

DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2004, we're making our way around the region, 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 sixth stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN KILMARNOCK

by Carroll Lee Ashburn

A taste of Scotland in old Virginia could very well describe Kilmarnock, Virginia.

The area of Kilmarnock goes back to the late 1600s, first called "Steptoe's Ordinary," later "The Crossroads," and finally Kilmarnock. Over the years it has been the center of commerce, not only for town residents, but for area fishermen and farmers.

The community, which straddles Lancaster and Northumberland counties, has survived three devastating fires that occurred in 1909, 1915 and 1952. Kilmarnock was incorporated in 1930, and with the leadership of Mayor **Mike Robertson** and new Town

CAROLL ASHBURN PHOTOS



AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 1,244

LAND AREA: 2.9 square miles

INCORPORATED: 1930

ELEVATION: 89 feet

FUN FACT: First called "Steptoe's Ordinary," the Kilmarnock community was first settled in the late 1600s.

LISA VALDRIGHI PHOTO, THE RAPPAHANNOCK RECORD



Manager **Lee Hood Capps**, planning is underway for a gala celebration for the 75th anniversary during 2005.

Kilmarnock was named by Scottish merchants in the 1770s for Kilmarnock, Scotland. These two towns maintain a sister-cities relationship to this day. Kilmarnock, Virginia, though much smaller

Kisha Thomas, a desk clerk at the Holiday Inn Express, was excited to find that she had been selected as the Kilmarnock Chamber of Commerce's Employee of the Month for May. She was presented with a plaque and a flower from the hotel's general manager Roger Harshbarger and chamber president Dr. Matthew Shifflett. The program recognizes the extra efforts and hospitable service of employees at the chamber's businesses.

Cooperative Living/July 2004

Main Street, Kilmarnock.



than its Scottish counterpart, features an authentic pub, complete with British food, a wide selection of British beer, musical entertainment and an English dart board. The town even has its own bagpipe band. The Kilmarnock Museum has an exhibit of Scottish memorabilia direct from Kilmarnock, Scotland.

Kilmarnock is located in an area known as the "Land of Pleasant Living," Virginia's historic Northern Neck. The Northern



Piper's Pub & Tea Room is one of more than 20 eateries in town.

Neck, or "the Neck," as it is often called, is bound on the north by the Potomac River, on the south by the Rappahannock River, and to the east by the Chesapeake Bay. As one would expect, the area was occupied by Native Americans and visited by Captain John Smith.

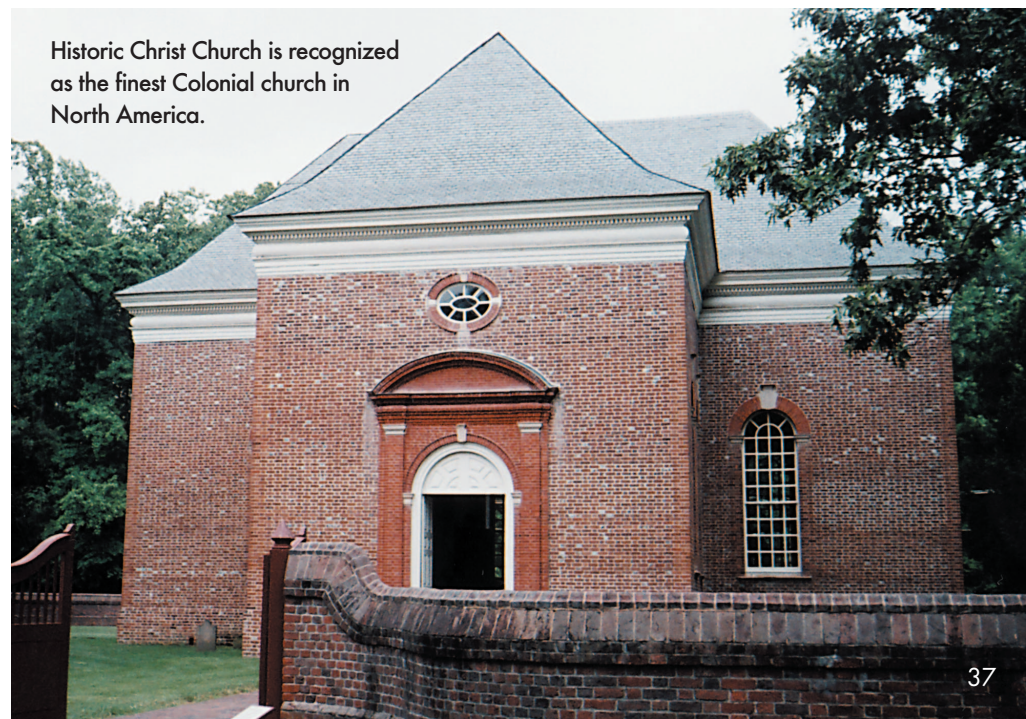
Kilmarnock is the home of Henrietta Hall Shuck, the first woman missionary to China. Her original house that was located in the middle of downtown is no longer standing, having been replaced in 1957 by

an auto-repair shop. A state marker notes the home's historic location.

Close by is Historic Christ Church, recognized as the finest Colonial church in North America. It was built in 1735 by Robert "King" Carter, one of the wealthiest citizens in Colonial America. It is built in the shape of a cross with three-foot-thick brick walls. A national historic landmark, the original limestone slabs still pave the floor and a three-level pulpit towers over the high-backed pews.



Town Manager Lee Hood Capps.



Historic Christ Church is recognized as the finest Colonial church in North America.

IF YOU GO ...



The best way to enjoy Kilmarnock is on foot, as most everything is close by and there is much to do and see.

LIKE TO SHOP?

No big-city, big-box stores or malls here, but Kilmarnock has more than 15 unique gift shops, with many featuring nautical items. There are three book stores, a wine shop, a health food store, a toy store, an Irish pub, six clothing stores, an old-fashioned ice cream and bagel shop, and an almost museum-like collectors' doll shop that was featured in the book, *Virginia Curiosities*. There are almost 300 businesses located in and around town.

HUNGRY?

Kilmarnock has more than 20 eateries, from delis to fast food, Chinese and Thai and, of course, traditional family-style restaurants; and, don't forget that Irish pub. Eat and enjoy.

WHERE TO STAY

The Holiday Inn Express on North Main Street has more than 60 rooms. Also located in town is the Waverly House Bed and Breakfast. Nearby accommodations include Flowering Fields B&B, Hope and Glory Inn B&B, The Inn at Levelfields B&B in Lancaster (an outstanding example of antebellum

Kilmarnock is home to The Doll House, a collector's shop that was featured in the book *Virginia Curiosities*.

architecture), St. Andrews Motel, Windmill Point Resort and, of course, renowned Tides Inn Resort.

Kilmarnock's location is about central to surrounding attractions and historic sites. A suggested trip itinerary might be to avoid the big cities' traffic and hustle and bustle, and use Kilmarnock as a base for one's next vacation.

Kilmarnock is a 90-minute drive from Richmond, two hours from Fredericksburg, three hours from the Washington, DC, area, an hour from the Williamsburg, Yorktown, Newport News triangle, and even closer to George Washington's birthplace and Stratford Hall. Both Busch Gardens and Kings Dominion are less than 90 minutes away. And in Kilmarnock, you're just minutes away from the beautiful Chesapeake Bay.

No visit to Kilmarnock would be complete without a trip to the unique village of Irvington, with its many quaint shops. Reedville, in neighboring Northumberland County, is well-known for its many Victorian homes, once known as "Millionaire's Row." Reedville also is the home of the Fishermen's Museum and the departure point for cruises to Tangier and Smith islands in the Chesapeake Bay. ■

Also nearby is Morattico Baptist Church (est. 1778), the mother Baptist church of the Northern Neck, and White Marsh United Methodist Church, the mother Methodist church in the Neck. Located in Kilmarnock, New St. John's Baptist Church is considered a good example of eclectic architecture with Gothic arches and Victorian features handsomely joined.

Another historic site, Ditchley (est. 1686) is just a few miles outside of town. Built by Hancock Lee, it was home to descendants of presidents Zachary Taylor and James Madison, and was later owned and restored by noted philanthropist, Mrs. Alfred I. duPont. Mrs. duPont grew up here and taught school in the area.

Not too far from Ditchley is Cobbs Hall, built around 1850 on the foundation of an earlier home from the 1720s. It was the home place of Richard Lee, from whom Robert E. Lee, President Zachary Taylor, and Chief Justice Edward White descended.

Many other attractions are all situated within a few minutes' drive from Kilmarnock, including Indian Creek Country Club, the former home of silent film star Helen Vincen and the free Merry Point Ferry, one of the last cable ferries in the country.

In addition to the Kilmarnock Museum, the town can boast of three more very different museums. The Welch Farm Museum depicts the history

The Kilmarnock Museum is one of four unique museums in the community.



of farming, the old Lancaster Roller Mill, which operated from 1843 to 1872, and the fledgling Northern Neck Wall of Fame Museum that honors those who have excelled in sports in the area.

Kilmarnock also has five Sears homes, all located within easy walking distance of the downtown area.

For the nature lover, there is Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve. Over 200 acres of sand beaches, hiking trails and observation decks give one a view of shore birds, deer, turkey and migratory waterfowl. The beaches are home to the threatened Northeastern Tiger Beetle.

There is also the Hickory Hollow trail with two miles of marked paths. Hunting for deer, quail, duck, geese, turkey and salt-water fishing is the best here with many charter boats available.

The Kilmarnock Chamber of Commerce, led by newly elected president, Dr. **Matthew Shifflett**, hosts many special events throughout the year including the Rivahfest street festival on Memorial Day weekend, Scottish Days during October, and the Illuminated Christmas Parade in early December. The Christmas parade has been voted one of the best small-town parades in Virginia.

The chamber also recognizes an Employee of the Month and honors a fireman, EMT and officer of the year with special plaques.

The annual Volunteer Firemen's Festival takes place each year during the last



week of July, as it has for more than 65 years. It is believed to be one of the longest-running carnivals in the nation, and is second only to the Chincoteague carnival in Virginia. All rides and concessions are owned by the fire department, and are operated by firemen and volunteers for the nine-day event. The carnival has become a homecoming for many who come back each year just for this occasion.

The annual Holly Ball of the Northern Neck that started in 1895 as a private Yuletide party, is one of the oldest debutante balls in the country. Held each year between Christmas and New Year, it has long been the premier social event of the holiday season. The original holly tree from which the ball got its name is no longer standing, but remnants are on display at the Kilmarnock Museum.

Kilmarnock Today

Now billed as the Antique and Art Capital of Virginia's historic Northern Neck, Kilmarnock can boast of two large antique malls and two art galleries, all located within easy walking distance downtown. Three smaller antique shops are nearby.

The Center for the Arts opened in 1991 and is home to live community theater with at least four productions a year, including a spring musical. The Academy for Performing and Creative Arts offers instructions in dance, instruments and karate in the same building located on Church Street.

Kilmarnock Tomorrow

The town has recently purchased several acres of open land near downtown with committees working on how best to utilize this property for the community. Plans call for it to be called "Crossroads Commons," if approved by the public.

The town is also moving forward with the Main Street renovation project, with most of the construction to begin in early 2005. When completed, the entire face of downtown Kilmarnock will have changed dramatically to be more pedestrian friendly.

Adding the gala 75th anniversary celebration to the mix makes an exciting future for Kilmarnock and the surrounding area for many years to come. ■