

Chapel Hill Landmarks Provide Haunted Histories

By ELIZABETH SCHATZ
Staff Writer

Decades of dead-end leads have left two of Chapel Hill's most tragic murders unsolved, dark evidence of ghosts that have yet to be vanquished in this college town.

Suellen Evans, a UNC-Greensboro student taking summer classes at UNC-Chapel Hill, was stabbed to death on July 29, 1965, in Coker Arboretum. Fourteen years earlier, Rachel Crook was found beaten to death on a deserted road about four miles from campus on Aug. 30, 1951. Neither of their killers have ever been found.

Police have tried to unravel the pall that covers these two cases. Hundreds of leads turned up empty, and the deaths remain unavenged.

Shortly after noon, Evans, 21, walked through the Arboretum from Franklin Street en route to Cobb Residence Hall.

The Arboretum was much more secluded 37 years ago, heavily shaded by trees and foliage. People walked just feet away from the place where Evans was stabbed at 12:30 p.m.

On that infamous day, two students heard screaming and saw an arm around Evans' neck. They rushed to help her, leading her to an exit as she whispered, "He tried to rape me ... I think I'm going to faint."

Evans collapsed and died as a groundskeeper saw a man running from the Arboretum.

None of the 100-plus suspects were charged, and no trial resulted from Evans' murder. Glimpses of Crook's killer led to fruitless chases as well.

Crook's Corner restaurant today stands as an altered reconstruction of Rachel Crook's fish market, launderette and remnant shop in one.

Born in Union Springs, Ala., Crook went to Vanderbilt University and then got her master's degree in mathematics. She taught high school in Alabama and Georgia before moving to Chapel Hill at age 50. Crook worked for 12 years to complete her doctoral degree in economics but never wrote a thesis.

Crook dubbed her converted chicken house between Chapel Hill and Carrboro "Crook's Corner" long before the name was associated with a Chapel Hill eatery. No one saw the 71-year-old disappear from her shop.

The trial of Hobart M. Lee, a construction worker from Burlington, failed to bring about a conviction for Crook's murder. The tire marks at the scene of the crime matched the tires on his 1949 green Ford truck. A heel print near Crook's body matched his shoes.

Witnesses heard screams coming from a green truck as it flew down N.C. 86 toward Hillsborough.

But the jury, one that excluded any members from Chapel Hill, found him not guilty of Crook's death, and Lee went free.

Until they are solved, both cases will remain open, said Chapel Hill police spokeswoman Jane Cousins. Today, police are still familiar with these crimes, and Cousins said that last year a News & Observer article about Evans' murder had phones ringing about the long dor-

mant case.

"We worked on (the Evans case) not too long ago. We got new leads on it," Cousins said.

But nothing turned up.

Gene Hamer, the owner of Crook's Corner restaurant, is reminded of Crook in a photo he has of her standing by her original "Crook's Corner."

After being a barbecue restaurant, a pool hall and a taxi stand, Crook's old

chicken house has found a permanent facade.

Hamer opened the restaurant in 1982, and said all that remains of Crook were the boundaries of her residence and a horseshoe Hamer owns.

Crook is now buried in a corner of Old Chapel Hill Cemetery and Evans in her hometown in Mooresville.

The murders of 1951 and 1965 remain unsolved and unforgotten.

Halloween Experience Shows What to Expect

By COURTNEY JONES
Staff Writer

Clear skies and crisp weather welcomed a record-breaking number of costumed partygoers and spectators to Franklin Street on Saturday night to celebrate one of Chapel Hill's most festive events of the year.

Nearly 70,000 people flooded Franklin Street on Oct. 31, 1998, according to Chapel Hill police, far surpassing 1997's crowd of 17,000.

Police closed the downtown area of Franklin Street at 9:20 p.m. and later blocked off the stretch from Raleigh Street to Mallett Street to accommodate the crowd.

Though many merchants closed to escape possible damage from the flock of partyers, some restaurants braved the masses and remained open.

"It was insane," said Kevin Fischer, a Caribou Coffee Co. employee. "We still had a line out into the street when we closed at midnight."

Vendors were pleased with business generated by those who sought refuge from the congested street and sidewalks.

Steve Ballard, owner of Smoothie King, said he wanted to be open on Halloween to expose his business to the public. The shop opened last Saturday.

"A lot of people gave us positive feedback on our coffee and smoothies," Ballard said. "We were non-stop from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and it was packed."

Hector's employee Ismael Portillo

said the door had to be guarded to keep too many people from entering the tiny restaurant. "People were still trying to come in when we closed at 4:30 a.m.," Portillo said. "Halloween is the busiest night of the year."

Silent Sam's manager Steve Hunt said he also had to designate an employee to regulate customers. "We had so many people we violated the fire code."

Along with the increase in business came more problems.

Many restaurants took action to combat non-customers who lined up to use the bathrooms. "We began charging \$1 to use the bathroom at 9:30 or 10," Fischer said. "If we were going to have to clean up after them we wanted something in return."

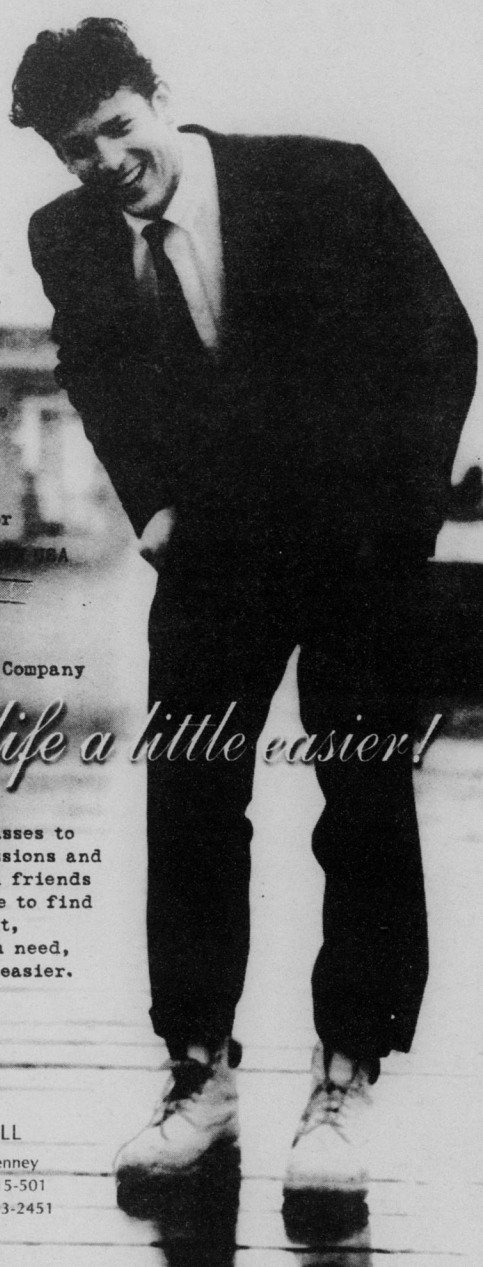
Ballard said he didn't want people using the facilities without first purchasing an item. "We made people show a receipt to use the bathroom."

Leigh Anne Thomasson, a hostess at Ham's Restaurant, worked until 5 a.m. cleaning up after customers. "Several people got sick. I didn't really notice it until we started cleaning up and it was underneath the tables."

University Police reports state an N.C. State University student who had too much to drink was taken to UNC Hospitals after police found him asleep in Morrison Residence Hall.

Celebration lasted until early Sunday morning, but crowds dispersed enough by 4 a.m. for streets to be reopened.

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