

# 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 fourth stop, we'll be...***

## Down Home in *Warm Springs*

The people are as warm as the thermal waters in this tiny village in the Allegheny Highlands.



A magazine article in 1838 described visiting Warm Springs as “the luxury of traveling in a most delightful county, a sojourn in a pleasant valley, unsurpassed in loveliness.”



“You live with the whole community,” says Jeannette Robinson, branch librarian for the Bath County Public Library.

It's just before 9 a.m. in Warm Springs, named for the warm pools of mineral water known for their soothing qualities. Springs and two rivers — the Jackson and Cowpasture — initially attracted folks to the area. People started settling in Warm Springs back in 1745.

The grass glistens with dew and birds chirp with delight in the county seat for Bath County. The occasional car climbs Courthouse Hill.

At 9 o'clock the bell in the courthouse tower rings. The chirping continues.

The temperature rises as BARC Electric Cooperative member-consumer Mary Hodges dons her overalls and boots and goes to work in her yard.

Two beagles, Zippy and Maggie, keep a watchful eye on things. Her husband Ryan and two children, Cabell and Will, round out the family mix.

Mary runs a gourmet food delivery service, The Rolling Scones, following a stint as a Montessori teacher in Atlanta. Ryan is part-owner of a real estate and insurance business in Warm Springs, which was called Germantown until 1918.

“We came here to escape the city and get back to Virginia,” says Mary, whose main hobby is gardening. “We missed our families.”

Cabell and Will can walk to their grandparents' home, their father's office, or the library. Since the children know everyone in the neighborhood, there's

never been any fear of something happening to them, explains Mary. In fact, the neighbors and others in town take an active part in raising Cabell and Will.

“They know you and care about you,” she says.

### Many Kinds of “Neighbors”

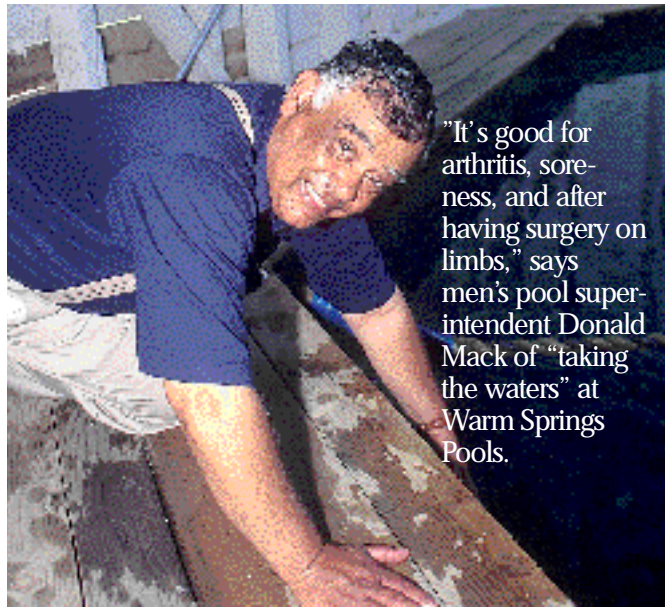
Mary reels off a list of “neighbors” who make the Warm Springs area their home. Deer, wild turkey, foxes, bears, great-horned owls, red-tailed hawks, and a variety of birds bask in the great outdoors. There have even been reports of bobcats.

“We just got back from Italy and I still looked forward to getting home,” says Mary as a group of hawks circles overhead.





Mary Hodges admits she likes getting a "city fix." At the same time, she says she always feels relieved upon returning home.



"It's good for arthritis, soreness, and after having surgery on limbs," says men's pool superintendent Donald Mack of "taking the waters" at Warm Springs Pools.

ROBERT GROSSMAN PHOTOS

Warm Springs has been home for BARC Electric Cooperative member-consumer Hugh Gwin since 1966. Gwin, born and raised in Bath County, lives with his wife Evelyn and a bulldog named Mugzy. Flowers grace the front yard of their home. A stream bubbles past as well.

"Lots of visitors come by," says Gwin, who enjoys the air and mountain scenery. "It's never boring living in Warm Springs."

It might be boring for those working in law enforcement, though, if they like chasing down criminals. The town is quiet. The Bath County Sheriff's Office is no different.

"We don't get many calls for service in Warm Springs," says dispatcher

Dorothy Ratcliff.

A steady stream of patrons keeps the Warm Springs Post Office busy much of the time. Selling stamps and money orders is the impetus for that, explains postmaster relief Ginger Williamson. Some mail is delivered. Most of it is not.

"It's no problem" to pick up mail, says Wendy Pritt, a BARC Electric Cooperative member-consumer. "I've done it for years."

Over at the Bath County Public Library, branch librarian Jeannette Robinson says overdue books are not a major problem, because they're usually returned. Theft is also not a concern.

"Our theft is so rare compared to cities that it wouldn't be cost-effective to put in a security system," says Robinson.

"It's never boring living in Warm Springs," says BARC Electric Co-op member Hugh Gwin. His wife Evelyn joins him for some yardwork.

Robinson, who grew up in a New Jersey city, says the atmosphere of connectedness in Warm Springs extends to the kids.

And they connect with the library. Will Trimble sits in front of a computer playing Treasure Mountain. He and his sister Carey agree that computer games are their favorite library activity. All computer games at the library involve learning. Robinson says she gets to watch kids grow up coming to the library. "You live with the whole community," she says.

The community includes Anderson Cottage, one of the oldest buildings in Bath County. The bed-and-breakfast on Old Germantown Road is owned by Jean Randolph Bruns. The building has been in her family since the 1870's.

Most guests are from regional points such as Richmond, Roanoke, Charlottesville, and Washington, D.C., explains Bruns. Travelers from Japan, Germany, England, and Scotland have also made the guest list.

"With people so busy these days, it's a real pleasure to slow them down," says Bruns, a BARC Electric Cooperative member. "Breakfast conversation can go on and on."

### Time to "Take the Waters"

Silence pervades the men's bath house of Warm Springs Pools as 65,000

gallons of water come up from the spring each hour. The water, which contains sulphur, iron, bicarbonate, and chloride, stays between 96 and 98 degrees year-round.

"It's good for arthritis, soreness, and after having surgery on limbs," says men's pool superintendent Donald Mack.

The pools, owned by The Homestead Hotel in Hot Springs, are open from around the first of April to the end of October. They close for the winter because the buildings are unheated.

Thomas Jefferson designed the men's pool building and used to ride his horse from Charlottesville to enjoy the pool. Mrs. Robert E. Lee, a rheumatoid arthritis victim, "took the waters" before the Civil War.

Warm Springs Pools have a long history: The men's pool first started in 1761, and the women's pool opened in 1838.

That same year, an article in the *Southern Literary Messenger* described a visit to Warm Springs as "the luxury of traveling in a most delightful county, a sojourn in a pleasant valley, unsurpassed in loveliness." ■

*If You Go...* **B**y all means, be sure to allow several days, to enjoy both Warm Springs itself, and the rest of Bath County as well.

**The Bath County Historical Society**, located next to the courthouse in Warm Springs, offers up tidbits such as Bath County artifacts and genealogy books. Admission is free and it's open Monday through Friday.

**The Warm Springs Pools** give you an opportunity to relax. You may also get some help in easing your aches and pains. The pools are located on Rt. 220 north of Warm Springs.

If you're a chamber music fan, the **Garth Newel Music Center** on Rt. 220 midway between Warm Springs and Hot Springs is the place to go. Concerts are held on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from July 4 through Labor Day.

Camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, and trailer space await you at **Blowing Springs**. The area lies west of Warm Springs on Rt. 39.

**Hidden Valley** is also located west of town. The attraction on the Jackson River has a 30-unit campground and a pre-Civil War plantation house, Warwickton, site of the movie, "Sommersby." The house is listed with the National Register of Historic Homes.

**Douthat State Park** is Virginia's oldest state park. Located on the Bath-Alleghany line, it features a beach, a bathhouse, boating facilities, fishing, hiking, a restaurant, and a lodge. The park has a campground and cabins for rent.

For more information, call the Bath County Chamber of Commerce at (540) 839-5409. ■