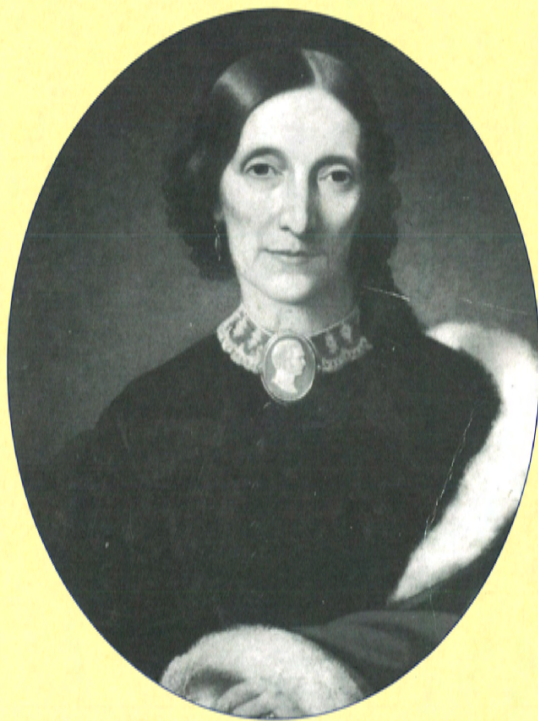


# Proceedings

of the Rockbridge Historical Society



Volume XII  
Rockbridge Historical Society



# Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society

Volume XII  
1995-2002



Larry I. Bland, Editor

Lexington, Virginia  
2003

Front cover photos:

William D. Washington's portraits of Superintendent and Mrs. Francis H. Smith. Painted from life and intended as family portraits rather than formal institutional pictures. (Courtesy of Colonel A. H. Morrison and Miss Anne Morrison).

Back cover photo:

The fire at Lexington Presbyterian Church, July 18, 2000. (Courtesy of the *News-Gazette*.)

*Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 49-31386*

ISSN 0080-3383

Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society, Volume 12.

Copyright © 2003

Individual essay authors retain the copyright to their work.

Copyright to the layout, design, front, and back matter is retained by the Rockbridge Historical Society, Box 514, Lexington, Virginia, 24450-0514

Printed in the United States of America  
by United Book Press, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland.

# Contents

<i>Buckle Down Winsocki: Washington and Lee University During World War II</i> I. Taylor Sanders II . . . . .	1
<i>Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend</i> William M. S. Rasmussen . . . . .	15
<i>The Dairies of Rockbridge County</i> Louise K. Dooley . . . . .	29
<i>Gentlemen, Irregulars, and Eclectics: Who Practised Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Rockbridge County, Virginia?</i> Andrew C. Holman . . . . .	45
<i>The Presbyterian Church in Rockbridge County: A Panel Discussion on the 250th Anniversary of Its Establishment</i> Katharine L. Brown and I. Taylor Sanders, II . . . . .	63
<i>Evolution of the Rockbridge Regional Library: Reminiscences on the Fiftieth Anniversary . . . . .</i>	75
<i>Two Senators from Virginia: Harry Byrd and Willis Robertson, A Political Partnership</i> Ronald Heinemann . . . . .	109
<i>Virginia Military Institute's Professional Post Band, 1839–1947</i> John A. Brodie . . . . .	121
<i>Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and the Natural Bridge of Virginia</i> David W. Coffey . . . . .	135
<i>Down the Paper Trail: Manuscript Collections of Rockbridge County</i> Charles A. Bodie . . . . .	147
<i>The Early History of the Paxton House at Glen Maury</i> Francis W. Lynn . . . . .	163
<i>William D. Washington: Before and After The Burial of Latané</i> Winifred Hadsel . . . . .	177

<i>Cheap, Quick and Easy: Concrete Block, Metal Ceilings, Linoleum, and Lincrusta in Local Buildings</i>	
Pamela H. Simpson . . . . .	217
<i>James McDowell, Builder of Col Alto and Virginia Statesman</i>	
Charles A. Bodie . . . . .	237
<i>Henry St. George Tucker, 1853–1932</i>	
David W. Coffey . . . . .	243
<i>Col Alto, Some Comments on the Architecture</i>	
Pamela H. Simpson . . . . .	249
<i>Three Days in Lexington: The Uninvited Visitors of June 1864</i>	
Richard C. Halseth . . . . .	257
<i>Reconstruction and Redemption in Lexington</i>	
David W. Coffey . . . . .	273
<i>Militia Leadership in Dunmore’s War, 1774</i>	
Colin P. Mahle . . . . .	301
<i>A Grand Tour of Virginia Landmarks in Landscape</i>	
William M. S. Rasmussen . . . . .	319
<i>Two County Industries: Bontex and Lees Carpets</i>	
Charles Kostelni, Buck Leslie, and Henry Hatcher . . . . .	345
<i>“Our Once Glorious Union”: The Secession Crisis in Lexington, Virginia, 1860–1861</i>	
Meridith G. Hays . . . . .	353
<i>The Virginia Drive-In Movie Era</i>	
James R. Kopp . . . . .	383
<i>An Ill-Fated Endeavor: Lexington, Rockbridge County, and the Valley Railroad, 1866–1881</i>	
John R. Hildebrand . . . . .	397
<i>Two Centuries of Ink: The News-Gazette Celebrates Two Hundred Years of Publication</i>	
Matt Paxton, Jerry Harris, and Doug Chase . . . . .	411
<i>History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1796–1899</i>	
David R. Rossi . . . . .	433

Contents

---

*History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1900–2002*  
William J. Matkins .....461

*The “New Deal” Comes to Rockbridge*  
David W. Coffey .....481

*“The Staple of Our Country”: Wheat in the Regional Farm  
Economy of the Nineteenth-Century Valley of Virginia*  
Kenneth E. Koons .....505

Society Meetings, 1995–2002 .....539

Index .....543





# Buckle Down Winsocki: Washington and Lee University During World War II

Taylor Sanders



URING that fall term 1939, Washington and Lee men were not oblivious to the news that Europe and Asia were tearing themselves apart. In fact, they followed international developments closely. The faculty, some of whom remembered 1914, made a special effort, particularly in history courses, to keep their pupils abreast of the world scene. That autumn saw frequent comments in class on contemporary politics and an expanded series of guest lectures on campus. Most notably, in October 1939, a German sociologist appeared in Lexington to offer his view on the Nazi movement. Student writers in the *Ring-tum-Phi* stressed international affairs. For example, Bill “Buck” Buchanan, later a politics professor at Washington and Lee, wrote a series on the “Conflagration in Europe.”

When the freshmen graduated four years later in 1943, they regarded themselves as the “class that never saw W and L as it was in a world at peace.” Despite the shadow of war, the patterns of college life carried on in traditional ways, and the late 1930s had been good ones for Washington and Lee. By 1939, thanks largely to defense spending, the country began to muscle its way out of the depression. For W&L this translated into a larger number of well-qualified applicants—perhaps the best prepared in its history. Several major gifts, including the Doremus legacy, helped the school assume a sounder financial footing.

---

I. Taylor Sanders II, Ph.D., is professor of history and University Historian at Washington and Lee University. His presentation was made on April 20, 1992, at Northen Auditorium in Leyburn Library at W&L.

The nineteen social fraternities continued to serve new Minks. Freshmen soon learned that if they wanted to eat, they better pledge a house quickly. Literary societies, debate, publications, and the prestigious Cotillion Club flourished. For that gregarious young generation with its optimistic, can-do spirit, new clubs continued to emerge, such as the new pre-med society. Organizations, new and old, simply added a counterpoint to the rhythm of traditional campus life of fall weekends, football, and classes, with the famed W&L convertible fleet convoying hordes of Minks down the road to neighboring women's colleges. And that year, 205 of 281 freshmen pledged one of the fraternities on campus.

As was often the case in the school's history, prospects for the football team were gloomy. Spirits rose with our defeat of West Virginia and with a freshman team (the Brigadiers) who, for the first time in our history, actually defeated powerful Maryland. That October nearly 350 women (then called "girls") invaded the campus for the Opening Ball, and Cy Young resigned as basketball coach to be replaced by a man from Ohio State University.

At the State Theater students joined with Lew Ayers and Lionel Barrymore to learn the *Secret of Dr. Kildare*, and they laughed with the Marx Brothers *At The Circus*. By the new year, students had tapped Kay Kyser to play for the Fancy Dress Ball, set the advance ticket costs at \$9.50, and selected a Kentucky Derby theme. The college told hopeful parents to expect to spend a total of some \$700 per academic year to educate their sons comfortably at W&L.

Perhaps the biggest flap that fall came on September 26, 1939, three weeks after the European democracies declared war on Germany, and as the Nazis were mopping up after their Polish blitzkrieg, when the editor of the *Phi* attacked the *Washington and Lee Swing* as being "clumsy, often pointless and inane."

John Graham, the professor who had composed the song years before, was hurt when confronted with the criticism of his old tune. Yet he had to agree with the editor's aesthetic judgment. He noted, however, that he could not see the alumni agreeing with a change in the school song. The next week the student newspaper reported support for Graham and the song with banner headlines: "LEAVE THE SWING ALONE" and announced that the presidents of the E.C. and Omicron Delta Kappa service organization strongly supported the "Swing."

Normal college life went on unabated during 1939 and into 1940, broken only by a two-month long epidemic of robberies in fraternity houses, the long-awaited appearance of the film *Gone With The Wind*, which blew into town, as students said, on March 11, and the eighth consecutive Mock Political Convention. Graham was thrilled when the 1940 Glee Club became nationally known with a series of victories in singing

competition; and a raucous mock convention followed in October 1940 when W&L students overwhelmingly supported Wendell Willkie for president in a straw poll. But the big news in the fall of 1940 was that Benny Goodman, who was unable to play for the Opening Ball because of illness, had agreed to play at Fancy Dress during the spring of 1941.

The Generals won only two football games in the fall of 1940, with seven losses and a tie, but the game films convinced most Minks that the officials had cheated the Blues out of one crucial touchdown. The wider world of defense policy and big-time sports intruded the next spring, when W&L decided to establish a compulsory Reserve Officers Training Corps unit, and noted tennis champion Fred Perry agreed to coach at W&L.

In September 1941, the school broke all previous attendance records as 486 new students enrolled at the college. A campus poll the next month reported that 30 percent of 803 students still preferred to stay out of the war. This paralleled a national Gallup survey showing that some 70 percent of the American public favored a German defeat. Thirteen students registered no opinion on the matter. Events in the Pacific would change that.

By early December 1941, Woody Herman had just signed on for Fancy Dress, when the news of Pearl Harbor shocked the campus. (In the December 9 *Ring-tum-Phi*, Herman got a 60-point, four-column headline. The news of Pearl Harbor got a 30-point, two-column headline.) Social scientists like to talk about defining social moments, those shocks that radically alter people’s social or cultural environment—that sort of event where years later one remembers exactly where and how the news arrived. That Sunday in December 1941 was such a moment—and it became the defining event for an entire generation.

On that quiet Sunday afternoon, students were preparing for jaunts to the women’s colleges. More studious boys, known as “crammers” or members of the “Sunday afternoon library study team,” headed for McCormick Library. Rumors of Pearl Harbor swept the campus, and soon students had dropped their books, parked their cars, and gathered around radios. Road trips were cancelled. Bull sessions replaced dates as the war, which most students had been expecting, finally arrived. Rather than being immediately galvanized, however, the atmosphere on campus was one of uncertainty as students pondered the fate of the five fellow Minks who had been drafted since September.

The next day, Monday, students checked their mail boxes and called local draft boards. One group, after stopping off at the post office, went across the street to the Corner Grill, sat down at tables, and quietly reviewed their situation. Coins poured into the juke box and over and over again they played the popular song, *Buckle Down Winsocki*. By the

next day, Tuesday, uncertainty gave way to a new feeling, one of “coolness and determination,” and the spirit on campus was “Buckle Down.”

The entire 1942 winter semester reflected that spirit, and advertising in the *Ring-tum-Phi* took on a military flavor. To save gasoline and wear on tires, road trips ended. To avoid flunking out under the automatic rule, which would lead to an immediate draft, students buckled down to their studies. They did this so that they would have some choice as to how they would spend the war. Others signed up for classes in civilian pilot training. All realized that their lives had been changed.

Many members of the class of 1942 look back upon Dr. Francis Pendleton Gaines’s presidential farewell to them at graduation as the most moving moment of their days in Lexington. Dr. Gaines pointed out to them that they were going into a world that they could “not even imagine on that happy day when you first invested your capacities for learning and development into the safekeeping of Washington and Lee. . . . May God bless you and be with you. I should make that prayer for any graduating class, but I assure you that I have in my heart a peculiar sincerity as I utter the words in your behalf.”

He continued to speak, telling them that the task facing them was

greater . . . than any outgoing class has known for many years. I hope you will believe it is a worthy task. It is my confidence that because of your wisdom and your character you will not spend idle hours in remorse that an older generation brought the world to an unhappy situation which you must straighten out. I am sure that because of your faith you will not dishonor yourself by a kind of fatalism in which you say you have just run into bad luck.

On the contrary, I have an assurance that you will know, whatever be the personal sacrifice, that it is your privilege, really and truly, to make a better world. Let me urge that you keep steadfast in your heart a strong purpose for the fulfillment of your own personal dreams, and that whenever this interruption shall cease you will take up again the energetic fulfillment of the plan by which you may live most happily and most usefully. In the meantime, however, as I leave on record this farewell, I remind you that it is a great thing you set forth to do, and I know you will do your part.

Official government policy wisely urged college students to stay in school for the time being. This helped a number of colleges that otherwise might have collapsed to survive the first months of crisis. As late as 1943, federal policy was that students should not immediately rush to the colors; rather, they should remain on campus where they could “develop qualities of leadership.” Colleges and universities were urged to “provide effective education to meet the needs of technical, scientific, and other professional services.” All this was easier said than done.

Pearl Harbor altered the atmosphere of typical college life swiftly and forever, but structural change came slower and worked itself out during early 1942. At their February meeting, trustees approved a summer session to accelerate graduation, and for the first time in the school's history allowed women to study here during the summer of 1942. This news made a splash in the press when an Associated Press story was featured in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* with a headline: “W&L Goes Sissy.”

Some 286 summer students enrolled in June 1942; twenty-four were women. By the fall of 1942, 187 students had enlisted. By year's end, fourteen alumni had been killed in action, most from the classes of 1939 through 1942. We began the 1942–43 academic year with some 300 fewer students than the normal 900. By the end of the year, we had only 300 students left. Needless to say, campus social life was strictly curtailed.

In December 1942, the trustees cancelled football for the duration, and within three months the *Ring-tum-Phi* suspended publication until the war ended. Instead of name bands, local groups played for student dances. Flowers on corsages were replaced by war savings stamps. By that spring the president of the spring dance set had joined up. So had all but one of the junior class officers, and the yearbook that year was a tribute to the more than eighteen hundred alumni who were engaged in the struggle.

Graduation 1943 is still etched in that class's memory. The class had been hard hit by attrition and the accelerated academic program. When the new graduates gathered in front of Lee Chapel at sunrise after graduation to sing “College Friendships,” it was an emotional scene. Moreover, the administrators were facing a prospect of fewer than one hundred students enrolling for the fall term.

Dr. Gaines could not afford to remain emotional for long. He faced a crisis. As with many American colleges of the time, we confronted possible extinction. Gaines worked overtime to get some sort of government program here and, aided apparently by Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, a VMI graduate who had fond memories of Lexington, the president succeeded. The program at W&L, together with the influx of GIs enrolled in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at VMI, changed the town. One of the participants at VMI, Gore Vidal, who later won fame as a writer, studied with Colonel Carrington Tutwiler. Another ersatz ASTP Keydet was the comedian Mel Brooks. When asked years later what he had done during the war, Mel responded with zeal: “I went to Virginia Military Institute and learned to become a Confederate cavalry officer.”

*It's In The* **CARDS**



For the most unpopular fellow in the class.



For the best dressed fellow in the class.



For the fellow voted most likely to succeed.



For the class politician.



For you and me and the rest of the class.

*Premonitions of the future from a 1942 Southern Collegian*

During much of 1942, Gaines, who was always an effective salesman, lobbied the Army to establish some sort of program on campus. He urged the military to consider what an ideal place this campus was for the Army. Classroom space, available faculty, indeed, the whole atmosphere of a college is aimed, as he said, at pushing students to cover “swiftly a large program of intensive study.” Lexington was the perfect place. Its two colleges had the classrooms—the government would not have to build them. The Army could have full use of the library, gym, swimming pools, tennis courts, and lab space. Furthermore, Lexington had medical facilities in place.

His case, presented during 1942 and later when it looked as if the school might move, struck a chord. We signed a contract in mid-1942 that insured W&L’s survival. Thus, Washington and Lee welcomed the School for Special and Morale Services. The official purpose of the School, which had been located at Fort Meade, Maryland, was to devise, plan, and supervise “practicable activities for combat troops in Theaters of Operations domestic and overseas,” and to “instruct and train Army personnel in the approved purposes, doctrines, materials, methods and operative procedures in all phases of the duties and responsibilities of the Special Services Branch.” That branch consisted of combat officers who would command units close to the lines and deliver recreation, games, movies, reviews, shows, and other morale support for the fighting men.

A special propaganda room in the library supported that part of the program aimed at training officers to answer questions that might arise among front line troops: What are we doing here? Why are we fighting? Why is Hitler so dangerous? Is this really my war?

The administration made a rental arrangement with the Army, leasing virtually the entire campus to the military. We charged the government 99 cents per day for each person living on campus and 49 cents for each soldier living off campus. In November 1942, we advised the freshmen that they would have to vacate Graham-Lees dormitory by 6 P.M. on November 28. Students moved their clothes and baggage into private homes as the troops moved into the dorm. President Gaines advised his students that this arrangement might save the freshmen as much as four dollars per month. Classes at the Army school began on December 7, one year to the day after Pearl Harbor.

Other than the construction of Washington Annex behind Washington Hall, which served as the enlisted men’s mess hall, the Army used regular campus facilities. Tucker Hall and Robinson Hall became the headquarters. The finance section moved into Newcomb Hall. Reid Hall was used for classroom space and a lounge. Dormitories served as barracks, a PX, and an officer’s mess. A home on Letcher Avenue became

THE SS SCHOOL NEWS

"Our Nation's Mightiest Weapon!"



*A cartoon from the W&L Special Services School newspaper depicts the purpose of the operation—improving troop morale.*

the Officer's Club, and the motor pool was established below the gym at the corner of Washington and Nelson Streets. The college and the school shared McCormick Library, which also housed, under armed guard, a moving van's worth of valuable documents from the U.S. National Archives. Washington Hall was the focus for normal college activities.

Many members of the faculty had already left to join the war effort. Others who remained threw themselves into the work of the Army School. Dean Frank Gilliam was the first liaison officer. Rupert Latture



stepped in to become W&L's Dean of Students, Director of Housing, and Buildings and Grounds Director. Dr. Allen Moger became Director of Testing at the Army School.

Initially, the personnel included 20 civilians, 60 enlisted men, and 90 officers. At its peak it employed 125 civilians, 100 enlisted men, and 90 officers. Over the weeks, quirks smoothed out and difficulties eased, and by early 1944, the School for Special Services was running full tilt. Some twelve hundred young officer trainees moved through the program swiftly, in twenty-eight days, completing some 192 hours of instruction.

They learned to run a PX, produce variety shows, organize games, and conduct physical training. Each Sunday evening they presented matinees at Doremus Gym for local crowds of productions like *USA, OK* or *Hi, Yank*. Among the participants were David Wayne, who presented Broadway-level shows, and Red Skelton, who kept Lexingtonians rolling in the aisles long before he became a famous television comic. Melvin Douglas and Lanny Ross thrilled townsfolk with their talents. One instructor, Norm Lord, grew to love this place so much, he decided to live here after the war.

Although the School provided some of the best entertainment Lexington has ever enjoyed, its aim was deadly serious. Trainees learned to relieve troops of boredom, and keep combat soldiers happy, in touch with their families, and informed of war aims and news in a way that countered the Axis war machine's propaganda. Although the program was strictly military, the atmosphere was open. Lexingtonians enjoyed the concerts, shows, and symposiums, and many local people participated in the programs, which in time expanded to several sections dealing with recreation, orientation, education, and personnel services, training officers to draw up wills, handle insurance issues, and even ameliorate family disputes. In time, the program's increased scope required quartering three



MISSION: ALWAYS KEEP THE LEVEL HIGH

or four troopers per dorm room, and the basement of Lee Chapel was used as a lecture hall eight hours each day.

Some years ago, one student, Will Tankersley, wrote an excellent essay on the program, in which he discussed Dr. Moger's testing methods. Dr. Moger, for many years professor of history at Washington and Lee and a prime mover in the Rockbridge Historical Society, ran a testing program that was both rigorous and humane. Students took up to four exams during the course. But the need for personnel was so crucial that some men who failed the tests eventually graduated from the program, especially if they had talent. Dr. Moger reported that Red Skelton, for example, who never rose above the rank of private because he was happy where he was, "couldn't pass any exam devised by the mind of man." He was certified, however, because of his show business skills.

During this period, Dr. Gaines's task was not easy and his job no laughing matter. In addition to trying to keep his now very small college afloat and traveling around the country using his oratorical skills in the War Bond effort, he found himself constantly having to stroke the Army in order to keep it here. His job was made more difficult by some of our alumni and by the widespread racial prejudice that marked them and plagued that era.

Some of our "old grads" grew concerned when they heard that black troops were being trained at Washington and Lee. One of them was a Virginia newspaper editor who, in the words of another alumnus who strongly supported Gaines, was quite "rabid" on the race issue. The matter vexed the president, especially between March and November 1943. In March, African-American newspapers around the country published a story that four Negroes would receive diplomas in Lee Chapel. The story said that "history will be made Saturday when, for the first time, four Negroes—the first ever to attend a major White College in the South"—will graduate. The paper reported that the men "have been attending the old Virginia College and living on campus, along with white officers."

Stories like this continued to surface, and, by November, an Atlanta alumnus wrote Gaines, informing him that "loose talk is going around" town that colored girls were attending dances at the college and that blacks and whites were dancing together in Lexington. Some of the letters were insulting, sharply worded, and, looking back on them now, totally inappropriate, if not pig-headed. They also nearly cost W&L the Army School. At least one alumnus stepped over the bounds when he protested to Washington about the presence of black students on campus. The general in charge of the program informed Gaines that unless he muzzled the protesters, the government would cancel the contract. The Army school would be transferred to Washington State University.

Gaines, whose skill as a letter writer matched his talents as an orator, took on the protesters. His letters developed consistent themes. After smoothing any ruffled feathers, he pointed out that the university was renting out its campus to a government school and that W&L had no choice as to who attended the program, nor did the school control its content. Then he carefully stressed that no Lexingtonians—and they knew the program best—had voiced criticism.

Then he pulled up his howitzers. He reminded the alumni that the country was in a national emergency. He informed them that “Negroes as well as Whites” are offering their lives in the nation’s service. He explained that ours was the only school in the country that offered such a program, the aims of which he carefully explained. He stressed that “Negro units in our fighting forces need the same kind of morale leadership in the hands of trained specialists that white forces need. He said that numbers of African Americans in Lexington were small, but he also stressed that they “have to get this training at our school or those Negro units would not get that type of leadership.” Gaines, who knew the South and its problems as well as anyone, was always informative, honest, and firm. And in time the issue died down.

To appreciate the pressures he faced, remember that during this period, through the summer and into the autumn of 1943, Gaines was “drafted,” as he said, to chair the Virginia War Bonds program. He wrote that the scope of the program, which was “to raise the biggest amount of money in history,” caused him “one uninterrupted headache.” When he took over the effort during the summer, he found that the two agencies in charge—the War Savings Staff and the Victory Loan Committee for special drives—were being merged and the combined operation was in an “incredible mess.” The task meant frequent trips to Richmond and Washington, and culminated in a massive war bonds campaign that began on September 20, 1943.

During this same period, Gaines coped with running his university. One student asserted that W&L had “lost a greater percentage of her student body to the armed forces than any other college.” Summing up, he said: “Everything changed, everything was halved, quartered, or ruled out. Things which had mattered no longer did.” He believed that W&L was of all schools “hardest hit by the war.”

The number of students attending W&L during the war seems incredibly small by today’s standards. From February to August 1945, we awarded a grand total of eight degrees. The administration’s rule of thumb seemed to be that the school would remain open so long as there were one hundred students in attendance. The typical freshman class then numbered some forty boys. The curriculum had to be adjusted and efforts made to offer a full freshman and sophomore program in the col-

lege and Commerce School from 1943 to 1945. Recruitment material stressed that high school graduates at sixteen or seventeen could make their “wisest investment” by attending W&L between the time they completed high school and reached the selective service age of eighteen.

All upper level programs—pre-med, pre-engineering, and journalism—depended on demand. In his messages to the students, many of whom were seventeen-year-olds who had completed high school and were waiting to be called, Gaines stressed those things which had stayed the same: our traditions of warmth and friendliness, our emphasis on the individual, the core of our spiritual heritage, and honor. These still mattered. All else had, indeed, changed.

In December 1942, the trustees captured the school’s spirit when they voted to discontinue intercollegiate sports “until the war is won . . . thus abandoning the battles of the playing field for the greater fight.” Great stress was placed on intramurals and physical education. Running an obstacle course became a major pastime for the boys whose big brothers, only months before, had been running down the road.

A few students were disappointed by the cutbacks, particularly the drastically reduced social life, lack of big name bands, and curtailed graduation ceremonies. One student used the school newspaper to lament the changes. He insisted that since “he and his classmates faced uncertain futures and were in the last year of school, they ought to go out in style with gay dances, caps and gowns . . . and the rest of the things that make up Washington and Lee.”

The case of one fraternity, the Betas, gives the period flavor. On May 8, 1943, Alpha Rho chapter of Beta Theta Pi had its last meeting and passed out of existence when virtually all the members entered the service. After graduation, a handful of brothers remained behind to close down the house. They stored all chapter records, books, and trophies at a local bank, and loaned out the furniture to Lexington homes for safekeeping. The end of an era arrived when the remaining brother turned over the house key to the University Registrar. Two members remained behind for the summer session, but when the last brother graduated and joined the Navy, the chapter was gone. Red Square joined other campus facilities that were turned over to the Army for use by the School of Special Services.

During the closing months of the war, W&L began sending out bulletins urging young Americans to consider their “post-war education” at Washington and Lee. In time, President Gaines could report that about one-third of the school’s living alumni and one-half of the staff were either in uniform or engaged in war work. Among the alumni, 136 were lost in the war.

During the summer of 1945, W&L began to receive inquiries from former faculty members about jobs at postwar Washington and Lee, and we began to gear up for our largest enrollments in history. But Dr. Gaines, ever mindful of the budget, urged all former professors to stay in uniform as long as they could.

It is remarkable how quickly the school got back to normal after World War II. Quick demobilization, spurred on by the “Bring Daddy Home by Christmas” campaign, led to a rapid decline in the number of students at the Special Services program. On June 6, 1946, the Army School pulled up stakes and moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Twenty-two thousand graduates had completed the Army program.

As early as September 1945, veterans began to drift back to college. By second semester, they became more numerous, along with transfer students. In April 1946, the university sanctioned Rush Week. At this stage, many fraternities, including the Betas, had not taken over their old houses completely, although they used the bars and lounges for weekend parties and for Finals Weekend.

By Christmas 1945, the veterans had already organized the campus, aided in part by the new phenomenon of the day, the student wife. In record time, it seems, they had renewed fraternal ties, reinvigorated student government, reformed the Assimilation Committee, re-established prestigious organizations like the Cotillion Club, the White Friars, and the “13” Society, and publications like the *Calyx* and the *Ring-tum-Phi*. In Red Square, the brothers spent much of the summer of 1946 repairing the fraternities. Some found that military occupation of Red Square had not been easy on the houses. They returned to discover broken doors, holes and cracks in the walls, wallpaper ripped, paint cracked, and floors scratched and worn. As one returning vet reported, the floors had to be sanded and finished throughout the whole house, because “for two and a half years of GI shoes, without protective covering of any kind, ruined them.” When fall term began in 1946, the houses were in shape for Rush Week which ended on September 22.

The Beta alumni secretary, Stew Epley, a decorated Air Corps veteran and later treasurer of Washington and Lee, reported on such things to Alpha Rho chapter alumni. It is clear, however, that hanging over a busy campus, one that was full of life, was a shadow: the fond memories of brothers who had not returned from the war. The Betas lost three: Doug Jamieson, killed in December 1944 while serving with the 78th Division; “Hoot” Gibson, late of the Seventh Army, lost in France; and William Hood, killed during the Italian campaign.

Those who did return, or who enrolled for the first time, found a university that was dedicated to “the reconstruction of its normal life and academic program as speedily as possible.” An accelerated program,

including summer school, allowed students to begin work in September, February, or June, and in some cases, in the middle of terms, November 15, April 1, or July 20. The school buckled down to give veterans the opportunity to complete college with dispatch, and an average cost for a comfortable year at the college, including tuition, books, room, board, and incidental expenses was tabulated at just over \$800.

In the autumn of 1946, the football team reappeared after a four-year hiatus. It reflected the tone of the student body and was made up mainly of freshmen. It faced some powerful competition from schools that had continued football during the war, and it employed a fast-paced, gamble-filled T-formation that scored more points than any Washington and Lee team since 1929. It rolled up the highest offensive yardage totals in the nation—and it only won two games.

That team serves as a metaphor for that generation of Washington and Lee men and the W&L spirit in general during the war. Like the university during the war, the fellows who came back after the conflict displayed a spirit that runs like a thread through the history of this place: a willingness to scratch, to struggle, and to persevere; to buckle down, to prosper, to survive.

# Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend

William M. S. Rasmussen



FEW figures in American history are better known or better loved than Pocahontas. She has been called the mother of our country, the counterpart to George Washington, the Father of our country. During the Civil War, the Confederacy printed a \$100 bill which had her picture on one side and Washington on the other. She has even been called America's Joan of Arc because of her saint-like virtue, as seen in her willingness to risk her life for a noble cause. Her story has been of interest to Americans of almost every generation and embellished to such an extent that the young Powhatan girl has become mythical. A legend has developed around her.

During the 400th anniversary of the birth of Pocahontas in 1995, the Virginia Historical Society mounted a major exhibition in Richmond, "Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend." The chief purpose of the exhibition was to separate the few facts about the life of Pocahontas from the legend. To this end, the exhibition identified the major episodes in the life of Pocahontas and, after presenting what is known about these events from historical sources, showed how various artists have interpreted the scanty facts.

---

**William M. S. Rasmussen**, Ph.D., Curator of Art at the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia., presented a slide lecture at the Rockbridge Historical Society on January 23, 1995, at Evans Dining Hall, Washington and Lee University. Rasmussen and Robert S. Tilton, professor of American literature at Queens College in New York, were co-curators of the exhibition, "Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend," which opened at the Virginia Historical Society on October 24, 1994, and closed on April 30, 1995. Rasmussen and Tilton were also co-authors of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. The tape-recorded talk to the Society's meeting and portions of the catalogue have been condensed for this publication by Winifred Hadsel.

By way of introduction, the exhibition displayed copies of the famous watercolors done by John White, a talented English artist who visited Roanoke Island in 1585–86 and depicted a native American culture that was probably similar to that later described by John Smith.

As shown in White's watercolors, a Roanoke Island girl wore, after the age of twelve, a deerskin apron, with a mantle draped over one shoulder in winter. She was also heavily tattooed and wore multiple necklaces as well as bracelets and earrings. White's pictures also indicate that the women had a physically demanding work load. They were responsible for the arduous task of house building for their families. Since there were no instruments in their stone age culture, they relied on tools made of stones and shells. The women also did all the farming, prepared the food (as well as the pots it was cooked in), wove the mats that furnished the houses, and made the tribe's deerskin clothing.

Specific information about Pocahontas herself comes chiefly from the history published in 1624 by John Smith, a remarkable man who had experienced more adventure before he set foot in Virginia than most people dream of. He had fought in the Hungarian wars against the Turks and won hand-to-hand combats with Turkish soldiers. After being wounded in battle, he had been captured and sold into slavery, but escaped by killing his master. Under the aegis of the Virginia Company, he made his way to Virginia, where his abilities quickly made him the actual, if not the nominal, leader of the expedition. He was one of the few colonists who learned to speak the Algonquian language. Above all, Smith was sufficiently shrewd to understand the importance of recognizing the cultural differences between the English and the native Americans.

### The Rescue Scene

It is Smith's account, in his *Generall Historie*, that furnishes the historical basis for the 1607 episode in Pocahontas' life known as "The Rescue of Captain John Smith." According to this account, Smith was exploring along what is now known as the Chickahominy River, when he was captured by Powhatan Indians and taken before Chief Powhatan himself. Smith's account of what ensued is brief:

Two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could layd hands on him [Smith], dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines. Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death: whereat the Emperour was contented he should live.





*Fig. 7. Engraving by Robert Vaughan, “King Powhatan Commands C. Smith To Be Slayne, His Daughter Pokahontas Beggs His Life,” published in John Smith’s *Generall Historie* (1624). Virginia Historical Society, photograph by Katherine Wetzel.*

During the years following this account, many artists interpreted the dramatic event. The first effort was made by Robert Vaughan, who made an engraving that appeared in Smith’s *Historie* of 1624. In this work, Vaughan established the convention of depicting Pocahontas as a quiet figure extending her arm protectively over Smith’s prone body. However, Vaughan’s use of a crowded hall as the setting for the scene was not followed by other artists. (Fig. 7. All illustrations in this essay are from the exhibition catalog, and the figures refer to that publication.)

By the early 1800s, the story of the rescue of John Smith had become well known in the fiction, drama, and the popular histories of the period. So widespread was the appeal of the rescue scene, that it was chosen for inclusion in the decoration of the United States Capitol. In 1825, an Italian sculptor, Antonio Capellano, was commissioned to make a bas-relief of the subject, and his bold carving was placed in a space high above the western door of the rotunda.



*Fig. 13. Lithograph by Christian Inger, Smith Rescued by Pocahontas (1870). Virginia Historical Society, photograph by Katherine Wetzel.*

The rescue was also the subject of a number of popular prints during the nineteenth century. In these prints, Pocahontas tends to be petite, beautiful, and seemingly Caucasian. A number of accomplished history painters also took up the rescue story. John Gadsby Chapman painted two versions, both using dark shadows and strong highlights. Alonzo Chappell also painted a highly dramatic version of the story and brought in elaborate details which were taken from the culture of the Plains Indians.

Christian Inger surpassed both Chapman and Chappell in the use of colorful but historically inappropriate dress and background features. In an 1870 image, Inger included tepees, a horse, and the elaborate head-dresses of the Plains Indians. (Fig. 13)

But it was a French history painter, Victor Nehlig, who frankly presented the scene as taking place on the western plains. In his "Pocahontas Saving John Smith" (1874), Nehlig also broke the long tradition of showing Pocahontas leaning over Smith and depicted her leaping into action to stay the executioner's hand. More than any previous artists, Nehlig stretched the drama of the rescue scene to the limit and completely removed it from Virginia to the west.

### Pocahontas Warns Captain John Smith

During the year after Pocahontas rescued John Smith, the Jamestown settlement became very short of supplies, and by the winter of 1608–9, was near starvation. John Smith accordingly decided to surprise Powhatan and take his provisions. But before he could carry out his plan, Powhatan became suspicious and left his village, leaving only a group of warriors that was instructed to destroy any English force that appeared. Smith avoided a confrontation with the warriors, but was unable to retreat to his ship, which sat at low tide on the icy James River.

Powhatan then prepared to attack Smith in his quarters and wipe out the settlers, whom he regarded as a threat to his land and independence. At this point, Pocahontas, who was among those who had moved to the woods with her father, intervened. According to Smith's *Historie*,

Pocahontas his dearest jewell and daughter, in that darke night came through the irksome woods, and told our Captain . . . [that] Powhatan . . . would . . . come kill us all . . . with our owne weapons when we were at supper. Therefore if we would live shee wished us presently to bee gone.

This "warning scene" challenged artists because it involved spoken action and, above all, it took place at night. Chapman, who wanted to paint a sequel to his "rescue scene," solved the problem by showing Pocahontas delivering her message as she stands in the firelight of Smith's hearth.

Chapman's idea was carried further in an outstanding painting of 1850 by Edwin White. White had studied painting in Düsseldorf, where there was a vogue for Rembrandt, and his "Pocahontas Informing John Smith of a Conspiracy of the Indians" is very much in the tradition of Rembrandt's paintings of Biblical scenes. Extreme contrasts of light and dark produced by the firelight create a very dramatic effect, and details which might have proved distracting are obscured by dark shadows. (Fig. 16)

### The Abduction of Pocahontas

The third episode took place four years later, shortly after John Smith left the colony. In April 1613, Pocahontas was visiting the Patowomeck Indians on the Potomac River, when an English navigator named Samuel Argall learned of her presence and kidnapped her. Unsure as how best to make use of his captive, Argall took Pocahontas on board his ship and, according to Samuel Purchas' contemporary account, "repayred with all speed to Sir T[homas] Gates, to know of him



*Fig. 16. Oil painting by Edwin White, Pocahontas Informing John Smith of a Conspiracy of the Indians (c. 1850). Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. William Maury Hill, photograph by Katherine Wetzel.*

upon what condition he would conclude this peace, and what he would demand.”

Pocahontas’ arrival in Jamestown was depicted by a canvas of c. 1910 by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, a prolific history painter of the Colonial Revival period. In a romantic painting, Ferris used the stately figure of Gates to embody Anglo-Saxon culture. Pocahontas, for her part, stands gracefully near the center of the painting and dramatically describes the treatment she has received from Captain Argall. Argall stands on the left and, according to notes Ferris made about the painting, is supposed to be seen as a crude “freebooter” who stands on a lower moral plane than the other protagonists. The majestic scale of Argall’s ship, the colorful costumes, and the interaction between Pocahontas and Gates invite the viewer to see a memorable historical event as a scene in a pageant. (Fig. 18.)

Since Powhatan did not meet the ransom demands, Pocahontas remained in British hands. During this period, John Rolfe, a twenty-eight year old widower, taught Pocahontas to speak English more clearly, and instructed her in Christianity.



*Fig. 18. Oil painting by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, The Abduction of Pocahontas (c. 1910). Courtesy of William E. Ryder, photograph by Katherine Wetzel.*

### **The Baptism of Pocahontas**

Some time after her capture, in April 1613, Pocahontas was baptized in an Anglican church that stood either in a settlement now referred to as the Henricus Site near Richmond, or in Jamestown. Since no details of the event were recorded, artists' depiction of the scene are wholly imaginary. Most famous among these works is the huge “Baptism of Pocahontas” that Chapman was commissioned to paint in 1836 as one of the panels in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.

Chapman was given this important commission because there was support in Congress at the time for a Virginia subject for one of the scenes in the rotunda. Many New Englanders had been claiming that they had laid the moral and intellectual foundations of the American republic, while Virginia had contributed nothing of value. A painting showing the baptism of Pocahontas was seen as a suitable means of placating Virginia, for it would not only show that Virginia was older than New England, but had played a part in Christianizing the Indians.

Despite the absence of historical details about the christening, Chapman wanted to achieve a kind of historical accuracy, and sailed for Eng-



*Fig. 20. Oil painting by John Gadsby Chapman, The Baptism of Pocahontas (1836-40). U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.*

land in search of suitable models, costumes, furniture, and the paraphernalia used in an Anglican baptism. In connection with the church itself, Chapman took enormous liberties and made it into a monumental edifice such as he had seen in England, but which did not exist in Virginia. The painting also had no historical basis for including Indians among the witnesses, but Chapman put a number of them in the painting in order to make the point that Pocahontas played a role in improving relations between the Anglo-Americans and the Indians. (Fig. 20.)

### **The Wedding of Pocahontas**

What is perhaps best known from the documentary record of the marriage of Pocahontas is the uncertainty that beset the bridegroom. During Pocahontas' captivity, John Rolfe declared that he "had bin in love with [her] and she with him," but he was hesitant to pursue marriage. In a long letter to Gov. Sir Thomas Dale, Rolfe agonized over what he perceived to be a moral dilemma. He attempted to convince himself that he was not motivated by "the unbridled desire of carnal affection," but was acting "for the good of his plantation, for the honour



*Fig. 24. Oil painting by Henry Brueckner, The Marriage of Pocahontas (1855). Courtesy of the New York State Office of General Services, New York State Executive Mansion, Albany New York.*

of our countrie, for the glory of God, for my owne salvation, and for the coverting to the true knowledge of God and Jesus Christ an unbeleieving creature, namely Pokahuntas.” Dale sanctioned the marriage as being “for the good of the Plantation,” and the wedding took place in April 1614 in some small undistinguished wood structure at Jamestown or the Henricus Site.

The famous depiction of this episode was painted by Henry Brueckner in 1855. It is a large painting (nearly six feet long), intended by the artist as the basis for an engraving which, he correctly believed, would be popular and sell well. Like Chapman’s interpretation of the baptism scene, Brueckner’s view of the wedding is largely imaginary. Like Chapman, moreover, Brueckner shows the scene as taking place in a grand interior that is based on sheer fantasy.

In the Brueckner painting, Rolfe is portrayed as a buoyant figure and Pocahontas as a thoroughly domesticated, modest, and Anglicized woman. The artist also used his imagination in deciding who attended the wedding. Some of his guests seem probable enough (Sir Thomas Dale), and there is documentary evidence that one of Pocahontas’ uncles and two of her brothers were also there. But there are some flagrant mistakes, notably in the inclusion (just below the clergyman) of the first Mrs. Rolfe. (Fig. 24)



Fig. 5. Engraving by Simon van de Passe, Pocahontas (1616). Published in John Smith's *Generall History* (1624). *Virginia Historical Society, photograph by Katherine Wetzel.*

Pocahontas's stay in London, the Virginia Company provided her with a small living allowance and saw to it that she was presented to English society.

A contemporary observer, Samuel Purchas, wrote of one of her social appearances:

[Rolfe's] wife did not onely accustome her selfe to civillitie, but still carried her selfe as the Daughter of a King and was accordingly respected . . . I was present, when . . . the Lord Bishop of London, Doctor King entertained her with festivall state and pompe, beyond what I have seene in his great hospitalitie afforded to other Ladies.

In the latter part of 1616, Pocahontas was sketched by Simon van de Passe for an engraving commissioned by the Virginia Company to present an image of their honored guest to the largest possible audience. (Fig. 5)

The present location of the Brueckner painting was one of the discoveries made in the course of organizing the Historical Society's exhibition. The picture was thought to be in the possession of the State of New York, but it took considerable effort to find it upon the third floor of the governor's mansion in Albany.

### Pocahontas in England

Pocahontas's journey to England in 1616–17 was arranged by the Virginia Company. The Company was constantly in search of investors and colonists, and hoped that the civilized and charming Pocahontas, along with her husband and infant son, Thomas, would attract favorable attention and be seen as embodying the potential of the Virginia venture.

During the months of Pocahontas's stay in London, the Virginia Company provided her with a small living allowance and saw to it that she was presented to English society.

A contemporary observer, Samuel Purchas, wrote of one of her social appearances:

[Rolfe's] wife did not onely accustome her selfe to civillitie, but still carried her selfe as the Daughter of a King and was accordingly respected . . . I was present, when . . . the Lord Bishop of London, Doctor King entertained her with festivall state and pompe, beyond what I have seene in his great hospitalitie afforded to other Ladies.

In the latter part of 1616, Pocahontas was sketched by Simon van de Passe for an engraving commissioned by the Virginia Company to present an image of their honored guest to the largest possible audience. (Fig. 5)



The contemporary engraving served as the basis for the dramatic life-size portrait that Richard Norris Brooke painted c. 1901. (Fig. 29) In this work, Brook greatly enlarged the original engraving, filled out the figure of Pocahontas, and presented her as she might have appeared at one of her London social successes. In the picture, she throws her stiff garment back and puts her hands on her hips in the manner of a saucy young woman who is aware of her attractiveness.\*

### Death of Pocahontas

The Rolfes began their return trip to Virginia in the early spring of 1617, but got no further than Gravesend (on the lower Thames), when Pocahontas died of an “unexpected” illness. In March 1617, she was buried in an English churchyard.

John Rolfe returned to Virginia, leaving Thomas in the care of an uncle. Thomas returned to Virginia as an adult, long after the death of his father in 1622. His only



*Fig. 29. Oil painting by Richard Norris Brooke, Pocahontas (c. 1905). Courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; gift of John Barton Payne, photograph by Ron Jennings.*

\* There is a Virginia Military Institute connection here. Brooke was the young drawing instructor who was hired by Supt. Francis H. Smith, in 1871, to teach art following the death of the Institute’s Professor of Fine Arts, Professor William D. Washington. Brook stayed at VMI briefly and then went to France, where he studied painting. When he returned to this country, he set himself up as a portrait painter in Washington, D.C.



*Fig. 26. Oil painting by Junius Brutus Stearns, The Death of Pocahontas (c. 1850). Courtesy of Nicolas Windisch-Graetz.*

child was a daughter and she, in turn, had an only daughter. However, Rolfe's granddaughter married into the Bowling family, and thereafter the descendants multiplied in each generation, thanks to families with twelve to fifteen children. By the next century, there were hundreds of descendants of Pocahontas, and today there are many thousands.

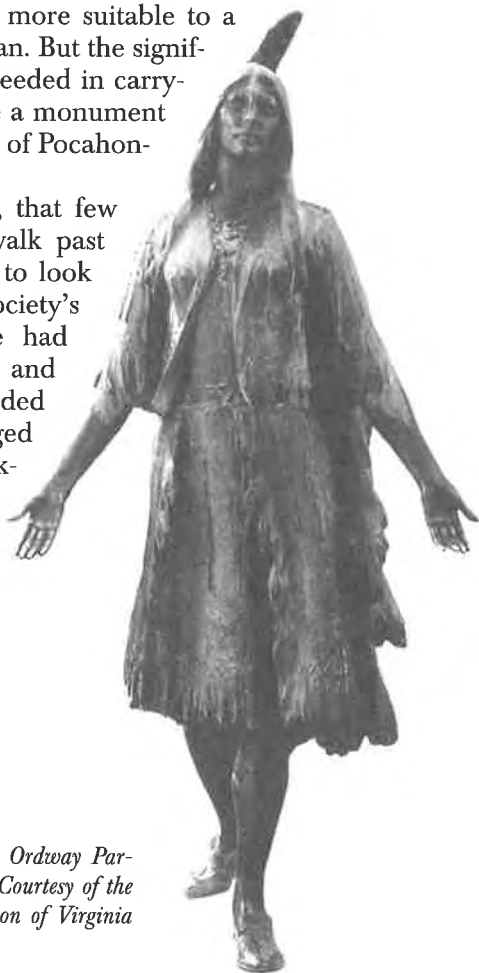
Smith's reference to the death of Pocahontas provides the only details about her final illness. He reported that those who witnessed her death were "joyous to heare and see her make so religious and godly an end."

The death bed scene appealed to the imagination of Junius Brutus Stearns, an accomplished ante-bellum history painter. In c. 1850, with absolutely no facts to go on, Stearns presented the death of a fully Anglicized young woman who had been transformed from her savage origins and thereby made worthy of Christian salvation. His painting provided on canvas the denouement of an exemplary life. Stearns used lush and gleaming fabrics that call to mind Pocahontas's high social position dur-

ing her English visit. The setting is an aristocratic English room, and the artist juxtaposes English and Indian figures to suggest that Pocahontas’s meaningful accomplishment was the bringing together of Indian and Anglo-Saxon cultures. (Fig. 26)

The strongest image in the exhibition is the life-size bronze figure of Pocahontas that William Ordway Partridge created for the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. Commissioned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the figure usually stands at the entrance to Jamestown Island. The impression given by Partridge’s figure is that Pocahontas has just emerged from the woods and is walking into the little English settlement, making a gesture of welcome and peace. (Fig. 38) Partridge took liberties in presenting Pocahontas as a mature woman instead of a girl of twelve to fourteen, and he also gave her clothing that was more suitable to a western Indian than to a Powhatan. But the significant point is that Partridge succeeded in carrying out his commission to create a monument that would inspire remembrance of Pocahontas and her accomplishments.

So successful was Partridge, that few tourists on Jamestown Island walk past the monument without pausing to look at it. At the Virginia Historical Society’s exhibition, the beautiful figure had much the same effect. The tall and graceful bronze sculpture presided over the entrance and encouraged visitors to think about the remarkable young woman who helped preserve the English settlement in Jamestown.




*Fig. 38. Bronze by William Ordway Partridge, Pocahontas (1906). Courtesy of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.*



# The Dairies of Rockbridge County

Louise K. Dooley

 SEVERAL years ago, late one June, I had something of an epiphany, a sudden and quite unexpected insight into my own importance. I had my fiftieth birthday and realized that I now, officially, qualified as an antique—having lived for a full half century. It gave me a whole new perspective on and appreciation for matters historical. All of a sudden, I recognized that events, ideas, and objects that were casually accepted parts of my experience were also part of a passing era in American history. Perhaps some of the activities and possessions that my generation took for granted would very soon become rarities or, worse, be completely forgotten.

History is not just the remembrance of major events or even major accomplishments in art, technology, architecture, literature, or other pinnacles of human endeavor. Our lives are also, although perhaps not so dramatically, affected by thousands of developments in society, domestic life, agriculture, fashion, ephemeral publications, and the like. We can learn from—and come to enjoy—many aspects of history, including the relatively recent as well as the ancient. In turn, we have a responsibility to future generations to preserve something of our history for them to peruse fifty or a hundred years from now.

It is in this context that I began to gather information and artifacts from the dairy industry of Rockbridge County. In most ways, the dairy

---

**Louise K. Dooley** is a graduate of Lynchburg College; she holds an M.A. in English from the University of Virginia. She is a Vice President of the VMI Foundation and a collector of Rockbridge County milk bottles. Her talk was delivered at Sunny-side, the former dairy farm outside Lexington, on July 24, 1995.

industry in this area probably paralleled or followed trends in other parts of the United States. There is very little record of dairying as a separate division of agriculture here before 1900, however, perhaps because southwest Virginia was still predominantly rural and most farmers kept a milk cow or two (along with chickens and a hog) for family use. However, during the first sixty years of the twentieth century, dairying flourished in this area, with perhaps fifty dairies in operation, many for several generations. Today, there are fewer than a dozen operating dairies, and at one point I considered titling this paper "The Evaporated Industry of Rockbridge."

Although milk production for widespread consumption is certainly a twentieth-century phenomenon in this county and we in Virginia usually have considerably more antique standards for matters historical, let me make a case for recognizing the importance and the intrinsic value of remembering and preserving something of the dairy industry in this community.

The dairy industry began long before any of us were around to know about it. The earliest bovine fossils are about fifty million years old and suggest that the animals are about the size of an average dog. The direct ancestors of our domestic cows were aurochs, which developed much later and weighed about half a ton each. Man began to domesticate cattle about eight thousand years ago, probably in Asia and mostly as beasts of burden. About two thousand years ago, the Europeans developed separate breeds, including the ancestors of some varieties that are still important today: Holsteins, Friesians, Guernseys, Jerseys, and Brown Swiss.

No cattle are believed to be indigenous to North America. When Europeans arrived, the Indians' only domestic animal was the dog. In the early sixteenth century, cattle were imported from Spain into Mexico, from which they spread all over what is now the western United States. By the seventeenth century, the English began bringing their domestic breeds to colonies up and down the Eastern Seaboard, clearing the forests for pastures and even importing strains of grass and clover to improve the nutritive value of the native grasses.

A major problem for the cattle was the North American winter, which was much harsher than that in Europe. Probably because they could hardly provide food and shelter for themselves, the early settlers offered little for their cattle. In many regions it was common to slaughter all but a few cows each fall and restock in the spring. Thus, meat and hides were considered to be the most important products derived from cattle.

Even in communities where they were allowed to survive, the imported cattle received minimal food and attention: they were turned loose to forage for themselves during the day and brought back to the relative safety of the village during the evening. Breeding was fairly indiscriminate with little attempt to develop separate strains for milk and meat production. Not surprisingly, the quality of the descendants of even fine imported cows dropped to mediocre within a few generations.

Although the settlers appreciated milk, they considered it a seasonal food. Most milked their cows only during the spring and summer in the belief that the longer a cow was dry, the more she would deliver when she freshened in the spring. Even those who milked throughout the winter had reduced amounts of milk, probably due to the poor nutrition of their herds.

By 1800, most rural families and many of those in small towns had a milk cow. The average per capita daily consumption of milk in the cities, however, was low throughout much of the nineteenth century. Citizens of New York City drank half a pint a day, and residents of Washington, D.C., had less than one-eighth of a pint.

Many practical factors militated against the development of dairies to provide milk, cream, butter, and cheese for urban dwellers. It was difficult to find space to pasture and stable herds of cattle near large cities and even harder to deliver milk, without benefit of rapid transportation or refrigeration, from outlying areas.

Agriculture in general, not just dairying, was considered a less-than-exciting occupation. Despite the romanticization of farming by literary types such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that agriculture “has in all eyes its ancient charm, as standing nearest to God, the first cause,” most people thought that farming was for those who could not do anything else. Farmers still had low social status and were considered hicks or hayseeds, poorly educated, willing to do hard and distasteful and monotonous work. In addition, agriculture was a risky business, subject to the vagaries of weather, disease, pests, and prices—all beyond the control of the individual farmer. There was no direct correlation between the labor expended and the profits to be expected from farming. Thus, as the population of the United States grew, the number of farmers actually fell.

The tide began to turn after the Civil War when agriculture in general experienced a revival, and farmers discovered that there was a substantial market for cheese and subsequently for butter in urban areas in the Northeast. Although sanitation was questionable and quality uneven,

the milk products were hungrily received by city dwellers, and farmers began to seek ways to improve their merchandise.

One of the first, and most important, improvements, was selective breeding of herds for milk production—without regard to whether the cattle would also be good for meat. Because dairy cattle must be handled so often, temperament was also a breed characteristic to be considered. The herd improvement process began with the importation of purebred dairy cattle from Europe and England (actually before the Civil War) and continued until there were numerous established herds in this country. Surprisingly, most of the early imported breeds have remained popular and have dominated the dairy industry for over 150 years.

One of the first breeds to arrive was the Guernsey, which was imported from the Island of Guernsey in the English Channel in the 1830s. A rather docile, mid-sized cow of about eleven hundred pounds, the pretty brown and white bovine was popular because it produced creamy-looking milk. Actually, both its skin and its milk contain yellow pigment, so the cows are often called “Golden Guernseys.”

The Ayrshire breed originated in Scotland and was first imported into Massachusetts in 1837. It is a large, imposing, reddish-brown and white cow, weighing twelve hundred pounds and carrying handsome horns. Since it is a bit skittish, those horns can be a problem, but the Ayrshire was considered especially useful since it produces good quantities of milk and is “beefy” enough to be used for meat.

The Jersey breed is the teddy bear of dairy cattle, easily recognized by its soft brown coat and liquid brown eyes. It was imported from the Island of Jersey about 1850 and seems to thrive in the warmer climates of the Southeast. Although the Jersey tends to be slightly nervous, when gently treated it becomes a regular pet. Because it is the smallest of the dairy breeds, the Jersey produces less milk, but it has the highest butterfat content of any cow.

Holsteins (also known as Friesians) originated in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands and were exported to Massachusetts in 1860. Large (fifteen hundred pounds), white with random black spots, the Holstein produces a large volume of milk but relatively little cream. They are considered very adaptable and easy to work with—important qualities in a big animal that has to be handled at least twice a day.

Less popular were the Brown Swiss, which were imported in 1869. A relatively large (fourteen hundred pounds) light grey to dark brown, heavy boned cow, the Brown Swiss can be rather stubborn and strong-willed. It is good for either milk or meat production, however.



Another dual-purpose cow was more widely used—the Milking Shorthorn or Durham. Originating in the county of Durham in the north of England, the cows are large and variously colored: solid red, red and white, solid white, or roan. Today, the breed is almost exclusively used for meat, but a century ago it was generally bred for milk as well.

In the 1870s, farmers realized that one good bull could, over a period of several years, significantly upgrade the quality of a dairy herd. At first, breeding was a gentleman's hobby, but as the results of careful selection of sires became clear, farmers began to pay attention to record-keeping and the relationship between family lines and milk production.

As the quality of dairy cows improved, the role of dairying in agriculture also changed. Until well into the nineteenth century, the care and milking of cows was primarily woman's work, one more chore the farm wife fitted into her day. The production of cheese and butter, closely related to cooking rather than a serious, money-producing activity, was also the duty of the women of a household. A poem that appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in Lexington on April 14, 1871, idealizes farm women but does suggest the role that dairying played in their lives:

"Farmers' Girls"

Up in the early morning,  
Just at the peep of day,  
Straining the milk in the dairy,  
Turning the cows away—  
Sweeping the floor of the Kitchen,  
Making the beds up stairs,  
Washing the breakfast dishes,  
Dusting the parlor chairs.

Brushing the crumbs from the pantry,  
Hunting the eggs at the barn,  
Cleaning the turnips for dinner,  
Spinning the stocking yarn—  
Spreading the whitening linen,  
Down on the bushes below,  
Ransacking every meadow  
Where the strawberries grow.

Starching the "fixings" for Sunday,  
Churning the snowy cream,

Rinsing the pails and the strainer,  
Down in the running stream;  
Feeding the geese and the turkies,  
Making the pumpkin pies,  
Jogging the little one's cradle,  
Driving away the flies.

Grace in every motion,  
Music in every tone,  
Beauty of form and feature,  
Thousands might covet to own—  
Cheeks that rival spring roses,  
Teeth the whitest of pearls;  
One of these country maids are worth  
A score of your city girls.

“Real Men,” on the other hand, worked in the fields, producing grains and vegetables and caring for the meat animals, but paying relatively little attention to the family cow. However, when it became apparent that milk products could provide significant agricultural income, men turned their attention to making dairying more efficient.

New England, probably because of its proximity to population centers, began a buildup of the dairy industry as early as the 1830s, so many technological advances took place in that region first. At the time, dairying was almost exclusively a manual operation: feed was produced with minimally mechanized farm equipment, cows were hand-milked twice a day, and the raw milk was delivered to consumers in buckets, usually but not always lidded. The milk-handling lent itself to all sorts of unsanitary customs. Perhaps the best known was “wet-hands milking”—the practice of dipping one's hands into the bucket of milk before grasping the teats—which was supposed to encourage the cow to let down her milk quickly. One does not really want to think about what fell into that milk from either the hands of the milker or the unwashed udder of the cow. Even the cursory straining through cheesecloth probably removed only the largest visible impurities. Moreover, wet-hands milking tended to give the cows mastitis.

For labor-saving and sanitary reasons, the first technological advance in the dairy industry was the development of milking machines. Early equipment was fairly awful, involving hollow tubes inserted into

the teats or using rollers to squeeze milk out. Neither system was especially effective, and the cows must surely have protested mightily, so other methods were considered. The pulsating vacuum system, in principal the same one in use today, was invented just before 1900. At first, the machines moved from cow to cow, but later the concept of a milking parlor (where several cows enter a milking area, are hooked up to machines and milked, then leave, to be replaced by other members of the herd) became popular. Still, the equipment was costly and hard to wash, so many smaller dairies continued to milk by hand for decades. As late as 1929, only 20 percent of the dairies in the eastern U.S. used milking machines.

But getting milk out of a cow efficiently was only the first step. Getting it to the consumer before it went sour was another matter. Many dairies stored their evening milk in the spring or spring house to retard spoilage; however, the cooling occurred slowly and in the hot seasons was inadequate. The advent of commercial refrigeration, though mostly limited to the use of chunks of ice to cool the milk before delivering it, was a major advance.

As the product became commercially viable, more attention was given to its quality. Dairy cow nutrition was the subject of extensive research, as farmers sought to increase the amount and the richness of the milk that each cow gave. Magazines and newspapers ran articles discussing the advantages of certain types of hay, the proper chopping of root vegetables for fodder, the ideal amount and temperature of water, and everything else imaginable about feed. One of the most important results was the implementation of the concept of silage and silos, which the French introduced into America about 1875. Silage is green corn (and sometimes clover) cut and stored either below ground or in vertical silos as a supplement to hay for winter feed. It is relatively cheap and nutritious, and its fresh taste must have brightened the lives, as well as increased the milk production, of cows forced to survive on dead winter pastures, dry hay, and a limited amount of grain.

Although milk products generally improved dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was still a great range of quality among the dairies, especially with regard to the cream content. Since milk was often sold by the liquid volume, there was also a temptation for an unscrupulous farmer to water down his milk. In an 1854 entry in his journal, Henry Thoreau sardonically referred to the problem: “Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.”



*Generic milk bottle caps.*

Prior to 1878, the only way to separate cream from skim milk so that it could be measured was by gravity. Milk was set out in a cool place, sometimes in cans set in the ground or in the spring house, until the lighter cream rose to the surface where it could be removed and measured. The system was time-consuming and, in hot weather, uncertain. Invention of the centrifugal separator in the 1890s reduced the time involved from a minimum of half a day to three hours. It was tremendously popular, and by 1903 there were over eighty models of hand separators on the market and forty-five models of power separators.

The Babcock test, also developed in the 1890s, established a quick and simple test for measuring the butterfat content of cream. This gave the farmer a clear scale for evaluating individual cows in his herd and the buyer a scale for determining the value and price of the milk.

Although today we take pasteurization for granted, its introduction in America about 1910 was controversial and produced economic havoc in the dairy industry. Farmers resisted implementing an extra procedure requiring expensive equipment. Many customers feared that the heating process would adversely affect the taste of milk, hasten its spoilage, and possibly even cause sickness. As a result, some dairies went out of business rather than pasteurize their milk, and others sold both raw and pasteurized milk for several years before government regulation in the 1940s forced them to pasteurize everything.

But all of these biological, procedural, and technological advances would not have triggered the blossoming of the dairy business had it not been for a linchpin invention, the very keystone of dairy technology (as well as the major symbol of the industry)—the glass milk bottle.

Until the early 1880s, milk was generally delivered by the farmer to consumers in metal pails or cans. Although there were surely people

who put milk in glass or ceramic bottles, no such containers had been created specifically for retail distribution. The field awaited a canny inventor with an eye for marketing.

In 1883 a druggist from Potsdam, New York, Dr. Harvey D. Thatcher, became interested in the sanitation of milk and patented a milking pail with a partial cover. He called it a "milk protector" since the lid was designed to keep debris from falling into the pail while the cow was being milked. A year later, he invented and began to produce the first milk bottle, also called the Thatcher Milk Protector. The bottle was really quite lovely, a round clear glass container embossed with the words "Absolutely Pure Milk" around the shoulder and "The Milk Protector" around the base. Between the two was the embossed image of a Quaker farmer milking a cow by hand. Lidding the container was a nickel-plated lightning-type fastener. Although he was pleased with the bottle itself, within five years Dr. Thatcher had replaced the lid with first a glass cover and then the paper cap (inserted into a groove in the mouth of the bottle) which would become the industry standard.

The milk bottles were almost an instant success, and glass manufacturers across the nation rushed to produce the containers. The use of individualized plates which could emboss personalized insignia on bottles made it possible for each dairy to have its own recognizable containers that could be "borrowed" by the consumer and returned to the dairy for cleaning and refilling. Within twenty years, virtually every dairy that produced milk for a retail market had its own distinctive bottles, most purchased at a reasonable price, usually from four to eight cents per bottle (plus one dollar for each plate required to create the individual insignia). Most dairies stocked a standard range of bottle sizes—quart, pint, and half pint—but specialized containers were available for quarter pints, yogurt, and cottage cheese. The evolution of the glass milk bottle during the seventy or so years during which it was widely used is an interesting reflection not only of technological advances but also of the changing interests and priorities of the American consumer.

The round embossed bottle developed by Dr. Thatcher became the industry standard from the 1890s until well into the 1940s. Not only was the bottle sturdy, made of thick glass that could stand repeated washing by hand and later by machines, but its narrow neck made it easy to grip. Because consumers prized cream, some dairies also embossed measurement marks on the long, slender necks of standard bottles to emphasize the high cream content of their milk. This bottle shape was very popular with customers, and many rejected a new round but squat bottle

invented in 1936 because it appeared to hold less cream. A few dairies tinted their glass green, grey, or red, supposedly to help preserve the milk, and many more used light rose tints to make their milk look richer.

In the 1920s, some dairies used bottles with modified necks to separate the cream from the rest of the milk. A bulge in the top of the neck, just under the lip, identified the container as a creamtop bottle. The addition of an embossed face to the bulge led to naming them “cop the cream” bottles, and others, with an embossee baby face, became “baby-top” containers. One type of creamtop seems to have been used only in Virginia. Called the “toothache” bottle, it features a lopsided bulge in the neck, possibly to simplify pouring off the cream. Naturally, a variety of spoons and siphons for removing the cream were also available.

In the mid-1930s, pyroglazing (the application of colored paint glazes) became technologically and economically feasible for the often washed milk bottles. The new bottles were bright, featuring lettering and pictures in green, orange, red, white, and black, and consumers saw them as attractively modern. Much more intricate designs and slogans were possible in paint, and the older embossing technique virtually ceased to be used after the 1940s.

The square, pyroglazed bottles that most of us best remember were popularized around 1945 after homogenization removed the need to emphasize the cream content of a given dairy’s milk. Although their neck lengths varied, the long version gradually giving way to the short, the advantage of the square bottles was that they fit conveniently into cartons for delivery. Four flat surfaces also encouraged the placement of more and varied advertising material on the bottles. And, perhaps in deference to the aching arms of delivery men, the glass was much thinner and lighter than that of earlier bottles.

Since the 1960s the glass bottles have virtually disappeared, replaced by the waxed paper cartons and anonymous plastic jugs that clog landfills all over the nation. The dairy industry is still important, still lucrative, but it is no longer the personal and service-oriented business that we knew during the first six decades of the 1900s.

The development of the dairy industry in the United States was paralleled by its progress in Rockbridge County.

In 1900 only 6.2 percent of all the farms in the United States were classified as dairy farms. On the other hand, 78.6 percent of all farms (plus many families who lived in towns) had at least one dairy cow. In Rockbridge, the situation was similar: virtually everybody had a cow or got milk from a close neighbor’s cow. In Lexington, most houses had a

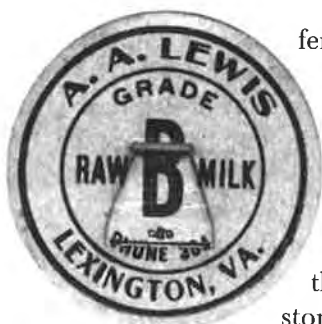
cowshed or combination cow and horse stable in the back yard. The cows were kept in at night, milked in the morning, driven to pastures on the outskirts of town, and returned to the barn for milking in the late afternoon. As late as 1910, public notices in the local newspapers reminded residents that the law required the weekly removal of manure from stables during the months between April 1 and November 1. A “found” notice published by the town sergeant suggested other inconveniences of owning a cow; it described a certain roving Jersey and noted that her owner could reclaim her by “proving property, and paying costs.”

The movement to specialized dairy farming was already under way, however, as evidenced by a number of articles run in the *Lexington Gazette* during the first decade of the century. The pieces, mostly picked up from national magazines and newspapers, sang the praises of dairying for profit, listed tips for successful dairy management, and gave specific instructions about breeding, nutrition, and barn construction. They even described how to handle the cows, making clear the connection between quiet, competent management and milk production. Probably as influential as any articles, however, were several brief notices. One read: “Wanted—cream at the Highest market prices. Cans furnished. Write for information to T. M. Wade, Waugh VA.” The second was a call for sealed proposals to furnish the Virginia Military Institute with milk. Clearly, there was a developing market for dairy products.

During the next half century, probably fifty or more dairies sprang up in the county. Some were tiny, milking 10 to 15 cows, and others had herds of as many as 125 cows. Some operated successfully for sixty or more years, but many were profitable only during the peak of the dairy boom between 1940 and 1960. Most were family operations, handed down through several generations of dairymen. A few were owned by people who lived elsewhere or had other primary occupations. Some dairies succeeded because of their retail sales, and others never had any private customers, always selling to creameries or large milk distributors.

In the middle 1990s, only nine dairies are in operation in Rockbridge County. All have sizeable herds of Holstein cows. All sell their milk directly to distributors as it is against the law for them to make milk available to individual customers.

During the past six months, I have been interviewing dairymen and other people connected with the dairy industry in Rockbridge about “the good old days” when locally produced milk was delivered to homes and small stores all around the county. Every dairy operation was dif-



ferent, and every dairyman had stories to tell, but some patterns do emerge.

The dairies developed, mostly from general farming operations, in response to growing and fairly specific markets. Maple Grove, Whistle Creek, McCrums Sunnyside, and Thorn Hill dairies competed for the residential, fraternity, and small grocery store market in Lexington. Although Cold Springs Dairy was begun in the early 1930s primarily to serve three Civilian Conservation Corps camps (Orinoco, Arnolds Valley, and Snowden), it also competed with Hill Crest for the house-to-house business in Buena Vista. Alphin's dairy, on Route 39, existed to produce milk on contract to VMI: the cows were bred to be dry in the summer and produce all winter. And numerous smaller operations provided milk in cans or generic bottles for small stores, fraternity houses, or a few local customers.

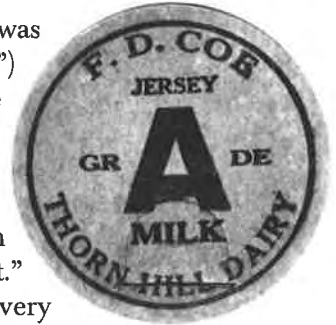
In some cases, competition for individual customers was strenuous. Frank Coe at Thorn Hill, using the slogan "Milk delivered before the dew," and Dick Nuchols at Maple Grove had a freshness competition: each tried to get milk delivered earlier than the other. Apparently the race had them putting milk on people's porches as early as 3 A.M. when they finally called it off. Most competition, however, was based on reliable service and the quality of the product, and there was almost no advertising for business. Occasionally, a dairy would print ads on church fans or calendars (an especially popular item), and some even had fliers at the county fair. But most advertisement was by word of mouth.

Even after dairies attracted them, customers were not always easy to please. Some demanded special deliveries: one farm boy remembers taking milk to the home of a teacher who would already have left for school. He would enter by the unlocked front door, lock it behind him, put the milk in the ice box, and exit the house through a window, closing it behind him. One dairy delivered twice a day seven days a week for years until the scarcity of gasoline during World War II forced it to cut out Sunday and Christmas Day deliveries. Customers were furious and did not hesitate to telephone with their protests.

People did not hesitate to complain about the product either. If the cows got into spring onions, which flavored their milk for several days, the dairyman heard about it. (In fact, when I mentioned a certain dairy which has been out of business for almost fifty years to a long-time resident of



Lexington, his response was, “Oh, yes, that was the dairy whose cows got into onions.”) Another dairyman whose milk must have been on the thin side traded his rickety old delivery wagon for a new car and unknowingly drove around town with a sign, placed on the vehicle by mischievous boys, which read: “Who’d have thought it! Water bought it.”



On the other hand, customers could be very understanding indeed. One dairyman, who obviously kept his milk in a spring house, was confronted by a customer who had discovered, after drinking half of a pint bottle of milk, a lizard in it. The farmer, somewhat concerned, asked the man what he did with it. “I threw the lizard out and finished the milk,” grinned the customer.

During the first half of the twentieth century, most dairy herds in the county were either Guernseys or Jerseys. The farms that ran Jerseys (Thorn Hill and McCrum’s, for example) tended to be very proud of the fact and to advertise it on their bottles. But after homogenization became common in the 1940s, most farmers gradually switched to Holsteins, because the consumer could no longer easily judge butterfat content, and the Holsteins produced considerably more liquid volume than other breeds. At least one dairy in the county, Maple Grove, tried Brown Swiss for a while, but went back to Holsteins.

Many dairies had begun with grade cattle (i.e., unregistered) or mixed breeds, but most moved gradually toward better quality herds. Of course, the easiest way to improve cattle was through selective breeding. Since cows had to be bred anyway in order to produce calves and thus milk, it made sense to use a good bull to upgrade the stock. However, dairy bulls are among the most dangerous domestic animals in the world—immensely strong, agile, and unpredictable. One trapped the owner of Whistle Creek Dairy in a fence corner and nearly killed him, and the widow of another dairy farmer told me how vividly she remembered and hated the sound of bulls pawing the ground, snorting, and bellowing—a sound she probably had not heard for the past thirty years. Nonetheless, many Rockbridge dairymen kept one or more bulls on hand all the time; others switched to artificial insemination as soon as it became available.

Most of the farmers I contacted grew practically all of the feed for their cattle, including silage, grains, and hay. Although that work was seasonal and usually involved extra farm help, milking was forever. It



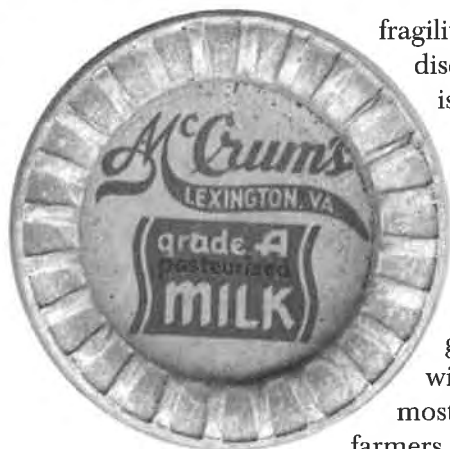
*The main house of the former Sunnyside Dairy (now a part of the Kendal At Lexington retirement community).*

had to be done twice a day, every day, all year round. As one observer of modern agriculture observed, “dairy farming is still among the least successfully industrialized sectors of the agricultural economy . . . because a cow has to be harvested twice a day.” And there is no hurrying a cow when it comes to milking.

Many of the local dairies milked by hand even into the 1940s, although milking machines were used on some farms here in the 1920s. As soon as possible after milking, the liquid had to be strained through a cheesecloth and cooled, usually by pouring it over a cone or series of coils filled with a coolant. In the early days, the milk would then be poured by the pitcherfull into bottles, a job that would later be handled by mass bottle-filling machines. Paper caps were fitted into the neck of the bottles by hand or by machine, and sometimes paper bonnets were placed over the mouth of the bottle as well.

Then the cool milk was put into the spring house or ice house to await delivery, mostly in unrefrigerated trucks. Cases of bottles were sometimes draped in blankets to protect against severe cold or heat, but there was no real insulation or, until pasteurization, protection against spoilage. Milk had to be delivered and consumed rather quickly, but it was a staple of everyone’s diet, well worth the effort it required. And at prices ranging as high as fifteen cents a quart, it was a bargain.

Today, there is little tangible evidence of this vigorous industry which was probably the most lucrative single element of our area’s farm economy for the first six or seven decades of the twentieth century. Some barns remain, mostly recycled for beef cattle or sheep production. And there are a few milk bottles to be found. Somehow, despite their



fragility, they escaped being broken or discarded. They remind us of a vanished era, and they are interesting artifacts in themselves.

Probably a dozen dairies that were located in Rockbridge County or serviced area households used returnable bottles that featured their names. (Others had generic store bottles, marked only with the deposit amount.) Buying mostly from dealers in dairy supplies, farmers got their bottles from several major manufacturers. The Thatcher Manufacturing Company provided bottles for Cold Springs Dairy, McCrums Creamery, Sunnyside, and Thorn Hill Dairy. Most of the locally ordered TMC bottles were manufactured at the company's plants in Elmira or Lockport, New York. Garst Brothers (located in Roanoke but purchasing milk from dairies in the southern end of Rockbridge County) used bottles from the Owens Illinois Glass Company in Toledo, Ohio. Maple Grove bought bottles from Universal Glass Products of Parkersburg, West Virginia, and from Thatcher, as did Rockbridge Creamery.

Although at first the bottles were simply returnable containers that featured the owner's name and telephone number, especially after the advent of pyroglazing they became vehicles for a variety of messages, all very much in keeping with the wholesome nature of the product they contained.

One of the earliest messages was a plea for the customer to please return the bottles to the dairy. Apparently this was a perennial problem, because the Rockbridge Creamery featured several bottles which carried reminders: "For your protection Please wash and return" or "Help us give you better service by returning bottles daily."

By far the most popular designs were those that advertised some quality of the product. Many emphasized the importance of milk for good health. Clover Creamery's bottle featured a picture of a family on a country road and the slogan "Follow the road to health; drink more milk." Garst Brothers urged customers to "Protect Your Teeth: Drink Milk," and reminded them that "Infants and growing youngsters need the extra protection of Vitamin 'D' in homogenized milk." Sunnyside (in an embossed lip design) used the slogan "A bottle of milk is a bottle of health."

Maple Grove Dairy opted to stress the cleanliness of its modern operation, saying “Let us PROTECT Your Entire Family with our SAFE pasteurized MILK,” and highlighting the promise with a picture of a young couple holding an infant. On a bottle that probably dates from the 1960s, Clover Creamery reminded customers of its long experience in the dairy business, “Dairy Products Since 1898: Quality & Service.”

Not directly related to product advertising but certainly in harmony with messages about good health were the public service announcements that often adorned the milk bottles. During World War II, milk bottles from Garst Brothers urged customers to buy war bonds, while bottles from other localities carried patriotic slogans such as:

Fight Food Waste  
Food Fights, Too  
Remember Pearl Harbor  
Air, Land, Sea  
Do Your Part, Too.

Of course, many bottles carried a melange of messages. One of my favorites is a Clover Creamery with four distinct, not particularly related slogans:


Attend the church of your choice every Sunday (accompanied by a picture of a family, hand in hand, walking toward a church)  
Fresh Buttermilk for Family Refreshment  
Crusade for Child Safety  
Objective: The world’s best food . . . delivered by the world’s safest drivers.

Even today, though perhaps with less naive charm, the dairy industry emphasizes some of the same themes that appeared on the early bottles: the importance of milk for good health (the “milk’s for babies” ad campaign), wholesome family values (featuring pictures of missing children on milk cartons), and even recycling (promoted by the recyclable products logo that adorns many plastic milk jugs).

But milk bottles from Rockbridge dairies, like the type of farming they represent, have mostly crumbled and vanished—though some can be found, dusty relics in flea markets and less-than-chic antique shops. Even in such dejected surroundings, a milk bottle reminds us of a time when dairy products were truly fresh, when we bragged on the heavy cream that rose gloriously through the swan-like neck of the bottle, and when a farmer’s son or a familiar milkman brought health and wholesomeness to our house before breakfast every morning.

# Gentlemen, Irregulars, and Eclectics: Who Practised Medicine in Nineteenth- Century Rockbridge County, Virginia?

Andrew C. Holman

CCORDING to some historians of nineteenth-century America, the practice of medicine was divided into two distinct and separate worlds, each of which was inhabited by different types of healers and patients. One half consisted of regulars, or “allopathic” doctors—educated, wealthy, respectable, and dignified men who graduated from medical schools with formal M.D. degrees. The other world consisted of irregular doctors, or those who practised sectarian medicine. These were the people to whom regulars referred when they spoke of “quacks.”<sup>1</sup>

The business of regular and irregular medicine is the subject of this essay. In particular, I would like to address two basic questions about the medical world of the nineteenth century and the ways in which it functioned in Rockbridge County. First, who were these regulars and irregulars, and what, exactly, did they do to heal people? Second, how well

1. See generally William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), and Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

---

**Andrew C. Holman** received his Ph.D. from York University (Canada). At the time he spoke to the society at the Rockbridge County Court House in Lexington on April 22, 1996—he was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Waterloo (Canada). He teaches American and Canadian history at Bridgewater State College in Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

does the model of “two worlds” fit nineteenth-century Rockbridge County?

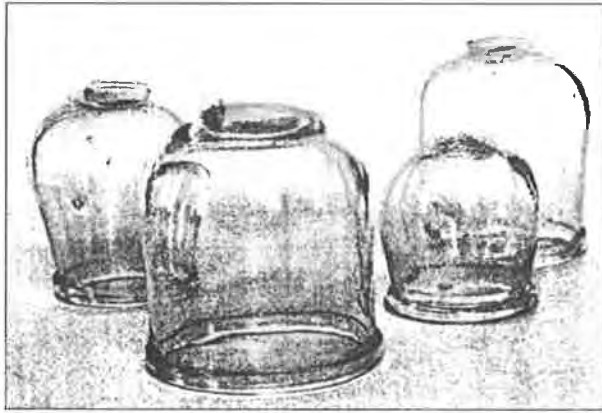
The terms “regular” and “irregular” medicine have lost their clarity since the 1800s, but contemporaries knew well what they meant. The terms had both social and technical meanings; that is, they described both who practised medicine and how. Dr. Wyndham Blanton defined what it meant to be a regular doctor in his renowned 1933 book *Medicine in Virginia in the Nineteenth Century*: “In Virginia, [at least] until the Civil War, medicine was a dignified and respected profession, followed by men of good breeding and education . . . wedded to antique theories and possessing a strange veneration for authority.”<sup>2</sup> Regular medical professionals claimed to be gentlemen, and on this claim rested much of their authority as medical practitioners.

Regulars could claim to be gentlemen rather credibly because, in many cases, they shared a number of attributes with other members of the gentry class in the Old Dominion. Many nineteenth-century Virginia doctors had considerable wealth, a fact that had important bearing on their image as men of science. For doctors, possessing independent wealth meant that they possessed also the freedom to assert their professional views and judgments without fear of recrimination or damage to their future professional prospects. Regulars, moreover, were men educated in the higher, liberal arts and the classics, a credential that could earn them positions of honor, authority, and leadership in their communities as enlightened men in an age of rational thinking. Finally, like other gentlemen, many regular doctors acted as local patrons, committing some of their wealth and learning to the community, and commanding deference in return. As landlords, employers, charity donors, political leaders, and in other roles, regulars were expected to possess gentlemanly personae.<sup>3</sup>

But as important as wealth, classical education, and community patronage, regular doctors were supposed to be gentlemen because they practised a respectable kind of medicine; that is, they employed the kind

2. Wyndham B. Blanton, *Medicine in Virginia in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1933), p. 4. See also Samuel Haber, *The Quest for Authority and Honor in the American Professions, 1750-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

3. Adam Smith, author of the classic eighteenth-century economic treatise *Wealth of Nations*, clearly saw regular medical doctors as legitimate members of the gentry class. “We trust our health to the physician, our fortune and sometimes our life and reputation. . . . Such confidence could not safely be reposed in people of a very mean or low condition. Their reward must be such, therefore, as may give them that rank in society which so important a trust requires.” Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: T. Nelson, 1884).



*Medical suction cups.*

of therapeutic regimen that the best medical schools and the most prominent textbook publishers prescribed. This regimen was what later generations would call allopathic or (sometimes derisively) “heroic” medicine. Regular doctors in the nineteenth century believed that the cause of sickness in the human body (whenever it occurred and in whatever form) was due to an imbalance in the body’s “humors” or radical fluids. There were four of these: black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. When an overabundance of one of these humors occurred, it caused disease. The remedy to this imbalance was to restore the balance by bringing the excess fluid out in fairly drastic interventionist measures: blistering, bloodletting, diuretics, emetics, and purgatives.<sup>4</sup> One wonders, really, whether it was the doctor or the patient who was truly “heroic” in these procedures. A recurrent claim among some contemporaries was that regular doctors “killed as many as they cured.” The

4. To blister a patient, doctors often used cupping devices which, when heated, produced a circular blister when applied to the skin. The release of pus and blood from the blister was to relieve the body of excess humoral fluid. For bleeding, physicians might use scarificators (small, box-like devices with spring-loaded blades designed to produce many small cuts when applied to the skin’s surface) or as in eighteenth-century practice, leeches. The most commonly employed purgative was calomel (mercuric chloride) which, when taken orally, produced profuse sweating and vomiting in patients. See John S. Haller, Jr., *American Medicine in Transition, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), and Charles E. Rosenberg, “The Therapeutic Revolution: Medicine, Meaning, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Morris J. Vogel and Rosenberg, eds. *The Therapeutic Revolution: Essays in the Social History of American Medicine* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).

important point here, however, is that heroic medicine was seen as normal and respectable medicine. Those who practised it claimed mastery of knowledge of how the body worked, and in turn, sole authority over medical matters.

Despite their claims, however, regular physicians did not have a monopoly on medical practice in the nineteenth century. There was in fact another side to the medical world, and that side was made up of irregulars. Unlike regulars, irregular healers cannot be defined so neatly. Irregular medicine was a broad collection of diverse medical healers and therapies. Irregular sects increased in number over the course of the nineteenth century. Seemingly, when one medical sect reached its zenith and then declined in popularity, others took its place. One regular doctor wrote with some dismay about the wide range of irregulars practising in New York City in the *New York Medical Gazette* in 1851: “[There are] Homeopaths . . . Hydropaths . . . Magnetic and Mesmeric doctors . . . Paw doctors, who profess to cure by friction with the hand . . . Indian doctors . . . Cancer doctors . . . Seventh-son doctors . . . Thomsonian doctors . . . Natural bone setters . . . Botanic doctors . . . oculists, and aurists, lung, liver, kidney, and urine doctors, dyspepsia doctors – pill doctors . . . and panacea doctors.”<sup>5</sup>

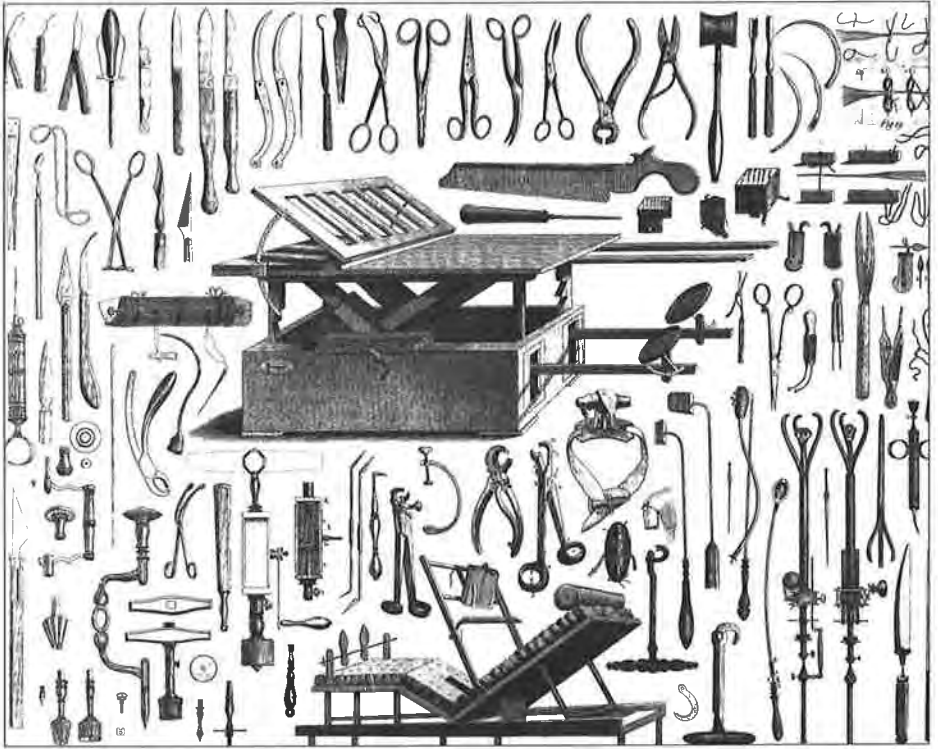
The differences between irregulars and regulars were significant and plain. Most irregulars lacked the kind of social attributes that regulars enjoyed: wealth, education, and community benevolence and prominence. Furthermore, irregular sects all rejected heroic medicine, championing instead their own cures which, they claimed, were much less harsh than heroic medicine but had no lower a rate of cure. While they differed in methods they shared the same goal: capturing the medical faith of ordinary people.

According to medical historians, these were the two worlds of nineteenth-century medicine. From this description, two points become clear. First, and simply, medicine in nineteenth-century America was an open, competitive arena where medical practitioners from different traditions vied with one another for a piece of the medical market. No one side could claim practical domination; and, in Virginia for most of the nineteenth century, no effective legislation defined who could legally practise medicine.<sup>6</sup> Second, this situation had an important implication.

5. As quoted in Jane B. Donegan, *Hydropathic Highway to Health: Women and the Water-Cure in Antebellum America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 7.

6. Not until 1884 was effective medical licensing legislation enacted in Virginia that examined doctors who wished to practice in the state and set standards for methods of practise. See “Medical Laws of Virginia,” *Polk’s Medical Register and Directory of North America* (New York: R. L. Polk & Co., 1886), p. 912.





*A sampling of nineteenth-century surgical tools.*

Ordinary people had real choices to make in health care. With no one tradition dominant, they could place their faith and their dollars wherever they wished.

Now, if all the world was Rockbridge County, surely this two-part model of the nineteenth-century medical world existed here too. We might ask, then, how typical was medical practice in Rockbridge County in the nineteenth century? Did Rockbridge possess the same kinds of gentleman on one hand and alternative or irregular sects on the other, as did other places in nineteenth-century America? My answer to these questions is yes, and no; history, of course, is never so simple.

First, the yes part. Nineteenth-century Rockbridge had both regulars and irregulars; both professional gentlemen who practised “respectable” medicine and “mountebanks” who, in the eyes of regulars, used questionable and irresponsible healing practices. But I want to suggest another wrinkle (and this is the “no” part). In reality, in nineteenth-century Rockbridge, the medical world was a little more complex.

While there were handfuls of real, living, breathing professional gentlemen and real, living, breathing medical irregulars, most doctors were located somewhere between these two poles. Between regular medicine and so-called quackery, a third medical pole emerged in Rockbridge in these years; one that we might call "eclecticism"—doctors who borrowed ideas and principles from both regular and irregular medicine. To see this, a closer inspection of Rockbridge medicos is required.

Between 1840 and 1890, 122 physicians practised medicine in the county. In this period, their numbers increased at first and then declined; from eight in 1840, Rockbridge doctors grew in number to twenty-six in 1850, twenty-eight in 1860, and thirty-five in 1870, but declined thereafter to thirty-two in 1880, and thirty-one and in 1890. Rockbridge doctors were a rather transient lot. Most practised medicine in the county for less than five years, a pattern of persistence rather typical of the population as whole in these years. Doctors, like others, were a people on the move. Almost all Rockbridge doctors were sons of the Old Dominion; of those for whom place of birth is traceable (eighty-two), all except four were Virginia-born. Not surprisingly, perhaps, most practised medicine in Lexington. Of those whose locations were traceable, about 47 percent had practices in Lexington before the Civil War, and this proportion increased to close to 60 percent in the 1870s and 1880s. The average age of physicians in Rockbridge increased steadily over time, from an average of thirty-six years in 1840 to forty-six years in 1880. Finally, these healers were all white, and they were all men.<sup>7</sup>

One uncommon feature of the Rockbridge medical profession came courtesy of the presence of the Virginia Military Institute. Like other formal military installations, V.M.I. had on staff an appointed "Post Surgeon"; a physician and often a commissioned military man whose principal duties were to maintain a post hospital, a sick list, and a dispensary, to generally watch over the health of the cadets and faculty, and in case of illnesses to prescribe remedies for their cure. From the Institute's founding in 1839 until 1895, eleven physicians served as Post Sur-

7. This aggregate information comes from a comprehensive table that I have compiled on physicians practising in Rockbridge, 1840–1890. The sources for the table include decennial censuses, medical school alumni lists, directories of physicians, private correspondence, diaries, genealogies, and published biographical sketches. I have encountered only a small amount of evidence concerning community healers among slave and freedmen populations, although one can be almost certain that they did exist. Diaries reveal that female healers did exist too, but in the nineteenth century their work seems to have been limited almost wholly to the practice of midwifery and nursing.

geon. In addition to their duties on campus, almost all post surgeons enjoyed a small local practice among Lexington citizens.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, nineteenth-century Rockbridge County was home to a number of regular professional medical gentlemen. At any time before about 1870, perhaps as many as one-third of the doctors in this county possessed the education and wealth, and practised enough community benevolence to be worthy of the title. Evidence of their educational backgrounds is somewhat sketchy, but prospective professionals in Rockbridge who were seeking a classical education did not have to look very far afield. Washington College, V.M.I., and the Brownsburg Academy were the most conspicuous places where the classics could be learned. However, other small private schools—like the one operated by Dr. John W. Paine in the 1850s—offered similar educational fare.<sup>9</sup> Potential professionals could find their classical training locally.

Gentlemen doctors, of course, went to reputable medical schools to learn respectable medicine. Most Rockbridge regulars were educated at one of three medical schools: the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, the Medical Department of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, or Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. Of the forty-eight Rockbridge doctors for whom a medical school is traceable, fourteen graduated from Jefferson, thirteen from UVA, and ten from MCV. Others graduated from medical schools at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Maryland, Tulane University, the Baltimore College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the Medical College of Cincinnati.<sup>10</sup>

Rockbridge regulars were among the wealthiest residents of the county as well. Many were substantial landholders; a few owned considerable houses. All of the physicians identifiable in the antebellum censuses were slaveholders, though the numbers of slaves they held varied widely. In 1840, individual physicians owned as many as twenty-three slaves, and on average, six-and-a-half slaves each. These are significant statistics considering the fact that in that year only one in six white household heads in all of Rockbridge owned slaves.<sup>11</sup>

8. These post surgeons were William Cole (1840), Henry Miller Estill (1839–57), John Moffat Estill (Assistant, 1839–57), Edward Lacy Graham (1857–59), Robert Lewis Madison (1859–61; 1863–65; 1867–78), John Randolph Page (Assistant, 1860), Hodijah B. Meade (1861–62), George Ross (1863–64), Howard Barton Thornton (1865–67; Assistant 1867–70), William Beverley Sinclair (1870–73), James McDowell Taylor (1878–79), and John Alexander Graham (1878–95).

9. Henry Boley, *Lexington in Old Virginia* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1936), p. 158.

10. Comprehensive list. See footnote 7.

11. Manuscript Census of the United States (microfilm), Rockbridge County, Virginia, 1840.

Finally, many regulars in Rockbridge were community patrons and activists. Before 1860, two doctors served as county Justices of the Peace, three as state legislators, and one as a member of the State Board of Works. In specially summoned community meetings, doctors were among the leading men. On a committee of twelve men selected to prepare a circular to the people of Rockbridge recommending secession from the Union in November 1860, for example, four were physicians: Edward Lacy Graham, James R. Jordan, John W. Paine, and James McDowell Taylor.<sup>12</sup>

For all the value in this collective portrait, perhaps a better sense of the stature of these professional gentlemen can be gained from three brief biographical sketches about the lives and practices of doctors Alfred Leyburn, William McDowell Gold, and Robert Lewis Madison. Alfred Leyburn (1803–78) spent all of his life and career in Rockbridge County, except for about two years. He was educated in the classics and liberal arts at Washington College and at Princeton. He graduated from Jefferson Medical College in 1825, and for the next fifty-three years practised medicine widely in Lexington and the surrounding area. In that time, he achieved a position of some prominence in public life. Leyburn was appointed a county Justice of the Peace in July 1834, and elected to the state legislature for several terms. Once in office, he carried the interests of his community well. Leyburn played an influential role in persuading the state government to locate the V.M.I. in Lexington, and served on the Institute's first Board of Visitors. He was a Trustee of Washington College (1841–78) and a its Rector (1871–78). It was Leyburn who penned a humble letter to General R. E. Lee in 1865, inviting him to become the college's first postwar President. An officer in the Lexington Presbyterian Church, Leyburn died in its service, while a delegate at the Synod in Abingdon.

Leyburn was also a regular practitioner. His belief in humoral pathology was evident in the remedies that he prescribed for both his wife (Ann Eliza Leyburn) and himself. For example, he attributed his wife's failing health in 1836 to her body's excessive production of bile, and he agreed with a colleague's "heroic" assessment: to restore her stomach, liver, and diseased lungs "to a perfectly healthy state," Ann Eliza was given "gentle emetics" and other strong drugs. In medical practice, and in other respects, Leyburn fit well the early nineteenth-century characterization of professional gentleman.<sup>13</sup>

12. "Photocopies of Information on Rockbridge Co. Physicians 1700's to 1940's," Leyburn Library Special Collections, Washington & Lee University.

13. Virginia County Court (Rockbridge) Court Order and Minute Books, Book I, January 1837–September 1840, p. 468; Alfred E. Leyburn Papers, Leyburn

William McDowell Gold (1805–57) fit equally well into this mold. Gold was born at Brownsburg, and educated in the classics at Washington College and in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1831. He returned to Brownsburg after graduation, practising regular medicine in that vicinity until his premature death. He was wealthy, most measurably after he acquired a large tract of land between Brownsburg and Fairfield. He was a prominent local patron, a founder of the Brownsburg Academy, a county Justice of the Peace at Brownsburg and served one term in the state legislature in 1846.

A medical man of the regular or allopathic school, Gold’s abilities were held in high esteem. He practised widely in several branches of medicine. Gold’s name appears in the diary of Brownsburg neighbor Henry Boswell Jones, for example, summoned on a number of occasions in the 1840s to “bleed” Jones and provide obstetrical care for his wife. County Judge James T. Patton recalled in 1875: “[a]s a citizen, Dr. Gold took an active part in public matters and maintained an influential position. His talents and purse were at the command of his fellow citizens . . . [He was c]haritable to the needy, [and] his heart was open and sympathetic. [As a doctor], [h]e had an extensive field of operation, [was] [a]ffable in manners, and skillful in the practice of medicine.”<sup>14</sup>

A third sketch shows a pattern similar to the previous two. Colonel Robert Lewis Madison (1828–78) served as post surgeon at V.M.I. for seventeen years, and he too provided a polished example of the professional gentleman. A grand-nephew of the fourth President, he was born in Orange County in 1828. Madison learned the classics at the College of William and Mary and at the University of Virginia, and in 1851 he graduated from Jefferson Medical College. Shortly thereafter, he established successful practices in Philadelphia, then Petersburg, then Baltimore before his appointment to V.M.I. in 1859. From 1860 until his death, Madison served as post surgeon with only two brief respites: from 1861 to 1863, when academic studies were suspended at the Institute and he served as a surgeon in the Confederate Army; and from 1865 to 1867, when he practised civilian medicine in Staunton while he was on

---

Library Special Collections; James G. Leyburn, “Dr Alfred Leyburn (1803–1878): A Lexington Whig, Legislator, and Man of Affairs,” *Rockbridge Historical Society Proceedings* 6 (1961–65): 22–30; Oren F. Morton, *A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia* (1920; reprinted, Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 200, 560; Manuscript Census 1840, 1850, 1870.

14. James T. Patton, “Old Men of Rockbridge,” *Lexington Gazette* [1875], as cited in “Photocopies of Information”; Manuscript Census 1840, 1850; Charles W. Turner, ed. *The Diary of Henry Boswell Jones of Brownsburg (1842–1871)* (Verona, Va.: McClure Press, 1979), pp. 9, 20.

furlough. He was a committed Episcopalian, and decidedly a family man.

Madison was also a regular physician of the heroic school. Unfortunately, the post surgeon's daybooks no longer exist to document his daily practice, but impressions of it can be gleaned from cadets' and other correspondence. For example, one first-year cadet, James Henry Reid, wrote to his father: "Dr Madison gives me quinine and some kind of acid which does me little good . . . but about 4 O'Clock every evening I have a very high fever which lasts till after bed time." For a ruptured ligament in the ankle, Madison advised in 1872 that ten or twelve grams of quinine be taken every morning for three or four days and, if the swelling continued, to paint the swollen part with iodine every second night. Among items that he procured for V.M.I. in April 1861 was a "small case of 'cupping instrument[s]'" for blistering patients.<sup>15</sup>

The position of Post Surgeon demanded that its occupant be a professional gentleman three times over: military officer, physician, and academic. It was a role in which gentlemanly character and deportment ranked high in importance. This fact comes through in Madison's own correspondence. Thinking he was too ill to continue his duties as post surgeon in 1866, he felt compelled to recommend a successor. His recommendation to Superintendent Francis Smith in July 1866 reflects his own self-image as a doctor.

Allow me to call your attention to the claims of Dr John R[andolph] Page, formerly of Gloucester Co., but now of Lynchburg. [B]eyond all comparison [he is] the best man, for the position I hold, in the whole South. I am intimately acquainted with him & know that by education, talents, tasks, habits &c he is the very man you want. He is a consistent member of our Church – a real Virginia gentleman of the old school – thoroughly conscientious in the performance of duty & one of the most skillful surgeons & physicians in the whole country. He would be capable of filling the position with ability & honor.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, Leyburn, Gold, and Madison provided walking, breathing examples of the professional gentleman locally for Rockbridge physicians. This image made up one sphere of medical practice in the county.

On the other hand, Rockbridge County was home to a handful of unorthodox, irregular medical practitioners. Beginning in the 1830s and

15. Quinine was a powerful drug made from cinchona bark and used to alter body temperature. "Madison, Robert Lewis," and Madison to Colonel F. H. Smith, December 23, 1864, and April 18, 1861, Post Surgeon Files, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia; James Henry Reid to "Pa," September 30, 1862, and November 1, 1862, "Reid, James Henry," Cadet Files, Virginia Military Institute Archives.

16. Madison to Smith, July 1, 1866, Post Surgeon Files, VMI.

continuing throughout the nineteenth century, a number of alternatives to heroic medicine sprang up in Rockbridge County. The most conspicuous of these were homeopaths, Thomsonians, botanic doctors, patent medicine producers and distributors, and hydropaths, but there were others as well. Each of them challenged regular practitioners as the sole, legitimate source of medical advice and treatment and helped to produce an open, competitive medical environment locally.

Homeopathy made significant headway in the Valley of Virginia in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. This medical system was founded in the 1760s by Samuel Hahnemann (1775–1843), a German peasant and transported to America in 1825 by American physician Hans B. Gram (1786–1840). Homeopathic medicine was based on two fundamental principles. The first was that diseases are cured by medicines that, when applied, produce in healthy persons symptoms similar to those of the disease. Two negatives, it was believed, could make a positive. The second principle was that medicine was made more effective the smaller the dose. Homeopathic medicine offered cures to most human ailments via pleasant-tasting pills composed of infinitesimal amounts of drugs. At first, homeopathic doctors provided advice and diagnosis to patients in need. But in time the homeopathic system could be learned by ordinary laypeople and purchased in domestic kits that provided manuals for self-diagnosis. These kits also provided a wide range of little pills. Once a diagnosis was made, people could treat themselves by simply taking whatever pill the manual recommended.<sup>17</sup>

Thomsonian medicine was another alternative sect. Thomsonian medicine was a system of botanic and herbal remedies, steambaths, and enemas that promised to cure every type of human ailment. It was patented in 1813 by a New Hampshire farmer named Samuel Thomson (1769–1843). The goals of Thomsonians were not unlike those of regular medicine: to rebalance the body’s natural temperature and radical fluids, albeit much less harshly than blistering, bloodletting, or other intrusive measures might. The Thomsonian system was distributed through “doctors” who had purchased rights to sell the system; in time, it became a “do-it yourself” system with the motto “every man his own physician.” Thomsonians published their own newspapers to broadcast their message and answer questions from their followers. On at least one occa-

17. Ronald L. Numbers, “Do-It-Yourself the Sectarian Way,” in *Medicine Without Doctors: Home Health Care in American History*, ed. Guenter B. Risse, Numbers, and Judith Walzer Leavitt (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), p. 59; Harris L. Coulter, *Divided Legacy: The Conflict Between Homeopathy and the American Medical Association. Science and Ethics in American Medicine, 1800–1910* (Richmond, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 1982), p. 110.

sion, Rockbridge County Thomsonians made a public call in their national journal, the *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, asking for lecturers and practitioners of Thomsonian medicine to make a visit to them.<sup>18</sup>

Other botanic doctors practised their craft in nineteenth-century Rockbridge as well. Most of them, it seems, were itinerant, or travelling medicos, who peddled their wares in one place for no more than a few weeks at a time. Botanic medicine was, of course, nothing new to Rockbridge oldtimers. Many settlers in Rockbridge, like those throughout rural America, remained accustomed to “making do” medically on their own with domestic, botanic remedies. So when transient doctors calling themselves the “African herb physician” or “Indian herb doctor” came through, they would likely have appealed pretty easily to rural Rockbridgers accustomed to botanic remedies.

The currency of botanic remedies in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Rockbridge was something well known by Dr. Edmund Pendleton Tompkins (1868–1952), a founding member of this Society, a physician in Natural Bridge (1897–1907) and Lexington (1925–49), and for many years, the County Coroner. “[T]he county is full of many types of folklore,” Tompkins wrote in his “informal” history of Rockbridge. “As county doctor I found that the everyday people, particularly those far back in the hills, had over the years devised a medical folklore of their own.”<sup>19</sup> This folklore would have been consistent with the ideas of generations of itinerant botanic doctors who passed through the county peddling supposed medical cures from time to time.

Patent medicine was another alternative to the harshness of regular medicine and a factor in the erosion of the hold that regular medical therapeutics once had. Anyone who has thumbed through a newspaper from the nineteenth century will be familiar with the advertisements that virtually leap off the surface of journals’ back pages. Almost invariably,

18. *Botanico-Medical Recorder* 8 (February 8, 1840). As cited in James O. Breden, “Thomsonianism in Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 82 (1974): 169.

19. “Once I called on a patient with a serious postpartum hemorrhage. An old woman stood before the patient with an axe, holding the sharp edge towards the patient, which she said would stop the blood. I have heard that a lock of hair will cure asthma, a raw potato will cure a boil, and a nutmeg hung around the neck a tooth ache. To relieve a victim of croup you rub his throat with pole cat’s grease. There are a dozen Rockbridge solutions to removing a wart. . . . A woman on House Mountain once gave me a sure-fire method of relieving vomiting. ‘Scrape the inside bark of a dogwood tree, mix it with cow’s tallow, put it on a cloth, and hang it ‘round your throat.’” Edmund Pendleton Tompkins, *Rockbridge County, Virginia: An Informal History* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1952), pp. 174–75.



patent medicine advertisements featured some cure-all mixture ingeniously compounded by an unknown "Doctor" or "Professor" with the claim that, if properly used, it would cure a long list of ailments. Accompanying these claims, normally, were interchangeable testimonials from real, ordinary people who had tried the stuff and gotten better. Dozens of examples exist, like "Holloway's Ointment" advertised in the *Lexington Gazette* in January 1856. This "grand External Remedy . . . when rubbed on the skin" claimed to cure "Diseases of the Kidneys, disorders of the Liver, Inflammations of the Lungs, Asthma, Coughs and Colds . . . Salt Rheum, Scurvy, Sore Heads, Scrofula, Sore Legs, Sore Breasts . . . Swelled Glands, Stiff Joints, Ulcers, Venereal Sores . . . [and] affections of the Heart."<sup>20</sup> Other, less prominent but still current unorthodox medical systems—like galvanism, mesmerism, and phrenology—made their way into the minds and lives nineteenth-century Rock-bridge residents as well.<sup>21</sup>

20. *Lexington Gazette*, January 10, 1856. See generally James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America Before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

21. Galvanism involved the therapeutic use of electrical current; mesmerism, the use of hypnotism, or "animal magnetism"; and phrenology, the reading of cranial "bumps" to determine character and medical susceptibilities. See Arthur Wrobel, ed., *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987). Poplar Hill adolescent

Let us Reason Together.



## HOLLOWAY'S PILLS

### WHY ARE WE SICK.

It has been the lot of the human race to be weighed down by disease and suffering. HOLLOWAY'S PILLS are specially adapted to the relief of the WEAK; the NERVOUS; the DRIFTY; the GATE; and INFIRM; of all climates; ages; sexes; and constitutions. Professor Holloway personally superintends the manufacture of his medicines in the United States, and offers them to a free and enlightened people, as the best remedy the world ever saw for the removal of the disease.

### These Pills purify the Blood.

These famous Pills are speedily combined to cleanse the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, the lungs, the skin, and the bowels, correcting any derangement in their functions, purifying the blood, the very fountain of life, and thus curing disease in all its forms.

### Dyspepsia and Liver Complaint.

Nearly half the human race have taken these Pills. It has been proved in all parts of the world, that nothing has been found equal to them in cases of disorders of the liver, dyspepsia and stomach complaints generally. They soon give healthy tone to these organs, however much deranged, and when all other means have failed.

### General Debility. All Health

Many of the most despotic Governments have opened their custom Houses to the introduction of these Pills; that they may become the medicine of the masses. Learned Colleges admit that this medicine is the best remedy ever known for persons of delicate health, or where the system has been impaired, as its invigorating properties never fail to afford relief.

### FEMALE COMPLAINTS:

No female young or old should be without this celebrated medicine. It corrects and regulates the monthly courses at all periods, acting in many cases like a charm. It is also the best and safest medicine that can be given to Children of all ages and for any complaint; consequently no family should be without it.

*Holloway's Pills are the best remedy known in the world for the following diseases:*

Asthma  
Bowel Complaints.  
Coughs, Colds, Chest, Dropsy, Dyspepsia, Diarrhoea, Indigestion, General Affectious, Female Complaints, Headaches, Indigestion, Inflammation, Venereal Affectious, Worms, of all kinds, Stone and Gravel, Secondary Symptoms, Inward Weakness, Liver Complaints, Lowness of Spirits, Piles

\* \* \* Sold at the Manufactories of Professor HOLLOWAY, 80 Maiden Lane, New York, and 214 Strand, London, by all respectable Druggists and Dealers in Medicines throughout the United States, and the world, in boxes, at 25 cents, and \$1 each.

As there is a considerable saving by taking the larger size.

N. B. Directions for the guidance of patients in every disorder are affixed on each box.

This Water HAS STOOD THE TEST OF THREE-FOURTHS OF A CENTURY AND HAS COME OUT TRIUMPHANT.

The Celebrated

Rockbridge Alum Water

*This Water is now in the hands  
and separate from the Springs  
sold in all the principal  
parts of the United States*

Rockbridge Alum  
PROPRIETORS

H. H. MYERS, PRESIDENT. Dr. J.  
LEXINGTON, VA.

ANALYSIS

OF THE

ROCKBRIDGE ALUM SPRINGS

IN VIRGINIA.

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THEIR HISTORY, AND THE PROPERTIES  
OF THE WATER, IN LETTERS OF EMINENT PHYSICIANS  
AND OTHER GENTLEMEN,

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

A FEW CERTIFICATES

OF THE

IN THE VARIOUS FORMS OF DISEASE WHICH  
HAVE BEEN CURED BY THESE WATERS.

Predating all of these new medical sects was another, more local and popular form of alternative remedy: hydropathy; or “taking the waters” at a area mineral spring, like Rockbridge Alum Springs or the Rockbridge Baths. This was a practice that had some social attraction. Throughout the nineteenth century, mineral springs across North Amer-

Elizabeth Wood wrote to her Lexingtonian friend Louisa Baxter about a mutual county acquaintance in 1841. “She has become a firm believer in Mesmerism have you faith in it? . . . [For me] it is too mysterious I dont love to think about it.” Elizabeth Wood, Poplar Hill, to Louisa Baxter, Lexington, November 20, 1841, Elizabeth Wood Letters 1845–51, Virginia Historical Society Collections, Richmond.

ica were places where wealthy Americans vacationed, honeymooned, and politicked, as several scholars have noted. Beyond these functions, however, mineral springs were looked upon by many as possessing real, chemical healing qualities. Even a cursory review of nineteenth-century diaries and correspondence from Rockbridge County reveals a seasonal reliance on mineral springs for health visits. Regular visitors to the springs included some of the most celebrated citizens such as Thomas Jackson and the daughters of Robert E. Lee. Curiously, contemporary medical therapeutics had difficulty explaining why mineral springs worked, or seemed to work, for their users. Mineral springs use did not fit any of their theories of regular medicine, and some regulars were outspoken in rejecting their therapeutic use.<sup>22</sup>

These medical regimens, then, composed the second "world" of nineteenth-century medicine in Rockbridge. To some degree, the "two worlds" model of the medical community did apply in Rockbridge. Regulars and irregulars coexisted peacefully, if somewhat uneasily. But to conclude here would be incomplete. What is most remarkable about medical practice in nineteenth-century Rockbridge is the number of doctors who seem to have been unwilling to confine themselves and their therapeutic regimen to one tradition or sect alone. Often, Rockbridge doctors—both regulars and irregulars—were willing to experiment and borrow ideas and procedures from other medical sects, to add to their own arsenal of remedies. Many physicians in nineteenth-century Rockbridge were not purists, but what might be called "eclectics."

A few examples provide evidence of this therapeutic borrowing. The most conspicuous way in which regular doctors borrowed irregular therapeutics had to do with the local mineral springs. Some Rockbridge doctors faithfully prescribed visits to area mineral springs as part of their practice. Many regular physicians were convinced of the healing properties of western Virginia mineral springs, despite the fact that much of the medical establishment in the northeastern United States held a rather dim view of them. J. D. McCluer, a regularly trained M.D., owned his own sulphur spring, which he advertised in the *Gazette*. Other regulars became resident physicians at the various mineral springs, professing their faith in the healing powers of the waters. Samuel Brown Morrison (1828–1901), a graduate of the University of Virginia Medical Department and the Pennsylvania Graduate School of Pharmacy, and a Confederate veteran, found security in postwar Rockbridge by operating a renowned sanitarium for invalids at the popular Rockbridge Baths. Archibald Graham (1804–80), well-known Lexington practitioner, state

22. See my article "Thomas J. Jackson and the Idea of Health: A New Approach to the Social History of Medicine," *Civil War History* 38 (1992): 131–55.

legislator, and cofounder of the Rockbridge Agricultural Society, was engaged at the Rockbridge Alum Springs as resident physician in 1867.<sup>23</sup>

Regular doctors borrowed from other traditions as well, like patent medicines and homeopathy. A. F. Rogers, M.D., had such a firm belief in the ability of a patent medicine called “Dr. Taylor’s Balsam of Liverwort” that he signed his name to a testimonial in an advertisement for the product in the *Gazette* in 1841. In the 1850s, another local M.D., Robert T. Marshall, operated his own drug store where he sold various patent medicines, including the fabled dyspepsia tonic “Oxygenated Bitters.”<sup>24</sup>

Samuel Miller Dold (1830–70) provides us with an final example. Dold was a trained regular who practised medicine in Lexington in 1850 and Harrisonburg in the late 1850s, and worked in the Confederate Hospital in Lynchburg during the Civil War. His letters to his friend, the physician and popular author George William Bagby, are interesting because they give us a sense of the process of therapeutic experimentation. He reported to Bagby in 1866 that his postwar practice looked unpromising, and that he was willing to consider administering irregular remedies if that would help to capture more paying patients. “I will as you request give Homeopathy an unprejudiced (if possible) examination. I will do so expecting to find not a little gold maybe with the drop – for I hardly believe you would pin your faith blindly to a baseless & worthless theory.”<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, medicine was a messy business in nineteenth-century Rockbridge. There were regulars and irregulars who clung tightly and faithfully to the therapeutic regimen in which they were trained. As we have seen, however, there were others less firmly wedded to one system and for whom selective borrowing from one tradition or another was preferable and most effective. It would be too hasty to conclude without at least suggesting why this was the case.

23. “McCluer’s Sulphur Spring,” *Lexington Gazette*, June 26, 1856; Graham Household Expense Book 1838–41, Archibald Graham Papers, Leyburn Library Special Collections; James A. Frazier, Proprietor, *Analysis of the Rockbridge Alum Springs in Virginia. With Some Account of Their History. and the Properties of the Water. in Letters of Eminent Physicians and Other Gentlemen* (N.p.: n.p., 1869), pp. 37–39.

24. “Consumption and Liver Complaint,” *Lexington Gazette*, May 20, 1841; “Oxygenated Bitters,” *Lexington Gazette*, September 4, 1856.

25. Dold, Harrisonburg, to Bagby, Richmond, May 4, [1859], Bagby Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. See also Thomas R. Winpenny, “Competing in the Medical Marketplace in Jacksonian America: The Creative Strategy of Dr George Barrett Kerfoot,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 116 (July 1992): 357–72.

Specifically, why did some physicians become eclectics? To answer this, we must return to two points made in the introduction. The first of these was that medicine was an extremely competitive enterprise in the nineteenth century. Rockbridge doctors became eclectics because they had to in order to survive. In the fifty years after 1840, Rockbridge witnessed a steady increase in the numbers of trained physicians seeking to practice in the county and to share an increasingly smaller piece of the medical pie. In 1840, each doctor practising in Rockbridge had an average number of 2,041 potential patients each; by 1870 each doctor here could claim only 458 potential patients on average. Physician:patient ratios improved in the 1880s, but at all times they were notably lower than the state-wide figure. Competition in postbellum Rockbridge was in theory more fierce than it was in all of Virginia.<sup>26</sup> Competition drove doctors to consider a liberal response: to broaden their range of usable cures to make them more competitive; to offer more things to more people.

The second reason for this eclecticism is related to the first. In these years, patients or ordinary medical consumers had a wide range of legitimate choices of cures—much more so than today. Rockbridge doctors chose eclecticism because patients demanded it. Many ordinary people refused to be straitjacketed in their personal choices. Doctors who could provide them with a choice of therapies to treat disease, stood a better chance of securing a clientele.

In 1851, the prominent Lexingtonian and legal professional John Brockenbrough wrote a rather sage and fatherly letter to a younger colleague of his in Richmond. The letter addressed many subjects, and one of these was about sickness and medicine. “A man,” he advised, “is a bad judge in regard to his own health.”<sup>27</sup> Brockenbrough, like many of us today, was content to leave his health to the care of the self-proclaimed experts—regular, professional gentlemen. But to conclude that Brockenbrough was typical in his views would be incorrect. In the 1850s, many of Brockenbrough’s Rockbridge neighbors were not content to rely solely on the advice and care of regulars. They had other, and at that time, equally reliable options. There were not two worlds of medicine and healing in nineteenth-century Rockbridge, but three: allopaths, sectarians, and those in between; in contemporaries’ words, medical gentlemen, irregulars, and eclectics.

26. Manuscript Census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880; *Polk’s Medical Register*, 1886, p. 65.

27. John Brockenbrough, Warm Springs, to William Wallace, Esq., Richmond, December 13, 1851, Brockenbrough Papers, Virginia Historical Society.



# The Presbyterian Church in Rockbridge County: A Panel Discussion on the 250th Anniversary of Its Establishment

**David W. Coffey, moderator;  
with Katharine L. Brown and I. Taylor Sanders, II**

*Coffey:* The reason we are here at New Providence Presbyterian Church is to honor this church and, by association, the other Presbyterian churches in Rockbridge County as they celebrate the 250th anniversary of the first establishment of the church in the county. Both of our panelists are professional historians, interested in the Scotch-Irish, and have written histories of county Presbyterian churches. Katharine recently spent a year in Northern Ireland as a British Council Fellow and is much interested in Ulster.

*Brown:* The term Scotch-Irish is not used in Scotland or Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the Protestants generally refer to themselves

---

**David W. Coffey** is an instructor in history at the Virginia Military Institute and the Society's program chair. The Society met at New Providence Presbyterian Church on July 29, 1996.

**Katharine L. Brown**, formerly the head of the Stonewall Jackson House in Lexington and subsequently head of the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace before becoming Director of Research and Collections at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton. She holds a Ph.D. in history from Johns Hopkins University. Her *New Providence Church: 1746-1996, A History* was published in 1996.

**I. Taylor Sanders, II**, is the University Historian at Washington and Lee University. His Ph.D. is from the University of Virginia. He has written histories of two county churches: *Now Let the Gospel Trumpet Blow: A History of New Monmouth Presbyterian Church, 1746-1980* (1986), and *A Journey in Faith: The History of Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church* (1999).

as Ulster Scots. The term Scotch-Irish is generally considered an Americanism, although I recently found a fairly authoritative source that asserts that Queen Elizabeth I used the term. When I use it in talks, some people—those who are terribly purist Scots nationalists—take me to task, insisting that Scotch is an American word for whisky (no *e*) made in Scotland and the Scots are the inhabitants of that land.

The term Scotch-Irish came into usage in this country in the middle of the nineteenth century. The people who came to America from Northern Ireland called themselves Irish initially, but when large numbers of Irish Catholics began flowing in, particularly as a result of the potato famine in the 1840s, the Ulster Scots were determined that nobody should confuse them with the “Bog” Irish and began pushing the concept of Scotch-Irishness.

The Ulster Scots originally came to Ireland from Scotland in the seventeenth century at about the time Virginia was founded. The scheme to colonize (or establish a “plantation” in) the northernmost of Ireland’s four traditional provinces, Ulster, originated as a method of controlling the Catholic Irish by establishing resident Protestant craftsmen and small farmers in the region. Consequently the Crown imported large numbers of settlers from England (Puritans) and lowland Scotland (Presbyterians).

There was also a significant influx of French following the upheavals resulting from the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which deprived all Protestants in France of religious and civil liberties. This group started the linen-weaving industry in Ireland. So these Protestants had, in some cases been in northern Ireland for at least a generation—in some cases three or four generations—before they crossed the Atlantic to Britain’s colonies in North America.

*Sanders:* I am glad that Katharine mentioned the Huguenots, because I have done a great deal of research into that group in northern Ireland. Many families that Americans sometimes think of as Scotch-Irish are actually of Huguenot ancestry: the Crocketts, whose name was originally Crockettan; the Pickins’s of South Carolina; the Dunlaps, many of whom were originally called Dunlik; the Bodeaus, who became Woods and Hardins; the Lewises, whose tradition was that they went to Wales and then fought for the British Crown. The classic Huguenot sojourn involved four or five moves before they ended up in Ulster. There were four Huguenot regiments that fought for King William at the Battle of the Boyne, and they all were settled in Ireland and rapidly became integrated into the Scotch-Irish community.

Some two-thirds of the land in Ulster was leased for long periods by the Crown to Protestants in the late seventeenth century. Perhaps fifty



thousand Scots crossed over to Ireland in the last decade of the seventeenth century alone, joining those who were already there. After 1710 thousands of the thirty-year leases that had originally attracted settlers came to an end and rents rose or the landlord threw the tenants off the land and converted to cattle grazing. Added to this were problems with the weather, agricultural epidemics, and discriminatory English economic and religious policies.

Between 1717 and 1775, more than 250,000 Ulster Scots moved to British North America, some attracted by letters written by cousins already in America, and this is why one finds so many families of the same surname settling close together. Sometimes an entire village would come. This is one reason why some families trace their ancestry back to the mythical “three brothers.” These families were not certain that they were related, but they often claimed that there were once three brothers who came over and all the people having the same surname were descended from them. The Lewis, Stuart, Campbell, and Walker families all claim such a development.

The early arrivals—between 1718 and about 1730—were not always met with joy by the locals. The secretary of the Pennsylvania colony—himself a former Ulster emigrant—lamented that it appeared as if “Ireland is to send all her inhabitants hither.” Moreover, he alleged, five families from Ulster caused more “trouble than fifty of any other people.” Thomas Jefferson, who never had a very strong antenna for religious people, called these folks people who few would dare to pass through and even fewer would hope to settle among.

The colony of Virginia, however, saw the value of having such self-reliant, feisty settlers in the Valley of Virginia as a buffer between the more settled east and the Indians. Many of these people came in through Philadelphia and moved to the back country and thence southwest into the Valley where land was cheap or free and where they faced little religious discrimination. By about 1750, perhaps 170 families (nobody knows how many people this was, because many of them had servants and squatters who tagged along with them) were settled in the area that is now Rockbridge county.

*Brown:* I am glad that Taylor mentioned the economic reasons the Scotch-Irish emigrated; it is important to remember that that was the main reason they came, not for religious freedom, as some myths assert. Religious freedom may have been an element in their leaving Ulster, and it was certainly a reason that tolerant Quaker Pennsylvania drew them, but it was not the main reason they left. Careful research shows that the years in which immigration was strongest correlate well with bad economic times in Ireland.

*Coffey:* Since religion and religious freedom have been mentioned, it might be useful for our panelists to explain the role of some of the key early Presbyterian ministers such as John Blair, John Brown, and William Graham.

*Brown:* John Blair was the brother of Rev. Samuel Blair, who ran a famous academy in Pennsylvania that trained a number of preachers, including Samuel Davis. But younger brother John had a great effect on the development of the Presbyterian church in this region. He was sent out by the revivalist New Side or New Light wing of Presbyterianism that had grown out of the Great Awakening, a powerful revival movement and perhaps the first mass movement in America. The conservative majority (the Old Side) opposed this revivalist mentality and any relaxation of the traditionally high educational qualifications for entering the ministry—i.e., a degree from a Scottish university. The New Lights were willing to relax these rigorous educational standards and to develop their own colleges to train ministers in America; the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) developed out of this wing of Presbyterianism.

John Blair was sent on a missionary tour to some of the new settlements in the back country. The dearth of traditional ministers encouraged the formation of small, informal worshipping groups that sought to keep the faith alive through lay leadership. These groups would importune the Presbytery in Pennsylvania for ministers. Consequently, long missionary tours were common for new young ministers like John Blair. During his tour in this region in 1746, he put half a dozen congregations in Augusta and Rockbridge counties in proper church order.

*Sanders:* The New Side controversy actually began in the 1720s when Dutch preachers, particularly, came to America and began preaching a somewhat more emotional religious experience. They stressed things such as hymn singing. New Side people came to believe that if one had some college and were able to survive a very tough examination for the ministry (e.g., Latin, Greek, and Natural Philosophy [Physics] in addition to Theology), that would be considered the equivalent of a bachelor's degree from, for example, the University of Edinburgh.

The New Side/Old Side split was over a number of different issues. For example, over the style of preaching—whether one should present a lengthy written-out sermon carefully divided into groups and subgroups (some of these sermons type out to about sixty-five pages, and one wonders how long it took to deliver them). Other disputes were over educational qualifications, as Katharine has noted. But also there were disputations over the notion of a preacher's having missionary zeal, or

whether a preacher should have real field experience in addition to the normal sort of Presbyterian “call” to service. New Side colleges included the institutions that became Hampden-Sydney College and Washington and Lee University.

New Siders were not the only active preachers hereabouts. One important Old Sider around Timber Ridge and Fairfield was John Craig. He was a pious Ulster boy whose parents sent him to Scotland to study for the ministry. While in school he decided he wanted to become a physician, but his parents sought to disabuse him of that notion. He came to America, and for a long time Craig was the only Presbyterian preacher in Virginia. He lived in the Tinkling Spring area and focused his energies in the Staunton area, where the Lewis family gave him a 350-acre farm. In the Rockbridge area he was supported by the Stuarts, Browns, Breckinridges, Pickenses, McDowells, Prestons, Christians, Campbells, Houstons, and Alexanders.

Fortunately, a great deal of literature survives from his pastorate, and one can see the struggle he went through as all these New Side preachers came into his area—which initially stretched from about modern-day Roanoke to western Maryland. He was quite upset by the New Siders, because he was very much for upholding the old standards of preaching decorum and erudition. While many New Siders avoided Craig’s home territory, they did established themselves as close as Timber Grove, just a few miles north of Timber Ridge. The impact of a single man like Craig was enormous in the early days; he performed thousands of weddings and baptisms, for example.

*Brown:* South Mountain Meeting House was the forerunner of most of the Presbyterian churches in this area. It was the first meeting house established to serve the people in southern Augusta and northern Rockbridge counties, and it was an Old Side establishment. Every year the group would send a call to the Donogal Presbytery in Lancaster, Pennsylvania—which favored the Old Side—asking for ministers. When the Donogal Presbytery could not supply their needs, they were willing to take a New Light like John Blair. He was not their first choice, but a New Sider was better than nobody, and besides there were a number of people in the group who were sympathetic to the New Side approach.

Many of this latter group had come into contact with people like Englishman George Whitefield, the granddaddy of all evangelists in America, when they were still living in Pennsylvania, and they were familiar with this method of operating. Moreover, the revival meeting really developed in Ulster. The first revival, in the mid-1600s, was called the “Six Mile Water Revival,” because it took place along a creek called the Six Mile Water. These open-air meetings in Ulster worked out the

basic pattern for what would become the American revival. So it was part of the Scotch-Irish heritage, not an imposition by outsiders like George Whitefield or John Wesley.

In my history of New Providence Church, I spend a great deal of time researching a man named John Brown, who was, not surprisingly, a native of northern Ireland. There are conflicting accounts of Brown's origins, family relationships, and the date he arrived in America. Despite stories to the contrary, I think he came over in his late teens, after he had received his principal education in northern Ireland. He attended Samuel Blair's academy before going off to the College of New Jersey to study for the ministry. Brown was a member of the college's second graduating class in 1749, and he immediately entered upon his ministerial apprenticeship. He was ready to accept a "call" by the time Blair had organized the churches in this area into a number of congregations. Congregations here sent a call to the Presbytery and Brown accepted one, arriving here in 1753 or 1754 and remaining until 1794 or 1795. He started out at both Timber Ridge and New Providence, remaining at the former for about a dozen years before deciding to concentrate his energies on the growing New Providence congregation.

Brown had a substantial farm house that he either built or that was built for him. It was a two-story log house with a number of fireplaces. He had an upstairs study with a fireplace, so he was living in relative comfort. He also owned several slaves. He ran a school all the time he was at New Providence, educating a number of young men who went on to bigger and better things, including his own sons.

He had the good fortune to marry into one of the most important local families: the Prestons. Margaret Preston was a niece of John Lewis's wife and also of Col. James Patton. Her sister had married Robert Breckinridge, who was the leading man in Botetourt County, and her brother, Col. William Preston, started out in Augusta County, went to Botetourt, where he had a handsome plantation, then moved to Montgomery County, where he built a remarkable plantation house on the outskirts of present-day Blacksburg: Smithfield. Fortunately, there is a collection of correspondence between John Brown and William Preston in the Draper Collection in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. A great deal of what we know about New Providence congregation under its first minister derives from that collection.

Brown, then, was a part of the frontier gentry, people who were well educated, sophisticated, lived well, and planned for their children to live well. John Brown had good reason to feel proud of his children; they included three physicians, one of whom held the first chair in medicine at Transylvania University. One of his daughters married a Presbyterian minister and another a physician. Two other sons became lawyers: one

was a member of the Confederation Congress and subsequently the U.S. Senate; another was active in the governments of Kentucky and later Louisiana, ending his career as President Monroe’s minister to France. The Brown boys who grew up at New Providence Church were some of the most important figures in the early Republic.

*Sanders:* John Brown was crucial in keeping the Presbyterian church together during the difficult times of the French and Indian War when some congregations west of here simply disintegrated and the people left for safer spots in North Carolina. Brown was also responsible for the wonderful old stone church at Timber Ridge, and his protégé, William Graham, was responsible for pushing for the construction of the stone church on Whistle Creek, the original stone building that became New Monmouth Church.

Graham and Brown had a long but rather shaky relationship. Graham was something of a protégé to Brown but also something of a rival. Graham was born in 1746, but he came from a relatively poor family and went to Princeton only in his late twenties. Of the twenty-nine members of his class, fourteen became ministers, four became college presidents, and three became state governors. At the school he became a great friend of “Light Horse Harry” Lee, which was probably Graham’s introduction to the Virginia aristocracy. One story has it that Graham coached Lee through his final exams at Princeton; in appreciation, Lee gave Graham a copy of Dodridge’s sermons and, more importantly, some years later, convinced George Washington to give Graham’s school, Liberty Hall Academy, a huge gift—in modern terms on the order of \$22 million—and secured the foundation of Washington College.

At Princeton, Graham taught classes for younger students in an academy connected with the college. His reputation as a good teacher was such that a friend of his—who was then in the process of trying to found Hampden-Sydney College, recommended that Graham come to this area and teach in John Brown’s school, which he did beginning in October 1774. He was ordained in 1776 and became the minister at Timber Ridge, Whistle Creek, and Hall’s Meeting House.

Graham quickly developed big ideas for the little academy at Mt. Pleasant near Fairfield. It moved to Timber Ridge in 1776 and changed its name to Liberty Hall Academy. By this time, the frontier had already passed on south and west and the area had a number of young men who were ready for a more advanced education. Brown, however, did not agree; he continued to believe that it was best to give the locals college-preparatory training and send them to Princeton. To add to the complexities of the Graham-Brown relationship, there was a tangled

relationship between Graham and one of Brown's daughters, who certainly would not be moving up socially by marrying Graham.

Graham had begun soliciting funds in the area for a college even before he was fully ordained in October 1776. That same month he placed an ad in the Williamsburg *Gazette* urging people to support his college, because it would have all the education needed for young gentlemen who aspired to become physicians and lawyers. Annual tuition would be £4; room and board £6 10 shillings. Moreover, the school would be open to all males, whether Seceder, Associate Reformed, or other brand of Presbyterian, or even Baptists.

The Revolutionary War brought college-building to a halt everywhere in the colonies. Graham moved to a farm on Mulberry Hill just west of the new town of Lexington. In 1782, Graham's school received a land donation outside of town and a state charter. It graduated its first class in 1785. Graham began devoting more and more time to the college and his ties to Presbyterian congregations weakened or ended. Yet had it not been for his interest in education and his vision, the New Monmouth Church would have languished and there would never have been a Washington and Lee University.

*Brown:* Philip Vickers Fithian, a Presbyterian ministerial student, made a missionary tour in the Valley in 1776. He stayed at John Brown's house and observed William Graham teaching in his school. Fithian, I think, found Graham an amusing fellow. Brown probably liked Fithian, in part, because Fithian poked a certain amount of fun at Graham's incredible earnestness as a teacher.

When Fithian was visiting the Browns, he reported that he, Mrs. Brown, and the eldest daughter spent a pleasant evening singing hymns. This pleasure was one the Brown family apparently indulged in often, but singing hymns here at New Providence Church caused a great deal of trouble in the early 1790s. The hymn issue finally came to a head over the issue of using Isaac Watts's version of certain traditional songs and his entirely new hymns published in *Hymns And Spiritual Songs* (1707) and his later *Psalms of David Imitated*. While Watts's hymns had been around for some time, Presbyterians had not opened their arms to his emotional and modernizing tendencies. Some Presbyterians, however, knew of and liked the songs; they are wonderfully singable, and many are still well known.

For years Presbyterians had been "singing" versions of hymns by Francis Rous, who had set the Psalter into verse in *The Whole Psalms Of David In English Metre*. In the traditional Presbyterian congregation, someone stood up in front and called out a line—there were no musical instruments present—and the congregation sang it back as best they

could. It had not escaped the notice of some Presbyterians that this was dreadfully dull, and when they went to churches that were singing well, they thought that this was fun and wanted to do it here at New Providence Church. Some members of the congregation felt very strongly that they wanted nothing to do with newfangled church music: the only fit songs to sing in church were from the Bible, the inspired word of God, not spiritual poetry people put down on paper. Many people left New Providence over this issue, and this was also an issue in other Valley Presbyterian congregations. For example, Rev. Charles Cummins at Ebbing Spring and Sinking Spring churches in Washington County was particularly opposed to the new style, and the Presbytery had to sort his congregation out for him.

Those who left New Providence over the hymn issue joined the continuing congregation near the old South Mountain Meeting House, which had organized itself as Old Providence and had affiliated with the recently founded (1782) Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, which was made up of “Covenanters” and “Seceders,” who were more recent arrivals from Scotland and brought in viewpoints from there. The new denomination firmly adhered to the practice of using only the old songs.

*Sanders:* Anyone who works in this period of Presbyterian church history has fun with the music issue. At New Monmouth, in later years, they compromised a bit and did some of both Isaac Watts and Francis Rous. From Rous’s conservative *Whole Psalms Of David*, this is one churches would use for the old Psalm without the modern music:

On Babel’s stream we sat and wept,  
When Zion we thought on,  
In midst thereof we hanged our harps  
The willow trees thereon  
For when a song requested they,  
Who did us captive bring;  
Our spoilers called for mirth, and said  
A song of Zion sing.

That is the song associated with the Kerrs Creek Indian raid. When the captors and the captives they had taken crossed the Ohio River into the safety of Indian country, the Indians demanded that Mrs. Gilmore sing a hymn as they bashed in her children’s heads.

Below is the Watts’s updated version of the Fifty-eighth Psalm. The problem was that Watts calls his songs translations, but I defy anyone to find these words in the King James, Revised Standard, or the New English versions of the Bible. Moreover, Watts’s psalms tended to have a

strong social and political message, which considerably upset the conservatives. Watts's version of the Fifth-eighth Psalm provided spiritual ammunition for people fighting for religious liberty.

JUDGES: who rule the world by law,  
Will ye despise the righteous cause?  
Dare ye condemn the righteous poor,  
And let the rich escape secure?  
  
Have ye forgot, or never knew,  
That God will judge the judges too?  
That ye invade the rights of God,  
And send your bold decrees abroad.  
  
Yet shall the vengeance of the Lord  
Safety and joy to saints afford;  
"Sure there's a God that rules on high,  
A god that hears His children cry."

*Coffey:* The final subject I hope our experts will discuss is missions, both domestic and foreign. What did the congregations at Timber Ridge, New Monmouth, and elsewhere see as their mission to the world and to their community? Was it a social mission, or entirely religious?

*Brown:* People at New Providence really became interested in missionary work when Ebenezer Junkin was their minister. The son of George Junkin, prewar president of Washington College, Ebenezer came to the area immediately before the Civil War and stayed until about 1880. He was an early advocate of the foreign mission movement. The congregation had been involved with supporting both domestic and foreign missions from the time they founded their Ladies Benevolence Society in 1819—one of the first women's organizations in Virginia. Initially they concentrated on raising money to ship off somewhere to support missionaries. Junkin inspired New Providence to energetic support of foreign missions, contributing two of his own sons and one of his daughters to the field in the Far East. In addition, a woman from the congregation became a missionary to China in the 1870s. The congregation's support of foreign missions continues to the present.

*Sanders:* The mission movement, like the movement to spread and enhance education, grew out of the revival movement. Indeed, the Great Revival of 1789 was a crucial event in county history. It began at Hampden-Sydney College. William Graham took some of his young students there and they were struck by the revival spirit. On their return



trip they stopped to sing gospel hymns on the top of the Blue Ridge. Among these young people was Archibald Alexander, who became the great champion of church music in the Presbyterian Church and the founder of Princeton Theological Seminary; he later went into the mission field. John Lyle went into Kentucky; various members of the Campbell family also went into Kentucky.

Perhaps the most famous person from Rockbridge County for much of its history, except for Sam Houston, was William McKutchan Morrison. Not only was he connected with Timber Ridge, New Monmouth, and New Providence churches, he is the only Washington and Lee alumnus who ever addressed both houses of the British Parliament. Arthur Conan Doyle said that Morrison in the dark was a better statue to liberty than the statue in New York harbor. Many years ago when Winnie Mandella came to W&L, one of the things she wanted to see was Morrison's birthplace.

Morrison was born in 1867; he planned to become a lawyer, but in 1897 he went to Africa as a missionary to the Belgian Congo. He rapidly became the acknowledged leader of the Congolese reform movement, and by the time he died in 1918, the number of local Presbyterians there had grown from less than a hundred to more than seventeen thousand. At one time, the church he headed in the Congo was the largest Presbyterian church in the world. He introduced black Americans to the mission field and trained African missionaries. He increased the number of missionary-supported schools in Africa from 5 to 450. He also took on the Belgian colonial government in the Congo, which was running a virtual slave state. Belgium was not pleased with his reformist efforts and it found various ways of persecuting him and his flock, but Morrison ultimately won over the new Belgian king after about 1910 to begin a bit of reform in the Congo.

All three of the churches under discussion here today have a claim on Morrison's reflected glory, because he had so many cousins in all of them. Moreover, he inspired many other families to participate directly in foreign missions. The Womeldorf family sent numerous missionaries from Timber Ridge and Lexington churches to Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America; they were part of that generation of young, local men who were spurred to the mission field by Morrison's example.

*Coffey:* There are many people of importance to Presbyterian church history who have not been mentioned, and they cannot be in any reasonable length Historical Society meeting, but we might talk a bit about Dr. McLaughlin and his work in this community.

*Brown:* Dr. McLaughlin was certainly one of the most exciting ministers

who ever preached from the pulpit at New Providence. When he came, one thing that stuck him was the vast divergence between the congregation's wealthy and poor members, something he could easily see in making his calls as minister. He made it one of his missions to emphasize the idea that sending missionaries abroad was a fine thing, but there was work to do among the people in the community. He got the New Providence people fired up to do a great deal more outreach work in their own neighborhood. For example, there was no physician in the area, and it was difficult for people to travel to Lexington or Staunton to see a doctor. He started a clinic and convinced a physician to come to Brownsburg.

Dr. McLaughlin also realized that many people in this area were tenant farmers, and land ownership for them was but a dream. He reasoned that if there were a means of getting credit, some of these people might be considered good enough risks for a bank loan, so he helped start a bank in Brownsburg that eventually became the Bank of Rockbridge. He saw his own work in broad terms. He initiated a great deal of Sunday School outpost work, but he also pressed his congregation to see a greater social responsibility in their own neighborhood—and they rose to the challenge.

## Evolution of the Rockbridge Regional Library: Reminiscences on the Fiftieth Anniversary



THE Rockbridge Regional Library celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on July 1, 1996, at a meeting in the Lexington headquarters building co-sponsored by the Rockbridge Historical Society and the Lexington Woman's Club. A number of the library's former employees and volunteers spoke at the meeting or sent written reminiscences in response to requests by Library Director Linda L. Krantz. An edited version of the remarks is presented here along with papers written earlier and excerpts from the library's records by Ann Vaughn.



**Robert R. Wayland,**  
Lexington, Virginia, May 1986

The seeds for a community library were planted in 1934 through the joint efforts of the Lexington Woman's Club and the newly formed Junior Woman's Club. The junior club was formed in October 1934 at the home of Mrs. E. P. Tompkins; Martha Moore was President, Medora Ford the vice-president, Polly Penick the secretary, and Mary Moore Harper the treasurer. At their first regular meeting in November, Mrs. Tompkins and Mrs. H. V. Shelly, representing the senior club, suggested that a community book shelf might be started primarily for children.

A small collection of books was set up in the Weinburg Building over what was then Grossman's store on Main Street. Books were donated by members of both the junior and senior women's clubs and by interested friends. Later the collection was moved into the Lyons Building on the northeast corner of Main and Nelson Streets, across



*Between 1949 and 1954 the library was on the second floor of the McCoy Building at 209 South Main Street in Lexington. The library's unprepossessing sign is inside the white circle. This photo is dated May 17, 1951.*

from Lexington Presbyterian Church. In 1936 the senior club held a book tea that brought in one hundred donated books, which swelled the collection to 438 volumes. One contributor gave four magazine subscriptions, and Mrs. Derbyshire gave a reading at which a silver offering was taken to raise money. The junior club women cataloged all the books and magazines, provided shelves for the collection, and took turns tending the library when it was open.

Upon notice that the Lyons Building was to be torn down in 1936, Mrs. Cleveland Davis offered a rent-free room over McCrum's Drugstore at the northeast corner of Main and Washington Streets. There the library remained until 1949, when it moved to 209 South Main Street. By 1938 circulation had increased tremendously, and some current fiction books were added, thus catering to more adults. By 1939 there were 1,243 books in the collection overseen by a library clerk who was paid by the Works Progress Administration. The WPA funds ran out in 1942, and the responsibility of tending and running the library each day from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. again became the responsibility of the Junior Woman's Club.

In 1944 the junior club promoted plans to have the Lexington Public Library housed in a municipal building, but the Town Council allot-

ted only \$20, which meant that all new books and equipment had to be provided out of club funds. Two years later, club members laid a good bit of groundwork for converting Lexington Public Library into a Botetourt-Rockbridge Regional Library, and on July 1, 1946, the state of Virginia contributed \$10,000 to the library. This project was carried to a successful conclusion through the untiring efforts of Mrs. Robert S. Munger, who was library chair of the Junior Woman's Club.



**Elizabeth E. Munger**

Lexington, Virginia, 1948

The eyes of the public library world are turning more and more toward that great unserved group, the rural people. Surveys have been and are being made. State legislatures are appropriating money to extend library services beyond city and town limits. This is the story of the beginnings of one push into that undernourished territory.

For the past seven years, my husband, who is a country doctor, our two children, and I have been living in a small town in the Blue Ridge section of Virginia. It is a town which for many years has been called the Athens of Virginia, and the state is quite proud of the two colleges which function here. But the colleges' research libraries offered no services for children or for many of the interests beyond the academic ones—certainly no best-sellers. It has only been during the past fifteen years that any attempt has been made to have books available, free, to all the people of the town and countryside around.

I grew up in a part of the United States where a public library was considered as necessary as street lights and paved sidewalks. In my memory, at least, every town in New England had its free library, often housed in an attractive building, a memorial to some past national tragedy. But this Virginia Athens in 1941 offered one dark, small, second-story room, containing about fifteen hundred books—largely, it seemed to me, best-sellers of 1905. Even such a collection as this was but five years old, and its sole support came from the Junior Woman's Club, its founder. Each year, these energetic young women raised \$120 by bingo games, rummage and gift sales, and the like. This \$120, at the time of Pearl Harbor, was spent to staff the library—one woman five afternoons a week—and to buy books and supplies. In the beginning, the club put on a drive for contributions of books, and the townspeople delightedly stripped their attics of books which they had long wondered what to do with. Even with the

very limited funds for purchasing books and the uncomfortable location—the stairs to the library were dingy, dirty, and of such Alpine steepness that even children were breathless by the time they reached the top—even with these conditions, the circulation at that time averaged 250 per month. This, then, was the only source of books for four thousand townspeople and eighteen thousand county people, except for those few who could, by direct contact, borrow from the Virginia Military Institute or the Washington and Lee University libraries.

I joined the Junior Woman's Club early in 1942 and was immediately interested in their main project—the library. Shortly after I became a member, the library chair went off to follow her husband to war and I was appointed library chair. From that day forward, the library became my third child, my contribution to society and the big problem in my life. Also, I suspect it was a neutral outlet for my Yankee crusading spirit in this citadel of Southern tradition.

About the middle of 1942, the library got wind of a state project to help libraries throughout the Commonwealth. It was even rumored that such a library as ours could get \$500. Images of what we could do with so much money were heavenly to contemplate. The reply to our inquiries revealed that the state would only help those who helped themselves. We must have financial aid from the local authorities—that is, the town and county governing boards—before we could apply for state aid.

At that time, the county was an unknown region to me, so the town powers were the first we approached. I soon learned the main lesson of politics: most of the town's business was really settled, not in the meetings, but on the street or over a coke in the drug store. I began buying cokes at a great rate and proselytizing officials as I did my marketing. I learned, too, who were the powers to convince, for, as always, three or four men ran the town and, at that time, two of them were not even in office. And sell the library we did. Three hundred dollars a year was appropriated for the Town Library, as we tactfully began calling it. Then, after much filling out of forms, along came \$100 in state aid to buy books. Not a bit bad, said we, and promptly invested in some new best-sellers.

Looking back now to those days, the library seemed peaceful, easily handled, and a job within our untrained powers to do well. It was also, as I now know, no real public library at all. Our quiet days were soon numbered, however, and we were on to bigger things. In 1945 the General Assembly passed the Library Extension Act. A representative of the Virginia State Library spoke to the Junior Woman's Club one night in November of that year, and the idea of a regional library was planted in our enthusiastic minds. She knew of adjoining Botetourt County's need for a public library. They had sixteen thousand people and no free

books, and Rockbridge County had twenty-two thousand people and fifteen hundred books. She suggested that we combine the needs, forces, and money (what money?) and have more books, greater variety, and better facilities. But how do you get books to people fifty or sixty miles away? By bookmobile!—a truck or bus converted with shelves into a library on wheels to travel up and down the countryside. A truck to take books up all the hollows, to all the villages, and everyone would find exactly the book he or she would like to read.

Breathless at such a prospect, we learned how all this could come to pass. Out of funds appropriated by the Virginia General Assembly were grants up to \$10,000 for any regional library that qualified—enough money to buy a bookmobile and the books to go in it. The questions were, what were the qualifications and could we possibly meet them. That night—and to this day—they have seemed to me reasonable and generous. Far from putting a great many strings on the funds, the law was structured to help us get them. There seemed no question in my mind but that the Junior Woman's Club should undertake the business of establishing a regional library and nourishing it with the \$10,000. On July 19, 1946, the funding was granted for a bookmobile and books for the Botetourt-Rockbridge Regional Library. It was in the qualifying for that seemingly astronomical sum that I fell headlong into the sea of county politics.

There was only one requirement that was difficult to meet: we had to have an assured income from local funds of ten cents per capita population—\$2,200 from Rockbridge County—and two-thirds of that had to come from taxes. This money was to be used for the maintenance of the library: salary for a trained librarian, gas for the bookmobile, and the like. So it was necessary to approach the County Supervisors for funds. All that we felt it was necessary to ask for was \$900 that first year, since we were going to receive additional funding from the Town Council and the Junior Woman's Club.

The Board of Supervisors meets every second Monday of the month in the courthouse, a masterful concoction of black mahogany-painted rooms, high ceilings, narrow but tall windows, and a general overall covering of gloom and grime. The outside can only be described as ugly, vintage 1895. I presented myself in the clerk's office in January 1946 to see the six men of the Board. They were in session behind closed doors, and I was to have a seat, please. An hour later I was invited in. The room was hot, steam heat going full-blast and the sunshine pouring in. It was nearly lunch time, and the men were restless and hungry, early risers that they were. All but one of them was well past middle age. The clerk, a full eighty-nine years, was dosing in a high-back, black armchair. The deputy clerk, eighty-one years of age, was taking the minutes. The Board

widely circled a heavy black table, all seated in big black chairs with high backs and arms. One man's feet could not touch the floor.

Quietly and objectively, I asked these men to invest \$900 of the county's money in a public library and get a return of \$10,000. I told them of the regional library idea. The two county governmental units had a chance to combine and cooperate in one aspect of their lives, a chance to build something bigger than either group could afford alone. We could have a bigger collection of books, available to more people, and a wider variety for all. I told of the bookmobile and how it could bring books to those far from any library.

As I spoke to these men whom I had never seen before, their faces were polite and without a glimmer of expression. After I finished, the chairman admitted to great confusion. He had never known that there was a town library, and he was baffled that the state would give \$10,000 for a truck and books. He implied a suspicion that there must be a catch in it somewhere. One man said that every time he read a book he fell asleep. Another, the oldest of the group, said he felt most of the books nowadays weren't fit for people to read. I was then thanked politely and told that the matter would be considered.

The next day I dropped by the clerk's office to see how the matter had been considered. No money—unanimous vote. I talked with the chairman a few days later and learned something of democratic functioning. The Board was the custodian of the taxpayers' money, and its responsibility was not taken lightly. It had no assurance that the county people wanted their money spent to have books carted around. Now if, he said, I had some petitions! He felt that if enough people in each district were willing to write down their name as favoring such an outlay of money, the board might change its mind. As this is a strongly Scotch Presbyterian neighborhood, wary of new ideas, its board was certainly representative.

Consequently, I set out to sell the county on free public library service. I gathered the names of important people in each district and we hit the road. It took doorbell ringing (or rather, knocking), speech making, and an intensity of effort that made me wonder why anyone ran for public office. Picnic lunch in hand, we would tackle a district. Sitting in the warm, homey kitchen or chilly, unused parlor, we would tell our story. It was the women who saw what the library could mean. They envisioned books on dressmaking and slip-covering, stories they had been wanting to read for a long time, and, above all, books for their children, who were being exposed to reading in school. Everywhere we went we left petition forms and the women did a masterful job that winter month of visiting neighbors and getting the all-important signatures.



Most rural parts of the United States have organizations such as the Ruritan Clubs. I contacted the presidents of these groups and asked if I could appear before their membership to tell of the chance we had for a regional library. Without exception they welcomed me with an invitation to their dinner meeting. What meals they were. My war-neglected palate had never been so indulged. I was so stuffed that often I was in better condition to sleep the meal off than to talk it off. Of course, as soon as I started to speak they knew I was a Yankee, which is still somewhat a cause for suspicion here. After eight years in the South, however, I have my accent pretty well under control, but the tension of public speaking undermines that control, and all of New England pours out when I begin to talk.

Little by little that month, my pile of resolutions and petitions grew, and at the next meeting of the Supervisors I had enough evidence to convince a bare majority that investing in a library would not lose them votes. The Botetourt County group, our partners in this undertaking, had met—and still meet—with instant and whole-hearted support from their Supervisors.

Shortly before the state approved our application for the \$10,000, we held the first meeting of the library Board of Trustees. We seven (three from each county and the superintendent of the Botetourt County school system) set out to run a library. No Board member had had any more association with a library than borrowing books; our librarian was just beginning her training; and no one had ever seen a bookmobile or had any ideas about where it should go or what it should carry. All we could see was the glorious vision of it rolling along the highway and being met by jubilant crowds who would practically throw roses in its path.

Our first year of operation was a wild one. Neither the librarian nor I had much idea of what to buy for thirty-eight thousand potential customers, mainly farmers and their families. She was still learning her trade and my college education had been more liberal than factual. Our dependence on the Extension Division of the Virginia State Library was, therefore, heavy and was always answered with detailed advice, tactfully given. The headquarters, that little second-story room, became the depot for \$7,000 worth of books. Soon the first \$2,000 order, from Personal Book Shop, began to arrive. Boxes of books reached nearly to the ceiling. We climbed over them and under them, but we could not get around them. Someone's bright idea solved our over-crowding: the room in the courthouse where the Supervisors met was used only once a month and there was lots of space, so why not store the boxes there? Thus for months those doubting men had tangible evidence that the library existed. As fast as possible, the boxes were brought to the library



*Leaders in the early years of the library gather around the punch table at an open house celebrating National Book Week in November 1953. From the left are Miss Madeline Willis, librarian; Mrs. Robert S. Munger, former library board chair; Mrs. Henry L. Ravenhorst, president of the Lexington Junior Woman's Club; Miss Christine Coffey of Richmond, assistant head of the extension division of the Virginia State Library; and Mrs. Raymond Dixon, president of the Lexington Woman's Club.*

and the books cataloged and processed. We were getting ready for the bookmobile.

We had set out, as soon as the state's aid was ours, to buy a bookmobile. But our first year in operation as a regional library was almost over before that longed-for green truck appeared on our roads. The war had been over for about a year when we went to market, and the demand for buses, trucks, and tractors was enough to swamp our hopes for a bookmobile. By a great stroke of luck, we snared a 1.5-ton Chevrolet chassis in Roanoke. To Indiana it went to sit in the winter weather for six months before going on the production line. Then, after another delay, back to Roanoke it went for its shelving.

Our trustee meetings at this stage were forlorn affairs—a school with no pupils. Moreover, our consciences hurt us that the rural taxpayers were getting nothing for their money. We did decide on a complicated system of deposit stations—small collections of books left in a home, store, or school near a settlement. So the librarian and I again set out to tour the county looking for store shelves, home book cases, and volunteer help which would permit us to leave the collections for the use of the immediate neighborhoods.

On one of these expeditions I learned how far I was from being a good politician. We went to one of the county supervisors and asked if he could spare a couple of shelves for books in his country store. His customers could get reading material when they bought their bread and chewing tobacco, we asserted. He threw back his head and laughed. He couldn't be bothered with watching after a bunch of books. On, no, I hastily assured him; he would be free of all responsibility. The woman across the creek had said she would be glad to come over and run the "library" three afternoons a week. "Well," he stalled, "I don't think I want to do that, anyhow. I may be hard-boiled, but I don't hold with this library business, nohow." "No," I sailed in gaily, "You're not hard-boiled, you're just short-sighted." He did not reply in kind but glared at me: "I'm going to remember that, Mrs. Munger!" And he has; with each of our successive appeals for financial aid to the county Supervisors, there has been strong opposition from that gentleman.

Bookmobile-less we worried through that year, making changes in the deposits whenever we could borrow the librarian's father's car. Often the books had been read out before we could get around to exchange them for others. We had a time selling a reappropriation for the almost inactive—as far as the county was concerned—library to the Supervisors. What had we done with the \$900 appropriated the previous year, they asked, if we had no bookmobile to spend it on? I explained the tremendous job it had been to catalogue thirty-six hundred books and that the money had been spent for additional help. The Supervisors' vote, I learned later, ended in a tie, and the chairman had to break it. He saved the regional library.

This second go-round with the County Board occupied all my thinking. The library, hampered as it was, had made some friends around the county. All of these people were told of the essential need for the continued money from taxes. They were to call on, write to, or stop their Supervisor on the street and tell him that they were in favor of keeping the library. Saturday was our best day for politicking, as everyone came to town to shop and we could find many of our key supporters in one day. My family got used to having library served to them with each meal. Even my dreams were affected; I dreamt that I had murdered (a

result of an overdose of detective stories, to which I am addicted) a member of the W&L faculty, and although several people were suspicious of me, I did not dare confess, because the Supervisors would never give any money for a library to a murderess.

Finally, in May 1947, the bookmobile came from Roanoke. Max Murray, one of the library's trustees, and his wife Dorothy drove it up. I thought the arrival should be done with some celebration, so my husband made contact with them at Natural Bridge and spent the afternoon supplying an airplane escort in his little Taylorcraft. Parked in front of our house, the bookmobile was a most satisfying sight. It is exactly like a school bus on the outside; it is painted green and has "FREE BOOK SERVICE" printed on the back and the library name on the sides. Inside, it is cream-colored with shelves—or stacks—perpendicular to the sides of the bus, with an aisle down the middle. Across the back is a seat where people can sit and browse. It has a capacity of a thousand to fifteen hundred books, which are held on the shelves between stops by welting straps.

With the bookmobile here, it seemed as if the end of my worries was at hand. It would go on its way; the people would use it; we would tell the Supervisors how great the circulation was; and each year they would support it with more and more money. My home would now be a different place and I would lead the peaceful and complete life—so the magazines said—of the housewife and mother: fresh flowers everywhere; darning done; meals planned ahead; and buttons sewn on the children's pajamas.

For the past year and more, the bookmobile has been going out eight days each month, stopping at six or seven places each day. We carry as great a cross-section of books as we can lay our hands on. Many easy-reading books for little children—today's children's books are superb—books for parallel reading for the older children. Biography and history for the older men, who come on and ask for "true stories, none of that make-believe stuff my wife reads." Sometimes the men go off with one of the Horatio Hornblower series, or one of Kenneth Roberts's books, but by and large it is straight stuff then want. There are many books for women—sewing, cooking (one woman takes a different cook book each time), gardening, house plants, etc. The Home Demonstration Clubs have a reading list from which members try to read three items per month. Their reading time is minute and usually at the end of a day that has been hard and long, so the women take along a "list book" and a "sweet story" book with which to relax. Demand is strong for Grace Livingston Hill, Harold Bell Wright, Zane Grey, Emile Loring, and Grace S. Richmond. We have fun trying to change that diet. The Jalna books are good transition material, but our successes are few; some

day they will have read every single Hill book and then our chance will come.

We have good laughs over the whispered requests for *Forever Amber*, or “after Mrs. Jones gets off the bookmobile will you find me a book that’s kinda dirty? I don’t want her to see me getting it.” I have often been tempted to stock up on these “kinda dirty” books and offer to let one out if the person will take *Wuthering Heights*, *Green Mansions*, or the like and read it, too. But I fear it would be unethical according to the librarian’s code, and besides, the Supervisors might hear of it. And they are seriously concerned about these books that will corrupt people. I wonder what they would say to that classic *Tom Jones*.

We once had a request for Miss Winsor’s flamboyant novel from a country store way up on a mountain. There were three or four log cabins in the neighborhood. We could hardly believe that this world of the pot-bellied stove, the wood floor, and the dingy shelves could have heard of Amber. It seemed, however, that a soldier, returning from overseas had read part of it, and both he and his wife wanted to finish it in their kerosene-lit house.

Our bookmobile moves in and about the ever-lovely and variable Virginia hills. One run takes us up into the Thomas Jefferson National Forest to a place called Arcadia. We ride the Blue Ridge Parkway part way, crossing the James River on a raft ferry powered by a man pulling on a rope. It is blisteringly hot in summer, and we make use of every shade tree. It is cold in winter, and we have many a scary moment on the icy hillsides.

For political purposes of crusading and emphasizing our still-precarious financial status, I often make the runs with the librarian and our stolid, dependable driver. We set out early in the morning and our first stop is usually met by a couple of women who have been enjoying a second cup of coffee together. Sometimes we are given one, too. Other readers are called on the telephone. It really takes only one call, for everyone knows the almost honored system of listening in that the bookmobile has arrived. Soon everyone has received the requests of the previous month, found a couple of Zane Grey westerns, taken a book on Robert E. Lee for a husband, asked me how Dr. Munger thinks old Mr. Patrick is getting on, and we are on our way.

The next stop may be a school, where each teacher brings out a couple of children—the “library committee”—to pick out twelve to fifteen books for the coming month. The driver sits up in his seat methodically checking in the returned books and then shelving them. The librarian and I help choose, recommend, and occasionally discourage books. Do you like cowboy stories, is there someone in your class who would like a book about airplanes, and where are some love stories suitable for four-

teen-year-olds? Teenagers are the dickens to please. Too many movies and *True Love* magazines have jaded their tastes. A good teenage mystery usually does the job. *Dr. Doolittle*, *Hans Brinker*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Martin Hyde*, and *Downright Dancy* are books of my own youth that still hold up. And there is great fun in finding a boy who wants more about Daniel Boone and seeing his eyes shining when we show him *Boy Explorer*.

Early in the afternoon, we often come to a large village inhabited by well-to-do, long-time gentry of the county. The women make meeting the bookmobile a social occasion. Anywhere from ten to fifteen women get on, compare books, point out good ones, swap news, and exchange ideas on how to make last year's dresses long enough. And our circulation gets a big boost. We have never had roses strewn in our path, but we have had lemonade and cookies awaiting us. There have been people standing in driving rain rather than miss us. We have had the thrill of being asked how much a book will cost and being able to say it is free for the borrowing. Who pays for it, then? You do, through your taxes—won't you sign a petition to keep it going. So goes my crusading.

For again the time had come to go begging to the county Supervisors. I felt that I could point with pride to our success. I was armed with facts and figures. The bookmobile had been going on its rounds for nearly a year, and the circulation, number of borrowers, and growing size of the deposit stations seemed to tell a convincing tale of use and demand for public library services. In February 1948, I took my knitting to the Supervisors' meeting and had added several inches to a sock before I was called in. For each member of the Board I had a typed copy of our minimum expenses, and the proof that the people wanted the library on wheels. I asked for \$1,800. They barely looked at the evidence I had handed them; I even had to put the papers on one man's lap to get him to take them—that was my hard-boiled friend. They turned immediately to the sheaf of petitions. (I have a feeling that when the library is a hundred years old, the Supervisors will wish to know how many petitions there are.)

I enjoyed telling them of the enthusiasm for the books. I quoted one borrower who said it was the finest thing the county had ever done. (The chairman wanted to know if the borrower was a big taxpayer.) I finished my appearance with a fine passionate appeal. I think the Supervisors were afraid that my enthusiasm would carry them away, so the decision was postponed a month. Nevertheless, \$1,350 was finally allotted to the regional library. Not the \$1,800 we so desperately needed, but at least a raise over 1947's \$900, and it set a precedent of increasing the appropriation.

Our shoestring budget is frazzled and frayed, and it will have to be knotted together with contributions from clubs and individuals who also

pay taxes. But the bookmobile goes up and down and around. The farmer with calloused hands, in dirty bluejeans, who wants Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, because he has already read the *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, will find it there for him on the next run. And that is what must be the hope of the world. The minds and feelings of these land-bound, struggling people can grow in understanding and have a closer identity with the people beyond their own rocky hills, and have, as well, moments of enjoyment and entertainment. But there I go, starting a speech to the county Supervisors.



**Marjorie (Mrs. James G.) Hollandsworth**

Huntington, West Virginia, March 1996

We lived in the Kerrs Creek neighborhood. Our house, and later my father's general store, had a bookshelf served by the bookmobile. People in the community used and enjoyed this bookshelf. I remember as a teenager tackling *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This was heavy stuff, and it took weeks for me to wade through that three-inch thick book.

My mother, Mrs. William E. Fitzpatrick, was very active in the early days of the library. She was the library chairman on the state board of the Home Demonstration Clubs. After attending her board meetings and being sent to Washington, D.C., for a library conference, she came home and worked to help get the library established. She contacted other clubs in the county for support, gave book reviews, and spoke to the Board of Supervisors on behalf of establishing a library. She served on the board for a number of years. Later, as mother's eyesight failed, she used the talking books from the library and received a great deal of enjoyment from them.

I succeeded her as a board member in the early 1950s, serving with Houston Harlow and Dr. George W. Diehl. While I served on the Board, we had an unusual and upsetting thing happen. The librarian was a lovely lady, very intelligent and well qualified. However, she went on a spending spree and ordered and purchased many expensive things. Boxes were arriving daily and she was so pleased. The budget was of no concern to her. Now that I look back on it, she must have been on the upside of manic-depression. Much as we disliked doing it, we had to ask her to return the merchandise, and we had to dismiss her. I believe she died soon afterwards. We had a somewhat trying time, but the library survived.



*The Bookmobile in the early 1950s. On the left is Margaret Patton; on the right is Ann Vaughn*



### **Samuel K. Patton**

Hopewell Junction, New York, May 1996

The library was located on the second floor of a building on Main Street at one time. In those days, before patron privacy became an issue, it was always interesting to look on the card of a book and see who else had read it. I was, and still am, a fan of detective mysteries, and I think there were some people who also read them whose names might have surprised others. The minister of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. J. J. Murray, was one whose name I looked for, because he and I seemed to like the same books, and if he had read one, it was probably good.

Cataloging, then as now, could be difficult, particularly for some volunteers. I remember chuckling over one fiction book, *By Rocket to the*



*Moon*, which had been cataloged in the Dewey Decimal 600s under science.

My mother, Margaret Patton, was a library volunteer, and she also wrote some book reviews for Houston Harlow of the *Lexington Gazette*. Later she was a volunteer librarian for the bookmobile. In the early 1950s, when I was a student at Washington and Lee, she would occasionally draft me to be the driver when Mr. Duncan Goodman, the regular driver, was not available. I remember how much the people where we visited appreciated the bookmobile, and how they always made us feel so welcome in whatever community we visited. There always seemed to be refreshments and a warm welcome for us. The bookmobile was a converted school bus, and some of the roads we went on would be a challenge for a large modern bus. Fortunately, it was a relatively small vehicle, and as long as we did not meet too many other trucks, we could always get through. One time, I think between Brownsburg and Fairfield, we ran into an unexpected snow storm. As the snow accumulated, and the roads became progressively more slippery, I began to get worried about getting through. There were tire chains hung in a rack below the body of the bookmobile, but there was no easy way to get them on the rear wheels—no jack and no good way to reach under without one. We finally decided to just keep going, and we made it. From Fairfield back to Lexington, there was enough traffic that a heavy vehicle like ours had no real problems. Still, I was very glad when we finally got safely parked at the library.



**Emory E. Wallin**

Rockbridge County, Virginia, May 1996

I was a full-time farmer, raising beef cattle and sheep, but I worked part-time on the bookmobile or library on wheels. It was a rewarding job and I enjoyed the work, people, and beautiful scenery. We left the library in Lexington around 7:30 A.M. and returned about 4:30 P.M. By the end of a month we would have driven five thousand miles or more serving Rockbridge, Bath, Botetourt, and Highland Counties.

There were two of us working on the bookmobile. It would have been impossible for only one person to take care of checking in and out books and keeping a list of books requested from the Lexington library. Stops were made once a month at Lexington House retirement community, stores, schools, homes, forks of roads, and individual shut-ins along

the way. People appreciated this service. Some places would serve us coffee and light refreshments as a token of appreciation.

We asked people to give us their magazines when they had finished with them. We distributed these to all who wanted them as long as the supply lasted. There were many retired people on low fixed incomes who were unable to subscribe to magazines. The expression of enthusiasm lit up their faces as they selected their favorite magazines. There were young housewives who enjoyed this, I am sure. They would swap magazines when finished. It was also interesting to watch the preschool children peek from behind their mother's skirts as they were selecting books and magazines. I am sure they enjoyed seeing pictures as parents read and explained to them.

Everyone was friendly, and after we had been in the county a few times, people we met would speak to us or honk their horns as we passed by. When we stopped at a restaurant for lunch or a filling station, a smile or an expression of appreciation was often given to us. They wanted their children and families to be well informed and educated. Some people would bring large grocery bags to carry their books. They were getting books for children and the entire family. On some trips I took a bag of suckers for the children; it was perhaps the highlight of their day.



**Frances D. Kinnear**

Harrisonburg, Virginia, June 1996

Mrs. Phil Day and I, representing our Timber Ridge Home Demonstration Club, traversed Rockbridge County trying to influence citizens to speak to their County Supervisors, asking them to support the library. My husband, Horace Kinnear, was at that time a member of the Democratic Committee, and with the backing of their chairman, Charley Davidson, I was asked to speak on the radio requesting support. One question was: "Who would use a public library?" My answer, "People from two-and-a-half-year-olds on up." Our daughter was then two and a half and enjoyed the picture books.

In those days, the library was supported by Botetourt and Rockbridge Counties, so on Tuesdays we left Lexington early for Botetourt County, hoping that the James River was not swollen with rain, since we had to cross it on a small ferry to get to Arcadia. On another trip in Botetourt County, to a village called Oriskany, we always hoped that we



*A library activity on August 22, 1951.*

would not have to cross a large stream on a narrow wooden trestle at the same time as the train crossed—the train track and road were side by side on the wooden trestle. Another of our concerns with the bookmobile was getting stuck in the mud on one of the many dirt roads we had to travel. But the only time a recall getting stuck was in the unpaved Randolph Street parking lot in Lexington.

The library at this time was housed in one room over the Lexington Hardware Company. We were constantly reminded that with all the weight of books, shelves, and people, we might land in the hardware store. With two counties to serve with a small book collection, it was quite a challenge to juggle books so that everyone's requests could be granted. All of us who worked in the library and on the bookmobile were well rewarded by the smiles and many expressions of appreciation from our loyal readers.



**John Watt**

Stockton, California, July 1, 1996

Forty years ago this past spring, I drove from Illinois to Lexington to be interviewed for the librarian's position. The trip was fourteen hours each way; I started on Friday, was interviewed on Saturday, and drove back on Sunday. It must have gone well, but the only question I remember was the final one. The whole group seemed to become tense as Houston Harlow steeled himself to ask: "Do you think that it is essential that the library needs a camera." "No," I answered perplexedly, "I do not think the library needs a camera." Everyone relaxed, the interview was over, and I was left with a fourteen-hour drive pondering "what did that question mean?" I must have given the correct answer, because I got the job. But I was wrong; if we had had a camera there would have been a much better record of those years in the library's history.

When I came to Lexington in September 1956, I found three wonderful women who were enormously supportive of the library and what I was trying to do: Ellene McKendree, Frances Nuckols, and, of course, Ann Vaughn. They were warm and enthusiastic, which I appreciated. Ellene was "sparkly"; everything she said was delivered with a smile with just a touch of the devil in it. Frances was model beautiful, the most glamorous person I have ever known. Ann was practical, inventive, and kept grounding me in the stark reality of our situation: no money.

State aid could be used for books, magazines, and a professional librarian. Later, Federal aid could be used for books and some equipment. All other expenses—building, equipment, supplies, and support staff—had to come from local governing bodies and contributions. The local governing bodies did not always consider the needs of the library a first priority, but we did have gratifying support from the Community Chest and organizations, particularly the Junior Woman's Club.

We decided to concentrate our efforts where we had money: on the collection. The goal was to broaden the information base of adult and children's materials and to have the book in the collection when it was requested. Since all orders had to be approved by the Virginia State Library before being placed, we did not have much lead time. It meant that we selected items the public might want from publishers' catalogs and prepublication reviews. It became very gratifying on Monday mornings when Mrs. Shelby would come in with the list of books she wanted taken from the Sunday *New York Times Book Reviews* and we could give



*John Watt in 1996.*

them to her. It was even better when we could say “that title went out last week; can we reserve it for you?”

In order to broaden the subject collections, we combed many “best books of the year” lists and ordered titles we had missed that would fit in our collection. Unfortunately, we did not keep a file of the sources on which we based our orders. About a month before I departed for California, a book of tables and formulas came it. I could not, and no one I consulted could, determine what subject it covered. Two years later, when I came back to visit, Ann said “There’s this book in the back room that you left.” I replied, “I don’t know what it is about but I do know that it was the best book on the subject published in 1959.”

One year we received a large increase in state aid, Federal aid became available, and, since we were ordering more books, we received a larger discount from our jobbers. This was delightful until one cold February, Ann looked up from her bookkeeping and said, “Well, we are broke.” I replied, “What do you mean we are broke?” She listed the extra catalog cards, circulation cards, glue, and staff time it took to process the extra books and made it clear that the local funds were almost exhausted. Somehow we muddled through with volunteer time and overtime until July. The books did not get on the shelves as quickly, but if the requested item was in the building, the patron got it—perhaps with glue still wet.

Mrs. Amos Knick was a dedicated bookmobile driver. The bookmobile went out twice a week. The Rockbridge County run left at 8:30 A.M., which was no problem. The Botetourt County run left at 8:00, which sometimes was a problem, but I was usually able to catch up with him at the filling station. Unfortunately even his dedication could not keep a worn-out bookmobile running. The new Federal aid could be used for the purchase of a bookmobile, but it was not enough. Suddenly there was a solution. (I am sure than Ann worked it out, since it was her type of operation.) We bought the body to be invoiced in June and the chassis to be invoiced in July—the next fiscal year.

There are other memories, such as our noon bridge games that sometimes went on too long. Frances’s bad hair day, and Ann and Ellene going fishing when I needed them the most, but these are stories for another time.



**Matthew R. Beebe**

Lexington, Virginia, May 1996

In 1961, our family lived at 312 South Main Street in Lexington, but after a long delay we had our plans and the go-ahead to build a new home on Barger Drive. We put the Main Street house on the market about the same time the Rockbridge-Botetourt Regional Library was being evicted from the basement of the Stonewall Jackson House. We think this was a happy coincidence for both parties. The site and asking price on our house were agreeable to the library, but there was a time problem. The library had to be out of the Jackson house by June and needed possession, but our new house was as yet only a hole in the ground.

This situation precipitated us into a unique situation. In some respects, it was no problem. We normally moved to our cabin above Rockbridge Baths when school was out each summer, so vacating the Main Street house was just a matter of putting most of our household goods in storage until the new house was ready. Now the monkey was on my back. As the builder-contractor, I was certain that we would be finished by the start of school in September. So, casting caution to the winds, I said let's go for it, and the die was cast. Contracts were signed, and we proceeded as planned.

Contractors being what they are, however, September arrived but the roof was just going on. With summer over, we found ourselves living in something of a frontier environment: outside john and no heat but the fireplace and kitchen oven. Our running water was the Maury River. Electricity and bottled gas were our only amenities.

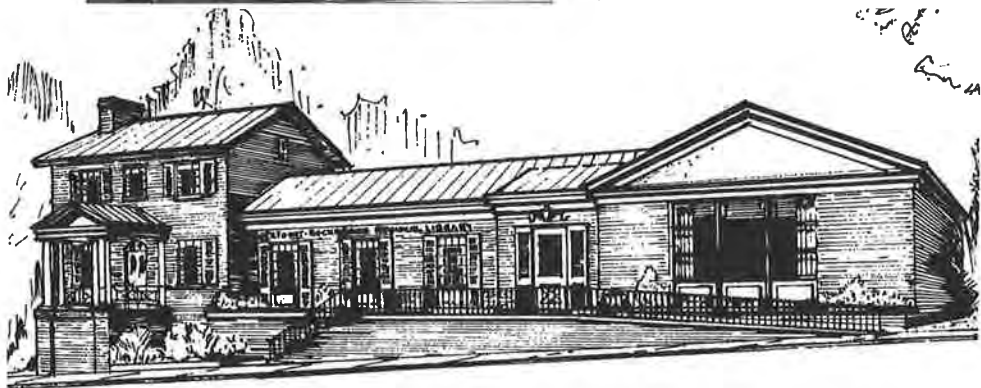
October was a nice month, but the house was not finished. The children loved it. They came in to school with me to study in the plan room and then on to school. My wife, Louise, came into her sister's for showers, shopping, laundry, and so forth, then picked up the children from school and returned to the cabin. Emptying slop jars, hauling in wood, taking ashes out, and getting water from the river were the children's after-school chores. No television; no radio. Baths in a tin washtub in front of the fireplace were a novelty.

Going into November, the air got frosty. It snowed twice, and the atmosphere inside with me, the contractor, got frigid. The Sunday before Thanksgiving was a snow day, and I took the children for a walk in the snow. When we got back, Louise was walking from the fireplace to the window—back and forth. Finally, she faced me and said: we move Wednesday, ready or not. So it was. We and the library both had new homes.



*Left: The library building on August 5, 1965.*

*Below: The expanded library building is shown on the cover of the program used for the dedication of the new facilities on June 28, 1968.*



BOTETOURT - ROCKBRIDGE REGIONAL LIBRARY



**Mary Richardson**  
Highland County, Virginia, May 1996

I recall the early days of the Highland County Public Library. Jimmy and Gwen Bowen moved to Monterey, Virginia, when Jimmy retired. They both loved to read, and they really wanted a library in the county. I don't recall how Jimmy got in touch with Linda Krantz, but they worked together to get a library going. Mrs. Krantz came to Highland County to interview applicants for the librarian's position, but I had not even thought about wanting a job and didn't apply. Anyway, it was late summer, and I was making applesauce. Jimmy called and insisted I come to the interviews.

They hired me in October 1975. The Rockbridge Regional Library had been operating a bookmobile in Highland County since July, and the response had been wonderful. Jimmy Bowen led a fight against the

Board of Supervisors, who did not want to fund the local contribution to the regional library—\$1 per resident in the initial year, or about \$2,500. The Highland Masonic Lodge donated a room in its building, and library officials, new lodge members, and the Monterey Lions Club remodeled it to house the library. Our formal opening was held on December 16, 1975.

Getting the job as librarian was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It was fun being at the old library building on Main Street, with everyone coming and going. So many people stopped by to help or to say hello. Dr. Landes always stopped to rest on his way to and from the post office. Gary Billingsley loved to come in and correct my English and spelling. Once the water pipes froze in the apartment above us and flooded the library, but everyone pitched in to clean it up.

The regional library allowed us to keep many of its books when the Highland County library became independent. It was due to Linda Krantz that we accomplished as much as we did. If it had not been for her help during our library's small beginnings, we would not be in our nice, new building today.



**Shirley Wagner**

Buena Vista, Virginia, 1996

One person who should be remembered is Helen Urie. She had a dream of seeing a public library in Buena Vista. At a meeting of the Junior Woman's Club, she presented her dream and told how she felt it could be accomplished by becoming a part of the Rockbridge Regional Library. I attended that meeting, and I was a very angry mother. A few days before I had gone with one of my children to the school library. She had just completed the second grade and wanted some books to read. She was and is an avid reader, and she had read everything designated for second grade. Even though she could read and comprehend books at third grade level, she was told she could not read any of those books, because if she did, there would not be anything for her to read when she started third grade. Needless to say, when I left the meeting that night I was a part of Helen's team.

We started work and the next few months were full of excitement, challenges, and disappointments. We found opposition where we least expected it. We took calls from citizens letting us know that we did not need this; we had the school library and that an attempt to create a pub-



lic library had been made in the past and had failed. The publisher of the local newspaper wrote an editorial saying that not that many people in Buena Vista cared about books. Those that did belonged to a book club or went to Lexington for books. He was fair about it, though. He sent a reporter to see us and we got full and unbiased coverage in his paper.

Then Helen's husband, who worked for one of the industries in Buena Vista, was transferred to another state. By that time I was completely addicted to the idea of a library, and with Ann Vaughn's support, combined with the encouragement of friends and other citizens who believed that this would be a good thing, we progressed.

We formed a Friends of the Library group and talked to civic organizations and the City Council. We found moral support, encouragement, and some offers of help. A local businessman donated temporary space upstairs over his offices, and the Jaycees donated time and labor. They painted and helped in whatever way they could. Later, City Council agreed to designate funds in the budget to pay the cost of utilities and a hired worker for the library. By this time, getting the rooms ready for the books had become an important part of my family life. My preschool daughter walked back and forth with me several times a week to take care of one thing or another. A few years later, my son's first part-time job was in the library. All three were on hand when finally the day came; walls and shelves gleaming with fresh paint, we filled the shelves with new books, and the Rockbridge Regional Library's Buena Vista Branch was ready to open. We have moved three times since that day, and now the library can be found in the old Court House on Magnolia Avenue.

Today I am amused when people I know opposed every attempt to get our library established now tell me that they supported it totally from the very beginning. Perhaps they remember it that way, and this is not a bad thing. To me it means that it is recognized and accepted as an important part of Buena Vista. This is what sometimes happens with a dream.



**Ann Vaughn**

Rockbridge County, Virginia

When we moved to Rockbridge County in 1944, I learned from newspaper reports that some determined people were working on a library project. I was busy with a new home, a very young daughter, and growing sons, so my participation in this project consisted of cheering

from the sidelines. When the library opened in July 1946, I was on hand to register and check out books. After this, I was a frequent visitor, offering at times to read shelves or do anything that might be helpful.

I have gone through the available reports and minutes of the Board Meetings to extract information on some of the events that were taking place in the library's history. For example, as of July 19, 1946, the Botetourt-Rockbridge Regional Library's Board of Trustees consisted of Mrs. Robert S. Munger (chair), Mrs. Max Murray, Col. Robert Marr, all of Lexington, Mrs. W. H. Woody of Fincastle, Dr. E. W. Dodd of Buchanan, and Mr. H. M. Painter, Superintendent of Schools for Botetourt County. The Acting Librarian was Miss Iva Candler.

The bookmobile was put into service in early 1947, and the budget for that year (1946-47) was \$4,000, not including state aid. The next year funding improved somewhat; the library's budget for fiscal 1947-48 was broken down as follows:

Revenue		Expenditures	
Balance on Hand July 1, 1947	\$2,117.02	Bills outstanding July 1, 1947	\$1,200.00
Botetourt County appropriation	1,644.70	Librarian's Salary	1,620.00
Rockbridge County appropriation	900.00	Bookmobile Driver	675.00
Lexington appropriation	600.00	Additional help	1,000.00
Lexington Junior Woman's Club	300.00	Books—including Botetourt	500.00
Fines	120.00	Supplies	350.00
Rockbridge contributions	450.00	Insurance	171.05
Botetourt contributions	<u>381.76</u>	Miscellaneous (phone, etc.)	150.00
	\$6,513.48	Bookmobile expenses	<u>450.00</u>
			\$6,116.52
		Balance for cushion	<u>396.96</u>
			<u>\$6,513.48</u>

In 1948 the circulation reports indicate that Lexington was averaging 1,400 books read per month; bookmobile and deposit circulation was about 1,500 per month. While there are no figures available for the size of the total book collection, 2,647 books were cataloged during the year. Jacqueline Helmerick was librarian during this time; she resigned and was replaced by Ann Shaner, acting librarian. In 1949, the library moved to the McCoy Building at 209 South Main Street, Lexington.

I was working part-time now, after substituting on the bookmobile. Miss Madeline Willis was appointed librarian in September 1950. There was increased circulation during this period due to more publicity about the library and visits by pupils from nursery and grade schools for Story Hour during National Book Week. The Lexington Junior Woman's Club held Story Hour every Friday afternoon. Many children who came brought Book Week gifts to the library. Displays of books were made at



*Ann Vaughn in 1996.*

the Home Demonstration Club's Achievement Day and placed in store windows in downtown Lexington.

The bookmobile had fourteen scheduled stops in Rockbridge County and twenty-five in Botetourt. The headquarters library finally acquired an attractive sign. The Reference Collection was given special attention when book orders were made, and the book collection began to come more into line with Virginia State Library requirements.

The library issued its first printed annual report in June 1951 for the year 1950-51. The collection statistics were: 12,379 books

owned; 97,856 books borrowed (72,123 from the bookmobile and 25,733 from the Lexington library). The bookmobile made eight trips per month, making forty-one stops per month. Total income for the year was \$8,518.90. The library served a population of 38,000, but in 1951 it still did not have the number of volumes per capita to meet the minimum state standards (2.5 per capita for regions of up to 70,000 persons). Assistant librarian Ann Shaner resigned to attend college, and she was replaced by Mrs. H. H. Vaughn, Mrs. Margaret Patton, and Miss Eleanor Tardy.

In 1952 the library subscribed to forty-nine magazines. In May of that year, the library acquired an additional room in the McCoy Building, as its book collection now totaled 13,409. At the July 10, 1952, Library Board meeting, plans were adopted to establish a branch library in Fincastle. The Home Demonstration Club was to furnish the staff and the rent was to be \$15 per month. This was the system's first branch library. Following recommendations by the Virginia State Library, the branch painted three of its interior walls yellow and one red. But while colorful, the citizens of Historic Fincastle were not really pleased. The branch opened on January 27, 1953, with a book stock of 2,000 and subscriptions to eighteen magazines.

Mrs. Margaret Patton of Lexington served as bookmobile assistant between 1949 and 1954. She also contributed a column to the *Lexington Gazette* called "The Book Corner," in which she wrote delightfully whimsical reviews of both adult and juvenile books. On August 1, 1954, the library moved from the McCoy Building to the Stonewall Jackson Home on East Washington Street.

In 1955, Miss Madeline Willis, the librarian, was granted a month's leave of absence with pay to determine whether she would be able to continue with the work. It was not discovered until later that she was suffering from a brain tumor which must have caused her much pain and contributed to her somewhat erratic behavior. She died from this condition a short time later. Her contribution to the library had been great. She brought the library into the public eye through attractive displays in all available areas, use of the weekly newspapers, and talks on the radio station and before various clubs and organizations. These talks helped people to realize what a low per capita funding the library operated on, what its problems were, and how much it needed support from the area governing bodies.

On March 21, 1955, I was appointed acting librarian, whereas previously I had been managing the bookmobile. Throughout the first half of the 1950s, the library ran a budget deficit. It was in debt, had a very low budget, and was on very shaky ground in every way. Extra help gradually disappeared. The library rented rooms on three different floors of the former Stonewall Jackson Hospital. The basement (formerly the Morgue) served as bookmobile headquarters. It was dark and gloomy, but it was wonderful to have space for the overflow of books, so the staff tried to forget the space's former use. The first floor, which adjoined the headquarters of the Stonewall Jackson Memorial, served as the main library. Offices were on the second floor.

The library struggled with its debts, reduced staff, and other problems. Pay for library workers was so low that they stayed on only out of loyalty. These difficulties were mitigated by the patrons' appreciation of the services; they seemed to realize that the organization was operating on the margin and doing its best to survive. Slowly the library paid off its debts and began to operate more normally. In 1956, for example, the library was able to purchase its second typewriter. Relief was short-lived, however, because the Stonewall Jackson Memorial raised the rent, and the library began to consider trying to find a permanent home of its own.

With the debts paid off, the Library Board could now contemplate hiring a certified librarian. John Riley Watt was hired as Head Librarian and began working on September 1, 1956. The challenges he faced must have appeared daunting: a struggling library (just ten years old) in rented rooms; a bookmobile of doubtful stability for a schedule cover-

ing two large counties (5,187 miles per month with stops at twenty-five schools and twenty-five stops in various communities); a rapidly growing Fincastle branch in rented quarters. Fortunately, Watt had a great sense of humor and was very popular with library patrons.

One of Watt's first efforts was to refurbish the card catalog in order to bring the listings up to date. Since the library was adding approximately 1,800 volumes per year, and the collection was approaching a total of 20,000, this was a tremendous undertaking. The catalog had not been corrected for some time, given the shortage of help, and discarded or lost books had not been noted. There were also wrong subject headings and numerous other corrections that needed to be made.

The Town of Lexington increased its library appropriation slowly. Botetourt County was the first to increase its funding each year, but Rockbridge County was always very slow to act. Money was scarce and agencies hesitated to raise taxes. Mr. Watt drew up a budget for 1958 that requested the supporting government agencies for an increase of thirty cents per capita in order to make the library eligible for state and Federal aid. Lexington and Botetourt agreed, but Rockbridge County refused. Fortunately, the Community Chest carried the library in its budget, and the library was able to qualify for aid.

The bookmobile was breaking down often and the need for a new one was becoming desperate. After long hours of plotting, planning, and praying, finally, in 1958, through the magic of Federal aid (\$4,414.00) and a \$1,300 loan from Betty Munger, a new bookmobile was ordered. It was delivered in Lexington on July 1, 1958. The new bookmobile was very modern (to us); it had heaters that worked (no more carrying along blankets for use at the back-seat charge-in desk). It had shelving for 2,500 books and was bright and colorful. Our spirits soared as we drove about the counties and experienced the pleasure of the many rural patrons.

It was inevitable that another library would soon offer John Watt a better job. Our library had too many debts and too little money to be able to afford an attractive counter-offer. He left the library on September 15, 1960. It is amazing how much he accomplished in the short time he was in Lexington. Almost single-handedly he made the library work, because there was almost no money for help. I again became acting librarian after his departure.

In 1960, the Stonewall Jackson Foundation notified us that we would have to move into the quarters formerly occupied by the Lexington Police Department and that our rent would be doubled to \$200 per month. The Library Board decided to purchase the Beebe house at 312 South Main Street. After getting the State Library's consent to borrow the necessary \$18,000, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Munger agreed to under-

write the loan. Henry Ravenhorst offered his services gratis as architect of the building. At the board's July 20, 1961, annual meeting all the papers were signed to purchase the Beebe property. The City of Lexington and County of Rockbridge notified the library that its real estate taxes would be waived.

The big job of moving seemed insignificant after the insecurity of the previous months. On August 21, 1961, the library closed its doors at 12 E. Washington St. and started transferring its books and shelving to 312 S. Main St. Trucks were borrowed and six male and three female students worked with the staff to form assembly lines loading and moving book trays (borrowed from the W&L library). Naturally, the weather was the hottest of the season, but the job was done in three days. The library opened again on September 11.

There were two big maple trees on the lot. Roots from the one in front had disrupted the sidewalk and were going under the foundation. The one in back was right where we planned to build our new quarters. Someone offered to remove the trees for fifty dollars, and the Board approved. We were not prepared for the disapproval of the garden clubs and various groups in the county. I thought we should write an article for the newspaper explaining why the trees had been taken down, but the Board said no: if people wanted to believe something, they would anyway, and our loyal patrons would know that we had good reasons. In fact, not long afterwards, a patron approached me to say that he hated to see the trees go, but he expected we felt we were justified.

Mrs. Miley Dunn and Betty Munger were appointed to organize a fund drive beginning in March 1962. Dr. L. J. Desha, a dignified and scholarly but humorous professor, chaired the effort to raise \$25,000. The fund drive was so successful that exactly one year later all indebtedness had been paid back.

Space in the new headquarters was limited, so we had to store books in Fincastle, at one time in Bordens Run School, and in every corner of the library building. We were too busy with trying to handle services to stop and worry about conditions. We were, however, high on the list for a Federal construction loan when the Federal Services Act passed. The situation was complicated for the library by the need to match whatever we got from the U.S. government. I made several trips to Richmond to examine the possibilities, and staff members made trips to other libraries who had completed a building program. Miss Florence Yoder, the Extension Division head at the Virginia State Library, was helpful and encouraging. Meanwhile, we struggled with books, books, books, and little space.

Efforts to bring Buena Vista into the library system were successful, and in 1965 we opened a branch library there. It was housed on the sec-

ond floor of a store building at 2105 Magnolia Avenue. The patrons in Buena Vista were eager to have a branch of their own and they cooperated in every way. Consequently, we soon found ourselves, again, in a situation of too little space to grow. We were soon offered an abandoned school building on Park Avenue and we took it. It was a big step for the library, but the space was adequate, and the floor plan allowed for much of the overflow of our book stock. Mrs. Grace Wagner was hired as the librarian in Buena Vista in January 1966.

In the meantime, the headquarters in Lexington was granted \$4,600 by the Virginia State Library for a remodeling-rebuilding project. This sum was 45 percent of the total needed, and the library raised the balance by borrowing from three Lexington banks and by the addition of \$16,000 left from the Fund Drive for the purchase of the Beebe property. With J. Russell Bailey of Orange as approved architect, plans were drawn up for a 5,150 square foot addition. Work began in May 1966. The library did not close its doors while construction was under way, but life was hectic for staff and patrons while workmen tore down walls and dug holes for the basement. Some days the staff had no heat, other days no electricity, and the dust was unspeakable. Problems finally overwhelmed dedication and tolerance and the doors were closed temporarily.

We were able to buy new shelving, reading tables, and chairs, a new charging desk, and carts for shelving books. After using homemade and cast-off furniture for so long, these furnishings seemed strange and formal. The addition of wall-to-wall carpeting was a luxury heretofore undreamed of. The architect designed the new addition to blend nicely with the older parts of the building, preserving the charm while maintaining its utility and practicality. The building was finished in June, but there was one last-minute hitch: a visit by the district Fire Marshall. I didn't know there was such an official. He was very officious and demanding. He inspected the whole building and asserted that the door to the stairway leading to the second floor would have to be replaced or he would condemn the building. We hurriedly designed a very heavy door and got it hung without delay. Nobody ever returned to see if we had met any of the Fire Marshall's demands. The library held a formal Open House in its new facility on June 29, 1967.

The Fincastle branch library was offered the old jail building for their new quarters; there would be no cost, but the library had to renovate the facility. Botetourt patrons were pleased with the idea, for the building was quaint and had two floors, which made it attractive for book storage. I went to inspect the building along with Mr. Wallin, our bookmobile driver. The Botetourt County sheriff met us there and told us we could have the services of two prisoners he had brought with him. We discovered a small porch at the back of the building that overlooked

a rather steep incline. I was dismayed to see that the county had left a huge refrigerator and electric stove there. One of our convict-helpers asked if we wished to get ride of the appliances. Yes, I replied, but what can we do with them. The convicts quickly pushed the offending equipment over the edge, where they rolled down the long hill shedding pieces and making a horrific noise that probably was heard by everyone in Fincastle. Mr. Wallin and I hurried out of the building and drove away, hoping to escape the expected wrath of the sheriff. We escaped justice, however, but not days of sanding, scraping, cleaning, and painting the old jail. The project was successful and remained in use as long as Botetourt County remained in the regional library system.



*VMI Professor Albert L. Lancaster explains the mysteries of the French horn to some library patrons.*

The Buena Vista branch was damaged by the flooding accompanying Hurricane Camille. The city allowed it to use the old courthouse, which had been vacated for new quarters. Again we had the job of cleaning, painting, and rearranging. New book shelving made by Mr. Wallin was added to accommodate the space. Mr. Wallin was one of those dedicated persons who gave the library the push and strength needed to change from one location to another. He painted, did carpentry work, drove the bookmobile, used his own truck to move the endless cartons of books, and I am sure he never charged more than half of the hours to which he was entitled. The new Buena Vista Library opened its doors at the former courthouse in 1972.

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of relatively smooth sailing for the headquarters library—something unprecedented in its history. The debts associated with the new building were being paid off at the rate of about \$5,600 annually. The annual budget was around \$30,000, with state and federal government aid adding another \$11,500. Ten percent of the Federal aid could be used for salaries. The library now operated more comfortably, but there was never any surplus.



The library expanded its regional coverage in the early 1970s. In 1972, the Bath County Cooperative Service joined the system, and a branch library was opened in the former railway station in Hot Springs. The bookmobile also expanded its range into Bath County. In 1974, Highland County asked for service there. We viewed this mountainous county with some awe and misgivings, but the people were very anxious to have the library and the bookmobile. Closer to Lexington, a branch library was opened in Glasgow in 1976. The need for one there had been felt for some time and the problems presented had often been discussed by the library staff. Local determination to have library services were the key to success in such an endeavor. Botetourt County left the regional system, becoming independent in 1978, and Highland County did the same in 1981.

In 1971, we were especially favored by the gods. A tiny, white-haired lady came in and asked for an application for work. She was Mrs. Skinner Boyd, otherwise known as Mary Al. She was a librarian from New York and had chosen Lexington as her retirement home. Possessed of a delightful personality, she was also skilled and knowledgeable. She instantly became our cataloger. Mrs. Boyd was one of the most valuable workers the library system ever hired. She stayed about twelve years, assisting in the opening of libraries in Bath and Highland Counties and in Glasgow.

Three years later the library received another lucky break. In 1974 Mrs. Linda Krantz visited the library, hoping to settle in Rockbridge County and looking for a job. She had excellent credentials, youthful enthusiasm, and a fresh and friendly outlook. I was especially thankful for her appearance, because I was feeling the need to retire and get into my family home. I agreed to stay on for a couple more years, however, retiring in 1976.

Many funny stories come to mind about things that happened while I worked at the library: the time a substitute driver took a wrong turn during a snow storm in Collierstown, drove over the Blue Grass Trail, and ended up in Buchanan; the never-ending collection of patrons' bookmarks (my favorite being a piece of cooked bacon); the sometimes outlandish requests for information, such as how to construct a grizzly bear trap.

Many people over the years gave the library crucial gifts of money and the staff encouragement. In addition to Betty Munger and some others already mentioned, Alma and Umberto Piovano were important donors from 1950 until her death in 1980; the Piovano room in the Lexington library honors them. Mrs. Elizabeth Moore, Rockbridge County Treasurer at the time of our struggles with debts and little money, was

patient in helping me with the financial books. Mrs. Ellene McKendree had a very practical mind and a quickness of intellect that made her an invaluable worker. Part-time workers, such as Mrs. Richard Nuckols and Mrs. Marguerite Moger and many others, and numerous volunteers kept the library going despite limited budgets. During our years of struggle in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s it was the dedication and vision of the entire library staff that produced a functioning library which has grown into the present great part of our community's life.



**Linda L. Krantz**

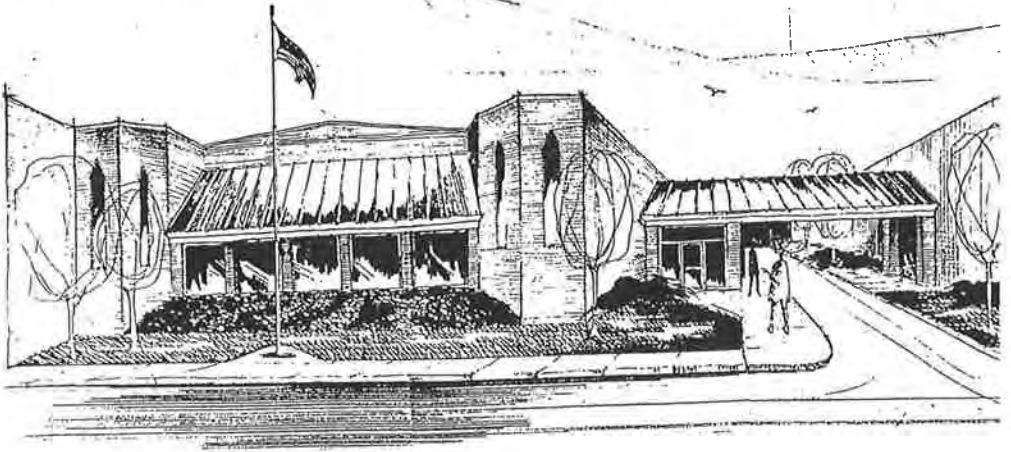
Rockbridge County, Virginia, March 2003

I would like to add a few small pieces to round out the library's history. The Bath County Library moved to Hella and Cecil Armstrong's house in 1975 when the Homestead resort claimed the train station for a shop. In 1979 architect Thomas Craven and his wife gave the system their home, a former bank and newspaper office in Warm Springs; the library moved there, and in 1984, with the help of an Appalachian Regional Commission grant, added a beautiful new wing that Craven designed, so the original space became the Craven meeting room.

The Goshen Public Library moved to the former Goshen School, subsequently a Food Mart, in 1988. It took a while before people stopped coming by for beer and bread. The library has been able to offer Dabney S. Lancaster Community College courses in the library's public meeting room. The library has a wonderful local history collection, thanks to the special interests of Branch Librarian Anne Drake McClung.

The Glasgow Public Library, begun by the Reverend William McDermott in 1976, will move to a new building by 2004.

With the news of Alma Piovano's bequest to the library system, library officials and the newly reenergized Friends of the Library sought a larger space for the Headquarters Library in Lexington, and chose the Woody Chevrolet dealership on South Main Street. Alice Shell was Board Chairman during this exciting time. The entire community helped to move the library. A first-grade class from Waddell School came by so that each child could carry a book down the street from the old library to the new. The library opened in its new location in May 1986.



*The new headquarters building at 138 South Main Street in Lexington was dedicated on May 18, 1986. The drawing above is from the dedication program cover.*



*This group was in charge of the dedication ceremonies at which Sixth District Congressman Jim Olin (right) spoke. From the left are: Linda L. Krantz, Library Director; William J. Watt, Chairman of the Dedication Committee; Betty E. Munger, speaker; and Farris P. Hotchkiss, General Co-chairman of the Campaign Committee. (Photo by Claudia Schwab.)*

In 1985 a literacy program began at the library; it became a department of the library in 1995 and offers adult, family, and English-as-a-Second-Language tutoring help to the community


The trustees were forward-looking and saw computer automation coming. Under their leadership, the Rockbridge Regional Library Foundation was born in 1992; the library was able to continue to offer its regular services while the foundation funded the automation of the library system in 1993. Suddenly every branch had access to the whole system's collection, rather than just what was in its own catalog. The library began offering Internet access in 1996, thanks to federal grants allowing the library and the four area public school systems to go together to form the Rockbridge Area Networking Group. A foundation campaign allowed the library to install a faster network and a new integrated automation system in 2002.

Over the years the library has gained much public support and has become a community center in each of its locations. A 1999 retail market survey of downtown Lexington, commissioned by the Lexington Downtown Development Association, showed that the top reason people come downtown is to use the Rockbridge Regional Library.

During this era of technological advances, the Rockbridge Regional Library has retained its strong commitment to personel, friendly service and its emphasis on the enduring value of books and other library materials to provide free lifelong learning opportunities for all.

# Two Senators from Virginia: Harry Byrd and Willis Robertson, A Political Partnership

Ronald Heinemann

ARRY F. Byrd, Sr., and A. Willis Robertson enjoyed a remarkable political partnership of fifty years. They went to the Virginia state senate on the same day in 1916, they went to the United States Congress on the same day in 1933—Byrd to the Senate and Robertson to the House of Representatives—and they spent the last twenty years of their political lives in the Senate, serving the citizens of the Old Dominion. It was almost as if they had been born under the same roof. Almost. They were born down the street from each other within two weeks, in 1887, in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

It was not an equal partnership, however. Robertson was clearly the junior in a subordinate position to a man who controlled Virginia politics for over forty years. Willis was always in Harry's shadow, even down to his last election, and thus, looking at their relationship requires focus on Harry Byrd because Byrd was indeed a much more significant figure

---

**Ronald Heinemann** joined the faculty of Hampden-Sydney College in 1968, and he is currently professor of history. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. He co-edited *The Governors of Virginia*, a volume of biographies of Virginia governors between 1868 and 1978. In addition to numerous articles on twentieth-century American history, he has written *The Depression and New Deal in Virginia* (1983) and *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (1996). Dr. Heinemann spoke to the Rockbridge Historical Society on April 28, 1997, at Waddell School, an appropriate location since Senators Byrd and Robertson both had connections with Waddell. Laura Stearns edited this essay for *Proceedings*.

in Virginia history. Byrd was one of the most important Virginians in the history of colony and Commonwealth. He certainly influenced this state for a longer time than any other Virginian. He was governor of Virginia in the 1920s, a United States Senator for over thirty years, and most importantly of all, he ran Virginia politics for forty years, selecting its leaders, passing on legislation, and imposing his very conservative economic and social doctrines on the state. He was also a rarity in American politics because he concurrently wielded his power not only on the state level, but on the national level. Yet his legacy has faded, a victim of a changing world that he could not fully appreciate. So the question remains, who was Harry Byrd?

Three aspects of Byrd's political life are revealing: his governorship, his years in the Senate, and his leadership of the Virginia political organization. His governorship from 1926 to 1930 is best described as progressive. He streamlined the state government, eliminating agencies and bureaus. He centralized executive authority, putting more powers in the hands of the governor and reducing the number of state officials who were elected on the so-called "short ballot" to the governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. He revised the state tax system, imposing tax segregation which left property taxes to the localities and income taxes to the state. He generated treasury surpluses, he encouraged industrial development and tourism, and he pressed for and signed an anti-lynching law, one of the strongest such laws in the country and one of the things that he was most proud of as governor. His years in the governor's office reflected what historian George Tindall has called "Business Progressivism" in the 1920s. A number of southern states were going through this. It produced no fundamental changes in the role of government other than tinkering in the realm of economy and efficiency, and so there was considerable road building and the state agreed to help create Shenandoah National Park, but very little was done for education or agriculture or the inefficiencies of county government. It is fair to say, however, that Byrd was much more of an activist as governor than he would be later as a senator.

With regard to education, though he did not do much in general, Harry Byrd was responsible for saving the Virginia Military Institute. In the 1920s a blue ribbon commission was established to examine education. Its members were not outsiders but blue-blooded Virginians, and their commission recommended that VMI be closed because it was too costly to maintain and there was too much duplication with other state colleges. Harry Byrd said no. He liked the kind of education offered at VMI, and he hoped that all of his sons would go there. Consequently, he vetoed the recommendation and VMI was saved.

Byrd was appointed to the United States Senate in 1933, succeeding Claude Swanson, and in that venerable body he became known as Dr. No. He was like a long-running, broken record: balance the budget, cut federal spending, balance the budget, cut federal spending, get off the backs of business, off the backs of states. It is impossible to look at a Byrd vote in the Senate, or at a piece of his legislation, or his decisions on the issues without acknowledging the influence of his philosophy of limited government. Over thirty years he compiled a remarkably negative record, opposing Social Security, national health care, and civil rights legislation. He never voted for any federal aid to education and opposed minimum wage laws, antipoverty programs, and public housing bills. He had an antilabor record, opposing the Wagner Act, which liberated working men and women in this country in the 1930s, and then supporting labor legislation in the 1940s that restricted union power and activities.

Indicative of his obsession with budget balancing was his criticism of Franklin Roosevelt's mobilization efforts during World War II. It is hard to imagine that the United States could have fought a two-ocean war in the 1940s without some expansion of the government and the military. Byrd did not like that, though, and he was scathing in his attacks on this growing federal bureaucracy. Francis Pickens Miller wrote to Virginius Dabney, the famed Richmond editor, that Byrd

reminds me of a man whose wife is undergoing a major operation from which she may not recover. The man has secured the best surgeon available, but his central preoccupation is with the cost of the operation. During the operation he is down in the hospital office complaining about the management of the hospital and dickering for a reduction in rates.

That aptly describes Harry Byrd, at least in part. He just could not see the forest for the trees. After thirty-three years in the Senate, he had little to show for it, and analysis of the record shows him to have been among the most conservative of senators, one of the least supportive of important Democratic legislation and the most Republican of all Democrats. An advisor to Lyndon Johnson once said of Byrd: “He was probably the most conservative member of either party in the Senate. He was as far to the right as a man could be and still remain in the bounds of sanity.”

No significant legislation bears Byrd's name, he held no leadership positions in the Senate, and his stand on the issues gave him very little authority in a Democratic Party that was quickly liberalizing. He was primarily an obstructionist. His major contribution was his repeated warnings about the dangers of excessive federal spending, a warning that had more substance twenty years later and even today than it did during his

own time, for there are limits to what government can accomplish. There are dangers in long term, unbalanced budgets, and there are liabilities in dependence upon the welfare state for rich and poor alike. Byrd's flaw was that he did not translate these forebodings into imaginative solutions to the problems of modern society. Instead he fell back on old clichés and a narrow individualistic ethic that was no longer serviceable. As the *New York Times* stated at his retirement, "A talented man, he chose to stand outside the broad terms of his time and to set his face against the future."

To set his face against the future. This obstruction of change was also reflected in his leadership of the political organization in Virginia. It was called the "organization"—Virginians did not like the term machine—but this was as powerful a political machine as could be found in the entire country at any time. Even Huey Long could not hold a candle to Harry Byrd when it came to power and longevity. No one dominated an entire state for forty years like he dominated Virginia.

Here Byrd did make a difference. In the first place, there was only one party. The Republicans were nonexistent for most of that forty years, except in Southwest Virginia, plus the organization was tightly knit, operating on the foundation that "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Number one was the courthouse ring of local office holders—the sheriff, the clerk, the commissioner of revenue—these were the people who got out the vote for the machine. They were crucial for the first sixty or so years of this century in Virginia politics. Then there was the rural dominated General Assembly and also a huge state bureaucracy that provided jobs for the supporters of Harry Byrd. Virginia had one of the largest bureaucracies per capita in the country. Ironically, though Byrd always argued against too much government at the national level, in Virginia too much government was just fine, because that was the way he rewarded his friends and kept himself in power. The organization was once labeled the Great Virginia Officeholders Mutual Protection Agency. In it, the first among equals was Harry Byrd. How did he manage this? It was not because of charisma. He was not a handsome man, he had a poor speaking voice, and he was very uncomfortable at public forums. Indeed, he was downright bland—and a biographer's dilemma. He was a modest man of simple tastes, a devoted father and husband. Self-control was the primary feature of his public and private life. He did not smoke or drink until late in life, he did not swear, and he was not a womanizer. There simply were no skeletons in his closet.

In temperament, however, Byrd could be a charming fellow, particularly on home turf. He had a wide array of political friends in the state with whom he enjoyed plotting the next election or spinning a yarn about past campaigns. To them, he was a warm and affable and unpre-



tentious soul who, despite his wealth, never lost the common touch. Yet he could also be a very private person, isolating himself in his orchards or in the mountains when he did not want to be found. When he went to the Senate, he never became one of that club's gamesmen—the arm twisting, elbow bending, back slapping sort of politician who is familiar to all. He was not one for small talk. His correspondence and conversations were always direct and to the point, very businesslike, which he always thought he was. Quiet and dignified, he was a loner, and did not often socialize with his Senate colleagues. Every Friday night he got in his Chevrolet and drove the distance from Washington to his home in Berryville near Winchester. He never failed to come home on weekends.

Predictably, this preeminent defender of the status quo in America was a creature of habit. In Washington, Byrd rose at 6:30 every morning, dressed in old khaki pants and an uncollared shirt, and walked through Rock Creek Park into the National Zoo, crawling under fences everywhere. One day he ran into a policeman who asked him who he was. He said, “I'm Harry Byrd, United States Senator,” and the policeman did not believe him. After all, he looked like a bum. Harry had to do a lot of fast talking to avoid being taken to the local jail. Some found Byrd's clothes “so out of style as to be bizarre.” Dabney recalled Governor Byrd walking into his office with his pants so tight and short that they had the appearance of having been shrunk by the wearer taking a fall in the nearby James River. Washington would improve his taste, but not by much, and he was often known as the least-well-dressed senator. Except for his traditional white summer suits, there was a certain dull sameness to everything he wore, but that never bothered him at all. Clothes were of such small importance to him that one would never know, from his appearance, that this man was a millionaire. Likewise with his vehicles. He drove old Chevrolets, right into the ground, until someone told him it would be cheaper to buy a new one every now and then, so he started trading them in. He made his fortune in the apple business. He started early in life, first leasing orchards, then buying orchards, and by the 1950s was the largest apple orchardist in the entire country—a millionaire several times over.

No Cadillacs for Harry Byrd, however. He was a workaholic. The primary loves of his life were politics and his orchards. The keys to his leadership in Virginia, in addition to discipline, were an ingratiating personality, tremendous organizational abilities, attention to detail, and an enormous amount of self-confidence. The most significant difference between the machine that he inherited and the one he created was the personal touch Byrd provided that organization. He mingled very comfortably with the local officeholders, relishing their Brunswick stews and the talk of weather and corn prices. He maintained direct contact with

them through letters which he wrote himself. Usually every campaign there were three letters—the first one was to organize the campaign, the second to get out the vote, and the third to thank you very much for the victory. In addition to the officeholders and the farmers, Byrd cultivated friends in business, the banking community, and among journalists to whom he catered with his press releases. His way of leading was not to coerce, but to reward with praise, jobs, roads, and legislation. His was a hands-on leadership that generated an incredible bond of loyalty between himself, the local officeholders, and assemblymen. That was a two-way street. Byrd wrote many letters in which he actually used the word love in describing the relationship he had with these people—I love you, I remember you, I so appreciate all the support you have given me over the years. There were not many people in this Mutual Protection Agency, but those who were knew how important Harry Byrd was to them, and they to him.

When he moved on to the United States Senate, he obviously had to reduce somewhat his participation in Virginia affairs, but he never lost that personal touch—his letters, his attendance at the county fairs, his affection for Virginia continued. What he created was a political organization that ran smoothly and efficiently and powerfully and was beholden to one man for its direction for forty years, an oligarchy that was far more dominant than the one he had inherited.

However, power does not always translate into progress. The legacy of his forty-year rule in Virginia was mixed. The senator always liked to say that he was a progressive conservative who favored sound progress within the bounds of fiscal restraint. His own solid governorship reflected that philosophy. His greatest gift to the state was a debt-free government which honestly and efficiently provided basic services to its citizens—good roads, law enforcement, and economic development.

Then as rapid changes engulfed the Old Dominion, independent of the Great Depression, this kind of government was just not enough. Policies that helped Virginia get through the Depression became obsolete by the 1950s, retarding development. No one was more dedicated to Virginia than Harry Byrd. He never did a thing in his life that he did not believe was in the best interests of the Commonwealth, but he erred in equating the interests of the Commonwealth with his own political fortunes and the financial interests of the wealthier classes. He ignored the majority of Virginians because only 10 to 20 percent of the state's population were voting. That being the case, he needed to control only a small portion of the electorate in order to stay in power. So he left behind a record of cash-drawer honesty which disguised a legacy of crowded colleges, inadequate mental hospitals, and neglected social services, not to mention racial intolerance. The decision for massive resis-

tance opposing school integration in the 1950s was Harry Byrd's decision. He cannot escape it. It was the worst one he ever made and produced the saddest day in Virginia history. While Virginia was changing, he was clinging to a time when life was simpler, goods were cheaper, and white males held sway.

Regardless of how one assesses Byrd's contribution to the state, there is no denying he made a difference. Virginia likely would have selected leaders similar to Byrd, but no one could have matched his ingratiating personality, his single-mindedness and decisiveness on the issues, his organizational skills, and his energetic involvement in the daily affairs of the Commonwealth. He was without a peer in building and maintaining a political organization that dominated the state for forty years. He wrote the script, created the set, chose the actors, and directed the play. For nearly half a century Virginia—at least the part that was politically active—was Harry Byrd.

Harry Byrd was also Virginia. He was a product of its conservative political heritage, a white male-dominated aristocracy that ruled its domain with a selfish and paternalistic hand. Wanting no social revolution, these gentlemen cavaliers feared the hand of big government in their pockets and the power of an expanded electorate at the polls. Byrd gave them the leadership they desired. The society and the individual were very compatible.

So, too, was A. Willis Robertson a member of the Mutual Protection Agency. Robertson was a loquacious country boy from Lexington, who had been friends with Harry Byrd since they entered the state senate together in 1916. Together they helped to create the State Highway Department, a major piece of legislation they both put through in 1918. A tall, good-looking man with an unflagging tongue and pen, Robertson had served as Game and Inland Fisheries Commissioner, an appointment received from Byrd during the latter's governorship. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1932, and often wrote voluminous letters to Byrd (who was serving in the Senate) explaining his votes on various legislation, letters which went on and on describing the legislation. Byrd could have cared less about this, but Robertson was intent on learning all about it.

Small annoyances aside, Byrd and Robertson remained friends and hunting companions for most of this period. Their families were quite close to one another. Byrd had even asked Robertson to assist in getting Harry, Jr., into VMI in the early 1930s. Nevertheless, their relationship began to cool as Robertson manifested a growing independence from the organization after he went to the Senate in 1946. This was not due to any disagreement over legislation. Both of these gentlemen were staunch conservatives, voting against Social Security, minimum wage

bills, work relief in the New Deal, and bills to support the interests of organized labor. Both tended to favor conservation legislation. In his days with the Fishery Commission, Robertson had pursued stronger environmental laws, and Byrd liked the National Park Service recreational areas where he often vacationed. He always said that the Park Service gave you 110 percent or \$1.10 for every dollar spent, so he was quite willing to support expanded funding for the Park Service. He and Robertson both really did like the outdoors.

Despite his seniority and power, Byrd never demanded conformity from the other Virginia congressmen. He was so indifferent to Washington politicking that he did not try to enforce any kind of discipline over the rest of that delegation, and he did not impose his will on Willis Robertson as the distance between them grew. He wrote Douglas Freeman in 1947, that never in fourteen years had he asked any member of the Virginia delegation to vote for or against any legislation. One reason he could enjoy that freedom is that he knew all of them agreed with him. They had the same philosophy, they came out of the same organization, and their voting records were remarkably similar. Even when they did disagree, Byrd usually tolerated that dissent, perhaps because he himself was something of a maverick and figured that others should be allowed to be that as well.

This included foreign policy questions. Harry Byrd was a noted enemy of any kind of foreign aid spending. He voted against appropriations for the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan; Willis Robertson voted in favor of both. Byrd favored General MacArthur in the controversy with Harry Truman over MacArthur's firing. Since Byrd was a Truman political opponent, he felt he had to support MacArthur, but Robertson knew quite well that MacArthur was out of line in the Korean incident and was encouraging Byrd to go along with the investigation of the general, which Byrd did not wish to do.

Still Byrd was willing to let his Virginia friends demonstrate an independence of mind, and Robertson fit quite well the description of a supporting acolyte with an independent streak. Initially, he was a very compliant assistant. His conservative inclinations meant that he and Byrd were voting together on most of the issues. The junior Senator conversed frequently with his mentor about legislation, lobbied with him on issues about which no decision had been made, and felt free to offer his advice when he thought he knew more than Byrd. On many occasions, he did know more. Byrd was rather indifferent to legislation, unless it cost a lot of money. Robertson was more concerned, more involved in the legislative process. Furthermore, Robertson was always there. Byrd had a spotty voting record in the United States Senate. He



*Senator Byrd (right) with Senator Robertson in 1958.*

was among the bottom half of those senators attending sessions, whereas Robertson was very near the top.

So why did they become at odds? As noted, it was not over legislation or philosophy. It developed largely because of political problems Byrd and the organization were having in Virginia. Robertson's reelection bids often coincided with important presidential elections in which Byrd had chosen to pursue a policy of what he called a "golden silence." He felt he could not commit to supporting the candidates of his own Democratic Party because they were growing much too liberal in their spending and civil rights legislation. At the same time, he did not feel he could openly support the Republican Party, for fear that might undermine his Democratic organization, so he wound up with these "golden silences"—i.e., Byrd chose to endorse no one in presidential elections between 1944 and 1964.

Robertson, on the other hand, was much more of a party loyalist at the national level. Even in 1944, when Byrd was running a shadow campaign against Franklin Roosevelt as a representative of Southern disaffection with the New Deal, Robertson urged the organization not to bolt the party. He declared that that would be the equivalent of fighting wind-

mills. Most importantly for the junior Senator, he was often up for reelection during these national contests—in 1948, when Harry Truman was running and in 1960, when John Kennedy was the Democratic candidate—and Robertson did not feel he could risk his chances of reelection by bolting the Democratic Party. He always won very comfortably, about as comfortably as Harry Byrd with 70 or 80 percent of the vote (there were no Republicans running against him at this time), but Robertson never got quite as comfortable as Byrd did with his margin of victory. Furthermore, in 1952 and 1956, he backed Adlai Stevenson as the Democratic Party nominee because he believed that Stevenson was one of the better nominees the party had ever put forward. So his unwillingness to subordinate his own preferences to those of Byrd and the machine angered them and raised the prospect of their trying to retire him. After the 1952 race, when Byrd publicly broke his silence by saying he could not support Stevenson, Robertson was singled out in an editorial in the *Winchester Evening Star* for having played politics as usual in his endorsement of Stevenson. The editor of the *Winchester Evening Star* was Harry Byrd, Jr. His father did not comment on this editorial, but observers believed that this forecast a purge effort in 1954, with Bill Tuck running for Robertson's seat. Robertson agreed, and said that young Harry would not have written so important a political article without his father's consent. Public criticism forced editor Byrd to retreat, but that episode seems to have produced a lingering coolness in the relationship of these two old friends.

Robertson also proved to be much more independent than Byrd desired on three other occasions. One was his reluctance to support a states' rights rebellion in 1948. That was when South Carolinian Strom Thurman broke with the Democratic Party and ran on the Dixiecrat ticket, a states' rights party, and there was some thought that perhaps Byrd and the organization would support him. They did not, but there was talk about it, and Robertson was very much opposed to that, saying this would have "split us from stem to stern." Secondly, Robertson gave very lukewarm support to John Battle's 1949 governor's race. He had no real animosity towards Battle, but he simply did not support him with the kind of enthusiasm Byrd felt was necessary. The third occasion, interestingly enough, was due to Robertson's relative (stress *relative*) moderation on the question of massive resistance. For obvious political reasons, Robertson always filibustered and voted against the civil rights legislation going through Congress. Privately, though, he had some reservations about the advisability of closing schools in the 1950s. Soon after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on desegregation, he wrote then-Governor Tom Stanley that he did not like the decision, but that they would have to be realistic in accepting it. A few years later he wrote a

very strong, very confident statement that he hoped the General Assembly would save public education for those who did not mind a degree of integration. At the same time, Byrd was working closely with his advisors to stop any integration, which is what the state did in 1958.

By then Robertson was no longer on the inside track of the organization and was rarely involved in the key negotiations over policy to follow. He did not seem to mind at that point. He really had come into his own in the United States Senate, which made him much more independent of Byrd. In 1960, he had become chairman of the Senate Banking and Currency Committee, which was preoccupied with legislation on housing, wage and price controls, and foreign trade.

It would be incorrect, however, to draw the conclusion that these two old friends just split and went their separate ways. That was not true. They still saw eye-to-eye on most legislation, and they remained committed to trying to hold onto the old order in Virginia, in particular defending the poll tax one last time. Robertson wrote Byrd in 1957, “Every man who knows anything about Virginia politics is bound to realize that if you suddenly give the vote to several hundred thousand who have not had it before, they are going to use it as directed by their group leader, labor or racial.”

Just as they had come onto the stage together, they left almost at the same time as well. Byrd retired in 1965, suffering the effects of a brain tumor which would take his life a year later. Robertson would lose his Senate seat to Bill Spong in the 1966 primary, only months before Byrd died. In fact, just before that primary election, Byrd took a turn for the worse and campaigning was halted. Even in death he seemed to have control over Virginia politics, although the results of that election were not as he would have wished. Robertson was defeated, and another old friend, Howard Smith, was also defeated. With their passing, an era in Virginia politics came to an end, for Virginia in the 1960s changed considerably, with an end to racial segregation and the progressive record of the Mills Godwin governorship. Harry Byrd and Willis Robertson represented an older generation of leaders, committed to a way of life and a political order that had outlived its usefulness.





# Virginia Military Institute's Professional Post Band, 1839–1947

John A. Brodie



MUSICAL accompaniment for military activities is an old tradition, so it is hardly surprising that it should appear in the early days of military schools. The U.S. Military Academy Band was established in 1813; the Naval Academy Band in 1852. Both bands were thoroughly professional and composed of enlisted musicians led by commissioned officers. Recalling his days at West Point in the early 1830s, the Virginia Military Institute's first Superintendent, Francis H. Smith, wrote in 1860 that

A band for a military school is one of the most important elements of discipline. Many a fellow would remain in camp to listen to the strains of music at night instead of running off and getting himself into difficulty. No one who ever went to West Point can ever forget the echo of the trumpet as it reverberated from hill to hill.<sup>1</sup>

1. Francis H. Smith to H. B. Tomlin, February 1, 1860, VMI Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institution, Lexington, Va.

**John A. Brodie** is a native of Denver, Colorado, and a graduate of Westchester State College, he spent several years making music for the U.S. Marine Corps. He completed his doctoral dissertation on the history of music at VMI and received his Ph.D. from George Washington University. An expert trumpet player, he used that instrument to illustrate points during his presentation. The Society's July 27, 1997, meeting was held in the Memorial Garden in front of Cocke Hall at VMI and was preceded by musical selections from the Post Band period played by the Staunton Brass.

Not surprisingly, when the Institute opened in November 1839 it had music. For more than a hundred years, from 1839 to 1947, the band at VMI consisted of hired musicians who, in addition to their musical duties, performed other jobs at the Institute: tailors, shoemakers, barbers, mail carriers, electricians, janitors, and clerks. The Post Band's primary function was to provide music for parades on and off post as well as duty music—fife, drum, and bugle calls—for the Corps. In addition, several bandsmen played instruments such as the violin and piano and would occasionally provide popular music for the cadets and faculty at dances and other social gatherings.

During the first decade of its existence (1839 until 1849), the VMI Post Band consisted of only a fife and a drum. These were played by two black men, most likely locally rented slaves, who formerly had played at Lexington Arsenal. Reuben and Mike, as they were usually called (Reuben Howard, 1818–?, and Mike Lyle, died c. 1875), were recalled by one Lexington woman as being

two very black men, dressed in scarlet coats, and white pants, and cocked hats. Reuben was short and round like his drum, and Mike was thin and tall like his fife. At our church fairs the ladies used to have dolls dressed like Reuben and Mike. These dolls were great favorites with the Lexington children.<sup>2</sup>

Reuben's and Mike's Lexington owners were paid \$300 annually for their daily services. Their nonmusical jobs included chopping wood, hauling water, and being janitors for the fledgling VMI museum. Lyle also served as the superintendent's coachman.

A typical day for the Post Band began with the playing of Reveille at daybreak. This custom continued until 1906 when the bugle replaced the fife. The two would march the cadets to breakfast at 7:00 A.M. and play for guard mount (changing of the guard team) at 8:00. Afternoon drill and dress parades occurred daily, thirty minutes before sundown, followed by Tattoo at 9:45 P.M. and taps at 10:00. Tattoo, sounded fifteen minutes before "lights out," was a signal to the corps to prepare for sleep. The Tattoo call is still played by cadet buglers, although it is different from the fife Tattoo. Taps was sounded on the side drum with the rhythm being tapped on the rim of the instrument—thus the name, Taps. Today cadet buglers perform official U.S. armed forces bugle calls in addition to several that have been developed over time at VMI.

2. Mrs. John H. Moore, "Memories of a Long Life in Virginia," June 12, 1920, Cooper Collection, VMI Archives.



*Drawing of Mike Lyle  
and Reuben Howard  
(1896 Bomb, p. 12)*

During the time Howard and Lyle were at the Institute, the one function for which a larger military band was required was the annual Independence Day parade. For this celebration, the cadets would tax themselves \$500 in order to hire a larger band from Charlottesville or Roanoke to march in a full military review and an orchestra to perform at the evening’s dance.

In December 1848, steps were taken to replace the slave musicians with professional white musicians: A. V. Bancker and his two sons. Bancker wrote to the Superintendent:

One son plays the fife and is 15 years old, the other son plays on the bugle and side drum and is 19 years of age, and myself on the side drum. We are regular bred musicians and know nothing of house or farm labor. I am, besides a musician, a tailor and can make up military work. The wage is \$10.00 [per month] for each musician.<sup>3</sup>

The Banckers arrived in Lexington on January 19, 1849, and began their work with Reveille the following morning. After their arrival, the band remained generally a three-piece unit—bass, snare drum, and fife—until

3. A. V. Bancker to Francis H. Smith, December 14, 1848, VMI Archives. *Bancker* is sometimes spelled *Banker* or *Bancher* in the records.

1869, when brass instruments were introduced. The new bandmen stayed only two years, and in June 1850, Superintendent Smith requested that the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army secure for the Institute some enlisted bandmen. By August the Adjutant General had secured three Irish musicians: Thomas McMahan, a fifer, William S. Moulton, a snare drummer, and James O'Heran, who played the bass drum. The short tenure of these three enlisted musicians constituted the only time in the Institute's history that active duty enlisted personnel were utilized, and it was as close as VMI ever got to the enlisted bands of the federal academies.

Unfortunately, the three Irish musicians had problems adjusting to life in Lexington. In January 1851 McMahan and O'Heran were dismissed for drunkenness while on duty. As a result, A. V. Bancker was again called upon for his family's musical services. Because young Josiah Bancker did not wish to return to VMI, his father and older brother, Hiram, were joined by a man identified in the records only as "Smith." In December 1858, at the suggestion of the Governor, Superintendent Smith made inquiries in the Virginia State Senate about procuring an enlisted Post Band of six pieces, but budgetary considerations defeated the initiative.

The Banckers and subsequent post bandmen often performed for social events, such as the large dances or "hops" in the fall, winter, and spring. Festivities during Finals and graduation were the biggest Institute social events of the year, and the celebrations often lasted for several days. Post bandmen who played orchestral instruments were joined by musicians from Lexington and Rockbridge County. The bigger dances were held in the mess hall, while smaller ones were held in section rooms. The end of the ball was signaled by the sound of the canon; the final tune played to return the cadets to barracks was "Auld Lang Syne," and "Home Sweet Home." Often, after the call to quarters for the Corps, younger faculty members or even Washington College students would escort the ladies home, much to the cadets' disgust. Nevertheless, that such events occurred at all in the mid-nineteenth century was notable; Presbyterian Washington College and many similar institutions forbade such activities.

During the mid-nineteenth century, musicians flowed in and out of the Post Band. John Lightell, a snare and bass drummer and replacement for the aforementioned Smith, first appears as a musician and ordnance sergeant in August 1856. He seems to have left at the end of the year, but he returned in January 1867 and continued in the band until

June 1870. James Henry Crocken, who had been a Marine Corps musician during the Mexican War, played the fife and was employed as a glazier and then ordnance sergeant from 1858 until 1863. Between 1864 and 1882 he held the sutler’s shop concession in addition to his musical duties. He was one of three Civil War era musicians who marched with the Corps to and during the Battle of New Market on May 15, 1864. In 1882 he moved his family to Lincoln, Nebraska, where he died seven years later.

The other two musicians at New Market were Richard Staples, who played the kettle drum, and Jacob Marks, a bass drummer. Staples had reported to VMI on July 14, 1856, and remained for thirty-one years. During the war years he was authorized to sell sutler’s goods to cadets in order to supplement his \$30 per month income. Jacob Marks came to the Institute in October 1861; after the war he moved to San Francisco.

After a period of rebuilding between 1865 and 1873, VMI was hurt by the poor national economic times in the late nineteenth century, although enrollments did not notably suffer. Nevertheless, the Institute was able to afford better music for its military duties during this period. VMI historian William Cooper, attributed some of the success to the efforts of cadet Joseph Anderson of the Class of 1870. During the summer of 1869, Anderson obtained information on starting a Post Band utilizing brasses. One result was that Joseph Ritterhouse accepted an offer in September 1869 to come to VMI as professor of Music and Languages and to organize a larger Post Band and to employ brass instruments.<sup>4</sup>

A coronet player, the forty-five-year-old Ritterhouse had been born in Germany and immigrated to Richmond in 1849. He served in the Confederate army during the Civil War. Within nine years of his arrival, Ritterhouse secured or maintained the services of the following musicians: John Francis Evans, a snare drummer, fifer, and cobbler in 1867; Thomas Winfield, a bass drummer, fifer, and tailor in 1869; John Ellig, a bass horn player and cigar maker in 1873; Joseph Pennington, a slide trombonist and barber in 1875; and Herman Krause, cornetist and bugler in 1879. The Superintendent’s annual reports for the period show that these men were paid \$30 per month, had various housing arrangements, and were looked upon as a significant improvement over the old fife and drum trios that had preceded them. Major Scott Shipp, Com-

4. William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, 4 vols. (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1939), 3: 205.

mandant of Cadets, noted in 1870 that “the band adds much to the pleasure of cadet life, relieving in a great measure the repetition of parades and of the military duties, and I am sure is a most valuable support of discipline.” Of the Institute’s five-man band, Superintendent Smith reported to the Board of Visitors at the end of the 1879 school year that “The music furnished by the Band has been musically good this year, and the personnel of the band better than ever before and much improved.”<sup>5</sup>

The youngest and newest member of that 1879 band was thirty-year-old Herman Krause, a cornet player born in Germany who had, like Ritterhouse, had emigrated to Richmond. Hired in September 1878, he not only doubled as a bugler, but also played the violin, viola, and French horn. In 1881, Superintendent Smith wired Krause, who was on furlough, to travel from Baltimore to Richmond to rejoin the band en route to Yorktown, Virginia, for the Yorktown Centennial. At the time he joined the band for the event, there was no music, and no leader; therefore, Krause pencilled parts for the band of two drums (snare and bass), bass horn, alto horn, and cornet (himself). During this trip Krause became the band leader. In addition to arranging parts for the band, he prepared the ensemble for the performance. Each member wore different clothing, which added to the problem of uniformity and appearance. Krause ordered new uniforms and had the band completely outfitted by September 1881 in time for the centennial. For the next fifteen years, he arranged parts for the group, since music for small bands was not readily available in Lexington. He occasionally arranged piano music for use at social events for the cadets.

Krause stayed at the Institute for fifty-two years. In 1884 he took over the sutler’s store and ran it until it was taken over by the state as the VMI Post Exchange in 1915. He paid the Institute rent for his store—\$300 in 1905—and agreed not to sell cigarettes to the cadets. After 1914, when John Wise became band director, Krause became “Director Emeritus,” and his band activities included playing at one dress parade monthly, arranging music for the small ensemble, and playing carols from the second stoop sally-port at Christmas. During his tenure he outlived many of his comrades and played taps for several of his fellow musicians’ funerals. He retired from the Institute in June 1931 and died three years later at age eighty-seven.

5. Scott Shipp to Board of Visitors, June 23, 1870, and Francis H. Smith to Board of Visitors, June 12, 1879, both in Annual Report, VMI Archives.

Another interesting, if ultimately tragic, bandsman was Walter Cicero J. Wev, a Mississippian who enlisted for Confederate service in 1861 at age twenty and served with the 16th Mississippi Infantry, a unit that participated in numerous crucial battles. In May 1863 he was captured by Brigadier General George A. Custer’s provost guard at Germania Ford during the fighting in the Chancellorsville Campaign. He was confined to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington until March 1864, when he signed an oath of amnesty and was relocated to Philadelphia. By 1880 he was raising a family in Lynchburg, working as a carpenter, and directing the band and orchestra of the Lynchburg Y.M.C.A. Wev was hired by VMI in 1886 as a bugler, cornetist, and barracks carpenter. On Sunday morning, November 28, 1887, he was found beaten to death with a rock in suburban east Lexington. His murderers were quickly apprehended. The *Lexington Gazette and Citizen* wrote in his obituary that Wev was known as

a fine musician and an expert on the cornet. He played the cornet in the Presbyterian Choir (Lexington) and also at the rooms of the Town Y.M.C.A. He was the leader and organizer of the Citizens Band and a popular man with the masses.<sup>6</sup>

He was buried in the VMI section of Lexington’s Stonewall Jackson Cemetery, the only member of the Post Band ever to have been murdered.

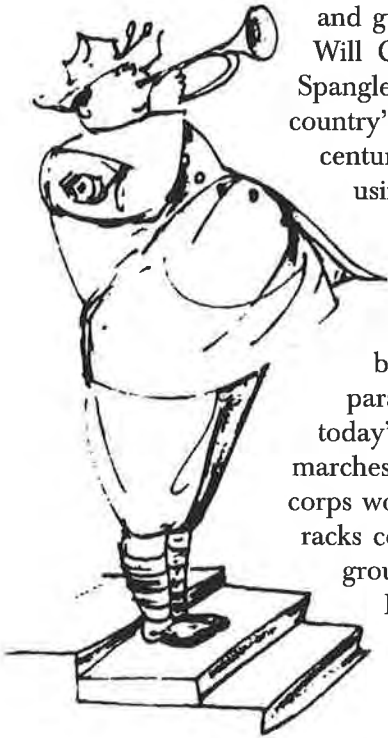
By 1888 the Post Band had grown to eight members. The Commandant’s report for the 1886–87 academic year stated:

The musicians of the Band, now comprising eight (8) members, have greatly improved the quality of the music. Good music is not only pleasant to hear, but promotes discipline to an extent difficult to realize, by one not bearing experience.<sup>7</sup>

A few written accounts and photos of hundreds of parades during the nineteenth century are the only remains of the Post Band of that time. Joseph Ritterhouse and Herman Krause arranged popular marches of the day for their group, including “Excelsior,” “The Hungarian March,” and “The Gary Owen March.” Unfortunately little of this arranged music exists today. The music of the Confederacy was always popular with the Corps, and “Dixie” and “The Bonnie Blue Flag” were performed regularly. Other popular Confederate tunes used for inspections

6. “A Bloody Murder,” *Lexington Gazette and Citizen*, December 1, 1887.

7. Scott Shipp to Francis H. Smith, June 1887, Annual Report, p. 4, VMI Archives.



*Sketch of bugler Thomas Delaney (bugler from 1902 to 1928) from the 1972 Institute Report for the fiftieth reunion of the Class of 1922.*

and guard mounts were “Lorena” and “Who Will Care for Mother Now?” As “The Star Spangled Banner” would not be adopted as the country’s National Anthem until the twentieth century, honors to the nation were performed using the bugle call “To the Colors.”

The parade sequences for the Post Band were similar yet less complicated affairs when compared to their twentieth-century counterparts. The band would form on the south end of the parade ground, facing west, on the site of today’s Preston Library, and begin by playing marches, interspersed with drum cadences. The corps would march onto the field from the barracks center archway and form on the parade ground to the immediate left of the band.

Inspections, the drilling of the corps in the manual of arms, the presentation of the corps to the reviewing officer, and other variations of the corps on parade would follow. During the sequence of the corps passing in review before the Superintendent, the band remained standing in place. This rather large movement of troops involved the corps executing two left column movements and returning to the barracks.

Similar sequences were performed for guard mounting, although these were small company-level affairs which were located at Jackson Arch on the south side of barracks. During dress parades, usually once a week, the Post Band would precede the corps during the pass in review segment and “block” itself—perform three consecutive left column or wheel turn movements, to face the reviewing party. This formula has remained basically unchanged for nearly one hundred years.

The size of the Post Band gradually increased during the early decades of the twentieth century. Prior to 1908, the band fluctuated between six and eight members. Generally, the band’s size grew slowly in conjunction with the size of the Corps of Cadets. By the 1920s, the band had grown to fourteen pieces and a drum major. Although still



small compared to Virginia Polytechnic Institute’s “Highty-Tighty” Cadet Band, the performances of VMI’s Post Band were excellent and the small group had a large sound. Most band members had long tenures—and nearly all had nonmusical duties at the Institute—many of them serving the Institute for over thirty years, even after retirement. Several bandmen and their families lived near each other on the hill just to the east of today’s football stadium. They were a congenial and close-knit group. The stationary lifestyle was attractive to those men who wished to raise a family. Many of those who settled in the Post Band had come from traveling circus bands and resort orchestras. It would be difficult today to employ musicians, amateur or professional, who, in addition to military band duties, would be willing to clean buildings, clerk in offices, sew clothing, serve food, or repair boilers as part of their contract.

The Post Band rarely rehearsed or even congregated in a musical sense other than for parades and the passing out of music ten minutes before each parade. As every musician’s schedule differed in conjunction with his other occupation, each individual in the Post Band was expected to be musically prepared for parades, guard mounts, or other formations. This is testimony to the ability of these musicians to perform constantly with a minimum of preparation, a fact not altogether lost on today’s cadet musicians.

Of the numerous early twentieth-century musicians about whom we know something, only three can be mentioned here. The first, clarinetist Samuel Arpia, a native of Naples, Italy, was hired in 1915; he also worked as a cobbler. He married and settled in Lexington permanently and was the father of eight children. As a result of an investment in ten acres on the southeastern part of town, he has the distinction of being the only VMI musician to have a city street named after him: Arpia Street.

The second musician was Antonio Carlo Esposito, a cornetist hired in September 1925, during the Institute’s brief experiment with creating a post orchestra of full-time musicians. Born in Philadelphia in 1886, Esposito had been the director of the Durham Community Band in North Carolina and a private music teacher. After the previous Post Band leader—a professional trombonist and band leader from Roanoke, Joseph Ruzza—resigned precipitously in November 1925 following the failed orchestra experiment, “Tony” Esposito took over as Post Band leader. He was described as an excellent trumpeter who was a faithful, reliable, and cooperative individual. His twenty-two years of records on



*Buglers William W. Swihart and Anthony Esposito (1948 Bomb, p. 48)*

the band's personnel are frequently the only materials available on many bandsmen between 1925 and 1945. In 1947 he assisted in the establishment of the newly created cadet band; afterward he continued at the Institute as a bugler until his retirement in 1958. In that year, he was featured in the opening scene of the Twentieth Century Fox film *Mardi Gras*, which starred popular singer Pat Boone. The film opens in the barracks courtyard with Tony sounding the bugle call "Reveille." Esposito died

in 1965 and is buried in Stonewall Jackson Cemetery in Lexington.

The third musician to be profiled was perhaps the most well known and popular post bandsman of the mid-twentieth century: William Wright Swihart, known affectionately to decades of cadets as "Bill the Bugler." Born in 1900 in Argos, Indiana, he left home at age fifteen and played in circus bands and toured the country for twenty-two years. He occasionally doubled as a clown, and between circus seasons he performed in vaudeville acts. He arrived in Lexington with the Tom Mix Circus in 1937 and decided to stay. He was employed at the Institute shortly thereafter as trumpeter and bugler with the Post Band and custodian of Alumni Hall. When the Post Band was retired in 1947, he and Tony Esposito became fulltime buglers. Over the years, many cadets running a few seconds late to formation were spared demerits by Swihart's habit of sounding the last notes of a call much longer than usual. This custom continues to this day with cadet buglers. Being a popular fixture at VMI over the years, newspapers frequently wrote articles and stories about him. He achieved his greatest fame when he was chosen as the subject of the CBS documentary "On the Road" by Charles Kuralt, which was nationally televised in April 1977. He officially retired in 1970,

but continued on a part-time basis until two months before his death on December 5, 1984. Three years later, a memorial plaque to him was mounted on the wall of the first stoop sally-port in barracks, the site of so many of Swihart’s bugle calls.

The tradition of bugle calls continues today at VMI, which is one of the few military institutions which perpetuates the use of totally “live” bugle calls performed throughout the day. Such calls are currently performed by cadet buglers to signal cadets to rise, go to class, eat, sleep, and to attend the many other formations which occur daily at the Institute. The system consists of approximately fifteen to eighteen calls each day depending on the day of the week. The calls have altered little over the years and are an interesting example of music unique to the Institute. For instance, calls to class or parade formations or role call formations on the bricks in front of barracks begin with “First Call,” the same bugle call used by the armed services. This is followed by a succession of calls in the following order: “Big Toot”—five minutes after first call; “Little Toot”—at four minutes before the formation; “Shake a Leg” at three minutes; and then the bugler exits the barracks and blows “Assembly” ten minutes after First Call.

The sequence of short original bugle pieces preceding formations is well known to generations of cadets, because they serve as the official time clock of the Institute. Their origin is unknown, but they were developed around the 1920s. The calls used before the invention of these original pieces were from a book entitled *Complete Instructive Manual for Bugle, Trumpet, Drum*, and this text was employed according to U.S. Army regulations.

The bugle replaced the fife and drum signals in 1906 as the medium for the calls, but the approximate times these signals are performed have been maintained. In contrast, the majority of U.S. military installations and the federal academies use recorded music.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of the three Irish bandsmen of the mid-nineteenth century mentioned above, and the short-lived orchestra in 1925, the post bandsmen who bugled for the corps were the only full-time musicians during the Institute’s history.

For the Institute’s centenary celebration in 1939, the Post Band reached a total of eighteen members, but its days were clearly num-

8. The federal academies use live bugle calls at morning and evening colors; the remainder of the calls are done by recordings amplified throughout the base. The smaller size of the VMI Corps of Cadets, their central location in barracks, and their proximity to academic buildings make the use of live bugle calls practical.

bered. The Second World War brought many changes to the Institute, and these had an effect on the Post Band. The number of regular cadets declined sharply, but the Institute expanded to accommodate the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). Cadets and ASTPs attended separate classes as the latter were engaged in accelerated programs. The years between 1943 and 1946 were trying times for both cadets and faculty. After the war, special, temporary classes of cadets were created to accommodate returning veterans, such as allowing them to live out of barracks and permitting married men to attend the Institute. The Post Band shrank to eight members during the war due to the departure of some bandmen for the war. Occasionally the Post Band would utilize cadets who could play instruments or hire Washington and Lee University students to help fill out the ranks. Moreover, the bandmen who remained at the Institute during the war years were older men preparing to retire, and the majority of them had worked at the school for decades.

The increase in size of the Corps of Cadets in the first half of the twentieth century coincided with the rise of instrumental music in public schools. These schools were producing student musicians who attended VMI and made the formation of a Cadet Band feasible. Moreover, the Institute was experiencing difficulties in maintaining the ever-maturing Post Band, and particularly in locating replacements who would perform in the band in addition to their other employment at the school. The practice of sporadically using cadets and Washington and Lee students in the Post Band ultimately led the administration to conclude that if cadet musicians could perform in the Post Band then why not form a band made up entirely of cadets. College bands had already come into their own at schools such as the Citadel, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and the University of Virginia, and the existence of these bands had an influence on the decision to create a band at the Institute.

In 1944, C. Richard Eichhorn of Greensboro, North Carolina, matriculated with the Class of '48B.<sup>9</sup> By September, Eichhorn was recognized by several upperclassmen and the Commandant as being a skilled musician. A talented pianist, organist, clarinetist, and composer,

9. During wartime, cadets matriculated twice a year. Classes took place on a floating schedule, with cadets attending school in the summer as well as during the normal fall and winter semesters. This system allowed the accelerated graduation of Army and Navy officers and created the class designations of "A" and "B" for each part of the academic year.

Eichhorn became the accompanist for the Glee Club. The Commandant directed him to perform for parades with the Post Band. In the spring of 1946, Colonel Herbert Nash Dillard, professor of English and director of the Glee Club, suggested that Eichhorn submit a permit to the Superintendent requesting permission to form a Cadet Regimental Band. The permit was approved in October, and Einhhorn was directed to create a Band Company, which he was chosen to lead, becoming a cadet captain in February 1947. The Superintendent, Major General Richard J. Marshall, officially authorized the organization of a cadet band in a memo to the Commandant dated December 13, 1946.

The Professor of Military Science and Tactics was authorized to request that Second Army place a qualified band master on temporary duty at the Institute to instruct the new band. Cadets were notified before departing for Christmas furlough in December that anyone who could play an instrument should return with it after break for the purpose of starting a cadet military band. A roster of musicians was collected of the new “rat” class of 1950B, and candidates were auditioned by Tony Esposito, who, it was agreed, would remain in control of the bugle calls. In January 1947 some twenty-two cadet musicians, mostly from ’50B plus a few upperclassmen, rehearsed for the first time in Jackson Memorial Hall. On Friday, January 31, General Order No. 25 officially established the Regimental Band.

The band practiced several afternoons per week after classes instead of attending drill formations, and after three or four weeks they began to progress significantly. Music rehearsals were held in Jackson Memorial Hall, and the band practiced its maneuvers on the parade ground or on the football field. The marching came quickly to the new cadet bandsmen, but preparation of music took more effort and concentration as the unit had to accommodate students who were at different skill levels musically.

Arriving at the Institute on January 23, 1947, was Chief Warrant Officer John Swiecki, on temporary duty for ninety days (later extended to three years, until his retirement) to assist in organizing and instructing the cadet band. A career soldier and musician, he directed the band for eleven years, as VMI hired him after he retired from the Army in mid-1950. In addition to preparing the band for parades and guard mounts, Swiecki rehearsed concert pieces, which the band performed once a week at supper roll call. Band Company’s first official parade was for the graduation of the Class of 1947A on January 31, 1947. Their first retreat parade was in February, when the cadets played for the parade instead

of the Post Band. On May 10 the band gave its first public concert outside the Institute when they played at Roanoke Veterans Hospital.

With the organization of the Cadet Regimental Band, the Post Band, which by 1947 had dropped in size to six members, accepted their replacement and considered the cadet band as a logical step in the development of a musical program at the Institute. The Post Band officially retired in April 1947, and the bandsmen either retired or stayed on at the Institute in their second occupations. Esposito and Swihart remained the only post bandsmen to continue as musicians for many years as buglers. An old VMI tradition had given way to a new one.

# Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and the Natural Bridge of Virginia

David W. Coffey



THE importance of the Natural Bridge to this county cannot be overestimated. Not only is it one of our chief tourist attractions, it also gave us our name—Rockbridge—making our county one of the few in Virginia which takes its name from a landscape feature. Moreover, the Bridge made easier the exit from Rockbridge of those early pioneers who had decided that their futures would best be made elsewhere to the south and west. Some of our evacuating ancestors, when crossing the Bridge for the last time on their way to Kentucky or Tennessee, must have seen the Bridge as a symbol of freedom—a freedom to move on and try one more time to achieve the American Dream. And, certainly, those god-fearing pioneers (and, of course, we assume that they were all god-fearing) must have seen the arch as its first owner, Thomas Jefferson, did—as a tangible proof of a Creator God.

These two visions—the Bridge as a symbol of freedom and the Bridge as evidence of an omnipotent creative force—are underlying themes which resonated with many of the early Virginians who experienced the Bridge.

They were present in the interpretation given the Natural Bridge by the Monocan Indians, the first people we know to have encountered the Bridge and to have viewed it as particularly their own. The Monocan

---

David W. Coffey, who teaches history at the Virginia Military Institute, is a graduate of Davidson College and holds a masters degree in U.S. history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has completed his course work for a doctorate in history at the University of Virginia. A long-time member of the Society's Board, he presented this paper on October 27, 1997, in the Dolly Hardee Turman Meeting Room of Preston Library at V.M.I.

tribe, an eastern branch of the Siouian Nation, once claimed as their domain the lands along the James River westward from the Fall Line to beyond the Blue Ridge into the Valley. Now, there are just a few Monocans living on Bear Mountain in Amherst County on the northern edge of the region which had once been especially theirs, a region which, of course, included the Natural Bridge. The Monocans obviously wondered how such an amazing rock formation came to be; to answer their question, they developed a legend which not only explained to their satisfaction why the Bridge was there, but bolstered their self-image as well—the Bridge was put there for them by the Great Spirit. A version of the legend, was included in *Bits of History and Legends Around and About the Natural Bridge of Virginia*, compiled in the mid-twentieth century by J. Lee Davis, for many years the president of The Natural Bridge of Virginia, Inc.:

Long, long ago, thousands of years before the Princess Pocahontas saved the life of Captain John Smith, there was a terrible war among some of the tribes. The Shawnees were noted for their cruelty; and they joined forces with the Powhatans. These Indians roamed through Virginia and fell upon the Monocans, a more friendly tribe.

There had been a famine that year and the Monocans were weakened by hunger; and many of their braves fell in battle. After a long conflict, the Monocans decided to retreat and they gave way before the enemy. But they were pursued relentlessly. The Monocans sought refuge in a strange forest and suddenly they came upon a high chasm, whose steep walls were of rocks. The braves peered over and were made dizzy when they saw the great distance to the bottom below, where a swiftly running river looked like a small silver ribbon.

Even the strongest could not have jumped across the wide chasm, for it was over a hundred feet wide. Their swiftest scouts ran hither and yon, but each brought back word that there was no way around.

These Monocans were in despair and in their distress threw themselves upon the ground and cried aloud to the Great Spirit to spare their lives from the approaching enemy.

One of the braves arose and went again to the edge of the cliff. He stared down at his feet, then turned and shouted, "Our prayers have been granted us—the Great Spirit has built for us a bridge across the great abyss."

And so the women and children passed over this into the shelter of the forest beyond. Even as they went they could hear the war whoop of the advancing enemy.

But the Monocans were refreshed in spirit. Their courage had returned, for was not the Great Spirit on their side? The braves quickly took positions on the Bridge, each feeling he stood on sacred ground, and like the Greeks of old at Thermopylae they turned and faced their



enemy and fought victoriously. From that day, we are told they called it “The Bridge of God” and worshipped it.

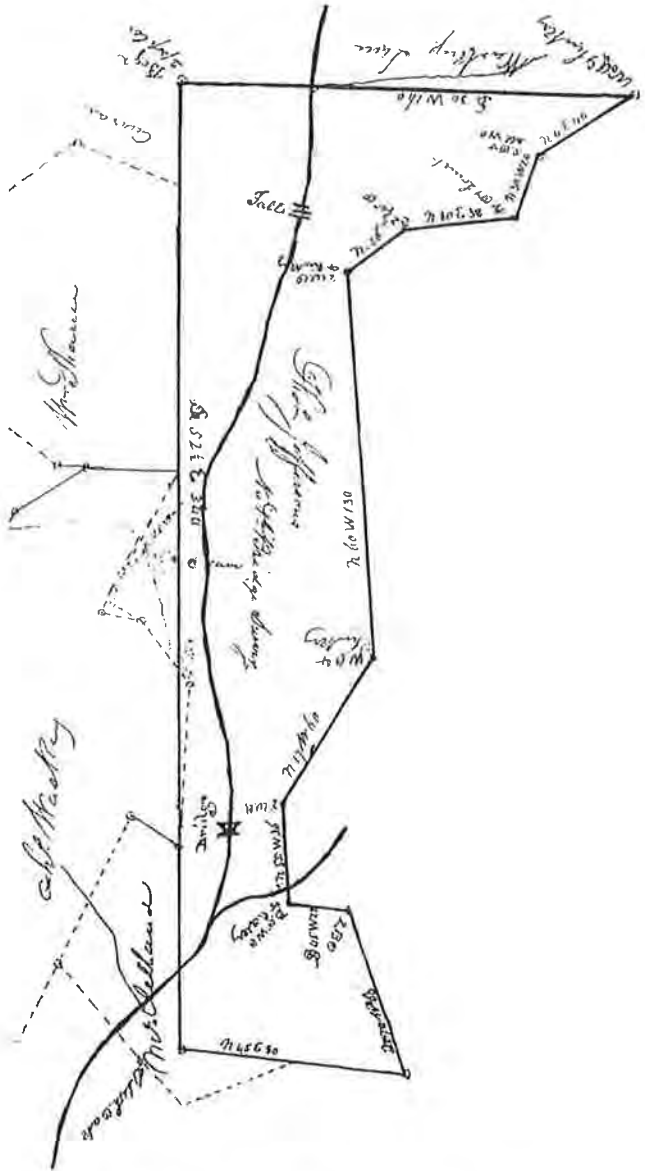
For the Monocans, the Bridge meant continued freedom (an escape from certain defeat and possible annihilation at the hands of the Shawnee and Powhatans) and a sure sign of divine benediction upon their tribe, a reassuring belief that the Great Spirit preferred them over their enemies.

John Peter Salling, a German weaver whose earliest home in the colony was in Williamsburg, was the first white person to take up residence in the vicinity of the Natural Bridge. Though he had visited the area previously, he did not return and settle here until after had been taken captive by the Indians and had traveled with them as far west as the Mississippi. After gaining his freedom, Salling and his family established their residence at present-day Glasgow. He took the occasional visitor to see the Bridge, but his recorded observations of the great stone arch are descriptive only, dwelling exclusively upon its physical dimensions. Having by his choice settled in an area where the nearest European was dozens of miles away, one can assume that Salling sought the freedom of solitude—and the freedom of contact with the Native Americans with whom he had spent considerable time as, one suspects, a somewhat willing captive.

As a young man, George Washington, we are told, came to the Bridge while conducting a survey for his mentor and employer, Lord Fairfax. One version of this story has it that Washington was surveying the path southward from Winchester in the company of Peter Jefferson, father of the eventual owner of the Bridge. The survey would have been of benefit to Benjamin Borden, one of Fairfax’s circle, who had acquired title to much of present-day Rockbridge County, though not to the Bridge itself. Peter Jefferson, a renowned map-maker, may have reported to his young son back home at Shadwell of the impressive natural wonder which lay beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. Whether he told young Tom of Washington’s marring of the Bridge with his initials is, of course, not known. In any case, if Washington in fact carved that big “GW” on the cliff above Cedar Creek, he became the first graffiti-artist to visit the Bridge; his wanton act of vandalism is, by today’s standards, not a worthy beginning to the long and illustrious career of “the Father of our Country.”

In 1767, on the 23rd of August, Thomas Jefferson, who was just beginning his career as a lawyer, visited the Natural Bridge for the first time. He was probably surprised to find that the great arch he described as “so beautiful, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven” had not been claimed by any of the thousands of settlers who

had poured into the Valley since his father and George Washington had made their survey in the early 1750's. Remarkably, except for Washington's initials, the Bridge remained untarnished and unblemished as (in Jefferson's words) "the most sublime of Nature's works." Jefferson, using his connections with the government in Williamsburg, paid a registration fee of twenty shillings and acquired title to 157 acres of land which included the Bridge and the creek which had formed it as far west as Lacy Falls. It was an odd-shaped parcel of land which Jefferson now owned. Its elongation was due in large part to the fact that all the surrounding lands suitable for farming had been claimed, leaving behind this largely useless parcel which had no probable agricultural or commercial value. For Jefferson, this was fortuitous since he now owned all the land that one can see when one approaches the Bridge from the area behind the present-day Gatehouse, as well as all the terrain visible while standing under the Bridge and when proceeding westward through the gorge formed by Cedar Creek between the Bridge and Lacy Falls. To use modern terminology, Jefferson had acquired



*A drawing of the plat of Jefferson's Natural Bridge property as it appears in the back of a ledger kept by William Douthat who ran a store in the vicinity. This plat was probably used to help determine the boundaries of Jefferson's property which were the subject of a dispute between Jefferson's neighbors and his tenant, Patrick Henry. (Virginia Historical Society.)*



*Edward Meyer, a German artist, published this illustration of Natural Bridge in 1858. (Album of Virginia, plate 36.)*

the viewshed of the Bridge and Cedar Creek. In his own words, Jefferson saw ownership of the Bridge as “a public trust,” and, functioning as a one-man Nature Conservancy, Jefferson deserves to be recognized as an early environmentalist.

Oddly, having acquired title to the Bridge, thus protecting it from encroaching development, Jefferson did not visit the Bridge again until 1781, and there are only three more visits to the Bridge recorded in his journals or memoranda books, in the years of 1815, 1817, and 1821, all made late in his life when he was in retirement at Monticello and Poplar Forest.

During the American Revolution perhaps, and definitely during the War of 1812, Jefferson leased out the Bridge property for use as a shot tower. In 1809, hard-pressed for cash (as he always was), Jefferson considered selling the Bridge. But by 1815, even though his financial situation was not much better than it had been in 1809, Jefferson wrote that he had changed his mind and had “no idea of selling the land. I would,” he wrote, “on no consideration permit the bridge to be injured, defaced, or masked from public view.”

What was the meaning of the Bridge for Thomas Jefferson? For one thing, it symbolized the glorious possibilities of the West as the creator of a future greatness for the infant nation. It is odd today to think of the Natural Bridge as emblematic of the West—but for Jefferson it was, as it were, the gateway to that vast region which lay beyond the mountains. The Natural Bridge was, in fact, as far west as Jefferson himself ever went, and engravings of the Bridge (and of that other “western” wonder, Niagara Falls) were prominently displayed at Monticello along with the artifacts which had been sent to Jefferson by Lewis and Clark. While in France in the 1780s, Jefferson had become embroiled in an ongoing, proto-evolutionary debate between Europeans favorably disposed to the United States and one of France’s greatest scientists, Count Buffon, who argued that America was unhealthy and would cause the decline and degradation of any Europeans who dared to make it their inhabitation. Basically, Buffon argued, Old World emigrants to the New World would soon skid backwards down the slope of progress until they reached the level of the American aborigines. Jefferson thought differently, and, using his 6’2” height to his advantage, argued that America actually had larger animals than did Europe. (To further prove his point, he arranged to have a large moose skeleton delivered to Paris for display to the skeptics who agreed with Buffon.) And then, of course, there was the grandeur of the American landscape which carried for Jefferson the same meaning as it had for the Monocans—it was a sign of a special Providence provided for all Americans by “Nature’s God.” Jefferson wanted images of his Bridge to be made available to Europeans, but believed that only an American artist could truly do it justice. He did not want it “misrepresented” by “some bungling European” painter (though he was willing to make an exception if access to his Bridge could entice his English artist friend, Maria Cosway, to come to America).

Figuratively speaking, Jefferson always faced west—Monticello is oriented so as to face the mountains, and the Lawn at the University of Virginia was intentionally left open at one end to entice students to contemplate the unending vista of America. The Natural Bridge was Jefferson’s own personal foothold in the greatness which lay ahead for America in its westward expansion. Jefferson was given the opportunity to rhapsodize about his Bridge when he answered a series of queries posed to the American states in the early 1780s by a representative of the French government who wanted to know more about the region whose independence France had supported. The result was Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a book-length report on the state of the Commonwealth which certainly exceeded the expectations of the French diplomat who had requested the information—after all, he had only asked twenty-three basic questions. One of those queries, the fifth one, inquired

about “cascades and caverns.” Jefferson admitted, reluctantly, that Virginia had no world-class waterfalls or caves, but then, he said, we have this Natural Bridge, and though natural bridges were not included in the question, he could not resist including a description of this “most sublime of Nature’s works.” (It’s worth noting that Jefferson very modestly did not reveal his ownership of the Bridge.)

It is on the ascent of a hill, which seems to have been cloven through its length by some great convulsion. . . . Though the sides of this bridge are provided in some parts with a parapet of fixed rocks, yet few men have resolution to walk to them and look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall down on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute, give me a violent head ach. . . . descending then to the valley below, the sensation becomes delightful in the extreme. It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven, the rapture of the Spectator is really indescribable.

Jefferson’s account of the sublimity of his Bridge reads more like the work of a Romantic than an inhabitant of “The Age of Reason.” Certainly, throughout the nineteenth century, the descriptions written of the Bridge by visitors almost always parrot Jefferson’s words. Though his word-picture of the Bridge may be the most widely known part of *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson spoke on many topics—of his admiration for the land of Virginia, of his desires for a more perfect government for the Commonwealth, of his struggle to procure a “Statute of Religious Freedom” for Virginia, and of the nobleness of the Native Americans (perhaps related to his debate with Count Buffon). Unfortunately, for those who wish to make Jefferson a man ahead of his time in all regards, in *Notes*, Jefferson gives expression to his most blatantly racist comments on the future possibilities of African Americans. Ironically, Jefferson’s ownership of the Natural Bridge and his desire to protect it from encroachment, brought him into contact with a particular type of African American, the free black, about whom Jefferson normally had conflicted opinions.

In 1787, the year of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, and while Jefferson was still in France, a boy named Patrick was born on a plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia. The owner of this plantation, Martin Tapscott, may, in fact, have been Patrick’s father, but Patrick’s mother was a slave—and that was legally all that mattered in determining the baby’s destiny. According to *The Tapscotts of Virginia* by family genealogist, Joseph Dan Tapscott, Martin Tapscott was a third-generation resident of the Northern Neck and his grandfather had come to Virginia in the late 1690s as an indentured servant. The family had

prospered and, at the time of his death in 1804, Martin Tapscott owned considerable land and thirty-three slaves, one of whom was Patrick. While not as well-to-do as a few of his neighbors, Tapscott was better off than most. Talk of freedom for slaves was commonplace in the Westmoreland County of Patrick's youth. The ideals of the American Revolution (so aptly summarized by Jefferson in the phrase "all men are created equal") seemed to many to make slavery an institution incompatible with life in a new and virtuous republic. Furthermore, Baptists and Methodists were making strong gains among all classes and races in Virginia, even among the white elite, and their anti-slavery teachings were changing many slaveowners into manumissionists. The most notable example in Westmoreland County was Robert Carter of Nomini Hall who freed all five hundred of his slaves in the early 1790s. And Westmoreland's most famous native son, George Washington, would grant his slaves their freedom in his will. But Martin Tapscott was not moved by these examples. During his lifetime he only freed one slave, a woman named Lavinia, who was, more than likely his mistress and Patrick's mother. In 1794, ten years before he died, Tapscott had penned the following deed of manumission, though it was not filed with the Clerk of the Court until after his demise:

To all whom it may concern, Know Ye that I, Martin Tapscott of Westmoreland County in the State of Virginia for and in consideration of the faithful Services, together with other conscientious motives, have forever, Emancipated, discharged and set free (whatever Law to the Contrary) one Negro named Lavinia, born in the year 1761, together with all her future posterity or increase forever.

No less an authority than Martin Tapscott's brother, John, indicated that Martin Tapscott had intended for Patrick to be granted his freedom as well. Martin's sudden death before Patrick had reached the legal age for manumission had, however, prevented Patrick's owner from actualizing his offer of freedom (and, coincidentally, sent Lavinia to the Courthouse to register her manumission document). It took Patrick seven additional years of labor to earn his freedom. Patrick's new owner, John Tapscott, described the process in his deed of manumission recorded in the Westmoreland County Deed Book:

Whereas Patrick a Mulattoe man was in February 1806 sold for the sum of 300 dollars and was purchased for that sum by John Tapscott of the County of Westmoreland, who, when he made the purchase was well knowing that it had been the intention of his Brother Martin Tapscott to have Emancipated and set free the said Patrick, but from doing which he the said Martin was prevented by sudden death in the month of November in the year 1804. He the said John Tapscott did promise the said Patrick that so soon as he could make up the said sum of 300

dollars and would pay the same to him, the said John Tapscott, that he the said Patrick shold be free, and whereas the said Patrick by his own exertions and from the liberality of others hath been able to make up the said sum of 300 dollars which he hath paid to the said John Tapscott, the payment and receipt whereof he the said John Tapscott doth hereby acknowledge—now in consideration of the promises he the said John Tapscott hath EMANCIPATED and set FREE the said Patrick . . . giving hereby to the said Patrick all the Priviledges and Enjoyments of a free man according to the Laws of this Commonwealth.

While one may readily fault John Tapscott for compelling Patrick to earn the freedom for which he had been destined by his original owner, one must also acknowledge that if Patrick had been purchased by someone not cognizant of or compliant with Martin Tapscott’s wishes, Patrick might never have become free. Somewhere along the way, many of the Tapscott slaves had adopted the surname Henry—a fortuitous choice for the now twenty-four-year-old free man named Patrick. What better name for him than that of the famous Virginian who had proclaimed, “Give me liberty or give me death.”

Like many Virginians, and others of his family, Patrick Henry believed his best chances for success were to be found in the West. Many members of the Henry family gravitated towards the Valley of Virginia, and they began to show up in the *Free Black Registers* of Augusta and Rockbridge Counties. Why did they come to the Valley? Were they following the example of members of the Tapscott family who had similarly and previously come west. (One of Martin’s brothers owned land in Rockbridge and Botetourt Counties and served as one of Botetourt County’s sheriffs in the early 1800s; Martin Tapscott’s only legitimate child, Henry, had been sent west to enroll at Washington College after his father’s death.) Since the Tapscotts of Westmoreland had family members resident in the Valley of Virginia, so, more than likely, did their slaves, for slaves had extended families, too.

By 1815, Patrick Henry, five years a free man, had found his way to Lexington. The next year, he purchased and freed a slave woman named Louisa who had previously belonged to Benjamin Darst. Her deed of manumission is on file in the Rockbridge County Courthouse. A year later, in 1817, Patrick Henry, now thirty years of age, found permanent employment and a place to live. In June of 1817, Thomas Jefferson agreed to a suggestion by William Caruthers of Lexington, who had been managing his affairs in Rockbridge, that Patrick Henry be given duties as caretaker of Jefferson’s Bridge property, primarily to prevent trespassers and neighbors from encroaching upon Jefferson’s nature preserve. Caruthers wrote Jefferson on 2 June 1817:

Patrick Henry a free man of Coular requested me to write you that he will rent what land is cultivatable on the Bridge Tract. . . . Patrick is a man of good behavior and as the neighbours are destroying your timber verry much it might not be amiss to authorize him to take care of it in order to which it might be well to have the lines run by the surveyor of the county.

Jefferson responded affirmatively to Caruthers and Henry's proposal a few days later, adding as an additional condition the requirement that Henry pay the taxes on the property (particularly significant for the former president since he had, on occasion, come close to losing the Bridge for nonpayment of local taxes).

Patrick and Louisa thus moved to the Natural Bridge and Patrick began building a cabin within 150 yards of the arch. Since Jefferson was very much an absentee landlord (though his last three visits were during Henry's tenancy), Patrick Henry achieved a status as a quasi-landowner. For Patrick, and those who knew him, his independence at the Bridge added additional verification to his status as a free man. Jefferson occasionally sent Henry some money to help pay his local taxes and as compensation for the extra laborers he had hired and for his work entertaining the frequent visitors whom Jefferson sent out to view his Bridge. However, troubles developed with some of the neighbors who found the presence of Mr. Jefferson's guard disagreeable—the fact that he was a free black man certainly did not make the situation any easier to take. Jefferson received in April of 1819 a letter from John Henry (Patrick's brother, who, unlike Patrick, was literate):

By request of my Brother Patrick Henry I write to inform you of his disagreeable situation respecting the house in which he lives. By your permission after your land was run by Mr. Graham and Mr. Douthat he built him the house mention[ed] within a hundred and fifty yards of the Bridge and is now threatned of haveing it taking from him to which he has devoted two years labor but he is satisfied in hopeing of seeing your soon. He would come to your house but being so bisy plowing on the place joining your land which he has rented prevents his coming.

There is no surviving written response from Jefferson to John Henry's letter—but evidently the controversy died down. At least, Patrick Henry, his wife, Louisa, and their two children remained on the property until Patrick's death in 1831. Jefferson had died essentially bankrupt in 1826, but five years later no action had been taken to liquidate Jefferson's Rockbridge County holdings. Henry was thus able to speak optimistically of the future in his will filed in the Rockbridge County Courthouse in 1831, the year of his death. Patrick's brother, John, or another witness, James R. Jordon, wrote down the words as Patrick dictated them:



I, Patrick Henry, conscious of approaching dissolution, but of sound mind, do make this my last will and testament. 1st. I wish to be decently interred at the back part of the garden attached to the house in which I now live. 2nd. The land now in my possession conveyed to me by Thomas Jefferson, if it can be retained by said conveyance, I wish to be disposed of in the following manner. The family shall keep it in possession until the Children arrive at years of Maturity after which time each shall be entitled to a third part, in case of the previous death of my wife to be equally divided between said Children Joseph and Eliza Ann.

Patrick Henry's wishes were presumably carried out as long as the ownership of the Bridge was in the hands of Jefferson's heirs. But, in 1835, the Bridge and its surrounding 157 acres were sold to Joel Lackland who began to develop the site commercially as a tourist attraction.

Louisa Henry apparently stayed on, working for Lackland as a domestic and kind of docent for the Bridge. (Several visitors to the Bridge reported the pleasure of meeting an elderly black woman there who had known Thomas Jefferson.) There is no record of what became of Joseph and Eliza Ann; but John Henry eventually migrated to Liberia.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that all previous accounts of Patrick Henry's tenancy at the Natural Bridge have assumed that he was a slave of Jefferson's, sent out from Monticello to do his master's bidding, gratefully occupying a cabin which Jefferson had previously built there. This falsehood is probably the result of the unsurprising assumption that all blacks were slaves prior to the Civil War. Most were, but there were exceptions like the Henrys.

Though Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry were hardly equal in status, wealth, or education, they were both free men. Their relationship was one of mutual convenience—Jefferson's Bridge was protected from greedy neighbors who, among other things, wished to poach his timber—and Patrick Henry had achieved a situation which approached landownership. The Bridge was, as far as he was concerned, his castle, and he had come closer to achieving the American Dream than he could have imagined growing up someone's slave in Westmoreland County.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Bridge since Jefferson's ownership have continued to consider the arch as “among the most Sublime of Nature's works.” The development in the twentieth-century of the sound-and-light show called “The Drama of Creation” has emphasized this view. Chances are that the Henrys were the last to see the Natural Bridge as a symbol of personal freedom.



# Down the Paper Trail: Manuscript Collections of Rockbridge County

Charles A. Bodie



THIS project had been on my mind for several years, but it was not until the Historical Society's July 1994 meeting at Buffalo Forge, where Charles Dew spoke about his newly published book *Bond of Iron*,<sup>1</sup> that my curiosity was piqued about local manuscripts. This volume explores the iron industry developed by William Weaver and the Brady family. At one point, Dew mentioned his excitement in finding a new cache of source material and how it enlarged his work. I thought to myself: What sort of things might I find if I rummaged about different archival attics? Perhaps I could turn Rockbridge history upside down—locate hidden diaries or love letters with a hint of “eau de Natural Bridge.” In a state of anticipation, I discussed the idea with the Historical Society's Board; a subsequent grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities moved me along, and here I am tonight.

I did find love letters, but they will not change how we look at our county's history, and they only have the musty fragrance of age. There

1. See “Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge,” *Proceedings* 11 (1990–1994): 211–23.

**Charles A. Bodie**, an independent scholar living in Rockbridge County, received his Ph.D. from Indiana University. In 1998 he completed his research and editing on the Society's publication *Rockbridge County, Virginia, Manuscripts: A Guide to Collections in the United States*. His talk was given at the Nichols Engineering Building auditorium at the Virginia Military Institute on April 27, 1998.

will be no disclosures that General Lee had a secret affair over there on the hill at Washington College. His integrity is still intact. What I can report is not at all risqué or headline-grabbing. After all, this was and still is, a Scotch-Irish county. No, my very ordinary message is that the people of Rockbridge certainly saved a big pile of interesting papers. Finding over eleven hundred collections about a small county is remarkable. It makes me speculate that perhaps they had a strong sense of themselves and of their location here in the Valley, qualities carried over into the twentieth century. There simply is a deep-rooted ethic of respect for the past in our county. This Society has done so much to nurture this ethic by your own programs in research, publications, exhibits, and, not least, your work to collect local manuscripts and have them deposited at Leyburn Library. Those are the heart of the *Guide*.

This is also an appropriate occasion to remind ourselves of the variety of ways the Rockbridge community remembers and celebrates its history. We have developed a state-wide reputation for our history projects. It has been a nice feeling for me when I visit a library somewhere out there, that when a person finds out where I am from, the conversation readily warms up and I detect an air of envy. It is getting tough to avoid smugness.

Look at this community's record: historic districts, buildings on the historic register, publications, historic house surveys, monuments, perennial workshops, and lots of organizational activity. Have I left anything out? Contrary to the notion that history is about dead things, we can say that history is alive in Rockbridge. Henry Ford would not have retired here. He made a callous remark that has unfortunately resonated through the years: "History is bunk!" You built good cars, Henry, but you must have slept through your history class.

I want to tell you how the *Guide* was assembled, what it contains, and how it might further enrich future studies. First a comment about the word, "manuscript." It is a staple of any kind of serious historic research. Without manuscripts, Dew could not have given us a detailed picture of masters and slaves at Buffalo Forge, Mary Coulling could not have fleshed out the life of Margaret Junkin Preston, nor could James Robertson have recently finished his exhaustive biography of Stonewall Jackson.<sup>2</sup> Historians search out these pieces of primary evidence, which might include most anything lucky enough to survive the ravages of time. Manuscripts actually are a broad category of private papers, such

2. Mary P. Coulling, *Margaret Junkin Preston: A Biography* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1993); James I. Robertson, *Stonewall Jackson—the Man, the Soldier, the Legend* (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1997).

as correspondence, diaries, notes, photographs, of business records, papers of churches and nonreligious organizations, and papers representing the professional fields of law, medicine, teaching, and the like. The other main category of historic records are public records, generated by the offices of government. That's a very large domain with a lot of Rockbridge material, but not on my list.

Where would manuscript material on our fair county be stored? The possibilities are endless. A letter signed by John Letcher may lie buried in the library of the Panama Canal Zone. We all have stories of how old papers are disposed of. Too often, they are consigned to the waste bin. They also get scattered by estate sales, auctions, or through wills that can leave distant cousins with mysterious, sealed, cardboard boxes. I would like to mention an example.

A couple of years ago, an alert resident of the Valley read of an auction at Stuart's Draft, Augusta County, that listed a small collection of papers relating to a Rockbridge County slave named Isaac Gwin. One item was a letter from him to a previous owner in Highland County, asking for the repurchase of Gwin and his wife, located elsewhere, to reunite them. The curious resident went to that auction, bought the collection, and then ensured its safekeeping by selling it to the Virginia Historical Society, to be added to their collections. If that had not happened, the papers would likely have disappeared and remained hidden from researchers. And this collection would not be part of my *Guide*.

Private papers are like chaff in the wind. Most float away, never to be seen again. Those that are saved and made available for public inspection are due to organizations like this, to public-minded manuscript owners, and to the teams of dedicated archivists who take good care of them, such as Diane Jacob at the Virginia Military Institute Archives and Vaughan Stanley at Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections.

In looking for these library collections, I used a variety of approaches, beginning with a mailed survey to one hundred libraries nation-wide. I also visited libraries within a few hours' drive of Lexington, scanned footnotes and bibliographies of scholarly works, made telephone inquiries, and also searched the world wide web. The final tally came to 1,162 collections in forty-five libraries. I must warn you that I did not find every Rockbridge collection. After the search thinned out, and David Coffey started asking about a scheduled talk, I finally stopped. There may be Letcher correspondence in a library of the Panama Canal Zone. Who knows? The bulk of Rockbridge manuscripts, however, are found close by at W&L, VMI, at the University of Virginia, the Virginia Historical Society, the Library of Virginia, and at the College of William and Mary. Other major collections are at the Library

of Congress, at Duke University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and in Kentucky, Wisconsin, and at Yale University.

The dispersal of our local papers are linked with some interesting stories. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison is a research facility of the first-rank. Perhaps its most noted president was Lyman Copeland Draper, born in New York state in 1815. Growing up with exciting stories about the colonial frontier and the Revolutionary War, he spent a lifetime collecting materials of the Appalachian region. Draper travelled southward through Virginia and over to Kentucky, interviewing people, taking copious notes, and assembling as many documents as he could get his hands on. Before he died in 1891, he had created a huge mass of material on the trans-Alleghany west that dated to about the year 1830. Now called the Draper Manuscript Collection, it fills about five hundred volumes of mostly transcribed material. A published guide to this collection is available at Leyburn Library, and I would think, at Preston Library.<sup>3</sup> It includes references to contacts Draper made with Rockbridge people and to the documents he carried off to his offices in Madison. Among them are late eighteenth-century papers involving the Preston, Patton, and McDowell families. After Draper's death, the Wisconsin Society kept adding Valley materials. One large group belonged to the holdings of the McCormick Historical Association in Chicago, then housed in temporary quarters. Wisconsin took a vast collection of nearly two million manuscripts and hundreds of business journals, which comprised the papers of none other than our own Cyrus McCormick of Walnut Grove, Raphine, the inventor of the mechanical reaper and founder of the International Harvester Company. Also an acquaintance of Robert E. Lee after the Civil War, he became a large benefactor of Washington College, and was later honored with a campus statue. After McCormick's death in 1884, his widow and children employed people to collect papers on his life and on agriculture in the Valley and elsewhere. So a good chunk of our history is up in the land of cheese.

There is also the story of Rockbridge papers at Yale University's Sterling Library. This collection was assembled by an eminent faculty member, Ulrich B. Phillips, considered the leading historian of the South during the early part of the twentieth century. His interpretations of the southern plantation system reigned supreme for several decades, until they fell out of date. To bolster his own research, he also travelled through the South, taking materials particularly from the Virginia Valley and the piedmont region of Georgia. At Yale, we can find collections on

3. Josephine L. Harper, *Guide to the Draper Manuscripts* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1983).

the Bryans, Dormans, McDowells, Moores, Reids, and Walkers. Phillips's major work, *Life and Labor in the Old South*, published in 1929, deals at length with Virginia plantations, including some in Rockbridge County.

Altogether, these papers and the others I have listed can satisfy our historical curiosities into the next century. We are so fortunate to have this material. There are many other communities around the country that simply will not have good histories written because the source material is not available. It may not have been generated in large amounts, or it may have just been thrown away. As an extreme example, what will we learn about the history of Apache Indians of the Southwest, aside from the Hollywood versions and the writings left by white settlers who certainly had axes to grind? You do not find out a great deal from the Apaches themselves, because apparently from fear of the spirits of the dead, they are reluctant to repeat their ancestors' names. Also their traditional culture lacked writing. We do not have such barriers to our past. At one point in my work, a passage from the New Testament came to mind, mainly because it is used in a book title dealing with the history of the South Carolina community of Edgefield, a community that reminds me of Lexington because of its strong sense of history.<sup>4</sup> It also was the home of governors, such as Francis W. Pickins, a forebear of Francis Pickins Miller of Rockbridge County. The Bible verse is found in the Book of John, Chapter 14, often quoted at funerals. Before his departure, Jesus consoles his followers with the statement that “in my Father's house are many mansions.” Here is imagery we can apply to our own county's past. Is it not similar to that of a spacious edifice with many rooms, and perhaps with a number of closets not yet opened? A less lofty metaphor also comes to mind: a Scotch-Irish condominium, with some rooms set aside for the descendants of Irish, English, German, and African-American settlers.

Why do we rate so highly in the manuscript world? Our county has always had a modest population. Could it be due to some special advantages? It *was* bisected by the well-traveled Valley pike. It *did* also have a natural world-class wonder in Natural Bridge, the healing qualities of sulphur springs, two four-year colleges, bookstores, literary and debating societies, and a high density of Presbyterians who read the Bible and took it seriously. In short, it had a literate society that appreciated the values of education and an inclination to explain things and argue positions, all qualities that might generate lots of records.

4. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

Its people left all kinds of papers that await both scholarly and genealogical study. A large volume belongs to the nineteenth century. This is not surprising, for it was a time of growth and short-term stability, interrupted by the conflagration of the Civil War. The earlier frontier era, beginning with Borden's Grant in 1739, has much thinner documentation, as we would expect. One task I did not perform—a difficult one to do—was to go through some of the early records of our parent counties, Orange, Augusta, and Botetourt, to locate references to Rockbridge families. At any rate, for the period before 1800, I still found early land grants, a smattering of correspondence, and some early Lexington business journals, including those of leather workers and blacksmiths. There are, I believe, enough materials to reconstruct that critical period of settlement, marked as it was with Indian warfare, the Revolution, the start of local government, and the planting of communities.

As to the nineteenth century, the collections literally bulge, reflecting a growing population and economic improvement. They tell us of family life, agriculture, small business, the iron industry, transportation improvements, religious activities, loss of family members due to emigration, and growing colleges. Especially in correspondence files, we find some of the detail and tone of daily life. Certain families, such as the Andersons, Davidsons, Houstons, Reids, McDowell's, and Prestons were prolific at writing letters, and careful in saving them. There are also many daybooks and diaries. We might ponder in our computer age what sort of paper trail we will leave to future generations curious about the direction of our lives. What clues will be available to them from an era of electronic messages?

The more we study the early nineteenth century in America, the more we appreciate the resonance of accelerating change. It was not all the coziness of a Currier and Ives print or the idyllic setting of a Grandma Moses painting. Raw, unregulated, economic growth led to business cycles that disrupted farmers and entrepreneurs. The practice of slavery was spreading, especially in places like Rockbridge where, between 1790 and 1830, the increase in slaves far exceeded that of whites and was proportionately faster than in the state as a whole. The opening of vast western and southern lands severed many families. The most ominous national trend was divisive, sectional politics, with the issues of states rights, western lands settlement, and slavery threatening the fabric of our national union. When the war did come in 1861, Rockbridge, as practically every other county in the Old Dominion, faced a collapsing way of life.

A major portion of the collections relates to that riveting drama of the Civil War. It still preoccupies us in Lexington today, certainly not without good reason. As the Jackson biographer, James Robertson, and



others have reminded us, more battles were fought on Virginia soil than in any other state. Our Valley was in the thick of military action. Numerous collections give testimony to its importance to our county. The wartime governor in Richmond, John Letcher, had been a leading attorney in Lexington. For a time, families in the county took different sides. An example is the Welsh family of Turkey Hill. One son, James, served in an Illinois regiment, and the other in a Virginia regiment. In a letter that James wrote to his brother, June 1861, he lamented that

I had always hoped that Rockbridge would be true to the Government but alas, she gone and all that dear to me that is in her . . . [unreadable]  
I can say it be so. I can hardly believe it and still you can not give me

Macomb, Ill, June, 9<sup>th</sup>, 1861.  
Dear Brother,  
yours of May 23<sup>d</sup> came safely to hand and found us all well and I hope this may find you the same if it is so fortunate as to reach you as I see they are about to cut of the mail service from Va or the seceded portions I had always hoped that Rockbridge would be true to the Government but alas, she gone and all that dear to me that is in her ~~is in her~~  
~~is in her~~  
we have been taught from our cradle to look on with pride the flag that our dear father left father mother & sisters that he might enjoy the pleasure of living under it I say can it be as I can hardly believe it but still I am compelled to

Part of the first page of a letter dated June 2, 1861, from James L. Welsh of Illinois to his brother, John, in Rockbridge County. (Welsh family papers, Washington & Lee University Library Special Collections.) The black streak demonstrates how tape can damage old paper.

one good sound substantial reason for your course what it is you complain of only that there is a Republican president elected and you are afraid he will do something to injure your dear institution of slavery.

The brother in grey, John, died two years later at Gettysburg. This war carried away or wounded hundreds of other men from the county, members of local units such as the Rockbridge Rifles, the Liberty Hall Volunteers, along with VMI cadets who followed behind Thomas Jonathan Jackson. The account of our county's role in the war has been well sketched in a volume by Robert Driver,<sup>5</sup> and I will not dwell on it too long. It was a time of deprivation, suffering, and death. I used an illustration in my own book to capture some of its meaning, a memorial poem by James D. Davidson to his son, Greenlee, who fell at Chancellorsville in 1863. It was inscribed to Greenlee's mother, Hannah. The last two stanzas read:

His wish fulfilled:—his earthly home  
is here, beneath his native sod;  
Near by th' immortal Jackson's grave,  
But 'nearer—nearer—to his God.'  
Mothers! mothers! Let me warn you;  
Heed well! heed well! A chastened one!  
How ere you love, oh! never make  
An idol of a son."<sup>6</sup>

The high rate of casualties, the raid on Lexington and VMI by Union forces under Union General David Hunter, the local hospitals, the death of "Stonewall" Jackson, and the postwar arrival of General Robert E. Lee—all these combined to ensure a long-term remembrance here of that tragic war.

Of course, there are other motifs besides war in these collections. The voices of women are well represented, in war and in many peacetime activities. We find them in correspondence to friends, siblings, husbands, and parents. They describe their lives which were much richer than many of us might imagine. Not only is this true in the papers of Margaret Junkin Preston, but also in others less well known. There is Emily Morrison Bondurant, daughter of Reverend James Morrison, of New Providence Presbyterian Church. Born in 1837, she married a gentleman of Buckingham County. Before her death in 1925, she had written nine volumes of reminiscences, deposited at Wilson Library, UNC

5. Robert J. Driver, Jr., *Lexington and Rockbridge County in the Civil War* (Lynchburg: H. E. Howard, 1989).

6. John D. Davidson, a poem to his son, Greenlee, 1863, Davidson Family Papers, Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University.

Chapel Hill. There are also the letters, affectionate and detailed, of Mary L. Wilson, a school teacher in the Brownsburg vicinity, to her fiancé and later husband, Emmette Brooks, during the Civil War period. They are here at the Marshall Foundation Library, part of the Smith-Crum Collection.

One more example comes from the genre of diaries. Held in the Library of Congress, it is by Sophie S. Wilson, of Charleston, South Carolina. She wrote in 1831 of a wagon trip with her family through the piedmont region of the Carolinas into the Virginia Valley. Her writing is straightforward and honest, with descriptions of run-down southern hamlets, picnics along the way, and broken axles. Her final entry was written at the Natural Bridge, where she was filled with religious awe.

The voices of another segment of the population, those of African Americans, are more muted. Fewer papers tell us much about this group that passed through slavery and subsequent years of continued poverty, inferior education, and disenfranchisement. To fill the gaps of first-hand materials, recent scholars have turned to a variety of approaches, using the tools of anthropology as well as history. In Rockbridge County, with just under four thousand slaves, by 1850 one in four was a person of color. The manuscripts, particularly in the McDowell, Reid, and Weaver collections, contain a considerable amount of information about them, mostly from the master's point of view. They do include a number of name lists and some emancipation contracts.

One interesting issue raised by the papers is the fate of free blacks in our community, about four hundred in number by 1860. They were usually restricted, watched closely, and often forced to leave. State law allowed counties to hire out members of this group delinquent in their taxes. Rockbridge County listed their names on a poster and invited gentlemen to hire them "cheaply." This poster, in a collection at Leyburn Library, is reprinted in the Guide. Since so little revenue was collected this way, it raises the question as to motives. It may have been used as a device to reenslave the group.

There were some highly valued free blacks such as Washington Jackson, the subject of an 1863 broadside signed by twenty-three white men petitioning to waive him from Confederate service. He was, the petition said, the "only reliable [black]smith in the town of Brownsburg or vicinity." He was one of the lucky free men of color. During much of the early nineteenth century, as suggested in our papers, some Rockbridge leaders gave support to the efforts of the American Colonization Society to ship free blacks to Liberia.

Slave ownership encompassed more than local slaves. Some owners, such as the McDowells, worked slaves on western lands in Kentucky and elsewhere. The topic of western lands is another important theme in

# PUBLIC HIRING OF FREE NEGROES.

**BY order of the County Court of Rockbridge County, made on the 6th day of February, 1854, I shall, on the first day of March Court next, offer for hire the following FREE NEGROES, for the purpose of paying their taxes, to-wit:**

Alexander Minor,	1854,	\$1 76
James Liggin,	"	75
Marshall Johnston,	"	1 76
Samuel Crumbles,	"	1 76
Willis Booker,	"	1 85
James Harper,	1853,	1 78
John Lumbel,	1852,	1 90
Elisha Nash,	"	75
Hugh Alexander,	"	1 75
John Bnttles,	1851,	1 75
Harrison Ailstock,	1852,	1 75
Robert Pleasants,	1851,	1 75
Wm. Scott,	"	1 75
Wynt Scott,	"	1 75
Nathan Saunders,	1852,	1 75
Burwell,	"	1 75
Henry Brooks,	"	1 75
Ned Gentry,	1853,	1 75
Jessee Mason,	"	75
Patrick Hill,	"	1 75
Wm. Hill,	1851	1 75
Jas Peters,	1853	1 75
Jes Mason,	1852	75
Willis Mason	1854	1 76
Edwin Nash,	"	1 79
Thos. F. Scott,	"	1 76

**Gentlemen wishing to hire hands will not have a chance of hiring cheaper than at the March Court. I am bound under the law not to hire them for less than ten cents per day. They are hired running at large, I am not responsible for their delivery.**

**JNO. J. M. GILBERT, D. S.**  
for John A. M. Lusk, S. R. C.

**February 6, 1855.**

*Poster by Rockbridge County to collect taxes from free blacks. This practice, aimed at a very small segment of the Virginia population, had legislative support as far back as 1792. (Rockbridge County Records, Washington & Lee University Library Special Collections.)*

Rockbridge papers, revealing the local side of the land fever sweeping much of the United States in our early history. One typical victim of this fever was a member of the Preston family who wrote in a letter, about 1810, to James McDowell of Cherry Grove that the lure of land speculation had seized him with excitement. Land promised wealth, status, a new beginning; and there was lots of it in the south and west.

The attraction of Kentucky and other similar places was confirmed to me while looking at a rich treasury of materials at the Filson Club in Louisville. This is one of the nation's preeminent research facilities for the history of trans-Alleghany region, which embraced western Virginia. It is also a good place to visit if you want to learn more about the Virginia frontier, and particularly the role of Rockbridge families in its development. Kentucky broke from Virginia and gained statehood in 1792. The bluegrass region was like a flame to Rockbridge moths after the Revolutionary War, as well as to other land-hungry people throughout the Old Dominion.

Samuel McDowell was one of the first of his family to arrive there in 1783. He was a veteran of the Revolution and son of John McDowell of Timber Ridge. He soon joined the ranks of frontier attorneys struggling to untangle Kentucky's incredibly complicated land claims. He also became a surveyor of public lands in Fayette County and president of the Kentucky constitutional convention in which he helped to write the state's first constitution. He also became a judge of the state's first district court.

Two other McDowells who resettled in Kentucky are worth noting. One was Dr. Ephraim McDowell, a Rockbridge physician, remembered for performing in the county the first abdominal surgery in America. He moved to Danville, Kentucky. The other was the younger James McDowell, born at Cherry Grove, perhaps the best educated member of his family. After a year at Washington College, he went north to Yale University with his friend, Carey Breckinridge. This was during the War of 1812, while his father, the elder James McDowell, was leading a Rockbridge unit of the Virginia militia patrolling the Virginia coast. The two students themselves, sailing from New York to New Haven, were temporarily detained in Long Island Sound by a British privateer. They were evidently not much of a catch and were released. With one year at Yale, James then went to the College of New Jersey (known later as Princeton University). He returned home at the age of twenty-one, read law in Staunton and married Susannah Smith Preston. The elder James decided his son was now ready to face life, so he handed him title to two thousand acres of McDowell land in Bourbon County, Kentucky. James went there with his new bride, settling near the county seat of Lexington and opening a law office. His father worried about him and sent off fre-

quent letters. Let me quote from one of them, dated 1821 and held by the Virginia Historical Society. The advice was a nineteenth-century version of “how to win friends and influence people.”

You have now commenced your housekeeping. I hope that you will make a point to be courteous and kind to your neighbors, especially those who would either profit by that kindness and respect you for your attention. You will find these not to be the exalted characters of the country but in the middle and humble walks of society. They are the people who will promote you. From them you will have sincerity and affection of the sort useful to you and not bestowed because they benefit for it.<sup>7</sup>

They remained, alas, only a couple of years as the practice of law disappointed him. It was not suitable, he felt, for an honest man. Nor was the management of a plantation satisfying for one educated at three schools. And his health went bad. They returned to Rockbridge and built a house for themselves on another tract given by his father. Called Col Alto, it had a nice view of Lexington and the mountains beyond. An ardent Jacksonian Democrat and public-minded individual, McDowell found that politics was a comfortable occupation, perhaps even a calling. He spent several years in the General Assembly, was elected for one term to the governor’s office from 1843 to 1846, and then filled a vacancy for a term in the U.S. House of Representatives. But his health remained poor, and he died in 1851 at the age of fifty-six, leaving his wife and eight children. McDowell had held on to the Kentucky land through much of his career, leaving local managers in charge of the slaves and farm production.

The subjects of Kentucky, slavery, and the Civil War are all associated with still another theme running through our county history. That is higher education. Our two colleges have been like magnetic poles that energized much of local life. They drew students from the western states and elsewhere and sent out graduates who excelled in various professions. At both schools, there were slaves, owned by the school and by students. Students and teachers occasionally debated the merits of slavery, and at Washington College, at least, there was vociferous debate on the question of secession in 1861 and the propriety of a Confederate flag waving over Washington Hall. The Pennsylvania-born President George Junkin objected, announced his Unionist sympathies, and left for his home state.

Important things happened at Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute, and they both played important roles in the commu-

7. James McDowell, Sr., to James McDowell, Jr., January 30, 1821, Edmundson Family Papers, 1781–1949, Virginia Historical Society.

nity and beyond. These schools have always been large features of our landscape that perhaps we have taken for granted. We have had a continuity of town and gown from early on. This historical town-and-gown relation—better described, I believe, as a triangle of town, countryside, and gown—deserves more attention. Our manuscript collections provide a mass of material for such a study.

The presence of colleges certainly enlivened the local social life. Among the descriptions of Lexington while General Lee was in charge of Washington College, I found one that nicely captures some of the tone of that period. It comes in 1869 from David Gardiner Tyler, the son of U.S. president John Tyler, and was written to David's mother, Julia Gardiner Tyler. The younger Tyler, after living in Germany during the Civil War, was the a student at Washington College.

Our town has been considerably enlivened by parties, receptions, masquerades, and such like affairs incident to Christmas and New Year. I attended a party at Professor White's last week, and there spent an exceedingly pleasant evening. All the beauty and chivalry of Lexington were assembled. . . . On New Year's Day, General Lee threw open his doors, and received the general congratulations of his friends. I, of course, called on the Old Hero and paid my respects. I had a long chat with Mrs. Lee about the scary times you and she experienced together while endeavoring to escape from the wrath to come in the shape of Yankee cavalrymen.<sup>8</sup>

The colleges, Tyler's letter shows, did add fun to the community. But they did much more than that. Having two front-rank colleges here set Rockbridge, and especially Lexington, apart from much of the rest of the state. Without them, what would Lexington's future have become? Probably not much more than another quiet Valley town. My own curiosity about the “college factor” in our history led me to consult alumni directories for many of the male names that showed up in my *Guide*. So many of them, I found, were graduates of one or the other school, and I added this information to the text.

Over the years, the many thousands of graduates enhanced the reputation of our area. A number of them, as they do today, kept some attachment to the Rockbridge area. Among them were ministers, teachers, attorneys, political officials, doctors, business leaders, and even some farmers. And each year, they added to our own pool of educated men who, in turn, contributed widely to the local community. The result had to be a raising of standards, a general enrichment of community life.

8. David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, January 7, 1869, Tyler Family Papers, 1716–1944, Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

# NOTICE.

**WILL BE SOLD, at Public Sale, at HART'S BOTTOM, the late residence of John Robinson dec'd, on Friday the 18th instant, the residue of the**

## Personal Property

of said deceased, which is considered by the Executors expedient to sell, consisting of Horses, Cattle, a quantity of Old Corn and some Rye, of this year's crop—also,

### THREE STILLS,

a quantity of Old Hogsheads, & some New Barrels, together with a number of other articles omitted at the former sale.

**There will be hired, at the same time and place, ALL THE NEGROES,** belonging to said Estate, excepting so many as may be considered necessary to work Hart's Bottom, and the old and infra.—They will be hired either for the remainder of the present year, or until the first of January 1828, as may be considered best—Terms will be made known at the sale.

WILLIAM PAXTON,  
ROBERT WHITE, } Executors,  
S. McD. REID.  
JAS. McDOWELL, Jr. }

August 9th, 1826

A COMMITTEE appointed by the Board of Trustees of Washington College, consisting of John Alexander, S. McD. Reid, and Robert White, will receive proposals, and contract with some suitable person as

## A Manager & Overseer

for Hart's Bottom.—The same committee are authorized and instructed by the Board, to rent, for one or more years, the FARM on the North River, adjoining J's Edmundson, Benja Camden, & others, opposite Edmundson's Mill—also SEVERAL TRACES on the top of the Blue Ridge.

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY, AUGUST 9th, 1826

*Notice, August 9, 1826, of a public sale of John Robinson's personal property. (William Fleming Papers, Washington & Lee University Special Collections.)*

The schools also enlarged the local economic base in countless ways, by offering local employment, by local purchases, in offering faculty expertise, and in helping to open doors elsewhere. We might ponder another question. Where would this area be were it not for those two heroes in grey, Jackson and Lee? Both of these luminaries would have bypassed Lexington were it not for our two colleges.

There are many more themes that run through these collections, too many to describe here. I will leave you with a final question: what do we do with all this manuscript information? Since you have supported me in this enterprise, I feel it my duty to suggest some answers. As I worked on this talk, trying to identify themes running through the collections, I also found there were specific topics that might warrant further investigation. For one thing, we need to know more about the leading families



of our county. Here as in most places, even with a rising democratic spirit, there was a local elite in the nineteenth century. The McDowells, Moores, and Reids come to mind. Who were the other members of this group? What was their power based upon? Did they have interlocking interests on such issues as land speculation, slavery, agricultural productivity, iron mining, and transportation improvements?

By understanding the leading families, other important parts of our history will also come into focus. Certainly a figure like Governor James McDowell deserves more study, even a full-length biography. In common with another governor, James Letcher, McDowell played key roles not just in Rockbridge but also state-wide. The material is there for a variety of studies. The *Guide* lists eight collections under the McDowell name. There is another question about local elites. What effects did the Civil War have on them? Did newer families, such as the deHarts, Myers, and Glasgows, supplant the older ones later in the century? I would think so.

The history of African Americans, both free and slave, also deserves more attention, from both the viewpoints of African American and whites. In what different labor systems were blacks employed? How did they fare under different masters? What was the extent of the leasing system by which workers were hired out to other masters? How important were black workers in the business of canal construction? How did Scotch-Irish masters reconcile the enslavement of other people with their own strong religious principles? What were the difficulties facing the small pockets of free blacks, and what occupations did they have? How strong were local efforts to support the American Colonization Society in returning free men to Liberia? Finally, what happened to the population of African Americans following the Civil War? I realize that such questions may not be dealt with easily and comfortably. They are, however, part of the texture of our history.

I also wonder about others in our county who made decisions to leave their families and go further south and west. What motivated these emigrants to pack their bags and leave? Was it land shortage? What other opportunities might have been lacking? And another question: I came across so many attorneys practicing in Lexington. Our dependence on the legal profession is nothing new today. Why was it so strong in the nineteenth century? What fresh insights can we gain about that society by examining attorney files? We could go even further and examine the public records of court cases and judgements. We might find a more gritty version of our history in those yellowed papers.

There are many other topics too, I'm sure. And there may also be specific steps for this Society, beyond what you are doing now, to stimulate additional research. How can we encourage students both in high

school and college to use these primary sources? What of possible stipend support for summer interns at the Campbell House, with an added requirement for a research paper? To make the papers more accessible, you may also want to consider a project to copy some collections in outlying libraries to enlarge your holdings here.

I could go much further, but will not try your patience longer. My hope is that the *Guide* will be a prelude to more research on many fronts. I will be disappointed to see it just occupy shelf space. New research can surprise us. It may confront us with unpleasant truths. It may also sustain traditional notions. Once engaged and uncontrolled by preconceptions, history will take its own path. Someone has pointed out—I can not recall who—that history is the one of the few fields that can teach humility. It teaches us that both good and bad happen, that events can overtake planning, that there are many things we can't control. Past generations in our county perhaps understood that better than we do today, with all of our technological gizmos.


But despite their problems, most people of earlier Rockbridge County, probably, felt their lives were generally good. They could roll with the punches. Consider a comment from Mary Custis Lee, the wife of Robert E. Lee. As you know, this couple had been through a great deal before coming to Lexington. And she knew the quality of the place they came to. As she wrote to a friend in January of 1866, soon after their arrival in town: "I should think that there was no place in Virginia so well fitted for schools as this surrounded by mountains. It seems like the happy valley cut off from contact with the world."<sup>9</sup> I agree, in looking back, that if not always a happy valley, it had its blessings.

I think also that we have been blessed with a trail of historical papers. May they be used in the years ahead to enrich our understanding of this place.

9. Mary Custis Lee to Selina Powell, January 10, 1866, Powell Family Papers, Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

## The Early History of the Paxton House at Glen Maury

Francis W. Lynn

 IN a hand-delivered letter to the Buena Vista City Council on September 30, 1968, Charles and Doris Wescott informed Council of the “impending sale in the very near future” of their property known as Glen Maury adjacent to the city for \$87,500 to the earliest qualifying buyer. Their letter slowed the potential of the 315-acre tract as suitable for industry, housing, schools, and recreation as well as “an abundant supply of natural spring water and recorded deed provision for unlimited withdrawal of water from the dam pond of the Maury River near the Bonded Fibers Plant.” Included in the letter was a detailed accounting of how the city might realize a yearly income of some \$8,000 in rental income from croplands, pasture, a five-room apartment, potential renting from the main dwelling, and sale of mined sand and rock materials.

Council was quick to act, and a letter from Mayor L. E. White appeared in the *Buena Vista News* informing the city of Council’s intention to consider approving a contract for the purchase of Glen Maury at the regular Council meeting on Thursday, October 10, 1968, and encouraging “all interested persons to attend the Council Meeting . . . for the purpose of stating their views on the critical problem.”

---

**Francis W. Lynn**, local historian, gave a slide-lecture outlining the early history of the Elisha Paxton House at the Society’s annual picnic held in Buena Vista at the Glen Maury Main Pavilion on July 27, 1998. Prior to the picnic, members enjoyed tours of the house and a stroll on the new Riverwalk along the Maury River overlooking the Paxton House.



*The Paxton House in Glen Maury Park, Buena Vista, in the 1990s.*

Council voted unanimously to purchase the property, and the deed was made the following day, October 11, 1968. The City of Buena Vista thus became the eleventh owner of a 315-acre farm and a house built in 1831 by Elisha Paxton.

In its history of nearly 170 years, not one of its eleven owners lived in the house as long as its builder and first occupant, Elisha Paxton. No record or other source exists which gives him a middle name or middle initial. He is always "Elisha Paxton." When he died in 1867 at the age of eighty-two, he had spent the last thirty-seven years of his life in the beautiful mansion on the North River (renamed Maury River in 1945).

Born in 1785, Elisha was the tenth and last child of Capt. William Paxton and Eleanor Hays Paxton. His father had served as captain of the Rockbridge Militia in the Revolutionary War. Elisha's grandparents had come from Scotland, then England, and finally immigrated to the New World from Northern Ireland, settling first in Pennsylvania. They came to Virginia in 1745, one branch settling along South River and Elisha's clan settling along North River, in what would later become Rockbridge County.

They built a log cabin across the road from where the present Ben Salem Presbyterian Church is located (on Ben Salem Lane off Forge Road). This simple log cabin was the first of four Paxton houses built in

this general vicinity. Twice the houses were destroyed by fire; each time the house was rebuilt, larger and more beautiful. The boxwoods at the entrance of Mountain View, the Paxton estate, remain as a reminder of its past glory. After the death of both parents, Elisha and a brother, William, bought out the other heirs. They later divided the property, William keeping the home place and Elisha taking possession of the tract along the western bank of North River opposite the Glasgow estate (later known as Green Forest). Elisha built a log cabin in the grove of trees between the present Lomax Funeral Home (off East Midland Trail [U.S. 60]) and the river.

In 1809 Elisha married his seventeen-year-old North River neighbor Margaret “Peggy” McNutt, daughter of Alexander and Rachel Grigsby McNutt. Between 1811 and 1828 five sons and a daughter were born to them here.

Elisha is described in the Paxton genealogy of 1903, *The Paxtons*,<sup>1</sup> as “a successful business man who accumulated wealth and gave to every child a finished education.” His wife, on the other hand, is described by the genealogist as a woman “with superior mental endowments and fixed moral and religious principles, and these virtues were instilled into all her children.” Indeed, Peggy McNutt was from a prominent North River family, the second of thirteen children. Her brothers attended Washington College, afterwards engaging mostly in the practice of law in Louisiana and Mississippi. The most notable was her brother Alexander Gallatin McNutt, who served as governor of Mississippi between 1838 and 1842.

Several anecdotes handed down through General Frank Paxton’s sons and grandsons provide some insight into Elisha’s character. As the first Matthew W. Paxton observed:

Elisha must have been somewhat irascible as was not uncommon with his family. He was once riding to Lexington on court day with a cousin. Their discussion waxed rather warm and Elisha Paxton hit his companion with his crop. The cousin had him hailed into court for assault and the judge fined him \$10, upon which Elisha Paxton said he would have given \$25 to hit him.

None of the family anecdotes tell us whether Elisha was a religious sort. Church and court records, however, do indicate that he was somewhat active in the church. As to religious preference, most of the early Scotch-Irish settlers in the valley were Presbyterians, and the Paxtons

1. William McClung Paxton, *The Paxtons: Their Origins in Scotland, and Their Migration Through England and Ireland, to the Colony of Pennsylvania, Whence They Moved South and West, and Found Homes in Many States and Territories* (Platte City, Mo.: Landmark Printing, 1903).

and McNutts were no exception. While Elisha was never an elder or deacon in the Ben Salem Presbyterian Church, he was one of the three original trustees of the first church, which was located on an acre of land across the road from Ben Salem Wayside on U.S. 60. (Some remember the spot as the location of the former “Coffee Pot” store.) His brother William donated the land for the church, and the deed—made in 1842—included the following: “for the express use of a church and school room and to be under the control of the Presbyterian denomination and no other.”<sup>2</sup> The school room referred to in the deed was built on the one acre in 1819 by twenty subscribers (including Elisha) and by permission of William Paxton.<sup>3</sup> Church records from the 1850s show that Elisha was one of the most generous subscribers to the Ben Salem church.

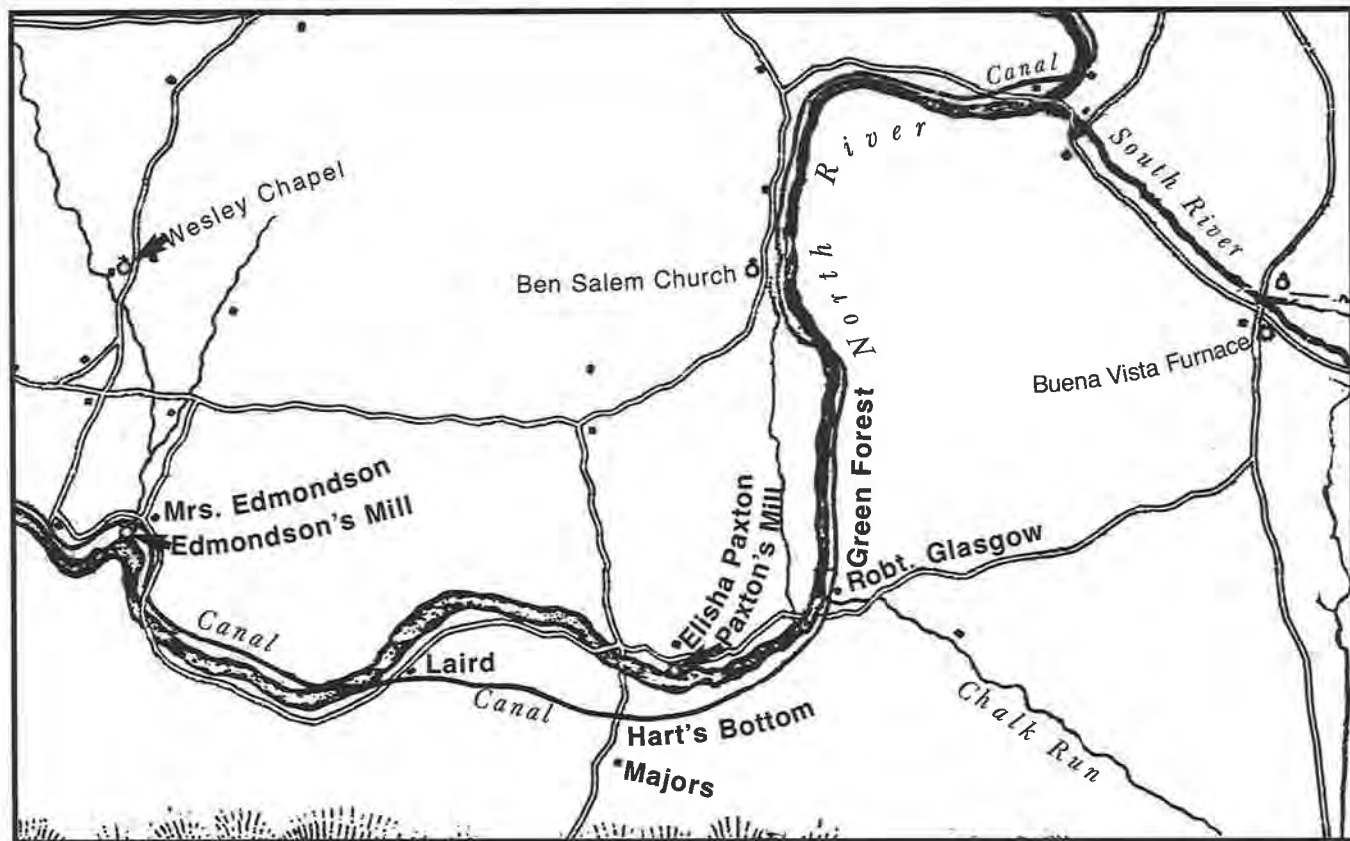
In 1827 Elisha purchased 171 acres of land along the North River adjoining his other land and opposite “Jockey” John Robinson’s Hart’s Bottom estate. Exactly which year he started to build this house is uncertain, but the year 1831 is the first year the house is listed in the Rockbridge County land book for tax purposes. Therefore, 1831 is the year used by most sources in dating the house, although construction might have commenced as early as 1828.

It is difficult today even to imagine what it was like living on this large North River plantation during the fifty-year period from 1830 until the coming of the railroads in the early 1880s. There were five large working plantations spanning both banks of the river in the area that would later become Buena Vista across the river. Three plantations were on the other side, the eastern side: the Glasgows at Green Forest; Hart’s Bottom, which was the estate “Jockey” John Robinson willed to Washington College in 1826 and which the college managed until 1840; and the Laird estate, later renamed Savernake during the land boom in 1890.

On the western side of the river were the Edmondsons and the Paxtons. Interestingly, when the estate was sold following Elisha’s death, the newspaper referred to it as “Palmyra.” Each estate had a large mansion, usually with porticos and white columns, that was the center of much activity. The estates included a flour or grist mill, saw mill, tenant house, cabins for slaves, barns, stables, blacksmith shop, gardens and orchards, but especially large fields where grew the cash crops of grains for flour and whiskey and, of course, tobacco. All these plantations depended on slave labor, especially for planting and harvesting crops. Slaves included in the census for 1840, 1850, and 1860 show that Elisha usually kept around twenty slaves, always in family groups.

2. Deed Book W, p. 2627, Rockbridge County Court House, Lexington.

3. Deed Book L, *ibid.*



*Area around modern-day Buena Vista showing the five working plantations in Elisha Paxton's time.*

To get these valuable crops, as well as lumber and iron from the nearby furnaces to the profitable markets in the east, transportation was by means of North River to Balcony Falls, and then down the James River to Lynchburg and Richmond. There is a wonderful exhibit on the walls as you enter the Buena Vista Municipal Building. It was sponsored jointly by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Center for Archaeological Research of the College of William and Mary. Entitled "Buena Vista: History Runs Through It," the exhibit records the era of river transportation, first by batteaux, those long, narrow, canoe-like boats that boatmen guided or steered with sweeps or steering oars, and later by packet boats on the North River Canal. Between 1851 and 1860 the North River Navigation Company constructed what is commonly referred to as the North River Canal, thereby improving river transportation and bringing to a virtual end the era of the batteau. Both Elisha and a son, James Gardner, were stockholders in the North River Navigation Company.

Another helpful resource in understanding the history of North River navigation during Elisha's lifetime is the *Maury River Atlas*.<sup>4</sup> Elisha not only witnessed the eras of both the batteau and the canal, he participated actively in both eras. Morton, in his 1920 *History of Rockbridge County*, calls Elisha Paxton "one of the leading boat captains" of the batteau era.<sup>5</sup>

At the death of "Jockey" John Robinson in 1826, Washington College, the heir to this valuable Hart's Bottom estate, took possession and continued to operate the farm as prescribed by the will. Elisha had borrowed money from Robinson to purchase the additional land needed to build his new home and was paying off the debt by hauling goods from the Hart's Bottom estate down the James to Lynchburg and Richmond. This practice continued after Robinson's death, for there are receipts for such trips credited to Elisha Paxton's account signed by Samuel McDowell Reid, a college trustee and also the manager of the Hart's Bottom estate. Receipts, such as the ones below, are in the Special Collections section of W&L's Leyburn Library:

Rec'd of Mr. Elisha Paxton one hundred and forty-five dollars the amount sales of twenty nine barrels flour sold in Richmond 23<sup>rd</sup> day last at five dollars per barrel and s'd Paxton is to be credited \$29—for freight and charges said flour belonged to Washington College—Witness my hand this 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1832. (Signed) Sam'l. McD. Reid

4. William E. Trout, III, *The Maury River Atlas: Nineteenth-Century Inland Navigation of the Virginias* (Lexington, Va.: Virginia Canals and Navigations Society, 1991).

5. Oren F. Morton, *A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia* (Staunton, Va.: McClure Co., 1920), p. 165.



Rec'd of Mr. Elisha Paxton one hundred and Seventy three dollars gross proceeds of thirty six Barrels flour carried to & sold in Richmond per bill rendered this day. Witness my hand this 26<sup>th</sup> April 1831—(Signed) Sam McD Reid agent, for Trustees Washington College

Rec'd of Mr. Elisha Paxton the sum of Thirty five dollars & 85 cents net proceeds of a hogshead of tobacco carried to Lynchburg & sold May 27<sup>th</sup> 1831. Witness my hand this 30<sup>th</sup> May 1831 for Robinsons estate. (Signed) Sam McD Reid

Several anecdotes told and retold by Paxton family members illustrate Elisha's involvement with the river:

When young, Elisha would ship his grain and lumber to Richmond via barges which were constructed on the river at his place. From Richmond, he would walk back after selling the merchandise and the barge. Later years he would ride back on a horse.

My father used to tell the story of the boat trips down the James River. Some of the old man's grain was shipped in the form of whiskey. A great deal of the local grain crop went into this form for convenience of handling and it has been said that one could see standing on a hill smoke rising from distilleries on the farms of seven elders in New Providence Church.

Elisha Paxton had a slave named Pompey to whom he was very devoted. Pompey used to pole these boats down the James and while going through rather dangerous rapids he would occasionally “sass” his owner. Elisha Paxton would say nothing at the time but when the boat got to still water would knock Pompey off in the river and then fish him out again.<sup>6</sup>

All seven of Elisha and Peggy's children lived at the Paxton House at one time or another, but only the youngest, John Gallatin, was born there. The initials of two of the sons carved into the bricks on the front of the house and the year 1831 are still clearly visible. Four of the six sons were graduates of Washington College; a fifth son started at Washington College before the Civil War but graduated from Virginia Military Institute after the war. The sixth son graduated from Virginia Military Institute in 1850. Five of the six sons attended law school—at Harvard, Washington College, or the University of Virginia—and all five had law practices at one time. The only daughter attended a female finishing school.

When the Civil War began in 1861, four of the sons were of age to serve, and all four took part on the Confederate side. The most famous

6. These anecdotes are from the Paxton Manuscript Collection in the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia.

of them is Gen. Elisha Franklin Paxton. He was called “Frank” by family and friends but was early nicknamed “Bull”—partly because of his large frame, but in part to match his somewhat stubborn and determined disposition. With no military education, he entered the war as a lieutenant in the Rockbridge Rifles, and rose to the rank of brigadier general in the Army of Northern Virginia. He was handpicked by General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson to command the Stonewall Brigade. It was while serving in this capacity that he was struck down and killed almost instantly on the second day of the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 3, 1863, the day after Stonewall received his mortal wound in the same battle.

With the VMI cadet corps as a military escort, Frank Paxton was laid to rest in Lexington Cemetery on May 12, 1863. The next day, May 13, the body of Stonewall Jackson began its journey from Richmond to Lynchburg by train on the way to its final resting place, also Lexington Cemetery. The body was transferred to the packet boat *Marshall* in Lynchburg for its final leg up the James River and then up the North River. Crowds lined the rivers’ banks, we are told, to catch a glimpse. It is very likely that Elisha Paxton stood on the bank just a few yards from his house to watch the *Marshall* pass. To capture this historic event, there is a casting in the floodwall on the east side of the river depicting a replica of the *Marshall* in its exact dimensions. Two days later, Stonewall was laid to rest only a few feet from Gen. Frank Paxton’s grave.

During the war, Frank Paxton had become deeply religious, due in part, no doubt, to the influence of Stonewall Jackson. His letters to his wife, written while he was in the army, are filled with emotional outpourings about his assurance of salvation and demonstrate a strong commitment to his unswerving faith. The letters also reveal a deep and abiding love for his wife and young family back in Lexington. His wartime letters were compiled and printed by one of his sons, John Gallatin Paxton, in 1905. Not until 1978, however, did a great-grandson of Gen. Frank Paxton publish the letters.<sup>7</sup>

We in the Buena Vista–Rockbridge area are perhaps more familiar with another son of Gen. Paxton. Matthew W. Paxton was the first of four generations with that same name who have been associated since the 1880s with the *Rockbridge County News* and the *News-Gazette*.

Elisha Paxton’s era at the Paxton House came to an end on November 21, 1867, when he died there at age eighty-two. In many ways his last years were sad ones. He died practically alone in his beautiful man-

7. John Gallatin Paxton, ed., *The Civil War Letters of General Frank “Bull” Paxton, CSA, a Lieutenant of Lee and Jackson*, with an introduction by Harold B. Simpson (Hillsboro, Texas: Hill Junior College Press, 1978).



*Gen. Elisha Franklin "Bull" Paxton*

sion, which was even then beginning to show signs of neglect. His beloved wife Peggy had died ten years earlier and he had already outlived two sons and his only daughter. The three eldest sons had moved years before to Mississippi and Louisiana, where they were practicing law or engaged in business. The one surviving account of his last days comes from the grandson previously mentioned:

My father told me he remembers staying at his grandfather's one summer after his father had been killed at Chancellorsville. He said he had a cook and her husband, former slaves, to look after him and he recalled that most of the house was used for grain storage. One day the colored man came to Lexington with a willow pole to note the length his coffin should be made. He had lived a long useful life.

Following Elisha's death, the house and property were tied up in several court cases. and it was not until 1873 that the property was sold through a chancery suit for the settlement of the estate. The new buyer was William Walz, a highly successful Lexington baker and candy merchant who, like "Bull" Paxton had served in the Rockbridge Rifles of the Stonewall Brigade during the war. The farm probably operated under a tenant overseer for three years until Walz sold the estate in 1876 to a member of another prominent Rockbridge family.



*Edward Alexander ("Ned") Moore in 1907.*

Edward Alexander Moore, better known as "Ned," purchased the property in 1876 and devoted himself to serious farming. His mother was a descendant of Benjamin Borden and his father was Capt. David E. Moore, who had been Captain of the Guard at the old Lexington Arsenal from 1827 until the arsenal was converted into the Virginia Military Institute in 1839.

While a second-year student at Washington College, young Ned entered the service of the Confederacy in the spring of 1862 as a member of the Rockbridge Artillery of the Stonewall Brigade. He had wanted to enter the war the year before, but his father objected because of his youth and for the more compelling reason that his three older brothers already were fighting for the South. He served gallantly throughout the war, surrendering with Lee at Appomattox. He was twice wounded, at Sharpsburg and later at Second Cold Harbor.

Some forty years after the war, Ned Moore was prevailed upon to write a book about his wartime experiences: *The Story of a Cannoneer*

under *Stonewall Jackson*.<sup>8</sup> Capt. Robert E. Lee, Jr., wrote an introduction, a part of which reads:

For nearly a year I served in the battery with this cannoneer, and for a time we were in the same mess. Since the war I have known him intimately, and it gives me great pleasure to be able to say that there is no one who could give a more honest and truthful account of the events of our struggle from the standpoint of a private soldier.

Ned Moore re-entered Washington College after the war, finished in two years, and was instructor in Latin during his senior year. He is pictured in a photograph of Lee's faculty in the Lee Chapel Museum. He pursued a teaching career for a short time in classical schools in Maryland and Kentucky. In 1876 he returned to his native Rockbridge County, purchased the Elisha Paxton estate, and began a successful career in farming. In 1880 the *Lexington Gazette* applauded his visit back to Kentucky: “bringing back with him some valuable thoroughbred stock from the blue grass region for his farm ‘Riverside’ on North River.” The improved stock and an improved system of agriculture on the part of young farmers, said the paper, was “bright with promise for the future of old Rockbridge.”<sup>9</sup>

Other changes had occurred in the area as well. B. C. Moomaw had purchased the Glasgow estate on the east side of the river and was developing a little village called Green Forest. He had influenced the Appold brothers of Baltimore to build a tannery between the two new railroads that had just come to Rockbridge County—the Shenandoah Valley and the Richmond & Alleghany. Their arrival struck the final blow to river transportation on North River.

By 1889 many people in Lexington and “old” Rockbridge, seeing an easy way to get rich quick, got caught up in wild land speculations. Ned Moore was no exception. In 1889 he sold his 333-acre estate to a land syndicate of prominent Rockbridge and Augusta County citizens for \$20,000. Among the Lexington-Rockbridge investors in the syndicate were Prof. A. L. Nelson, John Sheridan, John T. McKee, Jay Hugh Wills, and Rev. B. C. Moomaw. Ned Moore was an investor as well as one of the company's seven directors. Following the lead of the Buena Vista Company, the syndicate secured a charter and formed a land improvement organization known as the West Buena Vista Land Company. It quickly laid out lots and streets. Ned Moore continued to live in the mansion in Section 16. Many of the lots were sold, but none of the own-

8. Edward A. Moore, *The Story of a Cannoneer under Stonewall Jackson, in which is Told the Part Taken by the Rockbridge Artillery in the Army of Northern Virginia* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1907).

9. *Lexington Gazette*, January 15, 1880.

ers was able to build, due to the financial panic and depression that brought an end to the boom in 1892. When the West Buena Vista Company ceased operations in 1909, Ned Moore held one-quarter of the stock and was president of the company.

One family, however, did continue to do business and later lived in West Buena Vista after the boom and well into the new century. T. Hartwell Glass had married Miss Julia Price in 1898. She was the daughter of Capt. William A. Price, who had operated the Hart's Bottom estate prior to its sale in 1889 to the Buena Vista Company. The *Rockbridge County News*, in reporting the marriage, noted: "The bride is one of our most popular and charming young ladies. And the groom a successful business man."<sup>10</sup> They resided initially at Savenake, across the river from the Paxton House and began raising a large family.

Back in 1890, at the beginning of the boom, Hartwell Glass and a brother purchased from the West Buena Vista Company a lot on the North River for \$420. In 1897 they purchased nineteen additional lots and built an impressive three-story mill. They operated it successfully as Glass Bros. Milling Company until 1905, when they sold it for more than \$9,000 to Buena Vista Mills. W. N. Key, the owner, later changed the name to Key's Mill. The mill on the river, which Elisha Paxton built around 1831, just a few yards from the mansion, continued to operate until about 1900.

Dr. A. J. Hayslett, a successful physician and farmer from upper Kerrs Creek, purchased the mansion and thirty acres in 1903. He lived here only a few years before moving across the river to Buena Vista, where he died in 1906. Hartwell and Julia Glass purchased the house from Dr. Hayslett and moved in sometime in 1905.

Not since Elisha Paxton built the house for his family had young children and teenagers romped through the house. And just as Elisha's family came to enjoy those amenities of living not available in a log cabin, so the Glass family made numerous renovations and additions to prepare it for more comfortable living at the beginning of a new century.

Additions to the rear wing of the house around 1905 included a weatherboarded section consisting of three small rooms, two of which were a kitchen and bedroom. Also, a two-story cubicle was annexed to the rear to make a bathroom at the top of the stairs and a bathroom and vestibule at the end of the central hall. Jim Manuel, a W&L art history student of Dr. Pamela Simpson, for his senior thesis obtained this and other valuable information in 1978. Mr. Manuel interviewed Mrs. Helen Glass Wilson of Buena Vista, who had vivid recollections and fond

10. *Rockbridge County News*, December 12, 1898.

memories of the ten years she lived in this house as a young girl. She also provided the old photographs used frequently in this presentation, which are the earliest known images of the house.

The Glass family sold the Paxton House and property in 1915 to Thomas and Carrie Wills and moved to Buena Vista. Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Wills conveyed the property to her son-in-law and daughter, A. M. and Ruby Davis, in 1932. The Davises sold it to William M. and Evelyn Seay Brown in 1935 and moved to Buena Vista. Likewise, the Browns sold out to the Shurtleffs in 1941 and moved to Buena Vista.

The Shurtleffs maintained the property as absentee landlords while the Maury Fix family lived here and farmed the land. Charles and Doris Wescott purchased it in 1963 and operated a tearoom and restaurant before selling it to the city of Buena Vista in 1968. The city adopted a master plan to develop the grounds into a recreational area for the community and a campground for visitors. Financial restraints, however, prevented the full implementation of the plan.

The park was dedicated three years later, in 1971, at the First Annual Labor Day Celebration before a crowd estimated as high as 7,500. Dedicatory speeches were delivered from the porch of the Paxton House, including the main address by Elbert Cox, director of the Virginia Commission of Outdoor Recreation. A Federal grant from the Land, Water, and Conservation Fund provided almost \$ 150,000 for the park project.

Although the park has continued to expand its facilities and services, almost nothing has been done to maintain or improve the historic Paxton House. The house has seen little usage by the community, other than events of one or two days' duration, such as art shows and a haunted house. Several rooms were used until recently as a senior center.

To its credit, the city did apply for recognition of the house for historic purposes. In 1978 the Paxton House was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register, and in 1979 it was named to the National Register of Historic Places. After years of individual efforts had made little headway. Virginia Hess and Stella Humphreys decided that it was time to get serious about preserving and restoring the house. On May 19, 1997, with help from city officials, a group of concerned and interested citizens formed a nonprofit organization, the Paxton House Historical Society, whose mission is “to restore the Paxton House for historical, educational, and social purposes for the community.”





# William D. Washington: Before and After *The Burial of Latané*

Winifred Hadsel



At the main entrance to the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery in Lexington, Virginia, there is a sign showing the locations of a number of historically interesting graves, including that of William D. Washington, who is briefly identified as “Painter of ‘The Burial of Latané.’” At the grave itself there is a bronze plaque that gives more details:

William D. Washington  
Professor – Fine Arts  
Virginia Military Institute

Painter of the  
picture engraved in the  
hearts of Virginians  
“The Burial of Latané”

This marker placed by  
Rockbridge Historical Society

During the nearly fifty years since the Historical Society dedicated this plaque, on November 18, 1951,<sup>1</sup> this is the first time it has considered

1. *Lexington News-Gazette*, November 21, 1951.

**Winifred Hadsel** is a past president and a current trustee of the Rockbridge Historical Society. She is the author of *The Streets of Lexington, Virginia: A Guide to the Origins and History of Their Names* (1985) and *Roads of Rockbridge: A Directory of Public and Private Roads in Rockbridge County, Virginia* (1993, 1998). Her talk was given on October 26, 1998, in the Turman Meeting Room, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.



Washington's grave, Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, Lexington, Virginia. Washington was buried December 3, 1870. The memorial plaque was dedicated November 18, 1951. (Photo by Winifred Hadsel)

Washington and his work at one of its meetings. The first effort to study Washington and his paintings was made in 1968, not by the Historical Society, but by Ethelbert Nelson Ott, an MA candidate at the University of Delaware.<sup>2</sup> In her thesis, Ott presented a great deal of information about Washington's life and established the point that the painter's middle name was "Dickinson," not "De Hartburn," as stated in many art historical dictionaries. Above all, she located and discussed no fewer than thirty-two of his paintings. However, Ott's thesis was not published and hence had very limited distribution, and she did not pursue her subject after receiving her degree.

Neither, in fact, did anyone else. Except for brief references in *Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory* and an article on "The Burial of Latané as a 'Symbol of the Lost Cause'" in *Virginia Cavalcade*, nothing has been written about Washington since the Ott thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Thus matters stood in 1997, when I saw a recently rehung selection of Washington's paintings from the Virginia Military Institute's collection of twenty-three works by this artist in a new gallery-lounge of the Institute's renovated Preston Library. Thanks to VMI's Director of Museums, Lt. Col. Keith Gibson, the wall space of a comfortable reading area furnished with mission style sofas and chairs is now used to display nine portraits by Washington, and two more are hung in the adjoining rare book room. Seeing so many of Washington's works thus brought together from

2. Ethelbert Nelson Ott, "William D. Washington (1833-1870), Artist of the South" (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1968). Copy in VMI Archives.

3. Harold Holzer and Mark E. Neely, Jr., *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art* (New York: Orion Books, 1993); Emily J. Salmon, "The Burial of Latané: Symbol of the Lost Cause," *Virginia Cavalcade* 29 (Winter 1979): 122-24.



*Washington's carte de visite, Michael Miley Studio, Lexington, Virginia, 1868. This is the only studio photo of Washington, and he did not paint a self-portrait. (VMI Archives).*

the various VMI venues where they had previously hung, I found myself wondering what else this painter had done. After reading the Ott thesis in VMI's rare book room, I began my own research.

In the course of this research I located nine Washington paintings that were hitherto unknown or considered “lost” by Ott in 1968, and I believe that several of these works, along with some in VMI's collection, show that Washington was not only the painter of “The Burial of Latané” (an icon in the post-Civil War South), but a competent and generally under-rated American painter of the mid-nineteenth century. I also turned up a number of revealing facts about Washington's life.

Take, first of all, the questions of when and where Washington was born. At VMI, Superintendent Francis H. Smith wrote in his obituary of the painter, that Washington had been born in 1833.<sup>4</sup> But Smith apparently got it wrong, for I have found a letter from Perrin Washing-

ton (William's father), dated December 5, 1832, that refers to his *two* young children.<sup>5</sup> Since one of these children (Hannah) was born in October 1829, Perrin's second child (William) was born some time between 1830 and 1832. William's considerably younger brother thought the 1830 date was correct, but he did not recall the date or month, and he was wrong in his recollection of the place of birth.<sup>6</sup>

The 1850 census strongly suggests that the painter was born in 1831. The enumerator who called on the Washingtons completed his work by

4. Record of the meeting of the Academic Board, December 2, 1870.

5. Perrin Washington to Henry St. George Tucker, December 5, 1832, John Augustine Washington papers, MSS 1 W2 7777, Archives of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

6. J. H. Washington to J. R. Anderson, March 31 and April 16, 1909, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives. The date on Washington's badly eroded tombstone appears to be 1831.

July and reported that as of that time, the Washington household included William, who was eighteen years old (and hence born in the second half of 1831).<sup>7</sup> Since the enumerator correctly listed Hannah as twenty years old, I am assuming he was also correct in recording the age of William. In the absence of birth certificates for this period, I regard the 1850 census as the best available source and conclude Washington was born in 1831.

Next, where was he born? His brother thought the place had been Clark [*sic*] County, Virginia. But the U.S. Census, this time for 1830, presents contrary and surprising information. In the 1830 census for Loudoun County, Virginia, Perrin Washington, his wife, and a child under five (Hannah) were living in a small community that was enumerated separately and called Snickersville.<sup>8</sup> Other sources show that the Washingtons were still in this far western end of Loudoun County the following year, and it follows that William must have been born in Snickersville, Virginia.

In the early 1830s, Snickersville was a settlement of about 130 adults that had come into existence at the junction of two important roads: the Snickers Gap–Alexandria Turnpike and the Snickers Gap–Leesburg Road. A road ran west from this junction through Snickers Gap in the Blue Ridge and on to Berryville, Winchester, and points west. At the point where these important roads met, a community sprang up, and by 1807 had its own post office.<sup>9</sup> It was to this post office that Perrin Washington was assigned as postmaster on November 19, 1830.<sup>10</sup>

Perrin clearly got this job through the influence of a distant relative, Mordeci Throckmorton, who owned considerable land locally, and he promptly moved his wife and infant daughter to Snickersville during the autumn of 1830. Once there, the Washingtons either rented a house, lived in rented rooms, or lived over the post office. This old building has long since been replaced, and the present post office stands on a different site. It has also had its name changed, for the local inhabitants

7. U.S. Census of 1850, District of Columbia, microfilm roll 56, Ward 4, family 443, p. 251. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

8. U.S. Census of 1830, Loudoun County, Virginia, microfilm roll 25, Snickersville, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

9. Jean Herron Smith, *Snickersville: The Biography of a Village* (Miamisburg, Ohio: Miamisburg News, 1970), p. 18. The author incorrectly identifies the Perrin Washington who became postmaster in Snickersville in 1830 as the son of Samuel Washington, brother of the President. The Perrin Washington who became the postmaster descended from John Washington, brother of the President's father, Augustine. Hugh Brogan and Charles Mosley, *American Presidential Families* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 78.

10. *Bulletin of Loudoun County Historical Society* 2 (1960): 69.

rejected Snickersville at the beginning of the twentieth century and replaced it with Bluemont. In Bluemont today there is nothing left from the 1830s except the stone Clayton house dating from 1799, and it had no connection with the Perrin Washington family.

The new postmaster apparently moved to Snickersville, hoping that his job at the post office could be combined with a profitable trading business in this crossroads town. The Washingtons accordingly bought three small lots: two on the Snickersville Turnpike, probably intended for commercial purposes, and a third some distance from the turnpike, possibly for a house they hoped to build in due course.<sup>11</sup> But they found it difficult to raise the money needed to set up a business, and in October 1831, about the time William was born, they put a deed of trust for \$14,000 on their Snickersville properties and “some slaves.”<sup>12</sup>

Perrin’s dire straits at the time of William’s birth is, on the face of it, surprising, for the Washington family, along with the Fairfaxes and Carters, owned a large part of northern Virginia and what is now West Virginia. Perrin’s father, Warner Washington, Jr., was the grandson of George Washington’s uncle, John Washington, and during his lifetime built three fine houses in the Berryville area in Clarke County: Clifton, Audley, and Llewelyn. Clifton, where Perrin was born, still stands, albeit extensively changed and enlarged, and Llewelyn, where Perrin’s father lived until his death in 1829, also survives, with attractive additions, in excellent condition.<sup>13</sup> But Perrin was the ninth child of Warner, Jr.’s, first marriage, and his father had six children by his second wife. Under these circumstances, Perrin inherited nothing from his father and was left to make his own way.

In his early thirties, Perrin did what many impecunious younger sons did: he married into a wealthy family. He took as his bride Farinda Fairfax (1800–1823), a daughter of the late Ferdinando Fairfax (1773–1820), a godson of George and Martha Washington and a man of vast inherited wealth.<sup>14</sup> But, unfortunately for Perrin, the Fairfax fortune

11. Loudoun County Records, Deed Book 3V, 304; DB 3V, 307; DB 3Y, 258, Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Virginia.

12. Loudoun County Records, DB 3W, 469.

13. Mary Gray Farland, *In the Shadow of the Blue Ridge, Clarke County (1732–1952)* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1978). All three houses are described and photographed. See also John Wayland, *The Washingtons and Their Homes* (Staunton, Va.: McClure, 1944), pp. 188, 193, 198.

14. John McGill, comp., *The Beverley Family of Virginia: Descendants of Major Robert Beverley (1641–87) and Allied Families* (Columbia, S.C.: Bryan & Co., 1956). The Farinda Fairfax–Perrin Washington marriage took place February 5, 1822, in Jefferson County, Virginia

was largely spent by Ferdinando and Farinda died after giving birth to a daughter, also named Farinda Fairfax Washington.

After his wife's death, Perrin went back to the Berryville area, leaving the infant Farinda with Fairfax relatives in Jefferson County, and five years later, in 1828, married his first cousin.<sup>15</sup> She was Hannah Fairfax Whiting, who descended from both the Washingtons and the Fairfaxes. Hannah, however, was not a great heiress, and Perrin anxiously looked for employment and used his family connections to get the modest job at Snickersville. From the beginning, however, he counted on being able to combine his job with a flourishing merchandising business at the crossroads location in Snickersville.

But his plan was dashed in November 1832, when Perrin's patron, who probably owed a favor in another quarter, gave the postmastership to someone else. This development created a crisis for the Washington family. They quickly left Snickersville and took refuge with relatives near Berryville. From there Perrin sent, on December 5, 1832, an SOS to Henry St. George Tucker, whom he had known in Winchester. In 1832 Tucker was president of the Supreme Court of Virginia in Richmond, and Perrin counted on him to have political influence. In his letter Perrin explained that he found himself reduced to "penury," and his wife and two children were dependent on relatives for food and shelter. Under these appalling circumstances, he was "extremely anxious to procure a clerkship in one of the departments at Washington," and hoped that Tucker would use his influence to help him, either by "letter to the President, or someone else—or both."<sup>16</sup> Tucker came through. Within a few months, Perrin was in Washington, D.C., working as a clerk at the central post office with a salary of \$800 a year,<sup>17</sup> and living with his family in a boarding house.

The family was still in a boarding house six years later, when, on August 10, 1839, Perrin wrote the only surviving letter that provides any

15. John D. Hackett and Rebecca H. Good, *Frederick Co., Va. Marriage Bonds* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1992), p. 189. The marriage bond is dated December 23, 1828. According to family tradition, the wedding took place on Christmas Day, in Old Chapel, just south of Llewelyn.

16. Washington to Tucker, December 5, 1832, John Augustine Washington papers, MSS 1 W2 27777, Archives of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. It took the Washingtons some time to sell their Snickersville properties. Loudoun County Records, DB 4H, 27.

17. *Washington, D.C. City Directory for 1834*, microfiche 1521, Washington, D.C., Public Library. Perrin Washington is listed as a clerk in the Examiners Office of the General Post Office. His salary of \$800 was the lowest paid to a clerk in this office.

information about William’s childhood.<sup>18</sup> This letter shows that Perrin continued to feel “driven by the winds of adversity.” He now had a salary of \$1,200 a year, but was still paying off debts he had incurred to Baltimore merchants at the time of his Snickersville venture. He was finding that his basic expenses consumed nearly all of his salary, and he notes, rather wistfully, that he “very rarely touches the violin” because of the lack of a convenient place. He adds that he writes from the office because he has so little space at home.

Even more importantly, this letter reveals that William had been born with a club foot, and in June 1839, when he was seven, had had an operation on his ankle that left him with “almost a flat straight foot.” This, then, is the explanation for the “limp” or “slight lameness” that so many people later mentioned in describing Washington. It also helps explain, partly at least, the shyness and less than robust health referred to by a number of people who knew William later on.

While William’s body was being more or less satisfactorily seen to, what was happening to his mind? There is no indication that he attended school, and for lack of any information, I can only speculate that William was home-schooled by his mother. In any case, his dozen surviving letters show that he learned to write a good hand and to express himself clearly and coherently.

Where and how did he learn to draw? Could there have been someone living at the boarding house who was clever at sketching and caught the boy’s interest? I have not found even the shadow of such a person, but I feel he—or she—must have existed. As it is, I know only that William somehow learned to draw and was taken on, probably at the age of fifteen or sixteen, as an apprentice draftsman in the U.S. Patent Office,<sup>19</sup> which needed a corps of skilled draftsmen to make neat and accurate copies of drawings. It seems, therefore, that the U.S. Patent Office gave William his first artistic training.

At some point he tried his hand at oil painting and concluded that he might, with help, become a painter. The art school he had heard most about was the Dusseldorf Academy, known for the attention it gave to meticulous drawing and rich coloring, and for its emphasis on anecdotal and historical subjects of the kind that were very popular at the time. By the end of 1853, when he was twenty-two, he somehow managed to get to Germany and gain admission to the Dusseldorf Academy. He also succeeded in becoming an assistant to Emmanuel Leutze, the best

18. Perrin Washington to Wilson Fairfax, August 10, 1839, John Augustine Washington papers, MSS 1 W 27777, Archives of the Virginia Historical Society.

19. J. H. Washington to J. R. Anderson, March 31, 1909, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives.

known artist at the Academy and painter of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," which still stood in the studio when William arrived. This painting illustrated Leutze's conviction that history painting should not be concerned with actual details but with a simple and uplifting idea. Rather surprisingly, for one as inexperienced as he was, William was soon helping Leutze on a large painting of Milton and Cromwell that W. W. Corcoran, the rich Washington banker turned art collector, had commissioned from Leutze.<sup>20</sup> Corcoran was to become important in Washington's life, but he never became the great patron the artist probably hoped he would be.

William also worked on paintings of his own, and his first completed canvas was *The Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter*. In this painting, an irate Huguenot father is shown furiously disrupting his daughter's Catholic wedding ceremony. Just as William was finishing this picture, he received a very encouraging note from Corcoran that enclosed a letter of credit for one hundred pounds sterling (\$500) to enable him to travel with Leutze to look at pictures in European galleries. Even more important was Corcoran's concluding sentence: "When you finish 'The Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter,' send it to me."<sup>21</sup>

Hence "The Wedding" was the first painting William sold, and it was promptly shipped to America. Several months later, Corcoran wrote to William saying he liked the painting very much.<sup>22</sup> He added that it was being well-received in Washington, D.C., meaning it had been favorably commented on by visitors to Corcoran's house, which was open twice a week to anyone interested in seeing his art collection.<sup>23</sup>

The painting remained in the Corcoran collection until it was sold at auction in 1924. After that it became a "lost" painting. Since this is an example of a "lost" painting that I have found, let me list the steps I took to bring it to light.

(1) I asked the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. to check the record of its 1924 auction in order to find who had bought the picture. The curator found that the purchaser was "an unknown buyer" named R. J. McCandish of Hancock, Maryland. (2) Then I called the Hancock telephone operators and found there was no listing for a McCandish, but

20. Washington to W. W. Corcoran, July 3, 1855, container 8, W. W. Corcoran papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

21. W. W. Corcoran to Washington, July 11, 1854, container 34, Corcoran papers.

22. This March 1855 letter from Corcoran to Washington is referred to by the latter, but has not been found. Washington to Corcoran, July 3, 1855.

23. Mary E. Parker Boulogny, *A Tribute to W. W. Corcoran of Washington City* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1874), p. 76. This is a good account of Corcoran's early collection.





*Washington, The Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter, 1854. The first painting Washington completed while studying at the Dusseldorf Academy. He promptly sold it to the famous collector W. W. Corcoran of Washington, D.C. (Courtesy of Richard Crane)*

there was a number for the Hancock Historical Society. (3) When I called the historical society, I found that the volunteer who answered recalled hearing the name of McCandish when she was a child, and thought she had done so at church. Her church was the local Episcopal church, and she gave me the rector's name and telephone number. (4) When I called the rector, I was told that he had received a check for altar flowers some years ago from a Mrs. McCandish, and he thought he had written his thank-you note to a Winchester address. (5) I called the Winchester telephone operator and learned that there are two McCandishes in Winchester, one of whom is a woman living in the local Westminster-Canterbury retirement home. (6) I telephoned this Mrs. McCandish and found that she immediately recognized the title, *The Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter*. She told me that the picture hangs in the dining room of her late husband's nephew, and she gave me his telephone number in Midlothian, Virginia. (7) At last I talked to the owner, Richard Crane, who told me he had inherited the picture from his maternal grandfather, R. J. McCandish, and he would be glad to send

me a photo of it. He also gave me the dimensions, 49" x 43", and informed me that the picture is signed W. D. Washington, 1854, Dusseldorf. Crane added that his grandfather had not been a collector and "The Wedding" was the only oil painting he ever bought.<sup>24</sup>

After Washington sold "The Wedding" to Corcoran, he went on working in Dusseldorf and painted a large narrative picture showing the attack on the Huguenots at Bassy, in 1642.<sup>25</sup> By the time he went home in 1855, he was able to bring it and a number of other paintings with him. But all of these works have since been "lost" and are now known only by their titles: *Columbus in Prison*, *Hamlet*, *The Ancestral Tomb*, *The Bavarian Peasant Girl*, and *Leutze's Daughter*.

In order to show his paintings from Dusseldorf, as well as the new work he hoped to do, Washington joined some other painters in forming the Washington, D.C., Art Association, which wisely elected Corcoran a director. Henceforth, this organization, as well as the Maryland Historical Society, was useful in showing his paintings.<sup>26</sup> By 1858 he had sold perhaps a dozen pictures, but all of them remain "lost" despite my efforts to locate them.

There are two Washington paintings of 1858-59 that have not been lost. One is an American history painting showing Marion, the South Carolina militia leader, in his camp during the American Revolution. Washington depicts Marion seated with his men around a campfire at the famous moment when a British officer arrived under a flag of truce. To anyone familiar with this once popular story, which Parson Weems embroidered, it is clear that Marion is about to persuade the British officer to throw up his commission and retire from the service.<sup>27</sup>

The second pre-Civil War picture hangs above the judge's seat in the Fauquier County courthouse at Warrenton, Virginia. This is the life-size portrait of Chief Justice John Marshall that Fauquier County com-

24. Richard Crane, Jr., of Midlothian, Virginia, in telephone conversation with Winifred Hadsel, September 3, 1998.

25. Washington to Corcoran, July 3, 1855. This painting, now "lost," was sold by Washington to J. H. Meredith of Baltimore, and at that time was called *Attack Upon the Huguenots by the Soldiers of the Duke of Guise at Bassy, near Paris AD 1642*.

26. Ott, "Washington," pp. 29-44. Ott studied Washington's connections with the Washington Art Association and the Maryland Art Association in detail, and the present author has not searched the primary sources on this subject.

27. A large oil sketch of "Marion's Camp" is in the collection of the South Caroliniana Society, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina. A small oil version (entitled *The Spy*) is at the Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania.



*Washington, Marion's Camp, 1859. Washington's first painting of an American historical subject. (Photo copy courtesy of South Caroliniana Society, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina)*

missioned for \$500 in honor of its native son.<sup>28</sup> Since Marshall was dead, Washington needed a pictorial source and found it in a lithograph of Henry Inman's excellent portrait of Marshall, which had been painted from life.<sup>29</sup> Washington depended on Inman for the head and shoulders and then added the other parts of the body and gave the seated figure suitable accessories and background. This painting is interesting not only because it is a successful composition, but because it is the first of what turned out to be a long series of posthumous portraits by Washington, all based on whatever sources he could find.

Then the Civil War changed Washington's life, decidedly for the better. As a Virginian, Washington promptly left the Federal capital, went to Richmond, and on May 2, 1861, wrote to General Robert E. Lee,

28. Fauquier County Court Order of June 27, 1859, Fauquier county Court Minutes Book 1857- 59, p. 344, Warrenton Public Library, Warrenton, Virginia.

29. Andrew Oliver, *Portraits of John Marshall* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), p. 158.

seeking a position as a draftsman in the Army of Virginia.<sup>30</sup> But there is no army record for Washington, probably because of his limp. It appears he served a few weeks as an assistant draftsman in what turned out to be a temporary assignment in the Virginia State Engineers Office.<sup>31</sup>

Having failed to get a military appointment, Washington nevertheless managed to see something of the war during the late summer and autumn of 1861 by getting himself attached to Brigadier General J. B. Floyd in the West Virginia campaign that the south hoped would hold the western counties of Virginia in the Confederacy. So it was that he arrived in the Alleghany Mountains overlooking the Gauley River as Floyd was attempting to take and hold Gauley Bridge.<sup>32</sup> He was also with the Confederates when they withdrew shortly afterwards, and he joined that part of the army that retreated to Richmond.

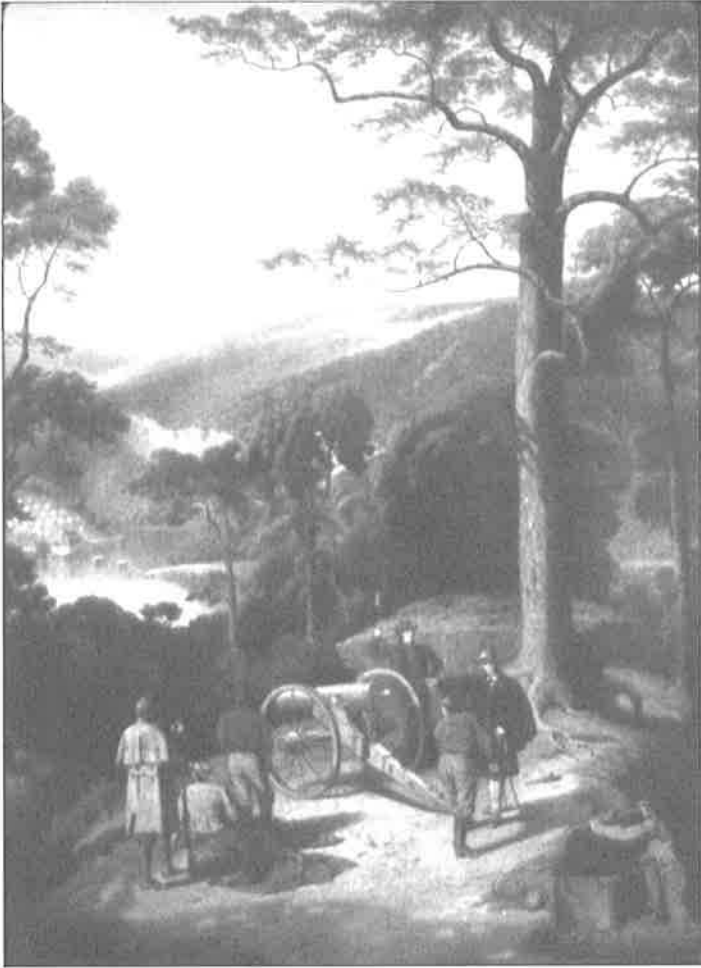
Back in Richmond, Washington decided to stay in the Confederate capital and set up a studio on East Leigh Street. It was there that he painted pictures that were quite unlike those he had painted in Dusseldorf and Washington. His several months of exposure to the dramatic scenery of West Virginia clearly gave him a new subject: the beauty of rugged landscape. His wartime experience had also shown him that material for history paintings lay all around him, and he need not search for melodramatic events of long ago in foreign countries or in the period of the American Revolution.

Washington's new approach is seen in two important paintings, now in the Museum of the Confederacy, which are based on sketches he made in the Gauley River area. The subject in both is the beauty of rugged cliffs and mighty trees in the mountains of West Virginia. To be sure, there are small figures engaged in military activities: in one a military wagon train moves through a mountain pass; in the other two soldiers rest while another keeps watch at the turn in the road. But they are fine landscapes and not merely "Civil War paintings." Although Washington must have seen dead or dying soldiers in West Virginia, as well as destruction caused by the artillery both sides were using, the horror of war was not his subject. I might add it was not the subject of most

30. W. D. Washington to General Robert E. Lee, May 2, 1861, Virginia Army, Executive papers 66.2450, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

31. Salmon, "Latané," *Virginia Cavalcade* 29 (Winter 1979); 123. Salmon finds that Washington's job with the engineers was terminated July 5, 1861.

32. General Jacob D. Cox, "McClellan in West Virginia," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Century Magazine, 1887-88), 1:126-48. See p. 147 for the etching W. L. Sheppard made from sketches by Washington of *Floyd's Command Recrossing the Gauley River*.



*Washington, Floyd's Command at Gauley Bridge, 1864. This is one of Washington's best works, but it is virtually unknown because it has remained in private hands and not been exhibited. (Photo copy courtesy of Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Inc., Spartanburg, South Carolina)*

painters, on either side, while the war was going on. The great battle scenes and close-ups of fighting were painted after the war.

By far the most ambitious and successful of Washington's paintings based on his West Virginia sketches is *Floyd's Command at Gauley Bridge*. It was "lost" until recently, when it left private hands and appeared for

sale in 1990 at the Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Gallery in Spartanburg, S.C.<sup>33</sup> It was painted in 1863–64, and is a fairly large picture, 44" x 36". Its significance lies in the fact that in it Washington combines his interest in history painting with the enthusiasm for rugged landscape that he acquired in West Virginia. In view of the fine quality of this picture, it is a great pity that it dropped out of sight for such a long time, for had it been known, I think it would have added considerably to Washington's reputation as a nineteenth-century American artist.

Meanwhile, Washington's personal life had become happier than it had ever been or, I think, than it ever was again. Despite the war, he found in Richmond a congenial circle of bright young people who welcomed him into their group. One of his friends later recalled that Washington, though sometimes moody, had a good tenor voice, and he was also famous for his whistling solos. In addition, his "fine address" gained him "a foothold in the best Richmond society."<sup>34</sup> It was, then, in this friendly and stimulating atmosphere of wartime Richmond that Washington painted the Gauley River pictures, which rank among his best works.

At the same time, he found good bread-and-butter work in commissions to paint posthumous portraits of men killed in the war. Most of these portraits undoubtedly remain in private hands and are, in that sense, "lost."<sup>35</sup> However, I have found one hitherto unknown example. It is a portrait of Captain Winston Radford, painted in 1863 on the basis of a daguerreotype supplied by the family of the captain, who was killed at the First Battle of Manassas.<sup>36</sup>

In Richmond, Washington also worked on a large narrative picture, 4' x 5', of *Jackson Entering the City of Winchester*. It is a history painting, but the event depicted was a recent one: Jackson's arrival in the recaptured city of Winchester on May 25, 1862. This event, Jackson himself later declared, was "one of the most stirring scenes of my life." The picture hung in the lobby of Murphy's Hotel in Richmond for many years, and is now on loan by the Valentine Museum to the Museum of the Confederacy.<sup>37</sup> The source Washington used for this and his other portraits

33. Illustrated brochure produced by Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Inc., Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1990.

34. Thomas de Leon, *Belles, Beaux, and Brains of the Sixties* (New York: G. W. Dillingham Co., 1907), pp. 285–86.

35. For example, a portrait of William Crump, Jr., painted in 1863, is in unidentified private hands.

36. Elizabeth S. Gray, Irvington, Virginia, to Winifred Hadsel, June 4, 1998, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives.

37. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 20, 1937.



*Washington, Jackson Entering Winchester, 1863–64. The first of Washington's three paintings of Jackson based on the 1862 "Winchester Photograph." (Courtesy of the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia, and the Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)*

of Jackson was a readily available copy of the 1862 "Winchester Photograph."<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1862, Washington had the deeply emotional experience that led him to paint the picture that was to give him enduring fame. The experience came from reading John R. Thompson's long poem entitled "The Burial of Latané,"<sup>39</sup> a work that Tennyson later called "The most moving poem to come out of the Civil War." As Washington read the poem, he visualized the scene Thompson described as a picture he would like to paint; but he was occupied with other work at the time and could not turn to the subject immediately. However, he went on seeing the scene in his mind's eye. He visited the grave and he mulled over the problem of finding suitable models. Then,

38. T. J. Jackson photograph files, Rockbridge Historical Society, Special Collections, Washington and Lee University.

39. John R. Thompson, "The Burial of Latané," *Southern Literary Messenger*, Summer (July-August), 1862.

in late September 1864, he finally began the large painting (47" x 56")<sup>40</sup> and completed it by the end of the year. The fact that this period was one of deep gloom in Richmond, because the war was going badly for the South, undoubtedly intensified the emotion that both Washington and his models felt as he worked on the painting.

The story told by the picture has been repeated many times, but its highlights must accompany any discussion of the famous painting.<sup>41</sup> Latané was a young cavalry officer of Huguenot descent, who was with Jeb Stuart when the Confederates encountered a small U.S. cavalry unit near Hanover Courthouse on June 13, 1862. Latané was killed, and his brother stayed behind to bury the body. While he was still kneeling by the dead man, he saw a plantation servant coming down the road in a farm cart loaded with bags of corn. Federal forces had blocked his way to the mill, and he was going back to his plantation. He agreed to hide the bags of corn and to take the body to Westwood, the nearby Brockenbrough plantation. The brother, who had lost his horse, ran behind the cart and once at Westwood, explained to Mrs. Brockenbrough what had happened.<sup>42</sup> She quickly had the body brought into her front hall, promised to arrange a proper funeral, and sent the brother off to the next plantation, Summer Hill, where she knew her sister had a horse.

Then Mrs. Brockenbrough and the women from Summer Hill prepared the body for burial. Mrs. Brockenbrough also ordered a coffin made in her plantation's carpentry shop, and sent a servant to fetch a clergyman to conduct the funeral at Summer Hill, where there was a family burying ground. But the servant could not get through the Federal lines. Mrs. Brockenbrough sent the farm cart with the coffin to Summer Hill, and turned the funeral service over to her sister (Mrs. Willoughby Newton), who was in charge of that plantation in the absence of her husband. So it was that Mrs. Newton led a procession to the grave and there calmly read the burial service from the *Book of Common Prayer*, while the women, children, and servants stood by.

40. Susan P. Quarles (sister of John R. Thompson) to John R. Thompson, September 25, 1864, MS 38-705, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

41. One of the important early accounts is found in "A Lady of Virginia," *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War* (New York: Hall & Son, 1868), pp. 143-44. Among the many articles on who-was-who in the painting, one of the most informative is by Joseph C. Walker, "The Burial of Latané," MS 1904, Special Collections, University of Virginia.

42. She was Mrs. William S. R. Brockenbrough. William was a brother of John W. Brockenbrough, who came to Lexington as a young lawyer and in due course organized the law class that developed into the Washington and Lee University Law School.





*Washington, The Burial of Latané, 1864. The picture that became an icon in the South after the Civil War remained in various private hands for more than a hundred years and was known to the public only through engravings. Since 1985, it has been on extended loan to the Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia. (Courtesy of Judge E. DeHardit and the Museum of the Confederacy. Photo by Katherine Wetzell)*

When the picture was first displayed in a frame shop on Broad Street, it drew large crowds to the window. Women wept, and children were held up to see the picture. One Confederate charity saw an opportunity and placed a bucket under the window for cash donations. The picture clearly appealed because of its solemn mood and religious feeling. Above all, it paid homage to the courage and resourcefulness of the women of the South during the war.

But no one came forward to buy the painting. Washington concluded that no southerner could afford to do so, and decided to take the picture to England in search of a buyer as soon as the war ended. But this attempt was unsuccessful, and he returned with the picture. He finally found a buyer, L. P. Bayne, a banker and broker in New York

City and Washington, D.C. After that the painting dropped out of view and was “lost” until 1939, when a researcher for Virginia Conservation Commission located the picture in South Orange, New Jersey, but kept the owner’s name confidential.<sup>43</sup>

Then, on September 19, 1963, the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* reported that a Mrs. William D. Muir of South Orange, New Jersey, had offered *The Burial of Latané* to the Hanover County Board of Supervisors, but they had not been able to meet her price of \$5,000.<sup>44</sup> Judge John E. DeHardit of Gloucester County read the newspaper article, telephoned Mrs. Muir, and offered her \$5,000 for the painting, sight unseen.<sup>45</sup> When the painting reached him in October 1963, it had three small tears and its colors were dulled by smoke and thousands of fly specs. He had the canvas carefully cleaned and restored and then hung it in his house, where it became a popular feature of the garden tours of the Gloucester County Garden Club. In 1983, Judge DeHardit loaned the painting to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and, in 1985, sent it on extended loan to the Museum of the Confederacy, where thousands of people see it each year.

Hence it was that it was not the painting itself, but the engravings of it that made *The Burial of Latané* the great icon it became in thousands of southern homes after the Civil War. Attempts to reproduce the painting were made as soon as the picture appeared in the Richmond shop window, but they produced only a few copies. An enterprising publisher, W. H. Chase, who immediately understood the popular appeal of the picture, opened the way to mass production. He applied, on January 11, 1865, to the Eastern District Court of Virginia for a copyright on publication, but did not succeed in carrying out his plan before the war ended.<sup>46</sup> Not to be deterred by collapse of the Confederate government, he applied to a New York court and received a copyright from this source in 1868. Meanwhile, he had hired W. G. Campbell to make a steel engraving of the picture before it left Washington’s hands, and stood ready to publish the engraving as soon as his copyright was granted.

Under the loose copyright laws of the 1860s, Washington probably made very little money, if any, out of the thousands of engravings which

43. *Richmond News-Leader*, February 2, and 18, 1939. These two articles describe the successful search for the original painting by Julia Sully, Junior Historian in the History and Archaeology Division, Virginia Conservation Commission, in the course of her work on the compilation of a Virginia art list for the commission.

44. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 19, 1963.

45. Judge John E. DeHardit, Gloucester County, Virginia, in telephone conversations with Winifred Hadsel, May 16, May 24, and May 27, 1998.

46. Confederate States of America, District Court of Eastern Virginia, Clerks’ office records 1864–65, MSS 4 C7b CSA, Virginia Historical Society Archives.

carried his name as the painter of the picture. Chase published his first copies in 1868 and originally sold them for \$20.00. Later on, he entered into an arrangement with the *Southern Magazine* whereby an engraving was offered to every adult who subscribed to the magazine.<sup>47</sup> One of these copies still hangs in a house in Lexington. Other publishers also entered the field despite Chase's copyright, thus increasing the number of engravings available to southern households.

From the sale of the painting itself, Washington apparently made enough money to tide him over 1866–67, when he was in New York City in a second-story studio at 35 Union Square. Here Washington had hoped to find commissions for portraits, but had no success. He turned, therefore, to subjects he thought would be sure to sell. One of these pictures was a fairly small, 16" x 14", picture of Jackson seated at the entrance to a field tent, on no particular occasion. Who the original buyer was is unknown and it became a “lost” painting until it was bought in the 1950s by George F. Markham.<sup>48</sup> Markham, who lives in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, was in New York City for a few days and happened to walk past the window of the Kennedy Galleries, where he saw what was clearly a Confederate portrait in rather poor condition. He was intrigued, bought the painting, had it cleaned, and was then able to identify both subject and painter. He hung the picture in his house until 1994, when he gave it to the Museum of the Confederacy.

Two other paintings are known to have been painted during Washington's New York stay. One is a scene in a fashionable New York City church and is called *The Rev. Dr. Morgan Administering the Sacrament of Baptism in Grace Church*.<sup>49</sup> It is recalled, at the Hicklin Gallery in Spartanburg, S.C., as having been shown there in about 1990, but since the painting was sold by another gallery, Hicklin's has no record of its present owner.<sup>50</sup> The other picture is a small genre painting of two children looking out of a window at a snow scene.<sup>51</sup>

47. “W. D. Washington, Artist,” *Museum of the Confederacy Newsletter* (Richmond, Virginia), Fall 1980.

48. George F. Markham, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, in telephone conversation with Winifred Hadsel, January 19, 1998. Jackson was again based on the “Winchester Portrait.”

49. W. D. Washington to Evert Duyckinck, February 15, 1868, Duyckinck Collection, Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, New York City.

50. Staff member of Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Inc., Spartanburg, South Carolina, in telephone conversation with Winifred Hadsel, July 7, 1998. The painting is shown in the Hicklin Gallery's brochure, *The Rev. Dr. Morgan Administering the Sacrament of Baptism in Grace Church* (Spartanburg, S.C., 1990).

51. The painting was used on a Hicklin Gallery Christmas card. Present owner is unknown.



*This genre picture, First Snow, dates from 1867-68. (Photocopy courtesy of Robert M. Hinklin, Inc., Spartanburg, South Carolina)*

Washington apparently realized, as early as the summer of 1867, that he could not support himself in New York, and he spent that summer traveling to Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Richmond in search of commissions, all to no avail. I had confidently expected to find that Washington encountered VMI's superintendent, Francis H. Smith, in Richmond, for I knew that Smith often went to Richmond when the legislature was in session. But in 1867, the General Assembly met only in March and April. I have not been able to find out when and how Washington and Smith made contact and laid the foundations for the painter's

connection with VMI. All I know is that Washington wrote a note on April 1, 1868, from New York City, to the Treasurer of VMI, acknowledging receipt of \$200 “on account of portraits to be painted by me for the Institute.”<sup>52</sup> My theory is that Smith, in a letter or a conversation I have not been able to track down, outlined the plan he had had ever since he inspected European universities in 1858, to establish a Chair of Fine Arts at VMI, and indicated that he wanted Washington fill that chair. I also feel sure that Smith would have made it clear that, although the Board of Visitors had approved his plan *in principle* in 1859, it had not yet financed the chair. Meanwhile, Smith must have added, he had some money donated by alumni and friends for a memorial fund and would be able, in 1868, to commission Washington to paint nine memorial portraits, at \$100 each, of VMI men who had been killed in the war. In this way, I think, Smith hoped to take a first step toward filling the Fine Arts Chair he so badly wanted, and to use memorial fund money not only to commemorate some of VMI’s war heroes, but to tide Washington over until the chair could be established and funded.

Washington, for his part, badly needed work and took the chance that the professorship would come through, particularly if he painted a couple of memorial portraits that Smith could show at the next meeting of the Board of Visitors. Accordingly, he closed his New York studio and moved to Lexington sometime in the spring of 1868.<sup>53</sup> There he apparently set up a make-shift studio in The Tower, a charming little building that had been used by the guard at the old limits gate. It had escaped destruction during General David Hunter’s raid on Lexington in 1864, and Smith had seen its possibilities as the lodgings and studio of his dreamed of Fine Arts Professor. Later on, The Tower was greatly altered and finally demolished in 1912.

Washington had two paintings ready to be shown at the June 1868 meeting of the Board of Visitors: those of Jackson and Major General Robert B. Rodes. Jackson was probably painted first. Not only had Washington already painted two portraits of Jackson, but he could count on this subject to be of particular interest to the Board. Rodes was another outstanding VMI hero. Douglas Southall Freeman includes him among Lee’s lieutenants and describes him as one who seemed to have stepped out from the pages of *Beowulf*. “Rodes,” Freeman says, “stalked through the camps and fought always as if this battle were to decide a

52. Washington faculty file, VMI Archives.

53. The Lexington newspaper (known under several names between 1866 and 1870) never noted Washington’s arrival in town. In fact, the only time the paper ever mentioned Washington was in his obituary.



*Washington, Portrait of T. J. Jackson, 1868. This portrait was the first in Washington's series of memorial portraits for VMI. It was the painter's third use of the 1862 "Winchester Photograph." (Courtesy of VMI)*

great cause."<sup>54</sup> Rodes was also a good choice as one of Washington's first memorial paintings because there was a small engraving of him at VMI that helped Washington give his subject an expressive and distinctive face.

But Smith disappointed Washington. At the June 1868 meeting of the Board of Visitors, the superintendent did not show the Jackson and

54. Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1943), 2:xxxviii. See also Robert B. Rodes alumnus file, VMI Archives. For additional biographical material on Rodes and all the other men in WDW's memorial portraits, see Charles D. Walker, *Biographical Sketches of the Virginia Military Institute Who Fell During the War Between the States* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1875).



*Left: Portrait of Robert B. Rodes, 1868. The second in Washington's series of memorial portraits for VMI. Right: Portrait of Stapleton Crutchfield, 1868. Washington appears not to have had a visual image as the basis for this portrait. (Courtesy of VMI)*

Rodes portraits or propose naming Washington to the Chair of Fine Arts that had been accepted in principle nine years before.<sup>55</sup> Smith apparently believed that restoration of the mess hall had to have top priority, and making Washington a professor could wait since he was still working on the commissioned portraits.

Washington was, in fact, very busy during the autumn and winter of 1868. During this period he painted nine or ten of his twenty-three paintings that are now at VMI. These 1868 works include a half dozen paintings for the memorial series, and these portraits vary greatly in artistic quality, depending largely on the kind of source Washington had to work with. Col. Stapleton Crutchfield, for example, was apparently painted without a pictorial source. However, Crutchfield, who had graduated in 1855, had taught at VMI for four years after that, with the result that there were a number of people at the Institute who could describe his features, coloring, and general expression.<sup>56</sup> But just in case there might be some difficulty in identifying him, Washington placed his left

55. Superintendent's Annual Report to the Board of Visitors, 1867-68, VMI Archives.

56. Stapleton Crutchfield alumnus file, VMI Archives. Captain G. G. Otey and Brigadier General S. Garland were also painted in 1868, and without good sources.



Washington's portraits of George S. Patton (left) and W. Tazewell Patton (right), 1868. Visual images were available for these portraits. (Courtesy of VMI)

hand on a book as a reminder that this man had graduated first in his class.

On the other hand, Washington's portraits of the two Patton brothers, Col. George Smith Patton,<sup>57</sup> grandfather of the General Patton of World War II, and Col. W. Tazewell Patton,<sup>58</sup> great-uncle of the general, were based on daguerreotypes or small photos, and are convincing.

In November 1868, Washington interrupted his work on portraits of dead heroes to paint a portrait from life of a mature woman who had an expressive face, lovely coloring, and beautiful clothes and accessories: Margaret Junkin Preston. Washington got his chance to paint her because her husband, J. T. L. Preston, felt obliged, as a pillar of VMI, to do something for Smith's artist, but didn't want to sit for his own portrait.<sup>59</sup> At this time, Margaret Junkin Preston was forty-eight years old, an accomplished writer, widely known as "The Poetess of the South" and also as an attractive woman.<sup>60</sup> Washington clearly enjoyed painting her bright eyes, the

57. George S. Patton alumnus file, VMI Archives.

58. W. Tazewell Patton alumnus file, VMI Archives. This portrait was stolen in 1935 and recovered and restored in 1993.

59. Elizabeth Preston Allan to General Scott Shipp, June 29, 1901, folder #2, J. T. L. Preston faculty file, VMI Archives.

60. Mary P. Coulling, *Margaret Junkin Preston: A Biography* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Blair, 1993).





*Portrait of Margaret Junkin Preston, 1868. Painted from life and undoubtedly flattering, the portrait is one of Washington's most attractive works. (Courtesy of VMI)*

lovely skin tones that went with her reddish-brown hair, the firmly shaped mouth, and the rounded curve of her shoulder. He also obviously relished painting her seed pearl jewelry, probably a wedding gift from her husband. He made much of the slate blue ribbon, the sheer white dress, and the delicately patterned gauzy black shawl. I personally rate this portrait as one of the best pictures Washington ever painted.

Margaret Junkin apparently liked the picture, for a photograph of her living room shows the portrait hanging over the mantle.<sup>61</sup> She apparently liked the painter as well, for after his death, she salvaged from his studio a small book in which he had written his name. She wrote on the

61. Photograph files, Rockbridge Historical Society, Special Collections, Washington and Lee University.



*Washington's portraits of Superintendent and Mrs. Francis H. Smith. Painted from life and intended as family portraits rather than formal institutional pictures. (Courtesy of Colonel A. H. Morrison and Miss Anne Morrison)*

flyleaf: "Margaret J. Preston retained [this] as a memento of Mr. Washington."<sup>62</sup>

During this same period, Washington also painted what were clearly intended to be family rather than institutional portraits of the Superintendent and his wife, both of whom were fifty-six years old at the time. In the portrait of the Superintendent, Smith is a decidedly approachable man, and not the stern disciplinarian seen in his later photographs. The famous spectacles are gold-rimmed and add a sparkle to the highly intelligent face. Sara Henderson Smith is shown as a serene lady in her middle years. Her fine features and calm gaze give her an expression of quiet dignity, and the lace collar, cameo brooch, and soft black dress emphasize her gentle manner. The fur-trimmed red cloak draped about her left

62. This book, *Sketches of Art Literature and Character*, by Mrs. Jameson (Boston: n.p., 1857), is in the collection of the Stonewall Jackson House, Lexington, Virginia. The Washington portrait of MJP was undoubtedly idealized, but in comparing it with the photographs of her by Lexington photographer Michael Miley (which show her as plain and rather stout) it must be remembered that the latter were taken when she was in her sixties.

shoulder skillfully relieves what might otherwise have been a rather stark portrayal.<sup>63</sup>

At the close of 1868, Smith asked Washington to paint a portrait of General Robert E. Lee as a companion piece to the VMI memorial series. This meant painting Lee as he had been during the war, in Confederate uniform. Since Lee, in his new life as college president, always wore civilian dress, Washington fell back on Matthew Brady's and Julian Vannerson's war-time photos as sources, and the result was an undistinguished portrait of Lee that has not become a well-known popular image. When I first studied this portrait, I was disappointed to find it was derived from well-known photographs, for it seemed to me that Washington should have taken a ten-minute walk to Lee's office and asked the general to sit for him. I knew that Washington had become acquainted with Lee's daughter, Mary Custis Lee, for I had seen the beautiful sketch he had given her for her scrapbook,<sup>64</sup> and it seemed to me he might have asked her to arrange an introduction to her father. Above all, I knew that a brash Swiss painter, Franz Buchser, arrived at Lee's office just nine months after Washington pored over his photographs and found Lee willing to pose for him in a portrait which now hangs in the Swiss National Gallery in Berne. But I had not taken in the fact that, although Buchser had asked Lee to wear his Confederate uniform, he quickly gave up this point and settled for Lee in frock coat.<sup>65</sup> Washington, for his part, was apparently too shy to bring up the question of dress with Lee and decided to rely on wartime photos. He thus lost an opportunity to paint Lee from life in what might have been an original and interesting portrait.

On February 13, 1869, Washington sent the VMI Treasurer his bill for \$900 for the nine memorial portraits he had completed, and he received a check for \$606.56, the sum due him after his advances and purchases at the Quartermaster's store had been deducted.<sup>66</sup> This was a sizable sum of money, but when could he expect another check? It was

63. These two Smith portraits belong to Smith descendants, Col. A. H. Morrison and his sister, Anne Morrison. Washington also painted Smith (probably in 1868) in a puzzling portrait that hangs at VMI. In this painting Smith's head is virtually the same as that in the family portrait illustrated on the previous page, but he wears the uniform and insignia of a captain in the Confederate Army—a rank he never held. Compiled Confederate Service Records show that he entered the Virginia Ninth Infantry on July 7, 1861, as a colonel.

64. Mary Custis Lee, Scrapbook No. 2, p. 119, MSS L-5 Lb-64, Virginia Historical Society Archives.

65. Gerald Maurice Doyon, “Frank Buchser—Swiss Artist in Charlottesville, 1869–70,” *Daily Progress* (Charlottesville, Virginia), September 20, 1983.

66. Washington faculty file, VMI Archives.

Virginia Military Institute

To W. D. Washington D<sup>r</sup>

To Portraits of	
Genl. Garland	\$100.
Col. Crutchfield	100
"  Jag. Patton	100.
"  Geo. Patton	100.
Genl. R. C. Lee	100
Capt. G. Fry	100
Mr. Clatur	100
Lackum & Rudy	700.
	200
	<u>900</u>

Lexington

Feb. 13. '69



Receipt

W. D. Washington

Feb. 14. '69.

Washington's receipted bill of February 14, 1869, for nine portraits painted for VMI. (VMI Archives)



*Above: House Mountain and Commandant's House. Washington based this painting on a Williamson drawing he had seen of a VMI building damaged during Hunter's 1864 raid on Lexington. Below: Cliffs of North River. One of the pictures Washington painted for his own pleasure while at VMI. (Courtesy of VMI.) There is a very similar version of this painting in the collection of the Rock-bridge Historical Society that appears to be a copy by Washington of the picture at VMI. The provenance of the copy is unknown.*



still four and a half months before the next meeting of the Board of Visitors could consider his professorship.

How did Washington spend these months of waiting during the spring of 1869? The answer is that he painted subjects of his own choosing, probably hoping that they would one day be displayed in a VMI art gallery.<sup>67</sup> These included two sylvan scenes at the back of nearby Washington College and a romantic view of the cliffs of North River adjoining VMI. In addition, he painted a typical landscape picture of an old mill he had seen near Lynchburg. All are agreeable pictures, well-designed and well-painted, and particularly attractive to Rockbridge County residents. But they are hardly memorable. More ambitious is a dramatic combination he painted of romantic landscape and historical subject. This is a painting he based on a drawing he had seen by Professor Thomas H. Williamson, VMI's highly respected professor of Practical Engineering. Williamson had made a drawing of his quarters on the VMI Parade shortly after Hunter's raid of 1864,<sup>68</sup> and Washington turned it into a romantic painting of a picturesque ruin seen against the background of House Mountain. The picture shows that Washington derived some of his paintings of nature, as well as most of his portraits, from other artists' work and felt very much at ease in doing so.

When the Board of Visitors met in June 1869, Smith fought hard to have Washington elected to the Chair of Fine Arts that the Board had agreed to in principle ten years before. Smith had his way, and the Board elected Washington Professor of Fine Arts, with the rank of colonel, as of July 1, 1869.<sup>69</sup> But Smith paid a price for his victory. He agreed with the Board that the Institute did not then have the means to endow a Chair of Fine Arts, and hence to provide a regular salary to go with the chair. Smith recommended that the new professor's remuneration should depend, at least in part, on forthcoming contributions to the fund for memorial portraits and on other sources that Smith was not very clear about. In other words, no figure was agreed on for Washington's salary, and it appears that Smith thought he needed to leave this matter unsettled in order to get the Board's approval of the appointment.

67. Washington's sketch books are not in the VMI Archives. Ott saw a WDW sketchbook (3.75" x 7.5") in the possession of Washington's grandniece, Mrs. Piper Krause, Plainfield, New Jersey, at the time she wrote her thesis in 1968. This sketchbook apparently included sketches made by the artist during his stay abroad in the 1850s.

68. Drawing by Thomas H. Williamson of his quarters following Hunter's raid, VMI Museum.

69. Superintendent's Annual Report to the Board of Visitors, 1868-69, VMI Archives.



*Washington's portrait of John Quincy Marr. Based on a prewar photo. (Courtesy of VMI)*

At first, Washington seems not to have been troubled about the uncertainty of his salary as the new Professor of Fine Arts. He had a couple of short conversations with Smith about the matter and apparently felt satisfied that the Superintendent would see to it that his concern would be taken care of at the June 1870 meeting of the Board of Visitors. Meanwhile, he lived on advances from the treasurer without knowing what salary he was getting advances on, and got on with his work.<sup>70</sup> During the first half of the academic year of 1869–70, he painted five more memorial portraits at the rate of about one per month. In addition, he took on the instruction of third year cadets who had shown potential in Colonel Williamson's Practical Engineering class.<sup>71</sup>

70. Washington, Officers Salary Ledger, VMI Archives.

71. Washington faculty file, VMI Archives. This is the only teaching Washington did as Professor of Fine Arts.

Three of the Washington memorial portraits of 1869 (Major J. H. Chenoweth, Colonel J. W. Allen, and Major J. W. Latimer) suffer from lack of good visual sources and are flat and stereotyped. But two benefit from the use of daguerreotypes or photos and are quite satisfactory. One of these two is that of Col. John Bowie Strange, the first cadet sentinel, i.e., the cadet who relieved the former arsenal guard on the snowy night of November 11, 1839, and formally took possession for the Institute of "all the government property in view."<sup>72</sup> The other is the portrait of Captain John Quincy Marr.<sup>73</sup> In this case, Washington worked with a good prewar photo and made three adjustments to turn the civilian subject into a soldier: he added a sword; he brushed in some lines to suggest captain's bars; and he added a row of buttons to the frock coat. He kept the white collar of the photograph to call attention to Marr's strong face, and he used a greenish-blue background to provide an attractive setting for the head. This is one of the best portraits in the VMI memorial series, and the picture is also of special interest because Marr was the first Confederate officer killed in the war.

Toward the end of 1869, Washington was pleased and excited to learn that the Board of Visitors wanted him to paint the decisive moment in early April, 1866, when Smith persuaded a meeting of members of the Board and faculty to borrow \$50,000 to restore VMI. As soon as Washington heard of this suggested narrative picture, he drew a sketch that showed Smith standing at the head of a table and pointing through an open window to the partly destroyed barracks, while Board and faculty members seated around the table listened approvingly to what he was saying.<sup>74</sup> Smith liked the sketch, and both he and Washington wanted to get on with the painting. But they were stymied by the wrangling that broke out over just who had been present at the historic meeting, and Washington never had a chance to work on the picture.<sup>75</sup>

Washington was deeply depressed by the postponement of the VMI narrative picture and felt very much at loose ends in the spring of 1870. It was then that Mary Custis Lee suggested he paint portraits of some of

72. John Bowie Strange alumnus file, VMI Archives.

73. John Quincy Marr alumnus file, VMI Archives.

74. A nineteenth century photo of Washington's sketch is in the library of the superintendent's residence. Benjamin Clinedinst, painter of *The Battle of New Market* in Jackson Memorial Hall, used Washington's sketch as the basis for the picture of the 1866 scene, and this painting (not quite finished when Clinedinst died in 1931) hangs on the fourth floor of Smith Hall, VMI.

75. William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, 4 vols. (Richmond: Garret and Massie, 1939), 3:202.





*Washington, Elaine. (Courtesy of VMI)*

the characters in Tennyson’s popular poems.<sup>76</sup> He took her advice and began with “Elaine,” using Mary Maury, daughter of Commodore Maury, to pose as “the lily maid of Astolat.” Mary Maury later recalled that Washington asked her to bring a bright shawl to the sittings, and since she didn’t have one, she borrowed Mary Custis Lee’s paisley shawl, to good effect. Washington also painted portraits of “Maude” and “Lady Clare”—characters in Tennyson’s poems—but both of these pictures have been “lost.”

76. Mary Maury Werth to Colonel Robert A. Marr, September 13, 1898, Washington Faculty file, VMI Archives.

Always at the back of Washington's mind during his first year as Professor of Fine Arts was the worry about his salary. It was not until March 31, 1870, nine months after his appointment, when he was paid for all three past quarters, that he learned his salary was \$350 per quarter, or \$1,400 per year.<sup>77</sup> This discovery seems to have dismayed him. Since VMI salaries were a matter of public record, he knew that his \$1,400 salary put him below the Institute's scale for professors, which ran from \$1,600 to \$2,400. Yet he felt that he worked as hard as the other professors, and he believed his services were as worthwhile as theirs. He accordingly had another word with Smith and again came away feeling his grievance would be dealt with at the June 1870 meeting of the Board of Visitors.

When, therefore, the Board met and Washington learned that Smith's report had merely referred to the Department of Fine Arts as a new department that had been organized upon the informal basis noted the previous year, he was deeply disappointed. He poured out his feelings in four long letters to Smith, making and remaking the point that his low salary was demeaning and the source of humiliating remarks by other faculty members. He concluded by proposing that he be paid \$1,600 a year, for which salary he would continue to give fine arts instruction and add to the memorial portraits at the rate of one a month.<sup>78</sup> There is no evidence that Smith replied, and I suspect that the hard-pressed superintendent felt that Washington simply did not understand the difficult financial situation at the Institute. The deeply unhappy Washington went to Richmond in July 1870, hoping to get some commissions there. Let me note that at this time, Washington, without knowing it, ended his career as Professor of Fine Arts at VMI, after only one year, 1869–70. Although he was to go on holding the position as professor another five months, he neither painted any pictures for VMI nor taught any cadets after June 1870.

In Richmond, during the summer of 1870, Washington succeeded in getting commissions from Governor Gilbert C. Walker for portraits of both him and his wife.<sup>79</sup> After finishing this work, he went to Hot Springs

77. Washington, Officers Salary Ledger, VMI Archives.

78. Four letters from Washington to Smith, undated, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives. Internal evidence suggests all four letters were written at VMI during late June or early July 1870.

79. Washington to Smith, September 24, 1870, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives. Washington's last letter to Smith was written on October 3, 1870, Washington faculty file. Smith's final letter to Washington was written on October 10, 1870, Smith's letter book of 28 July, 1870–25 January, 1871. Both Walker portraits have been "lost."

for a rest. At Hot Springs he was seen by General Lee, who wrote to one of his daughters, “Mr. Washington is here, but I know not whether he is in search of health or the picturesque—the latter is more easily found in these mountains.”<sup>80</sup> Washington, unfortunately, was in search of health, and he did not find it. In fact, he was by then seriously ill.

Yet when he wrote to Smith in late September he barely mentioned his health and emphasized how gratified he had been to read in the Richmond *Whig* about Corcoran’s donation to VMI and Smith’s proposed use of it.<sup>81</sup> This was a reference to Corcoran’s recent return to VMI of the two thousand dollars worth of bonds he had held since he advanced that sum of money to the Institute shortly after the war. Smith was enormously grateful to Corcoran and wrote an effusive letter of thanks and proposed that the bonds be used as a contribution to what would henceforth be known as “The Corcoran Gallery of Art of the Virginia Military Institute.”<sup>82</sup>

Smith’s enthusiasm for a Corcoran gallery at VMI does not seem to have been reciprocated. I can find no reply by Corcoran to Smith, and Smith would surely have kept such a letter had he received it. Neither can I find any record of further donations by Corcoran to VMI. It appears that Corcoran had no intention of following up his small gift to VMI and by 1870 was concentrating on helping a chosen few southern colleges.<sup>83</sup> By this date, he had given more than \$100,000 to the University of Virginia and \$20,000 to VMI’s neighboring Washington College, where he became a trustee and continued to make sizable contributions to the college.<sup>84</sup>

When Washington finally returned to VMI, shortly after Robert E. Lee’s October 15 funeral, a cloud of gloom hung over the town, and the atmosphere must have matched the painter’s own mood. Here he was, returning to VMI with his old problems of salary and status unsolved, and he had not been physically restored by his weeks at Hot Springs. Yet no one seems to have remarked, at least not in writing, on his poor

80. Robert E. Lee to Mary Custis Lee, August 14, 1870, R. E. Lee family papers, MSS L51 c 702, Virginia Historical Society Archives.

81. Washington to Smith, September 24, 1870, Washington faculty file, VMI Archives.

82. Smith to Corcoran, September 15, 1870, reprinted in W. W. Corcoran, *A Grandfather’s Legacy* (Washington: H. Polkinhorn, 1879), pp. 318–19.

83. Henry Cohen, *The Career Biography of W. W. Corcoran* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1971), p. 216.

84. Professor J. J. White of Washington College clearly joined in courting Corcoran’s support for his university. Among the trivia found in Corcoran’s effects was an envelope from White that contained a lock of Traveller’s mane. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

health. Some time in November, he took to his bed and the VMI doctor looked in on him from time to time. But it was not until December 1, that \$8.02 for "medicine," which he had apparently been taking in November, was charged to his account in the treasurer's ledger.<sup>85</sup> On that same day he died. He was thirty-nine years old.

The time of death was twenty minutes before ten o'clock in the evening of December 1, 1870, to give one of the few documented facts that exist about Washington's personal life.<sup>86</sup> The cause of death, according to Rockbridge County's Death Register, was reported by Superintendent Francis H. Smith as "Softening of the brain."<sup>87</sup> Whatever this ailment was, it must have lacked specific symptoms, for Smith used this same diagnosis three weeks earlier in reporting the cause of death of an eighteen-year-old cadet.<sup>88</sup> In short, the nature of Washington's terminal illness, like the precise date of his birth, remains uncertain.

However, the circumstances surrounding Washington's last illness and death are clear. He was, first of all, alone. His father and sister were dead, and he had not seen either his mother or his brother for some years. Moreover, he had not made any close friends at VMI. Smith's last letters to him were kindly in tone, and Washington felt sufficiently at ease with the superintendent to send "kind regards" to all the members of Smith's family. But the relationship was an impersonal one, and the same was true of his connections with fellow faculty members, including one of them who was a relative through marriage. This was Dr. Howard Barton, VMI 1843 and assistant surgeon at the Institute in the late 1860s. Barton had married Washington's half sister, Farinda Fairfax Washington, but Farinda had died two years before Washington came to VMI, and there is nothing to indicate that her husband and half-brother became friends. The only three people in Lexington who left some trace, in writing, of friendly feelings towards him were Mary Custis Lee, Margaret Junkin Preston, and Mary Maury, and none of these women knew him well enough to call on him during his illness, assuming they even knew he was ill.

He was also penniless. Although he had repaid the money he had borrowed from VMI, he died owing \$100 to the Bank of Lexington and

85. Washington, Officers salary ledger, VMI Archives.

86. Smith's announcement was made in General Orders No. 36, December 2, 1870, VMI Archives.

87. Angela Ruley, compiler, *Rockbridge County, Virginia Death Register, 1853-1870* (Athens, Ga.: Iberian Publishing Co., 1991), p. 231.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 229. Several nineteenth-century American medical dictionaries include "softening of the brain," but their descriptions of this malady do not fit Washington's case.

\$50 to a Lexington cabinetmaker, and he left no money for his burial expenses. Smith later had the painful task of writing to Washington's widowed mother, Hannah Fairfax Washington, for \$200 to settle her son's accounts, including the money owed the bank and the cabinetmaker, and including the \$45 VMI had paid for his casket and the \$5 for the grave digger.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, Washington must have died feeling his career as a painter had been a failure, not only because he found himself a Professor of Fine Arts without either a place in VMI's curriculum or an ensured salary, but because he had seen no indication that any of his work would survive as either a popular or a critical success. He certainly did not know that engravings of *The Burial of Latané* would hang in thousands of homes in the post-Civil War South and become a symbol of the courage shown by those who had fought for The Lost Cause.

Neither did he have any inkling that a number of his other paintings would also hold their own among the notable works of American mid-nineteenth-century artists. In my view, these particularly successful paintings are the large landscape entitled *Floyd's Command at Gauley Bridge* and the portrait of Margaret Junkin Preston. His many other works, while never innovative, include several attractive landscapes and genre pictures, together with a number of interesting portraits. But, unfortunately, many of his portraits are based on second-hand sources—or no visual sources—and not only lack original interpretation but are poorly painted as well. Most of the portraits in the VMI memorial series fall into this category and do not enhance his reputation. When, however, he painted living subjects he was able to produce strong presences—a fact that makes it regrettable that he did not seize his opportunity to paint Lee from life.

Immediately following Washington's death, VMI stepped in and made the burial arrangements. On December 2, Smith announced the artist's death and ordered the faculty to wear mourning arm bands for thirty days.<sup>90</sup> Smith also wrote a long obituary and sent it to the local newspaper.<sup>91</sup> On December 3, a funeral procession of the faculty, led by the small VMI band of that period, conducted the casket to the ceme-

89. Smith to Mrs. H. F. Washington, March 22, 1871, Smith's letter book of 26 January 1871-1 July 1871, VMI Archives. For C. M. Koon's April 11, 1871, receipt to VMI, see Washington faculty file, VMI Archives. The receipt was for “Best walnut coffin lined with silk and flannel, plated handles, [and] cash [for] hearse and attendance—\$45. Sexton's bill for grave—\$5.00.”

90. General Order No. 36, December 2, 1870, VMI Archives.

91. *Lexington Virginia Gazette*, December 9, 1870. A seven-inch-long column was given over to the obituary and Smith's General Order.

tery, where the Rev. John W. Pratt, of the Lexington Presbyterian Church, conducted the graveside service. The grave was in a lot that had been offered by Dr. Barton, and lay close to that of Farinda Washington Barton, who had died in 1866.<sup>92</sup> Washington was thus buried near his half-sister, but I do not have any evidence that he had ever known her.

Some time later, someone, perhaps Dr. Barton, marked Washington's grave with the simple tombstone that the Historical Society supplemented in 1951 with the bronze marker already mentioned. Now, nearly fifty years later, we know considerably more about Washington's life and the many difficulties he overcame. Above all, we have found a number of his previous "lost" works and can see him more clearly as a competent mid-nineteenth-century American artist. As a result, he now appears as more than the first (and only) Professor of Fine Arts at VMI and the painter of *The Burial of Latané*. Nevertheless, the Historical Society's brief epitaph, as the painter whose best-known picture is "engraved in the hearts of Virginians," remains eloquent and apt.

There is a postscript.

Smith wanted to replace Washington as Professor of Fine Arts and held a competition to find a suitable artist. The competition was won by Richard N. Brooke, a twenty-four-year-old drawing teacher from Philadelphia, but because of his youth, Brooke was hired as Assistant Professor of Drawing, and resigned one year later.<sup>93</sup> Thereafter, Smith made no further effort to maintain the faculty position he had tried so hard to create.

After leaving VMI, Brooke was appointed by President Grant as U.S. Consul at La Rochelle, France, where he stayed four years and went on from there to Paris to study art. When he returned, he became a fairly well-known portrait painter in Washington, D.C., and was commissioned by Congress to copy Washington's portrait of Chief Justice Marshall for the House wing of the U.S. Capitol. In this painting's lower right-hand corner is this signature: R. N. Brooke/W. D. Washington 1880.

92. Ruley, *Rockbridge County Death Register*, p. 193.

93. Richard Norris Brooke faculty file, VMI Archives

### W. D. Washington's Paintings

A chronological list of known paintings in 1999:

- Fanny Scott Carter Scott* (unidentified private owner)
- \* *The Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter* (Richard Crane, Midlothian, Virginia)
- General Francis Marion at his Camp Fire* (South Caroliniana Society, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.)
- Chief Justice John Marshall* (Fauquier County Courthouse, Warrenton, Virginia)
- Heroes of the Valley* (Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- Troop Train at Rest* (Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- Sharpshooters* (Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- \* *Floyd's Command at Gauley Bridge* (Robert M. Hicklin, Jr., Inc., Spartanburg, South Carolina)
- Jackson Entering Winchester* (Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia, on loan to Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- \* *Captain Winston Radford* (William Calvert Gray, Acton, Maryland)
- The Burial of Latané* (E. DeHardit, on loan to Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- Jackson Near a Field Tent* (Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia)
- \* *First Snow* (unidentified private owner)
- \* *The Rev. Dr. Morgan Administering the Sacrament of Baptism in Grace Church* (unidentified private owner)
- Lieutenant General Thomas J. Jackson* (VMI)
- Major General Robert E. Rodes* (VMI)
- Superintendent Francis H. Smith* (VMI)
- Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield* (VMI)
- Captain George Gaston Otey* (VMI)
- Brigadier General Samuel Garland* (VMI)
- Colonel George S. Patton* (VMI)
- \* *Colonel W. Tazewell Patton* (VMI)
- \* *Margaret Junkin Preston* (VMI)
- \* *Superintendent Francis H. Smith* (Colonel A. H. Morrison and Anne Morrison)
- \* *Sara Henderson Smith* (Colonel A. H. Morrison and Anne Morrison)


*General Robert E. Lee* (VMI)  
*E. L. Clayter* (VMI)  
*Colonel James W. Allen* (VMI)  
*Major Joseph W. Latimer* (VMI)  
*Major Joseph H. Chenoweth* (VMI)  
*Colonel John B. Strange* (VMI)  
*Captain John Quincy Marr* (VMI)  
*General Smith Addressing the Faculty Regarding the Restoration of the Institute*  
(photo of sketch, VMI)  
*Castle in Spain* (Archives, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia)  
*Commandant's Quarters after "Hunter's Raid"* (VMI)  
*Cliffs on North River* (VMI)  
*Old Mill* (VMI)  
*Laundry Woman on Wooded Path* (VMI)  
*Landscape in Rear of Washington College* (VMI)  
*Laundry Woman* (based on Washington's Dusseldorf notebook) (VMI)  
*Miss Mary Maury as "Elaine"* (VMI)

\*The nine paintings the present author has added to those listed in Ott's 1968 thesis.



# Cheap, Quick and Easy: Concrete Block, Metal Ceilings, Linoleum, and Lincrusta in Local Buildings

Pamela H. Simpson \*

 ARCHITECTURAL critic Ada Louise Huxtable once wrote that the popularity of what she called “substitute gimcrackery” in the later half of the nineteenth century was “fueled by the . . . American desire to find ways of doing things that were ‘cheap, quick, and easy.’”<sup>1</sup> What I have been doing for the last ten years is working on various types of “substitute gimcrackery” that were popular at the turn of the last century. I am going to talk about four of them: (1) rock-faced concrete block, (2) pressed metal ceilings, (3) linoleum, and (4) an embossed wall covering called Lincrusta-Walton. In the first part of this paper, I will examine the history of each of these materials;

\* Parts of this paper have been previously published by the author in a series of articles: Pamela H. Simpson, “Comfortable, Durable, and Decorative: Linoleum’s Rise and Fall from Grace,” *APT Bulletin* 30 (1999): 17–24 (APT Award, 1999); Essays on “Painted Floor Cloth and Linoleum” and “Embossed Wall Coverings” for *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, Joanna Banham, ed. (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997); “Linoleum and Lincrusta, the Democratic Coverings for Walls and Floors,” *Exploring Everyday Landscapes, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, vol. VII (Knoxville:

---

**Pamela H. Simpson** received her Ph.D. in Art History at the University of Delaware. Since 1973 she has been in the Art Department at Washington and Lee University, where she has risen to the rank of Ernest Williams II Professor of Art History and head of the department. She coauthored (with Royster Lyle) *The Architecture of Historic Lexington* (1977) and, most recently, *Cheap, Quik, and Easy: Imitative Architectural Materials, 1870–1930* (1999). She addressed the Rockbridge Historical Society on April 26, 1999, in W&L’s DuPont Auditorium.

in the second part, I will consider the criticisms leveled against them and the reasons for their popular success. All of these materials were made available because of changes in technology; they were distributed by an improved system of mass transportation; they were in demand, at least in part, because of the new system of mass advertising. Concrete block, pressed metal ceilings, linoleum, and Lincrusta are just a few examples of a whole range of new materials available in this period, but they were very popular and they can serve to illustrate this intersection of new technology with popular culture.

First, concrete block. The machine that made practical modern block possible (fig. 1) was patented in the U.S. in 1900 by Harmon S. Palmer. Concrete was, of course, not a new material. It had been used since classical times, and there had been a whole series of experiments and patents for various ways of making concrete block throughout the nineteenth century. But the none of these led to any widespread production. The mass manufacture of concrete block started only with Palmer's invention of a cast-iron machine with removable core and adjustable sides. It was a durable, practical design that spelled the beginning of the modern industry.<sup>2</sup>

University of Tennessee Press, 1997), pp. 281–92; “Substitute Gimcrackery: Ornamental Architectural Materials, 1870–1930,” *Ideas, National Humanities Center* 5, no. 1 (1997): pp. 36–47; “Concrete Block,” in *Twentieth Century Building Materials*, Tom Jester, ed. (Washington: National Park Service and McGraw Hill, 1996), pp. 80–85; “Quick, Cheap and Easy Part II: The History of Pressed Metal Ceilings,” in *Gender, Class, and Shelter: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), pp. 152–63; “The Early History of Concrete Block,” *Building Renovation Magazine*, March–April, 1995, pp. 49–53; “Ornamental Sheet Metal in the United States, 1870–1930,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* (special issue on construction history) 11 (Winter 1994): 294–310 (SESAH Award); “Pressed Metal Ceilings, 1890–1930,” *Building Renovation Magazine*, November–December, 1992, pp. 69–72. “Quick, Cheap and Easy: The Early History of Concrete Block Building,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), pp. 108–118. The author's book, *Cheap, Quick and Easy: Imitative Architectural Materials, 1870–1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999) was published in April of 1999 and was the occasion for this presentation to the Rockbridge Historical Society.

1. Ada Louise Huxtable, “Concrete Technology in USA: Historical Survey,” *Progressive Architecture* 41 (October 1960): 144.

2. H. Kempton Dyson, “Concrete Block Making in Great Britain,” pts. 1–4, *Concrete and Constructional Engineering* 3, nos. 3–6 (1908–9): 224–30, 291–98, 383–90, 463–66; and William M. Torrance, “Types of Hollow Concrete Blocks Used in the States and Their Patents,” *Concrete and Constructional Engineering* 1 (July 1906): 206–14.



Figure 1. *Process of block-making from Sears's Concrete Machinery, Specialty Catalogue, 1917, p. 15, Sears, Roebuck and Co. This is the downface type machine that H. S. Palmer invented.*

Yet even with Palmer's machine, the successful mass production of hollow concrete blocks would not have been possible without another early twentieth-century invention—the improved firing and grinding techniques for the production of Portland cement.

The Portland cement industry and the concrete block industry were integral to each other.<sup>3</sup> Both experienced a phenomenal growth in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1906, one writer noted that, “Concrete blocks were practically unknown in 1900, but it is probably safe to say that at the present moment more than a thousand companies and individuals are engaged in their manufacture in the United States.”<sup>4</sup>

The popularity of concrete block was immediate and a tremendous number of producers came into the market. In Omaha, Nebraska, for example, Nels Peterson, a stonemason, saw the new concrete block and said to himself, “Why should I hew these stones when I could make them in a mold?” So he took his savings, bought a block machine, and started the Ideal Cement Stone Company.<sup>5</sup>

Concrete block was quick, cheap, and easy. A block machine could cost less than \$60 and the manufacturers promised that experience was “really unnecessary” and “anyone can do this work.” A 1917 Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue recommended that the machine would be

3. H. C. Badder, “The Invention and Early Development of Portland Cement,” *Concrete* 25 (October 1924): 119–27. Edison Portland Cement Co., *The Romance of Cement* (Boston: Lovemore & Knight Co., 1926).

4. S. B. Newberry, “Hollow Concrete Block Building Construction in the United States,” *Concrete and Constructional Engineering* 1 (May 1906): 118.

5. Joseph Bell, *From Carriage Age to the Space Age: The Birth and Growth of the Concrete Masonry Industry* (National Concrete Masonry Association, 1969), 122.



Figure 2. *Frank Brown's rockface concrete-block blacksmith shop, 1915, Lexington, Virginia. Photograph by Delos Hughes.*

“profitable whether you manufacture for your own use or for sale. If for your own use, you can make them during your spare time, or on rainy days.”<sup>6</sup>

There is plenty of evidence that some people did buy the machines for their own use, but most block was made by people already in the construction business. They read the ads in builder's journals, the popular Sears catalogues, house pattern books, promotion materials from the manufacturers, and trade catalogues. All it took was one machine to get a whole industry going in a community.

In Lexington, Virginia, local building contractor H. A. Donald was the first to introduce rock-face concrete block when he did a building for his friend Frank Brown, the town's blacksmith, in 1915 (fig. 2). Brown had decided to expand his business to accommodate automobiles, and he contracted with Donald to build this more fire-resistant structure. A portable machine, that may have been a Palmer, was set up on the site to make the block.<sup>7</sup> Donald was also responsible for building some

6. *Concrete Machinery, Specialty Catalogue* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1917), 2. The same arguments also appeared in the 1907 Sears Catalogue no. 117, 424.

7. David Dickey, “Manly Brown's Blacksmith Shop,” student paper, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va., 1981.



Figure 3. *The Bank of Fairfield, 1926, Fairfield, Virginia. Photograph by author.*

twenty other rock-face concrete block structures in the Lexington area in the 1920s, including the Bank of Fairfield, finished in 1926 for \$2,400 (fig. 3). It may be the only concrete block building to be immortalized in poetry. Local poet, Ernest Sale wrote a humorous dedicatory poem for the opening of the bank that included this stanza:

Now for the building, shall it be frame or brick?  
We want something we can build right quick;  
Don't mind the expense, we can sell more stock,  
Then they decided to build it of concrete block!<sup>8</sup>

Sale's "Don't mind the expense" refers to the fact that concrete block was more expensive than wood, but it was much cheaper than stone. A block cost about thirteen cents to make and was less costly than brick to lay. It was also promoted as fireproof, something that made it especially appealing for garages as well as banks, it needed little repair, and would "last practically forever."

8. *Rockbridge County (Va.) News*, February 22, 1923. This was brought to my attention by Royster Lyle, Jr.



Figure 4. *Pressed metal ceiling in store in downtown Lexington, Virginia. Photograph by author.*

Still, with all these advantages, there is no doubt that one element in its popularity was its ornamental quality. Any number of wreaths, scrolls, or cobblestone faces could be produced. The most popular ornamental appearance was rock-face, the imitation of natural pitched stone. This was the standard unit on all Sears machines, and it was the face most in demand from the manufacturers. The imitation of quarried stone was apparent even in the name “artificial stone” which was commonly used by the manufacturers and builders. It was cheap, easy, and looked like something more expensive.

Pressed metal ceilings are our second example of a new material that received wide popular support. They first began to receive notice in the late 1880s. Simple, utilitarian, and iron when first produced, they soon became elaborate, ornate, and steel by the early twentieth century (fig. 4). Promoted as a “lighter, more durable, less breakable substitute for cast plaster” they remained popular until the 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the concrete block industry that was specialized, metal ceilings were produced as just one product of the larger sheet metal industry. Few companies were devoted to only making metal ceilings. If they

9. *Carpentry and Building*, December 1887, pp. 244–45, and March 1889, pp. 63–64. For material on metal ceilings, see Mary Dierickx, “Metal Ceilings in the U.S.,” *APT Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (1975): 83–98, and Ann H. Gillespie, “Decorative Sheet-Metal Building Components in Canada 1870–1930” (M.A. thesis, Carleton, 1985).

made them, they probably also made other exterior and interior sheet metal products.

The Mesker Brothers in St. Louis are one example. They had a thriving business in cheap architectural ornament and sold whole building fronts as well as well as metal ceilings. Other companies, like the Penn Metal Company of Philadelphia, had the ceilings as one of their major lines, but if the company made them, they probably also made cornices, drain pipes, and roof cresting.<sup>10</sup>

There were some forty-five companies making metal ceilings in the United States between 1890 and 1930. Most were located along the major rail lines in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. The railroads were important as a means for getting the pressed metal products directly to the contractors and especially to the small “tin shops” where most of the actual ordering and installation work was done.

The H. T. Klugel Architectural Sheet Metal Company in Emporia, Virginia, is a case in point. As a young man, H. T. Klugel had been trained in the hand manufacture of sheet metal products by his father in Danville, Illinois. Unlike most young men of his time, when he set out on his own, Klugel went east, not west, and settled in Emporia, Virginia, a town known for its conjunction of two major rail lines. There he opened his architectural sheet metal shop. He bought the rolled metal sheets from the big foundries and used them to manufacture cornices, stove flues, gutters, and drain pipes in the local shop. When pressed ornament was needed, they ordered it from the big firms. If a local store owner wanted a pressed metal ceiling, Klugel showed the customer a catalogue selection, ordered the ceiling plates and installed them. Klugel kept a variety of pressed metal ornaments on hand and used them when putting together a decorative marquee for a local bank or a cornice for a local hotel. Thus, at the local level, it was a combination of bought manufactured items and local tinner’s skills that supplied the need of the community. Klugel had a large shop and supplied work for contractors throughout his region. He also used the face of the building he put up in 1914 as a spectacular display of all the possible uses of sheet metal ornament (fig. 5).<sup>11</sup>

Individuals could not make pressed metal in their backyards as they could concrete block, but the wide availability through manufacturer’s catalogues, advertising in builders and carpenter’s magazines and even

10. *George L. Mesker & Co., Architectural Iron Works* (Evansville, Ind., 1903). *Seventy-Fifth Penn Metal Year, 1869-1944*, pamphlet at Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

11. Interview with W. A. Slagle owner of the Klugel Architectural Metal company in Emporia, Virginia, October 1991, notes in the possession of the author.



Figure 5. *H. T. Klugel's Architectural Sheet Metal shop, Emporia, Virginia. Department of Historic Resources.*

the Sears catalogues, all helped to make the ceilings popular. They became a nearly ubiquitous feature of early twentieth-century commercial architecture in the U.S., but were also widely used for hospitals, schools, churches, and even homes.

The advantages claimed for the ceilings were that they were fire-proof, sanitary, permanent, and cheap compared to other decorative materials. Their durability was one of the chief selling points. In fact, as many ads noted, the initial cost might be more than plain wood or plaster, but the low cost of upkeep and the virtual everlasting quality of the material would save money in the long run.





Figure 6. *Frederick Walton, the inventor of linoleum. Reproduced from Industrial and Engineering Chemical News 12 (10 April 1934): 119.*

Linoleum is our third example of a new material emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that proved to be widely popular. It was invented by an Englishman named Frederick Walton (fig. 6).

The legend is that one day the young Walton noticed that the top of a paint jar had a skin of oxidized linseed oil. He peeled it off and began playing with the rubber-like piece, thinking of ways to use it. This led to a series of experiments, many trials and tribulations, and eventually, in 1860, the patenting of his formula for linoleum. The name came from *linum*, Latin for flax from which linseed oil is made, and *oleum*, Latin for oil, thus, literally, “linoleum” means “linseed oil.” Essentially linoleum is oxidized linseed oil mixed with ground cork dust and certain gums and pigments that are then pressed between heavy rollers onto a canvas backing. Walton set up his first linoleum factory in England in 1864. By 1866

the Linoleum Manufacturing Company, as it was called, was reporting steady sales, and by 1869 they were exporting their product to the United States and the Continent.<sup>12</sup>

Walton’s chief competition was the older oil cloth trade which was largely centered in Scotland and Lancashire. He had tried to interest several of the larger firms in his new product, but to no avail. Oil cloth was made largely by a hand-process of covering canvas with successive layers of sizing and a painted design that was varnished. It had been an economical, practical, and popular floor covering since the eighteenth century.

Walton’s new linoleum was a far superior product because it was thicker, more waterproof, resilient, and much longer-wearing. Its popu-

12. William B. Coleman, “Frederick Walton, Inventor of Machinery for the Manufacture of Linoleum and Founder of the Linoleum Industry,” *Mechanical Engineering* 57 (May 1935): 298, and Coleman, “Frederick Walton, Centenary of the Birth of the Inventor of Linoleum,” *Industrial and Engineering Chemical News* 12 (April 10, 1834): 119. Frederick Walton, *The Infancy and Development of Linoleum Floorcloth* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co., 1925). Also see Bonnie Parks, “Floorcloths to Linoleum: The Development of Resilient Flooring” and John Wilson, Jr., “Floorcloths in America: 18th Century to Present” in *The Interiors Handbook for Historic Buildings*, vol. 2, ed. Michael J. Auer, Charles E. Fisher, III, Thomas C. Jester, and Marilyn E. Kaplan, II (Washington, D. C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1993).

larity was such that the older oil cloth firms began to try to imitate it. In 1877 Walton instituted legal proceeding against the large Scottish firm called Nairn for infringement of his trademark. But in 1878, the British Trade Commission ruled against him. It seems that Walton had never actually registered the name "Linoleum." The Trade Commission ruled that even if he had, he could no longer have exclusive use of the name linoleum because it had become "a household word." In other words, it had taken less than fourteen years for linoleum to become such a ubiquitous feature of homes and commercial buildings that it was considered "commonplace."<sup>13</sup>

Walton's company was thus in competition with a variety of rival firms by the 1870s and 1880s. His company had also begun to expand their own markets and sold their patent rights to firms in Germany, France, and America. In 1872 Walton sailed to New York to help establish the first American Linoleum Manufacturing Company. Walton set it up on Staten Island, and spent two years supervising the building of the factory and company town that he named "Linoleumville."<sup>14</sup> In 1879 *The Carpet Trade* journal reported that "The manufacture of sheet oil cloth has been considerably interfered with . . . by the introduction of linoleum," citing as one reason the popularity of the new American company owned by Joseph Wild.

The next major technological improvement in linoleum was Walton's introduction of "inlaid linoleum" in 1882 (fig. 7). He was no longer a controlling partner in his original firm, and was unhappy with their support for this new product, so he sold out and started a new firm called Greenwich Inlaid Linoleum. But again, his new product was so good that the others began to imitate it. The early linoleum had been all in one color. When designs were used, they were printed or painted on the surface and then covered with varnish, just as the earlier oil cloth had been. The disadvantage to this was, of course, that the pattern wore off with use. What Walton and the other firms wanted was to come up with

13. Augustus Muir, *Nairns of Kirkcaldy, A Short History of the Company* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd. for Michael Nairn & Co. Ltd., 1956), 28, and Philip Gooderson, *Lord Linoleum, Lord Ashton, Lancaster and the Rise of the British Oilcloth and Linoleum Industry* (Keele University Press, 1996), 34, cites the *The Times*, February 2, 1877, and January 31, 1878. Adrian Room, *Directory of Trade Name Origins* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 110, and *Fife Free Press* (February 2, 1878) clipping file, Kirkcaldy Museum and Library, Kirkcaldy, Scotland.

14. Charles L. Sachs, *Made on Staten Island* (exhibition catalogue) (Richmond-town, Staten Island, N. Y.: Staten Island Historical Society, 1988). Also curator's Files, Staten Island Historical Society.



Figure 7. Workers hand piecing the inlaid linoleum design. Nairn Company, Kirkcaldy, Scotland, c. 1950. Kirkcaldy Museum and Art Gallery, Kirkcaldy, Scotland.

a way to make the patterns just as permanent and long-wearing as the linoleum ground.<sup>15</sup>

The first experiments depended on hand work. Linoleum was made in various colors, the pieces were cut and then laid by hand into patterns (fig. 8). The roll was heated and re-rolled so pressure and heat fused it into one. By 1892 Walton, again, in the lead, invented a way to do all this with a machine (fig. 9). The obvious superiority of the inlaid linoleum was reflected in the advertising that always bragged that the colors went “straight through to the back.” Inlaid was more expensive, however, and the cheaper printed forms continued to be produced.

By 1910 there were at least six firms making linoleum in the United States. Wild continued to manufacture until the 1930s. In Philadelphia there were the firms of George Blabon and Thomas Potter. The British Companies of Nairn and Cook’s open American branches in New Jersey, but the one that would eventually dominate them all was Armstrong

15. Coleman, “Frederick Walton, Inventor,” *Mechanical Engineering*, May 1935, pp. 297–302; Coleman, “Frederick Walton, Centenary,” *Industrial and Engineering Chemical News* 12 (April 10, 1934): 119, 128; Barry, Ostlere and Shepherd, Ltd, “Linoleum, Historical Development,” (typescript, n.d. after 1929), Kirkcaldy Museum and Library.

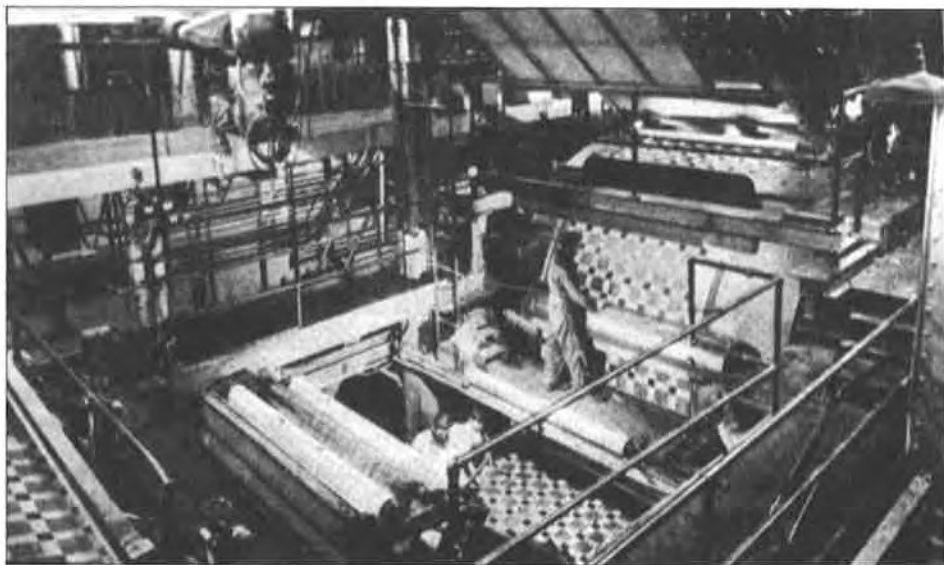


Figure 8. Walton's giant rotary press for straight-line inlaid linoleum. Reproduced from *Scientific American* 143 (October 1930): 312.

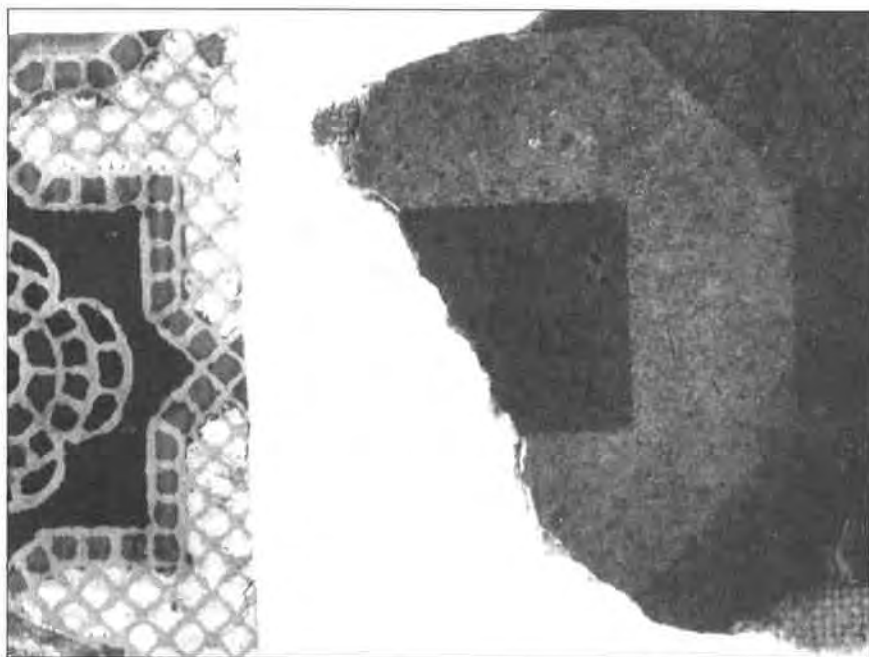


Figure 9. Printed linoleum c. 1920, left, from a house in College Park, Pennsylvania, and right, inlaid linoleum ca. 1910 from a house in Lawrence, Kansas. Photograph by author.

Cork and Tile Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which had started in the 1860s as a cork company. By 1907, someone had figured out that rather than selling all that cork debris to linoleum companies like Wild, they might as well start making linoleum themselves, and in 1908 they did. Armstrong led the way with new advertising techniques in the late 1910s that were the first ads directed at the consumer. Before that, ads were only to the trade. They continue to manufacture floor coverings today.<sup>16</sup>

Linoleum's markets and the number of companies producing it continued to expand in the early twentieth century. Germany's production soon rivaled that of Britain and, eventually, by the 1930s and 1940s, the Americans dominated. Linoleum was a world-wide product, as were its raw materials. The linseed oil came primarily from South America and the United States, the cork came from Portugal and Spain, the jute for the canvas backing came from India and Pakistan and was processed into burlap in Scotland. Linoleum was also used all over the world, in first-world countries as well as third. It was eventually replaced in the 1950s and 1960s with the introduction of plastic-based products, and today, most of what people call “linoleum” is actually vinyl floor covering. But from the 1870s to the 1960s, linoleum was the most popular and widespread manufactured floor covering in existence.

The appeal of linoleum like that of concrete block and metal ceilings was that it was practical, durable, decorative, and inexpensive. Because it was made of linseed oil and cork dust, it was resilient. As one ad said, “linoleum is, par excellence, a comfortable floor. Cork and oxidized linseed oil are naturally elastic and combine to make a sort of cushion that absorbs the shock of footsteps.”<sup>17</sup> This made it suitable not only for homes, but also for businesses, factories, and stores; anywhere someone would have to stand for long periods.

This comfortable, resilient, warm, quiet floor covering was also waterproof, non-skid, sanitary and easy to clean. As a water resistant, unified surface, it was easier to clean than wood, but there were also claims that it actually had antiseptic qualities. In 1913 a German scientist reported on experiments he had done that suggested that the oxidizing

16. H. W. Prentis, Jr., *Thomas Morton Armstrong (1836–1908), Pioneer in Cork* (New York: Newcomen Society, 1950), and *The First 125 Years* (Lancaster, Pa.: Armstrong, 1985). Robert F. Lanzillotti, *The Hard-Surface Floor-Covering Industry, A Case Study of Market Structure and Competition in Oligopoly* (State College of Washington Press, 1955). H. W. Prentis, Jr., *1884–1959* (Lancaster, Pa.: Armstrong Cork Company, 1961).

17. *Business Floors of Armstrong Linoleum* (Lancaster, Pa.: Armstrong Cork and Tile Co., January 1924), p. 4, trade booklet in the Avery Architectural Library.

linseed oil gave off a gas that was a germicide. This claim was often repeated in the advertising literature and thus linoleum seem especially suited to kitchens, bathrooms, nurseries, and hospitals.<sup>18</sup>

Linoleum was also valued for its durability. Unlike the earlier floor cloth, it was thick enough to wear well. There were claims of it lasting sixty years or more. Armstrong eventually claimed that it would “last as long as the house.”<sup>19</sup>

The chief claims for the virtues of linoleum, however, had to do with its artistic qualities. It was produced in an amazing variety of patterns. The early solid colors of brown and gray were soon superseded by an annual display of new patterns and forms. They included mosaics, tiles, parquetry, granites, marble, and “carpet” patterns.

Sometimes the claims for these imitative patterns seemed a bit outrageous as in a Cook’s ad that asked “Which is Which?”<sup>20</sup> It may stretch our credulity to think that one could really have difficulty telling wood parquet from its linoleum imitation, but that did not stop the claims. There was even the assertion that linoleum parquetry was better than the wood version because it would not splinter, and it was easier to clean. But most of all it was cheaper.

Linoleum was also noted for its many uses. It was used extensively by the navies of Britain, Germany, and the U.S. as a nonslip, nonsplintering, waterproof covering for decks. Its special thickness gave it the name “Battleship Linoleum,” but its reputation for durability made it also popular for schools, hospitals, and public buildings. Its plain color—battleship gray or brown—was used everywhere, especially in government buildings and post offices.

One particularly outrageous claim for the durability of Linoleum came in 1900 when an exhibitor at the Paris Exposition installed one-inch-thick linoleum in a few driveways and courtyards to test it as a road covering. The thought was that it would muffle the sound of horses’ hooves and carriage wheels. The developer of this product was so confident of its success, that he claimed that he was negotiating with the French government for a contract to pave the entire Champs Elysees with linoleum!<sup>21</sup>

18. “Germs vs. Linoleum,” *Dry Goods Economist* 68 (November 29, 1913): 23, and *Helpful Hints for Linoleum Salesmen* (Lancaster, Pa.: Armstrong Cork and Tile Co., 1918), p. 11. Avery Architectural Library

19. Hazel Dell Brown, *The Attractive Home, How to Plan Its Decoration* (Lancaster, Pa.: Armstrong Bureau of Interior Decoration, 1928), p. 13. Winterthur Museum and Library.

20. *Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review* 42 (April 1, 1911): 1, 7.

21. *Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review* 31 (September 1, 1900): 58.



Figure 10. Imitation oak Lincrusta-Walton wainscoting from the 1912 Ogden House in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Our last product to consider is Lincrusta-Walton (fig. 10). It was developed in 1877, again by Frederick Walton. It is essentially the same formulae as linoleum and he initially called it “Linoleum Muralis” or linoleum for walls. The major difference is that Lincrusta is embossed. It was a huge and immediate success.<sup>22</sup> Its many desirable qualities were noted in an 1880 pamphlet which claimed that it was “warm and comfortable,” “would not warp or be eaten by worms,” and “was not cold in winter or hot in summer like stone or terracotta,” “did not absorb moisture and give it out like brick and plaster,” and “was impenetrable and resistant to wet.”<sup>23</sup> It was this latter quality which drew particular attention. Linoleum already had a reputation as a unified nonabsorbent

22. The Wallpaper Manufacturers, Ltd., “The Lincrusta Walton, Caméoid, and Cordelova Branch,” Special Supplement, *Wallpaper News* 25 (September 1905) 29. Bruce Bradbury, “Lincrusta-Walton: Can the Democratic Wallcovering Be Revived?” *Old House Journal*, October 1982, pp. 203–6; W. G. Sutherland, *Modern Wall Decoration* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton and Kent and Co., 1893); Alan V. Sugden and John L. Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper, 1509–1914* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1925).

23. *Lincrusta-Walton, The Sunbury Wall Decoration, A New Linoleum Product* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1880), p. 8. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

surface that was easy to clean and Lincrusta-Walton brought those admirable qualities from the floor to the wall. It was completely waterproof and could be easily cleaned with soap and water. This point was made by the *Journal of Decorative Arts* in 1884 when they wrote, "Amongst the many contributors to these twin sisters, Hygeia and Art, the name of Mr. Walton is, and will long continue to be recognized as that of a man whose inventive powers have placed within the reach of the great bulk of the middle and upper classes a material peerless as a sanitary agent and of a beauty that need fear no rival."<sup>24</sup>

Besides its hygienic properties, Lincrusta-Walton was noted for its durability. Advertised as "Solid in Color! Solid in Relief! Solid in Value!", it was especially strong and durable, earning it a reputation as the "indestructible wall covering." This was humorously underscored by A. G. Butler in a 1943 memoir in which he wrote of helping to clean up the rubble of bombed London houses. He commented on "the triumph of Lincrusta," adding, "I do not mean aesthetically, but quite the opposite, in a military sense. No material, I think has stood up to blast so stoutly. The bumpy adhesive skin on wall and ceilings, aping rich plaster work has counteracted many blows from bombs, even sustaining whole surfaces by itself."<sup>25</sup>

Lincrusta-Walton's most important characteristic, however, was its imitative quality. It could simulate carved plaster and wood, as well as embossed leather and metal. In 1906 they brought out a line that successively imitated ceramic tile and in 1912, an improvement to their earlier efforts with oak dado that proved to be wildly popular. Lincrusta was used in almost every conceivable setting from homes to hotels to government buildings, lodge halls, railroad carriages, yachts and ocean liners—including the *Titanic*.

In 1897 Walton began to market Lincrusta in the U.S. and in 1883 a Connecticut company bought the patent rights. There were other embossed wall coverings that began to compete with it, but Lincrusta deserved its title of "King of wall decoration."

Lincrusta, linoleum, metal ceilings and concrete block can serve then as examples of new materials emerging in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were available because of new manufacturing techniques, but it was not inventive genius alone that accounts for their success. They were also part of a pattern of capital investment in new industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century and a rapid expansion of business that was supported by the whole infrastructure of improved railroad, telegraph, and mail service.

24. "Lincrusta-Walton," *Journal of Decorative Arts* 4 (March 1884): 472.

25. A. S. G. Butler, *Recording Ruin* (London: Constable, 1942), 139



If this account has thus far established that these materials were popular and that they reflect changes in mass culture, then we are still left with the question of what they meant to the people who made and used them.

There is no doubt that the major reason for their popularity is that they successfully met a need. They were cheap, quick, and easy. But they were also ornamental. In fact, it is their practical supply of durable ornament that imitated more expensive materials that rallied the elite against them.

The debate about the propriety of imitation raged in the building press during the last half of the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth as new materials came on the market. Echoing a long-held machine-hating attitude that goes back to Pugin and Ruskin, the architectural profession condemned the new materials as cheap, ugly, and tasteless. In 1907, the *American Architect and Building News* referred to the “imitations of rockface masonry which are so frequently seen” and which are so “depressing and distasteful.”<sup>26</sup> Oswald Herring, an architect, sounded the same alarm when in 1912 he wrote that “the sight or mention of concrete block in its present crude form, especially in imitation of rockfaced stone, has been sufficient to band the profession as a unit in protest and condemnation.” He concluded that as a “cheap and vulgar imitation of stone, concrete will never be acceptable in any work of worth.”<sup>27</sup>

The architectural elite condemned not only concrete block, but also pressed metal. In fact, pressed metal ceilings seem to have inherited a debate over sheet metal’s “servile imitation” of other materials that had been going on in the building press since the 1870s.<sup>28</sup> The manufacturer’s sensitivity to this charge is evident in comments like that of Albert Northrop when he wrote in 1890 that his ceilings were “not imitation of anything,” that they “were not a sham: but instead were “real panels, real moldings, real rosettes,” not painted ones “made of crumbling plaster or inflammable wood.”<sup>29</sup>

Metal ceilings were imitative of plaster. In the heyday of the Spanish Mission style in the 1920s, manufacturers even came out with lines

26. “Report of the AIA Committee,” *American Architect and Building News* 92 (December 1907): 214.

27. Oswald Herring, *Concrete and Stucco Houses* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1913), p. 52.

28. See a series of articles in *American Architect and Building News* 1 (June 1; July 22; November 11, 1876): 20, 239, 366.

29. *All About Iron Ceilings, Side Walls, etc., Manufactured by A. Northrop and Co.* (Pittsburgh: A. Northrop, 1890), pamphlet in the Avery Library, Columbia University.

called “stucco” and “Spanish Texture.” But the fact they were imitative did not make them a demeaned material to the people to made and used them.

Linoleum and Lincrusta also came in for criticism. Linoleum’s commonplace ubiquity and its reputation as a cheap floor covering sometimes brought it scorn. This is particularly true when we look at what has happened to it as part of the preservation movement. For years, it was considered something to rip out to get down to the “real floor.”

Lincrusta became so commonplace in the early twentieth century, especially in Britain, that it was sometimes disparaged as well. A. G. Butler in his 1943 comments about Lincrusta standing up to German bombs, reflected upper-class, elitist views when he referred to it as “bad and trashy decoration” and went on to say, “It quite hurts me to think that something we have scoffed at for years has turned out to be an able ally in the fight. A pity it is so unattractive, especially when painted chocolate.”<sup>30</sup>

This question of the propriety of imitation reflects a Ruskinian rejection of machine-made materials that faced all of the new products produced in this period. But against the elite rejection or scorn for these materials, there is the evidence of their incredible popularity. Mass production had made them widely available. Mass advertising had made them well known. But it was popular taste that made them such a success.

There was considerable discussion, for example, of these materials as “democratic” products. An 1888 article promoting Lincrusta in *The Painters Magazine and Coach Painter*, for example, noted that “Art in the past ministered to but a few who were lords of the earth. The temple and the palace were alone thought worthy of adornment. In the past it was the few only who were noble—in the future it will be the many and art is rapidly becoming democratic in the consequence.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, machines made ornament affordable to a broader population, just as changes in social structure, wealth distribution, and voting rights laws had broadened political enfranchisement.

The new materials were also considered “progressive” and “modern” because they were better than those they replaced. Linoleum could imitate marble, a traditional, elite material, but it was not “cold” like marble. Lincrusta could look like leather, oak or plaster, but would not dry out and crack as they would, and was easy to clean. Metal ceilings

30. Butler, *Recording Ruin*, 139.

31. Quoted in *Wallpaper Trade Department*, March 1888, p. 109, trade newspaper in the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Figure 11. Charles Staton's ca. 1945, rockface concrete block house in the Kerrs Creek area, Rockbridge County, Virginia.

looked like decorative plaster, but unlike plaster, would last “practically forever.” Rockface block looked like stone but could be produced at a fraction of its cost.

In 1904, in Artesia, New Mexico, for example, John Hodges opened the Hollow Stone Manufacturing Company and a year later had built most of the town. The local newspaper editor praised the new concrete block buildings as “substantial and beautiful substitutes for stone” and claimed that the buildings were so “attractive” that more would surely follow.<sup>32</sup> In Lexington, Virginia, in 1942, Bill Williams started the Rockbridge Block Company. He made both rockface concrete block and cinderblock, but when Charles Staton decided to build his house, he chose the rockface block (fig. 11). When I asked him why, he said because he “liked the way it looked.”<sup>33</sup> In 1912, the *Lexington (Virginia) Gazette* noted that the ceilings in the town’s People’s Bank were “handsomely paneled in metal” and that they denoted the “progressive spirit of this enterprising and successful bank.”<sup>34</sup> If we can take these people at their word and

32. *Artesia Advocate*, October 1, 1904, quoted in Betsy Swanson, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination, Artificial Stone Houses of Artesia New Mexico, 1984.

33. Interview with Charles Stanton, Rockbridge County, 1986, notes in possession of the author.

shift our own taste to accept theirs, then we can understand the appeal of the material.

These were not “hollow shams,” they were better than the materials they imitated. Fire-resistant, reliable, durable, and decorative metal ceilings, concrete block, linoleum, and Lincrusta were not only economical alternatives to plaster, stone, and wood, marble, and leather—they were modern alternatives. They were produced by the age of enterprise and when people chose them, they did not choose a poor second, but a wholly satisfactory alternative. Huxtable is right in her assertion that it was the practicalness of a middle class that was willing to accept “substitute gimcrackery,” and even delight in it, if the materials were “cheap, quick and easy” and also ornamental.

So what does all this tell us about building at the turn of the century? It tells us that it was part of a national system. Mass industrialization, mass transportation, and mass advertising had made these new materials widely available. It also tells us about people’s attitudes. For too long our architectural histories have focused only on the elite, architect-designed buildings. The study of concrete block, pressed metal, linoleum, and Lincrusta tells us about ordinary buildings and about ordinary people who embraced the products of their age.

34. *Lexington (Va.) Gazette*, February 17, 1915, 3.

# James McDowell, Builder of Col Alto and Virginia Statesman

Charles A. Bodie



IN the 1820s, Lexington, Virginia, was a village of about eight hundred people, planted beside the busy Valley Turnpike that paralleled the spine of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its citizens were mostly Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who ran small businesses, tended farms, and raised their families by the Bible. On a hill nearby sat Washington College, from whose doors passed future teachers, ministers, farmers, and men of business.

James McDowell built Col Alto on another hill in about 1828. He took comfort in this fine, imposing residence near the town, not far from the college where he had spent a year. It was a time of transition in his life. Born in Rockbridge County, he was then thirty-two years old, with a wife, Susanna, and three children. With his family, he had just returned from a brief sojourn in Kentucky, where he had practiced law in Lexington and managed the two thousand acres in Bourbon County that his father had given him. But the young couple were not happy there. He found the practice of law unfit for an honest man, and plantation management did not suit him. Even worse, he had contracted malaria, while Susanna had grown weak while nursing her first child.

---

Charles A. Bodie received his Ph.D. from Indiana University in history and is an independent scholar living in Rockbridge County. His previous publication for the Society was *Rockbridge County, Virginia, Manuscripts: A Guide to Collections in the United States* (1998). His talk was given at the Society's annual picnic meeting on the lawn at the Hampton Inn Col Alto on July 26, 1999.

Both longed for the familiar hills of the Virginia Valley and to be close to their families. Again, his father helped with a deed of gift to 328 acres on which James built Col Alto. While he later traveled extensively, Col Alto became his permanent home until his death in 1851. With its size and stately lines, it also marked the ascendancy of a new member of the Valley's landed gentry that exercised wide influence in the region and the state. Within a few years, McDowell won his first election to the Virginia House of Delegates. Later, state voters sent him to the governor's mansion and the U.S. Congress.

Besides the McDowells, this gentry included the Prestons, the Campbells, and the Breckinridges. While most lacked the power and wealth of their counterparts in Tidewater Virginia, they shared certain attributes. James McDowell, for instance, was born into a family of substance with influential kinship connections. He was also an attorney with a broad education, a large landowner, and a strong believer in public service. With his Kentucky experience behind him, he probably pondered his future for only a short time in his new house. His family's prominence made him feel impelled to follow the pattern. In a few years, public office beckoned the master of Col Alto.

The only son of James and Sarah Preston McDowell, the younger James was born in 1795 at Cherry Grove, his father's estate, north of Lexington near the village of Fairfield. Ancestors of the McDowells had entered this part of the Valley of Virginia in 1738, among its earliest immigrants. Good fortune put them in touch with Benjamin Borden, a speculator from New Jersey who held a land warrant signed by the colony's governor, William Gooch. It promised about 100,000 acres in southern Augusta County provided that settlement proceed quickly. Borden signed up John McDowell to survey the tract and paid him with a thousand-acre allotment. From this point on, the McDowells multiplied, gathered additional land in Virginia's seemingly endless western districts, and sought public office. A branch under Samuel McDowell moved to Virginia's Kentucky District where he served as a judge and helped to create the first constitution for the new state of Kentucky. His son, Ephraim, trained in medicine at Scotland's Edinburgh University, developed early techniques in abdominal surgery in both Virginia and Kentucky.

Meanwhile in Rockbridge County, by the time the senior James McDowell had built Cherry Grove on part of the family's Borden Grant allotment, he too was gaining attention. He was a prosperous planter, a fairminded justice of the peace, a county inspector of revenue, a trustee of Liberty Hall Academy and its successor, Washington College, and a colonel in the Virginia militia with active duty in the War of 1812. Upon his death in 1835, his estate left Sarah and their

three children over six thousand acres in Rockbridge County, and thousands more to the west in present-day West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.

Sarah was a Preston, another influential Scotch-Irish family. Its members had also become large landowners, centered in Montgomery and Washington counties, and their numbers would include military leaders, legislators, and state governors. Following his father's example, the younger James McDowell also chose his wife from this line. In 1818, he married a first cousin, Susanna Smith Preston, a daughter of General Francis Preston of Washington County. James's two sisters likewise married well. Elizabeth's husband was U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, a powerful figure later in Washington. The other sister, Susan, married William Taylor, a commonwealth's attorney and later U.S. Congressman. Additional family ties linked the McDowells with Governor Floyd of Virginia, and the noted Breckenridges of Virginia and Kentucky.

Another stepping stone for the Valley gentry was an education that led to professional advancement. The younger James attended a private school and then sampled several colleges. A year at Washington College was followed by another at Yale College. In New Haven, he found a reserve among the students and a shocking rowdiness that sometimes endangered the lives of the faculty. He went on to the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) where he finally found a more comfortable atmosphere for learning. He enjoyed literature and remained two years. In 1816 he graduated with a reputation as a brilliant student and delivered the salutatory oration in Latin. Back in Virginia, he read for the law in Staunton and Richmond, practiced law briefly in Kentucky, but became bored and disdainful of attorneys in general.

The practice of law might offer income in a pinch, but true wealth in the early 1800s came from the land market and agriculture. As with his father and other relatives, James was bitten by the “land fever” that had swept the young country. He added a plantation in Botetourt County and negotiated with the Prestons for choice bottom land in Montgomery County. Westward beyond the Appalachian Mountains, untold acreage was opening up for sale. Holding on his Kentucky tract, where he kept an overseer and a small group of slaves to market crops and livestock, the young McDowell looked for additional investment opportunities. He purchased several lots in downtown Louisville, a busy port on the Ohio River, as well as cotton fields and slaves in central Mississippi near the town of Columbus..

Widespread landowning brought both hopes for income and inevitable frustrations. The McDowells, Prestons, and others of their

rank, collected rents from tenants, counted on profitable sales in the agricultural market, and sold tracts when land values rose. Yet the income was never steady: cotton and corn prices fluctuated, national banking and currency fell into upheaval under President Andrew Jackson, and many tenants failed to pay on time. Such headaches forced James to visit his properties periodically, collecting rents along the way, and ironing out managerial and legal problems. Every two years or so, he was away from Col Alto for months at a time, missing his family and concerned about his political ties back home. Meanwhile, Susanna was left as the sole caretaker of their growing family and the overall manager of their Virginia lands and slaves.

Still, he kept his eyes on developing a reputation as a public-spirited citizen. He gave time to various boards, especially those dealing with education. Both he and his father served as trustees to Washington College and to Ann Smith Academy, a preparatory school for girls in Lexington. The younger James was also a board member of the Virginia Military Institute, Hampden-Sydney College, and the United States Military Academy. He was active in the temperance movement, helped to found an area newspaper, the *Valley Star*, and was vice president of the Rockbridge Colonization Society, a group dedicated to eventual elimination of slavery through the removal of free blacks to Africa.

The pattern was of a young leader on the move, and friends soon suggested that he run for a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates. With Col Alto completed, he accepted the nod of the local leaders of the Democratic-Republican party that had been founded by Thomas Jefferson during the Washington presidency. It had since eclipsed the opposing Federalist party, whose members included the senior James McDowell. He won the two-year seat in late 1831, and again twice more during the decade. In 1841, state voters elected him to a four-year term as governor.

American politics in the 1830s, shaped by the common man's president, Andrew Jackson, was marked by a zeal for greater democracy. The young political neophyte in the Virginia's legislature encountered a tumultuous atmosphere. The president's personality and policies were hotly debated, and the predominant Democratic-Republican party itself was about to fracture. Jackson's friends, including James, now joined under the umbrella of a new "Democratic party," while opponents hunted for a new home. There were other issues, some heatedly sectional and local, reshaping the American party system, including the future of slavery. Virginians themselves deadlocked over sensitive topics besides slavery, including internal improvements, and free public education. Many had also become pes-



simistic over the state's apparent economic decline. Hoping for gentlemanly discussions on these and other topics, James found himself caught in a hornet's nest of discord. He made few friends, avoided parties and receptions, and complained of being surrounded by windbags and knaves. Before long, his own party ruptured, and a new Whig party took shape.

In spite of his disappointments, he continued to seek elective office, and gained a reputation as a noble-looking figure with rock-solid integrity. He carried a serious, meditative demeanor, thoughtfully considered all aspects of an issue, and impressed his Valley constituents



*James McDowell*

as a strong advocate of their views. As governor, he struck a blow for temperance supporters by banning wine and dancing at all receptions in the governor's mansion. He pushed proposals for introducing free elementary schools, introduced the bill to create the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington as a state military school, sponsored support for a school for the deaf and blind in Staunton, fought to extend the James River and Kanawha Canal towards Lexington (later favoring an east-west railroad), and gave his blessing to proponents of steam power on the James River. He also took an early stand on the gradual elimination of slavery in Virginia by requiring that all free persons of color sail for Africa, to be joined by the children (at age eighteen) of existing slaves. When the northern abolition lobby became more strident, he joined the proslavery ranks. Among his own slaves, numbering twenty-seven in his estate following his death, he appears to have drafted but a single emancipation contract.

At the end of his gubernatorial term, the General Assembly selected him to replace his brother-in-law, William Taylor, who had died in office as U.S. congressman. McDowell won the seat for himself in the ensuing election. There he stayed until his own death in 1851. During his brief term on Capitol Hill, dominated by the national debate over extending slavery into newly acquired western territories gained from the Mexican War, he joined his southern cohorts in

opposing abolitionists and congressional Free Soilers. The guns of Fort Sumter were but a decade away.

His Washington days were marked by sadness. For many years, Susanna had suffered from severe headaches and eleven pregnancies, and in 1847 she died. Some months later, a stroke partly paralyzed the congressman. Then, three years later, he lost a daughter, Francis Elizabeth, to illness. As she had been living with him in Washington, he decided to leave the city and accompany her body to Lexington for burial. The procession reached Col Alto after a difficult rain-soaked journey. Burdened by the losses around him and growing more frail, the weary man died two months later at the age of fifty-six. He was buried with other family members in what is now Lexington's Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery. He left behind eight children, Col Alto and its farmstead, other properties, and his slaves. In a community that fondly remembers its military leaders, James McDowell did not cast a long shadow. But with his integrity and his visions for a more progressive state, his legacy was assured.

# Henry St. George Tucker, 1853–1932

David W. Coffey



AT 5:00 on the afternoon of July 25, 1932, a large gathering of mourners, including hundreds of politicians from around the state, assembled at Col Alto for the funeral of Harry St. George Tucker. The service was conducted by Dr. J. J. Murray of the Lexington Presbyterian Church and the Rt. Rev. Beverley Tucker, a cousin who was bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. The Presbyterian Church choir sang. Following the rites at Col Alto, a long procession wended its way to the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery where Tucker was interred next to the graves of his first two wives. Tucker was noted for his cheerful disposition—even his political enemies remarked on it. Perhaps it is therefore not surprising that Sen. Carter Glass commented on his way back to Col Alto after the burial that “no one would have enjoyed his own funeral more than Harry Tucker.”

Henry St. George Tucker (always known by the nickname of “Harry”) was probably predestined to follow the career path successful blazed by his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather (the first Henry St. George Tucker). Like his ancestors, Harry was a lawyer and a professor of law. Like his father, John Randolph Tucker, Harry taught law

---

David W. Coffey, who teaches history at the Virginia Military Institute, is a graduate of Davidson College and holds a masters degree in U.S. history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has completed his course work for a doctorate in history at the University of Virginia. He addressed the Rockbridge Historical Society on the lawn at the Hampton Inn Col Alto on July 26, 1999. The author is indebted for much of the biographical information contained in this paper to a senior thesis on Harry St. George Tucker written by James Fraser Humphreys at W&L under the direction of Dr. Charles Turner in 1979.

at Washington & Lee University, served as president of the American Bar Association, held a seat in the United States Congress, and was a confirmed Democrat.

Politically, Harry St. George Tucker is somewhat of an enigma. During most of his career he was allied with the progressive, anti-Organization faction in Virginia's Democratic Party, but he was a strong advocate of only a few of their favorite reforms. He was a strong supporter of public education and of the direct election of United States Senators, but he was opposed to woman suffrage and prohibition. Throughout his career, Tucker was a "strict constructionist" and a states-rights advocate (which made being a progressive more difficult)—and in his old age he became much more conservative. Perhaps the most important factor in determining his political stance was his determined opposition to the Democratic Party Organization in Virginia led during most of Tucker's life by Senator Thomas S. Martin (VMI, class of 1867) and by Martin's right-hand man, Hal Flood (who happened to be Tucker's cousin).

Harry Tucker was born in Winchester in 1853. After attending a series of private academies, he completed his education and received a law degree from Washington & Lee. In 1877, he established his law practice in Staunton and married Henrietta Preston Johnston, the granddaughter of Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston. They had first met, supposedly, when, as Gen. Johnston's granddaughter, she was called upon to present the trophy to the victor of the annual W&L crew race between the *Albert Sidney Johnston* and the *Harry Lee*. Tucker had captained the *Albert Sidney* and won the race. The Tuckers had six children—three sons (John Randolph, Albert Sidney Johnston, and Henry St. George, Jr.) and three daughters (Rosa, Laura, and Henrietta). (Ironically, the Tucker family history was affected by the yearly crew races in another, tangential way. In 1875, an African-American mother gave birth to a son and named him Harry Lee in honor of the winning crew that year. Harry Lee Walker would grow up to become one of Lexington's most prominent black businessmen and the owner of Blandome, Tucker's childhood home.)

In 1886, Congressman John Randolph Tucker, Harry's father, chose not to stand for re-election so as to assume the law professorship at W&L. Unfortunately for the Democrats, the seat was taken by a Republican, Jacob Yost of Staunton. Two years later, Harry Tucker won the nomination of the Democratic Party and challenged Yost, winning a narrow victory. Tucker was to serve four terms during this, his first stint in the United States House of Representatives.

While serving in Congress from 1889 to 1897, Tucker's name was attached to two important pieces of legislation. One was a bill which required the federal government to cease monitoring elections in the



*Henry St. George Tucker, 1853–1932*

southern states (a practice held over from Reconstruction in an effort to assure that blacks were not denied their rights as voting citizens guaranteed by the 15th amendment). This bill was obviously in keeping with Tucker's stand on state prerogatives in federal-state relations. The other bill which Tucker championed and pushed through the House was a resolution advocating a constitutional amendment requiring that United States Senators be directly elected by the voters rather than by the state legislatures as had been the practice since the founding of the Republic. Obviously, there is a contradiction here since Tucker was now advocating that the federal government tamper with time-honored voting practices through another constitutional amendment. Most southern whites (including Tucker, as previously indicated) still took offense at the

Reconstruction constitutional amendment guaranteeing black suffrage rights. Nevertheless, it was widely assumed (correctly) by progressives, even southern progressives, that legislative appointment of United States Senators was one of the major sources of governmental corruption—that robber baron-types were bribing state legislatures to choose their preferred candidates. (It was said at the time that John D. Rockefeller had in his pocket the finest state legislators and United States Senators which money could buy.) There was soon to be an example of just such corruption in Virginia when Tom Martin, using money provided by the railroads and liquor interests, successfully won election to the Senate. The Virginia General Assembly chose Martin rather than Fitzhugh Lee, the extremely popular former governor of the state, nephew of Robert E. Lee, and CEO of the Rockbridge Company which had attempted to develop Glasgow during the “Valley Boom.” The bad blood between Tucker and Martin most likely stemmed from these events and Tucker’s continuing advocacy of a more democratic way to select Senators.

In 1896, when Tucker was a candidate for renomination for a fifth term in Congress, the major political issue was to what extent silver should be used, along with gold, as the backing for American currency. Tucker, a strong advocate of fiscal conservatism, was opposed to those Democrats who, like William Jennings Bryan, were pushing for a policy favorable to silver. Tom Martin and his Organization had reluctantly decided to go along with the Bryan Democrats—and Tucker’s cousin, but Martin henchman, Hal Flood, made known his intention to challenge Tucker for the nomination. It seems likely that Tucker might well have lost the nomination. Tucker announced that he would not accept renomination from his district’s Democrats since they had endorsed a pro-silver position. Some interpreted this as a principled stand; others saw it as a face-saving maneuver since Flood would probably have won anyway. In any case, memories of this “abdication” were to plague Tucker throughout the rest of his political career. The upshot of the Democratic division was that Republican Jacob Yost grabbed the seat again. In a few years, however, Flood would succeed in regaining the seat for the Democrats and the Martin Machine. Flood would keep it until his death in 1921.

Ex-congressman Tucker did not have to wait long for another opportunity to arise. In the following year, his father died and Harry Tucker was offered the professorship of law at W&L which his father had held. It was at this point that Harry Tucker returned to Lexington and purchased Col Alto. In 1900, two more deaths occurred which were to shape his life: the president of W&L died and Tucker was named acting president, and Henrietta Johnston Tucker also died, leaving Tucker a widower in his grand new house.

Now a noted educator, Tucker was chosen as one of the two Virginia representatives to the Southern Educational Board, a Progressive-inspired organization, funded by a New York capitalist named Robert Ogden, whose purpose it was to improve the standards of southern education and advocate compulsory schooling for all. Since blacks were among those who would benefit from the Southern Educational Board's lobbying activities, the Ogden Commission (as it came to be called) was rather controversial. Tucker's involvement put him even more solidly in the anti-Martin camp by identifying him with Governor Andrew Jackson Montague, the poster-boy of Virginia Progressivism.

In 1903, Tucker left W&L to become Dean of the Law School at what is now George Washington University. He also remarried that year to a lady from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In 1904, Tucker served as president of the American Bar Association (as his father once had). A year later, he resigned his deanship to accept the presidency of the Jamestown Tricentennial Exposition, replacing Fitzhugh Lee who had recently died.

Following the somewhat unsuccessful conclusion of his Jamestown duties (the Exposition was not a rousing success financially), Tucker decided to take a shot at the Democratic nomination for the governorship in 1909. The hot issue in this campaign was prohibition. The Martin Organization, though not supportive of prohibition, was endorsing an avowed prohibitionist, William H. Mann, for the nomination. Tucker took up the mantle as the anti-Martin, less prohibitionist candidate. During the campaign, both Mann and Martin waffled on the prohibition issue. Tucker said he would not support state-wide prohibition since some of the larger cities did not want abstinence forced on them by state mandate; nevertheless, he would support local option for small communities like Lexington if they were to decide to go dry. Tucker's candidacy revived all the old negatives against him: his walking away from the Democratic congressional nomination in 1896, his support of the Yankee idea of compulsory education while involved with the Ogden Commission, and the mismanagement of the Jamestown Exposition. The Martin Machine pulled out all the stops and Tucker was soundly defeated for the nomination.

His political career seemingly at an end, Tucker devoted the next decade to authoring several books on legal and constitutional topics—though he did entertain the possibility that Woodrow Wilson might appoint him to his Cabinet. Surprisingly perhaps, given his sometimes progressive stance and his advocacy of accomplishing the direct election of senators through means of a national constitutional amendment, Tucker came out in 1916 against the woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution, arguing that if passed, it would be an unwarranted

intervention by the federal government into the rights of the states to determine their own suffrage requirements. Many southerners (Tucker included) feared that the woman suffrage amendment would call increased attention to the means by which Virginia and the other southern states had circumvented the 15th amendment.

In 1920, Tucker decided to re-enter the political fray and announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for the governorship. Now his platform sounded much more conservative, in keeping with the anti-Progressive, anti-overseas involvement attitude which the 1920s "return to normalcy" was to usher in. Even though Tom Martin had died, the Martin Organization (led for the moment by Hal Flood with the assistance of his up-and-coming nephew and namesake, Harry Flood Byrd) was still able to influence elections—and Tucker once again failed to gain the Democratic nomination.

The following year, however, an opportunity arose. Cousin Hal Flood died unexpectedly and Tucker was successful in regaining the seat he had surrendered more than twenty-five years before. Though he was opposed by the Martin Machine this time (perhaps because without Martin or Flood, the Machine was temporarily leaderless) several of Tucker's friends could not avoid commenting on the irony of this turn of events—Tucker replacing Hal Flood—and indicated that they were sure that Hal Flood was spinning in his grave at the very thought of it.


Tucker was to serve in Congress for ten years until his death in 1932. His old strict-constructionist, states-rights beliefs had by now completely eliminated any progressive inclinations he might once have had. He opposed federal efforts either through legislation or constitutional amendment to eliminate child labor. He also opposed efforts to provide federal financial support to mothers, an old Progressive stand-by. A plan to create a federal Department of Education with a Cabinet-level secretary was also anathema to Tucker. He warned that should federal standards for education be established, there were more congressmen from states with integrated schools than with segregated ones, and Congress might therefore mandate an end to the South's dual school systems. Tucker also opposed increasing congressional salaries and refused to accept his raise when the increase was approved.

Late in 1931, Tucker's health began to fail and on July 23 of the following year, 1932, he suffered a fatal heart attack. Tucker's life spanned the period between the Civil War and the Great Depression and during those years he held many important positions. His career had taken a number of unexpected turns (in several cases due to the deaths of others), but it ended as it had begun, in the United States Congress.



# Col Alto, Some Comments on the Architecture

Pamela H. Simpson

OL ALTO was built in 1827 by James McDowell, a man who served in the House of Delegates in the 1830s, was governor of Virginia in the 1840s and later a member of the U. S. House of Representatives. His father, also James McDowell, had purchased 328 acres on the outskirts of Lexington in 1819 from one Elizabeth Hoffman, a widow and her children. James McDowell, Jr., was born in 1796, educated at Washington College and the College of New Jersey and, after living for a time in Kentucky, came back to Lexington in 1823. He had married Susanna Smith Preston in 1818. Their daughter later recalled that her parents lived in “an old frame house” until a new building could go up. In 1827, McDowell’s father deeded the Col Alto land to him and he built (in his daughter’s words) a “large and commodious” mansion house “on the crest of the hill, having the town of Lexington in full view.”<sup>1</sup>

1. *Washington and Lee Historical Papers* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1893), 5:60.

**Pamela H. Simpson** is the Ernest Williams II Professor of Art History at Washington and Lee University. She coauthored (with Royster Lyle) *The Architecture of Historic Lexington* (1977) and other works. She addressed the Rockbridge Historical Society on the lawn at the Hampton Inn Col Alto on July 26, 1999.

She is indebted to the work of two of her former students who did extensive research on Col Alto and its history. Carry Schneider and John Pankow both wrote excellent papers on the subject for Simpson’s American Architecture class. Papers are now in W&L’s Special Collections in Leyburn Library.



*The logo for Hampton Inn Col Alto in Lexington.*

A mansion it was too. Similar in style and plan to the group of houses put up along Lee Avenue in the 1820s, it was a four room, central hall, two-story brick dwelling with fine classical detailing, most of which survives today. Tax records indicate that between 1827 and 1828, \$1,497.45 was added for “new building”—a sum equivalent to that of the finest houses in Lexington in the period.

We do not know who the builder was, but given the sophistication of the structure and other buildings going up in the 1820s in the town, we might do some speculation. The first candidates would, of course, be the firm of John Jordan and Samuel Darst, the builders responsible for the Center Building at Washington College and several of the Lee Avenue houses. Jordan and Darst had done work for Jefferson at Monticello and are credited with introducing Jeffersonian classicism into Lexington. If we compare the interior details and mantels of Col Alto with those at Jordan’s house, Stono, and at Darts’ house, Beaumont, we can see some similarities.

The other possible candidate is Samuel McDowell Reid, clerk of the county court and owner of the Reid-White House which now sits behind the post office on Lee Ave. There is evidence to suggest that Reid may have been an gentleman amateur architect. His drawings for his own house and detailed specifications to his carpenter survive and we know he served on the building committees for Washington College, the Presbyterian Church, and the County. He was a first cousin of James McDowell, and we might speculate on McDowell consulting Reid and the two putting their heads together to come up with a suitable plan. We might even speculate that once they had their plan, they

called on Jordan and Darst to build it. But there is no evidence for any of this. All we can do is look at what a fine house Col Alto is and compare it to the other classical style buildings going up in the period. One notable similarity in the Reid-White house and Col Alto, by the way, is the use of Ionic columns on the front porch—though Col Alto’s columns are still there, the porch itself was altered from a square form to one with covered ends in the 1930s.

We know that James McDowell named his house Colalto (spelling it as one word), but we don’t know exactly why. The most logical explanation is its site, high on a hill, overlooking the town. Col Alto means high hill in Italian.

The house was a large and fine one. A visitor in the 1850s described the view from the house this way: “few finer subjects can be found for an artist’s pencil” than the view from the governor’s residence. A “long graceful crescent of hills” is “topped with handsome private residences, a fine Female Academy, the colonnade of Washington College and the castle-like military institute with Jump, North and House mountains as background and in the intertwining forest, the ivy covered ruin of Liberty Hall Academy.”<sup>2</sup>

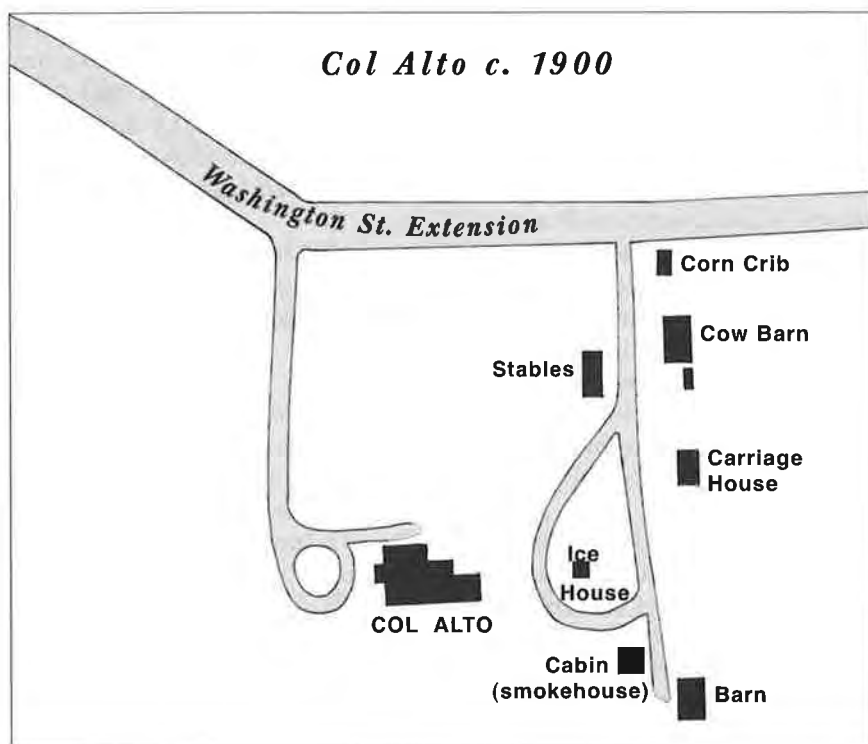
We know that the McDowell house was a full one. The 1840 census lists McDowell and his wife, his widowed mother, and nine children as dwelling there. He also had forty-three slaves (though we do not know they were all at Col Alto) and outbuildings included a barn, a carriage house, an ice house, and stables. McDowell died here in 1851. His estate inventory included such items as a twelve hundred volume library, twenty-four cane bottom chairs, a piano, three marble top tables, a “set of dinning tables,” red damask curtains and fourteen bedsteads, eight trundle beds, and three cribs among other things.<sup>3</sup>

To settle the estate, McDowell’s daughter Sally bought out her siblings in 1853. There were now some 427 acres. Sally married Rev. John Miller in 1856 and the Millers continued to live at Col Alto until 1864 when they sold it to Sally’s sister and her husband James Massie. But the Millers sold the Massies only the house and a little over 21 acres. Massie taught at VMI and he and his wife were responsible for improvements to the house in 1870s when they added a kitchen wing and a stair tower.

Massie died in 1872 and in settlement of the estate, the house was eventually sold at auction. The description published in the *Lexington Gazette* in 1875 called the house a “Fine brick Dwelling, large,

2. Ollinger Crenshaw, *General Lee’s College* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 72.

3. Rockbridge County Will Book, 12, p. 134.



commodious and handsomely finished with Carriage Houses, Stables, Ice House and all other outbuildings necessary to the comfort and convenience of such an establishment. The Dwelling stands upon an eminence in the midst of beautiful scenery of the surrounding country. Also two large frame tenements, a fine orchard and a large fertile garden."<sup>4</sup>

The house was purchased by Judge James N. Lea in 1875. He moved here from New Orleans. It now had a little over 24 acres and later in 1882, Lea added another 20 which he bought from the Millers. He died in 1884 and Col Alto was sold to R. B. Moorman. When he died, his widow sold it to Henry St. George Tucker. That was in 1898. The estate now had 41.46 acres.

Henry St. George Tucker was another prominent Lexington citizen. Son of John Randolph Tucker, who headed the W&L Law School, he had grown up at Blandome, graduated from W&L in 1876, and had a distinguished law and political career. He served in Congress from

4. *Lexington Gazette*, September 3, 1875.

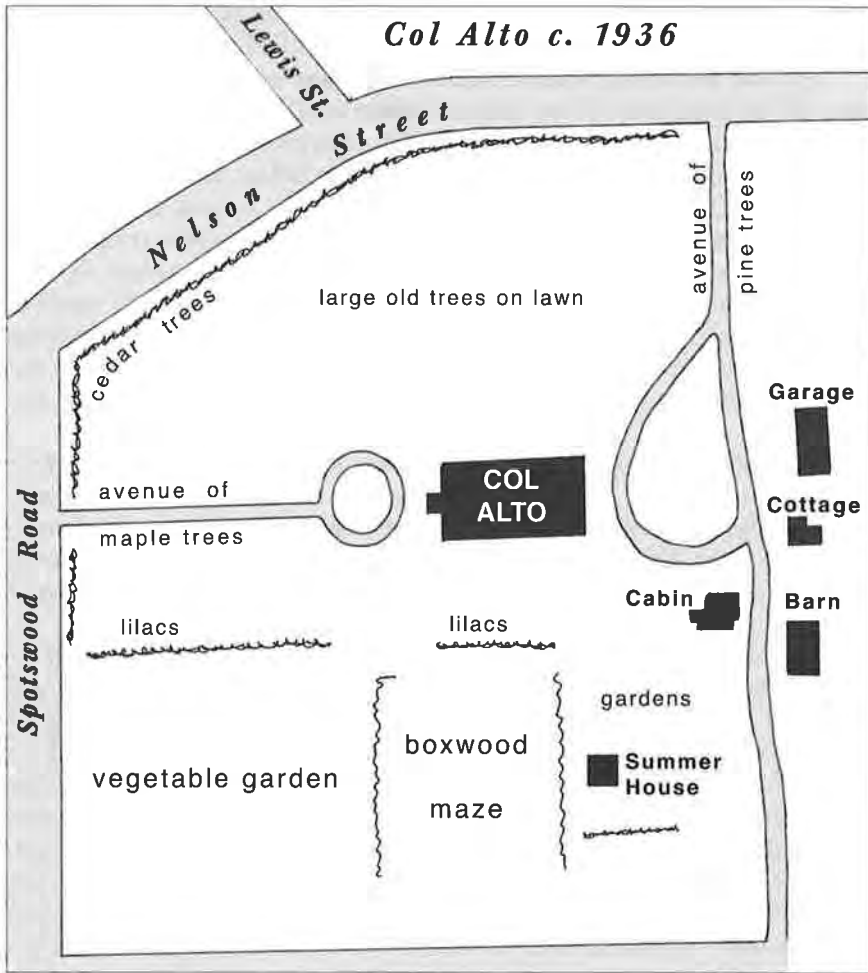
1889 to 1897, and became dean of the law school after his father's death in 1897. It was at this time he purchased Col Alto.

He and his wife had six children and many of you may remember two of his daughters, Rosa Tucker Mason and Laura Tucker Fletcher. Laura later recalled that the family did extensive work on the house, adding a kitchen wing and modern plumbing before they moved in, in late 1899. Unfortunately, her mother died only a year later. Tucker married again in 1903, and his second wife did even more renovations including adding electricity in 1907. (It was an independent system with its own generator.) Henry St. George Tucker died in 1932 and left the house to his children. Rosa Tucker Mason bought out her siblings and made Col Alto her home for the next twenty-eight years. She is the one who brought the most important additions and renovations to the site.

One of Mrs. Mason's good friends was Rose Greely, one of the first women to graduate from Harvard's school of landscape architecture. Greely did extensive work to the grounds, reorienting the main entrance from Nelson street to Spottswood Drive and adding a circle of boxwood, a row a maples, a boxwood maze, marble statues, formal gardens, and the brick wall that still surrounds the property.

Mrs. Mason also hired the nationally prominent architect William Lawrence Bottomly to do additions and renovations to the house between 1933 and 1935. Bottomly is best known for his Georgian Revival mansions and he must have found Col Alto a house much to his taste. He did away with the stair tower, added the graceful circular stairs, and a back section with two apartments for servants. He also added the formal, Palladian porch on the side and the Chinese Chippendale railings on the back. He changed the configuration of the front porch, keeping the original fluted Ionic columns, but adding coved corners, and he ran a dentil cornice around the whole of the exterior. He also added a new mantel to the back dinning room, but according to Laura Fletcher he used an old period mantel from another local house for the lower section and then made up the upper Georgian-style over-mantel. It is a very effective composition and shows how cleverly he wedded period features into his own style. He also reused the motif of the fancy fan and side lights from the front of the house for the new side porch door.

On the property, a barn which still survived was converted into a residence as was a log outbuilding behind the house. There has been much speculation about the date of this log building. I think it is likely mid-nineteenth century and probably served as an outbuilding or a servant's quarters. The hotel has kept it and plans its renovation. Many of you will remember the log building as the place that Ed Hamer



lived for many years. He moved into it in 1956 and lived there until his retirement from Washington and Lee.

Mrs. Mason had done a beautiful job of modernizing the property and she made the house a center of hospitality for the community. But in her eighties she worried about what would happen to it after her death, so she entered into an agreement with Washington and Lee, giving them the property to be used as a president's house, or for some other purpose as long as they maintained it in the condition in which she left it to them.<sup>5</sup> She died in 1961. W&L presidents did not want to

5. Rockbridge County Deed Book, 240, p. 383-86.

live at Col Alto—they had Robert E. Lee’s house to live in on campus—so the house became a storage site with parts of it being rented out. In 1981 the heirs brought suit saying W&L had not lived up to its agreement and in 1984 they regained the property in an out-of-court settlement.

And then, there it sat. We all worried for the next ten years or so about what would become of it, but finally the Hampton Inn people came up with a solution. They have maintained the core of the older house, rehabilitated it and added on a discrete and tasteful modern addition for rooms that all of you had a chance to see today. The grounds may not be quite as impressive as they were in Mrs. Mason’s day—the marble statues and the maze are gone—but they are beautifully maintained and the formal boxwood circle is still intact, as are many of the old and gracious trees. The Inn reinstated the original entrance approach off of Nelson Street with attractive plantings. And here we are, again enjoying the hospitality of Col Alto as many Lexingtonians did before us. We are grateful to the Hampton Inn for hosting us and letting us see the splendor of one of Lexington’s most important historic residences.





# Three Days in Lexington: The Uninvited Visitors of June 1864

Richard C. Halseth



OUR story begins in May 1864, with the German-born General Franz Sigel fighting at New Market, Virginia. He led the Union's first abortive attempt to move up the Valley to Lynchburg. Sigel was defeated on the fifteenth by a smaller Confederate force led by General John Breckinridge, that included the VMI cadets.

By June 1864, the Civil War was in its fourth year. In the eastern theater: General William Tecumseh Sherman was advancing on Atlanta; General Ben Butler was moving on Petersburg; General Ulysses S. Grant was leapfrogging around Richmond in one of the most brilliant moves in military history; and General David Hunter was marching toward Lynchburg. The Republican party had just nominated Abraham Lincoln for a second term. Although the Confederacy had suffered major defeats the year before at Vicksburg and Gettysburg and was being squeezed around Richmond, it was still a very dangerous opponent, far from being defeated.

Lincoln had recently given Grant overall command of the Union armies, and Grant had begun to implement his grand strategy of maintaining pressure on as many fronts as possible. He recognized that the South could not readily replace men or materials, and a war of constant

---

**Richard C. Halseth** is a local Civil War historian who has studied Stonewall Jackson's Shenandoah Valley campaign and the later campaigns by U.S. Generals Hunter and Sheridan. He has contributed articles on each of these campaigns to several Civil War encyclopedias published in 2000 and 2002. He has also served as an officer of the Historical Society and a docent at the Stonewall Jackson House. His presentation was made on October 25, 1999, in Nichols Engineering Building Auditorium at VMI.



*David Hunter (1802-86)*

pressure and attrition would, in time, destroy the South's ability to wage war. His eastern army had been in constant contact with Lee at the Wilderness (May 5-7), Spotsylvania (May 8-12), and Cold Harbor (June 1-3). His losses were terrific. But for the Federals, men and material were replaceable.

Included in Grant's strategy was a move up the Shenandoah Valley. After the humiliating debacle at New Market, Grant had to replace Sigel. He selected Major General David Hunter. General Hunter was a free-soiler and a staunch antislavery man. Born in 1802 in Washington, D.C., he grew up a Virginian and graduated from West Point in 1822. In mid-1862 he became commander of the Department of the South, covering the Atlantic seacoast area that included Florida and the major cities of Charleston and Savannah.

While there, he embarrassed President Lincoln by issuing the first emancipation proclamation. This was not within his authority and caused Lincoln much consternation and embarrassment. He had Hunter rescind the edict.

Even before coming to the Valley, Hunter was despised by the South. He was a 5 ft. 8 inch package of what Confederate commanders viewed as an atrocious dispenser of fire and fury to the defenseless. Robert E. Lee nourished a bitter animosity toward him long after the war had closed. One valley resident exclaimed, "Can I say 'God forgive him'? Were it possible for human lips to raise his name heavenward, angels would thrust the foul thing back again. The curses of thousands will follow him through all time, and brand upon Hunter infamy, infamy." The Yankees were not too fond of him either, nor were some members of his family who lived in the lower Shenandoah Valley. He burned two of their homes for good measure. Someone described him as the highest-ranking pyromaniac in the Federal Army.

Grant wanted Hunter to destroy General Lee’s supplies and cut his communications. Lee’s major base was Lynchburg, which was the junction of three railroads and a canal. On May 25, 1864, Grant sent a message to Hunter through his chief of staff, General Henry W. Halleck, that read: “If Hunter can possibly get to Charlottesville and Lynchburg, he should do so living on the country. The railroads and canal should be destroyed beyond possibility of repairs for weeks. Completing this he could find his way back to his original base, or from about Gordonsville join this army.” Hunter and several of his officers considered these orders as discretionary.

General Hunter’s command, the Army of West Virginia, was a newly named consolidation of the Army of the Shenandoah that included about 8,000 effectives under General Sullivan plus the Army of the Kanawha under General George Crook with about 12,000 men—a total of 20,000 infantry and artillery. In addition there were about 5,000 cavalry under General William Averill and General Alfred Duffie, altogether about 25,000 troops. About 7,000 were posted at the home base of Harpers Ferry and points in between, however, leaving about 18,000 for field operations.

After winning a small battle at Piedmont, Virginia, and decimating the Virginia Central Railroad and warehouses at Staunton, Hunter’s army left for Lexington early on June 10, going by four routes. Averill and Crook went via the Brownsburg road. At Newport, Averill left the main road and went west toward Walkers Creek Road. Crook went as



*William Averill*



*George Crook*



*Alfred Nattie Duffie*



*John McCausland*

far as Brownsburg. Hunter had his headquarters with General Sullivan, and they moved south by the Greenville road, camping at Midway (Steeles Tavern). General Duffie moved east with his cavalry to the edge of the Blue Ridge.

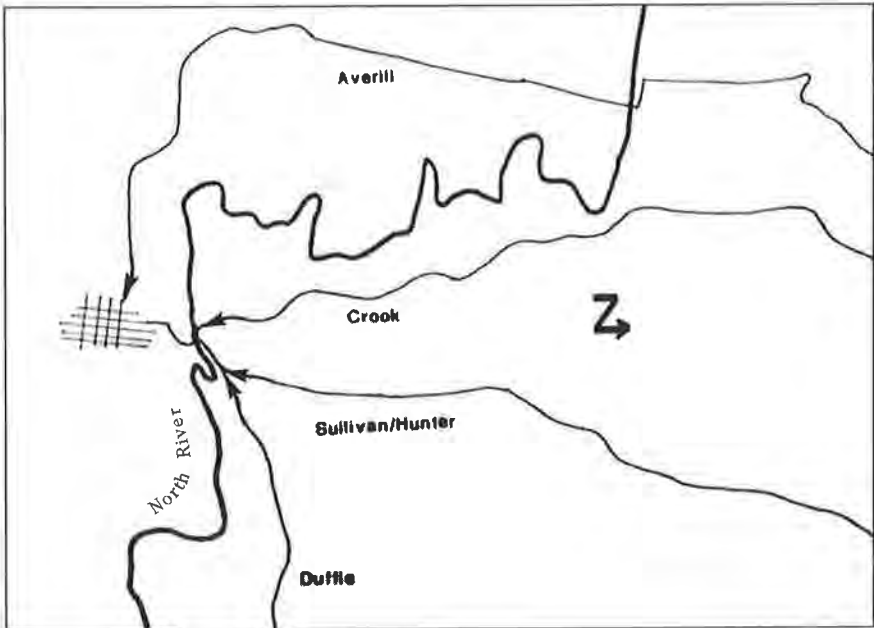
Opposing these forces was General John McCausland, whom the Confederates had recently promoted to brigadier. He had only a small contingent of cavalry and mounted infantry—about 1,500 men total. His orders were to harass and delay the Union troops, which he did effectively. This action caused them to pause several times and deploy for battle or to remove obstructions from the road. McCausland concentrated his efforts on Crook's troops coming in from Brownsburg.

On the night of June 10th, a Friday, Averill camped several miles west of Brownsburg at the home of Reverend James Morrison on Hays Creek Road near the intersection with East Field Road. Here Averill, on orders from Hunter, hung a civilian from a tree in back of the house. His name was David Craig and he had killed a Union soldier who ransacked his house in Lewisburg. On the morning of the eleventh, Averill moved through Rockbridge Baths where he forded the North River and moved on Lexington from the west.

Crook's troops camped at Brownsburg. Some camped as far east as the Sterrett farm (about a mile). Mary Lipscomb, who was born at this farm, told a family story about the Union army encamped in their yard near Hays Creek. One or more of the teenage girls in the house was reported to have yelled out the window "Hooray for Jeff Davis" at the Federal troops. This caused much concern by the lady of the house about retribution.

Crook moved down what is now state route 252 (the Brownsburg Turnpike) from Brownsburg to state route 39 (the Maury River Road). Hunter and Sullivan moved through Fairfield, burning several mills. In the history of *The Brick Church on Timber Ridge*, George Diehl talked about smoke from the burning mill at Fairfield heralding the enemy's progress to the anxious hearts at Timber Ridge. Recorded in the session book was a dramatic picture of the invasion.

Saturday morning dawned. A few old men, helpless females and young boys were all that remained to face the disastrous day. Hearts trembled, before unaccustomed to fear, and many a father trembled in the dis-



*Hunter's approach to Lexington, June 11, 1864.*

tance as the dear objects of home, helpless and unprotected, passed before his mind. Our sanctuary stood in view of the passing enemy and although the inscription upon the tablet was approached and read by groups of officers its inner structure was untouched and unmolested. On Sunday the church bell gave no cheerful sound to the breeze as usual.

During this time, General Duffie's cavalry stayed to the east trying to interrupt the rail line from Charlottesville to Lynchburg. "For a week Lexington had been in a state of great excitement. Refugees from Staunton had started pouring in on June 7th on stages and wagons. Everybody was in alarm." Many citizens sent their livestock, horses, valuables, wagon loads of provisions, and slaves to the mountains for safe keeping. Many families of VMI officers brought their goods and clothes to private homes.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the war, Robert E. Lee, moved his silver into hiding near Brownsburg, where it was safety kept for him. This was long before the Lees had any idea of living here and before Hunter's raiders swept down the Valley. The old Sergeant at VMI took the Lee silver, which was packed in two large chests, and buried it in a safe place known only to himself. Ultimately the sight of the burial was located on the north side of Sterrett Road about two miles east of

Brownsburg, across from the Hampsey home. There it was found in 1865 after the arrival of the Lees. It was "safe and sound but black with mould and damp, useless for the time," wrote the General's son, Robert.

According to David Hunter Strother, General Hunter's cousin and chief of staff, Sullivan's division arrived from Fairfield at midday and found General Crook in front of Lexington. McCausland's men had burned the wooden covered bridge over the North River and a sharp skirmish was in progress. McCausland fell back as the Union force multiplied on the hills overlooking VMI. He moved the section of two canon positioned on the island (now Jordan's Point park), back to the northwest corner of the VMI parade ground. These guns were the target of the two Union artillery batteries positioned on Shaner's Hill and another battery on Cameron Hill (now known as Hunter's Hill). Besides burning the bridge, McCausland set up some sharpshooters along the cliffs on the river's edge to harass the Union troops.

Crook sent some men from the 36th Ohio Regiment up the river about three-quarters of a mile to Leyburn's mill, where they found a ford and crossed. At this time, Averill's cavalry, coming from the Kerrs Creek area, was at Mulberry Hill (just west of Woods Creek on what is now US 60). McCausland was flanked by the Federals, and at about 2:30 P.M. he moved south toward Buchanan. The Union troops then floated a pontoon bridge across North River and the rest of Hunter's army moved into and around the town.

During the skirmishing and artillery fire, the VMI cadets were aligned behind the barracks over the parapet in a relatively safe position. One report places them about where Nichols Engineering Building is now. After the battle at New Market, they had returned to Richmond. Upon learning of Hunter's location at Staunton, they started toward Lexington on June 7th via canal boat through Lynchburg, arriving on June 9th. At about 11:30 A.M. on the eleventh, having never fired a shot, the cadets marched back out of town on the Lynchburg-Lexington Turnpike, stopping for the night at Balcony Falls on the James River.

The Union artillery had put several shells into the Institute, and one burst immediately inside one of the barracks' towers. The 6 pounder canon that belonged to the Institute and that the Confederates had positioned at the northwest corner of the parade ground, was dismantled by Union artillery. Reports vary as to how many rounds the Union fired and for how long. The official report from Hunter indicates just a few shots and for only a few minutes. A report from one of the battery commanders claims three hours of action. Several town people reported that somewhere between twenty and forty shells landed in the city and that the shelling went on for several hours. J. Scott Moore, a Confederate cavalryman wrote later in the *Richmond Dispatch* that "the residences of



*Union artillery in action (reenactors in 1992).*

Misses Baxter, Professor John L. Campbell, and others were struck, and two shells pierced the walls of the county jail, but, fortunately, there was no loss of life.” Rev. William S. White of the Lexington Presbyterian Church, who had been Stonewall Jackson’s minister, noted that six shells passed over the parsonage; one exploded in the garden, and one in the stable-yard. Margaret Junkin Preston, living on Preston Street at the end of Lee Avenue reported shells landing in her garden. Her old house still stands although modified and without all the original adjacent land. Several shell impacts were recorded on Main Street in front of the Lexington Presbyterian Church.

Another casualty of war was a young man, Matthew X. White. He had joined the Confederate army early and was captain of the First Rockbridge Cavalry. As a result of a so-called misunderstanding, he resigned and soon joined the 14th Virginia Cavalry as a private. He later placed a substitute in the 14th and returned to his farm, Spring Meadow, about 2.5 miles out the Collierstown Road. The 14th Virginia was part of McCausland’s group, and he rejoined them upon their return to Lexington in front of Hunter’s army. While on duty north of town he shot a local man, John Thorn, who was acting as a guide for Hunter. He bragged about the shooting to a couple of other Confederate soldiers over a drink. It turned out that these “Confederates” were actually Union spies known as Jesse Scouts. When Hunter’s army came into town they found Matthew White at his farm, took him out to Cameron Hill, and executed him as a bushwhacker. His grave is in the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery.

What accommodations were made available to the unwelcome guests? General Crook commandeered the Tucker house (Blandome) at the top of Henry Street hill. Generals Sullivan and Hunter took over the Superintendent's house at VMI, and the troops set up tents everywhere. At this point the pillaging began, which Hunter did not discourage. In the words of Margaret Preston—Stonewall Jackson's sister-in-law and wife of Col. J. T. L. Preston, a founder and professor at VMI—on Saturday, June 11th:

Evening: Our fears have all been realized; the enemy is upon us, and is in pursuit of McCausland, who left the town about an hour before they entered. About ten o'clock this morning, McCausland burned the bridge as the enemy approached it; he then began to fire upon them. We have been shelled in reply all day; one shell exploding in our orchard, a few yards beyond us, our house being just in their range, as they threw them at the retreating Confederates. The people from the lower part of the town fled from their dwellings, and our house was filled with women and children. I have distributed some of T. J. Jackson's blackberry wine, which I have always forborne to open, among the frightened and almost fainting ladies. About 4 o'clock the head of the Yankee column came in sight. For two hours there was one continuous stream of cavalry riding at a fast trot, and several abreast, passing out at the top of the town. Then the infantry began to pour in; these remained behind, and, with cavalry who came after, flooded the town. They began to pour into our yard and kitchen, half a dozen at a time, and I hesitated not to speak in the most firm and commanding tone to them. At first, they were content to receive bacon, two slices apiece; but they soon became insolent; demanded the smokehouse key, and told me they would break the door unless I opened it. Some rushed down the cellar steps and seized the newly churned butter there, and made off.

Sunday Morning, June 12th: A day I will never forget. I slept undisturbed during the night, but was called downstairs early this morning by the servants who told me the throng of soldiers could not be kept out of the house. They came into the dining room, and began to carry away the china. They then demanded arms; we got the old shot guns and gave them; these they broke up, and left parts of them in the yard; broke into the cellar; carried off a firkin of lard hidden there; a keg of molasses, and whatever they could find. They seized our breakfast, and even snatched the toasted bread and egg that had been begged. My children were crying for something to eat; I had nothing to give them but crackers. They carried off the coffee pot and everything they could lay their hands on.

Monday Morning, June 13th- We were told the house was to be searched as some of our neighbors' had been. I forgot that I had hidden Jackson's sword in a dark loft above the portico. At one o'clock last



night, I crept up there as stealthily as a burglar, and brought it down. I have hidden it in Anna Jackson's piano. With great trouble we carried it under our clothes that sword that had flashed victoriously over many a battlefield and finally concealed it in an outhouse.

Elizabeth Randolph Preston Allan, daughter of Col. Preston and step-daughter of Margaret Junkin Preston, noted in her reminiscences:

and what of Jackson's sword? All that anxious day, we women carried it under our skirts—that hero blade which had flashed victoriously over many a battle field! Phoebe [her sister], being taller than I, could manage better, but we took turns, even young Elizabeth felt the touch of valourous steel against her maiden thigh. We finally concealed it in an outhouse.

Up from the Preston home on Lee Avenue, there were and still are four grand homes on the west side. All four homes were subjected to intrusion by the Federal troops. Rose Page Pendleton, living on Lee Ave. (then Jackson Avenue) in the second house south of Nelson Street in the rectory of the Grace Episcopal Church, was the daughter of Brigadier General William Nelson Pendleton. The General was an 1830 West Point graduate and Lee's Chief of Artillery. Her brother was Col. Sandy Pendleton, once Stonewall Jackson's chief of staff, then serving Jubal Early in the same capacity. She described how at 4:15 P.M. on the 11th:

the vile rabble came scampering over the hills in swarms, and the feelings of the poor Lexington proper may better be imagined than described. Three houses hoisted white flags in token of surrender. They locked all the doors except the front at which they kept guard. The first who came asked for something to eat Ma gave them all the bread and buttermilk she had, and a shoulder of ham which had been cooked for our Sunday dinner. They were as insolent as possible and cursed and swore, vowed they would have anything and everything they wanted, but still Ma was so firm and we showed so plainly that we were not afraid of them, that they were forced to go without further intimidating us. They searched in like manner over everything at Colonel Reid's and Captain Moore's. I ought not to say 'in like manner,' for they behaved much worse that Saturday evening at those houses than they did here. At Colonel Reid's they broke into the smoke house and carried off 1500 lbs. of bacon, took from the cellar five barrels of flour, all the preserves, buttermilk and lard, besides boys' and servants' clothing, which they tore up. At Captain Moore's they went all over the house though they stole very little, finding scarcely anything. We sat on the porch, while the servants baked bread for them in the kitchen. Three ladies of the house saved uniforms by wearing them under their dresses. Miss Pendleton advised that the wretches stole much less from us than our neighbors. A few of the cooking utensils were carried off and one man who was barefooted got into the dining room without being heard, took

the pillow case off the lounge, and filled it about half full of flour from the same barrel which had been broken into the evening the Yankees came.

Mrs. McDonald reported in her memoirs an incident at Mrs. Elizabeth Compton's house on the south side of Washington Street across from the Episcopal Church. She said that as an officer was going through Mrs. Compton's house, Miss Lizzie was leading the way upstairs, when suddenly a string broke and a shower of spoons and forks came raining down the steps from under her hoops. The officer was greatly amused, and kindly helped her pick them up and gave them back to her.

General Averill camped at the Presbyterian parsonage. On Sunday, Rev. White took time to talk to some troops. He recorded with astonishment and pain the fact that he never saw or heard of a chaplain, nor could he discover that a hymn was sung, a prayer offered, or any form of worship observed through all that holy day.

David Strother stated that when he and General Hunter came into town on the afternoon of the eleventh they rode directly to the Institute and found the sack already far advanced. Soldiers, servants, and riffraff were disputing over the plunder. He noted that the private trunks of the cadets seemed to be quite fat and profitable, reporting that one soldier got one hundred dollars in gold from one of them. The plunderers came out loaded with beds, carpets, cut velvet chairs, mathematical glasses and instruments, stuffed birds, charts, books, papers, arms, cadet uniforms and hats in the most ridiculous confusion.

Superintendent Francis H. Smith of VMI, in his report to the Board of Visitors in July 1864, stated that in addition to the burned buildings and destroyed apparatus, etc., that

Every public document connected with the operations of the institute, found in my office, was destroyed or removed, My private library was looted of many of its most valuable volumes, and the portraits of Ex-Governors McDowell, Wise and Letcher, which occupied prominent positions in it, were removed. The house of our poorest operatives, including seamstresses, laundresses and laborers, were searched, in common with those of the citizens generally, and some of these persons were left in a destitute and almost starving condition. Our shoe shop was despoiled of all of its leather and unfinished work, and the shoe lasts, implements and benches were there wantonly destroyed.

Jim Gaines, in a history of the VMI library, reports that in 1862 the VMI records listed over 2,900 books. The Union soldiers took many of these and some were later found along the roads out of town. Soldiers could not begin to carry anything of size or weight on the march, so many items were left along the road. On Wednesday, July 6, the *Lexington Gazette* was back in business after having their principal press broken

and type scattered about the area. There was a plea in the newspaper, under the heading “Lost Books,” which read:

John W. Fuller Esq. has very kindly offered to take charge of the books belonging to any of the college, or Institute libraries or to individuals and which have been left any where in town or country. Any one who can get possession of stray volumes, will confer a favor upon the owners by leaving them with Mr. Fuller at the Franklin Hall. Many of the valuable books both from the College and Institute have been picked up and can be recovered if those who find them will act honestly.

Interestingly a few of the thieves had remorse in later years and returned the books. The last book came back to VMI in 1982—118 years later.

Hunter’s men ransacked public and private homes, but what else did they destroy while in the Lexington area? The cannon shot hit some homes, but the damage must have been minor. The Federals burned the warehouses and mill by the bridge at Jordan’s Point. The iron works at Buena Vista Furnace were burned by Averill’s troopers at Hunter’s direction. It never operated again.

The barracks at VMI were fired, as were two professors’ homes plus the mess hall. VMI was considered a military target as not only had the cadets fought at New Market a month before, but the “West Point of the South” had provided 425 of the thousand or so trained Confederate officers and about 25 of its generals. Major and Mrs. William Gilham occupied the home on the VMI post that is now the Commandant’s quarters. Hunter’s officers told Mrs. Gilham to get her furniture out as they would burn the house the next morning. They considered their action proper because it was a state building. Moreover, Mrs. Gilham was a soldier’s daughter and wife and sister of a Confederate officer. The Superintendent’s house was spared as General Smith’s daughter was very ill a month after childbirth and Hunter decided to show some compassion. General Hunter, General Sullivan, and several other officers occupied the house while in Lexington. VMI rebuilt the burned buildings and later moved the three homes back toward the river when the parade ground was expanded.

Aware of Hunter’s approach from Staunton, former governor John Letcher left town the evening of June 10, heading for Richmond via Bedford County. Late Saturday evening, June 11, soldiers of the 9th West Virginia Infantry, prowling and plundering, entered an abandoned printing office and there found the handwritten manuscript of a proclamation from Letcher encouraging the local population to engage in guerrilla tactics and bushwhack any Yankees they could. Hunter was incensed by the proclamation and ordered the Letcher home burned. This was done on the morning of the twelfth.



*Governor John Letcher's home on Main Street, Lexington, c. 1860.*



*John Letcher*

Washington College, a hotbed of prewar secessionist sentiment, was not exempt from the depredations of the Union army. Sadly, VMI moved many of its library books and other items to Washington College for safe keeping. They did not think that a private college, having no military association, would be harmed. Finally only the pleas of a member of the Board of Trustees saved the buildings from the torch. The college did, however, experience substantial losses as most of the windows and sashes were knocked out and the buildings used to stable horses. Here again they pillaged the library,

destroyed valuable scientific apparatus and ran off with furniture. In fact the only library to survive was that of the Franklin Society.

Back at VMI, Hunter's men carted off the famous statue of George Washington. This, a recent addition to the Institute, was a copy of the statue created by French sculptor Antoine Houdon that stands in the Virginia capital. The initial thought was to move the statue to West Point, but David Hunter Strother suggested that it be presented to the governor of the new state of West Virginia in Wheeling. And so it was.

There are other interesting antidotes worth retelling about the occupation of Lexington. Stonewall Jackson had died only thirteen months prior to Hunter's Raid. Jackson was not only revered by the South but much respected by the North. There are several stories about Federal soldiers passing the cemetery on Main street and saluting his grave. An account describes a Confederate flag—said to have been sewed with silk, gold, and silver threads by an English countess and brought to the Confederacy by a blockade-runner—flying from a tall pine flagpole near the grave of Stonewall Jackson. When the Federals saw the flag, they sent a detail to take it, but the movement was a little too tardy. A youth, seeing the overlooked flag, had gone to the cemetery and lowered it. Detaching it from the halyards, he sprang into the saddle of this horse and, as the Federals appeared, he dashed away, flaunting the flag in the face of the baffled enemy. Even if apocryphal, it makes for a dramatic story.

The 18th Connecticut Infantry regimental history noted:

When Hunter's army entered Lexington the rebel flag was found flying on a staff at the head of Jackson's grave. It was taken down and during the two days' stay of the Union forces, the flagstaff, and the head and footboard of his grave were fairly whittled away and carried off for relics. The house of Jackson was pointed out, as well as other places of note, owing to their relations to the Rebellion.

Margaret Preston tells of a conversation with a Union soldier who had in his pocketbook some leaves which he had gathered from Jackson's grave, which he said he would keep as sacred momentos. Another guard at her house said: "We think as much of him as you do." Teasing her for some trifle that had belonged to Jackson she gave them each an autograph.

Of interest concerning Hunter's raid are some of the other participants who had intriguing backgrounds and lived fascinating lives.

General Alfred Nattie Duffie, who commanded the cavalry column guarding the passes of the Blue Ridge, was the son of a French sugar beet refiner who had served in the French dragoons. He deserted and came to America, where he married the daughter of a wealthy and influential New York family. He spun elaborate tales about his background and experiences in the French Army, and so convincing were his stories that they have been accepted as fact until recently. When the Civil War broke out, Duffie received a commission as captain in the 2d New York Cavalry. After the war, he was U.S. Consul at Cadiz. Born in 1835, he died in 1880.

General William Averill was born in 1832 and graduated from West Point in 1855, twenty-sixth in a class of thirty-four. Wounded in the Indian Wars he became a brigadier general in 1862. In 1866 he was appointed U.S. Consul General to Canada, and in 1869 he became pres-



*David Hunter Strother*



*Houdon's Washington statue at VMI shortly after its return in 1866.*

ident of a large manufacturing company. Averill was a prominent inventor in several industrial fields, including steel, asphalt, paving, and electrical power. He acquired considerable wealth.

General George Crook was born in 1829 and graduated thirty-eighth in his 1852 class of forty-three at West Point. In 1857 he was wounded while serving in the Pacific Northwest. Appointed brigadier in 1862, he was at Antietam and Chickamauga. After the war he earned the reputation of being the most successful Indian fighter the army ever produced. Known to his men during the Civil War as “Uncle George” and called “Gray Fox” by the Indians. He died in 1890.

Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes commanded the 1st Brigade, 2d Infantry Division. He later became governor of Ohio and went on to become the nineteenth president of the United States in 1877. Hayes was not happy with actions of General Hunter and so wrote in his memoirs.

Captain William McKinley was a twenty-one-year-old who served under Colonel Hays. He became the twenty-fifth president of the United States in 1897. After the war he served fourteen years in the House of Representatives from Ohio and was the state governor from 1892 to 1896. On September 6, 1901, an assassin shot him and he died on the fourteenth.

David Hunter Strother was a cousin of General Hunter and served as his chief of staff. He was an accomplished artist and writer. He con-



*Henry A. duPont*

sulted Hunter on the burning of VMI and encouraged the removal of Washington's statue. After the war he became the Adjutant General of Virginia, a position which caused him to sit on the Board of Visitors of VMI. It was he who initiated efforts to return the Houdon statue of Washington to VMI from West Virginia. The Federal government and the state of West Virginia returned the statue in September 1866.

In 1914 the issue of compensating VMI for the losses sustained during the Civil War came before the U.S. Senate's Committee on Claims. Senate Bill 44 proposed restitution of \$137,000 plus interest to satisfy all claims by VMI for the damage and destruction of its library, scientific

apparatus, and the quarters of its professors. The bill specifically excluded the cadet barracks from the restitution. Interestingly, Senator Nathan P. Bryan from Florida, himself a Confederate veteran, chaired the committee; another committee member was Senator Thomas S. Martin of Virginia, who was a VMI cadet captain with McCausland's troops at Lexington. The most interesting fact is that a senator from Delaware introduced the proposition to the committee: none other than Henry A. duPont, the same duPont whose guns helped destroy the barracks at VMI. Senator duPont served two terms in the Senate and was a very successful gentleman. A West Point graduate, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for action at Cedar Creek, four months after the raid on Lexington. He also was credited with saving the Greenbrier resort at White Sulphur Springs from the torch. Hunter, after retreating from Lynchburg, passed through there, and Captain duPont had to use a great deal of diplomacy to get Hunter to rescind his order to burn the facility. After the war, duPont's first assignment was commandant of Fortress Monroe. His most famous prisoner was Jefferson Davis. Remaining in the Army until 1875 he resigned to become president of the Wilmington and Western Railroad. In 1906, he was elected to the U.S. Senator from Delaware; he served ten years. He died in 1926 at age eighty-eight.

One of the most interesting participants in the raid was General John McCausland himself. Born in 1837, he was an 1853 VMI graduate, standing at the top of his class of twenty-two. He then studied at the Uni-

versity of Virginia before returning to VMI to teach mathematics. He commanded a detachment of cadets at John Brown's execution. Most of his Confederate service was in western Virginia although he did see the outskirts of Washington, D.C., as part of Jubal Early's raid. Refusing to surrender at Appomattox, he led his brigade through the Federal lines. After the war, he spent several years in Europe and Mexico before retiring to his (West) Virginia farm. The irony is that he protected his treasured VMI that Hunter burned and then he, a few months later, burned Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, destroying over five hundred buildings and homes. McCausland died in 1927.

On the 14th of June 1864 the whirlwind passed. It must have been like three days in hell for the residents. But not everything was destroyed as evidenced by the first issue of the *Lexington Gazette* published after Hunter left. Dated Wednesday, July 6, 1864, it noted that "The vandals, whilst they have destroyed much, have left untouched, property of untold value, the growing crops of wheat, and rye, and corn and hay, have not been injured by them." Rev. White noted, "On the whole, with the exception of the buildings burned and the robberies inflicted on the store-rooms and wardrobes of many families, the damage was as slight as could have been expected from a hostile army of twenty thousand men encamped for three days in and immediately around a village of twenty-five hundred inhabitants."

Margaret Preston, in her diary dated June 16th, after Hunter's army left, said, "As after a storm has passed, we go out and look abroad to see the extent of the damage done, so now, having been slept with the besom of destruction, we look around, as soon as the calm has come, and try to collect our scattered remnants of property, and see whether we have anything to live on."

In the larger scale of the Civil War, the action at Lexington was insignificant. It did serve to incense the Southern population, however, because of its wanton devastation of what was considered nonmilitary property. When you consider the devastation caused later by Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas, Sheridan's scorching of the Shenandoah Valley, and McCausland's burning of Chambersburg in late 1864 this was just the beginning. Warfare was no longer just between soldiers.



# Reconstruction and Redemption in Lexington

David W. Coffey



ALTHOUGH the Civil War has been covered amply by historians writing about the Valley of Virginia, the immediate postwar years have received scant attention. This chapter fills a part of this gap through an examination of the Reconstruction period in the small Rockbridge County town of Lexington. While a troubled time politically and socially, Reconstruction was, for Lexington, a period of considerable prosperity. Lexington's economic recovery was both rapid and complete. Reports of Freedmen's Bureau agents, local newspaper accounts, courthouse records, files of Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute, and correspondence of students, townspeople, and northern schoolmarmes sent to Lexington to instruct the freedman—all shed light on Lexington's Reconstruction history, which divides into several phases. After an initial period of uncertainty about the extent to which Lexington's racial norms were to be reconstructed, a group of students and townspeople, in league with the local newspaper,

---

David W. Coffey, who teaches history at the Virginia Military Institute, is a graduate of Davidson College and holds a masters degree in U.S. history from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Virginia. A long-time member of the Society's Board, he presented this paper on November 15, 1999.

This essay was published in 2000 in Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra, eds., *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900*, by the University of Tennessee Press. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the press, which holds the copyright.

conspired, in 1868, to redeem the town for continued white domination and to return as closely as possible to the *status quo antebellum*. While focusing their efforts primarily on Lexington, the town's cadre of "Redeemers" also extended their efforts from time to time into outlying parts of the county.

Reconstruction was over for Virginia by 1870, with the return to home rule (and white domination) under the Underwood Constitution. Contrary to the intent of its drafters, this document had been adulterated through a postconvention compromise which allowed near-universal white male suffrage in conjunction with black enfranchisement. The statewide Redemption, however, was preceded in communities like Lexington by another form of Redemption, the restoration of white control over the social order. Ironically, Lexington's societal Redemption was effectively completed before the full implications of Congressional Reconstruction politics were realized in the town. White Lexingtonians had suppressed the black population's aspirations for a new order prior to the replacement, in late 1868, of its elected town council by a councilmanic slate appointed by the military commander of Virginia. The final two years of political Reconstruction in Lexington, under this non-elected government, were anticlimactic. The victors in the battle for Lexington already had been determined.

In many respects, Lexington was not a typical Shenandoah Valley town. Not only was it the county seat, serving as the legal and commercial center for Rockbridge County, but also it was a college town. Its two academic institutions, Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), provided employment to many locals and stimulated a constant influx of persons not native to the area. Moreover, Lexington's prewar population of approximately two thousand (which included the student bodies of the two colleges) was about two-thirds white and one-third black. About 5 percent of the total population in 1860 had been free blacks, giving Lexington a higher percentage of both free and enslaved African Americans than most other valley communities.<sup>1</sup>

1. Edwin L. Dooley, Jr., "Lexington in the 1860 Census," in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1975-79]* [Lexington, Va.] 9 (1982): 190-91. For additional information on Lexington's black community in the 1850s, see Ellen Eslinger, "Antebellum Liquor Reform in Lexington, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (1991): 162-86. See also William Fitzhugh Brundage, "Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," Northern Fellowship Research Papers, 1983, Mary Moody Northern Library, Stonewall Jackson House, Lexington, Va.; and Megan Haley, "The African-American Experience in Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson's Lexington" (unpub. paper, 1994); both on file in Mary Moody Northern Library, Stonewall Jackson House, Lexington, Va. For a thorough account of industrial slavery in Rockbridge County,

Unlike neighboring towns to the north in the valley, Lexington had been subjected to but one military attack during the Civil War, and that had come late in the conflict, when Union forces, under the command of Gen. David Hunter, briefly occupied the town, destroyed the buildings of VMI, burned the home of former Gov. John Letcher, and inflicted minor damage on Washington College property. During the war, in fact, Lexington had served as a place of refuge for some wishing to escape areas of the valley and the state which were more frequently the scene of military engagements. One such refugee, Cornelia McDonald, had moved from Winchester to Lexington with her six children in the summer of 1863.<sup>2</sup> Among the last refugees to arrive were a number of displaced freedmen, who, presumably searching for work, assistance, or family members separated from them during years of bondage, set up an encampment in some abandoned buildings at the fairgrounds on the edge of town.<sup>3</sup>

At war's end, the Lexington populace, black and white, was for the moment economically devastated. Even so, Reconstruction soon brought prosperity. In the summer of 1865, Mrs. McDonald's eldest son, Harry, felt compelled to take on work as a day laborer on a nearby farm even though, as his mother remarked, "the thought was terrible . . . of his working for the same wages, and by the side of negroes."<sup>4</sup> However, the economic situation improved quickly and amazingly. Although the 1865 wheat harvest had failed, the other crops did well, providing much-needed income for the rural farmers who used Lexington as their market town.<sup>5</sup> By the fall of 1865, young Harry McDonald was able to leave the fields and enter Washington College when it reopened in its hastily repaired buildings. Robert E. Lee soon accepted an offer to assume the presidency of the college, thus attracting hundreds of additional students.

Local boarding houses, already enjoying the benefits of the rapidly increasing college student trade, were further stressed when VMI reopened before its barracks were fully rebuilt, forcing the cadets also to

---

with some comments about slavery in Lexington, see Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: Norton, 1994).

2. Cornelia Peake McDonald, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865* (Nashville: Cullen and Ghertner Co., 1934), pp. 187-89.

3. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications No. 45).

4. Cornelia McDonald, *Diary with Reminiscences*, p. 263.

5. E. Nash Boney, *John Letcher of Virginia* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 223.

look for accommodations in town. As early as October 1865, the *Lexington Gazette and Banner* proclaimed in an editorial the critical need to construct additional dwellings and commercial buildings, noting that many potential residents and entrepreneurs were being compelled to locate in other communities due to their inability to find lodgings or business property to rent in Lexington.<sup>6</sup> General Lee, taking stock of the situation, urged his college's Board of Trustees, in 1867, to authorize construction of a college boarding house to help meet the demand. By charging a "barely remunerative rate," this operation would also assist in driving down the price of private lodgings in the community.<sup>7</sup>

Townspople found themselves priced out of Lexington's housing market, too. One such resident noted that, late in 1866, "in consequence of high rents & the difficulty of getting a house," he had been compelled to surrender his own lodgings and move in with his father-in-law.<sup>8</sup> Lexington during Reconstruction was a bustling place, and one undergoing a major expansion in population, if not in housing stock. Despite the housing shortage, the population of the town, fueled largely by expansion at the colleges, continued to grow unabated throughout the decade. The 1870 U.S. Census reported that the number of persons residing in Lexington had nearly doubled since 1860. Notably, the ratio of whites to blacks had remained nearly constant since the 1860 count had been taken.<sup>9</sup>

Given the large number of college students resident in the town, the Lexington population, not surprisingly, was much more youthful than most places of similar size. Lexingtonians also were well armed, with all the consequences one might anticipate in an overcrowded and testosterone-laden community. It was a place where confrontations frequently escalated from pushing to shoving to gunfire, and where weapons were readily available to meet challenges to one's honor or status. A Lexington saloon manager estimated in 1867 that many of the town's blacks and "at least two-thirds of the students at Washington College were

6. *Gazette and Banner* (Lexington, Va.), October 4, 1865.

7. R. E. Lee to Board of Trustees, Washington College, June 17, 1867, in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

8. Deposition of M. G. Burgess, January 11, 1867, in Case Papers, *John Letcher and Others v. Thomas L. Perry; John Letcher v. J. K. Edmundson and Others*, in Box 132, File 414, Office of the Clerk of the Court, Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Va.

9. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Manuscript Population Schedules, Rockbridge County, Va.* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, M-593).

armed."<sup>10</sup> When one adds to this mix the social, economic, and political instability brought about by the sudden transfer of nearly one-third of the population from bondage to freedom, the situation in Lexington aptly can be described as volatile.

Most of Lexington's new arrivals were welcomed with open arms by the town's white residents. General Lee, Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury, and the new students and cadets all were seen as splendid additions to the community. There were others, however, whose coming the white citizenry resented and opposed. For example, there were the refugee freedmen who had encamped at the fairgrounds. Although the local overseer of the poor provided the vagrants with some assistance, the Rockbridge Agricultural and Mechanical Society, which owned the ten-acre tract, attempted to demolish the buildings the freedmen were occupying (temporary structures erected there during the war) and to sell the land.<sup>11</sup>

Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, another group of outsiders who were *persona non grata* even more than the freedmen themselves, opposed the plans to evict the freedmen from the fairgrounds. Lexington had been chosen as the headquarters for Freedmen's Bureau personnel assigned to Rockbridge County and the adjoining counties of Alleghany and Bath. Last, but not necessarily least detested, among the unwanted arrivals were several New England teachers who came to Lexington under the auspices of the American Missionary Association to operate schools for the freedmen.

In her diary, wartime refugee Cornelia McDonald recorded the first known encounter of Lexingtonians with the Freedmen's Bureau staff. She wrote that, late one afternoon in May 1865, "a clerky looking man in a round hat and a jaunty coat stepped up on my porch as I stood there and requested in an impudent manner to know which of my sons had torn down a handbill which had been pasted on our garden fence by his order." Thinking that the agent would reconsider the grievousness of the offense when he met the guilty party, she produced the culprit, her eight-year-old son, Roy. Sensing that little Roy was an unreconstructed Rebel, the agent gave him a severe scolding, only to be greeted by Roy's "mocking face and fiery black eyes as they looked up from under the yellow curls." At this precise moment, elder brother Harry returned

10. Deposition of E. A. D. White, February 7, 1867, in Case Papers, *Letcher v. Perry*.

11. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of the Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*; Charles B. Turner, "Agricultural Expositions and Fairs in Rockbridge County, 1828-1891," in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1980-1989]* [Lexington, Va.] 10 (1990): 394.



*This view of Lexington's Main Street was taken about 1865, as evidenced by the fact that the Virginia Military Institute on the hill above the town still shows damage done to the school during the raid on Lexington by Union soldiers in 1864.*

from his day's labor in the fields alongside former slaves and, brandishing his riding whip, ordered the bureau agent off the property.<sup>12</sup>

The McDonalds then resided along a lane connecting the campuses of Washington College and VMI. It was inevitable that similar confrontations would occur between federal personnel and students or cadets. One such early incident was a verbal confrontation, late in 1865, between Captain Robinson, either a Bureau agent or a regular U.S. Army officer, and VMI student Stephen Decatur Barrow, a new cadet who previously had served in the 38th Louisiana Infantry. Robinson took offense at Barrow's insults and reported the matter to Francis H. Smith, VMI's superintendent, who investigated the case and sent Cadet Barrow to make amends to Captain Robinson. Although Barrow continued to deny having used the inflammatory language which had been attributed to him, he did apologize, and Robinson agreed to drop the matter. Superintendent Smith attempted to smooth the troubled waters further with a letter to Robinson reminding him that, previous to the incident, he had, both in personal conversation with cadets and in general orders posted to the entire corps, stressed "the importance of avoid-

<sup>12</sup> Cornelia McDonald, *Diary with Reminiscences*, p. 283.

ing all occasion for disorder or ingallantry, and especially all remarks calculated to reflect on any [federal officials] who were on duty here." Noting that the cadets had "generally" abided by the suggestions he had made, Smith thanked Robinson for having "made allowances for youthful indiscretions" in the Barrow case.<sup>13</sup>

During the next few years, there were numerous incidents involving freedmen, townspeople, and "outsiders" which attracted the attention of Lexington's bureau contingent. Some were as trivial as those involving the McDonald brothers and Cadet Barrow; others were of a much more serious nature.

Both students and teachers in the schools organized in Lexington under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA) were objects of frequent hostility and threats. In March 1866, a black girl was accosted by a young white boy who took offense at her chanting "Uncle Sam is rich enough to send us all to school."<sup>14</sup> A few months later, a young freedman named Eli King was stoned by a white boy on his way to class.<sup>15</sup>

The three AMA teachers likewise were subjected to threats and abuse. One of them, Julia A. Shearman, reported that a local storekeeper had refused to sell her any milk, that she had been cursed by the drunken son of the same shopkeeper while leaving the Presbyterian Church, and that the sexton of the church subsequently had been instructed to inform her that she and the other teachers no longer could occupy the visitors' pew which they had used while attending services. The Washington College students were equally hostile; Miss Shearman reported that they refused to let her pass them on the sidewalks and that they would "stare and laugh at us & make rude remarks as they dare." The AMA schoolhouse also served as the teachers' residence, and Miss Shearman blamed the college men for pelting the building with rocks almost nightly. There were, however, some successes to report; their black students numbered well over a hundred, and the storekeeper's son had apologized when he sobered up (although the Presbyterian Church still was declared off-limits to those of her calling). Moreover, Miss Shearman explained, some white people had actually requested instruction in reading and writing. She had even been asked by a German

13. Francis H. Smith to Captain Robinson, December 24, 1865, in Argosy Collection, Manuscripts Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

14. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, March 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

15. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," July 6, 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

immigrant (“a violent ‘Secesh’ and a negrohater”) to teach his children his native language, which Miss Shearman spoke fluently.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps, though, these successes did not outweigh the hazards of the Lexington work. After enduring a year in the town, Julia Shearman and the other female teacher, Sarah Burt, accepted positions at other AMA schools and left Lexington. Erastus C. Johnston, their male colleague, spent the summer of 1866 at his former home in Newbury, Vermont, before returning to Lexington in the fall of that year, not as a teacher but as a businessman, to operate a mercantile establishment in one part of the building occupied by the freedmen’s school. The work of educating blacks was taken up by others sent by a different organization, the Free Will Baptist Home Missionary Society.<sup>17</sup>

The Freedmen’s Bureau had numerous opportunities while in Lexington to intervene in the local judicial process; on occasion, it conducted its own court. One of the more notable early instances of the Lexington bureau’s involvement in local legal affairs was the case of a freedman who, in April 1866, pressed charges of assault and battery in the local magistrate’s court against three cadets. Captain Carse, the bureau’s agent-in-charge, reported that, since the freedmen “had given the Cadets as good as they sent, the parties were bound over to keep the peace only.” Because the case involved cadets, and since it was the first case ever heard in Lexington where a black person brought suit against whites, most of the students and cadets attended the proceedings. Consequently, these had to be moved to the county courthouse. Carse used the occasion to lecture the assembled student bodies and AMA teachers, and threatened to close the Washington College and VMI unless the disturbances ceased.<sup>18</sup>

Bureau agents and AMA staff alike consistently accused the students and cadets of being the most frequent offenders against themselves and their black clientele. Although the bureau agents reported that the VMI cadets could be heard “at any hour of the day or night singing rebel songs,”<sup>19</sup> they could not have found much fault with the cooperation they received from the leaders of the two colleges. The pattern which had been established by VMI’s superintendent in the Robinson-Barrow

16. Julia A. Shearman to Rev. Samuel Hunt, January 27, 1866, in American Missionary Association (AMA) Papers, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., microfilm.

17. Deposition of Erastus C. Johnston, February 7, 1867, in Case Records, *Letcher v. Perry*.

18. Capt. George B. Carse to Maj. W. Stover How, May 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.

19. Capt. George B. Carse to Capt. R. S. Lacy, August 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.





*This frame structure on Randolph Street, the original portion of which was constructed as a white academy in 1819, served as an African-American schoolhouse in Lexington from 1865 to the 1920s. (Jackson Davis Collection [MSS 3072], Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library.)*

case was followed again and again by both college administrations. Charges would be brought to their attention by the bureau agents. General Lee or VMI's Smith would investigate, remedies would be proposed, and penalties (often expulsion) would be assessed. These actions would be accompanied by statements of regret and promises that efforts would be made to prevent similar occurrences in the future. General Lee investigated such a confrontation at the freedmen's school on the night of Washington's Birthday in 1867, involving several of his students. Initially, four college students were suspected of having perpetrated the incident, but a fifth was discovered by the college to be more culpable, and he was dismissed by the faculty.<sup>20</sup> A year later, Lee rebuffed a suggestion that he intervene in the matter of one of his students leaving unpaid a laundry bill owned to a freedman, but this was an exception to his standard policy of dealing with bureau complaints.<sup>21</sup> In most cases,

20. R. E. Lee to Capt. J. W. Sharp, April 13, 1867, in Lee Papers, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

21. R. E. Lee to Capt. J. W. Sharp, April 13, 1867, in Lee Papers.

Lee and VMI's Francis H. Smith were willing to assist the bureau in its efforts to see that justice was done in matters involving freedmen and students. Quite possibly, they were motivated by a goodness of spirit towards black Lexingtonians, but certainly they also were aware that bad publicity in the northern press would complicate their fundraising campaigns with nonsouthern supporters. Furthermore, there was always the possibility that the bureau might make good on its threats to close down the colleges, should the students continue to harass the freedmen and their advocates.

The most frequent venue for violence in Lexington was its streets and sidewalks. The AMA schoolteachers and their pupils reported being jostled, shoved, and even stoned on their way to and from shops, church, or school. In one case, a young black woman named Mariah was pushed to the ground when she asserted her right to proceed on the sidewalk rather than step aside to let a cadet and his date pass without hindrance.<sup>22</sup> In a case without racial overtones, John L. Ellis, a newly arrived cadet, shot and killed a local citizen in front of the Lexington Hotel, where Ellis was awaiting the opening of the fall term.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes, as in the case of the shooting incident involving Ellis, and in some of the taunting of schoolteachers, excessive consumption of alcohol was a contributing factor.

More often than one might expect, however, sexual mores played a role in instigating interracial violence, for, in Lexington, liquor and firearms were more readily available than female companionship. The ratio of men to women was high, due to the presence of the two all-male colleges, one of whose students reported that Lexington had only forty "blushing maidens" and seventy-nine "old maids" to offer.<sup>24</sup> The AMA schoolteachers were quite perplexed by the frequency with which their female students were accosted by college students or cadets. One of them, Erastus Johnston, wrote, "it seems to be the chief amusement of many of the Students at Washington College and the Military Institute here to seduce young colored girls. And they (the girls) never having known a will of their own, submit to the brutal desires of these monsters who call themselves men." The intractability of the problem is shown by Johnston's assertion that, if every girl in the night-school class who slept

22. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (1st letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

23. *Gazette and Banner*, August 1, 1866. Interestingly, Ellis had been discharged from Confederate service because his mental instability was thought to be a danger to his fellow soldiers. See Dr. James T. Ellis to Francis H. Smith, August 6, 1866, in VMI Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va.

24. *Southern Collegian* (Washington College, Lexington, Va.), April 9, 1870.

with students or cadets had been expelled, there would have been none left.<sup>25</sup>

The sexual appetites of the student population may have exacerbated the interracial conflict in Lexington during the immediate post-bellum period. It almost certainly explains the murder of Patrick Thompson, a freedman, by John C. Johnson, a law student at Washington College. As recounted by a Freedmen's Bureau agent in the *New York Tribune*, the freedman happened upon the student while the college lad was conversing with a black woman on Main Street. Thinking that the student "probably meant to accomplish her ruin, the black man stood a moment to watch." Words were exchanged, and the freedman refused to move on, as Johnson commanded him to do. The student then ducked into a nearby house where some of his classmates lived and returned with a revolver, pursued the freedman, and shot him. According to the *Gazete and Banner's* version of the events, the freedman's deathbed description of his attacker did not fit law student Johnson and this resulted in Johnson's acquittal.<sup>26</sup> The *Gazette and Banner* conveniently ignored an early article it had published, which described Johnson's capture near Fishersville, some forty miles from Lexington. The editors thus had to offer no explanation as to why Johnson, if innocent and totally uninvolved, would have been apprehended on the run.<sup>27</sup>

In 1867, political events transpired that helped set the stage for the denouement of Reconstruction the following year. In a close election held that January, the incumbent mayor, J. K. Edmundson, and councilmen were rejected by the voters in favor of an insurgent slate led by the former governor, John Letcher. While it is probable that the Letcher contingent represented a somewhat more moderate, conciliatory, and cooperationist faction than the incumbent town government, the voting seems to have turned more on matters of personality rather than of ideology or philosophy. Edmundson and the incumbent council, however, refused to turn over their offices to the victors, compelling the Letcher slate to ask the local court to enforce the voters' mandate. Local Judge Hugh Sheffey accepted most of the challenges brought against the Letcher voters and awarded the victory to the incumbent council and mayor. It was Sheffey's contention that the electoral commissioner had the ultimate right to decide which of the potential voters were eligible to exercise the franchise. Otherwise, he asserted, anyone, including

25. Erastus C. Johnston to the Rev. Samuel Hunt, April 30, 1866, in AMA Papers.

26. *New York [City] Tribune*, November 25, 1866, quoted in *Gazette and Banner*, December 19, 1866.

27. Capt. George B. Carse to Capt. R. L. Lacy, August 1, 1866, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

“women, minors, negroes, [or] indians,” could maintain their right to vote, thus causing elections to become, in the judge’s words, “a farce.”<sup>28</sup>

Judge Sheffey’s decision was still fresh in the minds of Lexingtonians, and the furor resulting from the election had not yet quieted down, when, in March 1867, Virginia was transformed into Military District Number One, and a new phase of Reconstruction began. The new order offered the franchise to black voters, a prospect which alarmed white Lexingtonians. Even if universal male suffrage was the end result and no whites were disfranchised, the ratio of black to white voters in Lexington would approach fifty-fifty, since the largely underage student population would remain ineligible to vote. With a white electorate divided as a consequence of the recent mayoral election, and with the likelihood of a substantial black electorate soon to be enfranchised, Maj. James B. Dorman, an ex-Whig, prewar Unionist, and Douglas supporter in 1860, joined the new Freedmen’s Bureau agent-in-charge, Capt. J. W. Sharp, in an appearance before a freedmen’s meeting at the local fairgrounds. All the speeches were models of moderation, and the event went well except for one brief interruption by a drunken college student, who was led away by some of his classmates. Sharp told the freedmen “to cultivate friendly relations with the whites; to be sober and industrious; to respect their contracts; and to be respectful and courteous in demeanor”; and to register and vote. For his part, Major Dorman “urged confidence and harmony between whites and blacks . . . [and] alluded to the wonderful change that had taken place in their relations.” Dorman concluded his remarks by commending Captain Sharp for his comments and suggesting that his audience should “confide in the whites among whom they live as their best friends.”<sup>29</sup>

Major Dorman’s remarks reflect the activism identified by Jack Maddex in his *Virginia Conservatives, 1867–1869*, as one of several responses by white politicians to the challenges presented by Reconstruction. These Virginia Conservatives (i.e., Democrats and most former Whigs) were, Maddex reports, divided into several camps. One disdained to participate in a political process which now seemed irredeemably despoiled by the participation of carpetbaggers and African

28. Case Papers, *Letcher v. Perry*; and Judge Hugh Sheffey, February 22, 1867, re *John Letcher and Others v. Thomas L. Perry; John Letcher v. J. K. Edmundson and Others*, in Rockbridge County Law Order Book (1852–67), pp. 544–47, Office of the Clerk of the Court, Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Va.

29. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, May 31, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*; Ollinger Crenshaw, “Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861,” in *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society [1946–48]* [Lexington, Va.] 3 (1949): 7.

Americans, many of whom were Radical Republicans. A second group was pragmatically willing to cooperate with Republicans (especially the more moderate Republicans), on the assumption that, as the party in control nationally, only the Republicans could grant wished-for concessions. The third faction (the group to which Dorman belonged) believed that a sufficient number of black voters could be persuaded to support their former masters to offset the ballots cast by Radicals of both races.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout 1867, Captain Sharp, in his ongoing correspondence with Gen. Orlando Brown, the Freedmen's Bureau regional commissioner, gave a detailed account of how Lexington was reacting to the new circumstances brought about by Military Reconstruction. For the most part, his accounts indicate that whites were behaving in a manner conducive to forming an alliance with the black citizenry. Sharp commented favorably upon the local magistrates' handling of cases involving blacks,<sup>31</sup> and he singled Major Dorman out for praise for his attempts to defend several freedmen on trial for stealing some bacon. Later he noted that many of the black population did not adequately appreciate Dorman's efforts on their behalf.<sup>32</sup> By August, Sharp was telling Brown that the testimony of black witnesses, even against white defendants, was being given full credence by the local courts and that some of the white citizenry were complaining that the magistrates were more likely to look kindly on black defendants than white ones.<sup>33</sup> in addition to being a calculated move by white Lexingtonians to court black support, this turn-about also was in part a response to the strengthened hand given the Freedmen's Bureau under Military Reconstruction. For example, Sharp indicated to his superior that he was pursuing the case of J. C. McKenzie (who had been found guilty of willfully shooting a black man, William Lusk, but declared innocent of the associated charge of malicious intent to kill) primarily to enhance the bureau's image as the enforcer of the legal rights of freedmen. He hoped especially to impress the strength of his position upon the local college students, "who require peculiar management as they have a strong esprit du corps among them, are freed from the restraining influences of home and its responsibilities,

30. Jack Maddex, *Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. xxiii-xxiv, 50-55.

31. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (1st letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

32. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, April 30, 1867 (2d letter), *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*. Dorman was a noted Lexington Unionist before the Civil War. For a description of his Unionist activities prior to 1861, see Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861," pp. 7-14.

33. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, August 31, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

and can leave the neighborhood at any moment should any misconduct on their part call for such action.”<sup>34</sup> As subsequent events would prove, it was, in fact, the student population which would take the lead in frustrating hopes for black advancement in Lexington. The large number of young men—many of them veterans of Confederate service, freed from parental control and able to remove themselves quickly from the community should circumstances require—is one reason why social Redemption was accomplished so quickly and effectively in Lexington.

By the end of 1867, Sharp reported that relations between the races in Lexington had deteriorated, due to pressures resulting from the political campaigns waged during the first year of Military Reconstruction. The efforts of Major Dorman and other white leaders to secure black electoral support had failed abysmally. In the fall election for delegates to the upcoming Constitutional Convention, which was to consider the critical question of who deserved the franchise, only 7 of 132 black voters had cast ballots for the Conservative ticket; the other 125 African-American votes had been given to the Radical Republicans, who had been successful in convincing black voters that it was not in their interest to entrust their future to the Dorman camp. Immediately after the election, there had been talk among white employers of dismissing those of their workers who had voted with the Radicals. Even though these threats had not been carried out, according to Sharp, talk persisted in the community of two kinds of immigration (one bringing whites into the area and one forcing blacks to leave). This was causing “a great ferment” among the freedmen. That the Imboden Company, the most prominent firm engaged in schemes to import white laborers to the southern states, opened a branch in Lexington, corroborates Sharp’s assessment of the interest in increased white immigration.<sup>35</sup>

All in all, Captain Sharp was not optimistic about the situation developing in Lexington after the autumn elections. He reported that, even though, to the casual observer, the community seemed tranquil, he felt duty-bound “to look under the surface of society and watch the passions that are seething beneath.”<sup>36</sup> Sharp’s next report, dated December 28, 1867, indicated that his fears had been realized. Several shootings of freedmen during the Christmas week left him sufficiently alarmed to urge that a company of soldiers be sent to Lexington to restore law and order.<sup>37</sup> Sharp also had communicated his concerns to the Lexington

34. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, September 20, 1867, *ibid.*

35. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, November 30, 1867, *ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. Capt. J. W. Sharp to Gen. Orlando Brown, December 28, 1867, *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau.*

Town Council, whose response was worded curiously. The council asked permission of General Schofield (the commanding officer of Military District Number One) to pass ordinances establishing a townwide curfew and controlling the sale and use of alcoholic beverages. The council, however, felt that no clearance from higher authority was needed to enact an ordinance banning the carrying of firearms and other weapons, either openly or concealed, or to appoint a new assistant to aid the police sergeant. Another new ordinance authorized either the town sergeant or his assistant to deputize up to ten citizens to assist in maintaining law and order in time of crisis. Significantly, the council directed the mayor to confer with the faculties at Washington College and VMI to "ask their cooperation in effecting and preserving the Public Peace."<sup>38</sup>

The Town Council's wish for additional authority to deal with the situation in Lexington apparently was not fulfilled by General Schofield; neither were troops sent at this juncture, as Captain Sharp had requested. Rather, Sharp was replaced in Lexington by a higher-ranking and more determined bureau operative, Bvt. Brig. Gen. Douglas Frazar. Frazar, only thirty-two when he arrived at his Lexington posting, was a native of Danbury, Massachusetts. Before the war, he had been involved in the East India trade as a merchant and ship captain. His war service included a stint with the 13th New York Cavalry, assigned to guard the District of Columbia, and subsequent duty as a colonel with the 104th U.S. Colored Troops. Frazar had been raised to the rank of brevet brigadier general in March 1865 as a consequence of his faithful service.<sup>39</sup>

The storm which had been brewing would break in full force on Frazar's watch. White citizens, having seen their overtures spurned by the black populace in the selection of delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and having witnessed a serious division develop among white voters in the recent councilmanic elections, now were fearful of losing political and social control. More than a few of the townspeople and college students would unleash their fury upon a local African-American population, which, accurately as it turned out, now suspected the worst of at least some of Lexington's majority racial group. General Frazar's arrival in Lexington coincided with this shift in local attitudes; it also may have intensified it, since, given his resumé, it seems likely

38. "Minutes of the Council of the Corporation of Lexington, 1860-1873," December 30, 1867, City Hall, Lexington, Va. (Hereafter cited as "Council Minutes, Lexington.")

39. Roger D. Hunt and Jack R. Brown, *Brevet Brigadier Generals in Blue* (Gathersburg, Md.: Olde Soldier Books, 1990), p. 216.

that Frazar was more devoted to the cause of racial fairness than his predecessor, Captain Sharp.

The first major incident in the momentous and decisive year of 1868 involved Erastus Johnston, who had challenged the hegemony of white Lexingtonians in two ways. First, he once had taught in the freedmen's school. Second, he currently was operating a store there, catering to the town's black population. Now the Vermonter had the audacity, or foolhardiness, to join in one of the community's major winter recreations, ice-skating on the North (now the Maury) River. As a reward for hischutzpah, he was set upon there by more than fifty of the skaters already enjoying the river's frozen surface. Johnston reported that he was punched, kicked, beaten with sticks, and knocked down several times, primarily by college students. The mob had given him warning that he would be tarred and feathered should he not leave town within the next ten days. When Johnston attempted to address them as "young men," he was bullied even more until he called them by their preferred appellation, "gentlemen." Fleeing from the river, Johnston returned to his store, only to be followed by some of his "gentlemen" tormentors, who attempted to break into his shop while threatening to kill him.<sup>40</sup> As had become the custom of the Freedmen's Bureau in such matters, General Lee was asked to conduct an investigation. Based on a list provided by bureau agent Frazar and a statement prepared by Johnston, six students were interviewed, and several of them were dismissed from the college.<sup>41</sup>

Johnston was not the last person to be singled out in 1868 for eviction from Lexington; the attacks on him were but the first round in a battle to be waged that year for control of the town. Of more interest to Lexingtonians than the skating ruckus involving the outsider Johnston

40. Affidavit of Erastus C. Johnston, February 5, 1868, in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

41. Student affidavits filed with Johnston affidavit in University Archives, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va. A somewhat different interpretation of the incident appears in most twentieth-century treatments of Lee's presidency of the college. See, e.g., Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 4:345-46; Marshall Fishwick, *Lee After the War* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1963), pp. 163-64; Ollinger Crenshaw, *General Lee's College* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 153-54; and Charles B. Flood, *Lee: The Last Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 176-78. Freeman and all who follow his account of the fracas credit Lee's actions solely to his desire to achieve sectional reconciliation. All of them mention Johnston's having threatened with a pistol a twelve-year-old youth who had cursed him, although none of the students questioned cited, in their own defense, any provocative action by Johnston.



was the case of a freedman, John Burns, which cut to the very heart of the matters alarming the white population. Burns had been found guilty of burglary and the attempted rape of a young member of the local prominent Echols family. Douglas Frazar reported that the "evidence shows no proof of guilt, and [the] case appears to have been gotten up by the friends of the girl to clear her from fault in the eyes of the community."<sup>42</sup> Freedman Burns had been defended (inadequately, in Frazar's estimation) by William Wallace Scott, a Confederate cavalry officer who had attended VMI in 1865. Scott had returned to Lexington in 1868, following completion of the law course at the University of Virginia. He was a lawyer, the local news editor of the *Gazette and Banner*, and the Lexington agent for the Imboden Company, organizer of schemes to encourage white laborers to move into the southern states.<sup>43</sup> Frazar, convinced of Burns's innocence and horrified at the sixteen-year prison sentence he had received, insisted that the case be appealed to Henry H. Wells, the newly appointed provisional governor of Military District Number One (i.e., the former state of Virginia). Wells had overturned the verdict.<sup>44</sup>

Cadet James W. Gridgers, not previously known for his interest in political topics, made room in his journal (in which he recorded primarily his daily routine and ruminations about his self-diagnosed poor health) for a brief but cogent comment on March 29: "Great deal of talk about K. K. Klan around here."<sup>45</sup> Indeed there was. Soon the "talk" would be in print for all to see. The Ku Klux Klan never was very strong in Virginia during Reconstruction and rumors of a Klan presence were new to the Lexington area. In Virginia at large, the two primary bursts of Klan activity came at the time of the referendum on convening a Constitutional Convention in March 1867; and in the spring of 1868, when the convention was completing its work, heavily influenced by the Radical majority chosen to draft the document.<sup>46</sup>

In March 1867, Lexington's Conservative leadership had not yet despaired of electoral success; by the spring of the following year, they

42. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," April 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

43. Alumni File, in VMI Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va.; Gen. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau; Gazette and Banner*, May 15, 1868.

44. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

45. John W. Bridgers, "Journal, 1867-1868," in John W. Bridgers Collection, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

46. Richard Lowe, *Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1858-1870* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 125 and 141.

(and students from all parts of Virginia and the South who came to study at the town's two campuses) had seen their hopes for controlling the political process dashed. Now at least some were willing to take up the ways of the Klan (or create the appearance of having done so) in order to frustrate the will of the so-called "Underwood" Constitutional Convention and restore white control of Lexington's social order. The issues of the *Gazette and Banner* for April 1, 8, and 15 all contained much news of the Klan; in fact, one might surmise that the newspaper's publisher (Samuel Houston Letcher, brother of the former governor and defeated mayoral candidate) and news editor Scott (soon to be implicated in Klan-type activities in the nearby rural settlement of Collierstown) were attempting to *make* news as much as report it. The *Gazette and Banner* of April 1 ran an item which had the appearance of an advertisement and was replete with cryptic insignia and coded messages. This "notice" was accompanied by a "news" story headed "The KuKlux Klan." Referring to the "advertisement," the story read in part:

This formidable and mysterious order of men or devils, are rapidly spreading all over the country. By reference to our advertising columns it will be seen that they have organized a Division or Chapter or whatever they may choose to call it, in our midst, and on Friday night last, notices were posted at all the corners of the streets summoning them to Council and deliberation. . . . About 10 o'clock on Saturday night from 40 to 50 persons variously represented as from seven to ten feet high, clothed in all the habiliments of the grave, were seen marching up the street, and entering the graveyard at the head of town, and did not again make their appearance until about 3 o'clock in the morning when they passed through the town, all mounted on their white horses, save one, who seemed to be their leader, who bestrode a coal-black steed with fiery nostrils.

Editor Scott coyly concluded his column by stating, "The advertisement is Chinese characters to us, but those concerned will doubtless understand its import."<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly, Scott fully understood the import of his paper's entries; probably they were intentional fantasies of his own making.

The paper's April 8 edition reprinted on its front page an article from the *Lynchburg Virginian*, lauding the Klan. Moreover, Scott's local news section reported, "We understand that within the last 18 days, twenty negroes have died in Lexington and its immediate vicinity. Too much liberty, as has been predicted over and over again will prove a direful curse to the entire race, and deprived of the watchful and interested care of their former masters, they will rapidly die out and disap-

47. *Gazette and Banner*, April 1, 1868.

pear from among us." More direct references to the Klan appeared elsewhere in the paper, including an example of the kind of "watchful and interested care" which Scott was promising the freedmen: "The KuKlux are said to have made their appearance in various portions of the county. . . . Our supposition is that this is the year for the appearance of the seventeen year locust, the KuKlux are designed to supply their place as a special visitation for Radical iniquities. Look out darkies."<sup>48</sup> The Klan made its third and final appearance in the Lexington press on April 15, when a story elaborated upon the presumed escalating death rate among local blacks.<sup>49</sup>

Enough had been said, apparently, for events soon transpired which exceeded the expectations and helped to fulfill the goals of Scott and his Klan conspirators. On May 2, a freedmen's meeting was convened to discuss the work of the Virginia Constitutional Convention. Samuel McDowell Moore, a leader of the Conservatives and the scion of several of Lexington's most prominent families, took up the cause previously championed by Major Dorman and gave the main address, "endeavoring to convince them [the freedmen] that their interest was identified with that of the white race, and that they ought, therefore, to vote against the Constitution, or not vote at all." General Frazar (whose presence at the meeting had not been anticipated by Moore) countered with remarks which the local newspaper characterized as "intended to excite the prejudices of the negroes against the white people." Frazar, it was noted, had termed freedmen's "having to give way to white people on the side walks, and in the stores, as indignities to which they were not bound to submit."<sup>50</sup>

A subsequent encounter between the wife and son of Judge John Brockenbrough (professor of law at Washington College) and Caesar Griffin, newly emancipated by Frazar from his customary deference, gave the *Gazette and Banner's* intrepid local news editor the basis for a bold-face headline in the May 13 edition: "The first Fruits of the Incendiary Address made to the Negroes on Saturday the 2nd Inst., by a Member of the Freedmen's Bureau." The accompanying story

48. *Gazette and Banner*, April 8, 1868. This theory of the disappearing freedmen probably represents a combination of wishful thinking among local whites (generated by the immigration society movement) and an attempt to frighten the black community and its friends. Ideologically, Scott's analysis of the plight of the emancipated African American more likely derived from the proslavery argument than from any concepts of the Social Darwinists. See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 111ff.

49. *Gazette and Banner*, April 15, 1868.

50. *Gazette and Banner*, May 13, 1868.

recounted not only the speech of Frazar at the freedmen's meeting, but also the events of the ensuing week, which the *Gazette and Banner* deemed to be direct consequences of the bureau leader's remarks. Editor Scott described a heart-rending tale of unmerited insolence toward Mrs. Brockenbrough as she approached "Silverwood," her Main Street home, insults which were bravely met by her son Frank:

As Mrs. Judge Brockenbrough was returning home about 11 o'clock of the night from a visit to her brother's family, accompanied by her youngest son, a youth of about 18 years of age, they found the side walk occupied by a number of negroes, male and female. Young B[rockenbrough] requested them politely to let his mother pass, and, after some hesitation, all of them, but one, made way for her, but that one, a negro man or boy, by the name of Caesar Griffin, swore he would not give way for any d---d rascal, and continued to use various offensive expressions. When Mrs. B. entered her house, her son and his older brother returned to the gate. Frank having in his hand a small stock or switch, and jumping over the fence, approached the negro, with the stick raised, who immediately fired a small pistol, sending a ball through the breast bone of young B., into his body, inflicting a very dangerous, if not fatal wound.<sup>51</sup>

The Brockenbrough incident, with its teenage hero brandishing a whip-substitute like a prewar overseer or master against a black carrying a pistol, quickly became a *cause célèbre* and was reported with appropriate, if conflicting, outrage in both the southern and the northern press. Lexington residents were sure to include summaries of the event and updates on the condition of young Brockenbrough in missives to out-of-town friends and relatives. Hugh Moran, a classmate and friend of Frank Brockenbrough's older brother, wrote to his father that Caesar Griffin barely had escaped lynching, and added, "It has quite a wholesome effect for some of the students to shoot one [freedman] occasionally."<sup>52</sup>

51. Ibid. The Griffin case was not the first time that a Brockenbrough offspring had had a run-in with Lexington blacks. Two years earlier, another of the judge's sons had come to the attention of the Freedmen's Bureau for a rather full day of outrages, including an assault upon a black man and woman (possibly an incident parallel to the J. C. Johnson-Patrick Thompson episode) and a physical attack upon a "colored boy" who had asked for wages due him. Both cases were heard in the Mayor's Court, where the culprit was compelled to pay court costs in the first instance and saw his case dismissed in the second. Probably this Brockenbrough was not Frank, but his older brother, a Washington College student, a former VMI cadet (who had participated in the Battle of New Market), and a "second" in the encounter with Griffin. See "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," June 1866, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

52. Hugh A. Moran to "Father," May 10, 1868, in Moran Papers, Special Collections, James Graham Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

In his letter home, Lewin Barringer, another college student, provided additional information about the attempted lynching, indicating that the students “came near killing several other negroes through mistake, but fortunately they all escaped though shot at a great many times.”<sup>53</sup>

One of the lynch mob participants later was identified by General Frazar as the newspaper editor, W. W. Scott,<sup>54</sup> who, not surprisingly, included none of the drama of the attempted lynching in his *Gazette and Banner* coverage of the Griffin case. Marshall McDonald, eldest son of Cornelia McDonald and a faculty member at VMI, wrote to his fiancée a month after the incident, reporting Brockenbrough’s recovery, condemning Frazar, and praising Lexingtonians for showing “extreme moderation and forbearance in not hanging” General Frazar. In the same letter, McDonald gave evidence of the polarization which the Griffin-Brockenbrough incident had engendered in the white community by raising suspicions about the intentions of their black neighbors to an irrational pitch. McDonald wrote, “The negroes are about to give a supper to build their church, and consequently several smoke houses have been broken into lately.”<sup>55</sup>

More outrages against the freedmen and law and order were to follow during the summer of 1868. In July, a group of nightriders descended upon Collierstown, a rural community about ten miles southwest of Lexington, attracted by a meeting scheduled there to make plans for canvassing the county in preparation for the upcoming elections. Frazar related that “no overt act was made to break up the meeting but so many men were seen hiding in the bushes and riding the roads after dark that the Freedmen abandoned their work and took to the woods for safety. It is one of those cases where it would be impossible to prove much against the aggressors and yet each Freedman and some white Union men declare that they are convinced and know that they (the

53. Lewin Wethered Barringer to David Moreau Barringer, May 11, 1868, in Barringer Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Brockenbrough case and the Johnston fracas are the two primary racial incidents covered by the biographers of Lee’s postwar years. For varying treatments of the Brockenbrough incident, see Crenshaw, *General Lee’s College*, pp. 151–52; and Fishwick, *Lee After the War*, pp. 165–66. While Fishwick credits Lee with making a dramatic personal appearance to forestall Griffin’s lynching, no evidence of that exists in the contemporary accounts.

54. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, July 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.

55. Marshall McDonald to Mary E. McCormick, June 4, 1868, in Marshall McDonald Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

freedmen) would have been fired upon if they had attempted to speak.”<sup>56</sup>

The ringleader of the Collierstown gang, Frazar indicated, was none other than the *Gazette and Banner's* local news editor, William Wallace Scott, Esq., the former cavalryman who now was actualizing what he had only fantasized in his April columns. Scott's right-hand man during the Collierstown escapade was identified by Frazar as Col. Charles T. O'Ferrall,<sup>57</sup> a native of Frederick County, Virginia, and a Confederate veteran who, in 1868, was studying law with Judge Brockenbrough at Washington College in preparation for a political career. While a student, O'Ferrall ran a boardinghouse for students and also managed the Lexington Hotel, a prominent hostelry where some students lived. The colonel was well known in the Upper Shenandoah Valley as a horseman and owner of fine racing steeds.<sup>58</sup>

Still another incident occurred in August, when a college student named John Mizner was arrested for the violent rape of a young black woman, Lizzie Harper. According to Frazar, the Lexington town authorities conspired to permit his escape from jail and justice.<sup>59</sup>

The denouement for Frazar, the Lexington Freedmen's Bureau, and Lexington's townsfolk, white and black, transpired quickly, as the events of the summer of 1868 seemed (contradicting the season) to snowball. A detachment of Federal troops was summoned at Frazar's behest to maintain law and order in a community now beset with nightriders and mob violence. Frazar brought no charges against Scott and O'Ferrall for the Collierstown operations, because no overt acts of violence had been committed there. Although rape-suspect Mizner never was returned to jail, Caesar Griffin remained incarcerated in lieu of \$600 bond until his case finally was heard in September and he was sentenced to two years in prison. Frazar had expressed personal anger at the exorbitant bond

56. Douglas Frazar in Gen. Orlando Brown, July 1, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

57. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," July 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*.

58. *The Alumni Directory and Service Record of Washington and Lee University* (Lexington, Va.: The Alumni, Inc., 1926), p. 125; Franklin L. Riley, *Gen. Robert E. Lee After Appomattox* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 112; *Gazette and Banner*, October 24, 1866.

59. "Records Relating to Murders and Outrages," August 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen's Bureau*. Although this source spells the name "Mizver," Mizner certainly is the person intended. Mizner, from Nicholasville, Ky., was a member of the Class of 1870 but left Washington College after attending the school for only two years. See *Washington and Lee Alumni Directory, 1749-1975* (Lexington, Va.: Washington and Lee University Alumni, Inc., 1976), p. 137; and *Alumni Directory* (1926), p. 118.

(considering that, contrary to newspaper accounts, Brockenbrough was not badly injured) and at the long delay in scheduling his trial.<sup>60</sup>

Frazar, as it turned out, was gone by the time the verdict was handed down. By his own testimony, his decision to call in troops to bring the town to heel had backfired. He reported to Gen. Orlando Brown, his superior within the bureau, that “the presence of troops had exasperated instead of quieting the students.”<sup>61</sup> The succeeding summer months had seen Frazar called before Gen. John M. Schofield, commander of Military District Number One, to explain, in a general way, why Lexington had experienced such tumult since his assignment there<sup>62</sup> and, specifically, why his life had been threatened by three young men carrying concealed weapons who had stated to their friends an intention to shoot him.<sup>63</sup> Frazar was reassigned to another posting, and soon the troops whom Frazar had requested were withdrawn as well.<sup>64</sup>

General Schofield obviously was intent upon defusing a volatile situation by removing from Lexington the most visible signs of federal authority (the troops and the Freedmen’s Bureau’s General Frazar). It is likely not just a coincidence that, at the same time, Schofield relieved Lexington’s elected town council, replacing them with new councilmen who could take the Ironclad Oath affirming that they had not voluntarily given aid to the Confederate cause. The new councilmen, all whites, included a wagon maker, a cooper, a shopkeeper, and a stonemason; all were in their late fifties and thus had been too old for compulsory service in the Confederate army. All were long-term residents of Lexington, and their status as merchants and craftsmen was not atypical for Lexington’s councilmen during this period. They represented a continuation of federal authority, but with a gentler, more neighborly face. The new council did nothing during its term of service (which lasted until March 1870) to threaten the white hegemony which had been established prior to their appointment and seemingly affirmed by General Schofield’s actions. Like their predecessor board, this council concerned itself primarily with the extension of streets and water service for the growing town and with improvements to the fire protection system.<sup>65</sup>

60. Douglas Frazar to Maj. R. S. Lacy, May 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.

61. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, May 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.

62. Marshall McDonald to Mary E. McCormick, June 4, 1868, in Marshall McDonald Papers, Duke University.

63. Douglas Frazar to Gen. Orlando Brown, August 31, 1868, in *Records of Virginia Freedmen’s Bureau*.

64. *Gazette and Banner*, September 16, 1868.

65. Council Minutes, Lexington, November 9, 1868.

Such momentous events were bound to have a backwash, and the Griffin verdict was overturned in December by John C. Underwood, federal judge for Eastern Virginia and the man whose name was attached in common parlance to the hated new Virginia Constitution.<sup>66</sup> Frazar was able to vent his rage against Lexington in a long article in the *Boston Evening Traveller*. Some of his remarks were directed at northern philanthropists, and, though he inexplicably renamed Washington College, his message was clear. Frazar proclaimed, "Money sent to the South, as has been done, to keep in operation an institution such as Lexington College, is simply, in my mind, paying traitors to teach their damnable treason to the flower of Southern youth."<sup>67</sup>

By the end of 1868, passions had cooled, the blacks' brief period of self-assertiveness had dissipated, the situation had returned to the *status quo ante* Frazar, if not the *status quo antebellum*, and Lexington for all intents and purposes was redeemed, even with the federally appointed town council still in place. Both Federal troops and the Freedmen's Bureau were gone, and the United States government finally acceded to the request of Superintendent Smith and permitted VMI cadets once again to possess firearms. Hugh Moran, from his vantage point at Washington College, reported that the cadets were "as proud of them as a boy with his first pair of boots."<sup>68</sup> Seemingly placid black voters once again listened respectfully to speeches from local Conservative white politicians like John Letcher, who at one such gathering was praised by a freedman named John Collins, who recalled Letcher as his beloved boyhood playmate.<sup>69</sup>

The *Gazette and Banner*, now under new management and renamed the *Virginia Gazette*, commented favorably upon the new-style freedmen's political meetings. The paper's strident Negrophobic tone had disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Under its new masthead, the paper condemned an incident in which two drunken students fired upon and slightly wounded a freedman. The *Virginia Gazette* approvingly noted that the victim had "received every personal and medical attention at the hands of friends of the misguided young man."<sup>70</sup>

66. *Gazette and Banner*, December 17, 1868. Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: Biography*, 4:360, reports that Underwood's reversal itself was later reversed by Chief Justice Salmon B. Chase, while he was sitting as a judge on the U.S. Circuit Court in Richmond.

67. *Boston Evening Traveller*, reprinted in *Gazette and Banner*, November 11, 1868.

68. Hugh Moran to "Mother," February 27, 1869, in Moran Papers.

69. *Gazette and Banner*, February 10, 1869.

70. *Virginia Gazette* [Lexington], February 3, 1869.



Tranquillity had been restored, and the old sympathies had been revived, but at a cost. The *Virginia Gazette* for June 16, 1869, provided what may well have been intended to serve as "the authorized version" of the recent uproar. The editorial, imbued with racist assumptions, was triggered by the lynching of Jesse Edwards, a freedman who had been in the county jail accused of the murder of a white girl, Susan Margaret Hite:

The Scotch Irish are a patient but tremendous people. When aroused, their anger is terrible. In the dead of night, silently, deliberately, but surely, has righteous retribution been meted out by the hands of some of this quiet race, to a man who had outraged the county by his crimes. . . . The people of Rockbridge have indeed been patient. They have seen a son of one of our most honored citizens [Judge Brockenbrough] shot down in cold blood on our streets, and the would be murderer go unwhipt of justice; they have seen the burglar and intended ravisher [Freedman John Burns, not Washington College student John Mizner] escape with impunity; they have suffered much and long; . . . they have felt that not only life, but what was far dearer than life, was to a great extent at the mercy of a race inferior in all respects save the brutality and indignity of its passions. . . . At the door of Underwood and his vile crew of pretended administrators of the law, with "GOVERNOR WELLS" at their head, do we locate the murder of MISS HITE, and the swift and awful retribution that has visited her murderer.<sup>71</sup>

Events seemed to have come full circle when, in 1870, the Washington College student publication, *Southern Collegian*, published a witty description of a typical student's day. It culminated with a nocturnal journey to the black section of town, where, by 11:30, the student is asleep with an African-American woman he previously had sighted on Main Street and had been fantasizing about as "a black Venus."<sup>72</sup>

The daughter of VMI's Col. J. T. L. Preston, in her memoirs, gave an explanation of why Lexington's white citizenry triumphed over the "evil Yankees." Giving special credit to the role played by the students of Washington College and the VMI cadets, she wrote, "Lexington was under Federal military rule for a while, but it had a rather meek garrison; the presence of a thousand young Southerners in our midst, many of them ex-soldiers, did not invite insolence on the part of a handful of blue coats."<sup>73</sup> She makes no reference to the blacks' role in the battle for

71. *Virginia Gazette*, June 16, 1869.

72. *Southern Collegian*, May 21, 1870.

73. Elizabeth Randolph Preston Allan, *A March Past* (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1938), pp. 213-14.

Lexington in the Reconstruction years, but it is obvious that insubordination or assertiveness of African Americans was even less tolerable than that of the "meek garrison" or the Freedmen's Bureau. Assorted townspeople, members of Lexington's legal community, the local newspaper (which one of them helped edit), Washington College students, and recent VMI graduates—all these were prime movers in the wave of lawlessness which plagued the town and Rockbridge County during the spring and summer of 1868 and helped redeem the area from the threat of control by the Freedmen's Bureau and the newly enfranchised and emboldened blacks.

It is not certain what role, if any, the moderate faction of Conservatives earlier present in Lexington politics played in these developments. Whether they were accidentally, coincidentally, or intentionally quiescent in the events which transpired during Redemption, it can be presumed that they were not displeased with the outcome. Once Redemption of the social order had been achieved, by means of violence and threats of violence, it was deemed safe to return to Conservative politics and to court those black voters who "could be trusted."

The events of 1868 certainly must have served as powerful lessons to Lexington's African American community. Their true protectors, Federal troops and the Freedmen's Bureau agents, had departed, leaving the affairs of the town firmly under the control of its white citizenry. Neither W. W. Scott nor Colonel O'Ferrall remained in Lexington long after helping the town redeem itself. O'Ferrall settled in Rockingham County, Virginia, where he served as county judge and member of the House of Delegates. After three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, he concluded his illustrious political career with a term as Virginia's governor, from 1894 to 1898. In that capacity, ironically, he is best remembered for his campaign to secure passage of an antilynching law.<sup>74</sup>

Scott returned to his native Orange County, Virginia, where he benefited frequently from O'Ferrall's patronage. When O'Ferrall was in the state legislature, Scott was secretary to the State Democratic Committee; O'Ferrall as a congressman was assisted by Scott, who was clerk to a House committee; when O'Ferrall became governor, Scott was appointed state librarian of Virginia.<sup>75</sup> Upon Scott's death in 1929, one of his eulogists described him as "one of the few real Confederate soldiers left—such soldiers as galloped through the pages of John Esten Cooke. He was a cavalier both in tradition and experience. His death at

74. Minor T. Weisiger, "Charles T. O'Ferrall, 'Gray Eagle' from the Valley," in *The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978*, ed. Edward Younger and James Tice Moore (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), p. 141.

75. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 17, 1929.

the age of 84 emphasizes the fact that his dashing compatriots of the sixties—compatriots who made heart-gripping history—are a fast-dwindling group.”<sup>76</sup>

The “heart-gripping history” which Scott and his cavalier cohorts helped make during his few years in Lexington was not specifically mentioned, but the chilling effects of the work accomplished by Scott and “his dashing compatriots” lingered on for many decades. Even after Scott’s death, Lexington’s black population still awaited the coming of full freedom.

Redemption came early to Lexington, and the sequence and timing of events in the town’s Reconstruction and Redemption may not be typical of the rest of the Shenandoah Valley. Certainly, Reconstruction Lexington did not conform to the general assumption that the early postbellum years were, at best, a period of economic stagnation. Obviously, a number of factors influenced Lexington’s experience which were not present elsewhere in the region and which may have produced a more violent denouement for Federal Reconstruction efforts in Lexington than elsewhere in the valley. Undoubtedly, the larger than average black population, the presence of a Freedmen’s Bureau office, and, perhaps most importantly, the substantial number of young, non-native students at VMI and Washington College all played a major part in determining Lexington’s course during Reconstruction. While not an urban folk by anyone’s definition, Lexingtonians were differentiated from the typically rural valley dwellers by their town’s role as a county seat, marketplace, and college town. There is, however, some evidence of independent nightriding activities in outlying parts of Rockbridge County which, in at least one instance, were assisted by Lexington’s nascent Klan. Nevertheless, regardless of the tactics used to restore white supremacy in areas of the valley to the north of Lexington, the end result was the same there as that accomplished in Lexington and Rockbridge by their self-described but questionably labeled “patient but tremendous people.” The terms, as employed by the local newspaper, refers to the Scots-Irish natives. If the role of the college students in effecting Redemption was as large as the record appears to indicate, it is worth noting that the permanent residents of Lexington wished to take credit for the students’ accomplishments as if they were their own.

76. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 18, 1929.



# Militia Leadership in Dunmore's War, 1774

Colin P. Mahle



URING the years preceding the American Revolution, many settlers in Britain's North American colonies searched for more fertile land to grow crops. Numerous families in Virginia were involved in land speculation and became wealthy due to the colony's expansion. Only one thing stood between the colonists and nearly unlimited resources—the Indians of the Ohio River Valley.

The dispute over Indian land first showed itself during the Seven Years' War—the North American aspects of which are often called the French and Indian War, 1754–63—when the colony's leader was Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie. Many other key leaders invested substantially in land speculation, which may have affected their decisions about military actions and diplomatic relations with the Indians. Eventually the disputed land issues of the Seven Years' War were solved, on paper, with the Proclamation Line of 1763, wherein Britain promised the Indians that settlers would not cross a certain line between Canada and Florida. (All of what would become Rockbridge County was east of this line.) Since the proclamation was not adequately enforced, settlers continued to encroach upon Indian lands, which led to clashes between various Indian tribes and the settlers. Although these outbreaks of violence were infrequent, many colonists thought the Indians capable of vengeance, and when this issue was handled improperly, it came to a

---

**Colin P. Mahle** was a member of the First Class at the Virginia Military Institute at the time he delivered his address to the Society in the Institute's Nichols Engineering Building Auditorium on April 25, 2000. His presentation was based on research done for his honors thesis in history, which was done under the supervision of Colonel Turk McCleskey.

head in 1774. Western settlers battled for control over the Ohio Valley region, challenging the Shawnees for control of the territory.

### Lord Dunmore's War

Virginia Governor John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, made the region of Virginia between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Ohio River his personal governmental region, with its own court, and called it the West Augusta District. He hoped to gain control of this area even though most of it was beyond the Proclamation Line. If he were successful, he could expand both his political power and personal fortune. Lord Dunmore was heavily involved in land speculation in the region, and his land acquisition policies enjoyed considerable support in western Virginia in 1774.

Influential people who had invested with Dunmore's land schemes pressed him to secure their speculations in the disputed region. The Shawnees were the main Indian force opposing the colonists, although they were not the only tribe with claims to the land. In 1774 the same land that had been contested in the French and Indian War was being disputed by Pennsylvania and Virginia on one side and the Indians on the other. On June 10, 1774, Lord Dunmore mobilized the western militia. Colonel Andrew Lewis, of Augusta County, commanded the southwestern militia forces when they were mobilized.<sup>1</sup> Dunmore's plan was to execute an isolated attack to punish the Shawnees for various depredations on the assumption that this would send a message to the other tribes in the Ohio valley to stay out of the territory, restore settlements south of the Ohio River, and preclude a larger border war that might encourage a combination of all the tribes.

Approximately thirteen hundred militia troops mobilized to fight the Shawnees; these were mainly from the heart of the Valley of Virginia, including Botetourt and Augusta counties, which later were partitioned to make Rockbridge County. Fourteen militia companies assembled at Camp Union (now Lewisburg, West Virginia) in June 1774; additional independent volunteer companies joined Colonel Lewis soon thereafter. After mustering and drilling, the small army marched up the Kanawha River toward the Ohio. The Indians had excellent information and knew that the militia was on the move. The same was not true of the militia troops, who were largely uninformed about the enemy and ill

1. V. A. Lewis, *History of the Battle of Point Pleasant* (Harrisonburg, Va.: C. J. Carrier Co., 1974), p. 71; Turk McCleskey, "Dunmore's War," in *The American Revolution, 1775-1783, An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), pp. 492-97.



ments. The Indian loss was small while the colonists' lost significantly more in the brief clash.

Lewis's militiamen lingered near the battlefield for a time after the engagement, leaving at the end of October to harass Indian towns and to rendezvous with the rest of the army under Dunmore's command near the Shawnee village of Chillicothe. These raids on Indian towns had but limited success, and except for small patrols by independent militia companies, the war for control of the Ohio River valley was over. Lewis and most of his surviving troops return home on November 5.<sup>2</sup>

Shawnee leaders signed a treaty with Lord Dunmore that made them release all prisoners of war. The new boundary between the Indians and the whites would be the Ohio River. The treaty also restricted trade by the Indians and forced them to allow colonists' boats to pass unmolested through their territory. Although the war was a small one with but one pitched battle, the territory settlers had gained only added fuel to the Indians' anger with the colonists. The Indian problem would reconstitute itself soon after the American Revolution.

### **Militia Leaders' Socio-Economic Status**

Table 1 lists the lengths of deployments for all the officers in this study. The longer tours indicate men engaged in the fighting at Point Pleasant; shorter deployments indicate patrolling the county borders or training in the general vicinity. I initially examined the pay records for Dunmore's War in order to explore economic differences between officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who lived within the area that became Rockbridge County. The outcome proved different than I had expected: there was little or no economic difference between the officers and NCOs. Given the similarities between the two, how did some men attain the higher ranks?

The individuals that I used in my study became residents of Rockbridge County when the county was formed in 1778. I identified these individuals by cross-referencing county court order books from the first year of Rockbridge County with pay records from Dunmore's War obtained from the Library of Virginia. Each county had its own militia company. The matches from these two sources were the militiamen who deployed during the war, but actually lived in the section of Augusta or Botetourt counties that became Rockbridge in 1778. I selected officers and NCOs because of their possible higher social status compared with ordinary militiamen. I hoped that the difference between the officers

2. Lewis, *Battle of Point Pleasant*, p. 61.



**Table 1**  
**Service Records of Officers and Noncommissioned Officers**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Company</u>	<u>Days Service</u>
<b>Gilmore, John</b>	<b>Captain</b>	Gilmore	17, 8
McCampbell, Andrew	Ensign	Gilmore	17*
	Lieutenant	Gilmore	8
McCampbell, James	Sergeant	Gilmore	8
McKee, James	Sergeant	Gilmore	17
McKenny, John	Sergeant	Gilmore	8
Tedford, Alexander	Sergeant	Gilmore	17*
	Ensign	Gilmore	8
Tedford, John	Sergeant	Gilmore	8
<b>Lockridge, Andrew</b>	<b>Captain</b>	Lockridge	123
Armstrong, John	Sergeant	Lockridge	123
Blackburn, Benjamin	Sergeant	Lockridge	102
Bust, James	Ensign	Lockridge	123
<b>McDowell, Samuel</b>	<b>Captain</b>	McDowell	13, 3, 134
Buchanan, James	Ensign	McDowell	13*
	Lieutenant	McDowell	134
Hayes, Charles	Sergeant	McDowell	3
Keys, Samuel	Sergeant	McDowell	3
Lusk, Robert	Ensign	McDowell	3
Lyle, William	Sergeant	McDowell	13
McCampbell, Andrew	Sergeant	McDowell	3
McKenny, John	Corporal	McDowell	122
Moore, Andrew	Sergeant	McDowell	3*
	Lieutenant	McDowell	13
Moore, William	Ensign	McDowell	122
Reid, Andrew	Sergeant	McDowell	13, 134
Steel, John	Sergeant	McDowell	134
Tedford, Alexander	Sergeant	McDowell	3
Tedford, William	Sergeant	McDowell	134

\* Denotes first deployment

and enlisted personnel would become apparent. Instead, the individuals proved similar; differences of wealth and social status were not as apparent as expected. My study thus explores many implications of these new findings.

Quantifiable information about the militiamen—including tallies of horses and cattle, tithables,<sup>3</sup> and land acreage—are only a cross-section of

3. A *tithable* is defined as any male of at least sixteen and capable of doing work. Tithables included all slaves, but a farm worked by a white man and his sixteen-year-

the society during the period surrounding Dunmore's War. Many of the societal trends as well as the qualification to be an officer or noncommissioned officer in the county can be deduced from these simple quantitative amounts. In 1774 the officers and NCOs from what became Rockbridge County were not only socially influential, due to their wealth and position, but many continued to gain assets and affluence throughout their lives, increasing their social and military standing long after the war's end.

The system of promotion due to social standing is known as the "militia continuum." It, along with the social and economic roles played by the officers, allow nearly the full picture of their world to be seen. The troops served in and were paid for their service in Dunmore's War following the militia law passed in 1775. I used these pay receipts as the basis of my study.<sup>4</sup> Pay records included only monetary amounts, however, so ranks were determined by cross-referencing the different companies' rank structures, and a standard was set using the amount paid per day equal to a certain rank. All individuals above the rank of private were treated as noncommissioned officers, and all individuals with the rank of ensign or above were treated as officers.

I also studied the officers' and NCOs' family structures and wealth, because of the close link between the militia continuum and social class.<sup>5</sup> This family relationship can be established by certain court records or proceedings and tell us about the individual's wealth and the size of his household. Nevertheless, even if an individual had no identifiable family, one may still have existed outside the available records. Let me now examine four Rockbridge militia leaders regarding their militia standing and the social structure.

---

old son would constitute a household with two tithables, or taxable persons. White workers who relied on the household for economic support were also tithables. The law stated: "all male persons of the age sixteen years and upwards and all female slaves of the age of sixteen years and upwards, shall be declared to be tithable . . . except such as the county courts may, by reason of age, infirmity, or other charitable reasons, exempt from the payment of taxes." W. W. Hening, *The Statutes of Virginia, 1792-1906*, vol. 1 (Richmond: Samuel Shepherd Press, 1835), p. 184.

4. *Ibid.*, 1: 61-65.

5. Turk McCleskey, "Rockbridge County Eighteenth-Century Census, Interim Report #4," September 1, 1998, copy at the Rockbridge Historical Society, Lexington, Va. Some of the relationships are unclear in the records but are clear in the census report. "Records of Soldiers and Public Service in Dunmore's War" (Augusta, Bedford, Botetourt, Culpeper, Fincastle Counties), pp. 76-110, MSS in the Library of Virginia, Richmond. The information presented below on James McKee, Alexander Tedford, Andrew Moore, and William Moore derives from these two sources.

**Table 2**  
**Daily Wages for Service in Dunmore’s War<sup>6</sup>**

<u>Rank/Billet</u>	<u>Pounds.Shillings.Pence</u>
Commanding Officer ([Rank = Colonel])	1.5.0
County Lieutenant	1.0.0
Colonel	15.0
Lt. Colonel	13.0
Major	12.0
Captain*	10.0
Lieutenant	7.6
Ensign	7.0
Quarter Master	6.0
Sergeant	2.6
Corporal	2.0
Drummer	2.0
Fifer	2.0
Scout	5.0
Private	1.6

\* The rank of captain was the highest pay grade used during the period of this study.

---

*James McKee*

A sergeant in Gilmore’s company, McKee had many relatives in Rockbridge County, including four sons, three daughters, and a wife. The family paid taxes on one tithable and 280 acres; thus McKee had no outside labor help at this time. The family apparently had a decent income, and the seven children in the family and his position in the militia suggest that McKee’s position in the community was fairly stable. His age is unknown, but he was probably middle aged given his large family and large land holdings. He may never have obtained a commission as an officer, since evidence indicates that officers received their commissions before age twenty-six. Thus he was older than some of the other militia NCOs and officers who were promoted, and he may have been passed over for promotion and been near the end of his military service. This evidence seems to indicate that not all NCOs automatically received promotion to the officer ranks.

*Alexander Tedford*

In contrast with McKee, Tedford had a clearly defined family structure which he used as part of his success to vault into the officer ranks.

6. Lewis, *Battle of Point Pleasant*, p. 74.

He deployed three different times during Dunmore's War: first for three days in Captain James McDowell's company; second for seventeen days in Captain John Gilmore's company; third for eight more days in Gilmore's company. He was a sergeant during the first two deployments, but he was promoted to ensign for his third deployment. Tedford's financial status was comfortable, and although he did not own any land, he had a substantial amount of livestock—five horses and thirteen cows—along with three tithables. He is an example of a man who moved up slowly and joined the officer ranks after he had served his time in the senior NCO position. His promotion may have come because of a comrade being killed on one of the previous missions or simply because the militia continuum worked in such a way that he was chosen by the other officers as a reward for his job as an NCO and had the necessary economic requirements to fill the position. Moreover, he served in two different companies and consequently established more connections than men who served in just one company. It could also be that his large extended family had influence in society.

#### *Andrew Moore*

A sergeant and subsequently a lieutenant in McDowell's company, Moore is an example of an officer who had a large family, many assets, and became an officer sticking strictly to the path of a well-rounded militiaman. While his family was relatively small—wife, three young children, and perhaps a live-in brother-in-law—and he owned but thirty acres, Moore was the largest owner of livestock (nine horses and twenty-five cows) to be identified as an officer in Rockbridge. His livestock trading and breeding activities may have been a factor in his commissioning, as this type of income required travel to market to sell meat and hides. Consequently, he would have made many contacts in town that would have benefited him in his militia endeavors. Moore's story demonstrates that it was not simply land that made promotion possible; being successful in a trade and being connected in the right social circles could lead to promotion.

#### *William Moore*

An ensign in McDowell's company at the battle of Point Pleasant, Moore owned eight tithables, including himself, and eighty acres. Possession of seven horses and fifteen cows ranks him as the second largest livestock holder in the militia. His family of four sons and three daughters in 1778 indicates that he had been making a household since his service in Dunmore's War. This large family may indicate that he had the economic means to care for many children and that he was financially

secure. This large and wealthy family most likely helped him to move up in the militia ranks.

### Land Ownership as a Factor

Land ownership was an important measure of wealth in early American society. I will consequently examine land owned by Rockbridge County militiamen during 1787, the year closest to Dunmore’s War for which data are available, although this year’s comparison with 1774 is somewhat inaccurate due to many changes in the county between those dates. Nevertheless, influential individuals still dominated the county economically. The records I used sometimes provide the location, likely use, or net worth of properties;<sup>7</sup> thus the relative economic rank of militiamen may be approximated.

#### *Location of Land Holdings*

Corporal John McKenny of McDowell’s company is the most junior militiaman studied; he later rose to sergeant in Gilmore’s company. Whereas the average land holder in Rockbridge County in 1787 owned approximately 247 acres, the average for militia officers and NCOs was but 160 acres. McKenny is thus below the average in size of land holding and, given that most of it was in medium to large plots, it was likely that his land was at some distance from town, where land was cheaper

7. Rockbridge County Land Taxes, 1787, in McCleskey, comp., “Rockbridge Census.” There was only a small amount of information on landownership in the census, so these averages are based on a small sample size.

---

**Table 3**  
**Land Holdings of Selected Officers and NCOs**

Name	Rank	Company	Service (days)	# Tithables	Land (acres)
Buchanan, James	Ensign/Lt.	McDowell	13	2	300
Gilmore, John	Captain	Gilmore	1, 8	–	100
McKee, James	Sergeant	Gilmore	17	1	280
McKenny, John	Corporal	McDowell	122	1, 1*	160
	Sergeant	Gilmore	17+8	1, 1	160
Moore, Andrew	Sgt./Lt.	McDowell	3, 13	1	30
Moore, Samuel	Sgt./Lt.	McDowell	13, 3	1, 2	415
Moore William	Ensign	McDowell	122	3, 1, 3	80
Reid, Andrew	Sergeant	McDowell	13, 134	2	2.5

and thus a militia NCO like McKenny could afford it. He probably raised some type of cash crop and transported it for sale.

The largest single land holding positively identified as belonging to an officer from Rockbridge County was a 415-acre plot belonging to sergeant (later lieutenant) Samuel Moore of McDowell's company. Moore's primary source of income was probably from farming, but his land was sufficiently far from town (ten miles northeast of modern Lexington) that a variety of craft goods would also have been produced on the farm. Another sergeant and then lieutenant in McDowell's company was Andrew Moore, who owned the smallest identified plot of land away from town: thirty acres. He obviously could not have relied solely on this land as his chief source of income. Perhaps he raised cattle or horses to generate income.

After Dunmore's War and the founding of Lexington (1776), another kind of land existed: town lots. The only example we have of this in Rockbridge County is the 2.5-acre holding of Sergeant Andrew Reid. Such a plot was only large enough for a family garden and a cow and/or horse; however, he owned seven horses and thirteen cattle, so clearly he grazed some animals elsewhere. Reid apparently did not rely on land as his sole source of income. He possessed a marketable skill, which perhaps gave him a social status somewhat above that of most county land owners. Not only did he live in the county seat and center of commerce (Lexington), but he would have come in contact with other influential people, which may have been one of the reasons why Reid was selected as clerk of the county.

### *Distribution of Land Holdings*

It is useful to examine how land holdings were divided, not only among the owners, but how they came to be in the forms they were in at the time of Dunmore's War. The land owned by officers and NCOs was sometimes in more than one plot, which tells us something about inheritance practices as well as the value of the land itself. There are a number of reasons a man might own more than one parcel. Perhaps the owner purchased one tract and then inherited another in a different part of the county. He could also have been given two separate plots by older members of his family, or he could have purchased plots located away from each other because they were all that were available at the time. Moreover, an owner might have broken up a single plot because he had sons who were given the land either upon his retirement or on their reaching adulthood and beginning a family. The father might continue to be the land's legal owner, but one or more sons might actually have been farming a parcel. Land was not often included in a middle-class daughter's dowry.

While land holdings were an important indicator of wealth, a simple calculation of a militiaman’s total acreage is not sufficient to establish his social status. Other factors include use to which he put his land and the plot’s location relative to trade centers. A small holding near to town might indicate that the landowner had a skill or craft that helped supplement their farm income. It seems likely that the larger parcels were located farther from the trade centers and were more self-sufficient. Therefore, we can speculate that officers and NCOs with large land holdings were living in the countryside with little daily contact with the town or their neighbors. Clearly many officers obtained their offices for reasons other than or in addition to wealth.

### *Supplemental Assets*

Many officers and NCOs owned livestock after Dunmore’s War, although they did not seem use their horses during the campaign. No one of them possessed large herds, but their livestock holdings were sufficient for this to be one of their primary sources of income. Slave, indentured, or contract labor was another source of wealth for some militia leaders; Captain Samuel McDowell, for example, listed seven tithables on his farm in addition to himself. (Oddly, McDowell’s land holdings are not recorded in the Rockbridge census.) Ensign William Moore had six tithables plus himself but a total of only eighty acres in three different plots; consequently he may have hired out tithables to other farmers. Tithables who were skilled workers would generally have been more profitable than field hands. Militia leaders with a number of tithables besides himself were fortunate, because the Point Pleasant campaign occurred during the fall harvesting and winter wheat planting season, and their farms would not have suffered as much as small farms from the owner’s absence.

### **Militia Leaders’ Social Status**

While the militia drew its leaders and enlisted personnel from all socio-economic levels, officers and NCOs commonly held offices in the county. Nevertheless, a significant number of the county’s influential people were not militia members. Some were exempt due to their skilled positions, age, or physical infirmities. One study of the Virginia militia estimates that as many as eight thousand males of service age in Virginia were exempt from duty.<sup>8</sup> While most influential members of the county—e.g., magistrates and others—were assumed to be part of the militia, not

8. James Titus, *The Old Dominion at War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p. 5.

all served. Wealthy individuals who wished to be exempt from service could pay a bounty and someone else would serve for him, a practice that continued through the Civil War.

The county's political and legal structure at the time revolved around the county court, which appointed or nominated men to nearly every government job in the community: road surveyor, sheriffs, tax collector, etc. All these jobs required the holder to be in constant contact with the county court for instructions on court cases or rulings. Thus, if the high-level public offices were held by militia leaders, then the lower-level jobs were probably at least partially filled with militia personnel who were personally known to the leading officers. Holding militia offices and other offices of public trust were, to a significant degree, the result of connections and networking. For example, Sergeant Andrew Reid's family was well connected in the community, his father having been county clerk before Andrew took over.

Progression through the militia's ranks was a best a haphazard affair by modern careerist standards. This is one reason why there is no large discrepancy between the wealth of officers and NCOs in the county during Dunmore's War. There were few stated rules regarding promotion. Five officers and NCOs were promoted during the time that the militia pay records were being gathered concerning the Point Pleasant campaign. At least three of these promotions were from the enlisted ranks into the officer corps. It would appear that little special training was considered necessary to become an officer, and it is unlikely that a formal commission was needed. In the post-Civil War militia, it was uncommon to jump from being a noncommissioned officer to being an officer. Although it is not known how promotions were given at the time of Dunmore's War (probably by the other officers), it appears that it was considered necessary to spend some time in the ranks before being given a command; in addition, it was doubtless helpful to hold or have held a civil office. Not surprisingly, many officers and NCOs continued to gain wealth and stature in the community after their Dunmore's War experiences.

The militia continuum recognizes that the officers and noncommissioned officers were not divided by class or wealth differences. If NCOs were reasonably affluent and well connected in the community, they would most likely be promoted to officer when a vacancy occurred. The reverse is also true: if they were disruptive at musters, failed to gain wealth, a family, or stature in society, they continued in their position and were not promoted to the officer ranks.



### **Role of Age and Veteran Status**

Knowing the days of service for which a man was paid is a strong indicator of whether he was present at the Point Pleasant battle. Sort terms of service indicated guard duty or local patrolling for Indians or to prevent slave escapes or revolts. An individual’s presence for the battle is important in determining whether or not this was a factor for promotion or status in the social structure of the militia.

James Buchanan, an ensign and then a lieutenant in McDowell’s company, represents the young officer, as he held the lowest officer rank upon his first deployment of thirteen days. During his next deployment, clearly on the Point Pleasant campaign, he was paid for 134 days of service. He was age twenty-five at the time of the battle, and was probably promoted to fill a vacancy. His youth is a good example of the militia continuum, showing the age desired for junior officers in order that experience could shape their actions after a few deployments. Andrew Moore also began the war as a sergeant and then was promoted to a lieutenant in McDowell’s company. He was not present at Point Pleasant, being paid only for services in the three-day and thirteen-day deployments. Like Buchanan, he was twenty-five.

John Steel, who was a sergeant in McDowell’s company and was deployed for 134 days in the Point Pleasant campaign, was thirty-one years old. Steele’s experience demonstrates that not all young officers/NCOs were promoted to officer rank because of the coming of war and his prebattle deployments. Interestingly, while Buchanan and Moore had substantial wealth, Steele seems, from the records, to have had none. This may demonstrate that despite being older and experienced as an NCO, without the proper connections in society it was nearly impossible to achieve an officer’s rank in the militia. There does not appear to be a significant link between being a veteran of Point Pleasant and subsequent promotion. Of the six individuals who were promoted from NCO to officer, only one was present at the battle.

### **Wills as Information Sources**

While cross-referencing other documents to help identify the family structure and relatives of Rockbridge officers and noncommissioned officers, recorded wills were used to illuminate the primogeniture patterns of land holding as well as the inheritance patterns of the families of militiamen. Some officers and NCOs did not have wills (or at least none that

can now be found), so we have no record of who inherited their property. An example of a will-less militia leader is William Lyle, a sergeant in McDowell's company. He was paid for only one thirteen-day deployment, so he was not at the battle of Point Pleasant. He paid tithable taxes only on himself, and I cannot find any record of other assets. He did not appear to have a family, which doubtless limited Lyle socially and financially and thus makes him a likely example of someone who would never be taken into the upper rungs of the militia continuum. When he died in 1778 he was elderly and may have outlived his heirs.

Another example of an individual who died without a will was Lieutenant Samuel Moore of McDowell's company. Moore possibly attained his officer status on the basis of his great financial assets, including 415 acres of land. We have no records of either a will or a family for him. One could conclude from this case that while it might have been a prerequisite to own land and have ties in the community in order to secure a promotion, it may not have been necessary to have a family to progress up the militia rank structure.

### **Postwar Economic Status**

It is useful to examine records that show the accumulation of wealth by officers and NCOs after Dunmore's War, as one might expect such men to continue to be successful. Ensign Robert Lusk of McDowell's company acquired a male tithable in 1778, although it is not clear whether he was a son come of age or a slave. Sergeant William Lyle acquired an unnamed slave in 1778. Neither Lusk nor Lyle appreciably changed their economic status after the war. Far more successful was Captain John Gilmore. We have no documentation on the number of tithables he had at the time of the Point Pleasant battle, but he accumulated six additional tithables before 1781 and four more by 1782; not all of these were likely to have been his own children. Sergeant Andrew Reid (two tithables and 2.5 acres in 1774) acquired two male tithables by 1786. Reid was recommended for a militia commission by the Rockbridge County magistrates in 1778. Lieutenant James Buchanan, a wealthy officer during Dunmore's War, had accumulated five additional tithables (three males and two females) by 1798. Andrew Moore purchased an adult male slave in 1799.

Naturally, some officers and NCOs in Dunmore's War declined in success and status, which generally prevented their further success in the militia hierarchy. Sergeant James McCampbell of Gilmore's company disappears from the records that link him to assets in the county, possibly because he was convicted in 1778 of disorderly conduct during a

recent general muster. Perhaps he decided it would be advantageous to leave the county. The case of Ensign Alexander Tedford was similar, although he was able to post a £50 bond and perhaps stayed in the county, although his name never again appears in the available records.

Some available data—e.g., land transfer records—are ambiguous as indicators of success or trouble for an individual. Selling off multiple plots that had taken years to accumulate could signal a family that was either in debt or did not have the heirs to carry on. Some—e.g., Samuel Moore—appeared to sell off country land to buy land in Lexington, which probably indicated a change in the location of his primary employment.

### **Virginia and New England Militia Experiences Compared**

It is interesting to compare militiamen from New England,<sup>9</sup> who served with British forces in 1763, with the 1774 Virginia volunteers in Dunmore’s War. A historian of the Massachusetts militia noted that while some of them (officers, NCOs, and enlisted) were farmers, the majority relied on some other form of income, such as field labor. Moreover, while many of the farms were large producers, many were not self-sufficient. There is no hard evidence to prove that the farms of Virginia militia members were not self-sufficient, but judging by the size of farms and the number of livestock, many were clearly not. Consequently, farmers in New England as well as in Virginia needed trade and non-farm businesses to survive. Frequently, however, the junior officers and NCOs were men in their twenties, and a man’s accumulation of total wealth was not complete until he was into his thirties and forties, because he had not received his full inheritance from his father.

There was one significant difference between the militiamen from the Valley of Virginia and those from Massachusetts. The Point Pleasant battle was fought solely by militiamen—citizen soldiers who were, in many cases, completely new to the experience of battle. By contrast, the militia in New England served with regular British troops, many with Seven Years’ War battle experience. While British regulars were generally contemptuous of the militia’s discipline and leadership, the militia doubtless learned many things from the regulars that affected their readiness and combat effectiveness. On the other hand, the New England militiamen were unwilling to listen to officers they themselves had not elected, and the British regular–colonial militia split widened over time.<sup>10</sup>

9. See Fred Anderson, *A People’s Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 52–55.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–20.

The systems of deployment were also different between the two regions. New England militiamen were part of a larger army, fighting against a large contingent of Indians whose approximate location was known. They did not need to deploy to guard areas and towns from attack as the Virginians did; rather, the army would move deliberately as a whole looking for battle. Moreover, the British had a number of strong forts in reasonable proximity to the army's march. Virginia troops had no such forts and were forced to seek the enemy nearly everywhere, since the Indians' location was rarely known. This was a key reason why the battle at Point Pleasant was a surprise to Colonel Lewis's forces.

New England militiamen during the French and Indian War tended to be continuously deployed over a long period, but, because of their use of forts and frequent engagements, on the defensive. Because of the different scale of the war in the south in the early 1770s, Virginia militiamen were constantly on the offensive but only for brief periods. New England troops were issued all the essential equipment they needed for campaigns, which tended to be long. In Virginia, militiamen were not as well supplied.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusions

In this study I have used documentary evidence of assets of land, labor, and capital to ascertain not only how wealthy were the prospective members of the militia, but also who was most likely to obtain an officer's commission and become part of the militia's command structure. Clearly it was important to own land, to be well connected socially and economically in the society, and to have had service in a senior non-commissioned officer's position. Being present at the battle of Point Pleasant did not seem to enhance or detract from an individual's promotion status. Overall, this study identified the qualifications of a successful militiaman and, depending on his wealth, what the future would most likely hold for that soldier. Finally, the manner of militia officer selection was similar for Rockbridge County Virginia and New England, although there are reasons to believe that unit combat effectiveness may have been significantly worse in Virginia.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–70.

## Appendix: The Use and Function of Scouts

During the course of research to find officers and noncommissioned officers from the early years of Rockbridge County who were veterans of Dunmore’s War, I located information on many soldiers who were paid for their services at one rate throughout the war. In some cases, the pay grade held was not consistent throughout the dates of service, and in some cases, it fluctuated significantly.

Clearly some of these inconsistencies were due to the individuals being promoted for various reasons. But I also found that there were some militiamen who were paid at significantly different rates than normal for their ranks for long periods. After some matching of data, I found that these individuals were being paid the daily rate of five shillings per day for the dangerous duty as a scout. (The payment for a regular private was one shilling six pence per day.)

One wonders why the scouts were not in place at Point Pleasant on the morning of October 10, 1774, when the Indians were preparing to spring their surprise attack. Perhaps Colonel Lewis’s over-confidence was to blame. In a letter concerning scouts *after* the Battle of Point Pleasant, Captain Andrew Lockridge was directed to identify his command’s two or three “most active men and best woodsmen.” The October 19, 1774, order (issued only nine days after the battle) directs the scouts to patrol around the militia camp and return for further orders. Such scouts were respected because they received desirable assignments and were constantly on the front line skirmishing with the enemy or monitoring his movements.

Scouts were important even when not on campaign. On May 27, 1774, Colonel William Preston wrote a letter to Captain Samuel McDowell telling him of the extraordinary job the scouts were doing and observing that they should be praised for their efforts. Preston was impressed by the scouts because they helped to calm the settlers who were fleeing the area because of the border dispute with the Indians.<sup>12</sup>


Interestingly, all the scouts were privates when they returned to their regular service. This implies that scouts were not seen as needing to have significant formal military knowledge in order to perform their duties, but needed considerable experience in woodland lore, outdoor living, and tracking. Such experience did not require significant wealth or social status, and this may be the reason most scouts did not rise above the rank of private despite their technical knowledge and higher pay.

12. Reuben Thwaites, *Documentary History of Dunmore’s War* (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1905), p. 352, 25.



# A Grand Tour of Virginia Landmarks in Landscape

William M. S. Rasmussen

S we form our opinions today about the land—whether it should be preserved or developed—it is useful to see how people before us have looked upon the same landscape. They have expressed their views in writings and in pictures. The exhibition at the Virginia Historical Society, titled *The Virginia Landscape*, is a survey of the pictures. It presents 240 views, dating from the earliest ones (a view of Yorktown in 1755) to the present. These pictures contain a wealth of information: they record interests (such as recreation on the land), needs (such as physical and spiritual renewal from the land), philosophies (such as the appreciation of the picturesque [or picture-like scenery]), and pride (as in the once new but now-lost nineteenth-century market towns). We can read Virginia history in these pictures.

In the colonial era, there was less interest in the beauties of the land, so that few landscapes were painted then. (The rage was for portraits,

---

**William M. S. Rasmussen** has been Virginius C. Hall Curator of Art at the Virginia Historical Society since 1991. A Washington and Lee University graduate and former faculty member in its Art Department, he is the co-author of *The Making of Virginia Architecture*; *Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend*; and *George Washington: The Man Behind the Myths*. His slide lecture to the Rockbridge Historical Society was based on the Virginia Historical Society's then-current exhibition of Virginia landscapes, the largest of its type ever mounted. It was presented on October 30, 2000, in Pogue Auditorium at the George C. Marshall Library in Lexington.

The exhibition catalog, co-authored by Rasmussen and James C. Kelly, the Virginia Historical Society's assistant director for museums, was published as *The Virginia Landscape: A Cultural History* (Charlottesville, Va.: Howell Press, 2000). All of the illustrations used in the essay printed here have been taken from that source.

containing only artificial landscapes.) But later, people came to recognize the intrinsic beauty of the landscape in this region, and in fact the very identity and reputation of Virginia came to reside in its natural historic landmarks. Virginia became known as the place where, for example, the Natural Bridge and the thermal and mineral springs are located, and where Mount Vernon and Yorktown are. This identity from the land is the subject of my remarks here. I will give you a tour of the natural and historic landmarks. The exhibition in Richmond also deals with other themes that I shall not go into here—e.g., progress, which is a celebration of development [when cities were built over the natural landscape], and the current rediscovery of nature.

### The Natural Landmarks

The role of the natural and historic landmarks of Virginia in defining the region, in giving it an identity, began at an early date. In 1789, when George Washington first took the oath as president, every schoolboy knew that Mount Vernon was in Virginia, and that the Revolutionary War had ended, for all intents and purposes, at Yorktown. At precisely the same time, Virginia also was becoming known for its remarkable natural landscape. The first American guidebook—Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*—was available after 1787. Jefferson gave Virginia "natural wonders—like Natural Bridge and Harpers Ferry—the status of national treasures and made them known internationally. As a network of roads in the commonwealth connected these natural wonders, a southern version of the European Grand Tour emerged, with travelers going from place to place because (as a writer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* put it in 1861) "western Virginia offered natural attractions in a condensed locale." This is significant; it proves that throughout the nineteenth century (and beginning even before the turn into that century), the land in Virginia was every bit as important to everyone as the so-called Hudson River landscape was to northerners; this fact simply has been forgotten.

Some of those who made the full circuit of Virginia's world-famous natural wonders began in Washington, D.C., and first visited the Great Falls of the Potomac, just fifteen miles upriver. In 1873 William MacLeod painted a view in which we sense the presence of the vast Ohio lands that feed this river—the western empire that George Washington saw whenever he looked at the Potomac. But when Arthur Middleton wrote in 1810, "The Falls of the Patowmac, a few miles from this city, were too attractive to be neglected," he was thinking more about the magnitude and force of the water. He wrote, "water rushes down with tremendous





*William MacLeod, Great Falls of the Potomac, 1873. Oil on canvas, 34 x 45 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.2, p. 51.)*



*William Russell Birch, Falls of the Potomac, c.1800–10. Pencil and watercolor, 6 x 8.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 2.5, p. 16.)*

impetuosity, over a ledge of rocks, in several different cataracts, winding afterwards, with great velocity, along the bottom of the precipices, whose rocky crags are so intermixed with trees as to produce a beautiful effect.”

That same sort of vision was recorded in 1794 by the Englishman William Birch. The Great Falls seemed to these visitors to be “Sublime”—that was the word they used then, and this was their appeal. Of the eighteenth-century publications that explored new ideas about the

arts, the most influential was Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London, 1757). Burke wrote about the sense of *pleasure* that results from *knowing* of perils that pose no immediate threat to the viewer. He said, "The passions which belong to self-preservation turn on pain and danger, . . . they are delightful. . . . Whatever excites this delight I call *sublime*." Today we watch scary movies to get this sort of excitement. Many nineteenth-century travelers were quick to associate the Sublime with a number of the natural landmarks in Virginia.

Upstream from the Great Falls, the Potomac passes through the Blue Ridge Mountains at Harpers Ferry. This was a second site that Thomas Jefferson introduced to an international audience through his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, as an example of the Sublime. He imagined—better than any artist ever did—that the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers must have crashed through the Blue Ridge here—they were dammed up, he said, until "at length [they broke] over at this spot and have torn the mountain down from its summit to its base." Thus he called Harper's Ferry "one of the most stupendous scenes in nature" and "worth a voyage across the Atlantic" to see it. That description became famous, and for decades it lured visitors to the site. Not everyone agreed; the Englishman Isaac Weld said in 1795, "To find numberless scenes more stupendous it would be needless to go farther than Wales."

One of the first artists lured to Harpers Ferry was William Roberts, an Englishman. He gave President Jefferson a painting of Harpers Ferry, but was not happy with that first attempt (which is now lost). He then produced a watercolor, which he had engraved. His vantage point was the hill from which Jefferson had surveyed the scene. Roberts, however, gives only a slight suggestion of the sublimity of this landscape.

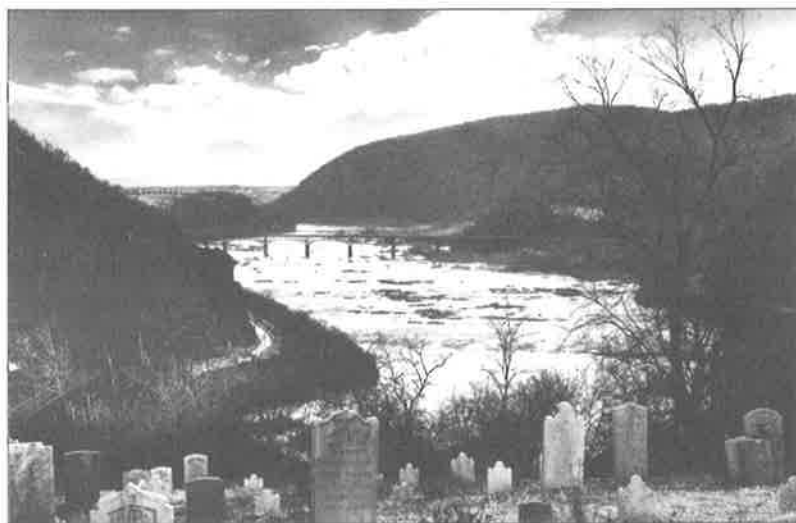
Photographer Aubrey Bodine came closer. In the 1950s he imagined highly dramatic atmospheric conditions that he almost certainly never saw at Harpers Ferry. He is known to have pieced together scenery with dramatic skies that he photographed in different regions of the country, and he apparently laid a non-Virginia sky above Harpers Ferry.

The fact of the matter is that Harpers Ferry is truly Sublime under one type of condition, when the rivers are at flood stage. No flood-control dams impound either river. In 1972, during Hurricane Agnes, the Potomac was pouring 347,000 cubic feet of water per second through the Blue Ridge—37.5 times its normal flow. The Potomac then produced a tremendous surge; the ground reportedly seemed to tremble. Seeing that must have been truly Sublime. Nobody knows if Jefferson ever saw the rivers in flood.

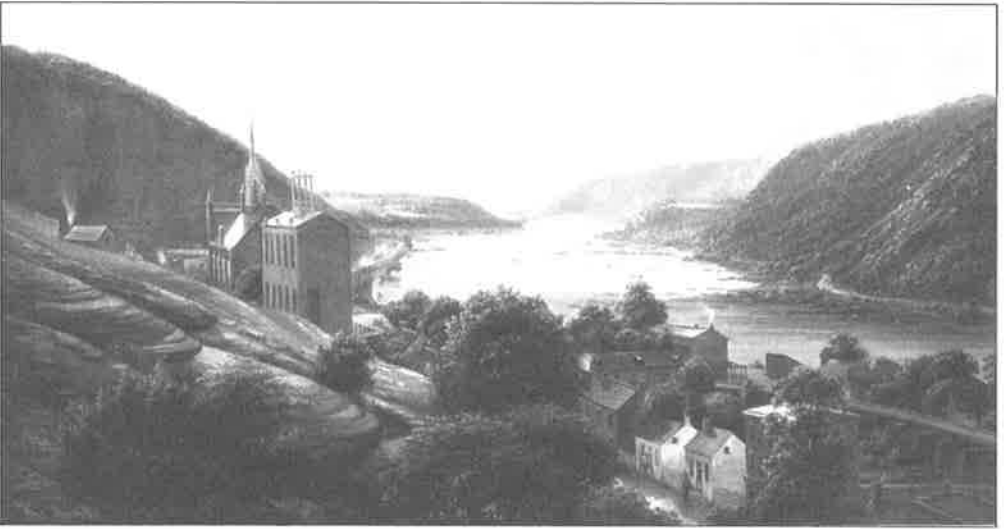
Most of the time, Harpers Ferry is bucolic and peaceful, not sublime. The writer William Gilmore Simms described Harpers Ferry in the mid-



*William Roberts, Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia, c. 1808-10. Watercolor, 12 x 15.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.3, p. 53.)*



*Aubrey Bodine, Harpers Ferry, c. 1950. Gelatin silver print, 9.5 x 12 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 2.4, p. 15.)*



*Ferdinand Richardt, Harpers Ferry, 1858. Oil on canvas, 28.5 x 48.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 36., p. 55.)*

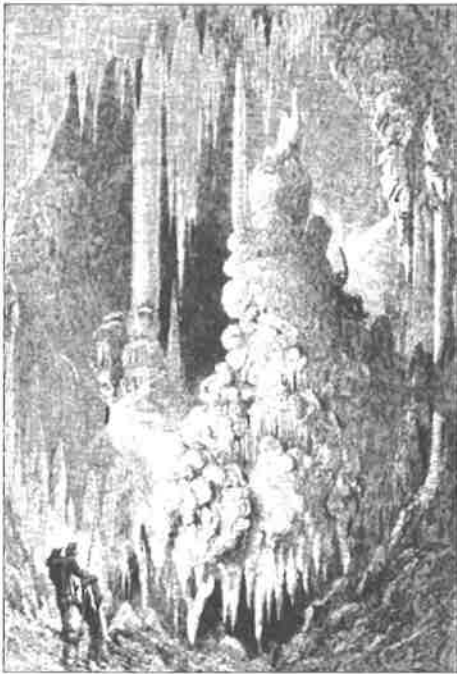
1830s: “Beauty is here, and dignity, and the eye lingers with gratification upon the sweet pictures which are made of the scene, at the rising and setting of the sun.” In the 1800s this type of scene was called “Picturesque,” meaning “like or suitable for a picture,” having interesting elements that are well composed. This philosophy goes back to the 1600s and the French painter Claude Lorrain, and to the ancient Roman poet Virgil, who had imbued the landscape with an enchanting myth, that of a rustic Golden Age—Arcadia—when man lived on the fruits of the earth in peaceful simplicity. Of course, the American landscape was not like that. Nonetheless, a number of artists born and trained in England became determined to locate picturesque scenery. The Picturesque was in vogue in the early nineteenth century.

The traveler making the Grand Tour of Virginia’s natural landmarks would next make his way down the Valley, where he might visit a cave or two. A French traveler in America, Jacques Milbert, wrote in 1828, “The Alleghenies, or endless mountains, are divided into small, nearly parallel chains, notable for their natural phenomena, including the numerous grottoes.” One of the most famous was and is Weyer’s Cave, discovered about 1804 by a German farmer named Bernard Weyer. It became one of Virginia’s foremost natural attractions and is known today as Grand Caverns.

One visitor in 1846 wrote that “Weyer’s cave is one of the great natural wonders of this New World, and for its eminence in its own class,

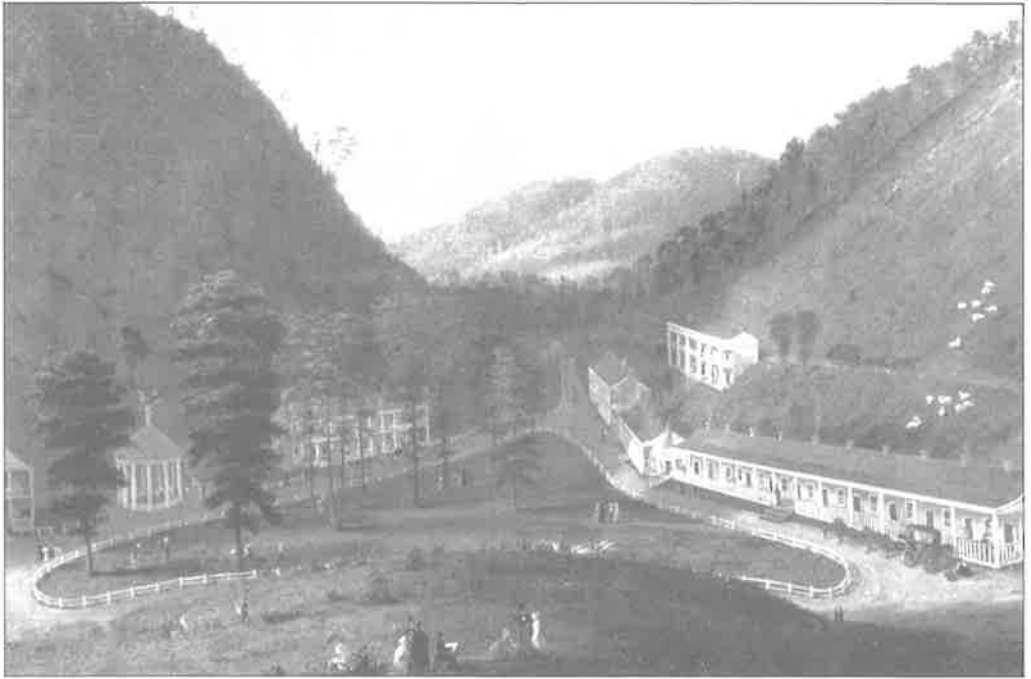


Russell Smith, *Scene in Weyer's Cave Looking Toward the Mouth, 1844*. Watercolor, 8.5 x 12.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.11, p. 59.)



Harry Fenn, *Cleopatra's Needle and Anthony's Pillar, 1872*. Wood engraving, 9.125 x 6.375 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 2.9, p. 18.)

deserves to be ranked with the Natural Bridge and Niagara.” Today we wonder why. The answer brings us back to the concept of the Sublime. Harry Fenn made numerous sketches of Weyer's Cave in the early 1870s. Scenes like *Cleopatra's Needle and Anthony's Pillar* (1872) inevitably inspired thoughts of the Sublime in the mind of the nineteenth-century traveler. Visitors responded to the darkness, stillness, and sense of isolation that they encountered in the caves with the mix of fear and delight that Edmund Burke had associated with the passions of self-preservation. In this strange setting, the dangers of the unknown and of becoming lost were real, or at least seemed so. In 1872 Luray Caverns in Page County were discovered. Luray was quickly accepted by many as “the grandest of American caverns.”



*George Cooke, View of Red Sulphur Springs, Virginia, 1836-37. Oil on canvas, 32.75 x 48 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.15, p. 63.)*

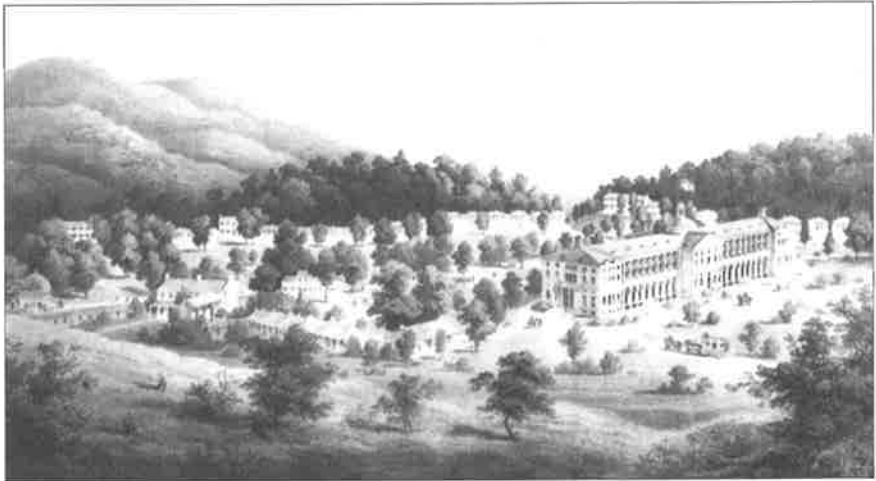
Throughout this period, western Virginia was dotted with spas that now are mostly gone and thus forgotten—an example being Red Sulphur Springs in Monroe County (now in West Virginia). In the early years these springs were so “remote” and “difficult of access” that “very few” other than invalids visited them. But by the middle decades of the 1800s, a network of decent roads connected the various sites, and people traveled from spring to spring. Visitors came from all over—from the Tidewater and low country regions of Virginia and from other states, and also from northern cities, to seek refuge from the summer heat and malarial fevers or simply for a summer excursion. They went for sight-seeing, sport, business, courtship, matchmaking, to see and be seen—and later for professional meetings.

There were thermal springs, such as Warm Springs and Hot Springs, where the water’s temperature as well as its mineral content made it appealing. At the mineral springs, the chemical content of the water was supposed to cure, or at least alleviate, a range of ailments and conditions. Some of the spas were denominated Warm, Hot, Sweet, Sweet Chaly-



*Above: Edward Beyer, Greenbrier White Sulphur Springs, 1853. Oil on canvas, 26 x 50 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.18, p. 65)*

*Below: Edward Beyer, White Sulphur Springs, Greenbrier County, 1858. Lithograph, 11.125 x 19.125 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.19, p. 65.)*



beate (which means it contains iron), Healing, or Boiling Springs, and others Red, White, Blue, Grey, Yellow, or Salt Sulphur. They were not interchangeable. Some springs were thought best for childhood illnesses, others for problems of the aged.

Virginia's resorts became the setting for romantic fiction and the inspiration for poems. Antebellum writers who were eager to defend the traditions of southern society played out their romantic fancies against a springs backdrop that characterized an aristocratic lifestyle sympathetically. These books contributed to the mythology of the Old South. Soon

everyone of "significance" was visiting Greenbrier White Sulphur Springs. Among the foreigners present was Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the French emperor, who described this scene: "The White Sulphur . . . is surrounded by hills. The middle of the valley, where the buildings stand, is cleared of trees, with the exception of some noble oaks, left for the purpose of ornament and shade. . . The 'tout ensemble' produces a most pleasing appearance."

The socially, politically, and financially eminent went to the Greenbrier, which was almost as famous as Mount Vernon. Edward Beyer, who painted the resort in 1853 and again in 1858, noted in his *Album of Virginia* the "great improvements" that had been made between his two visits: "Many of the cabins have been removed, and magnificent buildings and handsome cottages have been erected in their stead." The writer excused further comment: "But it is not necessary to describe this famous place minutely, as it is well known in every portion of our country."

There were so many visitors to Hot Springs by 1848 that the owner, a physician and entrepreneur named Thomas Goode, was compelled to build a large hotel there that he named The Homestead. According to the notes to Beyer's *Album of Virginia*, the accommodations for 250 guests were "first class" and the scenery was "wild, romantic, and beautiful." By the 1850s, The Homestead was easily reached from eastern cities. But more than the location and the architecture, it was the waters that set this resort apart. There are nine separate baths of varied temperatures. The waters were asserted to be "excelled by nothing ever known to the human race. Their curative powers are unsurpassed by those of any mineral water on the face of the Globe." (The nineteenth-century buildings burned in 1901.)

Heading west on the turnpike from Hot Springs and White Sulphur Springs to Charleston, one passed the Hawk's Nest and Crow's Nest overlooking the New River gorge—among the most westerly of the attractions on the circuit of Virginia's natural wonders. They are in Fayette County (now West Virginia) 320 miles from Richmond. An 1836 gazetteer reads: "Before reaching the valley of the Kanawha, the traveller is feasted by the sublime and picturesque scenery from the cliffs of New River." The English concept of Sublime, which so interested Virginians, was of little interest to the Cincinnati artist Worthington Whittredge, who painted Crow's Nest in 1848. He had traveled to New York City and learned the philosophy of the early Hudson River School of painters. They followed an entirely different, nationalistic agenda, whereby the land was valued as God's gift to a people who would develop in this unspoiled setting a great nation. Thus, the viewer is placed low in a wild and bountiful landscape through which he senses





Above: *Worthington Whittredge, Crow's Nest, 1848. Oil on canvas, 39.75 x 56 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.21, p. 67.)*

Below: *Unidentified artist, A West View of the Falling Spring, Bath County, Virginia, c. 1830–50. Engraving, 9 x 7.25 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.23, p. 68.)*



that man can easily progress. Not far beyond are mountains that tower toward heaven. A storm-blasted tree is evidence that this “Garden of Eden” (to use a phrase of the period) is still the domain only of explorers and hunters.

Tourists and artists also traveled in the Allegheny Mountains to view and paint the waterfalls there. Crabtree Falls must have been known to Thomas Jefferson, because they are located almost on the path between his homes Monticello and Poplar Forest, but Crabtree did not warrant mention in his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*. He did mention the Falling Spring, on the Jackson River, which rises in

the Warm Spring Mountains southwest of the town of Warm Springs. Jefferson ranked it as “the *only* remarkable Cataract” in the commonwealth. It is 205 feet in height, higher than Niagara by 50 feet, but Jefferson conceded that there was “no comparison [to Niagara] . . . as to the quantity of water.” In his day, the river rolled over the rock in a solid mass. But by the 1850s a writer noted that “many canals for driving mills and other works [had since] taken from the Fall much of the water.”

Almost every traveler stopped at Natural Bridge. In 1774 Thomas Jefferson had purchased Natural Bridge from George III so that it would remain accessible to the public. A decade later he called it “the most sublime of nature’s works,” and with that ranking it was soon viewed as the greatest of Virginia’s natural landmarks. Numerous important people visited—John Marshall, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, Thomas Hart Benton, Sam Houston, and Henry Clay. Currier & Ives issued a famous print of it. Natural Bridge was known seemingly to everyone, so much so that in 1851 Herman Melville could use the bridge to describe Moby Dick: “But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia’s Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight.”

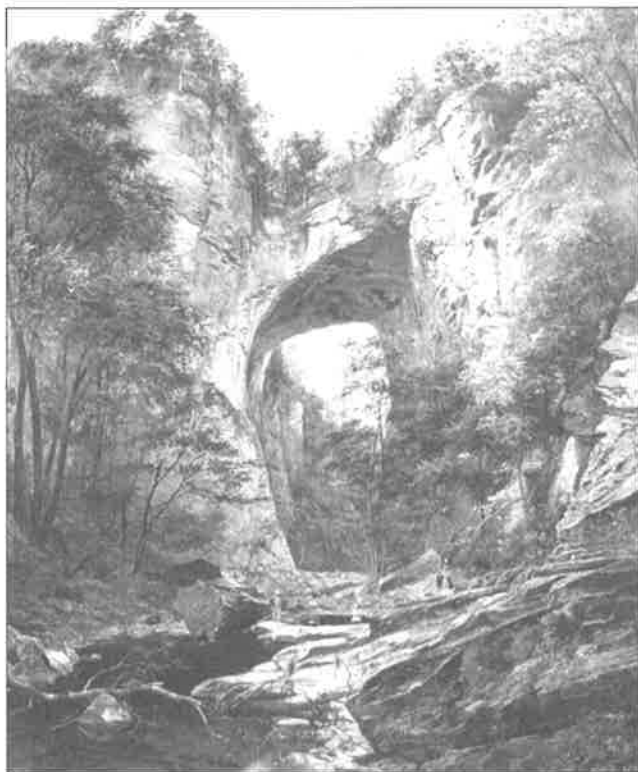
Travelers were dumfounded by the bridge. One wrote in 1852 of “staring upwards in stupid amazement at so grand a work of the Great Architect.” Most, like Jefferson, supposed that it was created by some cataclysm. In 1797 Louis Philippe, later King of France, surmised instead that it was “hollowed out by the water’s steady action, perhaps like the rifts of the Rhone.” He was close to the current hypothesis, which is that Natural Bridge was once a huge underground cavern produced by erosion; most of the cavern collapsed, leaving the Natural Bridge as a remnant of a much larger vaulted roof.

One of the best paintings of Natural Bridge was done in 1860 by David Johnson, another second generation Hudson River School artist. The bridge is shown to be a magnificent rock formation that seems infused with energy, or at least it still bears the imprint of some cataclysmic force. It slants and twists, so that the viewer can only tremble before the reality of it. The small figures seem miniscule beneath the giant arch. The foreground is given to rocks. No other artist so effectively used this array of nature’s rubble to suggest the upheaval that had put it there. The canvas presents Natural Bridge as comparable to Niagara Falls, which had been painted by the Hudson River artist Frederic Church only three years earlier in a painting that was greatly admired.

The bridge and Niagara were often paired and compared. Most people considered them the only two truly sublime landmarks in America.



*Above: Currier & Ives, Natural Bridge, c. 1860. Lithograph, 12.875 x 17 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.33, p. 74.)*



*Left: David Johnson, Natural Bridge, 1860. Oil on canvas. 30 x 24 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.34, p. 75.)*

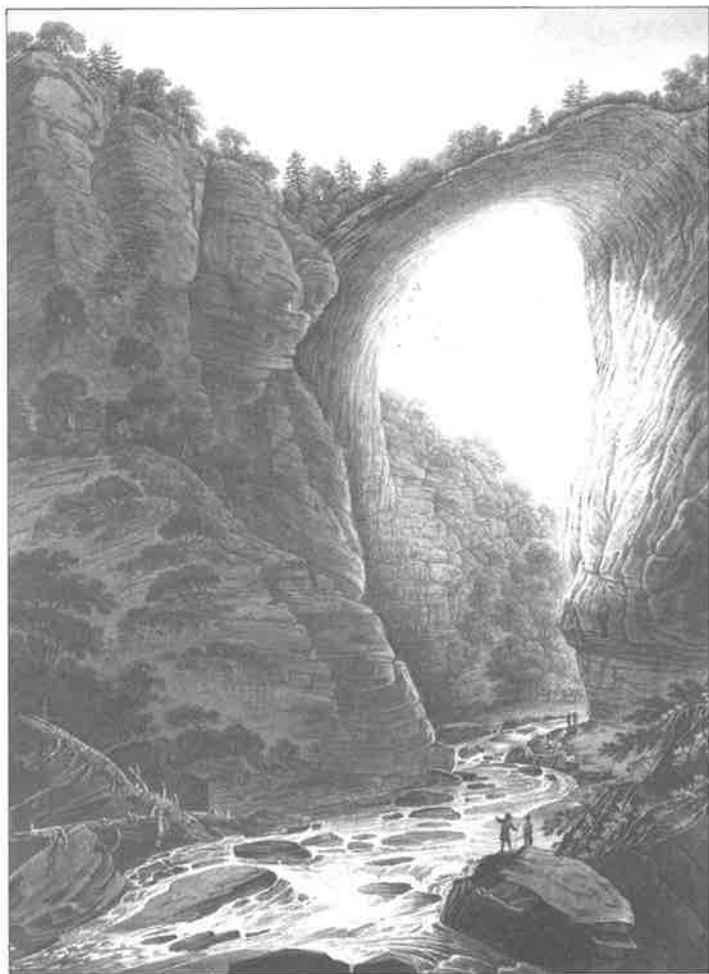


Henry S. Tanner, *Cartouche on Map of the United States, 1822*. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.35, p. 75.)

Some Americans knew of Natural Bridge from a map of North America printed in 1822 that shows the bridge towering over a puny Niagara Falls. A traveler, Henry Gilpin, wrote in 1827: “It is not perhaps as sublime as Niagara . . . but . . . if I were called upon to say which was the most worthy of a voyage to America I should hesitate considerably before I preferred Niagara.”

When Jefferson described the bridge as “the most sublime of nature’s works,” he inspired travelers and artists to view it in the same light. English painter William Roberts sent President Jefferson paintings of Harpers Ferry and Natural Bridge—now both lost. Then in 1808, he created the remarkable image of the bridge on the next page that by contortion exaggerates its sublimity in a way that conforms to Jefferson’s account. By the last quarter of the century, the railroad had made the bridge more accessible to tourists than previously. The bridge was now a spectacular, but not mysterious, site, for by then it had become accepted that the bridge was created by slow erosion rather than some unfathomable cataclysmic event.

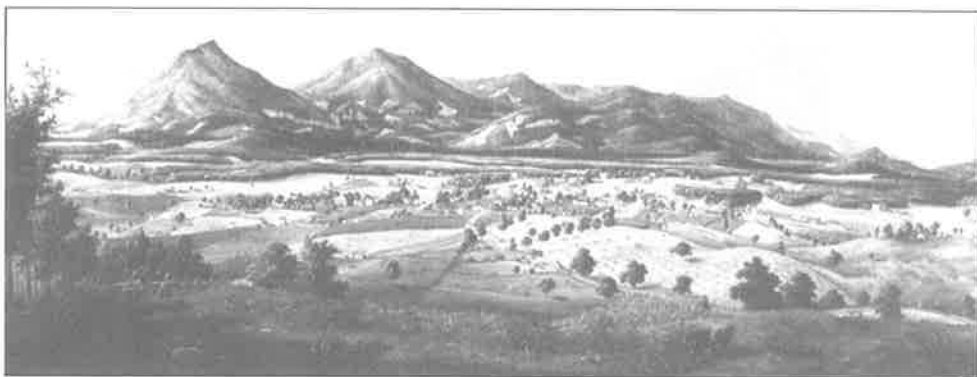
East of Natural Bridge are the Peaks of Otter, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains near where the James River crosses. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson incorrectly supposed the Peaks to be the highest mountains in the United States or even North America, but he conceded that they are “a fifth part of the height of the mountains of South



*J. C. Stradler after William Roberts, Natural Bridge, 1808. Aquatint, 2.25 x 24.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 2.2 p. 12.)*

America.” Englishman Isaac Weld, who was unimpressed by Harpers Ferry, saw the Peaks in 1796 and expressed his doubt that they equaled Mount Snowden in Wales.

Travel accounts suggest that the appeal of the Peaks lay not only in their “exceedingly imposing” appearance but also in the precarious situation at the summit and the sublime view from that elevation. Climbing up to the summit of the Peaks of Otter was fraught with the sort of dangers that Edmund Burke said are Sublime because they excite



Above: *Edward Beyer, The Peaks of Otter and the Town of Liberty [now Bedford], 1855. Oil on canvas, 26.75 x 58.375 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.43, p. 80.)*



Left: *Thomas Moran, The Summit of the Peak of Otter, Virginia, 1874. Wood engraving, 4.5 x 3.125 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 2.7, p. 17.)*

delight. In his 1874 book *The Great South*, Edward King wrote: “Under the great dome of the translucent sky we stood trembling, shut off from the lower world, and poised on a narrow pinnacle, from which we might at any moment, by an unwary step, be hurled down.” The word *sublime* was used to describe the sensation of “seeming suspension in mid-air.”

In the nineteenth century, swamps attracted considerable attention in folklore; they became associated with sin, decay, and death. The Dismal Swamp, below Norfolk, is shown in a folk painting of 1840 by a Connecticut artist. An Irish poet wrote at the end of the nineteenth century, the Great Dismal Swamp “is almost as familiar as Niagara or the Rocky Mountains.” It was huge, then, six times its present size.

An Indian tale had put Dismal Swamp on the map. In this story, which is illustrated here, a young man refuses to accept the death of his beloved; she has gone not to her grave, he insists, but to the Dismal Swamp. In that uncharted and seemingly boundless tract he joins her. In 1803, the Irish poet Thomas Moore made this tale internationally



*George Washington Mark, Dismal Swamp, Va., 1840. Oil on canvas, 38 x 48 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.46, p. 82.)*

known when he published a poem about this “death-cold maid” and the land where “the serpent feeds, And never man trod before”:

They made her a grave too cold and damp  
For a soul so warm and true;  
And she’s gone to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp,  
Where, all night long, by a firefly lamp,  
She paddles her white canoe.

Moore’s poem is about death, unfulfilled love, catharsis, and hope. It was popular because Americans in the 1800s increasingly accepted death as a release from the stress of life. The expansive lake in the poem appears to be an otherworldly region of spiritual calm. This painting effectively illustrates the final verse in Moore’s poem:

But oft, from the Indian hunter’s camp,  
This lover and maid so true  
Are seen, at the hour of midnight damp,

To cross the lake by a firefly lamp,  
And paddle their white canoe!

One of the first artists to depict the Great Dismal had been the Virginian John Gadsby Chapman. His 1835 painting is now lost but it is well-known from a print, which appeared in a number of gift books of the period. Currier & Ives even published a lithograph based on this image. Edgar Allan Poe knew this print, which he singled out for praise as the sort of image that would adorn his ideal room. Dismal Swamp had always intrigued Poe, who in his writings routinely described the same sort of phantasmic landscape that is constricted by stagnation and disintegration—which many feared was the condition of Virginia then, as it fell from its position of national leadership.



*John Gadsby Chapman, Lake of the Dismal Swamp, 1825. Oil on canvas (fireboard), 34 x 39 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.44, p. 81.)*

To many Americans, the swamp was too troubling to be looked at closely. It seemed an ambiguous region where little was clearly differentiated—light and dark, life and death, and good and evil, and where plant life is excessively prolific, almost like a cancer, symbolizing a breakdown of the very logic and order that underpin civilization. Other Americans, however, were ready at mid-century to look anew at the swamp, given how their society was plagued with such evils as greed and slavery, and



was changing under the impact of such forces as urbanization, industrialism, and democratization, and given how the new science seemed increasingly irreconcilable with religion. Thus in the 1840s and 1850s several painters traveled to the Dismal Swamp to observe and record its landscape. Regis Gignoux, a French artist with a studio in Brooklyn, painted it several times. He invites the viewer to study this previously neglected chapter of what nineteenth-century Americans called God's "Holy Book" of nature.

Interest in Virginia's natural landmarks peaked just before 1860. Admittedly, today the Valley and the mountains of Virginia attract more visitors than ever before, but this is because of population growth, increasing wealth, and transportation improvements. The relative position of this landscape within the larger picture of national and international tourism is a diminished one. No longer do people think instantly of the Natural Bridge when they think of Virginia. But Mount Vernon and Williamsburg still give Virginia its identity.

### The Historic Landmarks

During the ninety-two years Jamestown was Virginia's capital, 1607 to 1699, no one drew or painted a picture of it. It never had more than thirty-five houses. Only when Jamestown was abandoned, and became *historic*, did it seem a fit object for depiction.

In 1781 a French soldier in the Yorktown campaign wrote that there was but one house standing at Jamestown. He mused that "Tradition still preserves its locality; but the time will come when it will be as difficult to find the place where it stood, as that of the Capital of Old Priam in ancient Troy." What the Frenchman did not realize was that the campaign in which he had served launched a nation that would become the mightiest on earth and that Jamestown would *not* be forgotten.

The one house that the Frenchman saw is now gone, but the tower of the old church, built between 1639 and 1647, remained. In 1834, Alexandria-born artist John Gadsby Chapman painted his *Ruins of Jamestown, Virginia, America*, the title of which suggests that he did it for sale in Europe. In fact, that is where the we at the Virginia Historical Society found it in 1990. Europeans were fond of pictures of ruins, but Virginians were more ambivalent about it. America was too young to have ruins and they touched on a sore spot: the calamitous decline of tidewater Virginia in the half century before 1834. Before the exodus was over, a million Virginians would leave the commonwealth for points south and west. A whole literature of decline emerged in Virginia in the 1820s and 1830s. Some Virginia writers of this period—Edgar Allen Poe



*John Gadsby Chapman, Ruins of Jamestown, Virginia, America, 1834. Oil on board, 11 x 14 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.55, p. 92.)*

comes to mind immediately—rather fancied decayed ruins, but most Virginians considered them an embarrassment. Yet Chapman's image was not gloomy. Bathed in a warm early evening light, the church stands not as a monument to decay but as an inspiration to Virginians to celebrate and cherish their rich past.

Even in 1834 Americans remembered Jamestown. A Midwesterner, when he came to the headwaters of the James, west of Buchanan, wrote: "I could not but feel a kind of veneration, while I stood on the banks of that stream on which the first settlement was made in Virginia in 1607." American history, however, was coming to be written primarily by New Englanders, who had their own agenda. One visitor to Virginia wrote, "The New England writers who furnish our histories and school books seemingly desire to dwell upon and keep to the front the Pilgrim Fathers and Plymouth Rock and leave untold the entire story of the Cavaliers of Virginia." "One enterprising Yankee," he had been told, "sent off to New England two hundred relic bricks" from Jamestown church. "One wonders," he concluded, "if they desire to transplant this original landmark and rebuild it upon Plymouth Rock."

As at Jamestown, likewise at Williamsburg, no picture of it was made during the ninety years it was Virginia's capital. The famous Bodleian

copper plate of the 1730s does show architectural elevations of three buildings, but not the settings or surroundings. The aesthetic appreciation of the land for its own sake did not yet exist, and Williamsburg was not yet an historic place. When the capital was moved to Richmond in 1780, the Insane asylum was the only remaining institution in town, and it was unkindly said that “500 lazy live off 500 crazy.”

Although Williamsburg ceased to be a vibrant community after 1780, its role in the events leading to the Revolution was well known, and it became a hallowed site in the 1800s. It is a mistake, indeed a myth, to supposed that Williamsburg’s historical importance was overlooked until John D. Rockefeller matched his means to Reverend Goodwin’s vision in 1926 to produce Colonial Williamsburg. In 1860, the Englishman Lafevre Cranstone knew enough of Williamsburg’s role in the Revolution to seek it out. Among his sketches is one of the Powder Magazine in an apparently good state of preservation.



*Lafevre Cranstone, Williamsburg Virginia March 1860, 1860. Watercolor, 4.25 x 7.5 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.56, p. 94.)*

In an 1897 novel, the people of Williamsburg take a certain perverse pride in their sleepy town. In an electioneering speech, a candidate says:

New Yorkers are proud of the growth of their city at trade, wealth and population. The pride and boast of Williamsburg is that it has no wealth or trade, and that its population is less than it was a hundred years ago. This ambition, or lack of it, is at least unique. Williamsburg today is but an insignificant village. Williamsburg of the past is an immortal and glorious spot, around which the affections of every lover of our early history linger with unspeakable veneration.



*Thomas H. Wilkinson, George Wythe House, 1903. Watercolor, 12.75 x 17 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.57, p. 95.)*

Artists also knew of and were fond of unrestored Williamsburg. They liked its untidiness, its organic quality as a living, evolving community that juxtaposed buildings from different eras. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Louise Closser Hale, whose husband was an artist, wrote:

It makes no difference what you draw in Williamsburg for every house is historic and every one is a composition. If he begins on the Wythe House he is itching to get at Bruton church next door, and while he works upon Bruton he prays the creator of good architecture to keep the Poor Debtor's Prison from falling into dust before he gets around to it.

One of the artists who loved unrestored Williamsburg was Canadian-born Thomas Wilkinson who did the watercolor shown here of George Wythe's house.

By 1893, the colonial revival movement was underway. It perhaps began under the impulse of the Centennial of American Independence in 1876. Or, perhaps a longing for Chippendale, Adam, and Sheraton style afflicted those who viewed Victorian design with horror. But the colonial revival also was a social movement, backwards. It pined for the good old days of social order, deference, and hierarchy. The supposed

lifestyle of the Virginia gentry in the 1700s exercised a strong appeal to the Gilded Age plutocrats irritated by the rise of unions and socialism. What was needed, they thought, was good old-fashioned deference to the rich. The colonial revival included a strong element of this nostalgia not only for a preindustrial and primarily Anglo-Saxon America, but even for an inegalitarian and undemocratic age.

Colonial Williamsburg is an artifact of the colonial revival movement, albeit from a more progressive strain that took pride in the achievements of the Revolution itself rather than in the *ancien regime*. The restorers were faced with the problem that the principal buildings had not survived. Luckily, plans for them were found, and by the 1930s the reconstructions of the Capitol and Governor’s Palace were complete.

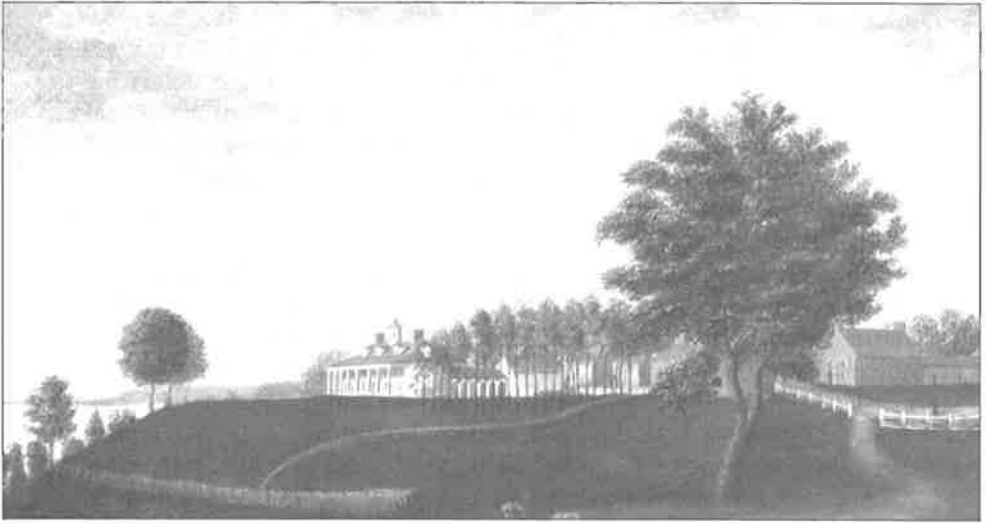
The village of Yorktown became famous and historic in 1781. Before that, however, it was depicted, unlike Jamestown and Williamsburg, because it was one of Virginia’s busiest and, small as it was, largest ports. Captain Thomas Davies’s sketch of Yorktown in 1755 is the earliest landscape of Virginia that has yet been found.

But, of course, it did not become a popular subject of art until it hosted the closing scene of the Revolution in 1781. The French naturally were thrilled at having bested their traditional foe and French print-makers were desperate to capitalize on the public’s interest; complete ignorance of how Virginia actually looked was insufficient to deter them.

In 1798 Benjamin Henry Latrobe said Yorktown was “half deserted. Trade has almost entirely left this once flourishing place, and none of the ravages of war have been repaired.” The commerce that caused Thomas Davies to make it a subject had vanished. Yorktown was victimized by

*Capt. Thomas Davies, A View of the Town of York Virginia from the River, c. 1755. Watercolor, 13 x 20 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 1.6, p. 5.)*





*Edward Savage, North-East View of Mount Vernon, Painted on the Spot, 1791-92. Oil on canvas, 22 x 36. (Virginia Landscape, fig., 3.50, p. 86.)*

the Revolution. But, of course, it was that very role that made it thereafter subject to far more pictures than it would have been had its trade remained.

Throughout the 1800s, Mount Vernon was the holy of holies of Virginia's historic attractions. In fact, it was known much earlier. In 1759 an English clergyman visited and wrote that "This place is the property of colonel Washington and truly deserving of its owner." He knew Washington as the twenty-two-year-old who started the French and Indian War, and thus the Seven Years' War, really the first war fought worldwide. But Mount Vernon did not become a major destination until the Revolution made Washington the most famous man in the world. To George and Martha's mortification, the flood of sightseers began during their lifetimes. For twenty years they never dined alone. People wanted images of Mount Vernon. Edward Savage produced a number of such views for more than twenty years.

Throughout the 1800s, Mount Vernon was by far the most visited historic site in Virginia, probably in America, because of Washington's preeminence as a historical figure, its proximity to the new nation's capital, and its inherent beauty. After Washington's death, however, a visit to Mount Vernon was less a journey to a picturesque site than a pilgrimage to the American holy land. In 1834, Theodore Dwight, president of Yale University, wrote of Mount Vernon, "the very name of that



*Russell Smith, The Original Tomb of Washington, 1836. Oil on board, 15 x 11.75 in. (Virginia Landscape, fig. 3.53, p. 88.)*

place has been dear to me.” Mount Vernon became the nation’s first historic house open to the public. To save the house for that purpose, American women legally incorporated for the very first time.

The most sacred spot there was Washington’s tomb. It was extremely modest, “a miserable brick hovel” one Englishman called it. Andrew Jackson was embarrassed by it and tried to shame Congress into doing something about it. But other visitors and artists were moved by its very humbleness. Theodore Dwight wrote: “There is something much more congenial to my mind in the simple and indeed humble repository of the ashes of Washington than in the most splendid monument of Italy or even Egypt.” But, of course, across the Potomac, in the city named for him, George did get his Egyptian obelisk.




Pierce F. Lewis, in "Axioms for Reading the Landscape" (in Donald W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* [New York, 1979], p. 12), has observed that "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography." This is not true of landscape art. If a stranger were to study only the painted Virginia landscape, he would obtain a highly incomplete and inaccurate idea about everyday life in the region. When, for much of the past several centuries, most Virginians lived on farms, hardly anyone painted or drew ordinary farms. Some painted large plantations, often as Arcadia, but Arcadia with slaves was a lie. When increasing numbers of Virginians moved into cities, few artists portrayed cities. After World War II, the American dream became a quarter-acre plot in the suburbs with a house on it, but images of suburbs are rare, although most Americans now live there. Landscape art has been a testament to an enduring love of the land, but not a document of life on it. What landscape art does record, as cultural historian Kenneth Clark has explained, are the stages in our conception of nature. What have these stages been in Virginia? First, that nature had utility. Then, that it had intrinsic beauty and contributed to identity and reputation. Later, that man's arrangements could triumph over nature. Today, there is a new appreciation of nature, a rediscovery of its beauty and spiritual value.



# Two County Industries: Bontex and Lees Carpets

## A History of Bontex

By Charles Kostelni, General Plant Manager

NFORTUNATELY, as a result of several floods over the years, many of our records have been washed away, so I had to go to some of the old-timers for their recollections. I used to tell people that our building went back to 1898, but in researching this talk, I found that it actually goes back to 1890. The first part of the mill was built as the Buena Vista Paper Company. In the basement of the facility, you can see the huge foundation stones, which are the reason the building has endured as long as it has. On the Buena Vista Company map of what the new city was going to be, it actually has our plant site on it. Moreover, the city was originally laid out on top of the hill across the road from our plant. (Imagine what the city would have been spared, if they had gone through with that plan.)

The Buena Vista Paper Company operated under that name until it was sold to the Columbia Paper Company in 1897. People around Buena Vista, however, called it the Columbian Paper Company, and our records have many invoices from local businesses using that name. Russell Robey recalled the smell that the paper company emitted; speaking nostalgically, he claimed that he enjoyed it. In the early part of the twentieth century, Columbia was an integrated paper mill, which means that it took in trees, made pulp from them, and made paper from the pulp. (Westvaco, for example, is an integrated paper mill and does much the

---

This panel of experts instructed the Society in the Lees Carpets plant cafeteria in Glasgow on January 22, 2001.



*Bontex, Inc., plant on U.S. 60 in Buena Vista.*

same thing.) They used some of the tree waste including bark to fill in a portion of the old North River Navigation canal that went through the plant site.

Later the plant became part of the Mead Paper Company. The facility closed during the Great Depression, but later it reopened as Piedmont Paper Company and continued under that name until 1954, when rather than closing it was sold to Hugo Surmonte, of Newark, New Jersey, and renamed Georgia Bonded Fibers, Inc.. The company produced a leather substitute developed by DuPont after World War II using a paper process and saturating with latex. At that time America was the largest footwear producing country in the world and Georgia Bonded Fibers, Inc., had growing sales of three million dollars. During the 1970s the U.S. market declined and under the leadership of James Kostelni the company grew with export sales. The company's sales peaked in 1995 at over fifty million dollars with 75 percent of the product produced in Buena Vista going over seas. Bontex's customers include Reebok, Adidas, Timberland, and Sears for among others as well as Liz Claiborne and Tumi for leather goods. The company name was changed in 1995 to Bontex, Inc., due largely to growth of business in Asia.

Since the peak of sales in 1995, the company has struggled with foreign competition. In the late 1990s, Bontex embarked on a restructuring plan to develop new products and to diversify sales. Currently the Research and Development team has developed several new products including specialty fiber boards, composite materials, and special tooling for molding.

Bontex, Inc., currently employs approximately one hundred people in Buena Vista. We also have plants in Stembert, Belgium, and Verona, Italy. The company has hopes of further modernizing and expanding the facility in Buena Vista as we are successful in developing new products and business.

## Lees Carpets

### Buck Leslie, Director of Customer Visits

The founder of our company, James Lees, was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1846 to a third-generation textile family. At age thirty-nine he came to the United States and located just outside of Philadelphia, then a major import area for wool, which was made into yarn. That led to the development there of the country's design capital. Over time, Lees bought several more spinning mills, which he turned over to the direction of his sons, Joseph and John. Mr. Lees died at the age of ninety-three in 1897.

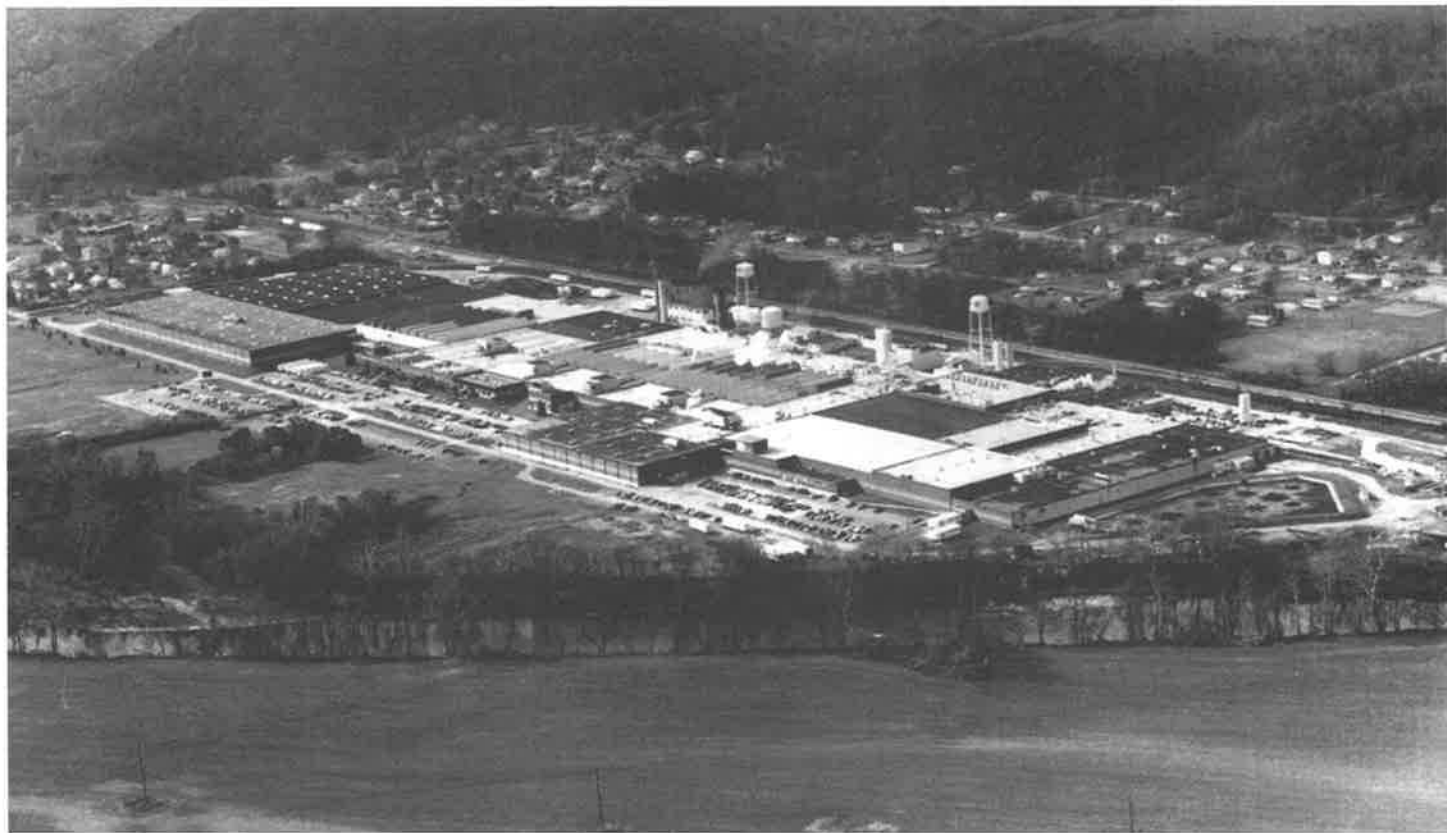
People frequently ask why the plant is located in Glasgow, Virginia. James Lees & Sons was a nationally known company by the time of World War I, and it was constantly seeking to expand, both physically and in product line. The company initiated a site-selection process under the direction of Earl Morgan, Jr., and about a hundred locations were initially considered before they were winnowed down to three: Asheville, North Carolina; Front Royal, Virginia; and Glasgow. Morgan made the final selection.

There were several reasons Glasgow won the competition. First was the availability of water. Second was its proximity to Route 11, a major north-south transportation artery in the pre-Interstate era. And third, the site had good access to railroads—the B&O and the C&O—the key freight-hauling system in the 1930s.

On December 26, 1934, the plant had its groundbreaking ceremony. The structures were built on an elevated plateau adjacent to the Maury River; consequently the river has never flooded in the plant. (The little flooding that occurred during the great 1995 storm came off the side of the mountain, not from the river.)

Company policy was to “hit the ground running.” Thus they began hiring and training people long before the building was up. The first employee hired by Lees Carpets was plant manager Wert Faulkner, a VMI graduate who had played on the football team and coached football there. He was hired in early 1935 because of his personality and people-handling skills. While the plant was under construction, the company sent down six trained weavers from Philadelphia. They set up six looms to train weavers in what has since been called the Blue Ridge Tea Room building.

By June 1935 the first part of the plant was completed; it had one hundred thousand square feet under one roof. The first roll of carpet came out of the plant in September of that year. Soon the spinning mill was added and then the Axminster weaving area was begun. But in 1941



*Lees Carpet plant in Glasgow.*

World War II broke out, and the plant converted to war production, delaying completion of the plant until after the war. During the war years we manufactured canvas duck. Of our twelve hundred people in the labor pool, four hundred men went to war.

In 1947 the spinning mill was completed, making the facility fully integrated for yarn manufacturing, dyeing, tufting, and finishing of carpets. Between 1945 and 1960 the plant expanded up to 1 million square feet of plant. Currently we have 1.5 million square feet on a site of thirty-four acres—three-quarters of a mile long and a quarter mile wide.

The Glasgow plant is one of oldest carpet plants in country, but also one of largest carpet manufacturing facilities in the world. Almost every carpet manufacturing process is under our roof—unlike most companies, which ship parts of the product around to various specialized plants. We do over forty distinct manufacturing processes. Nearly all of our employees are from Rockbridge County

In the last eleven years, we have hosted over one thousand groups of visitors from all parts of the United States and from twenty-eight foreign countries. The typical tour takes 2.5 to 3 hours. In the last two years, we have won eight carpet design awards. Business is good and has expanded at a record pace in recent years. We produce about 12 to 14 percent of the commercial carpet in the United States, fourth largest in the industry. Our goal, however, is to continue to be the best, not the largest.

### **Henry Hatcher Facility Technologist for Development**

When I came to Lees Carpets, we had two to three hundred looms and the product was 90+ percent woolen. We catered to the residential market. Today, our product is 100 percent synthetic; wool has gone by the way. We now have 1,200+ employees; we have forty-seven tufting machines.

I first heard of this company when my sister came to work here about 1950. In 1959 I came through the plant on a high school senior tour, and that summer I applied to work here: put in my application at eleven o'clock in the morning and started to work at three. I started out as "floor service" in the weaving department making 94 cents an hour—not bad money then for a young farm boy.

In 1960, James Lees & Sons became part of Burlington Industries. In 1967 the company became Lees Carpets Division of Burlington Indus-

tries. Our headquarters are in Greensboro, North Carolina, but the primary manufacturing facility is in Glasgow, Virginia.

When I began, we used only imported wool; domestic wool was not suited to making high-quality carpet. We imported in bales from Syria, Argentina, New Zealand, Scotland, and elsewhere. The first step in making carpet yarn was to open and scour the bales, a very smelly job. We removed the dirt and lanolin, and the wool emerged smelling something like freshly mown hay. The wool was then dyed in large kettles. From there it moved to the blending area, where it was piled in high stacks and then cut down like a cake so as to homogenize the blend and make the color uniform. Then it went to carding machine, which had cylinders with fine wire on them, and as the fiber ran through the cylinder it aligned in roving or rope fashion. Then it moved to spinning, which elongated the roving and put a bit of twist into it to make thread. After spinning, thread was twisted into combinations of two-, three-, or four-ply, which is where it received its interesting textures. Some yarns were then heat-set, but all were wound to a pencil-like tube or a cone to supply the weaving process.

There were three types of weaving until the mid-1970s when we went off the woolen system: *Wilton* (a Jackard loom system that operated like a player piano to give pattern and colors); *Velvet*, a bit more modestly priced, used a series of wires to determine the pile height; *Axminster*, the most elaborate in design and sophisticated coloring, where the loom looked like a giant venetian blind. After weaving, we put a back-size on it—a unitary application of starch, the purpose of which was to give the product tuft bind and to enhance the textural appearance.

In the mid-1970s, wool became difficult to obtain from foreign countries, which caused the price to skyrocket; moreover, dock strikes might shut down production that depended on imported wool. A combination of elements caused us to change our product mix and go from a residential type product into the commercial and institutional sector: schools, city halls, libraries, office buildings, churches, hotels, and airports. Airports are the toughest installations you can get because of the heavy traffic.

Nowadays we receive bulk continuous filament from Dupont, which eliminates all of those old preparatory phases needed for wool yarn production. The fibers are knitted into a tubular shape that we call a “sock,” because of its resemblance to hosiery. Then we dye and de-knit the sock for cable and Aerotwisting, where we put our ply combinations together, or the state-of-the-art entangling, where we use air pressure to interface up to four single threads into a ply.

Our yarns then go to the tufting department. A tufting machine is nothing more than a giant sewing machine. We take a woven “primary

backing sheet” purchased from Amoco, Exxon, or whomever, and we bring that primary sheet in and then tuft in the face yarn. One of these tufting machines contains up to fifteen hundred needles, depending upon the gage. Each needle has a thread line into it. A typical week’s output is 450,000 square yards, about sixty-four miles of twelve-foot-wide carpet.

Then the carpet has to be finished by laminating a “secondary sheet” to the back to give the carpet body and extended life on the floor. Our process enables us to give a lifetime warranty on our products for edge ravel, delamination, and zippering (which is like a “run” in ladies hose).


In the early 1960s, we were one of the innovators in modular or carpet tile. We hold numerous patents for products. Some of our innovations include using a synthetic polypropylene to weave a primary backing sheet to tuft into rather than jute. (In our days with woolen production, jute was the primary backing sheet, but it would mold and rot, and often when you needed it, it was on a ship somewhere.) Unibond is a product we have had for nearly twenty years—one of the first in the carpet industry to use it; this process that allows us to give a lifetime warranty for our carpet. We were also one of the first to use Bioguard, which inhibits the growth of mildews and molds. We also have a patent on Duracolor; this is a process that resists 90+ percent of all stains—e.g., coffee, Kool-ade, and soft drinks.

I have been fortunate to be part of a very innovative team over the years, and we continue to look forward to the future here in Glasgow.



# “Our Once Glorious Union”: The Secession Crisis in Lexington, Virginia, 1860–1861

Meridith G. Hays

 IN his *Reluctant Confederates*, Daniel W. Crofts uses Lexington, Virginia, as an example of a community that was hesitant to join the secessionist movement, doing so only after Lincoln's call for troops following the firing on Fort Sumter. Crofts's characterization would no doubt surprise the thousands of tourists who visit Lexington each year, and perhaps most of the town's residents as well. Popular tourist attractions include Lee Chapel on the campus of Washington and Lee University; the Stonewall Jackson House; the statue of “Virginia Mourning Her Dead” at the Virginia Military Institute; and Jackson's grave in the cemetery that bears his name.

Every May 15, in perhaps its most impressive ceremony of the school year, VMI honors the cadets who died in the 1864 battle of New Market. On October 12, neighboring Washington and Lee holds a memorial service for Robert E. Lee, who became its president after the war. Among the most popular postcards which people take home to commemorate their visit to Lexington, one depicts the recumbent statue of Lee located in Lee Chapel, and another the heroic statue of Stonewall Jackson in front of Jackson Arch, one of the three main entrances to the VMI barracks.

---

**Meridith G. Hays** is a Lexington native who currently teaches at Leesville Road High School in Raleigh, North Carolina. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in history and a master of teaching degree in social studies education, both from the University of Virginia. Her Historical Society paper—based on her history thesis—was delivered on April 23, 2001, in Pogue Auditorium at the George C. Marshall Library.

Many summer visitors enjoy the outdoor theater production of *Stonewall Country*. Indeed, Lexington is “Stonewall country,” as well as Robert E. Lee country. But today’s impression of Lexington as the quintessential Confederate town notwithstanding, as Crofts’s label suggests, the people of the town and surrounding Rockbridge County resisted joining the Confederacy until they felt they had no choice. Or perhaps more accurately, they could not contemplate leaving the Union.

Geography, demographics, and economics set Lexington and the surrounding area apart from Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia. Lying at the southern end of the Valley of Virginia, Rockbridge is one of nine counties comprising the Valley, which lies in the middle of the Great Valley running from central Alabama to upstate New York. The mountains on either side of the Valley created a natural corridor for the streams of Scotch-Irish and German immigrants who, by the 1730s, moved from the increasingly crowded areas of Pennsylvania to the less settled Valley of Virginia. As a result, some historians see the settlement of the Valley as a social and cultural extension of Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Although relatively few in number, settlers of English ancestry crossed the Blue Ridge to join the Scotch-Irish and German immigrants in the Valley. By 1860, the 603 square miles of Rockbridge County contained 17,248 settlers, making the population density 28.6 persons per square mile, as compared to 24.8 statewide average.<sup>2</sup> The 12,841 white residents made up the largest portion of the population, followed by 3,985 slaves and 422 free blacks.<sup>3</sup>

Students from various parts of Virginia and other states who attended the three educational institutions located in Lexington—Washington College, Virginia Military Institute, and the Ann Smith Academy—added to the preponderance of white residents, and the schools contributed a distinct educational characteristic to the community. A mid-century visitor described Lexington as a “well-built village . . . with handsome private residences, a fine Female Academy [Ann Smith Academy], the colonnade of Washington College, and the castle-like Military Institute.”<sup>4</sup>

1. Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hostra, “Introduction: The World Wheat Made,” in Koons and Hostra, eds., *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), pp. xvii–xix.

2. Edwin L. Dooley, “Lexington in the 1860 Census,” *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 9 (1975–79): 190.

3. Ellen Eslinger, “Sable Spectres on Missions of Evil,” in Koons and Hostra, *After the Backcountry*, p. 25.

4. Ollinger Crenshaw, *General Lee’s College: The Rise and Growth of Washington and Lee University* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 72.

True to their heritage, the people of Rockbridge County “were given to land acquisition, educational improvement, and Presbyterian piety”<sup>5</sup> which advocated the spiritual equality of all men. However, the financial and social profits promised by slaveholding often overcame whatever doubts they had about the morality of the institution. Two-thirds of Rockbridge County’s population claimed Scotch-Irish descent, and yet no other county in the Valley of Virginia had a more vigorous or expansive slave economy.<sup>6</sup> By 1850, slaves made up one-fourth of Rockbridge County’s population. In contrast, the predominately German settlers of Shenandoah and Rockingham Counties to the north “abjured the ownership of slaves” for religious reasons, resulting in fewer than one out of fifteen persons being slaves.<sup>7</sup>

This inconsistent pattern of slaveholding from one area of the Valley of Virginia to the next proved compatible with the labor needs of the mixed agricultural and small scale manufacturing economy of Rockbridge County. The practice of slave-hiring, by “providing a mechanism by which excess slave-labor could be distributed to those with demand for additional labor,” benefited both owners and nonowners.<sup>8</sup> For example, Jackson, not needing all his slaves, rented one to a hotel at Rockbridge Alum Springs.<sup>9</sup> However, slave labor was used more in agricultural pursuits than any other. By 1860, although wheat was the main commercial crop of the area,<sup>10</sup> Rockbridge County produced well over 400,000 pounds of tobacco a year.<sup>11</sup> Wheat was easier to grow and required less capital than tobacco; thus, a broad cross-section of people cultivated this crop. Consequently, wealth was more evenly distributed in the Valley of Virginia than east of the Blue Ridge, where tobacco was the main crop.<sup>12</sup> While there were more farmers—approximately 1,320—than people in any other occupation, the 1860 census records that Lexington and Rockbridge County together had 107 carpenters, 54 millers, 49 blacksmiths, 52 coopers, 79 merchants, and 149 professional men.<sup>13</sup>

5. Charles Bodie, ed., *Rockbridge County, Virginia, Manuscripts: A Guide to Collections in the United States* (Lexington, Va.: Rockbridge Historical Society, 1998), p. 1.

6. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Shifting Attitudes Towards Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County,” *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 10 (1980–89): 334.

7. Kenneth E. Koons, “The Colored Laborers Work as Well as When Slaves: African-Americans in the Breadbasket of the Confederacy, 1850–1880” (Department of History, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia), pp. 3, 6.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 10

9. Brundage, “Antebellum Rockbridge County,” p. 337.

10. Koons, “The Colored Laborers,” pp. 1–2.

11. Brundage, “Antebellum Rockbridge County,” p. 336.

12. Koons and Hostra, “Introduction,” p. xxi.

13. Dooley, “Lexington in the 1860 Census,” p. 191.

To market agricultural and manufactured products, Rockbridge County businessmen, like others in the upper Valley, developed commercial relationships with merchants in Richmond and other fall-line cities east of the Blue Ridge, an alliance which made up for the area's relative isolation from the main transportation arteries of the day, turnpikes, railroads, and canals. Richmond merchants, as well as those in Alexandria and Fredericksburg, traded with the major port cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore. This trade connection served as a conduit for ideas and material culture from northern urban centers to the upper Valley of Virginia, "among the most appealing" being "those shaping architectural tastes, dress, and genteel manners."<sup>14</sup>

In politics, after the new party system emerged in the late 1830s and the 1840s, with the Whigs and Democrats as the major parties, Rockbridge became a Whig stronghold, though the state as a whole usually voted Democratic. Even in the election of 1856, with the Whig party in tatters and the new Republican party fielding a national candidate, Rockbridge cast a strong vote for former Whig president Millard Fillmore, running on the American party ticket, giving him only eighty-eight fewer votes than Democrat James Buchanan, the national winner. Perhaps more surprising, the antislavery Republican candidate John C. Frémont, who ran second to Buchanan nationally, received 286 votes. Some attributed his showing to being the son-in-law of former Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who had close ties with the county.<sup>15</sup>

Virginia joined the rest of the South in worrying about the admission of new states upsetting the balance of power between the sections. The Compromise of 1850 resolved for a decade the political tension between the North and South, but the Fugitive Slave Law of the same year evoked a new and more personal kind of tension between slave owners and those opposed to slavery.

Four years later, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which divided what had been Nebraska into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, and allowed settlers to decide the issue of slavery by popular sovereignty, renewed sectional strife and the debate over slavery. Believing that the Kansas-Nebraska Act would, in effect, undo the Missouri Compromise, northerners expressed their disgust in "an outpouring of wrath that was almost universal,"<sup>16</sup> while southerners applauded the act. Consequently, Kansas, next door to Missouri, a slave state, became a battleground

14. Koons and Hostra, "Introduction," pp. xix-xx.

15. Oren F. Morton, *A History of Rockbridge County Virginia* (Staunton, Va.: McClure Co., 1920), p. 114.

16. Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), p. 148.

between the pro- and antislavery forces. The fighting between the two groups there led to the designation “bleeding Kansas.” Blood was also shed in the Senate when Preston Brooks, reacting to a speech in which Senator Charles Sumner denounced proslavery supporters, particularly Brooks’s cousin, Andrew Pickens Butler, entered the Senate with a gutta percha cane and beat Sumner unconscious. “Bleeding Kansas” and “bleeding Sumner” served as a rallying cry for both northerners and southerners, but for different reasons.

Because the Whig and Democratic parties had members on both sides of the slavery conflict, neither dared take a stand on Kansas or any other slavery issue. Thus, the scene was set for the new Republican party, with a strong antislavery platform, to emerge. In the 1856 presidential election, the Republican party, lacking any base in the South and running a political novice, Frémont, showed surprising strength.<sup>17</sup> The election returns mirrored the strong sectional lines dividing the nation. The Democratic candidate, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, won, but the Supreme Court’s decision in the Dred Scott case, issued two days after Buchanan took office, divided the nation even more. The Court, led by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, ruled that Scott’s residence in the free territory of Wisconsin did not make him free and that, as a slave, he had no right to sue in state or federal courts. In addition, the Court invalidated the Missouri Compromise by stating that Congress had no power to exclude slavery in the territories. While southerners rejoiced at the decision, northerners, even those who disliked abolitionism, greeted it with outrage. The new Republican party “charged that the decision itself was part of the Slave Power conspiracy between the executive and judicial branches to usurp the government from the people.”<sup>18</sup>

Outraged by the Scott decision, and seeing no political recourse, northern abolitionists provided both moral and financial support for John Brown, a religious zealot, to lead a slave uprising, first in Virginia and then throughout the South. Brown captured national attention with his abortive attempt in October 1859 to seize the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry to arm slaves. For residents of the Valley, Brown’s raid shifted the conflict from remote Kansas and court decisions to a physical threat at their own doorstep, creating “an instant alarm in the peaceful Shenandoah Valley town of Lexington and surrounding areas.”<sup>19</sup> Acting quickly to dispel rumors and allay fears, Governor Henry Wise sent the militia to stop Brown and his twenty-one followers. Two days

17. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

19. Robert J. Driver, Jr., *Lexington and Rockbridge County in the Civil War* (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, 1989), p. 1.

later, a group of U.S. Marines, led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, completed Brown's capture. Tried and convicted of treason, Brown's execution was set for December 2, 1859.<sup>20</sup>

Carrying out the sentence directly involved the faculty and cadets at VMI. Soon after the execution date was set, Cadet Joseph H. Chenoweth wrote his mother that "several companies of soldiers have been ordered to be present at Brown's execution. The Cadets have been ordered to hold themselves in readiness to be called on at any moment, and I believe that we will set out next Tuesday—at least we are expecting hourly an order from the governor to that effect."<sup>21</sup>

As Chenoweth anticipated, the governor ordered a contingent of some eighty cadets, with Major William Gilham in overall command and Major Jackson in charge of two howitzers, to Charlestown, where the execution would take place. Colonel Francis H. Smith, VMI's superintendent, designated by the governor to supervise the execution, proceeded to Charlestown ahead of the cadets.<sup>22</sup>

The northern outcry over Brown's execution was as unsettling as the raid itself to many Virginians. In parts of the Valley, groups armed and drilled to let northerners know that Virginia intended to maintain her institution, "peacefully if possible, but with force if necessary."<sup>23</sup>

The *Lexington Gazette* expressed the concern of area people about the John Brown incident, cautioning the country to "let sectional issues, sectional men, and sectional parties everywhere be regarded as the sources of lawlessness and treason."<sup>24</sup> Far from attacking northerners as a whole, the *Gazette* pointed out on October 27 that Brown's raid was the act "of a few desperate abolitionists."<sup>25</sup>

A few weeks later, the *Valley Star* stated that the raid placed the new Republican party in a difficult position. By supporting the raid, the party would retain the "fire-eating amalgamating element-men"<sup>26</sup> who wanted to abolish slavery outright, but would "lose the honest conservatives in their ranks . . . who are not inclined to be involved in treasonable pro-

20. Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), pp. 85-86.

21. Joseph Hart Chenoweth to Mother, November 19, 1859, Joseph H. Chenoweth Papers, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.

22. James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), p. 197.

23. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, p. 89.

24. "Harper's Ferry Invasion," *Lexington Gazette*, October 27, 1859.

25. *Ibid.*

26. "In A Tight Place," *Valley Star*, November 17, 1859.

jects." Regardless of the position taken, the paper concluded that the "result will be the weakening of the Republican party."<sup>27</sup>

Many southerners perceived the Republican party as antisouthern. Much of the party rhetoric was directed toward slaveholding states without recognizing that the majority of the people were not slaveholders. People in Rockbridge County were typical of those who "most devoutly" wished for the weakening of the Republican party.<sup>28</sup> While happy about the detrimental effect of Brown's raid on Republican party membership, some Virginians were concerned about the effect of the raid on loyalty to the federal union. The *Gazette*, for example, expressed fears that "the recent invasion of Virginia . . . seems to be loosening the affections of our people from their hold upon the Union."<sup>29</sup> Although strained by Brown's action, union loyalty in Rockbridge County was still dominant in the aftermath of Harper's Ferry. The prevalent feeling seems to have been one of watchful waiting, coupled with the hope that no future incident would increase dissatisfaction with the Union.<sup>30</sup>

James D. Davidson, a prominent Lexington attorney, reminded his friend and fellow Lexingtonian Governor John Letcher, in a January 8, 1860, letter, that Virginia should serve as an example to other states by cherishing the Union.<sup>31</sup> Letcher's inaugural address assured Davidson and all of Virginia that he would do everything in his power to repair the damage to national harmony, but failing this, would work to unite all southern states in their efforts to resist northern aggression.<sup>32</sup>

The January 5 and 12 editions of the *Gazette* applauded Governor Letcher's pro-Union stance and urged "the people of Virginia to speak out if they mean to save the Union."<sup>33</sup> The *Valley Star* followed suit by praising Virginia's patriotic spirit in support of the Union, but noted that "all the patriotism in the land will be required to avert the storm of Disunion."<sup>34</sup>

While Union support was strong in early 1860, the threat of disunion was not dismissed. A week after a Union meeting "attended by a large number of the citizens of this county [Rockbridge],"<sup>35</sup> an article in

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. "The Condition Of Affairs," *Lexington Gazette*, December 8, 1859.

30. "North And South," *Lexington Gazette*, December 8, 1859.

31. James Davidson to John Letcher, January 8, 1860, microfilm, John Letcher Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

32. F. N. Boney, *John Letcher of Virginia* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1966), pp. 92-93.

33. "Shall The Union Be Preserved!," *Lexington Gazette*, January 5, 1860.

34. "Letter To Editor," *Valley Star*, February 2, 1860.

35. "Union Meeting," *Lexington Gazette*, March 8, 1860.

the *Valley Star* suggested that Rockbridge County would be wise to “raise 4 or 5 well drilled volunteer companies,”<sup>36</sup> as other counties had done, for the protection of local citizens. Dissolution of the Union, should it happen, would not be peaceful; in fact, many Virginians believed that as a Border State, Virginia would bear the brunt of the battle, “her towns and cities burned, her soil invaded and drenched with the blood of her own sons.”<sup>37</sup>

Only a political resolution to the growing sectional differences could avoid the chaos of civil strife. Instead, the political parties’ activity during the spring and summer of 1860 mirrored the growing north-south division of the country. In the selection of a presidential



James D. Davidson

candidate, the Democratic party split along sectional lines, with the northern Democrats nominating Stephen A. Douglas, and southern Democrats choosing John C. Breckinridge. The northern based Republican party nominated Abraham Lincoln, who, though professing no intention to interfere with the institution where it existed, was opposed to slavery. A new southern based Constitutional Union party, composed mainly of former Whigs and Know-Nothings, nominated John Bell, a slaveholder. Far from reconciling sectional differences, the politics of 1860 exacerbated them. In June, the *Valley Star* expressed the view that “the differences existing between parties in the South weigh nothing in comparison with the awful responsibilities of these parties, in continuing the warfare, so uselessly perpetuated, and hurrying the republic to destruction. The masses, in our humble opinion, desire union, concession and harmony.”<sup>38</sup>

However, the citizens of Rockbridge County did not agree on the candidate who could best achieve this goal. The *Gazette*, which had

36. “Rockbridge Rifles,” *Valley Star*, March 15, 1860.

37. “Virginia And The Southern Conference,” *Lexington Gazette*, March 22, 1860.

38. “The Duty Of The South,” *Valley Star*, June 14, 1860.





*Governor John Letcher*

adopted the slogan, "The Union Must Be Preserved," supported John Bell, while the *Valley Star*, with the slogan, "The Union and The Constitution," endorsed Douglas. Governor John Letcher agreed with the *Valley Star* that Douglas, the only national candidate, would have the best chance to preserve the Union. "Honest John is with the people in this, perhaps the last struggle to preserve the Union so dearly formed by the blood of our fathers." The paper appealed to Democrats to "rally now once more, when sectionalism North and South are striving for . . . the overthrow of this glorious Union."<sup>39</sup>

The Democrats who supported Douglas viewed with dismay those who bolted the party to support Breckinridge, asserting that "if we place the most charitable construction possible upon the conduct of the Seceders, we are forced to admit that they are doing the National Democratic party more harm than the Opposition will ever be able to do."<sup>40</sup> The preservation of the Union, according to Douglas supporters, depended on a united Democratic party which would elect a national rather than a sectional candidate.

A week after the *Valley Star's* call for party unity, the paper reported that most of the people of Rockbridge County planned to support Douglas in the November election.<sup>41</sup> This pronouncement neglected to take into account the growing support for John Bell and the Constitutional Union party in the county. On August 9, the *Gazette* reported a Lexington rally for Bell which "was largely attended . . . to overflowing, and a spirit of high and patriotic enthusiasm pervaded the assemblage."<sup>42</sup> Leaders of the Bell rally, recognizing the division of the Democratic party, argued that the best way to preserve the Union was to elect Bell.

39. "Correspondence Of The Star," *Valley Star*, August 23, 1860.

40. "Our Ticket," *Valley Star*, June 28, 1860.

41. "Public Sentiment-Court Day," *Valley Star*, July 5, 1860.

42. "Political," *Lexington Gazette*, August 9, 1860.

The split in the Democratic party worried the Douglas supporters, who urged those who left the party to return on the grounds that "by holding on to Breckinridge [you] are securing the election of the Black Republican candidate."<sup>43</sup> Although the Douglas and Bell supporters disagreed on the best way to preserve the Union, they agreed that the Union would be threatened by the election of either Breckinridge or Lincoln. Breckinridge Democrats denied that a vote for their candidate would threaten the Union and insisted that only Breckinridge could defeat Lincoln.<sup>44</sup> Thus, supporters of all three candidates were united in their anti-Lincoln rhetoric and in their support for the Union.

Yet 1,887 Virginians supported Lincoln. Most of these votes came from the Panhandle around Wheeling and from the Northern Neck. Compared to the statewide 74,481 votes for Bell and 74,325 for Breckinridge, Lincoln's support was miniscule.<sup>45</sup> Rockbridge County cast 1,231 votes for Bell, 641 for Douglas, and 365 for Breckinridge.<sup>46</sup> In an attempt to allay John Letcher's disappointment that Rockbridge County did not join in his support for Douglas, James B. Dorman, a prominent Lexington lawyer, wrote to the governor that many voters

43. "Organize: Organize!!," *Valley Star*, October 25, 1860.

44. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, p. 112.

45. Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 82-83.

46. Morton, *Rockbridge County*, p. 114.

**THE QUESTION**

**IF LINCOLN**  
will be elected or not, is one which interests all parties,  
North and South. Whether he

**IS ELECTED**  
or not, the people of

**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
(whose rights have been for a number of years trampled  
upon) have the advantage of supplying themselves with  
CLOTHING, at the well-known CAROLINA CLOTHING  
DEPOT, 261 King-street, at such prices as

**WILL LEAD**  
them to be satisfied that the reputation of this Establish-  
ment has been

**BOLDLY**  
and fearlessly maintained

**FOR A**  
number of years, supplying its

**SOUTHERN**  
Customers with all the Latest Styles, and at as low prices  
as any Clothing House in the present

**CONFEDERACY**  
of all the States.

Thankful for the liberal patronage extended, the Proprietors desire merely to inform their customers and the public generally, that their present STOCK OF CLOTHING IS COMPLETE in all its departments, and are now prepared to offer Goods on the most reasonable and satisfactory terms. A call is therefore solicited by  
OTTOLENGUIS, WILLIS & BARRETT,  
November 6 261 King-street.

had believed a rumor that Douglas had withdrawn from the election.<sup>47</sup> Two other states, Kentucky and Tennessee, supported Bell, while nine southern states and Maryland supported Breckinridge. Lincoln won decisively in the electoral college, receiving 180 votes, with 72 going to Breckinridge, 39 to Bell, and only 12 to Douglas.<sup>48</sup>

Although Lincoln's election disappointed Virginians and the people of Rockbridge County, they did not see the Republican victory as a reason to dissolve the Union. Unlike South Carolina, which within a month voted to secede from the Union, Virginia made no such hasty decision. The pro-Bell *Gazette* published several articles calling for calm reflection about the election. On November 22, 1860, the paper advertised for all “friends of the Union living in and near the town of Lexington, of all parties to meet together” to discuss the implication of the election.<sup>49</sup> One week later, the paper stated that “according to our system of government we have always understood that it was the right of the party prevailing under the forms of the Constitution to rule. But the right is an empty one if the doctrine of secessionists is sound . . . the election of Lincoln is not a sufficient cause for dissolution of the Union.”<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, the *Valley Star*, which had supported Douglas, urged Virginians not to follow states moving to secede from the Union, contending that “it would be madness for Virginia to think of following the Disunion lead.”<sup>51</sup> Those who would break up the Union are “mad dogs” and “if any of them stray into these parts let the people beware of them.”<sup>52</sup>

While avowing loyalty to the Union, some reluctantly admitted that its dissolution was a distinct possibility. Virginia's geographic and political position placed it between the two opposing camps, those who supported the newly elected president and those who adamantly rejected him. Dorman's comments of November 18, 1860, convey what many viewed as Virginia's rather precarious position, that “we of the Border States, had interests as distinct in some important respects, from the Cotton States as from those of New England. And so it will prove, if matters are pushed to extremities.”<sup>53</sup> He went on to say that an “energetic front” of Virginia,

47. James Dorman to John Letcher, November 18, 1860, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

48. “Voting in the 1860 Election,” <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2outlines/election.html>. From the “Valley of the Shadow” website.

49. “A Union Meeting,” *Lexington Gazette*, November 22, 1860.

50. “Is The Election of Abraham Lincoln To The Presidency A Sufficient Cause For A Dissolution Of The Union?,” *Lexington Gazette*, November 29, 1860.

51. “Our Duty,” *Valley Star*, November 22, 1860.

52. “Disunionists,” *Valley Star*, November 29, 1860.

53. James Dorman to John Letcher, November 18, 1860, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

Maryland, Tennessee, North Carolina, Missouri, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania was the best way to prevent armed collision.<sup>54</sup>

Many feared that Virginia would become a battleground in such a conflict. Thomas Stevenson, a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, wrote to his sister “that our geographic position is such that should the enemy cross from Ohio this [Lexington] would be their first point of attack.”<sup>55</sup> For this reason, as well as from a sincere desire to preserve the Union, the antisecessionist movement brought differing political factions together. For example, local Breckinridge club chairman William White now expressed dismay at the extent of secessionist sentiment among Breckinridge’s supporters and declared his support for the Union.<sup>56</sup>

In the weeks following the election, a local Lexington debating club discussed “the question whether if the cotton states secede, Virginia should go with them.”<sup>57</sup> The consensus of the Franklin Society at that time was against secession. On a much larger scale, a notice in the *Valley Star* urged all citizens of Rockbridge County to meet at the courthouse to discuss “the alarming state of public affairs . . . and by the expression of our opinion contribute our mite to arrest, if possible, the impending calamity—and if that is impossible, then to consult together as to what is the safest course for us to pursue in the event of a dissolution of the Federal Government.”<sup>58</sup>

The *Gazette* echoed the same strong Union support as the *Star*. “There is no dishonor in submitting to Lincoln’s administration because he has been elected and is legally and constitutionally our president. . . . If we break up the Union upon a mere presumption that the President elect intends to trample upon the Constitution, we will have driven our Northern friends into an unnatural and reluctant union with our enemies.”<sup>59</sup> The *Gazette* concluded that the best course for Virginia was to remain loyal to the Union. Not only the political leaders but also the “working men” of the county held this Union sentiment. The *Valley Star* documented a large meeting at the courthouse consisting of the “bone and sinew of our town” who voiced their support of the Union.<sup>60</sup>

However, many of the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute and students at Washington College, coming from states advocating seces-

54. *Ibid.*

55. Thomas A. Stevenson to Sister, November 20, 1860, Thomas A. Stevenson Papers, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.

56. James Dorman to John Letcher, November 27, 1860, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

57. *Ibid.*

58. “To The People of Rockbridge Co.,” *Valley Star*, November 29, 1860.

59. “Wrongs And Remedies,” *Lexington Gazette*, December 20, 1860.

60. “Working Men’s Meeting,” *Valley Star*, December 20, 1860.

sion, did not join the chorus for Union loyalty. Consequently, "many word battles resulted between the young life and the older people" during the winter of 1860-61.<sup>61</sup> Across the mountains at the University of Virginia, the secession issue loomed as large as with the students in Lexington. Albert Davidson, a student from Lexington, in a January 2, 1861, letter to his father, a strong Union supporter, wrote that "there is a state of disquietude at the University: every one expected to be summoned away at any moment either to defend his country or protect his fireside. Such a state is of course very unfavorable to studying; on this account I wish I had not come here this session."<sup>62</sup>

Alarmed by the mounting tension in Virginia, Governor Letcher, in a January 1861 special session of the General Assembly, called for a national "peace conference" to be held in Washington the following month. In addition to adopting the peace conference resolution, the General Assembly called for a state convention to decide Virginia's course of action.<sup>63</sup> Governor Letcher, however, did not think a state convention was a good idea. "I see no necessity for it at this time, nor do I now see the practical results that can be accomplished by it."<sup>64</sup>

Like Governor Letcher, Union supporters in Rockbridge County were skeptical of a state convention. An article in the *Gazette* stated, "A convention, if there is one, will be a piece of machinery that will be operated by secessionists, to carry Virginia out of the Union."<sup>65</sup> On January 10, 1861, a week after the *Gazette* article, the *Valley Star* printed a resolution passed by a very large gathering of Union supporters in Rockbridge County: "We regard the National Union as essential to the peace, prosperity, and Liberty of the American People."<sup>66</sup>

Union support was strong in the General Assembly, where Albert Davidson, on vacation from his University of Virginia classes, observed several sessions. He wrote his brother Frederick (Seddie) Davidson that "the Assembly seems to be very conservative and not inclined to do any-

61. Henry Boley, *Lexington in Old Virginia* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie Publishers, 1936), p. 98.

62. Albert Davidson to Pa (James Davidson), January 2, 1861, Albert Davidson Papers, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

63. W. G. Bean, *Stonewall's Man: Sandie Pendleton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1959), p. 30.

64. George H. Reese, ed., *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965), 1: viii.

65. "Meeting Of The People Of Rockbridge," *Lexington Gazette*, January 3, 1861.

66. "Rockbridge Union Meeting," *Valley Star*, January 10, 1861.

thing rash.”<sup>67</sup> In general comments about Richmond, he wrote that the merchants were “conservative union loving men. And it is only the fire-eaters from abroad that strongly advocate secession.”<sup>68</sup> His mention of fire-eaters from abroad was in reference to a South Carolina delegation which addressed the General Assembly and urged members to follow their state’s lead. Governor Letcher and many of the delegates refused to listen to such talk and left the assembly.<sup>69</sup>

Virginia’s course of action was the campaign topic of the four candidates who wished to represent Rockbridge County at the state convention set to convene on February 13, 1861. Secessionists Cornelius Baldwin and J. W. Brockenbrough, contended against unionists Samuel McDowell Moore and James B. Dorman.<sup>70</sup> On February 4, 1861, the day the Confederacy was formed in Montgomery, Alabama, Rockbridge County gave Brockenbrough and Baldwin only 282 and 75 votes respectively. Union candidates Dorman and Moore received 1,875 and 1,844.<sup>71</sup> In reporting the results, the *Gazette* noted “that the people of Virginia are not going to be hitched on to the cotton States, and dragged into a state of revolution.”<sup>72</sup>

However, “Northern fanatics” should not misconstrue Virginia’s loyalty to the Union to be such that she would allow her rights to be trampled.<sup>73</sup> Like many others, William Hale Houston, a Lexington lawyer, believed that the convention would choose the right path for Virginia. His diary entry for February 4 reads, “Virginia, In Reference to a Convention will decide whether she Is the Bond Slave of the Damagogues—who have aided in bringing our Country to the verry verge of destruction—or that she is detained [*sic*] to be free.”<sup>74</sup>

The fact that so many Union delegates were elected to the state convention validated the claims of the peace conference proponents who saw Virginia as a mediator between extremists North and South. W. C. Rives, one of Virginia’s five delegates to the peace conference scheduled

67. Albert Davidson to Seddie (Frederick Davidson), January 20, 1861, Albert Davidson Papers.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

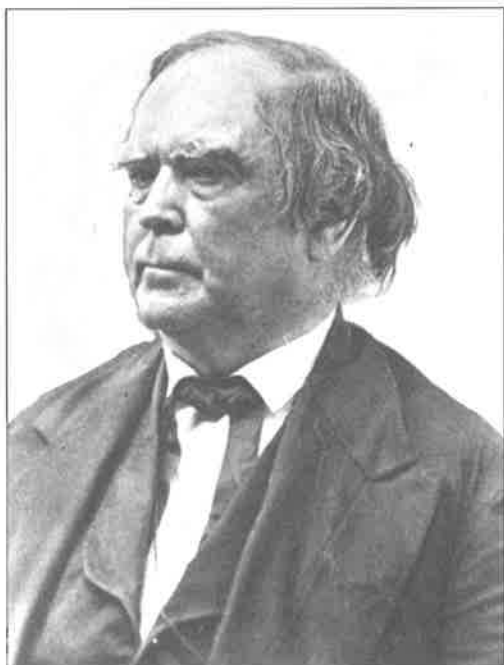
70. Katherine L. Brown, *New Providence Church, 1946–1996: A History* (Raphine, Va.: New Providence Presbyterian Church, 1996), p. 103.

71. “Rockbridge Election,” *Valley Star*, February 7, 1861.

72. “The Election,” *Lexington Gazette*, February 14, 1861.

73. *Ibid.*

74. William Hale Houston diary, February 4, 1861, Houston Papers, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.



*Secessionist John W. Brockenbrough*

to open on February 4, wrote “that our people have by their votes crushed the secessionists and their treasonable plots.”<sup>75</sup>

The state convention convened on February 13 and counted among its 152 delegates former President John Tyler, former Governor Henry A. Wise, twelve former members of the U.S. Congress, and prominent state legislators, judges, and local officials. Like the two Rockbridge County delegates, almost half of the members of the convention listed themselves as lawyers, with the next largest occupational group being farmers.<sup>76</sup> Unionist John Janey of Loudon County was elected president of the convention

by a vote of 70 to 54 over secessionist W. V. Southall of Albemarle County.<sup>77</sup> One of the first acts of the convention was to appoint a committee on federal relations to consider a variety of resolutions. However, the convention voted to await the results of the Washington peace conference before taking any action.<sup>78</sup>

In the meantime, the convention agreed to hear from representatives from Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina, who urged Virginia to join the newly formed southern Confederacy.<sup>79</sup> In very elaborate speeches, they defended the right of states to secede from a union which had been entered voluntarily. Fearing Lincoln’s response to secession, the commissioners of Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina stated that the destiny of the South depended on the unity of southern states.

75. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, p. 210.

76. Ralph A. Wooster, *The Secession Convention of the South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 143.

77. Reese, *Virginia State Convention*, 1: 6–7.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–93.



*Unionist viewpoint.*

"This is the inevitable destiny of the Southern people, and this destiny Virginia holds in her hands. By uniting herself to her sisters of the South who are already in the field, she will make that a peaceful revolution which may otherwise be violent and bloody."<sup>80</sup>

Moore, Rockbridge's representative, did not think that the North would force a violent conflict upon seceding states by a policy of coercion and further reprovved his secessionist colleagues by denouncing secession "as the most absurd and ridiculous notion that was ever presented. They make government nothing but a rope of sand, and the solemn compact that men can enter into is to be set aside by one of the parties to it."<sup>81</sup>

Moore, like so many opposed to secession, counted on the peace conference concurrently meeting in Washington to avert dissolution of the Union. While all thirty-four states were invited to send delegates, only twenty-one did so. From the very beginning the spirit of accommodation was lacking. Seven southern states, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, thought the

80. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 182.



convention useless and proceeded with the formation of their confederacy. Republicans arrived at the convention determined to make no concessions. In short, only the Union supporters from the Border States were optimistic. Even President Lincoln, in a February 9 conversation with a friend and Republican leader from Illinois, said that the peace conference would accomplish little except to increase tension when it failed.<sup>82</sup> Some, like Zachariah Chandler, Senator from Michigan, preferred a clash of arms over peace, holding that “without a little blood-letting, this Union will not, in my opinion, be worth a rush.”<sup>83</sup>

In contrast, Governor Letcher of Virginia thought the peace conference held much promise. He wrote to his friend, James D. Davidson of Lexington, that “the signs all look well—much more favorable than I supposed when I went to the City [Washington, D.C.]. I believe we shall have a settlement upon perfectly fair terms, and in a short time.”<sup>84</sup>

Two and a half weeks later, Governor Letcher learned of the end of the conference on February 28 and of the disappointing outcome. The final plan of the peace conference pleased neither unionists nor secessionists, and was rejected by Congress on March 22. The failure of the peace convention greatly disappointed Virginia’s unionists and strengthened the secessionist camp. Wanting some assurance that the Union would hold together, Albert Davidson, writing from the University of Virginia, asked his father “what are the prospects of a peaceful settlement of the country’s difficulties? . . . I still hold the conservative ground though is very hard to do so, where such a large majority are out and out Secessionists.”<sup>85</sup>

In a diary entry of February 27, William Hale Houston blamed northern and southern extremists for the growing secessionist sentiment. He viewed Lincoln and those who would “lick his boot” as warmongers, as were also the leaders of the seceded states, whom he described as “heartly Damagogues—firing Cannon and, insanely rejoicing over an act whch ought, one would think to cause them to hang their Harps on the Willows and weep as did the Isealites [*sic*] of old.”<sup>86</sup>

One extreme measure which unionists opposed was the so-called Force Bill introduced by Congressman Benjamin Stanton of Ohio, who attempted to push it through Congress without debate on March 1. In

82. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, pp. 170–71.

83. Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., *Virginia’s Decision: The Story of the Secession Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia Civil War Commission, 1964), p. 7.

84. Boney, *John Letcher*, p. 104.

85. Albert Davidson to Pa (James Davidson), February 23, 1861, Albert Davidson Papers.

86. Houston diary, February 27, 1861, Houston Papers.

addition to the manpower of the regular army and navy, this measure would give the president the power to call out and control the militia and to create an unlimited force of volunteers to carry out the administration's goals. Alexander R. Boteler, a strong unionist, who represented Virginia in the House, tried to convince Stanton to withdraw his bill. "Mr. Stanton, your bill is thwarting the efforts of the conservative men of Virginia, who are striving to prevent her secession, and to avert the calamity of civil war. . . . The secessionists of our State convention at Richmond, though now in a minority, will be enabled thereby to carry their point, and Virginia will be forced out of the Union against her will."

When Stanton refused to withdraw the bill, Boteler went to the Willard Hotel to see Lincoln, whose inauguration would take place in three days. He told Lincoln that the bill had caused painful anxiety throughout Virginia and "that its passage would do irreparable injury to the cause of the Union."<sup>87</sup> Boteler ended his plea with a reminder that he was a Union man from a Union state which had done more to maintain the Union than any other state. Recognizing the validity of Boteler's argument, Lincoln promised that the bill would not go forward.<sup>88</sup>

Boteler was not the only Virginia unionist to speak with Lincoln. Lexingtonian James D. Davidson also talked with the president-elect at the Willard a few days before the inauguration, and wrote that he seemed pleased to meet southern men. Davidson warned Lincoln that Virginia unionists would not countenance coercion, and Lincoln assured him that there would be none.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to meeting with concerned unionists, well wishers, office seekers, and members of Buchanan's outgoing administration, Lincoln attempted to polish his inaugural address, which he had written before leaving Springfield. He solicited comments on his address from fellow Republican William H. Seward of New York, who suggested several significant changes. Seward wrote Lincoln that parts of the speech, as written, would "give such advantages to the Disunionists that Virginia and Maryland will secede, and we shall within ninety, perhaps within sixty, days be obliged to fight the South for this capital. . . . In that case the dis-

87. Alexander R. Boteler, "Mr. Lincoln and the Force Bill," in Alexander Kelly McClure, ed., *The Annals of the Civil War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), pp. 221–23.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

89. Ollinger Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 3 (1946–49): 10.

90. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York: Century Co., 1890), 3: 320.

memberment of the republic would date from the inauguration of a Republican Administration.”<sup>90</sup>

Lincoln accepted in whole or in part all of Seward’s suggested changes. Of special importance for unionists was Seward’s suggestion that “some words of affection—some of calm and cheerful confidence” be added “to meet and remove prejudice and passion in the South, and despondency and fear in the East.”<sup>91</sup> Speaking directly to secessionists, Lincoln, in the last paragraph of his inaugural speech, asserted that “the Government will not assault you. . . . We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”<sup>92</sup> His conciliatory ending, however, did not placate secessionists, who inferred from other parts of the address that he was prepared to use force against them.

The reaction in Virginia to Lincoln’s inaugural address was mixed. Governor Letcher wrote that it “created quite a sensation here [Richmond]. The Disunionists were wild with joy, and declared if the Convention did not pass an Ordinance of Secession at once, the State would be disgraced.”<sup>93</sup>

In Lexington, two days after Lincoln’s inaugural speech, James L. Mackey, a student at Washington College, documented the mixed feelings about secession on campus. “The boys put up a beautiful blue flag. . . . It floated beautifully over old George’s head [statue on top of main building] until about 12 o’clock, when Doc [President Junkin] had it taken down and . . . lit a match and stuck to it and gave as a toast ‘To perish all hostility to the Union.’”<sup>94</sup>

The growing hostility toward the Union greatly concerned Governor Letcher, but he was confident that the convention would “think calmly over the whole matter” and that a meeting of Virginia with other border States might be in the offing, although this would be “by no means agreeable to the ultras.”<sup>95</sup>

The people of Rockbridge County, like those in Richmond, disagreed as to the meaning of Lincoln’s remarks. The *Valley Star* reported that “there are people here and elsewhere terribly frightened at Lincoln’s inaugural. We think their fright unfounded and unnecessary.” The article noted that Lincoln had to say something to “conciliate those who

91. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–44.

93. John Letcher to James Davidson, March 9, 1861, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

94. James L. Mackey to Willson, March 6, 1861, Correspondence of the Houston and Willson Families, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

put him in power” but that he had also “endeavored to satisfy the Border Slave States that he means not to involve them in civil strife.”<sup>96</sup> Some Lexingtonians were not so sure about this, and, according to James D. Davidson, the speech prompted some conservative men to join the secessionist camp. However, Davidson interpreted the speech to be a clear message against coercion.<sup>97</sup> James Dorman agreed with Davidson, but admitted that he and other Union men at the state convention “had a rough time of it” after Lincoln’s speech. Dorman himself joined with other conservative delegates in calling for calm and urging the convention to wait on the report from the Committee on Federal Relations.<sup>98</sup> In a long speech on March 7, John S. Carlile of Harrison supported Dorman’s contention that there was nothing in the inaugural address which called for Virginia to secede, emphasizing the point by reading a large portion of the inaugural address to the convention.<sup>99</sup> The secessionist delegates remained unconvinced, but had no choice but to wait for the report from the committee considering federal relations.

On March 9, the convention received a preliminary report from the committee which was pro-Union, but which recognized “the right of the people of the several states of this Union for just causes to withdraw from their association under the Federal Government.”<sup>100</sup> The conservative members of the convention recognized the efforts of the committee to find a middle ground acceptable to all factions, but the secessionists were disappointed that the report did not call for an ordinance of immediate secession. When news of the preliminary report reached Charlottesville, Albert Davidson wrote his father that “almost everyone here is for immediate secession, and if I venture to express an opinion on the other side, they throw out hints about ‘Lexington being an abolition hole.’”<sup>101</sup>

On March 19, the convention received a supplemental report from the Committee on Federal Relations which recommended a series of constitutional guarantees that Congress would not have the “power to

95. John Letcher to James Davidson, March 9, 1861, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

96. “The Inaugural,” *Valley Star*, March 14, 1861.

97. Crenshaw, “Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861,” p. 11.

98. James Dorman to James Davidson, March 8, 1861, Dorman Papers, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

99. Reese, *Virginia State Convention*, 1: 448–77.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 526.

101. Albert Davidson to Pa (James Davidson), March 11, 1861, Albert Davidson Papers.

legislate concerning involuntary servitude in any State or Territory wherein the same is acknowledged or may exist by the laws thereof."<sup>102</sup>

Henry A. Wise, a staunch secessionist and a member of the committee, submitted a minority report which called upon the convention to demand federal withdrawal from forts in the seceded states. When the recommendations of the committee were submitted to the whole convention in late March, the conservative members worked diligently to obtain approval. Fearful that any coercion from the federal government would thwart their plans, they urged Secretary of State William H. Seward to discourage any such action. The question for many was whether Lincoln would maintain or evacuate the federal garrison at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. Seward assured the Virginia conservatives that Lincoln would not reinforce Sumter.<sup>103</sup>

In mid-March, the *Richmond Enquirer* and *Richmond Whig* both reported that federal forts in seceded states would be evacuated, which greatly encouraged the unionists at the state convention. On March 17, Governor Letcher wrote James Davidson that "some of the disunionists seem to be getting somewhat disheartened, when the news reached here that the troops would be withdrawn from Fort Sumter."<sup>104</sup>

Three days before Letcher wrote to Davidson, the latter read a strong Union statement in the *Lexington Gazette*. "We are reluctant to give up the government of the United States, because we believe that taken all together it is the best government that has ever been organized on earth."<sup>105</sup>

Students at Washington College disagreed with the strong pro-Union sentiment of Lexington. On March 26, the faculty minutes recorded a request of thirty students to organize "as a military class, to be drilled by such Cadet [from neighboring VMI] as Colonel Smith [superintendent of VMI] shall detail for that purpose." While the faculty did not prohibit the class, it did caution the students about the "rabble crowd such an activity might attract."<sup>106</sup> Since many students at the two schools were from secessionist states or secessionist parts of Virginia, their action was understandable. However, when news reached Rock-bridge County that a leading state paper, the *Richmond Whig*, was lean-

102. Reese, *Virginia State Convention*, 2: 36.

103. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, p. 181.

104. John Letcher to James Davidson, March 17, 1861, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

105. "A Speedy Adjustment, Or A Permanent Separation," *Lexington Gazette*, March 14, 1861.

106. Faculty Minutes, Washington College, 267 March 1861, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

ing toward secession, James Davidson wrote Dorman at the state convention that a strong Union paper had to be maintained in Richmond, adding that such a paper would be well received in Rockbridge County. "We must have a Union paper, and then the *Whig* must go down, if it goes over to the Disunionists."<sup>107</sup>

In early April, disunionists in Lexington tried to persuade the editor of the *Gazette*, Josiah S. McNutt, to support their cause. He refused and was reported to be stronger than ever in his support for the Union.<sup>108</sup> Despite their failed efforts to win the endorsement of the *Gazette*, secessionists attempted to make inroads on pro-Union support by public meetings promoting secession. However, few people attended the pro-secession meetings held at Natural Bridge and in Lexington. After observing one such gathering "in the Court house yard," James Davidson wrote that "there were very few, except the leaders," and attributed such meetings to the "restlessness in the minds of the people" due to the slow work of the convention.

Lincoln was also eager for the convention to conclude and to do so without adopting a resolution for secession. Therefore, in a secret meeting in Washington on April 4, John B. Baldwin, a delegate to the convention from Augusta County and a leading unionist, met with the president "to explore face-saving solutions to the Sumter crisis."<sup>110</sup> Although there is no official record of what transpired in the meeting, later reports agreed that Lincoln conveyed his desire that the convention adjourn, but whether he offered to evacuate Fort Sumter in exchange for Virginia's loyalty is disputed. In his account of the meeting, Baldwin wrote that he told the president that "if there is a gun fired at Sumter, as sure as there is a God in heaven all is lost."<sup>111</sup>

On the same day as the Lincoln-Baldwin meeting, the convention in Richmond defeated a resolution of secession by a vote of eighty-eight to forty-five. The unionists maintained control even though the Sumter situation had caused some to defect.<sup>112</sup> Both unionist and secessionist delegates agreed "that the people of Virginia will never consent that the Federal power, which is in part their power, shall be used for the purpose of coercion."<sup>113</sup> Consequently, on April 6, the convention voted to send a delegation of three to Washington to ascertain "the policy which

107. James Davidson to James Dorman, March 31, 1861, Dorman Papers.

108. Davidson to Dorman, April 2, 1861, *ibid.*

109. Davidson to Dorman, April 1, 1861, *ibid.*

110. David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 290.

111. Hillman, *Virginia's Decision*, p. 9.

112. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, p. 190.

113. Reese, *Virginia State Convention*, 3: 281.



*General Pierre G. T. Beauregard of Louisiana became the Confederacy's first war hero when he commanded the forces that attacked the United States at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, harbor, April 12, 1861.*

the General Government intends to pursue toward the seceded states.”<sup>114</sup> The convention had no need to wait for the delegation’s report, however, for on April 9, James Dorman reported that news had reached Richmond of Lincoln’s plan to reinforce Sumter as well as other southern forts. While this action caused further defection from Union forces, Dorman wrote, “I shall not change the course I have pursued unless I have some reason to believe that they [the people of Rockbridge County] wish it.”<sup>115</sup>

Two days later, a long article in the *Gazette* urged the people of Rockbridge County to remain steadfast in their love of the Union and not “raise a sacrilegious arm and rend in pieces this glorious fabric consecrated by the mingled

blood of thousands with the vain and delusive hope of erecting a Southern Confederacy.” The article concluded with a reminder that Lincoln “has so far obeyed the mandate “ of Virginia to “not coerce the seceded states.”<sup>116</sup>

Early on the morning of April 12, Confederate batteries led by General P. G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter. James Dorman, as well as other members of the convention, learned of the event on the same day through official dispatches sent to Richmond by the Confederate government.<sup>117</sup> The secessionists at the convention joined a large crowd that evening to celebrate in the state capital. “Rockets exploded, tar barrels blazed, and rebel flags waved as throngs of excited happy people surged through the streets.” When the crowd arrived at the Governor’s Mansion, Letcher, speaking on the front porch, calmly reminded them that Virginia was still in the Union, but concluded “his brief

114. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

115. James Dorman to James Davidson, April 9, 1861, Dorman Papers.

116. “Hon. John T. Harris,” *Lexington Gazette*, April 11, 1861.

117. James Dorman to James Davidson, April 12, 1861, Dorman Papers.

speech by promising not to be found wanting when Virginia was assailed.”<sup>118</sup>

After the crowd left, Letcher ordered the Confederate flag, which had been raised over the capital, to be taken down and replaced with the state flag of Virginia.<sup>119</sup> Contrary to the belief of some that Virginia would secede as soon as the first shot was fired, many Virginia unionists still thought that Lincoln did not intend to wage a war to bring the seceded states back into the Union.<sup>120</sup> The day after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Jubal Early, a delegate from Franklin and a future Confederate general, said that his heart was “bowed down with



*Francis H. Smith, VMI Superintendent*

sorrow . . . [to] find Virginians ready to rejoice in this event.”<sup>121</sup> He, like other unionists, discouraged any hasty decision by the convention as to Virginia’s response to events in South Carolina. However, the firing on Fort Sumter limited the convention’s options, according to James Dorman, who wrote, “I now apprehend, the issue forced on us in a day or two will be, secession, or a Border State Convention to concert joint measures of safety and defence in a time of war.”<sup>122</sup>

Unionists in Rockbridge County, like those at the convention, found it more difficult to counter the cries for secession after news of Sumter reached the area. Cadet Andrew Gatewood wrote to his parents about an April 13 confrontation between secessionists and unionists in Lexington. “The cause of it was some of the secession citizens invited the cadets to come up and help raise a secession flag. . . . In the meantime some . . . were raising a Union Flag.” Angry that their flagpole broke, the unionists attacked those calling for secession, including the cadets. “You cannot imagine the excitement that was in Lexington. Col. Smith

118. Boney, *John Letcher*, pp. 111–12.

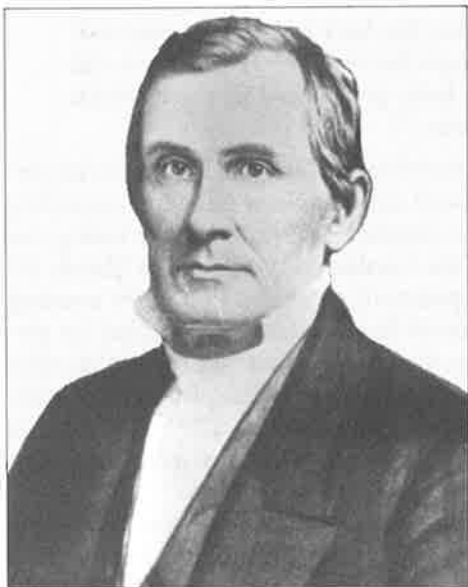
119. Hillman, *Virginia’s Decision*, p. 10.

120. *Ibid.*

121. Reese, *Virginia State Convention*, pp. 722–29.

122. James Dorman to James Davidson, April 12, 1861, Dorman Papers.





*George Junkin, Washington College President*

and all the Profs were there. It kept them as busy as they could be to get cadets to come back to barracks.” Gatewood ended his letter by saying that Superintendent Smith “is all right, he has made two or three speeches to us here in a few days. He says if VA don’t go out, he is going out. . . . The 13th day of April is a day long to be ‘Remembered.’”<sup>123</sup>

Like the incident in town, a flag-raising at Washington College caused an uproar. When Dr. George Junkin, president of the school and staunch unionist, learned that students had once again raised a Confederate flag on top of the main building, he rushed to the site and ordered them to take it down, reminding

“them that Virginia was still in the Union and he was still President of the College.” Reluctantly, the students carried out the president’s orders.<sup>124</sup> Although Sumter increased the calls for secession, unionists in Rockbridge County and at the state convention still held the upper hand and remained convinced that Lincoln would not use force against South Carolina.

Unionists did not believe an unverified report which reached Richmond on April 14 that Lincoln planned to use force. Confident that the president would not jeopardize Virginia’s loyalty by the use of force, many unionists even rejected as a hoax the presidential proclamation reprinted in the Richmond newspapers on April 15.<sup>125</sup> However, Lincoln’s call for troops was no hoax, and the wording of the proclamation left little doubt as to his plans.

I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States . . . hereby do call forth, the militia of the several States of the Union, to the aggregate number of seventy-five thousand, in order to suppress

123. Andrew Gatewood to Ma and Pa, April 15, 1861, Andrew C. L. Gatewood Papers, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.

124. Janet Allan Bryan, ed., *A March Past: Reminiscences of Elizabeth Randolph Preston Allan* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1938), p. 118.

125. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, p. 313.

said combinations, and to cause the laws to be duly executed. . . . The first service assigned to the forces hereby called forth will probably be to re-possess the forts, places, and property which have been seized from the Union.<sup>126</sup>

This was not an easy or quick decision for Lincoln. In the weeks preceding the proclamation, he explored various plans of action regarding federal forts in seceded states. He worried especially about losing the Upper South and Border States to the Confederacy. As late as March 28, Lincoln had not yet decided on a policy of coercion. In a night meeting with his cabinet, he presented General Scott's plan which called for giving up Forts Sumter and Pickens on the grounds that "we should thereby recover the States to which they geographically belong by the liberality of the act, besides retaining the eight doubtful states."<sup>127</sup> The cabinet strongly disagreed with Scott and on the following day gave the president written statements as to their reasons.<sup>128</sup>

Deciding between Scott's advice and his cabinet's was not easy. However, Lincoln could no longer delay. The federal garrison at Fort Sumter was low on supplies. Following the cabinet meeting, Lincoln instructed Secretary of War Simon Cameron to prepare a naval expedition to be ready in one week. Reluctantly, Lincoln decided to act on his promise to "reclaim the public property . . . and to hold, occupy, and possess . . . property and places belonging to the government," but he also stated that "there needs be no bloodshed or violence unless forced upon the national authority."<sup>129</sup>

The words of Lincoln's inaugural address rang hollow to Virginia unionists, who thought the call for 75,000 troops vastly different from an effort to hold on to federal forts. Virginia unionists had consistently argued against coercion of seceded states. Thus, while Lincoln's election and events in South Carolina did not weaken their resolve, the proclamation of April 15 did. In a letter home the following day, James Dorman wrote, "I have no idea that our people will tamely submit to Lincoln's arrogant and infamous usurpation of power, and to his diabolical purpose of waging war."<sup>130</sup> Coming from a long-standing unionist, these words were prophetic. Governor Letcher agreed with Dorman and

126. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 4: 332.

127. Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 3: 394.

128. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., *Abraham Lincoln Complete Works* (New York: Century Co., 1920), 2: 26-28.

129. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4: 254.

130. James Dorman to James Davidson, April 16, 1861, microfilm, John Letcher Papers.

informed Secretary of War Cameron that Virginia would not furnish the quota of three regiments requested by the president.<sup>131</sup> On April 17, in a secret session, the convention in Richmond passed an ordinance of secession by a vote of 88 to 55, to be referred to the people of Virginia for approval or rejection on May 23.<sup>132</sup>

The students at Washington College were jubilant over the resolution passed by the state convention and signified their support by once again hoisting a southern flag, which they formally asked the faculty not to remove. "Dr. Junkin stated that he regarded the erection of the flag . . . as a insult to him personally and that if the faculty did not order its removal at once, he would resign." When the faculty voted to sustain the students' request, Junkin, true to his word that he would never teach under a rebel flag, resigned.<sup>133</sup> Recognizing that continued residence in Rockbridge County would require him to suppress his pro-Union stance, Dr. Junkin left as soon as possible.<sup>134</sup> A Washington College student wrote his aunt that "there will be few tears shed at his [Junkin's] departure," adding that secession had been forced on Virginia, which was now "united in sentiment [and] . . . unconquerable."<sup>135</sup>

In contrast to the many pro-Union articles prior to April 15, none appeared in the *Valley Star* after that date. In fact, one headline, "Old Rockbridge Doing Her Duty," noted that students and townspeople were united in their preparation to defend Virginia.<sup>136</sup> A clash of arms was expected after Lincoln's proclamation signaled his plan of coercion. Writing to his friend, James Davidson, Robert Kaylor, of Nelsonville, Missouri, noted that the fight would be long and hard, but that the North had forced the confrontation because the South "may be reasoned with but not coerced. . . . We are not to be intimidated into submission by the threat of even an army of seventy-five thousand men."<sup>137</sup>

Lincoln's policy of coercion silenced Union voices in Rockbridge County. The *Valley Star* reported that because of Lincoln's call for troops, "men who formerly were most decided in their attachment to the Federal Union, are now among the foremost in arms to defend their

131. Boney, *John Letcher*, p. 112.

132. Hillman, *Virginia's Decision*, p. 11.

133. Faculty Minutes, Washington College, April 17, 1861, Washington and Lee University.

134. Crenshaw, *General Lee's College*, p. 124.

135. Frank to Aunt E., 267 April 1861, Correspondence of the Houston and Wilson Families.

136. "Old Rockbridge Doing Her Duty," *Valley Star*, April 25, 1861.

137. Robert Kaylor to James Davidson, April 25, 1861, James D. Davidson Papers, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

# TO ARMS!

## To Arms! To Arms!

**Defend your Homes and Firesides.**

**THREE HUNDRED ABLE-BODIED YOUNG MEN** are wanted to meet in LEXINGTON, on SATURDAY, APRIL 20th, 1861, to form three Companies of VOLUNTEERS for the defence of Virginia against the Invasion threatened by her Northern foes. Your State is in danger. Rally to her Standard.  
Lexington, April 17, 1861.

state.”<sup>138</sup> On May 2, the paper changed its slogan from “The Union and The Constitution” to “Union of The South” to emphasize its support for secession.<sup>139</sup>

Rockbridge County’s support for Governor Letcher’s defense strategy was documented in Thomas McGuffin’s letter to his son, John B. McGuffin, one of the volunteers guarding the arsenal at Harper’s Ferry. The elder McGuffin reported that “old Rockbridge is thoroughly aroused and prepared to contribute a full share in resisting the military despotism now operating in Washington.”<sup>140</sup> Letcher worked to prepare for Virginia’s secession with the same conviction that he had once held for her remaining in the Union. He knew that men and materials needed to be organized prior to the anticipated statewide vote on the resolution for secession scheduled for May 23.<sup>141</sup> The day before the referendum, William Hale Houston wrote in his diary that “tomorrow Virginia is to vote for or against Secession—In voting for Secession I vote not against our Old glorious Blood bought Union—as it was formed (and observed for a half Century) by a Set of Heven [*sic*] directed Men—but I hope

138. “The War Feeling in Virginia,” *Valley Star*, May 2, 1861.

139. *Ibid.*

140. Thomas McGuffin to John McGuffin, May 7, 1861, McGuffin Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

141. Boney, *John Letcher*, pp. 118–29.

every voter will vote . . . against . . . Phanatics [*sic*] and Cuthroats—who caused the destruction of our once Glorious Union."<sup>142</sup>

In a front page article titled "Independence Forever," the *Valley Star* on May 23, the day of the statewide referendum, urged "a unanimous vote in Rockbridge in favor of separating from the tyrant Lincoln, and his fanatical bloodthirsty, Republican crew at the North."<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the vote was almost unanimous, with Rockbridge County supporting the state convention's ordinance of secession by 1,728 to 1.<sup>144</sup> M. S. Roadcap, in a letter to his son, identified the lone dissenter as Zacheriah White of Lexington.<sup>145</sup> One dissenting vote for the Union was a far cry from the chorus of support emanating from Rockbridge County prior to April 15. A week after the election, the *Lexington Gazette* succinctly explained the results by stating that many were "loth to give up the Union and the government established by the patriots of the great American revolution . . . [and] been willing to forbear in the hope of yet having her wrongs peaceably redressed. But when the last hope of obtaining justice was dashed from her people . . . when the olive branch of peace, fairness, and equality was rejected, and in the place thereof the usurper's proclamation for her submission or subjugation was issued, then did the sovereign people of Virginia rise in the majesty of their strength and . . . declare that she was and of right ought to be free."<sup>146</sup>

This study confirms the characterization of the people of Lexington and Rockbridge County as "reluctant Confederates" who came to support secession only after Lincoln's call for troops to suppress secession in the South. Both Lexington newspapers, with their similar slogans, "The Union Must Be Preserved" and "The Union and The Constitution," steadfastly opposed secession throughout 1860 and early 1861. The overwhelming vote for unionist candidates to the state convention in early February 1861 indicates that the newspapers' position was also that of almost all of the county's citizens. After Lincoln's proclamation, however, the county supported secession by an even more lopsided vote, a lone dissenter keeping it from being unanimous. However reluctant Lexingtonians had been to become Confederates, once they committed themselves to the Confederate cause, they did so wholeheartedly. Significantly, no movement developed to follow the course of what became West Virginia, which separated from the Old Dominion to remain in the Union.

142. Houston diary, May 22, 1861, Houston Papers.

143. "To the Voters of Rockbridge," *Valley Star*, May 23, 1861.

144. "Virginia Elections," *Lexington Gazette*, May 30, 1861.

145. Driver, *Lexington*, p. 20.

146. "The Secession of Virginia," *Lexington Gazette*, May 30, 1861.

How could Lexingtonians have abandoned their long-standing support for the Union so quickly and so completely? Any explanation must begin with understanding that their position was always more complex and nuanced than a label such as “reluctant Confederates” can convey. To see the town as “an abolition hole,” as young Albert Davidson reported was the case in Charlottesville, was to misread opposition to secession as opposition to slavery. While Rockbridge County did not have a plantation economy, with the large number of slaves that entailed, it did have a substantial slave population. When Lexington unionists deplored “extremism,” they routinely singled out abolitionism as one of its most pernicious forms. In their denunciation of extremism, the unionists took pains always to balance southern secessionist against “northern aggression” and abolitionism. The balance, however, was more apparent than real. The formulaic reference to “northern aggression” is particularly revealing. Secessionism, while it might disrupt the Union, which was to be regretted, did not pose the kind of threat to Virginia and the Valley, and to southern institutions that what was viewed as northern aggression did. This meant, regardless of their rhetoric, that there was a limit, perhaps unrecognized, to Lexingtonians’ support of the Union. Indeed, as early as the time of the John Brown raid, the Lexington newspapers expressed fear that action by northern extremists would weaken commitment to the Union, suggesting a realization that unionist resolve, however sincere, was not unshakable. In the event, unionist resolve held firm through the crisis provoked by Brown, and even after the election of Lincoln in 1860; it could not, however, withstand the far more serious threat seen in Lincoln’s proclamation calling for troops for use against the South.

## TREASON IN VIRGINIA.


The Code of Virginia defines treason to be  
“In levying war against the State,  
adhering to its enemies, or giving  
them aid and comfort.”

Such treason, if proved by two witnesses, is  
punishable by death.

MAY 15 1861.

# The Virginia Drive-In Movie Era

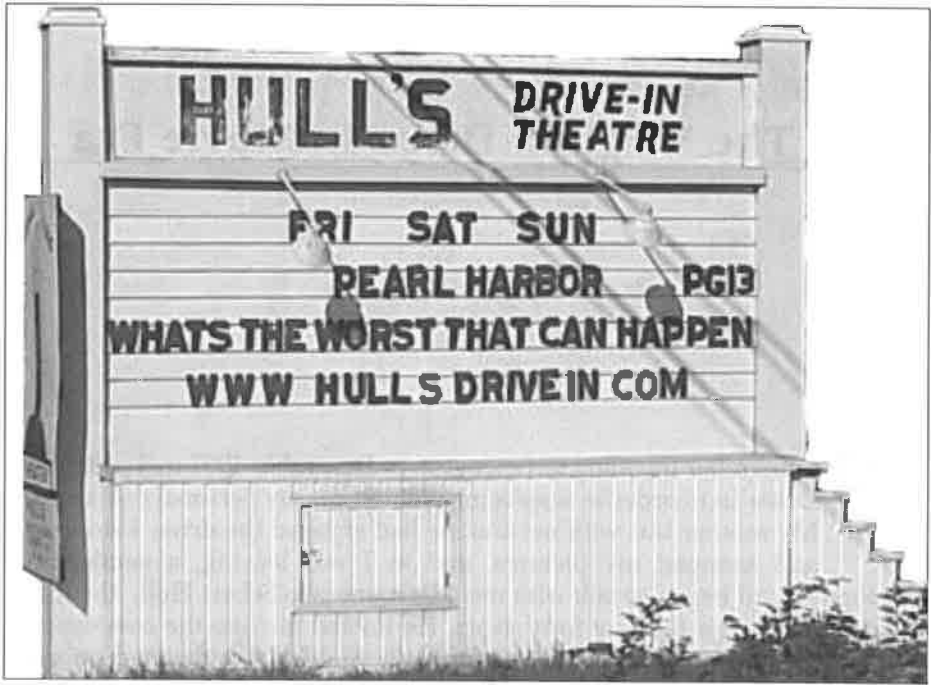
James R. Kopp

 I remember traveling to Lexington in December 1997 to find Hull's Drive-In in order to snap some pictures for my personal collection. My mother was with me and we had enjoyed the drive. I stopped and snapped my pictures, and as I was leaving, a gentleman stopped and began to talk with me. His name was Sebert Hull, the theater's owner for the past forty years. He invited me into the concession stand, and we proceeded to talk and talk. Suddenly, it dawned on me that my mother was still sitting patiently in the car, an hour and a half after Sebert and I entered the concession stand to chat. I learned a lot from Sebert that day, and was very saddened to hear of his sudden passing in early 1998.

I work as a Logistics Manager at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. My primary duty is to control and preserve millions of dollars of assets utilized in our daily operations. Essentially, the Library is more of a museum than a "library," in that we have over 121 million items in our collection, with only 22 million books as part of that total. A mission of the Library is to "preserve and protect man's collective knowledge." Perhaps that is one reason I have preservation cells in my blood, since I find myself wanting to protect and preserve the past for future generations to enjoy.

---

**James R. Kopp** is Logistics Manager for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He is also a free-lance writer who contributes to major websites and *The Drive-In Theater Fan Club's Journal*. His writings on drive-ins have been published in *USA Today*, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and elsewhere. He spoke to the Society at Hull's Drive-In on July 20, 2001, at which time he was working on a television documentary and on-line newspaper dedicated to the drive-in. After Mr. Kopp spoke, the Society held a special showing of the film *From Here to Eternity* (B&W, 1953).



Turning to my desire to preserve drive-in theaters: I must have learned those traits early as a child growing up in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area. Each weekend, my parents would load my brother and sister and me into the car and head for an evening at one of the city's thirty-five drive-ins. We would leapfrog out of the car before the movie started and head for the playground, so that we could play in front of the large screen before showtime. After playing, my parents would feed us popcorn, candy, and sodas bought from the concession stand, and we would settle into our seats for the evening's presentation. It was good family entertainment, and I clearly remember one night when rain threatened to wash out a night at the drive-in. My brother and I decided we were going, come hell or high water. We got into our metal pedal cars and announced our intention to our parents, that we were running away to the drive-in for the night. After a good laugh, and our continued insistence that this was what we were going to do, my dad opened the sliding glass door. "Enjoy the movie," he said, as we proceeded to pedal down the driveway. Needless to say, we did not make it very far. Years later as a teen, I learned what the slang term for drive-ins, "passion pit," meant, and to this day could not recall many movies that I "watched" on the screen during those years.



After I came to Virginia, I frequently patronized the fifteen or so drive-ins that were once in the Washington, D.C., metro area. I can clearly remember the Lee Highway, which was one of the largest drive-ins in Virginia, as well as my personal favorite, Super 29, which was in Fairfax (and is now a Costco store). Northern Virginia lost all of its drive-ins within two years of each other between 1985 and 1987. From 1987 until a personal trip to Pittsburgh with my youngest son on July 4, 1997, I did not attend a drive-in, and when I found one still operating in my hometown, I was surprised. We visited that night and saw the first night showing of *Men in Black*. Not only was the area in front of the original screen packed with families and young folk, the drive-in's newly built Screens 2 and 3 were likewise sold out. As I sat there, watching the movie, I thought that I would have to search the Internet to see where other drive-ins were so I could begin to enjoy them again.

On the Internet I found a website called “The Evil Sam’s Drive-In Theater Guide” and began to chat with the webmaster, Sam Graham, a radio disk-jockey in Des Moines, Iowa. This was his hobby site, and he badly needed volunteers to capture and record data about the drive-ins still operating. I immediately volunteered. I began to research the Virginia sites and wrote news articles as well as verifying data listed on the site. At about the same time, I found a couple in Maryland, Mark and Kim Bialeck, who were operating “The Drive-In Theater Fan Club,” and began to participate in researching and writing news stories on drive-ins. I also participated in fan club meets at drive-ins throughout this great land. Since that July day in 1997, I have researched and photographed over one hundred drive-ins and have seen my research and data published in *USA Today*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Philadelphia Enquirer*, and *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. While Evil Sam’s Internet site no longer exists, I am an active contributor to the three major websites dedicated to drive-in theaters. I am also a regular photograph contributor to the Family Drive-In website, and am working on some pretty interesting projects that will make the theater industry take notice of the resurgence of the drive-in.

### History of Drive-Ins

A few years ago, one thing most enthusiastic fans delving into the history of drive-in theaters noticed was that the history “recorded” is sketchy at best. Little data was available, and you spent considerable time piecing bits of information together to build a picture. One had to research old land records, Internet sites, old theater catalogs and master lists, and so forth. But thanks to people like Don and Sue Sanders, who

are authors dedicated to the drive-in, and the main drive-in websites, a great deal of history is being pulled together and recorded.

Certainly prior to there being a physical structure called a "drive-in theater," there were many outdoor showings of films in the early days of the industry, often at beaches and parks. That tradition continues in many cities today with outdoor film series. One such film series is held each year in Brooklyn and is sold out each night.

Richard Hollingshead, an auto parts salesman living in Camden, New Jersey, is credited with building the first drive-in theater. He began experimenting with the concept because his mother, who was physically too large to sit comfortably in indoor movie theaters, could sit in a car to watch a movie. He would tack a bed sheet to trees, place a 1928 projector on the hood of his car, and a radio behind the screen for sound. He simulated rain by using lawn sprinklers. He liked what he saw and began positioning other cars in his backyard to test visibility. He found that visibility was a problem and used blocks under the front tires, plus spacing to improve visibility. He conceived a series of ramps, such as you see today in this theater, where cars could park to view a movie.

In August 1932, Hollingshead applied for and received Patent #1909537 on May 16, 1933. On June 6, 1933, the first drive-in theater opened in Camden, New Jersey. The feature that night was *Wife Beware*. Admission was 25 cents per car and 25 cents per person. The theater was popular, but the sound was piped through large speakers mounted by the screen, which caused problems with the neighbors. This was the primary way sound was projected until 1941, when RCA introduced the "in-car speaker system." The Stockade Auto-Torium in Williamsburg, Virginia, was one of the first drive-ins to install these speakers. By 1945, all drive-ins were using in-car speakers. Hollingshead attempted to franchise his drive-in theaters through a company called Park N Theaters.

The second drive-in was built less than a year after the Camden facility in Orefield, Pennsylvania, opening on April 15, 1934: Shankweiler's Auto Park. Today, it is the oldest drive-in operating, the original Camden drive-in having died a few years after it was opened.

Between 1933 and 1939, there were nineteen drive-ins built, including one in Virginia. By January of 1942, there were ninety-five drive-ins spread over twenty-seven states, with Ohio leading the way with eleven. Today, Ohio is still the number one drive-in state with forty-eight operating theaters.

The building of drive-ins slowed during World War II. Only six drive-ins were built during that time, with many closing down for as long as two years to support the war effort since rubber, used for tires, was in short supply and gas was rationed. In 1946, however, the number of drive-ins expanded from 102 to 820.

The concept of the drive-in was strange to most people, and “open houses” were held during the day to show customers how to park, how the sound system worked, and what food was available from the concession stand. In the late 1940s, drive-ins were full of children looking for something to do, so most drive-ins added a playground. Some went further by adding miniature golf or offering pony rides, miniature trains, talent shows, and other attractions.

In the 1950s, the drive-in boom accelerated going from less than 1,000 in 1950 to almost 5,000 by 1958. Drive-ins even began to spring up in foreign countries. During those years, indoor theaters were closing and the number of indoor theaters declined from around 17,000 to 12,000. Not only were drive-ins growing, the size of the drive-in increased, too. There were many that parked over a thousand cars, and at least eight that offered parking for over twenty-one hundred cars. One of the largest was in New York, called “All Weather Drive-In”; it featured parking for twenty-five hundred cars, an indoor twelve-hundred seat viewing area that was heated and air-conditioned, a playground, a cafeteria, and a full-service restaurant. It had a shuttle train that took customers from their cars to various areas on the twenty-eight-acre facility. While many were large, there were a handful of drive-ins built that were very small, including the Hillsdale in Washington, Virginia (Rappahannock County), that would hold only fifty-five cars.

In the early 1950s, car heaters were invented to help keep drive-ins open year round: they were initially used in the Cincinnati and Louisville areas. CinemaScope (large curved) screens were introduced. In addition, some theaters experimented with “containment screens” to see if drive-ins could project movies during the day, but the cost of these screens was too high and they were never adopted. Many materials can be used to build a screen. Metal, wood, concrete block, masonite, plaster, and even asbestos have been used to reflect images to audiences nationwide.

While the 1940s and 1950s were the boom years for the drive-in, the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were marked by stagnation in the number of drive-ins built. By 1980, the number of drive-ins had decreased to thirty-five hundred. The 1970s and 1980s took a toll on the drive-in. Many things were a factor in the demise of the drive-in during those years, including the advent of the VCR, daylight savings time (one of the reasons that Arizona does not switch to daylight savings time to this day was in support of the drive-in owners of that state), the advent of cable TV, the rise of the multiplexes in many communities, the movie studios’ propensity to limit screenings to indoor theaters, and last, but certainly not least, the increase in land values. Many owners sold their land to shopping centers or housing developments. Those drive-ins that sur-

vived the 1980s often turned to adult films to attempt to make a profit, or used the land during the day for flea markets.

During the early history of drive-ins, many were used on Sundays for church services, such as the Virginia Beach Drive-In that was located only three miles from the ocean and had a popular summer crowd for Sunday church services. There are several drive-ins in the nation that still have church services during the summer, but there are two remaining full-time drive-in ministries: one in Columbus, Ohio, offering free Christian films; the other one in Michigan, operated by Terry Lytle. In August 2000, I ventured with a few friends down to Tampa to see Terry's Florida site before it was demolished to make way for a Wal-Mart. Terry is quite a man and takes his ministry seriously by designing unique screen towers with glass rooms for the minister to speak from, as well as a turntable that can be used for stage productions. Terry and his brother have taken drive-in ministries to a new level by designing a series of movable drive-ins that are used today in Florida, Eastern Europe, and Mexico. Perhaps the most famous minister to ever use a drive-in was Reverend Robert H. Schuller, Pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, which is across the street from the former Orange Drive-In Theater in California, where he began his ministry on \$500.

Today, there are about five hundred drive-ins left in North America. Many have added screens with the largest number of screens (thirteen) at a drive-in in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. There are reportedly over a thousand former sites still existing that could be resurrected as a drive-in again, should the urge strike you. Four states—New Jersey (where it all started), Alaska, Louisiana, and Hawaii—currently do not have a drive-in; the District of Columbia has never had one.

One piece of drive-in history that is changing is the number of drive-ins in foreign countries. There is no accurate count on how many drive-ins exist in foreign lands, but there reportedly is one in Moscow that cannot start movies until midnight, one in Saudi Arabia, several in Italy, South Africa, Germany, Spain, Denmark, and perhaps elsewhere. A report, recently received from a South African resident by one of the drive-in websites, states that the Menlyn Park Drive-In is built on top of a 1.2 million square foot shopping mall, and that another one is under construction on top of the largest shopping mall in the southern hemisphere.

### **The Virginia Drive-In Era**

Virginia has always had a good relationship with the movie studios, with over 169 movies being partially or fully filmed in the state; these include: *Airport 1975*, *Backdraft*, *Best Friends*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Con-*

tact, *Deep Impact*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Dirty Dancing*, *G.I. Jane*, *Hannibal*, *Lassie*, *The Other Side of Midnight*, *The Replacements*, and *Rollercoaster*. In addition, over thirty-seven television movies or series have been filmed to date in the Commonwealth.

The state was at one time seventh in the nation in the number of operating drive-ins, with 143. Almost every county had at least one drive-in, with several larger areas, such as Roanoke, Richmond, the Tidewater area, southwestern Virginia, and Northern Virginia having more than one.

The first drive-in built in the state was on Route 1 in Alexandria: the Mt. Vernon Open Air Theater. It opened on August 15, 1938, some five years after Hollingshead opened his first drive-in. It was owned by Loew's and charged thirty-five cents for admission. The opening feature was Claudette Colbert and Gary Cooper's comedy, *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. The theater was originally primitive and did not offer car speakers until 1946. Its concession stand was a small candy and soft drink stand next to the projection booth. It was later sold to Redstone Drive-Ins (now National Amusements) and was modernized in 1962 with a new screen tower and entrance, as well as a large concession stand. In 1978, Redstone added a second screen, and the 969-car capacity was divided among the screens. Unfortunately, the Mt. Vernon was bulldozed in 1984 and is now home to National Amusement's ten-screen multiplex.

Virginia's second drive-in opened in 1941. It was the Stockade Auditorium in Williamsburg, which was designed with a stockade fence in keeping with Williamsburg's decor. Other early drive-ins included:

**Wise Drive-In**, Wise, Virginia (1946), with outdoor seats.

**Moonlite Drive-In**, South Boston, Virginia (1947).

**Midlothian Drive-In**, which changed names twice and was finally named the Sunset. It was Richmond's first and opened on June 11, 1947, with the Bowery Boys in *Mr. Hex*.

**Cinema City Drive-In** (York Drive-In)—Tidewater's first drive-in (1947).

**Auto-View**, Highland Springs, which only lasted one year.

**Airport Drive-In**, Arlington, Virginia, opened September 8, 1947. It's advertised capacity was 1,000 cars, which made it the largest drive-in between Pennsylvania and Florida. It was famous for a large neon airplane on the screen tower and was located near Washington National Airport. The land this drive-in once sat on is now Crystal City.

**Harvey's Drive-In Theater**, Lynchburg, Virginia, opened in 1949.

**The Moonlite**, Abingdon, Virginia, opened in 1949 and is still operating.

By 1948—the first year the theater industry began to keep statistics—there were 26 drive-ins operating in Virginia. By 1954 there were 118,

and in 1958 (Virginia's peak year) there were 143. In 1963, the numbers declined to 115, then to 90 in 1967. A brief revival of drive-ins shows in the 1972 statistics when 102 operated, but by 1977, the numbers declined to 87, then to 56 in 1982; by 1987, there were only 16 remaining.

There were many duplicate names for Virginia drive-ins, with Sunset and Starlite leading the groups with four theaters each, followed by Park and Airport, with three theaters each. Rounding out duplicate names with two each were Route 220, Central, Dicks, Family, and Moonlite.

Rounding out the history of the Virginia Drive-In Era, here is a set of interesting facts about particular drive-ins.

**Seven Pines**, built in 1948, Cismont (Richmond area), had loud speakers by the screen and seats.

**Crescent Drive-In**, built in 1948 in Danville, featured carhop service with patrons ordering via intercom from their cars.

**Green Acres Drive-In**, built in 1948 in Hampton, was a full-time X-rated drive-in in its final years. (It seems rather incongruous that a place called Green Acres showed X-rated films.)

**The Bellwood**, Richmond area, was built in 1948 for a cost of \$200,000.

**Hiway Drive-In**, Radford, was built in 1948 for a cost of \$100,000.

**Lee Hi Drive-In**, in Salem, was built in 1948 and was the Roanoke Valley's first.

**The Lonesome Pine**, Coeburn, opened in 1949, and is known to be the only drive-in to build "privacy fences" between the parking spots so that patrons would watch the movie on the screen instead of the activities in the cars.

**Sunset Drive-In**, Falls Church, was the Washington area's smallest, but it was shut down in 1974 when citizens complained that they could see the screen (showing x-rated films) from a nearby apartment complex.

**Callaghan Drive-In** was the first built in Covington in 1949.

**Park Drive-In**, Petersburg, moved to two different locations.

**Royal Drive-In**, Winchester, is famous for singer Patsy Cline playing the drive-in during intermissions, while being booed by the locals.

**Thaxton Drive-In**, Thaxton, was short-lived in 1949. It had a small 16 x 20 foot screen and outdoor loudspeakers. It lasted only nine summer weekends.

**Arvonnia Drive-In**, Arvonnia, advertised the "World's Largest Rural Screen."

**Plantation Drive-In**, Suffolk, had a screen tower that looked like a southern plantation home, including columns and dormer windows. It was built by the same folks that did the Stockade in Williamsburg.

**Byrd's View Drive-In**, Louisa, was short-lived in 1949, was part of a lakeside resort community, and only placed one movie ad in the paper.

**Powell Valley Drive-In**, Big Stone Gap, was notable in that the movies were projected on the side of a barn. During the showing of a war film, *633 Squadron*, a tossed cigarette ignited the hay and sent the barn up in flames at the moment a plane crashed and burned on the screen. In 1979, it changed it's name to the Viking Drive-In to honor the local high school's athletic teams.

**Buena Vista Drive-In** opened originally as the Mountain View. One of the founders was Sebert Hull.

**South Drive-In**, Chesapeake, had a 130 foot wide screen.

**Castle Drive-In**, Collinsville, was located in a residential neighborhood.

**Crozet Drive-In**, Crozet, was built in the middle of an orchard.

**Super 29 Drive-In**, Fairfax (my favorite), was behind an Old West amusement park called Virginia City.

**Fredericksburg Drive-In** featured a miniature train, merry-go-round, and fishing pond.

**Roth's Drive-In**, Harrisburg, was the start of the Roth's Movie Theater chain. It owned both drive-ins in Harrisburg before branching out to indoor theaters.

**Hillsville Drive-In**, Hillsville, is literally buried under thousands of pounds of dirt used to make the high school's athletic fields.

**Stevesville Drive-In**, Lexington, boasted the first CinemaScope screen in Rockbridge County. The Econo Lodge on is currently on the north U.S. 11 site.

**Luray Drive-In**, Luray, was in trouble in 1982 when a minister contended that it showed allegedly soft core adult films on a screen that could clearly be seen from the road. The case was dropped when the prosecution failed to come up with the money to arrange the screening of the movie.

**Fort Twin Drive-In**, Lynchburg, had two movie screens: one to show family films, and the other to show adult films.

**220 Drive-In**, Martinsville, boasted state-of-the-art in-car stereo speakers, a paved lot, and air-conditioned snack bar.

**Lee Highway Drive-In**, Merrifield, boasted a car capacity of 1,353, and a 50 by 120 foot CinemaScope screen. It also had a unique rotunda-style dining area.

**Patterson Drive-In**, Richmond, built in 1966, featured outdoor seating, a teen dance pavillion, and a playground complete with a merry-go-round.

**Fairground Drive-In**, Rocky Mount, was built on the site of the former county fairgrounds.

**Sand & Surf Drive-In**, Virginia Beach, was reported to be the first twin drive-in on the east coast when built in 1968. It named its screens “Sand” and “Surf.”

**Dream Drive-In**, Wattsville, was the only drive-in on Virginia’s eastern shore. It was across the street from NASA’s Wallops Island facility. In its final years it played Spanish-language films.

**Skyline Drive-In**, Waynesboro, lives on in pictures taken of its beautiful screen published by Don and Sue Sanders on their American Drive-In website.

And last, but not least, there was a true “Mom and Pop” operation—the **B&L Drive-In**, Williamsburg, owned by Beatrice and Leonard Legum.

To round out the Virginia Drive-In Era, I want to talk about the nine drive-ins still operating:

**The Central**, located on old Route 23 in Norton, is a single screen classic showing double features. It is located on the border of the Jefferson National Forest and has a neat stone-faced concession stand, with radio sound.

**The Family**, located just south of Winchester in a community called Stephens City, is Virginia’s largest drive-in with two screens, playground, love swings, and picnic tables. It is quite popular and does a good business, particularly on weekends. It is the closest drive-in to the Washington metro area. Radio sound and speakers.

**The Hiland**, Route 11, Rural Retreat, is a nicely maintained single-screen theater, featuring single features on the weekends only. Speakers.

**The Keysville**, Route 360 south of Richmond, is a nice single screen theater featuring both single and double features. It is currently closed until 2002 for renovations. Radio sound only.

**The Moonlite Theatre**, Abingdon, is Virginia’s oldest operating drive-in (since 1949.) It offers single features and the second largest capacity in the state next to the Family. It is a famous theater seen in books and newspapers.

**Park Place**, Marion, Virginia’s newest drive-in, opened in 2000. It has a single screen and is part of a recreational center which includes mini-golf, batting cages, arcade, and restaurant with TCBY franchise. It was built on the former location of Marion’s Park Drive-In. FM stereo radio sound.

**Starlite**, Christiansburg, has a single screen, operates on weekends, playing a single feature. Speakers only.

And, of course, **Hull’s Drive-In**, owned by a group of angels—Hull’s Angels. Hull’s closest competition is the **Warner Drive-In** in Franklin,





*This aerial photograph shows Lee Drive-In shortly after it opened in 1950. It was owned by Wadley C. Watkins of Roanoke. It was renamed Hull's Drive-In in August 1957 when Sebert Hull of Buena Vista purchased it. (Photo courtesy of David Atkins, grandson of the original Lee Drive-In owners, and the News-Gazette.)*

West Virginia, 58 miles from here. The closest Virginia competition is the **Starlite** in Christiansburg, 67 miles away. Rockbridge citizens actually have a choice of six operating drive-ins within a 100 mile radius, and 22 operating drive-ins within 175 miles.

### **Current Drive-In Trends and the Future**

The late 1990s and the years so far in this new millennium have seen a resurgence in the drive-in industry. The number of drive-ins closing is declining, and there is about a 10% increase in drive-ins re-opened each year. Many new drive-ins have been built. A brand new three-screen, 1,000-car drive-in entertainment center is planned to open next May in Maryland just outside Baltimore. It will not only use digital sound systems, but a new digital projector. Besides the resurrected theaters and new ones being opened, drive-ins are also reporting record attendance years.

What is this resurgence about? Most of the drive-ins are seeing families come with children to the movies, thus introducing a whole new generation to the drive-in. Prices seem to be a key ingredient, because in most cases, children are free and adults are getting a bargain in seeing two movies for the price of one. Concession prices are also more reasonable than the multiplexes, and most drive-ins will allow outside food to be brought in. If you do bring your own snacks, please be sure to patronize the concession stand, because this is the profit center for the theater. You see throngs of families spreading blankets or chairs out in front of the cars, or loaded into the back of pick-up trucks ready for a fun night of watching movies under the big starry sky.

The drive-in owners have also received major support from fan clubs, websites, and newspapers. *USA Today* appears to be the most supportive newspaper running articles on drive-ins. This year alone, they highlighted the fight drive-in owners had with Disney over the release of *Pearl Harbor*, when Disney wanted to restrict the movie to indoor theaters for the first four weeks. Most of the owners thus turned to a little-known movie called *Shrek*, which turned out to be the movie of the year. Disney quietly released *Pearl Harbor* to drive-ins, coupled with a deal to run *Atlantis* for one price, two weeks into the *Pearl Harbor* run.

Owners have also formed the United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association, hoping to unite owners to represent the drive-ins to the theater and film industry. Several groups are currently planning to introduce preservation efforts for the drive-in, similar to the National Trust, to provide financial and technical support to drive-ins in need of assistance to survive. A national trade magazine, *Big Screen*, is on the drawing board and should be out by 2002. It plans on covering drive-in news as well as news on the single screen indoor theaters in many communities that are fighting to survive against the multiplex.

It used to be that people thought the drive-in was dead, and I used to get that response when I told folks that I had a hobby to preserve the drive-in; but with the resurgence, people are taking notice and so is the movie theater industry. The indoor chains had a rough year in 2000 and only two chains made money. National Amusements made money only because they continue to hold and operate drive-ins.

What does the current drive-in fan expect? According to surveys by one of the drive-in websites:

- 44% of the people attend drive-ins frequently
- 35% have a drive-in within fifteen miles of their home
- 92% said they would attend film festivals at the drive-in
- 48% wanted to see a concert at the drive-in
- 62% would like to see shakes/malts offered at the concession stand
- 47% said popcorn was their favorite snack

- 37% bought hamburgers at the concession stand
- 32% said Coke was their favorite soda
- 68% said they usually eat dinner at the drive-in
- 54% said they want a playground at the drive-in
- 46% still use the car speakers
- 92% said picture quality was important
- 87% wanted to buy memorabilia
- 91% said they go to the drive-in for atmosphere

The 1998 closing of the nearly half century old Hull’s Drive-In was a great disappointment to many moviegoers in Rockbridge County. The following June, Eric and Elise Sheffield called a public meeting of drive-in fans, and that group resolved to form a nonprofit group—Hull’s Angels—dedicated to reopening the theater. After a year of soliciting contributions, the Angels purchased the business in May 2001 and have since operated it as this nation’s only nonprofit, community-owned drive-in theater. This demonstrates that the drive-in is not dead and, indeed, it has numerous supporters and patrons.




*Hull’s Drive-In, 2001.*



# An Ill-Fated Endeavor: Lexington, Rockbridge County, and the Valley Railroad, 1866–1881

John R. Hildebrand

T was not until the nineteenth century that railroads in Virginia were extended beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Shenandoah Valley. In 1834, the Winchester and Potomac Railroad was built, connecting the lower Shenandoah Valley to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) main line at Harpers Ferry. In 1852, the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad was constructed from Lynchburg through Salem in Roanoke County to Bristol on the Virginia-Tennessee border. Here it connected to other railroads extending into the South. In 1854, the Manassas Gap Railroad was extended through Front Royal to Strasburg, providing a connection to the port at Alexandria. Later in the same year, the Virginia Central Railroad was extended from Charlottesville through a tunnel under Rockfish Gap to Staunton. This railroad was later extended to Covington, passing through Goshen in the northernmost tip of Rockbridge County.<sup>1</sup>

1. J. Randolph Kean, "The Development of the 'Valley Line' of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, October 1952, pp. 539, 541, 542.

---

**John R. Hildebrand** spent much of a decade researching and writing his book *Iron Horses in the Valley: The Valley and Shenandoah Valley Railroads, 1866–1882* (2001). He presented his findings to the Rockbridge Historical Society at VMI's Preston Library on October 29, 2001. This essay is adapted from his book and is used with the permission of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke, Virginia, the Salem Historical Society, Salem, Virginia, and the Burd Street Press, a division of White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., Shippensburg, Pennsylvania.

These railroads were of little benefit to Lexington and the greater part of Rockbridge County. When the Valley and Shenandoah Valley Railroads were chartered soon after the Civil War, the people of Lexington and Rockbridge were enthused by the opportunity to receive rail service. The Valley Railroad was preferred since it would pass through Lexington and central Rockbridge. The Shenandoah Valley Railroad was not as attractive since its charter proposed a branch line along the North (Maury) River from Buena Vista into Lexington.

When the Valley Railroad held its organizing convention at Staunton in April 1866, Rockbridge County was represented by James T. Patton from Fairfield and C. D. E. Brady from Buffalo Forge. Michael G. Harman of Staunton, convenor of the convention and the Valley's first president, outlined plans for financing construction of the railroad.<sup>2</sup>

The Valley's charter specified that it would not become effective until \$100,000 of its \$3,000,000 authorized stock was subscribed. This requirement was met in 1868, when Rockbridge County voters approved a \$100,000 bond issue, with the proceeds to purchase stock in the company.<sup>3</sup> Lexington and Rockbridge voters would continue their support in 1869 and 1870, when bond issues totaling an additional \$455,000 were approved.

There can be no question of Lexington's and Rockbridge's commitment and enthusiastic support of the Valley Railroad. Considering the economic devastation of the Civil War, the financial commitments of \$525,000 by Rockbridge and \$30,000 by Lexington were remarkable acts of faith and tangible evidence of their support of the Valley Railroad. Rockbridge County thus became the leader of the local sponsoring communities in working to make the Valley Railroad a success.

2. Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, 1968), p. 67; J. W. Wayland, *A History of Rockingham County* (Dayton, Va.: n.p., 1912), p. 228; Matthew W. Paxton, Jr., "Bringing the Railroad to Lexington, 1860-1883," *Rockbridge Historical Society Proceedings* 10 (1980-89): 182; Richard K. MacMaster, *Augusta County History, 1865-1950* (Staunton, Va.: Augusta County Historical Society, 1987), p. 64; Valley Railroad Company, *Director's Minute Books*, Unnumbered Volume, April 1866-June 1871, Volume I, June 1871-December 1878, and Volume II, November 1879-December 1943, Baltimore, Md., B&O Railroad Museum, Hays T. Watkins Research Library, Baltimore, Md. (hereafter cited as Valley, Valley I, or Valley II), Valley, p. 7. Directors elected at the organizing convention were W. E. M. Word, Fincastle; Edmund Pendleton, Botetourt County; James T. Patton, Fairfield; C. D. E. Brady, Buffalo Forge; Dr. J. B. Strayer, New Market; M. Harvey Effinger and Dr. S. A. Coffman, Rockingham County; and John Echols, Bolivar Christian and William Allan, Augusta County.

3. Virginia General Assembly, *Acts of Assembly, Session, 1866-1867*, Chapter 207 (hereafter cited as Assembly, Session years).

Unfortunately, comparable commitments were not forthcoming from the other local communities. Staunton's subscription was \$150,000, while Botetourt and Roanoke counties later subscribed \$200,000 each. Rockingham and Augusta counties did not participate, with Augusta voters rejecting bond issues on two occasions. By 1870, the feasibility of the project was highly questionable without outside help. Support by the B&O was arranged.

The Valley Railroad was of prime interest to the B&O. At Harrisonburg, a connection could be made to its main line and the Port of Baltimore by using three local railroads which it controlled.<sup>4</sup> At Salem, a connection could be made over the Virginia and Tennessee to the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railroad at Bristol, effectively extending the B&O system into the South, which was one of its long-range objectives. The B&O became the Valley's majority stockholder with the purchase of \$1,020,000 of its stock.

Even with this support, the Valley faced a significant shortfall in its financing. The estimated cost of the 113-mile railroad was \$5,700,000. The total budget for the project was \$6,200,000; \$3,200,000 from the sale of stock plus a \$3,000,000 mortgage.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the mortgage, the stock subscriptions by Rockbridge, Botetourt, and Roanoke counties required that the funds realized from the sale of their bonds be spent only in their county. The Rockbridge subscriptions were also conditional on the City of Baltimore, a direct beneficiary of the project, subscribing \$1,000,000 to the project.

The local communities took the initiative in seeking a solution to the financial shortfall. In April 1870, a delegation of local representatives, with Robert E. Lee serving as their spokesman, traveled to Baltimore to request that city's financial assistance. Although Baltimore ultimately approved the request by committing \$1,000,000 to the project in 1873,<sup>6</sup> the economic feasibility of the project remained questionable.

Some extraordinary effort was required if the Valley was to succeed. Here again, Rockbridge County, Lexington, and the other local sponsors took the initiative. Acting through the leadership of Michael G. Harman, A. H. H. Stuart, Hugh Sheffey, Thomas I. Michie, Colonel John B. Baldwin, and other leading citizens, Robert E. Lee, then president of Washington College, was asked to assume the presidency of the Valley Railroad. These men believed that only a person of Lee's stature could provide the creditability needed to make the Valley a success.

4. Kean, "Development of the 'Valley Line,'" pp. 544-47.

5. Robert Garrett, "Second Valley Railroad Company Report to the Board of Public Works, 1872-1873," pp. 152-55.

6. Paxton, "Bringing the Railroad to Lexington," p. 183.

Lee responded from Washington College, Lexington, on July 28, 1870. His letter was addressed to M. G. Harman, President, Colonel John B. Baldwin, Judge Hugh Sheffey, Honorable A. H. H. Stuart, Thomas I. Michie, Esquire, and others.<sup>7</sup> It read as follows:

Your favor of July 25 has been received. In response to your kindness in urging me to accept the presidency of the Valley Railroad and to your request that, if agreeable, I should signify my willingness to do so, I have to say that I have no desire for the office and would much prefer that it should be conferred to some other gentleman, yet so important do I regard this work to the interest of the Valley and of the whole state, that when the company is fully organized, if the desire of my services as president and think proper to make such arrangements as may render my acceptance of the position not incompatible with my present duties, I shall be willing to accept the control of the road and to use what energy and ability I may possess in furthering the speedy completion of the work.

The hope that Lee's involvement would insure the Valley's success was dashed when Lee died on October 12, 1870, only forty-two days after his election as the Valley's second president. Following Lee's death, Robert Garrett, son of John W. Garrett, the B&O president, became the Valley's president. His election indicated that the B&O and Baltimore were assuming control of the company. It marked the beginning of a diminution of the local communities' influence in the Valley's management.

From the start there had been an element of mistrust between the local communities and the Baltimore interests. This was evidenced by Rockbridge making its support contingent on a \$1,000,000 contribution by Baltimore. In the same manner, Baltimore's stock subscription was also conditional, with the periodic payments on its subscription being made only as equal payments were made by the local communities. Over the years the relationship deteriorated, a problem which plagued the Valley throughout its existence.

The Valley's rival, the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, with the support of the Pennsylvania Railroad, had started construction in July 1870.<sup>8</sup> Although the Valley's financial plan was incomplete, with the Baltimore and Roanoke County stock subscriptions not fully approved, construction of the first twenty-six miles of the Valley Railroad, Harrisonburg to Staunton, began in August 1872. In May 1873, the Valley awarded a con-

7. Valley I, p. 76.

8. Shenandoah Valley Railroad Company, Stockholders' and Directors' Minute Book A, 1870-1881, and Minute Book B, 1881-1887, Special Collections Department of the University Libraries of Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va. Directors' Minute Book A, p. 7.



tract to the Mason Syndicate. By July, work was under way in Rockbridge, Botetourt, and Roanoke counties. The work in Augusta County south of Staunton started in the fall.<sup>9</sup> It was anticipated that rails could be laid, bridges completed, and operations started in 1877.

By August 1873, about \$540,000 had been spent on the Harrisonburg-Staunton construction, funded entirely by the B&O. With this twenty-six mile section still incomplete, funding the eighty-seven mile Staunton-Salem section became completely dependent on obtaining the \$3,000,000 mortgage. Because of a nation-wide financial panic which occurred in September 1873, the Valley was unable to find an underwriter for its mortgage. The B&O was experiencing heavy traffic and revenue losses throughout its system and was not able to increase its investment in the Valley Railroad.

On March 3, 1874, the Harrisonburg-Staunton section was completed and operations started.<sup>10</sup> Construction south of Staunton was proceeding rapidly, but not without problems. By September, the contractor's limit for monthly progress payments was being exceeded, creating cash flow problems. The depression resulting from the September 1873 financial panic was becoming evident in the Valley's affairs. By mid-November, the Valley Railroad was without funds. On December 1, 1874, work was suspended.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Garrett resigned as president in February 1875 and was succeeded by P. P. Pendleton, a B&O vice president.<sup>12</sup> Activity during 1875 was limited to operations on the Harrisonburg-Staunton section. Heavy financial losses were experienced and the company discontinued operations, released employees, and leased the section to the B&O.

At the company's annual meeting in Staunton on November 14, 1877, the stockholders were advised that the estimated cost to complete the road to Salem was \$800,000 to \$1,000,000, based on using convict labor. A motion to resume work by April 1878 was defeated, but a second motion to place a \$1,000,000 mortgage on the railroad was approved. However, the mortgage could not be obtained due to the continuing depressed market for railroad construction securities.

No effort was made to reverse the defeat of the proposal to resume work in 1878. The negative vote on resuming work was a clear indication that the local communities had little influence in a decision to resume work.<sup>13</sup>

9. Garrett, "Second Valley Railroad Company Report," pp. 152-55.

10. Paxton, "Bringing the Railroad to Lexington," p. 184.

11. Valley I, p. 140.

12. E. P. Tompkins, "The Valley Railroad," Rockbridge Historical Society Collection, Washington and Lee University, 1947, p. 22.

13. Valley I, pp. 366-67.

The situation was compounded when Michael G. Harman died in Richmond on December 17, 1877.<sup>14</sup> Harman's leadership had brought the local communities and the B&O together, and following the B&O's and City of Baltimore's financial commitments in 1873, he was an effective spokesman for the local interests in planning, financing, and constructing the railroad. His task had been difficult because of the mistrust between the local communities and Baltimore interests, and he worked diligently to meld the conflicting interests of the two groups.

Local dissatisfaction with the failure to resume construction escalated in 1878. In the fall, J. B. Dorman, an attorney representing Rockbridge County, suggested to the Board of Supervisors that a petition to the legislature be considered as a means of forcing the B&O to resume work. His suggestion was accepted, and a petition was adopted providing for dissolution of the Valley Railroad, revocation of its charter, sale of its property, and distribution of the proceeds. The board requested Botetourt and Roanoke Counties, Lexington, and Staunton to cooperate in the legislative effort.<sup>15</sup>

At the annual meeting in Staunton on November 13, 1878,<sup>16</sup> the counties, Lexington, and Staunton proposed to divide the assets of the company with the B&O and Baltimore. Action on the proposal was delayed until a December 3 meeting, when it was defeated by the B&O and Baltimore. The discussion of the proposal revealed the depth of the mutual distrust which had developed between the local communities and the B&O-Baltimore interests, with William Keyser, the newly elected president pro tem, criticizing the local communities for failing to meet their \$1,200,000 subscription. Baltimore's position was that a division of the company's assets adversely affected the value of all county bonds.

The local communities were unmoved by the B&O and Baltimore criticism. Following the December meeting, an unsuccessful effort was made to lease the Valley to the C&O.<sup>17</sup>

William Keyser became the Valley's permanent president in 1879,<sup>18</sup> but he was unable to stem the increasing level of local dissatisfaction with the B&O's management and leadership. On January 25, 1879, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors rescinded the county's subscription and withdrew the balance of its \$200,000 commitment.<sup>19</sup>

14. MacMaster, *Augusta County History*, p. 67; Robert S. Driver, *52nd Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, 1986), p. 118.

15. Tompkins, "The Valley Railroad," pp. 20-21.

16. Valley I, p. 395.

17. Paxton, "Bringing the Railroad to Lexington," p. 185.

18. Valley II, p. 3.

19. Valley I, p. 416; Barnes, *History of Roanoke*, p. 70.

On April 2, 1879, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation allowing the counties and towns to revoke their financial subscriptions to the Valley Railroad. Sponsored by Rockbridge County, the legislation provided for forfeiture of the Valley's charter unless the road was completed to Lexington by April 1, 1881, to Buchanan by April 1, 1882, and to Salem by April 1, 1883. The charter amendment also provided that in the event of forfeiture, the whole property of the railroad company would be sold, with the purchaser obligated to complete the road to Lexington within one year, to Buchanan within two years, and to Salem within three years. The counties, towns, and Staunton would succeed to the franchise if the purchaser did not complete the work.<sup>20</sup>

Even this legislation failed to restart construction to Salem. Keyser believed that the legislation threatened the existence of the company by requiring its construction within a specific schedule, while at the same time eliminating the means of obtaining additional financing and investment. He suggested that the legislation's sponsors work for its repeal.<sup>21</sup>

The General Assembly rescinded the charter forfeiture legislation in 1880.<sup>22</sup> On May 8, Keyser advised the Rockbridge supervisors that arrangements, while not complete, were being made to complete the road to Salem by authorizing a mortgage to raise the necessary funds.<sup>23</sup> While this was welcome news, Lexington and Rockbridge County remained doubtful that work would resume.

Keyser's 1880 report to the stockholders advised that the prospects of obtaining funds to construct the road south of Staunton were very discouraging, and he was unable to advise of any means of obtaining a mortgage for that purpose.

At the same time, a plan involving the Richmond and Allegheny Railroad was presented for completing the unfinished construction between Staunton and Lexington. The Richmond and Allegheny was under construction, located along the James River, passing through Buchanan and including a branch line along the North (Maury) River into Lexington. A traffic agreement with the Richmond and Allegheny offered the Valley the possibility of obtaining a mortgage which would allow its completion into Lexington, where it would connect to the Richmond and Allegheny branch line. This would allow the Valley and the B&O to ship the traffic being generated by the mineral resources of the James River Valley and the manufacturing development at Lynchburg to the Pittsburgh and Wheeling mills. The B&O believed the Richmond

20. Assembly, Session 1878–1879, Chapter 74.

21. Valley II, p. 3.

22. Assembly, Session 1879–1880, Chapter 173.

23. Tompkins, “The Valley Railroad,” p. 9.

and Allegheny connection was a sound business opportunity justifying the Staunton to Lexington extension. Under this plan, Lexington would become the southern terminus of the Valley Railroad, with an extension further south being dependent on improved economic conditions in the nation.<sup>24</sup>

On January 20, 1881, the Valley's directors authorized a \$700,000 mortgage, later increased to \$1,000,000, to complete the construction between Staunton and the North River near Lexington.<sup>25</sup>

In April, the B&O agreed to take the Valley's mortgage bonds and furnish funds for constructing and equipping the road. The agreement was contingent on the negotiation of a connection contract and traffic agreement with the Richmond and Allegheny. A construction contract was authorized, but it was not until October, 1883, that the first Valley Railroad train would arrive in Lexington, some two years after completion of the Richmond and Allegheny into East Lexington.

In the same month, Rockbridge County proposed that the Valley Railroad between Lexington and Salem be conveyed to the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, possibly in response to the Shenandoah Valley's plan to extend its railroad south from Waynesboro to Big Lick in Roanoke County. No action was taken on the Rockbridge proposal.

In July, the directors formally agreed to complete the railroad to Lexington and efforts to go farther south were abandoned.<sup>26</sup> On August 11, \$1,000,000 of first mortgage bonds<sup>27</sup> were authorized, secured by the franchise, effects, and assets of the railroad.

The deed of trust securing the \$1,000,000 mortgage provided that the company could contract for sale or disposition, in whole or in parcels, of the line south of the depot in Lexington, including the right to construct the railroad.

There were no buyers for the partially completed work and right-of-way south of Lexington. This marked the effective end of the Valley Railroad as originally planned. The high hopes, dreams, and optimism of 1866 for a 113-mile railroad from Harrisonburg to Salem, connecting the B&O system to what was then the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, were never realized.

Two final efforts were made to extend the railroad from Lexington into the Roanoke Valley. In April 1882, the Rockbridge supervisors unsuccessfully petitioned the Shenandoah Valley Railroad to locate its

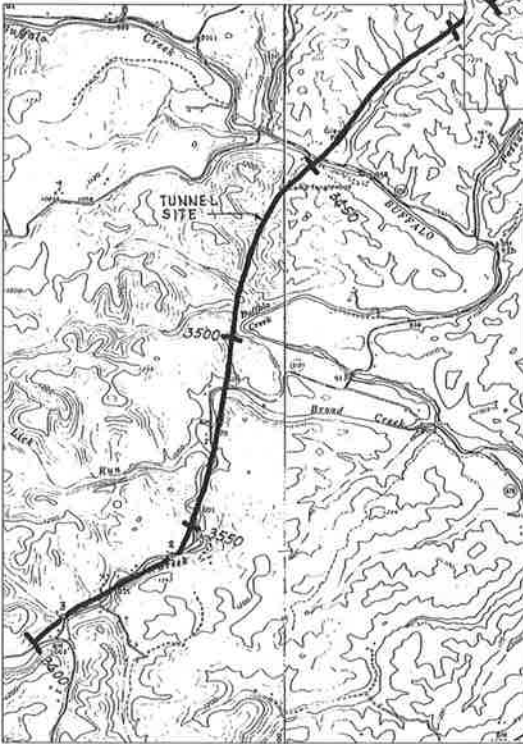
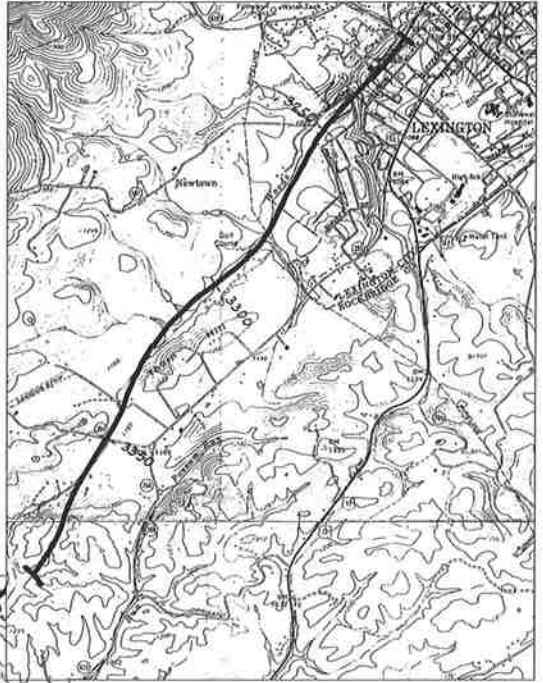
24. Valley II, p. 25.

25. Valley II, p. 63.

26. Valley II, pp. 46-48.

27. Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Roanoke County, Deed Book M, p. 194.

Waynesboro–Big Lick extension through Lexington. The second occurred on July 11, 1890, when the Valley, the B&O, and the Roanoke and Southern Railway Company agreed to exchange traffic at either Salem or Roanoke. Construction of the Roanoke and Southern had started at Winston-Salem in 1888 and was completed to Roanoke in 1892.<sup>28</sup> Here it connected to the N&W and its Shenandoan Valley line, making an extension



*A portion of the uncompleted line south of Lexington.*

of the Valley south from Lexington economically impractical.

The principal reason for the failure of the Valley Railroad was the financial Panic of 1873. The resulting depression, 1873–77, severely limited the market for railroad mortgage bonds that were critical to the Valley’s capitalization. The Valley’s failure can also be attributed to an accumulation of other factors, but none was as critical as the inability to attract additional capital after 1874. Even the sixty-two mile railroad between Harrisonburg and Lexing-

28. Barnes, *History of Roanoke*, pp. 163–65.



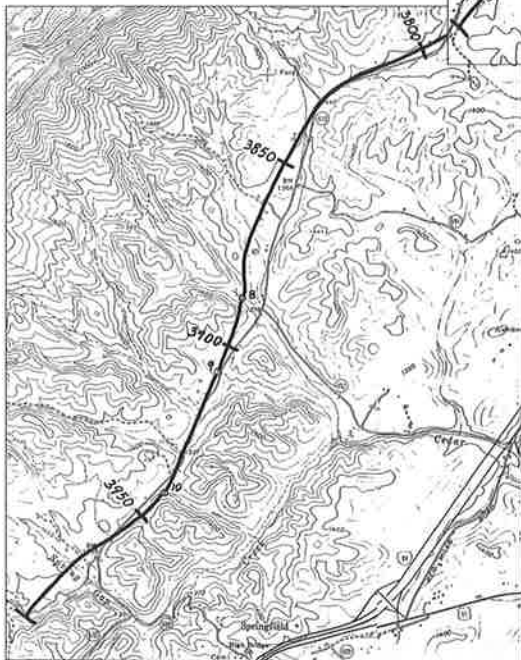
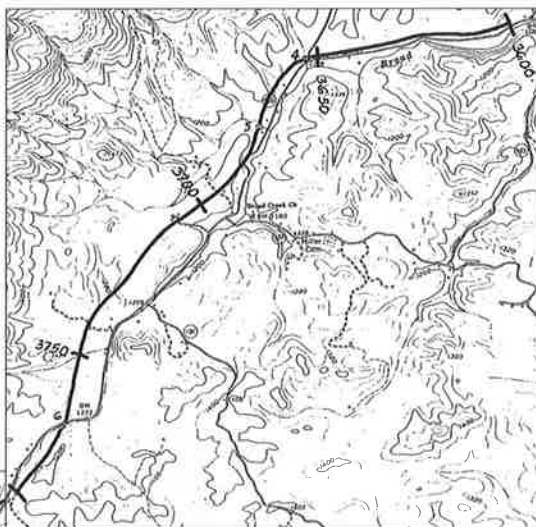
*Above: Structure 2 (at 3560 on the bottom map on the previous page)—abutments for a forty-five-foot bridge over Broad Creek.*

*Below: Structure 3 (at 3590)—fourteen-foot arch on a tributary of Broad Creek.*



ton was a failure. It was never profitable. The anticipated income from the Richmond and Allegheny connection never developed because the Shenandoah Valley Railroad made an earlier connection in 1882, depriving the Valley of the income from the James River Valley and Lynchburg traffic.

The beginning of the end occurred in December



1896, when the Valley's connecting link to the north, the Strasburg and Harrisonburg Railroad, was conveyed to the Southern Railway by the B&O. In 1942, then the Harrisonburg-Staunton section was taken over by the Chesapeake and Western Railway,<sup>29</sup> the Staunton-Lexington section was abandoned and the tracks removed.<sup>30</sup>

The final sad chapter in the Valley Railroad's history occurred on December 29, 1942, when the Chesapeake and Western purchased its entire holdings, including the right-of-way and unfinished construction between Lexington and Salem.<sup>31</sup> Hungerford's history

of the B&O records the Valley Railroad's end as follows: "A little later it reached Lexington, 162 miles from Harpers Ferry. There it halted for all time. Mr. [John W.] Garrett's original plan had been to carry it much fur-

29. Kean, "Development of the 'Valley Line,'" p. 550.

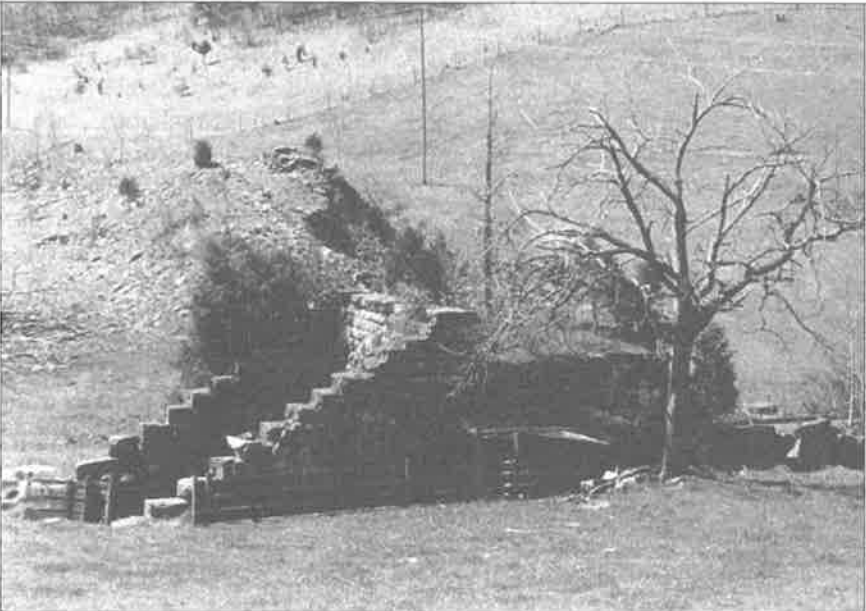
30. Paxton, "Bringing the Railroad to Lexington," p. 190.

31. Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Roanoke County, Deed Book 302, p.



*Above: Structure 6 (at 3770 on the map at the top of the previous page)—incomplete twenty-foot arch on Broad Creek at Rt. 610 (Plank Road).*

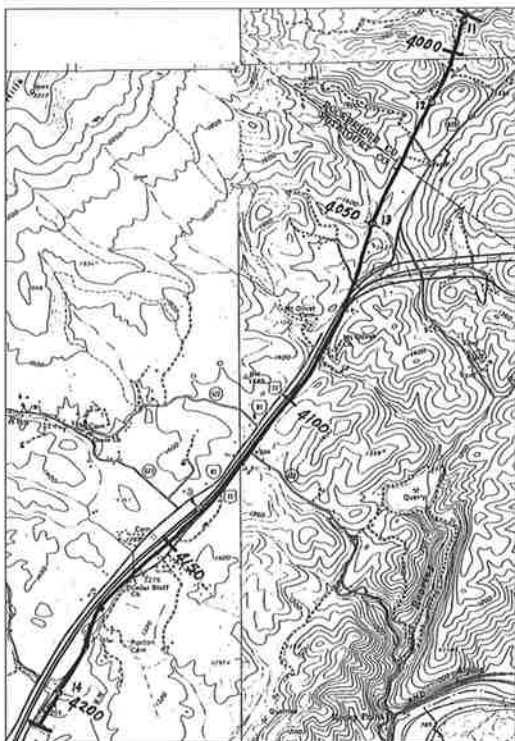
*Below: Structure 11 (at 3992 on the map on the page opposite)—partially complete twenty-foot arch on a tributary of Spring Gap Creek.*





ther. A right-of-way through Natural Bridge on to Salem had been partly purchased for the extension. At Salem, the B&O would have enjoyed direct connections, not only with the N&W, but with the entire railroad system that stretches itself over the face of the state of Tennessee. Financial difficulties, together with the shrewd machinations of his enemies, thwarted his purpose, however.”

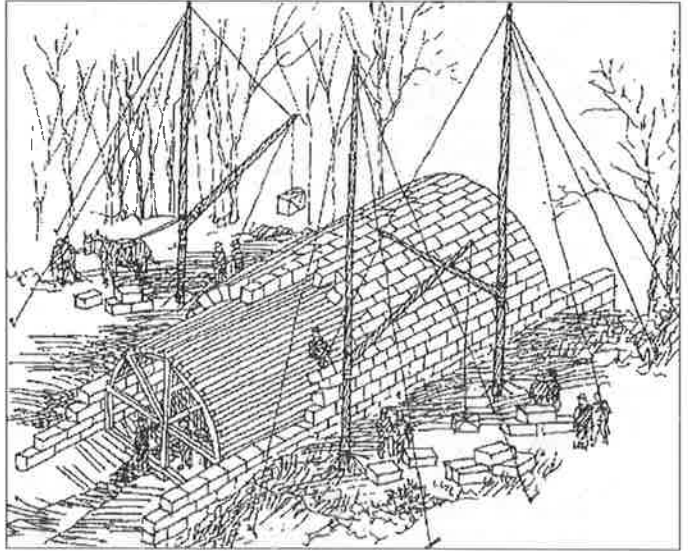
Unfortunately, it was not John W. Garrett, but the people of Staunton, Lexington, Rockbridge, Botetourt, Salem, and Roanoke County who bore the brunt and disappointment of the Valley’s failure. They did not experience the same good fortune as their competitors, the organizers of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, who were able, under the same financial conditions, to replace their original sponsor, the Pennsylvania Railroad, with E. W. Clark and Company.



Structure 14 (at 4196 on the map above)—twelve-foot arch on a tributary of Renick Run.



Today, their financial sacrifices during difficult times are witnessed by an abandoned railroad, comprised of partially completed excavations, embankments, culverts, and bridges. Dr. E. P. Tompkins offered this conclusion to his history of the Valley Railroad: "Thus passed the railroad which had caused so much talk, so much anxious discussion, so much written in the newspapers and which cost the taxpayers a



*Building a masonry arch for a railroad, a drawing by Robert S. Fry in Iron Horses in the Valley.*

pretty sum of money. And so the final curtain fell on the tragi-comedy-historical drama of Rockbridge County and its Valley Railroad."

Perhaps the final chapter in the Valley Railroad's history has not been written. Its remains south of Lexington are an important part of Rockbridge County's heritage and warrant preservation. There are many vestiges of the original railroad construction along the Plank Road. Separate construction sites and stone structures could be arranged as an historical trail to accommodate auto, bus, and/or walking tours which would provide interested visitors and railroad historians an insight into nineteenth-century railroad construction.

The accompanying maps and photographs of the remaining construction indicate major structures visible from the Plank Road and a continuous 1.25 mile length of the old roadbed in the area of the Rockbridge-Botetourt line located on private property. These remains of the Valley Railroad are examples of the construction which could be included in such a trail.

Collectively, these abandoned railroad works stand as monuments to the post-Civil War sacrifices of the people of Lexington and Rockbridge County, and to the labors of the men who worked to create a railroad. They are worthy of preservation. The development of such a historical trail presents a challenge to the Lexington-Rockbridge community, a challenge ideally suited to the talents and leadership of the Rockbridge Historical Society.

# Two Centuries of Ink: The *News-Gazette* Celebrates Two Hundred Years of Publication

Matt Paxton, Jerry Harris, and Doug Chase



HE community newspaper is a key unifying and defining institution in any town. The newspaper is the keeper of decades, sometimes centuries, of local information, from births, marriages, and deaths, to local disasters and triumphs, and the quirks of life as lived years ago. The Rockbridge area has a newspaper tradition almost as old as the established towns in the region. Lexington was chartered in 1777. Less than twenty-five years later, the town had a local newspaper, and Rockbridge residents have been reading the local news ever since.

Beginning with the *Rockbridge Repository*, which first published in the summer of 1801, and continuing through various names, today's *News-Gazette* traces its history back two hundred years. Unfortunately, little is known about the founding of the newspaper. The *News-Gazette* has a photostatic copy of the front page of the second edition of the *Rockbridge Repository*, dated Aug. 21, 1801. The nameplate lists John McMullen as the "printer," and locates the paper's office "in Washington Street, next

---

**Matthew W. Paxton, IV**, spoke on the history of the Lexington *News-Gazette* and its predecessor papers, drawing upon the research conducted in preparation for the two hundredth anniversary of the newspaper celebrated in 2001. A native of Lexington and a graduate of the University of Virginia, he is the fourth generation of Paxtons to be involved with Rockbridge County newspapers. In 1994 he became the publisher of the *News-Gazette*. The essay printed here was co-authored by the newspaper's Jerry Harris and Doug Chase. The photographs used are all from *200 Years of Newspapers in Rockbridge*, an August 15, 2001, supplement to the *News-Gazette*. Mr. Paxton's talk was delivered in the Appomattox Room at the Virginia Horse Center on January 28, 2002.

to Captain John Leyburn's, Merchant." There were no street numbers in those days, so we do not know exactly where that might have been.

The newspaper itself did not look all that different from the papers of today. The page size was a bit smaller, with a printed area ten inches wide by seventeen inches high. There was a nameplate at the top with a slogan, the location of the paper, the date and the volume and issue numbers. The type was laid out in four columns with column rules in between. There was no large headlines, and the paper ran classified ads on the front page down the left side. The copy does not indicate how many pages were in the edition, but it is safe to assume it wasn't more than four and may have been just the front and back of a single sheet.

Other than the local classified ads on the front, the remainder of the front page was devoted to articles reprinted from other newspapers. One from the *National Intelligencer* reported on a delegation of Cherokee Indians who traveled to Washington with grievances and treaty issues. The other article, from the *Lancaster Journal*, dealt with the confession of a convicted murderer in Pennsylvania.

An article in the *News-Gazette* tracing the history of the *Lexington Gazette* said that the *Repository's* name was changed to the *The Lexington News-Letter* in 1819. In 1820, the *News-Letter* merged with its competitor, the *The Telegraphe*. In 1823, the name changed again to the *Rockbridge Intelligencer*. Between about 1831 and 1835, it was known as *The Union*. Finally, in 1835, owner C. C. Baldwin arrived at the name that stuck—the *Lexington Gazette*, and with slight variations, it was known as the *Gazette* for the next 127 years. Over the ensuing decades, the paper operated under the names *Gazette and Banner*, *Lexington Gazette and Rockbridge Farmer*, and *Gazette and Citizen*. Some of these name variations reflected the purchase of or merger with other fledgling newspapers by the *Gazette*.

Another Lexington newspaper, the *Valley Star*, published from 1839 to 1860. The *Star* supported the Democratic Party, while the *Gazette* favored the Whig party, which became the Constitutional Union party in 1860.

By 1856, the *Gazette* was owned by Alphonso Smith and A. B. Fuller. The newspaper ran a slogan under the nameplate saying "Let us cling to the Constitution as the mariner clings to the last plank when the night and the tempest close around him." The front page of the July 24, 1856, issue of the *Gazette* is devoted almost exclusively to national and state political news. True to its Whig party leanings, the front page reprints a story from the *Louisville Journal* vilifying James Buchanan, the Democratic nominee for president. The *Gazette* also reported on the Whig party state convention and on the aftermath of the assault by Congressman P. S. Brooks of South Carolina on Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. This famous incident took place on the Senate floor, and was

indicative of the sectional passions which years before the Civil War were already engulfing the country.

In 1856, a normal issue of the *Gazette* contained four pages, and had more local news on the inside pages. A subscription cost \$2 per year, in advance. Advertising cost "one dollar per square of 12 lines for three insertions, and twenty-five cents for each continuance." Advertising took up more than half of a typical four-page paper. Land for sale, clothing, hardware, furniture, and foundry work were common items or services advertised. In late summer approaching harvest time, quite a few millers ran ads for their services

The paper took a pro-Union position up until Virginia actually seceded in 1861. On July 31, 1856, the *Gazette* reprinted a strongly pro-Union address by Dr. George Junkin, president of Washington College given at "Rutger's College."

The *Gazette* was not above a bit of sensationalism. On December 10, 1857, it reported on the exhumation of James Madison's body in preparation for placing it under a more suitable monument. It described in rather graphic detail the condition of Madison's remains.

By 1860, John S. McNutt was the editor and publisher of the *Gazette*. Almost every issue of the *Gazette* contained stories indicating the depth of sectional feelings in the country. In January, it printed an open letter from a Judson Crane, editor of "The News," announcing his departure from the paper. The *Gazette* does not say where the *News* was published. It appeared that Crane was leaving the paper and the south because of his pro-Union sympathies. Crane begged his readers, "Never despair of the Republic." That sentiment was in line with The *Gazette's* leanings at that time. During 1860, the *Gazette* carried a slogan below its nameplate saying, "The Union Must Be Preserved."

True it its Whig party identification, the paper supported John Bell of Tennessee for president. On September 6, McNutt wrote that Bell was the only viable candidate to oppose Lincoln. The Democratic party was split along sectional lines, and both factions nominated a candidate: Stephen Douglas was chosen by the northern Democrats and John C. Breckenridge by the southerners. The *Gazette* vilified the Democrats extensively, holding them most to blame for sectionalism in politics. The paper hardly mentioned Lincoln and the Republicans. Lincoln apparently was seen as so radical that no comment on his candidacy was necessary.

Writers to the paper understood that secession meant civil war. The *Gazette* reprinted a piece from the *Christian Banner* of Fredericksburg that said, "The work of war and death once commenced, the spirit will diffuse itself everywhere and in all classes. Kindle the fire and from ten thousand sources fuel will be gathered to increase the raging conflagra-

tion, until the smoke and flames in awful volume shall roll heaven high, desolating everything in its course. . . . Whom are we fighting? A foreign country? No, our brothers, our sons, our fathers, our own countrymen.” The essay went on to say that even if victory was achieved, that “despotic politicians” would “grind us into dust.”

All through 1860, advertising remained strong. Hostetter’s *Stomach Bitters* ran a prominent ad in every issue.

Not every news item was political. A story in the October 18, 1860, issue reported on the second annual Rockbridge Agricultural and Mechanical Society exposition—the county fair. “The finest exhibition by far were products of the orchard and garden,” the paper reported. The *Gazette* also continued to print poetry, fiction, and serialized historical pieces. “Ode to the Turkey Buzzard” entertained readers of the November 29 issue.

On November 8, the presidential election was over, but the result was not known. “We are not without hope that Lincoln is not elected,” wrote Editor McNutt. But in the next issue, Lincoln’s election was assured, and the paper reported on calls in South Carolina for a convention to address the “emergency.” On November 29, the *Gazette* called for a public meeting to debate whether the election of Lincoln was grounds for secession. A committee of twelve local men was named to chair the meeting. The *Gazette* hoped that the meeting might suggest a course of action for local leaders “in the event of dissolution of the Federal Government.” Among the twelve committee chairmen were J. T. L. Preston, T. J. Jackson, David E. Moore, Hugh Barclay, E. F. Paxton, William White, and J. R. Jordan. Several meetings occurred, all reported on extensively in the *Gazette*. On January 3, 1861, the *Gazette* expressed the hope that the local meetings would not support the calling of a secession convention in Virginia. The last meeting, reported in the January 10 issue, said that the meeting was broken up by fifty to sixty men cheering for “plucky South Carolina.”

On March 7, McNutt published an editorial entitled “The True Policy For Virginia” in which he argued against secession using a tortured rationale that the institution of slavery could be preserved only by remaining in the Union. McNutt claimed that by remaining in the Union, northern states were compelled to return runaway slaves under the Fugitive Slave Act. If Virginia left the Union, they would not be so bound, unless by treaty. On March 14, the paper reprinted Lincoln’s inaugural address, without comment.

The first shots fired at Fort Sumter came on April 12. Unfortunately, the microfilm record is missing the April 18 issue, which probably reported on that event to Rockbridge residents. The next issue on April 25 covered war movements and the mustering of the Rockbridge Rifles

and two companies of cavalry. It also reported the capture of the armory at Harper's Ferry by Virginia troops.

The May 30 paper contains a small note in the first column, front page saying, “The editor is absent. His place is supplied by a friend.” Whether McNutt or the “friend” wrote of Virginia's decision to secede, the pro-Union stance of the *Gazette* was gone. The paper editorialized, “Last Thursday the freemen of Virginia voted themselves out of the corrupt, rotten and abolitionized despotism of the northern usurpers. Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, their destinies are now cast with the Southern Confederacy.” But high spirits notwithstanding, economically secession and war were a disaster for the *Gazette*. Advertising volume fell by over two-thirds after the firing on Fort Sumter. In May, the *Gazette* was forced to drop to two pages, what is called a half-sheet. Gone were the poetry and light fiction. War news and some local news, obituaries, and weddings were all the reduced newspaper could print.

The July 25 issue contained reports from the Battle of Manassas, calling it “The Great Battle at Stone Bridge.” A few weeks later, the *Gazette* said, “In every account [of the battle] we have seen[,] our townsman, Gen. T. J. Jackson, has been spoken of in the highest terms.”

The paper remained two pages through 1861, but in January 1862 it was able to go back to printing four pages. Advertising was returning, and the additional space allowed the publishers to bring back some of the light reading such as the poems. Advertisements offering a reward for the arrest of deserters were showing up in the *Gazette*. The micro-filmed files are missing some issues during January and February 1862, but there was no mention of publication lapses in the existing records. The March 27 issue contained a notice saying, “While the editor has gone to wield his sword in defense of his country, he has requested a less able-bodied neighbor to wield his pen and scissors for him.” The notice went on to ask for forgiveness if the neighbor's inexperience caused the paper to offend its readers.

Many issues contained reports from local units, such as the Rockbridge Rifles, the Rockbridge Grays, and the Liberty Hall Volunteers. War news in the spring of 1862 was bad from the Confederate perspective, but the southern forces were generally portrayed as fighting gallantly until they surrendered to Union forces of overwhelmingly superior numbers.

During 1862, the *Gazette* ran numerous stories on the state of currency in the Confederacy. The paper listed area banks whose notes were deemed acceptable, and printed lists of banks that had failed. A May 29 blurb reported the circulation of counterfeit \$2 Bank of Rockbridge notes. Also appearing frequently during the period were instructions on

how to make saltpeter, an essential ingredient in gunpowder, and in short supply in the South.

Editorials by the publisher now normally appeared on page two starting at the top of the first column, and most issues contained some editorial comment, some on local topics, some more regional or national. On June 26, the *Gazette* noted that unless it could obtain paper, it might have to suspend publication. Apparently, the publishers were unsuccessful at finding any, because the next issue, dated August 7, says that, "The 'Gazette' is glad to be able to show its little face to its friends once more. It has been in retirement since the 26th of June, for want of clothes." Those owing money to the paper were exhorted to pay their bills.

Inflation was eroding the value of the Confederate dollar, and in November 1862 the publisher was forced to increase advertising rates by fifty percent, from a dollar a square to \$1.50, Confederate. Subscription rates remained the same. As 1862 drew to a close with news of shortages, bad money, and the inevitable ebb and flow of war reports, the paper expressed optimism for the eventual success of the Confederacy. Also appearing with increasing frequency in the fall of 1862 were religious pieces, mirroring the religious revivals that swept the Union and Confederate armies at the same time.

With the new year, the publisher wrote to his readers, "Ours is one of the few village papers that have kept up their regular issues, with little interruption." Subscriptions were up. The *Gazette* added an "Agricultural Department" as a permanent feature, edited by Professor J. L. Campbell. The publisher also noted that the *Gazette* was being printed on smaller size paper. On January 22, a notice appeared that those placing obituaries exceeding fifteen lines in length would be charged for the excess lineage. Notices of Tribute to officers and men killed in battle became a source of revenue for the paper as the war dragged on.

In the May 14, 1863, issue of the *Gazette*, "Stonewall" Jackson's death was mentioned in an account of the Battle of Chancellorsville. The next day, the *Gazette* got out an extra edition focusing mainly on Jackson, but also covering the deaths of two other locals, Gen. E. F. Paxton and Capt. Greenlee Davidson. Jackson's funeral and official proclamations setting statewide elections for late May dominated the regular issues of the paper in May and necessitated other extras. An editorial on May 27 noted that most other coverage had been bumped from the paper during that time, but promised that the agricultural features and regular local news would return.

On July 8, the paper reported on the Battle of Gettysburg, portraying it as a Confederate victory. Twelve thousand Union prisoners were supposed to have been taken, and the Federals were fleeing toward Baltimore. The next week, a more realistic report told of Lee's withdrawal



“to a position to better protect his rear, and his ammunition and supply trains.”

On August 19, the paper reminded readers that it accepted wood, corn, chickens, butter, and other products in barter for subscriptions. The September 30 issue informed readers that the *Gazette* functioned as the chief medium of communication between the tax collectors and taxpayers, and urged attention to the published tax notices in the paper.

Paper availability problems increased in 1864, and the *Gazette* went back to printing only two pages, but the sheet was quite large. Subscriptions went up to \$5 for six months, with no subscriptions running longer than six months, “on account of the great fluctuations in the prices on every article we have to purchase.” Advertisements were now \$10 per square.

Hunter’s Raid on Lexington, in which the VMI Barracks and Governor John Letcher’s house were burned, disrupted publication of the *Gazette* for over a month. The paper reported in an editorial on July 6, the first issue printed after the June 11 raid, that Federal troops destroyed the newspaper’s printing press and scattered its type in the streets. McNutt obtained a smaller press and collected what type he could recover from the streets of Lexington to resume publication. In the July 6 issue was an account of the “Yankees at Washington College.” Eyewitnesses reported seeing Hunter’s men looting the college library, smashing and defacing furniture and destroying the equipment in the laboratory. Northern commanders were observed watching the destruction “with seeming satisfaction.”

On August 16, the paper noted that “because of failure of mails, we have but little army news from any quarter.” At the same time, subscription prices doubled to \$10 for six months, or one year for a bushel of wheat, or two bushels of corn. In August 1864 the paper began publishing twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays, still using the large sheet, two-page format. By October, though, lack of paper forced the *Gazette* back to once a week publication, on Wednesdays.

During the summer and fall of 1864, as the presidential campaign was fought in the north, numerous stories of peace feelers and the emergence of a “peace party” ran in the *Gazette*. The Agriculture Department returned in September. In December, for unknown reasons, McNutt’s tenure with the paper ended, and Prof. J. L. Campbell, who wrote and edited the agricultural feature, and C. H. Burgess took over operation.

In the first issue in January 1865, Campbell reported that the *Gazette* finally had a stock of paper. He noted that some subscribers who received their paper at county post offices had complained of not receiving their newspaper. He assured his readers that the papers had been

mailed from the Lexington post office faithfully, and that “the fault lieth not at our door.” A notice directing subscribers who had paid McNutt for subscriptions during the previous two years to bring a receipt to the paper’s office to prove payment.

In the April 13 issue, Lee’s surrender at Appomattox was acknowledged. A notice of a town meeting to organize a police force to keep order ran in the same issue. Lee’s General Order #9 announcing the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia ran in the April 20 issue. It also reported on the occupation of some surrounding towns by Federal troops.

On May 18, the *Gazette* had to be printed on brown paper. Campbell wrote that he thought the paper’s readers would prefer that to no newspaper at all that week. The *Gazette* had published more or less continuously throughout the Civil War, with only a few breaks due to lack of paper and the destruction of its equipment in Hunter’s Raid.

Oren Morton’s *A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia*, said that the Lexington newspapers’ coverage of national events during the period of 1859 through 1865 is of historical significance, and points particularly to the twelve months ending in May 1861. Morton described the writing in the papers, saying, “The issues of the day are ably and lengthily discussed in the editorial columns, in articles contributed by prominent citizens, and in letters coming from a distance.” He states that even during the four years of the actual Civil War, the *Gazette* did not markedly reduce the space in the paper reserved for poetry, fiction, travel, household items and general interest news, though during times of paper shortage, those items were the first to be dropped.

The paper looked more prosperous during the latter half of 1865. It was back to being four pages weekly, with better than half of the space in ads.

In January 1866, Campbell departed, and just a few months later the paper merged with the *Banner*, becoming the *Gazette and Banner*. S. H. Letcher was editor. Later that year, the *Gazette and Banner* unveiled a new nameplate, with an engraving of a bust of Stonewall Jackson situated between the two names of the newspaper.

An extra edition on Monday, December 28, 1868, informed readers of the general amnesty proclamation by President Andrew Johnson, an issue of great interest to former Confederate soldiers and officers. The extra edition also printed some local tidbits, recounting that Christmas had passed quietly and reporting on a break-in at a local farm. About half the front page of the extra was devoted to classified ads and legal notices.

In 1873, Elihu H. Barclay, a Civil War veteran who lost an arm in the war, bought the *Rockbridge Citizen*, a competitor of the *Gazette’s*, from

J. D. Morrison and J. Scott Moore. A year later, Barclay, his brother A. T. Barclay, and Judge James Patton bought the *Lexington Gazette* from J. J. Lafferty and merged the two papers to form the *Gazette and Citizen*. Elihu Barclay eventually became sole owner, editor and publisher of the paper, which he ran until his death in 1902. E. H. Barclay was a staunch supporter of Confederate veterans' organizations, as well as an active member of the Democratic party. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates at one point. He was also an organizer and first president of the Virginia Press Association in 1879.

The *Lexington Gazette* had been the primary newspaper serving Rockbridge County and Lexington for eighty-three years when Rev. A. Poe Boude and Scott Moore announced the formation of a new newspaper in Lexington. Boude was a Methodist minister, and Moore had worked for the *Gazette*.

The first issue of the *Rockbridge County News* appeared on November 7, 1884, two days after Grover Cleveland was elected to his first term as President of the United States. The owners said that the paper would print political news but would refrain from comment on the political scene. In a message to the community, the new publishers said, “We shall print for the many, not for the few. The partisan may smoke his pipe over his campaign paper though it may slander his neighbor, cast firebrands everywhere in society, and delude him with false hopes and visions of party triumph: but while he is chuckling over its miserable caricatures and course jests, his wife and children will want to be reading the County News.”

A feature of the *County News* from the beginning was the inclusion of columns from county correspondents reporting on news and events from the many communities and areas of the county. County “letters” remain a part of the *News-Gazette* 117 years later.

While the publishers declined to endorse candidates, they made an exception to their apolitical philosophy in 1886, when they campaigned for local prohibition. Moore was active in the prohibition organization as its secretary. Lexington, however, went wet, and remained so until the third local option election seven years later.

Shortly after the first prohibition referendum, Moore retired from the paper and returned to his farm. On November 14, 1887, Boude sold the *County News* to Samuel J. Graham and Matthew W. Paxton. Graham was a young lawyer in Lexington, and Paxton was a farmer and deputy collector of internal revenue, appointed by President Cleveland. The new owners persuaded Scott Moore to come back to the paper as foreman. Graham maintained his interest in the paper for less than a year and sold out to Paxton in the summer of 1888. When Cleveland was defeated in 1888 by Benjamin Harrison, Paxton resigned his tax collec-



*The first Matthew W. Paxton was publisher and editor of the Rockbridge County News from 1888 to 1935.*

tion job and devoted himself exclusively to the publication of the newspaper for more than forty years.

When Graham and Paxton took over the *County News* in 1887, they did not make the same pronouncements of purpose as Boude and Moore. In particular, they did not promise to keep the paper out of politics. In the 50th anniversary edition of the *County News*, Paxton said that the duty of the paper was to be "a faithful chronicler of current events." A second objective was to devote space in the paper to discussions of public affairs. The paper began to editorialize on local, state and national matters, to endorse candidates, and to promote discussion on issues. The *County News* was almost always aligned with the Democratic party—not surprising since the Republican party in Virginia in

the late nineteenth century was practically nonexistent. One exception occurred in 1896, when the *County News* opposed the election of Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. Bryan disagreed with former President Grover Cleveland on key issues. Paxton admired Cleveland and could not support Bryan. The *County News* also reversed the position on prohibition it had taken under Boude and Moore's leadership.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the nation and the Rockbridge area underwent rapid changes in technology and culture. But through all the changes, all of the social and economic upheavals, disasters, war and illness, there remained two constants in the Rockbridge area—the *Rockbridge County News* and the *Lexington Gazette*.

The *Buena Vista Virginian* folded in early 1900; the *Buena Vista Weekly News* published in the early part of the century before going under years later. The *Buena Vista News* was started in 1916, and survived under the leadership of the Page family. Even the churches got involved with *The Sabbath School News* from Lexington Presbyterian Church and *The Lexington Star* beginning publication in 1922.

Both the *County News* and the *Gazette* were an influence on opinion and business throughout the first half of the century, but so were the people associated with the newspapers. For example, Dr. John J. Lafferty, a former editor of the *Lexington Gazette*, who died in 1909, was the first head of the journalism department at Washington and Lee University. William R. Kennedy, the publisher of the *Gazette* for almost a quarter century, was also a teacher, former mayor of Lexington, and assistant postmaster in Lexington for a time.

Neither the *Gazette* nor the *County News*, the forerunners of the *News-Gazette*, missed publication of an issue during those years of change and turmoil, but it was a close call on at least two occasions for the *County News*.

In 1907, the offices of the *County News* were all but destroyed by fire. At that time, and for a number of years thereafter, the *County News* was in the Hopkins Building on Main Street in Lexington, where First Union Bank is today. A fire that broke out in the store of M. J. Hess soon spread to the rest of the building in one of the most spectacular and devastating fires in Lexington history. The entire roof of the *County News*'s office was destroyed, along with most of the files and equipment. The only thing saved from the fire was a power press and folder.

But the newspaper's publisher, the first of four generations of M. W. Paxtons, refused to move and the newspaper made it to the streets on time. As the publisher wrote in that issue, "The *County News* makes its bow this afternoon with its plumage cut, but still prepared to serve the good people of Rockbridge." Indeed, only eight months later, the Hopkins building was renovated and the *County News* thrived.

The *County News* offices remained in the Hopkins Building until 1938, but yet another fire threatened the building in 1937 and finally convinced the newspaper to move. That fire destroyed the New Theatre, located where the State Theater now stands. Flames and sparks from the theater threatened the nearby Hopkins Building. The publisher, the second-generation Matthew Paxton, actually stood atop the building with a water hose, wetting down the roof while employees of the newspaper moved valuable records across the street to the yard of the Lexington Presbyterian Church. Even then, sparks blown by wind almost caught the records on fire.

After the two close calls, the newspaper built its new office building, touted as fireproof, the next year. That office, located between the State Theater and Schewel's Furniture Store on West Nelson Street, remained the home of the *County News* until it merged with the *Lexington Gazette* in 1962, and continues to house *The News-Gazette*.

Prior to 1904, the *County News* had a minimum price of fifty cents for advertisements. That year, the newspaper decided to start publishing a



*Above: The Hopkins Building on the corner of Main and Nelson streets housed the Rockbridge County News from early in the twentieth century until 1937. It was torn down in 1980 to make way for a bank.*

*Below: The new Rockbridge County News building on Nelson Street (now the News-Gazette building) was completed in 1938.*



“Want Advertisements” section at a cost on one cent per word—in essence, the first classified ads to appear in the *County News*. Before 1926, The *County News* was a four-page newspaper with almost no exceptions. However, beginning that year, the paper changed the size of its pages and increased the number of pages printed to eight, a format that would not vary for many years.

Around 1930, Matthew Paxton the elder, who had run the *Rockbridge County News* for over four decades, turned over the day-to-day operation of the paper to his son, Matthew White Paxton. The elder Paxton’s eyesight was becoming a problem for him. He died in 1935. The younger Paxton was also involved in a full-time law practice in Lexington, and while writing the paper’s editorials, relied on hired editors to put out the paper. He continued to write editorials into the 1960s, and retired from the active practice of law in the 1970s.

The younger Paxton’s wife, Nell, was very involved with the *County News* as a proofreader. Mr. Paxton’s cousin, Jenny Hopkins, worked as office manager. The *Gazette* was published on Wednesdays and was available from newsboys situated on downtown street corners by 3:00 P.M. each Wednesday. The *County News* came out on Thursday mornings. Both newspapers ran small job-printing operations, predominantly to keep the newspapers’ production staffers busy on Thursdays and Fridays.

World War II caused the papers to turn to the employment of women in some jobs that had traditionally been male preserves. The *County News* had several capable women serve as managing editor during the war. Louise Wade Kelley—a Paxton cousin—Laura Burks Alnutt, and Jean Moseley saw the newspaper through the war years. Shortages of newsprint, the paper on which newspapers are printed, were a worry during the war. There was a rationing system for newsprint for a while. Carefully nursed supplier relationships kept a trickle of paper coming to both papers and neither missed an issue, unlike during the Civil War eighty years earlier. For many years after the war, the *County News* made a point of buying at least some paper from the Caskie Paper Company in Lynchburg in recognition of that company’s efforts to keep newsprint coming to the *County News* during the war.

The *Lexington Gazette* avoided the ravages of fire and other dangers during the first half of the twentieth century, but it saw other changes. Little is known about the location of the *Gazette* offices before 1900, other than a vague reference to an old frame building on Main Street that was torn down in the summer of 1903. By 1900, the offices of the newspaper had already moved to the second floor of a building on Main Street in Lexington that was occupied at one time by the College Inn. An account of the move to those offices in what was known as Dr. W. S.



*Benjamin F. Harlow was editor and publisher of the Lexington Gazette between 1924 and 1946.*



*The Gazette Building on Jefferson Street was built in 1926 and was home to the Lexington Gazette until 1962. For several years after, the News-Gazette Print Shop operated in the building until it moved to the Nelson Street building.*

White's building, said the *Gazette* had been located at the previous abode, presumably the old frame house, for more than twenty-five years.

Changes at the *Gazette* in the first half of the twentieth century involved ownership and management. Elihu H. Barclay, editor and publisher of the *Lexington Gazette* since 1874, died in 1902. Upon his death, William R. Kennedy became owner and publisher until his death in late 1924. At that time, Benjamin F. Harlow purchased the newspaper and remained the principal owner, editor, and publisher until his son, Houston Harlow, a VMI graduate, returned home to assume the reins of the *Gazette* in 1946. When Houston Harlow took over, the audited weekly circulation of the *Gazette* was right at five hundred. Martha Harlow, Houston's wife, was quite active with the *Gazette*. Among her many talents was the ability to operate a Linotype machine, a skill that was essential in the days of hot-type production.

As the area entered the latter half of the twentieth century, Lexington boasted two institutions of higher learning, two movie theaters—and two competing family-owned weekly newspapers.

In 1952 another native son, who had once been a school teacher, returned home to assume the editorship of the *Rockbridge County News*. Matthew W. Paxton III, who went by the suffix of junior following the death of his grandfather, Matthew W. Paxton, represented the third generation of his family to run the paper. "I had graduated from Washing-



ton and Lee in 1949 with a degree in English and had not given much thought, really, to the newspaper business. My Dad had never really pressured my [younger] brother [Bob] or me to pursue the Fourth Estate," recalled Paxton, Jr., recently.

After graduating from W&L, he moved to Chattanooga and taught at the McCallie School for a year. During that year, he began thinking of a career in journalism, but not particularly with the *County News*.

Paxton attended graduate school at Columbia University and earned his master's degree in journalism. Then he went to work as a reporter for the *Lynchburg News*. "Dad was running the paper in Lexington at the same time he was practicing law, and that gave him a real full plate. Since Houston [Harlow] had arrived at the *Gazette*, it had really started giving the *County News* a real run for its money. The *Gazette's* circulation had expanded, and the *County News* needed more attention than Dad could give it. He offered me a job as the paper's editor, and I accepted," Paxton recalled.

When he assumed the editorship in 1952, Paxton immediately realized that Harlow and the *Gazette* had jumped way ahead of the *County News* in the area of photography. The *Gazette* was printing local photos, while the *County News* was still mostly all text. Paxton felt that the addition of photos to the *Gazette* was one reason why its circulation was climbing. He bought a used Speed-Graphic camera and learned to be a photographer in short order.

It was unusual to have in a small place like Lexington two family-owned newspapers that had survived and prospered for as long as the *Gazette* and the *County News*. Both papers covered the same meetings, spot news stories, and social events and competed against each other for advertising dollars. "Though the competition was fierce, it was always absolutely friendly and civilized. Yes, we were business competitors, but Houston and I were good friends. We shared ad layouts with each other because it was too expensive and time-consuming for both papers to lay out the same advertisements. As time went on, both of us began to wonder how we would be able to make it in such a small market," Paxton recalled.

Both newspapers used Linotype machines, hand-set and machine-created larger-point type for display advertising and headlines, and folding and collation by hand to produce their product. Newspaper technology had remained relatively constant since the turn of the century. The *County News* used a Babcock Optimus press until 1955. It was driven first by a gasoline engine and later by electric motor. The press, which was hand-fed with large flat sheets of newsprint, could print four pages at a time at a rate of one thousand an hour. After the four pages were printed on one side of the sheets, the sheets were inverted so that



*Skilled operators set lines of lead type on these Linotype machines in this photo taken in the 1960s. The device with the rollers in the foreground is a proofing press, used to print copies of stories for proofreading.*

the four pages on the other side could be printed. Once printed, the sheets were cut, trimmed and folded into sections by another machine, then collated by hand. "It was as loud as six freight trains in the building when that press was running," Paxton remembered. "It took a couple of days, once all the pages were ready for press, to do all the things that needed to be done to produce a finished newspaper."

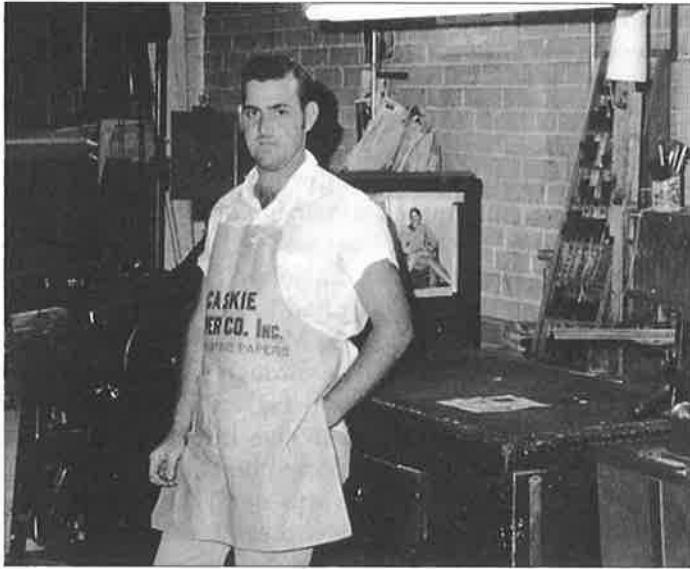
"Both the *County News* and the *Gazette* were always blessed to have good people who were very skilled at operating the machinery. I would stand in awe and watch our Linotype operators." At both papers stories would be prepared and then presented to the Linotype operators to be set. The Linotype machine was a total mystery to all save those skilled at its operation. Simply put, a keyboard was utilized which pulled letter dies and placed them into column-width lines. The operator would sprinkle some magic dust (or so it seemed) and hot lead would flow into a breach. The die would drop into the lead and cast the line. The lines would drop into a form until the story was complete. To make it more interesting, the lines of type or slugs were arranged in metal trays upside-down and backward. Paxton was among those who could proof copy in its negative form almost as quickly as in its final printed form. "It was difficult at first. Like anything else, if you practice long enough, you begin

to be able to do it,” he said with a laugh. “Personally, my greatest fear was that I would pie a form. That’s what we called it if we dropped one of the pages after it had been completely set and ready for press. Each page was extremely heavy. If one did get dropped, it was a mess—hundreds of little pieces of lead all over the place, just like a pie hitting the floor. All of us were very, very careful when we handled those pages.”

In 1955, Paxton, Jr., acquired ownership of the *County News* from his father. That same year, a rebuilt Goss web-fed press was purchased and moved to the *County News* building on Nelson Street. “That was quite an adventure,” Paxton recalled. “There had to be a pit under the press in order to work on it from underneath. Men with jackhammers came in and spent several days blasting a hole through solid concrete before we could set the press in place.” The new press was an automatic eight-page web press, and produced about twenty-five hundred folded eight-page sections per hour. The sections still had to be collated by hand, but the amount of time saved in production was significant. Paxton said, “The very first week we went to use our new press, it malfunctioned and didn’t print. We ran the paper through, but it came out blank. We weren’t feeling too good about our purchase at that point. But it all worked out, and we got our money’s worth out of that machine before technology demanded another big change.” The Linotype machine was still king, as it would remain until the onset of offset technology in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In the fall of 1961, as Harlow and Paxton were chatting, they began to discuss the obvious. The two papers had stopped competing; they were actually duplicating each other. Perhaps they should start quiet talks about a merger. Their talks were very quiet and extremely private. In the spring of 1962, a noted New York newspaper broker specializing in newspaper mergers, came to Lexington and privately and quietly analyzed every aspect of the two businesses. He presented Harlow and Paxton with his findings, and the two publishers agreed the time had come for the two enterprises to merge.

The duo did an amazing job of keeping their plans to themselves. It was just two weeks prior to the first edition of the *News-Gazette* that a public announcement of the imminent merger was made. At the time of the merger, the *Gazette’s* circulation had grown to approximately thirty-three hundred. The *County News’s* circulation was approximately forty-two hundred. Paxton remembered, “We both wanted to make sure we had dotted all our ‘i’s and crossed all our ‘t’s before we said much publicly. We were creating a new corporation, and we wanted to make sure that was handled properly, too. Happily, all the employees of both papers who wanted to continue to work for the new paper were able to do so.”



*Jim Dedrick, shown here in the 1960s taking a break from composing ads, started with the Lexington Gazette in 1960 and was the production manager of the News-Gazette Print Shop until he retired in 2002.*

“On the other hand, there were several, including Houston’s wife, my cousin, Jenny [Hopkins], and my mother [Mrs. Nell Paxton] who were glad to be able to turn over their long-held tasks to another, so it all worked out nicely. Family members had been so valuable—and so overworked—it was good for everybody that they were able to get out.” Paxton, Jr., explained.

In his final editorial for the *Gazette*, Harlow quoted from the previous week’s editorial in the *County News*. “The time has come to make a change. Duplication of effort must give way to concerted endeavor in this day of ever increasing production costs. But in this process, the chief concern of all will be to see that the character, personality and integrity of the old papers will be carried over into the new.” As to the name of the new venture, the editorial in the premiere issue of July 4, 1962, explained: “The new name satisfies the essential criteria. It gives equal emphasis to the two merging papers and is reasonably brief.” In conclusion, the editorialist wrote, “Rather we bespeak a continuation of that spirit of approval and co-operation and we promise to bend every effort to give Lexington and Rockbridge County a newspaper worthy of their high traditions.”

Paxton assumed the position of editor and Harlow the business manager of the *News-Gazette*. “It was so wonderful for both of us to be on the

same side,” said Paxton. “The merger could not have gone any smoother than it did. It was grand.” The merger was a great success. The news coverage became more sophisticated and thorough, though never wandering far from the paper’s half-joking, half-serious internal mantra of “If it didn’t happen in Rockbridge County, then it didn’t happen.”

In the fall of 1971, the *News-Gazette* made the move to offset printing technology, silencing the Linotype machines and negating the need to melt down vast amounts of lead every Thursday afternoon. No longer would there be heavy, cumbersome pages of upside-down, backwards type. There would be no lead type at all.

In the offset process, the reporters’ stories were typed on a tape punch machine, which produced a punched ticker tape. That tape was read by a photo typesetter, which exposed the copy on light sensitive paper. The photo paper was fed through a developing machine, which processed the light-sensitive paper and produced a camera-ready copy of the story or advertisement, properly laid out in columns. It could be read as it would be laid out on the page—not upside-down and backward. The galleys, or columns of paper with the stories, were cut and pasted with wax to layout sheets. The ads, also pasted up with clip art and copy produced photographically, were inserted in the designated locations on each page. The final pasted-up pages were then photographed using a large graphic arts camera, producing negatives the same size as the finished printed page. Those negatives were carried to the printer and were used to expose the plates from which the paper was printed.

The advent of offset, however, meant that the newspaper could no longer be printed on the *News-Gazette*’s own press, which was not compatible with the new technology’s demands. Originally, the printing was farmed out to the *Waynesboro News-Virginian*. Today, it is printed in Covington by the *Virginian-Review*. “That was an incredibly traumatic time for me. It seemed that every single technological thing I knew about the newspaper business was being thrown out the window. Houston had been sick and unable to work for several months, and I was feeling stressed,” Paxton, Jr., recalled. “But after I received some training, it didn’t seem so bad. And I didn’t have to worry about pieing those forms anymore.”

Like anything new, there were glitches. The access door of the typesetting machine had to be propped open. If it was closed, the machine would overheat and stop working. Even with the difficulties, the offset process was a vast improvement. It added a range of flexibility and simplicity to the paper’s production capability that would have been impossible with hot type. As the 1970s progressed, there were improvements in offset technology. Reporters used specialized typewriters, which produced type that could be read straight from the page by then state-of-the-

art scanning devices. This, too, increased the speed of the paper's production.

One of the more interesting stories broken by the *News-Gazette* came in 1974, when Mel Greenberg came to town. Greenberg claimed to be a Hollywood movie producer, and was going to shoot a movie in Lexington based on the life of Stonewall Jackson. The project sounded a little wacky—it was to be a musical, and have a nude scene involving a lady bathing in a tent. Greenberg announced that he needed many extras for the movie to play soldiers for the battle scenes, and he needed a lady for the “bath scene.” He set up shop at the Keydet-General Motel to conduct auditions for the movie. Locals flocked to his motel room to sign up for the movie. There were numerous little details that did not add up about Greenberg. For one, he would not allow anyone, certainly not a newspaper photographer, to take his picture. Commonwealth's Attorney Eric Sisler decided to invite Greenberg in for a chat. The *News-Gazette* found out about the appointment, and situated a photographer outside Sisler's office. When Greenberg left the appointment, the photographer snapped his picture. Greenberg tried unsuccessfully to get the photo.

Within a few days, sensing that he was under increased suspicion, Greenberg abruptly skipped town, leaving his motel bill unpaid. There was no movie, but Greenberg had brought two weeks of excitement to quiet Rockbridge County. He was later arrested in Ohio and returned to Virginia to face charges. Some Lexingtonians had become so taken with him, they visited him in jail in Roanoke. The Greenberg story won the *News-Gazette* a writing award in Virginia Press Association competition. The photo of Greenberg appeared in *Newsweek* and a few other national publications.

Houston Harlow's death in 1971 left a large gap in the paper's operation, primarily on the business side. “To be honest, I wasn't really sure what I was going to do,” recalled Paxton, Jr. “At that time, I could not really afford to take on the entire business myself, and I really didn't know where I would ever find a partner like Houston.”

Enter Ewing S. “Tad” Humphreys—literally. “Tad was Houston's first cousin, but I really did not know him or anything about him when he just walked in off the street one day in 1972 and asked if he could speak with me,” Paxton explained. “He told me he was interested in purchasing Houston's shares in the company. The more he talked, the more intrigued I became. He sounded like a top-notch businessman, and that is what we needed. The more I heard about him, I realized that he was a proven businessman who might be the right man at the right place at the right time. And he was.”

Matt Paxton IV picks up the story eight years later. Like his father, he had not really contemplated the newspaper business after his gradu-

ation from the University of Virginia. Four years into a banking career, the younger Paxton chanced to have lunch with Humphreys one day. Humphreys asked Paxton if he had thought about getting into the newspaper business. Paxton said he did not think of himself as much of a writer. Humphreys laughed and said, “Son, there’s a whole lot more to this business than writing.” After further discussions, Paxton moved back to Lexington in 1980 to work on the business side of the newspaper as an advertising salesman. Later that year, he moved up to advertising manager.

After Paxton IV’s arrival, the offset optical scanner technology began to hit a technological dead end. By the mid-80s, there were very few papers still using the equipment. If something broke down, the paper would call the equipment company, and they would have to fly someone in immediately to fix the problem or the paper couldn’t operate. There was growing concern on the part of the management that the vendor would no longer service the equipment.

In 1986 Humphreys retired, and Paxton IV succeeded him as business manager. The following year, the decision was made to expand the physical plant of the newspaper building and to install a computerized editorial system to replace the optical scanners. The computer system and software purchased in 1987 came from the same vendor the *News-Gazette* had been dealing with for years, the Compugraphic Corporation. Others asked, “Why not IBM or some of the emerging giants?” That was simple. The paper needed a supplier which knew the newspaper business and understood that a problem needed to be fixed immediately, often within hours. It also allowed the paper to be printed on Tuesday evening, which meant local mail subscribers would receive their papers on Wednesday.

The computer system connected the writer and editor directly with the finished product. The writers could correct things as they composed much easier than with the scanned copy. Reporters liked the computer system if only for its spell-checking feature. Press a button; highlight all the misspelled words. True, they all disappeared as soon as the reporter made the next key stroke, but it was a start.

In 1975, the paper had begun to print occasional spot color in some advertising in response to client requests. That year, some color photographs were printed at the time of the opening of the rebuilt streets in downtown Lexington. It was an expensive and experimental proposition. No color photographs appeared again until Richard Gere and Jodie Foster and the *Sommersby* movie crew swept into town for filming in 1992.

Claudia Schwab, one of the *News-Gazette*’s veteran writer/photographers, had taken an outstanding color photo of the actors on horseback and wagons turning the corner at Washington and Main Streets. To get

the picture, she got permission to photograph from the judge's chambers in the second floor of the Court House. She leaned out a window for the shot. The paper decided to run the photo on the front page in full color. The photo was sent to Roanoke to get the color separations made, and the picture reproduced in the paper very well. It was several years before the paper tried color again, but in the late 1990s began to run color photos on the front page sporadically.

In 1998, the *News-Gazette* decided to publish color photos on the front every week, and bought the necessary equipment to produce the color negatives in-house. At the same time, the *News-Gazette's* contract printer, the *Virginian-Review* in Covington purchased an additional press unit allowing full color printing on the front and back of a section.

Matthew Paxton, Jr., stepped down as editor and publisher in 1994, and sold his interest in the paper to Matt Paxton IV, who took the title of publisher. Darryl Woodson, a Rockbridge County native, Washington and Lee graduate, and *News-Gazette* reporter and copy editor of eleven years tenure, was named editor.

In 1989, the *News-Gazette* began to publish *The Weekender*, which is delivered to all residential mailing addresses in the Rockbridge area each Saturday. The publication was started because increasingly advertisers were needing a medium in which to run weekend ads and circulars.

Today, the *News-Gazette* has an audited circulation of 8,784, and reaches two-thirds of all Rockbridge area homes. In recent years, reporters from the paper have been awarded "Best in Show" for writing in the Virginia Press Association's "Better Newspaper" competition. Twice in the past five years, the *News-Gazette* has been judged the best newspaper of its size in the state by virtue of total points in VPA judging. In 2000, the paper won five national awards for writing, photography, and layout in National Newspaper Association judging.

In 1998, the *News-Gazette* began to explore putting some of its content on the Internet. Today, the paper maintains its own web site at [www.thenews-gazette.com](http://www.thenews-gazette.com), where breaking local news stories are updated daily Monday through Friday. The site carries local weather, sports, classified advertising and has links to many other state, regional and national media. The paper offers a free flash news service, in which breaking news stories are emailed to flash news subscribers. The company also offers web services, including site creation and site advertising.

The last fifty years have been a wild ride as two papers became one and the acceleration of change made mastery of new technology a continuous challenge. It is not without trepidation that the *News-Gazette* navigates these quickly shifting tides, but also it is with a sense of excitement, anticipation and adventure. We trust you will continue to share the ride with us.



# History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1796-1899

David R. Rossi



IN August 1950, the Lexington Fire Department celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary. Newspapers from the 1890s referred to the “original volunteer fire company” being formed in 1850, when forty concerned citizens banded together to protect the life and property of the town against fire. The roster, which listed the “original firemen” of 1850, was framed and hung in the engine house in the late nineteenth century so that the firemen would remember and honor the men who first volunteered their time and effort.<sup>1</sup> That roster still hangs on the wall of the department today, over 150 years later. But the document itself makes no mention of the men on the rolls as being the founding members of the department. It simply states, “The following is a list of the fire company of Lexington, Va., as presently organized,” then lists the names of the firemen and officers.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the history of the Lexington Fire Department dates back over fifty years prior to the supposed founding date. Through its many years of service the department went through many reorganizations, one of which was 1850. There were many others.

1. *Lexington Gazette*, November 30, 1893.
2. From the original 1850 roster in the Lexington firehouse.

---

**David R. Rossi** was a Virginia Military Institute cadet and a member of the Lexington Fire Department at the time of his presentation at the Jefferson Street firehouse in Lexington on April 22, 2002. He was a first-classman, a psychology major, and a Dean’s List student. He planned to become a professional firefighter after graduation.

The history of the department dates back to April 11, 1796, when a small trash or stable fire sparked one of Lexington's greatest disasters. Stories differ as to the origins of the fire. One theory says that the fire began when the wind fanned some embers of another fire that was being tended by a man burning trash in his garden. The other theory states that the fire was started in a local stable, either by an unattended tobacco pipe or the embers of a wash-kettle. Regardless of how it started, the flames were quickly spread by a wind from the west.<sup>3</sup> As the fire swept through the young town, founded less than twenty years earlier, heroic efforts were made by the citizens to save what could be saved, but by the end of the day only a few houses remained standing. The courthouse and over one hundred other structures had been destroyed. A stone structure on Randolph Street, known as "The Castle," that was owned by clerk of the court Andrew Reid, survived and was used as a shelter to feed those who had lost their homes in the disaster as well as to house the court records that had been saved. The brick Alexander House (now known as the Alexander-Withrow House, located diagonally across from the present courthouse) also remained standing, but had been so badly damaged that the family was forced to move out. A small manor house on the corner of Henry and Main Streets was saved by the effort of the owner's five daughters. They ran back and forth between the house and a near-by town spring, soaking blankets in the water, then throwing them on the roof in order to beat back the flames. The fire was stopped on Henry Street, just yards from the house.<sup>4</sup> All of the other homes had been built out of logs and had been burned to ashes.

A key reason for the severity of the disaster was that the town had been built almost exclusively from wood. When Lexington was rebuilt, in order to prevent such a fire from occurring again, most of the houses and buildings were constructed of brick.<sup>5</sup> The second reason the fire got out of control was that there was no organization or resources with which to fight the fire. A group of fifty citizens got together and signed a petition that was sent to the state legislature requesting permission to form a volunteer Lexington Fire Company. The petition was approved,

3. Oren F. Morton, *History of Rockbridge County, Virginia* (Baltimore: Regional Publishing Co., 1890), p. 148.

4. Mrs. Charles C. McCulloch, "Rockbridge and Its County Seat," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 1 (1939-41): 76, 74; Royster Lyle, Jr., "The Castle," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 9 (1975-79): 27; Mary Galt, "The Castle," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 5 (1954-60): 92; Mrs. Charles C. McCulloch, "The Blue Hotel," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 4 (1945-54): 20.

5. H. Jackson Darst, "Benjamin Darst, Sr., Architect-Builder of Lexington," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 8 (1970-74): 63.

the company was formed, an engine and hose were bought, and an engine house was built. However, thirty years later, although the engine and hose still existed, the fire company did not.<sup>6</sup>

Even though another new engine house had been built two years before, by 1829 the town’s Board of Trustees once again appointed a committee to organize “the efficient persons of the town into a company, the more effectively to extinguish FIRE.” The renovated company consisted of an Engine Company made up of twenty-seven white citizens, a Hook and Ladder Company made up of two white officers and seventeen slaves and free blacks, and a bucket brigade (“water line”) of over one hundred white citizens and two dozen blacks. The company was assigned its new duties on November 9, and Lexington once again had organized fire protection. Along with the firefighting duties of the new company, the men also marched semi-annual parades to show off their strength and apparatus.<sup>7</sup>

The Engine Company was housed in the engine house that had been built in 1827 and relied on the original engine purchased after the 1796 fire. The Hook and Ladder Company, on the other hand, did not own any apparatus or truck with which to haul their equipment. When the fire alarm rang out, the members rushed to the ladder house, a separate building where the hooks and ladders of the town were stored, and carried their tools to the fire by hand.<sup>8</sup> While it was the Engine Company’s job to put water on the fire, the Hook and Ladder Company had the more dangerous and dirty jobs of placing ladders and cutting ventilation holes in the roof and walls. They would constantly be in, on, or around the fire building without the protection of water or a hose. (Even today, firefighters assigned to hook and ladder companies—commonly known as truck companies—are said to have some of the most dangerous jobs in the fire service. They still climb on roofs to ventilate and perform search and rescue operations in extremely hostile conditions without the aid of hoselines.) For blacks in Lexington in the 1830s, the primary way to serve as a member of the Fire Company, whether as a slave or Free Negro, was to be assigned the most dangerous and dirtiest work at the fire scene. (Twenty slaves were members of the water line.)<sup>9</sup>

Because of the prevalence of brick buildings in the town, fires were rare and the perceived need for a fire company once again diminished. Most of the fires that took place in the area destroyed wooden barns out

6. Morton, *History of Rockbridge County*, p. 149.

7. Copy of newspaper poster, November 16, 1829.

8. Lexington Town Council Records, October 2, 1841, August 3, 1837, and May 11, 1838, City Hall, Lexington, Va.

9. Poster, November 16, 1829.



in the county that were not close enough to be protected by the Fire Company. However, despite the lack of local fires, the citizens of Lexington were well aware of the threat fire posed to their neighbors.

In the 1830s, fire was a major topic in the Lexington *Gazette*. The weekly paper reported on local fires from Staunton, Lynchburg, and Botetourt County and gave descriptive accounts of the frequent destructive fires in bigger cities such as Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Charleston.<sup>10</sup> But Lexington remained unaffected by fires. The town council appointed a few citizens to be responsible for the repair of the aging town ladders and fire hooks and to keep them in good order and in a safe place. Even after a fire in a local blacksmith shop, the Fire Company remained disorganized and once again Lexington was left without a ready or prepared department. On October 12, 1838, the most serious fire since 1796 broke out in Lexington. The town was saved only “by the great exertion” of the citizens. But these citizens acted on their own in an unorganized manner.<sup>11</sup> The Fire Company had failed to stay organized through the years when fire seemed a distant threat, and when two finally broke out in 1838, there was no company available to handle them. Even after these fires, however, no major attempt was made to strengthen or improve the preparedness of the company.

The ebb and flow of interest in maintaining a fire company was driven by the rarity of fires in the town. After a major burn the citizens would be outraged and concerned that there was no fire company, the firemen would reorganize and re-spark their fervor, and the company would be ready for the next one. The problem was that the next alarm would not be struck for many years and in the meantime, interest, morale, purpose, and participation would wane until the next house burned to the ground. This pattern would continue for the next fifty years.

Lack of interest in the company was reflected by the way that department property and apparatus were used during the quiet years. The engine house shared floor space with the town water works department and was used as storage by others as well. In 1841, the problem of dumping and storage had become so bad that the engineer of the Fire Company was ordered by the council to remove all the extra lumber from the engine house and to clear out everything that was not necessary for the fire engine or the water works. He was also to make sure that

10. *Lexington Gazette*, March 2 and October 5, 1838 (Staunton); January 13, 1837 (Lynchburg); March 24, 1837 (Botetourt County); February 9, 1838 (Baltimore); March 23, 1838 (Cincinnati); and May 18, 1838 (Charleston).

11. Lexington Town Council Records, Aug 3, 1837, and May 11, 1838; *Lexington Gazette*, March 16 and October 12, 1838.

the engine house was not used for any purpose other than those intended by the Board of Trustees.<sup>12</sup>

In 1842, as the citizens were warned to be vigilant against fire in the midst of a serious drought, the search for a new location for the engine house began. That summer, part of the lot on Nelson Street located between the Baptist Church and the future site of the Lexington Presbyterian Church was purchased and plans were made to move the engine house from its location next to the courthouse. The move was made in the spring of 1843, at a cost of \$65.00 to the town.<sup>13</sup> No serious fires occurred in the early forties; nevertheless, relocation of the engine house inspired some forward thinkers to prepare contingency plans.

In April 1845, a major fire ravaged Pittsburgh. For weeks the *Gazette* ran articles about the death and destruction caused by the fire and also of the heroism and courage exhibited by both the firemen and kind-hearted citizens. A month later, the paper ran an article that chronicled the number of alarming fires that were taking place around the country.<sup>14</sup> Knowing that it had been years since Lexington's last fire, and with the Fire Company all but extinct, another attempt was made to organize prior to the inevitable next fire.

In late May 1845, the new firemen met at the Courthouse to discuss "important business." By order of the chief engineer of the department, the firemen began meeting approximately twice a month at the engine house. The meetings were conducted to distribute new uniforms, train with new hose, and to practice with full gear and equipment. Over \$60.00 was spent on new uniforms and accoutrements and 180 feet of new leather hose was purchased for the engine. These meetings continued consistently from spring, through the summer, and into the fall. Along with the relatively new engine house, the ladder house was also moved to Nelson Street, repaired and refurbished, and over the next few years new ladders were purchased for the town and the company.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to improving the fire department's preparedness, the city began to give the company certain legal advantages in fighting fires. An 1845 city ordinance required the town Sergeant to inspect public and private fire plugs (hydrants) at least twice a month. Anyone caught tampering with or stopping up the hydrants would be subject to a fine of

12. Lexington Town Council Records, May 1, 1841.

13. *Lexington Gazette*, October 13, 1842; Lexington Town Council Records, May 30 and July 8, 1842, and March 27, 1843.

14. *Lexington Gazette*, April 1845 and May 1, 1845.

15. *Lexington Gazette*, May 22, June 19, and September 14, 1845; Lexington Town Council Records, April 29 and February 11, 1845, January 26 and February 6, 1846, and December 26, 1848.

between one and ten dollars. Fines were also issued to people who failed to keep their chimneys clean and clear of debris and soot. The *Gazette* even issued warnings about the danger of leaving matches out in the open. The town was prepared for a fire and was capable of fighting it. But the inevitable fire never occurred and once again enthusiasm faded. Other than a parade in April 1846, the town never called on the services of the company. After the reorganization, the only fires were in a barn and stable out in the county in areas where the company was unable to respond.<sup>16</sup>

By 1847, the company was once again in dire straits. The once large and prosperous Fire Company was “broken up,” the engine was not in service, and there was no one in town to stop the progress of fire should it break out. This turned out to be a poor time for the department to be in a slump. As some began to call for another reorganization, the fires that Lexington had avoided for the previous decade began to burn with a vengeance, aided by a helping hand.<sup>17</sup> The need for a fire company became painfully apparent.

In April 1847, the home of the Rev. Dr. John Skinner burned. The town’s citizens attempted to fight the fire but failed. In June, the grist mill of Col. Samuel Reid (a member of the 1829 water line) burned in what was suspected as arson. Two other fires in the surrounding area were also thought to be the work of an incendiary. That fall, town constable Joseph W. Moore called arson a “frequent occurrence,” and fear and concern prompted demands for the organization of a new fire company. Few, if any, of the arsonists were ever brought to justice; often the authorities or newspapers would simply speculate that the cause of a fire was arson when they could find no other explanation.<sup>18</sup>

Arsonists not only burned houses and property, but they also inflamed the emotions and anger of the law-abiding citizens. When these “evil people” caused the destruction of a house in South River, the Staunton Courthouse, and a barn just outside of Lexington, citizens called for justice. The residents of South River called for the death penalty for one perpetrator. The death penalty for such a crime was not unheard of in those days. Neither was vigilante justice. For example, a crowd in San Francisco reverted to lynch mob justice when one arsonist

16. *Lexington Gazette*, May 8, 1845; Town Council Records, February 10, 1845; *Lexington Gazette*, September 25, November 13, and August 13, 1845, and April 16, 1846.

17. *Lexington Gazette*, February 4 and September 30, 1847.

18. *Lexington Gazette*, April 1, June 24, March 18, July 22, September 16, and September 30, 1847.



*This 1892 Hook and Ladder truck and the commemorative flag are still owned by the Lexington Fire Department.*

was caught.<sup>19</sup> But, in addition to justice, the Lexington community also wanted a fire company to combat the consequences of the criminal's actions.

In August 1850 another attempt was made to reorganize. Led by chief engineer J. Fuller, forty men made up the latest volunteers of the company. Many of the men were related to those who organized in 1829. In 1851, two hundred feet of new hose was purchased for the engine along with five spanner wrenches and six belts for the firemen. A new lock was bought for the engine house and one meeting was held at the Courthouse in May. But the company's activities were limited to making repairs to the engine and ladder houses.<sup>20</sup>

In the three years following their latest reorganization the volunteers were not called upon to fight any fires. Through those years, the company remained in existence, but they lacked experience, and they demonstrated it during a fire on August 3, 1854. The fire began in the cellar of the Connevey & Estill store by a clerk who accidentally ignited some fuel. As a crowd gathered, the engine was pulled up the street by the firemen and hooked up to the nearest hydrant. But the company did not stretch enough hose, and for half an hour the firemen sprayed water in the direction of the flames, but the water fell short. By the time the firemen connected extra lengths of hose and actually ready to put water on the building, bystanders with water buckets had extinguished the fire.

19. *Lexington Gazette*, September 16, 1852, January 13 and 20, 1848, January 16, 1851, January 13, 1848, and August 14, 1851.

20. *Lexington Gazette*, November 30, 1893, and May 1, 1851; Lexington Town Council Records, January 16 and Feb 10, 1851, August 10 1852, and February 11, 1853.



Following this poor showing by the company, some people suggested that slaves might be used as the bulk of the fire force—with three or four white officers to train and supervise.<sup>21</sup> This idea was stillborn. Less than thirty years earlier the entire Hook and Ladder Company had been comprised of blacks, but as tensions over slavery grew, citizens seemed to prefer to do without a fire company rather than entrust the protection of the town to supervised slaves.

In 1857, the mayor sold the ladder house for \$10.00 and the ladders and hooks were moved to a more suitable location. The following year the engine house had to be moved from its location on Nelson Street to make room for an annex that was to be added to the Presbyterian Church. The house was moved and rebuilt with an eight-foot addition to lengthen it.<sup>22</sup>

Although fires still occasionally burned in town, the fire department often failed to show up.<sup>23</sup> Fortunately, by the late 1850s, the Fire Company was not the sole form of protection against disasters or misfortunes. Insurance companies brought a form of monetary protection so that if the inconsistency of the fire department continued to be a problem, the citizens of Lexington could at least take comfort that they could replace their lost homes and goods. By 1860, at least two companies with surplus capital—the Lynchburg Fire & Hose Insurance Company and the Virginia Fire & Marine Insurance Company—offered insurance to Lexington residents.

Despite the hopes and expectations of the citizens—and the fact that \$82.50 was spent on repairing the engine in 1861—the Fire Company remained ineffective throughout the Civil War. During a fire at a local smokehouse in September 1862, the company failed to show up at all. Treatment of the department in the press became harsh: “We expected about the time the burning subsided, to hear the old engine rattling down the street; but the Fire Company must have concluded, that a little smoke house was entirely too insignificant an object, upon which to waste their energy and water.”<sup>24</sup> The company’s problems were not due to unavailability of potential members. Not everyone left to join the ranks of the local militias, and, in fact, many young men of Lexington refused to fight in the war and remained in town (much to the outrage of many of the citizens). But this did not benefit the company, since the

21. *Lexington Gazette*, August 3, 1854.

22. Lexington Town Council Records, April 11 and January 16, 1857, and July 12, 1858.

23. *Lexington Gazette*, September 20, 1860.

24. Lexington Town Council Records, January 8, 1861; *Lexington Gazette*, September 25, 1862.

same men who chose not to volunteer for the military likewise failed to volunteer for the Fire Company.

The best circumstances occurred when the fire was discovered early and extinguished by near-by citizens without any aid from the Fire Company, as happened during a fire on the roof of a Washington College dormitory. Despite the success of bystanders and students in stopping the flames, the question was still raised rhetorically to the town council: "Suppose the fire had not been extinguished, until it was done by the town Fire Company, how much of the college buildings could have been saved?" The company was earning a reputation for showing up after the fire had done too much damage or after the fire was already completely out. They would show up anywhere between an hour and three days after the fire had been extinguished. Concerned bystanders and freedmen performed the bulk of the firefighting without the aid of the company or engine.<sup>25</sup>

The blame for the ineffectiveness of the company did not fall entirely on the shoulders of the firemen. Much of the blame was put on the quality and age of the engine. The engine that was used throughout the Civil War was the same engine that had been "purchased by the town authorities in its earliest infancy." It was constantly referred to as "old" and sarcastically referred to as "efficient." But even three years after the war, the town was still relying on the same old "apology for an engine" that had been used for decades already. The blame for at least some of the problems of the company were placed on the insufficient and ineffective engine "which has so often played a conspicuous part around the falling ruins of houses, which two such engines could not have saved."<sup>26</sup>

The end of the Civil War brought a renewed interest in reorganizing the fire company: "If a good engine could be procured, an efficient volunteer fire company could no doubt be organized." One year later, nothing having been done, the same sentiments were voiced: "If the citizens and property holders of the town will subscribe and purchase an engine and proper fire apparatus, the young men of the town will form a fire brigade immediately." But in 1866, a mere \$7.75 was spent on improvement to the fire company and that money was mainly used for repairs to the engine house and old hose. The only real protection the town had was provided by the insurance companies. Lexington residents tried other options to protect themselves, including the introduc-

25. *Lexington Gazette*, October 16, 1862, October 8, 1865, and August 29, 1866.

26. *Lexington Gazette*, August 29, 1866, September 25, 1862, October 8, 1865, October 16, 1862, and September 30 1868.

tion of more insurance companies as well as the development and sale of paint alleged to be fireproof.<sup>27</sup>

Following the war, Lexington also experienced a boom in commercial and private growth. Local schools expanded and grew, new hotels were added, a bowling alley was built, and the number of private residences increased. More people and more buildings meant more chance of fire, but the Fire Company still failed to organize. The company that could barely meet the demands of prewar Lexington would face even greater challenges with all the new growth. The need for a company had never been more apparent and it was a need that would remain unmet for the next few years. To make matters worse, the water system's inadequacies became apparent at this time and became a major issue in the council and among the townsfolk. Furthermore, the town council considered installing kerosene lamps around the town to light the streets at night, a plan that was later abandoned because of the obvious fire hazard of the fuel.<sup>28</sup>

As the town grew, fire protection remained ineffective. Two fires that took place in February 1869 finally brought the problem to a head. The fires, which occurred two days apart, combined to destroy a stable and two storehouses, damaged the Bank of Lexington, and threatened the Stonewall Hotel. Again, it was the citizens along with cadets and students who were instrumental in stopping the fires. The citizens were on hand in time to fight the fires but they did not have the resources or facilities necessary to halt the flames before the buildings were destroyed. Apparently by this time, the town had purchased and was using a second, just as useless engine, but it was no help. Their use was limited by the lack of hose and other firefighting equipment.<sup>29</sup>

Immediately following the second fire, a committee was established “for the purpose of devising a plan for the organization of a Fire Department and for reporting the best means of securing an ample supply of water for the town.” Within a week the committee had recommended the appointment of a principal engineer to act as commander and three fire wardens to act as his assistants. The volunteers were split into four companies, each having specific jobs and tasks on the fire ground. There was an Engine, Hose, and Water Company manned by a minimum of twenty and a maximum of sixty-four firemen, who were responsible for using the hoses and water to extinguish the main body of fires. The Hook and Ladder Company was made up of twenty to forty firemen. A

27. *Lexington Gazette*, October 8, 1865, August 29, 1866, and January 2 and 23, 1867.

28. *Lexington Gazette*, September 4, 1867, and March 4, 1868.

29. *Lexington Gazette*, February 17, 1869.

Rescue Company was formed of the “most efficient and trustworthy citizens of the town” in order to save and salvage furniture and other threatened property before it was destroyed. There was also a company of fire police for control. New by-laws were to be written by the principal engineer and his assistants. It was also recommended that a new engine be purchased and a new engine house built for the company. The water issue was deferred to another committee.<sup>30</sup>

As J. K. Edmondson assumed the duties of engineer, a real estate tax of fifty cents per one hundred dollars of assessed value was levied to raise funds to buy the new engine and erect a new engine house. In early summer, a lot at the corner of Randolph and Washington Streets was purchased as the site for the new station, and a two-story, thirty-five by forty-five foot granite and brick building erected. As a joke the engine house was insured against fire by one of the local insurance companies. While the company was waiting for a new engine and firehouse, the old problems continued. At a fire at the new bowling alley, the company eventually responded with the old engine twelve hours after the early morning alarm had been sounded.<sup>31</sup>

In May 1869, the company finally met in “full force” at the Courthouse with their new engine for the “assignment of the members to their proper places on the Engine; and also for the purpose of practice.” The engine had been purchased for \$1,500 in Philadelphia. Although it was a new engine for Lexington, the machine dated to the 1820s or 1830s and had been one of the first fire engines in Washington, D.C.<sup>32</sup>

The following February, after a quiet summer and fall when the firemen’s duties consisted only of a parade, the company held its annual meeting to elect new officers. R. H. Baylis was elected chief engineer and T. A. Chalkley, J. Wills, and J. A. Wilson were elected wardens. Other elected positions included that of secretary and treasurer. E. L. Graham acted as the company surgeon. The officers divided the other members of the department into groups of pipemen, axemen, hosemen, and torchbearers to further organize the company. Throughout the spring the company publicly trained in order to hone their skills, dealt with minor fires, and put up with a series of false alarms and pranks.<sup>33</sup> But it was not long before they faced their first major and challenging fire.

30. *Lexington Gazette*, February 24, 1869; Lexington Town Council Records, February 20, 1869.

31. Lexington Town Council Records, February 20, 1869, and May 17, 1870; *Lexington Gazette*, June 2, 1869, April 14, 1871, and March 17, 1869.

32. *Lexington Gazette*, May 12 and 19, 1869, and April 5, 1888; Lexington Town Council Records, March 16 and April 12, 1869.

On May 18, 1870, a small fire was discovered in the basement of the stables that were attached to the National Hotel on Main Street; it was quickly extinguished. There was brief speculation as to the fire's suspicious origin, but little was thought about it once the flames were out. The next day, however, the stable was ablaze again. This time, in spite of the efforts of the Fire Company—with aid from cadets, students, and other locals—the stable became fully enveloped and the fire began to spread. Another stable, a carpenter shop, and several other small buildings were destroyed. The fire became so hot that one of the volunteer's hats caught fire as he was working near one burning building. The National Hotel, the courthouse, and former governor Letcher's office were all in serious danger and were saved only “by the most energetic efforts” of those fighting the fire. In order to save both the property and the lives of the firemen, the engine was used to spray down the rooftops of some of the buildings while the firemen were still on them. At one point embers and cinders from the original fire ignited several other buildings over two hundred yards away, all of which were eventually saved. A group of VMI third classmen that had been formed into a water line extending from a local spring to the fire, were told by their professor that if they worked hard enough their math class the next day would be cancelled. One cadet was severely bruised when he fell off a roof while fighting the fire, but he was not otherwise seriously injured.<sup>34</sup>

The fire on “the day of the great Panic” was determined to be arson. Both firemen and armed members of the VMI first class patrolled the streets throughout the nights following the fire to make sure the arsonist did not strike again. The town was so anxious that in their haste to see justice done they picked-up and interrogated an innocent person. But the firemen had done a good job. With ample help from the citizens, cadets, and Washington College students, the fire department had performed well during the fire, stopped the spread of the flames, and prevented a very serious fire from threatening and burning more of the town. The next day, in appreciation of their efforts, the firemen were treated to a large meal courtesy of the National Hotel, which they had worked so hard to save.<sup>35</sup>

On the same afternoon as the fire, a meeting had been held at the Courthouse that passed resolutions to ensure the development of a proper water supply for the town and sufficient outfitting of the company with hoses and buckets. The town now had a good engine oper-

33. *Lexington Gazette*, October 27, 1869; and February 4, April 15, March 11, and May 6, 1870.

34. *Lexington Gazette*, May 20 and 27, 1870.

35. *Ibid.*

ated by capable and experienced firemen. What the department and the town now needed was a good water supply. The fire company wrote to the town council demanding a solution to the water problem.<sup>36</sup>

Before Lexington was officially founded, there had been a big debate over the proposed location for the new town. Three judges who had a hand in the decision actually objected to the site that was eventually chosen and cited the lack of a water supply as one of the main reasons for their dissent. The town was originally supplied by three springs that were later augmented by an underground water system, consisting of four-inch pipes, used to carry water to other parts of the town. The expansion and growth following Civil War increased the town's water needs and it was then that the water works proved inadequate—for both the citizens and the Fire Company. The system depended on gravity to push the water through the pipes, meaning that the water easily flowed to the lower sections of town but kept the elevated sections dry.<sup>37</sup>

Despite debates and proposals in 1869, the Great Fire of 1870 came and went without worthwhile improvements to the water supply. The *Gazette* observed that the “water supply is just enough to make the fire mad when squirted at.” Two years later, after a summer of water rationing, the newspaper predicted a disaster: “A fire anywhere in the neighborhood of the courthouse with a stiff breeze would seal the fate of the town and wreck the fortunes of 50 men.”<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the lack of water took its toll on the fire company's effectiveness and morale. During a fire at the VMI Mess Hall in 1871, the water pipes failed, rendering the engine useless. This forced the cadets on scene to haul water in buckets from Woods Creek, up the cliff behind barracks, and to the fire. It was said that without a water supply the engine was only good for showing off at state fairs. The frustrations began to compound themselves. During the race to a fire in the spring of 1871, the engine got bogged down in the muddy streets and the firemen had to drag the apparatus through knee-deep mud to get to the fire. When they arrived they were already tired and were too late to have much effect in saving the building. To make matters worse, when they connected to the fireplug they found that there was no water available. The muddy streets wasted time and energy and delayed both the men and engine from getting to the fire in time to save any structures. It would have been more effective to have left the engine at the firehouse, rushed the manpower to the fire and attempted to extinguish it by some

36. Lexington Town Council Records, May 20, 1870; *Lexington Gazette*, May 27, 1870.

37. McCulloch, “County Seat,” p. 65; *Lexington Gazette*, June 10, 1868.

38. *Lexington Gazette*, November 25, 1870, and December 6, 1872.

other means. Fortunately, the citizens did not hold these obstacles against the firemen. The *Gazette* admitted, “We have probably borne a little too heavily upon this company heretofore. In justice to them, they did all men could do. . . . The company is not to blame, for the most efficient firemen with the best engine ever built could do no more than they did.”<sup>39</sup> In a show of support, the Virginia State Insurance Company of Richmond donated \$100 to the company. (The agent for the insurance company was H. H. Myers, who would later lead the Fire Company’s most successful reorganization and serve as chief.) But the combination of lack of water, muddy roads, and futile attempts on the fire ground once again led to a decline in the fire department. At a springtime parade, barely enough members showed up to pull the engine through the streets. During a parade demonstration, the firemen had trouble attaching the hose to the hydrant and “only succeeded in wetting themselves” once they were hooked up to the water source. Within a few minutes they ended up draining all the water from that particular hydrant. In an attempt to redeem themselves, they repeated the exercise at another nearby hydrant with much better results and with a better water supply.<sup>40</sup> It had become apparent that the quality of the town’s protection against fire was dubious at best.

Stopgap solutions were proposed for implementation by individual households, but ultimately the *Gazette* placed the responsibility back on the shoulders of the firemen. In an editorial, the paper encouraged the department to become better organized and hold more frequent practice drills and meetings. It also called for the firemen to learn their jobs better, to follow orders, and to respond when needed. The water issue was not an excuse for being uncommitted to the job of protecting the town, although it was admitted that fixing the water problem would be a big factor in improving the state of the department.<sup>41</sup>

In an odd occurrence one night in the early summer of 1871, the company began running up and down Main Street, clanging their bells and raising quite a ruckus. The spontaneous action was not in response to a fire or for a parade and the event drew some criticism from the town. But it succeeded in re-energizing the company. Two weeks later another official reorganization took place. Chief Engineer J. A. Wilson remodeled the company and with forty-five firemen on the roster, attempted to restore the department to its recent efficiency and prowess. The renewed commitment reaffirmed the support and appreciation of the citizens: “It is silly—and worse, it is unjust—to blame men who are

39. *Lexington Gazette*, February 17 and March 3, 1871.

40. *Lexington Gazette*, April 14 and 21, 1871

41. *Lexington Gazette*, April 21, 1871.

working without reward for the public, with failure to subdue the flames with a scant water supply of water, or to reach a fire promptly over streets deep in mud." The press encouraged the citizens to provide every support they could to the department and its members. In September, the company successfully extinguished a fire and protected and saved the neighboring buildings. But continuing the pattern of bad luck, and this time bad timing, much of the department's hose had been sent up to Baltimore at the time of the fire, somewhat hampering the firemen's efforts.<sup>42</sup>

The company's success was again short-lived, and by 1872 the fire department had fallen apart. Reorganization attempts in 1875, 1876, and 1877 failed. Fortunately, the town remained relatively fire-free, but on the rare occasions when a fire did break out, the Fire Company was nowhere to be seen. In the late winter of 1883, a fire burned the house of *Gazette* employee S. B. Fuller. According to the newspaper report, "there was no engine, no water, no ladders, nothing but a crowd of men who could only stand by and see the building burn down." Some businesses began to provide their own fire protection. During a fire at the Lexington Manufacturing Company, the flames were beaten back by the employees, using their own fire engine and bucket brigade. The town engine did arrive and the combination of the two engines helped to extinguish the fire. The few fires that did burn were just bad enough to remind the town that the company did not exist. They were not serious enough to demand a full and prepared department.<sup>43</sup>

By the mid 1880s, Lexington had an ample water supply. New fire plugs and larger six- and eight-inch diameter pipes had been installed, there was a new reservoir, and the three hundred pounds of pressure per square inch in the pipes was strong enough to throw a stream of water over houses without the aide of an engine. Finally, in January 1886, a number of young men took it upon themselves to organize. Led by H. H. Myers, twenty-five men met at the old engine house to elect officers, write by-laws, and to inventory the equipment and needs of the new department. A committee was formed to report their findings to the town council in order to appropriate funds to buy new gear, tools, and apparatus.<sup>44</sup> Myers was elected chief.

In February, the town council accepted the department and the reorganization became official. A used truck was bought from Lynchburg, and by mid-spring the company was drilling and training regularly with

42. *Lexington Gazette*, June 30, July 14, and September 22, 1871.

43. *Lexington Gazette*, March 1 and July 26, 1883; *Rockbridge County News*, January 16 and March 27, 1885.

44. *Lexington Gazette*, February 26 and December 24, 1885, and January 21, 1886.



their new apparatus. As the company was training, the officers began to look for a new building to house the company. The engine house on Washington Street was not only too small to house the truck and engine, but the floor space was shared by the superintendent of the water works as a repair shop, and other organizations used the engine house for meetings. Using drills from the “fireman’s manual in handling apparatus,” the company continued to train on a weekly basis through the summer and fall and planned for even more elaborate drills once improvements were finished with the water system.<sup>45</sup>

Other organizations supported the new company as well. In order to raise money for the department, the local minstrel club played a benefit concert at the Opera House. In appreciation for one year of excellent service, a banquet was held for the firemen; in February 1887 the town council approved the acquisition of two new hose reels. Membership was on the rise and, due to fundraisers and donations, the treasury was strong. By spring the department had everything it needed for success. The water supply, although not completely satisfactory, was better than it had ever been, and new hydrants were being added around town.<sup>46</sup>

The only thing the department was missing was the chance to fight fires. They had formed together over two years earlier, acquired new apparatus and trained on a weekly basis, but they had not had the opportunity to put their skills into action. As a result, interest once again began to suffer, membership declined, and it looked as if the old pattern would repeat itself again. The by-laws were briefly abolished and the department had to ask the council for \$2.50 a month simply to keep the hose reels and ladder truck in good condition.<sup>47</sup> But this time, despite the lack of alarms, enough firemen continued their active involvement. Their patience paid off and so did their training.

In early November 1888, on the same day the company ran an ad in the newspaper asking for more members, a fire broke out at the home of the county treasurer, J. D. Anderson. The alarm emptied the local churches, which were holding services at the time, and bystanders fought the flames with buckets for a short time until the arrival of the firemen. After some minor trouble with the water source, the firemen took control of an “impossible” situation and extinguished the fire, much

45. Lexington Town Council Records, February 6, 1886; *Lexington Gazette*, February 25, April 29, May 13, July 15, and October 28, 1886, and June 3, 1887; *Rockbridge County News*, February 26, 1886.

46. *Rockbridge County News*, July 17, 1886, and February 25, 1887; *Lexington Gazette*, February 17, July 28, and November 24, 1887.

47. *Lexington Gazette*, August 9, 1888.

to the delight of the crowd.<sup>48</sup> On their first real fire since they had formed, the department performed successfully and proved themselves in front of almost all the citizens of the town.

Although the firemen refused to solicit money for themselves, the townsfolk and insurance companies provided monetary donations and held banquet dinners for the company, and the town council allocated more funds to buy new equipment. A third hose reel was purchased in early 1889. Some department members wanted to raise money to buy new uniforms, but the council would not provide the extra funds and there was not enough left over money in the company treasury. The firemen considered it unnecessary and even undignified and improper to solicit funds directly from the public, so for the time being they went without official uniforms. The efficiency and effectiveness of the department benefited the citizens in ways other than direct fire protection. Now that Lexington had a proven organization, the insurance companies began to lower their rates.<sup>49</sup>

Over the next few years the department continued to apply their skills and improve their reputation while fighting a few house fires and chimney fires. As a result of their continued success and performance, the town council gave more money for equipment, which was used to buy a dozen protective rubber coats and a half-dozen helmets. In April 1892, the council purchased a new and "badly needed" hook and ladder truck. The old one was too old, heavy, and cumbersome and was sold for \$11.00 and scrapped for iron. The new truck, which was delivered and began service in May, weighed 1,100 pounds, was pulled and operated by an 18-man crew, and held six ladders, twelve buckets as well as picks and axes.<sup>50</sup> (The department still owns this truck. It is marked "1886," but since the original truck was sold and scrapped, the surviving apparatus is most likely the 1892 truck. See the photo on p. 440.)

In April 1893, a fire was started when a lantern was knocked over and ignited barrels of oil and turpentine in the basement of Gorrell's Drug Store. After attempting to fight the flames himself, Mr. Gorrell narrowly escaped and finally exited the building with his pants ablaze. The fire department responded quickly with all their apparatus and within minutes had four streams of water pouring into the building. While some firemen knocked out windows in the back for ventilation, others

48. *Lexington Gazette*, November 6 1888.

49. *Lexington Gazette*, December 20, 1888, and January 10 and March 25, 1889; Lexington Town Council Records, December 7, 1888, and February 15, 1889.

50. *Lexington Gazette*, November 27, 1890, January 22 and November 5, 1891, and April 14 and May 26, 1892; Lexington Town Council Records, Jan 15, 1891, and April 7, 1892.; *Rockbridge County News*, May 26, 1892.

took the hoses down a fifty-foot hallway filled with thick, black smoke to cut a hole in the floor to get water on the seat of the fire. Despite the flammable and explosive fuel in the basement, the firemen kept advancing into the building until they finally had the blaze under control about an hour after it started. Their efforts contained the fire to the basement and first floor. Town councilmen Jayhugh Wills, a long-time advocate of the department and former member himself, who lived on the top floor of the building, refused to have his furniture moved, announcing his faith in the fire department to extinguish the fire before it threatened his belongings. The fire was serious enough that, if the firemen had not fought so hard against the fire, much of downtown and Main Street might have been destroyed.<sup>51</sup>

The performance at the drug store fire brought thanks and admiration from the citizens, but not the recommended new firehouse (the old engine house was not in a central location, and pulling the heavy apparatus up the hill on Washington Street placed an unnecessary strain on the firemen even before they arrived at a fire), or a centrally located electronic alarm to replace the makeshift system of the small courthouse bell and church bells that were then being used to call out the volunteers. The problem with those bells was that they could not always be heard well throughout the town and they could not be rung at night—when many of the fires occurred—because the courthouse and churches were closed. The town could not afford the \$800 to \$900 an electronic system would cost. Local businessmen offered to raise one half of the money needed if the town raised the other half.<sup>52</sup>

In the spring of 1894, Charles Pole was elected to his fourth term as chief, and the company began to focus on becoming more professional and involved in other community events other than fighting fires. With forty-nine active members on the rolls, the department ordered new uniforms with the extra funds that had been raised. The uniforms consisted of the traditional volunteer firefighter’s red shirt, white pants, and blue cap, and a fire department belt. During the annual memorial parade for Confederate veterans, an event the department was invited to participate in every year, the firemen marched in their new uniforms and pulled the hook and ladder truck, which had been covered in flowers and wreaths. To improve their marching and appearance during parades

51. *Lexington Gazette*, April 6, 1893; *Rockbridge County News*, April 6, 1893.

52. *Rockbridge County News*, April 20, 1893; *Lexington Gazette*, April 13, 1893, and January 16, 1896.



*Members of Reel Crew #3 prepare for a parade in the 1890s. Photo taken on Washington Street in front of the Davidson-Tucker House.*

the department recruited a former VMI cadet as a drillmaster and held practice once a month.<sup>53</sup>

The men who volunteered as firemen in the Lexington Fire Department were described as men who earned their “bread by the sweat of their brow.” Hard-working, young, and athletic, most of the men were not property owners in town and worked blue-collar jobs as plumbers and tanners. But every time they answered an alarm, they gave up their time and risked their lives to save the homes and possessions of the doctors, lawyers, professors, officers, and other professionals who did own property. Their sacrifice and skill did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. After only a few years since their reorganization, the department was quickly becoming recognized as one of the best and most effective companies in the state.<sup>54</sup> So many people wanted to join the ranks, that some had to be turned away. At every monthly meeting new members applied and their membership was determined by the vote of the veteran firemen. A system of fines and suspensions helped to maintain the group’s public image as upright and moral.

53. *Lexington Gazette*, May 14, June 14, and July 12, 1894; Lexington Fire Department (LFD) Minutes, May 14 and June 11, 1894, Lexington Fire Department, Lexington, Va.

To improve their ability, effectiveness, and image even more, the fire department put together its first racing team in 1893. Racing tournaments were popular around the country, and they offered firemen a chance to show off their skill, speed, and teamwork, as well as to earn pride and money for their departments. Races consisted of members of a hose reel pulling their apparatus about 200 yards, dropping some length of hose, connecting to a hydrant and throwing a stream of water. The team that flowed water through the hydrant first won.

In December 1894, the the company chose fifteen of its best men to train for the state tournament in Harrisonburg the following summer. Those chosen to compete took a pledge not to use tobacco, whiskey, or in any other way abuse their body while training. Through a fundraising dinner, the department raised enough money to send the racing team to Harrisonburg, where the competition would be a part of the three-day annual Virginia State Fireman’s Association meeting. The department attended the events that July but the outcome of the race is unclear.<sup>55</sup>

The department prepared for the next tournament by electing an official racing team trainer, V. E. Funkhouser, an accomplished athlete who competed in and won numerous bicycle races throughout the Rockbridge area. In July, the team traveled to Hampton by train to compete at the Fireman’s Association convention, which concluded with the races. It had been raining all weekend and the roads were muddy at the start of the Hampton races. Conditions were so bad that all but two teams pulled out of the competition. The teams from Lexington and Winchester competed in spite of the weather and Lexington beat their opponents by one and a half seconds for the state championship. The first place prize was \$50.00 in gold. Upon their return to Lexington the winning team was met by a battery salute from the VMI cannons and an excited crowd shooting fireworks. They were given an immediate parade through the streets that ended at Irvine’s Hotel, where the men were treated to a victory banquet.<sup>56</sup>

At the convention held in Winchester in July 1897, the Lexington team competed in both the world race (theoretically open to any team in the world) and the state race, both of which ended in controversy when the judges inexplicably added enough time to the team’s finishes to deny them the championships. The decisions confused the spectators and outraged the racing team. An observing team stated that “foul play

54. *Lexington Gazette*, August 9, 1888; *Rockbridge County News*, October 6, 1898.

55. LFD Minutes, December 10, 1894; *Lexington Gazette*, February 14, 1895.

56. LFD Minutes, February 10, 1896; *Lexington Gazette*, July 8, July 15, and September 16, 1896.

was pending” and many thought that Lexington had blatantly been robbed of victory. Some even speculated that a deal had been made between the judges from Winchester and the members of other departments for an exchange of favors at future tournaments.<sup>57</sup>

In 1898 at Newport News, Lexington won the world, state, and association races—but not without more controversy. Although fourteen departments were represented at the convention, only three cities—Lexington, Roanoke, and Suffolk—registered teams for the three races. Each race consisted of the reel teams sprinting to the fireplug, making the connection, laying 225 yards of hose from the hydrant, then attaching the nozzle to the open end of the hose. The first event of the day was the association race, which Lexington won handily in forty-seven seconds - eleven seconds ahead of second place Roanoke. But the other teams protested. Where the firemen from Roanoke and Suffolk competed in their firefighting uniforms, the Lexington team competed in special competition uniforms that consisted of red caps, garnet shirts, and black, skin-tight athletic knee pants. The other teams complained that Lexington should have shown up as firemen, not as college athletes. Some even suspected that Lexington had swelled their ranks with student athletes from the two colleges in town. However, the victory was declared legitimate since there had been nothing in the rules about specific uniforms. Because of the judges’ ruling on the uniforms, the two other teams refused to compete in the remaining competitions, but the Lexington team still wanted to run. There was pride at stake, as well as \$275 worth of prize money. The judges determined that if Lexington could beat its own time from the previous race then they could be awarded the championships. Up for the challenge, the team stepped to the line and ran the world race in forty-six seconds, then returned to the starting line and ran the same course again in forty-five seconds to win the state race. Roanoke again raised objections about the legitimacy of the victories since Lexington had raced without competition, but the judges overruled and awarded the team the \$325 for winning all three races.<sup>58</sup>

The key to Lexington’s success at the races, other than good training and athletic skill, was that every person knew his job on the team. As they raced from the starting line to the fireplug, the first two members would break the hose coupling from the reel, and as one man removed the cap from the hydrant, two others made the connection with the plug. The other ten men would pull the reel the remaining 250 yards down the course and attach the nozzle to complete the race. This strategy worked to make the Lexington into the premier racing team in the

57. *Lexington Gazette*, July 14, 1897; LFD Minutes, July 12, 1897.

58. *Rockbridge County News*, October 6, 1898; *Lexington Gazette*, October 5, 1898.



Reel #2's racing team.

state.<sup>59</sup> Successful competitions greatly enhanced company recognition and firefighter pride, and there was no doubt that Lexington had one of the most respected departments in the state at that time.

The competitive spirit of the firemen displayed at the races and athletic events occasionally made its way onto the fire ground and other aspects of company life. Hose reels raced to fires to get the credit for being the first on scene and to get the first shot at the fire. Small rivalries developed between the reels, although for the most part the company continued to work well together as a whole. Sometimes the rivalries resulted in mistakes. During a fire in the summer of 1899, Reel #2 was battling a fire when Reel #3 showed up, cut off #2's water supply, attached their own hose to the hydrant and proceeded to fight the fire themselves. The foreman of Reel #3 claimed that it was nothing personal or deliberate, just a misunderstanding of where they were supposed to hook up to the water supply. The members of Reel #2 had their own discipline problems. During one parade they decided to wear a different uniform than the rest of the company to set themselves apart,

59. *Rockbridge County News*, October 6, 1898.

which caused a controversy among the other members of the department.<sup>60</sup>

In 1895, the department was allotted an extra \$200 per year by the town council to use on equipment, uniforms, and training. Around this time the engine house was wired with electricity. Practice days were increased to a minimum of twice a month; however, the foremen of each apparatus was given the discretion to train with their men and reels at other convenient times if the scheduled practices did not work out.<sup>61</sup>

Through it all, the department still had a chance to do what it did best—fight fires. They successfully fought a fire at VMI (aided by the VMI bucket brigade), two fires at the Lexington Hotel, and a small house fire on Washington Street; during an arson fire on the corner of Nelson and Randolph, the quick response and action of the department saved the life of a rooster. Not every effort was as successful, however. During another fire at VMI, the company did not have the proper hose coupling reducers to attach to the VMI water system. Despite the department's best effort, and that of the cadet-operated hose reels and bucket brigade, the VMI carpentry shop was destroyed. To prevent the same problem from happening in the future, Gen. Scott Shipp, Superintendent of VMI, purchased three reducers (one for each reel) and gave them to the department. The department was also unable to save a local barn that was suspected to have been torched by an arsonist. A stable and dwelling house burned to the ground one night because the department did not arrive fast enough due to the lack of an alarm.<sup>62</sup>

From the beginning of 1896, Chief Pole emphasized the importance of discipline, order, and following directions on the fire ground. The training and discipline paid off. That year the department fought thirteen fires, a very high number for the town, and earned a reputation for speed and efficiency in protecting homes and property. In 1897, the town suffered only two fires, one of which involved a small house owned by an African-American family. The intense summer heat and distance to the scene did not slow the firemen and they arrived on the scene in time to extinguish the fire before much damage could be done.<sup>63</sup>

60. *Lexington Gazette*, June 24, 1895, and July 10, 1899; LFD Minutes, June 3, 1896.

61. *Lexington Gazette*, August 21, and March 11, 1895; LFD Minutes, September 9 and October 14, 1895.

62. *Rockbridge County News*, February 24, 1895; *Lexington Gazette*, December 23, January 8, April 1, March 4, August 19, and September 23, 1896; LFD Minutes, February 26 and April 13, 1896.

63. LFD Minutes, January 13, 1896; *Lexington Gazette*, August 19, 1896, and June 30, 1897.



The Fire Company was equally willing to protect the homes and property of the black citizens of Lexington as they were the homes and property of the white citizens. Sometimes because of, and other times in spite of the social conditions they faced, the black residents carved their own chapter in the history of the Lexington Fire Department. In the 1820s and 30s, slaves and Free Negroes were used to fill the ranks of the Hook and Ladder Company although, during the 1850s the citizens rejected the suggestion that slaves be used as the primary firemen of the town. Then, throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, the now freed blacks picked up the slack of the failing department and performed the bulk of the town's firefighting without the aid of the Fire Company, saving many homes and other property in the process. Regardless of their actual affiliation with the Fire Company, blacks had played a major and influential role in the town's fire history. But despite their previous contributions to the company and the town, blacks in the 1890s were not allowed to volunteer as firemen in Lexington.

Nonetheless, the black citizens of Lexington hosted a banquet for the firemen on the tenth anniversary of their 1886 reorganization. The firemen, dressed in their best uniforms, marched from the engine house to a local restaurant owned by James Humbles. The dining room was decorated with bunting, flags, fire helmets, and trumpets. After a brief welcome, the firemen were served a meal that was described as “one of the most elaborate served in Lexington for some time.” A number of speeches were given, after which the party dispersed. The dinner had been a great success and everyone left with “loud praise for the kind and courteous treatment accorded them by the colored people.”<sup>64</sup>

As successful and fun as the banquet had been, the mixing of black and white citizens provoked a controversy around Virginia. A few days after the dinner, the *Washington Post* and a few Virginia newspapers published an article asserting that whites and blacks in Lexington had “mingled on the plane of social equality” by sitting together at the same tables. Segregation had not been compromised, the *Lexington Gazette* fired back; the *Post* article had been full of fabrications and lies. Black people had neither mingled or mixed with the white firemen and other guests but merely served as waiters.<sup>65</sup>

In 1898, new technology began to benefit the department and their response time. Just before Christmas of that year a fire at VMI was reported by telephone. Although the cadets had extinguished the bulk of the fire before the company arrived, it marked the first time the department had been alerted of a fire by any means other than direct

64. *Lexington Gazette*, February 19, 1896.

65. *Ibid.*

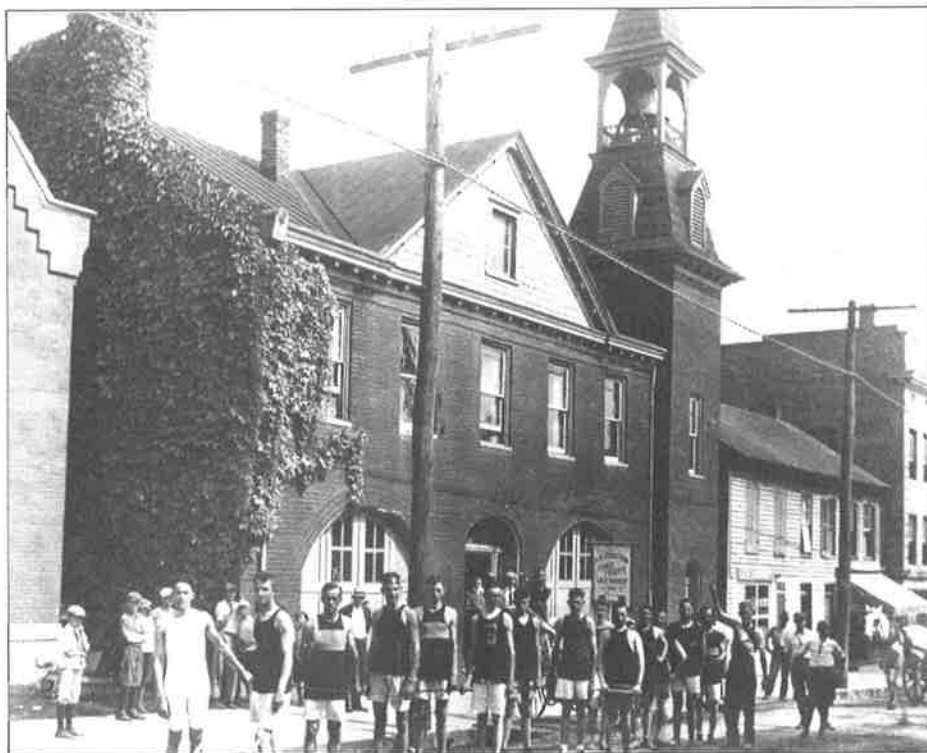
word of mouth. In the past, the initial alarm had to be shouted up and down the streets until it reached the courthouse where someone could ring the bell. Now all it took was a telephone call. Later that same night, the Fire Company responded to another fire in town. They worked so quickly and efficiently in fighting the blaze that no one in the neighborhood knew that there had been a fire until they woke up the next morning.<sup>66</sup>

When they were not fighting fires, the company focused on improving their apparatus and engine house. The town council approved the addition of ten members to the rolls, raising the total membership to sixty. Even though there were new members, much of the equipment was getting old. The engine house was not even in as good shape as the apparatus it housed. Apart from not having enough space to hold all the equipment, it was also falling apart. The disrepair became a threat to the company and all its equipment when it was found that the lock was not working and the doors could simply be pushed open. By fall, the doors were falling off their hinges and the apparatus and gear were unprotected from potential intruders. In February 1899, the town council agreed to overhaul and repair the old school house on upper Main Street (as had been suggested in 1893) for the purpose of a new engine house. The ground floor would be covered in cement to support the apparatus, while the upstairs would be converted into a large meeting room, and chambers for both the department and the town council. The building also had a bedroom with room for two firemen, so that someone was always on duty at night to ring the bell and sound the alarm. When the building was completed, fireman J. Tolley, moved in and lived at the station. A large tower was also built beside the structure to hold an alarm bell to summon the firemen.<sup>67</sup>

The announcement about the new building was made at the annual company meeting, on the last day of Chief Pole's tenure as leader of the department. Pole had successfully led the department through the 1890's and had earned the respect of his men. In addition to serving as Fire Chief, Pole also held positions as Town Sergeant and Chief of Police. He had attempted at previous elections to pass on the chief's torch by downplaying his interest and by nominating other firemen for the position in both 1897 and 1898. But the candidates declined the nominations and instead nominated Pole for another term. He was elected unanimously both years. Finally, in 1899, Pole declared that he was not a candidate

66. *Rockbridge County News*, December 22, 1898; *Lexington Gazette*, December 28, 1898.

67. LFD Minutes, April 12 and March 8, 1897, and February 20 and June 19, 1899; *Rockbridge County News*, February 23, 1899; *Lexington Gazette*, February 22, 1899.



*Lexington Fire Department racing team stands in front of the new (1899) firehouse on South Main Street.*

for re-election and stepped down after eight consecutive years as chief. Frank L. Young was elected to follow Pole and the business of the department continued. Pole continued to be a member of the department and used his experience to recommend improvements, especially in fire ground discipline and efficiency.<sup>68</sup>

Under the new chief, a committee was formed to work with the council to finalize the plan for the new engine house. The new building was completed in late June 1899 and the old station was sold for \$400. In the grand opening ceremony, the company marched from the old station to the new firehouse amid fireworks that were being shot off throughout the town. Once they arrived at the station, the building was

68. Lexington Town Council Records, November 5, 1896; *Lexington Gazette*, February 8 and 14, 1897; LFD Minutes, February 20, 1899.

blessed and the Fire Company hosted a banquet in thanks to the town council for their work in securing the new quarters.<sup>69</sup>

The company did not have long to wait after moving into their new station before they were needed. Less than a week after the move, the company fought a large fire on Nelson Street. When they arrived on scene only minutes after the alarm, they found heavy fire on the second floor and thick smoke pouring out from under the roof. The hoses were connected to the hydrants and ladders were placed at the windows. Within minutes the company had confined the fire to the room of origin. In a complete reversal from decades before, the firemen had to ask bystanders to step back and let them do their job. Several spectators were making suggestions and distracting the firemen as they were fighting the fire, prompting the department to make a statement that it is the job of the officers, not the citizens, to give orders on the fire ground. In decades past, the fire company had been so poorly skilled that they had to depend on the aid of bystanders to help. On the eve of the new century, the department had become so experienced and good at their job that they had to ask the well-intentioned citizens to step back and not get in the way.<sup>70</sup>

Through their first one hundred and four years of existence, the Lexington Fire Department had written a rough history. Throughout the nineteenth century the company was forced to reorganize over a half-dozen times, some of which were successful and others which were not. The firemen faced both the criticism and praise of the public and press, criticism for the years they were nonexistent and seemed willing to let the town burn, and praise for the heroic stands they made against fires that did threaten the town. On the eve of the new century, the Lexington Fire Department had developed into one of the best departments in Virginia. Backed by the support of the citizens, the funding of the town council, and the respect of other departments throughout the state, the company stood poised and prepared to protect the town in the beginning of the twentieth century.

69. Lexington Town Council Records, March 2 and 16, 1899; *Rockbridge County News*, July 6, 1899.

70. *Lexington Gazette*, July 12, 1899.

# History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1900–2002

William J. Matkins



THROUGHOUT the twentieth century the history of the Lexington Fire Department (LFD) was marked by growth, excellence, and dedicated service to the community, interlaced with a growing sense of professionalism. The LFD was considered one of the leading departments in the state throughout the first thirty years of the century. The fire department also gave a fair share of its membership to service in World Wars I and II. The interwar period was a time of change within the department with reorganization and less involvement with other fire departments within the state. After World War II, the department witnessed a time of revival and technological development. During the 1960s and 1970s, the department was subject to turmoil internally with different opinions clashing. In the past twenty years there has been a period of modern firefighting in reference to tactics and apparatus; however, some personal clashes continued.

The fire company's move to new quarters on Main Street in July 1899, marked the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Up to the 1920s, the fire company typically held monthly business meetings where they would discuss basic organization and future events. Discussion tended to focus on the largest event of the year, the annual reel races held at the Virginia State Firemen's Association

---

**William J. Matkins** was a Virginia Military Institute cadet and a member of the Lexington Fire Department at the time of his presentation at the Jefferson Street firehouse in Lexington on April 22, 2002. He was a second-classman, a history major, and a Dean's List student. He planned to become a professional firefighter after graduation.

(VSFA) conventions. In the first two decades of the twentieth century the department's meetings were more like those of a social club than business sessions. Most of the documented and more important meetings were the annual gatherings when elections occurred for the upcoming year. Positions filled by election at the meeting included Chief, Assistant Chief, General Foreman, Assistant Foreman, three Hose Company Captains, and Captain of the Ladder Company. During the first twenty years, the basic organization of the fire company's positions remained the same. The firemen's average age was twenty-one, but the officers were typically somewhat older and more mature.<sup>1</sup>

In 1907, at the annual firemen's banquet, General Scott Shipp, VMI Superintendent, donated one hundred dollars and thanked the firemen for their work at the 1905 VMI mess hall fire. The donation was enough to cover the banquet. Another major event in aid of the firemen came in 1909 in accordance with a bill passed by the Virginia Legislature to provide for disabled firemen. The Firemen's Relief Association was formed with Chief J. W. Seal, a local brick mason, at the helm of the local chapter. The money for the fund would come from one percent of the state fire insurance premiums.<sup>2</sup>

Other avenues of improvement in the first two decades came after large and often disastrous fires. On October 13, 1907, the most monetarily destructive fire in Lexington's history to date occurred in the Hopkins Block on Main Street across from the Presbyterian Church with a total loss between \$50,000 and \$60,000.<sup>3</sup> The fire company responded a few minutes after the initial alarm at the M. J. Hess Jewelry Store, but the fire had already gained great headway into the attic. There being no fire wall, the fire quickly jumped from building to building. The fire company fought the fire for four hours. The VMI cadets were called upon for assistance and they did efficient work in helping the firemen. Aside from the destruction of the buildings, the fire incinerated much of the historical photographic archives of the Michael Miley Studio, including many glass plate negatives of Robert E. Lee.

On January 8, 1915, the destructive Koones Block fire threatened the entire business section of town but was stopped by the fire company. It began with an explosion in the furniture store of Harrison and Hutton in the building owned by A. L. Koones at the corner of Nelson and Jefferson Streets. The fire spread across Jefferson Street to the "old Franklin Hall" and later to the H. A. Deaver and Company's store and Robinson Supply Company's office. A frame house belonging to the Jayhugh Wills

1. *Lexington (Virginia) Gazette*, February 13, 1901; July 20, 1904.

2. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1907; October 27, 1909.

3. *Ibid.*, October, 16 1907.

estate also caught fire. Most everything on the block was a complete loss or suffered major damage. Both the Buena Vista and Staunton Fire Departments were standing by to offer assistance, but the call was cancelled when the fire was finally controlled. VMI also lent their fire hose to the occasion which helped in the final extinguishing of the fire. The fire cost storeowners \$40,000 in damage.<sup>4</sup>

After the disastrous Koones Block fire, the fire company’s needs were discussed. The major ideas were for larger and better fire equipment with motor power, more fire hydrants, building codes and inspectors, sprinkler systems in large buildings, and chemical extinguishers for the company.<sup>5</sup> In April 1917, the city purchased a new “motor” fire truck: a forty-horsepower LaFrance with a forty-gallon chemical tank, two hand-operated chemical extinguishers, and twelve hundred feet of hose.<sup>6</sup>

America’s involvement in World War I caused twenty-seven members of the fire company to serve their country. Because of the large number of active members in the company, however, the department’s efficiency was unaffected. In April 1918, at the fire company’s urging, the *Lexington Gazette* published an article reminding its readers how the fire bell functioned and what the different signals meant: one tap was Ward 1—the Southeast part of town including Lexington Presbyterian Church; two taps was Ward 2—the Southwest including the firehouse; three taps was Ward 3—the Northeast with the Courthouse; and four taps was Ward 4—the Northwest including the Rockbridge National (now Sun-Trust) Bank.<sup>7</sup> Thus, both firemen and citizens would know the general location of the fire and confusion would somewhat decrease.

As it had been in the late nineteenth century, perhaps the most important focus to the Lexington Fire Company in the first three decades of the twentieth century was the annual reel race at the Virginia State Firemen’s Association convention. Planning for the reel race was a year-round activity with final preparations beginning at least a month in advance when practices were held every day. The reel race itself included fifteen-member teams from fire companies across the state. The race consisted of the teams having to pull the hose reel wagons for 150 yards, attach a length of hose to the fireplug, and successfully throw water. A good time was between thirty to thirty-five seconds.<sup>8</sup> Lexington was consistently one of the better companies in the races, which demonstrated their expertise, training in handling the fire equipment, and

4. *Ibid.*, January 15, 1915.

5. *Ibid.*, January 21, 1915.

6. *Ibid.*, April 18, 1917.

7. *Ibid.*, March 31, 1920; April 17, 1918.

8. *Ibid.*, August 13, 1902; July 20, 1904.

physical conditioning. After two successes at the 1906 convention, the town greeted the company and there was a great party held in town demonstrating the support the townspeople gave the company. In 1913, the townspeople and the VMI Band greeted the company. However, upon their return in 1919, only their fellow firemen greeted the fire company, showing that perhaps the reel races were not as important to the citizens as they once were.<sup>9</sup> But, as a whole, the town supported the fire company, and the public was proud of the fame that the company brought to Lexington.

On August 23, 1921, the town of Lexington was swamped with eight hundred firefighters as the company hosted the convention for the first time. There was a grand parade with the Lexington Fire Company at the head of a column in which all of the fire companies marched from VMI around town and ended back at VMI. That night, seventy-seven members of the Lexington Fire Company in dress uniform marched from the firehouse to dinner at W&L's Doremus Gymnasium where a banquet was held for the convention and the firemen.<sup>10</sup>

Fire Prevention Week originated from the great fire in Chicago on October 9, 1871, which killed more than 250 people and left 100,000 homeless. In 1920, President Wilson declared that October 9 would be the National Fire Prevention Day, and, in 1922, it was expanded to a week. Since 1925, it has been proclaimed by every president as a national observance week. The Lexington Fire Company was a few years behind some of the rest of the country in using this week, and it was only in October 1927 that the first Fire Prevention Week was held in Lexington.<sup>11</sup> The firefighters were given literature to hand out to the public with basic fire prevention tips. The Kiwanis and the Rotary Clubs discussed fire prevention at their meetings and paid tribute to the LFC for their efficiency. During Fire Prevention Week in March 1928, Chief Seal inspected local businesses and residences, suggesting the removal of fire-hazards. He also urged people, especially business owners, to be wary of the potential of fire. The inspections and dissemination of information continued throughout the period on an annual basis, assisting in fire avoidance.

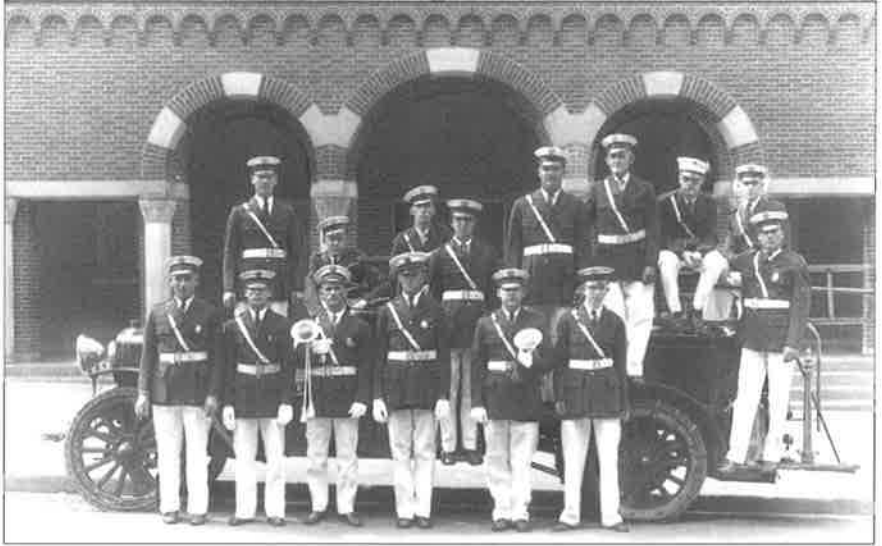
Through the early and mid 1920s, membership and organization remained at the high levels they had reached in the century's early years. In January 1921, the fire company purchased and began to use gas

9. *Ibid.*, August 29, 1906; September 3, 1919.

10. *Ibid.*, August 23, 1921.

11. The History of Fire Prevention Week, <http://www.nfpa.org>, October 2001; *Lexington Gazette*, October 11 and 18, 1927.





*Firemen in the 1920s in front of Trinity Methodist Church, which was beside the South Main Street firehouse..*

masks to aid in interior fire attacks.<sup>12</sup> The gas masks allowed the fire fighters to enter a structure and fight the fire from within, which in turn increased their efficiency in fighting fires. In 1926, the fire company purchased a Hudson Ladder Truck, dubbed “No. 2,” with five hundred feet of hose and a full compliment of extension ladders and other miscellaneous equipment.

Although, conditions were improving and new equipment was being added, in 1929 the town council believed that the company needed to be more efficient, not just effective. Thus, in February 1929, the town council and mayor passed a new town fire ordinance that disbanded the existing organization and created a new one. The fire company, not understanding the new ordinance, formed a special committee to inquire about the message and reasons for the change. The mayor responded, “Anyone can understand it . . . you must be dumb if you do not.” The LFC was indignant and many wanted the whole company to resign. Chief Seal interpreted the ordinance as disbanding the company and felt it was a personal attack on him by the police chief and town

12. *Lexington, Gazette*, January 5, 1921.

council. The town council asserted that they desired “to effect more efficient organization for the fire company.”<sup>13</sup>

Under this more formal organization there would be three citizens appointed by the council to be the fire commissioners in charge of the department, and they would answer directly to the town council and mayor. The board of fire commissioners was directly responsible for the organization, governing of conduct, and overall efficiency of the company. They were also responsible for recommending officers to be forwarded to the mayor and council for approval. The creation and designation of fire police also occurred, with the fire police having the same power as regular police when on duty. All the fire company’s equipment would be owned by the town. The company’s by-laws were subject to approval by the council and mayor. The LFC’s funding would be turned over to the town treasurer, and the company treasurer would be subject to audit at any time by the town finance committee. No other fire company could legally exist in the town.<sup>14</sup> The fire company was henceforth a branch of the town government.

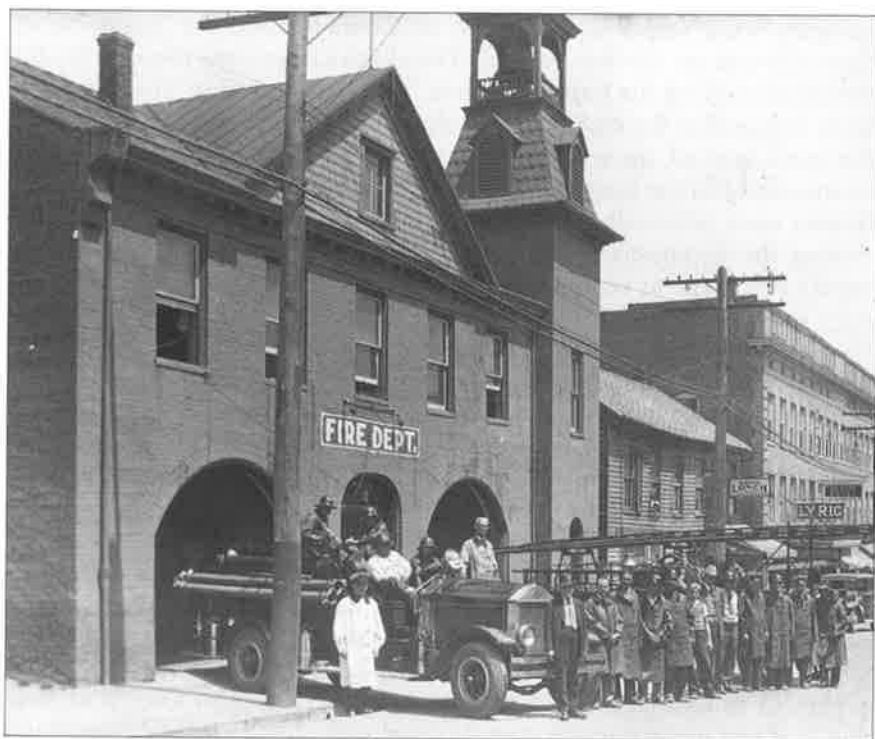
The fire commissioners chose C. E. Woodward, a Buick dealer, as the new chief and he was approved by the town council. This became common practice. Former Chief Seal signed up with the new company to keep the old members fighting fires, and fifty men from the old company signed with the new. In March 1929, a month after the fire company was reorganized, a fire at Police Chief King’s house occurred while he was out of town. The initial response by the company quickly extinguished the fire, but a hidden fire in the walls again called out the firemen. Their response was further delayed because the clacker on the fire bell had somehow had broken between the times of the two fires. Upon the men’s arrival the fire was serious, but it was eventually extinguished after it had already caused over \$1,000 in damage. The fire’s cause was not discovered.<sup>15</sup>

Because of an increased budget, new apparatus and equipment was bought as the company came under the more centralized command of the town council. In August 1929, the Lexington Fire Company received their first “modern” piece of fire apparatus. Previously, budget constraints and technology had made this impossible. The new fire engine was an American LaFrance type 92 with a six-cylinder motor at 106-horsepower. The pump was rated at 600 gallons per minute (compared to pumps on modern firefighting apparatus which typically rate at 1,000

13. Town Council Minutes, February 1929, City Hall, Lexington, Virginia; *Lexington Gazette*, February 19 and 26, 1929.

14. Town Council Minutes, February 1929.

15. *Lexington Gazette*, March 5, 1929.



*The Fire Department and its equipment in the early 1930s.*

to 1,250 gpm). It was equipped with two hand-operated chemical extinguishers, two ten-foot lengths of hard suction hose (used for pulling drafts at dry hydrants and other non-pressurized water sources), a twenty-foot extension ladder, a twelve-foot roof ladder, a pike bar (used for pulling ceilings and walls), and 1,200 feet of two-and-a-half-inch hose. The Lexington Fire Company finally had a modern and efficient fire engine.<sup>16</sup>

In January 1930, Woodward was reelected and twenty-eight members transferred from active to reserve membership, possibly annoyed with the progress of the company or the changes that had occurred.<sup>17</sup> With his reelection, Woodward reorganized the firemen into five divisions: chemical tank and extinguishers, electricians, plug men, nozzle men, and drivers. The members in the chemical tank and extinguishers

16. *Ibid.*, August 27, 1929

17. *Lexington Gazette*, January 6, 1930

category were responsible for the maintenance and the operation of those devices on the fire ground. The electricians were responsible for electrical work on the building, trucks, and electrical fires. The plug men were responsible for making the hydrant connection with the hose when the truck arrived on scene. The nozzle men were responsible for the maintenance of the nozzles and fire suppression when on a fire call. The drivers were responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the trucks and driving the apparatus to the scene. These new categories were Woodward's first steps to reorganize the company. He then began a disciplinary movement within the company, dismissing twenty-one members for non-attendance at the regular monthly business meetings. Woodward continued his reorganization over the next several years.

The Lexington Fire Company's name was changed to Lexington Fire Department in September 1931. Other changes included in the reorganization were an increase in training, which originated with the need to be proficient with new equipment and to assure overall efficiency on the fire ground. Specifically, instruction was needed in the use of the chemical extinguishers and the gas masks, and first aid classes were instituted to increase the department's ability to give aid to injured people on scene. The first aid class is the first reference to any organized emergency medical assistance being provided and can be assumed to be the precursor to today's first aid crew or rescue squad (now known as Rescue 1). Even more training was obtained with the first attendance of the department at a firemen's school held in Clifton Forge on September 18, 1933.<sup>18</sup>

The "fun" conventions had been superceded by the need for professional training, a very important aspect in firefighting which greatly increases the ability and proficiency of fire departments. Annually there was a first aid class and fire school held either in a nearby town or "in house"; this was aside from any minor training sessions that would have been held separately by the department. The increased training schedule demonstrated the motivation of the Lexington Fire Department to improve as firefighters and first aiders to better serve the community. The department was directing more attention to its involvement with its own community and its ability and dedication to fighting local conflagrations. Along with training, the equipment also had to be up to standards. In August 1933, the fire department bought a one-and-a-half ton Dodge truck equipped with a slide-in pump and tank; it was to be used as an attack/brush truck.<sup>19</sup> (Typically, attack/brush trucks are smaller

18. Lexington Fire Department Meeting Minutes, September 1931, March 6, 1933, and September 4, 1933, in archives of the LFD, Lexington, Virginia.

19. *Ibid.*, August 7, 1933.

than fire engines, allowing them to be more maneuverable and more efficient at handling smaller fires.) Since 1929, the department had witnessed the addition of new apparatus and equipment bringing the final count to two fire engines, one ladder truck, and a brush truck; they were well equipped to handle any fire. These additions may have been “payments” for the town’s partial take-over of the department.

On December 16, 1934, two fires on one night at nearly the same time tested the resources of the department. Washington and Lee’s Tucker Memorial Hall and the Higgins & Irvine planing mill and lumberyard were destroyed, with arson being suspected in both fires. The Higgins & Irvine fire was started on the main building’s front porch, and Tucker Hall, the W&L Law building, had two fires started on opposite sides of the building—front and rear. The Higgins & Irvine fire was called in about 2 A.M. and had spread throughout the lumberyard and facility when the department got there. The fire was so hot that houses on McLaughlin Street caught fire several times. The loss at the lumberyard was estimated at \$35,000. W&L’s Dean William Moreland discovered the fire at Tucker Hall at approximately 3:30 A.M., and because Lexington was already on the lumberyard fire, calls were immediately sent out to the Buena Vista and Staunton Fire Departments. Both departments made record time and Buena Vista had water on the fire in twelve minutes and Staunton in sixty minutes. By the time the departments arrived, the fire had already become fully involved and the building was gutted. The *County News* reported, “A number of VMI cadets” aided the departments in their battle. The estimated worth of the W&L building was \$50,000 and the 10,000 volumes destroyed in the Law library were worth \$16,000.<sup>20</sup> No arrests appear to have been made in connection with the two fires.

On January 7, 1935, former Chief J. W. Seal was reappointed by the town council, replacing C. E. Woodward. Seal continued the increase of training, improving the fire departments’ efficiency. He was also instrumental in helping in organizing the First Aid Crew on February 27, 1935. Previously, emergency medical services had been provided by firefighters who had taken the first First Aid class in March 1933. Lexington’s first aid crew was in response to Julian Wise’s movement in Roanoke, which in 1928 had founded the first rescue squad in the coun-

20. *Rockbridge County News*, December 20, 1934.

21. LFD Minutes, January 7, 1935, March 6, 1933, and April 6, 1936; *Rockbridge County News*, January 10 and March 7, 1935, and April 24, 1936; *Roanoke (Virginia) Times*, February 10, 2002.



*During and after the Tucker Memorial Hall fire of December 16, 1934.*



try. The first aid crew’s primary duties were to assist with fire department injuries. Lexington’s first aid crew was sworn into the fire department with a captain, E. L. Graham, a lieutenant, C. W. R. Dunlap, and nine members with membership capped at fifteen.<sup>21</sup> The first aid crew would continue to coexist with the department for the majority of the century until they eventually became a separate entity in the mid-1980s.

In July 1937, after Chief J. W. Seal’s death, E. W. Bare, a painting contractor, took the helm. He immediately proposed that firefighters receive fifty cents for every chimney fire or false alarm and one dollar for actual fire alarms—i.e., the more serious calls. On the afternoon of July 21, 1937, the department’s first major fire call on this new pay system occurred at the Warner Brothers “New Theater” on Nelson Street. A janitor from the Lyric Theater first discovered smoke at the rear of the New Theater at 12:15 P.M. The fire department arrived shortly thereafter, but because of dense smoke and intense heat they were unable to enter the building. The department was praised for saving the surrounding buildings, especially, the Sheridan Building. The Buena Vista and Staunton Fire Departments also gave aid, and the fire was eventually extinguished. The origin of the fire was unknown. In March of the following year, Warner Brothers opened the still-existing State Theater on the site.<sup>22</sup>

In May 1938, a fire book was instituted for payment purposes; firefighters had to sign it after returning to the firehouse from an incident, a policy that still exists, although call sheets are now used rather than a “fire book.” The department ran forty-five calls in 1938, but property damage by fire was a mere \$875. The majority of calls were chimney and grass fires, but also, for the first time, the department began responding to auto accidents. In 1939, twenty-six calls resulted in \$1,652.50 in damage. In late November 1940, the first recorded fatality in a Lexington fire occurred at the R. E. Lee Hotel.<sup>23</sup>

A major purchase by the department that still exists today was a fire siren alarm in April 1941.<sup>24</sup> The department installed it on top of the Rockbridge Motor Company’s building (now the Woody Building) at the corner of Main and Preston Streets because of its central location and flat roof; the firehouse was not suitable because of its angled roof. The system was purchased by the fire commissioners for \$400. Every

22. LFD Minutes, July 6, 1937; *Rockbridge County News*, July 23, 1936; *News-Gazette*, January 17, 2001.

23. LFD Minutes, May 1, 1938; *Rockbridge County News*, January 5, 1939, January 4, 1940, and November 28, 1940.

24. *Rockbridge County News*, April 10, 1941.

day, the siren sounded at noon by Western Union time, and it was said that it could be heard fourteen miles away.

With the growing threat of war in 1941, Rockbridge County, along with the rest of Virginia, began the Fire Defense Program, which would provide fire protection in the event of air raids. In March 1942, Lexington's Auxiliary Fire Department, formed for the Fire Defense Program, had its first meeting. It was determined that in case of a raid the siren would sound for two minutes, pause for ten seconds, then sound for another two minutes. Truck One would then report to the Rockbridge Motor Company, and the men would assemble there on foot. Truck Two would proceed to the town parking lot on Jefferson Street and the second group of men would assemble there. Both groups would remain at their designated locations for fifteen minutes. A "colored" auxiliary was also formed with seven men for assistance when needed, the first time since the Civil War that Lexington's African-American community was enlisted for service by the department.<sup>25</sup> It is unknown whether the system was ever used or tested.

A tragic fire in December 1942 demonstrated that the town still had not entirely solved its water delivery problems. A two-story house on Diamond Hill (located on Randolph Street behind the present-day Cameron Hall) caught fire and four black children of the Chester Wright family, all girls and aged from three to thirteen, died from asphyxiation on the second floor of the house. The fire department was hampered in their efforts to extinguish the blaze because the house was located a thousand feet from the nearest fireplug. The firemen had to drag the hose uphill from the plug before they could apply water. Within a month, the town council voted to extend the water main up Diamond Hill to provide better fire protection.<sup>26</sup>

In November, the fire department saw action with a fire that destroyed the O. D. Compton Freight Station on Jefferson Street. There was some delay in the response of the department because the call was not turned in through the phone system as usual. Word was more than likely passed to a firefighter or to the firehouse itself, then the alarm was sounded. By the time the department arrived, the fire had gained great headway and was unable to be checked before it had destroyed the building. No summary was given for the calls of 1944; the freight station fire was the only major fire that occurred.

Nineteen forty-seven was, beyond the total of sixty-two calls, a progressive and busy year. In late February, the town council authorized a contract with the county that would allow the Lexington Fire Department

25. *Ibid.*, July 24, 1941, and March 5, 1942.

26. *Ibid.*, December 17, 1942, and February 4, 1943.





*The Quonset hut on South Jefferson Street about 1950. This building still exists as the S&S Auto Repair Shop at 760 South Main Street—within sight of the 2002 firehouse.*

to store and operate the county’s new \$10,000 fire truck. The fire department provided a two-man skeleton crew and training for firefighters in the county. For the first time, Rockbridge County had a firefighting system of its own.<sup>27</sup> In the autumn of 1947, the town council granted the department’s request for a new firehouse to replace the “old Matthew House” on Main Street, which had been the department’s home for nearly fifty years. The new Quonset hut was to be on South Jefferson Street to the rear of the old firehouse in the town parking lot. It would be forty feet wide and sixty feet long with storage for the three fire trucks and the first aid vehicle. The reason for the move was because of the safety hazard that the old firehouse created. The Quonset hut would only cost \$7,000 but still be roomy enough for the needs of the department. When the new fire station was completed, the old Main Street building was demolished to expand the town’s public parking lot.<sup>28</sup>

27. *Ibid.*, February 27, 1947.

28. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1947; Town Council Minutes, March 4, 1948, September 27, 1947, and March 4, 1948.

The most important fire of the 1940s—and one of the most significant of the century to date—was the Stuart Building fire on Friday, December 16, 1949, that did approximately \$500,000 in damage to structures at the corner of Main and Washington Streets. The heart of the fire was in the Adair-Hutton portion of the Shields building on Washington Street, but the firemen (including companies from Buena Vista and Staunton) were able to contain the blaze. The Withrow building on the northwest corner of Washington Street suffered damage from exposure and at one time caught fire, but it was quickly extinguished. The courthouse suffered damage from the intense heat, and telephone service was disrupted. The heart of Lexington came close to being destroyed.<sup>29</sup>

In the postwar years, the Lexington Fire Department became especially involved with the local Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, whose founding pastor and the LFD's chaplain, Reverend David T. Lauderdale, was an ardent recruiter for the department. He served the department for twenty-nine years from 1940 to 1969. His self-created duties were to open the meetings with a prayer, give the oath to new members and officers, visit sick members, and write resolutions for deceased members. In 1965, he was voted fireman of the year.<sup>30</sup>

Normally around Christmas, the department took the responsibility of giving \$50 in donations to the needy. Beginning in 1954, the department increased its ties with the ARP Church, giving annually a fifty-dollar donation to the Reverend Mr. Lauderdale, to distribute to those he thought were in the most need of the financial assistance. Also beginning in 1954, a committee was formed on the department to restore old toys to be handed out at Christmas by the LFD to the needy children of Lexington. This charity continued until 1961, when it was decided at the December monthly meeting, for reasons not recorded, that it would be discontinued.<sup>31</sup>

Along with annual donations, the department began fire demonstrations and continued Fire Prevention Week to interact with and demonstrate to the town their march to professionalism. Beginning in April 1952, the department held occasional public demonstrations of fire-fighting techniques. These sessions served as good training for the department in the sense that the town was watching and this increased the pressure to do the training well. Preplanning or preincident survey was another provision of fire prevention. A preincident survey is a design of the building to include water systems, stand pipes, means of

29. *Rockbridge County News*, December 22, 1949.

30. LFD Minutes, December 1, 1950; *News-Gazette*, November 23, 1976.

31. LFD Minutes, December 6, 1954, November 1, 1954, and December 4, 1961.

egress, and other basic information. Included in preplanning can be possible scenarios about what to do in case of a fire. In September 1952, the new Adair-Hutton building and the R. E. Lee Hotel were preplanned by the department's officers.<sup>32</sup> Fire prevention allowed the department to teach the public the dangers of fire and how to prevent such occurrences.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s improvements continued in standard operating procedure (SOP) and by-laws changes. At the July 6, 1953, meeting, for example, the by-laws were changed to subject new members to a ninety-day probation period. Furthermore, fines for nonattendance at meetings were eliminated.<sup>33</sup> Numerous changes to the SOPs in the 1950s and 1960s were made to increase the department's efficiency, and they were evidence of its growing professionalism.

Improvements in training and equipment occurred continuously. In August 1954, for example, the fire department received a water truck-tanker to be used for water support for the county truck in rural areas. In February 1959, new fire gear was bought, including coats, boots, and helmets.<sup>34</sup> Then, the gear consisted of boots and three-quarter-length coats for protection from fire. (Now, firefighters are covered from head to toe with insulated boots, pants, coat, a Nomex fireproof hood, and a helmet.) In September 1959, a new Mack truck was received as the second county truck to replace the older counterpart. The department was well equipped to aid the county in rural firefighting and to protect the town.

Extracurricular activities shifted from races to parades, where different companies competed to determine who had the best appearing trucks and firefighters. Only once in the postwar period did the department send a race team to the Virginia state convention. In August 1954, LFD's racing team went to the VSFA convention, but it failed to place and no further effort was made toward raising teams thereafter. Technology and the arrival of motorized apparatus led to racing's extinction. Lexington regularly attended parades throughout this period, however, including Fairfield, Rockbridge Baths, and Harrisonburg.<sup>35</sup>

The department's attention in the next thirty years shifted more to its primary role of firefighting, as evidenced by two large fires in the 1960s. On April 24, 1963, the historic Natural Bridge Hotel caught fire, origin unknown. It was the largest fire in the county since the 1949 Adair-Hutton blaze. It raged out of control after 30,000 gallons of water

32. *Ibid.*, April 7, September 8, and October 6, 1952.

33. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1953.

34. *Ibid.*, February 2, 1959.

35. *Ibid.*, August 2, 1954, and 1958, 1960, and 1961.

from the hotel's water tank failed to stop it. Through the use of tankers and water pumped from the nearby Cedar Creek, the fire was eventually brought under control. The hotel was one of the county's major employers, and because of its value as a tourist attraction, plans to rebuild were begun immediately. The damage from the fire amounted to \$500,000, but the Lexington and Glasgow fire departments were still able to save three out of five hotel wings. The second big fire occurred early Saturday morning on September 4, 1964, when the Delta Tau Delta fraternity house on Lee Avenue caught fire for a second time—the first time being April 23, 1949. Unlike the earlier fire, this time the Delta house was a total loss. Forty-three members attended, almost the whole company, but poor water pressure at the hydrants negated the large number fire fighters who were also aided by the South River and Buena Vista Fire Departments. It was the worst fire in the town since the Adair-Hutton blaze.<sup>36</sup>

To help cure the water pressure problems, in September 1963, the city water department added new high-pressure pumps on Providence Hill that increased pressure by forty pounds per second in the portion of town south of Houston and Jordan Streets. Another addition to Lexington's fire system came in October 1963, with the new alerting system, transmitter, and generator. This would also ease the town's sleeping problems at night by silencing the sirens. Twenty-eight radios were bought to install in firefighters' houses, and ten were added in the first aid crew members' houses. Chief Craft stated that neither agency would receive the others' calls, and the members outside of the siren's radius could now receive the calls.<sup>37</sup>

In March 1966, the new city charter for Lexington was passed and the Lexington Fire Department became the city fire department. Along with this new status, the department had also outgrown its existing firehouse requiring a new one. In May 1967, the plans for the new firehouse were accepted by the city council. The new brick building costing \$120,000 was to be built on the same site as the existing structure and would span two stories with a total square footage of eleven thousand feet. The old firehouse, the Quonset hut, was disassembled and moved. It now stands behind the Rockbridge Farmers' Co-op on South Main Street and houses the S & S Auto Repair Shop.<sup>38</sup>

In the summer of 1970, Arthur Wallace became the first African American to be voted into full membership. Wallace later recalled that his acceptance by the LFD was "rough." The chief, Earl Hall, had asked

36. *News-Gazette*, April 24, 1963, and September 9, 1964.

37. *Ibid.*, September 1963, and October 23, 1963.

38. *Ibid.*, March 16, 1966, and May 24, 1967.

him to apply, but he was not accepted. He was asked to apply again, and this time he was voted in sixteen to fifteen. At the next election of officers, Chief Hall was voted out and Sam Donald took his place. On one call, soon after being voted on, a white man would not get on the truck because he was on it. The man was suspended, and after that the department was somewhat more open to his existence as a member. He was positioned as chief nozzleman for three years, and functioned as one of the main drivers of the truck throughout his membership. After he broke the ice, no other black men had as difficult a time getting in. In July 1975, Wallace was elected second assistant chief, the first time a black man had held an elective position in the department. Arthur Wallace still works with the department as a member of the fire police who are responsible for maintaining traffic safety and crowd control.<sup>39</sup> In October 1977, another black man, Richard Lee, was elected to full membership, and twenty-five years later his younger daughter, Pamela, became a full member.

In the late 1970s, further changes occurred within the department's organization. In March 1977 the membership age for regular firemen, which had been raised from eighteen to twenty-one in July 1960, reverted to eighteen. In March 1978, the junior fire department was again created for youths from the ages of fourteen to eighteen. Despite a seeming shortage of applicants, certain men were consistently turned down for membership. Part of this was because of a by-law requiring members of the department to be residents of Lexington. Another reason was a reluctance to permit W&L and VMI students to become members.<sup>40</sup>

Late in 1980, county lawmakers debated whether they should buy a \$100,000 piece of apparatus for the Buena Vista Fire Department, and if so, what would the other companies receive? The county decided to buy the truck for Buena Vista, but they also felt a “moral obligation” to support the other companies by raising their yearly allowance from \$6,000 to \$10,000. A year later, the membership voted Payne Poindexter in as Chief by a large margin; he was the first black man ever to hold the position. Chief Poindexter stated that he “wanted a sense of unity in the Fire Department that has been plagued by some dissension.” After a week as Chief, Poindexter stated that the atmosphere at the department was better and that he would work with his men “to do the job.” As if to award the department for their newfound conviction, in January 1982, the city

39. *Ibid.*, July 16, 1975; LFD Minutes, November 2, 1970; interview of Arthur Wallace by Joe Matkins, November 13, 2001.

40. LFD Minutes, July 7, 1960, March, 1977, March 6, 1978, April 3, 1978, and September 10, 1979.

council approved the purchase of a new truck at the cost of \$128,988 from the American LaFrance Company. The council had \$43,000 already earmarked, and they borrowed the remaining \$85,988. This new fire engine was an addition, not a replacement. Five years prior, the city council had a professional consulting firm investigate the equipment of the department, and the results showed that a new piece would be needed in five years, so this purchase was right on schedule. In June, the new custom-built Class A engine arrived—it still exists today as the third engine.<sup>41</sup>

In July 1984, a process began which would lead to the eventual separation of the first aid crew from the fire department. A study was begun by the city for a new and separate squad building or possible fire department. In May 1985, a site was finally found for the first aid crew, and the new squad building was finally built on Spotswood Drive in 1987.<sup>42</sup>

A new era in the fire department began in the mid-1980s with still more emphasis placed on professionalism and organization. Three permanent committees were formed: fundraising, training, and entertainment. A fund drive in June 1987 brought in \$19,589 with a response from a third of the city businesses. The department had also entered the modern era of training with many different classes being held over the next decade that are still offered today. They were firefighter I, II, III, hazardous materials awareness and operations, EVOC—emergency vehicle operators course, Instructor I and II, EMT (emergency medical technician), aerial operations, Incident Command System, and many other smaller classes. A new mandate was also created where each member had to have thirty in-house training hours and thirty hours of state classes. The push for greater professionalism did not go over well with some members. Nevertheless, the march toward greater professionalism continued as three shifts were created to answer fire calls. In December 1987, the county finally agreed to purchase a new American LaFrance Engine for service in the county.<sup>43</sup>

In June 1989, Butch Hall was elected chief, beginning a long tour of duty. The key issues during his tenure were state regulations, pay to firefighters, maintaining discipline in the department, and the acquisition of new equipment. One of his first moves was to remove any friction that existed within the department, and at the July meeting he stated that all disputes on the fire scene needed to be handled by officers, not individ-

41. *News-Gazette*, December 23, 1980, December 22, 1981, January 13, 1982, and June 9, 1982.

42. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1985.

43. LFD Minutes, June 1, September 7, 1987, November 2, and December 7, 1987.

uals. “We need to pull together,” he told the firemen. By late 1990, Hall could state that the “company seems to be coming together, but not totally and those who are not can go elsewhere.” In December, a by-law change was unanimously approved that would allow the department to conduct business at its meetings even if there were not enough members for a voting quorum.<sup>44</sup> Basically, this change represented the department overcoming a lack of interest and involvement from its members. Such improvisation would reoccur many times in the years to come as the membership continued to dwindle not so much from a lack of interest of the existing members but a lack of prospective members within the community.

Gender issues were resolved in August 1991, when Wanda Hall, the chief’s wife, was voted on as the first female by a vote of 19 to 3. In June 1992, Wanda Hall was elected to the office of treasurer, so the department, as it had done with race issue, accepted its members as people based upon their abilities and not their race or gender. The long-existing Ladies’ Auxiliary had ceased to function by the 1990s.<sup>45</sup>

The membership of the fire department dwindled in the 1990s, and out of necessity the department opened its rolls to the city’s college students. In November 1993, three VMI cadets, all with previous firefighting experience, applied for membership. However, for some reason none of the cadets were voted on—they may have withdrawn their applications. Another way to acquire more fire fighters came with mobilization of the juniors. Five juniors above the age of sixteen were allowed to ride the trucks on fire calls after completion of Firefighter I class. In May 1994, a VMI cadet with prior experience, Scott Shropshire, applied for membership and in June he was voted on as a six-month probationary member. Another VMI cadet was voted on as probationary member in July. In April 1995, two more cadets were voted on to probationary status. Another VMI cadet and the second female were accepted as probationary members in November 1995, and in May 1996, the cadet was voted into full membership.<sup>46</sup> One problem with students as firefighters, of course, is that after four years or other events, they are no longer available. Since Scott Shropshire in 1994, ten VMI cadets and two W&L students have been voted on to the department as at least probationary members.

The long fought for emergency 911 central dispatch system went online in February 1995. Finally, the county and the cities of Lexington

44. *Ibid.*, June and July 1989 and December 3, 1990.

45. *Ibid.*, June 1, 1992.

46. LFD Minutes, November 1, 1993, January 3, 1994, May and June, 1994, July 11, 1994, November 6, 1995, and May 6, 1996.



*The newest firehouse, completed in the October 2002, on South Main Street.*

and Buena Vista had a modern dispatching system which would increase the coordination of the departments and in turn increase each department's efficiency. Also from the county, starting on June 1, 1995, the fire department's members would begin to receive \$2.50 per call run in the county.<sup>47</sup>

Beginning in April 1994, the city council and fire department agreed that a new building was necessary and construction was scheduled for 1997 at an estimated cost of \$1,000,000. Debates over the site delayed construction until 2001, and the new facility on South Main Street was completed in October 2002. With a new firehouse, thoroughly modern equipment and training, and the contentious issues of race and gender of members largely settled, the Lexington Fire Department was ready for its third century and the new millennium.

47. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1995.



# The “New Deal” Comes to Rockbridge

David W. Coffey



On the 29th of October 1929, Wall Street and the larger financial community were stunned by a sudden, precipitous drop in the value of shares of stock traded on the New York Stock Exchange. “Black Tuesday” (as the day was known) was, however, more a symptom of the great economic disaster which was to befall the nation than it was a cause of the Great Depression.

In Rockbridge County, far removed from the New York financial world, it was not until 1932 that the full force of the Great Depression was felt. There was little discussion of an economic crisis in the pages of the *Rockbridge County News* during 1930 and 1931. In the issue of September, 3, 1931, for example, there was a long story recounting the triumphant moment the previous evening when Lexington became the first town in the state to have natural gas available for piping into homes and businesses. On the evening of September 2, the town had been treated to quite a sight—two upright gas pipes on the property of the Harrington Waddell High School had been ignited by the mayor. In the same issue of the *County News* there was discussion of plans to gain direct bus service to Richmond via Lynchburg and concerns were expressed about discharges from the Stillwater Worsted Mills in Goshen polluting the North (Maury) River. Plus, one of Lexington’s own, the Rev. David T. Lauderdale had won a \$2000 prize in a “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” contest; his winning entry was the story of a Kansas City man, who

---

**David W. Coffey**, who teaches history at the Virginia Military Institute, is a graduate of Davidson College and holds a masters degree in U.S. history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has completed his course work for a doctorate in history at the University of Virginia. A long-time member of the Society’s Board, he presented this paper on July 22, 2002, at the Effinger Fire House.

being both blind and without hands, used his tongue to read the Bible in Braille. (Lauderdale had met this remarkable fellow while he himself was studying Braille at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.) It was reported that the Rev. Mr. Lauderdale had given half the prize to the subject of his story; the rest he had donated to the building fund of the Lexington Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.<sup>1</sup>

The next issue of the *County News* included several “fillers” indicating that the Depression was affecting other communities, if not Lexington: in Kentucky, ministers were accepting peaches as compensation for performing marriages due to the lack of available cash; Morris Harvey College in West Virginia was allowing students to pay tuition in farm products; and the International Harvester Company was willing to take wheat at the rate of 75 cents per bushel as payment on equipment purchases.<sup>2</sup>

But, by 1932, the Depression had arrived in Rockbridge. One of the first indications in the local newspaper that the Depression had at last reached the county can be found in its reporting on the 1932 County Fair. Attendance at the event was down 25 percent from the previous year, and “visitors to the fair this season showed greater inclination to stand and watch others enjoy these rides and concessions than to participate.”<sup>3</sup>

Another indication of the county’s belated realization of the economic crisis came with the presidential election. In November 1932, the *County News* reported that Lexington and the county had stated an overwhelming preference for Franklin D. Roosevelt over Herbert Hoover in “the largest vote ever cast in this county.” FDR carried the county by more than a two-to-one margin; in the preceding 1928 election, the Democratic nominee, Alfred E. Smith, had won the county by a mere one hundred votes. The *County News* noted that the Socialist candidate, Norman Thomas, had received twenty-five votes, all but three from the town of Lexington, and that “a large proportion of the colored vote went to Roosevelt.”<sup>4</sup>

In November 1932, concurrent with the presidential election, Lexington had launched its annual Red Cross–Welfare Committee–Children’s Clinic solicitation. The *County News* editorialized about both the depth of the need and the benefits which were to be provided to the worthy recipients:

1. *Rockbridge County News*, September 3, 1931. Additional information about the prize received by the Rev. Mr. Lauderdale was provided by Mary Lauderdale Sorrells.

2. *Ibid.*, September 10, 1932.

3. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1932.

4. *Ibid.*, November 10, 1932.

The Lexington Welfare Committee . . . is practically keeping alive 250 families . . . with a minimum assistance of \$1.50 worth of groceries and a bag of flour once every two weeks. An average of more than twenty-five calls a day from people actually in want are made at the office but these have to be sifted and selected and only the worst and worthiest cases helped because of lack of funds. Thirteen helpless transients [have been] given a nights lodging during September.<sup>5</sup>

Over sixty Lexington citizens were listed as solicitors for the drive under the chairmanship of Walter L. Foltz , and they hoped to raise \$5000. The Red Cross campaign was to encompass not just Lexington, but the entire county, and, as the newspaper noted, the Red Cross had already poured into the county four times as much in flour and cloth.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the community drive fell \$1500.00 short of its goal. The *County News* attempted to shame its readers for their parsimony:

There is an idea prevalent among a certain few that the need in the community has been exaggerated. A visit to the welfare worker, Miss Barclay, at 9 o'clock in the morning would soon clear this fallacy. Even as early in the winter as this, they stand together, pinched with cold, holding their ragged garments around them, their little one's eyes looking wistfully out of thin, hungry faces.<sup>7</sup>

By November, the Lexington Town Council, aware of the large number of citizens in its midst who had no work, and probably realizing that private charity was unequal to the task at hand, launched a project to hire some of the unemployed to work on the town's streets. Elizabeth Barclay, the town's social welfare worker, was assigned the duty of selecting thirty men from among seventy applicants. Those chosen would work three days a week for \$1.00 per day. Some of the hires were to be utilized to cut into useable firewood the trees which the town had removed when a new water line had been laid into the town the past spring. The firewood was “to be stored in the town hitching lot on Randolph Street” and distributed by Miss Barclay to the needy during the winter season.<sup>8</sup>

Still, however, out of necessity, Lexington and Buena Vista joined other localities and the Commonwealth in lowering the tax rate for the 1933 year; Lexington's reduction represented a 20 percent drop and returned the tax rate to the level it had been in 1925.<sup>9</sup> The substantial reduction in tax revenues, both as a consequence of the rate drop and

5. Ibid., November 3, 1932.

6. Ibid., November 10, 1932.

7. Ibid., November 24, 1932.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., November 17, 1932, and January 12, 1933.

the decline in property values, would mean that the local governments would be strapped for funds to meet the needs of its Depression victims.

Searching for assistance for its unemployed, the County Board of Supervisors reluctantly voted in December 1932, to apply for a \$10,000 loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the only major Depression remedy created during the Hoover administration. RFC funds were not grants, but loans against future federal aid funds; they were to be paid back by the state over a five-year period from 1935 to 1940. The money was to be expended on road construction and the intent was to use it primarily in those parts of the county which were most heavily affected by unemployment (the Buffalo and Irish Creek districts). There was some opposition among the Supervisors to submitting an application, due to the complicated forms which needed to be filled out, and the fact that the funds were ostensibly to be administered by the county welfare worker, a position which the Supervisors had not seen fit to create in the past. W. L. Foltz, treasurer of the local Red Cross chapter, indicated that his organization was willing to pay half the cost of a county welfare worker if need be, but the Board chose to appoint a citizens' committee to supervise the RFC funds rather than select a county welfare director.<sup>10</sup> (The Supervisors finally relented in October 1933, and selected Mrs. John Robertson, formerly county sanitary officer and county nurse, to be the county's welfare director.<sup>11</sup>) At the December 1932 meeting, the county's new congressman, A. Willis Robertson, and the Rev. J. M. Williams, who served a church on Irish Creek, were among those who appeared before the Supervisors to urge them to seek an RFC loan. The Rev. Mr. Williams noted that "his people on Irish Creek were opposed to accepting charity from the Red Cross and wanted to work for their money."<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the Red Cross continued its labors on behalf of the needy. The *County News* provided a detailed description of the Red Cross's December 1932 shipments of piece goods:

Six hundred yards of outing was especially welcome as it furnished warm under-clothes and other garments for so many. Most of the outing was in dark colors, blue, brown, and red grounds. It was woven in

10. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1932, and January 12, 1933.

11. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1933. Though Mrs. Robertson was the only candidate for the position, the Board of Supervisors had tied on whether to appoint her, evidence that half the Board did not want to create the new office. It took a court-appointed tie-breaker, Greenlee Letcher, to break the deadlock and secure Mrs. Robertson as the county welfare officer.

12. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1932.

North Carolina. Five hundred yards of Amoskeag gingham in pretty colors and patterns came from New Hampshire.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, finished garments and other clothing items were supplied to the County:

ninety-six heavy denim blue buckle overalls and 12 coats were made in Lynchburg . . . children’s play-suits—only 48—came from Tennessee. Work socks and black socks for men, 22 dozen in all, came from North Carolina. Childrens heavy ribbed stockings, 22 dozen, were made in Portsmouth and two dozen infants warm white stockings came from Bristol. Men’s underwear, women’s underwear (only four dozen), children’s and boys woven underwear have all come and quickly been distributed to those who need. . . . Four dozen boys knickers, made of heavy cotton like whipcord, will furnish forty-eight lucky boys with school trousers.<sup>14</sup>

The situation in the county appeared grim indeed. The Vesuvius correspondent to the *County News* reported in January of 1933:

This part of the county still remains practically at a stand still, as we see no movement in wood or lumbers, and all prospecting and mining is closed. We are hoping that the county will allocate some of the reconstruction funds in this part of the county if obtained, also to the road from the Nelson County line near Montebello down by the Irish Creek postoffice. . . . When two vehicles meet at several places along this route one has to back several hundred feet before the other can pass.<sup>15</sup>

Help was on the way. RFC funds (\$12, 033.34, rather than the requested \$10,000) had been received by late January. By early February, seven hundred men (all married with dependents) had been hired at \$1.25 per day. They were selected from over nine hundred applications by the county’s committee whose chairman was the ubiquitous Walter L. Foltz. Initially, the RFC crew worked on the county roads for three days per week, but this was changed to one week on, one week off. The RFC program was to be a temporary one, with all projects to be completed by April 1st.<sup>16</sup>

The inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt on March 4, 1933, brought with it a “bank holiday” as the banks were closed on order of both the president and Governor Pollard so that their solvency could be determined. The *County News* described how Lexington was dealing with this unprecedented action:

13. *Ibid.*, January 5, 1933.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, January 19, 1933.

16. *Ibid.*, February 2 and 23, 1933.

Local businesses are not suffering as much inconvenience as is the case in most localities in the country. . . . Our town and county, it could almost be said, lives within itself, our supply and demand being so closely confined in the community. Business is being carried on about as usual by means of extended credit. The chain stores which deal only on a cash basis report no appreciable loss of business . . . [though] they are continuing their policy of giving no credit.

The independent merchants are extending credit and some show an increase in business as cash customers take advantage of this policy. . . .

A few merchants with a good supply of ready cash are cashing checks for customers. . . .

Bus transportation has slowed down to a conspicuous extent. . . .

Attendance at the moving picture shows, according to Manager Ralph Daves, has fallen off about 33 1-3 percent during the early part of the week. . . .

The greatest inconvenience is worked on the travelling public. The manager of a local hotel reports no touring for pleasure, but the usual number of business trips. Credit has been extended by hotels and restaurants to their regular salesman customers.<sup>17</sup>

Two weeks later, the *County News* reported that “valuable silk weaving and throwing machinery equipment” belonging to the bankrupt Buena Vista Textile Corporation would be sold at auction on April 15.<sup>18</sup> Fortunately for Buena Vista, the plant was purchased by Majestic Silk Mills of Allentown, Pennsylvania, and reopened in June, though it was subject to periodic strikes throughout the remainder of the decade.<sup>19</sup>

On April 1, as promised, the RFC road projects were terminated, but an additional \$3000.00 was obtained from the RFC operation to provide garden seeds for the needy. The total amount of loans received from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation it was estimated would exceed \$14,000.<sup>20</sup>

The first significant benefit to come to Rockbridge from their new president was the establishment of several Civilian Conservation Corps camps in the county. One was located at Glenwood in Arnold’s Valley and another along the train track just south of Vesuvius. (Still another camp was established on the south side of the Old Buena Vista Road opposite the Womeldorf farm, but there is little information about it in the newspaper.) Two other camps were near the borders of Rockbridge—one at Oranoco in Amherst County east of Buena Vista, and a camp for

17. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1933.

18. *Ibid.*, March 23, 1933.

19. *Ibid.*, June 1, 1933.

20. *Ibid.*, April 20, 1933.

African Americans north of Goshen near Deerfield in Augusta County.<sup>21</sup> Ronald Heineman, who has written the definitive history of the New Deal in Virginia, indicates that the CCC program was by far the most popular and least controversial New Deal operation for Virginians—and that the Commonwealth was fourth in the nation in the total number of CCC camps within its borders.<sup>22</sup>

The CCC program was modeled after the training programs which had been developed for draftees and enlistees during World War I in the hope that it would have similar beneficial effects upon the young men to be enrolled. Most of the CCC work was devoted to forestry conservation, a cause which had been dear to the hearts of Progressives since the time of Theodore Roosevelt. CCC campers would receive \$30.00 per month, but, since most of their living expenses at the camps were covered by the government, all but a small portion of their wages was to be sent to their parents, thus assisting in the economic recovery back home. Almost all the CCC participants were single men in their late teens or early twenties, but the Arnold’s Valley camp was different in that it was composed primarily of World War I veterans, many of whom had been involved in the 1932 “Bonus March” on Washington.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the work performed by the CCC enlistees involved the establishment of their camps and the building of dormitories and dining and recreational facilities. The projects of the Glenwood Camp in Arnold’s Valley are typical—the creation of the Cave Mountain Lake recreational area, annual stocking of area streams with fish, the removal of underbrush and thinning of forests to prevent forest fires and encourage the growth of desirable, marketable timber, the construction of miles of forest trails and roads, and, eventually, work on the Blue Ridge Parkway.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the remainder of the 1930s, Rockbridge men were selected to join CCC volunteers at camps throughout the state—the policy was to assign CCC corpsmen to sites outside their native counties. (The Vesuvius camp residents, for example, came primarily from the Eastern Shore with a few from Shenandoah County and southwestern Virginia.<sup>25</sup>) The impact of the CCC camps was not limited to the bene-

21. *Ibid.*, April 13, 1933, June 20, 1933; telephone interviews with Clarence T. Cash, July 15, 2002, and R. N. Baisley, July 17, 2002. Of the area CCC camps only the Glenwood Camp survives; it became the site of the Natural Bridge Learning Center.

22. Ronald Heineman, *Depression and New Deal in Virginia: The Enduring Dominion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 64–66.

23. *Ibid.*, July 20 and 27, 1933.

24. *Ibid.*, April 7, 1938.

25. *Ibid.*, June 8, 1933.

fits received by the young enrollees. The camps also enlivened the economies of the communities in which they were located as supplies for their operation were often obtained locally. Just a few months after the Vesuvius camp opened, the *County News's* Vesuvius correspondent reported:

Roosevelt prosperity has arrived at Vesuvius and, we hope, to stay for a long time. Here are some of the evidences.

Loading of lumber and chestnut wood from early in the morning until around 9 or 10 o'clock at night or until some "early to bed-ers" complain of the noise as they cannot get to sleep owing to the "hum-of-business." Twenty-five cars loaded out last week and around two hundred tons of coal delivered and distributed throughout the community . . . and almost everyone that uses coal made haste to lay in their winter supply.<sup>26</sup>

At the time the CCC camps were being organized, the *County News* urged that attention be given to the six hundred acres the town owned at Brushy Hills, the watershed of its previous water supply, saying, "This forest is due to be preserved for its past good services to the town, if not for the future. The springs there don't undertake to do much but they never fail."<sup>27</sup>

On May 12, 1933, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act, one of the two major cornerstones of the First New Deal. The plan was to bring supply into accord with demand by cutting farm production; farmers were to receive cash payments as compensation for the reduced production. As was customary in the New Deal programs, copious records were kept and participants were closely monitored to assure they were abiding by the contracts they had made with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. (See 1933 reports on corn and hogs published in the 5 April 1934 issue of the *County News*.) Approximately \$30,000 in "adjustment payments" were sent to Rockbridge farmers in 1933. The *County News* noted that while the average yield for wheat during the preceding three years was 13.6 bushels per acre, the pre-AAA yield reported by participating farmers for 1933 was 15.6 bushels. While the newspaper thought this indicated that only "the best farmers in the county signed contracts to reduce wheat acreage,"<sup>28</sup> one could hypothesize another possible explanation. Though the procedures employed under the original Agricultural Adjustment Act led to its being declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, the basic principles which it represented were reinstated by subsequent legislation. In the long run,

26. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1933.

27. *Ibid.*, May 11, 1933.

28. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1933.



the agricultural economy improved considerably in the later 1930s, but farm incomes did not return to the levels realized before 1929, and the pre-'29 levels were hardly anything to brag about.

The other cornerstone of the First New Deal was the multi-faceted National Industrial Recovery Act, passed by Congress on June 16, 1933. Though Rockbridge's economy was heavily based on agriculture, the NIRA and its components, the NRA and the PWA, had much greater impact on the county than did the AAA.

The National Industrial Recovery Act created the National Recovery Administration (NRA) whose mission was to negotiate nationwide standards for wages and working hours. Working hours for current workers were to be reduced, thus creating new job opportunities; workers were to be granted higher wages as compensation. America's workers were to work less and earn more, a very popular idea. Each industry was to adopt a code in accordance with NRA standards; those who agreed to adhere by the code were permitted to display the blue eagle which was the NRA logo. For example, retail merchants were to limit working hours for their employees to forty hours per week (except for grocers who were allowed forty-eight hours); all stores were asked to stay open for at least fifty-two hours during a week. The minimum wage for southern workers was set at \$12.00 per week (\$1.00 less than the minimum for northern workers). The local post offices were to serve as registration stations for the NRA program and local compliance committees were to be organized. The post office also distributed pledge cards so that consumers could promise to shop only at NRA-conforming establishments.

The NRA scheme was derived to a considerable extent from the propaganda and industrial mobilization experiences of World War I.

On the evening of August 1, a meeting of Lexington businessmen and employers was convened in the County Courthouse. Several hundred attended and unanimously approved a resolution introduced by Greenlee Letcher, president of the local chamber of commerce, and seconded by M. S. McCoy, local grocer, to adhere to the NRA standards. Congressman A. Willis Robertson played a key role at the meeting, which lasted several hours. Sounding rather like a populist or even a socialist (and he was neither), Robertson commented that

human nature being inherently selfish, certain groups had withdrawn more than their share to a point where the wealth of the nation was concentrated in the hands of a few with millions unemployed and going hungry. Captains of industry . . . [had] recognized that we were on the verge of bankruptcy and that revolution might ensue.

Thus, President Roosevelt and Congress had developed the NRA program to restore the economy to the right path. He warned that though the NRA rules “were voluntary and not compulsory . . . the pressure of society could be more ruthless than the law.” Now, Robertson said, was the time “when individualism must give place to the welfare of the masses.”<sup>29</sup> The *County News* expressed a wish that the town and County would achieve “over 100 per cent in NRA members.”<sup>30</sup> Full page ads co-signed by numerous Lexington businesses, and advertisements placed by individual stores indicate that compliance was nearly universal.

Buena Vista merchants met on August 2 to affirm their support of the NRA concept and to decide upon uniform selling hours. Monday through Fridays, shops would be open between 8 a.m. and noon, then re-open at 2 p.m. and close at 6. On Saturdays, they would be open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., except for a two-hour closing between noon and 2 p.m.<sup>31</sup>

One effect of the NRA codes was rising prices. Adair-Hutton, Lexington’s main department store, was not alone in urging its customers that they should make their purchases in August, both to help the economic recovery and avoid the inevitable price increases: “To buy in August is not only the patriotic course open to every American citizen. To buy in August is also the intelligent, thrifty course open to YOU from a selfish viewpoint.”<sup>32</sup>

When Washington & Lee students returned for the fall semester in 1933 they took umbrage at the price increases at the local laundries. The editor of the *Ring-tum Phi*, the student newspaper, threatened “to seek an injunction to restrain what he branded increases of more than 100 per cent unless some satisfactory action is taken by the cleaners within three days.” The Lexington cleaning establishments argued that the prices during the preceding school year had been exceptionally low due to a price war between laundries, and that the Fall ’33 prices were the same as they had been in 1931–32.<sup>33</sup> The irate “Minks” engineered an economic boycott by arranging with a Clifton Forge firm to provide daily service to Lexington for 25 percent less than local laundries charged; they also rented space from a local tailor and opened their own shop, “The Blue and White Cleaners,” which charged even less but accepted only student trade.<sup>34</sup> Within a week, the local laundries had capitulated,

29. *Ibid.*, August 3, 1933.

30. *Ibid.*, August 31, 1933

31. *Ibid.*, August 3, 1933.

32. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1933.

33. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1933.

34. *Ibid.*, October 19, 1933.

# MR. PRESIDENT--WE ARE WITH YOU!

These Lexington employers, believing the New Deal to shorten hours, maintain wages and relieve unemployment will bring back prosperity, are cooperating to the limit with the National Recovery Drive.



Adair-Hutton, Inc.	First National Bank	Irwin & Co., Inc.	Peoples National Bank	The Sachs Store
R. S. Anderson Co.	Grossman's Woman's Shop	Kroger's Store	Rockbridge Motor Co.	Stonewall Jackson Cafe
A. & P. Store	A. A. Harris Lunch Room	Mays Pastry Shoppe	Rockbridge National Bank	Southern Inn Restaurant
Brown's Cleaning Works	Harper & Agnor, Inc.	McManama & Christian	Ruble & Hutcheson	University Cleaners and Dyers
Chas. W. Barger	Huger-Davidson Sales Co.	McCoy's	Rockbridge County News	Varner & Pole
J. A. Cook	W. R. Humphris & Son	McDaniel & Chiltum	Rice's Drug Store	Virginia Cafe
J. Ed. Deaver & Sons	Harlow's Print Shop	New and Lyric Theaters	Rockbridge Farmer's Exchange, Inc	Woodward's Garage

Rockbridge County News, August 10, 1933

offering discount coupon books which brought their prices down into line with the out-of-town and student-run establishments.<sup>35</sup>

Another important section of the National Industrial Recovery Act created the Public Works Administration, initially funded in 1933 with \$3.3 billion which was to be expended primarily on large construction projects. Initially, the federal government intended to grant just 30 percent of the cost of the projects; the federal share was, however, soon increased to 45 percent. Unlike those of the RFC, these federal contributions were gifts, not loans, and the PWA would, if need be, loan the remainder to localities not able to come up with matching funds immediately.<sup>36</sup> Initially, those employed in PWA projects were to be drawn from the list of registered unemployed,<sup>37</sup> but this requirement was dropped as the numbers of unemployed declined.

Lexington and the surrounding county received an abundance of PWA grants; it probably did not do our area any harm that VMI's James A. Anderson was serving in the state PWA office, first as chief engineer and, subsequently, as PWA administrator.<sup>38</sup>

In 1933, VMI received PWA assistance in constructing a new Mess Hall, expanding, renovating, and fireproofing Maury-Brooke Hall (then the chemistry building), constructing a new utility building (Richardson Hall), and a new military

35. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1933.

36. Heinemann, *Depression and New Deal in Virginia*, 60-61.

37. *Rockbridge County News*, May 24, 1934.

38. *Ibid.*, May 16, 1935.

**ADAIR-HUTTON, Inc.**

**Buy In AUGUST**



**A Tip on Fall Fashions from NELLY DON**

They've arrived . . . these superbly styled **NELLY DON** . . . and you've want to be first to see them! Definitely low in price in spite of a **quality** but . . . yet . . . fascinating fabric . . . amazing "controversial" lines including shoulders that rear off in surprising angles . . . **admirable proportions** make a look . . . characteristic fine **finishing!** Come in tomorrow . . . or arrive at . . . and you'll have Nelly Don's who won't . . . **MISS LITTLE IS PARTY GOING.**



and we are happily doing nothing to do you with no intention in your for the present. But with the eye here on us, the **NRA** program, we are bringing out our most hot of **Dresses—**quite quality will be fit to all happen.

Frankly, we urge you to anticipate your **visit** soon.

### To Our Customers

Our **Ray**, Mrs. Hutton, has just returned from New York, where she made some wonderful selections in **Dresses and Millinery.**

Due to our connections in New York, where we are affiliated with one of the finest buying offices, we brought our- chandise with hardly any advance in price. Costs we bought six weeks ago and still! **Don** **Disappears** we bought six weeks ago. Our office covered on sev- eral weeks ago on **Millinery** and **Dresses**





**Call for the Favorites**

New leather-look belt with contrasting edge ribs and buttons \$**8.95**

Wool fabric shirtwaist dress with white plece trim \$**10.95**

Colorful stripes at shoulders brighten one of Nelly Don's Jerseys \$**6.95**

Striped knit wool with grosgrain ribbon label; novel patent belt \$**10.95**

Weatherwise suit with model overcoat jacket . . . and contrasting flared skirt \$**13.95**

Novel colored tulle and eye no- cent to this fine customer's jeans \$**8.95**

ADAIR-HUTTON, INC

LEXINGTON'S SHOPPING CENTER

"It Pays To Trade Here"

Rockbridge County News,  
August 24, 1933



## Going Up—

DID YOU SAY? MOST EVERYTHING IS, BUT THESE DRESSES ARE NOT. THEY'RE GOING DOWN TO CLOSE OUT, AND AT PRICES THAT ARE REAL BARGAINS.

Whites and pastel shades in prints and plain colors. Washable silks, rayons and cottons, one and two piece styles.

Dresses that formerly sold up to \$3.95 now priced at—

**\$1.39 and \$1.95**

## What are you making?

BEDSPREAD, MATS, DRESS, HAT OR WHAT-NOT, WE HAVE THE THREAD.

COTTON CARPET WARE: A smooth, hard twist 4-ply thread in half pound spools.  
Spool ..... **35c**

SHIELTLAND FLOSS: A very fine quality yarn in one ounce balls.  
2 fold. Ball ..... **30c**

GERMANTOWN YARN: White and colors. 1/2 ounce balls. 4 fold.  
Ball ..... **10c**

BEDSPREAD AND TIDY COTTON: White and ecru. A 4-ply highly mercerized smooth finish cotton for dresses, hats, spreads, etc.  
400 yard balls. Ball ..... **19c**

STEEL CROCHET HOOKS: Sizes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 18. Each ..... **10c**

On and after September 1st we cannot charge goods to anybody except those who pay their bills every month. Circumstances compel us to adopt this rule. Others will please not ask for credit, as a refusal will embarrass both them and us.

# Irwin & Co., Inc.

Rockbridge County News,  
August 24, 1933

store and tailor shop.<sup>39</sup> In 1935, funds were granted for the gutting of the Barracks and the replacement of the old wood interior with fireproof steel and concrete. The following year, a new swimming pool was inserted beneath Jackson Memorial Hall.<sup>40</sup> To complete the Institute's haul from the New Deal, in 1938, PWA money was approved for construction of new stables and a new library.<sup>41</sup>

Not wishing to be left out, Washington and Lee University submitted a bundle of requests to the PWA in 1935. Their wish list included the fireproofing of Washington Hall and the library, the construction of a new power plant, the construction of a student union building, and the building of a university auditorium at the corner of Jefferson and Washington Streets.<sup>42</sup> (Though some of these projects such as the power plant were completed, it is not clear from newspaper accounts whether W&L was actually assisted by PWA funds.)


Elsewhere in Lexington, the PWA provided money for an

39. Ibid., November 9, 1933. For additional information on these and other VMI New Deal projects, see William Couper, *One Hundred Years at V.M.I.*, 4 vols. (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, 1939), 4: 272-92.

40. *Rockbridge County News*, January 9, 1936.

41. Ibid., October 20, 1938.

42. Ibid., April 11, 1935.



**CASSCO  
ICE**

**CASSCO  
ICE**

**We have signed the President's re-employment agreement.**

**Have put more men to work.**

**Have adjusted working hours and wages to conform to this agreement.**

**In complying with N. R. A. we are increasing the cost of conducting our business.**

**To partly defray this additional expense, we are increasing the cost of ice to the consumer only by withdrawing the 5 per cent discount on coupon books as of Aug. 15.**

**We respectfully request the cooperation of all our customers.**

**Central Atlantic States Service Corp.**  
Lexington

**CASSCO  
ICE**

**CASSCO  
ICE**

Rockbridge County News, August 24, 1933

extension of the Post Office and the construction of a loading dock there,<sup>43</sup> the new bridge across the Maury River at East Lexington,<sup>44</sup> and a municipal auxiliary water supply with filtration tower.<sup>45</sup> The *County News* commented favorably upon the landscaping which surrounded the Reservoir, indicating that "when the grass and shrubbery is established" the site would function nicely as a town park.<sup>46</sup> While the reservoir itself

43. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1933, June 28, 1934, and October 13, 1934.

44. *Ibid.*, December 7, 1933.

45. *Ibid.*, September 12, 1935, and October 3, 1935.

46. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1937.

was judged esthetically pleasing, several townspeople complained to the Town Council that the red lights on top the tower were an eyesore and “the town manager was instructed to look into the matter and remedy the objectionable features.”<sup>47</sup>

In Buena Vista, PWA grants were received for completing the federal road system within the city, a new bridge across the Maury River (now the Robey Bridge), and a new jail and firehouse.<sup>48</sup>

Congressman Robertson’s intervention was credited with winning approval from the PWA for assistance in construction of a water system for the town of Goshen.<sup>49</sup> The most significant PWA projects in the county, however, were three new high schools (Brownsburg, Natural Bridge, and Effinger) a new elementary school at Glasgow, and an addition to the Fairfield High School. The construction of a new high school to serve the southern end of the county was delayed since Natural Bridge and Glasgow both wanted high schools and the state education authorities were insistent upon a consolidated school to serve both communities. Eventually, Glasgow was compelled to settle for a new elementary school and Natural Bridge won the high school.<sup>50</sup> Initially, the Effinger community was slated to receive only an auditorium addition to their old frame school building, but the plan was expanded to include an entirely new brick building for their high school program.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, Goshen was granted permission to solicit funds to construct an auditorium addition to its school with the promise of a matching contribution by the County School Board.<sup>52</sup>

Several other projects were discussed by Lexington or the county but were either not funded by the PWA or dropped from consideration by the local governmental bodies. One such aborted project was a county plan to enlarge the courthouse and jail and construct a special facility for juveniles and women prisoners.<sup>53</sup> Lexington hoped to construct a town hall and auditorium next to the firehouse on Main Street; though PWA funds were eventually allotted for the project, the town was unable to obtain title to the land necessary for the building.<sup>54</sup> The Lexington Woman’s Club hoped to sponsor the construction of a community hall and public library, but nothing came of that idea.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the most far-

47. *Ibid.*, May 26, 1938.

48. *Ibid.*, December 7, 1933, and November 23, 1935.

49. *Ibid.*, December 27, 1934.

50. *Ibid.*, June 25, 1936.

51. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1938.

52. *Ibid.*, April 14, 1938.

53. *Ibid.*, February 28, 1935.

54. *Ibid.*, February 14, 1935, and July 14, 1938.

55. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1935.

reaching plan put forth by the Town Council was to seek funding for a municipal electric power-generating facility. The town fathers were evidently fed up with the high rates charged by the Virginia Public Service Authority (a predecessor of Virginia Power or VEPCO) and believed that they could recoup their 55 percent share of the costs of a power plant by selling electricity at lower cost to Lexington's residents. The project was approved for PWA funds, but the Town Council decided to drop the idea when Jay Johns, chief executive of the power company, promised to lower rates.<sup>56</sup>

Another separate area of New Deal operations which had a major effect on the Rockbridge area was initiated under the Federal Emergency Relief Act, passed by Congress on May 12, 1933, the same day the Agricultural Adjustment Act was ratified. The intent of this legislation was to provide grants of money to the states to be distributed to the needy. Harry Hopkins, director of the Emergency Relief program, preferred that recipients perform useful work in exchange for their payments. While most states found it easier to simply dole out the money, Virginia insisted on instituting a "workfare" program. Conversely, Virginia also consistently refused to provide the matching funds the FERA program required, and probably saw no need to since the federal monies kept pouring into the state anyhow.<sup>57</sup> The public works projects sponsored under FERA were smaller-scale ventures than those funded by PWA. Over the course of the New Deal period from 1933 to 1939, the programs were sponsored by several different agencies. First came the Civil Works Administration (CWA) which then reverted to the FERA name (and its Virginia variant, VERA); subsequently, the programs once managed under the auspices of the CWA and FERA/VERA were subsumed into the Works Project Administration (WPA) operation.

Lexington was well connected for the CWA work since W&L president Francis P. Gaines was state chairman of the CWA advisory committee. Among the early CWA projects in Lexington were the resurfacing of several streets, improvements to the Moore's Creek dam, and extension and repairs to the town's water system. County schools were to receive fresh coats of paint, playground upgrades, and "sanitation" improvements (i.e., new and better outhouses).<sup>58</sup> Ann Smith Elementary School in Lexington had a bathtub installed to serve students in need of a bath. The Lylburn Downing School was to see the creation of a playground and ball-field while the Waddell High School was to benefit from the leveling of its athletic field and the construction of concrete bleachers

56. *Ibid.*, May 26, 1938, and July 14, 1938.

57. Heinemann, *Depression and New Deal in Virginia*, 69-71.

58. *Rockbridge County News*, November 30, 1933.



built into the hillside.<sup>59</sup> The dam behind the school on Woods Creek (which had been erected the previous summer out of telephone poles and boards by a volunteer student crew under the supervision of the legendary Kenneth A. Thompson) was to be upgraded by the CWA workers and rebuilt using stone and concrete. The aim was to create a public swimming pool for the community. A diving board and boats were to be installed on “the lake” which was to be bordered by a flagstone walk.<sup>60</sup> By the beginning of January 1934, a total of 657 previously unemployed men were working on CWA projects, fifty of whom were assigned to tackle the lake and football field projects at Waddell High School.<sup>61</sup> The CWA projects were initially under the direction of Mrs. Robertson who was also serving as county welfare director. As her duties soon became overwhelming, she relinquished the CWA post to Charles Berry. Offices for the various New Deal programs were established on the upper floors of Lexington’s bank buildings and the Weinberg Building.<sup>62</sup>

Under the general direction of Frances Herring, a women’s division of the CWA was established, concentrating on the creation of sewing rooms throughout the county in public buildings and private homes where local women would be employed to turn out garments from fabric donated by the Red Cross and other sources.<sup>63</sup> Area women were also hired with CWA funds to organize the alumni files at VMI and to serve as librarians in the county schools.<sup>64</sup> The need among the female population was greater than could be met with CWA funds; the County News reported with some amusement that one disappointed local job seeker had written directly to Eleanor Roosevelt asking for assistance (and that her letter had been forwarded to the Richmond CWA office by the White House).<sup>65</sup>

CWA work also encompassed health and hygiene classes, first aid instruction, and counseling for those involved in domestic disputes.<sup>66</sup> CWA workers were used to dig Lexington’s streets out after an unusually heavy snowfall in March 1934,<sup>67</sup> and both W&L and VMI used CWA funds to hire students as research assistants, library aides, and for buildings and grounds work.<sup>68</sup>

59. *Ibid.*, November 30, 1933.

60. *Ibid.*, June 22, 1933, and February 1, 1934.

61. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1933, and January 4, 1934.

62. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1933.

63. *Ibid.*, January 18, 1934.

64. *Ibid.*, January 11, 1934, and January 18, 1934.

65. *Ibid.*, January 25, 1934.

66. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1934, and February 15, 1934.

67. *Ibid.*, March 1, 1934.

68. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1934, and May 31, 1934.

Considerable interest was also shown in attempting to obtain CWA support for construction of a local airport either near Lexington or Buena Vista, but no agreement could be reached on the best site.<sup>69</sup>

On April 1, 1934, all CWA projects were placed under the supervision of FERA/VERA, and a new supervisor was hired, Philip Day from the Riverside community.<sup>70</sup> At the beginning of the next academic year, it was announced that adult education classes, funded by FERA/VERA, would be initiated and that teachers would be hired for the program from among the unemployed educators in the community. Classes generally met daily for an hour or two, and were offered in many different subjects. Fifteen instructors, including three African Americans, were hired to offer courses in economics, bookkeeping and accounting, mathematics and drafting, electricity, business, forestry, home economics, elementary education, art and handicrafts, sewing, and general adult education. They were to receive \$42.00 per week.<sup>71</sup> Nearly 500 students enrolled (412 white and 81 black in segregated classes).<sup>72</sup> By January of 1935, a series of evening lectures on current events taught by faculty members from W&L and VMI was added to the roster of classes.<sup>73</sup> The education programs resumed in the fall of 1935 and ran for another year.

In spite of the useful work being performed under FERA auspices, the Lexington Town Council temporarily halted its involvement in the FERA program in January 1935, because of the high cost of the workmen's compensation insurance the program required, an expense which they judged to be "out of proportion to the work that could be accomplished."<sup>74</sup> The matter was quickly resolved and FERA/VERA projects continued to be supported by the Council.<sup>75</sup>

The fall of 1935 saw the arrival on the local scene of still another new acronym, the NYA (National Youth Administration).

Its first endeavor was to provide work for needy high school students so they could continue their educations. The county had been allotted twenty-two such positions, which would pay six dollars per month.<sup>76</sup> College student programs had also been transferred to the NYA; one of the projects undertaken by the NYA cadets at VMI was the mapping for the Town Council of the graves in Evergreen Cemetery.<sup>77</sup>

69. *Ibid.*, February 8, 1934, and March 22, 1934.

70. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1934, and April 19, 1934.

71. *Ibid.*, September 20, 1934, and November 22, 1934.

72. *Ibid.*, November 29, 1934.

73. *Ibid.*, January 31, 1935.

74. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1935.

75. *Ibid.*, January 17, 1935.

76. *Ibid.*, September 26, 1935.

77. *Ibid.*, June 10, 1937.

As 1935 drew to a close, the *County News* indicated that the area had not yet achieved economic recovery in spite of many encouraging developments such as the opening of the rug factory in Glasgow. It noted that Christmas shoppers were being very cautious in their spending, indicating that cheaper gifts were selling better than the more expensive ones. “The two five-and-tens are filled with shoppers,” the *County News* reported, “and there is a large turnover in their goods. . . . It is the general opinion that Rockbridge county buying has not yet reached the high level of six years ago.”<sup>78</sup>

By the 1st of January, 1936, the NYA and FERA/VERA programs had been included under the umbrella of the Works Progress Administration. Among the new initiatives begun by the WPA were school lunch programs (replacing volunteer soup kitchens) and a canning project which would provide some of the food needed for the school meals. Under WPA auspices, Lylburn Downing’s students were included for the first time in the school lunch program.<sup>79</sup>

The WPA’s aim was to employ those who had still not been able to return to the workforce. Its projects were thus to be labor-intensive. Major building projects remained primarily the PWA’s responsibility. In addition to the school programs in Rockbridge, WPA funds were solicited by Lexington to complete the widening of South Main Street which had been begun by the RFC in 1933. The plan was to widen the road from White to Wallace Streets to forty feet, the minimum width required for the state to assume maintenance on what was a part of the Lee Highway. Sidewalks were to be installed or replaced as needed along one side of the street. The town would construct at its expense stone retaining walls to buttress the yards which had surrendered some of their width to the widened street. It was noted in the *County News* that only two trees would be removed to make way for the improvements; the sidewalk would be worked around other trees whose lower trunks would be painted white as a warning to highway and pedestrian traffic.<sup>80</sup>

An even more significant road project was the construction with WPA money of a “viaduct” across the ravine behind Randolph Street so that East Nelson Street could be extended from downtown to Col Alto. The town originally feared that the available money would only permit a dirt-fill across the gap, but the WPA came through with sufficient funding to permit the building of a bridge. Completion of the East Nelson bridge in late February 1939, allowed removal of U.S. Highway 60 east-

78. *Ibid.*, December 19, 1935.

79. *Ibid.*, March 12, 1936, and June 17, 1937.

80. *Ibid.*, December 12, 1935, and July 2, 1936.

bound vehicles from Washington Street, thus considerably improving traffic flow through the town.<sup>81</sup>

Under the auspices of the NYA, and with help from NYA cadet workers from VMI and local volunteers, a house for the Boys' Club was erected in the old quarry at the foot of VMI hill. The clubhouse featured a large assembly room, outdoor play areas, and an apartment for the club director.<sup>82</sup>

To provide summer recreational opportunities, a building was constructed in 1938, using NYA money to house a camp at Rockbridge Baths for Lexington boys and girls. The facility, now to be known as the "Ned Graham Camp," had been in existence for several years but was in need of permanent quarters of its own. The lodge, designed by Henry Ravenhorst as one of his first projects upon graduation from W&L, was built adjacent to the Rockbridge Baths schoolhouse, thus enabling it to be used for community functions when the camp was not in session. B. Lee Kagey chaired the campaign to raise \$1000 to match the NYA grant. The camp was named for the late postmaster of Lexington, Edward L. Graham, better known as "Ned," who had died earlier that year.<sup>83</sup>

The WPA also had an interest in encouraging the arts and assisting "starving artists." Lexingtonian James W. McClung was hired in March of 1936 to conduct a three-year study of historic county buildings.<sup>84</sup> In 1939, he published some of his findings in a volume entitled *The Historical Significance of Rockbridge County, Virginia*, a book notable for its many inaccuracies.

A major WPA endeavor in the arts was its sponsorship of the Virginia Symphony, headquartered in Richmond, which traveled the state presenting concerts. The Symphony came to the Harrington Waddell High School auditorium at least six times, giving an afternoon program for school children and an evening concert for adults. On several occasions during its Lexington visits, the Symphony performed works composed by John A. Graham, W&L music professor, and brother of Ned Graham. A local Philharmonic Society was organized to support the Symphony's Lexington appearances.<sup>85</sup> (Ironically, the Symphony series supplanted an existing concert series of some years standing which contracted for performers under the management of the National Concert Association. Given the superior opportunities afforded by the visits from

81. *Ibid.*, February 6, 1936, and February 2, 1939.

82. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1937.

83. *Ibid.*, June 30, 1938, October 6, 1938, and October 20, 1938.

84. *Ibid.*, April 9, 1936.

85. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1938, and September 22, 1938.

the Virginia Symphony, the Lexington National Concert Association steering committee folded its tent.<sup>86</sup>)

The final New Deal benefaction to Rockbridge was the gift of electricity. The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was funded by Congress in 1936, and began its work in our county in 1938. Its mission was to bring electric service to rural areas where it was unavailable and/or prohibitively expensive by encouraging the formation of local electrical cooperatives with low interest loans and grants for the stringing of wire. Approximately 400 families in the southwestern part of the county and 120 families in the northern section had received electric service by the summer of 1939, with other areas to follow during the coming years.<sup>87</sup> (REA service did not reach the construction site for the Effinger community in time to be of use while the school was being built; the wooden floors had to be sanded by hand rather than with electric sanders.<sup>88</sup> By 1950, approximately 80 percent of America’s farm families had their homes wired through the efforts of the REA—Rockbridge County’s rural population was to be counted among that number.

Undoubtedly, the 1930s was, for Rockbridge, a period of exciting (and sometimes disturbing) change. The New Deal poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into the county, brought jobs (at least temporary ones) to thousands, and built numerous school buildings, roads, bridges, and other public improvements. Hundreds of county residents had heard a live symphony orchestra for the first time and participated in community educational and recreational activities. Electricity, courtesy of the REA, had literally and figuratively brightened the lives of many more. Additional opportunities for local women had been created. Area African Americans, like their compatriots throughout the South and the nation, had switched their political allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic Party.

Even as many were grateful for the benefits provided during the 1930s by the New Deal and had come to anticipate their continuation, others became more and more troubled by the increasing presence of the federal government in their lives and the plethora of expensive programs. The *County News* which had once given the New Deal its unqualified endorsement, by 1939 was urging its readers to get off the gravy train:

One of the greatest savings in our top-heavy government expense program can be made in the public works expenditures. But as Senator

86. *Ibid.*, September 1, 1938.

87. *Ibid.*, April 20, 1939, August 14, 1939, and October 20, 1939.

88. Interview with J. Francis Coffey, July 8, 2002

Byrd pointed out some time ago, there is but one way to stop these expenditures, and that is for localities to stop applying for projects and refuse to accept the grants. To assume such an attitude is exceedingly difficult for it is a temptation for a town or county to "get its" while all of the others are getting it. The fact is lost sight of that the locality is going to pay for these improvements in one way or another.

Some locality has to start the movement to refuse these federal government handouts. It might be well for Lexington and Rockbridge county and its public institutions to set such an example.<sup>89</sup>

The reference to Senator Harry F. Byrd is particularly revealing. He had turned against the New Deal agenda shortly after FDR began implementing it. Congressman Robertson, and most other Virginia Democrats, were increasingly falling in line with the viewpoint of the leader of the state party organization, especially now at the end of the decade when the economy seemed to be on the mend.<sup>90</sup>

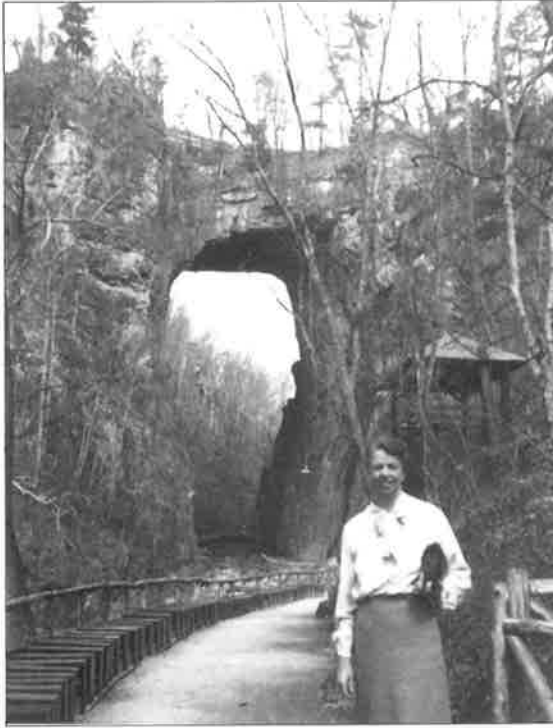
Lexington had perhaps another reason to experience second thoughts about all the "progress" that it had seen during the 1930's. It had long been ambivalent about change, protesting suggestions from the state that the Lee Highway should bypass downtown while simultaneously complaining about the heavier traffic and the changes which were occurring along Main Street to accommodate the increasing number of travelers. Some of Lexington's oldest houses and commercial buildings were being demolished to make way for service stations and automobile garages. The old covered bridge across the Maury, woefully inadequate to the task of carrying modern traffic, was now superfluous and endangered along side the sleek new structure which the New Deal had provided.

Moreover, some Lexingtonians had evidently been to the Rockefeller project, Colonial Williamsburg, some several hundred miles east on U.S. 60. The spanking new Texaco filling station at the corner of Main and Nelson Streets, strongly opposed by the Lexington Presbyterian Church, was reputed to be "built in the colonial style." D. D. Woody was granted permission by the Town Council to replace an ancient dwelling once occupied by Matthew Kahle and bearing examples of his finest wood-carving, with a new automobile showroom and garage, "provided he conforms to such architectural style as might be required" by a committee composed of the mayor, town attorney, and the superintendent of public works.<sup>91</sup>

89. *Ibid.*, July 13, 1939.

90. Heinemann, *Depression and New Deal in Virginia*, 140-41.

91. *Rockbridge County News*, June 24, 1937, and July 1, 1937.



*In April 1937, Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Natural Bridge while motoring through Virginia. This photo was taken by Lucille Floyd (later, Mrs. James A. Hight, Sr.), who was at the time an employee at the Bridge. Local newspapers indicated that Lexingtonians were somewhat miffed that Mrs. Roosevelt had not taken the time to stop in Lexington as she drove through on her way back to Washington. (Photo courtesy of James A. Hight, Jr.)*

The concept of a town planning commission, hinted at in the Woody matter, was gaining popularity as were proposals to create a “white way” along Main Street by replacing the lights hanging from wires in the center of the street with lights on one side only, affixed to ornamental poles. (A proposal to place the downtown electric wires underground had been judged to be prohibitively expensive.) The suggestion was also made that downtown signage should be restricted to flat signs affixed to the fronts of the buildings.<sup>92</sup> A citizens’ group, adopting the name Old Lexington and New, was formed to lobby for an appropriate preservation and beautification policy for the downtown. It is no accident that a local branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (1935) as well as the Rockbridge Historical Society (1939) were both organized in this challenging decade.


92. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1938, January 26, 1939, March 9, 1939.





# “The Staple of Our Country”: Wheat in the Regional Farm Economy of the Nineteenth-Century Valley of Virginia

Kenneth E. Koons\*

Y the middle of the nineteenth century, the Valley of Virginia had achieved wide renown as the “great wheat-growing section of the state,” but the commercial importance of wheat in the regional economy had been established in the previous century.<sup>1</sup> In *Commercialism and Frontier*, Robert D. Mitchell’s landmark study of the Shenandoah Valley during its frontier period, Mitchell documents valley farmers’ participation in the emergence of “the Old Dominion’s age of

\* This research was supported by Grants-in-Aid of Research from the Virginia Military Institute Foundation and by Mellon Research Fellowships from the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. I am indebted to Ellen Eslinger, Warren R. Hofstra, and Bruce Vandervort for reading earlier versions of this essay and providing helpful suggestions. Special thanks to Turk McClesky for producing the graphs.

1. “Harvesting Wheat,” *Southern Planter* 16 (August 1856): 237.

---

**Kenneth F. Koons** holds a Doctor of Arts degree in history from Carnegie-Mellon University and is a member of the Virginia Military Institute History Department. He teaches courses on the history of everyday life and on local and regional historical analysis. His research and writing focus on the history of society and economy in the Pennsylvania and Virginia sections of the Great Valley during the nineteenth century. He delivered this address at the Society’s meeting of July 31, 2000, at the Buffalo Springs Herb Farm, near Raphine.

This essay was published in 2000 in Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra, eds., *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800–1900*, by the University of Tennessee Press. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the press, which holds the copyright.

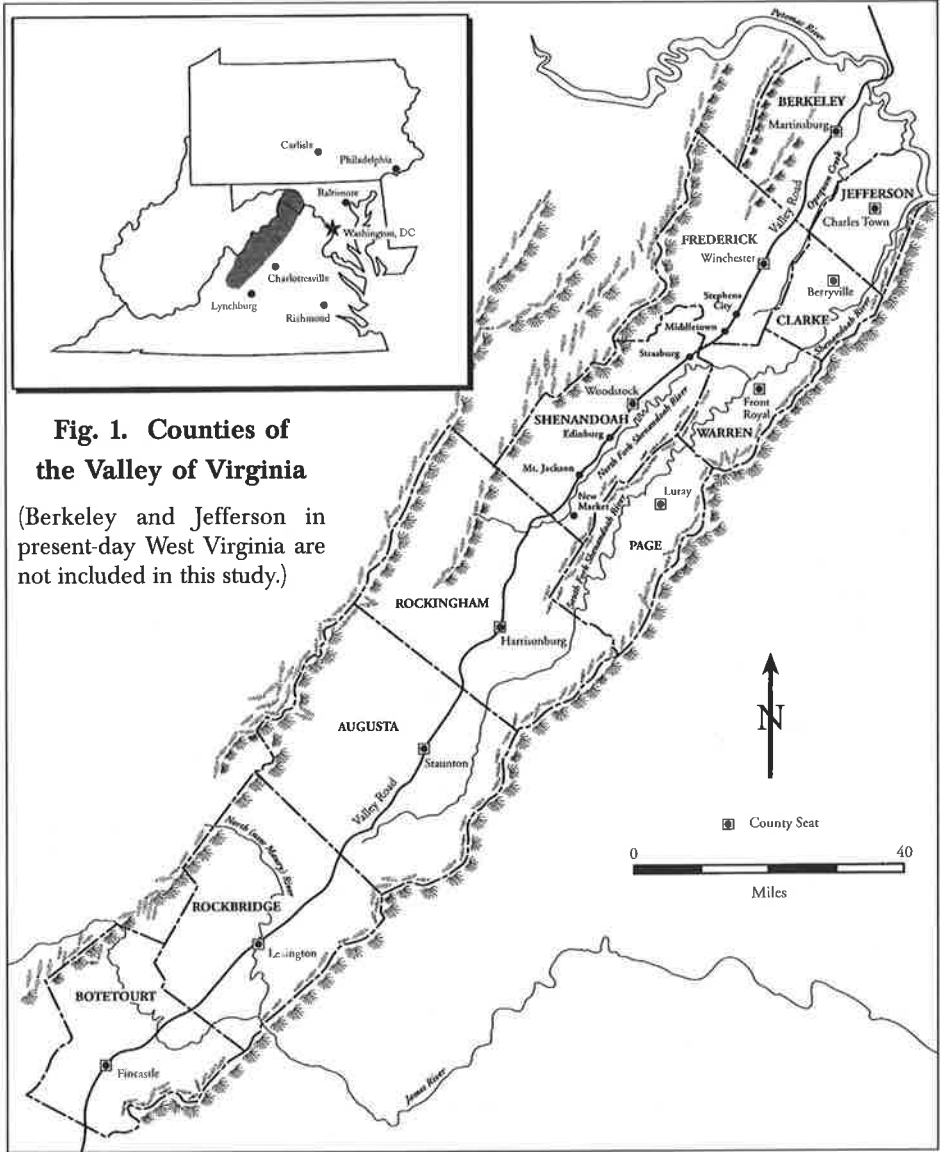
grain."<sup>2</sup> As markets for hemp and tobacco diminished during the era of the American Revolution, valley farmers responded to increasing demand for flour by producing ever greater quantities of wheat. An economic infrastructure for the milling and marketing of wheat and wheaten flour evolved during the final quarter of the eighteenth century; by century's end, the Shenandoah Valley had become "the most important wheat and flour-producing region of the entire South."<sup>3</sup>

Mitchell provides a detailed analysis of the rising commercial importance of wheat in the Shenandoah Valley during the last decades of the eighteenth century, but few scholars have looked beyond this period to examine the significance of wheat farming there during the subsequent century. During the nineteenth century—and far into the twentieth as well, as this essay will show—wheat continued to be the crop of first commercial importance and the mainstay of the regional economy. In light of its central role in the sociocultural and economic development of the nineteenth-century valley, it is curious that wheat farming has not received greater attention from historians. A few studies of the lower Valley of Virginia document the significance of wheat production in economic life there during the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>4</sup> but scholars have given virtually no consideration to the role of wheat in the economy of the upper portion of the Valley of Virginia, or to its importance in the social and economic development of the region as a whole.

2. Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), chs. 5 and 6; Jack Temple Kirby, "Virginia's Environmental History: A Prospectus," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (October 1991): 461.

3. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 161–83; quotation, p. 175. For further discussion of the valley as a hemp-producing region during the colonial period, see Freeman H. Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), pp. 8–9. On the subject of increasing demand for wheat during the post-Revolutionary War period, see Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606–1860*, University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences No. 13 (March 1925) (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1926; reprint, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), pp. 77–78.

4. Warren R. Hofstra, *A Separate Place: The Formation of Clarke County, Virginia* (White Post, Va.: Clarke County Sesquicentennial Committee, 1986; reprint, Madison, Wisc.: Madison House, 1999); and John T. Schelbecker, "Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah Valley, 1850," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 79 (October 1971): 462–76. See Emmett B. Fields, "The Agricultural Population of Virginia, 1850–1860" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1953), p. 46. In describing agriculture in the Valley of Virginia (his 15 sample counties include Shenandoah and Page), Fields writes, "Antebellum production figures indicate a grazing economy with very slight attention to crop cultivation."



Also, the second half of the century is virtual *terra incognita*. In particular, historians’ understanding of the consequences of the Civil War for the valley’s agricultural sector is especially poor. The overwhelming devastation of agricultural infrastructure occasioned by that war, the “retrogressive trends” and general “malaise in agriculture” in Virginia

and much of the South during the postwar decades,<sup>5</sup> and the rise of the midwestern wheat belt during the decades after mid-century have led historians uncritically to assume that, during the postbellum era, the valley's agricultural economy, including wheat farming, entered a period of stagnation and decline from which it never recovered.

Contradicting widespread popular as well as scholarly opinion, this essay will show that, far from collapsing after the Civil War, wheat production in the Valley of Virginia soared during the final third of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Valley farmers participated in the mechanical revolution of agriculture during the middle to late decades of the nineteenth century, increasingly used commercial fertilizers, and remained committed to the diversity of enterprise characteristic of general mixed farming. These efforts made wheat cultivation impervious to the vicissitudes of war, competition from midwestern wheat producers, and market fluctuations. Consequently, the Valley of Virginia remained a center of wheat production long after large-scale wheat farming had all but died out in the Piedmont and Tidewater sections of Virginia. The pattern of economic declension and malaise evident elsewhere in Virginia and much of the South during the latter third of the nineteenth century was notably absent from the Valley of Virginia.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Valley of Virginia—defined here, for statistical purposes, as the region of western Virginia comprising, from north to south, the counties of Frederick, Clarke, Shenandoah, Warren, Page, Rockingham, Augusta, Rockbridge, and Botetourt<sup>6</sup>—established itself as the primary center of wheat production in the state. Emblematic of the significance of wheat to the regional economy was a commentary appearing in the August 1845 number of *Valley Farmer*, which began: “The last fortnight has been the busy season of our people in this wheat-raising country. While our town has presented the stillness of the Sabbath, without its church going crowds, the country has been alive with the industrious bands of cradlers, rakers, binders and shockers. Every farm—almost every golden-covered hill and valley—has been peopled by the harvesters in their white garments,

5. Crandall A. Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 11.

6. Throughout this essay, unless noted otherwise, the terms “Valley of Virginia” and “valley” refer to this nine-county region of 4,698 square miles (see Fig. 1), as calculated from data contained in Charles S. Johnson et al., *Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties: Listing and Analysis of Socio-Economic Indices of 1104 Southern Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), pp. 245-60. This region is slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut, the area of which is 5,018 square miles, according to the *National Geographic Atlas of the World*, rev. 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1995), p. 120.

securing the staple of our country, the wealth of the farmer, and the food of all classes.”<sup>7</sup>

After rhapsodizing further about the bountiful wheat crop of that year, the author of this Jeffersonian tableau went on to assert that “wheat is the crop which the farmer looks to, to bring money.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, a decade later, in 1855, a resident of Winchester explained to a correspondent from outside the region that “wheat is the staple crop with us, and the only one not consumed at home.”<sup>9</sup>

Although valley farmers concentrated on wheat raising as the dominant market activity, they did so with a system of mixed agriculture, the central feature of which was diversity of enterprise. Farmers produced a wide array of crops and stocked their farms with various types of livestock. Corn was the principal secondary crop—after wheat, “our next most important grain,” as one writer explained.<sup>10</sup> Other main field crops included cereal grains such as oats and rye, as well as artificial grasses such as clover and timothy.<sup>11</sup> These crops and others provided foodstuffs for human consumption, as well as grain, fodder, and pasturage for livestock. Animal husbandry formed an integral component of mixed farming as practiced by valley farmers. On virtually every farm, horses served as draft animals, while cattle provided meat and dairy products. Swine were ubiquitous on farms of the valley and served as a leading source of animal protein. Nearly every surviving farm diary describes the annual butcherings of hogs that occurred, typically in the months of November, December, and January. In the winter of 1848–49, for example, Henry B. Jones of Rockbridge County butchered hogs weighing a total of 3,822 pounds, with five more remaining to be killed.<sup>12</sup> A diarist in Clarke County who was unfamiliar with the routines of rural life and with southern foodways, described in tones of wonderment the slaugh-

7. “The Harvest,” *Valley Farmer, and Gardeners’ Monthly Chronicle* 2 (August 1845): 10.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

9. Robert Young Conrad, Winchester, Va., to [Dan]. August 15, 1855, in Robert Young Conrad Papers, 1850–1944, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

10. “The Harvest,” p. 11.

11. Other secondary cereal grains included barley and buckwheat. Evidence of valley farmers’ raising timothy grass may be found in “The Crops in Clarke,” *Valley Farmer, and Gardeners’ Monthly Chronicle* 2 (August 1845): 2; John R. Hildebrand, ed., *A Mennonite Journal, 1862–1865: A Father’s Account of the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1996), p. 18; and Charles W. Turner, ed., *The Diary of Henry Boswell Jones of Brownsburg (1842–1871)* (Verona, Va.: McClure Printing Co., 1979), p. 37.

12. Turner, *Diary of Henry Boswell Jones*, p. 41.

ter of forty-eight hogs she witnessed one day in November 1854.<sup>13</sup> Sheep, less prevalent on valley farms, provided an economical way to utilize rough pasturelands and were valued mainly for their wool. At local woolen factories, farmers could sell the wool or exchange it for finished cloth.<sup>14</sup>

Many valley farmers participated in the business of fattening cattle raised in the ridge and valley regions of western Virginia and destined for the livestock markets of Philadelphia or Baltimore. Historically, this was a significant form of farm enterprise in the valley. The valley served as the main corridor for moving large herds of cattle from the uplands of western Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio to eastern markets. Farmers in the valley fattened cattle for these markets and contributed their own surplus cattle to the drives. The pattern of economic activity, which originated in the period immediately after initial settlement, continued far into the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In 1820, one writer claimed that "in some seasons the droves amount to 12,000 head."<sup>16</sup> In 1854, a diarist described having watched nine drovers direct the progress of 700 cattle as they forded the Shenandoah River near Harpers Ferry.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in the grain-livestock economy of the Valley of Virginia, farmers marketed wheat as

13. Alma Hibbard[?] Journal, 1854–55, in Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. For discussion of the importance of pork in the southern diet, see Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hocake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).

14. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Shenandoah County, Va.* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132) (notes, written in the margins of manuscript census pages, by enumerator of Lee Magisterial District, Shenandoah County); S. F. Christian, "Sheep in the Valley of Virginia," *Southern Planter* 16 (February 1856): 45–47; "Large Fleece," *Valley Farmer, and Gardeners' Monthly Chronicle* 2 (October 1845): 33; "South Downs," *Valley Farmer, and Gardeners' Monthly Chronicle* 2 (October 1845): 41; entry for November 29, 1875, Emanuel Suter Diary, 1864–1902, in Suter Papers, Menno Simons Historical Library and Archives, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.; and Hildebrand, *Mennonite Journal*, pp. 27 and 43.

15. Richard K. MacMaster, "The Cattle Trade in Western Virginia, 1760–1830," in *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, and Development in the Preindustrial Era*, ed. Robert D. Mitchell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 127–49; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 147–49; and Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1933; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 2:840.

16. John S. Skinner, "Observations on the Agriculture of Virginia," in *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, ed. Eugene L. Schwaab (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 1:140.

17. Hibbard[?] Journal.

their principal cash crop and fed livestock most of the grasses, corn, and secondary cereal grains they produced.

Throughout the nineteenth century, distilleries for reducing grain to alcohol provided another use for grains produced on valley farms. Among the grains distillers converted to spirits, rye and especially corn predominated, although small amounts of oats and wheat were processed as well. John Robinson, a Rockbridge County distiller, used corn and rye to produce whiskey for local consumption, but he filled substantial orders from outside the valley as well. In 1826, in response to an order from a Lynchburg merchant for “a boat load of your common whiskey,” Robinson sent, by canal boat, 42 barrels containing about 40 gallons each. At mid-century, eleven distillers in Rockbridge County converted nearly 26,000 bushels of corn and rye to almost 61,000 gallons of whiskey; by 1860, sixteen distillers in the county produced 97,000 gallons of whiskey. Distillers shipped much of their whiskey to merchants in cities east of the Blue Ridge. In 1860, John F. Lackey processed 1,350 bushels of corn and rye to produce 3,100 gallons of whiskey. On seven different occasions during the year, he shipped, by canal boat, a total of 82 barrels of whiskey to merchants in the cities of Lynchburg, Richmond, and Petersburg. Similarly, in 1860, John Gibson converted 2,400 bushels of corn, rye, and oats into 5,200 gallons of whiskey. In 1860 and 1861, Gibson shipped a total of over 250 barrels of whiskey to nine different merchant houses, most of them in Lynchburg. In some instances, distilling formed an adjunct economic activity to farming and grist milling.<sup>18</sup> One miller in Rockingham County, who also owned a distillery, put aside for conversion to whiskey a small portion of every load of corn hauled to his mill for grinding.<sup>19</sup>

The diversity of enterprise characteristic of farming in the Valley of Virginia enabled farmers readily to exploit the complementarity of crop production and stock raising, and to practice “plaster and clover husbandry” and other soil improvement techniques associated with the agricultural reform movement of the late eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Deep plowing, the amendment of soils with plaster and lime, and a scheme of

18. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Manuscript Manufacturing Schedules, Rockbridge County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132); Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Manuscript Schedules, Rockbridge County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132); John Robinson Papers, 1810–37, in Virginia Papers, McCormick Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Account Books, 1860–64, Lusk and Davidson, Rockbridge County, Va., in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; and Skinner, “Observations on Agriculture,” p. 140.

19. John L. Heatwole, *The Burning: Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville, Va.: Howell Press, 1998), p. 162.

crop rotation that included clover were viewed as essential to sound farm management. "Clover with lime and plaster are the keynotes to success in farming and the means for rejuvenating our soil," asserted one member of the Central Farmer's Club of Rockbridge County, and another member added "deep plowing" to clover and plaster as "the three essentials for successful farming."<sup>21</sup> Farmers grazed livestock on fields of artificial grasses such as clover, or they mowed the grasses and stored them to serve as forage for overwintering livestock. Farmers also penned livestock in order to accumulate manure for replenishing the nutrients in cropland soils. Thus, in the late 1830s, George H. Chrisman of Rockingham County, for example, claimed to have, over the course of twenty years, restored his farm "to good heart" through "the four-field system . . . of corn, wheat, clover, and clover, and by a free use of plaster, and some degree of economy in saving manure." Each year he mowed some of his clover as forage for livestock during the winter months and grazed hogs on the remainder.<sup>22</sup>

The thorough integration of stock raising and crop production characteristic of mixed farming could profit both forms of enterprise. For a brief period in the spring of each year, for example, farmers grazed livestock on the tender new growth of fall-sown winter wheat. Then, in late July and August, after the wheat had been harvested, animals were turned onto the fields to graze the stubble, which, depending on the crop rotation scheme utilized, could include a newly emergent crop of cover that had been interplanted with the wheat.<sup>23</sup> The combination of grain

20. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 2:800–810, but esp. 803–4. An informative discussion of the qualities of clover for improving soils and for its role in the agricultural revolution of the late eighteenth century in Europe appears in Thorkild Kjaergaard, *The Danish Revolution, 1500–1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation*, trans. David Hohnen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 59–60 and 67–87. Also see James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 159–60, 170–71, and 208; and Thomas Shaw, *Clovers and How to Grow Them* (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1906).

21. February 27, 1873, and March 27, 1874, "Record of Meetings etc. of the Central Farmer's Club of Rockbridge County, Va., 1873–1874," in Virginia Papers, McCormick Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

22. George H. Chrisman, "Experiment in Planting Corn—Alternation of Crops—Mode of Applying Gypsum—of Fattening Hogs," *The Cultivator: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to Agriculture* 5 (February 1839): 209.

23. A. J. McCue Diary and Account Books, McCue-Robertson Family Collection, 1879–1882 volume, in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. For evidence of the interplanting of wheat and clover, see Chrisman, "Experiment in Planting," p. 200; and Thomas Pollard, *Crop, Stock and Labor Report for June, 1878, Compiled from Special Correspondents*, by Thomas Pollard, Commissioner of Agriculture, Circular No. 11 (Richmond, Va.: R. E. Frayser, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1878), p. 50.



production and livestock raising also had the advantage of permitting greater responsiveness to market fluctuations; in periods of unremunerative grain prices, cheap grain could be used to fatten livestock.<sup>24</sup>

Farmers’ integration of elements of scientific farming into their practice of mixed agriculture helped to maintain the productivity of their soils.<sup>25</sup> In a series of letters written by farmers who had moved from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kingston, Georgia, may be found strong evidence of valley farmers’ use of clover and manure to revitalize soils, their belief in the salutary effects of deep plowing, and, not coincidentally, their perception of themselves as skillful farmers. In November 1865, M. H. Harris wrote that “our big two horse ploughs attract great attention. The people predict that we will ruin our land by . . . our ploughing. I am perfectly satisfied to cultivate the land here as we did in the Valley. It is complete butchery the way they farm here. I saw a piece of ground prepared to sow rye. I pledge you my word twenty steps from the field you could not have told that a plough was ever in it, yet I saw them ploughing.”<sup>26</sup> In February 1868, after requesting that his addressee send him ten bushels of clover seed, R. H. Harris noted, “It is surprising to see the amount of [clover] seed that was brought to this county this spring and it is selling readily. When I first came to this county it was hard to find though this county is improving rapidly in many respects. Big ploughs are quite common. Men who laughed at mine when I first came to this county are now using them.” In a subsequent passage, Harris described how the land formerly had been “badly farmed.” It had been “farmed in cotton, corn and wheat without a particle of manure put

24. Skinner, “Observations on Agriculture,” p. 140; “The Crops in Clarke,” *Valley Farmer* 2 (August 1845): 2.

25. Widespread evidence exists concerning the use of these techniques of high farming in a system of mixed agriculture, and of wheat as the crop of foremost commercial importance within this system. A sampling may be found in “The Harvest,” pp. 10–11; Turner, *Diary of Henry Boswell Jones*, passim but esp. pp. 4–6; Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah,” pp. 466–76; William M. Harner Diary, 1847–1861, passim, in Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.; and Thomas S. Pleasants, “Diversity in Agricultural Production,” in *Reports of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1867* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1868), pp. 247–53. Discussions of the superior qualities of limestone soils for wheat farming, and their wide distribution in the Valley of Virginia, are in Turner, *Diary of Henry Boswell Jones*, pp. 4–5; Skinner, “Observations on Agriculture,” pp. 136 and 139–40; and William Gilham, “The Soils of the Valley of Virginia,” *Southern Planter* 16 (January 1856): 22, 26–28.

26. M. H. Harris, Kingston, Ga., to J. S. Roller, Harrisonburg, Va., November 6, 1865, in John Edwin Roller Papers, Roller Family Collection, 1844–1917, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

on the land of any kind. Ploughed with no other plow than what we call the bull tong. Now what would Rockingham land produce at the end of twenty-five years using only [this plow], no manure, no grass of any kind. I think not much."<sup>27</sup>

Of course, many farmers outside the valley practiced these principles of high farming, and we can be certain that not all farmers within the valley adhered to them. Nonetheless, the number of observers from outside the region who commented on the extraordinary degree to which farmers of the valley practiced these agricultural techniques, to good effect, is striking. A visitor to Tidewater Virginia in 1814, after disparaging the agricultural potential of that region, remarked that "the lands further to the west are said to be much superior, particularly the extensive Valley beyond the Blue Ridge, which is described as a delightful country, highly cultivated." Another traveler, in this case one who passed through the valley in 1818, referred explicitly to the principles of high farming as he commented on the "improving" state of agriculture there. In 1820, John Skinner, a noted agriculturist of the period and editor of the *American Farmer*, traveled "up the fine lime stone valley of Shenandoah . . . to view, for the first time, the most beautiful, and most bountiful portion of our country." Skinner's report to his readers stressed the prevalence of "mixed" agriculture in the Shenandoah Valley and the superiority of this system of farming for successful grain production.<sup>28</sup> Valley farmers, then, had acquired a reputation outside the region for their practice of mixed farming that incorporated elements of scientific agriculture. On the rich limestone soils of the region that were supremely well suited to the culture of wheat, farmers exploited the biological linkages between animal husbandry and crop production to produce a broad array of crops and livestock. They concentrated on wheat, however, as the cash crop of paramount importance.

The federal census of 1840 contains the earliest comprehensive data with which to compare levels of wheat production among farmers in the Valley of Virginia to those of farmers elsewhere. It confirms contemporary observations and impressions of the valley as the prime wheat-growing district of Virginia. In 1840, the valley produced a fifth of the Virginia wheat crop. At mid-century, working only 9 percent of the improved acres of farmland in the Commonwealth, valley farmers pro-

27. R. H. Harris, Kingston, Ga., to J. S. Roller, February 26, 1868, in John Edwin Roller Papers.

28. Thomas H. Palmer, "Observations of Virginia," in Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South*, 1:96; John Holt Rice, "Journey about Virginia," *ibid.*, 1:194-95; and Skinner, "Observations on Agriculture," pp. 136-41.

duced 22 percent of Virginia’s wheat crop.<sup>29</sup> By this time, the valley had emerged as one of the most productive wheat-farming regions of the South. One historian’s comparison of wheat productivity in ten multi-county regions encompassing portions of Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and Georgia shows that in 1850, farmers in a four-county portion of the Valley of Virginia produced almost twenty bushels of wheat per capita, while farmers in each of the other nine regions produced fewer than six bushels per capita.<sup>30</sup>

For labor to perform the myriad tasks integral to agricultural endeavors in a mixed grain-livestock economy, farmers relied heavily upon wives, children, and other kin, as well as landless white day laborers who resided in the villages, hamlets, and open-country neighborhoods of the valley. But free blacks and slaves labored on valley farms, too. At mid-century, almost 25,000 slaves—nearly 20 percent of the total population—lived in the Valley of Virginia, and the valley was home also to over 3,800 free blacks (over 3 percent of the total population), a large proportion of whom found work on valley farms. In Shenandoah County, for example, where at mid-century the population consisted of 12,565 whites (91.3 percent), 292 free blacks (2.1 percent) and 911 slaves (6.6 percent), approximately half of all slaveholders were farmers. Collectively they owned over 60 percent of the slaves in the county.<sup>31</sup> Thus,

29. Percentages are calculated from data contained in U.S. Department of State, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, . . . From the Returns of the Sixth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841); and U.S. Census Office, *Statistical View of the United States, . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, D.C.: A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854) (hereafter cited as *Sixth Census* and *Seventh Census* respectively). Valley farmers also produced a disproportionate share of Virginia’s wheat crop in 1860, but at a level significantly below that of 1850. Data contained in U.S. Census Office, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1864) (hereafter cited as *Eighth Census*), show that valley farmers, with 9% of the improved acres in the state, produced 15% of the state’s wheat crop. Perhaps the lower production of 1860 resulted from the relatively low prices that prevailed during the period 1856–61. See Arthur G. Peterson, *Historical Study of Farm Prices Received by Producers of Farm Products in Virginia, 1801–1927* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station, in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1929), p. 27.

30. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 2:876. The four Valley-of-Virginia counties were Augusta, Page, Rockbridge, and Rockingham.

31. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Manuscript Population Schedules, Shenandoah County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, M432). Of 197 slaveowners listed in the 1850 slave schedules for Shenandoah County, 160 could be linked nominally to the population schedules of that year in order to discern their occupation. These 160 slaveholders owned a total

the institution of slavery proved compatible with the work cycles and labor requirements of agriculture as practiced in the mixed grain-livestock economy of the Valley of Virginia. As laborers on farms, African Americans participated actively in the emergence of the valley as one of the most productive wheat-producing regions of the Upper South.

During the late antebellum period, a large majority of valley farmers cultivated wheat—96 percent in 1850 and 90 percent in 1860. In several valley counties, wheat production was virtually universal in 1850 and 1860 (see Fig. 2).<sup>32</sup> Much of the wheat produced by valley farmers was ground in local mills and the flour transported by wagon down the Valley Pike to Winchester, or through gaps in the Blue Ridge to coastal or fall-line cities such as Baltimore, Georgetown, Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and Richmond. In 1840, a resident of the upper valley noted that “they have got the Mcadamized road nearly completed from Staunton to Winchester.” Two years later, he reported, “Our Mcadamised road is beginning to be of some service to the Valley. The large wagons . . . carry from 80 to 85 hundred [pounds of] produce from Staunton to Winchester for 50 cents per hundred.”<sup>33</sup> Twice yearly during the period from 1847 through 1860, William Harner, a farmer of Rock-

---

of 781 slaves. Among these slaveholders, 74 (49.4%) were farmers (including one “merchant and farmer”). Collectively, the 74 owned 494 (63.3%) of the 781 slaves. Further discussion of slavery and its aftermath in the Valley of Virginia may be found in Kenneth E. Koons, “The Colored Laborers Work as Well as When Slaves’: African Americans in the Breadbasket of the Confederacy, 1850–1880,” in *Archaeological Perspectives on the American Civil War*, ed. Clarence R. Geier and Stephen R. Potter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 229–52.

32. Percentages are calculated from data in Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Augusta County, Botetourt County, Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, and Warren County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132); Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Augusta County, Botetourt County, Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, and Warren County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132).

33. Robert and Sally McCormick, Augusta County, Va., to William and Rebecca McCormick, Caledonia, Washington County, Mo., May 30, 1840; and Robert and Sally McCormick, Augusta County, Va., to William and Rebecca McCormick, Greenville, Wain County, Mo., December 25, 1842; both in William Steele McCormick Papers, 1833–79, McCormick Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. See Parke Rouse, Jr., *The Great Wagon Road, from Philadelphia to the South* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 219–20, for a discussion of the macadamization of the so-called “Valley Turnpike” during the 1830s and early 1840s.

**Wheat producers in proportion to all farmers**

(black section of bar = wheat producers;

\* = data not available)

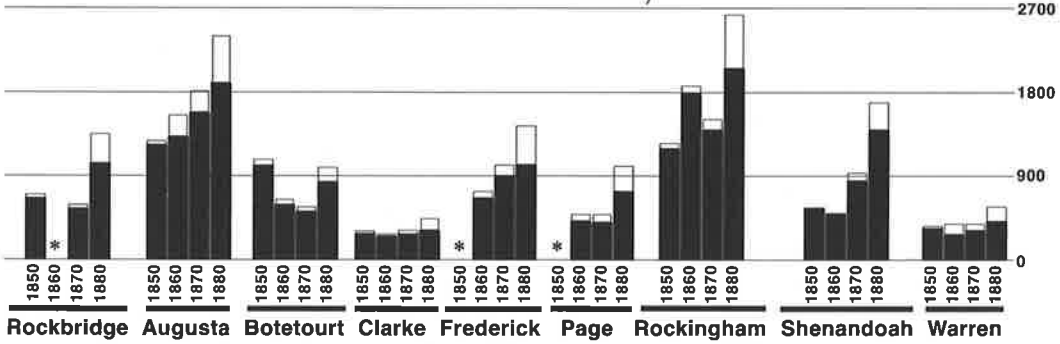


Fig. 2. Wheat producers in the Valley of Virginia, 1850–1880. Source of data: Bureau of the Census, Seventh through Tenth Censuses of the United States, 1850–1880, *Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Counties of Augusta, Botetourt, Clarke, Frederick, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132).

ingham County, wagoned his flour over the Blue Ridge Mountains to Richmond or Fredericksburg, where he sold it. Usually Harner carried ten barrels of flour and returned with coffee, sugar, salt, and plaster.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, barrels of flour were loaded onto gundalows—long, low river boats constructed of rough lumber—and floated down the south fork of the Shenandoah River and into the Potomac at Harpers Ferry. The carrying capacity of a gundalow depended on its size and the depth of the river, but some could hold over one hundred barrels of flour. When waters ran high enough to permit it—typically in the spring of each year—convoys of gundalows carried flour and other products, such as iron and lumber, downriver.<sup>35</sup> In October 1854, one Clarke County observer, on an evening walk along the bank of the Shenandoah River,

34. William M. Harner Diary, 1848–61, in Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

35. Informative accounts of flour transport on the Shenandoah are Anthony Greiner, “Navigation and Commerce on the Shenandoah River of Virginia,” *Log of the Mystic Seaport* 52 (Summer 1990): 42–46; and Ann McCleary and Nancy Sorrels, “Port Republic: Portrait of a Shenandoah River Town,” *Potomac Valley Chronicle: Journal of the Potomac River Consortium* 1 (n.d.): 75–85.

“came opposite some gondolas laden with flour” destined for Harpers Ferry.<sup>36</sup>

Some farmers of the upper valley used a combination of land and water transport to market their crops. During the 1840s and early 1850s, three or four times annually, Henry B. Jones had one of his slaves haul his flour and other goods by wagon over the Blue Ridge to Scottsville, on the James River, for transshipment to Richmond by canal boat. On the return trip, Jones’s wagons carried provisions, such as salt, coffee, sugar, plaster, and guano. In the early 1850s, with the completion of a canal linking the town of Lexington, in Rockbridge County, to the James River, Jones and other upper-valley farmers began sending their flour and other produce to Lynchburg and then Richmond by water.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the coming of railroads to parts of the valley during the middle third of the nineteenth century gave some farmers another way to ship flour to eastern markets.<sup>38</sup>

In light of the agricultural productivity of the valley and especially valley farmers’ exceptional capacity for wheat production, it is hardly surprising that, during the Civil War, the Confederate high command counted heavily on the Valley of Virginia to fill its commissary wagons.<sup>39</sup> During the Civil War, the Valley of Virginia was of great strategic importance to the southern cause; it formed a natural corridor of invasion, so that Confederate armies moving northward into its lower portion gained access to the northern cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia and the capital city of Washington.<sup>40</sup> Also important to southern strategy was the degree to which the region could serve as a source of foodstuffs and for-

36. Hibbard[?] Journal.

37. Turner, *Henry Boswell Jones Diary*. The Lusk and Davidson Account Books, 1860–64, show that large quantities of flour were carried out of Lexington on canal boats during the Civil War. See Peterson, *Historical Study of Farm Prices*, pp. 7–8; and John W. Knapp, “Trade and Transportation in Rockbridge: The First Hundred Years,” *Proceedings [1975–79] of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 9 (1982): 211–31.

38. For discussion of Staunton as a rail center for shipment of goods to the East during the 1850s and after, see Hildebrand, *Mennonite Journal*, p. x. Evidence of farmers’ use of railroads in Staunton and Harrisonburg to market their produce may be found in A. H. McCue Diary and Account Books; and in Jonas Blosser Diary and Account Book, 1873–89, Blosser Family Papers, Menno Simons Historical Library and Archives, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.

39. Samuel Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy: A Study in Civil War Pacifism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1967), p. 90.

40. James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983), p. 184; Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1971), pp. 243–44.

age for southern armies.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in the context of the Civil War, the Valley of Virginia often is called “the breadbasket of the Confederacy” or is referred to by similar epithets indicative of both the unsurpassed productivity of the valley as an agricultural region and the extent to which Confederate armies relied upon it for provisions.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, these same circumstances made the valley a particular target of Federal armies seeking to destroy sources of foodstuffs for southern armies. Invading and occupying armies stripped the valley of its agricultural products and resources, as they burned barns and grist mills, ruined crops, and confiscated livestock. In the summer of 1864, General Grant directed General Hunter, his chief subordinate in the valley, to “take all provisions, forage and stock wanted for the use of your command; such as cannot be consumed, destroy.”<sup>43</sup> Later, in the fall of 1864, General Sheridan, who replaced Hunter, received essentially the same instructions.<sup>44</sup> These orders resulted in burning, freebooting, pilferage, and livestock depredations throughout the valley. At the height of Sheridan’s raids, Federal troops made daily forays through the countryside, killing or driving off livestock and taking all the “bread, bacon, butter, lard, and poultry” to be found.<sup>45</sup> Graphic eyewitness accounts of these kinds of activities are legion. One Confederate soldier, from a vantage point high above the valley, “could see Yankees out in the valley driving off the horses, cattle, sheep and killing the hogs and burning all the barns and shocks of corn and wheat in the fields and destroying everything that could feed or shelter man or beast. They burnt nearly all the dwelling houses, the valley was soon filled with smoke.”<sup>46</sup>

41. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, p. 429; Catton, *Civil War*, p. 244; Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983), pp. 66 and 82; Virginius Dabney, *Virginia, the New Dominion: A History from 1607 to the Present* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971), p. 346.

42. Hildebrand, *Mennonite Journal*, p. x (quotation) and passim, but esp. p. 15, contain descriptions of impressment and payments of the “tithe, a 10 percent tax-in-kind on all agricultural products and slaughtered hogs,” promulgated by the Confederate Congress in 1863. See Heatwole, *Burning*, p. xiii and passim; and Henry B. Jones Papers, 1831–82, in Virginia Papers, McCormick Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

43. Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy*, p. 98.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101; Horst’s ch. 8, “Destruction and Famine,” includes numerous eyewitness accounts of such activities. Also see sketches and diary in James E. Taylor, *With Sheridan Up the Shenandoah Valley in 1864: Leaves from a Special Artist’s Sketch Book and Diary* (Cleveland, Ohio: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1989); Heatwole, *Burning*, and David Hunter Strother, *A Virginia Yankee in the Civil War: The Diaries*

Another unusually vivid account of Federal destruction describes the activities of Union soldiers in a rural neighborhood about three miles north of Harrisonburg:

Sometime in May [1864] the Federal army passed through the valley again, but this time they took nearly all our bacon. I recollect very well seeing a yankee (as we called them) follow mother with a drawn pistol in his hand, and made her show him where she kept her bacon. Father saved a few pieces by throwing them out of the garret window into a patch of weeds. In the fall of this year Sheridan made his raid through the Valley destroying everything as they went. They came to our house and went all through it and took anything that was of any value to them. Some went in the hog pen and killed the hogs and took the best of the meat and left the balance lay. It was bang bang all day shooting hogs, sheep, and chickens, so that it was not safe to go out of doors. . . . Sheridan . . . ordered his men to burn all the buildings in the neighborhood both barns and houses. I will never forget the evening when they burnt the buildings. It looked like burning a new ground. They came to our house and set the barn on fire then . . . put fire in every room of the house and set the outbuildings on fire too.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, the population of the valley suffered greatly as a result of these activities, which was exactly the point, as Federal armies resorted to purposeful destruction of civilian property in order to wreck the southern economy and render the South incapable of continuing to wage war. As one historian has written, "Barns and corncribs and gristmills and herds of cattle [became] military objectives now."<sup>48</sup> Sheridan's "35,000 men moved up the Valley like a swarm of locusts," with the result that thousands of valley residents became penniless, ragged refugees.<sup>49</sup> After weeks of these activities, General Sheridan reported to his superiors that "the whole country from the Blue Ridge to the North Mountain has been made untenable for a rebel army. I have destroyed over two thousand barns filled with wheat, hay, and farming implements, and over seventy mills filled with flour and wheat, have driven in front of this army over four thousand head of stock, and have killed and issued to the troops over three thousand sheep."<sup>50</sup>

Late in the year 1865, a resident of Winchester summarized the calamitous circumstances of farmers in what he referred to as "our once beautiful but now desolated Valley." He wrote of farmers' need for "the

---

of David Hunter Strother, ed. Cecil D. Eby, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

47. Memoirs of Samuel Blosser, Blosser Family Papers.

48. Catton, *Civil War*, p. 245.

49. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, p. 444.

50. Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy*, p. 108.



**Table 1**  
**Changes in Livestock and Major Field Crops,**  
**Valley of Virginia, between 1860 and 1870**

	1860	1870	Change	% Change
Number of:				
Horses	36,566	31,152	-5,414	-14.8
Milk Cows	28,709	27,112	-1,597	-5.6
Other Cattle	62,112	46,964	-15,148	-24.4
Swine	147,890	80,468	-67,422	-45.6
Sheep	71,648	50,336	-21,312	-29.7
Bushels of:				
Wheat	1,955,910	2,148,600	192,690	9.9
Corn	3,160,633	1,512,116	-1,648,517	-52.2
Oats	797,526	822,144	24,618	3.1
Rye	229,174	149,684	-79,490	-34.7
Buckwheat	22,173	3,583	-18,590	-83.8
Tons of:				
Hay	79,125	70,553	-8,572	-10.8

Sources: *Eighth Census* and *Ninth Census*.

means to enable them to resume their farming operations, without which their fertile lands [would be] valueless, for their stock [has] been killed or taken away, their farms laid waste, their implements destroyed, their labor disorganized, and the only currency within their reach totally without value.”<sup>51</sup> The devastation of the valley’s agricultural infrastructure during the Civil War, with the consequence that the farm population of the valley suffered enormously, is a familiar theme, coverage of which is widely available in standard accounts. Less familiar, however, is the process by which the agricultural sector of the Valley of Virginia recovered from both the systematic destruction carried out by Federal armies and the activities of Confederate impressment bands.

The Civil War profoundly disrupted rural life and farming in the Valley of Virginia. A sense of the magnitude of this disruption may be gained by comparing indices of agricultural production in 1860 and 1870. Such a comparison shows that, in 1870, five years after Appomattox, almost without exception, the numbers of various types of livestock on hand and production of major field crops remained far below prewar

51. *Report of the Secretary of the Baltimore Agricultural Aid Society, December, 1865* (Baltimore, Md.: John Murphy and Co., 1865), p. 15.

levels. Production of rye had fallen 35 percent, corn 52 percent, and hay 11 percent. The number of horses—the main source of draft power on valley farms—had decreased by 15 percent; and the number of milk cows had fallen 6 percent, beef cattle 24 percent, sheep 30 percent, and swine 46 percent (see Table 1).<sup>52</sup> Further, in many counties, “the waste of war” sharply reduced land values as formerly improved lands reverted to a “wild” state.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps it is the collective weight of this kind of evidence that has led some historians uncritically to assume that, during the postbellum era, the valley’s agricultural economy in general, and wheat farming in particular, entered a period of stagnation and decline, from which it never recovered. One agricultural historian, for example, asserts that “the Civil War so damaged farming in the Valley that a later generation could scarce believe the area had once been the wheat kingdom of the South.”<sup>54</sup> Whatever the case, this claim is at odds with most of the evidence bearing on the issue. Certainly, this assessment would not have resulted from an examination of data on wheat production in the valley during the postwar decades of the nineteenth century. For these data show that wheat production actually increased by 10 percent during the 1860s and burgeoned during subsequent decades. Modest though this 10 percent increase may seem, it contrasts starkly with the 40 percent decline of wheat production in other portions of the Commonwealth during the same decade.<sup>55</sup>

In the valley, wheat was the only major field crop whose production rose during the decade of the Civil War, providing further confirmation of its importance as the principal cash crop of the region. Farmers after the war needed cash to restore their farms to productivity. As before the war, they relied upon wheat as their principal market crop. Although the Civil War greatly impeded the business of farming, it did not alter the

52. Percentages calculated on basis of data contained in *Eighth Census* and U.S. Census Office, *A Compendium of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870)* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1872) (hereafter cited as *Ninth Census*).

53. J. R. Dodge, “Report of the Statistician,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1867*, p. 112.

54. Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah,” p. 176.

55. Percentages are calculated from data contained in *Eighth Census* and *Ninth Census*. To calculate the percent change in wheat production from 1860 to 1870 for the portion of the state not in the valley, the 1860 data pertaining to counties that later would become “West Virginia” were disaggregated from those that would remain Virginia counties. Despite the anachronism, meaningful comparison requires this procedure. The Valley of Virginia produced 1,955,910 bushels of wheat in 1860 and 2,148,600 in 1870. In the nonvalley portion of Virginia, farmers produced 8,808,307 bushels of wheat in 1860 and 5,250,187 bushels in 1870.

basic pattern of economic activity by which valley farmers traditionally had earned their livelihoods. Farmers continued the seasonal round of agricultural activities associated with mixed farming, with an emphasis on the production of wheat. In a period of severe economic dislocation, continuity prevailed as farmers turned to the tried and the familiar.

In preserving the valley’s long tradition of reliance upon wheat culture as the principal source of cash revenues, farmers of the valley were assisted—greatly, it appears—during the immediate postwar period by an organization called the Baltimore Agricultural Aid Society. Formed at the close of the war, the stated mission of the society was to supply, at cost, to farmers “of the neighboring State of Virginia . . . stock, agricultural implements and seed to enable them to resume their farming operations and provide bread to their families.” Although the corresponding secretary of the society portrayed the mission of the organization as essentially humanitarian, he noted that its activities “cannot but have its reflective influence on the future trade of the City [of Baltimore].” Ostensibly formed to aid farmers in Virginia generally, the society seems to have focused a disproportionate share of its activity on the Valley of Virginia and to have concerned itself especially, though not exclusively, with the distribution of seed wheat and implements necessary to produce wheat.<sup>56</sup>

During the period from 1870 to 1900, valley farmers continued to produce wheat in prodigious amounts. Indeed, they produced vastly more wheat during these three decades than they had during the three decades prior to 1870.<sup>57</sup> Also remarkable is the degree to which levels of wheat production in the valley exceeded those of Virginia as a whole during this period. From 1870 to 1900, as wheat production in the portion of Virginia outside the valley rose by 3 percent, valley farmers increased their production of wheat by 63 percent.<sup>58</sup>

56. *Report of the Secretary of the Baltimore Agricultural Aid Society.*

57. This statement is made on the basis of wheat production as reported by each census from 1840 to 1900; *Sixth Census*; *Seventh Census*; *Eighth Census*; *Ninth Census*; U.S. Census Office, *Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1885 (hereafter cited as *Tenth Census*); U.S. Census Division, *Abstract of the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1896) (hereafter cited as *Eleventh Census*); and U.S. Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900: Agriculture*, pt. 2: *Crops and Irrigation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1902) (hereafter cited as *Twelfth Census*). From 1840 to 1870, wheat production of valley farmers increased by 138,794 bushels, or 6.9% (2,009,806 bushels in 1840 to 2,148,600 in 1870). From 1870 to 1900, wheat production of valley farmers increased by 1,359,130 bushels or 63.3% (2,148,600 in 1870 to 3,507,730 in 1900).

58. Calculations based on data contained in *Ninth Census* and *Twelfth Census*.

As they had before the war, valley farmers continued to produce a disproportionate share of the Commonwealth's wheat crop. In each census year from 1870 to 1900, valley farmers held 12 to 14 percent of the improved acres of farmland in Virginia but produced between 29 and 42 percent of the state's wheat crop. In 1900, for example, valley farmers worked only 13 percent of Virginia's improved acres of land but produced almost 40 percent of the Commonwealth's wheat crop. In each census year from 1870 to 1900, valley farmers produced between two and three bushels of wheat per improved acre of land, while farmers in the rest of Virginia produced under one bushel per improved acre (see Fig. 3).<sup>59</sup> Thus, if wheat was "the staple of our country" during the antebellum period, production figures indicate that it became even more the chief staple of the valley during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the aggregate, Virginia farmers outside the valley increased their production of wheat by a mere 3 percent from 1870 to 1900, conforming to the pattern described in standard accounts of economic development in the nineteenth-century United States. This is a familiar story. Briefly, wheat farming accompanied the westward movement of the frontier, so that, as the nineteenth century progressed, midwestern farmers produced increasing proportions of the national wheat crop.<sup>60</sup> From 1870 to 1900, for example, a twelve-state region composed of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and the seven states north of them, increased its production by 126 percent. In each census year from 1870 to 1900, this region produced between 67 and 72 percent of the national wheat crop.<sup>61</sup> meanwhile, in older states of the East, farmers continued

59. Calculations based on data contained in *Ninth Census*, *Eleventh Census*, and *Twelfth Census*.

60. For discussions of the development of the midwestern grainbelt, its integration into the national economy via new forms of transportation, and the consequences for agricultural enterprise in the eastern regions of the U.S., see Lance E. Davis et al., *American Economic Growth: An Economist's History of the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 376–79; Gilbert Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 20–29; Clarence H. Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820–1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 9–15; Harvey S. Perloff, Edgar S. Dunn, Jr., Eric Lampard, and Richard F. Muth, *Regions, Resources, and Economic Growth*, 3d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), pp. 113–17; and Louis Bernard Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of Wheat," in *Readings in the Economic History of American Agriculture*, ed. Louis Bernard Schmidt and Earle Dudley Ross (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 370–80.

61. In 1870, 1880, 1890, and 1900, the twelve states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota, produced 67.7%, 71.7%, 68.6%, and 67.1%, respectively, of the national wheat crop. See Schmidt, "Westward Movement of Wheat," p. 375.

“The Staple of Our Country’: Wheat”

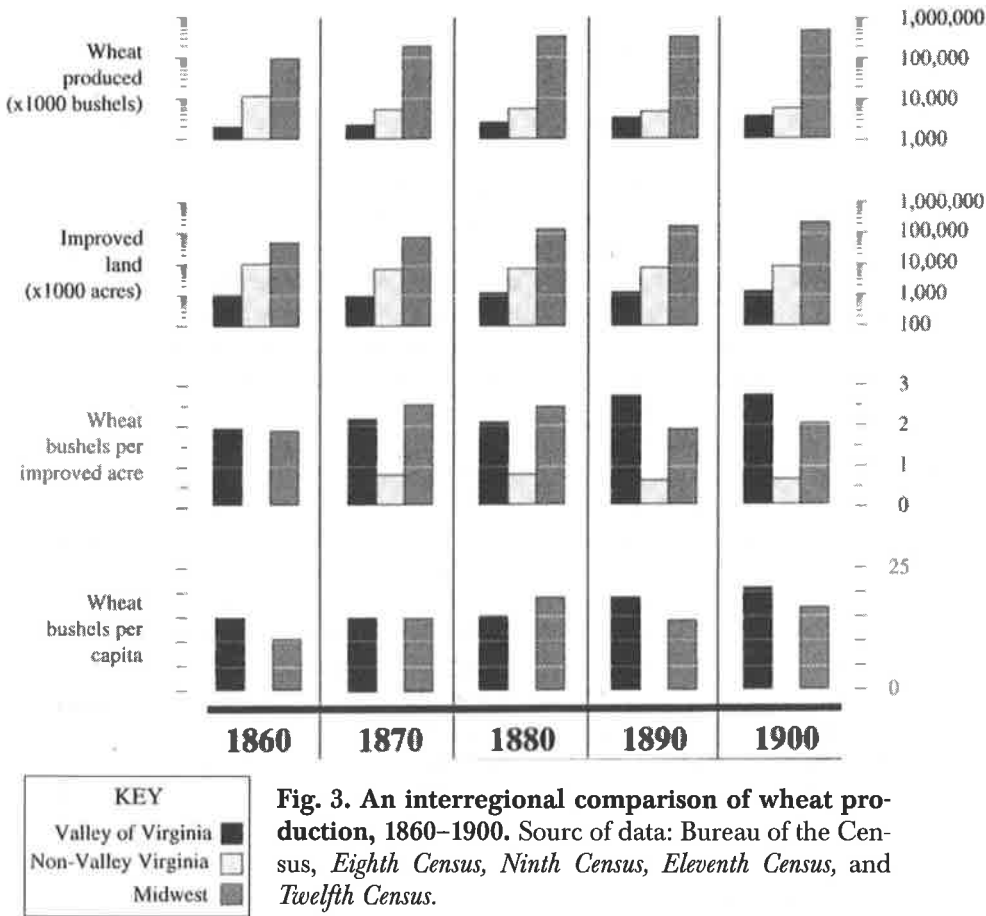


Fig. 3. An interregional comparison of wheat production, 1860–1900. Source of data: Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, *Ninth Census*, *Eleventh Census*, and *Twelfth Census*.

to increase their production of wheat but only at diminutive rates of growth; moreover, the proportion of the national crop produced by them dwindled rapidly. Thus, Virginia, the fourth highest wheat-producing state in 1840 and 1850, ranked twenty-third in 1900.<sup>62</sup>

Measured on a per capita basis, however, levels of wheat production in the Valley of Virginia were comparable to those of this twelve-state region of the Midwest. In most census years during the period from 1860 to 1900 (1880 is the exception), per capita production of wheat in the valley exceeded that of the twelve north central states (Fig. 3). Employing an alternate comparative measure—the number of bushels of wheat produced per acre of improved land—shows that valley production

62. *Seventh Census*, *Eighth Census*, and *Twelfth Census*.

surpassed that of the north central wheat belt states in 1860, 1890, and 1900 (Fig. 3).<sup>63</sup>

These high levels of wheat production in the Valley of Virginia during the postwar decades of the nineteenth century force us to ask questions. How were farmers able to increase levels of production so dramatically? And, perhaps more important, why did they choose to do so, given that these high levels of production were achieved during a period when the secular trend of wheat prices was steadily downward.<sup>64</sup> By the 1870s, farmers of the valley had relied upon wheat as their staple crop for a century. But continued production of wheat during the latter third of the nineteenth century involved factors other than simply the preservation of tradition.

Schlebecker has argued that the enormous losses of livestock occasioned by the Civil War ruined wheat farming in the valley because of the resulting lack of manure to restore fertility to crop lands.<sup>65</sup> By 1880, however, the numbers of horses, asses and mules, milk cows, beef cattle, and sheep had risen to levels higher than those of 1860 (see Table 2); and there is no evidence that farmers were any less diligent than before in using livestock manures to revitalize soils. As in the prewar decades, farmers continued routinely to haul large amounts of manure to their fields, often recording in their diaries how many loads were hauled on a given day or during a given season. In April 1881, for example, A. H. McCue hauled fifty-six loads of manure to his fields, and judged there to be "40 or 50 more" that he would "let lay until fall." Over a four-day

63. The data pertaining to this twelve-state region are from Schmidt, "Western Movement of Wheat," pp. 275 and 371. They were recalculated and confirmed using population statistics in Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960). Per capital production figures for the valley were calculated using production data found in the *Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census*, and the population data in John S. Andriot, *Population Abstracts of the United States* (McLean, Va.: Andriot and Associates, 1983), pp. 821–26. Figures on bushels of wheat per improved acre, for both regions, were calculated using data in the *Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census*.

64. Peterson, *Historical Study of Farm Prices*, p. 25. For detailed discussion of low wheat prices and their consequences in one valley county during the postwar decades of the nineteenth century, see Richard K. MacMaster, *Augusta County History, 1865–1950* (Salem, W.Va.: Don Mills, Inc., 1988), pp. 99–103 and 107–11. Also informative is Pollard, *Crop, Stock and Labor Report* [1878], in which a farmer from Page County claimed that "farming [is] not remunerative at present prices." Similarly, a farmer in Rockingham County complained of "the low price of everything; 2-1/2 cents for hogs, 3 cents for sheep, and 3-1/2 cents for cattle, and 85 and 90 cents for wheat is beyond endurance."

65. Schlebecker, "Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah," p. 176.

**Table 2**  
**Livestock in the Valley of Virginia, 1850–1900**

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
Horses	33,964	36,566	31,152	40,290	48,186	49,863
Asses/Mules	503	970	553	985	1,197	1,829
Working Oxen	849	1,239	540	315	556	—
Milk Cows	29,913	28,709	27,112	34,524	37,169	46,611
Other Cattle	62,504	62,112	46,964	67,277	70,775	76,017
Swine	150,321	147,890	80,468	116,731	107,004	118,317
Sheep	86,085	71,648	50,336	75,910	62,209	119,667

Source: *Eighth Census, Ninth Census, Tenth Census, and Eleventh Census.*

period in early April 1882, McCue hauled about fifty loads of manure to his fields. Similarly, Isaac Acker of western Rockingham County or his hired hands, hauled manure for five days in March 1881 and four days in March 1882.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, commercially prepared fertilizers were widely available; during the last third of the century, farmers bought and applied them in prodigious amounts. Nearly every farmer’s diary or account book which survives from this period—it is difficult to find an exception—contains frequent notations relating to the buying, mixing, or application of fertilizer. Similarly, the records of Grange chapters, the minutes of agricultural improvement societies, and especially the pages of agricultural periodicals are filled with information or advice relating to fertilizer.<sup>67</sup> Surviving account books reveal fertilizer to have been a major cost of production, and some farmers routinely borrowed money to purchase it. In September 1876, for example, A. H. McCue paid a note for \$52.00 for fertilizer; in September 1877, two notes totaling \$32.57; in October 1878, a note for \$43.00; and in May 1879, a note for \$20.84. These notes

66. *Seventh Census, Eighth Census, Ninth Census, and Tenth Census*; A. H. McCue Diary and Account Book; and Isaac Acker Diary, 1880–1906, in Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

67. As examples, see Isaac Acker Diary; A. H. McCue Diary and Account Book; Jonas Blosser Diary and Account Book, 1873–89; Emanuel Suter Diary; Minutes of the Churchville Farm Club, 1860–74, in Research Library, Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton, Va.; and Minute Book of Timber Ridge Grange, No. 277/Account Book of Margaret Hannah (Gibson) McBride Lyle, in Gibson Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

did not cover the entirety of McCue's fertilizer purchases. The note for \$43.00 in October 1878 was for one ton of fertilizer; in September of that year, he sowed 3,340 pounds of fertilizer on one field.<sup>68</sup>

Data in the manuscript agricultural schedules of 1880—the first census in which enumerators recorded individual-level data on fertilizer use—suggest that farmers used commercial fertilizers mainly for wheat production. In one rural neighborhood of 132 farmers in Augusta County, for example, among 41 (32 percent) farmers who did not use fertilizer in the previous crop year, only 12 raised wheat. Further, in this neighborhood where the average wheat producer raised thirty-two acres of wheat in 1879, 6 of the 12 farmers who did not use fertilizer grew fewer than six acres of wheat. In the valley as a whole, the value of fertilizer purchases rose from \$412,916 in 1880 to \$468,020 in 1890, a 13 percent increase. It is possible that heavier use of fertilizers in the 1880s resulted in higher yields of wheat. During this decade, wheat fields rose from three to five bushels per acre in every county of the valley except Clarke, where they remained unchanged.<sup>69</sup> perhaps increasing fertilizer use in the decades after the Civil War gave rise to the development of a new type of outbuilding on valley farms. In 1880, Isaac Acker built what he called a “fertilizer house,” where he stored and mixed fertilizer, and in his diary he made reference to the fertilizer houses of some of his neighbors.<sup>70</sup>

It seems likely that many farmers continued to raise wheat at increasingly high levels during this period of declining prices because they had invested heavily in mechanical implements for producing it. Until the middle third of the nineteenth century, productivity gains in agriculture resulted largely from new agricultural techniques rather than from labor-saving mechanical devices. Until this era, American farmers used essentially the same tools as farmers of classical antiquity. Valley farmers participated in the nineteenth-century mechanical revolution in agriculture by investing in expensive, horse-powered (and thus labor-

68. A. H. McCue, *Diary and Account Book*. Also see David P. Lupton, *Bonds, in Lupton Family Papers*, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, for numerous examples of promissory notes representing extension of credit expressly for the purchase of fertilizers, all during the 1880s.

69. This “rural neighborhood” was listed as the “19th district” of Augusta County in the source of these data: Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Augusta County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132). According to these schedules, A. H. McCue, who lived in this neighborhood of east-central Augusta County, near the village of Fishersville, spent \$145 for fertilizer in 1880; this amount was exceeded by only 20 of 91 farmers in the 19th District who used fertilizer. Data on fertilizer purchases in the valley as a whole are from *Tenth Census* and *Eleventh Census*.

70. Isaac Acker diary, August 7 and 9, 1880, and September 11, 1881.



saving) mechanical implements such as grain drills for sowing wheat, reapers for the harvest, threshers for separating grains of wheat from their stalks, and wheat fans for separating wheat from chaff. The traditional and continuing propensity of valley farmers to use horses (rather than oxen) as draft animals (see Table 2) made it possible for them readily to exploit the advantages of horsepower for the mechanization of grain production.<sup>71</sup>

Some farmers had purchased drills, reapers, threshers, and wheat fans during the antebellum period; but there is convincing, if impressionistic, evidence that a great deal of agricultural machinery was destroyed by Federal troops during the Civil War, especially Sheridan’s troops in the fall of 1864.<sup>72</sup> After the war, perhaps in consequence of reduced availability of labor or—to view the same problem from a different perspective—perhaps from a desire to expand the number of acres devoted to wheat, farmers seem to have accelerated their purchases of such equipment.<sup>73</sup> In 1873, in a discussion of the consequences of increasing competition with western producers, one member of the Churchville [Augusta County] Farmer’s Club argued that “farmers [should] put forth more energy and raise larger crops.” In the same discussion, another member urged farmers to “clear off and prepare their lands so as to enable the use of machinery to advantage.”<sup>74</sup> Whether club members followed this advice is not known, but scattered evidence from elsewhere in the valley indicates that many farmers behaved in ways

71. Thorough analysis of mechanization in nineteenth-century agriculture may be found in Peter McClelland, *Sowing Modernity: America’s First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). For a description of traditional methods of wheat farming in colonial Virginia, see Harold B. Gill, “Wheat Culture in Colonial Virginia,” *Agricultural History* 52 (July 1978): 380–93. On the traditional use of horses as draft animals by valley farmers, see Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Atlas of Antebellum Southern Agriculture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), pp. 51–52 and 55–56; and Lemon *Best Poor Man’s Country*, pp. 156 and 164. Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty*, pp. 12–13, discusses the “great advantages” of horses over oxen as draft animals in utilizing new mechanical devices for grain production.

72. *Report of the Secretary of the Baltimore Agricultural Aid Society*, p. 15; Taylor, *With Sheridan Up the Shenandoah Valley*, p. 23; Heatwole, *Burning*, pp. 166, 175, and 193; and General Sheridan to his superiors, as quoted in Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy*, p. 108.

73. On the shortage of labor, see Minutes of Churchville Farmers Club, June 8, 1865. Interesting descriptions of the conditions of labor in the late 1870s, from the perspective of farmers in the valley counties of Augusta, Botetourt, Page, Rockingham, and Shenandoah are in Pollard, *Crop, Stock and Labor Report*, pp. 15, 17, 43, 49–50.

74. Minutes of Churchville Farmers Club, March 12, 1873.

consistent with it, by buying such equipment and by increasing the acres of wheat they cultivated.

The purchase of a reaper, a threshing machine, or a grain drill was an event sufficiently significant in the lives of farmers that many recorded it in their diaries. Although it is risky to generalize from individual notations of such purchases, it appears that many farmers joined—or perhaps rejoined—the mechanical revolution in wheat production during the 1870s. Emanuel Suter, a farmer of Rockingham County, west of Harrisonburg, purchased a grain drill in 1866, a reaper in 1870, and a wheat fan in 1875; sometime during this period, he acquired a thresher that he used for custom jobbing in his neighborhood as well as for cleaning his own wheat. By 1880, in a county where the average wheat producer planted 24 acres yielding a total of 382 bushels, Suter produced 710 bushels of wheat on 44 acres. In the early 1870s, Suter became a local sales representative for a manufacturer of reaping machines and enjoyed brisk sales among farmers of his locale during the first half of the decade. Similarly, A. H. McCue bought a combined reaper-mower in 1876; Jonas Blosser bought a reaper (from Suter) in 1871, and in 1879 he purchased a combined reaper-mower. During the 1880s, many farmers also began to use steam engines rather than horses to power threshing machines.<sup>75</sup> Although many farmers mechanized their production of wheat, older technologies persisted. In Shenandoah County during the late decades of the century, blacksmiths specializing in “general repairs” of agricultural machinery repaired binders, drills, threshing machines, engine wheels, and the like, but they repaired large numbers of grain cradles as well.<sup>76</sup>

75. MacMaster, *Augusta County History*, pp. 100–102, discusses the advent and spread of mechanization on farms in Augusta County during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The diaries and account books of A. H. McCue, which provide richly detailed information about general mixed farming with an emphasis on wheat, as it was practiced in east-central Augusta County, contain evidence of the gradual process of mechanization, beginning in the mid-1870s. Blosser Diary and Account Book, May 22, 1871, and June 9, 1879; see this day’s entry in the Suter Diary. Figures pertaining to Suter’s wheat production in 1880 are calculated from data in Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Rockingham County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132). Data pertaining to average production of wheat in Rockingham County are calculated on the basis of information in *Tenth Census*. For an example of a period of brisk business in the sale of reapers, see Emanuel Suter Diary, May and June 1871. Suter’s entrepreneurship as a salesman for these machines is detailed in Scott Hamilton Suter, “‘The Importance of Making Progress’: The Potteries of Emanuel Suter, 1851–1897” (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1994), pp. 68–74.

76. J. S. Borden and Sons Co., Toms Brook, Va., Account Books, 1886–1896, in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

Farmers who purchased equipment for the more efficient production of wheat wedded themselves to a continuation of wheat farming in order to make a return on their sizeable capital investments.<sup>77</sup> Of course, once tied to wheat farming under these circumstances, farmers found it sensible to maximize production by devoting more acres to wheat. In the valley as a whole, acres planted to wheat rose from 223,883 in 1880 (1880 is the first census that elicited information on the number of acres planted to various crops) to 288,939 in 1900, an increase of nearly 30 percent.<sup>78</sup> Clearing and cultivating land formerly classified as unimproved made it possible for farmers to expand the number of acres devoted to wheat. A number of diarists describe land-clearing activities or mention sowing wheat in “new ground” or “new fields,” suggesting recent clearing efforts to create additional improved acres.<sup>79</sup> Apparently, at least some farmers resorted to raising grain on marginal land or parcels of land not conventionally viewed as arable. One observer, in this instance an enumerator for the census of 1880, noticed that “orchards are sometimes mown, and sometimes crops of grain are raised therein.” In describing grasslands in the upland districts of western Shenandoah County, he wrote, “This mountain land can hardly be said to produce grass; in fact the owners say not; a sheep pasture is all you can call that which they do not mow. At times, of course, they raise grain on this land which is now called a sheep pasture.”<sup>80</sup> The number of improved acres in the valley as a whole increased by 30 percent between 1870 and 1900, from 1,041,666 to 1,308,550. Further, in some areas of the valley, farmers belled their cattle and sent them to mountain grazing areas in the spring, retrieving them later in the year. Perhaps this was done in order to conserve their own farmlands for the cultivation of wheat.<sup>81</sup>

77. See *Annual Catalogue and Price List of Labor Saving Agricultural Implements, and Farm Machinery, Manufactured and Sold, Wholesale and Retail*, by H. M. Smith and Company (Richmond, Va.: Printing and Publishing House of Fergusson and Rady, 1868), p. 47, where reaper-mowers are listed as selling at \$155 to \$225. In the spring of 1871, Suter sold his reapers for \$180; Suter Diary, June 5, 1871.

78. *Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census*.

79. As an example, see fall 1878 entries in McCue Diary and Account Books.

80. *Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, 1880, Shenandoah County, Virginia* (notes written in the margins of manuscript census pages, by the enumerator of Lee Magisterial District, Shenandoah County).

81. *Ninth Census, Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census*. As examples of livestock being grazed on mountain pastures, see entries for May 7, July 12, and September 20, 1878; May 12, 1879; and spring (no date), 1880, in the Jonas Blosser Diary and Account Book. Also see Suter Diary, April 28, May 24, and June 11 and 12, 1875. Apparently this practice was widespread, at least in areas west of Harrisonburg. In his diary, Suter names six neighbors who sent cattle to the mountains and indicates that “others” did the same (June 11, 1875).

If many farmers strove to maximize production of wheat by increasing the number of acres devoted to its cultivation, some discontinued wheat production altogether. Whereas wheat raising had been nearly universal in the Valley of Virginia during the antebellum period, by 1880 the percentage of farmers participating in the production of wheat had declined to about 77 percent (see Fig. 2).<sup>82</sup> Apparently, the high cost of mechanization, the dearth of labor, and the low price of wheat induced some farmers to abandon wheat farming.

Although wheat continued as the main staple for a solid majority of valley farmers during the last third of the century, declining profits in wheat impelled farmers to exploit markets for alternative cash crops or products. Of course, diversity always had characterized valley agriculture. As observed above, valley farmers proved adept at exploiting the biological linkages between plant and animal husbandry inherent to mixed agriculture. Doing so allowed them to practice more effectively the principles of high farming for the enhancement of wheat production. In addition, the diversity of enterprise that mixed farming entailed minimized the risk of reliance on one cash crop. A report issued by the United States Commissioner of Agriculture in 1867 contains an article entitled "Diversity in Agricultural Productions," in which mixed farming as practiced in the Valley of Virginia is recommended to planters of postwar Tidewater Virginia as a model of sound agriculture, both for its salutary effects of soil fertility and for the freedom it provided from the financial consequences of relying on one staple crop. In making this latter point, the author wrote that farmers who practice this form of agriculture "derive no large income from the sale of any single item; but, gathering something from numerous sources, the aggregate amounts to a handsome sum. . . . Moreover, should any one crop fail, disaster cannot be expected to befall all . . . under the most unfavorable circumstances, some one or more will succeed."<sup>83</sup> In late 1873, the Churchville Farmers Club debated "the question of whether a staple or mixed agri-

82. Percentage calculated from data in Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Augusta County, Botetourt County, Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, and Warren County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132), and *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Augusta County, Botetourt County, Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, and Warren County, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, T1132).

83. *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1867*, p. 250. Also see the description of "mixed husbandry" in *American Agriculturist for the Farm, Garden, and Household* [Baltimore], n.s. 39 (September 1880): 339.

culture was to the best interest of the Valley farmer.” The recording secretary of the club reported that, after heated debate and no consensus, “the majority of members, excluding two, favored mixed husbandry.”<sup>84</sup>

Valley farmers do seem to have striven to maintain a broad product mix. During the period from 1880 to 1900, they devoted only 18 to 22 percent of their improved acres to wheat, leaving the remainder for other crops and enterprises. Even in valley counties where farmers concentrated most heavily on wheat production, the proportion of improved acres planted to the crop never exceeded 25 percent.<sup>85</sup> At least among farmers for whom surviving documentation is sufficiently detailed to reconstruct sources and amounts of income, wheat accounted for slightly greater than one-third of total revenue, with the remainder arising from a host of other farm enterprises. The account book of Augusta County farmer A. H. McCue shows that, in 1878, proceeds from the sale of wheat amounted to 37 percent of his yearly income; the sale of lambs and wool amounted to 22 percent; hay 16 percent; and corn 13 percent. The remaining 12 percent resulted from the sale of a few cattle and small sales of items such as bacon, apples, eggs, and lard.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, in 1880, Jonas Blosser, a farmer of western Rockingham County, derived 35 percent of his income from wheat, with the remainder resulting from small sales of livestock, clover seed, eggs, butter, beans, cabbages, bacon, and the like.<sup>87</sup>

During the last third of the nineteenth century, valley farmers deepened their commitment to the diversity of enterprise that had always characterized valley agriculture. Exploiting market opportunities in grass farming, dairying, and orcharding enabled farmers to sustain a wheat-based economy during a period when prices for the staple declined. Farmers pursued grass farming more ardently in order to support greater numbers of livestock, but also to produce hay for sale. Hay production increased by 20 percent during the 1870s and by 110 percent during the 1880s, and there is evidence of farmers selling large quantities of baled hay to buyers outside the region. In 1876, for example, A. H. McCue loaded onto railroad cars (for shipment to an unnamed destination) some 227 bales of hay weighing over sixteen tons. He

84. Minutes of the Churchville Farmers Club, November 12 and December 11, 1873.

85. Percentages calculated from data in *Tenth Census*, *Eleventh Census*, and *Twelfth Census*.

86. Percentages calculated from data in A. H. McCue Diary and Account Books, 1878.

87. Percentages calculated from data in Jonas Blosser Diary and Account Book, 1880.

shipped over fourteen tons in 1878 and over twelve tons in 1881. McCue sold his 1881 crop for twenty-one dollars per ton, after which he calculated that he had profited sixty-five dollars on his hay for that year.<sup>88</sup>

Farmers also accorded increasing attention to dairying during the last decades of the century. In the early 1870s, David P. Lupton of Frederick County submitted a report to the "Mutual Farmers' Club" of his county, in which he urged that dairying "be carried on on a larger scale." Apparently a trend toward dairying as a significant enterprise was already under way on valley farms. After an 11 percent decline during the 1860s, the number of milk cows in the valley rose steadily for the remainder of the century, from over 27,000 in 1870 to nearly 47,000 in 1900 (see Table 2), with the consequence that production of dairy products increased substantially.<sup>89</sup>

Production of fluid milk increased spectacularly, from almost 9,000 pounds in 1870 to just under 13.5 million pounds in 1890, as farmers responded to expanding market opportunities for dairy products. Farmers produced greater quantities of milk in order to supply growing numbers of creameries in the region, the result of the increasing commercialization of dairying. In the late 1880s, Jonas Blosser of Rockingham County, west of Harrisonburg, contracted with a milk company to procure the milk of one hundred cows in his neighborhood for the operation of a creamery built on his property. Creameries operated under similar arrangements in nearly Augusta County and probably elsewhere in the valley as well.<sup>90</sup> During the period from 1870 to 1890, production of butter rose by almost 120 percent. In an 1873 letter to his brother in the midwest, Anderson Bushong of New Market described the ice house he had built the previous year and its role in his increased butter production: "I would not do without my ice house for one thousand dollars. . . . We made 200 lbs. butter last summer and 200 lbs. this summer, that makes 400 lbs. I am satisfied the ice house increased the

88. *Ninth Census, Tenth Census, and Eleventh Census*, McCue Diary and Account Books, 1876, 1878, and 1881.

89. *Eighth Census, Ninth Census, Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census*, David P. Lupton, Letters and Accounts, in Lupton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. In January 1887, Lupton received a letter from "Parkins, Jordan and Parkins, Proprietors of the Augusta Creameries, and Wholesale Dealers in Butter, Cream, and Milk," in Fort Defiance (Augusta County), replying negatively to Lupton's earlier offer to supply dairy products to them.

90. *Ninth Census, Tenth Census, and Twelfth Census*, Jonas Blosser Diary and Account Book, 1887. Similar examples in Augusta County are documented in MacMaster, *Augusta County History*, pp. 101-2.

butter 200 lbs.” A few years later, in 1879, Bushong produced 1,040 pounds of butter.<sup>91</sup>

Fruit production also developed as an important enterprise among valley farmers after the Civil War. Apples especially, among fruits of the orchard, always had been an important component of mixed agriculture as practiced in the Valley of Virginia. They were consumed at home as raw fruit or apple butter, or were converted to brandy. Apples were sold locally as well as beyond the region, and at least some farmers used them for fattening hogs.<sup>92</sup> The dollar value of orchard production increased nearly fourfold during the period from 1860 to 1880, from nearly 72,000 in 1860 to over 270,000 in 1880.<sup>93</sup> However, this growth in orcharding was under way before the Civil War and should be viewed not as recovery, but rather as the uninterrupted continuation of a trend evident as early as 1860. Apparently fruit trees were not damaged significantly during the war. By the turn of the century, apple production began its emergence as a major agricultural enterprise in the lower valley. By 1930—perhaps earlier—apples had replaced wheat as the dominant crop in one county of the lower valley.<sup>94</sup>

91. *Ninth Census, Tenth Census, and Twelfth Census*; Anderson Bushong, New Market, Va., to Frank Bushong, Clinton [Iowa?], December 18, 1873, in Bushong Collection, Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington; *Tenth Census of the United States, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, 1880, Shenandoah County, Virginia*.

92. Farm diaries of the nineteenth century provide ample evidence of the manifold uses of apples. As examples, see Henry B. Jones Papers, 1831–82; and Turner, *Diary of Henry Boswell Jones*, which contains evidence of Jones’s extensive fruit-growing activities and of his sales of apples locally, as well as in Richmond (representative examples are diary entries for October 9 and 16 and November 3, 1857, and October 8 and 11 and December 10, 1858). Also see Henry B. Jones, “List of Apples,” *American Farmer* (14) (December 1858): 172, where Jones lists 86 varieties of apples he had shown that year at the fair in Richmond, sponsored by the U.S. Agricultural Society. In his diary, William M. Harner details his apple picking and processing activities during the months of September and October (see, as representative examples, 1847 and 1848). He hauled many apples to a local distillery or ground them to make apple butter. John Whelan Luke, *Commonplace Book, 1875–92*, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, contains detailed descriptions of the extensive planting of fruit trees and bushes (especially apple trees: 50 trees, 23 varieties represented) in Clarke County in 1875. For documentation of the rise of apple production as a major commercial activity among valley farmers during the second half of the nineteenth century, see S. W. Fletcher, “A History of Fruit Growing in Virginia,” in *Virginia Pamphlets* [University of Virginia, Charlottesville] 48:15 and 24–38.

93. *Eighth Census, Ninth Census, and Tenth Census*.

94. This was Frederick County. See Johnson et al., *Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties*, pp. 245–60.

Elsewhere in the Valley of Virginia, despite farmers' deepening commitment to a broad product mix and their exploitation of alternate market opportunities, wheat remained the preeminent crop.<sup>95</sup> One historian has argued that Virginia's age of grain "ended quietly and with little notice by 1900."<sup>96</sup> But the experience of the Old Dominion during its so-called age of grain was not necessarily that of all its constituent regions, least of all the Valley of Virginia. In the valley, high levels of wheat production persisted in the twentieth century until the decade of the 1940s. During the 1930s, a team of researchers compiled data from the federal census of 1930 to form a statistical portrait of over 1,100 counties of the southern United States, including those of Virginia. For each county, the team identified the "major crops—defined as any crop to which at least ten percent of total improved acres were devoted—and ranked them according to the percentage of total acreage planted. Wheat ranked first as the major crop in every county of the valley except Frederick, where fruit ranked first, and Botetourt, where hay ranked first. Further, wheat was the first-ranked major crop in only one county of Virginia not in the valley."<sup>97</sup>

In response to the demand for flour created by World War I, wheat production in the Valley of Virginia reached an all-time high in 1920,<sup>98</sup> then declined steadily but modestly until 1940, after which time it plummeted. By 1950, production had fallen to only slightly more than half what it had been in 1940, and large-scale wheat farming in the valley was on its way to becoming a thing of the past, as it remains today (see Fig. 4).<sup>99</sup> During the World War II era, the agricultural economy of the

95. Thorough discussion of the continuing dominance of wheat in the farm economy of the Valley of Virginia during the first three decades of the twentieth century, even as farmers increased their attention to other enterprises, such as livestock grazing, dairying, and orcharding, may be found in *Virginia: Information for the Homeseeker and Investor* (Richmond, Va.: State Department of Agriculture and Immigration, 1907), pp. 22–23, 27–28, 53, and 72; and *Virginia* (Richmond, Va.: Department of Agriculture and Immigration of the State of Virginia, 1931), pp. 21, 23, 63–70, 97–98, 105, 119, 123, 141–42, 197–98, 215–19, 223, 225, 241, and 243.

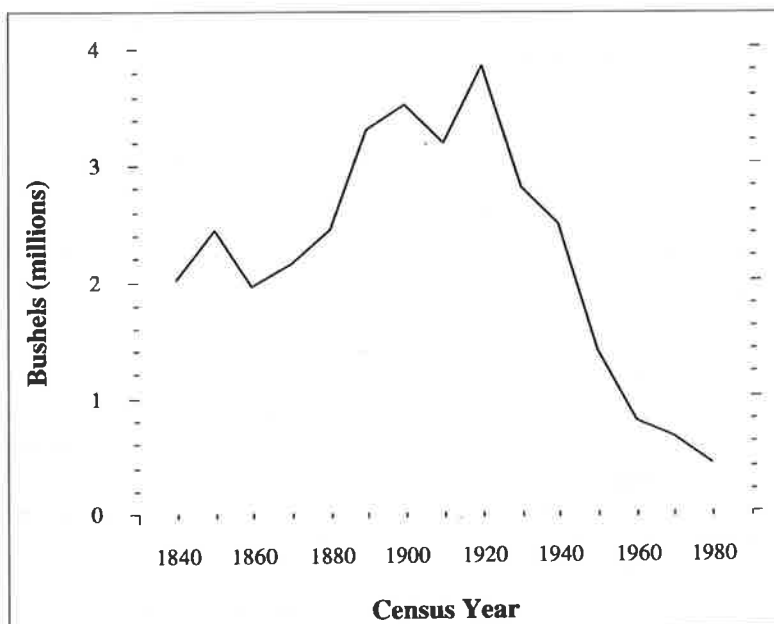
96. Kirby, "Virginia's Environmental History," p. 461.

97. This was New Kent County, on the middle peninsula east of Richmond. Johnson et al., *Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties*, pp. 245–60.

98. Peterson, *Historical Study of Farm Prices*, pp. 21–29.

99. Wheat production figures (in bushels) for the Valley of Virginia during the twentieth century are as follows: 1910, 3,189,475; 1920, 3,836,504; 1930, 2,792,517; 1940, 2,468,100; 1950, 1,376,420; 1960, 770,900; 1970, 641,400; 1980, 404,000. Virginia Crop Reporting Service, "County Farm Statistics" (Richmond: Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 1982). Although these data are shown (here and in Fig. 4) as pertaining to years ending in zero, they pertain actually to the





**Fig. 4. Valley of Virginia wheat production, 1840–1980.** Sources of data: Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census, Seventh Census, Eighth Census, Ninth Census, Tenth Census, Eleventh Census, and Twelfth Census* and Virginia Crop Reporting Service, *County Farm Statistics* (Richmond: Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 1982). See ch. 1, n. 99, of this book for details.

Valley of Virginia was altered fundamentally by changes transforming the agricultural sector of the national economy. A mechanical revolution (epitomized by the widespread adoption of tractors, a biological revolution (e.g., hybridization of plants and animals), a chemical revolution (pesticides and herbicides), and an economic climate that rewarded specialization and economies of scale in agricultural production<sup>100</sup> com-

previous year (years ending with the digit nine). For the sake of consistency with nineteenth-century data, I have labeled them as pertaining to years ending with zero. (Nineteenth-century data were collected in years ending with zero; for field crops, however, the data pertain to the previous crop year.)

100. These developments in the agricultural sector of the United States economy are discussed in standard surveys of the history of American agriculture, e.g., John T. Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Agriculture, 1607–1972* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975); John L. Shover, *First Majority, Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1975); and R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture: A Brief History* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994).

bined to produce a new agricultural economy in the valley, one based on grass farming and livestock production. Thus, in the 1940s, farmers abandoned wheat as a cash crop and increasingly turned to apple orchards, or to the production of sheep, cattle, or poultry, for profits.

Farmers in the Valley of Virginia sustained a wheat-based farm economy all during the nineteenth century and far into the twentieth. Although the Civil War profoundly disrupted rural life and farming in the valley, it did not change the regional emphasis on wheat production. For the agricultural sector of the regional economy, and particularly for wheat farming, the Civil War was not the watershed it is often viewed as having been. The consequences of that war for valley agriculture, although severe, were acute and temporary rather than sustained and ruinous in the long term. The process by which farmers recovered from the catastrophic circumstances produced by the Civil War, as documented here, suggests that as historians study social experience and economic life in the nineteenth-century South, they would be wise to avoid viewing, so reflexively, the decade of the 1860s as a watershed. In a host of ways, the Civil War did constitute a watershed, of course; but, in their attempts to understand better the enormous transformations it produced, historians too often have failed to recognize significant elements of continuity that bridge the antebellum and postbellum periods, and they have missed the perdurance of lifeways and seasonal rhythms of labor and economic activity by which inhabitants of the rural countryside earned their livelihoods.

During the nineteenth century, the Valley of Virginia formed a wheat belt of the Upper South. For over 170 years—from the era of the American Revolution until the decade of World War II—wheat farming within a system of general, mixed agriculture endured as a major element of continuity in the rural economic life of the Valley of Virginia. Accordingly, this aspect of the region's economic development requires the attention of scholars who seek understanding of the sociocultural identity and experiences of the Valley of Virginia's nineteenth-century inhabitants.

## Society Meetings, 1995–2002

### 1995:

*January 23:* William M. S. Rasmussen, “Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend.” Evans Dining Hall, W&L.

*April 24:* Jean Dunbar, “Understanding and Restoring Late Victorian Interiors.” Auditorium, Nichols Engineering Building, VMI.

*July 24:* Louise K. Dooley, “The Dairies of Rockbridge County.” Sunnyside, Lexington.

*October 30:* Barbara Crawford, “Rockbridge County Artists and Artisans.” Pogue Auditorium, George C. Marshall Foundation.

### 1996:

*January 22:* John O. and Margaret T. Peters, “Virginia’s Historic Courthouses.” Jefferson Ballroom #1, Natural Bridge Hotel.

*April 22:* Andrew C. Holman, “Gentlemen, Irregulars, and Eclectics: Who Practiced Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Rockbridge County, Virginia?” Courtroom, Rockbridge County Court House.

*July 29:* Katharine L. Brown and I. Taylor Sanders, II, “The Presbyterian Church in Rockbridge County: A Panel Discussion on the 250th Anniversary of Its Establishment.” Sanctuary, New Providence Presbyterian Church.

*October 28:* A Panel Discussion, “Fifty Years of the Public Library in Rockbridge County.” Piovano Room, Rockbridge Regional Library.

### 1997

*January 27:* Colleen Callahan, “Bustles, Bloomers, and Naked Elbows: Fashion Myths and Facts of the Nineteenth Century.” Ballroom, Lejeune Hall, VMI.

*April 28:* Ronald Heinemann, “Two Senators from Virginia: Harry Byrd and Willis Robertson, A Political Partnership.” Auditorium, Waddell Elementary School.

*July 27:* John A. Brodie, “Virginia Military Institute’s Professional Post Band, 1839–1947.” Memorial Garden, VMI.

*October 27:* David W. Coffey, “Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and the Natural Bridge of Virginia.” Dolly Hardee Turman Meeting Room, Preston Library, VMI.

**1998:**

*January 26:* Pat and Keith Gibson lecture-demonstration of the music of the antebellum and Civil War periods. Restaurant, Sheridan Livery Inn.

*April 27:* Charles A. Bodie, “Down the Paper Train: Manuscript Collections of Rockbridge County.” Auditorium, Nichols Engineering Building, VMI.

*July 27:* Francis W. Lynn, “The Early History of the Paxton House at Glen Maury.” Main Pavilion, Glen Maury Park.

*October 26:* Winifred Hadsel, “William D. Washington: Before and after *The Burial of Latané*.” Dolly Hardee Turman Meeting Room, Preston library, VMI.

**1999:**

*January 25:* Mame Warren, a slide-lecture on her new book *Come Cheer for Washington and Lee*, the 250th anniversary history of the school. Great Hall, Science Building, W&L.

*April 26:* Pamela H. Simpson, “Cheap, Quick, and Easy: Concrete Block, Metal Ceilings, Linoleum, and Lincrusta in Local Buildings.” Auditorium, DuPont Hall, W&L.

*July 26:* A panel (Charles A. Bodie, David W. Coffey, Pamela H. Simpson) on the history and people of Col Alto estate in Lexington. Lawn, Hampton Inn Col Alto.

*October 25:* Richard C. Halseth, “Three Days in Lexington: The Uninvited Visitors of June 1864.” Auditorium, Nichols Engineering Building, VMI.

*November 15:* Special Seminar on African-American History. David W. Coffey, “Reconstruction and Redemption in Lexington.” Auditorium, Nichols Engineering Building, VMI.

**2000:**

*January 24:* Gregory Kimball, slide lecture on *Virginia in Maps*, based on the Virginia State Library’s historical atlas of Virginia maps. Ballroom, Lejeune Hall, VMI.

*April 25:* Colin P. Mahle, “Militia Leadership in Dunmore’s War, 1774.” Auditorium, Nichols Engineering Building, VMI.

*July 31:* Kenneth E. Koons, “‘The Staple of Our Country’: Wheat in the Regional Farm Economy of the Nineteenth-Century Valley of Virginia.” Buffalo Springs Herb Farm.

*October 30:* William M. S. Rasmussen, “A Grand Tour of Virginia Landmarks in Landscape.” Pogue Auditorium, George C. Marshall Foundation.

**2001:**

*January 22:* A panel on the histories of two county industries: Bon-tex, Inc. (Charles Kostelni) and Lees Carpets (Buck Leslie and Henry Hatcher). Cafeteria, Lees Carpet Plant.

*April 23:* Meredith G. Hays, “‘Our Once Glorious Union’: The Secession Crisis in Lexington, Virginia, 1860–1861.” Pogue Auditorium, George C. Marshall Foundation.

*July 20:* James R. Kopp, “The Virginia Drive-In Movie Era.” Hulls Drive-In.

*October 29:* John R. Hildebrand, “An Ill-Fated Endeavor: Lexington, Rockbridge County, and the Valley Railroad, 1866–1881.” Dolly Hardee Turman Meeting Room, Preston library, VMI.

**2002:**

*January 28:* Matthew W. Paxton, IV, “Two Centuries of Ink: The *News-Gazette* Celebrates Two Hundred Years of Publication.” Appomattox Room, Virginia Horse Center.

*April 22:* David R. Rossi, “History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1796-1899,” and William J. Matkins, “History of the Lexington Fire Department, 1900–2002.” Jefferson Street Fire House.

*July 22:* David W. Coffey, “The ‘New Deal’ Comes to Rockbridge.”  
Effinger Fire House.

*November 18:* William M. S. Rasmussen, “Michael Miley: General  
Lee’s Photographer.” Pogue Auditorium, George C. Marshall  
Foundation.

# Index

- African Americans: and election of 1932, 482; and Lexington Fire Department, 435, 441, 456–57, 472, 476–77; CCC camp for, 487; Democratic party, switch to, 501; documentary sources re, 155–57; Emergency Relief, classes sponsored by, 498; population in Rockbridge Co. in 1860, 354; school for freedmen, 279–81; and segregation, 248, 457; and W&L Special Services School, 10–11; white conservatives seek alliance with, 284–86, 291, 296, 298. *See also* Slavery; Slaves
- Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 488–89
- Agriculture: cattle, types used in dairying, 32–33; and dairying, essay re, 29–44; image of farming, 29, 33–35; livestock on farms, 30–31, 38–39; selective breeding of cattle, 32–33; in Valley of Virginia, 505–38
- Alexander, Archibald, 73
- Allan, Elizabeth Randolph Preston, 265, 297
- American Missionary Association, 279–80
- Anderson, James A., 492
- Anderson, Joseph, 125
- Architecture: colonial revival movement in, 340–41; historic buildings survey (1936–39), 500; substitute materials, essay re, 217–36
- Argall, Samuel, 19–21
- Armstrong Cork and Tile Company, 227, 229–30
- Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), 5, 132
- Arpia, Samuel, 129
- Artesia, New Mexico, 235
- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 71, 474
- Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 27
- Averill, William, 269–70; and Hunter's raid, 259–61, 266; photo of, 259
- Bailey, J. Russell, 103
- Baltimore, Md., and railroads, 399–400, 402
- Baltimore Agricultural Aid Society, 523
- Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 398–405, 409
- Bancker, A. V., 123–24
- Bank of Rockbridge, 74
- Barclay, Elihu H., 418–19, 424
- Barclay, Elizabeth, 483
- Bath County, Va.: Falling Spring, 329–30; public library in, 105, 106
- Beauregard, Pierre G. T., 375
- Beebe, Matthew R., 94
- Belgian Congo, 73
- Benny Goodman orchestra, 3
- Ben Salem Presbyterian Church, 164, 166
- Beta Theta Pi fraternity, 11–13
- Beyer, Edward, 327–28
- Billingsley, Gary, 96
- Birch, William Russell, 321–22
- Blair, John, 67
- Blandome (Lexington, Va.), 244, 252, 264
- Bluemont, Va., 181
- Bodine, Aubrey, 322–23
- Bontex, Inc. (Buena Vista, Va.), 345–47
- Borden, Benjamin, 238
- Botetourt County: and regional library, 77–79, 81
- Bottomly, William Lawrence, 253
- Bowen, Jimmy, 95
- Boyd, Mrs. Skinner, 105
- Breckinridge, John, 257
- Breckinridge, Robert, 68
- Brockenbrough, John W., 61; photo of, 367; and secession, 366
- Brockenbrough, Mrs. John, 291–92
- Brockenbrough family, 192
- Brooke, Richard N., 25, 214
- Brooks, Mel, 5
- Brown, Frank, 220
- Brown, John, 68–69
- Brown family, 68–69
- Brownsburg, Va., 74; and Hunter's raid, 260
- Brownsburg Academy, 53
- Brueckner, Henry, 22–23
- Buchanan, James, 313
- Buchser, Franz, 203
- Buckle Down Winssocki* (song), 3–4
- Buena Vista, Va.: Bontex/Georgia Bonded Fibers, 345–37; Columbia Paper Co., 345; Fire Department, 463, 469, 471, 477; Glen Maury Park, 175; land boom in, 173–74; Majestic Silk Mills, 486; map showing plantations c. 1850, 167; Municipal Building history exhibit, 168; and National Recovery

## Index

- Buena Vista, Va. (*continued*)  
Administration, 489–90; New Deal funds for (PWA), 495; newspapers in, 420; Paxton House (Glen Maury Park), 163–76; public library in, 96–97, 102–4
- Buffon, Count, 140–41
- Building materials, essay re, 217–36
- Burial of Latané, The* (painting), 177, 191–95, 213–14
- Burke, Edmund, 322
- Burns, John, 289
- Burt, Sarah, 280
- Byrd, Harry F., Sr., 248; essay re, 109–19; New Deal, opposition to, 502; photo of, 117
- Campbell family, 73; and three-brothers myth, 65
- Capellano, Antonio, 17
- Capitol Building (U.S.), decoration of, 17, 21
- Carpet, manufacture of, 348–52
- Caruthers, William, 143–44
- Chapman, John Gadsby, 18–19, 21–22, 337–38
- Chappel, Alonzo, 18
- Cherry Grove estate, 238
- Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), 486–88
- Civil Works Administration (CWA), 496–98
- Clinedinst, Benjamin, 208
- Coffey, Christine, photo of, 82
- Col Alto (Lexington, Va.): designer of, 250–51; drawing of, 250; estate, maps of, 252, 254; history of, 237–55; name, meaning of, 251
- Collierstown, Va.: nightriders and blacks in, 293–94
- Conan Doyle, Arthur, 73
- Concrete block, 218–22, 233, 235
- Constitutional Union party, 360–63
- Corcoran, W. W., 184, 211
- Craig, David, 260
- Craig, John, 67
- Cranstone, Lafevre, 339
- Crocken, James Henry, 125
- Crook, George, 270; and Hunter's raid, 259–62, 264; photo of, 259
- Crutchfield, Stapleton, 199–200
- Cummins, Charles, 71
- Dabney S. Lancaster Community College, 106
- Dairy industry, 534; butterfat content, test re, 36; cream separation in, 36; development in U.S., 33–36; essay on, 29–44; and glass milk bottles, 36–38, 43–44; and homogenization, 41; milking machines, development of, 34–35; number of dairies in county, 39; and pasteurization, 36
- Dale, Sir Thomas, 22–23
- Darst, Samuel, 250
- Davidson, James D., 154, 359, 370, 372, 374; photo of, 360
- Day, Mrs. Philip, 90
- Dedrick, Jim, photo of, 428
- Delaney, Thomas, 128
- Democratic party: and antebellum South, 357, 360–63; blacks switch to, 501; and Byrd political machine, 190–19; and Martin-Flood political machine, 244, 246–48
- Diehl, George W., 87
- Dillard, Herbert Nash, 133
- Dismal Swamp, image of, 334–37
- Dixon, Mrs. Raymond, photo of, 82
- Dold, Samuel Miller, 60
- Donald, H. A., 220–21
- Donogal Presbytery, 67
- Dorman, James B., 284–86, 375, 378, 402
- Douglas, Melvin, 9
- Draper, Lyman Copeland, 150
- Drive-in movie theaters, 383–95
- Duffie, Alfred Natie, 269; and Hunter's raid, 259–61; photo of, 259
- Dunmore, Earl of (John Murray), 302
- duPont, Henry A., 271
- Dwight, Theodore, 342–43
- Early, Jubal, 376
- Edmundson, James K., 283
- Eichhorn, C. Richard, 132–33
- Ellig, John, 125
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 31
- Epley, Stewart, 13
- Esposito, Antonio Carlo ("Tony"), 129–30, 133–34
- Evans, John Francis, 125
- Fairfax family, 181–82
- Fairfield, Va.: bank building in, 221
- Ferris, Jean Leon Gerome, 20–21
- Fincastle, Va.: public library in, 99, 102–4
- Fire Department. *See* Lexington
- Fire Prevention Week, 464
- Fithian, Philip Vickers, 70
- Fitzpatrick, Mrs. William E., 87
- Fletcher, Laura Tucker, 253
- Flood, Hal, 246, 248
- Floor coverings: Battleship linoleum, 230; industry producing, 225–27, 229–30; linoleum, 225–30; oil cloth, 225–26; vinyl, 229
- Floyd, J. B., 188
- Folz, Walter L., 485
- Franklin Society, 268
- Frazar, Douglas, 287–89, 291, 294–96
- Freedmen's Bureau, 277–79, 284–89, 294–95, 298–99
- Free Will Baptist Home Missionary Society, 280
- French and Indian War, 69, 301–4
- Funerals, cost of, 213



- Gaines, Francis Pendleton: and African Americans at W&L in WWII, 10–11; graduation speech (1942), 4; WWII efforts of, 5, 7, 10–13
- Gilham, Mrs. William, 267
- Gilham, William, 267, 358
- Gilliam, Frank, 8
- Glasgow, Va.: land boom in, 246; Lees Carpets, history of, 348–52; public library in, 106
- Glass, Carter, 243
- Glass, T. Hartwell, 174
- Glass family, 174–75
- Gold, William McDowell, 53
- Goshen, Va.: New Deal funds for (PWA), 495; public library in, 106
- Graham, Archibald, 59–60
- Graham, John, 2, 69–70
- Graham, William, 72
- Grant, Ulysses S., 257–58
- Great Falls of the Potomac River, illustrations of, 321
- Greenberg, Mel, 430
- Green Forest community, 173
- Griffin, Caesar, 291–96
- Hampden-Sydney College, 72
- Hampton Inn Col Alto, 250, 255
- Harlow, Benjamin F., photo of, 424
- Harlow, Houston, 87, 424–25, 427–28, 430,
- Harper's Ferry, W. Va., images of, 322–23
- Hart's Bottom estate, 167–68, 174
- Hatcher, Henry, 350–52
- Hayes, Rutherford B., 270
- Hayslett, A. J., 174
- Helmerick, Jacqueline, 98
- Henry, Patrick (free black), 141–45
- Henry family, 143–45
- Highland County, Va., 95–96, 105
- Hollandsworth, Marjorie (Mrs. James G.), 87
- Hollingshead, Richard, 386
- Home Demonstration Clubs, 84, 90, 99
- Homestead, The, 328
- Hotchkiss, Farris P., photo of, 107
- Hot Springs, Va., 211, 328
- Houston, William Hale, 366, 369, 380–81
- Howard, Reuben, 122–23
- Huguenots, 64
- Hull's Drive-In, 383–84, 393, 395
- Humphreys, Ewing S. "Tad", 430–31
- Hunter, David, 258–72, 275; photo of, 258
- Huxtable, Ada Louise, 217, 236
- Indians: Apaches, beliefs of, 151; depiction of, 15–27; Kerrs Creek raid, 71–72; Monocans, 135–37; Shawnees and Dunmore's War (1774), 302–4; Valley of Virginia settlement as buffer against, 65
- Inger, Christian, 18
- Irish Creek community, 484
- Jackson, Andrew, 240
- Jackson, Thomas J. ("Stonewall"): and John Brown execution, 358; portraits by W. D. Washington of, 190–91, 195, 197–98; Union troops' view of, 269
- Jamestown, Va., 337–38
- Jamestown Tricentennial Exposition, 247
- Jefferson, Peter, 137
- Jefferson, Thomas: and Natural Bridge, 135–45; westward intellectual orientation of, 140
- Johnston, Erastus C., 280, 288
- Jones, Henry Boswell, 518
- Jordan, John, 250
- Junkin, Ebenezer, 71
- Junkin, George, 371, 377, 379; photo of, 377
- Kahle, Matthew, 502
- Kay Kyser orchestra, 2
- Kennedy, William R., 421
- Kerrs Creek community, 71, 87
- Kinnear, Frances D., 90–91
- Kinnear, Horace, 90
- Knick, Mrs. Amos, 93
- Kostelni, Charles, 345–47
- Kostelni, James, 347
- Krantz, Linda L., 95, 105–8; photo of, 107
- Krause, Herman, 125–27
- Ku Klux Klan, 289–91, 299
- Kuralt, Charles, 130
- Lafferty, John J., 421
- Lancaster, Albert L., photo of, 104
- Land: acquisition, importance of, 156–57; speculation in, 239–40, 301–2
- Latture, Rupert, 8–9
- Lauderdale, David T., 474, 481–82
- Lea, James N., 252
- Lee, Fitzhugh, 246
- Lee, Henry ("Light Horse Harry"), 69
- Lee, Mary Custis, 208–9
- Lee, Robert E.: assists Freedmen's Bureau in Lexington, 282, 288; family silver, hiding of, 261–62; portraits of, 203; and Valley Railroad, 399–400
- Lees, James, 348
- Lees Carpets (Glasgow, Va.), 348–52
- Leslie, Buck, III, 348–50
- Letcher, Greenlee, 484
- Letcher, John, 267–68, 283, 296, 375–76, 378–79; Douglas favored by in 1860, 361–62; inaugural address, 359; peace conference, support for, 365, 369; photos of, 268, 361
- Leutze, Emmanuel, 183–84
- Lewis, Andrew, 302–4

## Index

- Lewisburg, W. Va., 302-3  
Lewis family, and three-brothers myth, 65  
Lexington, Va.: and Civil Works Administration, 496-98; colleges, importance of in, 274-99; concrete block buildings in, 220-21; entertainment in during WWII, 9; Hopkins Building in, 421-22; and Hunter's raid, 257-72, 275, 417; Letcher (John) house, 267-68; lynch mobs and lynching in, 292-93, 297; movie theaters in, 471; natural gas service in, 481; Nelson St. viaduct, 499-500; New Deal funds for, 492-95; population growth after Civil War, 276; reconstruction and redemption in, 273-99; Rescue Squad in, 469-70, 478; secession crisis in, 353-82; size of (1820s), 237; *Sommersby* film-makers in, 431-32; town council, replacement by military governor of, 295; Valley Railroad, money for, 398; Waddell High School, 496-97; water system of, 443, 445-48, 476, 488, 494; weapons carried by population of, 276-77; Woods Creek dam, 497; WPA projects in, 499-500  
-Fire Department, 433-80: African Americans in, 476-77; as a branch of government, 465-66; buildings for, 435, 437-38, 444, 449, 458-59, 461, 467, 473, 473, 476, 476, 480; college student members of, 477, 479; equipment for, 435, 437-38, 440, 442, 443, 448-51, 464-69, 475, 478; female membership in, 477, 479; founding date of, 433-34; name, change of, 468; photos of members, 452, 455, 459, 465, 467, 473; racing by, 453-55, 459, 463-64, 475; uniforms of, 451  
-major fires in, 421, 443, 445; Delta Tau Delta (1964), 476; Hopkins Block (1907), 462; Koons Block (1915), 462-63; Stuart Building (1949), 474; town (1796), 434; Tucker Hall/Higgins & Irvine (1934), 469  
Lexington Junior Woman's Club, 75-79, 92, 96, 98  
Lexington Presbyterian Church, 279  
Lexington Woman's Club, 75-76  
Leyburn, Alfred, 52  
Liberty Hall Academy, 69, 70  
Library, regional, 75-108; bookmobile, 79-105 *passim*; books owned by, 76, 77, 98, 99; Botetourt County participation in, 77-79, 81; buildings, illustrations of, 76, 95, 107; computer network for, 108; fundraising (private) for, 76-77, 92, 103; local government support for, 79-80, 83, 86, 92, 97, 98, 101, 102; state and federal funding for, 76-81, 92, 93, 104  
Library of Congress, 383  
Lightell, John, 124-25  
Lincoln, Abraham, 257-58; inaugural address, 370-72; southern views of, 362-63, 413-14;  
Lincrusta-Walton wall covering, 231-32, 234  
Linoleum, 225-30  
Lord, Norman F., 9  
Luray Caverns, 325  
Lyle, John, 73  
Lyle, Mike, 122-23  
Lyle, William, 314  
Madison, Robert Lewis, 53-54  
*Mardis Gras* (film), 130  
Marks, Jacob, 125  
Marr, John Quincy, 207-8  
Marshall, George C., 5  
Marshall, Richard J., 133  
Marshall, Robert T., 60  
Martin, Thomas S., 246-47, 271  
Mason, Rose Tucker, 253-54  
Massie, James, 251  
Maury, Mary, 209  
McC Campbell, James, 314-15  
McCausland, John, 271-72; and Hunter's raid, 260, 262; photo of, 260  
McChuer, J. D., 59  
McClung, James W., 500  
McDermott, William, 106  
McDonald, Cornelia P., 275, 277-78  
McDonald, Harry, 275, 277-78  
McDonald, Marshall, 293  
McDowell, Ephriam, 157, 238  
McDowell, James, Jr., 157-58; and Col Alto, 238, 240, 242, 249-51; and Kentucky, 237, 239; political career of, 238, 240-42  
McDowell, James, Sr., 157  
McDowell, Samuel, 157, 238  
McDowell family, 157-58, 238-39, 242, 249-51  
McKee, James, 307  
McKendree, Ellene, 92, 106  
McKinley, William, 270  
McLaughlin, Dr., 73-74  
McNutt, John S., 413-15, 417  
McNutt family, 165  
Medicine: and blistering, 47; calomel as purgative, 47; competitive nature of, 61; and galvanism, 57-58; homeopathic, 55; and humor theory, 47; and hydrophathy, 58-59; irregular practitioners of, 48; physicians, licensing of, 48; physicians, number in county, 50; physicians social status of, 46-48, 51-52; and scarificator device, 47; Thomsonian, 55-56  
Metal, ornamental building, 222-24, 233-34  
Militia: bounties and service in, 312; exemptions from duty, number of, 311-12; leaders in Dunmore's War, 304-17; New England

- and Virginia experiences compared, 315–16; scouts in, 317; and slave patrols, 313; socio-economic status of leaders, 304–12; wages during Dunmore's War, 307
- Miller, Francis Pickens, 111
- Miller, John, 251
- Moger, Allen W., 9, 10
- Moger, Marguerite, 106
- Moomaw, Benjamin C., 173
- Moore, Andrew, 308
- Moore, Edward Alexander ("Ned"), 172–73; photo of, 172
- Moore, Elizabeth, 105–6
- Moore, Samuel, 314, 315
- Moore, Samuel McDowell, 291
- Moore, Scott, 419
- Moore, William, 308–9
- Moorman, R. B., 252
- Morrison, James, 260
- Morrison, Samuel Brown, 59
- Morrison, William McKutchan, 73
- Mount Vernon, 342–43
- Munger, Elizabeth E. (Mrs. Robert S.), 101; library origins, essay on, 77–87; photos of, 82, 107
- Munger, Robert S., 84, 85, 101
- Murray, J. J., 88, 243
- Murray, Max and Dorothy, 84
- Music: hymn singing and Presbyterians, 70–72
- Myers, H. H., 447, 448
- National Hotel (Lexington, Va.), 445
- National Park Service, 116
- National Recovery Administration (NRA), 489–91
- National Youth Administration (NYA), 498–500
- Natural Bridge: and Jefferson, 135–45; depictions of, 139, 330–33; described by Jefferson, 141; Eleanor Roosevelt visits, 503
- Natural Bridge High School, 495
- Natural Bridge Hotel, 475–76
- Nehlig, Victor, 18
- New Monmouth Presbyterian Church, 69, 71
- New Providence Presbyterian Church, 68, 70–72, 74
- News-Gazette* newspaper, history of, 411–32
- North River Navigation Company, 168
- Notes on the State of Virginia* (Jefferson), 140–41, 320, 322, 329
- Nuckols, Frances, 92, 106
- O'Ferrall, Charles T., 294, 298–99
- Olin, Jim, photo of, 107
- Palmer, Harmon S., 218–19
- Partridge, William Ordway, 27
- Passe, Simon van de, 24
- Patton, George C., 200
- Patton, Margaret, 89, 99, 100; photo of, 88
- Patton, Samuel K., 88–89
- Patton, W. Tazewell, 200
- Paxton, Elisha Franklin ("Frank"), 164–71; photo of, 171
- Paxton, Matthew W., 419–21, 423; photo of, 420
- Paxton, Matthew W. (II), 423
- Paxton, Matthew W., Jr.(III), 424–29, 432
- Paxton, Matthew W., IV, 430–32
- Paxton family, 164–71
- Paxton House (Buena Vista): Historical Society, 175; photo of, 164; purchase by City of Buena Vista, 163–64
- Peaks of Otter, 333–34
- Pendleton, Rose Page, 265–66
- Pendleton, William Nelson, 265
- Pennington, Joseph, 125
- Pennsylvania, Scotch-Irish in, 65
- Perry, Fred, 3
- Phillips, Ulrich B., 150
- Physicians. *See* Medicine
- Piovano, Alma and Umberto, 105–6
- Pocahontas, 15–27; birth and death dates of, 15, 25
- Point Pleasant, battle of, 303–4
- Pole, Charles, 451, 456, 458–59
- Potomac River, images of, 321–23
- Presbyterian Church: French and Indian War impact on, 69; minister training in, 66; missionary efforts of, 72–74; music controversy in, 70–72; New Side/Old Side division of, 66–67; origins in county, essay re, 63–74
- Preston, J. T. L., 200
- Preston, Margaret (Mrs. John Brown), 68, 70
- Preston, Margaret Junkin: and Hunter's raid, 263–65, 272; portrait by W. D. Washington of, 200–201
- Preston, William, 68
- Preston family, 239
- Price family, 174
- Princeton Theological Seminary, 73
- Princeton University, 66, 69, 239
- Proclamation Line of 1763, 301–3
- Public Works Administration (PWA), 492–96
- Quinine, 54
- Ravenhorst, Mrs. Henry L., photo of, 82
- Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), 484–86
- Reid, Andrew, 310, 312, 314
- Reid, Samuel McDowell, 250; and Hart's Bottom estate, 168–69
- Reid-White house (Lexington, Va.), 250–51

## Index

- Republican party: and antebellum South, 357, 359, 362–63; in Virginia, 117–18, 244, 246
- Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), 3
- Revivals, Ulster origins of, 67–68
- Rhodes, Robert B., 197–99
- Richardson, Mary, 95–96
- Richmond and Allegheny Railroad, 403–4, 407
- Ritterhouse, Joseph, 125, 127
- Roberts, William, 322–23, 332
- Robertson, A. Willis, 109, 115–19, 495; NRA, support for, 489–90; photo of, 117
- Robertson, Mrs. John, 484, 497
- Robinson, John (“Jockey”): estate operated by Washington College, 166, 168; property sale poster, 160; whiskey production by, 511
- Rockbridge Baths, Va.: Ned Graham Camp in, 500
- Rockbridge Block Company, 235
- Rockbridge Colonization Society, 240
- Rockbridge County: agriculture in, 355, 505–38; Civil War as reported in local press, 414–18; *Cliffs of North River* (painting), 205; colleges, importance of, 149, 158–60; early newspapers in, 411–12; fire-fighting in, 475–77; Great Depression arrives in, 481–82; inflation and currency problems during Civil War, 415–17; land holdings in 1780s, 309–11; manuscript collections re, 147–62; New Deal’s impact on, 481–503; plantations, organization of, 166; political parties in antebellum, 356–57; population, 65 (c. 1750), 354 (1860); presidential vote in 1860, 362; transportation of goods to market from, 168–69; Valley Railroad, money for, 398
- Rockbridge County News* newspaper, origins of, 419–20
- Rockbridge Historical Society: Washington (W. D.) historical marker, 177–78, 214
- Rockbridge Regional Library. *See* Library, regional
- Rogers, A. F., 60
- Roosevelt, Eleanor, photo of at Natural Bridge, 503
- Ross, Lanny, 9
- Rous, Francis, 70–71
- Rural Electrification Administration (REA), 501
- Sale, Ernest, 221
- Salling, John Peter, 137
- Schofield, John M., 295
- School for Special and Morale Services, U.S. Army, 7–11, 13
- Schwab, Claudia, 431–32
- Scotch-Irish: slavery, attitude re, 355; term, origins of, 63–64; Ulster Scots, migrations of, 64–65
- Scott, William Wallace, 289–93, 298–99
- Sears, Roebuck and Company, 219
- Shaner, Ann, 98, 99
- Shearman, Julia A., 279–80
- Shell, Alice, 106
- Shelly, Mrs. H. V., 75
- Shenandoah Valley Railroad, 397, 400, 407
- Sheridan, Philip, 519–20
- Shipp, Scott, 125–26, 127
- Sigel, Franz, 257–58
- Skelton, Red, 9, 10
- Skinner, John, 514
- Slavery: debate over, 241–42; expansion of, 356–57; Hunter’s emancipation proclamation, 258; and John Brown raid, 357
- free blacks under: Lexington, number in, 274; Patrick Henry and Natural Bridge, 143–45; Shenandoah Valley, number in 515; taxation of, 155–56; Washington Jackson (blacksmith), 155
- Slaves: and colleges, 122–23, 158; in Lexington Fire Department, 441; in Shenandoah Valley, 515–16; and Elisha Paxton estate, 166, 168; Isaac Gwin, papers of, 149; of James McDowell, 251; Pompey, 169; owned by physicians, 51; population in Rockbridge Co., 354; treatment of, 141–43
- Smith, Captain John, and Pocahontas, 16–19
- Smith, Francis H.: bandsmen, seeks enlisted army, 124; Freedmen’s Bureau, assistance to, 278–79; and John Brown execution, 358; military school bands, value of, 121; obituary of W. D. Washington by, 179, 213–14; photo of, 376; portrait of by W. D. Washington, 202; report on Hunter’s raid, 266; secessionist sentiments of, 377; VMI band, quality of, 126
- Smith, Sara Henderson (Mrs. Francis H.), portrait of by W. D. Washington, 202–3
- Snickersville, Va., 180–81
- Southern Educational Board, 247
- South Mountain Meeting House, 67, 71
- Springs and resorts, healing properties alleged for, 58–60
- Staples, Richard, 125
- State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 150
- Stearns, Junius Brutus, 26
- Steel, John, 313
- Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, 242
- Stonewall Jackson Memorial Foundation, 100–101
- Strange, John Bowie, 208
- Strother, David Hunter, 266, 268, 270–71; photo of, 270
- Stuart family, and three-brothers myth, 65

- Sublime, idea of the, 322, 325  
 Sunnyside house (Lexington, Va.), photo of, 42  
 Surmonte, Hugo, 347  
 Swiecki, John, 133–34  
 Swihart, William Wright, 130–31, 134
- Tapscott family, 141–43  
 Tardy, Eleanor, 99  
 Taylor, William, 239, 241  
 Tedford, Alexander, 307–8, 315  
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 191, 209  
 Thatcher, Harvey D., 37  
 Thompson, John R., and “Latané” poem, 191  
 Thorn, John, 263  
 Throckmorton, Mordeci, 180, 182  
 Timber Ridge community, and Hunter’s raid, 260–61  
 Tompkins, Edmund Pendleton, 56  
 Tompkins, Mrs. Edmund Pendleton, 75  
 Tucker, Beverley, 243  
 Tucker, Henry St. George, 242–48, 252–53; photo of, 245  
 Tucker, John Randolph, 243–44, 246  
 Tucker family, 243–44  
 Tyler, David Gardiner, 159
- United States: educational reform and segregation, 248; senators, direct election of, 245–46; white immigration to South encouraged, 286, 289  
 United States Military Academy, 121  
 United States Naval Academy, 121  
 Urie, Helen, 96–97
- Valley Pike (Staunton-Winchester), 516  
 Valley Railroad, 397–410  
 Vaughan, Robert, 17  
 Vaughn, Ann, 92; library history, essay re, 97–106; photos of, 88, 99  
 Vesuvius, Va., 488  
 Vidal, Gore, 5  
 Virginia: and Byrd political machine, 109–19; electorate in, 114, 119; and Federal Emergency Relief Act, 496; and John Brown’s raid, 357–58; landscape, essay on depictions of, 319–44; Martin-Flood Democratic party organization, 244, 246–48; presidential vote in 1860, 362; and prohibition, 247; and public education, 241, 247–48; and railroads in western areas, 397; Republican party in, 117–18, 244, 246; resorts and springs in, 325–28; and secession convention, 365–69, 372–74; secession crisis of 1860–61, 353–82; tithable, definition of, 305–6; and Underwood Constitution, 274, 290–91  
 –Shenandoah Valley: agriculture, history of, 505–38; Civil War’s impact on, 507–8, 518–23, 529; dairy industry, growth of, 534; fruit production in, 535–36; liquor production in, 511; livestock production in, 510–13, 521–22, 526–27; map of, 507; mechanization of agriculture in, 528–32, 537–38; scientific farming methods in, 511–13, 527–28; settlement as buffer against Indians, 65; transportation in, 516–18; wheat crop, compared with Midwest, 524–26; wheat crop, proportion of state’s produced in, 514–15, 524; wheat growing, rise and decline of, 508–9, 537–38  
 Virginia, University of: gifts from W. W. Corcoran, 211; secessionist sentiments at, 365, 372  
 Virginia Historical Society, 15, 149  
 Virginia Military Institute: and Army Specialized Training Program, 5; bands, professional, essay re, 121–34; bugle call tradition at, 131; cadet attitudes toward Reconstruction, 278–79, 299; closing recommended by commission, 110; compensation for Hunter’s raid losses, 271; Fine Arts Chair, attempts to establish, 197–99, 206–7, 210; firearms restored to corps (1869), 296; fires at, 446, 456, 457, 462; gift from W. W. Corcoran, 211; *House Mountain and Commandant’s House* (painting), 205; and Hunter’s raid, 262, 266–68; John Brown’s execution, participation in, 358; legislation to create, 241; New Deal funds for (PWA), 492–93; paintings by W. D. Washington at, 178, 198–201, 204, 207, 209; Post Surgeons at, 50–51, 54; secession sentiments at, 364–65, 376–77; slaves at, 122; The Tower (building), 197; and Washington statue, 268, 270–71  
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 129  
 Virginia State Library: local libraries, role in promoting, 78–79, 81–82, 99, 101, 102, 103
- Wagner, Grace, 103  
 Wagner, Shirley, 96–97  
 Walker, Harry Lee, 244  
 Walker family, and three-brothers myth, 65  
 Wallace, Arthur, 476–77  
 Wallin, Emory E., 89–90, 103–4  
 Walton, Frederick, 225–26, 231–32; photo of, 225  
 Walz, William, 171  
 Warm Springs, Va., 106  
 Washington, George, and Natural Bridge, 137  
 Washington, Perrin, 179–83  
 Washington, Warner, Jr., 181  
 Washington, William D., 177–213: at VMI, 197–213; death and funeral of, 212–14; Ger-

## Index

- Washington, William D. (*continued*)  
man training of, 183–84, 186; in New York City, 195–97; in Richmond, 187–91, 193; paintings, chronological list of known, 215–16; photo of, 179; and *Wedding of the Huguenot's Daughter*, 184–86
- Washington and Lee University: African Americans at in WWII, 10–11; applications to, 1; and Col Alto, 253–54; “convertible fleet” of, 2; and cost of attending, 14; and Cotillion Club, 2, 13; crew race at, 244; enrollment during WWII, 5, 11–12; and Fancy Dress Ball, 2–3; fires at, 442, 469–70; and football, 2–3, 5, 14; fraternities, social, 2, 12–13; gifts from W. W. Corcoran, 211; and Hunter’s raid, 268; and Mock Political Convention (1940), 2–3; New Deal funds for (PWA), 493; Pearl Harbor attack, effects on, 3–5; and Red Square, 13; *Ring-tum-Phi* in WWII, 1–5; Robinson estate operated by, 166, 168; ROTC at, 3; School for Special and Morale Services at, 7–11, 13; secessionist sentiments at, 364–65, 371, 373, 379; students’ attitude toward Reconstruction, 279, 281–82, 288, 299; students’ reaction to NRA prices, 490, 492; war casualties among alumni of, 5, 12; *Washington and Lee Swing*, 2; Washington Annex, construction of, 7; women enroll during WWII, 5; and World War II, essay on, 1–14
- Washington family, 179–82, 212–13
- Watt, John R., 92–93, 100–101; photo of, 93
- Watt, William J., photo of, 107
- Watts, Isaac, 70–72
- Wayland, Robert R., 75–77
- Wayne, David, 9
- Welsh family, 153–54
- Wescott, Charles and Doris, 163, 175
- West Buena Vista Land Company, 173–74
- Wev, Walter Cicero J., 127
- Weyer’s Cave/Grand Caverns, 324–25
- Wheat growing, 505–38
- Whig party, 412, 413
- White, Edwin, 18, 20
- White, John, 16
- White, Matthew X., 263
- White, William S., 263, 266
- White, Zacheriah, 381
- Whitefield, George, 67–68
- Williamsburg, Va., 338–41
- Willis, Madeline, 87, 98, 100; photo of, 82
- Willkie, Wendell, 3
- Wills, Jayhugh, 451
- Winifield, Thomas, 125
- Womeldorf family, 73
- Women: farm women’s work, poem re, 33–34; organizations of, 72; sexual mores and race, 282–83, 294, 297; suffrage amendment, 247–48; white teachers of blacks, treatment of, 279–80
- Woodson, Darryl, 432
- Woody Herman orchestra, 3
- Works Progress Administration (WPA), 499–500
- Yale University, 239
- Yorktown, Va., 341–42
- Young, Cy, 2







