

## ■ DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2011, 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 fifth stop, we'll be ...



## DOWN HOME IN

# YALE

by Lynn Thornton, Contributing Writer

When most people hear the word “Yale,” they probably think of the esteemed university in New Haven, Connecticut ... unless they reside in southeastern Virginia.

Then, chances are they think of a small community located a few miles south of Route 40 in Sussex County. If you drive along Courthouse Road you will travel through Yale in a very few minutes. And you may feel that you have not missed much by

The community of Yale, marked by long stretches of soybean and peanut fields, is located along Courthouse Road in Sussex County. The sole General Store, more restaurant than store, is the only place in Yale to buy gas.

doing so, but you need to drive slower and look deeper. Otherwise, you'll likely miss the history, mystery and mischief that are all part of Yale.

The community of Yale is classified as a code “U6,” which is “a populated place that is not a census-designated or incorporated

place having an official federally recognized name.” Indeed, the origin of the community's name itself is something of a mystery.

“I never really thought about it,” was Roger Kitchen's response when asked where the name came from. A phone call to his sister, Adelaide Harrup, who is one of several keepers of the local history, yielded the same answer. There would seem an obvious connection to Yale University and an article written by a Yale student did assert the area was named by a Yale graduate who was laying rail for the Southern Railway in the late 1800s, though no verification for the information was cited.

In driving the area, one sees more what used to be than what is. “You can still see several of the six stores that were running at one time,” according to Roger Kitchen, a lifelong resident of the area. “As a young boy, I learned to cuss sitting outside one of the old stores at night where the men would go to play cards.” The remaining store has become more restaurant than store and is quite busy during hunting season. It is also the only place in Yale to buy gas.

The Yale post office, zip code 23897, was originally in one of the still standing, but closed, stores. Magee's Store housed the post office until 2004, when a new structure was built across the street. Mrs. Dot Frye, another of the area historians, recounts that the first rural postal



BILL SHERROD PHOTOS



## AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** Approximately 600

**LAND AREA:** 64.84 square miles in zip code 23897

**LONGITUDE:** 36.846

**LATITUDE:** 77.287

**ELEVATION:** 108 feet

**FACTOIDS:** The old one-room schoolhouse is now home to the largest colony of Virginia big-eared bats in the state.



LYNN THORNTON PHOTO

- 1.** Magee's Store, now closed, originally housed the Yale post office.
- 2.** The new post office was built across the street in 2004.
- 3.** Mrs. Dot Frye recounts that the first rural postal route in Sussex County was run from the Yale post office by horse and buggy.
- 4.** Mrs. Fannie Key came to Yale in 1942 to teach the area's African-American children.
- 5.** The one-room schoolhouse where Mrs. Key taught students from grades 1-7.

route in Sussex County was run from the Yale post office by horse and buggy. Mrs. Frye worked for the postal service for 35 years. The first postmaster was Mr. Lowery, an African-American gentleman. Sadly, this post office recently received word that its rural route will be moved to another post office, leaving postal-box delivery the remaining delivery service.

Though the community's most visible commerce now is production of peanuts, soybeans, cotton, wheat, corn and other agriculture-related activities, Yale once

supported two stave mills, two lumber mills, two cotton gins and a sawmill to harvest the abundant surrounding forests. The rail line had a stop at Yale for freight, logging and passengers.

"My mother came to Yale by train from Fredericksburg in 1920 to teach. She was paid \$100 a month and \$25 of that went to the superintendent of schools, who offered room and board to several teachers at the school," shared Mr. Kitchen, who still has a letter his mother wrote concerning her new position.

The "two-up, two-down"-style high school, built in 1917, burned to the ground and wasn't replaced. Local legend has it that the old school bell was removed from the premises while it was still warm by a couple of brothers using a child's wagon.

About a mile from the post office is a one-room schoolhouse that served grades 1-7 of the area's African-American children. Mrs. Fannie W. Key came from Powhatan in 1942 to teach those grades. She was selected by Superintendent T. D. Foster as a result of a mass hiring that occurred after





BILL SHERROD PHOTOS

**1.** Calvary Baptist Church was erected in 1884 and was rebuilt in 1999. **2.** Lifelong resident Dan Koliadko is part of the significant Russian population in the community. His mother was born in Yale in 1901. **3. & 4.** Clay Hill consists of beautifully restored old buildings and lovingly tended gardens. It is owned by Debbie Wilson, who stages garden events such as receptions, weddings and family reunions. **5.** Yale native Roger Kitchen and his wife Retha. Roger's mother came to Yale from Fredericksburg in 1920 to teach school. **6.** Charlie Stephenson, current manager of Camp Rudolph, grew up in Chesapeake and attended the Christian service camp as a youth. **7.** Antioch Baptist Church, founded in 1772 with 87 members, was the first Baptist church in Sussex County and one of the earliest in Virginia.



some of the previous teachers had protested that black teachers were not paid the same as the white teachers and were let go.

"I had 54 children in grades 1-7, all being taught in that one room," recalls Mrs. Key. "That was part of the 'Equal but Separate Educational Opportunities' at that time. The children had to walk to school and I remember it being so cold in the winter. We had a potbelly coal stove in the center of the room and all of the children would sit in circles around that stove. After a while, the ones closest to the stove would move to the outer circle of chairs and the next row would move up to the stove. We would do that all day to try to keep everybody warm."

Mrs. Key found that part of the problem was the trap door to the attic in the building was missing, so cold air was just blowing in through the opening. "I looked around and saw George Washington hanging up on the wall above the blackboard — like he was in all of the schools — and I asked one of my taller boys to get that picture down. We nailed him up over the trap door so instead of us looking up at him, he was looking down at us and the room was a whole lot warmer after that."

Mrs. Key retired from teaching after 47 years in other elementary schools in Sussex County. All of those years of experience led her to one primary observation: "Busy students don't have time to get in trouble."

### A STRONG RELIGIOUS CORE

Aside from stores, farms, and forestry related employment, Yale has also had a strong religious core through the years, an influence that exists to this day. Antioch Baptist Church was founded on June 13, 1772, with a total of 87 members. Originally known as Raccoon Swamp Meeting House, the name changed in 1852 when Antioch became the mother church of six congregations in four other counties in Virginia. Antioch Baptist Church is the first Baptist church in Sussex County and one of the earliest in Virginia.

Two other churches are found along Courthouse Road. Calvary Baptist Church was erected in 1884 and was rebuilt in 1999, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church was

organized in 1913 with the present building erected in 1955.

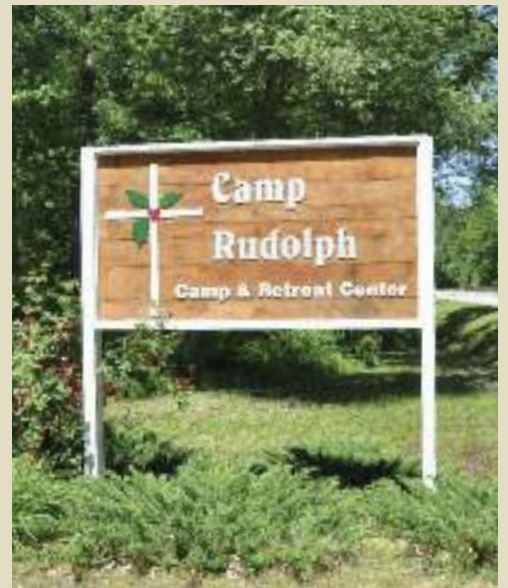
Riding down the roads in Yale you will see names such as Shanko, Zimmerman, Bonderanko, and Koliadko representing the Russian population in the community. Mr. Dan Koliadko has resided in Yale all of his life. His mother was born in Yale in 1901. His father had come to the United States to make money, go back to Russia and enter the Greek Orthodox priesthood. His parents met in a Russian class at a college in Chicago, where the future Mrs. Koliadko took courses with her two brothers. Mr. Koliadko tells of his father returning to Yale with one of the brothers to farm. "He earned one dollar per week plus milk and eggs."

Others found employment in mill work, farming, the railroad or newly emerging manufacturing jobs. At that time, the Russian community of Yale attended the Russian Baptist Church, where services were conducted in Russian and English. Over time, beliefs and philosophies changed from Russian Baptist to Seventh Day Adventist, which is active today and includes a school for grades K-8.

### THE YALE OF TODAY

Despite its many old buildings and history, Yale is not a village stuck in the past. The Joyner-Gray-Yale Ruritan club is very active and held its 37th annual oyster roast in January. There is also a Tidewater Christian Service Camp known as Camp Rudolph that hosts young campers during the summer and also provides retreats for adults in the off-season. "I grew up in Chesapeake, Va., and came to Camp Rudolph for a couple of summers," stated Charlie Stephenson, current manager of Camp Rudolph. "We had 536 campers come through in 2010 and are always looking for activities to add as time and our budget allows." Some newer offerings at the camp are a zip-line, team-building course, and wholesome fresh produce for meals grown by the Carr family next door.

If you find yourself traveling down Route 40, in southeastern Virginia, turn south at Sussex Courthouse and follow Courthouse Road to Yale for a glance back to yesterday. And be sure to look up Roger Kitchen if you know where the name "Yale" came from. ■



Yale's Camp Rudolph functions as both a summer camp and a retreat center in non-summer months.

**IF YOU GO...** Camp Rudolph is a Christian camp and retreat center that primarily functions as a summer youth camp and also a retreat center from late August to early June. Different camp sessions are designed for different age groups and interests such as Expressions of Worship, Adventure, and Wilderness camp. Visit [www.camprudolph.org](http://www.camprudolph.org) or call the office at 434-535-8147.

Clay Hill consists of beautifully restored old buildings and lovingly tended gardens. It is owned by Debbie Wilson, who stages garden events such as receptions, weddings, family reunions, and whatever else may be of interest. Thanks to Debbie, several old farm buildings in the area were saved from being torn down and now stand ready to provide a quaint country venue for your event. Call her at 434-246-9369 or visit [www.clayhillgardenevents.com](http://www.clayhillgardenevents.com).

Historic Sussex Courthouse is approximately one mile north of Yale. There are several buildings noted on the Virginia Landmark Register and the National Register of Historic Places; the clerks' office built in 1817, the old courthouse completed in 1828, the 1800 Dillard House and the 1810 Bannister House.

Miles B. Carpenter House & Museum, about 12 miles from Yale on Highway 460, is located at 101 Hunter Street in Waverly. This museum demonstrates the life and folk art of Mr. Carpenter in the Victorian house in which he lived. His work is from a more-than-40-year career of carving hand-painted creatures. His subjects were humans, animals and Biblical characters. Phone 804-834-2151 or 804-834-2969 for hours and information.

First Peanut Museum in Virginia is located beside the Carpenter museum and tells the story of peanuts through pictures, antique farm machinery and equipment. Phone 804-834-2151 or 804-834-2969 for hours and information. ■