



► 19th century architect Jacob Holt's imprint on the Lake Country spans an area from Warrenton, N.C. to northern Mecklenburg and Charlotte County. Above: from left: Boydton United Methodist Church; the front doorway entering Boyd Tavern; Jacob Holt's gravestone at Woodland Cemetery in Chase City. (Contributed photos)

An architectural legacy that deepens with time

19th century builder Jacob Holt designed many of Lake Country's most distinctive structures

By **SUSAN KYTE**
Sun Staff Writer

Throughout history, architecture has stood as a representation of society, reflecting the values and successes of a community.

In the Piedmont area of Southside Virginia and northern North Carolina, one person credited with reshaping the architectural character of local towns and counties is 19th century builder Jacob Holt.

Richard Hunter, a retired clerk of court for Warren County, N.C., has helped to preserve and highlight Holt's architectural legacy in the Lake Country area. Hunter says Holt built houses and other structures that "defined the region" — from simple Greek Revival designs such as the Mills-Foote House on

North Main Street, to the modified Italianate Jacob Holt House on South Bragg Street, both located in the Town of Warrenton, N.C.

Hunter and members of the local Rotary Club have been instrumental in preserving Holt's second house, the Italianate villa at 122 South Bragg.

Even today, Holt's iconic buildings are woven into the fabric of downtown Warrenton, site of the greatest collection of buildings attributed to Holt. Ten existing homes and the Presbyterian Church feature his designs. His enduring work is also found throughout Mecklenburg in Chase City, Baskerville, and Boydton and west into Charlotte County.

His influence is seen in the front door of Boyd Tavern and Boydton United Methodist Church in Boydton. In Chase City, Shadow Lawn, owned by Glenn and Lisa Gillispie, and its sister home on Sycamore Street are both Jacob Holt designs, though Shadow Lawn was originally built in the late 1700s and later renovated by Holt.

Other known works by the renowned architect include Eureka in Baskerville, home of retired county supervisor William Blalock and wife Doma, the former Tarry family home in the Eppes Fork area

of Virginia, known as Long Grass, and Annefield Plantation in Saxe.

Scholars consider Eureka to be Holt's most elaborate and significant work.

His early designs favored the Greek Revival style, which became popular in the United States in the 1820s and 1830s. Greek Revival architecture is known for its tall columns, intricate detail, and symmetry. By the 1850s Holt's designs evolved to reflect the then-popular Italianate style.

These homes were typically symmetrical, with a front gabled or peaked roofline and overhanging eaves that had the appearance of being supported by large decorative brackets. Heavy, often arched double-door entryways were flanked by single story columns that support the roofline or a second story porch. Holt added a unique twist to many of the front entrances he designed — matching arched sidelights on either side of the front door with two small circular pinwheel windows flanking an elongated oval-shaped transom window above the door.

According to Catherine Bishir, author of the sem-

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► Eureka in Baskerville was built around 1860 for Dr. R.D. Baskerville. It was similar in style to a home Holt designed and built for Baskerville's father.

HOLT

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inal work on Holt, "Jacob Holt: An American Builder," he was responsible "for every detail from cutting and curing the timber and sketching a ground plan to such finishing touches as window hardware or decorative painting and graining."

Many of the design elements Holt incorporated into his homes were mass-produced by his craftsmen, albeit with industrial machinery. For example, Hunter said many of the mantels Holt installed were oversized, stretching beyond the firebox. In that way, Holt did not have to build a unique mantel for each home. Instead, it was a "one-size fits all" approach.

Holt was born in Prince Edward County in 1811. Orphaned after the death of his father when he was 14 — Holt's mother died in 1822 when he was 11 — Holt's uncle and guardian is believed to have apprenticed him to a leading local builder.

By his twenties, Holt had established himself as a respected member of Prince Edward County. By the 1840s census records identify him as having the second-largest non-agricultural workforce in Prince Edward with



► A Jacob Holt House in Chase City on Sycamore Street is believed to be the "sister" to Shadow Lawn, also in town.

nearly 50 workers, 29 of them slave labor.

Around 1845 Holt had relocated his design and build operation from Prince Edward County to Warrenton. Hunter said the exact reason Holt moved is unknown. What is known is that at that time, Warrenton was a very wealthy and cosmopolitan community. Bishir speculates that Warrenton was a ready market for new and stylish construction.

Holt brought with him his enslaved workers, as well as export craftsmen who worked on his buildings. None of the buildings remain from the large

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operation he created on Warren Street. Hunter believed it was the largest building operation in Warren County and possibly North Carolina before the Civil War.

In less than a decade, Bishir writes that Holt's buildings had transformed Warrenton from a downtown streetscape filled with small-scale, old-fashioned dwellings to a town of elegant homes fronted by large-columned porches.

It was while Holt was in Warrenton that his design influence shifted from Greek Revival to the Italianate style. The best example is found in his second home, now referred to as the Jacob Holt House. Hunter said he believes Holt built the home as a "spec house," since he never owned the property, but lived in it until he departed Warrenton for Chase City.

The Jacob Holt House has a three-story center column flanked on either side by two smaller symmetrical cottages. It is unlike other homes that Holt



► Long Grass is one of many plantation homes that Holt designed and built in and around Mecklenburg and Warren counties. It can be found in the Eppes Fork area near Townsville, N.C.



► The Jacob Holt House at 122 S. Bragg Street is Jacob Holt's final home in Warrenton, N.C.. It is his interpretation of the Italianate or Tuscan style modeled after a Tuscan Villa. (Contributed photos)

built for his clients in Warrenton. Bishir believes the design reflects Holt's personal aesthetic, which was quite different than the tastes of his patrons and clients.

By the end of the Civil War, few planters or merchants living in the Warrenton area had access to the money needed to support Holt or his construction firm. In 1869 he relocated to Chase City, then known as Christiansville, where he began working for the wealthy northern families moving into the area, including John E. Boyd and George Endly. Within a year he'd expanded operations into Boydton.

Holt died in 1880 and is buried in Woodland Cemetery in Chase City along with wife Aurelia. His legacy was ongoing. Two of Holt's sons became builders, one in Petersburg and the other in Chase City, and at least four of his grandchildren followed the family tradition, but none locally.

Bishir wrote, "Few if any builders in 19th century North Carolina are known to have produced such a large body of work in such a distinctive mode in style and form and plan." His career is said to have endured because of his attention to detail, but also attention to his client's tastes and pocketbooks.

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Calling confusion can cost lives in emergencies

Untimely death spurs work of task force

By **SUSAN KYTE**
Sun Staff Writer

Bob Herzing died August 27, 2018 while helping out a friend at a Lake Gaston residence in Brunswick County. The official cause of death was myocardial infarction or heart attack, but the unofficial cause may well have been the 43 minutes it took for Brunswick County EMS to arrive on the scene.

The delay was not the fault of the EMS medics who responded to the emergency or the Brunswick County 911 call center that dispatched the rescue unit after receiving the call. The likely culprit was a flawed wireless communication system that repeatedly

sent the 911 calls to the wrong county.

In an era when your mobile phone lets Google and Facebook or your favorite pizza place or video game know where you're located — with amazing accuracy — 911 operators are often left in the dark. It is a fatal flaw that cellular communications companies have known about for years but are slow to address.

As Herzing lay on the ground in distress, his friend dialed 911 from his cell phone. Because the call was routed through the nearest cellphone tower to a neighboring county's 911 system, the dispatcher was unable to help and told the friend to hang up and dial



Sherry Herzing, founder of the LKG 911 Community Task Force

the 10-digit phone number for Brunswick County emergencies. That was an impossible task for him while he was outside performing CPR on Herz-

ing, working without a pen or pad to record the number.

Bob's widow, Sherry, said it took 23 minutes to reach

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INSIDE: PARK VIEW GIRLS BASKETBALL ENDS HISTORIC

CALLING

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Brunswick County 911 that day. That only happened because the distress call was ultimately made using a landline. It took another 20 minutes before the medics were able to reach Herzing, which for a rural area is not an unreasonable or unexpected delay. But, by then it was too late to save his life.

No one can say for certain if that 23-minute delay is what caused Bob Herzing to die, but it certainly did not help his situation.

Sherry Herzing could have gotten angry and railed against the system. Instead she chose to work toward a solution by forming the Lake Gaston 911 Community Task Force. It is a group of informed citizens whose mission is to raise awareness about 911 systems and to save lives by providing education and resources that help the community avoid delays when 911 emergency services are urgently needed.

She and her team are not waiting for the cellular giants to fix the problem. They are lobbying their legislators as well as the two main companies who provide cellular service in their area — CenturyLink and Verizon. They're also educating the public about limitations when using cell phones to call 911 and giving out the ten-digit landline numbers for local call centers.

Herzing has personally met with the five 911 directors whose counties border Lake Gaston to discuss their needs and concerns. These counties are Mecklenburg and Brunswick in Virginia and Warren, Halifax, and Northampton in North Carolina.

Herzing said her work began in January 2019 while listening to Brunswick County Sheriff Brian Roberts talk about the county's 911 emergency call center. Roberts used the story of Bob Herzing to highlight problems that E-911 centers around Lake Gaston were experiencing.

Too often calls were routed via cell towers to the wrong county. That's because the 911 center cannot get an accurate fix on the location of the caller to send medics, due to the age of the equipment on the cell tower or the age of the cellphone. During times when more people are visiting the lake area, calls often do not "go through" or drop in mid-transmission.

Roberts said when Devon Clary — who heads the Brunswick E-911 center — first told him about Bob Herzing, he decided to conduct a test. He traveled to 24 locations in Brunswick County near Lake Gaston. Using his cellphone, he dialed 911 from each site. Of those 24 calls, 83 percent of them were routed to a 911 center outside of Brunswick County: 11 went to Warren County, seven to Northampton County, one to Colorado and one never

connected to any site. Only four calls reached Brunswick County 911.

Roberts performed the same test a year later with similar results. This time six calls went to Brunswick 911, though one was delayed by about 45 seconds. Eight calls went to Northampton County 911, and ten went to Warren County 911.

Dispatchers in Northampton told Roberts they could not get a fix on his location during his calls. At one point it was determined that he was in the lake, which was not accurate. Dispatchers in Warren County were able to get close to determining Robert's location, but could not pinpoint the exact spot.

This highlights a second problem E-911 dispatchers face, according to Clary: "How can we help you if we don't know where you are located? Do you know how many Main Streets are found in the five counties around the lake?"

If the cell phone's technology does not communicate exact location data to the 911 center and if the caller does not or cannot accurately convey their location, the 911 operator will not know how to tell a first responder where to go to deliver the needed aid.

Ben Duncan, who heads Mecklenburg County's 911, said the issue is not unique to Lake Gaston. It is a rural problem that impacts people living around Buggs Island Lake as well; it also applies to people living on the border of a neighboring county.

Duncan said calls made from cellphones are routed to the nearest available tower, so there is no way to guarantee that the tower being pinged will deliver the call to the correct 911 center.

Duncan said Mecklenburg County is doing all it can to overcome the problem while waiting for the cell phone companies to do their part. He's worked with Andy Wells at the Southside District Planning Commission to develop a mapping system of roads and other notable areas around the lakes and worked with others to install location markers.

He and fellow communications directors Devon Clary of Brunswick, Tamme Piland of Northampton County, Henry Hedgepath of Halifax County (N.C.) and Sheila Basket of Warren County have even put together standardized protocols that will allow them to better assist each other when emergency calls are misdirected.

What they can't do, according to Duncan, is change how cellular communications systems operate.

Five years ago, the FCC implemented a new federal rule that requires carriers to steadily increase the percentage of cellphone calls to 911 that transmit precise

location data. It was supposed to ensure this information was shared at least 40 percent of the time by 2017 and 80 percent by 2021. Sheriff Robert's test suggests that threshold has not been met in this area.

Clary said part of the problem could be tied to equipment — both phones and towers. New cell phones work best with new tower equipment. Older phones and older equipment are not as reliable.

Duncan said, too, the cost of the technology upgrades that would improve the accuracy of location data cell phone users is too great for most rural counties to bear.

Calls to officials with Verizon and CenturyLink to discuss the matter were not returned.

For now, rural counties such as Mecklenburg, Brunswick and its North Carolina neighbors are forced to take an old school approach — by educating local residents about the limitations of 911 when it comes to cell phones. The goal for everyone involved with 911 is for people to be survivors, not statistics, when it comes to emergency situations.

To that end, the task force suggests the following as a way to prepare before an emergency happens.

1. Know the ten-digit phone number for your local 911 call center. In Mecklenburg County it is 434-738-6191 and in Brunswick County it is 434-848-3133. It's a good idea to add the number to your cell phone contact list.

2. When calling 911, be sure to know and provide the operator with your exact location including street, number, town, county and state and nearby landmarks.

3. If possible, always call 911 from a landline.

4. Stay on the line until the 911 operator tells you it is okay to disconnect the call and remain calm while speaking with the operator. He or she is your best friend in times of crisis and is there to help.

5. Place reflective numbers on your home or near the road and on both sides of your mailbox to allow first responders to find your location.

6. Identify neighbors who have special skills who can assist you in times of crisis, such as police, fire, medical professionals or others.

7. Learn CPR.

Lynn Cisar, who heads the communications committee for the Lake Gaston 911 Community Task Force adds that "as citizens, we need to take control of the situation and be prepared until these problems can be fixed."

You can find out more information or about the work of the Lake Gaston 911 Community Task Force on their Facebook page, LKG 911 Community Task Force.

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HERE'S TO VICTORY!

Victory Gardens of yesteryear offer solace in the present day

By **SUSAN KYTE**
Sun Staff Writer

Are Victory Gardens the panacea we need to fight the COVID-19 pandemic? Sadly, not quite. But they may help us overcome our pandemic fatigue and safeguard against food shortages due to supply disruptions and hoarding.

Gardening also provides a good reason to get outside, tackle a physical project and pull your mind away from unsettling news.

What is a Victory Garden?

It's simply another name for a vegetable garden. During World War I and World War II, when food items were in short supply, a Victory Garden was a way for everyday people to express their patriotism, support the war effort and ease the burden on commercial farmers struggling to produce enough food to feed troops and civilians overseas and well as people at home.

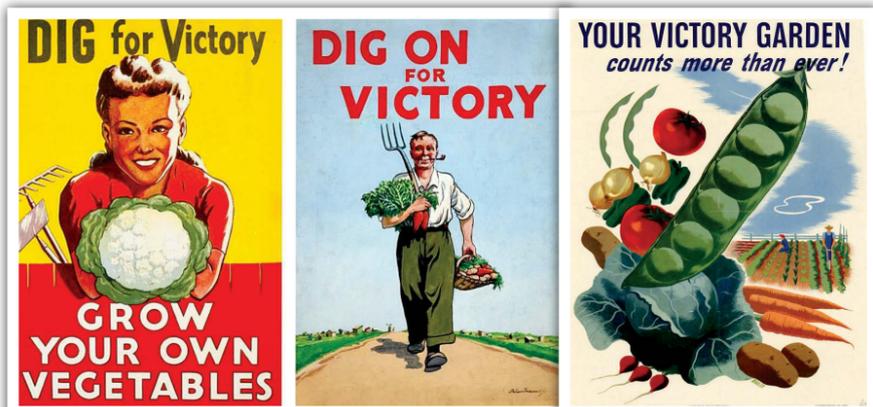
Using slogans such as "Dig for Victory" and "Sow the Seeds of Victory," the U.S. government called on families to combat food shortages by putting their idle land to work.

When First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt planted her own Victory Garden at the White House in 1943, people followed her lead. Many believed it was their national duty to help relieve some of the burden on the public food demands. Others viewed these gardens as an expression of patriotism that also served as a safeguard against the food shortages they were experiencing.

Gardens were planted in public parks, suburban backyards, vacant city lots and on the roofs of city buildings. People grew tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, beets, and peas. Neighbors and communities worked together and even schools got involved.

The federal government did its part, providing growing plans and tips on how to grow a backyard garden, as well as a recipe book with home-grown vegetable recipes.

By some estimates, 40 percent of the food Amer-



► Above, World War II poster art promoting Victory Gardens. Below, seeds for garden and pantry, available at Sandy Fork Farm Supply west of Clarksville. (Susan Kyte photo)



icans consumed during these times was grown in home gardens.

It's no longer World War II, but today we face a different kind of battle. The worldwide pandemic reminds us all too clearly that access to fresh, healthy, local food is never a given — even if it's an important aspect of daily life.

It's Time for Coronavirus Victory Gardens.

By the end of WWI in 1945, Victory Gardens began to disappear. Grocery stores and commercially produced and processed food became so prevalent many Americans did not see the need to grow their own. Gardening became a hobby rather than a necessity.

Now with the spread of COVID-19, the food supply is once again facing new challenges. Because people locally are regularly seeing empty grocery store shelves, they have concerns about the availability of our food. Home gardening is making a comeback.

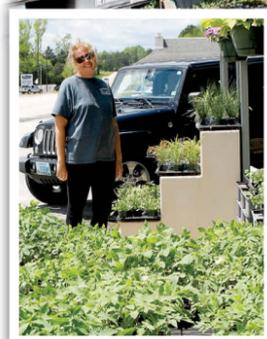
Danny Pittard, a local farmer and owner of Sandy Fork Farm Supply, said he's seeing more and more people stop by his store on Highway 58 to purchase seeds and starter plants, fertilizers and a tool or two before heading off to plant.

He's even building and selling raised beds for those new to farming who don't have the time or the tools

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► Buds and Blossoms owner Crystal Platzke Nehme (left) outside her plant stand in South Hill. (Susan Kyte photos)



to prepare Southside Virginia's heavy clay soil to grow vegetables.

"I'm glad to see people going back to growing their own," said Pittard, before describing his delectable dinner from the night before that included cabbage grown by chance from seeds he cast aside last year. He'll tell you that his support for local farming has nothing to do with disruptions in supply chains. As far as he is concerned, "there's nothing better" than food picked fresh from the garden.

He said he's also happy to see more people interested in canning the vegetables and fruits they grow. If you have a successful garden, canning is a great way to preserve your bounty.

Pittard offered a few helpful hints to optimize growing. A good idea is

to take some soil samples to test for needed fertilizer and to assess the soil pH. Samples of soil from the garden area can be dropped off at Sandy Fork Farm Supply. Pittard said he'll send them off for testing and provide a report explaining which nutrients, if any, are needed to provide the seedlings with the best chance of producing.

"You need good fertilization and a soil pH of 6.5. You also need to guard against powdery mildew on cucumber plants and bugs such as squash bugs," Pittard explained. He and son Watt are always willing to answer questions from newbie growers. The Sandy Fork Farm Supply shop has a full selection of seeds, fertilizers, soils and garden tools. They also have slips, too, but these tend to sell out fast.

Over in South Hill, Buds and Blossoms Nursery and Farm is ready to supply victory gardeners with a variety of vegetable and herb starter plants, including hot and sweet peppers, cucumbers, several varieties of tomatoes, zucchini, yellow squash, eggplant, watermelon and cantaloupe, peppermint, spearmint, coriander (cilantro), stevia, lemon balm and lemon grass, rosemary thyme, sage, basil, chives, savory,

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VICTORY

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oregano and parsley. Everything a nascent gardener might want to start growing.

Later this summer, Crystal Nehme, owner of Buds and Blossoms, said she plans to sell locally-grown produce for those who are not able or ready to start their own victory garden. In the fall, they'll have brussel sprouts, collards, broccoli, and cabbage plants as well as pumpkins and flowering plants for sale.

Tips for Getting Started

Want to get started without being overwhelmed? Here are some practical tips.

1. Start small — Variety may be the spice of life, but not for the new gardener. Start with just three or four types of vegetables.

2. Choose easy to grow veggies — Pittard says easy to grow "staple plants for beginners include squash, zucchini, eggplant, watermelon, okra, cucumber, string beans, English peas, purple hull peas, tomatoes, peppers and corn." These can grow from seed or you can purchase starter plants. "Peppers are best started from slips [starter plants] and you need at least two side-by-side rows when growing corn so the plants can pollinate," Pittard explained.

3. Grow vegetables in season — It may be too late for now to grow spinach, lettuce, collards, or cabbage. All of which are easy to grow but prefer colder temperatures. "These are good fall crops," said Pittard.

4. Add some beauty — Sandy Fork Farm Supply and Buds and Blossoms sell annuals and bedding plants that help attract pollinators (think bees) and add vibrant color to the garden.

There are many ways to plan and grow your garden. Pittard even has a vegetable planting guide that includes a list of recommended plant varieties, planting times, depths to plant each seed or plug, the



► Fruits and vegetables for sale at Moore's Farm Produce Stand in Clarksville. (Susan Kyte photo)

required distance between plants and each row, the best soil pH and the number of days to maturity.

Don't let lack of space deter you. No matter how much room you have, you can grow your own vegetables in your yard — back, front, even in pots on a patio or deck. When in doubt, apply seed to soil in a sunny spot, water, and see what happens. You just may be surprised by the result.

Of course, there is an alternative for those with no ability or space to grow your own. It is the local farm stand and farmer's market. There, you can purchase locally-grown and fresh picked fruits and vegetables without the hassle of tilling and planting, weeding and watering.

Perhaps it's time to recognize that when crunch time hits, we have to look to our neighbors, our local community, and our own backyards. To build and support that local supply chain to move local and seasonal food from farm to fork. Maybe we're learning a lot from this virus.

You can find Sandy Fork Farm Supply is at 6142 US-58, in Buffalo Junction. They are open 8 a.m.

to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday. Buds and Blossoms Nursery and Farm is located at 1220 W. Danville St., South Hill. Their hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Farm fresh produce and locally sourced butter, cheese and eggs, as well as tomato starts and some bedding plants are also available in Clarksville at Moore's Farm Produce Stand, 700 Virginia Ave., Clarksville. They're open Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Clarksville also hosts its Farm Fresh Market for local growers on the second and fourth Saturday of the month from April through October. The market, located in the pocket park at the corner of 4th Street and Virginia Avenue, is open from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

As the State of Virginia eases restrictions on group activities, look also to the South Hill Farmer's Market for farm fresh goodness this summer. The market is normally open every Saturday from May to November, from 8 a.m. to noon.