

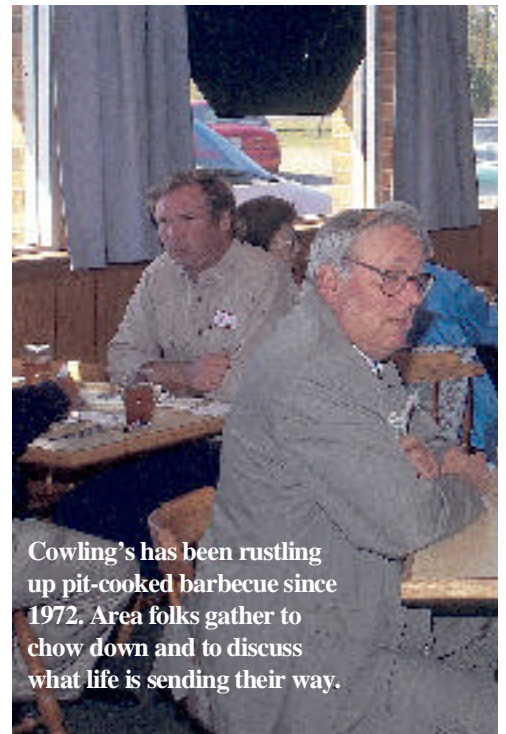
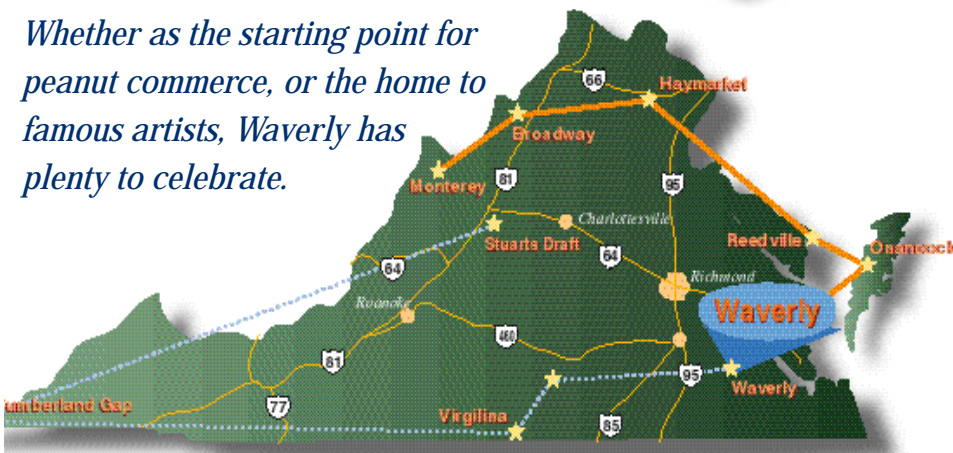
## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Robert Grossman,  
Contributing Writer

*During 1998, 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, our sixth stop, we'll be...*

# Down Home in Waverly

*Whether as the starting point for peanut commerce, or the home to famous artists, Waverly has plenty to celebrate.*



Cowling's has been rustling up pit-cooked barbecue since 1972. Area folks gather to chow down and to discuss what life is sending their way.

The lunch hour approaches in Waverly. Traffic cruises down Main Street. There are places to go, and people to see, as the saying goes. No one appears to be in too much of a rush, though. The pace is decidedly unhurried.

Then, off in the distance, a train whistles its approach. Before long, a Norfolk and Southern freight train barrels through, headed for its next destination.

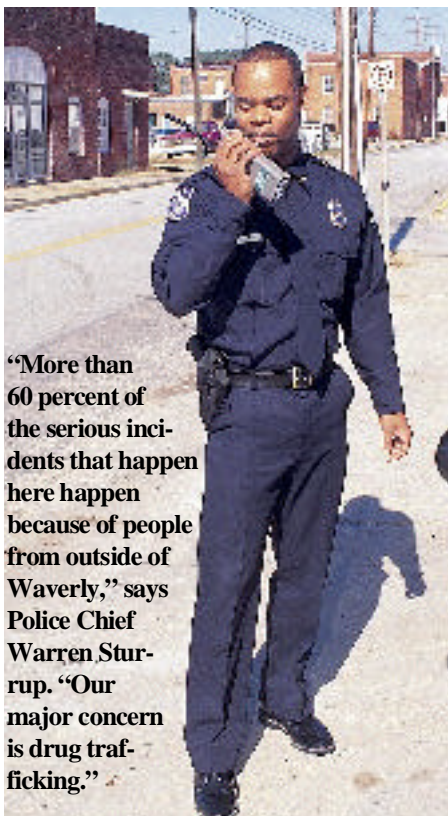
Waverly, named after Sir Walter Scott's romantic novels, owes its growth to the railroad. The Petersburg and Norfolk Railroad began laying track in 1851. Work was completed by 1858, resulting in rail stations that linked Waverly, Disputanta, Wakefield, Ivor, Zuni, and Windsor.

Two small villages near Waverly's present location provided the impetus for the town's start. One was Blackwater, named after a nearby river. The other was Coppahaunk Spring, situated to the south.

The town was incorporated in 1879 and operates under a charter granted by the 1926 General Assembly. The population is 2,223, according to the 1990 Census.

Waverly has shown reasonable growth, explains **Mayor William Hartz**, in office for nearly 28 years. In 1975 the town had an annexation that tripled its land area from one square mile to three square miles.

"I believe we've done a good job over the past two decades attracting business, commercial, industrial, as well as residential growth and development," he says.



"More than 60 percent of the serious incidents that happen here happen because of people from outside of Waverly," says Police Chief Warren Sturup. "Our major concern is drug trafficking."

ROBERT GROSSMAN PHOTOS



"Peanuts get in your blood," says L.L. "Cat" Pope (above), supervisor of Hancock Peanut Company's buying point in Waverly.





**“I believe we’ve done a good job over the past two decades attracting...growth and development,” says Mayor William Hartz.**



**Shirley Yancey, curator of the Miles B. Carpenter Museum Complex, sits next to a carving by Carpenter, who gained nationwide fame as a folk artist.**

Forestry, agriculture, commerce, and light industry drive Waverly’s economy. As for agriculture, the farming scene is comprised of corn, soybeans, sweet potatoes, cotton, tobacco, and peanuts. In fact, the first commercially grown crop of peanuts in the U.S. was harvested just east of town about 150 years ago.

Sussex County is one of eight peanut-producing counties in Virginia, explains **L.L. “Cat” Pope**, supervisor of Hancock Peanut Company’s buying point in Waverly. Other buying points are Greenville, Southampton, Surry, Dinwiddie, Prince George, Isle of Wight, and Suffolk.

Pope munches on peanuts as he recounts their storied yesteryear, a time when mules were used. He started in the business in 1942 and has been involved full-time since 1957.

“Peanuts get in your blood,” says Pope. “Once a peanut man, always a peanut man.”

Over at Waverly Hardwoods, meanwhile, the emphasis is on buying logs and turning them into hardwood for the flooring and furniture industries. The company manufactures about 10 million board-feet of lumber yearly.

Red oak, white oak, poplar, maple, and ash are the main types of lumber. Logs are

culled from a 100-mile radius, with 20 percent of the logs coming from the Waverly area, explains general manager **Gordon Kendrick**.

“Waverly has always been supportive of the timber industry in the area,” he says.

Miles B. Carpenter (1889-1985) opened a planing mill and a sawmill in 1912. He eventually turned to whittling figures and gained nationwide fame as a folk artist. His legacy lives on at the Miles B. Carpenter Museum Complex, which consists of the Folk Art Museum, the First Peanut Museum in the U.S.A., and the Wood Products Museum.

Carpenter used to drive around town in a 1951 Chevy with a woodcarving of a woman in the passenger’s seat. At first glance people thought she was real.

“I finally named her Lena Wood, she being lean and made of wood,” wrote Carpenter in his book, *Cutting the Mustard*.

**Pat Branch**, a museum volunteer, stops by with burlap bags she made for the peanut museum. Curator **Shirley Yancey** compliments her on a job well done. Yancey, a Prince George Electric Cooperative member-consumer, also has words of praise for Waverly.

**“We love the people,”** says **Mary Van Brown**, who moved to Waverly from Surry with her husband, Kelley, and her two daughters, Morgan and Heather. **“They’re very friendly.”**



"I have stayed here at my own choosing because I feel the town has a lot to offer," she says.

Waverly offered actress Shirley MacLaine a home during her early childhood. *Waverly: The First One Hundred Years*, by Kenneth Coker, shows a photo of Waverly High School faculty at a summer outing in 1935. Principal Ira Beatty is in the foreground, holding his daughter. Those who visit the town ask about her.

"It's been interesting, because people have an interest in our community," says Yancey. "We enjoy sharing our community with others."

That sharing doesn't apply to everyone, of course. Police Chief **Warren Sturupp** puts the crime stats into perspective.

"More than 60 percent of the serious incidents that happen here happen because of people from outside of Waverly," he says. "Our major concern is drug trafficking."

Sturupp believes in community policing, in which citizens, businesses, churches, and civic organizations are involved in fighting crime.

In addition to peanuts and Miles Carpenter, Waverly is also known for its hearty portions of down-home food. The Tavern is a popular spot. In addition, just east of the town limits on Rt. 460 sits Cowling's, where they've been rustling up pit-cooked barbecue since 1972. Steaks, chicken, pork, and homemade pies are also a draw. Area folks gather to chow down and to discuss what life is sending their way.

"Just about everybody here is local," says manager and Prince George Electric Cooperative member **Charles Wilson** of the mid-week lunch crowd. The restaurant gets a lot of its summer traffic from Virginians stopping for a barbecue sandwich on their way to Tidewater or North Carolina's Outer Banks.

### "We Love the People"

**Mary Van Brown** and her husband, **Kelley**, as well as her two daughters, **Morgan** and **Heather**, used to be in the out-of-town category. It's a Waverly life now, though, following a move from Surry.

"We love the people," she says. "They're very friendly."

Says **Larry Malcom**, the town's facilities director: "Life is laid back in Waverly. It's a very quiet, sleepy town. This place reminds me of Mayberry." In this peanut-loving town, "Goober" would no doubt feel right at home. ■

## If You Go...

**M**ake sure to stop at the **Miles B. Carpenter Museum Complex**. A framed schematic shows you significant places to visit, such as the **early childhood home of Shirley MacLaine**, the **station for the narrow gauge Southern Railroad (circa 1886)**, and the **plantation (circa 1842) on which Dr. Matthew Harris grew the first commercial peanut crop**.

Waverly spotlights the homes of three State senators, **W.O. Rogers** (Mayor Hartz's grandfather), **Garland Gray**, and **Elmon Gray**. The same applies to the home (circa 1869) of **Purnell Fleetwood**, considered the "founding father" of Waverly because of his impact on early economic development.

The museum sponsors the **7th annual Peanut Harvest Time**, set for Saturday, November 7, 1998. The event runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine.

Demonstrations include peanut picking and thrashing, cider pressing, as well as shucking and shelling corn. Peanut butter sculpture, peanut butter bird feeders, and clowns offering face painting and balloons are part of the event's activities.

The **Folk Art Festival**, held on the second Saturday in May, features folk art along with woodcarvings and whirlygigs made by Miles B. Carpenter. The event is held on Miles B. Carpenter Day.

On the **fourth of July** the museum sponsors an **all-American celebration** with music, games, and food.

The museum also holds **art classes** and **writing workshops** for ages 10-16 from mid-June to mid-August.

The museum complex is open from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. Call (804) 834-2969 after 11 a.m. or (804) 834-2151 for reservations.

For more information about **Waverly**, call the town office at (804) 834-2866. ■