



'TWIN CITIES' OF SHARPSBURG & TURIN SHARE PAST, FUTURE

By W. Winston Skinner

Back in 1938, a group of 20 women from Sharpsburg and Turin formed the Twin City Garden Club.

The club's name was later changed to the Old Town Garden Club, paying tribute to the Old Town Festival held in Sharpsburg twice each year. Sharpsburg and Turin have had a symbiotic relationship since the days when folks rode in buggies and made their living plowing the fertile fields around the two burgs.

Today both twin cities continue to be small towns with streets lined with historic homes. Sharpsburg's city leaders have developed a plan for growth that incorporates the authentic downtown's architectural styles and features walkable designs with proposed areas for shopping, recreation and senior citizen housing. Turin's town fathers have forged ties with officials in the Italian city for which it is named — a place with a distinctly biblical heritage.

Both communities date to the early days of Coweta County's history. A small village, Kedron, was located close to the current site of Sharpsburg, and Turin was originally known as Preston. Preston had a post office — which reportedly later was used as a barn — and a school.

The coming of the railroad changed things for area residents. Folks moved close to the railroad tracks and formed the town of Sharpsburg. The town, named for a local Confederate veteran named Elias Sharp, who liked to share stories of his wartime exploits, extended one mile in each direction from the

depot.

Turin's new name also had a direct connection to the railroad. According to local legend, children from the school in Preston talked with Italian laborers putting the railroad lines through Preston. The children had just studied about Turin, Italy, home of an ancient shroud said to be the burial cloth of Jesus. Thus, one of the twin cities adopted the name of a famous Italian metropolis.

The 2000 U. S. Census showed Turin with a population of 165 and Sharpsburg with 316. The Turin business district includes a television repair shop and a lawn mower shop. An auto parts store operates in a more modern building on Highway 16. Sharpsburg's storefronts — and several of its older homes — have become shops selling antiques and uniques to local folks and tourists. Sharpsburg also boasts an auto repair business and a photography studio.

Both towns have gasoline service stations along their respective highways. Community centers provide both meeting space and a location for town offices for both Turin and Sharpsburg.

Each of the twin cities also has its own festival. The Old Town Festival brings arts-and-craft vendors to Sharpsburg every April and September.

Each August for the past 12 years, community volunteers have sponsored the Turin Tractor Pull. There are tractor pulling weight class events, and the pedal tractor race for the younger set has always been a big hit. A parade of the



metal farm machines is a highlight of the day. The grand marshal for the 2006 Tractor Pull was Frances Christopher, who came from one old Turin family, married into another and knows the genealogy of most of the rest.

Both towns are growing. Construction began in 2006 on homes at The Oaks at Turin, a 71-home development. Sharpsburg's plans to annex a large tract slated for development fell through. Sharpsburg has a comprehensive plan that incorporates aspects of New Urbanism – greenspace, areas that are easily used by people on foot, and access to shopping and activities in a short distance of homes. While the plan is likely to be scaled back, council members have shown a vision for keeping what is appealing about their town as new people and businesses arrive.

Sharpsburg's population figures are a bit deceiving. Turin's post office offers only post office box delivery, but Sharpsburg serves rural customers in a wide swath stretching to the Fayette County line. Oldtimers can well remember when folks with Sharpsburg addresses picked up their mail from Mrs. Avy Bridges at Bridges and Cole's Store. Now the Sharpsburg post office has 15 routes and 6,622 delivery points – homes, businesses and post office boxes.

When the Winter Olympics were held in Turin, Italy, attention was focused on the Georgia town with the same name. Turin, Italy is home to a cathedral that contains the famous shroud. Scholars are divided about the shroud's authenticity, but no one has ever satisfactorily explained how the strip of cloth – which dates at least to the 14th century – bears a photographic negative image of a crucified man.

A shroud museum for Turin, Georgia, has been proposed. "It's not a done deal," Turin Mayor Allen Smith said of plans for the museum, which could have a price tag of \$1 million or more. There are "a lot of hurdles" that must be overcome before the museum can become a reality, he said.

Smith, his wife JoNell and daughter Nancy traveled to Turin, Italy last year – along with City Clerk Paulette Brown and her husband Ronnie. The Browns and Smiths, who traveled at their own expense, viewed the container where the shroud is kept. They also were formally recognized by Cardinal Severino Poletto during High Mass at the cathedral.

The depot that once formed the central point in legal documents for Sharpsburg is long gone, and the town of Preston exists only in dusty archives. Coweta's twin cities, however, are poised for growth and progress. ☺



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