

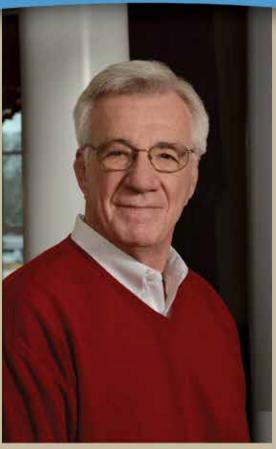
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Embracing Change

Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher once said, "there is nothing permanent except change."

Even though it's been about 2,600 years since he said that, it's still true today.

I was already thinking about change a few weeks ago when I heard that the Walmart was pulling the plug on its Walmart Express experiment — including closing the ones in Four Oaks and Benson.



Randy Capps randy@fouroaksjournal.com

Reaction to the news on our Facebook page ranged from surprise to sadness to anger, basically covering the seven stages of grief in one handy spot on social media.

My takes are simple — shop local and remember that nothing good or bad lasts forever.

While I feel badly for anyone negatively affected by the store's demise, I'm not nearly as distressed about that as I am about the fact that my only child is turning 14 this month and is just a few short months away from becoming a high school student.

Jill Holtz wrote a piece on parenthood last year, and it's been ringing in my head ever since:

But don't forget ... There is a last time for everything. There will come a time when you will feed your baby for the very last time. They will fall asleep on you after a long day, and it will be the last time you ever hold your sleeping child.

One day you will carry them on your hip then set them down, and never pick them up that way again.

You will scrub their hair in the bath one night, and from that day on they will want to bathe alone.

They will hold your hand to cross the road, then never reach for it again. They will creep into your room at midnight for cuddles, and it will be the last night you ever wake to this.

Like stores, moments with family are also fleeting. One day, you're crying in the delivery room because a tiny little guy looks like you, and the next thing you know, you're the parent of a young man that owns an electric razor and has a date to the eighth-grade dance.

Instead of thinking about the days gone by, I'm trying to enjoy all of the new things going on in my son's life — like his unrelenting enthusiasm about the Batman vs. Superman movie.

Change is constant. Things come and go all the time, and sadly, so do people.

So cherish these days with the ones you love.

As for the Walmart Express, well, there's an excellent pharmacy and grocery store across the street.

ON THE COVER

The inside of the James Bryan Creech Public Library.

Photo by Ron Sloan, Sloan Communications



FEATURES





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Volume 1, Number 10

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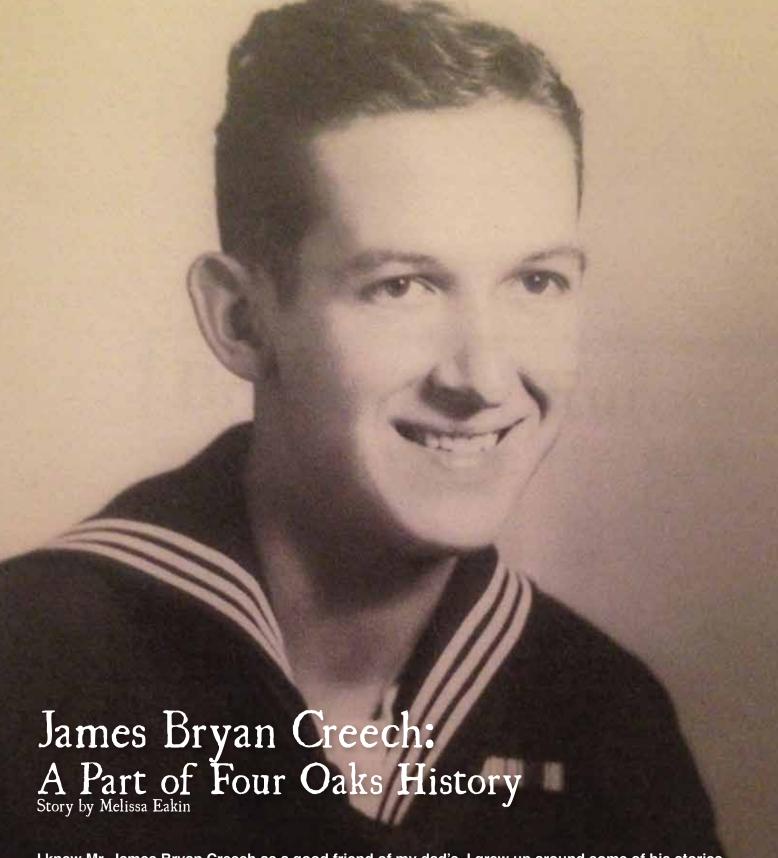
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I knew Mr. James Bryan Creech as a good friend of my dad's. I grew up around some of his stories, told with his characteristically dry humor, and can remember how he often made people laugh. I didn't appreciate such subtle humor back then, preferring falling anvils and cartoon animals with speech impediments, but I have laughed out loud recently reading that humor in a collection of letters he wrote home to his family during his service in World War II. Reading his letters and articles served as a kind of introduction to a man I wanted to know more about. He was a historian, teacher, writer, carpenter and journalist whose family roots went deep into Four Oaks history.

James Bryan Creech was born in 1925 to Barham Bryan Creech and Bertha Langdon Creech, whose father, James William "Billy" Langdon, moved to Four Oaks in 1888. Billy was a carpenter, making furniture and coffins for the people of the then-brand-new town. In 1890, he opened a photography studio, photographing the people of Four Oaks until about 1930. James Bryan inherited a lot of these photos and enjoyed looking through them.

His curiosity about the people in the photographs and their stories led him to write the column "Yesterday in Four Oaks" for the Four Oaks News, in which he'd print a picture he'd chosen, along with any information he'd come across about it. Readers responded with additional information and with pictures and stories of their own family history in Four Oaks. His column, "Four Oaks History," grew out of this in 1977 and continued for the rest of his life. You can still read these articles, as they're printed weekly in the Four Oaks/ Benson News in Review.

As my childhood memories of him were vague and admittedly unreliable, I headed over to the town library, which bears his name. It's a dignified-looking brick building off Hatcher Street with white columns across the front porch mirrored by columns of tall pine trees across the front yard. I walked in the front door and was greeted with the near-forgotten but distinctly familiar smell of the interior: books, carpet, and about 20 years past. Tonie Collins, the librarian, returned my smile from her seat at the front desk.

"Can you lead me to any information on Mr. James Bryan Creech?" I asked, after a brief introduction.

"Sure!" she responded, rising cheerfully and heading over to a shelf marked "Johnston







"He spearheaded the fundraiser to have the library built in 1979," she answered. "They built this building and any money that was left over was put into a fund to run the library." That fund has kept the library operating for almost 35 years.

"He was the one who was really behind the library to begin with," she continued. "He had this vision."

"Was there no library in Four Oaks up to that point?" I asked.

She nodded. "There was a library, but it was downtown in this little bitty building where the town hall is now. I think he foresaw that we would need a bigger building."

Mr. Creech donated the land for the library and spent almost a year helping to build it. He also took apart the cabin that his grandfather was born in, which had fallen into disrepair on the family farm, and reassembled it on his property just behind the library. There, he kept many family artifacts and would reportedly go sit on the porch on Sunday

afternoons, talking to whoever happened by. The cabin was originally built around 1845 by his paternal great-great grandfather, Henry Wright Strickland, and housed various members of the Creech family into the 1950s.

My dad, Ron Sloan, met him around 1978, not long after he and my mom bought their house on Maple Avenue across from my grandparents. I asked him to tell me some of his memories of "Mr. James Bryan," as I'd called him since childhood.

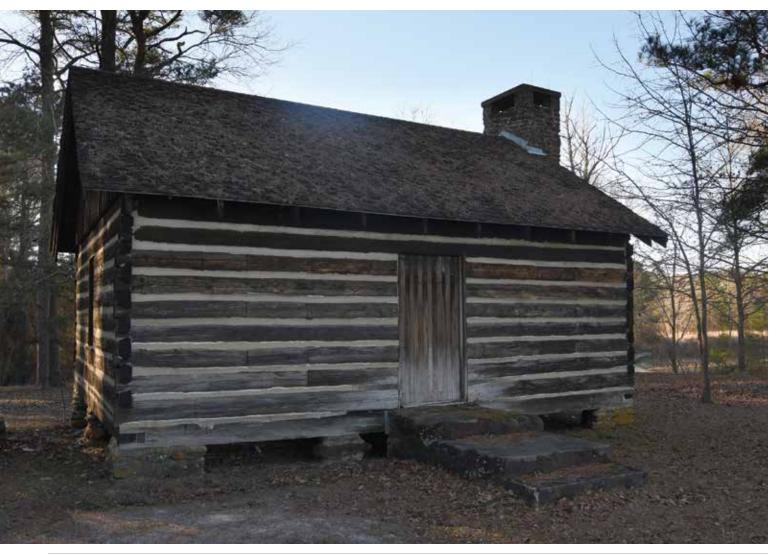
He told me that early on in their life in Four Oaks, he'd needed some help installing some crown molding and asked my grandmother whom she would recommend. She pointed him in the direction of Mr. Creech, who came over and helped my father, teaching him how to cut the molding so it would fit neatly and snugly in the corners. Dad found Mr. Creech to be engaging and very interesting and he loved listening to his stories and learning from him as they worked. While hammering up molding one day, dad commented on the fact

that Mr. Creech was left-handed.

"We were all born left handed," Mr. Creech answered matter-of-factly. "When you first sin, you become right-handed."

Dad laughed as he recounted Mr. Creech's deadpan delivery.

"That was my first introduction to his humor, much of which I was to learn as I knew him through life. He had so many different stories that he shared with me over the years." He paused and smiled, looking off to one side as if into memory. "One of my favorite stories was when I went by his house one night to bring him Krispy Kreme doughnuts (a favorite of his). There was always something he wanted to show you or tell you whenever you came by and that night he ushered me into the house. At that point in time he had lost his sight due to glaucoma and he couldn't read, but he still knew where things were and could show you things he wanted you to see. He had shown me something in particular and told me about it and as I was standing there afterward, I



looked down and saw this leather portfolio. I picked it up and said, 'James Bryan, I just saw this thing here that says "Distinguished Alumni, Campbell College." He responded, 'Yes, I think that just goes to show that if you give someone enough money, they will consider you distinguished.""

Dad and I both laughed.

There was another portfolio beneath that one. Inside was his presentation certificate from Wake Forest College in Wake Forest, NC, where he was Phi Beta Kappa.

My dad continued, "I picked it up and said, 'Golly James Bryan, Phi Beta Kappa!' He said, 'Well, I'm afraid that doesn't represent any great accomplishment or effort.' I said, 'What do you mean? That's an honors fraternity! At Wake Forest!' There was a short pause and James Bryan responded, "The reason I say that is because schooling came rather easily to me. Learning was easy for me. Like drawing is for you."

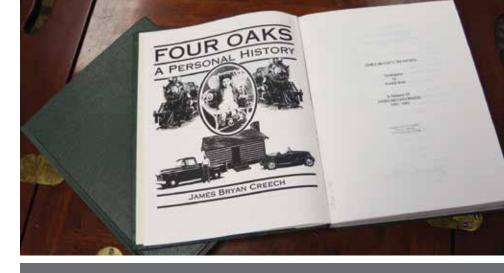
I remember visiting Mr. James Bryan's bungalow on the corner of Main Street and Sanders, sitting in the small parlor as he told stories that made my dad laugh. I could almost hear the deep monotone of his dignified voice.

"Many people would consider my life a great waste," he continued that night to my dad. "To have had

the education that I have and then look at what I did with it. They would consider me a failure. But in my eyes, I was a success. My goal and ambition was to do whatever I had to do in order to live in this little town, surrounded by friends and family and people I loved and who loved me. And I have managed to do just that."



Melissa Eakin



Photos by Ron Sloan

Above, the volumes of James Bryan Creech's "Four Oaks — A Personal History" display a frontice piece designed by the writer's father, a close friend of Creech. It features a photo of Creech, about age 5, taken by his grandfather, flanked by photos of an engine that pulled through Four Oaks in his youth. It also shows Creech along with his beloved 1956 Chevrolet truck, 1953 MGTD and his great grandfather's cabin, which he restored by hand on a site behind the library. Below, a photo of the library that bears his name.







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One of the things I've learned anything in producing the first 10 issues of this magazine is that you never know what you're going to hear when the phone rings.

Marty Baker called me up early in December and asked if I'd be interested in writing about his dad's paper chain.

"It's more than 20 miles long," he said, proudly.

Naturally, that got my attention.

So, I set up a time to go over to Butchville on Black Creek Road and meet Butch Baker, the man behind the enormous paper chain.

"I'm on the 700th yard of the 23rd mile," he said of the chain, which lies in a pile that's roughly the size of a Volkswagen he might work on out in his shop — and it takes up a fair portion of his living room floor behind his recliner.

There's no glue or staples in the chain, only pieces of card stock (think Christmas cards, paint sample card or travel brochures) folded into each other.

It all started during a snowstorm 37 years ago this month in 1979.

"It was snowing, and I was bored, so I started cutting up pieces of

paper," he said.

What started as a time filler became therapeutic for Baker.

"I can have a bad day in the shop and things aren't going right, I can come in, sit down and work on that and forget all that other stuff," he said.

So, just how long is it?

If you grabbed the end that dangles over the top of Butch's recliner and headed out his back door, you could carry it to downtown Kenly and still have about a mile's worth of paper left in his living room.



Randy Capps randy@fouroaksjournal.com

Or, if you'd rather go to Raleigh, the chain would extend from his home to the start of the 440 beltline.

During our interview, Butch handed me his box and some scraps and invited me to give it a try.

Every link in that chain passed through the box, Butch tells me, and



it's clear that the old cigar box is being held together by equal parts tape and tenacity.

He's not into sharpening scissors, though, as he goes through about six pairs of them a year.

He showed me how to fold the pieces to where they fit together and after much fumbling and a couple of aborted attempts to make new links, I had my very own four-link paper chain.

I also had the basis to solve a little math problem that struck me the second I walked in the door — how many pieces of paper is that?

Now, the chain is a little longer now than it was when I was there, but when it was 22 miles and 700 yards long, we know that's 1,419,120 inches worth of distance.

Or my calculator did, anyway.

The pieces of paper are cut into quarter-inch slices, but when folded and added to the chain, each link added .625 inches to the total length.

That means that Butch Baker sat in his living room, cut up and

joined together roughly 2,270,592 links in his chain.

That's a lot of time and energy, and it explains why the chain remained in place when he had new carpet installed. Well, that and the fact that the chain weighs a little more than 2,200 pounds.

Marty's girlfriend, Wendy, once climbed on top of it to install some new blinds, and the household cats have to be discouraged via tarp from using it for other, more sinister purposes.

Butch's wife, Marie, would like to see the chain donated to a museum. He's less keen on the idea.

"When I'm gone, you do with it what you want to," he told her.

The official Guinness Book of World Records' listing for longest paper chain was recorded in June 2014 when Julie McKenney of Fishers, Ind., made one that was just under a half-mile long in about 12 hours.

Clearly, the folks at Guinness have never been to Butchville.

Randy Capps can be reached at randy@fouroaksjournal.com or 919-980-5522.







BUSINESS PROFILE - FOUR OAKS AREA MINISTRIES (FOAM)



Meeting the needs of our Four Oaks neighbors

The day before Thanksgiving, volunteers gathered to sponsor a community meal at the Four Oaks Volunteer Fire Department. It was a nice scene, and one of the groups responsible for the organization of that event was Four Oaks Area Ministries (FOAM).

FOAM is starting its second year hoping to meet "the unmet needs of their fellow citizens residing in the Four Oaks area," as it says on the brochure, but it goes beyond that, according to its president, Gaylord Hiler.

"I think the statistic is that 48 percent of the children that go to school in Johnston County, let alone Four Oaks, are on government subsidies for lunch programs," he said. "The children don't have a choice of where they are in a family. The parents maybe have made wrong choices, but the children don't have the chance to change where they are. So, we're focusing a lot on how we can help the children."

In a perfect world, FOAM would have unlimited resources to fund programs to help families. Instead, the group focuses on making families in need aware of the resources and programs that may already be in place to assist them.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel," Hiler said. "We're trying to go around to the different organizations that are already in existence to see if we can lend a helping hand so they can better serve the community. (We) go around and meet with

different pastors or leaders of churches to try to let them know where volunteers are needed."

FOAM's reach isn't limited to children. It also partners with Lighthouse Christian Fellowship and Cornerstone Baptist Church with local food banks, provides support to the Salvation Army and helped raise awareness for a benefit for homeless female veterans.

The needs are many, but FOAM is trying to help where it can.

"We are being called to partner with local churches to form a ministry to serve people that don't know how to get from where they are to where they need to be," Hiler wrote in a letter to the FOAM board members. "We have to take the time and whatever else it takes to bring them to the lifesaving, life changing Jesus."

For more information on FOAM, or to volunteer, email them at info@fouroaksareaministries.org or call 919-934-5150.

Four Oaks Area Ministries' Mission

- A. To promote and encourage diversity with respect to gender, age, race, national origin, sexual orientation, religion and disability in all services and activities of FOAM.
- B. To assist Four Oaks area residents with unmet needs by locating resources to address their needs in areas concerning their personal, social, health and vocational needs.
- C. To form partnerships with local schools, churches, businesses, organizations and agencies to assist in carrying out the purpose and mission of FOAM.
- D. To provide Emergency funds, when available, to assist in some crisis situations requiring immediate intervention, such as fires and natural disasters.
- E. To promote a spirit of commitment in the volunteer process and solicit volunteers to assist when necessary in locating and directing residents to referral resources based on their needs.
- F. To establish a data bank of all community resources available to local residents.
- G. To assist Four Oaks area residents in locating and accessing the necessary resources to address their needs.
- H. To explore State and Federal Grants relating to support the mission of FOAM.

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SAVE THE DATE

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Four Oaks Civitans Baseball and Softball Signups

Registration for baseball and softball runs through Saturday, Feb. 27. For more, visit their website at bit.ly/1lsqhFD or call Jeff Canady 919-628-3829 for baseball questions and Michael Worley 919-369-8230 for softball.

Every Wednesday, 10:30 a.m. Story Time

James Bryan Creech Library, Four Oaks Come out for story time at the library each Wednesday morning. For more information, call 919-963-6013.

Every Wednesday, 10 a.m to noon Smithfield Tadpoles

Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center
Bring your little "tadpoles" to SRAC Splash Park. The cost is \$3 for adult
Smithfield residents, and \$2 for residents ages 3-12. The non-resident fee
is \$5.50 for adults, and \$4 per child. Each additional child is \$3. For more
information, call Tiffany Pearson at 919-934-2148, ext 107.

February 2, 4 to 8 p.m.

Explore, Sip & Shop, Downtown Four Oaks

Take a tour of downtown businesses and discover what shopping locally in Four Oaks has to offer. For more information, call the Four Oaks Area Chamber of Commerce at (919) 963-4004 or email info@fouroaksareachamber.com.

February 6, 10 to 11:30 a.m. Valentine's Day Pottery

Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center

Children ages 6 to 14 will have fun creating handmade Valentine's Day pieces out of clay that they can make for themselves or give away as a Valentine's gift. Pre-registration is required by Feb. 1. The fee is \$10 for the first child, and \$8 for each additional sibling. For more information, call 919-934-1408.

February 20, 9-11 a.m. Capture, Store, Release

Howell Woods - How much water will a watershed shed if a watershed sheds its wetlands? This program will explain how wetlands obtain their waters and the how it captures, stores and releases water. Participants will use household items to simulate how wetlands function. Cost is \$15. For more information, call 919-938-0115.

February 20, 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Daddy-Daughter Dance

Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center - Dads and your girls, ages 3-14, it's time to register for the Daddy-Daughter Dance. Registrations must be made by Feb. 17. Come enjoy the music, dancing, pictures and appetizers! The fees are \$45 per couple for Smithfield residents, and \$55 per couple for non-Smithfield residents. There is a \$5 charge for each additional daughter. For more information, call 919-934-1408.

February 20, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Spring Time Pruning

Arboretum at JCC - Your garden will be waking up soon and spring is the time to prune many ornamental plants. This program will instruct and demonstrate various pruning techniques and will give you the confidence needed to maintain healthy, properly formed trees and shrubs. Cost is \$20. For more information, call (919) 209-2052.

February 26, 11 a.m. Clothing Closet and Food Pantry

American Legion Post 346, Four Oaks For details, contact John Jernigan at Lighthouse Christian Fellowship at (919) 320-7387.

To add your organization's events to the calendar, email us at hello@fouroaksjournal.com



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