

Noteworthy from North:

Famous entertainer Eartha Kitt was born in North, S.C. on Jan. 17, 1927. At the age of 8 years old, she moved to New York where she got her entertainment career started. Read more about Eartha Kitt at her website: [www.earthakitt.com](http://www.earthakitt.com).

## North native Eartha Kitt: From tears to triumph

By PHIL SARATA, T&D Staff Writer Saturday, December 27, 2008

A native of North who left for New York City at the age of 8, entertainer Eartha Kitt reconnected with her South Carolina roots a decade before her death.

Some residents of the Orangeburg County town where Kitt was born remember the visit 11 years ago by the woman who gained international acclaim as a dancer, singer and actress.

Then-mayor Neal Livingston honored Kitt with the key to the city during the visit.

"She had a bad feeling about her childhood," Livingston said. "But she was a real lady. We gave her the key to the city after a little ceremony and she was able to see some of her old friends and family. She was real nice to us and sent the town a nice letter afterwards.

"Everyone in North was proud of what she had accomplished and so was I. She went up there and did well. I told her that, too, even though we didn't have a real one-on-one talk."

Beverly Jamison, daughter of late North council member Sybil Jamison, who presented Kitt with a plaque during the 1997 visit, said Kitt visited her grandmother's grave during the trip.

"We took her back to the spot where her homestead had been," Jamison said. "It was also the first chance she'd had to visit her grandmother's grave at St. Peter AME Church since the funeral. As I remember, she was excited and happy that she was able to visit that site. There was also a woman in the crowd, Mildred Amaker, who said she and Ms. Kitt had played together as children.

"I don't remember if it was that same night but sometime during that visit I saw her perform at the Township Auditorium in Columbia. My mother, the mayor and I went with some local folks. I thought she was delightful and I enjoyed her performance. I don't remember everything she did that night but she did her famous kitten purr. Ms. Kitt even gave my mother something with a personal autograph."

Current North Mayor Earl Jeffcoat said, "I believe it made people here feel good about being from North because Kitt was from here. She had made a name for herself and she was a great entertainer."

In her 1956 autobiography "Thursday's Child," Kitt said of her early life in North, "My first scene in life was a long, dark, dusty road. I could not see the end of it, for it just went down, down, down — to end in what to me seemed like hell."

Former T&D staff writer Thomas Brown, who wrote about Kitt's visit in 1997, said "Eartha was a diva and she played that up. Actually, the connection I had was with her daughter, Kitt Shapiro. I had met her in Washington a number of years previously and that's how I learned about her mother."

One of Brown's articles dealt with Kitt's appearance at a tribute held at Benedict College in Columbia in which Kitt was quoted as saying, "I had no idea how I'd feel coming home. I left in tears but it seems I've come home to love. I have been in over 108 countries and today you make me inextricably proud to say that I'm a South Carolinian."

Rosa Mavins Bogar, a native of Orangeburg who has lived in Minneapolis, Minn., for 41 years but returns often to the area, met Kitt in the early 1980s. Bogar also used Kitt's third autobiography, "Confessions of a Sex Kitten," as part of her Ancestral Wrap project presented in Orangeburg in 2003.

"I first met Eartha after she performed in Minneapolis and I told her I was from Orangeburg," Bogar said. "We talked a great deal about our lives back in South Carolina and every time we talked about it she would cry.

"Later she wrote me a card in which she said, 'Thank God for good fathers, if not good mothers.' I was really confused about what that meant until I read her autobiography where she said her mother gave her away.

"She pulled herself up by her bootstraps and made something of her life."