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During the year 2000, 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 eighth stop, we'll be...

Down Home at Smith Mt. Lake

Visit this pristine, hospitable lake community and chances are you'll want to stay forever!!



JOHN HINKLE PHOTOS



path in the gap of the mountain about one mile long.

Two hundred years after those first settlers, a group of engineers proposed damming the gap to build a hydroelectric plant. In 1924 the Staunton River Power Company (SRPC) was formed and began buying land to build a power generating plant.

Ten years later, the Army Corps of Engineers recommended Smith Mountain as one of a dozen proposed dam sites in the United States. Eventually, the SRPC liquidated and the project was taken over by Appalachian Power Company (now American Electric Power).

Construction began in 1960. Six years and \$66 million dollars later, in March 1966, the dam had been completed and the lake reached full pond.

It's not hard to imagine what the first settlers thought of the area when they arrived here in the early 1700s. The mountains, rolling valleys, abundant wildlife,

and overall serenity must have seemed like paradise. No doubt that's why the Smith brothers, Daniel and Gideon — the first recorded pioneers in the area — laid claim to the huge mountain which eventually bore their name.

Skirted by the Roanoke River, Smith Mountain towered 1,000 feet above the countryside. Gradually, the river wore a narrow



Most agree, there's no better way to enjoy the lake waters than cruising along its shoreline in a pontoon, bass boat, sailboat or jet ski.





The Visitor's Center at the Smith Mountain Dam offers a slide show detailing the construction and operation of the dam, a three-dimensional terrain map, and a spectacular overlook of the dam, lake and mountain.

Today, Smith Mountain Lake, 40 miles long, with 500 miles of shoreline, is one of the biggest, cleanest, recreational lakes on the East Coast.

Before the Waters Flowed

Gladys Meador Hoover grew up in the heart of Moneta, later to become the northeast side of Smith Mountain Lake. Established in the 1880s around John Thaxton's general store, Moneta acquired its first pas-

Clockwise: 1) The lake is wrapped in the arms of a serene and peaceful countryside. 2) In the early 1900s, local residents would line up outside this tiny office waiting to see "Dr. Sam" Rucker. 3) The front steps of the Meador family home are quiet now, ever since the highway department built a bypass over the railroad tracks. Sadly, most of the few remaining commercial businesses in "downtown" Moneta have closed. 4) Richard Saunders grew up in the area and once knew every car on the road. If a stranger drove by, he said everyone would stop and wonder, "Who could that be?"

senger railroad in 1909 and began to flourish.

Downtown Moneta had five to seven stores with a wooden sidewalk that led to the local school. It was here that Howard Meador, Thaxton's nephew, built his home. Hoover, the youngest of Meador's daughters, one of 11 children, remembers fondly the sounds of the old saw mill and blacksmith's shop nearby.

The local physician, Dr. Sam Rucker, whose house and office were across and up the street from the Meadors' home, provided the townspeople with all their medical care in the early 1900s.

"Dr. Sam practiced medicine amid squirts of tobacco juice and you paid what you could," according to the late Kenneth Crouch, who wrote a history of the area for the lake's 25th anniversary. Oftentimes, the revered doctor would make house calls, even though those pot-holed, dirt-filled back roads were tough on his car. Frequently, he sought out the mechanical services of **Richard Saunders**, who owned a garage and grocery store nearby.

Saunders would alert the community when Dr. Sam's car was on its last leg. "The Ruritans would help raise money to buy Dr.

Sam a new auto. We'd just ask people to throw in (some money)," Saunders explained.

The Moneta Ruritan Club, chartered in 1954, was also instrumental in the development of a Medical Center (after Dr. Sam retired), and establishing and building a fire department for the community, Saunders, a Ruritan founding member recalled.

"I remember that preacher from Bethlehem Methodist Church," Saunders said. "He'd come down, roll up his sleeves and get to working on building that new fire house."

Working Together

While there were several Baptist and Methodist churches in the area, those of the Catholic faith met in private homes to celebrate Mass. When their numbers exceeded their meeting space capacity in the late 1970s, the Catholics approached the Methodists at Bethlehem and asked to use their sanctuary on Saturday evenings.

Years later, after Resurrection Catholic Church had been built, the Catholics were approached by a fledgling church group of Lake residents looking for a temporary location to hold an ecumenical service com-





What started as a poultry business in 1923, Calvin Woodford (left) and his sons Stuart and Jimmy have expanded to meet the needs of local farmers and lake residents.

prised of Lutherans, Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

According to **Sister Betty Bagen**, “We were privileged to be able to return the hospitality shown to us by Bethlehem by sharing our facility with Trinity.” Eventually, in 1997, Trinity Ecumenical Parish built their own church building.

Preserving the Rural Flavor

Agriculture was still the biggest business in the area back when S. W. “Pete” and Lula May Woodford established a poultry farm in

1923, just outside Moneta on Route 122. Their four boys helped in the family business.

In 1965, after his father’s death, **Calvin Woodford** bought the family’s poultry farm. His wife, **Macklyn**, and their five children were kept busy raising 28,000 laying hens and producing over 12,000 dozen eggs per week. Still, Calvin saw the need to provide

When Lynne Hines bought the Holland Duncan House for her interior design business, she was intrigued by the history of the homestead.

more services to the area, and expanded to include hardware and farm equipment.

As the lake residential areas began to grow, so did Calvin’s Moneta Farm Service. Eventually the poultry operation was phased out to make way for new products now in demand: lawn and garden supplies, nursery stock, irrigation systems, dock supplies, lumber, power equipment and more.

In the early 1990s, the local Lions Club took a one-room schoolhouse — used by William Duncan not long after the Civil War — and relocated it to Dudley Elementary School. The Halesford Academy — later called the Duncan School — was completely rebuilt and furnished as a living educa-



The oldest church in the area, Morgan’s Baptist Church was established in 1771.

If You Go...

Not just a place to escape for the summer, Smith Mountain Lake offers year-round events for its families, friends and visitors. Among the popular activities coming up this fall is the **SML Wine Festival**, Sept. 23, featuring 16 wineries, tastings, food and live music.

Thousands come to the **Smith Mountain Lake Charity Home Tour** Oct. 6-8 (for information call 540-297-TOUR or visit their Web site at www.roanoke.com/smlhometour). The following weekend, businesses around the lake celebrate the **Fall Festival** with flea market sales, food, music, cloggers, tractor pulls, local crafts and more. **The SML**

Chamber of Commerce Local Golf Tournament is held at The Westlake Country Club Oct. 23.

The year’s events informally end with a **Christmas Boat Parade**, Dec. 9, at the Virginia Dare Marina. But people enjoy the lake all year.

Throughout the season, fishing and boating fans are invited to enjoy special events like the spring **Mr. Bass Fishing Tournament**, the **SML/Tom Maynard Memorial Poker Run** in May, or the **Annual Antique & Classic Boat Show & Rally** held in August.

Swimmers without a private dock flock to the beach at the **Smith Mountain Lake State Park**. Opened in 1983, the park includes 1,500 acres of protected woodlands along with 16 miles of shoreline. The park offers miles of hiking trails, picnic areas, wooded campsites, rental cabins,

tional museum. Area schools today are invited to send students back in time and re-live life in a one-room schoolhouse!

Several modern-day retailers at the lake have helped preserve other significant structures in the area. The Holland Duncan House, formerly the home of Asa Holland, who in 1848 hired Duncan to educate his children, was recently purchased and refurbished to display an interior design service, with a complementary retail and gift shop.

Owner **Lynne Hines**, looking for a new location for Creative Design Services/Lyndi's, was thrilled with the opportunity to "rescue" the historic home from possible demolition for commercial development.

"We've been careful to preserve several artifacts we've uncovered while renovating the house," Hines said. "We hope to have them on display along with a history of the area and the house."

Preserving the Lake

The most aggressive advocates for maintaining the beauty and serenity of the lake waters are the volunteer directors of the Smith Mountain Lake Association. Originally founded in 1969 as a businessman's organization, the SMLA now includes property owners and others with interest in the lake who are concerned with the environmental, ecological and safety aspects of the lake and its waters.

Bordering three counties — Pittsylvania, Franklin and Bedford — the lake began to grow slowly at first as local area residents

guided canoe trips and special programs just for kids.

Five major golf courses are located here, public and private. Most include scenic views of the lake and mountains, said by some to be a "serious" distraction, but a handicap everyone enjoys. In addition to the tournament in the fall, the **SML Corporate Cup Golf Tournament** at the Waterfront Country Club is held in the spring. Junior golf tournaments are also offered for younger players. For those with a "smaller" passion for golf, there's the delightful **Harbortown Miniature Golf** course, built over the water at Bridgewater Plaza at the Halesford Bridge.

Landlubbers who enjoy historical sites will want to visit the **Booker T. Washington National Monument**, a reconstructed farm from the 1800s with live animals, craft



The Smith Mountain Lake Charity Home Tour has drawn as many as 3,000 visitors in one year to see 10 grand and beautiful homes on the lake. This year's home tour will be October 6-8.

looked for summer and retirement homes. In a few short years, the word had begun to spread that Smith Mountain Lake was a jewel in southwest Virginia.

It was while building a home at the lake that **Jeanne Wagoner**, searching for a fundraising project for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, came up with the idea of a home tour at Smith Mountain Lake.

Wagoner and her late husband, Joe, felt people would be interested in seeing the vari-

demonstrations, self-guided and ranger-led tours. Nearby **Explore Park**, in Roanoke, offers a similar step back in time to those early settlement days, as does **Poplar Forest**, Thomas Jefferson's summer home, just outside of Lynchburg. A bit of more recent history is recognized at the newly opened **D-Day War Memorial** in Bedford, just 25 miles north of the lake.

If shopping is your favorite pastime, you'll find an abundance of antique shops, boutiques, gift shops and more in the mini-malls around the lake. A visit to the internationally known **Emerson Creek Pottery** factory and outlet store is a must.

For information on any/all of these events, activities or overnight accommodations, contact the Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce/Partnership at 1-800-676-8203. ■

ety, styles, decor and landscaping being used in the homes being built in the area.

In 1991, while Jeanne coordinated the efforts to feature ten special homes on the tour, Joe solicited sponsors to help underwrite the costs of the event. Friends and neighbors — 300 in all — joined in the planning. A black-tie dinner was organized to honor the homeowners and major sponsors of the tour, and an auction was added as an additional source of funds for the tour.

Despite months of preparation, Jeanne was still uncertain the home tour would be a success.

It was. While its organizers had initially hoped to raise at least \$10,000, the home tour actually brought in just under \$50,000!

In 1997, the home tour elected its own board of directors and became incorporated as the Smith Mountain Lake Charity Home Tour, maintaining an affiliation with the National MS Society, but extending the opportunity for other local charities to share in the proceeds.

As it celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2000, the SML Charity Home Tour is proud of the fact that it has raised over \$1.2 million for its charities.

Close to Paradise

A community that works together, plays together and prays together. You probably should come see it, to believe it. Like many here now, chances are once you come visit Smith Mountain Lake, you'll want to stay forever!! ■



Five major golf courses are located in the Smith Mountain Lake area.