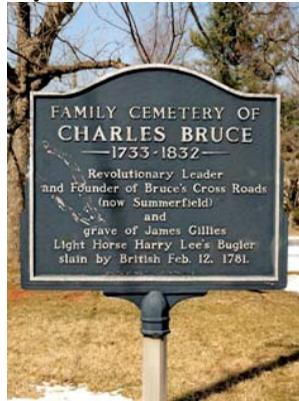


Summerfield, settled by English colonists in the 1700s, once was called Bruce's Cross Roads. It was named for Charles Bruce, who built a large plantation near the intersection of two early stagecoach routes, the Salisbury Road (now NC 150) and a route north from Guilford Courthouse. Settlers were attracted to the rolling hills of the Piedmont and the ready access to water from the Haw River and Reedy Fork Creek that still form the northern and southern boundaries of the community.

Bruce's Cross Roads

In 1768, Bruce brought his new bride, Elizabeth Benton, to the "back country" of the Piedmont. As a supporter of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, Bruce oversaw munitions for the patriots. Thus, in the winter of 1781, it was to Bruce's home that Colonel Light-Horse Harry Lee (a military hero and father of Robert E. Lee) rode with his men to seek refuge as they evaded British forces. It was at a skirmish in the vicinity of Bruce's Cross Roads that Light-Horse Lee's bugler boy,



James Gilles, gave up his life. Gilles, whose image graces the town seal, is buried in the Bruce family cemetery, a landmark of the community.

Less than a month after the earlier skirmish, the army of British General Cornwallis would gain on the patriots, winning the battle at Guilford Courthouse, seven miles south of Summerfield. Although defeated, the American General Greene and his army had done such damage to the British forces

that Cornwallis would surrender later that summer at Yorktown, Virginia, effectively ending the war and ensuring that a new nation would come into being.

In 1791, Charles Bruce and the community were hosting the nation's first president. Returning north from his "Southern Tour," George Washington is said to have stopped at State Senator Bruce's home, where one of the Hoskins' houses stands today just north of Summerfield Elementary School. Another Hoskins house, recently beautifully refurbished with its magnificent mahogany doors and mantels, stands next to Bruce's cemetery.

Summerfield's Saunders Inn

By the 1800s, Summerfield's main street not only hosted large brick and timbered homes but a smithy or two, a sawmill, a feed mill and livery stables. Later in the century, tobacco farms extended along the *Oak Ridge* and *Pleasant Ridge*. Connecting roads between these farms evolved into the major thoroughfares through town.

Scattered across the Piedmont along the well-traveled roads were stagecoach inns, the most famous of which is the still-standing Saunders Inn. Perched prominently on the high point of Oak Ridge Road, the Inn, finished in 1822, is just west of today's commercial and residential crossroads.



Saunders Inn (begun 1815)

One traveler who passed by on his way from Pennsylvania to Georgia was a teacher named Sidney Porter. The innkeeper, Hezekiah Saunders, talked Porter into staying and educating Saunders' children

and others in the farming community. The teacher's grandson was born in 1862 and raised in nearby Greensboro. As a result, Guilford County can boast of its most famous son, William Sydney Porter, better known as the great short story writer, "O'Henry."

Historic Homes & Buildings



Down the road in both directions from the Inn, horse farms host stables and old tobacco barns, even as new residents attracted to the rolling countryside move to the growing town. Historic houses and buildings representing each of Summerfield's previous centuries can still be seen.

For example, The Brittain Building (1872), built of hand-made bricks from Brittain's brickyard, began as the general store at the intersection of Summerfield Road and the Salisbury Road (now NC 150 or Oak Ridge Road). Today, the building houses the town offices and a small museum (*see brochure cover*), welcoming residents and visitors wishing to learn more of this historic community.



R.C. Gordon's Hardware (1872)



Martin House (1836)



Charles Willson House (1859)



Brittain House (1903)

On the southeast corner of the intersection, R. C. Gordon's Hardware Store, another hand-made brick building from the 1870s, stands opposite the oldest remaining home in town, the Martin house.

Not far away along Oak Ridge Road is the Willson house, and just next door stands the home of

H.C. Brittain, which is one of the best examples of Victorian architecture in Summerfield.



Look for plaques, like the one on the left, on the other twelve historic houses and buildings that contribute to the Summerfield National Historic District.

At the far eastern end of town stands the

Hillsdale Brick Store, the only local building listed individually as a National Historic Landmark. Once serving as a general store and post office, the building is located at the corner of NC 150 and Lake Brandt Road.



Hillsdale Brick Store (mid 1800s)

Less photographed, but just as significant along the roadways, are tin-roofed, one-story homes representing late 19th/early 20th century rural American architecture.

Preserving Our History

The Town of Summerfield was incorporated in 1996. A few years later, at the turn of the century, the Town established the Historical Committee.

The Committee has been working since its inception to preserve and tell the story of Summerfield by, among other acts, establishing a National Register Historic District in the heart of old Summerfield.

Unfortunately, some significant landmarks of Summerfield Road are gone—the old filling station, the old log and brick schools, even the newer 20th century brick high school that drew its students from all of Northwest Guilford County. Gone also is the train depot that once was a bustle of activity with sometimes as many as six trains a day passing through the town. All that remains are the remnants of the old rail bed, yet even this is seeing new life as a Greenway Trail.

Present goals are to save the unique landmarks in Summerfield that could be lost if precaution is not taken, such as the Saunders Inn as well as the Summerfield Rock Gym, built of rock from a nearby quarry in 1939 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) work project.



The Rock Gym (1939)

The history of a community is not only the buildings but encompasses the people and the natural environment of the community. This is evidenced in the long histories of local families dating back more than 200 years who tamed the forests, built the mills, and tilled the fields. Tobacco, the cash crop throughout the 20th century, has dwindled and mostly been replaced with horse farms and vineyards, which ensure a continued presence of a rural lifestyle that is disappearing from other areas of Guilford County and the Piedmont. The Historical Committee is working to document this change through oral history programs and by accepting family artifacts into the Town's museum collection.



The Haw River

Work is needed to fully preserve our history. A nation that does not know and cherish its history does not know itself. We of Summerfield, formerly Bruce's Cross Roads, believe that this community has a unique place in the history of our region and the nation.

*Summerfield Historical Committee Vision:
To promote the preservation and restoration of Summerfield's historical properties for the purpose of maintaining the unique history of the community for today and for future generations.*

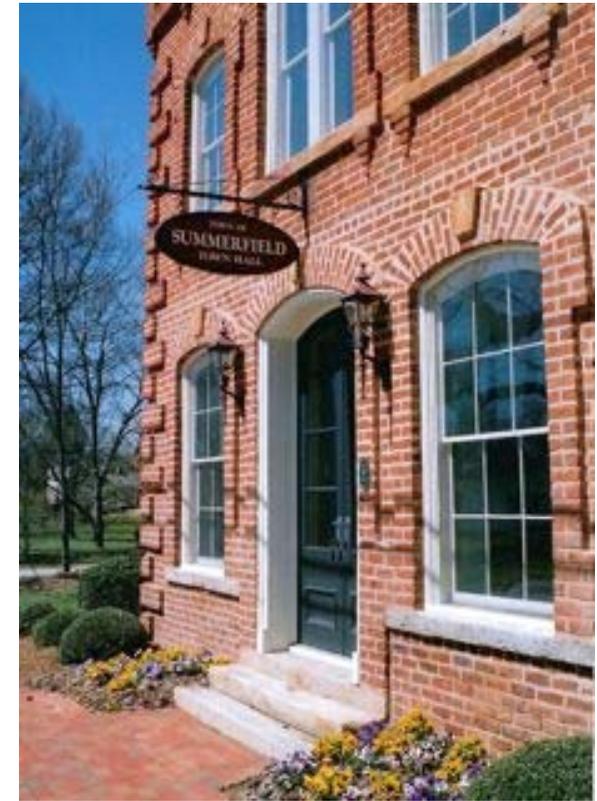


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All photographs by Bill Gordon



Historic Summerfield **North Carolina**



Summerfield's Town Hall
The H.C. Brittain Building

Celebrating Over 240 Years of History