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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 fourth stop, we'll be...*

## Down Home in **Montross**

*Something old, something new,  
something borrowed,  
but seldom blue!*



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LYNN NORRIS



Bill Sanford, who followed in the footsteps of his grandfather as the town's maintenance supervisor, and Town Manager Brenda Reamy hold the Montross banner in front of the new Town Hall, which opened for business this spring. (Inset) Old Town Hall is being torn down this summer to allow for smoothing the 90° turn Route 3 takes in the heart of Montross.

**L**ocated on Route 3 southeast of Fredericksburg and its sprawling suburbs and the booming research community surrounding the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Dahlgren, the Town of Montross is not large either in terms of population or size.

Nevertheless, two summers ago when the Marines launched an urban warfare training exercise here for young officers, certain Montross residents led by **Mayor Dave O'Dell** showed their revolutionary tendencies to such an extent that the terrorist infiltrators (read: enlisted men acting the part) gave those few "Good Men" quite a run for their money.

On the national TV news, no less.

Revolution is, after all, in the Montross bloodlines. George Washington was born just up the road, as were James Monroe and James Madison, as well as Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee, the only two brothers brave enough to risk their property and their sacred honor by signing the Declaration of Independence.

In short, Westmoreland's county seat is a wonderful blend of intriguing history and excitement about life in the present — chiefly due to the personalities of her service-oriented inhabitants, many of them lifelong residents.

**Shown here with Fire Chief Eddie Weston, Buren Pitts is one of two charter members of the Westmoreland Volunteer Fire Department who still lives in town. He's kept the active, dedicated department's history since it was founded in 1948.**



Take **Buren Pitts**, for example. He'll be glad to talk your ear off about the fire department (he's a charter member of the 52-year-old, all-volunteer organization) or about the architectural and archaeological manifestations of the nearly 350-year-old county. Pitts has carefully documented much of Montross' history.

Talk to band-director-turned-pharmacist **Bob Burner**, the vice mayor, and his wife **Peggy**, whose family have run Peoples Drugstore since Sept. 1, 1934. Start the day off sweet with pancakes at the counter where

many old-timers gather to catch the latest news. Hand-dipped ice cream and old-fashioned milkshakes made from scratch are an equally fetching draw.

Or talk to **Town Manager Brenda Reamy** and Mayor Dave O'Dell, who could share stories from here to next year about the generosity of Montross residents. **George King, Stanley Schoppe** and **Les Sisson** merit special mention for their cool, calm and collected aid in emergencies and during town events, but community spirit is high year-round — as evidenced by donations for gifts





Peoples Drugstore is famed far and wide for the delicious old-time flavor at its lunch counter. Pharmacist Bob Burner and wife Peggy are pictured here with employee Janice Belfield and customers James Wise, Naomi Johnson, Louvenia Reed, Stump Chatham, Chuck Hutchinson, Sophia Oord and Mrs. Oord's sister, Gerda Hyma — who was visiting from Ontario.

This eye-catching mural draws attention to the Northern Neck Coca-Cola Bottling Co., where the Carver family have bottled their delicious brew since 1921. Check out Northern Neck Ginger Ale (also bottled as Carver's Ginger Ale) for a burst of flavor.



Dating to the early 1950s, this photo of the heart of Montross was given to Town Manager Brenda Reamy by Mrs. L.E. Westmoreland. It sparked much discussion at a recent council meeting.



Longtime Mayor Dave O'Dell is always ready to share a joke.

### Council Talks History

Reamy treasures two large pictures from the early 1950s.

One is an aerial view and the other is shot from where Angelo's Pizza Restaurant stands today — looking toward the Northern Neck Coca-Cola Bottling Co., where since 1921 the Carver family have been famed worldwide for the excellent flavor of their product, enhanced by ultra-clear artesian water.

These occupied council's attention for

almost an hour at the February meeting, its first in the new quarters. The beautifully detailed photos, donated by Mrs. L.E. Westmoreland, will be hung in the new building, so they had to be carefully scrutinized.

"Lookahere, there are signs showing four gas stations right in the middle of town. And isn't that a '52 Chevy? And a 1949 or '50 Ford?" council duly noted.

That was when Brenda passed around some town stationery given to her by Virginia Harris Clapp, from the days when her dad Richard Harris was Mayor, Ashby R. Carver was treasurer and Elizabeth H. Yeatman was town clerk. Council members in those days

for those who are ill or have suffered some accident or calamity or for such causes as the town's Christmas lights and various seasonal festivals.





**Back row: Dottie Lewis, Stan Schoppe, George King and Debbie Polly give a great deal of energy to the town's youth and festivals. Pictured here with them at Stan's Skateland are hockey players Stan Schoppe Jr., Will Lewis and David Jones. Schoppe has employed hundreds of local students at the Dairy Freeze since 1969, at Skateland since 1981.**

**Genealogical researchers and others are welcome to visit the old courthouse, where County Clerk of Court Gwynne Chatham and her staff are the proud keepers of the county's 350 years of deeds, books, wills and circuit court orders. Pictured here are, front row: Brenda Fowler, Alisha Smith. Back row: Betty Horner, Anne Bayne Battaile, Gwynne Chatham and Cindy Hayden.**

were Mary M. Sumner, W. Norris Lowery, George L. Hutt, Elton C. Healy, Charles W. Harris and Arthur E. Carver Jr.

Other memorabilia include the badges of former law enforcers Sgt. Sam Hall and Chief Arthur Thorne.

Councilman and 23-year Northern Neck Electric Cooperative employee **Page Sanford**



was raised in Montross, as was his mother, who lived upstairs as a child from the car dealership run by her daddy Flynn S m a l l w o o d where Wakefield Furniture now sells appliances and furniture.

**Northern Neck Electric Cooperative employee Page Sanford is a Montross councilman.**

Like the rest of council, Sanford is proud of the parade and a variety of sales, music and other activities surrounding Fall Festival, the first Saturday of each October — a celebration of harvest season. Christmas begins the first Friday in December with carolers, celebrations at local businesses and banks, and the lighting of the Rescue Tree on the Courthouse Green.

### The Name

The town was officially incorporated on June 3, 1946, but has a much longer history, of course.

According to the place-names section of

the county history book, *Westmoreland County Virginia*, edited by **Walter Norris Jr.**, the origin of the name may be traced to "shipowner and merchant William Black, who in 1759 leased his land and house, commonly called Montrose, contiguous to Westmoreland Court House," to Thomas Minor. It was designated a town corporate in February 1852 by an Act of the Assembly.

In other historic notes, monthly court meetings from the county's earliest days in various locations set the scene for Westmorelanders to exercise their disputatious, litigious and frequently rebellious natures.

Court Square in Montross was the center of this activity from the 1680s on, with ves-

tiges of the 1707 courthouse enclosed in the c. 1820 structure that still houses the Clerk of Court and all the county's court records, as well as deed, will and land books.

Three war memorials in front of the courthouse honor the county's war dead from the Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and the Vietnam War.

**County Clerk of Court Gwynne Chatham's son, Kenny Jr.**, adopted the cleansing of the monuments and the landscaping of the grounds of the Courthouse as his Eagle Scout project. In the course of this, the vista was altered greatly, as the large trees on the green proved to have rotten hearts.

Other changes will be readily apparent to those of you who may have visited the



**History comes alive at the town's Fall Festival each year.**

## If You Go...

Tourists are welcome throughout the county, which has miles of waterfront, accompanied by a suitable number of marinas and seafood restaurants.

Brochures and more info are available on the numerous sites of interest from **Town Hall** (804-493-9623), through the **Westmoreland County Museum and Library**, (804-493-8440) on **Court Square** in Montross, and over the Internet at [www.westmoreland-county.org](http://www.westmoreland-county.org).

A brief sampling of the local attractions, starting from the western end of the county, includes:

**Vorhees Nature Preserve and Westmoreland Berry Farm.** On Route 637 near Oak Grove (804-224-9171). Miles of woodland trails along the Rappahannock River; pick-your-own and already-picked fruit.

small but hopping town in the past:

- A new branch of Central Rappahannock Regional Library is going up across from the English Building, which houses the county offices and today's circuit and general district courtrooms.
- The sharp turn on Route 3 in the middle of town is going to be smoothed out. This necessitated the building of a new Town Hall, across the street from the old one, which formerly held sway in a c. 1927 bank that must be razed for the new roadway.
- Census figures show Montross has actually declined in population from 1990 (359) to 2000 (315), but growth is definitely on the way due to the enhancement of utilities via a new sewer system and the extension of water lines.
- A shell building in the industrial park just outside town — for which funds were channeled through the Rural Utilities Service, courtesy of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative — has not sold yet. But there are nibbles and the county is marketing it through a number of venues.

### Directions

The long and narrow "Village" of Montross stretches about 2.5 miles from stem to stern; there are three ways to come in:

- From the west on Route 3, up the steep hill from serene Chandler's Millpond.
- On a network of back roads that offers a shortcut to those coming from Essex and Richmond counties, emerging by the Dollar General Store, Kwik Stop and Southern Tire.
- From the east on Route 3, via bustling East End, where the thriving Northern Neck Building Supply stands cheek by jowl with

Sisson's fruit stand, restaurants, gas stations, convenience stores, Northern Neck State Bank (whose congenial Vice President **Rusty Brown** is a member of the Northern Neck Electric Cooperative Board), and more.

Once you're in Montross, the friendly souls here will keep you busy for quite awhile.

There's plenty to eat, ranging from gourmet cuisine to pizza to some of the world's best fried chicken.

Check out the Welcome Center and Museum to check out the latest exhibits or pick up some genealogical tips from **Darlene Tallent**, chat with **Dal Mallory** about his book on the Civil War, or put together a few shards from the 17th-century pottery that curator **Vicki Miller** is reassembling.

You can find almost anything you want in town.

Flowers find their way to every occasion throughout the year, whether solemn, sad or joyous, from talented arrangers here such as those at Bridget's Bouquets. The Ptuchas' greenhouses also provide both beauty and nourishment, available for purchase in the old Pitts' gas station.

And there's a 50-50 chance you'll be served by folks who've been serving people here for decades, whether you're at Peoples Community Bank or the Bank of Lancaster, at Blue and Gray Supermarket, in mechanics' or body shops, or getting your hair done or ...



**The three banks in Montross are vital to commerce and have a history of good advice when it comes to saving for a rainy day. Pictured are Northern Neck Electric Cooperative board member Rusty Brown (vice-president of Northern Neck State Bank), Bill Johns (president and CEO of Peoples Community Bank) and Pam Fawver (Montross Branch officer, Bank of Lancaster).**

Although small, as noted, the town offers a veritable barrage of services.

Realtors, accountants, lawyers, doctors, an Internet service provider, auto sales and parts dealers, the *Westmoreland News* are easily accessible within walking distance, as are Washington and Lee High School, the Methodist and Episcopal churches, a laundromat, shoe repair shop and dry cleaners.

Whether you want gifts, crafts, antiques or vintage or children's clothing, your every need can be met thanks to the creative force centered in Court Square. Visitors have said the interest level compares to that of Gatlinburg or a little Colonial Williamsburg.

Come visit. You may end up staying a lifetime! ■

**Ingleside Winery.** On Route 638 south of Oak Grove (804-224-8687). Tours and tastings of award-winning vintages.

**Town of Colonial Beach.** Off Route 205 north of Oak Grove. Visitors have been flocking to the Potomac-front town for more than a century to enjoy its delicious seafood, festivals, boating opportunities and history (804-224-8145, P.O. Box 475, Colonial Beach, VA 22443).

**Monroe's birthplace.** A monument on Route 205 marks the birthplace of the fifth president.

**George Washington Birthplace National Monument.** Route 204 near Oak Grove (804-224-1732). Waterfront colonial farm, natural area, walking trails wind through Popes Creek Plantation, where the Father of our Country was born.

**Westmoreland State Park.** On Route 347 (State Park Road) near Baynesville (804-493-8821). Miles of woodland and riverfront nature trails, cabins, camping, swimming, fishing, boat rentals and picnicking.

**Stratford Hall Plantation (pictured at right).** On Route 214 near Lerty (804-493-8038). Ancestral home of the Lees, including the only two brothers to sign the Declaration of Independence — Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee, and the birthplace of Gen. Robert E. Lee. The 1,670-acre plantation offers tours, a dining room, nature trails.

**Kinsale Museum.** On Route 203 off Route 202 at Kinsale, the oldest incorporated town on this side of the Potomac; the museum is open weekends (804-472-3001).

Want to stay overnight? There are two B&Bs, ('**Tween Rivers**, run by the Debskis —



800-485-5777 or 804-493-0692; and **Porterville**, hosted by Mary Porter Hall — 804-493-9394). Also available are the **Washington & Lee Motel** (804-493-8093) and the historic **Inn at Montross** (804-493-0573), whose basement dates back to 1683 when John Minor kept an "ordinary" there. ■