

A history of the birth of Union County

BY VIRGINIA BJORLIN

The North Carolina legislature passed the law creating Union County in December of 1842 out of Anson and Mecklenburg counties. Residents had tried two years earlier but it didn't happen. The motive of the citizens was that, for many people, in the lower part of Mecklenburg or western part of Anson, travel to the courthouse (in Charlotte or in Wadesboro) took more than a day. That was a real problem in the days of horse and wagon travel - no motels in those days. The county paid Henry Chaney \$75 for 75 acres in the middle of the County of Union in June of 1843. In late 1844 the Legislature incorporated the City of Monroe as the county seat and stipulated it be named for the fifth President of the United States, James Monroe. Writing only 30 years later, Joseph P. Caldwell ("Monroe", from *The Daily Observer*, Charlotte, NC, 10 April 1873) said, "There was not so much as a county road leading to the point where the town now stands." It is thought that before the War Between the States the road to Monroe from Charlotte (via Providence Road) was called New Town Road.

A log courthouse is believed to have been under construction soon. The 1986 book *The Union County Courthouse* by Wayne Durrill has descriptions of the building and the bell tower on the 175-foot square laid off in the middle of the town plan. By 1886 this log building was inadequate and the present brick building was built; the log courthouse was moved to the corner of Beasley and Jefferson streets to be used as a livery stable.

The oldest building in Monroe was erected in 1847-48 as the county jail (third floor) and the home of the jailer. It still stands on the northwest corner of Jefferson and Hayne streets. The first jailer was James Bickett, also proprietor of Bickett's Tavern. Bickett was the grandfather of Thomas Walter Bickett, only North Carolina governor born in Union County. This fine old brick building was used as the jail until 1892, at which time it was bought by the City of Monroe for \$2,880.80. It housed Monroe city government from 1893 until 1974 when the new City Hall was opened. The city still owns the building and rents it out for offices. The architecture of Old City Hall is interesting as a fine example of North Carolina antebellum civic architecture.