

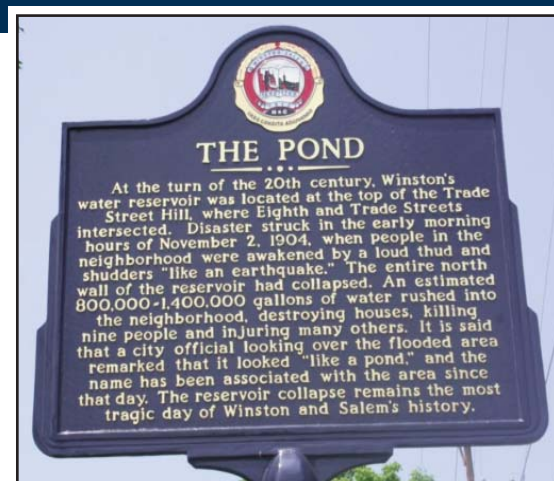
# HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

## The Pond

At the turn of the 20th century, Winston's brick and concrete water reservoir lay at the top of Trade Street Hill, where today's W. Eighth and N. Trade Streets intersect. The Winston Water Supply Company had built the reservoir in 1882. This private company acquired what was known as "Belo's Pond" on Peters Creek (near what was Western Electric's Chatham Road plant) and built a pumping station to push water up the steep ridge to the east. Trade Street Hill was, at that time, the highest point in Winston, so water from the reservoir could be fed in all directions by gravity flow. In 1894, the Winston Water Supply Company sold out to the Town of Winston. The Town in turn enlarged the reservoir by adding ten feet in height and six feet in length.

Unfortunately, the reservoir leaked and there was some concern about its condition. In 1903, voters overwhelmingly approved a \$100,000 water bond issue (a vote of 307 to 10). The new water system was completed on October 12, 1904. Within a week, powerful pumps filled both the new metal standpipe, visible on the skyline in



photographs of the time, and the old brick reservoir, which remained a supplementary part of the new system.

The reservoir was located on what was then Winston's north fringe. This was a racially-mixed neighborhood, but predominantly African-American, and it was largely made up of small, one-story rental houses. Trade Street Hill pitched downward from W. Eighth Street to Peters Creek, along which Northwest Boulevard now winds. N. Trade Street itself then ended at a railway cut some four to five blocks below and north of the reservoir.



*Winston's Water Reservoir after Collapse, 1904*  
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library  
Photograph Collection



*Collapse of Winston's Water Reservoir, 1904*  
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library  
Photograph Collection

On Wednesday, November 2, 1904, people in the neighborhood were awakened at 5:20 a.m. by a loud thud and shudders "like an earthquake." The entire north wall of the reservoir, the wall overlooking the steep descent of Trade Street Hill, had collapsed. A cascade of water estimated at 800,000 to 1,400,000 gallons exploded into the neighborhood, destroying houses, killing nine people, and injuring many more. The Western Sentinel newspaper called the collapse "the most horrible catastrophe in the history of Winston-Salem." The Union Republican termed it, "The saddest chapter in our history," and the Winston-Salem Journal called it "Winston-Salem's greatest tragedy."

The water flowed north down the Trade Street Hill past W. 12th Street and the Southern Railroad to Peters Creek, covering a large area of low-lying "Bottom" housing. At Peters Creek, it gushed west and southwest along the creek past today's N. Cherry Street and into

Belo's Pond (near Rundell Street and Northwest Boulevard). It is said that a Town official looking down over the flooded area remarked that it looked "like a pond," and that the name stuck.

Emerging from the disaster, the families that survived banded together, worked hard, prayed much, and out of the community emerged many successful professionals, including doctors, lawyers, ministers, educators, and others. Each year, descendants of individuals involved in the disaster hold an annual reunion commemorating those who lost their lives in the tragedy and celebrating those who lived through it. The Pond continues to have one of the richest histories in the City of Winston-Salem.



**THE POND: CITY RESERVOIR GAVE WAY; NINE PEOPLE KILLED**

# Where Water Fell

*"I think anytime we have a tragedy, there should be some remembrance. You go to remember."*  
**Jeri Brinegar**  
 whose great grandmother, Laura Poe, died in Big Flood

**A historical marker now stands at the corner of Trade Street and Northwest Boulevard, the site of a November 1904 disaster that ranks among the city's worst.**

## Crowd gathers to remember a tragedy

**By Paul Garber**  
 JOURNAL EDITOR

Flora Golden moved out of the neighborhood known as The Pond in the 1920s when she was 12. At 90, she still has vivid memories of the area around the intersection of Trade Street and Northwest Boulevard.

"There was everything you needed," she said, including a bakery, several grocery stores, a meat market and a funeral home. Although there is a lingering perception that most of the houses were small rental units, there were some homeowners in nice houses, she said. "All the houses weren't shotgun houses, as you've heard."

The severe nickname of "The Pond" belies its violent origin. It was coined after a reservoir collapsed, spilling more than 800,000 gallons of water into the community in November 1904. Nine people died in the resulting flood.

In the years afterward, a strong community grew in its place, former residents said. It became known as "The Pond."

"When you talk about The Pond, you don't have anything to be ashamed of," Golden said.

About 100 people with ties to the neighborhood gathered yesterday for an unveiling of a historical marker to commemorate the neighborhood's place in city history.

It is one of the few markers that details an important place and recognizes a great loss, said Ferrell Clay, the chairwoman of the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission.

Jeri Brinegar brought a portrait of her great-grandmother, Laura Poe, to the ceremony. Poe died in the flood.

Brinegar said she was glad to see the marker put up and was pleased by the large turnout.

"I think anytime we have a tragedy, there should be some remembrance," she said. "You go to remember."

In the early morning hours of Nov. 2, 1904, the north wall of the city's brick-and-concrete reservoir at Eighth and

**See THE POND, Page B3**



This information is also available  
 at the Forsyth County  
 Historic Resources Commission's web site:  
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>

**METRO**

*"It was a struggle. But it was a community. It was a village."*  
**Delores Scales, Pond Heritage Community Committee**

## THE POND

**Continued From Page B1**

Trade streets gave way, sending a wall of water down Trade Street. The water destroyed many of the houses in its wake.

Golden grew up on Trade Street in the 1920s and said she can remember when there was a house on almost every lot of the steep hill that slopes north from downtown. Many of those lots are empty, including where her house once stood, across from New Bethel Baptist Church.

The neighborhood began to splinter in the 1960s, in part because of the influx of urban renewal projects such as Kimberly Park Terrace.

The Pond Heritage Community Committee has held reunions for the past 16 years to help keep the memories alive, said Delores Scales, a historian for the committee.

Many in the community were poor, but it was also a time when neighbors helped each other, Scales said.

"It was a struggle," she said. "But it was a community. It was a village."

That commitment to one another is one reason, Scales believes, so many residents come back for occasions such as the dedication.

"It's a reaffirmation of the feeling of a community," she said. "We remember where we came from."

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**Visit [www.journalnow.com](http://www.journalnow.com) to read the Journal's story "Pond of Memories" by Janice Gaston, which covers the history of the neighborhood's namesake.**

**The Rev. Dr. Walter Mack Jr. speaks at Trade Street and Northwest Boulevard. Ferrell Clay and Nelson L. Malley Jr. also attended.**