

Pioneer Ahoskie Drug Business: Copeland Was First Pillpusher

AHOSKIE — It was 40 years ago in December that young Robert Royal Copeland set up his mortar and pestle, and hung out a sign saying "Copeland's Drug Store" on Main Street near the railroad.

Son of Ahoskie's first postmaster, Rob Roy Copeland had a good spot in one of the three buildings owned by his father. His store was in the location formerly used by Dr. Gardner, an optometrist who visited Ahoskie.

Copeland had the distinction of being the town's first licensed pharmacist, and as new doctors moved into Ahoskie, he prevailed upon them to use his services for filling prescriptions instead of carrying their own supply of drugs.

Copeland was graduated from pharmacy school in Virginia in 1908, and went to work for a Suffolk drug firm until 1916. From there he went to a Tarboro drug store until he returned here to set up his own business.

Copeland was sole owner until November, 1947, when he was joined by Earl U. Capps, a native of

Cumberland County. Capps, a graduate of the UNC School of Pharmacy, had worked in Greenville, Nashville, and Rocky Mount before purchasing the partnership in Copeland's Drug Store.

Copeland rounded out 37 years as a pharmacist before retiring on December 30, 1956, when Capps became sole owner.

During those 37 years, Copeland had been president of the N. C. Pharmaceutical Association in 1927, and was honored as "Pharmacist of the Year" for North Carolina in 1955.

He estimated that he had filled 230,000 prescriptions since the start of his career. Still going strong, he has just rounded out 33 years of perfect attendance at the Ahoskie Kiwanis Club.

Since purchasing Copeland's in 1947, Capps has given the store on Main Street a complete face-lifting, added new fixtures, and in 1958 opened another store, Capps Drug Company, in the Roanoke-Chowan shopping center. Capps has

served on the County Board of Health, the Ahoskie school committee, is a Mason, Shriner, Rotarian, and active in the Baptist church. He and his wife are parents of two sons, Earl, Jr., and Jimmy.

CHURCH

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In 1943, the trustees recommended that the church be renovated, with the work to be completed by December 5, 1951. In 1944, the decision was made to build a new brick building instead of repairing the old church.

In 1947, when Dr. Watkins resigned because of ill health, \$16,044 had been raised for the construction.

The Rev. Thomas J. Boyd of New York City, a Shaw University graduate, was to see the dream of the new church come true under his pastorate.

In 1949, construction on the

new edifice began. Sherman Boone served as construction superintendent, with F. D. Robbins, Solomon Keene, Samuel Hall, E. M. Weaver and A. H. Brett on the building committee.

One hundred years after the establishment of the church, dedication services were held in the new brick building on April 22, 1951. The Rev. Mr. Boyd preached the sermon, and Dr. Watkins conducted the dedication. The handsome new building cost about \$42,000.

It has been within the past several decades that the church has relaxed the original rule of descent for membership. Many of the names found on the first church roll are listed among the present-day members, including some of the most important colored families in the county. The Rev. Addison Williams, a native of Raleigh, has served as pastor since 1954.

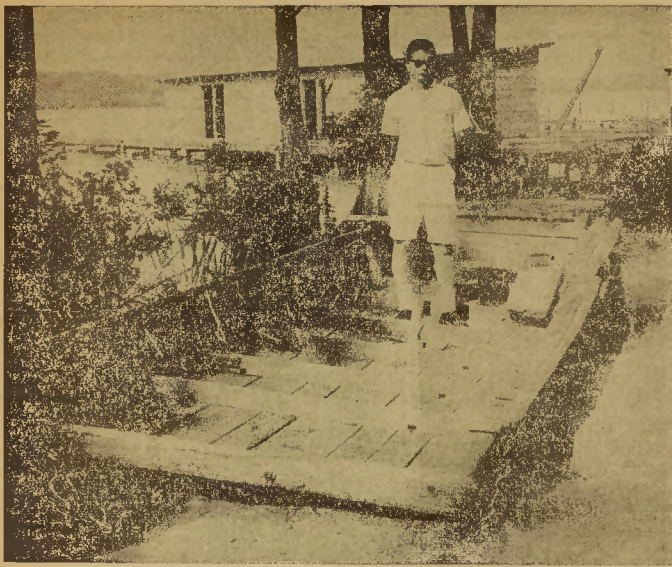
(This article is based on information in "The Free Negro

in North Carolina," by John Hope Franklin; and the history of Pleasant Plains Baptist Church compiled by Arthur H. Brett for the dedicatory service in 1951.)



Our
MILESTONE
Year ~
HERTFORD
COUNTY
1759-1959
THE
HERALD
1909-1959

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RUIN OF OLD BOAT—When the Chowan River and its tributaries were important arteries of commerce, the flat-bottom pole boat was one of the more common modes of transportation for goods and people. Many of these boats survived until recent times. This ruin of a flat-bottom-type river boat was raised from the Chowan near Tuscarora Beach in 1956. Made of cypress, the one-piece gunwales of the boat are more than 16 inches wide, and all planking is more than an inch thick.

FREE

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borers." Seventy were listed as "farm hands."

Thus, while most free negroes supported themselves in the forests and on farms, there were certain other trades in which free negroes held a significant place.

Building Trades

This was especially true in the building trades.

In 1860, six Negro carpenters worked in Hertford County. One plasterer, nine painters and five brickmasons were listed among the Hertford free negro population.

Some free negroes held expert jobs. There were three free negro blacksmiths in the county in 1860, two shoemakers, and three seamstresses.

Expert outdoor work was also done by free negroes. The 1860 Hertford census lists five "timber-hewers" and two ditchers among the free population.

Free negro women were also listed in the occupations. Besides the seamstresses also mentioned, there were two "washerwomen" and 19 "servants."

Finally, the 1860 census lists four free negroes of Hertford County as "seamen." These were undoubtedly members of crews of river boats which plied a busy trade on the Chowan and Meherrin rivers.

Racial Attitude

What was the attitude of the races toward each other in Hertford during the ante-bellum period?

It was unique in some respects. For one thing, there were few large slaveowners in Hertford. Less than half of the white households owned any slaves at all. Most owned only one family. The few big plantations in the county had not more than 25 or 30 slaves, and there were only a handful of these.

Thus, the society was a close-knit one, and there was little of the impersonality of relationship which existed in the areas of big plantations. Many slave families lived essentially as tenants did and do in the 20th century.

The free negro families in Hertford during this period were a group, comparing favorably with many of the white population. Many had owned land for decades and many could trace their ancestry to the beginnings of the county's history.

There was, thus, a mutual trust and cooperative attitude between the races somewhat stronger than in other counties of the northeast. Many Hertford County people were active in the ante-bellum period in what was a major effort at aiding slaves and free negroes to form colonies in Africa.

This was the effort to form a negro nation in Africa which finally resulted in the establishment of Liberia.

"Colonization societies" sprung up in the area in the 1830's. In 1830, Hertford people were being solicited for funds to help pay for the colonization effort.

Daniel Southall of Murfreesboro gave ten dollars to the drive in 1830. Despite the waning interest in this effort, a subscription meeting to raise funds for the colonization society was held in Murfreesboro in 1856.

In 1849, Thomas Capehart, then living near Murfreesboro, willed \$3,000 to send 60 slaves to Liberia. The money was never used for that purpose, however. It was tied up in a court litigation the results of which are not known.

—ROY PARKER, JR.

(This article is based on the book, "The Free Negro in North Carolina," by John Hope Franklin, on local sources, on standard histories of North Carolina and Hertford County, and U. S. census reports.)

Insurance Agency Was First In Ahoskie, Opened in 1908

AHOSKIE — Mrs. Una Bradley Troxil is in a business which she originally vowed she "wouldn't have on a bet."

It was in 1940 that Mrs. Troxil purchased the Curtis Insurance Agency from the estate of its founder, the late Walter Curtis.

For 16 years before Mr. Curtis' death, Mrs. Troxil (then Miss Una Bradley) had been his right-hand helper in the insurance agency. The Curtis agency was the first insurance firm to open in Ahoskie, having been founded in 1908. At that time, it was merely a sideline for Mr. Curtis, who was cashier of the Bank of Ahoskie.

The Curtis family had come to Ahoskie, then a thriving town of about 800, when Mr. Curtis' father assumed the pastorate of the Ahoskie Baptist Church. Walter Curtis entered into the spirit of community growth in his position at the bank, and with the insurance firm.

In 1924, Miss Bradley came from Rich Square, where her father was a Methodist minister, to become secretary for Mr. Curtis, who had left the bank to devote full time to his insurance agency. The first Curtis location was in the old Farmers-Atlantic Bank Building on Main Street.

During the depression years of the 1930's, Mr. Curtis also acted

as secretary of the Federal Land Bank in this area, handling many of the foreclosures and bankruptcies necessary during that period. In the latter years of his life, Mrs. Troxil acted as manager of the insurance agency when Mr. Curtis was incapacitated by arthritis, which caused his death in 1939.

In 1940, Mrs. Troxil purchased the agency from his estate, and moved to the present location on Railroad Street. In her one-woman firm, she handled fire, lightning, automobile and casualty insurance for the Great American Insurance Company, the Niagara Fire Insurance Company, New York Underwriters, Merchant and Manufacturers Insurance Company, and the Hartford Steam Boiler Insurance Company.

"Having worked so long with Mr. Curtis in his agency, I said I wouldn't want to continue the work but in the past 18 years I have managed to retain many of his original customers and increase my business," said Mrs. Troxil. Her husband is Elmer J. Troxil, a mechanic for Charles H. Jenkins Company.

Last year, the Curtis agency celebrated its fiftieth year in business, and Mrs. Troxil is looking forward to more years in the town's oldest insurance firm.

The Chowan Story

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Conditions During Postwar Days . . .

It is fitting to turn aside here and see more of the conditions during the Civil War and the Period of Reconstruction, from 1860-1878.

Judging from the minutes of the Board of Trustees during this period, you hardly realize that a war was fought and Reconstruction followed. They had it hard financially, as the greatest struggle was with debts for many people could not pay their bills. In view of the real condition of the South, it is difficult to understand how the doors of the Institute were kept open. It was done only by a few people of means and conseration who threw their lives and money into the struggle and some consecrated teachers who put service ahead of money. None of the teachers were fully paid any year. It is evident that the Lord was in it all with His people.

Here are the conditions as described by Conner in his "History of North Carolina," Vol. III:

"The close of the war found the state well-nigh prostrate. The people had been taxed to the limit during the war, the productive male population had in the main been engaged in the most unproductive of all occupations, the land had been ravaged by invading armies, crops in large areas had been destroyed by fences turned out to feast, vehicles had almost disappeared, fences were gone, often stables and other farm buildings, and even in some cases the dwellings, were destroyed, and ruin and decay were on every hand."

"Every bank in the state through the repudiation of the war debt was forced into liquidation, the highest amount received by the stockholders being thirty-six cents on the dollar."

"Business was at a standstill for lack of money and people were entirely unable to meet their obligations. Thousands, probably, went into bankruptcy. To make conditions worse, bad crops were general. Those of 1865 were good, considering everything, but those of 1866 and 1867 were very small. The fact of loss and disturbance among the male population by itself would explain poor farming."

"Other elements contributed to the distress of the state. Crime increased and public morals degenerated. Theft was so common that it became a menace to prosperity. Livestock was stolen until in some communities the raising of sheep and hogs was abandoned."

Moore in his History of North Carolina, Vol. II, describes the condition in eastern North Carolina:

"The condition of eastern North Carolina grew hourly more deplorable. Frequent incursions of the enemy resulted in the destruction of property of all kinds. Especially were mules and horses objects of plunder. Planes and other costly furniture were seized and sent North, while whole regiments of "bummers" wantonly defaced and ruined the fairest homesteads in eager search for hidden treasure."

"When the year 1869 came upon North Carolina, the people had scarcely recovered from the stupor and astonishment produced by such radical and pervading changes in their midst." The continued existence of Chowan Baptist Female Institute through such conditions for eighteen to twenty years is indeed a marvel and wonder.

During this period of ten years, 1868-1878, the number graduating was as follows: 1869-6; 1870-7; 1871-8; 1872-9; 1873-8; 1874-10; 1875-6; 1876-20; 1877-7; 1878-8; 1879-11.

Total graduates for this period—100.

1937-1959



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