



CCHA Newsletter



Volume 19 — Issue 4

Editor: R.T.Crowley - CROWLEY3@MINDSPRING.COM

Forth Quarter 2007

SAVING CHATHAM'S GRAVES

One of CCHA's most ambitious ongoing projects is the Chatham County Cemetery Survey. From 1989 through 2001, under the direction of the late Will Heiser, CCHA volunteers identified cemeteries from published maps, and then called on the citizens of Chatham County to help identify others. Calls poured in, and the volunteers visited hundreds of sites to record information about each cemetery and all of the individual gravestones located there. By late 2001, more than 550 gravesites had been reported, and a majority of them had been visited. All told, volunteers recorded information from more than 27,000 inscribed grave markers. This information, as well as information about the location and condition of each cemetery, was entered into the CCHA's Cemetery Survey database, serving as the county's official record of gravesites.

Wanting the cemetery information made available to the public, even though realizing the cemetery survey would always be a work in progress, the CCHA published the two-volume *Gravesites of Chatham County North Carolina* in 2002. Continued sales of these volumes indicate they are still a valued source of information.

More recently, the gravesite data have been made available on the Internet through a site called CemeteryCensus.com, hosted by Allen Dew. This site makes searching the Chatham County data by name or by cemetery very easy, and unlike the *Gravesites* volumes, it is updated regularly.

In 2006, a small group of volunteers renewed the effort to find and document Chatham's unvisited gravesites. In an important step, Jane Pyle worked closely with the county Planning Department staff to see developers are made aware of existing regulations regarding cemeteries. The CCHA brochure, *Historical Preservation and Development: A Guide for Developers*, is now available on the county website. That effort, and Jane's continued monitoring of new developments, has resulted in a

number of formerly unreported cemeteries coming to CCHA's attention.

Meanwhile, volunteers have discovered researching cemetery reports, contacting property owners, and finding remote sites can be a time-consuming and sometimes difficult task. Most of the easily identified and accessible sites, like church graveyards, have now been inventoried. The reported sites we have not yet visited are often remote, and their locations uncertain. In many cases, they were reported by individuals now deceased.

"The cemetery team has braved thickets, mud, ticks, heat, cold, steep slopes and other obstacles to find and document some of the most recent sites," said Bev Wiggins, current cemetery project coordinator. *"On the other hand, some of the most generous, welcoming, and interesting people have helped us find or learn more about several of the sites. Most folks in the county seem to think we are doing important work. They respect these old gravesites."*

The group has made progress. Since 2006, more than twenty additional cemeteries, containing more than two thousand graves, and more than 800 inscribed grave markers, have been added to the Chatham County Cemetery Survey. Some of these sites were among the ones reported almost twenty years ago, but had never been visited and documented. Others were discovered when properties were surveyed for development.

"It is very rewarding," noted Wiggins, *"when we find a site that hasn't been visited before. When that happens I feel that we are making it more likely that those souls can really 'rest in peace,' since having the site documented will make it more likely that it will be preserved well into the future. Gravesites are lost because they are forgotten, or because developers, timber companies, or even homeowners, are not sensitive to the signs that they exist. Documenting these sites helps preserve them for future generations."*

Of course, a job like this is never done.

More gravesites are being discovered and reported, and some reports long on the books still await visits. *"This project is the result of a remarkable, sustained community effort,"* said David Peterson, who keeps the survey database, and also makes cemetery visits. *"It will take the continued participation of many more volunteers to see that every gravesite in Chatham County is recorded."*

"More volunteers are needed," echoed Bev Wiggins. *"And there are jobs that don't involve trudging through the woods. We sometimes need a volunteer to go to an accessible graveyard to check information on a particular stone, or to visit a site that is not difficult to access. We also occasionally need data entered or checked. I'm working to define some research jobs that we'll need volunteers for, too. Of course, if you do like trudging through the woods, we have a job for you!"*

If you have questions, suggestions, feedback about the cemetery database, or want to volunteer, contact Bev Wiggins, 919-542-4478, or send email to us at history@chathamhistory.org.

ENDOR IRON FURNACE WALK

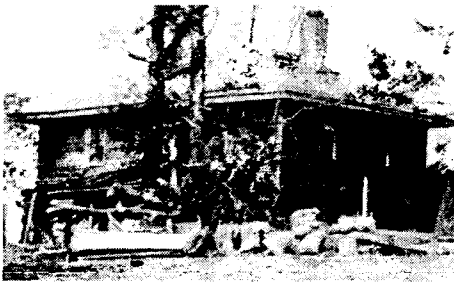
The Triangle Land Conservancy will conduct a walking tour to the Endor Iron Furnace on Sunday, 4 November, at 2:00PM. Join the Railroad House Association and local historian Edwin Patterson on this interpretive walk. Go to <http://www.tlc-nc.org/news/calendar/calendar.shtml> for further information.

The Endor Iron Furnace was a "pig iron" furnace from the early 1860s until 1874, and one of the oldest and most historically significant structures in the area. TLC purchased it in 2001, and transferred ownership to the NC Department of Cultural Resources. TLC continues to manage the property with assistance from the Railroad House Historical Association and other local interests. The Endor Iron Furnace is currently located in Lee County, but county lines have moved, and during its functioning period, it was in Chatham.

THIS OLD HOUSE - SAVING THE PIECES HISTORICAL CHATHAM COUNTY HOUSE DECONSTRUCTED

You would expect the Chatham County Historical Association (CCHA) to be concerned with preserving old houses. You might not expect this group to be involved with tearing them down. But that is sometimes what happens.

"Sometimes, even though we'd like to see a structure preserved, we can't make that happen," said Jane Pyle, who serves as the CCHA's liaison with the Chatham County Planning Department and with area developers. *"If an owner decides that an old structure on the property must come down, we try to save what we can by asking that the structure be deconstructed - that is, taken apart carefully, so that materials can be salvaged."*



PACE HOUSE IN 1924
PHOTO COURTESY OF BRITT NORWOOD

That is just what happened to the old Harbison house on River Road, on property being developed as the Harrison Pond subdivision, where plans put the house right in the path of road construction. Old boards and beams that had not been covered by remodeling led Pyle to trace ownership, and early deeds soon revealed that the property once belonged to James Pace, whose mill was on the Haw River less than a mile from the site. Pace ran the mill with Stephen W. Cotton, a wealthy Pittsboro businessman, and he bought both land and mill in 1867. Pace's Mill was a Chatham County landmark until 1924, when a tornado destroyed both the mill and the bridge, which were never rebuilt. Pyle collected additional information about the old house and its former owners by searching census materials and old newspapers. Neighbors and visitors to the site recalled bits of history and lore associated with the property.

The developer of the property offered to let CCHA salvage materials from the

house in the brief period before road construction was to begin, and Carl Bigness was appointed the agent for deconstruction. Both old and newer materials were salvaged, with wiring, metal roofing, and glass canning jars being recycled and many items given to Habitat for Humanity for resale. Hand-planed heart pine wallboards, flooring, beams, and siding were saved or sold to specialty dealers. *"At least these historical materials will be reused,"* observed Pyle; *"otherwise, all of this would have ended up in a landfill. Perhaps the new owners will remember something about where their new walls came from, but in any event we have documented a bit of Chatham County's history that might otherwise have been lost."*

During deconstruction, a number of other artifacts were found, including linen shirts and pants, much patched and badly soiled; two unmatched shoes, one with the sole and the wooden pegs holding it in place; nails and pegs of various sizes, papers from the Extension Homemakers Club in the Mt. Pleasant area, and some of the salmon or unfired brick that were used to build the inside, two-story chimneys.



PACE HOUSE IN CURRENT TIME

These artifacts and photographs documenting the deconstruction are on display in the Chatham County Historical Museum, which is located on the first floor of the historic Chatham County Courthouse in Pittsboro. The museum is open every Wednesday, from noon until three, and on First Sundays from one until four. The public is encouraged to visit.

CCHA DUES INCREASE

Inevitably, the reality of economics comes to all, and the CCHA must increase its annual dues from \$8 to \$12 per year, effective 1 January 2008. Members renewing before that date will still be accepted at the old rate. We regret any inconvenience this may cause.

JOIN SNIPES FAMILY OF AMERICA REUNION WEEKEND IN OCTOBER

Invitation from Bob Snipes, President

Snipes Family of America (SFA) is a non-profit organization established in 1979 to foster the collection, sharing, and preservation of Snipes family history. Almost half of our 645 members descended from William Snipes I, a resident of northern Chatham County beginning ca. 1770. SFA holds an annual reunion and this October it will be once again held at Cedar Grove Church in Chatham County on land once owned by William Snipes I.

We welcome any interested Chatham County Historical Association members and their friends to participate in our weekend activities.

Friday, October 12 - The La Quinta Inns & Suites, Raleigh Int'l Airport will serve as our base of operations for Friday's activities. Please call for further details at 304-261-9024. The SFA Board meeting will take place at the La Quinta at 2:00PM. Highlights of this meeting will be reported at Saturday morning's membership meeting and summarized in the newsletter.

We invite everyone to join Board members for Friday night dinner at a local restaurant. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:45PM. This will be a relaxed, fun time together. A social will be held at the Cedar Grove church Fellowship Hall Saturday after lunch.

Saturday, October 13 - The SFA annual membership meeting will be held at Cedar Grove Methodist Church in northern Chatham County, beginning at 10:00AM. We begin with self-introductions of those in attendance, including identification from which line they each descend. Board members report on the organization's activities and research. The meeting will be followed by the SFA group photo at the front of the church. Voluntary donations to the church for use of their facilities will be accepted at the door.

We will have a BBQ lunch in the fellowship hall next door after the meeting. The cost likely \$10, collected at the door. RSVP requested. Please contact Britt Norwood at brittnorwood@mindspring.com, and put "October meeting" in the subject line or call 919-942-4106.

For more information about SFA or the October weekend activities, contact Bob Snipes at 304-876-1332, 304-261-9024, or snipes@principia.edu.

MOVING DAY

The CCHA had a moving day on Saturday, 11 August 2007. We had most of our stock of books and collateral materials, and some artifacts as well, stored at the Beal House, next to the parking lot at Beggars & Choosers, in Pittsboro. A good crowd of committed volunteers made short work of the task. These folks included:

- Carl Bigness, with station wagon
- Edith Calhoun and son, with pickup
- Doug Cordaro, truck, trailer, hand trucks
- John Gartner
- Reece and Ruth Jones
- Bill Mandusic
- Judith Peterson, truck and museum photos
- Barbara Pugh, hand truck and van
- Jane Pyle
- Jane Smith
- Bev Wiggins, with vehicle

We apologize if we missed anyone in that list. Bev Wiggins, Jane Smith, and Jane Pyle packed up the loose stuff to get it ready to load. Then, when everything was loaded, the little convoy set out to Pat Rounds's garage in Siler City. There the files went back into the filing cabinets, and the books and artifacts were unpacked and put on shelves. Sodas and water were on ice, and snacks were out for everyone to enjoy. We are very lucky to have such willing volunteers to help when needed. Thank you to everyone involved.



MOVING DAY PHOTOS



LOCAL HISTORY FILES AT WREN LIBRARY ARE NOW INDEXED

Local history files, composed largely of newspaper clippings from the Chatham Record, are housed at Wren Memorial Library in Siler City. Twenty-five large loose-leaf notebooks contain sections for topics such as churches, people, communities, transportation, natural history, Black history, artists, Jordan Lake, and the county courthouse. Within each section,

separate items are listed in roughly chronological order with a headline or other brief description. The entries note the inclusion of a photograph. In addition to clippings the collection has brochures, maps, booklets including church histories, and other materials of interest to students of the history of Chatham County.

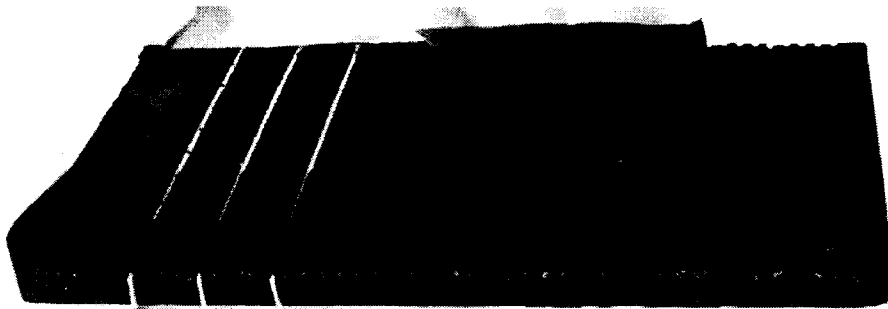
This listing of contents may be searched with key words on the dedicated computer in the local history area of the library. Also in the area are books devoted to genealogy and general historical topics, a set of donated family histories, published family histories, and records from the Chatham County Cemetery Inventory. Microfilms of federal censuses and of newspapers (Chatham News, Chatham Record, Siler City Grit, and other early newspapers). Wren Library is open Monday from noon until 8:00PM, Tuesday through Friday from 10 to 6, and Saturday from 9 to 5.

Organizing the clippings and family history files was largely the work of Edith Calhoun and Jane Pyle, with assistance from Emily Carter, and was completed partly in preparation for digitization of the files to make them accessible online, a long term project still in the planning stages. CCHA seeks volunteers to help maintain the clipping files; please call Jane Pyle at 919-542-3603 for more information.

WHERE ARE YOU?

Please ensure we have your correct address, telephone number, and EMAIL address, at all times. Send a note by regular mail or to the email address on the first page of this publication, and we do the rest.

WHAT IS IT?



This mysterious old item is on display at the Chatham County Historical Museum, with a sign saying, "What was this used for? We'd like to know." If you know the purpose of the pictured item, please contact museum curator, Jane Pyle, at 919-542-3603. To see the mysterious item, visit the museum, located in the historic Chatham County Courthouse in the Pittsboro circle. The museum is open Wednesdays from noon until three, and on first Sundays, from one until four.

CCHA 2007 EVENTS

Museum Wednesdays

The CCHA Museum in the historic Chatham County Court House is open every Wednesday from 12:00PM to 3:00PM

First Sundays

The CCHA Museum in the historic Chatham County Court House will be open from 1:00PM to 4:00PM the first Sunday of each month during 2007.

CCHA Lecture Series

Plans are being considered for future lectures and presentations on the various facets of Chatham County History.

**CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION, INC.**



CCHA Newsletter

Published by the Chatham County Historical Association, Inc.

Post Office Box 93, Pittsboro, NC 27312

Email: HISTORY@CHATHAMHISTORY.ORG

Web: [HTTP://CHATHAMHISTORY.ORG/](http://CHATHAMHISTORY.ORG/)

Published four times per year. Subscription is included with membership.

Copyright © 2007 - Chatham County Historical Association, Inc.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Chatham County Historical Association, Inc. Articles appearing in the CCHA Newsletter may be reprinted in whole or in part under fair use provided proper credit is given to the source. Submissions are always welcomed, along with accompanying photographs. Articles reprinted herein are done under the principals of fair use, with full and proper credit given to the source.

OFFICERS:

President: Barbara Pugh
Vice President: R.T.Crowley
Treasurer: Beverly Wiggins
Secretary: Edith Calhoun

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Nancy Balasubramanian
Candace Burke
Edith Calhoun
R.T.Crowley
William Dow
Walter "Corkey" Harris
Kay Judge
Judith Peterson
Barbara Pugh
Jane Smith
Beverly Wiggins

PAST PRESIDENT:

Fred J. Vatter

MUSEUM CURATOR:

Jane Pyle

MARKETING:

R.T.Crowley

MEMBERSHIP:

Nancy Simons

**CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
POST OFFICE BOX 93
PITTSBORO, NC 27312**

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE PAID
PITTSBORO, NC
PERMIT NO. 19



CCHA NEWSLETTER