

## **Historical Perspectives**

**By Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler**

### **Colon, NC**

The Buckner Post Office was established (25 May 1891) 3.5 miles northeast of Sanford under Postmaster William B. Webster. No one seems to know why it was renamed (2 January 1892) Colon. Some derive the name from a Scottish town; others, from *Colonel* C. O. Sanford, whose surname was adopted for Sanford. It appears as a given name among local Black and White families (e.g., Judd, Kelly, McKenzie). From a few families (Wicker, Redding, Lynch, Davison, McIver, Dye, Bela, Webster, Riggsbee, Smith), Colon grew to about 500 and, in the 1930's, belonged to the Lee-Chatham Baseball League.

In early 1860, worship services began under a brush arbor and were eventually held at "Bela Church," a house originally owned by the Belas. In 1872, David Turner Dye organized a Sunday school, served as its first superintendent, and was later a minister. When he left the state, about 1874, the name became Turner's Chapel United Church of Christ in his honor. From 1906-1926, when it joined the Sanford System, the two-room Colon School offered eight grades. It functioned as the Community Building (1934-57) until dismantled and moved.

The oldest home (1892) was built beside the tracks for David Samuel and Augusta Riggsbee Redding. He was connected with Atlantic and Western Railway. Their son, John Aaron Redding, another "railroad man" and the husband of Lessie Lee Nalls Redding, designed and made the "U.S. Post Office" sign for Colon. Today, the house is occupied by their daughter, Johnsie Lee Redding Tipton and her husband Dean. The next oldest homes were those of the Lemon Lynch and Will Talley families.

The Raleigh and Augusta Airline Railroad laid the tracks from Haw River to Sanford (1 July 1871-1 July 1872), and Colon's depot came in 1893. The first agent was William Tally. The Section House, constructed 1865-70, housed the railroad Section Foreman and, with the well in back, was a Colon landmark. Moses Nunn and Martha Thompson Redding were the first occupants.

The Post Office was initially in the Postmasters' homes and served 34 people. In 1925, Hume C. Booker, also agent for the Seaboard Airline Railway, erected a brick building as a store, with the Post Office in the rear. When he retired, the J. T. Bridges bought it and replaced it (1963) with a building of bricks made at Sanford Brick and Tile, where Bridges was employed. Some of the store's counters and the wall separating the Post Office and grocery were of Philippine mahogany. The Post Office, in the rear, with its entrance on the east side, was located a few yards across the tracks from the depot. Sanford Brick & Tile was its major user. It also served as a "book station" in lieu of a library.

Sam Smith started the first brick plant, but a chance encounter led to a major one. Lewis Calvin Isenhour, whose Rowan County family had turned from gold mining to brick-making, made a business trip by train (1918) and was excited to see, in passing, the red (Triassic) shale of Colon's ditch banks and cuts. His daughter Mary came with him on a return trip by car to inspect

the area firsthand and meet with landowner Jonas Frank Wicker. She was concerned when the men did not return as scheduled, for they had become lost! Her father took home to Salisbury bags of shale samples and tested them at her grandfather's brick plant. Pleased with the results, he purchased land from Wicker and built a home for his family and a brickyard (started in 1919, producing in 1920). Sanford Brick & Tile Co. would be "the South's largest manufacturer from New England to Florida with excellent rail and truck service." Other entrepreneurs, including Marks, Dalrymple, Snipes, Holler, Borden, Lano, followed. Robert Dalrymple's father and uncle, with Snipes and Marks, started Shale Brick and Tile. It, too, used beehive (round, downdraft) kilns and had a commissary for workers. The Isenhours bought out competitors and merged Colon's four brick factories after 1935. As Sanford Brick Corporation, it pioneered (1977) the use of wood waste products as a fuel for firing bricks. Colon was also home to Roman Charcoal Corporation.

For additional information, see Lessie Lee Nalls Redding's "Sketches of Colon" and the section on brick and railroads in *In Celebration of the 2007 Centennial of Lee County* compiled/edited by Lynn Veach Sadler. Mrs. Redding was the Colon representative for the *Sanford Herald*. Her daughter Johnsie worked for the *Southern Pines Pilot* and signed all her correspondence with me "God bless and Jesus take the wheel." [That sounds better and better in the times we're living in *now*.]

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. As Central Region Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet 2013-2015, she mentored student and adult poets.