

200-Year-Old Thagard's Mill Site Now Center of Lively New Development

A Moore County mill pond fact that electricity, which sustained the project long after its importance as a grist mill declined, is playing a vital role in its re-birth. (Many of the homes springing up around the lake will be "all-electric.") The mill was equipped with a hydroelectric generator in 1902 by I. F. Chandler, who introduced electricity to Southern Pines, Aberdeen and Carthage. Electricity from the Thagard plant fed Southern Pines. Now the process is reversed. Power feeds the Thagard development from Carolina Power & Light facilities at Southern Pines.

In 1920, Chandler sold this and other Little River sites to the Electric Light & Power Company, and in 1924 the properties were acquired by Carolina Power & Light Company. Three years later CP&L retired the Thagard plant in favor of its larger Blewett Falls and Tillery plants on the Pee Dee. For the past 33 years the Thagard plant has been abandoned, visited only by fishermen who still find good catches in its tailrace and lake.

The Thagard site was first developed by Nicholas Smith as a grist mill in the early 1700's. Smith had received the land through king's grant. The property passed from Smith to John Ray, a Scot who settled there and continued to operate the mill during the American Revolution. It later passed to William C. Thagard, who gave it the present name and operated the grist mill during the Civil War. Thagard in turn sold the property to M. C. McDonald and Chandler purchased the site from him.

CP&L sold the mill site to John Warren Watson, a Pennsylvanian who rebuilt the dam. Last year a corporation name Sandhills Properties purchased the mill and 1,100 acres of adjoining woodland.

New Life
In the face of expressed misgivings from natives who looked upon the site as a poor financial gamble, the company's stockholders—Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Hardee and children and Attorney Frank Holton of Lexington—began to bring new life to the Little River site.

Hardee lowered the lake level six feet and is removing stumps and logs as a concession to boaters.

"We're pulling out stumps that were cut by axe, probably 200 years ago," he remarks. Exposed too is a deep pool near the mill house where rocks for its foundation and the dam were quarried.

Hardee stocked the lake with bass and will add 19,000 "hard-head shell crackers," a species of warm-water trout. He will build a second lake of 175 acres farther west at a site used as a pond by John Ray many years ago. This body of water will be entirely spring fed and will be stocked with mountain trout.

Picnic areas, boat landings and natural sandy beaches are features of the development. Long range plans call for an 18-hole golf course. Fourteen homes are already under construction around the lake. Several, including Hardee's own home, will be all-electric, bringing full cycle a story of electrification which began with Chandler's hydro generator in 1902.

Hardee has even considered installing a small turbine-generator in the mill, as an historic novelty, to light the picnic grounds. The development is served with electricity by CP&L.

The residential area has been named "Whispering Pines," well describing the 100-foot slash pines which stand along the border of the lake.

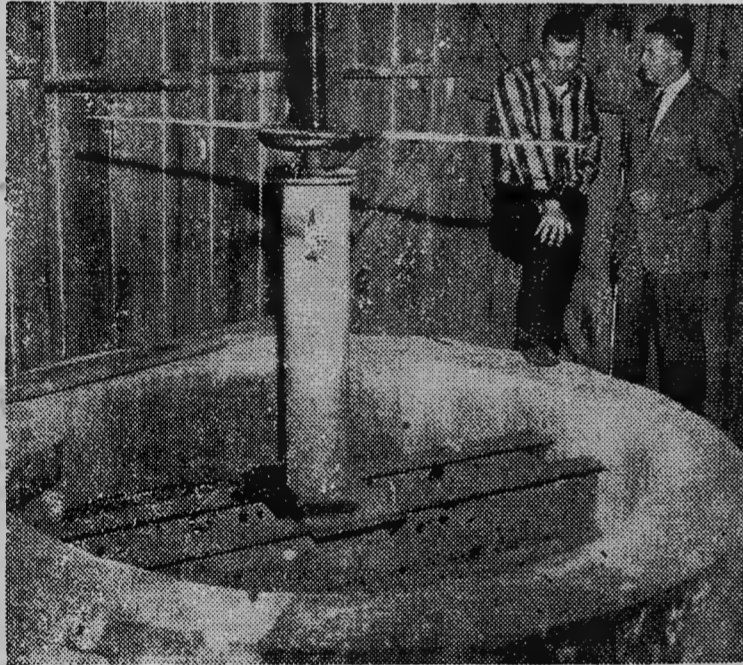
Public Showing
Hardee will open the development for public showing the weekend of April 22. He describes it as a perfect haven for retiring people, within easy driving distance of resort centers at Southern Pines and Pinehurst and military facilities at Fort Bragg. Several homeowners are military personnel.

On the northeast bank of the lake is a graveyard in which rest the remains of Ray, Thagard and their kin. This plot is being maintained as a memorial to these pioneers who first recognized the site's commercial appeal. Within earshot of this point construction goes on at a pace quickened by spring. Old Thagard's Lake is coming to life again!

Paradox
A paradox of this change is the



MARKER TO PIONEERS — This marker identifies the resting place of William Calvin Thagard, who gave his name to the development. Thagard operated a grist mill here during the Civil War period. It was a mill site as early as 1769. Nicholas Smith received the property through a king's grant when Moore County was part of Cumberland. Later it passed to John Ray, Scot pioneer, who is also buried here. This grave plot is being maintained as a memorial to the pioneers. At right is Dick Byrd of Carolina Power & Light Company's publicity department.



WHERE GENERATOR OPERATED — In the foreground is the turbine pedestal in the old Thagard Mill. A hydroelectric generator installed here in 1902 by I. F. Chandler of Southern Pines made this one of the earliest hydroelectric sites in the state. The pedestal now houses a gate which controls the flow of water through the penstock below. Shown are A. B. Hardee, left, present developer of the Thagard site, and Ward Hill, right, Southern Pines manager for Carolina Power & Light Company.

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