

Barroom history

Founding of University traced through tale of old tavern

By MICHAEL KEYS

Chapel Hill's distinction as the beer-drinking capital of the world, at an estimated 80 gallons per capita annually, didn't come about overnight.

The tradition goes back to when Chapel Hill was no more than a crossroad and the University but a glimmer in William R. Davie's eye. In fact, it must have been a matter of prudence that Chapel Hill didn't become known as the sleepy little community of Tavern Hill.

The story, at least this version of it, is worth retelling.

On a warm spring afternoon in 1792, Davie and a committee from the original board of trustees, set out to find a suitable spot for the new state University of North Carolina.

Having no luck, the group came to rest at a spot where the main-traveled road from Petersburg, Va. to Pittsboro crossed the road extending west to the Blue Ridge Mountains. The area was known as the Hill of New Hope Chapel for the ruins of an Anglican Church that had been built in the pre-revolutionary days. A more functional landmark of the day, however, was a roadside tavern run by Betsy Nunn.

The story goes that Davie had to stop to water down his brandy. Davie and the board stretched out under a handy poplar tree for a noontime repast. According to one history of the episode, they "regaled themselves with mint juleps and other exhilarating drink."

Before the gentlemen bowed out to the spirit of the afternoon, Davie had convinced his party that there was no finer place on earth and that they had come upon the object of their quest. Thus, in one unanimous "uh-huh", the University of North Carolina was seated not too terribly far from Betsy Nunn's tavern.

The Nunn Tavern may be the oldest landmark in the area, dating back to the revolution according to some sources, and it still stands today. The old tavern, 419 Hillsborough Rd. was a roadside attraction offering not only drink and food, but an upstairs loft. It was certainly the cultural center of Chapel Hill when Davie stumbled through.

Once Davie had obtained land donated from the Scotch-Irish community in the area, and had laid the cornerstone of Old East, the University was ready for students. In February of 1795, a student population of one had invaded Chapel Hill.

In order to attract a more substantial student body, something had to be done. Rev. Samuel McCorkle speculated, "Ere long we hope to see the University adorned with an elegant village, accommodated with all the necessities and conveniences of civilized society."

The Reverend had to speak no further. Betsy Nunn and her husband Bill built a bigger tavern. The beginnings of Franklin, Raleigh, Columbia and Rosemary Streets existed by 1797. The Nunnns added on to the old James Patterson residence near the southeast corner of Franklin and Columbia, and boasted of a house of

entertainment in an advertisement of the day:

The subscriber wishes to inform his friends and the public in general, that he is now living at the University of North Carolina and keeps a house of entertainment. He assures those who may think proper to call on him, that every attention which may be in the power to give, shall be used to make their time easy and agreeable while with him.

What better promise could Kirkpatrick's or The Village Green make to their customers?

The Nunn's tavern and hotel lasted some 50 years, and with the Eagle Hotel comprised the major hot spots of Chapel Hill's social circuit. But Chapel Hill, the University and taverns fell upon hard times during the Civil War years and for sometime thereafter. In fact, it would take liquor by the drink to restore Franklin Street to an image of its former self.

In the late 1800s, the law prohibiting alcohol within a certain distance of the campus first emerged. Professor James Allcott, formerly with the history department, discovered there was once an enterprise near the turn of the century known as the "traveling tavern". Men with wagons full of homemade beer would pull up to some point outside of town which was made known to the students. Even under the threat of disciplinary action, the students would migrate out of town to gather at the wagons.

With no emporiums in town, and the student population on the rise, there was a healthy market for moonshine. Peter Wilson, born and raised in Chapel Hill

and a 1929 UNC graduate, remembers a part of Carrboro that he had been forbidden to wander into as a boy.

Where the Villages apartments now stand near the bypass, there was a row of shacks that housed cobblers and other artisans. Behind the shacks, the ground fell off steeply and provided a sinister spot where students and other derelicts would go to buy whisky from bootleggers. The place was known as "a blind tiger."

Wilson's Grandfather Pickard owned a livery at the corner of Pickard and Franklin that was sustained by renting buggies and horses to students to ride out of town to the countryside taverns. An old house where the Blue Cross/Blue Shield building stands was the closest spot for a beer.

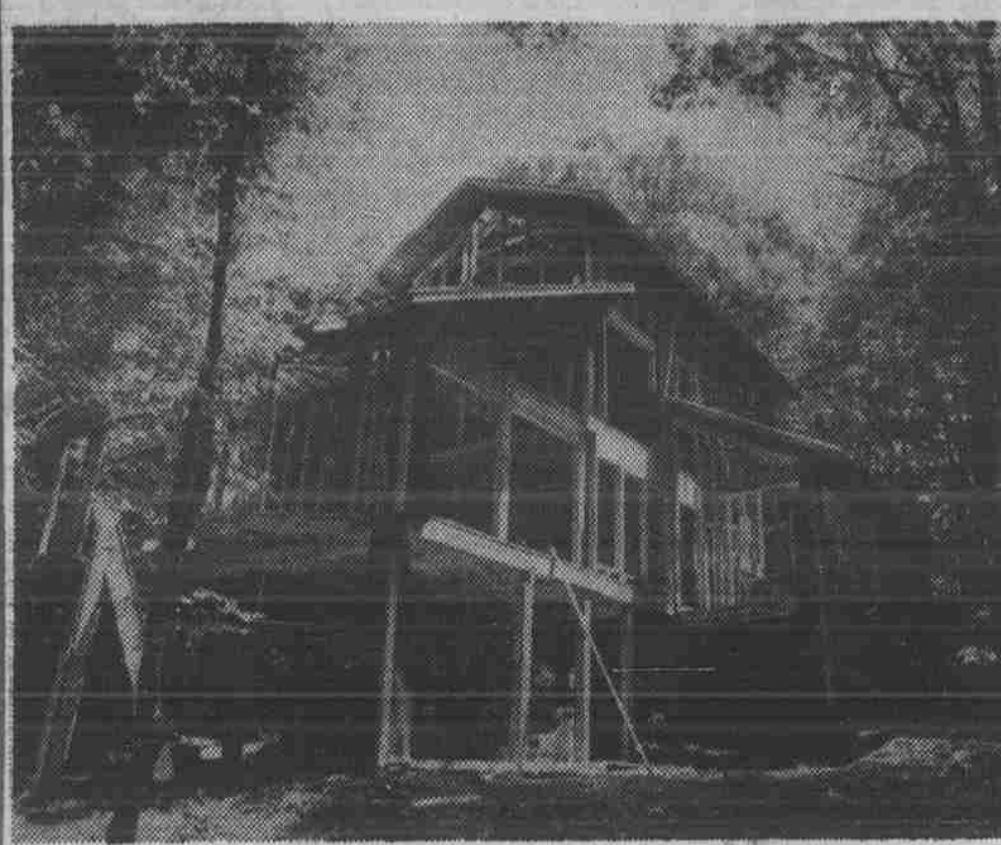
When Wilson was an undergraduate, Brady's on the old Durham road was where all the students went for beer. In the early 1930s near-beer was introduced to campus and restaurants. Wilson remembers getting his first sip of the real thing on campus at a place called the Bloody Bucket, later to be known as the Porthole Restaurant.

According to historians in town, beer was readily available in restaurants by the 30s, but bars as such were non-existent. Brown bagging became an acceptable practice after Prohibition.

Davie's description of the spot he founded as the University of North Carolina as "an extraordinary place, with an abundance of springs," promised that Chapel Hill would become one of the finest watering holes in Carolina, and "with all moral certainty, to be a place of growing and permanent importance."



The old Nunn Tavern as it appears today on Hillsborough Street ... a popular watering hole years ago



Giles Blunden and Jackie Skulp, members of the Space Builders cooperative, work on house near Haw River.

Space Builders

Construction crew shares benefits of labor

By BETH PARSONS

Susan Fowler pushes her dinner plate aside and orders pound cake for dessert. "That's one nice thing about being a carpenter," the slim 25-year-old said. "You get to eat a whole lot more."

A psychology graduate of the University of Rochester in New York, Fowler is a carpenter and general manager for Space Builders, a construction-management cooperative in Carrboro. She and four others started the business in July. All had previous experience in construction work. Fowler learned carpentry as a member of Twin Oaks commune.

Susan Fowler looks like any college student. She wears shorts and a halter, and gold barrettes in her curly brown hair. Only the cuts and scratches on her arms are out of character.

"I've never been seriously injured," she said, "but I've probably gotten more cuts and scratches in the last four years than I would have normally."

Space Builders is jointly owned by its eight workers. Unlike other construction companies, the cooperative manages the construction of buildings and oversees the work done by other contractors.

"We don't actually act as contractor," Fowler said. "We like to call ourselves 'construction managers.' We don't do plumbing, electrical work or heating installation, but we choose contractors for these, and they get paid directly by the customer. Management and woodwork is basically what we do."

Most Space Builders projects, however, start in the planning stages since two members, Giles Blunden and Lucy Davis, are architects by profession. The two also

manage the business and do carpentry work.

Fowler and Davis are another example of how Space Builders differs from other construction businesses. Half of the eight people who own and work for Space Builders are women. Sex does not delegate the job, though. "Each worker does a little of everything," Fowler said.

"We're real oriented toward teaching and learning from each other," she said. "We trade off roles but maintain constant supervision of each other."

Fowler said she is as strong per pound as the men she works with. "I can do most things. Now, I probably couldn't toss plywood onto the roof, but I can carry it."

Blunden, who worked with another cooperative in Chapel Hill before he helped organize Space Builders, said he enjoys working with women. "It's great, as long as they don't get pushy," he said jokingly. "The work is pretty strenuous, but it doesn't seem to bother anybody."

But those who stay with Space Builders receive good benefits and plenty of work. "Space Builders has better benefits than other workers' co-ops," Fowler said. "We all own it, so we all share in the decisions and profits. Workers get one hour paid vacation for each 20 hours worked. They work as much or as little as they want and, if they want extra time off, talk it over with their fellow workers. Other benefits include health insurance, workman's compensation and tool money."

Everyone draws a weekly salary based on the number of hours worked. The profit made by Space Builders is either reinvested or split between the owners as a cash bonus.

Business has been good for the

cooperative. "We've been booked up solid," Fowler said. "Everybody in construction seems busy. I've heard more complaints about not being able to get a carpenter than from carpenters not being able to find work."

Plenty of work allows the cooperative to be choosy in accepting jobs. "If we ran out of work, I guess we'd build about anything," Blunden said, "but we like to concentrate on environmentally efficient structures."

Several houses managed by Space Builders have had passive, or non-mechanical, solar designs. "We're definitely very interested in that whole area," Fowler said.

Since last July, Fowler said Space Builders has completed "four big jobs and two little ones." One of the big jobs was Papagayo restaurant in NCB Plaza.

"Our other projects slowed down considerably while we were doing Papagayo," Fowler said. Davis designed the restaurant, and Space Builders managed the construction. "We're very proud of it."

Fowler is also proud of Space Builders. "The quality of our work is very high, because that's what we care about. We're all in it because we want to be."

"Some days, I don't like it. But I plan to stick with it at least for now. I feel pretty committed to Space Builders and carpentry."

Fowler admits readily that the pay could be better. "The best-paid carpenters in the area get \$7.50 an hour, and that doesn't even compare with what carpenters make up North. Most people we work for are basically older and richer. Most of us couldn't afford the things we build."

Still, the freedom of Space Builders cooperative appeals to the workers. "Just being able to do what we want to do as individuals is important," Fowler said. "If people are seeing the rewards of their work and invest in it, they're going to like it better."

Renovated home retains charm; owner brings innovative design

By CHRIS BURRITT

For six years the Prestons lived with the clutter and racket of carpenters in their house on North Street.

When they were looking for a house in Chapel Hill in 1969, Edwin and Nancy Preston decided to spend the time and money to renovate a house built in 1914 by J.G. de Roulac Hamilton, founder of the Southern Historical Collection at UNC.

"When we bought it, our four young children were very dismayed," Nancy Preston said. "And my parents thought we had lost our heads because the house was in such bad shape and the 'yard came right up to the front door.'"

Since then, Preston has used her knowledge from several architecture courses to remodel the interior of the house and make it comfortable for a family living in the '70s.

"I loved the gracious things of the earlier time," she said, "such as the lofty high ceilings and the wide front porch." But many tiny, chopped-up rooms connected by hallways that didn't seem to go anyplace were unsuitable for the

Preston's plans. And the second floor was still an attic, she said.

The renovation took three major stages and the family moved around and adjusted to the ongoing displacement.

Major changes included knocking down nine walls on the first floor, installing all new electrical wiring and plumbing, and converting the attic space to three bedrooms, complete with skylights. A deck was built onto the rear of the house.

"The house is much more modern than when we bought it," Preston said. "I didn't try to make the house look ultra-modern, nor did we try to restore it to look like the 1920's. I mostly tried to blend the two harmoniously."

"It has been satisfying to take this old place, something that wasn't so great in the beginning, and make it into something special and different," she said. "And our children have grown to love it with each new addition."

All in all, the renovation has cost half again as much as the Prestons paid for the house. The structural aspects of the house have proved sound. And the original heating steam radiator system has been maintained.



Nancy Preston in entryway ... of renovated Hamilton home

Chapel Hill architect promotes restoration

By KIMBERLY MCGUIRE

He works in the old Methodist Church building on East Rosemary Street, but his business isn't religion.

James M. Webb, who first came to Chapel Hill 32 years ago as a UNC professor of city and regional planning, has renovated the 1853 structure to house his architecture office.

"When I first came to Chapel Hill, people thought I was the worst kind of intruder because I'm a contemporary architect by profession," Webb said.

Now that his 29-year teaching stint has ended, Webb is practicing architecture again and also serving on the Historical District Commission, which was established in Jan. 1977 by the Board of Alderman.

His office in the historic district serves as "an example of living history," Webb said.

"I'm a modern architect, but I have a sincere interest in preservation and trying to maintain the character of this town," Webb said.

"Chapel Hill has grown up around the University and that gives it a certain flavor that's very different from the run-of-the-mill North Carolina town," Webb said.

"We have tried to identify Chapel Hill's important buildings and protect them by zoning in order to save the special quality."

Chapel Hill has set a precedent by establishing a historic district and adopting zoning and other



Architect James M. Webb at his office ... original Chapel Hill Methodist Church

appearance requirements over and above regular building standards.

Webb talked about renovation and restoration efforts here.

"The most difficult thing is to make contemporary additions on an old house without ruining the original charm," said Webb. He cites the Preston home on North Street as a good and considerate example of renovation. Webb defined restoration as "putting it back exactly as it was when it was first built." "About the only serious restoration in this town has been my work on the Horace Williams house," Webb said. Webb restored the building that is now the home of the Chapel Hill Preservation Society.