

Owensville Preceded Roseboro

Article from Sampson Independent August 3, 1978 by Melvin

The predecessor of the present town of Roseboro was a small country community known as Owensville, centered a few miles away on the old Salemburg road. This hamlet was flourishing before the period of the Civil War. Its first postmaster was a Mr. Cotton Hall, a relative of the late James M. Hall of Roseboro, who served as postmaster in 1839.

Owensville was then one of the main points on the Old Stage Road from Fayetteville to Wilmington. This road crossed the river at the old Governor Gabriel Holmes mansion, at the White Woods. Built by Gabriel Holmes, this house was an imposing structure, the river at this point was the scene of many baptisms.

Mr. Will Culbreth was postmaster during the Civil War, when Federal officers and troops used the same road. When Mr. Culbreth, a bachelor, heard that the Yankees were coming, he took his trunk and hid it in the water and then climbed a tree. But, alas, the soldiers found both him and his trunk. An issue of "Pitch and Tar" published by the history class of Miss Matilda West at Lakewood High School, included much material about the war period at Owensville. During the war the little community was the only village in Sampson County west of Clinton.

The kitchen of the present Forrest Owen house is one of the few remaining older buildings. Its fireplace and chimney take up one entire end of the room. Another old place, the Etta Fisher homeplace, sits in a swamp between the old and new Salemburg roads. It is put together with wooden pegs and has wide pine boards in both ceiling and floor. Slaves were said to have been traded there; kept in the cellar, which had bars to the windows.

Another old home is the James White house, the late Dr. J. Street Brewer's grandfather White's home. It, too, lies on the old Salemburg Road. Old Bethel Methodist Church is nearby, on two acres of land given to the church. Prior to that the Methodist and Baptist congregations met together at Pleasant Union. The Owensville post office, already mentioned, was a two-story building.

Turpentine was a leading industry. A store was operated at Owensville by Mr. Tom Neal Culbreth. This man had six brothers who went into the Methodist ministry. Turpentering had flourished ever since Governor Holmes around 1821-1824 built his turpentine plantation along the Little Coharie River between Roseboro and Salemburg.

Roseboro's advent was conditional to the coming of the railroad from Fayetteville to Wilmington, which supplanted the Old Stage Road through Owensville. This railroad was built with convict labor. The contractor, or perhaps his overseer, boarded at Mr. Tom Neal Culbreth's. I am told that the Roseboro site was a low swampy section of the roadbed, said to be the lowest anywhere along the railroad line to Wilmington. Part of the town is still referred to as "The bottom."

The town is named after Mr. George McNeil Rose, a prominent attorney for the Cape Fear and Yadkin Railroad. It was Mr. Rose who selected the site for a railroad station. Tradition says that Mrs. Annie White conferred onto it the name of Roseboro. At the onset, many of the town's residents lived in this bottom section, referred to above.