyterian Church, with giving the community its title.

The true origin of Mount Ulla's name is a mystery, but there's never been a doubt that the area boasts fertile farmland. Mount Ulla has always been an agricultural community. In the early 1800s, a large flour mill was built close to where the current post office stands, providing farmers a place to take their grain. The mill was critical to Mount Ulla's development.



"It was a more active rural community than most because of the mill," said Rose LaCasse, a founding member of the Mount Ulla Historic Preservation Society.

Early Mount Ulla was principally organized around the mill, a general store and Back Creek Presbyterian Church, LaCasse said, with most of the farming being done in fields around Sills Creek, Back Creek and Withrow Creek. Back Creek Presbyterian Church is one of several Mount Ulla structures list-

A photo of the Mount Ulla flour mill constructed in the 20th century. The third flour mill built roughly on the same site, it was one of the largest in the area at one point.

(Submitted photo)

ed on the National Register of Historic Places, along with the Rankin-Sherrill House and the John C. and Anita Sherrill House.

Mount Ulla's flour mill burned in the early 1900s, was rebuilt and then

burned again near the middle of the 20th century. It was rebuilt for a second time and stood as one of the largest mills in the area, but eventually closed and was torn down altogether in 2005.

Mount Ulla is still a thriving farming community today as new generations of farmers take advantage of its well-regarded soil. The Historic Preservation Society has paused during the pandemic, but plans to continue to collect and keep the area's history for years to come.

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Salisbury was center of veteran activity with VA hospital

BY NATALIE ANDERSON
natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

One of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's last official acts was approving the construction of a VA Medical Center in Salisbury in April 1945.

The W. G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center, located at 1601 Brenner Ave., is the headquarters of a system that now serves more than 287,000 veterans living in a 21-county area of the central Piedmont region of the state. Other sites within the system are located at Kernersville and the south and north Charlotte areas. The VA includes the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration and the National Cemetery Administration.

Congress announced in January 1944 it would spend \$500 million on the construction of VA hospitals across the nation. The Salisbury Chamber of Commerce made a bid for the establishment of a VA system in September 1944. Then-President Leo Wallace along with J. F. Hurley and Carroll T. Overton of the Hospital Action Committee said the application touted Salisbury's geographically centered location, with 500,000 veterans living within 120 miles from the proposed site. Additionally, Salisbury was located on the main line of the Southern Railway system and at the center of the state's highway systems.

Months later, in December, engineers from the federal VA Department made a trip to visit the site. On April 3, 1945, the Sunday Post reported Roosevelt signed off on a site location in Salisbury. At the time, it was the county's largest building project to date.

The VA Medical Center sits on 98 acres that had been donated by the American Legion Samuel C. Hart Post



14, which is currently located at 5865 South Main St. Additionally, Duke Power sold a 42-acre tract for the project at only a third of what it was worth.

Salisbury's campus also includes the Salisbury National Cemetery Annex, which accommodates full casket and in-ground cremated interments for veterans.

Another article from September 1951 reported the groundbreaking for the last of more than a dozen buildings constructed for the VA at a total cost of about \$15 million. The main buildings were also constructed with connecting tunnels.

Salisbury VA Medical Center Chief of Staff Dr. Randall Gehle said the doors opened to patients for the first time in October 1953, offering 21 buildings and around 970 beds. At the time, many patients were receiving mental health-re-

lated services.

In 1999, the Salisbury VA medical center was named in honor of Willie Gathrel Hefner, a Democrat who represented Rowan County in Congress for 12 terms beginning in 1974. He owned radio station WRKB in Kannapolis and was a southern gospel singer. During his time in Congress, Hefner built a reputation for advocating for veterans and programs for senior adults such as Social Security and Medicare.

Gehle said while other areas today such as Charlotte and Winston-Salem have become such hubs, Salisbury's branch employs almost 3,000 employees and serves more than 30,000 veterans at its facility alone. Approximately 100,000

unique veterans are serviced within the medical system spanning Kernersville and Charlotte.

Gehle said VA systems continue to undergo market assessments and improvements today. In addition to being a Navy veteran, Gehle is also a physician who spent nearly two decades practicing medicine in the private sector. Gehle said it's difficult to provide comprehensive health care to all patients within the private sector, but with the VA health care system every patient has an entire team dedicated to their health care from day one. Veterans seeking services at the Salisbury location are assigned social workers, primary care physicians, nutritionists, pharmacy doctors and mental health specialists and other medical professionals.

"This is the health care that they've earned," he said.

*The V.A. Medical Center.
(Salisbury Post file photo)*

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West Rowan's football dynasty

BY MIKE LONDON

mike.london@salisburypost.com

In 1997, after nearly 40 years of football, West Rowan owned the least tradition of any of Rowan County's schools.

Salisbury, North Rowan, South Rowan and East Rowan had celebrated championships and produced legendary teams, but things had been relatively quiet in Mount Ulla.

West had enjoyed a few good teams and a few exciting teams, but no great ones. There had been 147 wins, 240 losses, 12 ties — and zero conference championships.

West principal Henry Kluttz set out to change that pattern. He hired a former East Rowan lineman who was employed as a Davie County assistant.

The new head coach's name was Scott Young.



Young

Young's first season at West Rowan was 1998. Young was quite young, only 26, when that season got under way. He was still learning. West went 3-8.

But the culture began to change by 1999. Young was building a winning staff and a winning program. West started strong and finished 8-3.

Young's third season, 2000, brought that long-awaited first conference championship for the men in light blue and their patient fans. It was achieved in the hardest way possible, by prevailing on back-to-back weeks in fierce games against the perennial neighborhood bullies — A.L. Brown and Concord.

In 2001, West began a streak of winning against county opponents that would roll on and on and on.

In 2005, the Falcons put together an undefeated regular season, but an



extended run in the state playoffs remained elusive.

In 2008, the Falcons started out 1-1, but that's when West discovered the perfect storm of junior running back K.P. Parks, sophomore quarterback B.J. Sherrill and a stellar defense that included future NFL player Chris Smith.

That's the season the Falcons cleared that third-round hurdle.

Trailing Carver 16-7 at home with the final minute ticking away in the third quarter, West struck suddenly for a 60-yard touchdown on a pass thrown by receiver Jon Crucitti to Brantley Horton. That was a future West Pointer and a future Naval Academy man teaming up. West would win — the most important victory the program ever had on its home field — on a 50-yard run on a faked punt by defensive back Austin Greenwood.

That inspiring rally would galvanize the fan base as never before. The Falcons would roll on to their first 3A state championship in 2008.

West would evolve into a true dynas-

West Rowan's KP Parks runs against South Rowan High School during a game in 2009. (Salisbury Post file photo)

ty. The Falcons would win the 3A state championship again in 2009 with a perfect 16-0 season. Parks put up astounding numbers and broke state records.

Parks would rush for 10,915 yards in his four-year career and score 158 touchdowns. As a senior, he amassed 3,794 rushing yards and scored an incredible 59 TDs.

Then the Falcons went 16-0 again and won 3A again in 2010, even without Parks.

At that point, the Falcons had won 46 straight and accurately could boast that they owned the nation's longest active winning streak.

In 2011, with all the legends gone, the winning streak ended on opening night, but it was still a program filled with the belief that it would win every Friday. On sheer will, those Falcons (13-3) made it back to the state championship game and

finished as 3A runner-up.

West's famed county winning streak lasted for 11 years. It ended in dramatic fashion in 2012 at East Rowan, 13-7, with the Mustangs making a game-saving tackle on their 1-yard line on the final play.

A bit of magic slowly ebbed from West's program after that loss and some of the mystique was shattered, although steady winning continued and playoff appearances were automatic.

When health issues forced Young to step aside following the 2014 season, he did so with a 172-54 record, three state titles and nine conference championships.

He had led the transformation of West into a winning program. When he finished, West was 292-201-12.

Young died on a November morning in 2017. He was 46.

The night he died the football stadium lights stirred to life and illuminated the night sky not just at West, but at every high school in the county at exactly 7:30 p.m. — kickoff time — because Young raised the bar for all of them.



Kayakers access the Yadkin River from the York Hill wildlife boat access near the Wil-Cox and U.S.29 bridges in the Trading Ford area. (Salisbury Post file photo)

TRADING

Continued from 45

venience stores at major intersections and interstate exits. Then, there were camps on either side of the river for travelers to dry off or purchase provisions. Roads in the area still follow the general direction of the centuries-old trading path.

Trading Ford's origins are lost in history, but a history compiled by Brownlee says the Spanish built a fort in the area in 1567, and the journals of early explorers documented the location in 1670, 1674 and 1701. It became a major ford in the Yadkin River as Europeans settled the area.

Brownlee says the first bridge over the Yadkin River in the Salisbury area was the covered Beard Bridge in 1818, just behind former N.C. Finishing Company site. Until then, travelers needed to cross Trading Ford or use a ferry.

Modern bridges over the river are much more recent. The current bridge, which replaced twin spans that opened in the mid 1900s, opened in 2012. The Wil-Cox bridge, today only a pedestrian path, also wasn't built until the 20th century.

The oldest part of the ford in the river was about a mile downstream from where bridges are today. Brownlee says there are traces of roads used to get to the ford on Duke Energy's property near the river, with large gullies cut into the land by thousands of wagons passing over it.

Today, Brownlee calls Trading Ford a place time has largely forgotten in the 21st century. That's due in large part to High Rock Dam's construction in the 1920s, which flooded low-lying areas at Trading Ford and prevented it from being passable. The islands once used to cross the river, however, can still be seen east of the I-85 bridge.



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Tallest point in county gets Young name from old figure



Young's Mountain in the Cleveland area as seen from the intersection of Mountain Road and Lone Mountain Trail on the north side. The most prominent features of the mountain are radio, cellphone and data towers on its peak. (Josh Bergeron photo)

BY JOSH BERGERON

josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com

On a clear day, visitors to Dunns Mountain can see the skyline of uptown Charlotte or further, but the ambitiously named hill isn't the tallest point in Rowan County.

That title belongs to Young's Mountain, a point that rises nearly 1,100 feet into the sky near the western Rowan County town of Cleveland.

On Young's Mountain, there is no county park or viewing platform to look

toward nearby cities. Instead, it's home to cellphone and internet broadcast towers — a longtime use for the landmark. A few homes are on one side of the mountain. Most of the western side is owned by Myers Forest Products.

Young's Mountain gets its name from Samuel Young, who was born in Scotland in 1721, emigrated to North Carolina when it was a colony and died in Rowan County in 1793.

Young represented Rowan County in the 1774 provincial congress, which met in New Bern, as well as the 1775 provincial congress in Hillsboro. He was one of the county's magistrates be-

fore the Revolutionary War. Then, the magistrates had a much different set of duties than today's magistrates in their downtown Salisbury office. He also was named chairman of the Rowan Safety Committee in 1775, which required him to make an address to militia companies in the county. He was also military treasurer for the county.

Cleveland Mayor Pat Phifer got to know Young's Mountain during various childhood exploits. There are wild turkeys, deer and old wildlife living on the mountain, he said.

Phifer knows a bike that starts high enough on the mountain can get up to 62

mph because of a friend who installed a speedometer on his bicycle. The road to the top isn't paved anymore, which makes cycling down difficult.

A snowstorm hasn't dropped enough precipitation in many years, but Young's Mountain is the best sledding spot with a little advanced snow packing preparation, he said. Today, locked gates prevent the same kind of mountaintop adventures, but it remains a landmark for the western part of the county.

"From our standpoint, it's as close to a mountain as we're going to get in west Rowan," Phifer said.



West Rowan's Chris Smith blocked several passes by Eastern Alamance's Lamar Ivey during a game in 2009. (Salisbury Post file photo)



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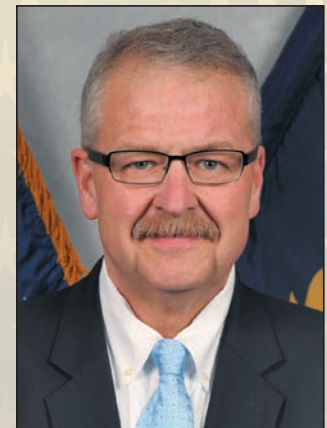
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Above: A photo likely taken in the 1890s shows Benny Martin, a Gold Hill resident and mine worker, recovering gold by washing away debris. Water sprayed by Martin would keep the unwanted material moving while allowing the gold to stick to the mercury on the table. (Photo courtesy of Vivian Hopkins)

Below: Patterson Farm's seasonal favorite of various colored poinsettias is a popular gift for decorating for the Christmas season. (Salisbury Post file photo)



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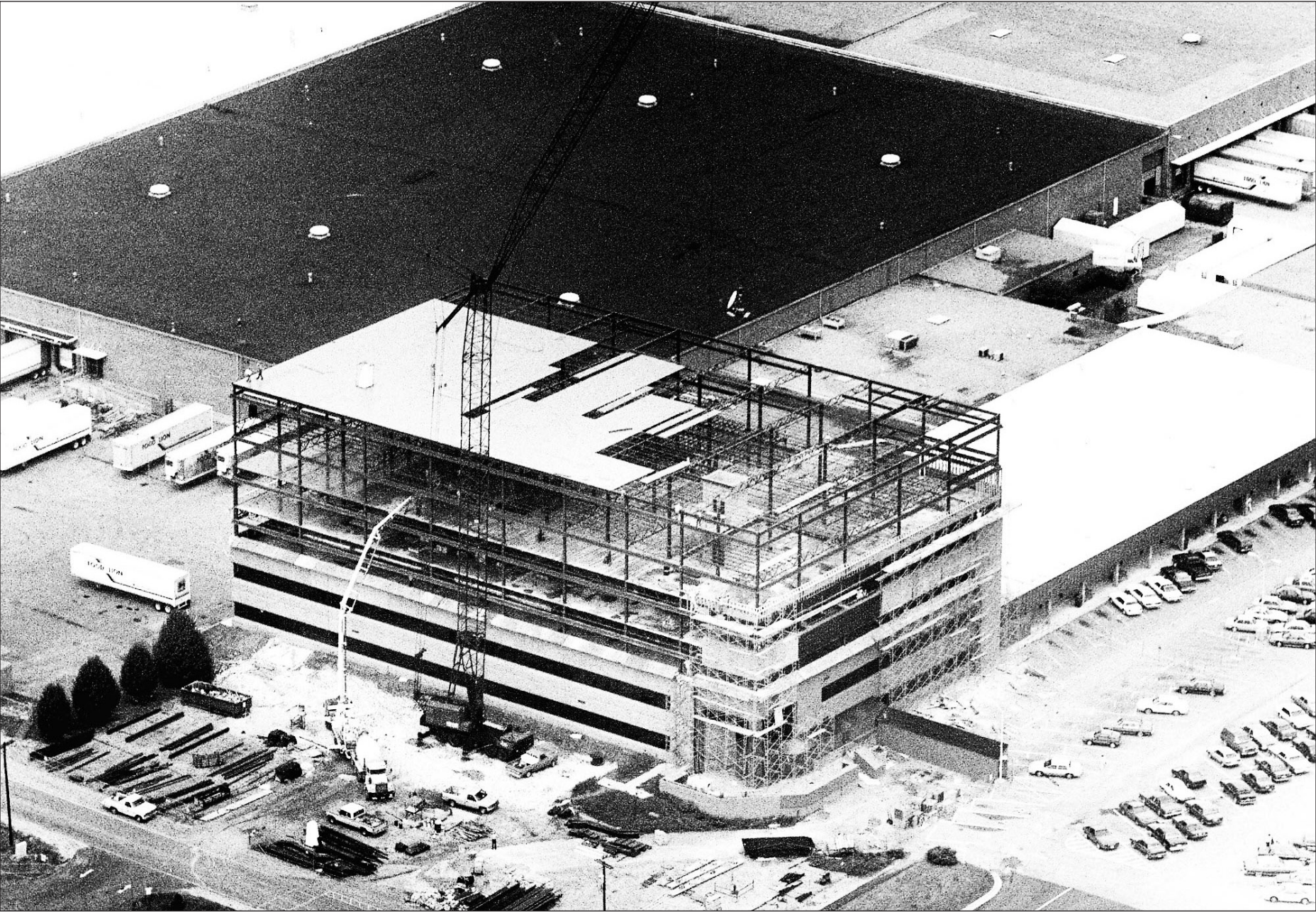
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Food Lion headquarters being built in 1989. (Salisbury Post file photo)



The barn quilt mural on the side of the Cleveland Community Volunteer Fire Department. (Salisbury Post file photo)

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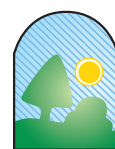
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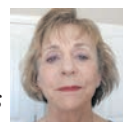
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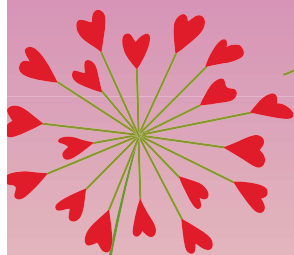
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***Above:** Aerial photo of the I-85 Yadkin River Bridge project in 2012.*

***Left:** A family exits Rowan Wildlife Adventures at Dan Nicholas Park. (Salisbury Post file photos)*



The Back Shop in operation at Spencer Shops in 1905. (Salisbury Post file photo)



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China Grove Farmers Day in 2018. (Salisbury Post file photo)



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Houses on High Rock Lake. (Salisbury Post file photo)




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1838 ~ 184 Years



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The manufacturing process for making headstones at the quarry at Granite Quarry. (Salisbury Post file photo)

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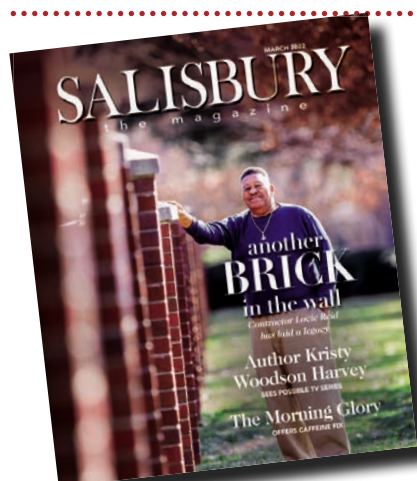
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