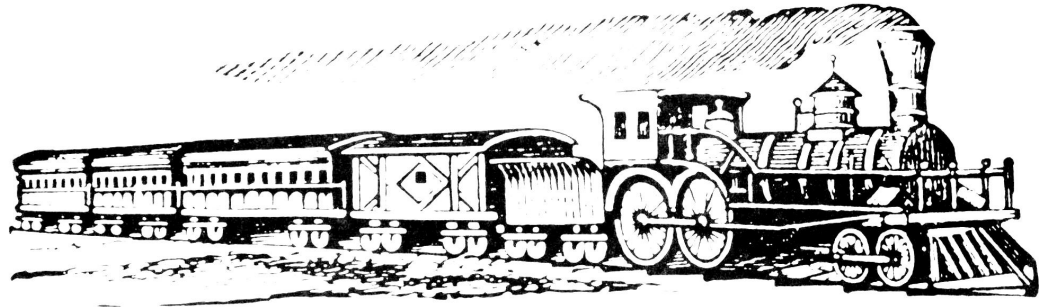


# The Dispatch

Apex Historical Society



The Newsletter of the Apex Historical Society

Apex, North Carolina

January/February/March 2020

## ***Looking back at our Society's History.***

**by Claire Rousseau, Past President and founding member**

**Welcome aboard** to our 34<sup>th</sup> year as we keep chugging along the tracks making history as we go.

We come to a crossroads in 2020. As we stop to evaluate, look back and sit on the tracks for a spell, we make new plans to move forward with purpose and meaning in presenting and interpreting Apex's history for future generations.

Please join us as we look back over the years since our inception as a society October of 1987.

We look at our accomplishments. Places saved, such as the Maynard Pearson House. Yet some not, such as the Norris House and Shepherd's Vineyard Plantation House. For these we gather the memories of residents and share the pictures of this vanished Apex of long ago. We can talk about them and recall their owners and their way of life.

Join us as we carry on our mission to preserve, protect and promote Apex history.

## ***Talking with Buddy Holland***

**By Claire Rousseau**

Today I had the pleasure of talking with Buddy Holland about his photograph of the old Norris home. You may recall seeing the photo of it in the Maynard Pearson House placed over the mantle in the front room. This room is dedicated to the Norris Family as it showcases their donated period furnishings.



Buddy told me that the day after a snow storm in February 1960 he ventured out to snap this iconic picture of the Norris house.



“The old house just looked so lovely covered in snow,” he said, and he also recalled fondly it’s occupants Miss Maude Norris and sister Maybelle, daughters of Jesse A Norris (b.10 Dec 1831 d.24 Nov 1916) and 2<sup>nd</sup> wife Ellen B Coffield (b.19 Oct 1859 d. 25 Oct 1889). The sisters lived in the family home growing vegetables to sell along with milk from their two cows and eggs from the chickens they kept. Miss Maude also sold Avon cosmetics. He said they were well liked in the community.

Buddy recalls his father, **Nathaniel Earl Holland**, worked for Oakdale Service Garage in Raleigh that serviced the trucks and sales cars for the Garland C Norris Company in Apex. The company was started by Garland C Norris, brother to Maude and Maybelle.

This company still exists today in Apex, after having moved for a time to Raleigh. Buddy remembers his dad traveling to Florida to the Golden Tap Orange Juice plant to repair trucks that brought juice to Apex to be sold through the Norris Company. He enjoyed the fresh oranges and grapefruits his dad brought home from these trips.

Buddy turned 86 this past December 24<sup>th</sup> and as a charter member of the Apex Historical Society, he still enjoys meetings with our society sharing the old Apex stories.

He was a neighbor of **Jan Brooks** on Center Street, recalling her saying upon moving to this town in 1982, that, “Apex needs an historical society,” and by golly, she set out and founded one. He continued, “You know Claire, she did a good thing helping us to appreciate our town history.” He concluded our talk saying he appreciated all the Society has done and will continue to help as long as he can.

We thank Buddy for graciously sharing his stories with us.

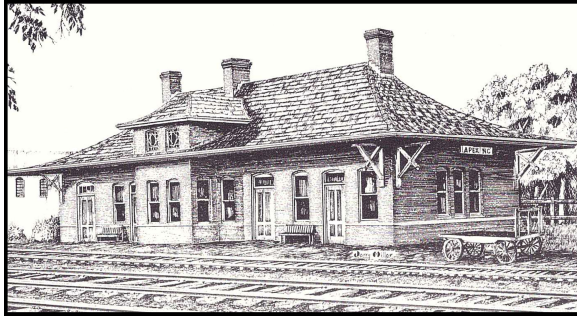
### Looking back at our history, continued...

We have added new events such as the annual Tree Lighting and the Home Tour, which have become annual traditions that bring people together each December. These events and the Town Christmas Parade make for fun weekend family activities.





We can look back proudly at our town buildings that we have had placed on the historic register in 1988, and which sport bronze plaques indicating their building date: the Depot in 1914, and the Town Hall (now the Halle Center) in 1912.



History comes to life as we walk the streets and read the historic markers on the buildings. The Depot, the Town Hall, punctuated by the Red Caboose, serve as reminders of what brought people and a way of life to this pine tree covered piece of earth. Notecards are available.



*Apex Historical Society  
25th Anniversary - Oct. 14, 2012  
100-Year-Old Former Town Hall is Venue*

So much of what we enjoy today reflects on our being a group with a mission. Our officers and calendar are listed on the closing page. Hop on board.

## ***The Norris House Remembered***

**By Mary Hunter Schaub**

The railroad that runs in front of the Norris House site was used during the Civil war to allow Chatham County coal to be supplied to the Confederacy. After the war, its purposes were reverted to the peaceful pursuit of commerce. The first substantial local enterprise to make use of the railroad was the large lumber firm founded by **J. McC.**

**Ellington.** Around 1840, he built a house near the railway line, at what is now **100 South Elm Street.** As he prospered, he joined with other prominent citizens to develop the rural land into what became the town of Apex.

### **Distinctive Tower Added in 1880**

In November, 1880, **Mr. J. A. Norris** moved to Apex from the Fuquay area because he needed reliable rail access for his lumber and turpentine business. He bought the Elm Street house from Mr. Ellington, and added on the distinctive tower-centered front section, making what we remember as the Norris House.

A 1959 **Raleigh Times** article reports the Norris House to be “one of the oldest in this area built of heart pine.” Mr. Norris “spent many months getting it ready for his family.” His first wife, **Amy Ann Adams** of Holly Springs (1834-1872), died when her seven children were still very young.

He then married **Ellen Barbara Coffield (1859-1889)**, who also died young, but not before giving him six more children. Mr. Norris cared for them with the faithful assistance of **Uncle John**, an African American servant who was both cook and butler. The banquet sized dining table regularly accommodated 18 or more, and the fine food and gracious atmosphere caused the Norris House to be known locally as “Hospitality Hall.”

In those early days, Mr Norris built two large “summer houses” on the spacious front lawn.

These were welcoming shelters for visiting businessmen or friends whose horses were cared for in the lot behind the main house.

The picket fence bordering the front lawn was **built after the Civil War** by a Yankee soldier working his way back north. Mr. Norris gave him room and board and a small weekly wage while he constructed the fence. There was a hand-carved gate between posts topped by massive carved knobs.

### **The Norris House was indeed a Finely Built and Furnished Home**

A 1949 article by **Mabel S Lassiter** provides wonderful details on the house.

The main section was two stories high, with nine rooms, three halls, and four first-floor porches. In the Victorian tradition, the porches were decorated with delicate ornamental woodwork. The central tower rose to about a four-story height, crowned by a shingled cupola. Stairs gave access to the tower's third floor, and then ladders allowed the venturesome to ascend into the cupola where two porticos were enclosed with balustrades.

Directly above the symmetrical second story windows, a pair of matching squared dormers flanked the tower. The large center entrance hall was hooded by a gothic arch, and opened into a diagonal hall that extended across the entire house. It was enclosed by "huge beveled doors whose locks still hold the original keys." A breezeway connected the distant kitchen with the servants' quarters.

In its prime, the Norris House was lavishly furnished. Many of the pieces were made from black walnut grown on neighboring tracts of land.

Attention upon one's entry was immediately drawn to the massive walnut newel post supporting the stair railings. A six-inch walnut cornice edged in gilt crowned the top course next to the ceilings, and that decorative design was repeated over the tall, slender windows.

These full-length windows were fitted with interior shutters with movable slats.

Miss **Maude Norris** told Mabel Lassiter, "In those days, there were no screens, so people just walked in and out the (first floor) windows as they would through doors. Too, more light came through windows reaching to the floor surface."

The walls were white plastered, and there were eight fireplaces with handmade mantels. Two large brick chimneys extended above the roof level and across about two thirds of the windowless end walls of the house's front section.

Old masters' prints framed in gilt and walnut decorated the walls. There was a profusion of marble-topped tables and old-fashioned hat stands. Among the handmade chairs was a "quaint high-back rocker in constant use for over half a century, constructed with a space to fit the head and curve of the shoulders." An antique oil lamp with frosted rose glass shade was suspended from the ceiling by slender brass chains.

### **Not all of these grand relics of the past are gone.**

A splendid photograph taken by Buddy Holland in the late 1960's shortly before the Norris House was destroyed hangs above the Maynard Pearson House mantel in what is termed "the Norris parlor." That parlor's furniture comes from the Norris House, as do all the dark shutters and two porch balusters. Maude's pedal-operated sewing machine is also on display.

A Wheeler and Wilson, a forerunner of the more famous Singer, it was the first sewing machine in this area. Maude was a gifted needle-worker and seamstress.

The Maynard Pearson house also has a framed photograph of an elegant dinner party given by Maude Norris. One of the prominent Apex citizens in attendance was **Mrs. A. B. Hunter**.



There is also a framed advertisement from the **Garland C. Norris Company**, with pictures of the founding staff. Garland Norris was one of Maude's brothers. His business operated an office in Apex for many years before moving to Raleigh, and then back to Apex.

I well recall the colorful designs painted on his big transport trucks – the legend “Golden Tap”, was enormous oranges and little children (or elves?) sticking faucet-like taps into the oranges to drain out the juice (Mr. Norris acquired his juice from his Florida operations).

Another brother, **Herbert**, was a respected lawyer and district solicitor, and **Julia Montgomery Street**, the noted N.C. children's book writer was a niece (granddaughter to Jesse A Norris.)

### **Spinster Sisters Occupied the Home After Mr. Norris' Passing**

Mr. J.A. Norris died in 1916. **Maude** and her younger sister **Maybelle** remained alone together in the Norris House. Maybelle had suffered a birth injury and needed protective care for the rest of her life. Maude considered that responsibility solely hers. She told a family friend, “Maybelle is to stay with me. The Lord and I will take care of her.”

Long-time Apex residents will remember the inseparable Norris sisters making their regular walks along main street.

As the years passed, the Norris House and the sisters gradually weathered and weakened. My sister **Sandra** remembers as a child (probably around 1944 when she was about 6) accompanying our grandmother **Mrs. O. P. Schaub** on a visit to the Norris House for afternoon tea and cookies. Even then, the structure of the house was dangerously decrepit in places.

Sandra was an energetic climber, and was drawn to the tempting staircases leading

upward toward the great tower. She was deeply disappointed when Miss Maude limited her tour of the house to a walk down a long hall to the back sections, and firmly refused to let her go up any of the stairs.

They were entertained in a front parlor. Sandra remembers sitting on a footstool beside Mrs. Schaub's chair. It was like going back a whole century, she recalls in retrospect, and adds that the Norris sisters seemed to belong to that earlier time.

### **Maude Norris was an Accomplished Gardener.**

When Mr. Norris constructed the main house, he also had the acre of grounds landscaped by the best gardening expert available. Elms and maples were set to border the front walk. Maude later said that as long as she could remember, there had been a fine planting of blackberry lilies, whose flowers resembled butterfly orchids, and whose seed pods exactly mimicked blackberries.

A 1959 article by **Mr. W. L. Blanton** praised Maude's gardening talents in the most glowing terms. Mr. Blanton, then pastor of Salem Baptist Church, and himself an accomplished gardener, exclaimed over her bountiful vegetable gardens and especially noted that among her many beautiful flowers, the chrysanthemum appeared to be her favorite. When she was able to pursue gardening, she made countless gifts to friends of flowers and her celebrated homemade relishes and pickles.

Mr. Blanton concluded his warm profile, “she is, I believe, the most respected and beloved citizen of our town, and incidentally, our finest gardener.”

### **The Norris Home Imparted a Sense of Imposing Dignity**

I doubt that any person who ever saw the Norris House will ever forget its imposing dignity. Even when it declined into deserted semi-ruin, it remained an impressive structure,

a very special Apex landmark. Those of us who remember it will never pass by its vacated space without envisioning what the Norris House must have been in its days of inhabited grandeur, and feeling the keenest regret that all efforts to preserve it so that it might be restored were swept aside.

When a landmark that has been an integral part of the historical fabric of a town is untimely demolished, it leaves an aching void. The poet **Edwin Markham** captured that emotion in his poignant eulogy for Abraham Lincoln:

*"As when a kingly cedar green with boughs  
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,  
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."*

For those of us Apex residents who remember the Norris House, there is a lonesome place at 100 South Elm Street.

*By Mary Hunter Schaub of Apex, (1943 - 2009),  
from the AHS archives, December 2, 2001,  
copyright 2001-2020 by AHS. Ms. Schaub was a  
noted Apex writer. This article was featured in the  
2001 Christmas Home Tour brochure.*

## Postscript

In 1976, the estate of Jesse A. Norris via Triangle Associates approached Apex United Methodist Church (AUMC) about the purchase of the land defined as "Tracts A and B according to survey and plat of J.A. Norris Estate (Old Home Place) by Smith and Smith Surveyors, dated October 3, 1973, and being part of the land convey to Jesse Norris by deed dated November 4, 1880." The total area of this land was 1.598 acres and greatly expanded the physical property of the Church. The Norris home (since burned by the Town of Apex) and several cedar trees still standing along the property frontage with South Elm Street were included in this purchase completed by the Church on June 30, 1976 and recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 2423, Page 417) at a price of \$25,000.

## Apex Erects Historical Markers at Rosenwald Schools

by Warren Holleman



During the first half of the 20th century, half the population of SW Wake County (Apex, Holly Springs, Friendship, New Hill) was black and half was white. Yet the Wake County Board of Education refused to build schools for black children. Segregation was the rule of law, so the only option for African-American citizens was to raise the funds themselves. Needless to say, "separate" was far from "equal."

Then something AMAZING happened. Booker T. Washington (President of Tuskegee) and Julius Rosenwald (CEO of Sears) collaborated to raise funds from northern philanthropists, and they matched this money with funds raised in local black communities. Between 1913 and 1932, they built 5,300 schools throughout the southern US. Two were in our community: one in old Apex, and one in Friendship.

This week the Apex Town Council approved a resolution to erect historical markers at the sites of these "Rosenwald" schools. Kudos to those who helped make that happen. L to R: Nicole Dozier, Mayor Pro Tem; Larry Harris, Sr. and Deborah Harris Judd of the Friendship community; and, Jacques Gilbert, Mayor.

Follow Warren Holleman on Facebook: *Apex is Amazing*.





## ***Santa Claus***

by Diane Long.

This Santa Claus was painted by my mother-in-law Mabel Mann Long when she was about 12 years old. She was a life long resident of Apex and was the valedictorian of her graduating class. She was born in 1912 and died in 1984. Her grandfather was Daniel Mann, the first postmaster of Apex.



Rogers-Fike House, Built 1906



Hunt-Bridges House, Built 1912.



Maynard-Pearson House, Built 1870,  
Decorated for the 2019 Home Tour.



Norris Room at the Maynard Pearson House,  
with furnishings donated by Jimmy King, a  
descendant of Garland C. Norris.





2019 Home Tour Brochures ready for distribution.

## President's Message

**Jeff Hasting, President, 2019-2020**

It is with great thanks from all our membership that we thank our homeowners Jeff & Sheryl Fike and Erin and Ryan Bridges for sharing their homes.

Thank you to the Chammer of Commerce, the Apex Methodist Church and the Halle Art Center for sharing their buildings.

So many members gave of their time and talents to make our 33rd Home Tour a success. We are grateful.

## New Members

We welcome new members David & Gayle Brown to our Historical Society.

## Reminder:

March 19, 2020, join us for our annual potluck supper and installation of officers at the Maynard-Pearson House, 6:00 PM..

## AHS 2019-20 Board Members:

Jeff Hastings ..... AHS Board President  
 Jeremy Bradham AHS Board Vice President  
 Erin Thompson .... AHS Board Co-Secretary  
 Diane Long ..... AHS Board Co-Secretary  
 John Messler ..... AHS Board Treasurer  
 John Pearson ..... AHS Board Member  
 Margaret Lawrence ..... AHS Board Member  
 Michael Lawrence..... AHS Board Member  
 Laverne Seagroves ..... AHS Board Member

Leaving the board is Heather Werking, to whom we offer our thanks and gratitude. New board members are Michael and Margaret Lawrence, and Laverne Seagroves.

## AHS Calendar

- February, 2020, Date TBD, Preservation & Pie, Halle Ctr., 7:00 PM
- March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Annual Membership & Pot Luck Dinner Meeting, Maynard Pearson House, 6:00 PM. (Annual meeting & election of officers)
- April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Members volunteer at the Apex Peaktique Antiques Festival
- May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020: Member-staffed booth at the Apex Peakfest
- May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Annual Plant Sale Fundraiser, Maynard Pearson House, 7:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
- July 2020, Date TBD. Annual Ice Cream Social with homemade ice cream.
- September/October 2020: Annual Membership Fall Picnic
- December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Annual Holiday Home Tour & Fundraiser, multiple locations, 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Visit us on the web at

[ApexHistoricalSociety.com](http://ApexHistoricalSociety.com), or on Facebook at: *Apex Historical Society*