

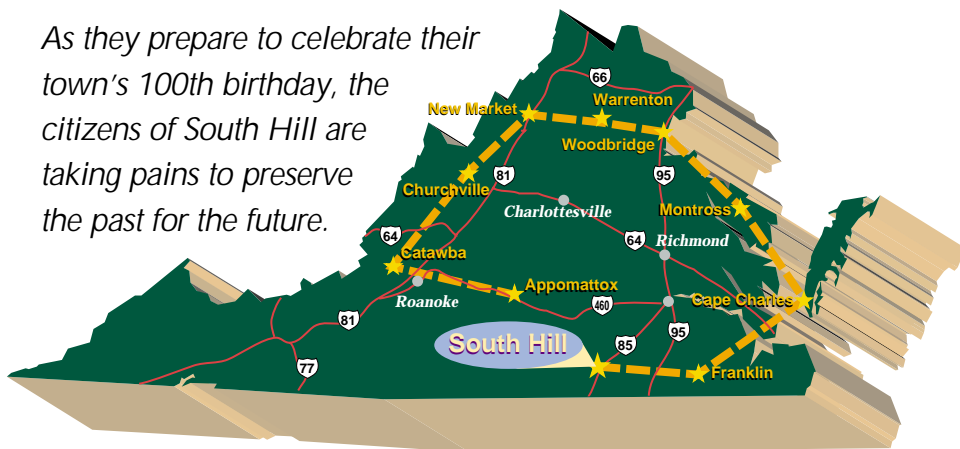
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Barbara G. Nanney,
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During the year 2001, 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 first stop, we'll be...

Down Home in South Hill

As they prepare to celebrate their town's 100th birthday, the citizens of South Hill are taking pains to preserve the past for the future.



When a town survives and thrives for a century, it's time to have a centennial celebration. That is what South Hill, Virginia, is going to do beginning February 16, 2001. South Hill was incorporated February 16, 1901. The Atlantic and Danville Railroad was completed through South Hill in 1889 connecting the eastern and western parts of the state of Virginia. Later, U.S. Rt. 1 passed through South Hill connecting north and south and U.S. Rt. 58 in an east-west direction.

South Hill is situated on a ridge with the Meherrin River in a northerly position and Buggs Island and Gaston Lakes to the south and southeast. Rail and highway systems, plus the tobacco industry, contributed greatly to South Hill's growth and development. Many military personnel will remember South Hill because they traveled these routes going to and from their homes to serve

in the military. In 1965, Interstate 85 opened up just east of town providing a major route north and south. I-85 is an asset to South Hill's industrial and business growth.

The town's depot has been restored and now houses the South Hill Chamber of Commerce and the South Hill Tourist Information office. The Virginia Evans doll collection, two operating train villages, one of which includes a small replica of South Hill in the early 1900s, is also in the depot. There is a wildlife exhibit as well as a photographic exhibit of old South Hill in the depot.

Across the street and up the block is the Tobacco and Farm Life Museum. The only museum of its type in Virginia, it shows the history of tobacco and farm



life. There is a reconstructed wood-burning tobacco barn on the site. **Mrs. Patricia Farrar**, curator, is there to guide you or to answer questions about tobacco farming and farm life. The Tobacco Museum is located in a triangular building that was once located along a railroad spur. R.T. Arnold donated the building.

Along with the development of transportation, two tobacco warehouses were built in 1901 and 1,600,000 pounds of



BARBARA NANNEY PHOTOS

Patricia Farrar, curator of the Tobacco Farm Museum of Virginia in South Hill, helps visitors get a feeling of early day tobacco production and what equipment was used



tobacco were sold that year. Later, several other warehouses and tobacco-related industries were built. From the beginning until today, South Hill has ranked among the top four tobacco markets in Virginia.

"Preserving the Past for the Future"

When people get together for birthdays, they tend to recall the past and talk about the future. Lucy Clayton Wilkerson left a handwritten, undated account of South Hill's beginnings. "South Hill had a very small beginning of one store, a railroad car for a depot on the A and D (Atlantic and Danville) Railroad and a small store which stood on the site of the home of Mrs. W. H. Paulette Jr."

The "Village of South Hill" was surveyed and laid off in lots in 1889 but was not incorporated until 1901. With the completion of the A and D in 1889, financiers, quick to see the advantages for future growth, purchased 56 acres of



The South Hill Chamber of Commerce Building, a restored railroad depot, houses the doll and train museums and a wildlife exhibit. Joyce Bratten, Josephine Shaw, and Frank Malone (above, l-r), Chamber of Commerce staff, welcome visitors.

land. The land was surveyed and laid out in lots, streets and alleys. The original plat of South Hill was in a circle. South Hill and Washington, DC, were two of only three or four towns platted in a circle. The circle did not change until annexation in 1967. Since then there have been other annexations and plans are in the works for another one.

John Stockton, town manager, says with the new annexation, 2.9 square miles of land mass will be added to South Hill. "Land mass and water supply are two important factors for future growth," states Stockton.

"South Hill's town council and other

town government-related bodies are aggressive, visionary and forward-moving. These groups of people are energetic and talented and provide leadership to enter this millennium," Stockton continues.

Sandra Harper Kinker, who with her husband owns Harper Jewelry, says the store has been located in the same building since 1958. It is located on Route 1, one-half block from what at one time was the only traffic light in town.

Sandra, who grew up visiting her parents' shop, can recall all the businesses located on that block. New businesses now occupy the buildings in the block, but Garland Drug is still on the corner at the traffic light.

The motto for South Hill's centennial logo and celebration is "Preserving the Past for the Future." There is a revitalization committee working on plans to keep the old buildings and the ambience of the past in the town. At the same time the committee is thinking of the future and how the town can move forward yet maintain its image.

Frank Malone, recently appointed executive director of the South Hill Chamber of Commerce, says his parents were in the motel business and he met many interesting people and heard many stories about South Hill and its people. He recalls how his family was concerned when Interstate 85 opened in 1965. They were sure their business would close down, but on the first night the highway opened the new Holiday Inn was calling and asking for vacancies. "I did have to adjust to a quieter street once the



Sandra H. Kinker, member of the revitalization committee, says South Hill's greatest asset is its people.



Dr. C.H. Crowder Jr. (above) recalls the days of medical practice before the construction of Community Memorial Hospital in 1954 and speaks with pride about today's expanded services. **South Hill Manager John Stockton (above, right)** describes the town council and other government bodies as energetic, talented and forward-moving.

through traffic stayed on I-85," says Malone.

"South Hill's greatest resource is its people," says Malone. "If there is a need, people respond generously with time and money. The pace sped up, but the people still slow down to help each other."

Dr. C.H. Crowder Jr., a recently retired family practitioner in his 70s, recalls the early days of medical practice and the development of Community Memorial Hospital, now known as Community Memorial Healthcenter (CMH).

In the days prior to the hospital services, doctors had their offices in commercial buildings downtown, usually on the second floor. A few doctors built offices on their property. The doctors made house calls, often riding in carriages or on horseback.

When the Hill-Burton Act, which provided grant money for hospital construction and equipment, was passed, a committee was formed to begin the application process. Mecklenburg, Brunswick and Lunenburg counties joined together to seek the grants.

In 1954, Community Memorial



Hospital opened its doors to provide medical services. It was a 40-bed hospital with a full-time physician staff of seven doctors who operated their own offices and were on 24-hour emergency call.

Faye Matthews, director of marketing at Community Memorial Healthcenter, says that today the hospital is licensed for 284 beds. The hospital provides long-term care and psychiatric care as well as most other medical services. There are 46 active physicians on staff plus courtesy staff. Employing approximately 700 people, the hospital is one of the largest employers in the county.

CMH is a not-for-profit hospital managed by a volunteer board of trustees. It

has a working relationship with Duke Medical Center and Medical College of Virginia Hospital. This relationship allows it to offer care and treatment for special-needs patients, including oncology and dermatology.

"If you need to know, ask Jo," is the slogan at the South Hill Chamber of Commerce office. **Miss Josephine Shaw** is 85 years old. She retired from the telephone company in 1980 and since 1982 has been a full-time volunteer at the chamber office.

Miss Jo moved to South Hill from Bracey in 1935 because she "wanted to come to town." She worked for the Ribbon Mill before going to work for the telephone company where she was one of two switchboard operators. She likes all the changes that have occurred since she came to town. She appreciates all the services, particularly the hospital and life-saving services, and the wide variety of shops, stores and restaurants that people can enjoy. She does, however, miss the times when people dressed up for Saturday nights and met in town for socializing and dancing.

Open to New Ideas

While Miss Jo was here when telephone services started, **Mayor Earl Horne** is enthusiastic about bringing in fiber optics and broadband lines to the community. This type of telecommunication will open up computer systems for faster communication around the

If You Go...

South Hill Centennial Committee has three major events planned to help celebrate the **100th anniversary**.

It all starts on Friday, February 16, 2001, with the **official ceremonies at 1 p.m.** The **reading of the official charter** passed by the Virginia General Assembly on February 16, 1901, followed by a viewing of a special-made video of South Hill, "Preserving the Past for the Future." Also, there will be a cutting and serving of a huge "birthday cake." The public can not only see the video, but also visit a new **photo gallery** in the town municipal

building of old photos of South Hill. They can visit the **doll and train museums**, as well as a **wildlife exhibit** in the Chamber of Commerce building (restored depot), see how tobacco was harvested in the early 1900s at the **Tobacco Farm Life Museum of Virginia**, and **South Hill Veterans Memorial Park** — all within easy walking distance from the town municipal building.

On Saturday, April 28, at 11 a.m., the Centennial Committee will unveil and dedicate its **Memorial and Living History Wall and Garden** at Centennial



world. The system will be an asset for the smaller businessman as well as the larger industries, several of which are already internationally connected.

When Mayor Horne came to South Hill in 1973, there was a small mall with a chain store, Burlington Industries and Community Memorial Hospital. He saw a need for recreational activities for children. So his first involvement as a public servant was to help establish a youth basketball league.

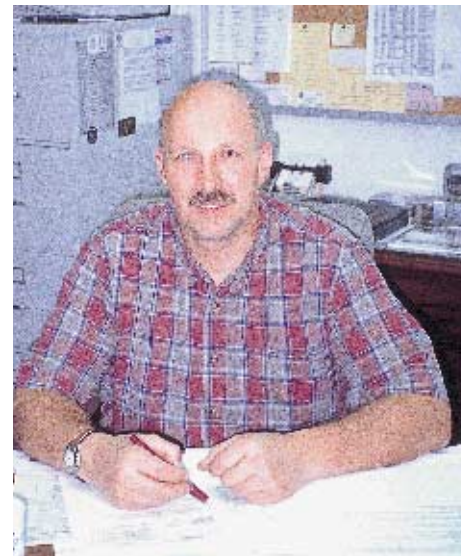
Mayor Horne describes the past and present governing bodies of South Hill as willing to research facts for growth and development and as being open to new ideas. The mayor is proud of the development of the Roanoke River Services Authority (RRSA). The RRSA, which is now under construction and scheduled to be completed by December 2001, will pump additional water from Lake Gaston to the area. The new service will increase the water supply from 1½ million gallons per day to four million gallons per day. Meherrin River, the current water source, has reached its maximum capacity and without a good water source, industry could not move into the area and the town could not easily meet the needs of an increasing population.

Roland Hossli, plant manager of Narricot Industries, said the RRSA would be capable of providing the company with the additional water



needed for their expansion. He went on to say that the Industrial Development Authority does an outstanding job of attracting industry and assisting the businesses in the industrial parks to grow.

South Hill has three industrial parks, all of which have successful businesses, many of which are growing and expanding. Narricot Industries was the first industry to locate in South Hill Industrial Park, the first park developed in South Hill in the 1980s. Narricot was purchased in 2000 by Berger Group of Germany and is the largest air bag producer in the world. There are several industries now located in the park. BGF located in another industrial park, is a French-owned company that produces



Mayor Earl O. Horne (above, left) is proud of the progress made in South Hill by past and present town councils. The town's Industrial Authority does an outstanding job of attracting businesses says Rosland Hossli (above), plant manager of Narricot Industries.

glass fabrics used in space programs, boating, and recreational gear. Jones Apparel has a large warehouse in the same industrial park. Virginia Quilting was the first industry in the third industrial park. Peebles, owners of a chain of department stores, has its corporate offices in South Hill.

For the future, Mayor Horne wants to establish a Farmer's Market, a continuing education center, and to continue providing assistance and guidance for industrial growth and development.

Working Together for a Better Community

When asked how he wants South Hill to be viewed in 2101 when the time capsule is opened, Mayor Horne says, "I hope the people will see that the citizens and organizations in South Hill pitched in and worked together in the year 2001 to develop a leading locality in this part of Southside Virginia. I hope the citizens in 2101 have the same attitudes of today, that of working together for a better community. I would like for the community to keep its rural flavor, however."

South Hill officials are working hard to preserve the past for the future and to make the town a good place in which to live and work. ■

Park on East Danville Street. **The Exhibition Hall 100 will open** that day and **a church tour of the older churches is planned.**

A full day has been planned for Wednesday, **July 4th**, starting in the

The centennial logo represents the many factors that contributed to the development of South Hill.

morning at **Centennial Park** with **games and activities for children**, a **"non-moving parade"** in which antique automobile and farming equipment as well as other items will line the streets near

Centennial Park and the public can browse at their leisure to view the many interesting items on display. The program will continue that evening at South Hill's annual **"Picnic in the Park,"** with the Community Chorus providing a medley of music representing different time periods of the past 100 years. All of this will be followed by a **fireworks display** — and all of it is free to the public.

Mark these three dates on your calendar and join in the fun. There are quite a number of eating establishments and hotels in South Hill to help make your stay comfortable. If you need more information, contact the Chamber of Commerce, (804) 447-4547. ■