

A Story of North Carolina Told in 100 Buildings

HOW THE
TAR HEEL STATE
HAPPENED



CRUDEN BAY BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a group of settlers arriving in an undeveloped location. First come shelters in which to live and then structures in which to work and shop. There are buildings for worship and education. As the community grows government buildings are required. With prosperity comes places in which to spend leisure time. And each step along the way builds a story only North Carolina can call its own.

That story is all around you in the work of those who came before you. In these pages you'll learn the explanations behind the quirks, the traditions and the secrets that make North Carolina uniquely North Carolina. What was the steepest mainline railroad line in America"? Solved. What building ignited North Carolina's rise to the "Hollywood of the East"? A mystery no more. The first public park built in North Carolina? Identified. The second smallest post office in America? Revealed.

Moravian souvenirs...college sports...gold rushes...the "Poet of the People"...iron horses...kissing bridges...Hollywood producers...roadside architecture...beloved carbonated beverages...iconic dams...the CCC...general stores...historic stages...auto racing...carousels...diners...the golden age of motoring...kit houses...master potters...minor league baseball...civil rights...barbecue...early aviation...bucket list golf...Sears kit houses...the rise of suburbia...This book will have you telling stories like a native in no time.

Almost all of the selections within are open to the public, or at least visible from public spaces. So, if you haven't seen these landmarks in person, fire up your GPS and get out and see the story of the Tar Heel State standing in plain sight on North Carolina streets!

**A STORY OF NORTH CAROLINA TOLD IN 100 BUILDINGS...
HOW THE TAR HEEL STATE HAPPENED**

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**Cruden Bay Books
184 Kanuga Heights Lane
Hendersonville NC 28739**

Town Creek Indian Mound

Mount Gilead
1400s



Mound-building cultures, which flourished in the American Southeast and Midwest for hundreds of years, constructed earthen mounds for burials, for ceremonies, for spiritual connections, and for residences. The only such surviving example in North Carolina is the handiwork of the Pee Dee people. The existing Town Creek platform mound is not a large souvenir of the craft. The Pee Dee left no written record to identify its purpose. Archaeologists who have been working the site since 1937 conclude that the area was used as a general conference and ceremonial center. The picket palisades, mound and temple have all been reconstructed to help interpret the National Historic Landmark site.

Newbold-White House

Hertford
1730



Prized for its straight-forward representation of American Colonial architectural design, the Newbold-White House is the oldest house in North Carolina open to the public. Constructed in 1730, the Flemish bond brickwork is exquisite. Newbold and White were the last two owners before the building was acquired by the Perquimans County Restoration Association and restored in the 1970s. The original owners were Abraham and Judith Saunders who made their unostentatious home available as a Quaker meetinghouse as well. Before that records indicate an earlier dwelling back to the 1670s providing a direct link to North Carolina's Proprietary era.

St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Bath
1734



North Carolina's oldest town is home to the state's oldest surviving church and one of the 35 oldest in the United States. The parish is a decade older than the town, getting under way in 1696. The simplicity of the composition belies the craftsmanship of this house of worship with brick walls two feet thick. Anglican clergyman John Garzia, a Spaniard, spearheaded the construction of the sturdy church despite never really mastering the English language. The building has undergone renovations through the decades but the congregation soldiers on towards its fourth century.

Orton Plantation

Winnabow
1735



It was 1983 and movie producer Frank Capra, Jr. was scouring the South for a suitable mansion to serve as the setting for a story of a couple who bore a child able to ignite fires just by thinking about them. He spotted a prototypical antebellum plantation house on the cover of *Southern Accents* magazine and came to North Carolina to see the model for himself. And so Orton House took a star turn in *Firestarter* and kickstarted Wilmington to becoming "Hollywood East." More than 300 films would be shot in the Old North State over the following 20 years. Adulterous Sissy Spacek shoots husband Beeson Carroll inside the Greek Revival showcase in *Crimes of the Heart*. More than 50 movies and television shows have brought camera crews here. Erected on the banks of the Cape Fear River and given its classical makeover in 1840, the old rice plantation is private but can be viewed from the garden paths, which are open to the public.

Cupola House

Edenton

1758



This is one of the most loved and most scrutinized houses in North Carolina. After decades and decades of obfuscating local legend and lore an extensive dendrochronology procedure was conducted in 1991 to definitively date the yellow pine timbers inside the Cupola House. The conclusion? The house was constructed in 1758 making it the oldest in town. The original owner was Francis Corbin, land agent for the last of the English Lords Proprietors, Robert Carteret, Earl of Granville. In 1918, in dire financial straits, the first floor was stripped of its elaborate Georgian woodwork which was sold to the Brooklyn Museum. Horrified townsfolk quickly assembled one of North Carolina's first preservation groups, purchased the property and eventually reconstructed that lost first floor in the 1960s.

Braun House

Salisbury

1766



Known more familiarly as "The Old Stone House," German immigrant Michael Braun deserves to have his name attached to the "castle in the wilderness" that was one of the first homes constructed in the North Carolina Piedmont. Braun, a merchant and millwright, quarried 3,500 tons of granite and spent seven years on the project. Each stone was painstakingly shaped and assembled. Braun eventually acquired over 2,000 acres and a large chunk of Salisbury where he operated a German-American printing press. The Braun House has been part of the Rowan Museum for the past 60 years, interpreting the German influence on Western North Carolina and preserving one of the state's finest stone structures.

Chowan County Courthouse

Edenton
1767



After tiring of holding political and social meetings in private homes the Edenton Assembly mandated that a courthouse be built in 1712. A wooden structure was ready by 1718 but a more satisfactory building replaced it in 1724. This cupola-topped courthouse, magnificently sited at the head of a broad lawn facing Edenton Bay, was ready in 1767 and hosted patriots Joseph Hewes, Samuel Johnston and James Iredell in the incendiary days leading up to the American Revolution. Architecturally, with its beautiful proportions and exquisite Flemish bond brickwork it doesn't get any better for Georgian public buildings in the South. Although Edenton constructed a more modern courthouse in 1979, the historic Chowan County Courthouse remains in use and is the oldest government building in North Carolina.

Single Brothers House

Winston-Salem
1769



In 1741 a small band of missionaries representing the Unitas Fratrum or Moravians, founded in 1457 by followers of John Hus and now recognized as the oldest organized Protestant denomination in the world, walked into the wilderness of Pennsylvania and began a settlement on the banks of the Lehigh River. From the start it was a planned community in which property, privacy and personal relationships were subordinated to a common effort to achieve a spiritual ideal. The Moravians were industrious and eager to expand. In 1753 a small party set out in search of desirable land for a new settlement. After hundreds of miles they came here to "the three forks of Muddy Creek." Moravians lived in groups based on life circumstances, known as choirs. This half-timbered brick structure dates to 1769 and served as a home and workplace for the community's single men and older boys. Across Salem Square was a similar arrangement for the Single Sisters' Choir.

Joel Lane House

Raleigh

1769



Joel Lane's fine Georgian frame abode was hailed as "the best house for 100 miles." Not that there was a whole lot of competition out by the Lane place. Lane had left his native Halifax for the interior of the colony where he purchased 6,000 acres and constructed his house when he was about 30 years old. A representative to the General Assembly from Johnston County, he introduced the bill in 1771 that would cleave off a chunk of land that became Wake County. After serving as a lieutenant colonel in the Wake militia during the American Revolution he returned to politics and in 1792 engineered the deal that would transfer 1,000 acres of his plantation for the new capital city of Raleigh. The "Father of Wake County" and "Father of Raleigh" was also on the first board of trustees for the University of North Carolina and offered land for its site as well. The Lane House is the oldest in Raleigh and operates as a museum.

Burgwin-Wright House

Wilmington

1771



In 1781 Lord Cornwallis used "the most considerable house in town" as his headquarters while in Wilmington, shortly before he would surrender his British army in Yorktown to end the military part of the American Revolution. John Burgwin, a merchant and lawyer, had constructed the Georgian-style house atop the foundation of the former county jail. The "Wright" was Joshua Grainger Wright who purchased the house in 1799. Among his list of accomplishments were Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives and first president of the Bank of Cape Fear. The house was altered and enlarged while in the Wright family until 1867. It was preserved by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America and restored as their North Carolina headquarters in 1937.

Stanly House

New Bern

1779



John Wright Stanly arrived in town in 1772 and quickly became a leading ship owner and molasses distiller. By the time of the American Revolution, Stanly may have been the wealthiest man in North Carolina. He poured money into the patriots' cause and lost 14 ships harassing the British fleet. In 1779 he spent \$30,000 to build this Georgian-style house, probably designed by John Hawks, who had crafted plans for Tryon Palace. John Wright and Ann Stanly both died during a yellow fever epidemic in 1789, leaving nine young children, none of whom was of age to occupy the house. It would not be until 1798 that Stanlys would again live here. The house - constructed of hand-hewn longleaf pine - stands as one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in North Carolina.

Old East

Chapel Hill

1793



This is America's oldest state university building. The cornerstone for the then 16-room residence hall was laid on October 12, 1793, since declared University Day by Governor Zebulon Vance in 1877. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's first student, Hinton James moved in 18 months later. James K. Polk, 11th President of the United States, would later bunk here. A third story and Palladian styling were added in 1823 to match its new arrivals, the South Building (1814) and Old West (1822). Twenty years later the university brought celebrated architect Alexander Jackson Davis down from New York City to expand the complex to what is seen on the quad today.

Union Tavern

Milton
1810s



One of North Carolina's finest early 19th century Federal-style commercial buildings dominates Milton's two-lane main drag on Broad Street. The brick facade is laid in elegant Flemish bond while the sides and back use a more pedestrian common bond. Three impressive recessed brick arch entranceways with fanlights dominate the composition. Thomas Day, a free Black woodworker from across the state line in Virginia, came to Milton in 1823 and was able to purchase this building for his workshop in the 1840s. Day operated his business for nearly 40 years and his reputation as a builder of fine furniture spread widely. He carved much of the interior of the Milton Presbyterian Church and worked on two society halls at the University of North Carolina. Legend has it he crafted furniture for the governor's mansion but it was rejected as too costly. Restoration of the building is ongoing.

Dudley Mansion

Wilmington
1825



Today this 10,000-foot showcase on prime Cape Fear River turf is known for its builder, Edward Dudley. Dudley was the first governor to be elected in North Carolina by popular vote, in 1836, when he had already been working on his house for 11 years. There were still eight years to go. It was a grand edifice to be sure but nothing like what is seen today. Dudley's wife was already selling the property as he died. James Sprunt, Scottish-born adventurer, exporter, and chronicler of Cape Fear history, bought the property in 1895 and executed the lavish overhaul that eclipsed any memory of the original owner and landed the mansion on souvenir postcards of the day. After the Sprunt family the grand residence did time as a restaurant, the Elks Lodge, and headquarters for the Historic Wilmington Foundation as it fell into disarray. It has since been privately restored.

Fort Macon

Beaufort

1826



The need for the defense of Beaufort Inlet became apparent in the early dawn hours of 1747 when Spanish raiders sacked the town of Beaufort. It took another 50 years for a formal masonry fort to be completed on the tip of Bogue Banks but in 1825 it was washed away by a hurricane. By 1826, behind the efforts of North Carolina Senator Nathaniel Macon, a new fort was underway. In the 1840s the critical task of keeping back the sea was assigned to a young Army engineer named Robert E. Lee. At the start of the Civil War, Confederates quickly took control of the fort but the garrison surrendered on April 26, 1862 to Federal troops. For the duration of the war Fort Macon served as a coaling station for Union navy ships. After the war the seacoast brick fort was a federal prison for a time and was eventually abandoned following the Spanish-American War in 1903. The state purchased the property for one dollar in 1924 and made it an historic site.

Market House

Fayetteville

1831



On this site in the center of town once stood the old State House where the Constitution of the United States was ratified, the University of North Carolina chartered and where, on March 4, 1825 the Marquis de Lafayette addressed the townsfolk and offered thanks for naming the town in his honor. The State House burned six years later. It was replaced by the three-bay brick Market House surrounded by arched passageways. Following the English town hall-market model the second floor was used as the town hall while meats and produce were hawked by farmers in the lower arcades. In recent years the Market House has done duty as an art museum, library and office space.

State Capitol Building

Raleigh
1831



After the original state house was damaged by fire in 1831 the General Assembly ordered up a new Capitol building with the proviso that it retain the cross-shaped form of the original and feature a central, domed rotunda. New York architect Ithiel Town, a champion of the emerging Greek Revival architectural style, was hired to provide a design. Scottish native David Paton was retained to oversee construction and he imported fellow countrymen to lay the ashlar stone. The cornerstone was laid in 1833 and seven years later work was completed with a price tag of \$532,682.34 - more than three times the yearly general income of the state at that time. The Capitol stands today as one America's finest civic buildings rendered in the Greek Revival style.

Reed Gold Mine

Midland
1831



On a lazy Sunday in 1799 Conrad Reed played hooky from church and went down to splash in Little Meadow Creek on the family farm. That day young Conrad found a shiny yellow rock and brought it home. Purported to weigh 17 pounds, for several years it served as a doorstop in the Reed house until a local jeweler recognized the rock as gold. America's first gold rush was on. By 1824 John Reed had collected an estimated \$100,000 worth of gold from his creek when placer mining began to give way to underground hard rock mining. A wooden ten-stamp mill, resembling a giant mortar and pestle, was erected at the Reed Mine. There were two iron hoppers with 750-pound iron stamps rising 35 times per minute to crush white quartz and release the veins of gold trapped inside. The apparatus constructed at the Reed Mine has been recognized as an Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark.

Burke County Courthouse

Morganton
1837



Burke County had a courthouse in 1791 but by 1830 it was being disparaged as “shabby” and “weather-beaten.” Scottish builder James Binnie answered the call to replace the original seat of justice. He used native stone to fashion a classical composition on the city square. The North Carolina Supreme Court adopted the building as its summer chambers in 1847 and continued doing so until the Civil War. In the waning days of the conflict Major General George Stoneman’s Union troops plundered Morganton and scuttled most of the Burke County records inside the courthouse. The elaborate Baroque cupola came in 1901 courtesy of Frank Milburn, one of the busiest architects in the Old North State at the turn of the 20th century. Cases were argued here until 1976 but the building has been preserved and the highest court in the state still holds a summer session inside from time to time.

Connemara

Flat Rock
1838



Christopher Memminger hired Prussian-born architect Charles Reichart to design the manor house in 1838. Reichart delivered a Greek Revival-style house fronted by a quartet of fluted Doric columns. Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Carl Sandburg moved to Connemara in 1945 and this graceful example of rural architecture is now one of the best-preserved writer’s homes in America. “The Poet of The People” was a full-blown celebrity when he lived here. In the early 1960s Bob Dylan, taking a road trip with friends, insisted on a detour to Flat Rock. He stopped at a gas station in town for directions and the attendant said, “I don’t know Sandburg the poet but Sandburg the goat farmer lives down the road.” Dylan knocked on the door and Sandburg, in his eighties, graciously let him in for a ten-minute visit. Dylan was disappointed, however, that the legendary folk singer did not know the young troubadour. Today, Connemara is a National Historic Site and Dylan is a Nobel Prize recipient.

Blandwood

Greensboro

1845



This magnificent Italian villa lays claim to being the oldest residence of its kind in the United States. The structure began life as a Federal style farmhouse of Charles Bland in 1795 and was purchased by industrialist Henry Humphries - the first to use steam to power cotton mills in North Carolina - in 1822. He sold it to his son-in-law John Motley Morehead who was making his way up the state political ladder. During his time in Raleigh as governor in 1844 Morehead met New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis, who had many years earlier had won the commission for the North Carolina State Capitol with his partner Ithiel Town. Davis remodeled the house with a signature three-story central tower and wings with dramatic projecting eaves. The design was a prototype in his friend Andrew Jackson Downing's popular architectural pattern books. After a long stretch as a treatment center Blandwood was rescued by preservation efforts and opened to the public as a house museum.

Belo House

Winston-Salem

1849



Frederick Edward Belo was born and raised in the Moravian community of Salem and apprenticed in Pennsylvania to be a cabinet maker. But back in North Carolina the energetic Belo swerved into linseed oil production. He soon tore down that mill and built an iron foundry. Belo's ambitions began to fray his relationship with the church and the final break came when he opened a dry goods store, the Belo House. In the midst of staid German-style structures Belo plopped an imposing Greek Revival edifice on 150 feet of Main Street frontage. Belo carved the models for the Corinthian columns himself and had the railings forged in his foundry. The first floor was for business, the second for his family's quarters and the third, added in 1859, for employees. Belo's original design became an important influence in Greek Revival architecture in the South. The property eventually wound its way back into church hands and is used as apartments.

Eu and Phi Halls

Davidson
1849



In 1842, when Davidson College was scarcely five years old, the two rival debating societies that dominated campus life reached an armistice of sorts when it was decided that "each Society should act independently, but that their halls should be alike in size, material, and magnificence." Eumenean Hall was finished first, in 1849, and Philanthropic Hall was dedicated a year later. The brawny brick Greek temples with Doric porticos still face each other on Davidson's original quadrangle and still host classes and debates. One Eumenean debater from the 1870s took his oration to a larger stage. When Woodrow Wilson returned to campus as President of the United States in 1916 he was requested to speak from the balcony of Eumenean Hall. He replied, "I failed in my first speech in this hall and will not attempt to make another."

Horton Grove

Durham
1850



Stagville was once one of the South's largest plantations, spreading across more than 30,000 acres. Some 71 remain, administered as a North Carolina State Historic Site. Richard Bennehan began his accumulation of the property in the 1770s as a clerk in a country store on the Flat River. The 18th century plantation house built by the go-getting Bennehan is still extant but of greater significance are a collection of well-preserved slave quarters known as Horton's Grove. Some 900 enslaved workers were housed here. The residences boast such rare amenities as a raised foundation, brick chimneys and shuttered windows. Triangular pediments even graced the entrances. These are the only two-story slave quarters remaining in North Carolina. They were lived in for more than 100 years after the Civil War. The barn at Stagville is one of the state's most impressive agricultural buildings as well.

Playmakers Theatre

Chapel Hill

1850



David Lowry Swain emerged from the Western Carolina mountains to become the state's youngest governor at the age of 31 in 1832. He was term-limited out of office after three one-year terms and went immediately into the presidency of the University of North Carolina. He served in that capacity for 33 years until his death in a buggy accident. A tireless promoter of the institution, Swain believed that magisterial buildings could inspire young minds. He recruited one of America's top architects, Alexander Jackson Davis, to that end and Davis delivered some of the state's most revered educational landmarks. Smith Hall, an elegant Greek Revival composition fronted by fluted Corinthian columns, was constructed as a library and ballroom. Over the years it also did time as a laboratory, bath house, and even a stable for Union horses. In 1923 it became the permanent home for the Carolina Playmakers to showcase original "folk plays" about life's simpler things.

Duke Homestead

Durham

1851



Washington Duke was a tenant farmer until he received 72 acres of land from his new father-in-law. But his wife Mary never saw her 23rd birthday. Duke continued on as a subsistence tobacco farmer with his new wife until he entered the Confederate Navy at the age of 43. After the Civil War and needing money Duke switched to manufacturing smoking tobacco. From the small ramshackle wooden "factories" on the Duke Homestead would grow the world's largest tobacco enterprise, the American Tobacco Company. The Dukes sold the farm in 1874 and moved into downtown Durham but Washington's granddaughter bought the property back in the 1930s and gave it to Duke University which passed it on to the state. Today the rustic buildings that birthed an empire are open to the public

Cooleemee

Mocksville

1853



The Cooleemee Plantation house was designated a National Historic Landmark as an "unusually sophisticated villa for its rural Piedmont location." The design featuring an octagonal core came straight out of an architectural pattern book by William H. Ranlett. Engravings of the Cooleemee - the name is a Creek word approximating "the place where the white oaks grow" - manor were printed in the most popular antebellum magazine of the day, *Godey's Lady Book*. More than 300,000 bricks made on site were used in the construction. The money for the project came from Samuel Hairston's profit from tobacco sales on the 4,200 acre estate. At the time *The Richmond Whig* declared Hairston the largest slaveholder in the country. In the 1930s descendants of Hairston slaves began meeting for a reunion. As word spread more than 1,000 Black Hairstons from over a dozen states began attending the "Hairston Clan Reunion," spawning a book about one of the most extensively documented groups of slave descendants.

Thalian Hall

Wilmington

1855



John Montague Trimble, who rose from an acclaimed stage carpenter to renowned theater builder, designed Thalian Hall, which was constructed between 1855 and 1858. Of the more than 30 theaters created by Trimble in antebellum America, this is the only one that still stands. The new building housed the town government, the library, and an opera house. Tom Thumb, Buffalo Bill Cody, Oscar Wilde, and John Phillip Sousa all performed or spoke in the building. Thalian Hall has faced several threats from the wrecking ball over the years but the Old North State's most renowned 19th century theater has enjoyed a series of renovations, the most recent being a \$5 million sprucing up in 1988.

Heck-Andrews House

Raleigh

1869



Jonathan McGee Heck was a Confederate officer who was captured early in the Civil War. He was paroled and began manufacturing arms for the Confederacy, an enterprise that springboarded him to a successful career in real estate after the war. This grand French Second Empire mansion, designed by George S.H. Appleget, appeared on the Raleigh streetscape in 1869 and set the standard for the coming development of North Blount Street as the residential street of choice in Raleigh. Its mansard roof and dramatic central tower mark it as one of North Carolina's most distinctive Victorian houses.

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse

Buxton

1870



America's most famous lighthouse is also its tallest at 208 feet. The light from the black-and-white swirl-striped brick tower can be seen 20 miles out to sea and has been reported to have been seen from 51 miles. The first light attempting to illuminate "The Graveyard of the Atlantic" was built in 1802 but proved ineffective. After nearly 70 years of listening to grumbling sailors Congress coughed up the funds for a new beacon. The final price tag for the Trahell State's most

recognizable symbol was \$155,000 - more than double the appropriation. The current location of the Hatteras Light is not the original - in 1999 the entire structure was moved five football fields further away from the ever-voracious ocean. The light has been automated since 1950 but visitors are welcome to make the climb up 268 steps to the top, just like the keepers of old.

Estey Hall

Raleigh
1873



Raleigh Institute was founded on December 1, 1865 as the first Historically Black College and University in North Carolina. Founded by the North Carolina Baptist Convention to offer theological instruction to former slaves, the school was quickly named for Elijah Shaw who paid for the first campus building. Etsey Hall, with extensive Italianate detailing, was constructed as the first academic building in America to house Black women. It is the oldest building at Shaw University. New Jersey native George S. H. Applegate, one of Raleigh's most hustling contractors in the years after the Civil War, provided the design. The residents in Etsey Hall received Shaw's first degrees in 1878.

Briggs Hardware Building

Raleigh
1874



This is the only building on Fayetteville Street Mall that 19th century shoppers would recognize were they to be strolling downtown Raleigh today. The highly decorative Italianate four-story building was completed in 1874, replacing the first store built by Thomas H. Briggs and James Dodd nine years earlier. Legend maintains that Briggs was able to pay for his share of the enterprise with gold and silver coins he had buried during the Civil War. Briggs family members sold hardware here until 1995 and the first floor today houses the Raleigh City Museum.

Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station

Rodanthe

1874



In 1871 Congress appropriated \$200,000 for the United States Life-saving Service (USLSS) to construct seven stations in North Carolina and three in Virginia. The original seven were built according to designs used in the stormy Northeast "without much reference to architectural effect." Nonetheless, the timber frame Chicamacomico station received some Carpenter Gothic detailing from Francis W. Chandler, a European-trained architect earning \$8.00 a day for his efforts with the USLSS. Chicamacomico, perched on the easternmost spit of land in the Old North State, received a new life-saving station in 1911 and the "1874 Station" was repurposed as a boathouse. Grouped together as a museum today, the complex makes up the most intact representation of early sea rescue operations in the United States.

Banker's House

Shelby

1874



For a rural town Shelby punches far above its weight in architectural treasures. The picturesque French Second Empire style reached its apex in North Carolina with the arrival of the "Banker's House" in the county seat of Cleveland County. Documentation has been lost as to its creator but its similarity to Raleigh's Heck-Andrews House has pointed attribution to New Jersey-born George S.H. Applegate. The architect himself was never bashful about promoting his efforts, once bleating, "I have designed all of the best buildings, with only a few exceptions, in Raleigh, Goldsboro and Greensboro, and almost all over the State..." The client was Jesse Jenkins, founder of Shelby's first bank. Financial reversals caused him to lose the house in 1879 and several subsequent owners also happened to be bankers, hence the unusual appellation.

Saluda Grade

Saluda

1878



The undertaking of the Saluda Grade was one of the most audacious engineering feats in the history of American railroad building. The Southern Railway could find no better way up the Blue Ridge Mountains from Spartanburg to Asheville than a grade rising between 4 and 5 feet every 100 feet in length. The three-mile stretch of track would become the steepest standard-gauge mainline in the United States - by a lot. To find tracks even nearly as steep you have to go all the way to New Mexico and there the grade is only 3.5 percent. It would take five years and necessitate the first use of controversial large scale convict labor in North Carolina to complete the Saluda Grade. A safety spur had to be built to slow runaways. There were mishaps and loss of life but no passenger train ever recorded a fatality. The notorious Saluda Grade was the only place in America where trains went faster going uphill than they did going downhill. The last regularly scheduled freight train chugged up the legendary stretch of track in 2001.

Korner's Folly

Kernersville

1880



Jule Gilmer Körner made his money as an artist and sign painter - he traveled rural America painting the iconic Bull Durham tobacco advertisements on barns and billboards. But he saved his greatest inspiration for this building which he intended as bachelor's quarters, studio, entertainment center, and horse stables. The eye-grabbing structure had enough eccentricities on the outside - it is 48 feet square and uses eight different sizes of bricks for starters - that a passing farmer proclaimed it would be known as "Körner's Folly." And he never saw inside. Start with ceiling heights ranging from five feet to 25 feet. Toss in 15 fireplaces. Murals could appear on almost any surface, even under staircases. Körner used 10,000 feet of bead molding, all carved by hand. Rooms were constantly being repurposed - an upstairs room became a private theater, another became a showroom for his interior design business. The horses eventually had to move across the street when Körner wed. "The Strangest Home in the World" fell into disrepair but it lives on as a house museum.

Mast Store

Valle Crucis

1882



In 1792 Joe Mast began walking from Pennsylvania. He stopped walking in Valle Crucis and started clearing land for a farm. Many generations later, in 1898, W.W. Mast bought into the mercantile business of a distant relative, Henry Taylor. Taylor had built a general store on Caldwell Watauga Turnpike in 1882 and now had an emporium on both sides of the road. Mast became sole owner in 1913 and three more generations of Masts operated the business until 1973. New owners could not make a go of the operation but Mast General Store was revived and now operates stores across Western Carolina and into neighboring states as well. Although Mast General no longer accepts chickens as payment the original is still the epitome of the nostalgic American country store.

Thomas Wolfe Memorial

Asheville

1883



Thomas Wolfe died when he was only 37 but had already established his legacy as North Carolina's greatest writer. He would influence such diverse talents as Philip Roth and Hunter S. Thompson. In *Look Homeward*, Angel Wolfe accurately remembered the house he grew up in and called "Dixieland" in the novel as a "big cheaply constructed frame house of 18 or 20 drafty, high-ceilinged rooms." The sprawling Queen Anne-influenced residence was originally only six or seven rooms with a front and rear porch when prosperous Asheville banker Erwin E. Sluder constructed it in 1883. By 1889, massive additions had more than doubled the size of the original house, but the architecture changed little over the next 27 years when Wolfe moved in with his mother, Julia Westall Wolfe. He lived here until 1916, when he entered the University of North Carolina. Julia enlarged and modernized the house, adding electricity, additional indoor plumbing, and 11 rooms to start a boarding house. Descendants remembered Julia, a shrewd and uncompromising businesswoman, as a "driver of hard bargains."