

A Brief History of Forsyth County

Forsyth County began as a Moravian settlement in 1753 when Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg acquired a hundred-thousand acre tract of land from Lord Granville, one of the lord proprietors of North Carolina. The Moravians called their land Wachovia after the Austrian estate of Count Nicholas Lewis von Zinzendorf, an early protector of the Moravian Church.

After the two settlements of Bethabara and Bethania were established, the Town of Salem was begun in 1766 as the central town in Wachovia. Salem grew rapidly both as a religious center and as a center for crafts and trades.

In 1849, the North Carolina Legislature created the new county of Forsyth out of part of Stokes County. In 1851, the town of Winston was named as the County seat. The courthouse square was laid one mile north of Salem Square with plans for the streets of the two towns to run together.

Forsyth County was named in honor of Colonel Benjamin Forsyth, a respected landowner in Stokes County. Colonel Forsyth distinguished himself in heavy fighting during the war of 1812 at Odelltown, Canada, where he was mortally wounded.

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The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners is elected by Forsyth County citizens for staggered four-year terms and is composed of seven members. The new election plan which was approved by the General Assembly set up district seats and one at-large seat and expanded the Board from five to seven members beginning in December, 1990. The Board selects a Chairman from among its members for a one-year term. Meetings are held on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Hall of Justice. The Commissioners also meet for briefings on Thursday afternoons at 2:00 p.m. These meetings are open to the public.

The Commissioners pass ordinance and resolutions to establish County policies, levy taxes, make appointments to boards and commissions, and set levels of service provided to Forsyth County residents. The County acts as a co-administrative unit with the State in the areas of public health, mental health, social services and education.

The County Commissioners appoint a County Manager as the administrative head of Forsyth County Government. The County Manager supervises the day-to-day operations of all departments under the general direction of the Commissioners.

Ag & Home Extension Service

The Agriculture & Home Extension Service was originally set up in Forsyth County in 1914 to aid rural & farm areas. During the 1950's & 1960's, the service was housed in a building at the corner of Spruce & 7th streets.

In 1972, the County built a new building on Fairchild Drive next to Smith Reynolds Airport. It is now known as the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and is in partnership with N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University.

Animal Shelter

The Forsyth County Animal Shelter provides countywide service and was initially built during the 1960's with county, city, and privately donated funds. In 1975 they began enforcement of Winston-Salem's leash law which made it illegal for a dog to run loose within the city limits.

The Animal Shelter was replaced in 2006 and is located off of Shattalon Drive.

Board of Elections

Forsyth County Board of Elections was established in 1955 by authority of the NC General Assembly. The Board of Elections is selected by the state administration, but the Director and other workers in the office are County employees.

County Manager

1961 - Commissioners initiated a major change in the County Government's operation by adopting the County Manager Plan and appointing the 1st FT professional manager, to serve on a nonpartisan basis. 1st FT professional County Manager was G. Robert House, Jr. who served in that position from its beginning in 1961 until 1969.

Department of Social Services

The Department of Social Services, as it has come to be known today, was formally organized in 1919 to provide basic assistance to the poor, but today the department and its services have been expanded to meet the ever-growing needs of Forsyth County citizens.

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Emergency Medical Services

Forsyth County Emergency Medical Services was originally named the Forsyth Ambulance Service when it was established in January 1968. Until 1967 local funeral homes furnished all ambulance services within the county. However, as a result of new federal and state laws relating to minimum wages and ambulance standards, all funeral homes discontinued ambulance services. The County Commissioners accepted the responsibility and 2 funeral homes donated used ambulances and provided back-up service until an ambulance service was operating in all areas of the county. The service began with 5 used ambulances and was originally based at the County Fire Department @ Smith Reynolds Airport. In 1974 the service moved its headquarters to Reynolds Memorial Hospital, and by 1975 the fleet included 4 modular ambulances & 5 limousines.

Today, EMS deploys 13 ambulances 24/7 with 2 additional peak load trucks operating at various times. Convalescent service is provided through franchise agreements with private providers. EMS headquarters is located on 5th Street and also operates out of 8 satellite stations strategically located throughout the County.

Environmental Affairs

One of Forsyth County's departments changed its name and expanded its functions during 1974; formerly the Air Quality Control Department, it became the Environmental Affairs Department. The department was established by the Board of Commissioners in 1968, to prevent a serious air pollution hazard. In addition to being responsible for county-wide air quality control, the department coordinates solid waste management outside corporate limits in the County. The department has continued to expand its duties and responsibilities in protecting various aspects of the environment by the enforcement of federal, state, and county laws.

Fire

The Forsyth County Fire Department was established by the Board of Commissioners in 1951 and began operating with 2 FT firemen. Since that time, the department has assumed the responsibility for coordinating the 19 Volunteer fire departments scattered through-out Forsyth County and 1 independent rescue squad. In 1963, a new headquarters building was constructed for the County Fire Department @ Smith Reynolds Airport. The emergency communications system housed in this building provides 24 hour a day contact for county fire, EMS, and the Sheriff departments. The Board of Commissioners passed a fire prevention code in 1974 compatible with the codes of WS and Kernersville.

Today, many of the volunteer departments have shifted from all volunteer service to a combination of paid and volunteer firefighters. County fire code follows those established by the State of North Carolina. The Fire Department also staffs the Smith Reynolds Airport crash fire rescue truck which is housed at the Fire Department.

Historic Bethabara Park

Reflecting a public desire to preserve & interpret the area's historical heritage, the county began in 1970 to support the operation of Historic Bethabara Park. The park, a stabilized archaeological site with a restored 18th century church, and other restorable buildings, marks the site of the first Moravian settlement in Wachovia. Archaeological work and restoration has been largely supported by grants from the late Charles Babcock and the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. Initial impetus came from Edwin L. Stockton, Sr., and the Bethabara Historical Society; community participation continues to play a great role in the operation of the site. The county and the city provide the funds for the interpretative and maintenance staff and the park is administered by the city recreation department.

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Jail

In 1953 Forsyth County built a new jail on Church Street behind City Hall at a cost of \$400K to replace a structure built in 1908. In 1967 an addition capable of housing 72 prisoners was added, bringing the capacity to 202 prisoners, and the County assumed custody of all prisoners, including those for the City of WS. With the county contracting to house its prisoners, the old City jail was closed.

In 1995, the newest facility on the corner of 2nd & Church Streets opened with a capacity to house 1,016 prisoners.

Library

Forsyth County Public Library System was founded in 1906 and came under the County government in 1965, after approval by the county voters, who also agreed to a 5¢ special tax levy to support the countywide library system. Previously, the system was supported by the county, city and private funds, and was operated by the City of WS.

Today the Library System includes the Central Library along with nine other branches across the County.

Planning

Another joint city/county operation is the Planning Department, administered by the city and serving as the planning agency for both Forsyth County and Winston-Salem. The Planning Board was established in 1948 by the Board of Commissioners and Board of Aldermen to carry out comprehensive countywide planning. The Board, as its name implies, is a full-service planning facility. It works for a comprehensive and uniform approach to zoning, provides land-use planning, gathers and evaluates census and socio-economic data, and has provided proposals for erosion, sedimentation, and grading control. The Planning Board (9 members) hears requests for rezoning from county residents along with recommendations from the Planning Department. If the property is located inside the City of Winston-Salem or within one mile from the city limits, the Planning Board makes a recommendation to the Board of Aldermen. If the property lies outside the one mile limit from the city, the Planning Board makes a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. Planning also serves the Towns of Bethania, Clemmons, Lewisville, Tobaccoville, Rural Hall, and Walkertown. The Planning Department also collects, analyzes, and stores statistics needed by local, state, and federal agencies.

Public Health

The Department of Public Health was created in 1913.

The department was charged with the responsibility of promoting and protecting the general health of the population of Forsyth County. Although communicable disease and sanitation were concerns in the beginning, the Health Department has continued to evolve and expand its scope. The department's role has expanded to focus on child health, maternal health, school health, dental health, preventive health (through education), as well as programs such as WIC that focuses on nutrition health for children. In January 2008, the department opened a dental clinic to focus as a segment of the population not able to receive dental treatment.

Register of Deeds

From the County's formation of the Register of Deeds in 1849 until 1904, all recorded instruments were copied by hand. Typewritten record keeping was introduced in 1904 and continued until 1929, when photocopy equipment was 1st used to achieve an exact facsimile of original records. In 1954 microfilming was introduced to eliminate the large books used for recording personal property records. By 1962, marriage, birth, and death records were also integrated into this system, and in 1965 computerized indexes were installed.

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Today, the Register of Deeds is completely automated and provides customers with a free service to perform title searches and research for property sales and other transactions. Forsyth County has over 2 million records and images stored digitally and users can search back to 1973 for images and to 1849 for deeds and indexes.

Tanglewood Park

A unique recreational facility available to all the citizens of Forsyth County and surrounding areas is Tanglewood Park, the estate of the late William N. and Kate B. Reynolds. The Park opened in 1954 for the use of Forsyth County's white citizens as provided in Reynolds's will. When civil-rights laws made "white only" operation impossible, the park closed briefly, but the courts set aside the restrictive clause and the park reopened and resumed the expansion of its services. Swimming, sightseeing, picnicking, camping, horseback riding, golfing, theatre, dining, and overnight lodging are available.

Tax

The Forsyth County Tax Offices deal primarily with the listing of property for taxes and the collection of these taxes. The Office of Tax Supervisor was created by the NC General Assembly in 1939, and is responsible for listing and assessing all real and personal property in the county and city for ad valorem taxes. The office records all real property in the county on maps with a block and lot number for each parcel. Each transfer of real property is listed on an ownership sheet showing the chain of title. In 1967 the Board of Commissioners put in a new tax listing system, permitting property owners to list by mail rather than requiring them to appear before a list taker. The office is also required under stat law to conduct a revaluation of all real property in the county every eight years. The Tax Collector was first appointed by the Board of Commissioners in 1929, and in 1941 the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Aldermen consolidated the functions of the county and city tax offices.

Revaluations are now held every 4 years, and this began in 1988. Also, in 2007 the department began phasing out the block and lot parcel identifier and began switching to a geo-coded parcel ID system.

Youth Center

The Forsyth County Youth Center was established by the Board of Commissioners in 1962. The purpose of the center originally was to provide temporary care for children detained for juvenile court disposition because of committing a criminal offense, running away from home, truancy, custody disputes, and maltreatment. In addition to providing and arranging counseling or psychiatric services, the center's staff provides educational and recreational programs. The Center's school was brought under the Forsyth Optional School of the public school system in 1974.

Population

1890	28,434
1900	35,261
1910	47,311
1920	77,269
1930	111,681
1940	126,475
1950	146,135
1960	189,428
1970	215,118
1975*	229,353

*estimated

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Forsyth County Manufacturers in 1860

Product	Number of establishments	Capital	Cost- raw material	Employees		Annual Labor Cost	Annual value of product
				Male	Female		
Boots & shoes	1	\$2,000	\$1,200	3	2	\$1,020	\$2,700
Carriages	2	7,000	1,;660	11		3,300	7,350
Cotton goods	1	150,000	14,780	20	34	8,472	24,800
Flour & meal	1	25,000	15,000	4		960	16,500
Iron castings	1	1,500	120	2		600	1,600
Leather	4	11,600	9,080	8		2,100	10,800
Oil, linseed	1	1,000	200	1		300	2,000
Paper, printing	1	5,000	1,300	2	2	420	2,500
Tobacco, mfd.	2	17,000	5,500	10	13	3,960	11,500
Wagons, carts	4	12,700	2,430	28		8,460	15,100
Woolen goods	1	100,000	38,000	30	25	10,200	62,500
	19	\$332,800	\$89,270	119	76	\$39,792	\$157,350

Forsyth County Manufacturers in 1869

1869							
Boots & shoes	1	15,000		17		7,000	47,200
Carriages & wagons	6	3,400		29		5,300	21,000
Cotton goods	1	29,000		29		5,013	33,139
Flour mills	5	18,800		19		3,566	65,443
Woolen goods	1	41,000		50		9,310	38,129
							\$204,911

Crops/Livestock	1860	1920	1944
Corn, bushels	317,890	388,854	483,100
Hay, tons	5,489	19,595	20,600
Wheat, bushels	187,836	199,466	172,330
Oats, bushels	60,934	38,372	143,600
Sweet potatoes, bushels	21,001	46,531	71,400
Irish potatoes, bushels	11,869	25,143	31,960
Tobacco, pounds	551,442	4,049,428	7,151,600
Butter, pounds sold	74,681	520,242	164,378
Horses	2,275	2,533	1,878
Mules	318	2,065	2,097
Cattle	6,180	8,013	8,861
Sheep	6,386	418	89
Swine	18,942	9,127	7,648

Excerpts from "Forsyth - The History of a County on the March"
by Adelaide Fries, Stuart Thurman Wright, and J. Edwin Hendricks