

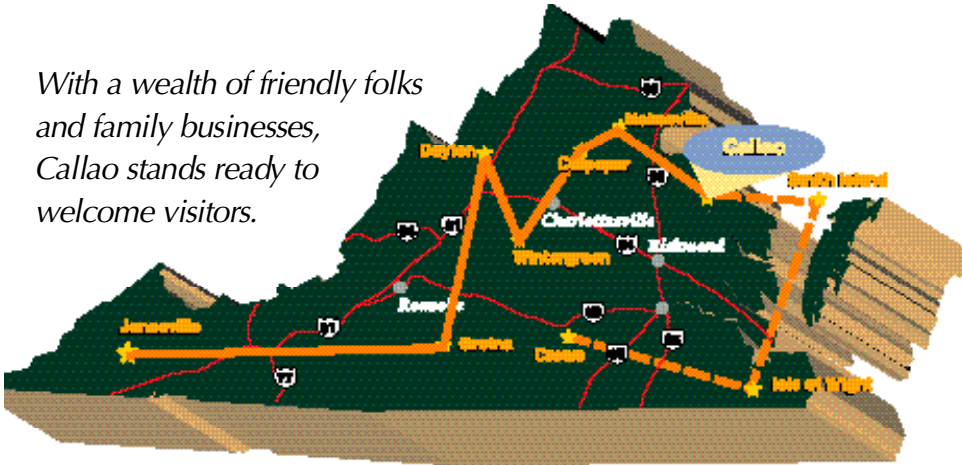
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Mike McKenney,
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Again in the year 2002, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's seventh stop, we'll be ...

Down Home in Callao

*With a wealth of friendly folks
and family businesses,
Callao stands ready to
welcome visitors.*



MIKE MCKENNEY PHOTOS



the Rappahannock River to the south and the Chesapeake Bay to the east, the Northern Neck is the northernmost of Virginia's peninsulas and is comprised of the counties of Westmoreland, Richmond, Lancaster and Northumberland.

In the heart of this beautiful area lies the village of Callao in Northumberland County. Perhaps the only village in America whose name was devised when its originally proposed name was denied by the U.S. Postal Service, the history of Callao stems from its location at an upland crossroad between roads leading to Montross in Westmoreland County, Warsaw in Richmond County, and Reedville in Northumberland County.

When Captain John Smith first visited the Northern Neck of Virginia in 1608, he was struck by its natural beauty. His notes mention trees "so lofty and direct" that they could provide planks 2½ feet square and 20 feet long. The land was a mighty forest surrounded by water in which the abundant natural resources

seemed so plentiful that Captain Smith's party tried to catch fish with a frying pan. Crabs and oysters were also observed in plentiful supply.

Visitors to the area are still drawn to nature's bounty. The lush rolling tidal plain provides opportunities to hunt, fish and enjoy the recreational amenities of the area. Bordered by the Potomac River to the north,



Four generations have worked at R. R. Beasley Concrete. Seated to the right surrounded by family is founder Bob Beasley, who began the company in Callao with a single truck.





Bethany Baptist Church welcomes visitors as they head east toward Callao.

In the late 1800s, most of the business activity on the Northern Neck occurred at steamboat landings. Whether at Coan Wharf, Lodge Landing or any of a number of such steamboat landings along the waterfront, mail was delivered and commerce was transacted. However, for those who lived upland from the rivers, a more convenient post office was requested to be placed at Bells' Store, site of today's Callao. Originally called French's Store before the Civil War, an application was filed for a post office at that location.

On May 27, 1893, the United States Post



Callao Supply owner Phillip Edwin Deitz is the third generation to own the hardware store, located on U.S. Rt. 360.



The Callao Post Office continues to thrive.

Office approved a post office at Bells' Store with Jacob Callaway of Mt. Zion Farm as postmaster. Mr. Callaway agreed to serve as postmaster only if he could name the post office after himself. The United States Post

Office denied his application for a post office named "Callaway, Virginia" since there was a Callaway, Virginia, in Franklin County. Arevised application dropped the "way" and added an "o" for the new name of Callao (pronounced Cal lee oh).

The Callao Post Office has continued to thrive and now serves many of the sites previously served by steamboat

landing post offices and country stores, such as Lodge, Harryhogan, Mundy Point, Fruitplain, Hyacinth-Village, Luttrellville and Walmsley.

Callao also thrived as the major business

(Left) Third- and fourth-generation owners Bobby and Chris Burgess welcome customers to Callao Supermarket. (Below) James Harper runs Northern Neck Cleaners with daughters Janie Harper and Betsy Harper Hale and granddaughter Amanda Hale.



If You Go...

Callao is located on U.S. Route 360, about an hour east of Richmond. Businesses line Route 360 as you head east through Northumberland County. The **Callao Volunteer Fire Department** is located in the center of town. Stop by any evening and a fireman will proudly show the restored **1921 American LaFrance-Brockway fire truck** to an interested visitor.

The area is well known for **fishing and recreational water activities**. Public boat landings are located on Lodge Road at the end of Route 712.

A public fishing pier is available at Glebe Point, a 15-mile trip east of Callao on Route 200 in Northumberland County. The fishing pier and grounds are opened to the public from sunrise to sunset. A Virginia Saltwater Fishing License is required.

Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve offers a number of excellent examples of wetlands as well as exemplary undeveloped beaches, dunes and upland forest. The area is open to the public and features trails, a woodland boardwalk, wildlife-viewing platforms and interpretive signs. Located off of Route 200 in Northumberland County, additional information may be obtained by contacting

the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage, at (804) 445-9117.

In nearby Heathsville, the Northumberland County seat, immediately behind the historic 1851 courthouse is **Rice's Hotel-Hughlett's**



Hyatt Headley (at the wheel) is the last surviving charter member of the Callao Volunteer Fire Department. He is joined here by Northern Neck Electric Cooperative employee Chris Neale.

Tavern. Believed to have been built by the sons of John Hughlett, the tavern dates to the late 1600s and was expanded six times to form a two-story, 110-foot long Greek Revival wooden landmark with a two-story veranda. Under the guidance of Rice's Hotel-Hughlett's Tavern Foundation, the building has been restored and houses the Tavern Restaurant and a foundation

store. The restaurant is open for lunch Wednesday through Saturday and for Sunday brunch and is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday night. Reservations may be made by calling (804) 580-7900. Work continues on restoration of the "backyard" with plans to build a carriage house to include a workshop and blacksmith shop as well as other supporting structures. To learn more about the Tavern and its history, contact Rice's Hotel-Hughlett's Tavern Foundation, Inc., at (804) 580-3536.

The fishing industry has been at the center of the economy of the Northern Neck since the first English settlements. **The Reedville Fishermen's Museum** located at 504 Main Street, Reedville, on U.S. Route 360 is dedicated to preserving the heritage of the maritime history of the lower Chesapeake Bay area and the watermen who have applied their trade for hundreds of years. The museum also focuses on the menhaden industry that has existed in Reedville for over 100 years. Also on display at the museum is a 1911 skipjack, "Claud W. Somers" and a 1922 buy boat, "Elva C." The museum is open May through October daily from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and November through December 20, Friday through Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, contact the museum at (804) 453-6529. ■

center for Northumberland County. "We have everything a town could want," says **Hyatt Headley**, 85, a former Callao merchant.

Hyatt, retired from his business since 1975, remains the town's leading citizen. From 1940 until its close, Hyatt and his wife, the former Virginia Hayden, ran People's Drug Sundrae, selling patent drugs and novelties while running a lunch counter and soda fountain. Hyatt expressed surprise at how people remember him and his store. He is frequently approached by people who patronized his store. Mornings in the store saw a gathering of men who drank coffee and told stories. "There were some big fish caught in that store," remembered Hyatt, thinking of the tales exchanged by his early-morning coffee club.

The afternoon saw school children come by for ice cream or limeade. During the 1950s, the store had a jukebox and high school students from Callao High would gather to listen to records and dance.

Everyone who grew up in Callao while the People's Drug Sundrae was in operation has a fond memory of something special at Hyatt's

store. For the author of this article, it was Tuesdays when new comic books were delivered and two comics could be purchased for 25 cents. Nothing could beat seeing your favorite comic book displayed in your hometown ready for the reading.

Hyatt Headley was more than a local businessman. He set a tradition of community service by joining with 17 men and 1 woman to form the Callao Volunteer Fire Department in 1948. The fire department began with a 1921 American LaFrance-Brockway fire truck that had been originally assigned to the Prince Anne County, Maryland, Fire Department. The old truck, which was retired shortly after the fire department started and newer equipment purchased, was restored by members of the Callao Fire Department in 1971. A second restoration project has just been completed under the leadership of **Chris Neale**, son of former fire chief, the late Thomas Bowie Neale, and an employee of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative. The truck has served as a motorized landmark and has traveled throughout Virginia representing

Callao in various parades and festivals. The Callao Fire Department proudly displays hundreds of trophies won by the antique engine.

Hyatt Headley not only was a leader in forming the Callao Volunteer Fire Department, he has been a goodwill ambassador for Callao throughout his life. **James Harper**, who runs Northern Neck Cleaners in Callao, remembers meeting Hyatt as a boy when he would visit a cousin in Richmond County. The cousin would meet Hyatt early in the mornings to deliver newspapers. Harper remembers Hyatt's kindness and remembers buying Pepsi-colas, "12 full ounces for five cents," before 5:30 a.m. from Hyatt. In 1959, when Jim and his wife, **Jean** were looking for a small town to raise their children in, he jumped at a chance to buy the cleaners from **Thelma** and **Phil Riley** and moved to Callao. "I cannot imagine living anywhere else," Harper says. He continues to operate his cleaners with his daughters, **Betsy** and **Janie**.

Family connection in business is not unusual in Callao. In fact, most of the busi-

nesses are now run by a second, third or fourth generation. For example, **Phillip Edwin Deitz** recently took over management of Callao Supply Company from his father, **Phillip H. Deitz**.

The store was started by Phillip Edwin's grandfather, **Edwin Deitz**, in 1938. Edwin Deitz was a town visionary. He built most of the commercial and residential buildings on the east end of town. At one time, he ran the hardware store, a sawmill, planing mill, locker plant, motel and built a furniture store for his wife. He also had a carpentry crew of 65 men working on building homes throughout the area. Mr. Deitz is famous for having appeared before the Department of Transportation to argue against bypassing Callao when it expanded U.S. Route 360. To make his point to the highway commissioners, Deitz asked, "Once you get to Callao, why would you want to go anywhere else?"

Many business people feel the same way, such as the Burgess family, who own and operate Callao Super Market. Started in 1948 by **Robert Burgess** and his father **Paul Burgess**, the business continues today under the management of the founder's son and grandson, **Bobby** and **Chris**. The supermarket offers a full range of products including local seafood, Mrs. Manning's hominy, canned in nearby Lake Neck, and Callao pilser, a Peruvian beer (named for Callao, Peru, the only other town in the world with that name). The supermarket serves as a gathering spot to visit with neighbors and friends.

The family tradition continues as well at Callao Pharmacy where local pharmacist, **Michael Mangano**, has taken over the business from his father, **Charles Mangano**. A new store located on the west end of town has replaced the original 1952 location. When Charles Mangano first began his business in town, his father-in-law, who ran a number of drugstores in the Richmond area, told him, "You'll never make it." As is true with many individuals in the area, he had come to visit the area during the summer and fell in love with it. His business grew and expanded and

the Mangano family developed a special bond with the people of the community. While modern in design, the new pharmacy continues to have a small-town feel at a special



Mike Mangano continues the family business at Callao Pharmacy. A new store has replaced the original 1952 location.

counter built to allow pharmacist Mike a chance to talk with his patients, dispensing prescriptions and good advice.

Family ties are also found at R. R. Beasley Concrete, W. C. Lowery Concrete, Callao Wheel Service, Cralle Insurance and in the offices of many local realtors, where parents, children and grandchildren work together. The commitment of families to business in Callao represents what makes it a special place to live. While not an incorporated town, residents

have a special loyalty to Callao. There is a closeness among people who live in Callao and a devotion to it as their hometown.

This pride can be seen in the response to the accomplishments of the town's residents as well. Recently, attorney **Thomas A. Williams** was recognized by the Virginia State Bar for 50 years of service. A former four-term Commonwealth's Attorney for Northumberland County, Mr. Williams has had a successful practice in Callao. Mr. Williams passed the bar on February 2, 1952, making his golden anniversary date 02/02/02, a fact which delights Mr. Williams. He has been described by a local newspaper as being "well known for his encyclopediac knowledge of arcane facts." The entire town has been quick to recognize Mr. Williams for his success and his contributions to the community.

Community pride may also explain why

Callao is such a gathering spot. The late Ralph W. Hundley, former Northumberland County Board of Supervisors' member and president of the Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, once said, "A crowd will gather in Callao to hear a baby cry." While a baby crying is not a highlight during the year, special events draw great crowds throughout the year. The Callao Ruritan Club sponsors a spring and fall tractor pull and entices folks from near and far to participate in their Memorial Day Bull Roast. The Ruritans also sponsor softball during the spring and summer. The Callao Volunteer Fire Department sponsors its annual fireman's festival on the third Saturday of each August. The parade and accompanying events draw thousands who gather to hear music, enjoy crafts and visit with friends, old and new.

Callao, like the remainder of the Northern Neck, has seen a change in its basic economy. The traditional industries of farming, fishing and lumber have changed. New economic ventures such as Carry-On Trailers — a utility trailer-assembly business located outside of town on Harryhogan Road — represent a new economic opportunity for the town.

Of course, manufacturing is not a new business in the Callao area. From the 1870s until 1931, the Chambers Stamp Factory made postmark and cancellation stamps for the post office department. The factory located at Lodge was the exclusive provider of

these products to post offices nationwide until the 1930s.

The town's community pride can also be seen in its civic and community organizations. The Callao Volunteer Rescue Squad just opened a new building and stands ready to serve a growing community.

The church also plays an important role in the life of Callao. With seven churches located within 5 miles, the churches serve to strengthen the community's faith and minister to those in need.

Set in the midst of the beautiful Chesapeake Bay region and surrounded by history, Callao is a mix of businesses, families and friendly folks. It stands ready to welcome you. ■



Thomas A. Williams was recently recognized by the Virginia State Bar for 50 years of service. Mr. Williams has practiced his entire career in Callao.