

## **Preserving Albemarle's history**

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Bessie Carter sits on the steps of history.

From the porch of her family's 200-year-old home at Redlands Farm in Albemarle County, she points to pastures that were part of an original land grant from King George II to her late husband's ancestors.

Just a few miles south of her farm is Theodore Roosevelt's presidential retreat, Pine Knot. To the north are Monticello, Michie Tavern and Ash Lawn-Highland.

"I can count at least 14 houses between Monticello and Route 20 at Carter's Bridge that are over 150 years old," the longtime Albemarle resident said.

Knowing that, it surprised Carter and other county residents that this rural area of Albemarle has never been designated a historic district.

"We have such a rich history," resident Cindy Patterson said. "We thought, 'How could this not be a historic district?'"

A group of county residents, called the Southern Albemarle Association, are working to have 87,000 acres recognized as a historic district by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the National Park Service.

There are 22 properties in the proposed district that already are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District would stretch south from U.S. 250 to the James and Rockfish rivers, near Howardsville. Its western boundary would follow Route 20 and Route 717; the eastern border would extend north from Scottsville to Simeon.

It would link the Madison-Barbour Historic District, the Southwest Mountains Historic District and the Scottsville Historic District. Meanwhile, the Piedmont Environmental Council is working to make Covesville – once a key stop between Lynchburg and Charlottesville – a historic district.

In all, the districts would create a contiguous 143,000-acre historic corridor – making it the largest in the state.

The association has hired Arcadia Preservation LLC to inventory roughly 1,700 structures in the proposed district.

Gardiner Hallock, principal of Arcadia Preservation, said the Keswick firm will spend the next year and a half surveying the properties to determine their age and historical value.

The district, he said, has a wide range of historic properties from grist mills to canal systems to a soapstone quarry in Alberene.

“You name it, the district has it,” he said.

“It also contains several historic villages, including Esmont, Keene, Alberene, Milton, Shadwell and Simeon.

Bessie Carter noted that many of the area’s original roads still exist.

Secretaries and Rolling roads, for example, were created by John Carter around 1737 and used as a route to transport tobacco to the Bremo Plantation port in neighboring Fluvanna County.

Jennifer Hallock, architectural historian and principal of Arcadia Preservation, said that creating the historic district would not put any restrictions on what landowners could do with their property.

“No one is going to tell you can’t paint your house purple,” she said. “You could even tear it down and the state and federal government couldn’t penalize you.”

However, members of the Southern Albemarle Association hope that creating the district will spur more residents to preserve their properties.

Since the creation of the Southwest Mountains Historic District in 1991, residents have placed roughly one-third of the district’s 31,000 acres into conservation easement, Gardiner Hallock said.

The association plans several meetings to explain their efforts to residents in communities of the proposed district starting at the end of June.

Patterson, who is vice president of the Southern Albemarle Association, said the effort is turning her into a “history freak.”

“Looking into everything makes me appreciate the area more,” she said.