

To Gospel Music Sounds

They're Serving Steaks In Dallas Jail

Story &
Photos ByLIB
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The old jail in Dallas is rocking with music these days, gospel music, and the new owners praise the Lord for giving them the building in answer to prayer.

For 129 years, the old jail, which used to be the Gaston County Jail before the county seat was moved to Gastonia in 1911, has been a landmark of Dallas and many stories from old-timers in the area recount how a scaffold was constructed in the back yard and a resident sentenced to the hangman's noose for murder but was granted a new trial and went to prison. Another tells how the prisoners tore up some sheets and came climbing down the outside wall from their cell blocks on the third floor only to be met on the lower level by the Deputy's wife who marched them all back inside.

The Jail has new stories of its own now, and the present owners, Peggy Jean and Harold Springfield, have put new life into its walls, opening a steak house featuring entertainment in the form of gospel singers from area churches.

Peggy Springfield is sure "the Lord had a hand in our being able to buy this building." She said a friend had told them the jail, owned by North Gaston teacher Steve Hansel, was up for sale. "We had exactly the right down payment," recalled Peggy, so she and her husband relocated their business and moved in.

Another "blessing", said Peggy, was fact that former owner, Emil Traenkner and Mrs. Traenkner, had given the jail a facelift, sandblasting the exterior and doing major renovations in red and black to the interior. Bobbi Traenkner had used part of the jail at one time for a tack and leather shop and another part to put up historical displays centering on the jail and Dallas.

Mrs. Springfield has added some of her own decor, utilizing red kerosene lamps, red tablecloths, red hanging lamps and black antique pieces to enhance the four dining rooms which seat approximately 135 guests. The original black cell doors, the original bars on the windows which look out over Trade Street, and the old jail theme give a unique and quaint flavor plus the addition of gospel music by entertainers who perform on Friday and Saturday evenings before a piano on the third floor, or cell block, in a big dining room festive in red and black.

Harold Springfield is a ministerial student at Fruitland Baptist Institute in Hendersonville who got in the chef business by doing some "moonlighting" for a Gaston steak house and

working in a supermarket. He and his wife have worked in the food business for 19 years, moving to Gaston County from Spartanburg, S. C. They are active in Mt. Beulah Baptist Church. Their 22-year-old daughter, Diane (Mrs. Jeff) Costner, is a part-time waitress in their new business.

Mrs. Springfield said that the Calvary Crusaders, Bates Sisters and Eternal Life Trio have been featured entertainers and that other local church groups will be invited to sing as a personal testimony.

Peggy pointed out that she and her husband are operating a family-type steakhouse, with no brown-bagging permitted. "We love the Lord and know that Christian people like to take their families out for supper and would enjoy a facility of this kind."

Said Mrs. Springfield, "we prayed about this move a long time and feel that the Lord gave us this building, opening the doors for us as an instrument for His will in this community."

Natives in the Dallas community take great pride in their ancestry and a number of these can be traced back to the dates their ancestors left Europe for the New World.

Other present landmarks include the quaint, historic Courthouse, built in 1848 and renovated after it was razed by fire in Dec. 1874; Hoffman Hotel, circa 1852; Matthews Hotel, circa 1849; Rhyne Building, circa 1850; Setzer General Store, circa 1870; Smyre-Pasour Home, circa 1850; Wilson Spargo (Webb) home, circa 1890.

Dallas was the county seat of Gaston from the date of its separation from Lincoln, Dec. 21, 1846, to 1911, when through the vote of the electorate of the county in 1909, the seat of government was moved to Gastonia. It derives its name from Honorable George M. Dallas of Philadelphia, who was the President of the United States in 1844. The Act of the



OLD GASTON COUNTY JAIL — The old Gaston County Jail in Dallas is a Gaston County landmark. Built in 1848, the jail is now rocking with music by gospel singers who entertain for patrons of a steak house which has recently opened.

Assembly, in creating Gaston, provided that its county seat be established within a given distance from Long Creek Baptist Church, and this church, apart from its age, will forever have an additional tie to the pioneer history of the county.

Much of the early history of Dallas centers about a few landmarks, like the old jail, a few family names, a few lawyers and doctors, a few celebrated law suits and many Court Weeks, fresh still in the minds of old-timers who like to reminisce.

It sits up there in Dallas — its barred windows looking out over main street as they have for many years, but now the jail is empty no longer, filled not with prisoners but with happy people enjoying good food and gospel music which rings out loud and clear.



NEW OWNERS — Harold and Peggy Springfield feel that their new business venture is an answer to prayer. Harold donned a chef's hat and stands with his wife on the spiral staircase leading to one of the four dining rooms which are decorated in black and red.



BEHIND BARS — Peggy Springfield stands behind the bars of an original jail cell which the new owners are featuring in the decor of the newly-decorated steak house in Dallas.