

## HISTORY OF FEARRINGTON VILLAGE

### ***Those Who Came Before Us***

In 1745, when this area was first settled by English speaking people, there was little here but trails left by the Native American tribes formerly occupying the land: the Occaneechie, the Saponi, and the Keyauwee. The Indian tribes for the most part had left the area to move west, although a few continued to live in some parts of Chatham County. John Andrew Fearrington, the great, great grandfather of Jesse Fearrington, Sr. arrived here from Virginia in the 1770s. The property that he owned did not include the land that became Fearrington Village.

In 1786, John Oldham sold the 640 acres where Fearrington Village now sits to William Cole Sr. for 100 shillings. According to family history, Oldham sold the land because there was not enough water to run both a grist mill and a still. The Cole family then grew cotton, tobacco, and corn and processed grain in a mill which was constructed on the property. The farm was deeded to William Cole, Jr. in the early 1800's and in 1820 the original farm house was built close to the cemetery that is located on Windstone across from Tinderwood. The farm was passed to Elijah Cole in 1840 and in 1859 to his daughter Adelaide and her husband, Edwin Mebane Fearrington, the grandfather of Jesse Fearrington, Sr. Edwin, who became the first Farm Agent for Chatham County, continued operations and gave it the name of "**Eureka Farms.**" In 1870, Edwin built a house for he and Adelaide where the **Fitch Creations, Inc. (Fitch)** compound now stands near Camden Park.

Edwin and Adelaide's son, John Bunyan (Bun) Fearrington lived in the original Cole house as an adult, but it was destroyed by fire in 1925. A new home was completed in 1928 that is now the Fearrington House Restaurant. Since its original construction, there have been several changes to the home. The columned porch was added and in 1947 a two-story wing was added by Bun's son, Jesse Fearrington, Sr. in order that he and his new bride, Willa, would have ample room to raise their family.

The farm was converted to dairy farming in the 1930's, and the farm also raised chickens. By the late 1960's, however, when neither of their children showed any interest in continuing operation of the farm, Jesse Fearrington Sr. and his wife began looking for a buyer who would preserve the farm's historic values along with the special qualities that had made Eureka Farm such an important part of Chatham County. They found those qualities in R.B. and Jennie Fitch who purchased the farm in 1974.

### ***The Fitch Vision***

R.B. and Jenny Fitch grew up respectively in Chapel Hill and Siler City and had long admired the Fearrington farm with its neatly manicured lawns and imposing columned portico. It was regarded by many as one of the most attractive sites between Chapel Hill and the coast. R.B.'s father had run a small lumber yard in Carrboro and R.B., who had been in the residential building business, was ready to take on a very challenging project. The purchase of the Fearrington farm provided that challenge as well as some new opportunities. The Fearringtons wanted to see the family farm preserved and the Fitches

wanted to incorporate the farm and its outbuildings into their master plan for a country village.

R.B. and Jenny Fitch were determined, insofar as possible, to protect the environment and to preserve the unique qualities that had made the Fearington farm itself so long admired for its beauty. They purchased about 450 more acres from the Gust family adding to the original 760 acres of rolling countryside, woodland, pastures, and farmland. It had once been part of the original Fearington family holdings, though it was not part of the land owned by Jesse Fearington at the time of the sale of the old Eureka Farm. The Fitches committed to maintaining the farm character of the property, and have kept animals ever since. In 1999 they hired a full-time farm manager, “Farmer Bob” Strowd, who breeds and manages the animals we have today (see May 2020 Newsletter). Belted Galloways, Tennessee Fainting Goats, and Columbian Wyandotte chickens now graze in the pastures by the old silo and near the Village Center. At one time, Tunis sheep also grazed in those pastures but they were replaced with an even rarer breed of “Crete Sheep,” which now graze peacefully in Central (Camden) Park. The ponds are home to rare Khaki Campbell ducks. Thousands of azaleas and fruit trees have been planted throughout the village and surrounding woodlands, adding to the already arresting beauty of the Fearington farm.

### ***Creating a Planned Unit Development (PUD)***

The first, and perhaps most important decision of R.B. and Jenny was to create a master plan of development. They had a vision of quiet country residential neighborhoods with a vital and attractive village center, parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and housing to meet different needs.

They retained the Bell Design Group in Raleigh to assist in drawing up the initial plans for the new development, and design of the first homes to be built. R.B. received permission to create one of North Carolina’s first planned developments, a designation that gave to him and his wife the flexibility to craft a village in their vision, utilizing the best aspects of the farm and the landscape. The Planned Unit Development (PUD), the first in Chatham County, allowed them to incorporate their concepts of how the ideal country village might look. **Fearington Village** was thus born. Approval for the first phase, consisting of 74 lots, was given by Chatham County officials in May of 1975 with the recording of the initial plat plan. The initial covenant for that phase was filed on August 30, 1976. It was also in 1976 that the first house, located at #11 Benchmark, was ready for viewing.

In 1979, Jon Condoret was retained to provide architectural guidance for construction from that point forward, and he did so continuously until his retirement in 2009. A few other architects were retained following Jon’s retirement until Fitch settled on Brian Cather, who assumed all design work and still continues in 2020.

### ***Marketing the Village***

In the initial stages of development, publicity surrounding Fearington Village was directed toward graduate students, young professionals, UNC faculty and others living in apartments or small homes who might prefer home ownership in the countryside. The emphasis on the environment and on the preservation of historic values also had an appeal to people sharing those concerns. By the end of 1976, 20 homes had been built and within

the space of five short years, Fearington Village was receiving national attention through articles in Southern Living, Better Homes and Gardens, Family Circle, and many professional builders' magazines. However, it was not until 1980 that a conscious effort was made to attract and create a community of active retirees. It was then that Fitch began a series of modest advertisements in The New Yorker and The Wall Street Journal, announcing the creation of their country village near Chapel Hill. There were also advertisements in Harper's and Gourmet magazines. Those advertisements, plus the national publicity from home and building magazines, began to attract the attention of more and more people interested in retirement in the area. The fact that Chapel Hill had frequently been mentioned on lists of the ten best places to retire in the United States helped encourage additional interest in the area generally and Fearington Village specifically.

### ***Adding A Village Center***

As Phase 1 of the master plan was being completed, Fitch turned its attention to the development of the Village Center. A particular appeal in purchasing the property for the Fitches was the opportunity to assemble a "coming together place" set amidst the farm structures where one could pick up daily necessities, visit with friends, and enjoy a tranquil setting. Jenny envisioned a place that married sophistication and warmth. This place offered a laboratory to experiment with what the Fitches loved most on their trips through Europe and the U.S., from gracious and friendly staff to lush gardens to charming shops and fresh local food.

In 1982, plans were announced to develop the rest of the Village Center. It was important to the Fitches to keep the surrounding pastures and the simple, painted white farm structures that dotted the hilltop. Their intention was to preserve all of the existing farm buildings: the pack house, the original milking barn, the hay barn and other outbuildings have been incorporated into the new country village.

The pack house became the Market and Deli, and is now the Belted Goat; the milking barn became Pringle's Pottery, and now houses Dovecoat; and a corn crib is now the Roost Beer Garden. The old hay barn and stables initially became the meeting place and the site of a Farmer's Market, and now is a popular venue for receptions, author readings, art shows, concerts and dances. Over the years these shops have changed from time to time and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

Over the years, Fitch added several rooms to the Inn as well as other buildings and shops such as McIntyre's Bookstore, Sun Trust Bank, The Roost Beer Garden, and a professional building that now includes The Village Beauty Shop and The Spa. The Fearington House Restaurant became the first AAA Five Diamond restaurant in the country to be Green Certified.

In 1995, the administrative offices of Fitch Creations were moved to the newly constructed Administrative building overlooking the Central Park that separates East and West Camden. It also houses the Fitch Sales Office and Showroom. After the death of Jenny Fitch in 1995, plans were announced to develop the 12-acre Camden Park into the Jenny Fitch Memorial Park, emphasizing her favorite plants and trees. This is often referred to as "Jenny's Park."

## ***Managing the Village***

Responsibility for preserving the qualities that initially attracted us to Fearington Village (qualities which reflect the vision of R.B. and Jenny Fitch) has been vested in the Board of Directors of the **Fearington Homeowners Association (FHA)**. In discharging those responsibilities, the Board maintains a close working relationship with Fitch Creations, Inc. to be certain the actions of the Board reflect the intentions of its creator.

The FHA, which was chartered in 1976 as a nonprofit, non-stock corporation under the laws of North Carolina, was managed by Fitch until November 16, 1980 when the first meeting of an elected Board was held. The specific purposes of the Association are to provide for the maintenance and preservation of the common areas, the enforcement of the governing covenants, and to promote the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the Village. Its powers are enumerated in the Articles of Incorporation and include any and all of the powers, rights, and privileges that might be exercised by any corporation organized under the Nonprofit Corporation Act of North Carolina. The Board, in discharging its responsibilities, must take into account the needs and concerns of all residents of the Village and, to that end, should solicit the views of all members of the Association and conduct its affairs in public to the extent feasible.

The FHA Board has responsibility for establishing a budget and a reserve fund, collecting dues, maintaining the common areas, receiving complaints, enforcing the terms of the covenants, and in general protecting the interests of residents of the Village in a manner consistent with the vision of R.B. and Jenny Fitch. The first Newsletters were published by Fitch on a quarterly basis in 1977. In June of 1981, the FHA Board began publishing a Newsletter on a bi-monthly basis. It is now published eleven times a year.

The Board monitors the activities of various units of government on matters of interest to the community and, if necessary, expresses the views of the community on matters of common interest. In past years, the Board has been involved in discussions over the planning of postal facilities, the 911 program, Community Watch, emergency services, recreational needs, cable television, the appropriate fire insurance rating codes, expanding telephone services, the installation of a stop light on U.S.15-501, additional street lighting and property valuations. In addition, the Board has represented resident concerns regarding deer population, proposed Compact Community construction and its effects, a proposed major change to our wastewater treatment facility, and in general, the desire to preserve the rural character of Chatham County.

Membership on the Board requires a willingness to contribute time and energy to community service but, because the Board terms are limited and membership is constantly changing, it does not impose an unreasonable burden on those willing to serve their community. The changing composition of the Board does make it essential that newly elected or appointed Board Members familiarize themselves with the issues which constantly confront the Board in order that there be some consistency in the handling of recurring problems. The Director's Handbook should help provide that continuity. Knowledge of history does provide some guidelines for the future.

Fearington Village is unique in many respects. Although the Board of the FHA is responsible for the enforcement of the covenants governing all parts of the Village, there

are many separate and distinct entities within the Village referred to as **Service Groups**, and their own Boards of Directors. These Service Groups are subject to their own covenants, as well. (For more on this, see “Farrington 101” on the FHA website.)

The Covenants have been summarized in the Directory that is furnished to each resident of the Village. The Declarations of each independent Service Group prevail to the extent specified in their Declarations. Fitch continues to have responsibility for the maintenance of the Village Center, the open area denoted as Central Park, the Fitch residential compound, and for those parts of the Village which have not yet been developed.

### ***Providing Recreation and Socialization***

In the early years, meetings of the various social groups were held in private homes or in the little house behind the Farrington Inn, but it became necessary to create a separate facility where residents might gather for business and social meetings. That facility, called **The Gathering Place**, was erected near the Swim and Croquet Club in 1990 and turned over to the FHA for management. It houses the FHA Office, and a “Hospitality Suite” that provides meeting spaces and includes a kitchen. Use of the meeting space is restricted to residents of the Village. In 1995, with funds contributed by Fitch and an anonymous donor, an addition was made to the Gathering Place for *Home Care Connection* and to provide additional office space for the FHA. *Home Care Connection* and *Stay Put for Now* merged in 1999 and took the name **Farrington Cares**. Due to the generosity of Fitch, Farrington Cares is now housed in a separate building in back of the Gathering Place.

The original plan for the Village contemplated recreational facilities and open spaces that became part of the approved plan. The tennis courts were constructed in 1975, the playground in 1978, and a bocce ball court was added in 1982. The tennis courts are leased by the FHA to the Tennis Club that is responsible for their maintenance. The Swim and Croquet Club was completed in 1985 and was later deeded to a new entity created for the purpose of managing and maintaining that facility. For all of these facilities, only paid members and their guests are permitted use, but membership is open to all residents of the Village.

Walking paths are a great Village asset, and are free to all. A special component of these are the forest trails like Creekwood, which were first created by deer! This area—the sliver of land that borders the Creekwood stream on its way from the Village to Beechmast Pond—was one of the parcels of land that Fitch granted to the community under the PUD. Early residents began walking their dogs along the deer path, and began to mark it with those little square pieces of tin that can still be seen, but the single most influential thing that brought the trail up to its current standard was the work of Henry Castner and Colette File. Henry had started a lot of the heavy clearing and demarcation of the trail. Colette joined in and raked the trails daily over a number of years to create the distinct and solid path we now enjoy. This is why one of the trail bridges bears her name: Le Pont De Colette!

As traffic on the trails slowly increased and resident interest built, Henry led a “Light Cavalry” that organically formed to continually clear fallen trees and upgrade eroded areas. The improved walking experience was its own advertisement and attractor of willing residents, who eventually built bridges, steps and railings; installed informative

markers; and created interesting additions like the Labyrinth and Puzzle Pad. Their contributions are why we have such a beautiful way to enjoy the quiet nature of this area today! Over time, Fitch Creations has added walking paths to our community along our streets so the residents can safely walk to various destinations within our community.

### ***Providing Utilities***

Water was originally provided to Village residents from deep wells on the property, but as the Village grew it was felt that a more assured source of water was needed. In 1983, Chatham County proposed to build a water plant to distribute water from Jordan Lake to parts of Chatham County, including Fearington Village. Mr. Fitch agreed to give the Fearington well water to the County if the bond issue passed. With the passage of the bond issue, Fearington became the largest single development to be served by the new system.

The first homes built were served by septic tank systems, but as the Village developed, Fitch Creations obtained a sewer franchise and constructed a sewage plant to serve residents of the Village. Fitch chartered a separate corporation of Fearington Utilities that provides waste water treatment to the Village. Fitch still owns the infrastructure, and as of January 2021 has resumed management of it..

### ***Completing the Vision***

Since its inception, Fearington Village has been built in different phases. It was approved to have a total of 1,602 residential units on 934 acres, and an average of 25-30 new homes have been built each year.

**Galloway Ridge**, a continuing care community, broke ground in the summer of 2003, is located south of West Camden and is part of the revised P.U.D. Galloway Ridge opened its doors to its first residents in May of 2005, and consists of 300 independent apartment and villa homes. The Duke Center for Living, a 20,000 square foot health and wellness center, serves both Fearington and Galloway Ridge residents.

Residential construction continues at a steady, measured pace. In addition to the 1,602 homes, an adjoining development not done by Fitch Creations—Henderson Place—was added as part of Fearington Village in 2011 but it is not part of the approved Fearington PUD. Today, over 2,000 residents from 40 states (and several countries) call Fearington home. Because construction in the Village is largely market driven and not speculative, it is impossible to predict the precise mixture of single family and cluster housing which will eventually be built. Each of the various phases of the village is uniquely different, yet each blend naturally into the Village as a whole, thanks to the vision of R.B. and Jenny Fitch and the work of Jon Condoret. As of early 2020, over 85% of the envisioned Village had been built.

### ***Final Note***

There is nothing original in this paper. It has drawn heavily on the information provided by Jesse Fearington, Sr. The brief history was originally prepared by Carl Strome, one of the original residents of the village, and from various publications and news stories. The

history was updated in 2011 by Fitch Creations, Inc, and again in 2020 by Jesse Fearington, Jr. a resident of Fearington Village and who served on the FHA Board. It is intended only to provide essential background knowledge about the Village to new members of the Board of Directors of the FHA. It is by no means the definitive History of Fearington. That is a project yet to be undertaken. It might help Board Members to know where we have been and if they can more clearly understand that, in one sense they are keepers of the Fitch vision, as well as guardians of the property interests of residents of the Village. One of their responsibilities is to help preserve that vision.

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