

In a manner of speaking . . .

by Gaines Steer

Holy Cow! Among the things that have categorically changed since the early 1980's when I became a newspaper reporter and country-style journalist (up North in Maryland) is, in fact, everything. True. Obviously, our culture has shifted in ways widely documented, led by the revolution in technology and the end of sanity in politics. I'll add this one notable change: the role of the newspaper reporter. Frankly, there are few field-news reporters extant. Gone!

Well now, what if Gaines here, decided to dust off the ole reporter role and ventured out from beneath the Dell and actually interviewed people and reported on interesting places and events in Chatham...



GAINES STEER

OK. I'm going down to **Moncure** and **Bear Creek** and see if I can locate some news "where all voices are heard." (*Chatham County Line* slogan). This is a brief test! Sort of...

Just pulled into the **Exxon gas station** on #902 in Moncure 24 miles from downtown Pittsboro. The **Jordan Dam Mini Mart** and **Country Kitchen** anchors the site. A local retired preacher named **Lea**, sings the praises of the daily buffet served herein. Today's menu features fried chicken; turnip greens; blackeyed peas; scallop potatoes. Now, I'm no food critic (As a matter of fact, I overly admire most food.) yet, I have the distinct intuition that The Surgeon General would give this dining venue less than 5 stars. Need I mention that fried bologna, corn dogs and grits n'gravy are staples on the buffet? Sounds Southern... Goodness gracious!

I met some friendly patrons congregated in the dining area and isles. An older gent, named **James**, interrupted his breakfast to report that he "ate here every day but Sunday and had for 20 years..." He looked fit. In full disclosure, I counted an equal number of black and white patrons. No brown folks at this time. Found it interesting that the Moncure natives that I encountered would not surrender their names to the Press (FYI: I sport a PRESS sign atop my fedora). Could this be, I wonder, because they have heard a rumor that "the press is the enemy of the people?" Probably not the reason, Gaines.

Here is a brief inventory of signs/services: hunting and fishing licenses, no alcohol consumed on premises; live bait and money orders; lotsa cigarettes; gas cylinders; deer corn @ \$9.99/bag; an over-the-hill local event bulletin board.

Uh oh, it's raining hard now; I'll come back to investigate downtown Moncure and vicinity for next issue. And, of course, the wondrous Jordan Dam nearby deserves some astute reporting. Be warned.

Let's see, what would an intrepid news reporter seek out to investigate in rural Chatham County on a rainy day? Of course! Let's visit and report on Bear Creek's enigmatic "**Devil's Tramping Ground**" and factually report the

experience. (In full disclosure, if readers Google the topic they will join 23,366 viewers and be exposed to a video of the modest circle in a wooded area.) The story-line is simple: "...a cleared circle in the woods. Likely the devil comes here at night to dance?" That's all, folks!! No amount of intrigue can convert this modified trash dump into a story worthy of this great newspaper. It's not a hoax, rather a fabrication that several internet reviewers term "underwhelming." Alas, I agree.

However, locating said-site required all of my guile and resourcefulness. It is unmarked except for a prominent "NO Trespassing" sign. Yep! Bear Creek locals thus encountered seem open, yet a bit reserved.. However, none proved willing to reveal directions to the designated satanic circle. One exception...

It is contra-indicated to lie and exaggerate when the big news lead you are pursuing turns out to be misleading or untrue (I did not say "fake" on purpose, please note.) Well, for openers, there is no town of Bear Creek, said to be 25 miles from Pittsboro, NC. The sign on #902 promises that Bear Creek is 10 miles hence. At a very distant 25 country miles, this scribe realized that he was lost in the hinterlands of rural Chatham County. Honey, I was so far out in the country that I could not find a Doctor Pepper! The only signs (endemic) were sharing: "Thank You Jesus." Plus a bunch of big blue signs promoting some guy named MIKE. FYI: I did see one wild turkey and a bunch of timber clear-cutting going down, so-to-speak.

Make lemonade! (sage advice, I recall) As is often the case, I believe, with the daunting craft of down-home investigative reporting, there is more to a story than originally projected. Perfect example: I got seriously lost. Where am I? While the country roads seemed mighty straight, I passed the same bridges several times, indicating a circuitous trail. Been there?

Siri was off duty, for obvious reasons... Finally, a kindly sign indicates that **Goldston** is down yonder way. Probably; Perhaps. Arriving from somewhere out back, I remembered visiting Goldston in 1992. I can't believe it! Nothing has changed. The railroad track runs down the center of town and there are a few stores of sorts, a quiet filling station, two places to dine (26 years ago there had been one, I recall).

Lo and behold, the **Calico Quilt Antique store** in that ancient wood building is still active and open. (I had once been antiques dealer colleagues with **Myra**, proprietor of this edifice.) I parked hurriedly and walked into a familiar setting, a stage for elder items situated in every direction. Even the smell was pleasant and familiar. And there was dear proprietor, **Myra**, miraculously preserved, and even younger than before. "I remember you, Gaines" she said. "I'm Myra's daughter, **Denise**." The acorn does not fall far from the oak. I note the resemblance in the eyes and voice. Myra, I learn,

is now bedridden and faithful daughter keeps the original antique store open several days a week. This is a nostalgic store, full of elder items of interest, yet devoid of victorian furniture and expensive pretties. The same antique potbelly stove in use. Just right!

Rufus' Restaurant on Main Street, Goldston, needs no detailed menu. You can smell the rural American fare from the sidewalk outside. The sign in the window proclaims "Best Bar B Q for Miles." (Yes, we all know where that mile-marker ends—**Allen and Sons**.) Immediately next door is **Lizzie's Grill-N-Chill**. Cool! A vivacious young woman, named **Sara Beal** offered me either a breakfast or lunch menu, each boasting about 30 items. Frankly, I'd be partial to the Oatmeal/Grits for \$1.29. Sara interviews easily; she lives in nearby Antioch Community, I learn. Tell her "I sent you..."

Leaving Goldston on a remarkably marked highway, I note a new US Post Office and a very impressive **American Veterans Memorial** near the town library. Three hand-printed and dated signs warn: turkey shoot; chicken tender breakfast; fall fundraiser and pancakes. From Pittsboro: 20 miles via Pittsboro Goldston Rd. Oops, almost forgot. Goldston features **Old Fashioned Day** every fall (for 31 years). Anybody you meet there when you visit will give you the details, I promise. You may meet many of the 350 proud residents.

TIME FOR A BEVY OF CHATHAM COUNTY SHOUTOUTS

- A deserved praise for **April Weaver**, Director at **Siler City's NC Arts Incubator**. A must...
- **Gene**: for you-know-what.... Many thank yous! Deserved.
- **Moses Horton**, Chatham slave and poet, lest we forget.
- Bear Creek's **Nancy Harmon** (and **Harvey** too!) Gracias for all, y'all!
- **Esther Neal**, she-of-deserts at **Pittsboro Community Luncheon**
- Head baker **Maria Avalos @ The Phoenix Bakery** wins praise for years of loyalty
- **Wilma** brings **Siler City** everywhere she goes. Saludo!
- The not-so-silent **Quakers** among us.
- **Barbara Lorie**, a legend, to say the least. Lots!
- Extraordinaire photographer **Jeff Davis: The Chatham Record**
- **Chatham Market's Terry Alston** limps "like a hero." He is!
- **Southern Supreme Fruitcakes** (and more). **Bear Creek, NC**. Read the reviews... recommended!

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*Wishing you a peaceful
Holiday Season and a
new year filled with joy.*

Next issue: February, 2019

Dancing

BY LOU LIPSITZ

i've forgotten
SO MUCH and yet
five seconds of one
song
throws open
the doors
and I see YOU
with that amazing scar -
how
can it be
that after
fifty years
you
are still buried in me, still
wounded and still dancing?

Grand Trees of Chatham Calendar

The popular Grand Trees of Chatham (GTOC) 2019 Naturally Chatham calendar featuring Chatham County nature photos by Gary Simpson is now available from the distributors below in Pittsboro.

The \$20 donation for the calendar supports the work of GTOC throughout the year.

Chatham Marketplace
Deep River Mercantile
Fair Game Beverage Tasting Room
(at the former Biodiesel plant on Lorax Lane)
Liquidambar
New Horizons West
Pittsboro Roadhouse & General Store
Rosemary House B&B

For information about the program contact:
grandtreesofchatham@gmail.com



For the times they are a-changin' —Bob Dylan

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