



LINDSEY WRAY | The Roanoke Times

Mel Bryant, a retired Hotel Roanoke maintenance engineer, built his house in 1936 before Brambleton Ave. existed. Here, he holds a photocopy of a Roanoke World-News article about his house.

Times have changed from rabbit-hunting days for Roanoke man

The Bryants' home was nearly finished when it was featured in a July 11, 1936, issue of The Roanoke World-News.

By Lindsey Wray

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Mel Bryant remembers hunting rabbits in the woods around his house before Brambleton Avenue was constructed.

"We enjoyed getting out and chasing rabbits," he said.

Today, a busy road, a church and other houses have replaced the wooded areas that once surrounded Bryant's Southwest Roanoke home.

Bryant, 92, started building his brick house in the Grandin Court area with his wife, **Mary Bryant**, in 1936. The couple met when Mary Bryant was a nurse and Mel Bryant was in the hospital for appendicitis.

With the exception of laying the brick and doing the electrical wiring and plastering, the Bryants did all the work on their house themselves.

"We did a little of everything," Mel Bryant said.

The Bryants' home was

nearly finished when it was featured in a July 11, 1936, issue of The Roanoke World-News.

The couple, according to the article, drew their own plans, borrowed a neighbor's mule to carry supplies and obtained most of their lumber at local sawmills. They rented a concrete mixer for the foundation, and used old newspaper mats — discarded after they were used as forms for metal plates — between the wood framing and brick casing of the house.

Bryant, who was born in Martinsville and grew up in Roanoke, graduated from Jefferson High School in 1931. After working at a filling

station on Patterson Avenue for three years, he began work as a maintenance engineer at Hotel Roanoke in 1937.

Working seven days a week, Bryant earned \$80 a month. His duties included everything from making ice to setting up Christmas trees and he recalled one time when he had to tend to a broken chandelier that almost fell from the ceiling.

"It was quite an operation," he said of taking down the light fixture piece by piece.

Bryant attached an antenna to the top of his house so that he could receive signals on a walkie-talkie from the hotel.

TIMES: 'I can hardly find my way around now,' said Bryant

FROM 5

when there were maintenance emergencies — such as the chandelier problem — that occurred in the middle of the night.

A Chrysler show in 1956 and a cattle show in the hotel ballroom are among the other hotel events that stand out in Bryant's mind.

"He has so many fond memories and a passion for the hotel," said **Gary Walton**, area vice president and general manager of Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center.

Walton, who has been at Hotel Roanoke for about 10 years, met Bryant at a softball

game where Walton's children and Bryant's great-grandchildren were playing. He invited Bryant to the hotel to meet the engineering team and said it's been great to listen to Bryant's stories about the hotel to hear how things have changed over the years.

"I can hardly find my way around now," Bryant said of the changes that have been made to Hotel Roanoke since he retired.

Bryant also changed the way his own house looked when he remodeled in the 1950s. Moving a mattress from room to room, he said, allowed him and his wife to

remain in the house while making changes such as adding more electrical outlets.

After triple-bypass surgery in November, Bryant still lives in the house that he and his wife — who died in 1994 — built nearly 70 years ago. Though he doesn't like having to wait to make a turn onto Brambleton, Bryant said he's glad to still be living in the house and to have had the opportunity to watch Roanoke's history firsthand — both around his house and at Hotel Roanoke — over the years.

"Things change," he said. "It's interesting."

HAVE YOU HEARD?



FROM 5

MILITARY

Air Force 2nd Lt. **Mark Buchy**, son of **Phil and Mary Buchy** of Hanging Rock, has graduated in the top 15 percent of his T-1 jet training class and has received his pilot's wings at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas. He will now train to pilot the USAF C-17 aircraft out of McCord AFB in Seattle. Buchy graduated from Roanoke Catholic School in 1997 and the University of Virginia in 2002.

Mark Buchy

RANGERS: Parks program covers five SOL requirements

FROM 7

they will be learning more about in the coming weeks, Manns said.

"I love the way he brings the science to life with the kids," she said.

The National Park Service has formed partnerships with at least three other Roanoke Valley elementary schools, ensuring that park rangers

give presentations in every classroom at those schools. Some teachers request the program on an individual basis. Either way, the program is free and dates are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Wray said he is booked for the rest of this school year.

Though each grade level has a different lesson, ranging

from topics such as habitats to the geology of the Blue Ridge Parkway, all emphasize park preservation.

"This is their environment. This is the area they live in," said **John Finnerty**, East Salem Elementary principal. "I think it's a good opportunity for the kids to get a little closer to nature."

SO MANY
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