



Tar Heel Town

Sanford

Born from the railroad, the seat of Lee County remains on the track to growth while preserving its small-town feel.

BY JIMMY TOMLIN

Golfers from all over the country — and certainly golfers from across North Carolina — are familiar with the Tobacco Road Golf Club in Sanford, a course that attracts players from here and yon on reputation alone. Known for its imaginative, challenging holes, the course earned *Golf Digest's* designation as the 10th-hardest course in America.

It's ironic, though, to find a golf course that's so challenging in a city like Sanford, where the living is decidedly easy. Just ask 69-year-old Tommy F. Bridges, who lives in the Deep River community just north of Sanford and

whose business, Bridges-Cameron Funeral Home, is located in town. He's one of the community's most vocal cheerleaders.

"We're growing, but it's what I would call 'under control' growth," Bridges says. "We still have a small-town feel. People will speak to you on the street and wave as they pass by. I think everybody sort of feels responsible for each other."

Rails and bricks

Sanford, a town of about 28,000 people, sits in the heart of Lee County — it's the county seat — but was originally part of neighboring Moore County. Sanford was

born of the rail industry following the Civil

War, serving as the junction for the Western Railroad and the Raleigh and Augusta Air Line Railroad.

Incorporated in 1874, it got its name from Col.

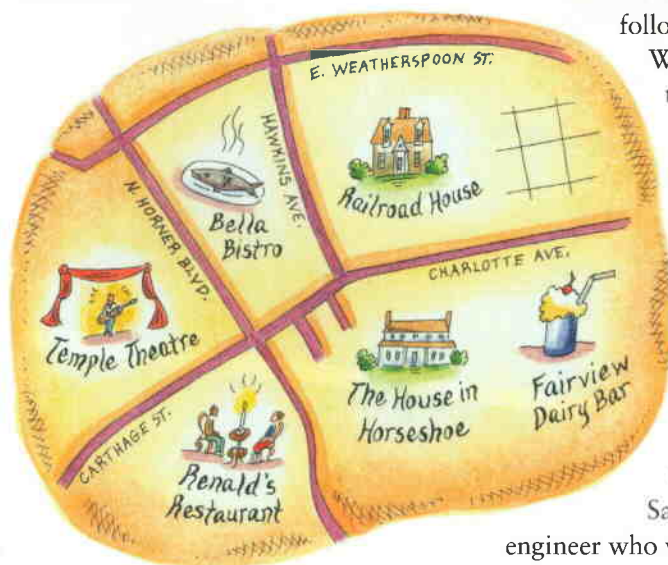
Charles Ogburn Sanford, a railroad engineer who was instrumental

in building the local railroad lines. By 1880, Sanford had grown to a population of 236 residents.

As the city grew, traveling by buggy and wagon from Sanford to Carthage, the Moore County seat, became too time consuming. In 1907, the General Assembly agreed to form a new county to be named in honor of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, with Sanford as the county seat. Spurred by the railroad junction and the thriving industries that developed there as a result, Sanford's growth spurt became more rapid. The population grew to 2,262 in 1910 and soared to 13,400 by 1930. Sanford merged with neighboring Jonesboro in 1947, triggering even more growth.

Also important to the town's growth was a thriving brick industry, which began to develop around 1920. By the 1950s, Lee County brick plants were producing about 40 percent of the brick manufactured in North Carolina. To this day, a brick sign in Sanford declares it as "Brick Capital of the U.S.A."

Like Tommy Bridges, Bob Joyce, president of the Sanford Chamber of Commerce, believes that Sanford is still growing. "This is a town that grew up around the railroad, and



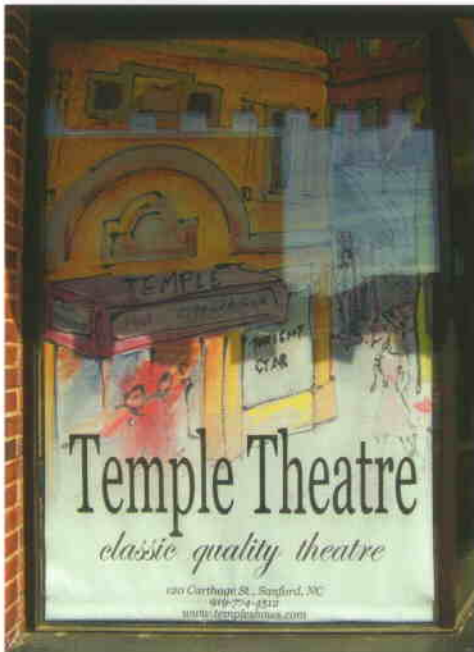
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRYAN REGAN; ILLUSTRATION BY JENNIFER THERMES



Left: Sanford's oldest building, the Railroad House is now a museum featuring an old steam locomotive.

Below left: Built in 1908, the Camelback Truss Bridge spans the Deep River and connects Lee and Chatham counties.

After shopping downtown (bottom right), spend an evening enjoying the fine dining of Bella Bistro (below) before catching the latest production at the Temple Theatre (bottom left).



PHOTOGRAPHY BY (TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM ROW) JULIANN BUTCHER;
ALL OTHERS BY BRYAN REGAN

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we didn’t have many other natural resources here,” Joyce explains. “We don’t have a big historic plantation. We don’t have a big body of water or a big fountain. We were a very rural town in a fairly isolated area of North Carolina for the first 50 years of our existence. But we do have U.S. [Highway] 1 running right through the middle of town. I think because we had limited natural resources and commercial opportunities, our community has always been one that had to work harder. We’ve worked hard to build our community, and we’ve been very successful because we’ve had progressive, farsighted leadership.”

Cultural scene

Much of the city’s unique history can be discovered at the Railroad House, downtown’s oldest building, which was built in 1872 as a home for the first stationmaster of the Raleigh and Augusta Air Line Railroad. The neo-Gothic building, which later served as the home of Sanford’s first mayor and as a schoolhouse, faced possible demolition in the early 1960s, but it’s now a museum managed by the Railroad House Historical Association. The museum, which features an old steam locomotive on the grounds behind the building, showcases a wide array of photos and artifacts depicting life in Sanford through the years.

Located on Moore Street, the Sanford Antique Mall makes it easy to travel back in time.

A couple of other historic highlights you’re likely to hear Sanford folks talking about include the Deep River Camelback Truss Bridge and “The House in the Horseshoe.” The bridge, located at Deep River Park, is a one-lane bridge originally located in Lillington and moved to Cumnock in the early 1930s. The house, now known as the Alston House, is a 1772 home once owned by Gov. Benjamin Williams. The old

structure still has bullet holes and scars from a Revolutionary War battle near the house.

Sanford is about much more than history, though. Consider, for example, that the town hosts the annual Sanford Pottery Festival, a two-day event that has grown to become the largest pottery festival in North Carolina and one of the largest on the East Coast. The popular festival, which this year included more than 150 exhibitors, grew out of the city’s rich pottery heritage. That heritage boasts the late A.R. Cole of Cole Pottery, who moved from Seagrove to Sanford in the early 20th century and has



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