

News from Main Street Pittsboro

by Randy Voller

Main Street Pittsboro has pulled together information from its Promotions, Economic Vitality, and Design committees to provide guidance and input on how the Town can keep



its Main Street District, vital, authentic, and economically viable.

With input from the state, Main Street Pittsboro recently expanded the borders of the District to reflect Pittsboro's historic boundaries with some small additions. At its January 22nd meeting, the Town voted to expand the district.

Commercial and institutional buildings within the Main Street District are eligible for a Facade Grant Program which will match improvements to the facade of a building on a dollar for dollar basis. This equates to a 50 percent

investment in the form of a grant from Main Street Pittsboro to the property owner to upgrade a building's facade.

In addition to presenting the new map to the Town, and answering questions from the board, Main Street Pittsboro board members provided information about the tax base of the new Main Street District.

Currently, the district is composed of 147 parcels of land, which equate to roughly 60 acres. The total value of those parcels is \$41,546,096, with \$12,232,249 of that value attributed to land and the remaining \$29,344,161 attributed to improvements to the land. This means that in 2017 the Town and County will collect \$317,753.34 in property taxes for properties located in the District. By comparison, when the new multi-use project Mosaic I — located across from Northwood High School — is completed, it will add approximately \$150,000,000 of assessed value to the Town and County, which should equate to roughly \$1,590,000 a year of property tax revenue.

The Town and County also collect a pro rata share of sales tax revenue and revenues from liquor-by-the-drink served at restaurants and bars in the District as well.

One economic challenge with the Main Street District is that 27 of its parcels are "tax exempt" and thus pay no real property taxes at all. Tax exempt parcels include properties owned by churches, the government, non-profit entities and utilities, such as Verizon (formerly Sprint). This could change over time as new plans, ideas and development are approved and developed within the District.

In addition, businesses within the Main Street District employ hundreds of people in jobs such as government and institutional positions, real estate, banking, insurance, professional services, auto repair, restaurants, and retail.

Main Street Pittsboro seeks to enhance the economic prospects of the District in the face of changing times and growth pressures, while maintaining the authentic and original feel of the District, its design, history, culture and people.

If you'd like to learn more or get involved in Main Street Pittsboro, please visit our website at www.MainStreetPittsboro.org

Randy Voller is the former Mayor of Pittsboro, a consultant, business owner and Democratic/progressive political activist.

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Chatham County Line is a community newspaper serving all of Chatham County as well as the southern part of Orange. Our mission is to inform our community by providing a forum "where all voices are heard." We seek all views and ideas about our community, and we report on important matters — including our cultural life — comprehensively and in-depth. Our commitment is to create the best-written, best-edited and most stylish community newspaper anywhere. Chatham County Line is published ten times a year.

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Trauma-hardened by the 1923 Yokohama Earthquake

Part I Ruth Elizabeth Collier met her husband, George Owen Stead, at the University of Michigan. She later worked in New York as a medical secretary, and he was a dentist and Navy Captain. In 1981, they moved to a golf resort southeast of Sanford, North Carolina, from Elma, New York. They had "shopped" extensively for the best place to retire, then learned about Carolina Trace from their neighbors, whose son played its two eighteen-hole Robert Trent Jones courses whenever he was in the area on business. Prior to George's sudden death in 1995, the Steads had begun a search for a smaller home in a retirement community with graduated medical facilities; Ruth moved alone, in February, 1996, to their choice, Plantation Village north of Wilmington. She would return to New England and die among close friends.

George left his naval career to become President of Teledyne's Hanau Engineering. He saw much of the world, but Ruth was in Japan before him. In fact, George gave her the nickname by which she remained known—"Nipper"—from her days in "Nippon," where she and her family experienced one of the world's most traumatic events. Her father's written account of that experience remained a prized possession; her own memories complemented it.

Jiles Heber Collier, always called "Jack," had been in Japan's great "Port City," Yokohama, three years as Superintendent of the Goodrich Rubber Plant. Mrs. Collier had gone out after his first year, and the parents had returned to the States for their son and daughter in the last year.

Life was wonderful in the hospitable city that connected Orient and Occident and showed both off in its architecture and attire—from "coolies" in loin cloths to gentlemen in morning frock and silk plug hats. Diversity was a hallmark. Because Yokohama was an import-export center, the population included some two thousand British, many other foreign nationals, and two thousand Americans, not to mention the tourists arriving via great passenger ships and threading the city in "genuine" rickshaws. No one except an occasional newly arrived "tourist lady" paid much attention to the rather frequent tremors.

JORDAN LAKE
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On September 1, 1923, for the first time during his stay in Japan, Jack Collier, dressed in his customary white silk pongee suit, decided to work for a half-day on a Saturday. The early morning was cloudy, and a pleasant and needed rain had fallen from about 6:30 to 8, but the sun was out and the day beautiful when he arrived at his office. He was sorting the papers on his desk when his chair suddenly canted. The first shock of the Yokohama Earthquake, at 11:58 a.m., produced a sickening side motion that sent him fighting to get out from under the heavy ventilation/heating fan strussed to the ceiling. He made his way outside, though his was a one-story building of concrete reinforced with steel, the latest approved construction. "Just another slight shock." His first thought vanished with the sinister rumbling and thunder. He was thrown down violently as if a rug had suddenly been jerked from under his feet. Impossibly, the factory collapsed. Its beautiful smoke stack, 125 feet high, decorated with quaint Japanese characters, illuminated nightly, and seen from all parts of the city, fell over the building. He had no time to think. An eighteen-inch crack suddenly gaped before him and immediately filled with sea water. Nightmare: clouds of dust from falling buildings, darting flames, smoke suffocating daylight and humans. The ground liquefied; the sound, horrible, intensified. Within fifteen seconds, no habitable building remained in Yokohama.

Jake Collier made sure rescue efforts were in process, then started for his home, three miles away, through a city fast becoming a furnace as horrific winds abetted the flames. He crossed the twisting, rolling railroad tracks; followed the streetcar line; timed his steps to avoid twitching, lashing power lines. The crowds and intense heat blocked the way to the waterfront. Burning buildings likewise prevented a direct route to Yokohama City Park.

Miraculously, one collapsed and momentarily opened a narrow passage. He crawled to the canal and eventually joined the thousands who had sought refuge in the open space of the park. They were standing in water to their knees, to their waists by the time the next terrible shock seized the city and sent him retreating to the streetcar rails. The dying pinned under fallen buildings could only await the flames. Hell stared back from every direction.

He could not pause. Mrs. Collier, thirteen-year-old Harold, and almost-eight-year-old Ruth were at home. His wife would run for the front door with the children and wait for the tremors to end. She knew how to proceed. She would not panic. Neither would the children. Seasoned natives had advised him when he first arrived, and he had had the occasion to practice when he and his wife had been trapped on the second floor of a hotel during an ordinary quake in April, 1922. They had stood in the door and watched until the walls stopped see-sawing.

He arrived at his home about two hours after the first heavy quake. He had encountered a bridge upended five feet, a caved-in embankment. Women and children had placed narrow planks end to end and tried in vain to negotiate between the embankment and the far end of the bridge. He crossed the canal by jumping drifting boats, eventually made his way to what was left of the prestigious Bluff area, and moved on toward the open country where he would find whatever was left of his home.

Mr. Collier reported that his wife and children knelt and prayed in the doorway, along with the two Japanese girls who worked for the family. The house, a modern bungalow built a few years earlier by an American doctor, danced on its foundation. The heavy chimneys crashed, opening great holes in the roof and bringing down the ceilings and beams. Plaster was two feet high on the floors. The furniture was thrown across the living room.

Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler, of Burlington's The Village at Brookwood, a former college president, is widely published in academics and creative writing and works as a writer and an editor. A version of this column was published in The Lone Wolf Review, 3.2 (2000).

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