

■ DOWN HOME SERIES

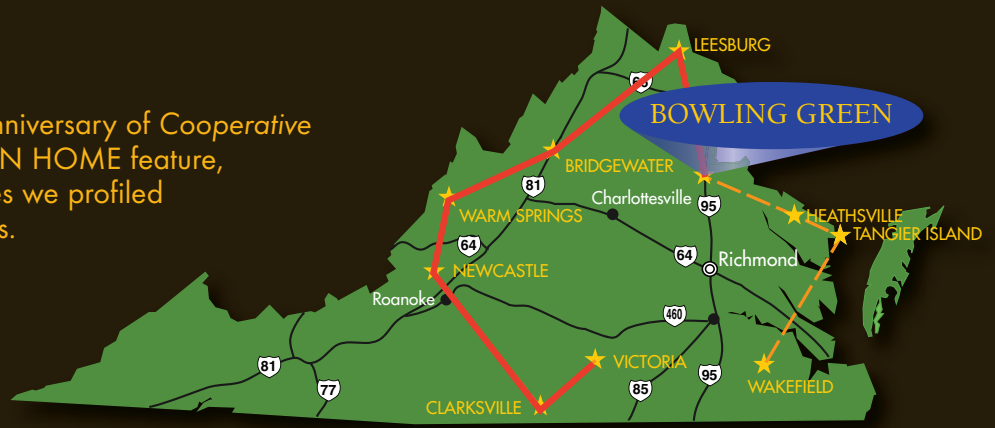
The year 2012 marks the 15th anniversary of *Cooperative Living* magazine's popular DOWN HOME feature, so we're revisiting the communities we profiled in 1997, the first year of the series.

On this seventh stop, we'll be ...

DOWN HOME IN

BOWLING GREEN

Story and photos by Susan Sili, Contributing Writer



In 1945, Thomas Hunter Lomax wrote, "My road to Richmond takes me through the lovely little Town of Bowling Green. I know of no prettier village in all of the old Virginia lowlands."

Lomax, known as the "Poet Laureate of the South," was just one of many authors over the last several centuries to fall in love with and write about the beautiful old trees, wide spacious lawns and amazing architecture of Caroline's county seat.

Amid the famous old trees of Bowling Green's Main Street, the Caroline Courthouse with its arcade and keystones lends a Jeffersonian presence to the town. The front lawn of this 1835 Roman Revival gem is also home to two Civil War Trails signs detailing the stories of local residents who lived through this defining moment in American history.

The town of Bowling Green has as its main street Route 301, which today runs from Richmond to Washington, DC, but was once part of the "Old Stage Road," the oldest north-south road in the Colony of Virginia. As colonists began to move away from the coast, the Old Stage Road connected Williamsburg and the plantations along the James River with Virginia's northern frontier.

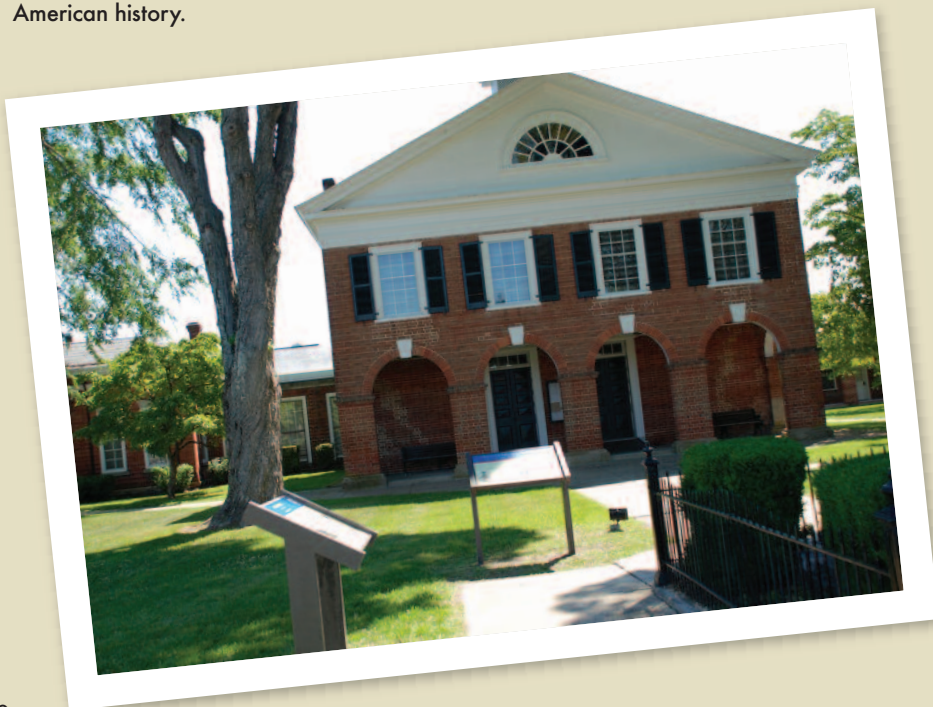
One of those colonists, an adventurer named Major Thomas Hoomes, crossed the

frontier into the land that would one day become Caroline County. In the late 1600s, he was granted land, calling the estate "Bolling Green" after his family seat in England. Despite the fact that he was deemed "foolhardy," Hoomes, one of a handful of military men to brave Indian territory to establish a homestead, prospered. Just north of the manor house, his heirs opened a tavern on the Old Stage Road where it intersected the Tobacco or "Rolling" Road leading to the Rappahannock River in Port Royal. At this intersection, a trading settlement grew that was first called "New Hope."

AN ILLUSTRIOUS PAST

In 1804, a grandson, John Hoomes, donated the land across the street from the tavern for a new courthouse. The town adopted the name Bolling Green and began to call the manor house "Old Mansion." Hoomes had served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1791-1795 and in the Virginia Senate from 1796-1803 and corresponded with Thomas Jefferson on matters of state's rights. Hoomes was a prominent patriot and leaders of the American Revolution frequently stayed at his tavern at the Bolling Green or the manor house. Guests included George Washington, The Marquis de Lafayette, and the Comte de Rochambeau on his way to Yorktown.

The tavern became the focal point of the village, where "drummers," or traveling merchants, set up their wares on Court Day. In fact, an easement dedicating the



AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 1,111

LAND AREA: 1.6 miles square miles

ELEVATION: 220 feet

FOUNDED: 1827

FACTOID: Bowling Green's founder, John Hoomes, imported the first racehorses to the New World and they became the foundation stock of today's Thoroughbred winners. Organized horse races were held at "The Bolling Green" in the late 18th century, giving the town its slogan, "Cradle of American Horse Racing."



1. Across from the courthouse, the surviving wing of New Hope Tavern has been renovated and turned into an attractive complex of suites, complete with courtyard, by local business entrepreneurs Webb & Associates. The building provides quarters for the service members attending the training schools at Fort A.P. Hill. **2.** Kenmare, an example of the vintage architecture represented in town, is home to one of Bowling Green's famous resident ghosts, Mattye Chandler. **3.** On Main Street, Bowling Green's "Walkabout" maps out points of interest around town. Just in front of the "Walkabout" is the marker commemorating the town's place as a National Historic District.

lawn of the tavern to the public has conveyed through the centuries. Old Mansion has been described as a venerable Pre-Georgian manor house and remains on a lane just off south Main Street. Privately owned, it has been opened down through the years for special events.

Notwithstanding its illustrious but traditional founding, Bowling Green has a rather unique and unusual narrative going forward. History shows that although a large percentage of men from Caroline did not return from the Civil War, many of those who did made their home in Bowling Green. So while other towns were strug-

gling during Reconstruction, Bowling Green enjoyed a revival as the men who survived the war returned, married and built churches, businesses and institutions of learning.

TWISTS OF FATE

A few generations later, in another twist of fate in 1941, a third of Caroline County was taken by the federal government and hundreds of families were relocated to make room for Fort A.P. Hill. The town was rocketed from the effects of the Depression and boomed, taking full advantage of the arrival of such training divisions as General George S. Patton's troops.

In an even stranger twist of fate, the town's business district was twice destroyed by fires starting at the same location, exactly 55 years to the day on Easter Sunday, respectively in 1900 and 1955. Each time the town rose from the ashes immediately, rebuilding itself with rapid determination. The business district today reflects the brick-and-glass look contemporary at the time of the last fire in 1955.

Here and there, however, a touch of older architecture survives in the district. The Classical Revival old Bank Building (now a florist), was once home to Union First Market Bank, which was founded



1. Nationwide Insurance has been a fixture on Main Street for over five decades and is a gathering spot for residents. Dale Ballew (standing, left) works for the town and is pictured here with retired Caroline County Sheriff Ottie Moore, Nationwide Insurance Manager and Agent Alice Farmer, and Town Councilman Otis Wright. Seated (l-r) are longtime customers Ann Baylor, Linda Grey and business founder, Mrs. Robert W. (Lois) Farmer, Jr. **2.** Caroline Cleaners' owner Allen Brown offers pick-up and delivery service. **3.** Tom and Emily Swoap head for the local Farmer's Market. Tom served on the Town Council and Planning Commission and is the town's oldest living male resident. **4.** Mark Mallin helps sell homemade breads and plants at Bowling Green's popular Farmer's Market, a concept he helped bring to fruition. Cheryl English of English Acres Nursery is also a regular market vendor. **5.** Davis Farmer (left) of D&J Meats has become quite famous in the catering world for custom preparations. **6.** Jason Satterwhite serves on the Bowling Green Town Council. He, his wife Brooke and son Leyton live in one of the new subdivisions, Bowling Green Meadows. **7.** Hunter Rothwell, Mary Motley, Mark Bissoon, and Manager Jared Hageman of A&M Hardware are famous for the best old-fashioned customer service in the town.

here in 1903, and is still headquartered in Bowling Green. The town's residential districts are an incredible mix of vernacular cottages, like the Molly Todd House, dating from the early 1800s, to the rambling Victorian style reflected in the fully restored Kenmare. Bowling Green enjoys National Historic District status and there are 169 designated structures.

Over the years, the town has been described as small and quiet, with men still gathering on the street to talk about the weather, crops and politics. Look closer, however, and you will find history repeating itself with new businesses arising despite economic challenges. Three new antique/art shops have opened in the business district in the past several years, and a Town Art Commission has formed and regularly develops professionally run shows. The business community has become a mix of the old and the new. Flower Fashions, the florist that found a home in the old Bank Building, has a 40-year history in Bowling Green, and Alice Farmer knows her customers well after 39 years with Nationwide Insurance, a business located in Bowling Green for over five decades. There are a number of wonderful eateries within the corporate limits, featuring home-style cooking and a wide variety of finely crafted homemade desserts.

The local hardware store is a great example of how a business can adapt to changing times. First located in one of 11 buildings to survive both fires on the corner of Milford Street, Borkey Hardware, founded in 1944, became A&M Hardware in 1976. Today, in a new location on Main Street, manager Jared Hageman utilizes all of the latest tools to bring in customers, including Facebook and a website.

MULTI-TASKING RESIDENTS

In typical small town-fashion, the residents and business folks wear multiple hats. Mark Bissoon, for example, works in the hardware store but also spends much of his time at his own business, American All Star Realty, located in part of the surviving wing of the old Tavern building. The balance of the building has been renovated into a modern Inn to house military trainees from Ft. A.P. Hill. Bissoon, commenting on the local real estate market says, "The one thing that never seems to change is the desire to have a home in Bowling Green. I used to hear all those 'Accidental Tourist' stories of the people who were just passing through and were struck by the beauty of the town and bought a home either that very day or in the months to come. It really is true, even a

modern home in the relatively new subdivision of Bowling Green Meadows is a much-sought-after commodity.”

Local business owner Cheryl English of English Acres Nursery also plans special events for the town, such as a shopping extravaganza called “Ladies Night Out,” held in November. This year, she introduced a brand-new event called “Mayberry Days,” held in the spring, which included Aunt Bee’s Pie Contest. English is also a regular at Bowling Green’s Farmer’s Market, held every Saturday from April through October. The Farmer’s Market was the brainchild of former Town Council member, Mark Mallin. The market features everything from fresh produce to canned goods to high-end crafts to homemade breads to plants of every variety. A recently passed golf-cart ordinance allows residents to move around town at a bit slower pace.

THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The proactive business community extends north of Main Street to the shopping centers. D&J Meats is located in Bowling Green Plaza and offers everything from high-end catering to barbecue and a ready selection of fresh seafood and Boar’s Head meats. Stone Creek antique owner Susan Durrett says, “I think the word is getting out. We look like Mayberry but we have some very vibrant business happening here. In town you will find an expert tailor, beading and art classes, and can buy everything from handbags to clothing, as well as the jewelry and antiques.”

The town is governed by a mayor and seven-member Town Council. The council recently gave the go-ahead to the building of a new park for children, which is scheduled to be open this summer on property located adjacent to Town Hall. In a recent bold move the Town formed and created a utility district on the annexed Route 301 corridor and made the major step after paying off its original utility debt of adding water and sewer to prime businesses properties in the newer area. The project will be completed this year.

If history repeats itself, Bowling Green will grow in a time of adversity when other communities are pulling in their belts. Town Councilman and member of the Town’s Economic Development Committee Dan Webb says, “We worked long and hard on this project, making sure that we obtained the very best deal we could and with a repayment plan that makes sense and not only grows the town but brings us revenue in the long run. Bowling Green can be America’s very best small town and still continue to grow.” ■

IF YOU GO...

Plan to walk the paths of history in one of Virginia’s most charming towns.

There are eight Bowling Greens in the United States, all drawing their name from this small community, but residents think this is the very best one. Townsfolk enjoy having visitors admire the well-kept lawns and avenues of old trees. Once called “New Hope,” the town incorporated in 1837 and here one can find every style of architecture from Gothic Revival to Italianate to high-styled Victorian. The town kicked off “The Walkabout” several years ago, complete with marked routes, distances and walking paths on an oversized sign in the yard of what was once **New Hope Tavern**.

You may choose to start your journey on the east side of Main Street in front of the **Courthouse**, designed by students of Thomas Jefferson and fully restored in 1976. Open for special occasions, the interior features an English-style jury box and what most first-time visitors describe as a “surreal” portrait gallery. It includes original, classical oil portraits of the founding fathers; Edmund Pendleton, first acting governor of Virginia; Gen. William Woodford, hero of the Battle of Great Bridge; George Washington, and many more. The gem in the collection is the original English coronation portrait of Queen Caroline. England has the copy. The exterior of the Courthouse strongly reflects the pavilions of Mr. Jefferson’s University.

The complex also includes a **Pauley Jail**, built in 1900 and one of only three left in the United States. Toward the front of the complex, there are two markers that are part of the most successful tourism program in America, **Civil War Trails**. Both signs commemorate the events toward the close of the war as Grant pushed Lee closer to Richmond, and one figures significantly into the events of the assassination of President Lincoln.

The sign facing Courthouse Lane looks toward the property where once stood the infamous **Star Hotel**, haven for Confederate spies and where Willie Jett was awakened by the Union posse in pursuit of John Wilkes Booth. Also of interest is a large mural in a glass case by the late National Park Service artist, Sidney King, depicting the Union occupation of Bowling Green in 1864. The mural also shows the buildings that still stand today and that survived both devastating town fires in 1900 and 1955.

Across from the complex on Courthouse Lane, located on what was known as “Lawyer’s Row” after the Civil War, is the **Caroline Museum and Cultural Center**. Open by appointment and for special events, the museum has recently had the good fortune to obtain an important loan of never-before-seen materials. They’re part of an archeology dig from a property closely associated with **Old Mansion** and shed new light on the founding of the town of Bowling Green. The dig was conducted by students of historic preservation from the University of Mary Washington on “Oakridge,” home of the daughter of Bowling Green’s founder, John Hoomes. Research shows that Sophia Hoomes



The Pumpkin Painting Contest is a beloved tradition at Bowling Green’s annual Harvest Festival.



Owner John Bissoon (second from left) offers an array of homemade desserts at John’s Place.



Stone Creek Antiques owners Dean and Susan Durrett display their new line of handbags.



Proprietor Ruth Limberick (center) of Flower Fashions offers custom-designed arrangements.

was instrumental in founding the business district and Main Street of Bowling Green. The artifacts will be on display in the late autumn of 2012.

While on your downtown tour, **Old Courthouse Cafe** (also open for breakfast) and **Jack’s Cafe** on Main Street offer home-cooked meals.

For more information, contact the **Bowling Green Town Hall**, 117 Butler Street in Bowling Green, 804-633-9084; or visit: www.TownofBowlingGreen.com. ■