

Civic pride – with an eye toward service

by Dave Blanton

Gold was discovered in White Plains in 1834. Seventy-five years later, the textile boom was beginning to shape our town, which by then was called Kings Mountain. It wasn't long after that, in the time between the turn of the century and World War II, that club life was beginning to take hold.

First came the Woman's Club, the town's oldest existing civic organization. In 1905, monthly dues were a nickel. By 1932, it found a permanent home on Mountain Street. The group's 100-plus year tradition of annual Floral Fairs continues to this day, although for many years now it's been called the Fall Festival.

Following in the Woman's Club footsteps came a burst of new club be-

ginnings. From the town's first Boy Scout troop, in 1908, to The Thursday Afternoon Book Club, in 1913, to the Daughters of the American Revolution, which saw its first chapter chartered here in 1916, Kings Mountain was ascending as a town with strong civic ties.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Kiwanis, Lions Club, the JayCees, and, later, a Kings Mountain chapter of the International Rotary had become powerful engines of fundraising and civic movements.

Dave Baity remembers when the Mountain Street bridge that passed over the train tracks downtown had two lights and lots of traffic, often moving very slowly on the weekends.

"We peddled Pepsi between those two stop lights and raised a heck of a lot of



Scouts camp out at a Hickory gathering in 1960. "There's a lot of shared responsibility in Boy Scout life," says Tommy King, who has served as a merit badge counselor, a scoutmaster, an assistant scoutmaster, district commissioner and an assistant district commissioner with the Boy Scouts of America.

money for charities," he said referring to the time when he was still fresh out of high school and a member of the Jaycees. This was a good twenty years before the U.S. 74 Bypass skirted north of town. Before that time travelers headed toward the mountains or Charlotte had few options other than streaming through the center of Kings Mountain.

Baity went on to learn a lot more about the town, continuing his work as a reporter for the Kings Mountain Herald before becoming an editor at the Belmont Banner in the early 60s. He retired after a long run as a reporter and columnist for the Charlotte Observer. A few years ago, he wrote and published "Tracks Through Time: A History of the City of Kings Mountain, 1874-2005," an illustrated history of the town's many facets, with chapters devoted to the area's 19th century gold

rush, its schools, businesses, sports teams and civic clubs.

Baity said he grew up poor, in one of the town's many mill villages, but he "never felt substandard."

He recalls that many of his peers in school left the life of books for a job in the textile industry, which was in those days powered the local economy. But for many of those who stayed in school and pursue higher education, there was a bridge that helped get them there.

"The civic clubs really helped in that transition," he said. "There were scholarships available to kids who wanted to go farther but didn't have the means."

Indeed, from the Kiwanis and Rotary to the Woman's Club and the Boosters Club and the Daughters of the American Revolution, it has been service clubs that have historically established some of the most generous scholarships in the post World War II years.

The tradition continues today.

"Local organizations giving scholarship money is a huge help to our students," according to Leigh Bell, a guidance counselor at the Kings Mountain High School who aids students in the hunt for the right college and the funds to pay for their education. She said that many organizations also continue to support students past their first year of college through continuing scholarships.

That certainly resonates with Baity. A favorite seventh grader teacher fostered his love of stamps and his budding hobby of stamp collecting by directing her husband, a comptroller at Neisler Mills, to give the young student all the postage from his incoming business mail.

"I had stamps from all over the world," he said in a recent talk from his home in Gastonia. "I think now ... how much that broadened me. The teachers in the schools in the schools encouraged kids to be better than they ever could be. There was a culture there – the teacher and the business community did kind of

come together on that front."

For Tommy King, this strong and long-running sense of civic pride and service has its roots in one place: The Boy Scouts. King has spent a lifetime with the young man's outdoor and adventure organization, which began in England and the United States in the first decade of the 20th century.

King, who is 71, was a scout here in Kings Mountain as a boy and, much to his chagrin, missed becoming an Eagle Scout by just one badge. He later served as a merit badge counselor, a scoutmaster, an assistant scoutmaster, district commissioner and an assistant district commissioner with the Boy Scouts of America.


"There's a lot of shared responsibility in Boy Scout life," King says, rattling off the number of ways the youngsters work together to accomplish goals or look out for each other, from camping and learning about wildlife to providing assistance at the annual Over the Mountain Triathlon hosted by the city.

"We don't allow harassment or kids being picked on," said King, who spent his professional life as a magistrate in Cleveland and Lincoln Counties. "The scouts is about service."

For every group that has grown lean as times change... others spring up and become robust fixtures...



Boy Scout troops from the Kings Mountain area gather in 2009 to commemorate 100 years of scouting.



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... Excited About Our Future



Julia Wood is seen here in period dress at a special meeting of The Thursday Afternoon Book Club, which celebrated its 100th year in October.

"Come, follow me, Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19

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