

## DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2005, 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 fourth stop, we'll be ...



The Pocahontas ferry docks at Scotland Wharf on the Surry side of the James River.



## DOWN HOME IN SURRY

by Lynn Thornton, Contributing Writer

### AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 262

LAND AREA: 1 square mile

INCORPORATED: 1928

FUN FACT: Surry was once known as Scuffletown.

There are several routes to the town of Surry. You can travel by Rt. 10, Rt. 31 or on a car ferry across the James River from Jamestown/Williamsburg. One of the first things you will notice when arriving in Surry is how quickly you seem to get there. Part of that is due to the straight stretches of routes 10 and 31 that form the intersection at the heart of the village. It is also partly due to the fact

that there are no stoplights in Surry County.

That fact is a testament to the largely rural nature of Surry County and village-like setting of the town. Surry County was formed from James City County in 1652. Many of the existing county roads are in the same pathways that existed in Colonial times. And it is not difficult to find history around every curve in the road.

Through the years, the major industries have been related to the production of pork, peanuts and pine trees and every July there is a festival at nearby Chippokes Plantation State Park to honor that history.



The River House, built around 1830, overlooks the James River at Chippokes Plantation State Park. The Farm & Forestry Museum at Chippokes houses many early tools and machinery.







Volunteer firemen Michael Shinaberry (l) and Scott McLuer prepare a stew for a fundraiser for the Surry Volunteer Fire Department, which serves the town and county.



Farmer Joe's Greenhouse and Garden Shop will delight any shopper with its wide array of live plants and specialty gifts. Proprietor Marge Holler displays one of their flower arrangements. The Hollers relocated to Surry from Vermont in search of a warmer climate.

For a small town, Surry offers some of everything to a visitor. **Faye Grandison**, branch manager of the Surry Branch of the Blackwater Regional Library, has spent hours assisting people from near and far with genealogy research. "We have had visitors from as far away as Australia asking for information. Requests come in the mail and by phone. If we can't help them, we direct them to the courthouse or Surry County Historical Society."

One of the advantages of being in a small town is how close knit the community can be. That is true in Surry.

**Stacey Richards**, employee and faithful customer of Farmer Joe's, commented that she was late for work due to stopping at Zoom's Convenience Store. "Farmer Joe recently had an accident and at least 12 people stopped me to find out how he was doing." Farmer Joe's is a combination greenhouse, flower and gift shop, though "Most of our business is the greenhouse and flowers," explains **Marge Holler**, Farmer Joe's wife. They, with their son **Matt**, have been in business in Surry since 1994 after relocating from Vermont where they were cattle farm-

ers. "We were looking for a warmer climate and found Surry to be a unique area. It has always felt like it was meant for us to be here. The people here are very kind to each other."

The building itself was a grocery store long ago. It currently has a varied assortment of gifts ranging from journals, children's books, and gardening items to decorative cocktail napkins. "Many local people have told us how glad they are we are here" acknowledges Marge. Farmer Joe's is also the only florist in town. "People are surprised at how much stuff we have in





The Surry County Courthouse houses records that date back to the 1600s.

here” she added, noting the coziness of the shop.

Under large old oak trees at the courthouse you can close your eyes and let your senses imagine gatherings from

years past. Perhaps the shouting lone voice of a politician giving a campaign speech, or the clanging sound of swords being stacked by Revolutionary militia camping overnight, or the laughter and

aromas from a community picnic ... these grounds have seen all of these activities in the last three centuries.

Within the courthouse area are several old buildings. The town of Surry became the county seat in 1797 when the first session of court was held at the then-wooden courthouse. The current courthouse is in the same location, though it has been burned twice. Nonetheless, county records dating back to the 1600s survive and make this an invaluable resource for those doing historical research.

Touring and research work up an appetite and Surry has several eateries offering varied fare. The oldest is the Surrey House Restaurant, which was established in 1954 by Owen Gwaltney. It was in the Gwaltney family until 1993 when **Mike Stevens** bought it. “Though ownership has changed, some menu items have not. The ham rolls and peanut raisin pie remain the most popular items for tourists.” The hospitality is another thing that has not changed. A long-standing employer, the Surrey House has several employees who have been working there for 30 to 35 years and **Miss Elsie Evans** has been baking pies for the restaurant since 1954.

Mike has expanded the business since becoming owner. A dining room has been added and a motel behind the restaurant was purchased in 1998. Serving breakfast, lunch and dinner,



The staff at the Surrey House Restaurant is always ready to offer southern hospitality and down home food.





Edwards Ham Shoppe offers a wide variety of pork products and gift items. Long time employee Vickie Jones (above) takes orders by phone.

people from Smithfield, the Ham Capital of the World, come to us for their hams,” she laughs.

The shop not only carries ham products, but also other goodies made in Virginia like jams and jellies and peanuts. Hostess gifts, dish towels, and

the restaurant is busiest between Easter and Thanksgiving. At other times the business is patronized by locals who enjoy a cup of coffee at the counter or a weekday special. The restaurant also provides the meeting site for the area Lion’s Club, Tourism Bureau, and Surry County Chamber of Commerce, of which Mike Stevens is president.

Another unique shop is the Edwards Ham Shoppe. Though it opened in 1988, stepping onto the porch is like

stepping back in time with a 1950s ice drink box to hint of the cold refreshment to be found inside. The shop offers a myriad of pork products from hams to sausage to bacon. Tasty samples are available on the counter to help in your decision of which products to buy. The business is now in its third generation of the Edwards family. Eight-year employee **Vickie Jones** commented on how devoted people are to Edwards hams. “We even have



Surry is located in Surry County, which is rich in historical sites and interesting stops along the way. Traveling from Smithfield on Route 10 you come to the village of **Bacon's Castle** where its namesake, the oldest-documented brick house in the U.S. (pictured) famous for its role in Bacon's Rebellion, is located. The house is open seasonally. **Hog Island Wildlife Management Area** is located on the same road and so named because early settlers kept their hogs on the island to forage freely. Bird watching, hiking and

fishing are available and the area is open daily. Educational displays and exhibits about nuclear power can be found at the **Surry Nuclear Power Station and Information Center**. Information about the center and tours can be found at [www.dom.com](http://www.dom.com).

Not far from Bacon's Castle on Route 10 are **old ruins from an eighteenth-century church**. A wall and high arch of a window opening are still standing. The grounds are open year round. **Chippokes Plantation State Park** is located on the James River with an old **River House** high on a bluff above the river. A mansion, circa 1854, is open for tours seasonally as well as the **Farm and Forestry Museum** where many old tools and implements are displayed. **Smith's**

**Fort Plantation** is the site of the ruins of a fort from 1609 started by Captain John Smith. A story-and-a-half mid-eighteenth-century dwelling at this location is also open for tours seasonally. Much of the interior pine woodwork is original. If you have never ridden a ferry, take the 15-minute ride on the **Jamestown-Scotland Ferry**, which is operated the Virginia Department of Transportation. The ferry is toll-free and leaves on each half hour. The view from the water gives a different perspective to the surrounding area and what the early colonists saw upon their arrival. **The Country Store** on Route 10 at Spring Grove was built in the 1880s. It is today much like it was then. Antiques, collectibles, and general goods are sold here on Saturdays. ■

gift baskets are among the other items for a shopper's delight. Or you may want to stop in to pick up a ham sandwich for a picnic at some roadside tables near the center of town.

If you plan to stay overnight, you may want to spend the night at the Seward House Bed and Breakfast. After walking up a flower-lined brick pathway past a white-railed porch with beckoning wicker chairs, you may be greeted at the door by Polly, a friendly, soft, sweet-eyed dog. The house was built in 1901 by Dr. William and Elizabeth Seward. **Jackie Baird**, a great-niece, opened the B&B in 1990 and has done work to restore the house. "People come here for the quiet and the location. There are things to see and do on this side of the river and it is close to the Williamsburg attractions as well." The main house has two rooms available upstairs and there is also a separate cottage that was originally built for and used as the doctor's office. "We have done renovations to the property to restore the house, but the only thing that has been added is a side porch."

Breakfast is included in the stay, but dinner may be available with advance planning. "We have enjoyed visitors from Holland, France, and Greece in recent years," states **Cynthia Erskine**, co-hostess of Seward House. "And everyone has been very welcoming when we moved to the area and opened the B&B".

After visiting the town of Surry and riding through the peaceful countryside at a leisurely pace, you can only wonder how long it will continue as it is today. The quiet rural nature of Surry County will face the same issues of growth that neighboring counties have seen in recent years. The large agricultural base and location of the land make it an appealing prospect for potential development and individuals looking for a quieter way of life. The impact on Surry will eventually be felt. The first sign may be a stoplight in the middle of the town. For more information, visit [www.toursurryva.com](http://www.toursurryva.com). ■