

## Introduction to Boog Heath Article

Growing up in Esmont, of course I knew Boog Heath, his wife Estelle, and his children William, Boyce and Shay, everyone did. He and Estelle ran the post office for many years and owned the post office building. Family members lived in the building from time to time.

Boog (nicknamed that because of his great love for baseball) was an Esmont real estate broker, constantly buying, renovating and selling land and buildings. He was raised in Esmont in the house now owned by his grandson. He raised his family mostly in the house across the creek, behind the post office.

In the attached Daily Progress article about Heath and Esmont, you will read, again, how trains impacted people who lived in Esmont. The train ran right through the village, crossing over the road at several points, carrying soapstone and slate from the quarries and pulpwood and railroad ties from Tucker Tapscott's wood yard near the depot, all managed by Dispatcher, Jimmy Morris.

Boog and my mother held Esmont together for a lot of years, he on one end and she on the other! They would come together during "emergencies" such as dealing with Blue Ridge Slate Corporation (known in the village as The Dust Plant) when they were choking Esmont residents to death with their daily white dust storms. You will often read that the plant closed due to "local residents' complaints about the dust." The two of them took the company to court and won!

Then when Albemarle County built a big, new, beautiful school and said Esmont kids could not attend because they had Scottsville High School, Boog and my mother disagreed with that decision as each had high school age children whom they thought should have a choice. The county said ok to that but would not offer a school bus. The Dynamic Duo got together enough money to buy an old bus, hired Robert Baber from Howardsville to drive, and off the kids went to Albemarle High School, often getting there late due to mechanical issues which were corrected alongside the road by the boys riding the bus!

The following year, Esmont got a brand-new bus and all was well for Shay and me to ride to Albemarle along with several other kids from the area. (I am happy to say that Shay Heath Booth is a Friend of Esmont and helped me with this presentation.)

Following the article about Boog, which appeared in the Daily Progress, in 1985, I thought it would be appropriate to append an article about living upstairs in the post office, that appeared in the October-February 2018-19 issue of Abode-C'ville Magazine, featuring Mark Otis and his family. (Mark is also a Friend of Esmont and a member of the board of directors.) Mark owns the post office building and the former Steed's Store building next door, which he is renovating.



*Peggy Purvis Denby*

*April 2019*

# Quiet Village Remained as Boom Came and Went

*The Daily Progress – 1985*

*By: Lawrence Hardy of the Daily Progress*

William Heath, Postmaster of Esmont for 38 years, remembered the conductor's chant when one of Heath's beloved passenger trains left Rockfish, about 10 miles west of his home town. It went something like this:

"Train 134, for Charlottesville, Orange, Culpeper, Manassas, Alexandria, Washington, New York and all points of the world."

Heath, 76, and retired, gets a kick out of the idea that a short train trip on the Nelson and Albemarle line from Esmont could connect you with a grand series of cities leading ultimately to the four corners of the earth. After all, there is no train in Esmont now, weeds grow on the embankments where rails once ran, and all the town's industries have long since departed.

But in the 1920s Esmont was a quite different place. Heath said, with a hotel, a bank, a livery stable and eight stores – all there because of slate and soapstone mining.

For many years the Blue Ridge Slate Co. was Esmont's largest business. In 1905 the C&O completed a line from Schuyler to Warren. Because of the quarry the 6-mile run was, for a time, the highest paying segment of track, per mile, that the railroad ever owned, Heath said.

But the boom years eventually ended. Passenger service to Esmont ceased in 1950, and a few years later Blue Ridge Slate was closed after residents complained of the white dust from the stone, which would leave a fine film on their houses and cars.

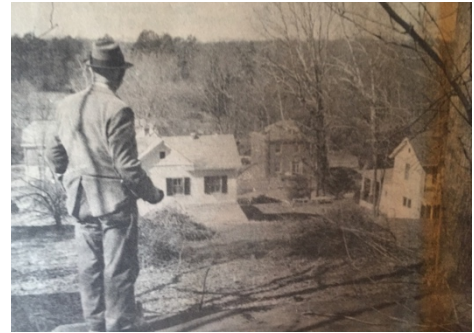
"A man coming through here could get just as white as snow from the dust," said Gilbert Goff, who runs Purvis' Store with his wife, Lucille.



Esmont Purple Marlin Houses

Nowadays Purvis' Store is one of the centers of town and the eight purple martin houses that line the road across from it are a major attraction. Travelers often stop by in the summer to look and listen, Mrs. Goff said.

"Purple martins make the sweetest sound in the world" she said.



William Heath, Esmont Postmaster, looks over the community that has been his home for 76



Lucille and Gilbert Goff in Purvis' Store

Next to the store is a white house with a sign: "Will Campbell. Marine Construction."

A native of Hanover County who worked in Charleston, S.C. for the past several years building marinas and repairing docks, Campbell was drawn to Esmont after he and his wife visited the town last September.

"I said, I like this," and that's where we settled, Campbell said.

There are no docks to build in Esmont, so Campbell finds work restoring old homes.

"At Purvis' Store, they leave the Pepsi (machine) light on 'till 8 p.m.," Campbell said. "And then there's two mercury vapor lights, and that's it."

Monroe Scott, shop foreman for the Albemarle County Schools' bus garage, has a different view of Esmont's activity. A long-time member of New Hope Baptist Church, Scott is both chairman of the deacon board and superintendent of the Sunday school. Founded in 1877, New Hope Baptist Church now has 350 members.

"We don't have any dull moments," Scott said.

Mrs. Goff, who has lived in Esmont since 1937, has an equally high view of the town and her work in the general store.

"You know, it's a fascinating job," she said. "People think it's terrible, but I like to meet people."

"And when I go away and leave, I get so disappointed. I'm afraid I'm going to miss something."

Izetta Taylor, Esmont's oldest resident, has not missed much in the town she has lived in continuously for the past 105 years.

Asked why she never lived anywhere else, Mrs. Taylor replied, "Esmont's my home."



William Heath, an Esmont institution and Postmaster for 38 years



# Blueprint

Design in  
all its many  
forms

In Esmont,  
a historic  
building  
becomes  
a home

RENOVATION

# Take it to the bank

By Erika Howsare  
Photography by  
Virginia Hamrick





Like many people on the hunt for real estate during the housing bubble of the last decade, Mark Otis was being priced out of the market. So when he saw the old Esmont post office come up for sale on Craigslist in 2007, he took notice—both because it was a rare property he could afford, and because it was a bit of a landmark from his own past.

“Tim and I used to come down and swim in the quarry,” he says, referring to his friend Tim Rausse, “and we’d park at the post office.” He asked Rausse if he’d like to come tour the building—a two-story brick structure, originally the First National Bank of Esmont, built around 1903. The postal service rented part of the first floor, and it also held two apartments.

Both thought it was an interesting investment, and they decided to buy the building together. As a historic structure in a once-bustling village, it had plenty of character—it came with more than its share of challenges, too.

The trouble started with deadbeat tenants and continued with a horribly inefficient boiler system, “like a Volkswagen in the basement,” Otis remembers. The first winter he and Rausse owned the building, they paid \$7,000 in heating costs. “We were counting quarters to fill that tank,” he says. Then a tenant called him and innocently asked, “Is it bad if the boiler shoots a big old fireball out the side every time it comes on?”

Thus the renovation started with installing an updated HVAC system, along with replacing the



electrical and pulling down unstable chimneys. Over the years he’s owned the building, Otis has mastered the art of repairing plaster, repainted exterior moldings, redone kitchens and bathrooms, built decks, and installed fences—among other tasks on a never-ending list. “This was like having a child,” he says.

The post office still occupies its downstairs spot, and the apartments have seen various tenants and friends come and go. Since 2011, Otis has lived here himself, with his wife Esther Lozano. They live upstairs under soaring ceilings, with tall windows and a generous staircase leading down to the shared foyer, where Otis has posted a historical photo of downtown Esmont when it hosted an active railroad depot.

The onetime bank “was never meant to be a domicile,” says Otis. “As much as I want to preserve its historical nature, you have to change some things. If it’s going to survive, it has to adapt.”



Though the onetime bank and current post office “was never meant to be a domicile,” says its owner Mark Otis, he and his wife have made various changes to the property over the years. A room that once housed a ping-pong table now serves as a nursery for the couple’s daughter; in the kitchen, they added a soapstone backsplash, glass-front upper cabinets, and a window seat.



He's tried to respect the structure while making the apartments as appealing and comfortable as possible. This has meant tackling long-deferred maintenance, like fixing plaster walls that crumbled at a touch ("In certain places, we had to put three inches of plaster," he says). And it has meant adding certain conveniences, like closets, that weren't part of the original program for the building.

A wall between the living and dining rooms of the upstairs apartment just came down a couple of years ago, creating a great room that also includes the kitchen. Here, Otis and Lozano tore out what previous renovators had built and designed a kitchen for their own taste: soapstone backsplash, glass-front upper cabinets, and a window seat where the sink had previously blocked the view. While some trim details couldn't be perfectly matched with the originals, Otis thinks of those variations as his own contribution to a long series of modifications to this building. "I like the fact that it's not perfect," he says.

In the bathroom, Otis added stained-glass panes to the window for privacy and commissioned Corey Blanc of Blanc Creatives to fabricate a curved shower curtain rod. One of the latest additions is a rear deck that connects the upstairs apartment more effectively to the backyard, a shady and level space.



There have been times when Otis was grateful for the ways in which the building had been neglected; lack of attention helped preserve some details, like brass doorknobs and fireplace screens. Surfaces had only a few coats of paint rather than dozens. And some elements that had been removed were still around—next door or, in the case of the vault doors from the old bank, shallowly buried in the yard. Otis salvaged and reinstalled what he could.

The project has taken Otis through several life stages, from the days when a certain upstairs room held a ping-pong table to now, when it serves as a nursery for the couple's daughter. And he's become invested in Esmont as a village, purchasing a small nearby house and the former general store next door to the post office—an even older building, dating to 1889 or 1890, which has an Esmont slate roof and the original long wall of merchandise shelving behind the counter.

"This has become such a part of who we are," he says. "I love it."

"As much as I want to preserve its historical nature, you have to change some things. If it's going to survive, it has to adapt."

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