

THE HISTORY OF KNIGHTDALE

(Compiled by Joyce P. Smith in 1971)

The history of Knightdale as a community goes back to 1907 when the Norfolk and Southern Railroad located a depot on land donated for that purpose by Mr. Henry Haywood Knight. Besides giving the right-of-way for the railroad from Raleigh Eastward, the Knights also donated land for a school and for the Baptist Church. Thus the town was named "Knightdale".

A. A. Jernigan ran a typical small country store, selling a few groceries, some patent medicines and beer, just down the street from the depot. This was on First Avenue where the Spic and Span Cleaners stands today. Mr. Jernigan was forced out of business when the Baptist Church was built on the corner of Main and Second Avenue in 1906 because of the statute stating that alcoholic beverages may not be sold within a certain distance of places of worship.

The first general store in this farming community was the N. G. House Store. It, too, was on First Avenue across from the depot and where Stained Glass Associates is today. The first telephone in the area was installed here.

On May 29, 1908 an office of the U. S. Post Office was opened at Knightdale with James M. Ferrell as the first postmaster. He was followed in this post by Joe Horton, G. C. Purkerson (1915-1920), Bennett Wall (1920-1941), Myrtle Wall October 20, 1941--December 13, 1959), Yates Neville (December 14, 1959--April 14, 1961), Bailey Williamson (April 15, 1961-- August 25, 1961), Billy Rand Faison (August 26, 1961--June 11, 1964) and Grady Douglas, Jr., who has served from June 12, 1964 to the present.

On September 1, 1908, G. E. Robertson and son opened a general merchandise store on practically the same site where Robertson's Store stands today. The "son" in the business was Mr. D. J. Robertson who retired in 1942 and lives just down the street from the store now. Mr. D. J. recalls how the town looked when he came to open his store that fall of 1908. A path had been cleared through a grove of pine trees with stumps still remaining here and there. Leading off the main highway, the path followed a course about where the Main Street in Knightdale is today. There were a couple of houses and N. G. House's General Store. The Post Office was located near where Second Avenue is now.

The story of Robertson's Store closely parallels the growth and development of the Town of Knightdale. It began primarily serving the farmer's needs since Knightdale was a farming area. As the years passed, the economic picture of Knightdale has changed until today it is primarily a residential area with the farming changed to mechanization with little need for farming supplies. So, Robertson's Store today is devoted largely to groceries with only a small corner supplying hardware and farm needs.

Ownership of the store changed hands several times, but it has remained in the Robertson family until today, 63 years. It changed from "G.E. Robertson and Son" to "Robertson and Keith" to "Robertson Brothers" to "C. L. Robertson and Son."

Knight's Chapel Baptist Church was organized on March 17, 1901 with 12 charter members and Rev. C. E. Gower as the first pastor. The newly formed congregation met in Knight's School House which was located in a pecan grove about where Country Squire Mobile Estates is today. In 1906 a frame church building was erected on Main Street a block behind House's Store, where the church stands today. On October 4, 1930, the congregation voted to change the name of the church to Knightdale Baptist Church. Rev. Charles Howard was pastor then. A new brick building was dedicated on the same site in 1951, it is the present sanctuary. Over the years, many improvements have been made in the church-property. Significant among these was the addition of air-conditioning for the sanctuary in 1962. A new educational building was ready for use in the fall of 1967. This modern, two-story brick structure is completely air-conditioned. It houses the pastor's study, church office, library and Sunday School rooms and offices. The most successful revival in the history of Knightdale Baptist Church, in 1964, added 70 new members--47 of these by baptism. Rev. Stanley K. Howard was the revivalist and Rev. Jack Painter was pastor at the time. The current pastor, Rev. George Pullium, has been serving the church since September, 1967.

Knightdale Methodist Church was organized on July 29, 1917 by Rev. L. E. Sawyer with 12 charter members. The first church building, completed in 1919, was a one-room frame building used for Sunday School and preaching. This building was replaced by the present brick structure in 1949. Wings providing 6 additional rooms were added later.

About 1949, the membership of Oaky Grove Methodist Church (between 15 and 20 active members) was -transferred to Knightdale Methodist Church.

The present minister, Rev. R. Bruce Pate, came to this field in June; 1968.

KNIGHTDALE SCHOOL

Around the turn of the century, local children attended Knight's School which was located in a pecan orchard on the Knight Estate about where Country Squire Mobile Homes is today. A few years later the Knights gave some land to build a school in Knightdale. That site was on First Avenue where the home of Mrs. Selma Robertson and Claude Robertson, Jr., are today, adjacent to the cemetery. Eventually the schoolhouse was enlarged by three rooms and grades one through nine were taught there. Anyone wishing to finish high school (only 11 grades then) had to go to boarding school in Zebulon.

The present school was built in 1926 and the first graduating class was in 1927. This consolidated the many small schools which were scattered over this area. It served as both elementary and high school until Vaiden-Whitley was completed in 1965. Over the years many additions and improvements have been made to the building. From 1965 to 1970 grades one through eight were taught there. Beginning in the fall of 1970, grades one through six comprised the school's program. Seventh and eighth grades were sent to Lockhart Junior High, J. Everett Hudson came as principal of the school in 1960.

THE WOMEN'S BETTERMENT ASSOCIATION OF KNIGHTDALE PUBLIC SCHOOL was organized in 1912 and was the forerunner of the present Knightdale Extension Homemaker's Club. In the early days the club members centered their interest around the school. It is believed that the Knightdale School was the first North Carolina rural school to serve lunches. Members of the Betterment Association volunteered to take turns preparing and serving one hot dish to the children each weekday beginning on November 19, 1918. Not only did the women help with the lunches, but they raised money to buy stoves, dishes, and clocks for the school.

The Association minutes from 1915, tell of Box Parties, a spelling Match, a Quilting Contest, and presentation of a play to raise money to pay for a piano for the school. In 1950, the Knightdale Club House was built on a lot donated by the late J. F. Keith. The Club has a large assembly room, modern kitchen, 2 cloak rooms and 2 rest rooms. The kitchen is fully equipped with cooking utensils, dishes and silver. There is a piano in the assembly room. Many people helped raise the money to construct the clubhouse. It is used as a community building by church groups, youth groups and family reunions.

In the Fall of 1970, many of the members of the Knightdale Extension Homemakers Club received recognition for 40 or more years membership and service in their organization.

THE KNIGHTDALE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT was organized in 1953 with 27 charter members. Randolph Griffin was the first Chief. It began with a used truck and equipment and built their first building in 1956. Today they have a 32-member unit with 2 pumpers, 2 tankers and a trash-and-woods-fire truck and they participate in the county-wide fire department radio hook-up.

DOCTORS AND MEDICAL CENTER

Dr. J. R. Hester was the first doctor in Knightdale. He lived and practiced here from June 5, 1910 to 1929. He was followed by Dr. R. R. Weathers who practiced from his home assisted by his wife who was a nurse. (Dates: October, 1926 to June, 1958). When Dr. Weathers became unable to continue his practice, a group of interested townspeople banded together to build a medical center and secure a doctor and dentist. The Knightdale Medical Center was incorporated and sold its first stock on July 2, 1959. The medical building was ready for occupancy on January, 1960, and Dr. Norman Hornstein was the first to practice there. Dr. Rollin Ransom came on August 17, 1960 and remains the town dentist.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Knightdale claims two sons who have held the office of County Commissioner: C. N. Robertson (1950-1962) and J. T. Knott, Jr., who is serving currently. C. N. Robertson was chairman of the Wake County Board of Social Services in the 1950s also.

SIDE LIGHTS:

Three miles West of Knightdale on Highway 64E in the area generally known as Green Pines is an area which was strongly considered as a site for the State Capitol.

Three miles East of Knightdale just off Highway 64E is the Wendell-Knightdale Airport which boasts the only privately-owned paved airstrip in the area which has no federal, state or county funds backing it. It is owned by J. T. Knott, Jr.

THE HISTORY OF KNIGHTDALE

On March 9, 1927, the N. C. Legislature ratified an act incorporating the town of Knightdale, setting forth its boundaries, providing for town officers, and empowering the mayor and aldermen to "make such rules, ordinances, regulations and laws as may be necessary for proper government." Since that time, the boundaries have been enlarged twice.

The first mayor, Bennett L. Wall, and the aldermen--N. G. House, J. F. Keith, L. A. Doub, J. T. Ramsey and C. L. Robertson were appointed by the Legislature. An election was set for "the second Tuesday in May, 1928, and every two years thereafter...with the mayor and five aldermen to take office on the first Monday in June following their election." Those first town officers were the local businessmen: Mayor Wall ran the drugstore located on the corner of First Avenue and Main Street across from the depot. J. T. Ramsey was in the lumber business. C. L. Robertson and J. F. Keith were in the mercantile business where Robertson's Store is today. N. G. House ran a store in the building which now houses Stained Glass Associates, and-L. A. Doub's business was on the corner of Railroad and Market Streets.

Mr. Doub is the only surviving member of this group. Present town officials include Mayor Eugene F. Harper who has served in this capacity for more than 20 years with only one 2-year interruption. Aldermen are Odell Edwards, Tommy Oakley, Claude Robertson, Jr., Vance Tibbens and Billy Wilder.

The town clerk is O. W. Hedrick, police chief is Gurthie Daniel and assistant police chief and

sanitation engineer is Ray Eddins. Bernice I. Wall is chief of the Volunteer Fire Department, G. C. Purkerson is the tax collector, and Clarence Kirk is the town attorney.

POPULATION

The population of Knightdale has grown each decade since the town's incorporation. In 1930 there were 243 people listed in the census, in 1940 there were 352, in 1950--461, by 1960 it had jumped to 622 and the population had risen to 815 by the 1970 census.

WATER AND SEWAGE

In the early forties the town first considered installing complete water and sewer systems. The Federal Government offered to pay 75-80% of the cost, using WPA labor. The town's part would have been about \$25,000. However, when it was put to a vote, the people voted it down. As Mayor Harper explains it, "The -town was very small then and \$25,000 was a lot more money than it is today."

For some time, a privately-owned water system supplied much of the town. Many homes had private wells. Then in 1952, the municipal water system brought metered water to each house and installed fire hydrants. This water supply comes from 3 deep wells.

The Town of Knightdale has the unique distinction of being the only town in Wake County which uses the lagoon system of sewage disposal. This system was completed in 1970 at a cost of \$253,000. This is the most inexpensive type of sewer installation. Prior to that time the town had no sewer system.

THE FIRE

One happening that stands out in the memories of long-time residents was the big fire that destroyed nearly an entire block of the business section in 1940. At 2:40 that Wednesday morning, February 7,

1940, Mrs. Doris Taylor was awakened by the cries of her year-old son, Zachary. Smelling smoke and seeing flames, she roused other members of her family, and her brother, George Robertson, ran to waken other residents of Knightdale. The bell at the Baptist Church was rung to call the people out to help. The fire apparently started in the back of Robertson's General Store and spread quickly to a hot dog stand, barbershop, two empty stores, a new store scheduled to open the next week and the Wiley Robertson and Claude Robertson homes. The Raleigh Fire Department was called by Gene Harper, but they did not arrive until 4:30. Volunteer workers carried water in every available bucket, tub and pan trying to prevent damage to their homes, the drug store, post office and beauty parlor.

Mayor J. E. Davis estimated the total damage at approximately \$60,000.

The fire information is recorded in the February 7, 1940 edition of THE RALEIGH TIMES, Volume LX, No. 84.

Knightdale's only Industry is a beautiful and unusual one – Stained Glass Associates. Robert Wysocki brought the beauty of stained glass manufacture to Knightdale from Raleigh in 1960. They sell to churches, firms and homes all over the United States. Six people are employed in this old world craft.

(This history of Knightdale was written by Joyce P. Smith in March, 1971.

Assistants in research were Lewis Parrish, Mildred Wall,

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