4-2-1960

A Persuasive Picture of Picturesque Polk

Bill Sharpe

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/fay-webb-gardner-desk-contents

Recommended Citation
Persuasive Picture of Picturesque Polk

New citizens, coming from all over the world, declare there is no place on earth quite like it.

By BILL SHARPE

Lotus eaters of the 20th century were the first to herald the news that the southern slope of the Blue Ridge was an exceptionally fine place for living. The very first settlers knew it, too, but while they happily put their roots down in this soil, they had not thought of communicating their discovery to others.

Well-Kept Secret

That is why Polk County's secret was kept so well and without effort or design. While it was still a part of Mecklenburg, settlers came in, nudging their farmlands right against the Indian boundary so closely that Royal Governor Tryon himself came to the area to parley with the Cherokees and establish a line. The expedition led to naming for him both a mountain and later the new county of Tryon, formed in 1768 from Mecklenburg.

Already, traders were coming up the old Blackstock Road from Charleston to trade the Indians out of their furs and hides. The trail ran to the Block House on the state line just below the site of the present town of Tryon. Settlers later used the same path in entering the county, and the Block House survives as the site of modern horse events.

But neither the county nor the peace its name celebrated lasted long. In 1776, General Joseph McDowell was defeated by the British at Earle's Fort, forcing his withdrawal to Gilbertown in Rutherford. The Cherokees were emboldened by this success to join with Tories in bloody raids on frontier farms.

A company of militia under Captain Thomas Howard finally ended these massacres. An Indian guide named Skyuka showed Thomas a secret pass over the Blue Ridge, and by following this route, the militiamen surprised the Indians from the rear at Round Mountain, driving them back toward the Smokies. The battle site today is known as Warrior's Gap, the secret pass is Howard's Gap, and the Indian who betrayed his people is remembered in the naming of Skyuka Creek which flows into the North Pacolet River near Mimosa Inn.

Tryon County was abolished in
and until 1840 North Carolina was the nation's principal source for this metal. What is now Polk was well prospected. Little productive mining was done there, but the gold rush brought settlers.

In 1846, the legislature created Polk, a small county from Henderson and Rutherford, but a squabble developed over location of the courthouse, and the General Assembly was so disgusted that in 1849 it repealed the act creating the county. After litigation over this repealing act, the General Assembly in 1855 repealed the repealer and once more Polk was set up in business, with Columbus fixed as the courthouse site. It is the only instance in North Carolina history of a county being erected twice.

The new county was a small one, totaling only 237 square miles. All of it lay on the southern slopes of the Blue Ridge, the county's northern boundary following the crest of that range. It had some of the characteristics of both Mountain and Piedmont regions, an oddity later exploited with establishment of Saluda as a summer resort, while 8 miles away Tryon flourishes as a winter resort. Elevations ranged from 750 feet in the south to 3,238 in the northwest. Then as now the terrain was pleasingly varied. The Blue Ridge sends long shoulders southward to the lower lands; rolling foothills break up the occasional flatlands and river plains.

The climate is salubrious, and the water trapped in the forested Blue Ridges is slowly released to stream over the county in dependable rivers and creeks. The Pacolet and Green rivers drain the county, the latter feeding beautiful Lake Adger, a Duke Power project used for recreation.

Thousands of springs gush from the slopes, and even the most realistic pion- eers paused to admire the waterfalls, numerous and sometimes spectacular, such as Pearson's and Melrose. On the side of White Oak Mountain, a stream rushes down the precipice in two mighty leaps, and the water seems to pour over the very rim of the mountain, apparently pushed up there by artesian pressure. When a well was drilled for the Central High School near Mill Spring, water was struck at 138 feet and astonished the drillers by producing 40 gallons of water a minute around the clock — pure and so cold it almost chatters the teeth.

Flora
Such benign physical characteristics stimulate the co-operation of nature. It has been said that Polk has a larger variety of plant life than any other county in the state. Flowering shrubs beautify the landscape.

Thermal Belts
To all this Providence added a novel bonus — the thermal or iso-thermal belts. Earliest settlers noticed these areas — some large, some small — of frost-free lands, and took advantage of them in their plantings. But they had neither understanding nor name for them. One especially warm cove was explained by a superstition. Here a family was burned at the stake by marauding Cherokee, and the diabolic heat of that outrage has never died, said the legend. However, scientific studies begun in 1861 by Silas McDowell of Macon County have resulted in a large volume of specific data.

Perhaps in no other county in North Carolina has the weather so shaped development. Early farmers planted the traditional cotton and grain crops along the river bottoms and creek bottoms, but diversity reduced their importance. Agriculture has been more and more altered to take advantage of the variety of growing conditions — terrain, soil, climate — and few places offer farmers so many choices.

Agriculture
It may surprise some readers to learn that Tryon grapes are more important in romance than in economy. Of the $2,138,592 farm income in 1958, grapes accounted for only $12,000. The same is true of the well-known Saluda apples, which brought only $105,000.

A crop rarely associated with Polk (in the popular mind) actually was a leading income producer. The county harvested 149,000 bushels of peaches in 1958 and for them received $211,500. Cotton planting, once totaling 8,500 acres, was reduced to about 250 acres. But milk brought $495,110, eggs $348,000 and beef cattle $97,750. In addition to these products, Polk commercializes wheat, corn, sweet corn, tomatoes, snap beans, peppers, lima beans, cucumbers, watermelons,
A PERSUASIVE PICTURE

(Continued from page 12)

strawberries, cabbages and lettuce. There are 997 farms.

Civil War

Meantime, the twice-born little county organized around the courthouse at Columbus was still an infant when the Civil War struck.

Polk sent 303 men to the confederacy, and while no battles were fought in the county, Stoneham's raiders pillaged and it was plagued by bushwhackers and deserters. There was division of sentiment, and just before the war abolitionists set up "stations" for the "Underground Railroad." Robbery and murder occurred, and a Ku Klux Klan was active. Disorders continued for a decade, and the new county was set back in the years when it should have been growing.

Rails Bring Growth

Not until the railway came did the section begin to revive. The rails, coming from Spartanburg, reached Tryon in 1877, and the painful construction to the top of the Blue Ridge began. Money ran out, and the state permitted the use of convict labor to speed the work. It was the first time prisoners had been used in this way, and casualties were so high that a legislative investigation was made of the situation.

The line reached Hendersonville in 1879 amid much jubilation. Apparently, the railway company was so exhausted by the ordeal that it decided to rest awhile. Buncombe County had put $100,000 into the kitty and insisted, without avail, that the line be continued on to Asheville.

At last, Richmond Pearson introduced a bill in the General Assembly to forfeit the railway's charter. Before the bill was read a second time, work was resumed, and in 1885 the line was completed, fulfilling a dream of 50 years. The line later was leased to the Southern Railway for 99 years and is now a part of that company's system. The most spectacular thing about it, of course, is the record-breaking grade down the mountain from Saluda to Tryon — the steepest of any standard gauge in the east, or so it is said.

The modern era really began when more articulate settlers arrived. The first of these self-appointed press agents cannot be identified, but he probably came on the railroad along with less purposeful vacationists. Rail travelers from the lowlands discovered that at Pace's Gap they first and most conveniently encountered cool altitudes. Here the summer resort town of Saluda sprang up right on the crest of the Blue Ridges. It was an old route through the mountains, and was being used by wagons as early as 1793.

Later over this same route had come the horde of livestock driven from Kentucky and Tennessee to the cotton plantation country. Polk had shared in the boom created by demand of drovers for feed for their cattle.

Publicity for County

Before long — in the 1880's — newspaper and magazine articles about the "ozone" of Saluda, the thermal belts of Tryon, the scenery and the goodly soil began to appear. One of the volunteer salesman was a politician, William D. Hill, who in a fulsome speech declared that he had spent six months in Polk County and his stay "has convinced me that the half
COME TO COLUMBUS
The County Seat of Polk . . . in the Blue Ridge Foothills, Heart of the Famed Thermal Belt . . . A Profitable Site for Industry, Farming, Ranching . . . The Perfect Location for Your Vacation or Retirement Home Site.

- Modern Public Utilities, wide paved streets
- Excellent schools, churches; active civic and social life; medical services
- Up-to-date shops and services. Convenient rail, highway and air transportation
- Good roads, natural gas, plentiful electric power
- Ample supply of dependable labor, proven skills
- Year-around mild climate, wholesome ozone atmosphere
- Fertile soil, long growing season
- Pure mountain water in abundance
- Level sites for cultivation or building, low building costs
- Exceptional recreational advantages, scenic beauty

THE MARKS OF A GROWING TOWN — Columbus is alive, alert, and growing, sparked by a public-minded, hospitable citizenry which is anxious to share its progress with newcomers. Some of the recent evidences of this progress are: two new county buildings completed last year, a new health center and county office building . . . construction of the new county consolidated high school about five miles from Columbus, to cost approximately $384,000.00 . . . two new fire trucks . . . action of the Polk County Recreation Commission to build a swimming pool, picnic facilities, baseball diamond, and other park facilities on a seven-acre site in Columbus . . . installation of modern mercury street lights by Duke Power Company . . . new dial telephone system installed by Thermal Belt Telephone Co. . . . 36 new homes within the town limits, at a value of more than one-half million dollars; and other homes at the town outskirts . . . new church buildings.

DISCOVERING COLUMBUS — Motivating this vigorous growth is the fact that a steadily increasing number of people who are discovering the exceptional — and unique — advantages that a Columbus location affords for living and "making a living." Some of these are summarized above. Columbus affords the complete facilities for convenient modern living usually found only in relatively larger towns, yet citizens here enjoy the genuine friendliness and informality characteristic of small town living. The exceptional climate and the scenic mountains and resort attractions always available to Columbus citizens — including horseback riding, golf, hunting, fishing, boating, swimming, hiking, picnicking — are the exceptional ingredients that provide a "bonus" in good living here. Within a 45 mile radius are such population centers as Asheville, Greenville and Spartanburg.

The advantages of Columbus as an industrial location have been proven by the continued success of existing industries, the principal of which are Hatch Mill and Southern Woven Label Co., who together employ about 500 people. Columbus will welcome other suitable types of industrial development. Complete information and practical assistance will be gladly given in your investigation of this location.

Above all, the people in Columbus are good neighbors, interested and active in their community, working together for a full and pleasant life. Evidences of this are the Little League competition . . . the outstanding Boy Scout troop (4 boys achieved Eagle rank last year) . . . the social life, built around several Civic Clubs, two active garden clubs, a book club, Chamber of Commerce, Jaycees, P.T.A. and Masonic Lodge.

We invite you to visit Columbus; and while you're here, we hope you will consider coming to live with us. Many fine new people have — and are!

ADDRESS INQUIRIES TO

COLUMBUS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MISSILDINE'S PHARMACY
TRYON, N. C.
1896 — 1960

“Whatever mankind does, printing records, aids and abets.”

ELBERT H. ARLEDGE
PRINTER
Printing and Office Supplies
UL 2-2555 TRYON, N. C.

Our 20th Year

DELECTABLE MOUNTAIN-SIDE GRAPES!
From The Heart of North Carolina’s Rich Thermal Belt

Sweet . . . fresh and delicious, grapes of rare excellence. Perfect for your table — or as a gift for host, friends, or business associates. Skillfully gift-packed, shipped anywhere. 5, 8, and 10 lb. packages, $4.45, $5.95 and $6.95. Trial package, $2.85, postpaid.

TRYON GRAPE KETCHUP — the new sauce that adds a piquant, delightful zest to roast lamb, baked ham, cold meats, chops, fowl, and many meats. A wonderful pepper-upper on sandwiches and appetizers. Made from Tryon grapes, skillfully blended with imported spices and other fine ingredients. A wonderfully thoughtful, unusual gift. 10-oz. jar, $1.25, 20-oz. jar, $2.15, postpaid.

DELETED ANYWHERE
IN THE U.S.A.—Postpaid
Address Your Order to
P. O. Box 1177
Tryon, N. C.

VALHALLA HAND WEavers
3 Miles North on Hwy. 176
TRYON, N. C.

GIFT SHOP — MOUNTAIN CRAFTS AND WEAVINGS
Native weavers on the looms, weaving cotton rugs, neckties, homespun material, nylon bags, and nylon place mats.

It is neither South nor North. It is not mountain, piedmont nor plains, either in geography or people, and it is as much a summer place as it is winter. It is mildly agricultural, mildly industrial and commercial. Its contradictory nature is indicated by the fact that it is as often classified with the mountain resort county of Henderson as it is with the Sandhills resort county of Moore, and it is utterly unlike both. It is hospitable both to sedentary retired people and active sportsmen. It is unspectacular without being mediocre.

People in Polk feel and enjoy their identity with a peculiar environment. There is little snobbery in the modest living of these people, native or immigrant, but a part of their contentment is a realization that they are citizens of a distinctive country.
had not been told. . . . Reverently, I have often thought that if the Creator could have made a more delightful climate than that enjoyed by this country, surely He has never done so. . . . Surely, Polk County is a favored land.”

Perhaps through lucky accident, the section early began to attract professional writers who were not loathe to use the section as a subject, not only of published articles but of letters to their friends. For it is a fact that a great deal of the migration to this area has been from word-of-mouth recommendation. One man would bring down his kinsmen, and they would convert a neighbor.

This may be why the new citizens formed such a homogeneous group. Such a pattern of migration naturally brought alikes, and to this day “the same sort of folks” seem to join those already there. Carter Brown, a longtime resident, remarked that this was true even in the immigration of “specialty” groups. For example, in recent years a revived interest in the horse events had induced numerous horse-lovers to buy places in the county. “But they’re not the loud, extravagant horse people,” said Brown. “They are the type who want to get away from the dissipating, hard-living horse set.”

Saluda got a head start on Tryon, which came into existence about 1890 as a spring and fall resort. At first both were primarily vacation places, but after World War I the emphasis began to shift to seasonal cottagers and year-around residents. No new hotels have been built in this generation, but two motels recently were built near Tryon.

This shift brought two new developments — one was the spread of the homeseekers throughout the county; the other was the development of industry. Polk’s population became more stable and with a larger proportion of older citizens. Now, native and convert, the county has 11,627 people.

Industry

The county’s industries lean to the textile side. They include the Hatch Mills and the Southern Label Company at Columbus; Tryon Processing Company, Southern Mercerizing, Adam

Everything You Need For Enjoyable Year-Around Living Is Yours At

White’s Lake

Formerly known as Lake Hosea; two miles west of

SALUDA, NORTH CAROLINA

ON THIS BEAUTIFUL MOUNTAIN LAKE, D. C. White, of D. C. White Homes — who has built over 3,500 homes in St. Petersburg, Florida — has opened a delightful community for year around living. A community of desirable neighbors, with paved streets, electricity, and telephones.

YOU WILL LOVE IT HERE! There are fishing and swimming to your heart’s content; and convenient in the surrounding mountain area are golf, horseback riding, hunting — a full range of recreational opportunity. In the mild climate here, extremes are rare, and you can enjoy outdoor sport the year around. And always there is the quiet, unspoiled beauty of the mountains — a scenic wonderland in every direction. This is the ideal location for your vacation or retirement home.

FIVE NEW HOMES in the price range of $10,500 to $30,000 have just been completed, on beautiful lots surrounding the lake. Most of them are brick, designed and constructed for pleasant living.

BE FIRST AND GET THE BEST!

CALL: Saluda, N. C., Victor 9-2031 or St. Petersburg, Fla., DI 5-9141 Collect.
WRITE: D. C. White Homes, 815 49th Street, North, St. Petersburg, Fla.