

New book tells of Richmond County architecture

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By Tom MacCallum
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A book on the history of 284 architectural properties in Richmond County dating from 1794 to 2005 is to be available Sept. 2.

Neal Cadieu, president of the Richmond County Historical Society, said the "Architectural History of Richmond County" will be on sale for order by phone or mail, or available at several locations in the county.

"The book was nine years in the making," said Dr. John Stevenson, chairman of the publishing committee.

"It will never be out-of-date," he said. "It will be used for historical research for years to come. It is a guide from this county's beginnings to the present and should be in every home."

The history of Richmond County is revealed through the descriptions of the buildings and their significance to the development of a society in the county, Cadieu said.

The book begins with an illustrated essay introduction of the county's history which begins with the days of the American Indians and continues through 2005.

Following the essay are historical property descriptions in Ellerbe, Hamlet and Rockingham. All descriptions have at least one photograph, Cadieu said.

The largest segment of the book contains descriptions and photographs of properties in the remainder of the county.

Available

The book will be on sale at several locations.

Books can be ordered by mail by calling (910) 997-6008. There is a \$5 charge for postage and handling. Credit cards will be accepted at the phone contact.

The cost of the hardback book is \$75. A leather-bound volume is available for \$100. Both prices include sales tax.

Orders by mail can be sent to the Richmond County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1764, Rockingham, NC 28380.

The hardback book weighs just under four pounds. It contains 351 pages, including an index of property and property owner names.

The current committee members include Len Butler, Audrey Moore, Neal Cadieu, Laura Stevenson-Daskal and Betty McBryde.

“It is nice to see all these wide grins,” Stevenson said when the book was delivered to them. It had been a long time coming from when it began in 1999.

Contents

The dust cover contains a full-color picture made on the porch of Richmond County’s oldest structure, the fully-restored 1794 Touchstone house near Norman.

There are 284 properties described in words and photographs. In all, there are 529 photographs, most of which have never been published.

In 1999, Mike Eaves, then society president, asked Stevenson to chair the committee to begin the survey of properties of historical significance in the county.

Cadieu said the need for a professional survey came to light when the N.C. Department of Transportation announced plans for the I-73/74 route through the middle of the historic Zion community west of Rockingham.

“The beginnings of the Zion community were among the earliest beginnings of Richmond County,” he said. “It was then we realized neither NCDOT nor N.C. Department of Cultural Resources had any information on historical sites in Richmond County.”

North Carolina provided almost half the cost of the professional survey of the properties. Additional funding came from the Cole Foundation, Thomas H. Leath Foundation, the City of Rockingham, City of Hamlet, Richmond County Board of Commissioners and private donations raised by Stevenson.

To begin the project, \$46,000 was secured making it possible to hire Edward F. Turberg of Wilmington.

“Committees were formed in various communities to assist Turberg. They provided a start,” Cadieu said, “however, Turberg went beyond their suggestions and found unmapped back roads and drives often leading to houses of interest.”

Hidden cabins

In at least two instances, Turberg found log cabins inside houses which had been hidden by plaster or wood paneling, he said. "One house he discovered has a chimney of a design usually found only in New Bern," he said.

His findings in 2002 were presented to the N.C. Archives and History and the society.

At that time, Benny Sharpe was society president and asked the committee to develop a book from the Turberg survey.

While N.C. Cultural Resources agreed to help with the cost of preparing the text, Stevenson's committee was left to find money for printing.

"Again, Dr. Stevenson and his committee turned to the Cole Foundation, Leath Foundation and private donors," Cadieu said.

Turberg began the project but it soon was given to J. Daniel Pezzoni, a veteran in preparing county architectural history books.

Dr. P. R. Rankin Jr. was then asked to head a book-preparation committee. During the next 18 months, the book was expanded not only in text but also in the number of photographs.

In May 2007 when Pezzoni's work was complete, Donning Publishers of Virginia Beach, Va., was selected. It was the same publisher that produced "No Ordinary Lives; Richmond County 1750-1900," written by John Hutchinson.

That book is still available.

The society is also preparing a continuing history of Richmond County from 1900 to the present.

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