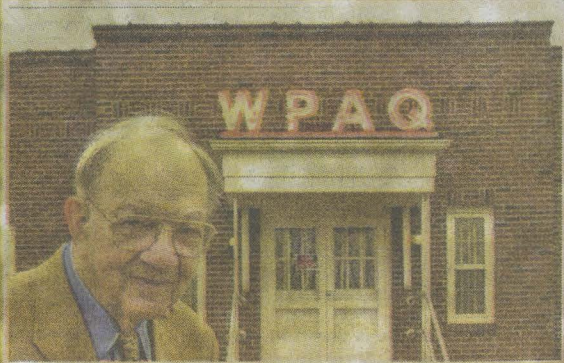


SURRY COUNTY



CELEBRATING

25 Years



A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO The Mount Airy News & THE TRIBUNE

SECTION A

Day-long bash starts 250th celebration



Twin brothers Alden (left) and Arnold Nunn, known as The Nunn Brothers, will be performing Saturday at Surry 250.

It's finally here.

Two-hundred-and-fifty years in the making, not to mention a year of pandemic-fueled delay, Surry County is kicking off its 250th anniversary celebration on Aug. 21 with Surry 250, presented by Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital.

The gathering is a day-long celebration of the county, its people, and its history, and is just the kick-off to a string of activities and events commemorating the 250th anniversary of the county's 1771 founding.

The first event, Surry 250, to be held at the Historic Courthouse Square, 114 W. Atkins St. in Dobson, will get underway with an opening ceremony at 10 a.m., with entertainment and activities continuing throughout the day, closing at 6 p.m.

While there will be vendors on hand selling food, the majority of the day's activities, including many kids' games, are free.

"Citizens will enjoy a car show, Surry County sonkers, numerous food trucks, children's activities, displays by local historical organizations, Revolutionary War demonstrations and great music from headliners Presley Barker and Taylon Hope, as well as the Nunn Brothers, the Slate Mountain Ramblers and the Celtic Sessions

band," the county said in a statement announcing the celebration.

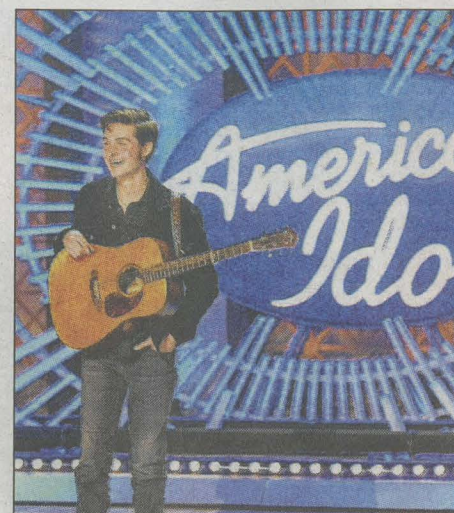
Barker is a 16-year-old local prodigy who competed on American Idol and has appeared at the Grand Ole Opry, MerleFest, Elkin Roots Music Festival, the Reeves Theater and the Galax, Virginia, Old Fiddlers Convention where he won the adult guitar competition when he was 10. He is recording an album in Nashville and has performed at many music venues in North Carolina and Virginia.

Hope is another successful 16-year-old with a great amount of experience in Nashville, having shared the stage with Dolly Parton, Tracy Lawrence, Lee Greenwood, Lonestar, Shenandoah and Colin Raye. She moved to Nashville from West Jefferson to pursue her career in country music as a pre-teen and is a signed artist for Dolly Parton's Dream More Resort, where she performs throughout the year. Hope has performed at the Grand Ole Opry, on historic WSM Radio, at CMA Music Fest, at MerleFest and at many music venues in North Carolina and Tennessee.

The Nunn Brothers and the Slate Mountain



The Slate Mountain Ramblers will be among the local groups performing at Surry 250. Pictured here are three of the band members, from left, Marsha Todd, Richard Bowman and Barbara Bowman.



Submitted photos
Presley Barker, a young musician with Surry County ties, will be part of the Aug. 21 kick-off for the county's 250th anniversary celebration.

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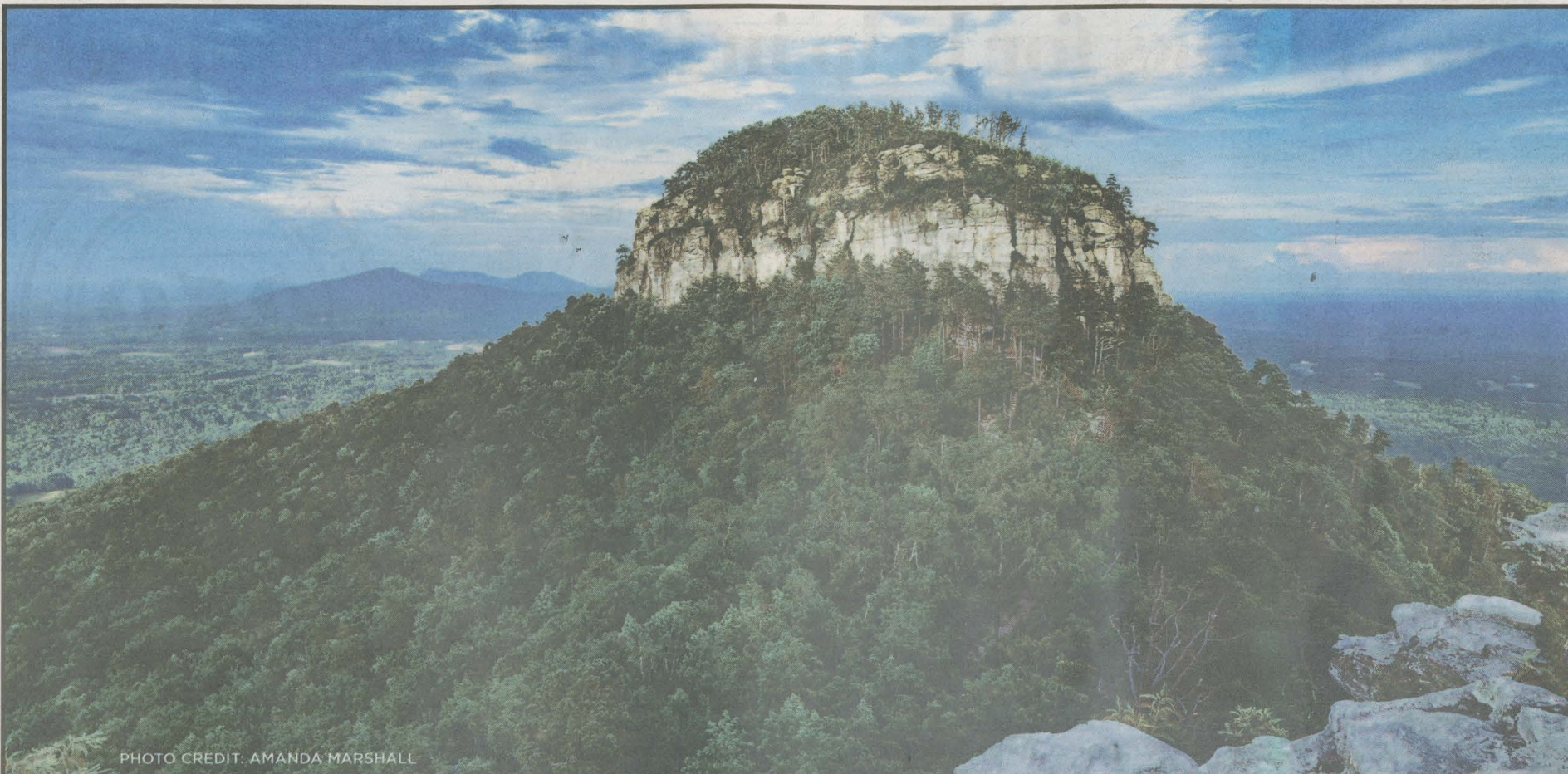


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County looks for help in filling time capsule

Opening is set for the year 2121

By John Peters

jpeters@mtairynews.com

If you've ever wanted to leave your mark for those who come after you — or your watch, or your necktie, or most anything else — now's your chance.

Surry County is celebrating the 250th anniversary of its 1771 founding later this week, and one big part of the day's events will be sealing a time capsule to be opened in a century.

Only problem is, county organizers haven't yet gotten enough to fill the capsule.

The birthday bash, dubbed Surry 250, is set for Saturday, Aug. 21, from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse Square, 114 W. Atkins St. in Dobson. The day will be much like a festival, with food trucks selling concessions, lots of music from local and national acts, loads of free children's activities, historical displays, along with Revolutionary War demonstrations, and other activities.

One part of the celebration sure to be felt long after the day has concluded is the time

capsule, or perhaps more accurately time vault.

"We decided this one is going to be above ground," said Nathan Walls, assistant to the county manager, clerk to the board of commissioners, and unofficial point person for much of the county's efforts toward the anniversary celebration.

Historically, communities and other groups have buried time capsules, only to be opened 25, 50 or 100 years later to find some — if not most — of the contents compromised by condensation build-up inside the capsule. While some of that can be avoided by modern airtight sealing technology, part of the problem develops inside the capsule because of higher moisture content under ground.

Thus, the county and other local groups involved with the history observance opted for an above-ground, granite vault.

"This is going to be a granite time capsule, for people to open in 100 years," Walls said. All of the materials and work have been donated by NC Granite Corp., Johnson Granite Inc., and Wholesale Monument Co.

"I think the time capsule will be something that's really special," he said. "We'll have children, grandchildren, great-grand-

children of people who will be attending our ceremony (on Aug. 21), who will be able to attend that ceremony in a hundred years who can see items their parents and grandparents put in there."

The capsule is what he describes as a two-piece monument, that is four feet long, 28 inches wide, and 24 inches deep. The monument will have the county seal, the Surry 250 logo and some other lettering imprinted on it, along with the items to be placed inside.

Walls said plans are already in place for a number of items to be included. Among those are a Surry 250 coin the county had made for the event, drawings of the historic courthouse, pictures of the county commissioners, current paper money and coins, a special section being produced by The Mount Airy News commemorating the day, and a sign-in sheet everyone who attends Saturday's event can sign.

But, he said the county is looking for area folks and agencies to donate plenty of items to go in the monument.

Among the items organizers are hoping for are a wristwatch, a neck tie, jewelry, as well as brochures and listings for local organizations such as popular area restaurants,



an account of what folks like to do for leisure activities locally, information on the Blackmon Amphitheatre concert series, as well as information about Mount Airy, Elkin, Pilot Mountain, Dobson, and annual reports from both the Greater Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce and the Yadkin Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Walls said he hopes local residents may have some of these sorts of items, and perhaps other items, they can donate to be placed in the time capsule.

Bash

From page A2

tain Ramblers have won numerous awards and performed in many festivals and events in North Carolina and Virginia. Both bands have a large following in the area.

Children can enjoy the Dobson Splash Pad, a monster mural, a playground, cornhole boards and Horne Creek Living Historical Farm old-timey games. Historical displays and demonstrations will be provided by Horne Creek, the Wake Forest University Anthropology Department, heritage craftsmen and the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, which will present a walk-through mobile museum that traces Surry County's history from the Native Americans to today. Surry County historical videos will be played in the His-

toric Courthouse Board Room on the second floor and a time capsule will be on hand for citizens to add their contents to be re-opened in 2121.

Those who attend should bring a blanket or lawn chair to relax on the Historic Courthouse lawn, where concerts and social events were held for decades. Bands will be available for pictures, autographs and album and merchandise sales.

Atkins and Crutchfield streets will be blocked off for the event; parking will be available at Dobson Elementary School, Dobson First Baptist Church, the Surry County Judicial Center and Surry Community College, where guests can hop on a shuttle for a free ride to downtown.

A lecture series, bus tours, mobile museum school trips and historical articles in regional media outlets will follow over the next year to honor the county's history,

which includes a time period that current land in Forsyth, Stokes and Yadkin counties were part of Surry County. Dates, times and details for those events will be announced later.

For more information about Surry 250, log onto <http://facebook.com/surry250> and www.surry250.com.

The Surry 250 event's rain date is Saturday, August 28.

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AUGUST 18, 2021 **A5**

Year-long slate of history activities on tap

Tours, lectures, and a look toward the future

By John Peters

jpeters@mtairynews.com

Generally, when a major milestone anniversary is observed — be it a party, informal get-together, or a big public shindig, the gathering serves as a way to mark the end point of a celebration.

Not so with the upcoming Surry County 250th anniversary. The celebration, set for Aug. 21 in Dobson, is a big deal to be sure — it's not every day a community marks a quarter of a millennium — and the gathering will include a car show, food vendors, a wide variety of musical performances, kids activities, historical displays, and more.

But that day will also serve as just the beginning, with a year-long slate of activities set to mark the county's founding in 1771. Plans were for the big party to take place last year, with the series of events leading into the 250th year, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced all of that to be moved back a year.

No matter, local officials and volunteers are set and ready to welcome area residents and visitors to Dobson on Aug. 21 for the celebration, and then begins the year-long series of history-focused events.

Marion Venable, a member of the Surry County Historical Society, said the first gathering will be another public celebration, slated for Sept. 18 in Rockford.

"That will be a Rediscover Rockford event," she said, adding the Rockford Preservation Society has been holding an annual Rockford Reunion for nearly a decade trying to rekindle interest in the former county seat.

The hamlet, on the southern border where Surry meets Yadkin County, was once a bustling town, created in 1789 as the county seat for Surry — a designation it held until 1851, after Surry County was split to form Yadkin County, and the Surry County seat was moved to Dobson.

With the move, Rockford eventually lost much of the traffic into town, with the popu-



The former William P. Dobson store, built around 1813 in Rockford, was one of the dominant buildings in the town, serving as a general store along with a meeting house. Here is a photo from the structure before restoration work began about a decade ago.

Photos courtesy Hannah Holyfield



This photo shows the building in the midst of outdoor renovations, with new railings on the front porch and deck. (Photo courtesy Hannah Holyfield)



Marion Venable, left, is seen here conducting a history tour at Isaac's Mill during a Leadership Surry County program several years ago. She will be conducting similar tours of historic properties and sites over the course of the coming year.

See ACTIVITIES | A10

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Activities

From page A6

lation declining and the community becoming a small, unincorporated village.

On Sept. 18, Venable and others with the Rockford Preservation Society hope folks will turn out to see what the town was like years ago — with historic buildings open to the public, and a nearly completed renovation and restoration project of the W.O. Dobson store to show off.

"We've been restoring the 1813 Dobson Store," she said, a project that's been going on for nearly a decade. "It's near completion."

Hannah Holyfield, of Rockford Bed and Breakfast and also a member of the Rockford Preservation Society, said with the outside and structural work done, plumbing and electrical restoration are all that remain.

Included in that renovation is the meeting room of the former Masonic Lodge that gathered there, starting with its founding, in that very room, in 1866.

On the Sept. 18 get-together, she said there will be music, food available, and David Diamont, a former 20-year Surry County representative in the North Carolina House of Representatives, will be giving a talk on the early government in Surry County.

But the showcase will be the buildings.

"The building (the store) does have lots of the original components, and decorative paint," she said. "We're really excited about the rebirth of this architectural treasure, one of our earlier buildings there....this will be a real good day to see the work that's been done," she said, adding that Rockford's historical importance to the county is often overlooked because, being on the southern tip, folks elsewhere in Surry don't often see or think of the village.

That's often the case for many parts of the county. Most people are familiar with Mount Airy as the commercial and population hub of the county, with Dobson as the county seat, and Pilot Mountain and Elkin because they are both incorporated municipalities, but there are plenty of other communities with a rich history in Surry County.

Thus the history series that kicks off Sept. 18 but continues on over the next year.

"We're just hoping to reintroduce many people to the more rural parts of our county," Venable said.

After the Rockford event, the history tour

will become just that — an actual tour with a big bus taking interested parties to different communities.

The first stop is slated for Oct. 23, when the tour visits west of Dobson, taking in some locally famous sites such as the Edwards-Franklin House, Flat Top Primitive Baptist Church, Kapp's Mill, the Tuck House, and other structures in the area.

"The tour bus — we're working with Black Tie Tours — will accommodate 32 people," she said. Venable said registration details will be available at the Aug. 21 history celebration, but she believes the cost will be about \$25 per person, and will include a four- to five-hour excursion.

"We did this during the bicentennial, it was very popular," she said of widespread history celebrations in 1976, when the United States marked the 200th celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. "It always seems to be a real popular thing, for people to be able to go to a site, hear the story, really become a part of the experience."

With often unpredictable winter weather on tap after October, she said the next tour won't be until April, when the big bus will trek down through and around Elkin. In May the tour will include Mount Airy, followed by June stops in the Westfield area of Surry County. The August jaunt will take local history buffs on a tour of historical sites in south-central Surry.

"This is a year-long opportunity for people to register and be a part of those tours, to learn about our history," Venable said. "We hope to reach as many people as possible with those opportunities, on a first come, first-served basis. If we had a tremendous response, there's a possibility we could have two buses. Right now we're planning to limit it to 32 people each time."

Venable has a long record of being involved in local history projects and teaching local history to area residents — she said she believes it's important for people to know about their community's founding and development.

"I just feel if people don't know about where they live, they can't be a full participant in community service, in organizational efforts, in wanting better things for your community. You really need to know where you're from to fully engage and be a contributing member of the community. I just think it's important. We can't be our best at being community members."

Lecture series and more



Photos courtesy Hannah Holyfield

Workers on the scene of the former William P. Dobson store in Rockford during the outside work of the restoration project.

In addition to the history tours, a series of lectures is planned for the upcoming year. Those are:

- Nov. 18, a talk on Surry County architecture;
- January's talk will focus on the area's traditional music;
- February will feature a look at local Native American history;
- March's talk will focus on the natural history and heritage of the region;
- May will not so much be a look back, but a look forward, with a talk on the future of Surry County.

The group has other activities coming up as well. Among those are:

- Work with the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History on a mobile display of the county's history. After the Aug. 21 celebration, the mobile history unit will move among the local schools. Teachers will have a locally created curriculum to teach, featuring Surry County history.
- The publication of "tidbits" on Surry County history, brief two or three-sentence facts about the county to be disseminated throughout the year through area media outlets;



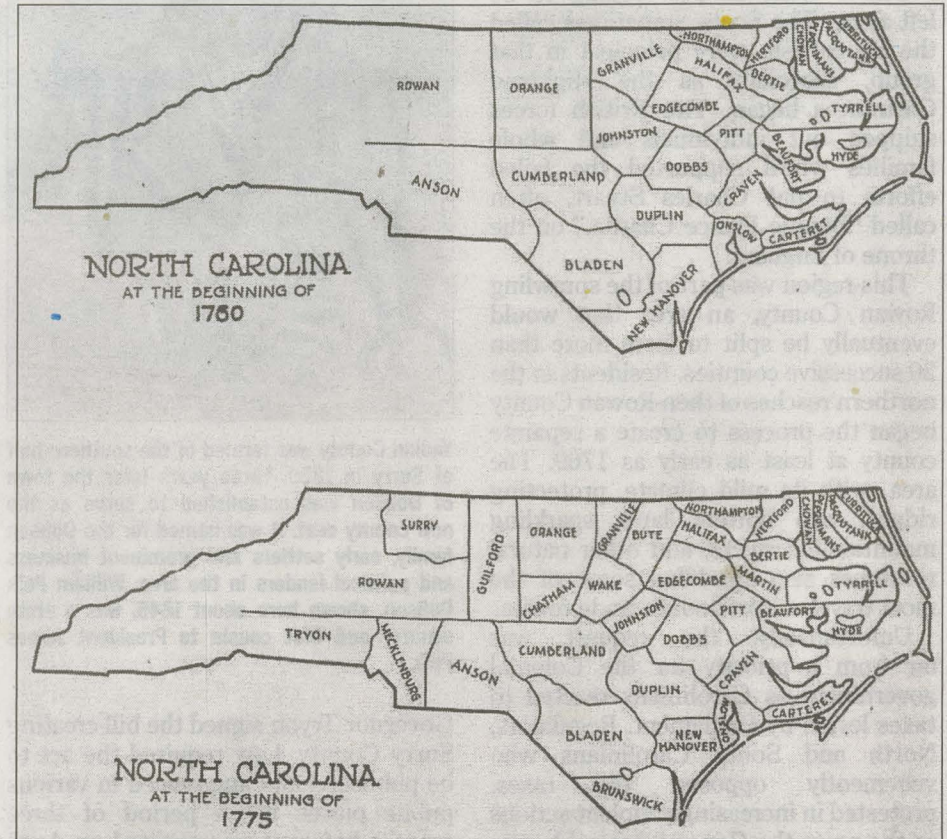
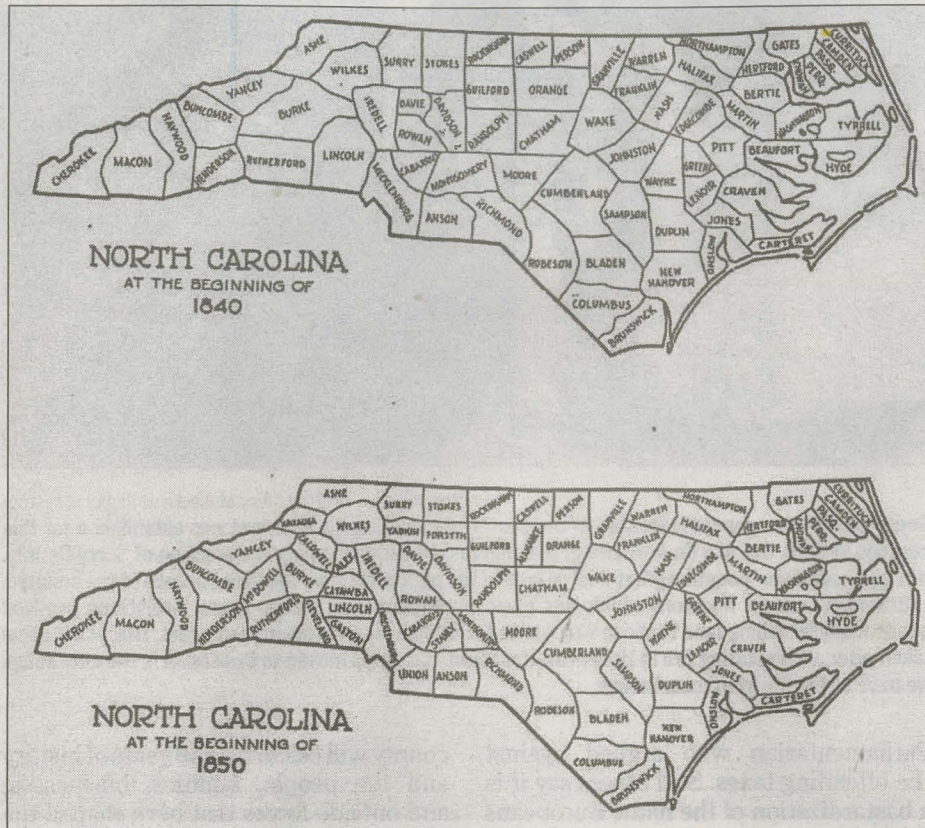
While restoration continues on the former William P. Dobson store, much of the outside work had been completed when this photo was taken.

- Republishing books that have fallen out of print, including The Surry County Book produced during the Bicentennial; Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War by Hester Jackson; along with publication of a new Enslaved People's Index that gathers records on individuals who were slaves prior to the end of the Civil War.

Surry County's founding

Our History

★★★★★★



A small portion of Surry was combined with portions of Washington County (now Tennessee) to form Wilkes in 1778. The county was divided in half in 1789 to form Stokes County which birthed Forsyth in 1849. Yadkin was created in 1850. From the state Department of Archives and History

Photos courtesy of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History
Created in 1771, Surry County originally encompassed land that, today, is Stokes, Forsyth, and Yadkin counties. The act directed that court would be held in the home of Gideon Wright in Donnaha, more or less in the center of the county, until a permanent courthouse, prison, and stocks could be built. This was done in Richmond, now in Forsyth County. These maps show the state's counties in 1760 and 1775. From the state Department of Archives and History

Few records exist from the earliest days

By Kate Rauhauser-Smith

This Our History column was first published in the Jan. 29, 2020 edition of The Mount Airy News. The column was meant to be the first of a long line of articles, events, and celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of Surry County. Many of those plans were delayed by more than a year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This month is the beginning of Surry County's 250th birthday. Sort of.

There are few written records that

remain from this area during Colonial Days so our understanding of what was actually happening here must be found or inferred from records in other regions of the state. Fortunately for us, some have been gathered by local historians Jesse Hollingsworth and Ruth Minnick and others over the years.

Here's what we know about Surry's beginnings:

In 1770 Surry County was the Wild West — an unsecured and unruly frontier populated by Scottish, German, and English fur trappers, traders, and farmers living uneasily with Native Americans. The so-called Cherokee War in 1758-'61, overlapped by the French and Indian War (1754-'63), had ground to a brutal end but the frontier was still dangerous.

Raids and kidnappings continued, though often carried out by white men disguised as Natives who kidnapped mostly women and children to take to other colonies illegally claiming they were indentured servants.

A growing number of settlers traveled down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania or on the Saura-Saponi Trail from the old Virginia and Maryland settlements. Colonial port cities were growing at unprecedented rates as Europeans fled famine, drought, and war in search of safer homes for their families. In the years leading up to the American Revolution Boston topped 16,000 people; New York City, 25,000; Philadelphia was the most populous city

in the American Colonies with 38,000.

By comparison, Wilmington and New Bern in this state had fewer than 2,000 each and Charleston, South Carolina, 12,000.

Many groups such as the German Dunkards and Brethren, and English Quakers, followed the Moravians to the North Carolina backcountry seeking religious freedom, and good farms in community with the larger and better-organized group. They established mills and small manufacturing businesses across the migration routes and helped build and maintain fortified towns such as Bethabara.

See HISTORY | A12

History

From page A11

Others came simply looking to be left alone. The Scots, sometimes called the Scots-Irish, were principal in that group, especially as the Highland Clearances began. The British forces shipped out individuals and whole families who'd supported the failed efforts to put Charles Stuart, often called "Bonnie Prince Charlie," on the throne of England.

This region was part of the sprawling Rowan County, an area that would eventually be split to form more than 20 successive counties. Residents in the northern reaches of then-Rowan County began the process to create a separate county at least as early as 1769. The area, with its mild climate, protecting ridges, rich bottom land, sparkling mountain-fed rivers, and other natural resources also straddled some of the most traveled north-south trade routes.

Unfortunately, the request was far from a priority for the Colonial government as Carolinians reacted to taxes levied by Parliament. Regulators, North and South Carolinians who vehemently opposed the taxes, protested in increasingly violent actions to the point the General Assembly was dissolved in 1769 before the proposal could be considered.

A second attempt in 1770 was, at least, considered, but not acted upon before the body adjourned.

Finally, on January 26, 1771,



Yadkin County was formed of the southern half of Surry in 1850. Three years later the town of Dobson was established to serve as the new county seat. It was named for the Dobson family, early settlers and prominent business and political leaders in the area. William Polk Dobson, shown here about 1845, was a state senator and first cousin to President James Polk.

Governor Tryon signed the bill creating Surry County. Law required the act to be published and announced in various public places for a period of three months before it was enacted on April 1 of that year.

There is some disagreement about the source of the name. Some say the county was named for Surrey, England, Tryon's birthplace. Some say the county was named in honor of Lord Surry, a



Photos courtesy of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History

Courthouses were generally located in the center of each county. Rockford was established for this purpose in 1790. Col. Martin Armstrong, the man tasked with surveying the erection of Surry County, was given and later bought a great deal of land in the region. He gave the land for each of the county's courthouses except Rockford which was given by Thomas and Moses Ayers. Armstrong profited handsomely by selling land to those who wanted to build near the government seats. This picture was taken after a devastating fire in 1925 after the county seat was moved to Dobson. It is the only image we have of the Rockford courthouse.

Parliamentarian who argued against the offending taxes. Still others say it is a bastardization of the name Europeans knew the early Native Americans by, Saura.

Regardless, the county was established as the nation hurtled toward the establishment of an even larger new governmental organization in 1776.

Through the coming months the

county will celebrate 250 years of history and the people, families, businesses, and outside forces that have shaped the region we live in today. I hope you'll come out and help commemorate all that has come before as we anticipate what comes next.

Kate Rauhauser-Smith is a freelance writer, researcher, and genealogist.



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WPAQ keeps area musical legacy alive



Kelly Epperson operates the station his father started. He continues the station's dedication to regional, gospel, and bluegrass music and a strong connection to the community but he's guided the station into the 21st century by bringing WPAQ to the world via the internet. He is seen here explaining radio to Madeline Lowery and Alex Pell in 2018.

Station began broadcasting in 1948

By Kate Rauhauser-Smith

This Our History column was first published in the Feb. 2, 2020 edition of The Mount Airy News as part of a long-running weekly series of history columns produced by the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History. It has been updated for August 2021.

To say the first broadcast of WPAQ radio was eagerly anticipated by those in the listening area would be an understatement.

The lobby was packed with flowers. The driveway and public road were parked full. People filled every space in and around the simple brick station and an unknown host crowded around radio sets from Mount Airy to South Boston, Virginia, and more.

They were rewarded with the sounds of a local group called the Green Valley Boys

Our History



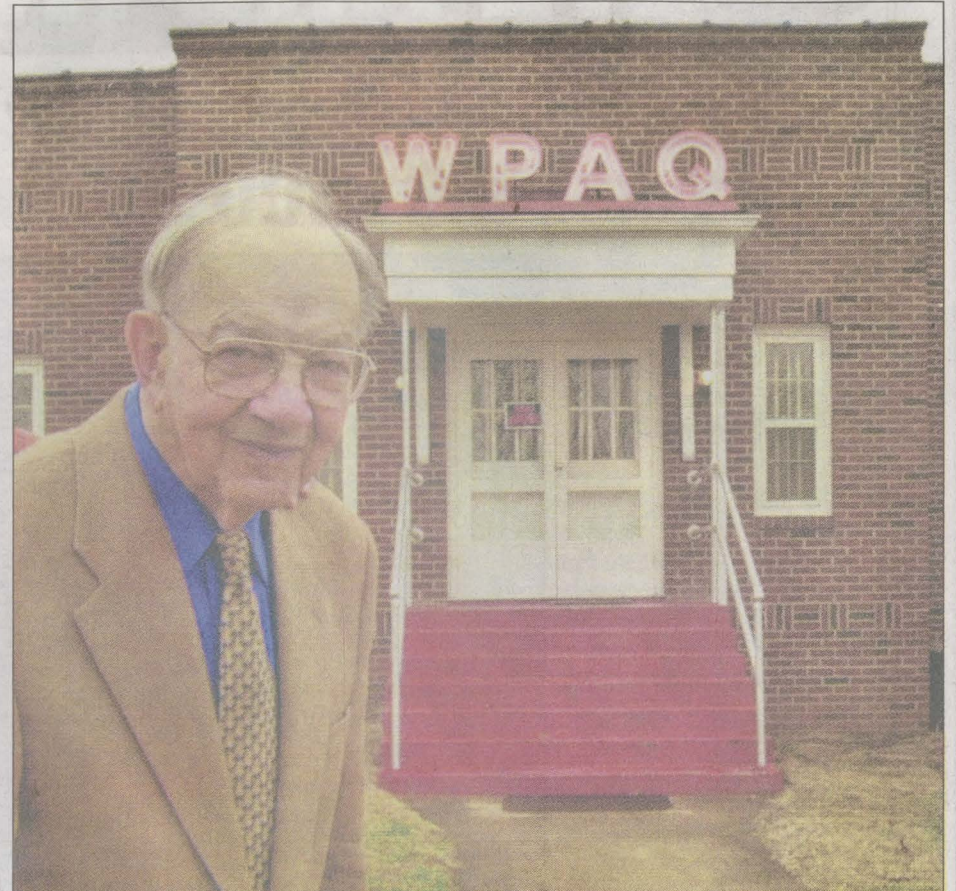
which included Benton Flippen, and James and Russell Easter.

It was Feb. 2, 1948. Groundhog Day, 72 years ago.

The station served a population that loved music, and craved information but without a local outlet. Mount Airy, positioned as it is, in the middle of southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina tobacco production, was far removed from other radio stations. Just as important to the music and Christian programming were the weather and tobacco business reports the station faithfully provided.

In the 1930s, when Ralph Epperson was in high school, he took a correspondence course on a popular new technology, radios. As part of the course he built two small radios.

"I fell in love with the medium, the idea



Photos courtesy of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History

Ralph Epperson fell in love with radio, the idea of sound traveling through the air delivering programs to people's homes, when both he and radio were very young. He operated pirate radio broadcasts before launching WPAQ in 1948 and 72 years later it has a worldwide audience streaming regional mountain, gospel, and bluegrass music on the Internet. This picture dates from 2001.

of transmitting messages and information through space," he said in the 2013 documentary about him, "Broadcast: A Man And His Dream." It was a love that would never leave him.

Ralph went away to John Brown University in Arkansas to become a minister in 1938. He worked in the school's dairy barns for a while but soon convinced the school to reassign him to the radio station. He switched his major to radio engineering and graduated magna cum laude before heading to the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C., for three years in 1942.

There he worked on a variety of transmitting devices for the war effort.

When he returned to the family farm he ran a pirate station out of a back bedroom in his parents' house, broadcasting local folks singing or playing hymns and other music. The broadcasts were very popular.

In 1947, with help and support from his family and many friends, he applied for a license from the Federal Communications Commission. When the reporter from the Mount Airy News interviewed him in June of that year at the future site of the station, he was in dirty overalls with several days of stubble on his face driving stakes for the surveyor.

He was given permission to broadcast on the AM band at 740 at 250 watts but had already been increased to 1,000 watts by



Mount Airy Museum of Regional History
The Merry-Go-Round radio show is the second-oldest live music broadcast in the country behind the famed Grand Ole Opry (which started in 1925). Originally staged at The Pick Theatre in Mount Airy, local performers were regularly joined by such well-known names as Grandpa Jones and Scruggs and Flatt. This picture dates from about 1952.

June. The primary content was his favorite old-time and bluegrass music.

"It's music from the heart," he said in a 1991 interview. "It appeals to the heart strings and shoestrings and everything else in between." His love for the music drew such greats as Roy Acuff, Grandpa Jones, and Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs to Mount Airy to perform on the Merry-Go-Round.

Many of the studio recordings of music and interviews he and his engineers made over the decades are now part of the Southern Folklife Ralph Epperson

Collection held at UNC-Chapel Hill where they are an invaluable resource to researchers on a variety of topics.

In 1961, he was appointed to chair the Cancer Crusade of Surry County. In that role he focused the energies of local volunteers not only on raising money but on educating everyone on the signs of cancer and encouraging them to be screened.

He led the Mount Airy Merchants Association, served on the board of the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, and on the advisory board for the Blue

Ridge Music Center.

For his community service and tremendous efforts to preserve the musical heritage of the region, Ralph received many awards and honors including being made an honorary Doctor of Laws by John Brown University.

In 1991 the North Carolina Folklore Society bestowed the Brown-Hudson Folklore Award on him for his "important contributions to the appreciation of regional folk and bluegrass music through your long work at WPAQ." They noted that he had

not only preserved important traditions through the station and recordings made there, but had "establish(ed) an audience for excellent folk artists, honor(ed) the talents of great folk musicians and provide(d) a local music archive of great use to scholars."

"I feel grateful and appreciative," he said at the time, "though somewhat unworthy."

With respect, sir, we disagree. Happy Birthday, WPAQ!

Kate Rauhauser-Smith is a freelance writer, researcher, and genealogist.

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