

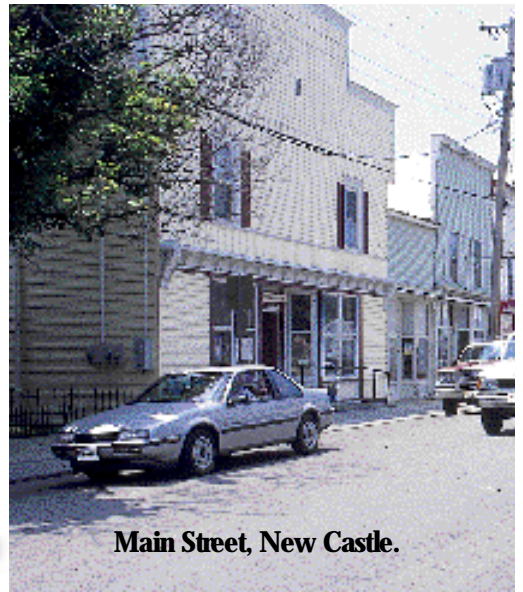
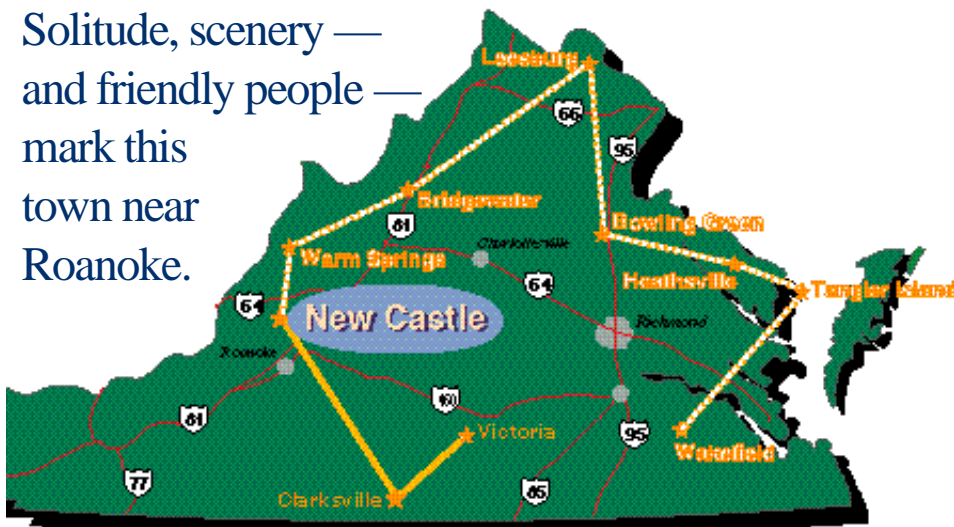
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Robert Grossman, Feature Writer

During 1997, 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 tour's third stop, we'll be...

Down Home in *New Castle*

Solitude, scenery —
and friendly people —
mark this
town near
Roanoke.



Main Street, New Castle.



Tucked away in a scenic basket of mountains, the town of New Castle is known for its relaxed lifestyle. Resident Charles Cole, pulling on the lanyard of a lawnmower, observes “It’s a slow life down here.” The mower, reluctant to start, is put away and a back-up is rolled out. It starts promptly.

“That’s the lifestyle most anybody would want to retire to,” says Cole, who himself retired at age 42 and moved to New Castle’s Main Street. “If you want a faster life, you can head about 20 miles down the road to Roanoke.”

At noon, a siren heralds the arrival of lunchtime in town; country music drifts from a passing pickup truck’s radio: these sounds of a small town’s daily life

are enveloped by distant vistas of stunningly beautiful, softly rolling mountains.

Farther down Main Street, Craig Botetourt Electric Cooperative member-consumer Charles Lynn Barnes digs holes to place plants, and talks about his preference for the agricultural community. The rural flavor and sense of community make a difference, explains Barnes, a farmer and landscaper. “It’s kind of isolated, which is a plus, yet it still has proximity to metropolitan areas,” he says.

We’re All in This Together

Incorporated in 1911, New Castle is the county seat of Craig County. Some say the town is named after a town in England; others say it was originally

named “New Fincastle,” after Fincastle, the county seat of Botetourt County, from which Craig County was formed. The “Fin” was dropped to render New “Castle,” because of mail-delivery difficulties born of postal confusion.

With a population of about 200, New Castle is one of the smaller incorporated towns in the Old Dominion. Small, but friendly and supportive. Helping each other plays a key role in New Castle, says Barnes. He tells the story of an out-of-state woman whose truck got stuck in a culvert, and her unabashed gratitude when helped out by two unfamiliar but friendly New Castle residents.

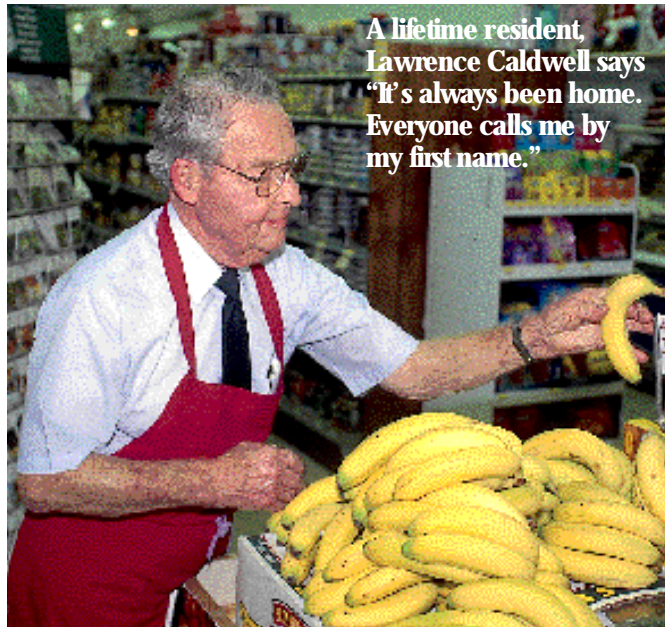
And that’s the way it is in New Castle, where people passing on the road



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Charles Cole retired at age 42 and moved to New Castle's Main Street.



A lifetime resident, Lawrence Caldwell says "It's always been home. Everyone calls me by my first name."

ROBERT GROSSMAN PHOTOS

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1900s from iron mining, explains Bostic.

"Iron mining, the timber industry, and spas were the only money-making ventures that brought people to the area," says the Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative member. "The solitude and the National Forests bring people here now." The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests contain vast wilderness areas where deer, bear, turkey and a wide array of other wildlife roam. And the scenery, from the breathtaking mountain vistas to the quaint 18th-century architecture of the town's business district, remains a strong lure for those tired of city life.

Health Is Wealth

The Craig County Health Department provides a broad range of services, including clinic services for maternity patients, family planning, child health, and immunizations.

"Our focus is on trying to get the numbers down with teenage pregnancy as well as low birth-weight babies," says office manager and Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative member Nancy Surface.

The Health Department looks at trends within the community to help make positive lifestyle changes. Cardiovascular problems and tobacco

are likely to salute you with a smile and a wave of the hand.

P.J. Medley is a volunteer firefighter for the Craig County-New Castle Volunteer Fire Department. His father, Wendall, is a groundsman for Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative. Commenting on his service as a volunteer firefighter, P.J. notes, "One reason I do it is for a hobby. Another is to let people know we're here when they need us."

"You try to help people when you can," adds resident Michelle St. Clair. "That's how I was raised."

County Treasurer Sandra Reynolds says when her son was growing up, she packed his lunch and gave him a fishing pole. She didn't see him again until

dark. "It's a place where you can let your kids run loose and not worry about them," she says.

Lawrence Caldwell, owner of Lawrence's Bestway, a grocery store, has lived in New Castle all his life. "I like the quiet and the people," says Caldwell. "It's always been home. Everyone calls me by my first name."

The Farmers & Merchants Bank of Craig County is one of the smallest banks in the state, a distinction the bank wishes to keep.

Jack Bostic, the bank's executive vice president, describes the town as being "in a corner that's off the beaten path." New Castle experienced a population surge in the late 1800s to early

usage, including smokeless tobacco, are issues that have been addressed.

“Education is very important,” says public health nurse and Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative member Pat Johnston. “That’s the most important thing we do, so the public will know about a problem before it occurs.”

The Health Department is involved in every facet of the community’s health. Moreover, it works closely with Dr. William Andersen, an osteopathic physician. He’s the only doctor in town and sole health care provider for the county.

“It’s wonderful,” says Andersen of his practice. “East of the Mississippi it’s probably as close as you can get to a country doctor practice.”

The country doctor and glider pilot receives his fair share of vegetables, cakes, pies and bread. “I draw the line at chickens,” he says.

Andersen and others in New Castle and Craig County seem to like their home just the way it is: quiet, relaxed and friendly. ■