



INTRODUCTION OF THE HISTORIC SALUDA MURAL

The mural was the winner of a contest held by the City of Saluda and the Polk County Appearance Commission to promote local artists and encourage them to focus on the history of the area and the cultural importance of their subjects. It was unveiled at Pace Park in downtown Saluda on May 15, 2023.

Artist Susan Olivari has captured the essence of this small mountain paradise. Visitors come to enjoy many of the outdoor activities which are depicted in this mural. Mountain bikers traverse the Saluda Grade and a variety of winding roads. The rivers are frequented by kayakers and tubers. If one looks closely, one can catch a glimpse of a person in mid-air going across the Green River Gorge on one of the longest zip lines in the country. Pearson Falls is depicted with such accuracy one can almost feel the mist on their face when they reach the bottom of the falls. A banner announcing Coon Dog Day, one of Saluda's oldest festivals, flutters above the town. The artist is not lacking in humor. To the right of the banner are Saluda's famous Belton cows, also known as the Oreo cows. Coming down the mountain is a train, representative of the many trains, both steam and diesel, that once traveled the Saluda Grade. Featured downtown is Historic Thompson's Store, alleged to be the oldest grocery store in the State of North Carolina, as well as Ward's Grill. Tucked in on the side is a depiction of the Saluda Historic Depot and Museum. The tiny figure on the porch entertaining the crowd below, is Aaron Burdett, a beloved local musician who is now a permanent member of the Steep Canyon Rangers. The heart of the mural features six iconic residents, who out of many, helped shape the history of the town in the past for the future. Left to right are: Dr. D. Lesesne Smith, Lola Ward, Charlie Ward, Phoebe Sullivan, Robert Pace and William "Billy" Morris. For more details see below:

Unless otherwise noted, all information was provided by the Historic Saluda Committee, www.historicsaluda.org. More details about the history of Saluda can also be found in their publication Images of America: Saluda.

Pearson's Falls

Pearson's Falls and Glen is a top natural attraction in Polk County, NC, hosting over 30,000 visitors each year. They are located in the foothills of Western North Carolina off Hwy. 176, between the towns of Tryon and Saluda. This unique botanical preserve is comprised of over 300 acres of rich cove forest, spring-fed streams and a moderate 1/4-mile trail to a 90 ft. waterfall. We boast having over 310 species of wildflowers and plants, a few that are rare. Mosses, lichens, shrubs, and a variety of trees reside in this Glen, which is classified as a deciduous climax forest. Pearson's Falls is a perfect stop when visiting the area. We have picnic facilities and can accommodate groups and cyclists. Pearson's Falls is owned and maintained by The Tryon Garden Club, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. (Credit: Tryon Garden Club, www.pearsonsfalls.org)

Coon Dog Day

The Blue Ridge Coon Club had been having successful chicken dinners and dog shows for many years, which were always held the Saturday after the 4th of July. When the club saw the success of the Old Prospectors parade in 1962, they decided to add a parade to their event. In 1963, the Blue Ridge Coon Club hosted the first Coon Dog Day Parade. Today the tradition of Coon Dog Day continues and is always held the Saturday after the 4th of July. At the end of the parade, there is often a Coon Dog Day float complete with a raccoon up in a tree and a coon dog baying below with the owner struggling to restrain him from getting to the coon. The only difference between today and the early days is that now times are a little more humane with no live raccoons used on the float.

Cycling

Cyclist flock to Saluda. Reasons might include the beautiful mountainous landscape, the rich ozone, and the exciting thrill of the switchback curves and challenging climbing ranges. Completed in 1926, US 176 between Saluda and Tryon is for anyone who wants to experience the adventure of the Saluda Grade. This stretch of road is still open for vehicle traffic today and is a favorite for bicycle and motorcycle enthusiasts alike. This route provides a 6-8% climb range with some exciting switchbacks. Another favorite stretch of road comes through the Greenville Watershed along old Hwy. 25.

Historic Thompson's Store

Pictured in the mural is the Historic Thompson's Store. However, there are two iconic stores that remain in operation today in the historic district of downtown Saluda, the M.A. Pace Store and Thompson's Store. Records for the Pace Store indicate it was opened in 1899 by M.A. Pace. The Thompson family early records show that George Lafatte Thompson first became involved in the mercantile business as early as 1890. Lola Thompson Ward grew up working in her daddy's business in the early 1900s. The two stores were once in operation together and were co-existing in the current M.A. Pace building. The current owners of the Pace store still have a letter from M.A. Pace to D.M. Ferry Feed Company dated Feb. 24, 1927 notifying the company that Thompson and Pace had dissolved. The M.A. Pace Store remains in operation at the same location and Thompson's Store is located a short distance up the street.

Historic Saluda Depot and Museum

The depot, built in 1903, on Highway 176 about ¼ mile past the bridge, is on the National Registry of Historic Places. It has a long history in Saluda including its eventual move from the original location to its current location on Main Street. The depot had been used for retail space until 2015 when, the then current owner, Clark Thompson, decided to put it up for sale. It was this opportunity that prompted concerned citizens, who wanted to preserve the depot's authenticity and history, to create the Saluda Historic Depot. The historic depot is a modern icon of Saluda's beginning and subsequent prosperity with the coming of the train bringing passengers up the Saluda Grade, the steepest mainline standard gauge railroad grade in the country. Because brave men hammered up the treacherous side of Melrose Mountain, the small mountain village of Saluda came into being. In June of 2016, after an 18-month journey, a group of citizens in Saluda organized and created a 501(c) 3 non-profit LLC, named the Saluda Historic Depot (SHD) to purchase the building and create a train and heritage museum. (Credit: Saluda Historic Depot and Museum, www.saludahistoricdepot.com)

Aaron Burdett

Aaron Burdett, now a member of the Steep Canyon Rangers, is an acclaimed Americana/folk singer-songwriter and performer from Saluda, and is listed as one of the most important western NC musicians by WNC Magazine. He's won top awards in multiple songwriting competitions hosted by the likes of Merlefest, The USA Songwriting Competition, Mountain Stage, the NC Songwriter's Co-op, and Our State Magazine. His last four albums have been voted top 20 Albums of the Year by WNCW radio listeners. (Credit: www.aaronburdett.com)

Saluda Grade

The Saluda Grade opened to rail traffic on July 4, 1878. However, the idea for tracks across the mountain came about as early as 1832, when the demand became great to move goods, livestock, and humans up the mountain away from the stifling heat of South Carolina and Georgia. When surveying began, it became apparent that the best route was the one taken by the early settlers to travel to the new lands, using the Howard Gap Trail.

It wasn't until 1877 that Capt. Charles Pearson, former Confederate Army officer, was assigned chief engineer. Pearson's ultimate goal was to bring the line of the Asheville and Spartanburg Railroad across the Blue Ridge from Tryon to Asheville. This created quite a challenge since the early surveys revealed no route was available to ascend the mountains at a reasonable grade. Rejecting the route along Howard's Gap, due to the instability of the ground, Pearson selected a route that followed the Pacolet River up the steep gorge, an almost vertical wall. This route begins at the bottom of Melrose Mountain at 1,081 feet and climbs to the town of Saluda cresting at an elevation of 2,097 feet.

In 1879, due to the depletion of financial resources and manual labor, the North Carolina legislature ratified a bill to provide financial support and to allow convicts to work on the construction of the line. The price paid by all workers, free or otherwise, was high, due to sickness and accidents resulting in a high death rate. Despite this adversity, the tracks reached the top of the grade three months after the convicts began work on the project, resulting in the completion of the steepest mainline standard gauge railroad in the United States.

The last passenger train crested the Saluda Mountain on December 5, 1968, thus ending the era for passenger service in Saluda. Norfolk Southern suspended freight traffic between East Flat Rock, North Carolina and South Carolina in 2001, thus ceasing operations on the Saluda Grade.

Green River

The Green River has dished up challenges and entertainment since man first walked its banks. Located within the Green River Game Lands, the river provides plenty of water activities for the meek and even the most daring. Offering class V whitewater rapids, the Narrows, located deep in the Green River Gorge, have become the ultimate challenge for extreme kayakers.

The Gorge Zipline

Steep. Fast. Beautiful! The Gorge, a thrilling tree-based zipline canopy tour in Saluda, NC, will take your breath away! Begin your experience perched on the rim of the Green River Gorge then plunge into untouched wilderness. Descend 1,100 vertical feet in elevation as you zipline from tree-top to tree-top on 11 ziplines, traverse an epically beautiful sky-bridge, and conquer 3 huge rappels. All this adventure is held within a stunning old-growth forest, overlooking 18,000 acres of protected Green River Gamelands.

(Credit: The Gorge Zipline, www.thegorgezipline.com)

Dr. D. Lesesne Smith

Dr. D. Lesesne Smith's general practice in Spartanburg, SC was healthy but not satisfying. So, in 1913 he went to Harvard Medical School and became one of the first pediatricians in the South. With a high rate of infant mortality in the southern Appalachian Mountains, he reasoned that using his skills he could reduce the number of deaths in Saluda and the surrounding mountainous communities. In 1914, he established the Infants' and Children's Sanitarium (ICS) that was open from June 1 to September 1. The first summer 18 babies were treated and the sanitarium grew to 12 cottages where mothers and babies stayed together. Another entity under Dr. Smith's supervision was the Spartanburg Baby Hospital where babies could be seen for free. Out of these two hospitals in 1921 Dr. Smith developed the Southern Pediatric Seminar where physicians received "a post-graduate summer course in methods of diagnosis, prevention and treatment of diseases of children." Until it closed in 1958, the Seminars put Saluda on the medical map of the country as physicians came to learn how to care for their smallest patients.

Lola Thompson Ward

Lola Thompson Ward was the daughter of the founder of Thompson's Store, George Lafatte Thompson. The store was the town's information hot spot for generations since folks called to find out everything from the weight of new babies to the funeral arrangements of old timers. Miss Lola was the very heart of it all, stationed on her stool up front by the cash register, well into her 90s. She died at the age of 103.

Charlie Ward

Charlie Ward, son of Lola and Roy Ward was best known for whistling while he worked, hugging friends and strangers alike, and calling everyone "buddy" while working at his family's business, Thompson's Store and

Ward's Grill. Charlie retired and sold the family business in 2007 to spend time with his family. In 2008, Charlie passed away. The business was only out of the family's hands for a few years when Charlie's cousin, Clark Thompson, and Judy, Charlie's widow, partnered to acquire the business when it came up for sale again. It officially reopened in 2011. Charlie's famous sausage is still served today.

Phoebia Sullivan

Born to former slaves in South Carolina, Madame Phoebia Sullivan was a healer, herb doctor, mystic, prophet, and leader in Saluda's black community. She arrived in Saluda in the late 1920s after the death of her husband, bringing with her many children, and it is said she adopted even more. According to her memoir, *From the Cradle to the Crutch*, she experienced her first vision in a dream on her ninth birthday, when she was given a Bible by a messenger and left with the power to heal by the laying on of hands. Those who believed often arrived at her door by the busload from all over the country. Founding Sullivan's Temple Missionary Baptist Church in 1947 was her greatest accomplishment. She often held grand celebrations on the church grounds, where a bounty of food was served, and all were welcome. According to the engraving on her tombstone in the black section of Mountain Page Cemetery and death records, she was born in 1855 and died in 1956; however, these dates conflict with her own memoirs.

Robert Pace

Robert Hugh Pace was the son of M.A. and Mintie Guice Pace. Until his death in 2010, Robert was the owner and proprietor of M.A. Pace General Store, a landmark Saluda institution that his father had founded in 1899. Known for his friendly smile and cheerful personality, he had a deep and extensive knowledge of Saluda's history that he loved to share with his customers. The Morgan family, distant cousins of the Paces, purchased the business in 2011 and have carried on the tradition of the Pace family by continuing to share the history of Saluda with their customers.

William "Billy" Morris

William "Billy" Morris, known as the Keeper of the Century-Old Fire, lived in a log cabin on Holbert Cove Road and became famous for helping to keep a fire burning for 164 years. The fire was started by his grandparents in 1780. Billy loved to play the fiddle, and his companion was a dog named Booker T. After Billy passed away in 1944 at the age of 84, the fire went out.