

Ladd's store  
Robbery

Mrs. Marion Stevenson

# The Record's Editorials

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 1959

## SALEM CROSSROADS Remembers the Robbery But Now Relishes Fine Pickles

By JOHN BIGHAM

A recent, exploratory venture into Western Fairfield County brought us in due time to Salem Crossroads, a small but significant spot on the map of the Midlands.

The roads which cross at this point, and thus create the name, are highways Nos. 34 and 215. The former is an east - west route which delivers traffic back and forth across the Broad river a few miles distant. The latter is a north - south highway once popular as a means of transporting Columbians to and from the mountains, but which in recent years has been largely relegated to local usage.

The hurrying visitor sees little at Salem Crossroads. There is the usual store and filling station at the intersection, and off to the side one observes a school, a church, and some scattered homes. Little else meets the eye. However, if the same visitor will stop and hobnob, as we did, with one or two prominent citizens in the community, he will come away signally impressed by an area which represents much more than a road crossing in the hills and valleys of western Fairfield.

Our first point of call was the home of the Marion Stevensons, situated hard by the Monticello High School and appropriately designated on a small granite marker as "School Daze."

Stevenson is the efficient and popular superintendent of this school. As we approached, he came dashing out of the house. He greeted us cordially, but allowed that "I have two prospective teachers to interview at the school, and I sure don't want to miss them."

For this reason he was excused from questioning, but his good wife was routed out of her kitchen into the living room to supply

us with facts and figures about the crossroads area.

"I am busy making bread and butter pickles," she said, "but I will be glad to come out of that hot kitchen long enough to help you, if possible."

Ruth Stevenson, housewife and office worker, is a leader in the Monticello - Salem Community organization. Serving as its treasurer at the present time, she is a fervent believer in the present and future of this Fairfield area. She is also acclaimed as the best cucumber and artichoke pickle-maker in the countryside. She was kind enough to give us a jar of bread and butter pickles hot off the stove. These we have accepted as being the best in the world, but real proof will come next winter when they are broken out of the family pantry.

In the short period of relief from her kitchen which our presence afforded, Ruth Stevenson furnished much information about the crossroads community.

"The Monticello - Salem Community program, now in its third year, has paid off," she advised, "and we want to continue what has been begun. As much as anything, we want to induce desirable families to move into our community and help us make it grow and prosper."

As an aside to the conversation, Ruth Stevenson recalled an event that solidly put Salem Crossroads on the map several years ago. That was the robbery of Ladd's store, wherein two men were convicted of the crime but the money (amounting to thousands of dollars) was never recovered.

The victim has since died, the store has long been abandoned, but the commotion stirred up by the event in this part of the country has yet to die completely away.

"It was the most exciting thing

to ever happen here," said Ruth Stevenson, "and I recall that everybody and their brother turned out for the various investigations and the trial."

The Stevenson park at Salem Crossroads, located between the school and the Presbyterian Church, is one concrete result of the Monticello - Salem Community organization's work. The site was once thickets of briars and honeysuckle vines; today it is a recreational area as attractive and useful as any we have found in our rambles through rural communities.

Our second call at the Crossroads was made on the Rev. Bob Wallace, pastor of the Salem Presbyterian Church. Founded in 1812, this is one of the most historic rural churches in Fairfield county. Not only is this personable and colorful minister among the community's most loyal boosters, but he is also quite worthy of a story himself.

A native of Alabama and for 29 years a practicing attorney in several southern states, Bob Wallace in 1947 suddenly changed his life calling from the law to the ministry. A severe heart attack at that time helped him to make the decision which took him out of the courtroom and into the pulpit.

Our chat with him in his study was short but fruitful, revealing that he is sold on the Monticello-Salem community and its people.

Declining his invitation to stay for lunch, given perhaps seriously, and another invitation to preach for him the following Sunday, given we are certain in a jocular manner, we drove away from the Salem manse and the crossroads, greatly convinced that when it comes to bread and butter pickles, education, community pride, and faith, no place in the world offers a superior product.

## THE LETTERS to The Record From Readers

FIGHTING OBSCENITY  
To the Editor of The Record:

This will extend to you my personal thanks for the excellent manner in which the Post Office Department's present vigorous campaign against obscene matter in the mails was handled on your editorial page of June 17.

We were most anxious that favorable publicity and comment

The politicians will be quick to jump in and stop all news coverage because, for them to stay in office, they have to pacify the minority and take the position of, "To hell with the majority; they don't have enough sense to organize." Alas, we find this becoming more true even in the Southern states.

GUESTS OF MOSCOW  
To the Editor of The Record:

Instead of Maine or Miami, it's now stylish to vacation in Moscow, basking 'neath the sunshine of Khrushchev's smile. Nikita beams as gullible Americans swallow his bait and the ballyhoo that sojourns in his

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By JOHN

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Fairfield are practically expects, and we of Rich- proud of the fact, rating racter and ability many y just above us have con- health of our county.

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## **Pitts Gets 21 Years; Russell Ten; Miss King One, or Fine of \$3,000.00**

**Dramatic Robbery Trial Ends Friday With Three Convictions, as "Peggy Jean" Screams and Faints. Whereabouts of Ladd Money Remains a Mystery. Courtroom Crowded to the Last Minute.**

By **BILL MASON**

One of the most sensational criminal trials in Fairfield county's long and turbulent past ended Friday night on a dramatic note, with two convictions and one guilty plea, in the \$41,500 gunpoint robbery of Wash Ladd's Salem Cross Roads general store.

The robbery, which received nation wide publicity, occurred at dusk on a warm summer evening in August. Storekeeper Wash Ladd was about to close when

two armed bandits trussed him up at gun point and then, apparently with advance information, went directly to a strong box upstairs which contained the elderly merchant's life savings.

Eventually breaking loose from his bonds, Ladd set in motion a three-state search by law enforcement agencies which months later resulted in the arrest of three persons, Harry W. Russell and Robert James Pitts were charged with the actual robbery while

### **Pitts and Officers at Trial**



Pictured here is James Robert Pitts, the "man without fingerprints," and three officers standing just outside the Fairfield county courthouse. Left to right they are an unidentified detective from Charlotte, Pitts, Tom Lemmond, formerly of Winnsboro, now a member of the State Highway patrol, and Sergeant L. E. Sheely, also of the patrol.

(Photo courtesy The Columbia Record)

## Famous Salem Cross Roads Robbery Trial Under Way in Packed Courtroom

Pitts, "the Man Without Finger Prints," Russell and Miss Peggy Jean King, Alleged Accomplice, On Hand But "Mysterious Man From Rock Hill" Not Yet Identified.

The most sensational criminal case in Fairfield county's history, the nationally publicized Salem Cross Roads Robbery, went to trial Wednesday morning before the February term of the Court of General Sessions.

### RUSSELL AND LADD TESTIFY WEDNESDAY

Court recessed at 6 p. m. Wednesday and Judge Gren-eker ordered the jury "locked up" for the duration of the Sa-



JAMES ROBERT PITTS



HARRY W. RUSSELL

lem case. Only two witnesses were heard Wednesday, Harry Russell, who turned state's witness, and G. W. Ladd, proprietor of the store who was bound, gagged and robbed.

Mr. Ladd identified both James Robert Pitts, 39, and Peggy Jean King, walking down from the witness stand into the crowded courtroom and pointing each out. As the court recessed, Mr. Ladd was being cross examined by At-

(Continued on page eight)