



## The History of Summerville & NARFE Chapter #1082 Paul D. Donahue, Historian

Summerville, the largest city in Dorchester County, is located in southeastern South Carolina on I-26 just north of Charleston. Known as "The Flower Town in the Pines," Summerville has a profusion of public and private gardens and is especially beautiful in the spring when the azaleas bloom. The town's name is evocative of its history. The first settlement in Summerville began following the Revolutionary War; it was referred to as Pineland Village in 1785. Situated on a pine-forested ridge, it was first inhabited in the late 1700's as Charlestonians and other inhabitants of the SC Lowcountry sought respite from the summer heat, mosquitoes and swamp fever disease. From May to September plantation families along the nearby Ashley River and other coastal areas, headed for higher elevation to live temporarily in the tiny forest colony soon dubbed Summerville.

Modernization came to town with the arrival of the railroad in the early 1800's and led the village to incorporation. Trees were being cut in large numbers for laying rails and the clearing of lots to relocate the commercial center near the tracks. To protect Summerville's biggest asset, the village became an official town in 1847, passing a first law prohibiting the cutting of certain-sized trees without permission, and fining offenders a then hefty \$25. That ordinance, one of the oldest of its kind in the United States, is still on the books. It's no wonder perhaps that the motto on the town's official seal is "Sacra Pinus Esto - The Pine is Sacred".

The last decade of the 19th century saw two of the worst local events, followed by one of the best pieces of luck ever to befall a struggling community. While still recovering from the War Between the States, Summerville suffered extensive destruction during the 1886 earthquake, followed by a downtown fire which wiped out most of the buildings surrounding the town square. The good fortune stemmed from Paris, France, when the International Congress of Physicians (Tuberculosis Congress) in 1899 declared Summerville as one of the two best places in the **world** for the treatment and recovery of lung disorders. Such belief was founded in the purported healing aspects of that tree's turpentine scent. This led to the building of inns and hotels to handle the mass of visitors, who first came for their health and then discovering the comeliness of the town, built winter homes and often became permanent residents.

Despite the publicity and the development it spurred, the town's population hovered around 3,000 for nearly a century, not reaching 6,000 until the late 1970's. Then, as a bedroom community for the larger urban centers in the area, the charm of Summerville resulted in a doubling of the population in the 1980's. It continues to attract families, business people and military personnel, all looking for a quality of life that has long since disappeared in cities. It is hard to believe that 30 years ago the Town of Summerville had a population of 3,000 and today exceeds 33,000, with 14% of Summerville residents reporting German ancestry, and 11% report Irish.

NARFE'S Summerville Chapter, known as Flowertown #1082 was chartered by NARFE National Headquarters in Washington, DC on March 25, 1968, and accepted into the South Carolina Federation of NARFE Chapters on April 5, 1968 with 22 charter members. Today it

boasts 244 members and continues to grow. The first president of the chapter was Lee Blanchett who was Postmaster in Summerville at that time. Since then there have been 12 other presidents.

On February 4, 1986, Mayor Berlin G. Myers signed a Proclamation declaring 1986 the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NARFE in Summerville and urged Summervillians to join in the observance. In addition to local observances, then South Carolina Governor Dick Riley repeated the Proclamation for all of South Carolina.

Over the years, the chapter meetings were held in quite a few different locations before it settled in its present meeting place, the Faith Sellers Senior Center. The meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month, September through May, at 1:30 p.m. Along with Summerville, membership includes the areas of Goose Creek and Monks Corner, as well as more distant places.

Since its inception NARFE'S Summerville, Flowertown Chapter #1082 members have hosted two Federation Conventions. One during the term of Walter Reed in 1988, as SC Federation President and the other in 1998 when Narvie L. Bilbray, Sr. was SC Federation President. Both of whom are deceased.

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