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A day with Dead Poets Society

By Marjorie Hudson

On Wednesday, May 19, the Dead Poets Society of America blew into Chatham County in their "Poe-Mobile" to document yet another dead poet: George Moses Horton.

Filmmaker Walter Skold, founder of the society, and his sound man and camera woman have been traveling the South and Mid-Atlantic states documenting forgotten poets of the Civil War era, asking living poetry enthusiasts to read poems aloud on film to keep the memories alive.

"I was really excited to learn about George Moses Horton," Skold told me. "He is unique in the history of the era." A retired teacher and self-described "amateur poet," Skold was inspired to form the Dead Poets Society of America when his dying father told him, "You can write a poem about this."

Skold took this as an affirmation of his love of poetry, and he decided to gather a crew to film living poets reading on the graves of forgotten ones. Since 2008, Skold and others have documented the final resting places of hundreds of poets.

George Moses Horton is indeed unique in the annals of poetry and history. He is the first black man to publish a book in the south—"The Hope of Liberty," published in 1829. He published two books of poetry and an autobiography while living in slavery, then a third book after gaining freedom. His accomplishments are noted in a historic marker at the corner of 15-501 and Mt. Gilead Church Road. Footage about Horton and his poetry will be featured in a full-length film documenting many forgotten poets of the Civil War.

As there is no known grave for Horton—he likely died and is buried in Philadelphia—we toured Horton's haunts in the area, including the UNC



Above, Kasey Glover and filmmaker. Left, Walter Skold and the crew with Marjorie Hudson and the Poe-Mobile.

campus, where Horton lived and sold his poems for a time, and the Mt. Gilead Baptist Church, where the pastor showed us a historic register listing a "George" and many other Hortons, white and black, as nineteenth century members.

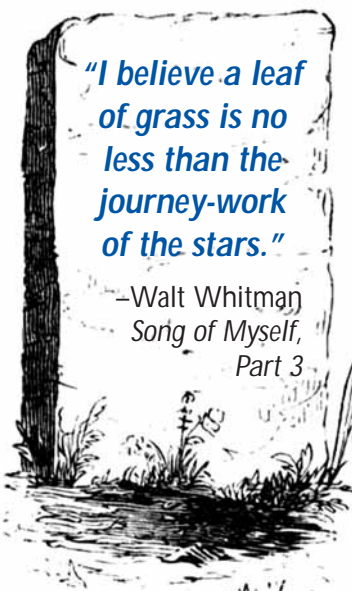
Years ago, I had tracked down the location of the last farm where George lived, in order to prove to the NC Division of Archives that a marker could be placed here. Key factors in the proof were an 1865 bill of sale and map showing that the church land had been carved out of the Hall Horton farm on Mount Gilead Church Road. But this was the first time I'd

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An open letter to Durham leaders from friends across the lake

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My background is in English and Theology. Yours most likely is not. Nevertheless, before casting your votes for or against rezoning to allow for the "751 Assemblage" development along Jordan Lake, I hope you will meditate on the following words of a poet and a prophet. They should strike a common chord in us all. I know many neighbors from Chatham and other surrounding counties share my hope. Together we seek to preserve and enhance the magnificent resources meant to benefit the common good of citizens throughout our region of the state.



"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars."

—Walt Whitman
Song of Myself, Part 3

"All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field... The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands for ever."

—Isaiah chapter 40 vs. 6-8

Question: What does a blade of grass mean to you... you who have the power to give and take with your Aye or Nay? Soon you will decide the fate of a place along the disputed boundary of Jordan Lake that can be symbolized in a poetic and sacred metaphor, a leaf (blade) of green grass.

What place does a symbolic leaf of grass hold for you in the grand scheme of things, both finite and infinite? How will your appreciation of the fleeting gift of Life and your understanding of your role as caretakers of the created order color your choices? From whom do you draw your motivation, and to whose words do you listen as you create the future for all living things in your corner of creation?

What hope is there in a time and place where the twin deities of power and wealth seemingly rule the day, that a cadre of principled servants dedicated to the public good can rise up and stand up to such influential and controlling forces? Will you as leaders be able to lead in a direction that points our communities toward a more disciplined sustainable lifestyle that values environmental health over real or perceived financial gain?

These are the terrifyingly critical questions

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Economic recovery starts at home

By Julian Sereno

When Gov. Beverly Perdue spoke at Opportunity Chatham, the annual breakfast meeting of the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation in mid May, the mood was decidedly upbeat. The Ferrington Barn was packed with various elected officials, civic leaders and other interested parties.

In her remarks, Perdue said that North Carolina's economic health is a lot better this year than last, "because people are shopping again." She knows because she sees the sales tax receipts. She pledged to do all she could to promote economic development, and in rebuilding the Chatham County Courthouse.

The picture of Chatham's economy hasn't been cheerful this year. At the Third Annual Development Briefing at Governor's Club a few weeks before the Courthouse fire, the good news was that Chatham retains all the characteristics that made its real estate



GOV. PERDUE

market sizzle just a few years ago. The bad news was that the real estate sales figures all remain anemic, and the more expensive the house, the more difficult it is to sell.

Less than two months later, the Legacy at Jordan Lake went belly up. Originally planned for 463 houses starting in the \$900,000 range, with a par 3 golf course, waterfalls and views of Jordan Lake, it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The lawyer who did the filing blamed the economy.

These things have a ripple effect. If not too much is being built, there's not much of a demand for building supplies, such as paint. About the same time that the Legacy filed for bankruptcy, Jim Henry of J. Henry Paint and Hardware, 56 South Street, Pittsboro, announced he'd be closing his doors forever at the end of May. He said that business dried up last fall, but that "the courthouse fire was the straw that broke the camel's back. We were cut off for three weeks."

And what of the courthouse? After the commissioners voted to rebuild it and the Governor of North Carolina pledged her support, it is hardly a hub of activity.

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