

Mountain Park Stays Small, By Choice

... But It Was Surry County's Original 'College Town'

By DAVID HILL
News Staff Writer

MOUNTAIN PARK—Two horsemen approaching the town's intersection at dusk provide the only break in the silence. With the day's end, the intersection becomes the focus of activity.

A mere 400 people live in the Mountain Park Fire District, most in the outlying regions. But when the community gathers, it circles about this intersection of Mountain Park and South Fork Roads.

The Mountain Park Grocery and pool room, with plenty of sitting space off front, serves as a good enough place to watch the world rush by.

Across the street sits the Mountain Park Baptist Church — with twin spires — which has stood at the intersection since 1907.

Each of these spots is a congregating point for a rural habit: after-supper conversation.

But, the single lynch-pin that seems all-encompassing is Mountain Park Elementary School.

The well-brushed ball fields with

lights, the shade trees and the school's traditional brick front helps give the Mountain Park community glue.

The elementary school, the main structure of which was built by C.W. Williams as a boarding college, has been the center of Mountain Park since 1912.

The Mountain Park Institute was a private, coeducational industrial and secretarial college with Baptist origins. It had two dormitories filled with students from across North Carolina and other states.

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Ralph Beane attended the school's secondary grades during the early 1930s as a high school student and recalls it being a community cornerstone even then.

"Girls did the cooking for the boys most of the time and they all knew the town's citizens and would visit with them," said Beane, a semi-retired beef farmer here.

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"We have people coming down from the north who somehow get off the interstate and find their way here."

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Members of the Mountain Park Ruritan Club, who are preparing for a weekend tractor-pull near here, are quick to praise Williams and his contribution to the town.

"He was a man ahead of his time," said one member, Vance Thompson. "He wanted it (the school) to be a four-year agricultural college and had the foresight to do it if things had worked out."

"We would have probably been Appalachian State University," added Marie Nixon, a Ruritan supporter.

Club members explained that Williams was an "idea man" who lost out in 1933 by waiting for the resolution of the will of H.L. Haymore, a school benefactor from Mount Airy.

Haymore's principal heirs held up the money for years, thinking that if they denied the school the willed \$100,000 it would close and the money would revert to them, according to the

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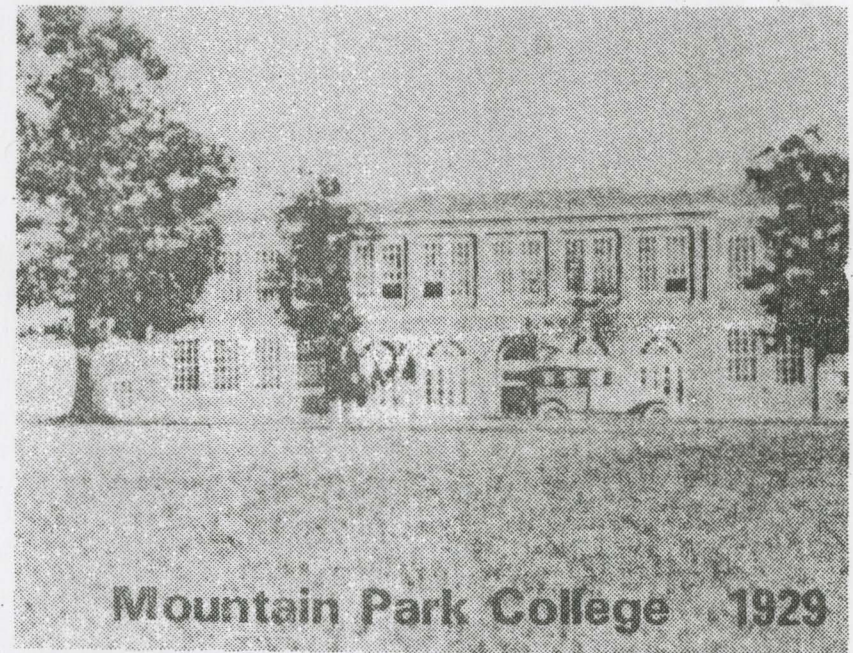
Mountain Park re-attracts many of the students and teachers at various community events, with the year's highlight being the annual Fourth of July celebration.

"Many of the people who come back and make our days a success are people who lived here formerly and want to remain in touch often and meet others who moved away. It becomes a reunion for us," said Ruritan Frank Nixon.

Mountain Park remains a small town by choice of its older landowners, according to several residents.

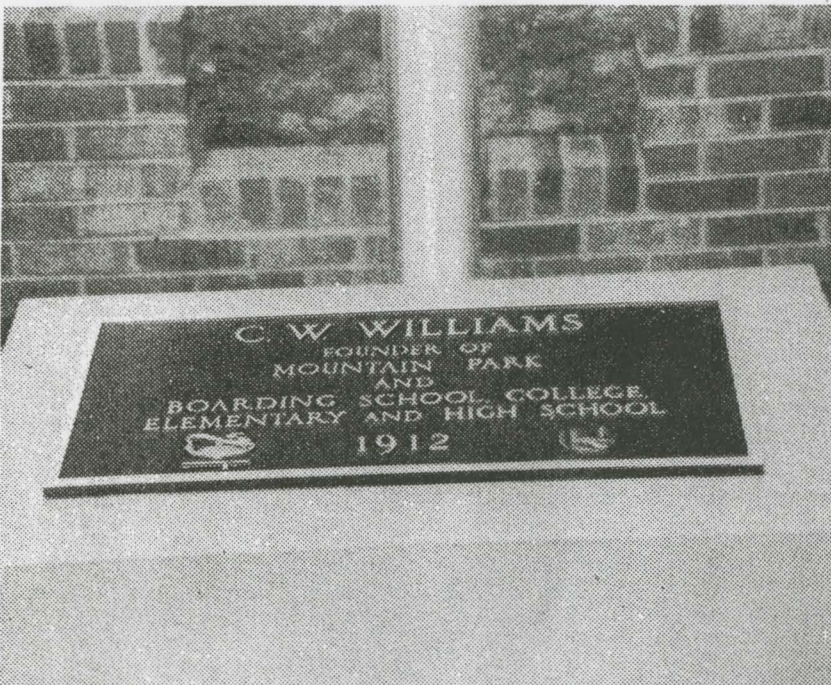
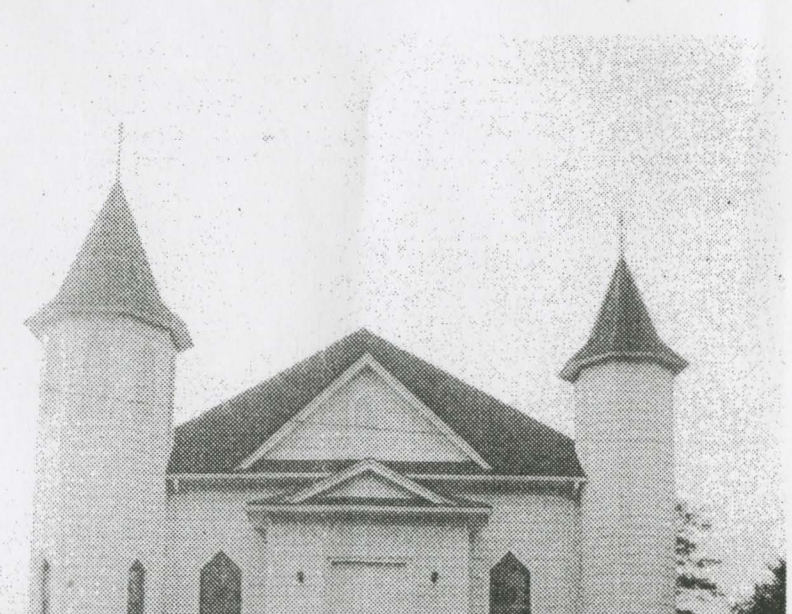
"There are no more buildings in Mountain Park today than there was years and years ago," said Frank Nixon, "because no one will sell their land. There would be five times as many people here if there was land to build on in the community."

Development around the outskirts of town represent the only changes



Mountain Park College 1929

A look at how the community's school appeared at its beginnings.



A plaque in front of Mountain Park Elementary School honors the town's first promoter.

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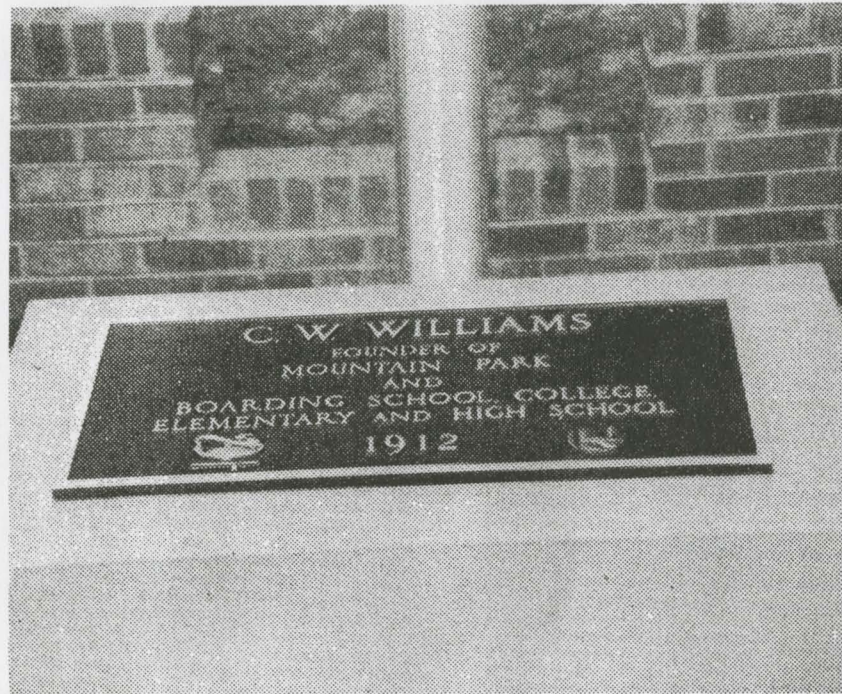
Development around the outskirts of town represent the only changes — a house-siding business or a garage, but the center of town remains unaltered.

"We have people coming down from the north who somehow get off the interstate and find their way here," Beane said. "A lot of them make vows to stay or return because it's so settled. But part of the reason is that we've had so few new people come in."

Few young people stay here but all seem to think it's the perfect place to return to.

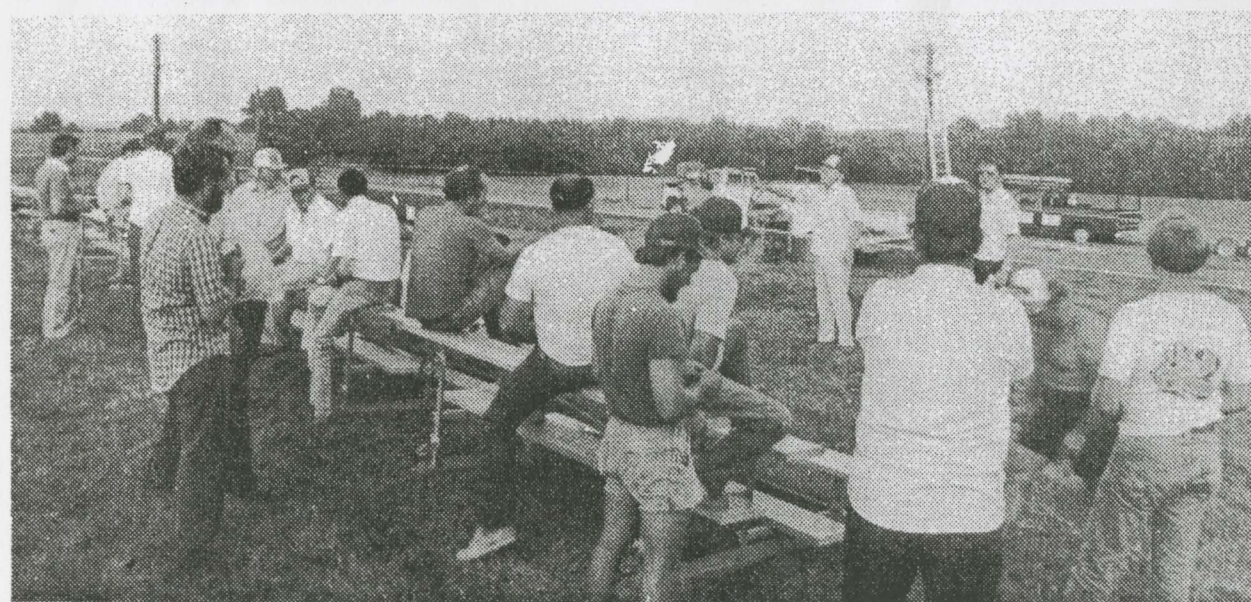
"There are no jobs around so it's not likely kids will stay here, but a lot probably would stay if it were possible," said Richard Wagoner, a recent Surry Central High School graduate.

To those who remain, change will be measured in teaspoons.

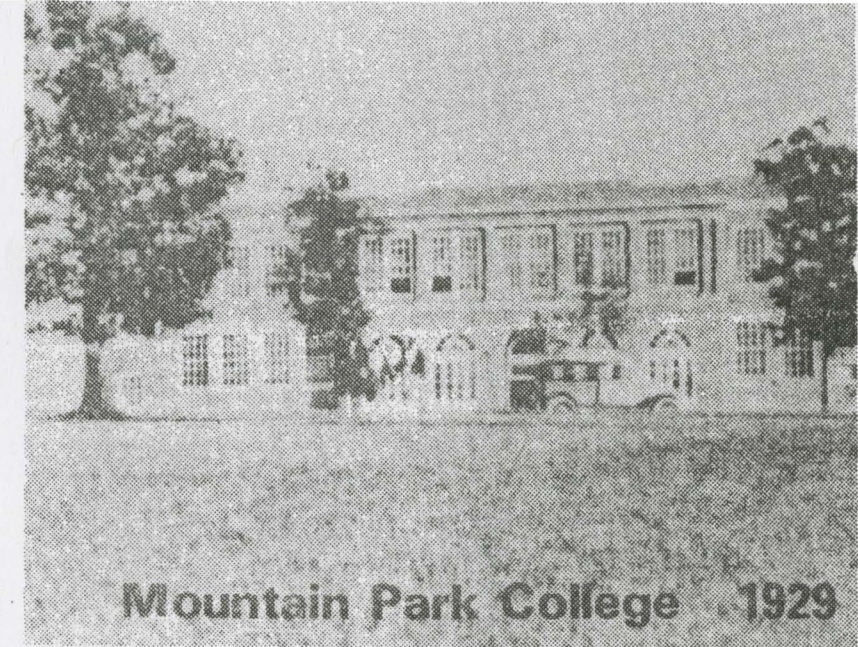


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Members of the Mountain Park Ruritan Club prepare a local farm for this weekend's tractor-



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The Mountain Park Baptist Church stands at the town's only intersection.