

# PROGRESS

## Winfall was once a bustling commercial site

It's hard to imagine the sleepy, quaint town of Winfall as a bustling commercial center, but that's just what it was around the turn of the century according to documented history and local legend.

Winfall is located at a junction where the roads from Hertford and Parksville meet the road from Woodville to Belvidere. Legend has it that the first building built in the town fell over during a windstorm. That event is credited with changing the name of the community from Red House Fork to Winfall. The "d" was eventually dropped, and the town became Winfall.

The bustling Winfall was incorporated on March 7, 1887. A.S. Jordan was the first mayor. Original town councilmen were Josiah H. White, Watson Winslow and R.H. Kirby. The town's boundaries were the perimeter of a circle one-quarter mile from the intersection of the Norfolk Southern Railroad and the county road. At the center of town stood the train station.

Winfall was a very busy crossroads before the bridge was built across the Perquimans River. The town served as the commerce center for people on the north side of the river. Even before the Civil War, the community had developed as a commercial area.

In 1873, a post office was established for Winfall with Josiah H. White as its postmaster.

19th century business enterprises included blacksmith N.H. Corey, fish dealer F.E. Winslow, millwright A.J. Bright and bricklayer/plasterer Thomas Perry.

The Winslow family owned and operated a grist mill across from Cedar Grove Church.

Stores in town offered merchandise brought in by train as well as locally-grown produce. Lang Jessup owned a general store and a grocery store was owned and operated by Fonz White. There was a store where the post office sits now owned by Cliff Edwards.

Stores were not only places to purchase needed goods, but meeting places as well. Going to town meant hitching up the wagon and meeting friends to exchange news. Some of Winfall's early stores were built side by side, almost joining. Under the front stoops were benches for visiting.

In the late 1920s, Winfall boasted about seven stores plus a cafe and a cool drink shop. The stores all stayed open until midnight on Saturday and until 9 p.m. on week nights, a practice which continued until just after World War II.

Just outside the original boundaries of Winfall

stood one of the area's most important commercial enterprises, the Major Loomis Mill. It was a big lumber mill, employing over 150 people, founded in 1894 by George Major and Mr. Loomis from New Jersey. It was the largest lumber company in the county and probably the largest company on the east coast until 1930.

The mill stood near the Perquimans River and shipped out 20 train-car loads of lumber each week. Nine boilers powered the mill's machinery. Average pay after deductions for a full week's work was \$10 at the turn of the century. In 1952, the mill burned and was never rebuilt.

The railroad was also an important piece of Winfall's history. The first railroad to serve the town was the Elizabeth City and Norfolk, connected to Winfall in 1881. A station was built that served both passenger and freight traffic.

One train was referred to as the "fast train." It did not stop from Elizabeth City to Edenton. This train carried the mail. In order for the train to pick up mail without stopping, a crane was built near the railroad track and from it a mail bag was hung when the train came by, an iron arm was extended from the baggage coach and would grab the mail bag.

A nickel brought a piece of ice for the ice box that would last a couple of days from Charlie Bagley's store.

The early 1920s saw the establishment of a barber shop in Winfall by Eli Felton. Lee White and Lang Lane each began a hair cutting business soon after.

Daniel Jones is said to be the first Black man to buy a lot and build a house in Winfall. Later his four sons and a daughter bought and built in the same area. The area is still referred to today as Jonestown by some old-timers.

Augustus White was the first Black magistrate in Winfall.

Among the first African-Americans in Winfall to become well-known school teachers was J.A. Rogerson Sr., a graduate of Hampton University and a classmate of Booker T. Washington.

There were also African-American residents who owned enterprises such as filling station, a barber shop and a sandwich shop.

The first church built within the original bound-

aries of Winfall was the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, built in 1895. It was followed by Ellis Temple Baptist Church in 1897. Epworth Methodist Church was established in 1903.

When Winfall celebrated its 100th anniversary with a day-long program at Central School, its centennial booklet provided a glimpse of daily life from the town's earliest days. Creativity was a hallmark of entertainment for children and video games weren't invented, and few families could afford expensive toys. For those fortunate enough to own a Victrola, listening to music was a pastime. Young girls made dolls and doll clothes from scraps of cloth. Marbles were favored toys. Baseball was popular at the turn of the century, as well as leap frog and hide-and-seek. Youngsters also played follow the leader and pop the whip. A child might make a slingshot or spinning top. An older youth might whistle a whistle.

Sunday was the day for visiting. Whether on foot or in cars, buggies or surreys, folks talked on the front porch in good weather and by the fire in winter.

Over the years, Winfall has undergone great changes. Through community development block grants, many residences have been renovated to meet housing standards. Mosquito control was begun. A fire department staffed by volunteers was established and still serves the town today. The town has its own water system. Street lights have been erected.

At present, Winfall is in the process of constructing a sewer system. Mayor Fred Yates and former councilwoman Shirley Yates worked long and hard to educate the public on the necessity of the sewer system and to lobby for grants to finance the system. Hopefully, the years of waiting will be over soon and all residents can have safe, sanitary indoor plumbing.

Winfall also boasts a mall, a doctor's office, a mechanic's garage, an antique dealer, a florist, a convenience store and a gas station/grill. It is home to two of the county's four schools, as well as the Perquimans Learning Center.

Town leaders would like to see the town prosper, and hope that the sewer system will bring new business possibilities.

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