

You can take the Tar Heel out of the state, but you can't take the state out of the Tar Heel. There's something about North Carolina that lingers within its natives long after they've moved beyond the state lines, far from the land of pimento cheese and vinegar-based barbecue.

North Carolinians hold tight to the roots of the Old North State, even in places as exciting and glamorous as New York City. If you need more proof, say hello to the **North Carolina Society of New York**.

#### WHO'S IN?

Founded in 1898 by George Garland Allen, the Hon. George Gordon Battle, James B. Duke, W.W. Fuller, and Judge Janius Parker, the society serves as a social organization for North Carolinians who live in New York. On top of that, it is the oldest surviving state society in the city that never sleeps.

Before you start thinking of stuffy club chairs and cigars, stop right there. The N.C. Society of N.Y. isn't a place, it's a group, and these days it's a group with approximately 850 members ranging in age from their 20s to their 80s.

You don't have to go through a hazing process or an interview to become a member. You simply have to have been born in North Carolina, lived in North Carolina for no less than 10 years, attended college in North Carolina, have a spouse who is a member, or have a parent who was a native of North Carolina. If you're at least 21, know two members, and meet one of those qualifications, you're in. Dues are nominal — \$35 for New York City and surrounding area residents and \$25 for non-residents.

"We've been having a great deal of success with younger people as they move to New York, and there are a lot of younger people who move to New York," says Robert Hackney, a native of Wilson who serves as the society's president. "We try our very best to let them know that we exist and that we would like very much to have them." Last year the society brought in approximately 100 new members.

"Because there's so much going on in New York with the arts, publishing, and finance, the city draws people from all over the world, and North Carolina is no exception," says Charlie Higgins, a native of Charlotte who is on the society's board of trustees. "We just have a great group of folks from North Carolina who are here, and it's really a fun social group."

#### BARBECUE IN BROOKLYN?

The society holds three social functions a year, including a cocktail party in the fall, a dinner dance in December, and a spring barbecue. Held on the first Friday in December, the dinner dance has been going on for more than 100 years.

"The dinner dance is one of those nights that everybody looks forward to all year, and it's a great chance to see new and old friends," says Higgins.

At the dinner dance the society honors someone who has made a significant contribution to North Carolina. Past honorees include Charles Kuralt, Loonis McGlohon, Hugh Morton, and most recently Paul Rizzo. You can bet your Cheerwine that there's also some shagging going on at the dinner dance.

The spring barbecue is a more casual affair, and perhaps a little tastier, as it is catered by Bill Ellis Barbecue of Wilson. Ellis sends up a large truck from his fleet for the event, which is held at a member's loft in Brooklyn. "For years,

we tried to get [restaurant] people to fly in, and we tried some of the barbecue places here and they're not particularly good, but you do the best you can," says Hackney.

The society also promotes North Carolina-connected events in the city. For instance, this past January the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts [MESDA] in Winston-Salem loaned a featured exhibit to The Winter Antiques Show in New York City. "We did our best to make sure that everybody knew that MESDA was here and that it's a Winston-Salem organization," says Hackney.

But perhaps the best thing the N.C. Society of N.Y. does is gives its members a sense of home. "To me it's a really neat way to get together with a bunch of other people from North Carolina," says Windsor Beaver McKenna, a native of Charlotte and the society's executive secretary. "It's just fun in this huge city to every now and then, three times a year, go to an event where every person there is from North Carolina." □

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# SOCIETY AND THE CITY

For more than 100 years, the North Carolina Society of New York has been making folks in the Big Apple feel right at home.

Written by *Lori K. Tate*