

Chatham divided

There's a history to east-west tensions in the county.

By Julian Sereno

"Oh, east is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet," wrote Rudyard Kipling more than a century ago.



County Commissioner Carl Thompson is a lifelong Bear Creek resident.

He wasn't writing about Chatham County, but he could have been – at any time in Chatham's history.

"I've been here since '68," said John Grimes, Siler City Commissioner and Mayor Pro Tem. "There has always been somewhat of a divide between eastern and western Chatham."

The divide started in colonial times, when the eastern part of the county, with its rich agricultural lands along the Haw and the New Hope Rivers, was the home to wealthy plantations. The western part of the county was home to hardscrabble farmers.

The Revolutionary War did not unify the county. Grimes was told that Tories, loyalists to the British Crown, lived in the East. That didn't change during the first part of the 19th century. "Abolitionists left west Chatham county and formed Pittsboro, Indiana," said Pittsboro Mayor Randy Voller, a history buff.

For much of the 20th century, Pittsboro was a

sleepy county seat, and Siler City the wealthiest and most populous town. But during the last decade or two, Siler City has suffered the steady erosion of its manufacturing base. And while Jordan Lake now covers that rich land that gave rise to plantations, in their stead has come suburban development, with affluent commuters working outside Chatham and wealthy retirees from elsewhere.

Today, the division is economic and ideological, and the rancor is worse than ever. Many residents of the northeastern part of Chatham are self-described progressives; those in Siler City are self-described conservatives.

The conflict, according to Carl Thompson, Chatham County Commissioner and lifelong Bear Creek resident, is between newcomers and longtime Chatham residents.

"A newcomer is anybody who doesn't talk like they were raised in Chatham," he said. "But as long as you agree to the philosophy in the west, you are not a newcomer."

"At first, the western bloc of the county had the majority," said Grimes, a former Chatham County



Siler City Commissioner and Mayor Pro Tem John Grimes has lived in the county since 1968.

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Chatham Mills to host former workers' reunion

By Cameron Barnett

While the corridors of the old Chatham Mills have been quiet since 1996, they'll be a bit livelier for at least a few hours on June 14. Between Noon and 3 p.m., the Chatham Mills Development Corp. and Co-op grocer Chatham Marketplace will host a reunion for former Chatham Mills employees, their families, and other community members.

During the event, local musicians will provide entertainment, and current mill owner Tom Roberts will sponsor tours of the building. Memorabilia from the mill's operational years will be available for viewing. Media and historians will be on hand to record the occasion; notebooks and cameras will be



A Chatham Mills employee reunion will be held June 14.

available for guests to record moments and reminiscences.

Chatham Marketplace, a tenant of a portion of the Mill that once housed management offices, will provide lunch at \$5 per plate. Desserts and beverages will also be available for purchase at the store.

Talk of a reunion has already sparked support from former workers, all of whom share fond memories of the long-time mainstay of Chatham's economy. Ralph Riddle of Pittsboro is a 44-year veteran of the plant who served as Plant Superintendent of the Mill from 1955 until his retirement in 1976.

The Chatham County native credits Chatham Mills with helping pull Pittsboro through the Great Depression as the plummeting cost of cotton

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Home builders face risks

By Lonnie West

"Builders are gamblers, but they never get to shuffle, cut or deal!"

The new home market is currently in a slow-down cycle as evidenced by fewer building permits issued and an existing inventory of unsold new homes. A lot of national attention is devoted to this story, but little attention is given to the effect on the local builder.

There is a myth that builders are raking in huge profits in residential construction. So it follows that builders must view the slowdown as a little vacation. Surely they are doing maintenance on their boats now and filling out Bass Tournament entries!

The more likely story is that builders are spending a lot of time worrying about their subcontractors. "How can I make sure my subs; the plumbers, the concrete finishers, framers, drywall crews, the painters, electricians and all the other trades stay in business so that they will be there when things pick up again?"

But what about the myth? Just how much do builders profit from the sale of a new home? Small builders, who produce fewer than 25 homes a year, would like to clear 10 percent of the sales price of the new home. Actual results are between 6 percent and 8 percent if everything goes exactly according to plan.

Let's look at the cost of a new home and see where the money goes. One typical new home lists for a price of \$127.00 per square foot. Using figures from the National Association of Homebuilders, the accompanying chart is a breakdown of that \$127.

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How \$127/square foot breaks down*

Materials	\$35.56
Land	30.48
Labor	25.40
Sales & Marketing	7.62
Financing	6.35
Overhead**	11.43
Profit	10.16

*Figures from the National Association of Homebuilders.
**Overhead is the expense of being in business: Licenses, taxes, permits and fees, tools, equipment, insurance, etc.

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