



An old bridge on Torrence Chapel Road was torn out before the lake filled.

History lingers like a series of fingerprints under Lake Norman.

Before 1960, the lakebed held houses, stores, vast farms, churches, cemeteries, historic sites and textile mills, all linked by a network of roads and bridges.

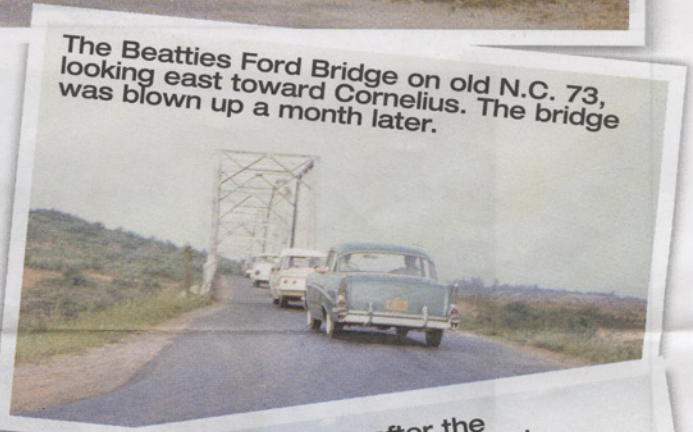
From Long Island in the north almost to Cowans Ford in the south, Duke Power began erasing all traces of habitation as it created the 32,500-acre Lake Norman from 1959 to 1963.

"Lake Norman is one of the cleanest reservoirs on the (Catawba-Wataree) system," says Buck Knox of Mooresville, who grew up in the area. "They took just about everything out of that lake."

Despite that, there are traces of the past under the water, some even visible occasionally when the water is low and some detectable on boat fish-finders.

Perhaps the most intact piece of the past is a dam that stretched from Monbo to East Monbo and powered area textile mills. Robert Eades of Long Island, president of the Catawba County Historical Association, says the dam sat far enough below the projected lake level of 760 feet mean sea level that it posed no obstruction problem and was left in place.

The two mills still operating along



The Beatties Ford Bridge on old N.C. 73, looking east toward Cornelius. The bridge was blown up a month later.



Only the supports remain after the Beatties Ford Bridge was demolished in 1962.

Photos courtesy of Wib Overcash

SECRETS OF THE LAKE

Water took land but not history

By Carol-Faye Ashcraft

that stretch of the Catawba River did not fare as well, however. Duke bought out businesses such as the East Monbo Mill, built in 1896, and Superior Yarn Mill (formerly Long Island Cotton Mill), built about 1852 in Long Island, and had them demolished.

Visible remains

Eades says that as a youngster growing up in the 1960s, he could see the foundations of the mill and support buildings, as well as red bricks from the mill scattered along the lake bottom and shore, when he swam in the area.

He also could see foundations of the small houses from the village that had grown up around the mill. Almost a dozen of the 40 or more one- and two-story mill houses sat in the path of the lake. Tenants who lived in the houses when the mill closed in 1959 were allowed to move the houses elsewhere.

The road that had run in front of the Long Island mill now plunges beneath the lake. It is the same with many roads in Catawba, Iredell, Mecklenburg and Lincoln counties.

Joe Knox, former mayor of Mooresville, remembers Brawley School Road, which deadends near The Point community, as Gamble Road, a main thoroughfare from Mooresville to Davidson and Cornelius. The south end is now Torrence Chapel Road in Cornelius.

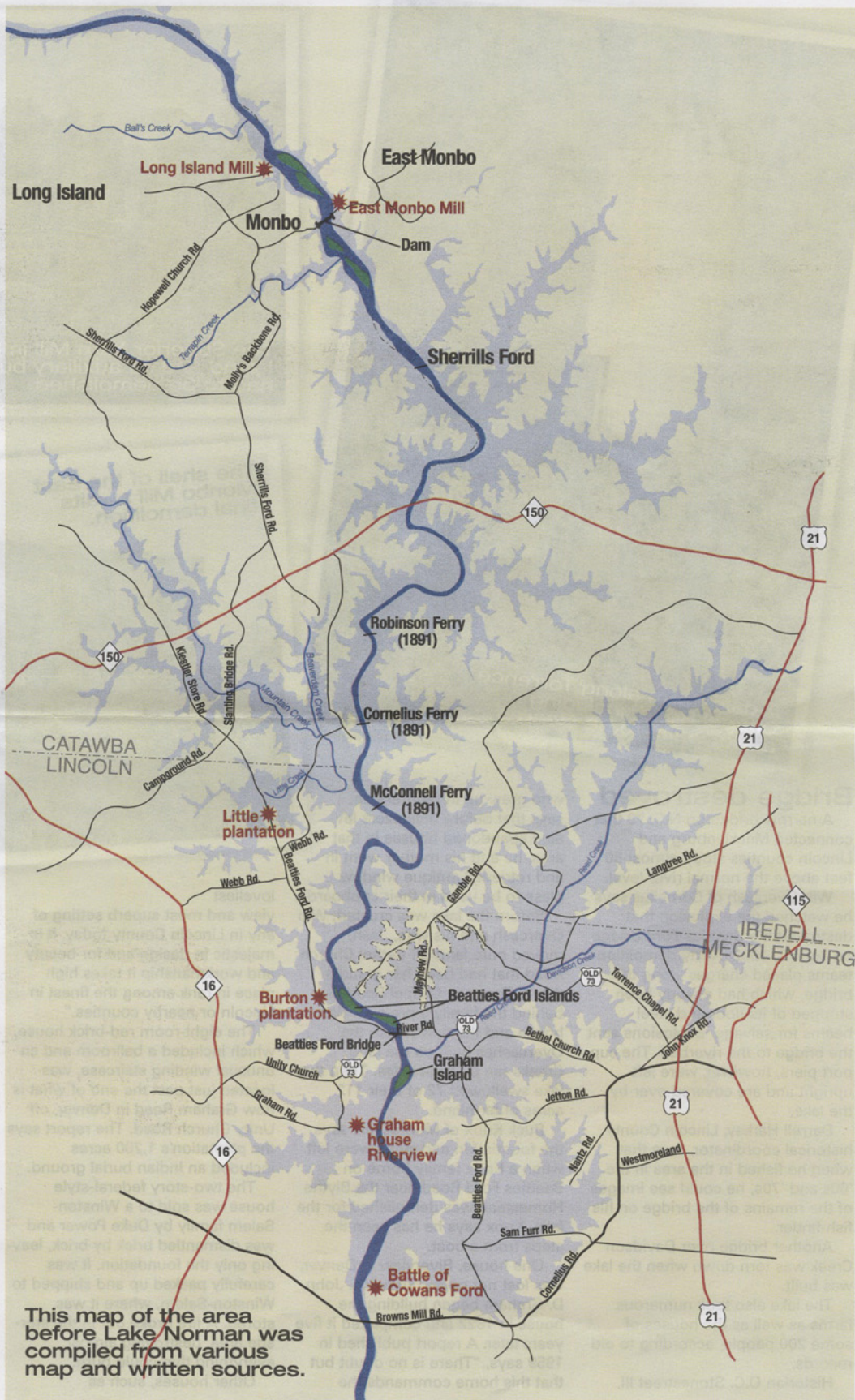
Mary Fetter Stough, who grew up in Davidson, would travel with her family along old N.C. 73, which ran from what is now Knox Road in Cornelius through to Unity Church Road in Denver. "It used to go through to South Main Street by way of Jetton Street. We would go on 73 without going to Cornelius," she says.

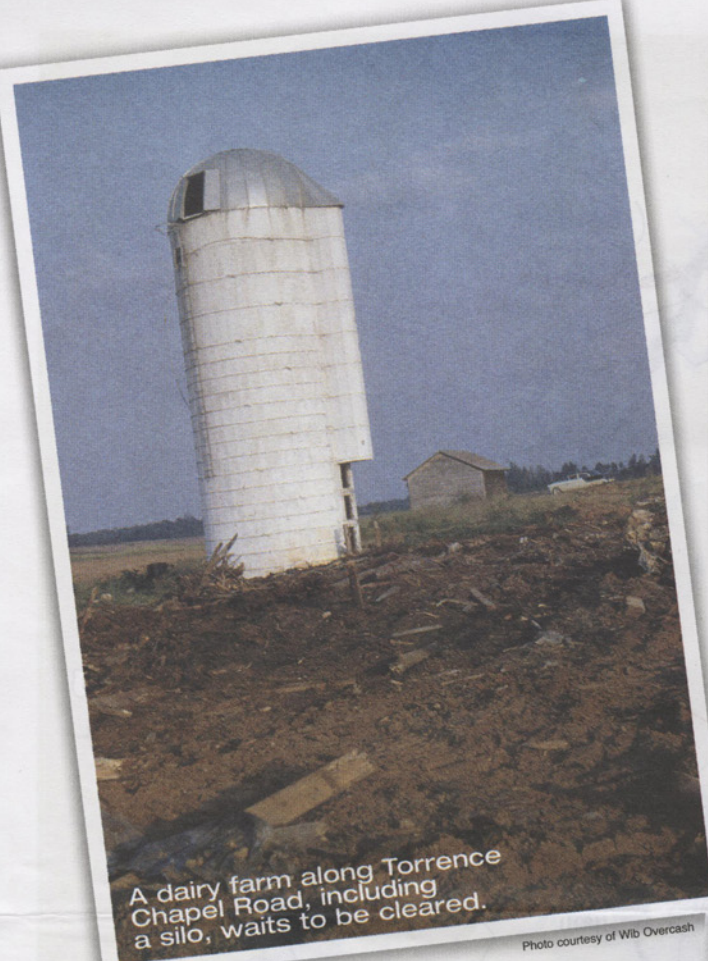
The road also allowed farmers in Lincoln County to get their cotton to the weigher and later to a mill in Davidson in the late 1800s.



Photo by Richard Rudisill

The lake behind Jean and Wib Overcash now covers much of their property.





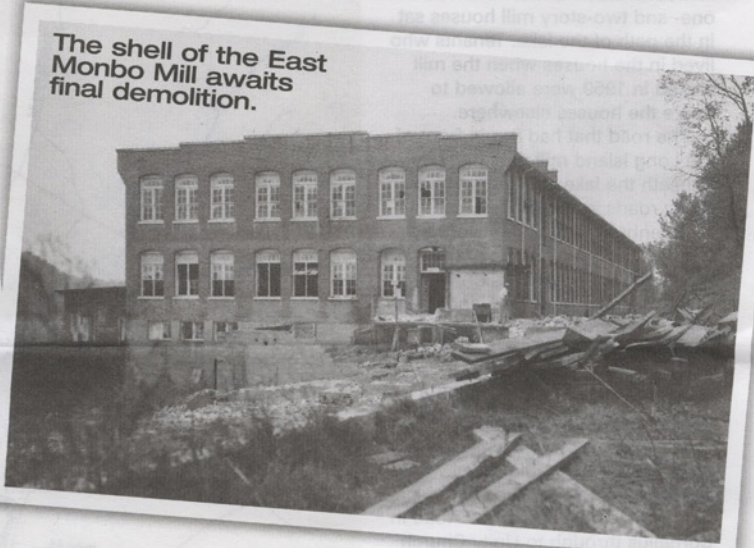
A dairy farm along Torrence Chapel Road, including a silo, waits to be cleared.

Photo courtesy of Wib Overcash



The Superior Yarn Mill in Long Island and its auxiliary buildings had to be demolished.

Photo courtesy of Duke Energy



The shell of the East Monbo Mill awaits final demolition.

Photo courtesy of Duke Energy

Bridge destroyed

A narrow bridge on N.C. 73 that connected Mecklenburg and Lincoln counties stood almost 50 feet above the normal river level.

Wib Overcash of Cornelius says he watched the explosion that destroyed the Beatties Ford Bridge on June 3, 1962. Army demolition teams placed charges along the bridge, which had already been stripped of its floor and steel beams for salvage. Explosions sent the bridge to the riverbed. The support piers, however, were left upright and are covered over by the lake.

Darrell Harkey, Lincoln County historical coordinator, says that when he fished in the area in the '60s and '70s, he could see images of the remains of the bridge on his fish-finder.

Another bridge over Davidson Creek was torn down when the lake was built.

The lake also took numerous farms as well as the houses of some 200 people, according to old records.

Historian O.C. Stonestreet III,

who grew up in Mooresville, says that before bulldozers leveled abandoned houses in that area, he and his mother went in and retrieved antique window glass to be used in their cupboards.

Before the lake was created, Wib Overcash and his wife, Jean, moved onto land off Bethel Church Road that had been her grandfather's. Torrence Chapel Road was behind the family's pre-Civil War house and the new house the Overcashes built on the land. Creeks ran on both sides. Then the lake swallowed 72 of their 112 acres of farmland.

Buck Knox of Mooresville says the foundation and steps were left when a Knox family home on Beatties Ford Road near the Blythe Homestead was demolished for the lake. Knox says he has seen the steps from a boat.

One house, Riverview in Denver, was lost not once, but twice. John D. Graham began building the house in 1822 and completed it five years later. A report published in 1959 says, "There is no doubt but that this home commands the

loveliest view and most superb setting of any in Lincoln County today. It is majestic in design and for beauty and workmanship it takes high place in rank among the finest in Lincoln or nearby counties."

The eight-room red-brick house, which included a ballroom and an unusual winding staircase, was located just past the end of what is now Graham Road in Denver, off Unity Church Road. The report says the plantation's 1,200 acres included an Indian burial ground.

The two-story federal-style house was sold to a Winston-Salem family by Duke Power and was dismantled brick by brick, leaving only the foundation. It was carefully packed up and shipped to Winston-Salem, where it was stored. A fire broke out in the storage area, destroying almost everything that could burn.

Other houses, such as

Greenwood, built by Maj. Henry W. Connor about 1820 in the Terrell area, were moved out of the way of the lake. Greenwood was shifted about three-fourths mile to a spot overlooking the lake, although all the masonry was left in the lakebed.

Places of the past

But some sites could not be moved, such as the location of the Revolutionary War Battle of Cowans Ford, now underwater north of the Cowans Ford Dam.

The spots where two pioneers established their homes and controlled river crossings also have vanished - Sherrills Ford and Beatties Ford.

Adam Sherrill brought his family, including eight sons, from Virginia around 1747 and found a crossing

at the north end of what is now Lake Norman. At that time, two islands split the Catawba River into three channels.

Beatties Ford, located about 3,000 feet due east of present-day Governor's Island on the southern end of the lake, had been the major east-west crossing on the Catawba for thousands of years. John Beatty bought 944 acres on the west side of the crossing, starting in about 1749. The ford included an island that extended south to where the Beatties Ford (old N.C. 73) Bridge was built in 1912, about a mile below the ford. The island had several names, including Goat Island, Graham Island and Burton Island, according to local historian Marvin K. "Ken" Brotherton. The riverbed at the crossing was a smooth, flat rock that was ideal for foot or wagon traffic.

Beatty eventually sold his land to Alfred Burton, a relative of Gov. Hutchins Gordon Burton. All of the ford, except about 23 acres of the Burton home place, now Governor's Island, is now underwater.

Brotherton, in his book "Lake Norman Piedmont History," recalls that north of the ford was a hill that was a favorite camping site of Indians using the crossing. "Indian artifacts, mostly different types of broken arrowheads from different tribes, were scattered over the hill," he writes.

Brotherton also writes that a grist mill once operated on Burton Creek, a half-mile west of Governor's Island. Falls on the creek dropped about 15 feet, creating enough power for a large water wheel at the mill.

Burton Lane at one time was part of Beatties Ford Road and ran through to Kiestler Store Road in Catawba County. During Prohibition, it was the main north-south route for bootleggers traveling from Wilkesboro to Charlotte and became known as "Bootleggers Alley."

Ferry crossings also no longer exist. O.C. Stonestreet noted in a newspaper column last year that he had obtained a historical map of the area. "I was pleased to see the locations of the old ferries that my great-grandfather used to cross the Catawba before the bridges were built," he wrote. "Situated above Sherrills Ford was Brown's Ferry. Below the ford and going downstream were the Robinson and Cornelius ferries, and the McConnell Ferry just above the Mecklenburg line.

Submerged cemeteries

In addition, a number of family cemeteries are underwater. The Olde Mecklenburg Genealogical Society says eight cemeteries were covered. Others outside Mecklenburg County also are in the depths of the lake. Duke worked to find the families of those buried in land it would flood and ask how they wanted the graves handled. Several families asked that the graves, many of them more than 150 years old, be left undisturbed but that the markers be moved to dry ground. Duke cleaned and repaired markers when it moved them.

Seven markers from the Cornelius family cemetery were moved from the Mountain Creek area to Rehobeth United Methodist Church in Terrell, for instance. The Baker cemetery in Iredell County was relocated to Centre Presbyterian Church cemetery in Mount Mourne, and the Little family cemetery in Lincoln County was moved to Unity Presbyterian Church in Triangle.

The Little cemetery, located about 2,000 feet north of what is now the Little Creek access area, is one of the oldest cemeteries in Lincoln County. It was used until the 1880s. The boat landing sits in the middle of the old Little plantation, located where the Morgantown Highway crossed what is now Burton Lane in Denver.

The Little ancestral home, built in the 1760s, was a "log cabin mansion of its time," according to Brotherton. The house was razed when the lake was created.

But the history covered by Lake Norman reaches even farther back in time. Stonestreet says that, no doubt, many artifacts have been submerged.

Duke itself says in its final shoreline management plan update for the Catawba-Wateree system, filed in 2001, that its research has shown that the immediate Lake Norman area includes "23 single dwellings, a church with a cemetery, two other cemeteries, two agricultural complexes, a mill, a bridge, a commercial building, a mill village, a school and a commercial district. The architectural resources date from the 18th through the 20th centuries, although most of the resources date to the 19th century." The report also mentions 421 archaeological sites that range in date from the Early Archaic (10,000-9,000

Missing Slides

Wib Overcash, an avid photographer who supplied many of the photos for this article, says that several years ago he lent two carousels of slides to someone, perhaps a men's club in Charlotte. The slides, depicting the area before Lake Norman was created, were not returned. He has tried repeatedly to locate them. If you have those historic slides or information about them, please contact us and help us return them to their owner. You can reach us at Lake Norman Magazine, 400-B North Harbor Place, Davidson, NC 28036; phone (704) 892-7936, ext. 12; e-mail LNMag@charlotteobserver.com, or fax (704) 896-0661. You may contact us anonymously, if you wish.


Know More History?

If you have other stories or photos about the history of the area, we'd like to hear about them for future articles. Contact us at Lake Norman Magazine, 400-B North Harbor Place, Davidson, NC 28036; phone (704) 892-7936, ext. 12, or e-mail LNMag@charlotteobserver.com.

B.C.) period forward.

"The majority of the sites have components that date to the Woodland (3,000-500 B.C.) period, and many contain ceramic and lithic artifacts. ... More than half of the sites are underwater," the report says.

Duke says on its Web site that it respects and protects those artifacts, those fingerprints of history: "Duke Power is committed to pro-

tecting irreplaceable archaeological and historic resources. Interfering with archaeological and historic artifacts destroys the information provided by these remnants of inhabitants' lives. Because of this, Duke Power does not allow any artifact collecting on its property, including the lakebed. Interfering with burial remains and associated grave goods on any land, private or public, is also illegal." 



Best Ham!
Best Holiday!

\$5 OFF

Any 8lb Ham
or Larger

THE HONEYBAKED HAM CO.
... CAFÉ

Expires 12/26/04. Valid at Cornelius location only. May not be combined with any other offer. While supplies last.

\$19⁹⁹

Turkey Breast
Better Than Ever

THE HONEYBAKED HAM CO.
... CAFÉ

Expires 12/26/04. Valid at Cornelius location only. May not be combined with any other offer. While supplies last.

Cornelius - 20609 Torrence Chapel Rd., Ste 112
(Southlake Shopping Center) 704-892-9592