



Remembering a Bygone Lumberton

Jim Alexander, pictures courtesy Elaine Jardine

When Charles R. Johnson was born in 1921, Lumberton was a small village surrounded by farms. As the area began to change in the second half of that century, Johnson was already serving Lumberton. One of the earliest members of the small Lumberton Police Department, joining in the mid-1950s, he proudly wore Badge # 3 until his retirement in 1975. In the early years, he often was THE police department during the night shift.

He also served at Lumberton's Florence Walther School, nominally as head custodian, but in fact heavily involved in repeated expansions of the school, where his design and construction skills helped to cope with the growing school-age population. His interest in the place called Lumberton was shown by his involvement in its Historical Society, the Last Man's Club, and as a Life Member of the local Fire Department. For many years during the Cold War, he served as the township's Civil Defense Director as well. In 2010 he was honored as Lumberton's oldest resident. He enjoyed many years to think about Lumberton, and a happy finding after his passing in 2013 demonstrated that.

In cleaning out his home at the corner of Main Street and Creek Road, his family came upon a satchel. The satchel was moved to the attic, where later it was revealed to contain several sketch books. It seems that he had tried to preserve a sense of the Lumberton that had existed mostly before he had even been alive there. Often using old photographs of buildings around town, he had sketched

colorful pastel scenes on drawing paper of what they looked like. In some cases, an old photo or newspaper article, which had provided his inspiration, was located in his sketchbook.

The scene at the top of this article draws on such an old photo, now in the Historical Society, of Lumberton's former passenger and freight station. His mind's eye portrayed the view as it might have been, with vivid colors and remarkable honoring of the original scene.



In this sketch, he copied from an old black and white drawing published when the former Mineral Springs Hotel on Main Street was for sale in the 1800s, adding detail and his typical sense of color that perhaps showed the intensity of his commitment to portray real buildings and people. For many of his sketches, he resorted to memory of information he had gleaned from older residents. He didn't want the life and images of the town he had grown up in to be forgotten.



Johnson was especially fascinated by the Eayrestown section of Lumberton, where almost all the buildings no longer exist. In his sketch book, he had kept several newspaper clippings by folklorist Henry Charlton Beck, featuring a series of photos of what was left of Eayrestown in 1934. Together with this was a separate photo of one of the old mills there. From these, his mind's eye created the sketch above, which while not a detailed depiction, captured the sense of what once had been. (The area is along Eayrestown Road, generally between Landing Street and Bridge Road.)

As he did with a number of his sketches, affixed was a Post It. In this case, it read: "In the 1800s in Eayrestown were two mills: filling – cotton mills." A different photo of a mill was marked: "Feed Mill Eayrestown. 1910. Lightning struck same and mill was lost by fire."



As we were going through these papers, his daughter, Elaine Jardine, active in the Historical Society leadership, remembered that he had bought an early label-making machine, and used it to identify various household items. The drawing above, showing the former bridge on Main Street and the one building based on a 1975 news clipping we found (see the clip on page 6), is covered by a series of small labels about what buildings once had been where, the names of streets, and things that had happened.

Perhaps a special art form of embedding memory-joggers into sketches, likely as a basis for future sketches, or maybe as a roadmap for future historians!

Yet another such sketch was found which showed some of the former Eayrestown buildings and features about which he had learned, depicted in an unscaled reminder fashion:



When asked to comment on several samples of Johnson's work, Lumberton Leas noted artist Anne Reid observed:

"The pastels remind me of Grandma Moses's paintings. Her work is described as folk-art style, primitive, with simple realism, nostalgic atmosphere, and as having luminous color." Not bad for a person who served his town so well in his life, and left art, remembrances, and guideposts for later historians.





Photo of old Lumberton Main Street bridge, built c. 1891, just before it was demolished for construction of new span. From November 1975 news clip in Johnson's sketch book. Used as central image of Johnson's sketch of old time Lumberton.

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