

Pittsboro's tragic experience with circumstantial evidence

A good amount of background material regarding events in Chatham's history can be obtained from old newspaper clippings and conversations with people. This column is largely based on information submitted to the Chatham County Herald by Wade Barber, a prominent local attorney, on May 20, 1981. Mr. Barber had been told this story by a Confederate veteran, John R. Bright.

The events to be related were said to have occurred in Chatham about two or three decades before the Civil War. There were no local newspapers in the county at that time and the story was handed down orally.

Apparently a local drinking establishment stood on the east side of Hillsboro Street, just north of the present court house circle. On one particular evening the customers included a rather well-to-do Chatham property owner who was smartly dressed in a black broadcloth coat. Also drinking at the bar was a large, muscular man who was telling his companions about a planned move to property that he had purchased in Mississippi. As he spoke with his companions another local man, somewhat inebriated, entered the premises and after ordering a half-pint of whiskey began insulting the affluent property owner. There was apparently an exchange of harsh words and the drunkard declared that if he met the well-dressed citizen outside he would slit the man's throat from ear to ear.

After closing his establishment at sundown the bartender cleaned up the premises and went to the hitching post at the rear of the building to get his horse. He was horrified to find the well-dressed man sprawled out on the ground with his throat cut. The sheriff was called and soon he and a number of local citizens were at the scene of the crime.

A local man claimed to have seen the drunk hitch his horse and wagon to the post behind the bar about one half hour before closing time. The bartender and other

CHATHAM'S Historical Heritage

By Fred J. Vatter, Jr.



bystanders told the sheriff about the threatened throat cutting.

A search was started for the inebriated man and the sheriff found the man's horse and wagon heading for his home near the Rocky River, with the drunk passed out cold on the bed of the wagon. There was a blood stain near his side coat pocket, which was found to contain an open knife with a bloody blade.

After he regained sobriety the suspected man insisted that he didn't remember anything and said that the knife was not his. The well-dressed victim had been known to carry large amounts of money on his person, but only a small amount of change had been found on his body. The drunk was searched but his billfold contained only one dollar. He did not appear to have robbery as a motive for the crime.

Another local man owned a farm that was scheduled for sale at a foreclosure auction. He had tried to borrow money from the affluent man to save his farm. The desperate fellow was not only turned down but learned that the affluent man was planning to purchase the farm himself at the auction. The poor farmer was questioned by the sheriff but seemed to have a valid alibi as to his whereabouts at the time of the murder.

Eventually the drunk was indicted and tried in Superior Court. There had been no witness but the jury relied upon the circumstantial evidence to find him guilty of murder.

The unfortunate man was sentenced to death and was shortly thereafter executed on Pittsboro's hanging tree.

Sadly, a couple of months later, the man who had moved to Mississippi became ill and on his deathbed gave a sworn statement to the Clerk of County Court stating that he was the one who slit the throat of the affluent gentleman. He explained that he dropped the bloody knife into the drunk's pocket, helped him up onto his wagon, and started the man's horse on his homeward journey.

Shortly after his confession the man died but his statement was mailed to the Clerk of the Superior Court in Chatham County.

Fred J. Vatter is Past President of Chatham County Historical Association and a Board Member

BRIEFS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

"We are excited that a public online database of all of our county's services is now available," said Kathy Hodges, co-executive director of Family Violence & Rape Crisis Services, an agency that participated the testing phase of Chatham Connecting. "One of its best features is people can connect clients with a wide range of services from several agencies."

Dianne Birch, a member of the

development committee, has been asked to speak to other Triangle organizations about the beginnings of Chatham Connecting, which may end up serving as a model for similar websites. "We have heard from many people who are excited and we think participation will grow over time as the website becomes more known," she said.

Holy Trinity Chatham is fledgling congregation

All are invited to visit a new church in Chatham County, Holy Trinity. Our worship service is held at 9 a.m. on Sundays.

We share space with Evergreen United Methodist (11098 US 15/501, just south of Cole Park Plaza). You can expect a warm welcome; passionate liturgical worship; vibrant music and singing; engaging sermons; Holy Communion; a joyful and reverent mood; the family of God worshipping together. Our phone is 919.631.9564 and our website is at <http://www.holytrinitychatham.org>

Along with sharing space on Sundays with Evergreen, we are delighted to be helping with the Take and Eat Food Pantry housed within Evergreen. This food pantry provides assistance to families in eastern Chatham County, specifically the Northwood High School area.

Free health screenings during Healthy Heart Day

The Chatham County Council on Aging invites residents to receive free health wellness screenings, fitness information and other activities as part of its 16th Annual Healthy Heart Day on Tuesday, February 7, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Western Chatham Senior Center in Siler City.

The health screenings include the Lion's Club vision van, blood sugar checks, balance and hearing screenings, memory and depression screenings, and foot checks.

The event also features information on chair massages, dental care, pharmacy, physical therapy, nutrition, home care, assisted living and health insurance

assistance. Related books, jewelry and handmade gifts will be on sale.

This free event is the kick-off for "We Love Seniors Month," the Council on Aging's annual celebration of Chatham County's older adults. Other events coming in February include the 24th Annual Chocolate Cake Bake Off, a Rook tournament, the 4th Annual Concerned Bikers Association Polar Bear Poker Run and an AARP (American Association for Retired Persons) dinner.

For more information on these activities, call 919.542.4512 in Pittsboro or 919.742.3975 in Siler City.

Galloway Ridge Fund helps Chatham nonprofits

For the fifth consecutive year, the Charitable Fund of Galloway Ridge, Inc., a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 retirement community located near Ferrington Village, has awarded grants to Chatham County Community not-for-profit organizations, public schools and governmental units.

This year the Fund awarded grants totaling \$43,745. Projects and programs were supported at these organizations:

Bonlee Elementary School, Bynum Front Porch, Chatham Soccer League, Chatham County Arts Council, Central Carolina Community College, Chatham County Schools, CORA Food Pantry, Chatham County Council on Aging, Family Promise of Chatham County, North Chatham Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., Pittsboro Elementary School, Pittsboro Elementary School PTA, Sage Academy, Sisters' Voices, Inc., St. Julia's Catholic Church, West Chatham Food Pantry.

LEND A HAND. WARM A HEART.

Families are struggling to afford basic necessities. You can help. Your gift to the Energy Neighbor Fund helps low-income families who could not otherwise afford to heat their homes this winter.



ENERGY NEIGHBOR FUND

Join Progress Energy employees in supporting the Energy Neighbor Fund. You may donate online at progress-energy.com/enf.

Or fill out this form and return it with your next bill. Choose one option below:

- An **ongoing** pledge amount added to each monthly electric bill.
 - Add \$1 Add \$5 Add \$_____
- A **one-time** contribution added to next month's electric bill. \$_____
- A **one-time** contribution in a separate check, mailed with your bill. \$_____

Progress Energy account number _____ Date _____

Customer name (please print) _____

Signature _____



**Pam Herndon CLU
LUTCFC ChFC, Agent**
104 S Estes Dr, Ste 105
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Bus: 919-240-0155
www.pamherndon.net

Come in for a test save.

Total average savings of
\$696*

Let me show you how combining home and auto policies can add up to big savings. Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.®

CALL FOR A QUOTE 24/7



*Average annual per household savings based on a national 2009 survey of new policyholders who reported savings by switching to State Farm. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company, State Farm Indemnity Company, State Farm Fire and Casualty Company, State Farm General Insurance Company, Bloomington, IL

NEED MORE INCOME FOR YOUR RETIREMENT?

Work from home advertising for an Inc. 500 company.

Find out more today!

www.so-worth-it.com/retire

Kathy Simmers
919-612-0009

So Worth It
BALANCE + FREEDOM + PEACE OF MIND