

# **The Curtis Collection**

## **A Personal View of Prince William County History**



**Donald E. Curtis**

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**Donald E. Curtis**



**Prince William County Historical Commission  
Prince William, Virginia  
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## INTRODUCTION

The *Curtis Collection* contains the series of 57 articles written for the *Potomac News* by Donald E. Curtis during the period June 1977 to May 1982. Readers of Don's column were disappointed when this series ended; sadly, most of us did not have the foresight to collect and save these valuable history lessons which focus on Prince William County.

The work is presented as it appeared, but it does not have to be read in sequence. Each column stands alone in the newspaper style in which it was written and necessary background information is presented with each vignette. It is particularly interesting to compare Don's vision of the actions which should be taken with those which have come to fruition — a tourism director, commemoration of additional points of interest, expanded library facilities, and increased public concern for preserving areas of archeological, historical, or public interest. Still more remains to be done if we are to realize the potential of Don's vision for Prince William County.

As chairman of the Prince William County Historical Commission from 1977 to 1980, Mr. Curtis directed his energies toward raising the public consciousness about our colorful past. His writing served to generate interest in history and historic preservation, as he challenged his readers to become better acquainted with the area. Don's sharp pen was also directed at our politicians and community organizations, encouraging them to take positive action to protect our heritage, expand our museums and libraries, encourage tourism and open new areas to public use.

Mr. Curtis' great accomplishment was the acquisition of Leesylvania and its dedication as a state park. Using his perseverance and the power of his pen, he achieved almost single-handedly what most could only dream about — the creation of a state park. Buttonholing politicians, lecturing, testifying before the state legislature, gaining an audience with one of the world's richest men to plead his case, Don cajoled state and local governments to provide matching funds to bring the historic home of the Lees and Fairfaxes into the park system. What a magnificent achievement!

Don Curtis came by his historic interest somewhat belatedly, but brought to it the fervor of the devoted convert, with a range of interests that spans archaeology, genealogy, politics and history. Don's great involvement began in 1970 when he joined his uncle, Jesse Curtis, in exploring the Civil War encampments in present-day Montclair. A few years later, after combing the National Archives during his lunch hour and digesting the available literature on the County, Don began sharing his knowledge through numerous



“Letters to the Editor” from 1974 to 1977, then contributed these columns on a regular basis.

My family has enjoyed the rare privilege of Don’s tutelage, as he sought to instill in us his sense of urgency to preserve the past in the face of rapid development. Don and his wife’s offers of personally conducted tours often came on short notice. “Let’s go” and off we went, not daring to miss an opportunity to learn more about Prince William and other areas and eager to experience his boundless energy, enthusiasm, grasp of detail and sharp wit.

Don Curtis was a lifelong resident of Prince William who traced his heritage in this County to 1701. After graduating from Occoquan District High School in 1950, he served in the Army during the Korean War and stayed on with the Army as a civilian analyst and computer data specialist until 1962, when he joined the Internal Revenue Service. He was appointed to the Senior Executive Service as a charter member in 1979 and served as Director of the Planning, Budgeting, and Review Staff, IRS. He was selected as “Citizen of the Year” by the Potomac News in 1978 and received a Prince William County Chamber of Commerce “Distinguished Service Award” in 1985. Don and Christine Gravely Curtis resided near Leesylvania State Park.

Sadly Don and Christine died in a tragic automobile accident in January 1995. At the time, they were doing what they most enjoyed; exploring areas of historic interest. Since their deaths, the County has undergone many changes. As you read his articles you will notice that Don foresaw some of these changes and perhaps brought about others.

The Historical Commission is grateful to Don Wilson of the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center of Virginia and local history in the Bull Run Regional Library for doing the original indexing of this book and to Bob Bainbridge for including appropriate photos to go along with the articles.

Jane B. MacDonald, Former Chairman  
Prince William County Historical Commission



## A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH LOCAL HISTORY

*by Donald E. Curtis*

An address presented at a meeting of Historic Dumfries  
Virginia, Inc., at Dumfries Merchant Park  
July 14, 1977

My roots in the Dumfries area date back to 1701. One branch of the family settled on 600 acres of land along the south side of Powells Creek just across from the Leesylvania Plantation tract. This area was then, of course, part of Stafford County. The family name was “Bland” and they moved into the Colony of Virginia from St. Mary’s County, Maryland.

I was born and raised in Prince William County, but I never began to understand the powerful history of this area until the 1970’s. It always seemed to me, up to that point, that all the worthwhile events of Virginia history happened somewhere other than Prince William. The only exceptions were the First and Second Battles of Manassas. I was led to believe that these were the only major Civil War events in Prince William.

A rather innocuous event in the spring of 1970 certainly changed me on that score and began a series of truly eye opening experiences. My uncle, Jesse Curtis, asked if I would like to join him in a metal detecting trip to a newly discovered Civil War camping area in Minnieville. Since I had never done anything like that before, I thought, why not?

The area was overgrown with trees, but reasonably devoid of underbrush. There appeared to be the outline of many rectangles on the ground beneath the trees. They seemed to measure about 10x15 feet each and contained a large clump of stones at one end. I was later to find out that each of these enclosures housed eight soldiers and the stones were remnants from the individual fireplaces. Amazingly, the huts were laid out in perfect rows somewhat like a company street.

The process of metal detecting was quite simple under circumstances such as those encountered. By a sweeping action each hut area was searched. And what a fantastic series of things were revealed. Buckets of metal objects were collected. They included coins, buttons, knives, forks, spoons, breast plates, bullets and most important of all — belt buckles. Many oblong buckles were found all bearing the same inscription — 6th INF — N. C. S.T.

It seemed to me that with the inscription on the belt buckles, I could perhaps unravel the mystery of the camp we had found. Obviously, the unit was Infantry and from North Carolina. I wanted to know when they were there and what they were doing at the time. So, I called Senator Sam Ervin’s office in Washington and explained what we had

found. I was told to correspond with the North Carolina Division of Archives and History in Raleigh. This I did immediately.

In a few days, I received a reply indicating that a regimental history had been written in 1965 on the Sixth North Carolina Regiment and I could purchase a copy from them. It was entitled The Bloody Sixth. The order was placed instantly. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I received the volume. It contained an entire chapter devoted to the camp we had detected. This in turn led to a fantastic personal insight into local Civil War events.

The Sixth North Carolina Infantry Regiment was organized on May 16, 1861 by Colonel Charles Frederick Fisher. He was president of the North Carolina Railroad. The regiment was made up primarily of railroad men. The unit was quickly sent to Virginia and was heroically engaged in the First Battle of Manassas on July 21, 1861. The regiment also suffered terribly as a result of this action. Colonel Fisher was shot through the head and killed. Another 15 members of the outfit were wiped out and 64 were wounded.

Following this major battle, the regiment remained in the Manassas area for several days. They then moved to Camp Jones in Bristow. On September 19, 1861, the unit was ordered to Powells Creek near Dumfries. The new camp was called "Camp Fisher" in honor of their fallen commander.

The mission of the regiment while at Camp Fisher was to support the blockade of the Potomac. A major decision had been made by the Confederate government to harass Washington by cutting off shipping on the Potomac River. Large guns were brought in and placed along a six mile stretch of shoreline in Prince William running from Freestone Point to Evansport (Quantico).

Some 11,200 men were stationed in the Occoquan-Dumfries-Quantico area at that time. Four regiments were located along Powells Creek, the Sixth North Carolina being one of these situated on land now part of Lake Montclair.

During the several months that the Sixth North Carolina was located near Dumfries, they had some interesting officers about. Colonel William Dorsey Pender was the regimental commander during that period. He was a West Point graduate, went on to become a major general, and died as a result of wounds received at Gettysburg. The brigade commander was General W.H.C. Whiting, also a graduate of West Point. He had the highest scholastic standing ever attained in the Academy until the graduation of Douglas MacArthur. No wonder those huts at Camp Fisher were lined up so straight.

Incidentally, General Pender carried on a prolific correspondence with his wife, and several letters from Camp Fisher are contained in a collection of his writings in a volume housed in the Prince William County Central Library. The Sixth North Carolina was ordered out of the area along with all other Confederate military units on March 8, 1862. All operations were restructured south of the Rappahannock River.

Can you imagine my surprise to read of a big Confederate military campaign in Eastern Prince William County? I had grown up hearing about nothing but the battles of Manassas. Incredible. On the basis of the *Bloody Sixth*, I began a form of research that was to go on for a long time. I thus discovered Joseph Mills Hanson's book, *Bull Run Remembers* written in the mid-50's. He knew well the story of the Confederate Blockade — why hadn't someone told me before? Now, of course, we have Mary Alice Wills' excellent and comprehensive book on the subject.

At this point, I was badly bitten by the historic research bug. I simply had to see for myself some of the manuscript collection cited in the resources list of *The Bloody Sixth*. Many of them were housed in the National Archives virtually next door to me at work. I applied for a research permit and requested Confederate Record Group 109 and the General W.H.C. Whiting military papers.

When the documents were brought to me, I could scarcely believe my eyes. I had in my hands the original copies of general officer correspondence, newspaper accounts of military operations, order books, letters, etc. I never dreamed such detail was available. This was the beginning of many hours to be spent in the National Archives, especially using microfilm records. By the way, I was also able to examine the original of the magnificent December 8, 1861 sketch of all the Confederate Regiments and Batteries located between Freestone Point and Chopawamsic Creek. The drawing was done by the Union Army from a balloon over Charles County, Maryland. If you have not seen the map, a copy is on display at the Dumfries Museum along with some other very interesting Civil War artifacts.

After finding such complete records of the Confederate Army in the Archives, I decided to trace all the members of my family that served in the Civil War. I had relatives in the Forty-Ninth Virginia Infantry (Quantico Guards), Fortieth Virginia Infantry, and Ninth Virginia Cavalry. Each regimental microfilm has a header record that shows battles engaged in during the war. I made a point to visit each major pertinent battlefield from the James River to Gettysburg. I also visited the family prison locations, except for Elmira, New York, and have hunted the graves of those killed during the war. A few even made it back to Prince William alive.

Among the other treasures of the National Archives are Census Records from 1790—1900; military and pension records going back to the Revolutionary War; immigration records; and passenger lists for the major ports of entry. With such data available, I could hardly resist the urge to try my hand at genealogy. There are some record gaps caused by fire and war, e.g., the British torching Washington. Other records such as tax rolls, Anglican Church records, etc., have proved useful to fill the gaps. The earliest "Curtis" I have found in Virginia came in 1621 on the "Flying Hart" and entered at Newport News.

Needless to say, my work on genealogy is not finished — I wonder if such work ever is. I need more time and access to records not nearly as convenient as the National

Archives. It has been a fascinating experience, and it certainly causes you to become acquainted with older and more distant members of the family. In this connection, Mrs. Ethel Maddox Byrd, organizing regent of the Elizabeth McIntosh Hammill Chapter, DAR, and Jack Ratcliffe, Prince William County Historian, are family members who were very helpful to me. For those of you that have not started tracing your roots, I would say, "What are you waiting for?"

I got the history bug too late to share in the wonderful work that was done to commemorate the Centennial of the Civil War. But I was bound and determined to do something to support the American Bicentennial. My first shot was a series of letters to the editor in the *Potomac News* beginning in 1974 aimed at getting the County actively engaged in the 200th Birthday celebration. I also worked with the Bicentennial Committee of the Chamber of Commerce and joined Historic Dumfries Inc. about the same time. In 1976, I was appointed to the County Historical Commission.

My major concern at this point is to get Prince William County a better press when it comes to its historical significance. We don't need to enjoy a vicarious thrill on other Virginia history. We have ample of our own. Consider our early land patents, the Indian Fort on Neabsco, the ports of Dumfries and Occoquan, William Grayson, Light Horse Harry Lee, the significant roads and troop trails, old mills, old plantations, the Civil War engagements — all things to be proud of and to preserve. I also want to see us get a state historical park at Leesylvania.

We need a Virginiana Room at the Potomac Library urgently. Such a facility would become the repository of rare reference materials, maps, pictures, microfilm records, etc., dealing with the history and culture of Prince William County, especially the "older" eastern part. I would like to see Historic Dumfries use its clout to push for such a public facility. It would be an excellent way to celebrate the 25th birthday of the Prince William Library Service.

I have far less time now for the pursuit of research than I did in the early 1970s because of the demands of my job. This condition has not, however, affected my interest level. History, genealogy, and archaeology continue to be my hobby interests. History certainly is much more interesting than fiction. And the things one can learn about who you are from genealogy are enough to boggle the mind.

Don Curtis

## COURTHOUSES — AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The more things change, the more they are the same. Or so it would seem in reviewing the history of the courthouse moves within Prince William County. There is a thread of consistency concerning the needs of the people which has caused the county seat to be located in five different places over a period of 246 years.

Many people are surprised to find that the first Prince William County Courthouse was located in Woodbridge. The exact location was just east of the Jefferson Davis Highway (U.S. Route I) almost to the Occoquan River. A stone marker with identifying plaque is located along the northbound lane at the approximate spot.

This first courthouse site was established in 1731 at a ferry landing on a plantation owned by George Mason III. The location was considered ideal at the time since it was situated on a prominent river and was somewhat central to the general population of Prince William during that period. All Virginia lands above the Occoquan and westward to the Blue Ridge were also then part of Prince William County.



Former Historical Commissioner Steve Phinney looking at the monument at the site of the second Prince William County Courthouse

In 1742, Fairfax was formed as a separate county and a clamor began to move the courthouse. The back country of Prince William (later to become Fauquier County) was settling quickly and the new planters wanted a more conveniently accessible seat of justice. Five sites were proposed on or near Cedar Run causing the colonial Governor some grief. It was necessary for the matter to go to arbitration. After meeting at the Iron Mines at Neabsco, the arbitration board recommended that the new court house be erected on the plantation of Philemon Waters near present day Independent Hill.

Fauquier County sprung from the loins of Prince William County in 1759. By this time the port of Dumfries was in high gear and made a bid to become the next county seat. The parish church was located in Dumfries and it was generally agreed that the new location would be more convenient to the majority of inhabitants of Prince William. The new Court House at Dumfries was completed in May, 1762.

After silt clogged the Dumfries port from poor farming practices, the population shifted again. The country along Broad Run became the most populous part of the county and included land owners with the most political clout. In 1820, a decision was made to give Prince William its fourth courthouse location at Brentsville.



4th Prince William County Courthouse, Brentsville

In 1852, railroad construction in Prince William created an intersection between the Manassas Gap, and Orange and Alexandria lines. This tiny crossroads was called Manassas Junction and became a household name as a result of the Civil War. In 1872, Manassas Junction became ambitious and began a campaign to acquire the county seat. They promised to donate the site, to erect the new buildings, and to bear all expenses incident to moving the seat of government from Brentsville. The entire matter was put to county referendum and Manassas lost.

Manassas was not easily discouraged, so in 1892 it renewed efforts to become the county seat. Again enticing inducements were made and again a referendum was held. This time Manassas won and the present courthouse location was established.



5<sup>th</sup> Prince William County Courthouse around 1900

Today history is again being made as we deal with the matter of once more moving the courthouse to a new site. The issues are not new and involve the establishment of a more conveniently accessible location to the population and political power center of the County. The movement of a county seat is a complicated matter involving psychological as well as economic factors. Left to the people, a proper decision will be made on this extremely important matter.

June 29, 1977



## LOCAL CIVIL WAR EVENTS

This month marks the 116th anniversary of the First Battle of Manassas. Prince William County can be justly proud of the Manassas National Battlefield Park which honors both Manassas (Bull Run) campaigns fought in 1861—62. But many citizens are not aware of the other important military operations conducted in our County during the Civil War. For example, let's consider a massive confederate military action that employed 11,200 men in the Occoquan-Dumfries area from September, 1861 to March, 1862.

Immediately following the First Battle of Manassas, the Confederate Government turned its attention to the military importance of the eastern end of Prince William County. Since the Union Navy controlled the Potomac River, there was great concern on the part of Confederate Generals that the Yankees might try to land a strong amphibious force somewhere between Woodbridge and Quantico. Additionally, the Confederates quickly saw the wisdom of using the Prince William shore line along the Potomac to interdict Union shipping to Washington.

To harass Yankee vessels, heavy artillery positions were constructed along a six mile stretch of the Potomac. Several gun tubes obtained from the Norfolk Navy Yard were installed at Freestone Point, Cockpit Point, Possum Point, Shipping Point, and Evansport (Quantico). Each of these gun positions commanded a major portion of the open water.

In order to prevent any flanking action by the Union forces and to protect the guns engaged in the blockade of the Potomac, it became necessary to employ vast numbers of Confederate Infantry and support troops in the eastern portion of Prince William County. An entire division was engaged consisting of three brigades, fourteen regiments, and various supporting cavalry and artillery units.

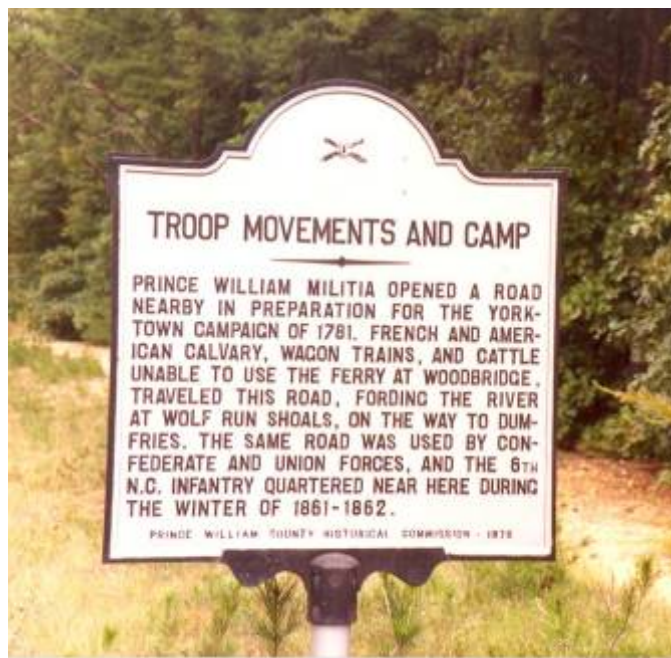
Some years ago, it was my happy experience to participate in an archaeological operation dealing with the camp of the 6th North Carolina Infantry Regiment. The site was called "Camp Fisher" in tribute to the regimental commander, Colonel Charles F. Fisher, who was killed in action at the First Battle of Manassas. The exact location of the camp now lies within the Lake Montclair community.

The 6th North Carolina Infantry was a part of the Third Brigade which was commanded by General W.H.C. Whiting. This particular unit assisted in the support of the gun battery located at Freestone Point. For a time, the Brigade Headquarters was located on the Dane Farm in Minnieville. The nearest town to the Sixth North Carolina

was Dumfries. General Whiting emphasized the military importance of Dumfries by issuing orders appointing a provost marshal and provost guards to maintain order in the town. Special provision was made concerning the sale of whiskey and strict orders were issued for regiments and batteries to retain their positions.

Before the Confederate forces withdrew below the Rappahannock River on March 8, 1862, there were numerous interesting actions associated with the blockade operation. They are beautifully described in *Bull Run Remembers* by Joseph Mills Hanson, and *Confederate Blockade of Washington* by Mary Alice Wills. The action involves the areas of Bacon Race Church, Minnieville, Occoquan, Neabsco and Powells Creek, Dumfries and Quantico.

Artifacts discovered at Camp Fisher are now on display at both the Dumfries and Occoquan Museums. Additionally, an enlarged sketch is on display at the Dumfries Museum showing the Confederate batteries and camps from Freestone Point to Chopawamsic Creek. The original sketch was made by the Union Army from a balloon in Charles County, Maryland, on December 8, 1861.



Prince William County Historical Commission marker

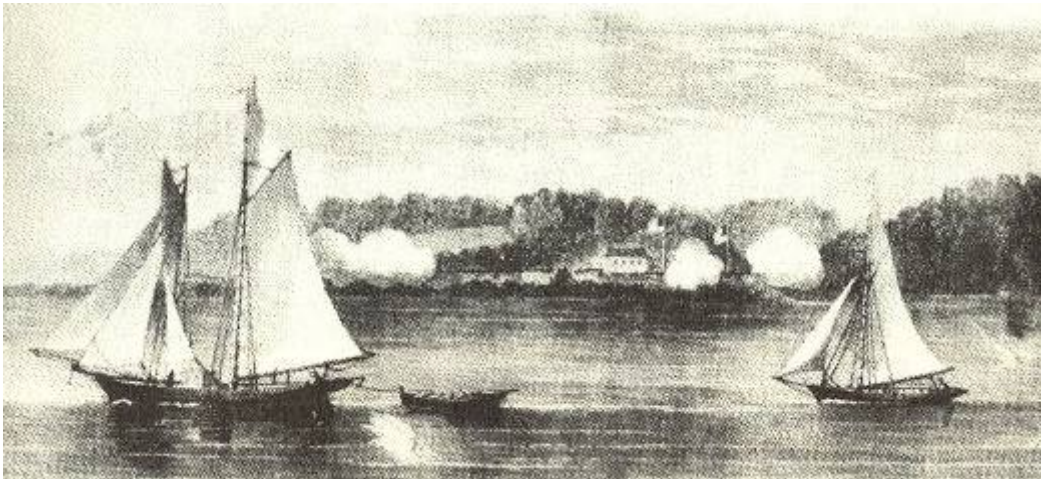
While the Manassas National Battlefield Park preserves historical lands in the western part of the County associated with the Civil War, no such preservation measure has yet been undertaken to honor the blockade effort in eastern Prince William. Establishment of a much needed State Park at Leesylvania plantation would correct this deficiency. The Freestone Point battery is located within that tract of land and the gun pits are in excellent shape.

Prince William County contributed a tremendous number of soldiers to the Confederate ranks. One of the most interesting from a local family standpoint was a

company called “The Quantico Guards”. This unit was part of the 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment. The company was organized at Dumfries on July 1, 1861, and was mustered into service on July 16, 1861. Their regimental commander was William Smith, a man who was twice governor of Virginia.

For those of you who would like to know more about your ancestors who served during the Civil War, I would like to suggest a visit to the National Archives in Washington. That facility has a fantastic series of microfilm records covering muster rolls, pension records, etc., for that period. And they have been so impartial as to give attention to both Confederate and Union participants.

July 27, 1977



Schooners passing Confederate batteries

## THE ORIGIN OF WOODBRIDGE

An awful lot of the people who carry a “Woodbridge” mailing address are not familiar with the origin of that name or the historical significance of the area. The name actually derives from a plantation property which was the site of a colonial ferry and early toll bridge.

The Woodbridge area was first visited by Englishmen as a result of Captain John Smith’s exploration of the Potomac River in 1608. The map resulting from that early trip is remarkably accurate when overlaid on a current chart. It identified the location of an Indian Chief’s house on the upper shore of the Occoquan River across from Woodbridge.

In 1653, the first land patent was established for property now included in Prince William County. The original patent covered a 3,000 acre neck of land that ran from the Occoquan River to Neabsco Creek. From this tract was cut the 534 acre plantation that came to be called Woodbridge by the George Mason family.

During the remainder of the 1650’s several other land patents were recorded in the area that constitutes present day Prince William County. As the settlers pushed further into the area, the Indians became more and more hostile. This sort of trouble culminated in 1675 with Bacon’s Rebellion and the retreat of the English to the Aquia Creek area. In 1679 a fort was constructed on Neabsco Creek to be commanded by Colonel George Mason, great-grandfather of the builder of Gunston Hall.

The fort was dismantled in 1682 and replaced by a force of 20 rangers. This action made the Potomac Path crossing over the Occoquan River at Woodbridge extremely important. Colonel Mason was required to provide official ferry transport for the rangers from his plantation property. There was no statutory obligation to provide civilian ferry service at this spot until 1691.

During this same period, Martin Scarlet lived at Deep Hole Plantation, virtually next door to the Woodbridge Plantation, and assisted in the operation of the ferry crossing. He was a member of the House of Burgesses, justice of the County Court, and surveyor of the road between the Occoquan River and Neabsco Creek. His tombstone, dated 1695, is located in the immediate area.

In 1731, Prince William County was organized and its first public buildings were constructed at the Occoquan River ferry landing owned by the Mason family. During the next several years a number of beautiful plantation homes were built in the area. The

tobacco port town of Colchester was established directly across the Occoquan River from the Woodbridge Plantation in 1753.

President George Washington met with an accident while using the Occoquan River ferry in 1791. The horses pulling the presidential chariot somehow managed to go overboard while the ferry was about 50 yards from shore. By some miracle, not clearly described, all four horses ended up in the water in harness, but did not cause any harm to the President.

A ferry continued to operate at the original crossing point on the Occoquan River until a wooden toll bridge was authorized by the legislature in 1795. It was this construction that caused the Mason plantation to be given the name Woodbridge. The toll bridge was washed away by one of the recurring floods that plagued the Occoquan River in 1807.

Meanwhile, the village of Occoquan was getting its act together and competing heavily for the traffic crossing the Occoquan River. In 1805 a mail stage route was authorized running through Occoquan over a bridge built by Nathaniel Ellicott. The flood that wiped out Mason's bridge only damaged Ellicott's span.

The toll bridge at the Woodbridge Plantation was not rebuilt. It wasn't until 1872 that any sort of traffic could be transported across the Occoquan River at this point. Following the Civil War, action was taken to extend the RF&P Railroad northward from Stafford County through Prince William. In this process, a railroad bridge was built across the Occoquan River on the site of the old Mason ferry.

In 1916, the RF&P Railroad widened and realigned the roadbed. A new bridge was constructed for rail use, and the old one was given over to vehicular traffic. This very same bridge was incorporated into use by U.S. Route 1 when it was established in 1927. The old veteran collapsed as a result of tropical storm "Agnes" in 1972 after giving a century of service.

Today Woodbridge is a sprawling metropolitan Washington bedroom community. The traffic that was once handled by a ferry across the Occoquan River has grown to strain two rail tracks and twelve traffic lanes. What price progress!

August 24, 1977



Steel Truss Bridge Over the Occoquan

## EARLY INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

As Prince William attempts to play catch-up with its county neighbors to the north in matters of industrial development, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that things were not always in that posture. Old Prince William had a rather remarkable record in industry and commerce.

In 1679, before this neck of the woods was even known as Prince William County, Neabsco Creek was given special recognition by the Colonial Government when it was authorized a fort for use in fighting Indians. English graves, well marked, were discovered along the banks of the Neabsco dated in the 1690's.

Colonel John Tayloe operated an iron foundry in this general area early in the 1700's. This particular industrial site functioned well into the Revolutionary War. Thomas Jefferson remarked in his writings that the Neabsco iron works supplied pig iron for the defense of the Colonies. On early maps this operation is shown as "Neabsco Mills."

The great importance of such early iron mining and furnace operations is not too widely understood. While the early colonists landing in Virginia seemed to have a fixation on minerals and their exploration, it appears that the first successful smelting furnace was not established until 1715. Colonel Tayloe was quick to go with such a winner on the south bank of the Neabsco.

In 1755, Colonel Tayloe and his partner, Presley Thornton, joined forces with John Ballendine to get the Occoquan iron furnace and forge enterprise underway. The Occoquan location was described as having every convenience of wood and water that could be wished for. Unlike the earlier Neabsco works which used local iron ore beds, the Occoquan operation used ore brought in by water from Maryland. Apparently, Lord Fairfax reserved to himself a third of all ore discovered in the Northern Neck as he took more interest in his proprietary.

Perhaps more people understand the role that tobacco commerce played in Prince William, especially in bringing to life such port towns as Dumfries. After the bars to profitable tobacco trade were lifted in 1707, the merchants of Glasgow, Scotland immediately concentrated their interests around Quantico Creek. It is believed that Glasgow merchants established a "factory" and "agents house" on Quantico Creek as early as 1713.



What may be surprising to some people is the fact that the towns of Dumfries and Alexandria were chartered on the very same day in 1749 by the General Assembly. Both entities were intended to promote trade and navigation to the advantage of the inhabitants of the respective ports of the Colony. But what a difference location makes. Alexandria was a deep water port on a principal river; Dumfries was located inland on a creek. Although Dumfries ran ahead of Alexandria for a time, silt from poor farming practices was to sound the death knell for the port facility.

It is also interesting to note that several years prior to the Revolutionary War some Prince William County farmers began to move away from tobacco and begin the cultivation of wheat. This change was brought on by heavy duties placed on tobacco which cut into the profit margin of this traditional crop. Also, the exhausted land tended to give a better yield of wheat than tobacco.

With the opening of wheat lands in the back country of old Prince William, John Semple began the transition of Occoquan from iron works to flour works. The “Miller’s House Museum” now stands in Occoquan as a monument to what was a very large and productive flour mill. This particular mill operated until 1924. There were other grist mills on every significant stream of water in Prince William, many dating back prior to the Revolution.

It also comes as something of a surprise to many to learn that Occoquan had one of the first cotton mills in Virginia. The mill was built in 1828 by Nathaniel Janney. Within the four story structure ran 1,000 spindles. The mill was destroyed by fire during the Civil War.

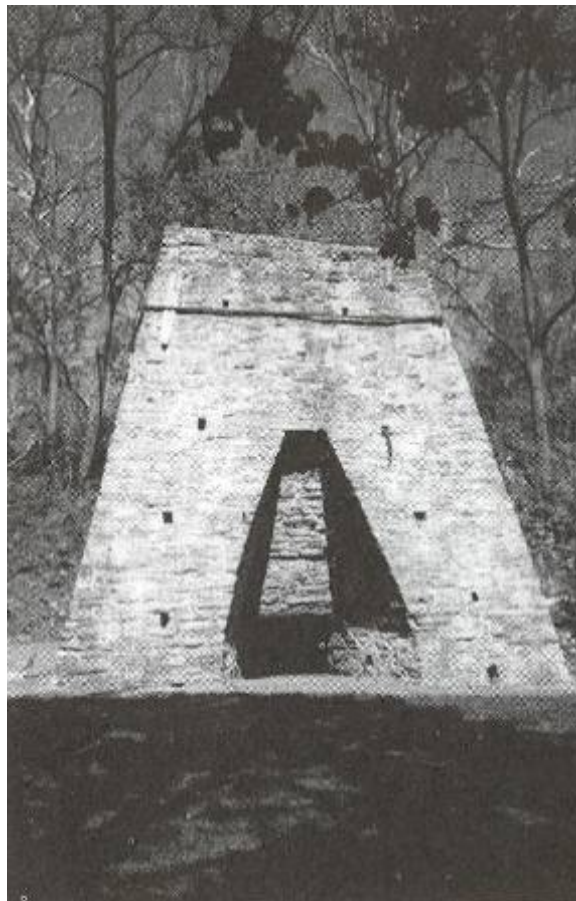


Mill and miller’s house in Occoquan around 1920

In the 1840's and 1850's Prince William County was peacefully invaded by Yankee farmers. They were attracted by the cheap land and more favorable farming climate. Several successful dairy and horse farms were established by these folks. When the Civil War began, it made for some interesting military affiliations. Some joined Confederate regiments; others made different arrangements.

A review of the economic history of Prince William County shows ups and downs that generally parallel the rest of the nation. Most notably, things were tough after the Revolutionary War, and even more so after the Civil War. But on balance the County had an interesting record in industry and commerce. With proper and dedicated leadership in this important area, we can do as well again.

September 28, 1977



Colonial iron furnace resembling  
the one that stood at Neabsco



## LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY

Prince William County has done a poor job in promoting many facets of its history, but perhaps the most deficient area concerns our religious heritage. Organized religion has been present in Virginia from the first day English colonists landed in 1607. Its growth, trials, tribulations, and reorganization are a very vital piece of local history.

The Church of England was the only legal and official religion of the Colony of Virginia from the time Jamestown was settled until after the Revolutionary War. However, the forces that led to the disestablishment of the State Church were beginning to stir many years prior to the Revolution. The events of this period involved Old Prince William.

For perspective, it is worthwhile to recall a few things about the Church of England and its organization in the Colony of Virginia. Spiritual oversight of the Colony was vested in the Bishop of London. There was no process to produce a native ministry sufficient and suitable for local needs. The vestry was composed of the most conspicuous and influential members of the community.

Each county of the Colony of Virginia was organized into one or more parishes. The parish performed civil functions in addition to its religious duties. Among these important responsibilities were care of the poor, processioning the boundaries of land, establishment of the tax rate for church support, and policing the personal conduct of parishioners. Glebes, or church-owned plantations, were also established.

The first land patent in present Prince William County was recorded in 1653. By 1667 the first site for the “Quantico” Church was selected in the Dumfries area. The “Quantico” chapel of ease became a full fledged parish church when Prince William County was established in 1731.

A church building described as “old and indifferent” was sold in 1752 for 1500 weight tobacco. In its place was constructed a new brick church measuring 1,800 square feet at a cost of one hundred thousand weight tobacco. What a pity it does not stand today between the magnificent sister structures of “Aquia” and “Pohick.” The only item from the old church that seems to have survived is a paten made in 1736—37.

The forces that led to the ultimate disestablishment of the Church of England in Virginia were rather complex. They seemed to be a mix of religious, political, social, and economic considerations. Apparently, there was a need to dethrone the twelve lords of

the parish or vestry, and generally humiliate the aristocrats. And, of course, there was a desire to do away with the parish tax. As relations with Great Britain became more strained, the Church of England became more and more a target.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, there was only one Baptist Church in Prince William County. It was located in Occoquan. In the early days of the Baptist Church in Virginia, its activity could be best described as a combined religious movement, class struggle, and political process. Arrests and imprisonment of Baptist preachers were common.

As events unfolded preparatory to armed conflict with Great Britain, the Baptist Church saw in the struggle of the colonies for political freedom an opportunity to advance the cause of religious freedom. The Baptist Churches showered the lawmaking bodies with petitions demanding the complete separation of Church and State. On May 11, 1776, the Occoquan Baptist Church submitted their petition to the Committee of Religion, Convention of Virginia, which read, in part:



Bethel Church around 1900

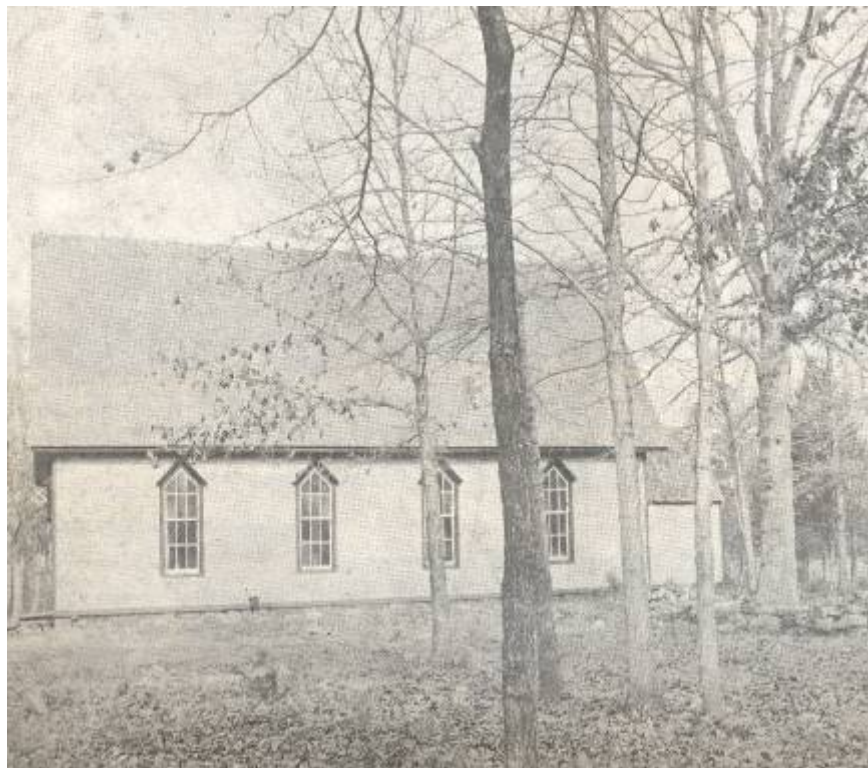
“...to petition for several religious privileges which asserts we have not been indulged with in this part of the world. Viz.

1. That we be allowed to worship God in our own way, without interruption.
2. That we be permitted to maintain our own Ministers, etc., and no others.
3. That we and our friends who desire it, may be married, buried and the like, without paying the Parsons of any other denomination. These things granted, we will gladly unite with our Brethren of other denominations, and to the utmost of our ability promote the common cause of Freedom, always praying for your welfare and success.”

The result of all such activity, and the successful conclusion of the Revolutionary War, was the passage of Thomas Jefferson's bill for "Establishing Religious Freedom" in Virginia on December 17, 1785. In so doing, Virginia became the first civil government in the world to take such an action.

I am sure there are many other examples of Prince William County's religious heritage that should be preserved and recalled for the current generation. The work done by Historic Dumfries in publishing the "Records of Dettingen Parish" is to be applauded. Also, the recent work done by the Bethel Methodist Church in saving its 127-year-old structure was outstanding. But so much more ought to be done throughout the County.

October 26, 1977



Quantico Church, Dumfries Episcopal Church around 1920

## EARLY LANDOWNING

Most of us count ourselves lucky if we own a quarter or half an acre of land to live on. The acreage of present day Prince William County seems huge by contrast, but in its entirety it constituted only a small plat within the original boundaries of the “Kingdom of Virginia.” Try to imagine one person holding title to five million acres of land in the Colony of Virginia.

The lands that make up Prince William County today were duly included in the Second Virginia Charter of 1609. This charter was drawn the year following Captain John Smith’s voyage up the Potomac and into the Occoquan in 1608. The revised charter granted jurisdiction over “all those lands. . . in that part of America called Virginia, from . . . Point Comfort. . . northward 200 miles.. . southward 200 miles.. . and all that space and circuit of land, lying from sea to sea, west and northwest...” These limits of the “Kingdom of Virginia” would have been more sweeping, but at that time the Pacific Ocean was believed to be just beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

In 1649 King Charles II made a gift of a little piece of land in the Colony of Virginia for services rendered. The gift was the five million acre Northern Neck of Virginia. This extraordinary grant, later called the Fairfax Proprietary, included all land bounded by the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. Present day Prince William lands were, of course, included in that transaction.

Thomas Fairfax, sixth Lord Fairfax of Cameron, inherited this vast piece of turf from his mother, the daughter of Lord Culpeper, Governor of Virginia in 1680. He was born in Yorkshire in 1693 and was attending Oxford University when he became the owner of one fourth of the Colony of Virginia. For a considerable time he handled the property as an absentee landlord, but in 1735 it became necessary for him to visit Virginia to protect the grant and survey the lands. The matter was settled in 1745 and two years later Lord Fairfax located permanently on his Proprietary. He remained a firm loyalist during the American Revolution, and died as if on cue following the British defeat at Yorktown.

It was the general practice of Virginia during the Revolution to confiscate the estates of British subjects that failed to take an oath of allegiance to the American cause, but Lord Fairfax was left undisturbed. A young public surveyor earlier employed in the Shenandoah Valley by the Fairfax Proprietary was by this time an influential general officer. His name was George Washington.

When Lord Fairfax died in 1781 he left his estate to a brother in England, but Virginia moved quickly to expropriate the Fairfax Proprietary. Resultant litigation continued until 1816. Landowners that had been paying quitrents to Lord Fairfax were allowed to hold their lands in fee simple. The rightful heirs of Lord Fairfax were allowed to retain the lands which Lord Fairfax had appropriated for his personal use. Lands which were left unappropriated were taken by Virginia.

I was reminded of the grip Lord Fairfax had on the land in Prince William County in some genealogical research I was doing a few weeks ago. In tracing the early ownership of land by my family in old Prince William I came across a land contract involving an early ancestor and Lord Fairfax. The conditions of the contract, involving several hundred acres of land, called for an annual fee rent of one shilling sterling for every 50 acres of land payable on the “Feast Day of St. Michael of Archangel.” Also included was Lord Fairfax’s standard reservation to himself of a third of all ores and minerals discovered on the property.

It was possible, however, for clever speculators to make a killing even under such conditions as imposed by Lord Fairfax. For example, Robert “King” Carter amassed 330,000 acres of land in Virginia during the 1700’s. Several of the tracts patented included lands now part of Prince William County. The properties lay along Kettle Run, Broad Run, Bull Run, and the Occoquan River.



Robert King Carter  
1663-1732

Too bad Lord Fairfax never had the experience of receiving a real estate tax bill from Prince William County.

November 30, 1977

## **“COME HOME TO VIRGINIA”**

Last year during the high-water mark of the American Bicentennial, there was keen competition among the original thirteen colonies to attract the lucrative tourist trade from all over the country. One of the slogans used by the Old Dominion in this process was a thoughtful piece that simply read, “Come Home to Virginia”. Many persons residing elsewhere in the Nation are surprised to find that some earlier generation of their family lived for a time in Virginia.

Most people are aware that the first permanent English settlement in America was at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. But many are not aware of the fact that the State of Virginia had the largest population in America when the first Federal Census was taken in 1790. At that initial census old Prince William weighed in at 11,615 persons.

In the early days of the colony, rivers and streams were the highways that facilitated the migration of people. The Northern Virginia counties as far west as Leesburg were settled from the same general stock that inhabited the Tidewater Area. The area beyond that point was settled by families entering the Shenandoah Valley from the colonies to the North.

The territory which is now called Prince William County was originally included as part of Northumberland County when it was established in 1648. At that time, only the very end of the peninsula of land between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers was settled by the English. As civilization edged up the Potomac additional counties were formed. Westmoreland was founded in 1653 and Stafford in 1664. Each in turn contained present day Prince William County lands. Finally, Prince William was made a separate county in 1731.

Let's focus on the critical colonial period that ran from 1653 to 1722 to get some understanding of the hardships encountered. The year 1653 is important because it saw the first land patent in present day Prince William County. For the following three generations of settlers, Indians were the biggest problem that had to be solved. Horrid murders of English men, women and children required the construction of a fort on Neabsco Creek and the organization of ranger units in Eastern Prince William. It was not until 1722 that the problem was resolved by solemn compact with the Iroquois and their allies. The tribes agreed never again to cross the Potomac River or the Blue Ridge Mountains into Virginia.

Migration seems to be a permanent part of our national heritage. During the early 1800's Prince William began to show a decline in population as a result of generally bad

economic conditions and the lure of western lands. The condition was later aggravated by the trauma of Civil War. Some folks believe that recovery came only after the Shirley Highway was completed to Woodbridge in 1949, thus making way for the Hylton housing boom.

In this most recent cycle of migration to the bedroom communities of Prince William, there must be a fair number of people that have wondered who their ancestors were. If they were to trace their "roots", there is a reasonable chance that one or more of the family moved through Virginia within the past 370 years and perhaps even old Prince William.

I would like to see the Potomac Branch of the Prince William County Library aid such research by building an extensive reference section on genealogy. The Virginiana Collection seems to be concentrated in the Central Library in Manassas. As a balance to this condition, basic County genealogical record materials should be gathered at the Potomac Branch. For example, copies of the microfilmed census records for Nineteenth Century Prince William should be housed there along with an assortment of other Virginia county reference materials, indices, genealogical guides, etc.

Genealogists recently made an important discovery about President James Earl Carter, Jr. It turns out that he now qualifies to join the distinguished ranks of people having ancestors from Virginia.

December 21, 1977

## PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY'S MOST FAMOUS SON

Any county in the State of Virginia worth its salt has to have fair claim on being the birthplace of some well-known and important person in American History. This month marks the 222nd anniversary of the birth of the most famous historical figure born in Prince William County. His name is Henry Lee III, better known as "Light-Horse Harry" Lee.

The Lee family first gained possession of lands now a part of Prince William County in 1676. It was to be many years later, however, before any member of the family would reside on the 3,000 acre plantation that came to be named "Leesylvania". On December 1, 1753, at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Henry Lee II married Lucy Grimes and headed for old Prince William. Thus began a union that produced a line of military heroes that left an indelible mark on the Revolutionary War and Civil War history books of America.

Henry Lee III was born at Leesylvania Plantation on January 29, 1756. George Washington was a friend of the family and frequently visited his plantation neighbors. Mount Vernon was not too far distant from the Lee home by the Potomac River waterway. In due time young Henry was sent to the College of New Jersey, now known as Princeton University.



Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee  
1756-1818



As things began to heat up in preparation for the Revolutionary War, Henry Lee III was given a captain's commission in Theodorick Bland's Virginia Cavalry Regiment at the tender age of nineteen. In 1777 he was attached to General George Washington's Continental Army. In 1778 he was promoted to major and given command of a combined infantry and cavalry unit known as "Lee's Legion". Because of his great agility in pursuit of the British, he was given the sobriquet "Light-Horse Harry".

"Light-Horse Harry" participated in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. He was also involved in covering actions around Valley Forge. But his most famous exploit was conducted against the British post at Paulus Hook, New Jersey. For this brilliant capture he was given a gold medal by the Continental Congress. Such an honor was given to very few military commanders during that period.

During 1780—1781, "Light-Horse Harry" was sent to the Southern Department of the War and served with General Nathaniel Greene. Again, his green-jacketed legion performed admirably and was thought to be the best trained and equipped fighting group in that sector. He was present at the British surrender at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

As part of the observance of Prince William County's contributions to the American Revolution, the Historical Commission dedicated a monument to "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. It is in the form of a marble obelisk and is located on the south end of the Oar-Field County Administration Building. This memorial acknowledges his military and political accomplishments, including election as Governor of Virginia and U.S. Congressman. It also gives him recognition as the father of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A. But this memorial cannot begin to list all the interesting facets of this great patriot.

In 1794, President George Washington called on "Light-Horse Harry" to assist in putting down the "Whiskey Rebellion" in western Pennsylvania. This particular incident concerned certain newly enacted excise tax regulations and culminated in violence against Federal Officers. "Light-Horse Harry" was commissioned a major general and put in command of 15,000 militiamen to quell the disorder.

"Light-Horse Harry" had the misfortune to be caught in a political Street fight while visiting a friend in Baltimore, Maryland in 1812. It seems that the War of 1812 was almost as popular as the Vietnam War and caused much unrest and some violence. As a result of injuries received, he spent five years in the West Indies attempting to regain his health. On his way home to Virginia on March 25, 1818 "Light-Horse Harry" died at the plantation home of his old commander, Nathaniel Greene on Cumberland Island, Georgia.

Action should be taken this year by the State of Virginia to establish a park on the remaining 508 acres of the birthplace of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. The new park ought to be called "Leesylvania State Park". All distinguished members of the Virginia delegation, please copy.

January 25, 1978

## **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA?**

For those of you that think things have gone bonkers when you hear the suggestion that we should build a new Prince William County Courthouse, jail, and administration complex in the City of Manassas, consider how wild the situation had grown to be 117 years ago. When the ordinance of secession was passed on April 17, 1861, the State of Virginia was divided east and west a little bit like our fair County is today. Old Prince William was right in the thick of things during a very troubled period that was to last a very long nine years.

As soon as the secession ordinance was passed in Richmond, conventions of counteraction were held in Wheeling. The objective of these meetings was to develop a solid front against the ordinance and cut off the northwestern counties of Virginia from the Confederate eastern counties. Animosities between the plantation east and small farm west had been building for many years.

With a great deal of help from the Federal Army, this separatist effort became a success and the new State of West Virginia was formed. At one point in the process, a plan was devised to add an additional 23 Virginia counties to West Virginia. Included was our very own Prince William County. Fortunately, that particularly diabolical plan collapsed.

By this time, the Federal Army had a fairly firm grip over much of Northern Virginia. Alexandria had been invaded at the beginning of the war and a series of heavy Union forts were under construction in a defensive perimeter around Washington. The Federal Army also controlled Fort Monroe, along with a good deal of contiguous territory around Norfolk.

The Federal strategists then hit on the bright idea of establishing a “restored government of Virginia” to be located in Alexandria. They placed in power a “loyal governor” by the name of Francis H. Pierpont. He was from Marion County, West Virginia and had been an early organizer in the separatist movement.

The first meeting of this rump government was held in the chambers of the Alexandria City Council on December 7, 1863. Prince William County, sad to say, was represented by a so-called delegate to that session. Obviously, this administration existed only within the shadow of Federal bayonets and by no means derived power from the consent of the governed.

The Alexandria Government continued to exist throughout the remainder of the Civil War. When the war ended, the government moved to Richmond. It became the nucleus of the Republican Party in Virginia. Pierpont became provisional governor of Virginia during the reconstruction period.

When General Robert E. Lee surrendered on April 9, 1865, the resources of Virginia had been more horribly drained than those of any other Confederate state. Prince William County was in sad shape having been the scene of two major battles, a river blockade, and numerous skirmishes.

Civil Government seems to have ceased at the old Brentsville Courthouse when the Confederate Armies withdrew south of the Rappahannock River in March 1862. No courthouse minutes were recorded from March 6, 1862 to July 31, 1865. The area was not allowed to return to the bosom of the Union until January 26, 1870.

So, Prince William County has seen her share of trials and tribulations. No doubt she will even survive the outcome of the March 2nd referendum with grace and dignity, regardless of the result. But no other county in the Commonwealth more richly deserves a new governmental complex, centrally located within the county, than old Prince William.

February 22, 1978

## COUNTY REVOLUTIONARY CONTRIBUTIONS

So far as one can tell from recorded history, Prince William County made its most significant contributions to government and politics during the last half of the 18th Century. The courthouse, which was then located in the tobacco port of Dumfries almost the entire period, figured heavily in these events. It appears that the leading citizens living in or near the town of Dumfries were quite in touch with important events of the day, especially those dealing with rebellion against Great Britain.

A remarkable number of outstanding local leaders emerged during those demanding times. The best known of the influential native sons of old Prince William County were “Light-Horse Harry” Lee and William Grayson. After a brilliant military performance during the Revolutionary War, Lee became Governor of Virginia and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Grayson also served in several high military posts during the Revolution, and became a senator in the very first U.S. Congress.

Few people realize that George Mason, another great Virginian, also played an important role in old Prince William during this fateful period. Although Mason was born across the Occoquan River on property usually thought of as always being in Fairfax County, he had strong ties with Prince William. The Mason family originally came to this part of the country as very early pioneers.

In 1684 a statute was passed in the Colony of Virginia which required the first George Mason to provide a ferry for transport of soldiers and horses over the Occoquan River near the present-day RF&P Railroad bridge. More than one hundred years later the Mason family built a wooden toll bridge at this same point. From that time on the 534 acre Mason plantation on the south side of the Occoquan came to be known as “Woodbridge”.

As time passed, the Mason family came into ownership of a great deal of land in Prince William. In addition to the “Woodbridge” plantation, the family owned property along Neabsco Creek, Cockpit Point Neck on the Potomac, and acreage on the north side of Chopawamsic Creek. No wonder the famous master of “Gunston Hall” shows up as one of the original trustees when Dumfries was chartered as a town in 1749. He married his second wife, Sarah Brent, in Prince William County.

George Mason is often called the “pen of the Revolution”. He is most remembered for framing the first Constitution of Virginia and the Virginia Declaration of Independence and Federal Bill of Rights.

But George Mason also wrote some heavy stuff for old Prince William. As the non-importation movement against Great Britain picked up momentum in the colonies, he penned the Prince William Resolves on June 6, 1774. This was more than a month before the much touted Fairfax Resolves were written. A plaque commemorating these resolves has been affixed to the courthouse historical marker in Dumfries.

On December 10, 1781, George Mason wrote a very interesting petition to the General Assembly of Virginia from the freeholders of Prince William County. The contents of the petition give some interesting insights into the hardships suffered in Prince William during the build-up for the decisive Yorktown campaign.



George Mason, IV  
1725-1792

A troop road was cut by local militia through Prince William County to move the American and French troops south to Yorktown. The road ran from Wolf Run Shoals Ford on the Occoquan River through Hoadly, Minnieville, and Dumfries to Stafford County. As the military moved through the County, deputy commissaries “plundered the people under the protection of impressments laws.” Great numbers of cattle were taken for food, and horses were seized to mount corps of cavalry.

The petition and remonstrance from Prince William County clearly demonstrates the power of George Mason’s writing ability. It is a lengthy and dramatic catalog of oppressions under misguided home rule. Governor Thomas Nelson was the chief target of political criticism.

What a pity it is that Prince William has had such a poor press concerning its contributions to the Revolutionary War and the formation of a Federal government. Think of the tourist dollars other nearby cities and counties reap from their links to history, e.g., Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Fairfax County. As in so many things, Prince William County deserves better.

March 22, 1978

## THE LEE CONNECTIONS

Thanks to unprecedented cooperation between county, state and federal levels of government, proper recognition is at long last going to our Leesylvania Plantation. This property, which was patented in 1658, probably has more historical significance in terms of range of events occurring on it than any other part of Prince William County. No better use of this land could be made than to make it a public park.

In 1679 the original tract, which grew to include some 3,000 acres, was selected as a site for fort construction to defend the English settlers against the Indians. The oldest marked tomb, dated 1690, was discovered on this magnificent piece of land. Iron mining and furnace operations were begun on the property in 1734. During the Revolutionary War it was the home of the county militia commander, and for that reason came under attack by marauding British vessels on the Potomac River. And during the early months of the Civil War it was the site of a major Confederate gun battery engaged in the blockade of Washington, D.C.

Notwithstanding all these events, the new Leesylvania State Park should be best known as the birthplace of Prince William County's most famous son, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. The contributions made by this patriot are etched in a marble obelisk to his memory located at the south end of the Garfield County Administration Building on U.S. Route 1. Perhaps his finest contribution to society was his son, General Robert E. Lee.

Our very own Leesylvania has very special significance as the ancestral plantation of Robert E. Lee's branch of the famous Lee family. But there are a number of other historical sites nearby which connect with the Prince William line that should be visited. For example, consider that the Sully Plantation in Fairfax County was originally operated by Henry Lee II, from his seat at Leesylvania. The present plantation house at Sully was built by Richard Bland Lee, who was born at Leesylvania in 1761.

On your next outing to the 800-acre Great Falls Park, located on the Virginia side of the Potomac River, be sure to visit the ruins of Matildaville. This ancient canal company town was named for "Light-Horse Harry" Lee's first wife, Matilda. The canal company was founded in 1784 with George Washington as its first president.

When you have the opportunity to motor in the opposite direction towards the James River, be sure to visit old Shirley Plantation on State Route 5. This was the home of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee's second wife, Ann Hill Carter. They were married there in 1793 when "Light-Horse Harry" was governor of Virginia. His second wife was the mother of Robert E. Lee.

And if you have not already done so, please be sure to visit Stratford Hall Plantation located in Westmoreland County on State Route 3. Stratford Hall is a rare operating plantation owned and maintained by the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association. It was on this beautiful plantation that Robert E. Lee was born in 1807.

A very fine painting of “Light-Horse Harry” Lee may be seen on your next visit to the Custis-Lee Mansion in Arlington Cemetery. Keep in mind when you visit this awe-inspiring area that it was the 1,100 acre plantation home of Robert E. Lee at the beginning of the Civil War. It was converted to a cemetery by the Union Army in 1864 to insure that it would never again be used as a civilian residence.



Leesylvania house chimney around 1935

In a recent letter received from Daniel K. Ludwig, billionaire owner of the remaining Leesylvania tract, he stated: “I have always admired the contributions of the Lees to the heritage of Virginia and to our nation. It is good to know that an area so significantly involved with the history of this illustrious family will be preserved always as one of the Commonwealth’s great parks.”

It is very important that increased visibility be given to the vital Lee connections that belong to Prince William County. A proper mixture of history, Lees and tourism spells significant revenue yields to many parts of the great state of Virginia. Prince William County ought not be denied its share.

April 27, 1978



Light Horse Harry Lee Monument  
Eastern Prince William County Government Center



## WALL-TO-WALL PLANTATIONS

It is hard to imagine today that the Potomac River shoreline of Prince William County was ever wall-to-wall with plantations, but such was the case in colonial times. The first land patent in the territory that is now Prince William was established in 1653. That particular tract included the neck of land formed between the Occoquan River and Neabsco Creek. In just five short years following that original patent all of the waterfront property bordering the Potomac between the Occoquan River and Chopawamsic Creek was patented in huge tracts.

An excellent example of the magnificent plantation homes built in those ancient times is “Rippon Lodge”. The present day house was built by Colonel Richard Blackburn in 1725. An even earlier building existed on the site, and was thought to have been built by Martin Scarlet, a member of the House of Burgesses. He was buried nearby on the original patent in 1695.

Rippon Lodge, a private property, is situated on a beautiful knoll overlooking Neabsco Bay, the Potomac River, and the Maryland shoreline. The plantation took its name from the cathedral town of Rippon in Yorkshire, Northern England. What was originally the seat for managing over 21,000 acres of plantation lands has now shrunk to a 40-acre parcel.

To this day “tea” bushes grow at Rippon Lodge as a reminder of the hard times experienced prior to the Revolutionary War. In protest of the taxes levied by Great Britain on East India tea, the Colony of Virginia adopted a rather severe non-importation posture. The original “Tea Berry” plants now growing at Rippon were imported from Bermuda to produce a product used as a poor substitute for the more delectable tea leaves.

Also located on the original plantation is a quite discernable stretch of the original Potomac Path or King’s Highway. This roadway is the oldest such route used by white men in the Northern Virginia area. The Daughters of the American Revolution plaqued this historical trail in 1933. The marker was disrupted by vandals, but will be reinstalled after road construction is finished in the vicinity. Rippon Lodge was not too far by water from Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, Belvoir, Springfield, Belmont, Leesylvania, Dipple, and other sizeable plantations. One can imagine the socializing that went on up and down the Potomac River. Two daughters of Rippon Lodge did, as a matter of fact, become mistresses of old Mount Vernon. In 1785 Julia Anne Blackburn married Bushrod Washington, an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. Later Jane Charlotte Blackburn married John Augustine Washington, nephew of Bushrod. Their son was the last private

owner of Mount Vernon before it was purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in 1860.



Rippon Lodge around 1935

Today, Rippon Lodge is owned by Admiral Richard Blackburn Black, fifth great-grandson of the original, builder. He is a proud member of the Society of the Cincinnati, a hereditary organization made up of the descendants of American and French officers who served in the American Revolution.

Admiral Black's direct line qualification for the Society of the Cincinnati comes through a Prince William County Officer of the American Revolution, Captain William Baylis. Captain Baylis was born near Dumfries in 1758 and served with the 8th Regiment Virginia Continental Line. He later acquired acreage in Ohio as a result of his service during the Revolution.

For you local history enthusiasts, the Department of History, George Mason University, is launching a new thrice yearly publication. The journal will be known as "Northern Virginia Heritage" and is scheduled to appear in early 1979. Prince William County will, of course, be included in the basic geographical area of coverage. The prepublication subscription rate is \$4.00. If interested, the mailing address is Box NVH Fairfax, Virginia, 22030. The editor is Peter R. Henriques.

May 26, 1978

## **THE HISTORICAL FOREST PARK**

Too few local citizens realize the long history that is connected with our beautiful Prince William Forest Park. The thousands and thousands of acres contained in this Interior Department facility figure heavily in the heritage of our County, and tie directly into the rise and fall of the colonial port of Dumfries.

The earliest patents of land in the Forest Park area date back to the period 1654-58. One of the individual tracts contained 5,211 acres of land and was patented by “the present governor of Virginia”, Samuel Mathews. Serious settlement of the area began in the last half of the 17th Century, notwithstanding the difficulty being experienced with Indians hereabouts.

For that portion of the 18th Century that Dumfries was a major tobacco port, the land that is now Prince William Forest Park was extensively farmed in tobacco. As the land was denuded for this purpose, serious erosion took place. Tons of silt washed down the watershed of the North and South Branches of Quantico Creek and ruined the harbor at Dumfries.

In the years following the Revolutionary War, the economic picture for the Dumfries area became very bleak. In 1793 one of the two public tobacco warehouses shut down. By 1822 the slump was so severe that the County Seat was moved to Brentsville.

Meanwhile the farmers on the upper reaches of Quantico Creek hung on as best they could. Their main crops became wheat, corn, oats, hay and various green vegetables. Dairy farming, which came to be a principal support industry in Prince William, never gained a foothold in this particular area.

The Civil War, of course, also took its toll on the families that lived on the Forest Park lands. Due to the great number of troops in the vicinity required to support the Confederate blockade of the Potomac River, requisitions on the local farmers for food stuffs and timber were quite severe. Many of the men of the area served in Confederate regiments and this fact is revealed on several of the tombstones located in the Park today.

A major boost to the economy of the area came in 1889 when the Cabin Branch Mine was opened to produce high grade pyrite ore. The mining operations were located very near the confluence of the North and South Branches of the Quantico Creek. Three mine shafts were operated, about 70 support buildings were constructed, and a narrow-gauge railroad connected the operations with an area on the Potomac River. The mine closed in 1920 during a strike over a 25¢ per day increase in wages.



Artist's rendering 18<sup>th</sup> century Keys House  
Prince William Forest Park

In 1933, the United States Government classified the Quantico Creek watershed as “submarginal” and embarked on a new project called “Chopawamsic Demonstration Area”. The objectives of this effort were to return the depleted land to an ecological balance; provide a recreation area for the people of Washington and Northern Virginia; and provide employment, through development, to Civilian Conservation Corps and Work Projects Administration.

In order to accomplish this feat, some 150 farm families had to be relocated from the area, You can still see evidence of the old farm sites as you drive through the Forest Park. In addition to the clearings where the individual homes were located, you can still detect the old fields by the squares of pine trees. Since the pines are the first trees to reclaim a clearing, it is easy to distinguish the cultivated areas from the hardwood lots. The foundation of the old one-room school house that was built for the farm community can also be discerned today.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt transferred the Chopawamsic project from the Resettlement Administration to the Department of Interior by executive order in 1936. The 76th Congress approved a public law in 1940 that “mandated the National Park Service to maintain and operate the area known as Chopawamsic Recreation Area as a part of the Park System of the Nation’s Capital.” Entry to the facility was restricted to the military during World War II and was used for specialized security training purposes.

Prince William Forest Park today is a quiet oasis that allows one to retreat from the frenzy of the Washington Metropolitan Area. Superintendent Robert Haney manages

an outstanding facility that offers camping, picnicking, fishing, hiking, biking, etc. He even provides a specific hike that allows you to gather “fool’s gold” at the site of the old pyrite mine.

A review of the history of the Forest Park has been especially interesting to me. Members of my family came into the Dumfries area in 1701, farmed the land along the north fork of Quantico Creek, worked at Cabin Branch Mine, and still rest in a cemetery within the government owned property. Genealogy is so much more fun when your research brings you into contact with ancestral land that has not been raped by a bulldozer.

June 28, 1978



Cabin at Prince William Forest Park Cabin Camp

## **GOVERNOR SMITH AND THE QUANTICO GUARDS**

Prince William County sent a great number of her sons off to war in the Confederate Army in July 1861; a significant portion became casualties and never returned home again. The County contributed companies to several infantry and cavalry regiments. Microfilm of the muster rolls are available for research in the National Archives today.

Members of my family served in three separate Confederate regiments, but the bulk of them were attached to the “Quantico Guards” Company of the 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment. This particular company was organized in Dumfries on July 1, 1861 and mustered into service on July 16, 1861, just days in advance of the First Battle of Manassas.

The regimental commander of the 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment was a truly remarkable man. His name was William Smith. He was governor of Virginia on two separate occasions, the last term covering the twilight months of the Civil War.

Governor Smith was born in King George County on September 6, 1797. He was an extremely able lawyer and enjoyed a lucrative practice in the Virginia and United States Courts. He experimented with the creation of stage coach lines, at his own expense in the Northern Virginia area. In time he extended his operations through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and into Georgia. The line ultimately covered a distance of 650 miles and included relay stations, hotels, shops, stores, etc.

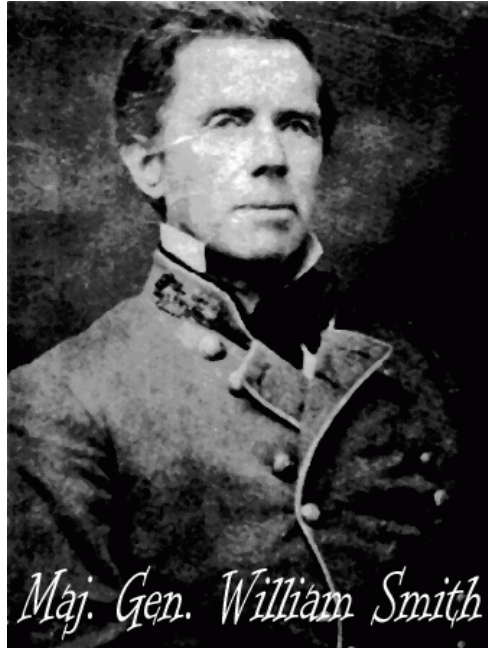
In 1835 Smith managed to obtain a contract to carry the U.S. Mail by steamboat and stage from Washington to Richmond. He also ran a line of steamers between Norfolk and Baltimore. All in all, he was a very successful entrepreneur.

Smith’s political career began with his election to the Virginia State Senate in 1838. He became a member of the U.S. Congress in 1841. His first term as Governor of Virginia covered the period 1846-49. In 1853 he was again elected to the U.S. Congress and remained there until the Civil War began.

At the incredible age of 64, Smith organized the 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment in 1861. He won distinction at the First Battle of Manassas and rose rapidly to the rank of Major General. He suffered multiple wounds at Sharpsburg. Quite a record for a man with no prior military experience.



Smith was again elected as Governor of Virginia in 1864. He is remembered as the “War-Governor” who had the grim task of holding things together in the last hours of the Confederacy. In April, 1865, he moved the seat of Virginia government from Richmond to Lynchburg, and later to Danville. He surrendered the executive office on May 9, 1865.



After the Civil War, Smith returned to his home in Warrenton ruined in fortune, much advanced in years, and suffering from his five separate war wounds. He was, however, undaunted in spirit and engaged in farming until his death on May 18, 1887. He is buried among heroes at the old Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

Governor Smith is today honored by an impressive monument on the grounds of the Virginia State Capitol. The inscription on the monument proudly proclaims his service as regimental commander of the 49th Virginia Volunteers in 1861-62, an organization so much a part of Prince William County’s heritage.

July 20, 1978

## **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY'S OTHER FAMOUS SON**

It is true that the most famous son of Prince William County has been “Light-Horse Harry” Lee. Based on his military and political contributions during the birth of our Nation, William Grayson is a close second. Grayson was born 20 years earlier than Lee and entered the Revolutionary War with much more maturity behind him. But Grayson seems to have been damned by faint praise and overshadowed by such other Virginia luminaries as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Mason. He did, however, acquire the unique distinction of having his burial vault vandalized by Union soldiers during the Civil War.

William Grayson was born in Prince William County in 1736. His father emigrated from Scotland, as did so many of the original inhabitants of the area. He attended a university in the Colony of Pennsylvania, graduated from the University of Oxford, and studied law at the Inner Temple of London.

Prior to the Revolutionary War, Grayson practiced law in the thriving tobacco port town of Dumfries. On November 11, 1774, he organized the first Minuteman Company in Prince William County. This was the logical extension of his activity in the County's Committees of Correspondence and Safety.

Grayson was appointed aide-de-camp to General Washington on August 24, 1776. On January 1, 1777, he was commissioned Colonel of a Virginia regiment. He took part in the battles of Long Island, White Plains, Brandywine, and Germantown. In the spring of 1778, he served on the commission appointed by General Washington to arrange for the exchange of prisoners with the British at Valley Forge.

Grayson became a commissioner on the policy-making Board of War in December 1779. In late 1781 he resumed the practice of law in Dumfries. He was subsequently elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and the Continental Congress. While in the Continental Congress, he took a most active part in the debate over the Northwest Ordinance of 1785. He had a profound interest in the development of the western country and was a devout Anti-Federalist. He was afraid that the proposed central government would destroy the liberty of the states.

After ratifying the Constitution, Virginia elected William Grayson and Richard Henry Lee of Westmoreland County (well remembered from the musical play “1776”) to the newly formed United States Senate in 1789. Grayson died at Dumfries during the second session of Congress on March 12, 1790. He was buried at the family vault at “Belle Air” plantation, which today is smack in the middle of Marumscoc Hills in



Woodbridge. His unmarked tomb is located on a high, grassy knoll overlooking the Potomac River at the intersection of Longview Drive and Grayson Road.

As a Bicentennial project, the Prince William Historical Commission planned to erect an appropriate gravesite marker for this patriot who had contributed so much to his country during and after the Revolutionary War. It seemed somewhat ironic at that time that the state of Virginia had named a county after Grayson in 1793, but nothing of significance had been done in his honor in the county of his birth.

In researching the background of the gravesite and its curious rough condition, correspondence was discovered involving Admiral Cary T. Grayson dated March 29, 1931. Admiral Grayson, a descendant of William Grayson, is thought by many to have been the most influential presidential physician in the history of the White House. At about that time he was trying to pinpoint the location of Senator Grayson's tomb.



William Grayson  
1736-1790

The correspondence revealed that the original family burial vault was built of stone on the style of the vault at Mt. Vernon. During the Civil War Federal troops had blown up the vault and burned the plantation house. These same troops were believed also to be responsible for the destruction of a cotton mill in Occoquan. The vault lay open until the present rough and unmarked cement cover was applied.

The County Historical Commission was unable to establish a suitable marker at Grayson's tomb due to private property questions, but other appropriate actions were taken to honor this proud son of Prince William. A roadside historical marker was erected at the intersection of Silverwood Lane and U.S. Route 1 touting the location of his grave. More importantly, the Grayson Memorial Gazebo was constructed in Dumfries at Merchant Park. In addition, a comprehensive book was published in 1977 entitled "William Grayson: A Political Biography of Virginia's First United States Senator" and is now available for sale to the public.

August 23, 1978

## MARTIN SCARLET, GENTLEMAN

Prince William County is justly proud of its two Revolutionary War sons who did a smashing job in combat operations and later went on to high political office. “Light-Horse Harry” Lee won a Congressional medal as General Washington’s cavalry commander during the War. Subsequently, he became Governor of Virginia and a U.S. Congressman. William Grayson was an aide-de-camp to General Washington, fought as a regimental commander, and sat on the policymaking Board of War. He later became one of the first two senators to represent the State of Virginia in the U.S. Senate.

But what is often overlooked is the fact that other important politicians and soldiers lived on present day Prince William County soil long before the Revolutionary War came about. One of those very early pioneer souls was a fellow by the name of Martin Scarlet.

An early reference to Martin Scarlet shows him to have been a justice in Stafford County. Prince William was a part of Stafford from 1664 to 1731 when it became a separate county entity. He is also shown in a listing of prominent seventeenth century members of the House of Burgesses. At that time the area around the Occoquan River must have seemed a long way from the James River.

For a considerable period of time it appears that Martin Scarlet and William Fitzhugh alternated in high public office. Fitzhugh was a Tory and high churchman; Scarlet was an avowed Whig. Party feelings ran rather high between them and from time to time got completely out of hand. In 1686 there was a mutual preferment of formal charges of malversation in office, but nothing seems to have come of it all.

Shortly after the turn of this century, the William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine devoted an interesting article to the discovery of Martin Scarlet’s tombstone in Woodbridge. It was described as being located at the mouth of the Occoquan, partially concealed by water.

In other material published by the State of Virginia, the tombstone was described as being originally erected on a gravesite near Marumscro Creek, and the gravesite cultivated at the beginning of this century. The stone was retrieved and erected at a new location approximately one mile east of the original site about 1915.

The tombstone itself was created in absolute simplicity. It identifies Martin Scarlet by name and shows the year of his death as 1695. Perhaps most important of all, it

shows him to have been a “gentleman”. This designation originally denoted a man of high birth or one who did not have to work for a living.

Martin Scarlet lived on a very historical piece of Prince William County property. The area is referred to in early accounts as Burbage’s Neck. It roughly included all the land that lies between Neabsco Creek and Marumsco Creek. This land was part of the earliest patent in present day Prince William County, having been established in 1653.

There was a great deal of interest in this part of Virginia in the last half of the seventeenth century. Pioneers found it worthwhile to suffer the Indians and very quickly settle this area after the first land patents were taken. The earliest tombstone found in Prince William was for a female by the name of Rose Peters who departed this life in 1690. The stone was discovered along Neabsco Creek.

Prince William County does not have to vicariously enjoy the seventeenth century history of Tidewater Virginia. She had a very colorful history of her own for this period. Indeed, even Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676 had an impact on this area. I will develop this point in a later article.

September 27, 1978



Martin “Scarlit” Grave Stone around 1935

## **PRINCE WILLIAM'S 17TH CENTURY HISTORY**

One hundred years before the American Revolution, irate frontier planters took on the Colonial Governor of Virginia, burned Jamestown, and established their own rebel leader in power. This early taxpayer revolt was known as "Bacon's Rebellion" and had significant ties to the land that is now a part of Prince William County.

The sparks that ignited the rebellion occurred in late 1675 and early 1676. As plantations were settled further north along the Potomac River Valley, Indian troubles began to mount. Many frontier settlers were tortured and killed by marauding tribes. Massacres of the English had taken place at the hands of the Indians in 1622 and 1644. These nightmares were not easily forgotten.

The Doeg Indians were particularly troublesome in the Prince William County area. Whenever local plantations were struck, militia forces were assembled and any nearby Indians were attacked furiously. Innocents were slaughtered with the guilty. George Mason and George Brent were local militia captains during this troubled period.

The Colonial Governor of Virginia, Sir William Berkeley, had a much different outlook on "Indian policy" than the frontier planters. The government had a lucrative fur trade going on with certain Indian tribes. Indiscriminate slaughter of Indians didn't seem to be in the best interest of that policy. The frontier planters felt they were being taxed to keep the Jamestown crowd in luxury and were getting very little protection in return.

A young man by the name of Nathaniel Bacon organized a large band of irate frontier planters and moved against the Colonial Government in Jamestown. In the process Governor Berkeley was driven across the Chesapeake Bay to the Eastern Shore of Virginia. For a short period Bacon controlled the colony.

Just a while after seizing power, Bacon became ill and died. Governor Berkeley returned to Jamestown and began a witch-hunt that ended in many hangings. Word soon reached London about the disturbance and a commission was organized by King Charles II to look into the matter. One thousand British troops were dispatched to insure order in Virginia. The aged Governor was recalled to London and died shortly thereafter.

Although the rebellion was short lived, it did have significant consequences for old Prince William. An Indian Fort was authorized for construction on Neabsco Creek in 1679 to protect the settlers in the area. George Mason was appointed to oversee the construction.

Also, a young British officer by the name of William Harris came to Virginia as a member of one of the regiments sent to quell Bacon's Rebellion. He was later granted 1,600 acres of land in the Neabsco Creek area. The patent was confirmed in 1691 by agents for the proprietors of the Northern Neck.



William Harris grave stone

The tomb of Lieutenant Harris was discovered many years ago and was thought to be the oldest grave in Virginia. The death date was misread as 1608 rather than 1698. The grave was originally located near Saunders Middle School. The tabletop grave marker is now located at Pohick Church.

Neabsco Creek was the scene of intense activity during the last half of the seventeenth century. Someday, with proper professional attention, the key will be found to unlock the complete history of this part of Prince William County.

October 25, 1978

## OLD MINNIEVILLE

The public has been given a reasonable opportunity to become acquainted with the heritage of some of the oldest towns in Prince William County. The tobacco port of Dumfries was the very first town authorized by the General Assembly in Prince William in 1749. The water-oriented industrial town of Occoquan was chartered in 1804. Following its rise to a household name during the Civil War, Manassas was established as a municipal entity in 1873. Each of these three old worthies now has a historical society and individual museum open to the public.

But many of the older villages that never made it to the statute books have a much harder time getting their heritage before the people. There are many historically rich rural community centers in Prince William. Let's just examine one example - the little agrarian crossroads of Minnieville now sandwiched between the Lake Montclair and Dale City developments.

Lands were first patented in the Minnieville area in the last half of the Seventeenth Century. The centerpiece of the farm area that constituted Minnieville is the beautiful plantation known as Bel Air. There were many other very large homesteads in the vicinity, but none weathered the years like charming old Bel Air.



Bel Air around 1940

This two and one-half story gem was constructed in 1740 by Major Charles Ewell, who was involved in business enterprises in Dumfries and Occoquan. Just how such a fine 14 room mansion came to be built so far from the Potomac River or one of the major tributaries is a matter for considerable speculation. It is believed by some that the upper stories of Bel Air were built on a solid stone foundation that had been an earlier fort.

In the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Parson Mason Locke Weems moved his family to Bel Air. He had earlier married into the Ewell family. Parson Weems was the first biographer of General George Washington. In 1806 he gave us the now famous cherry-tree anecdote concerning young George Washington. Parson Weems is buried in the family cemetery at Bel Air.

The Minnieville area was the scene of troop activity in both the Revolutionary War and Civil War. French and American troops moved through this tiny community on their way to Yorktown in 1781. Local militia personnel were ordered to open an interior road through the area from Wolf Run Shoals on the upper Occoquan through Dumfries. Portions of this road are still visible today.

During the Civil War, the area was a virtual beehive of activity. The Confederate Third Brigade, under the command of General W.H.C. Whiting, was on station there in 1861-62 to protect the several batteries erected along the Potomac River to blockade Washington. During this mission 11,200 Confederate soldiers were located in the Occoquan-Dumfries sector.

A few years prior to the Civil War, northern dairymen began to take an interest in the fallow lands located in eastern Prince William County. Several New York farmers moved into the Minnieville area. When the Civil War erupted, some of the newcomers fought for the South and others for the North. One example of Union support is etched on a tombstone at the site of Greenwood Presbyterian Church near Bel Air. It shows service by one of the local citizens in the Second Regiment of the District of Columbia.

Following the Civil War, there was a significant increase in the number of villages given post office status. One of these new post offices was created for Minnieville in 1884. The entity was named after the oldest daughter of the man appointed postmaster of the new location. Her name was Minnie Alexander and she was only ten years old at the time.

The Minnieville Post Office remained active until 1924. The precise location of the post office was at the intersection of Minnieville Road and Cardinal Drive, on the corner directly opposite the new Seven Eleven Store. A small farmer co-op cheese factory was also located nearby.

When the Minnieville Post Office was deactivated, the territory was shifted under the Neabsco Post Office located near the area now occupied by the Pilot House

Restaurant. That Post Office was deactivated a short time later and the entire area was transferred to the Woodbridge Post Office.

In Jack Ratcliffe's recent book, "This Was Prince William," he included a long listing of Post Offices established before 1890. It contains quite a number of colorful villages that have all but been forgotten. But in their day they meant the world to a good number of fine families in old Prince William.

November 29, 1978



Sudley Post Office around 1980



## CIVIL WAR BATTERIES AND FORTS

A few months prior to the First Battle of Manassas, the State of Virginia established a battery of 13 heavy guns at the mouth of Aquia Creek. This very strategic location was then the terminus of the RF&P Railroad. Passengers transferred at this point from rail cars to a Potomac River steamer in order to make the final leg of their trip to the City of Washington. Even at that early date there was fear that Federal forces would conduct a quick amphibious attack at this location with the objective of moving toward Fredericksburg.

During these early preparations for hostilities, the Union organized the Potomac Flotilla composed of several commercial steamers seized and outfitted for warfare. Command of this naval group was given to Commander James H. Ward. A very short time after his appointment he was killed while attempting to land and occupy Mathias Point, Virginia. This interesting area is located about 18 miles below Aquia.

Following the Confederate victory at the First Battle of Manassas, it became feasible to build and maintain heavy gun batteries along the Potomac River closer to Washington. Thus began the creation of six miles of shell fire between Freestone Point and Quantico aimed at blockading Washington. In addition to the heavy artillery placed along the Potomac River, gun positions were also located in the town of Occoquan and a long line of rifle pits were dug along the Occoquan River just west of the old Woodbridge Plantation.

The Prince William County blockade batteries were successfully employed from September 1861 to March 1862. During that period some 11,200 troops were stationed in the Occoquan-Minnieville-Dumfries-Quantico area. Infantry Regiments were employed from the States of Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia.

This very interesting but little known chapter of Prince William County Civil War history was fairly well described by Joseph Mills Hanson in his book *Bull Run Remembers*. The subject was more exhaustively treated by Mary Alice Wills in her book *Confederate Blockade of Washington*. The Prince William County Historical Commission recently published a free brochure entitled "Confederate Batteries Along the Potomac." Copies are now available to the public at the County libraries, Chambers of Commerce, local museums, and County schools.

The cover of this new booklet is taken from an actual map compiled by the Union Army Topographical Engineers office in January, 1862. The detail of the map is quite

impressive in that it gives information about the industries that existed in the County at that time and a pretty fair indication of the areas under cultivation. Some family names are also identified.

In the center of the brochure there is a copy of a reconnaissance sketch made of the Confederate batteries and the Infantry Regiments which supported them. The sketch was made by the 26th Pennsylvania Volunteers from sightings taken in Professor Lowe's balloon over Charles County, Maryland, in December, 1861. The Confederate Regiments are shown mainly camped along Powells, Quantico, and Chopawamsic Creeks.

When the Confederate Government ordered all forces withdrawn below the Rappahannock River on March 8, 1862, there were not enough baggage wagons available to move all of the artillery pieces and supplies. Guns were spiked or otherwise destroyed, supplies were buried, and a great deal of equipment burned. This exercise resulted in an investigation by the Confederate Congress.

One of the old Confederate gun tubes has survived the test of time and is on display at Quantico today. It is located at the old site of Waller Hall very near the present day officers club. The Marine Corps has erected a historical marker at this site which includes recognition of the blockade mission performed at the old Evansport battery.

At about the same time that the Confederates were building their blockade batteries in Prince William County, the Union Army was busy constructing defensive forts along a narrow 12 mile strip of Virginia opposite the City of Washington. This area took in portions of present day Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. By the end of the War this complex included 68 enclosed forts bristling with 1,120 gun emplacements.



Fort Ward battery, Alexandria

To gain a thorough understanding of the Union fortification system you have but to visit the restored site of Fort Ward in Alexandria. This installation was named after Commander Ward, leader of the original Potomac Flotilla who was killed in combat. Today the fortification is used as a beautiful 40 acre public park. A very fine museum is located just outside the original fort and ample picnic facilities are available.

December 26, 1978

## ANTE-BELLUM PLANTATIONS

Most of us, at one time or another, have wondered if we bought homes in the right neighborhood. But consider the special plight of Wilmer McLean as he sought the proper place to hang his hat in Virginia during the Civil War.

Wilmer bought the plantation “Yorkshire” in Prince William County in 1854. There was no way for him to know at that time that his property was destined to become a battleground. From all accounts he managed to construct a fine home and dependencies prior to the war.

Incidentally, this particular piece of land was originally patented in 1729 and was for a time owned by Colonel Richard Blackburn. This is the same Blackburn who built Rippon Lodge on Neabsco Creek. His ownership produced the tag for Blackburn’s Ford, an important action point in the early days of the Civil War.

In May, 1861, Yorkshire was caught up in the construction of Confederate military camps and defensive positions that was going on all along that part of Bull Run. As July arrived, along with General McDowell’s Union forces, things really got tense.

At one point, General Beauregard established temporary headquarters at Wilmer McLean’s home to get a better look at things in that sector. The McLean home came under artillery attack from Union gunners along with the large stone barn being used as a hospital facility. Needless to say, this kind of environment reaped havoc on plantation operations.

McLean decided to pack up his family and household goods and move further into the heart of Virginia. He wanted to be away from war torn Prince William County and return to the quiet life of a planter. His new choice of location was Appomattox Court House.

Imagine Wilmer McLean’s surprise when he was approached on April 9, 1865, by Union and Confederate officers in Appomattox seeking a house with a room large enough to accommodate a joint military conference. His fine and commodious home seemed the logical choice to fill such a noble need.

So, as history would have it, the McLean house was the place where General Lee and General Grant met to draw up the terms of surrender. What an unforgettable experience it must have been for the McLean family to witness the beginning and the end of the Civil War in Virginia.



Liberia around the time of the Civil War

Right next door to the Yorkshire Plantation on Route 28 was another fine plantation called “Liberia.” This beautiful mansion house was built about 1825 by William J. Weir. Nearby was located “Fort Beauregard”, a Confederate redoubt measuring 240 feet by 160 feet with embrasures cut for seven cannons. The fort fell victim to commercial construction some years ago.

Liberia ought to be considered hallowed ground by the City of Manassas. It was General Beauregard’s permanent headquarters during the First Battle of Manassas. Confederate President Jefferson Davis visited the house on July 21, 1861. Here the decision was made not to pursue the routed Union Army toward Washington.

About a year later, General McDowell used Liberia for his Union Army headquarters. McDowell fell victim to a riding accident in June, 1862. President Lincoln, concerned about the condition of his Washington defenses commander, visited Liberia accompanied by Secretary of War Stanton.

The Civil War put Manassas on the map. Today, the City of Manassas should cultivate the tourist industry in every way she can. Highlighting Civil War history in and around Manassas is one way to do that. Yorkshire Plantation has been completely destroyed. Fort Beauregard has fallen victim to the bulldozer. Surely, the City of Manassas will not let Liberia fall into oblivion too. What an attractive museum that stately old mansion would make.

January 24, 1979

## MAGNUM OPUS ON OLD PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William County carries an awful lot of burdens such as her decrepit bus transportation system and curious telephone network. But she is blessed with a first class county history written by a man who was an outstanding lawyer, railroad president, and historian.

I am, of course, referring to “Landmarks of Old Prince William” by Fairfax Harrison. This invaluable reference source was privately published in 1924 as a two-volume work. It still stands as a model for those wishing to write comprehensive and accurate historical material. The notes provided for each individual chapter contain an incredible amount of basic research data.

Harrison was born in New York City on March 13, 1869. He was, however, fortunate enough to have a profound Virginia ancestry on both sides of his family. His father served the Confederacy as private secretary to Jefferson Davis. His mother was a descendant of the Fairfax family, so prominent in the Northern Virginia area.

The senior Harrison had moved from Virginia to New York City to pursue the practice of law at the end of the Civil War. Young Fairfax Harrison was also admitted to the New York Bar in 1892 after graduating from Yale and Columbia. He was quickly given the reputation of a decisive mind, strong personality, and unshakable adherence to conviction.

Fairfax Harrison’s railroad career got under way in New York when he worked for two years on legal problems involved in the formation of the new Southern Railroad. In 1896 he was appointed solicitor for the Southern. It was this position that brought him to the Washington area.

In 1903, he became assistant to the president of the Southern and in 1906 he was promoted to vice-president in charge of financial affairs. His brilliant fiscal mind helped the Southern survive the money panic in 1907.

In 1913, Harrison was elected to the presidency of the Southern Railroad. During his tenure he had to face the problems of World War, prosperity, and depression. The war period was particularly troublesome since it involved government control of the nation’s railroads.

During the time Harrison held high corporate position, he managed somehow to find time to write a prodigious number of books. Among his products were numerous

books on genealogy, several volumes on the history of horse breeding, many articles on Virginia history, and the fabulous “Landmarks of Old Prince William.”

Harrison’s total conversion as an avid Virginian and Southerner came after the family moved to the beautiful estate, “Belvoir,” in Fauquier County, Virginia. This area was, of course, part of Old Prince William County until it was separated in 1759.

There are no less than 63 Library of Congress cards for recorded publications written by Fairfax Harrison. They cover problems of railroads, finance, the development of the south, genealogy, and history. But “Landmarks of Old Prince William” is recognized as his *magnum opus* due to its clarity, research, comprehension, and literary merit.

Harrison retired from the Southern Railroad in 1937. He died the following year and was buried at Ivy Hill Cemetery, Alexandria. This soil, too, was part of Old Prince William County until it was separated in 1742.

Regardless of whether you are a newcomer to Prince William or an old-timer, if you have any interest in county history at all, be sure to pick up a copy of Harrison’s “Landmarks of Old Prince William.” It is available at any good public library.

March 1, 1979

## **COUNTRY ROADS AND THEIR HISTORY**

In order to properly understand the colonial history of old Prince William, one must give some attention to the development of her roads. Since the original colonists of Virginia were from England, it was only natural that they fell back on English Common Law and the basic road law of 1555. That statute placed the responsibility for construction and maintenance of roads upon the parish, the smallest English administrative unit.

The first statute dealing with roads in Virginia was passed in 1632. Following English precedent, the responsibility for roads was placed on the local parish. This concept had to be modified in 1657 since early colonial parishes tended to be so large in territory and sparse in population. Gentleman justices of the county courts were given the power to appoint individual overseers of roads. These persons were charged with constructing roads leading to parish churches (Anglican), county courts, to the Colonial Capital, and between individual counties.

And where do you suppose the actual labor came from to do the work? Well, all titheables, males above the age of 16 (free or slave), were required to work on the roads under supervision of the overseer when so ordered by the parish vestry. The original English law of 1555 had required six days' labor per year from each parishioner. Virginia law also provided a schedule of fines to forestall neglect.

It's hard to imagine that such a system could keep on top of even Seventeenth Century potholes, but all that was needed in those days was a well defined path through the woods. The readily available network of waterways in early Virginia was sufficient to handle heavy commerce. Wagon roads were not required until settlement pushed past the fall line of the major rivers.

The most historical road in Prince William would appear to be the old Potomac Path. It represents the earliest north-south route in all of Northern Virginia. It began as an Indian trail and today is largely paralleled by U.S. Route I (Jefferson Davis Highway).

It seems that the first road financed by a public levy in Virginia occurred in 1691 as a defense measure. The basic idea was to construct a road to connect a chain of frontier forts located along the fall line of the rivers and thereby allow communication between them. Among these defensive fortifications were installations at Hunting Creek and Neabsco Creek. These two forts made the Potomac Path ferry operation at present day Woodbridge a critical link in the protection of early settlers.



Potomac Path or King's Highway in Woodbridge

During the Revolutionary War, another historical road was cut through Prince William by General George Washington to move columns of cavalry, artillery, carriages, wagons, and cattle belonging to the American and French Armies. This particular construction took place in September, 1781, to facilitate the movement of troops to Yorktown.

General Washington ordered county militia units to open a road from Georgetown to Dumfries via Wolf Run Shoals on the Occoquan River. For this important fatigue duty during an emergency operation, the militia units were excused from further service in the Yorktown Campaign.

Many portions of that original troop route still exist today. After crossing the upper ford of the Occoquan River, the road winds past Bacon Race Church, through Hoadly, skirts the edge of Dale City, cuts through Minnieville, and winds through Lake Montclair to Route 234 just above Dumfries. Ironically, that same road was again used by Confederate and Union troops during the Civil War.

Prince William County has many historical roads, some better documented than others. The County Historical Commission plans to install historical markers on a few of them in the months ahead.

March 28, 1979



## THE MIGHTY RF&P

Just as one has to give attention to the ancient trails and roads hereabouts to properly understand the history of old Prince William so must study also be given to the railroads that cut through the County. Let's consider the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Company (RF&P) as a starter.

The RF&P was chartered in 1834 by the Virginia General Assembly. The original founders only had in mind the construction of a railroad from Richmond through Fredericksburg to some point on the Potomac River where a connection could be made with steamboats headed for Washington, D.C.

By January 1837, the line was opened from Richmond to Fredericksburg. In November 1842, the railroad was extended to Aquia on the Potomac River. While the extension of the rail system was not completed to Washington until after the Civil War, the steamer connection at Aquia effectively killed stage traffic and put the old Potomac Path (U.S. Route 1) on the backburner of history.

The Aquia facility received tremendous use by the Union Army as a supply terminal during the Civil War. I suppose almost everyone has seen the famous picture of the precarious old Potomac Creek RF&P Bridge repaired by Union forces during the Civil War. President Lincoln described the hasty patch job of Confederate demolition as being composed of "beanpoles and cornstalks."

In 1924 Fairfax Harrison wrote that one could still see the "abandoned and weather wasted fill, reaching out towards what was once a terminal wharf where the Washington steamer awaited the adventurous traveler." Harrison also points out that an overly anxious Smithsonian archaeologist mistook the long snake mound at Aquia for Indian remains and applied for an appropriation to excavate them for prehistoric artifacts.

After the Civil War the RF&P moved northward into Prince William County. By May 1872 tracks were extended to Quantico then called Potomac, and launched that area on a short binge as a resort town. In the forward progress of the line a railroad bridge was built across the Occoquan River on the site of the old colonial militia ferry and location of the first Prince William County Courthouse.

At the turn of the century double tracking was completed from Richmond to Washington, a vast improvement over the old single track system. The rail bed at Woodbridge was not only widened but realigned. A new bridge was constructed for rail use, and the old one was given over to vehicular traffic. This very same bridge was

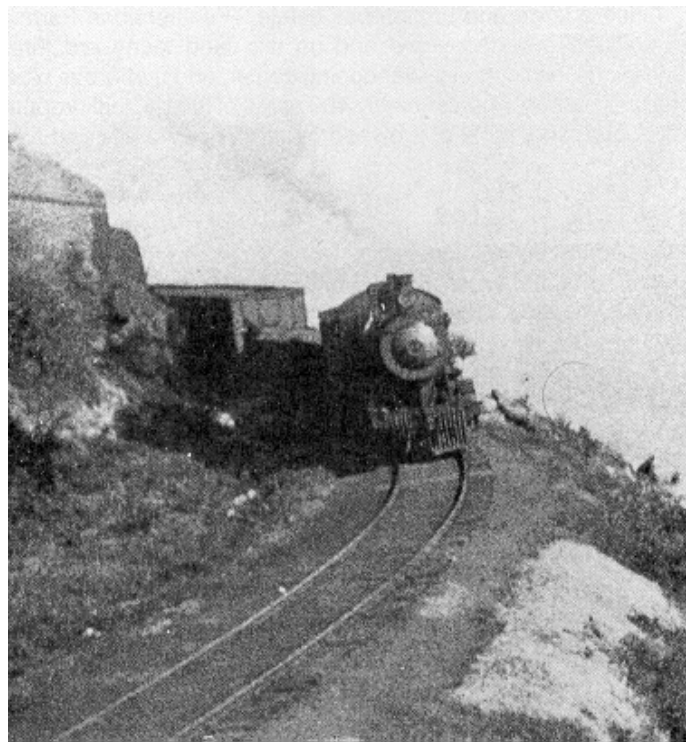
incorporated into use by U.S. Route 1 when it was established in 1927. The old veteran collapsed during tropical storm “Agnes” in 1972 after giving a century of service.

It was quite an innovation in 1874 when catcher cranes were installed to receive mail from the trains without stopping. The RF&P also became a boon to area dairymen and farmers in the 1880’s when fast freight service was instituted, facilitating the movement of produce to Washington in an economical and efficient manner. But the importance of the RF&P in national defense didn’t become apparent until the Marines landed at Quantico in World War I. All RF&P records of traffic and revenues were broken when World War II came along.

The RF&P began making the transition from steam to diesel power in 1949. The change was completed with operation of the last steam locomotive in 1953. The powerful coal burning monsters, complete with spinning drive wheels and blocked traffic in downtown Quantico, were sorely missed. Perhaps the energy crisis will bring them back.

Today, the RF&P is installing new rail welded in a continuous strip to give a smooth, durable riding surface. What a pity the system is not going to be used to haul commuters to and from Washington. Real history could be made if the RF&P roadbed were mobilized to solve the monumental automobile traffic jam that forms north of Woodbridge every workday.

April 25, 1979



Steam locomotive – RF&P Railroad

## COUNTY HISTORY BY THE SQUARE FOOT

Prince William County has an abundant heritage with area events well documented back to Captain John Smith's visit along the Potomac River in 1608. Things picked up a bit with the real estate boom that began in Woodbridge as the first land patent was filed in 1653. After becoming a county entity in 1731, important Revolutionary War and Civil War contributions were made by local citizens.

The work that has been done by the Dumfries, Occoquan, and Manassas Historical Societies has been very useful for people wishing to gain an understanding about these particular individual communities. The museums operated by each of these history minded groups is well worth a visit from time to time as exhibits change. Many smaller communities within the County also have interesting histories that need to be highlighted and interpreted for public awareness.

An outstanding example of how a small community can raise the awareness of its heritage is seen in the work done by the Montclair Bicentennial Committee. In that effort a group of residents of Lake Montclair banded together to research and write about the significant facets of that area's history. They also raised funds to place a historical marker in the development.

Almost any large tract of land in Prince William County has some form of historical significance if one is tenacious enough to do the research to establish the facts, but Lake Montclair has more than its share. This is true because it is located on a major military troop road, has a nice stream running through it, and is not far from the Colonial seaport of Dumfries. The Prince William County Historical Commission recognized the significance of the area with the erection of a highway marker on Route 234.

In 1663 the Corbin land patent was established in this area. Included in that tract was the land that later came to be known as "Leesylvania Plantation", a total of 3,000 acres. The corner of that patent is located on Yorktown Drive in Montclair. This boundary means that the original tract included all land from Lake Montclair to the Potomac River located between Powell's Creek and Neabsco Creek. Corbin would have gotten quite a property tax bill at today's prices.

As incredible as it may seem, the military troop road that runs through Lake Montclair was cut by order of General George Washington to move French and American troops to Yorktown. Almost a century later, that same troop route was used by both Confederate and Union Forces. Today, large segments of the trail can still be seen. The road was even used early in this century for automobile traffic.

Located very near the Lake Montclair dam is the gravesite of Alexander Henderson. He was a friend and close associate of General Washington. Henderson was a merchant in Dumfries and Colchester, prosperous area landowner, and dedicated politician. His son, Archibald Henderson, was the first general officer authorized in the Marine Corps and served as Commandant for 38 years. The Montclair Bicentennial Committee installed a fine historical marker nearby the gravesite.

During the early months of the Civil War, Lake Montclair was the home of the Sixth North Carolina Infantry Regiment. The site was called Camp Fisher in honor of the organizing colonel who was killed in the First Battle of Manassas. Fort Fisher, an interesting tourist spot in North Carolina, was also named after this same individual. During the time the "Bloody Sixth" was located in the area its mission was to support the Confederate blockade batteries along the Potomac River.

Lake Montclair was also the location of an ancient grist mill driven by the waters of Powell's Creek. The mill is most often referred to as Dyer's Mill. Its original location was just below Lake Montclair's earthen dam. There were several such essential grist mills on Powell's and Neabsco Creeks.

The Montclair Bicentennial Committee documented the results of their excellent research in a brochure for distribution to property owners and club members. Montclair residents also mustered a worthy effort to honor Alexander Henderson by naming the local elementary school after him. Unfortunately, the drive was unsuccessful for reasons not too clear. It would certainly be fitting for the community developers to name sections, streets, etc. in honor of the history of that unique area.

Well, another "Historic Garden Week in Virginia" has come and gone without old Prince William County as a participant. The Garden Club of Virginia does a wonderful job with this sort of activity and publishes a beautiful guidebook. The Virginia Department of Highways, Virginia State Travel Service, AAA Offices, and Chambers of Commerce help support this annual spring event. Where is Prince William County in this highly visible tourist attracting event?

Tourism is a \$2 billion business in the State of Virginia. Most of this volume is built on historical attractions. Is Prince William County doing enough to get her share of the revenue pie? I think not, and what a pity.

May 30, 1979

## **THE MIGHTY ORANGE AND ALEXANDRIA RAILROAD**

In an earlier column coverage was given to the history of one of the few railroads that still retains its Civil War name — the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. Let's now turn our attention to another historical railroad running through Prince William County — the old Orange and Alexandria Railroad (now part of the Southern Railway).

Although old Prince William has a rich documented history going back to the Seventeenth Century, more attention has been devoted to the Civil War era than any other period. That war was the first major combat effort that saw railroads become a significant factor in military strategy and the conduct of battle operations.

The chief means of transportation and commerce in early Virginia evolved from natural tidal waterways to canals to railroads. Once settlers pushed to the fall line on the principal rivers of the Commonwealth, costly canals had to be constructed. Major canals were constructed on the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers. Consideration was even given to a canal on the Occoquan River, but construction was never started.

In order to more efficiently move farm produce from the bountiful interior lands to the port of Alexandria, the Orange and Alexandria Railroad was organized in May 1849. As the name implies, it ran from the Orange County area to the City of Alexandria. Construction began in 1850 and by October 1851 it had reached Tudor Hall (now known as Manassas).

When the Civil War began most of the rolling stock of the Orange and Alexandria was moved south from Alexandria. A portion of the equipment was used on the southern end of the line, and the remainder supplied other Confederate railroads. The last train to depart Alexandria under Confederate control carried Virginia troops to Manassas on the morning of May 24, 1861.

As soon as the State of Virginia withdrew from the Union, Federal forces occupied Alexandria. The Federal government needed the area to build a defensive buffer around the Capitol and to gain control of the three railroads then entering Alexandria. By November 1861 the Union Army was operating nine miles of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad.

As strange as it may seem, there was no railroad link between Virginia and Washington, D.C. at the beginning of the Civil War. During the months of January and February 1862, this problem was overcome by the Union Army. A seven mile connector

line was constructed from the old Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Depot at First Street and Indiana Avenue to the Alexandria hub site. The line crossed the Potomac River at the location where you see a railroad and subway bridges today.



Orange and Alexandria Railroad bridge over Bull Run during the Civil War

The Orange and Alexandria Railroad was operated by both the Union and Confederate Armies during the course of the Civil War. Up until the time the Confederate blockade batteries on the Potomac River were abandoned in March 1862, the southern end of the railroad was the main supply line for the large Rebel force located in Prince William County. A special spur line was also built by the Confederate Army from Manassas to Centreville to supply another heavy concentration of troops in that area.

Throughout the entire war the northern portion of the Orange and Alexandria was controlled by the Union Army. By August 1862 the Union was operating 61 miles of the line out as far as Culpeper. The line supported McClellan's activity following the Battle of Antietam, Hooker's movements after Chancellorsville, and Meade's maneuvers in the wake of Gettysburg. As Grant moved below the Rappahannock, the Union supplies moved by water routes and railroad operations in Northern Virginia began to cut back. The Orange and Alexandria line was again very active in bringing Union troops back to Washington at the end of the war when the "Grand Review" was held.

The City of Alexandria has been a leader in historical preservation and reconstruction. But unfortunately action was not taken by her to save the classical old railroad round house located at Duke and Henry Streets that served the U.S. Military Railroad command during the Civil War.

At the peak of the Civil War activity the Alexandria rail headquarters area contained a depot, round house, carpenter and bridge shops, locomotive shops, car shop,

crew quarters, hospital and other miscellaneous facilities. The operation covered a 12 block area which was surrounded with a massive wooden stockade fence.

I often marveled at the old round house as a youngster, never realizing the history of the old structure or the relationship it had to Manassas. The only other one like it nearby that I know of is located in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

June 28, 1979



Orange and Alexandria Railroad locomotive, 1862

## THE OLD MANASSAS GAP RAILROAD

In earlier columns, I wrote about two historic railroads that were cut across the face of Prince William County in the last century — the RF&P Railroad and the Orange & Alexandria Railroad (now part of the Southern Railway System). Let's complete the picture now by giving attention to perhaps the least known of all our old country rail lines — the Manassas Gap Railroad. It, too, is steeped in Civil War glory.

The Virginia General Assembly chartered the Manassas Gap Railroad Company on March 9, 1850. It was built from a junction point with the Orange and Alexandria Railroad at the present day city of Manassas, driven through the Bull Run Mountains at Thoroughfare Gap, penetrated the Blue Ridge Mountains at Manassas Gap, and continued into the bountiful farm country of the Shenandoah Valley.

Although the main purpose of the line was to move the trade of the upper Shenandoah Valley to the port of Alexandria, financing became an immediate problem. A group of Fauquier farmers finally got the act together and made up private stock subscriptions of \$60,000 and, in turn, obtained much needed State aid for the construction needs.

By September 1851, it could be reported to the Company stockholders that construction had begun at the junction with the Orange & Alexandria line. The Plains was reached in May 1852, Rectortown in August, and Markham in December. The top of the Blue Ridge was reached in November 1853, but heavy construction work west of the mountains delayed the opening to Strasburg until October 1854. In some four years a few farmers managed to build 60 miles of railroad and became the first to transcend the natural barrier of the Blue Ridge with such a newfangled device.

The Manassas Gap Railroad Company began to do quite well and planned to become independent from the Orange & Alexandria connection between Manassas and Alexandria. The company purchased property at Jones Point on the Potomac River in order to construct its own terminal at Alexandria. Plans were also developed to cut a new rail bed from Gainesville to Bull Run at Sudley Mill, through Fairfax County down the slopes of Accotink Creek, around Annandale to Cameron Valley and over to Jones Point.

Much of the required grading was quickly done for the new line in both Prince William and Fairfax Counties. However, later reverses in the company's resource picture and the devastation of the Civil War prevented completion of the bold plan. Many of the grade cuts can be seen today. Amazingly, the south ramp of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge at Jones Point is built on the original railroad grade.



One of the Union Army's prizes-of-war when Alexandria was invaded in May 1861 was 1,100 tons of rail which was stockpiled for the Manassas Gap Company construction project. The original line of the Manassas Gap Railroad was in Confederate hands during the early part of the war. The most important service performed by the line was rendered in July 1861 when she carried General Johnston's troops from the Valley to the plains of Manassas to join General Beauregard's men in the First Battle of Manassas.

The Manassas Gap Railroad's new, but never to be used, grade cut was also an important terrain feature in the Second Battle of Manassas about one year later. The important battle action that took place in the Groveton area focused on General Jackson positioned in the unused railroad grade cut. This important landmark can be visited at the Manassas Battlefield Park today.

After the major body of the Confederate Army withdrew from Prince William County, the Manassas Gap Railroad was used by the Union Army as part of their Military Railroad Command as far west as the Piedmont. In late 1864, as the fighting in Virginia shifted to the Richmond-Petersburg area the railroad was abandoned, and the rails were taken up by the Union for shipment to Alexandria.

Following the Civil War, the Manassas Gap Company threw in the towel and merged its interests with the Orange & Alexandria. Today, the line is part of the Southern Railway System.

July 25, 1979

## SKYLAND HISTORY

On a clear, crisp day you can see the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains from many points in Prince William County. If you can still afford the gas, the Shenandoah National Park is a most rewarding place to visit. The highest point on the Skyline Drive within the Park is an area called "Skyland". A trip to this very special spot is more interesting if you are acquainted with its unusual history.

The hollows, ridges, and slopes of the land now within the Shenandoah Park were home to the mountain people from the mid-eighteenth century until the early 1900's. It is suspected that the forebears of these early pioneer folk were Tidewater indentured servants who worked their way to freedom, but could not afford to buy good land. These hardy souls had to settle on marginal mountain tracts, usually as squatters.

A tough life was eked out by these people by growing a little corn, beans, cabbages, and apples. They also raised their own chickens, hogs, and cattle. In later years, they were able to market chestnut ties, tanbark, honey, furs, and good old fashioned moonshine. They were remarkably self-sufficient, creating their own style of music, and passed their traditions on from one generation to another.

During the period 1845-50 there was a copper boom in the Blue Ridge Mountains. A number of companies were formed to explore and develop the minerals of the area. One such company was the Miners' Lode Copper Company, Inc., with stockholders largely drawn from the New York area. This particular company began operations on the Stony Man Mountain Tract. The site contained 5,371 acres and included a striking pinnacle 4010 feet above sea level.

The copper ore proved extremely hard to work and the Stony Man Mine was played-out by the beginning of the Civil War. The squatters, however, continued to enjoy the natural products of the area including tons of chestnut and oak tanbark which was being sold to the tanneries in Luray and Sperryville. A great number of cattle were also being pastured on the tract by lowland farmers, especially in the hotter months.

In October 1886, a very significant event occurred. A young man by the name of George Freeman Pollock visited the Stony Man Mountain Tract. His father had been one of the principal stockholders in the Miners' Lode Copper Company. Young Pollock was only 16 years of age at the time and was working for the chief taxidermist of the Smithsonian Institution. He made his initial visit to collect small mammals.

In those days, the trip from Washington to the Stony Man Mountain area was quite a big deal. It was possible to make it to Luray by train. Caverns had been discovered eight years earlier in that charming area. From the train station on it was a tricky nine mile ride by horse and wagon over very primitive trails.

Young Pollock's life was completely taken over by the beauty of the area. His trivial task of collecting snake specimens gave way to a vision of building a mountain top recreation area. He then began several years of extremely hard work aimed at realizing the dream.

By 1894 Pollock was able to generally announce to the public that he could accommodate organized company parties on Stony Man Mountain for the months of July and August. He provided planned recreation and entertainment at a fantastically low price.

Prominent people were attracted to the Stony Man Camp area from Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. The location was given the post office designation of "Skyland". The reputation of this summer resort continued to grow until the 1930's.

In 1924, the Federal Government began its search for an area in the Southern Appalachian for establishment of a National Park. Pollock began intensive lobbying efforts to insure that the natural beauty of the Skyland portion of the Blue Ridge Mountains was included in that area. The overall result was the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park which was dedicated by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933.

Skyland continued to be operated by Pollock until 1937. At that point all commercial interests were sold to Virginia Sky-Line Company, Inc., a concessionaire. The Department of Interior did, however, grant Pollock a life-time lease on Massanutten Lodge, a part of Skyland. On September 5, 1949, the "Little Chief of Stony Man Mountain" died in Takoma Park, Maryland, just a few weeks shy of his 80th birthday.

So, the next time you visit along the Skyline Drive stop by "Skyland" and see the place where it all began. And give thanks for men like George Freeman Pollock — the father of the beautiful Shenandoah National Park.

August 30, 1979

## HISTORIC VIRGINIA BEACH

To old-line Virginians hereabouts, a trip to the seashore means a trip to Virginia Beach. If you have not traveled through the Tidewater Area to that fascinating ocean playground, you ought to do so. It is rich in colonial history and even has some witchcraft thrown in for good measure. This area also has interesting ties to Potomac Newsland.

The brave band of 104 people who established the first permanent English colony in Virginia left London on December 19, 1606. They took the so-called southern route along the shores of Europe and Africa, across to the West Indies and continued northward along the coast of North America. Four awful months were spent on winter seas in very small boats before they reached their destination.

Colonial history for Virginia Beach began on April 26, 1607, with the arrival of the tiny English vessels “Susan Constant”, “Godspeed”, and “Discovery”. The land first sighted by those boats is the Virginia Beach area of today. A landing party came ashore at Cape Henry, which now makes up the northern end of the shoreline.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Colonists erected a huge granite cross in 1935 to mark the spot of the original landing. The marker also commemorates the first church services conducted by the hardy souls who gave us the first permanent colony at Jamestown a few weeks later. The very next year after the landing, a party from this same group of colonists visited the Occoquan Bay area. For a time, it was thought that the Occoquan was the source of the Potomac River.

As Jamestown became more secure, settlements expanded further into the Virginia countryside. Land patents in the Virginia Beach area date to the early 1620’s, only thirty years prior to those in Prince William County. Even today there stands a modest but substantial brick home built by the Thoroughgood family in 1636. This fully restored building is believed to be the oldest surviving brick home in America. For the next couple of centuries, the area went the way of most of Virginia, i.e., it was divided into huge plantations.

Many people are surprised to find that Virginia has witches and witchcraft trials in her history. Down in the Virginia Beach area in 1706, Grace Sherwood was accused of blighting gardens, causing livestock to die, and influencing the weather — all valid suspicions of witchcraft in those days. She was by her own consent tried in the water by ducking. The site of that event is known as the community “Witch Duck” today.

Since water was then regarded as the one pure element, it was believed that the substance would reject anything of an evil nature. Suspected witches were crossbound with the thumb of the right hand tied to the big toe of the left foot, and the thumb of the left hand tied to the big toe of the right foot. The next step was to dump the suspect into the water.

In the case of poor old Grace Sherwood, she stayed afloat, freed herself, and swam to shore. She was then immediately thrown in the slammer as a proven witch. Concern for witchcraft in the colony became passé and Grace was freed after several years. She went on to become a landowner in the area and lived until the ripe old age of 80.

The oldest National building in the United States is located in Virginia Beach. It is the Cape Henry lighthouse which was the first of its kind built by the new Federal Government in 1791. Amazingly, it was constructed of stone taken from the Aquia Quarries in Stafford County. This is the same type of stone that was used by the new government in building the Capitol and White House.



Cape Henry Lighthouse

It took until 1880 for the seashore boom to really get underway in Virginia Beach. In that year Colonel Marshall Park, prominent developer and entrepreneur, began to focus attention on the resort qualities in the area. In 1883 railroad connections were made to the area. Later the New York Vanderbilt interests bought in and things really got going.

Thanks to 2,770 acres of land preserved by the Virginia Parks System, you can still see parts of the area in their primitive state. The “Seashore State Park” offers tent and trailer sites, hiking trails, and 336 species of trees and wild flowers. When you are deep into this Park, you can imagine that this is what the early colonists may have seen when they arrived in Virginia over 372 years ago.

September 28, 1979

## **TIES BETWEEN STAFFORD AND PRINCE WILLIAM**

Many historical ties exist between Stafford and Prince William Counties. From 1664 to 1731 the present boundaries of Prince William were a part of Stafford. This particular period even produced some “Scarlet Letters” for local planters. Even so, the close relationship between the citizens of these two counties weathered both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and continued strong into the Twentieth Century. The Marine Corps played a major cementing role in more recent years.

A very interesting tobacco fraud case is documented in the Stafford County Court records for March 1690. It concerns a complaint lodged by Nicholas Goodridge, Mariner and Master of the good ship “Spencer of London,” against David Darnell, local tobacco planter and resident of Freestone Point. This is the same tract of land that later became known as “Leesylvania Plantation” when occupied by the famous Lee Family of Virginia.

In May 1689, the “Spencer of London” had sailed up the Potomac River to present day Prince William County waters with a cargo of manufactured goods to trade with individual planters. At that time such visits were common practice and the usual staple of exchange was tobacco. Unfortunately, even at that early date planters were beginning to rip-off ship captains.

When the ship’s representative sampled the casks of tobacco being offered by Darnell as his payment for goods received, the product appeared completely acceptable. The tobacco was left at Darnell’s home for some time prior to loading aboard Captain Goodridge’s vessel.

When the time came to bring Darnell’s hogsheads of tobacco aboard ship, it became necessary to open the containers for proper bulking. When the contents were fully exposed, they were found to consist of a very vile tobacco mixed with great quantities of ashes, dirt, and sand. The awful mixture was immediately thrown overboard as unmerchantable.

Captain Goodridge then hauled Darnell into the Stafford County Court. Darnell was adjudged by the magistrates as “a notorious false cheat and knave.” He was cast in damages, placed in the pillory for a short time, and made to fix upon his breast “Capital Letters” attesting to his wicked and notorious act.

The spreading practice by plantation owners of “trashing” tobacco led Governor Spotswood to call for an act to prevent such fraud in 1713. The act was duly passed and

led to the establishment of public tobacco inspection warehouses along the navigable rivers and creeks of Virginia. Inspector warehouses were established locally in Occoquan, Dumfries, and Marlborough.

Tobacco inspector agents were appointed by the Governor to examine and grade all tobacco intended for export, payment of public dues or taxes. Ship Masters were required to take an oath, not to load any tobacco that had not been inspected by a government agent. This system restored the reputation of Virginia tobacco so vital to the economy of the area at that time.



Tobacco inspector's house (Merchant House) in Dumfries around 1935

Yet another interesting record of close relationships between citizens of Prince William and Stafford Counties resides in the Virginiana Collection of the Rappahannock Regional Library in Fredericksburg. This fine facility has a copy of the old record books of the "Chopawamsic Baptist Church" which was organized in 1766 near Quantico in Stafford County. This church drew its membership from both sides of Chopawamsic Creek and included Blacks and Whites.

This "Old School" Baptist Church apparently continued to function until 1919, which was only a couple of years after the Marines landed at Quantico. The small Greenwood Primitive Baptist Church located at the intersection of Minnieville Road and Cardinal Drive sprung from the loins of the original Chopawamsic Church about 1881.



Greenwood Church

The Quantico Marine Corps Base constructed along the border of Prince William and Stafford has also brought a lot of citizens from both Counties together since the original 5,300 acre tract was leased over 62 years ago. As the reservation increased in size and significance, a great number of farmers were required to part with their land. In turn, a good number of jobs were made available and an income base was provided that helped the overall economy of both Prince William and Stafford Counties.

Quantico has a unique military history that even predates the arrival of the Marines. The area performed a military mission during the Revolution and was a major blockade site for the Confederate Government during the Civil War. Today, it performs very important functions and is one of the best looking military posts in the United States.

How wonderful it would be if our elected officials at County, State, and Federal levels would get a program underway to move the Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps out of its present congested space to beautiful Quantico. The Marines could find no friendlier place or stronger ties.

October 25, 1979



## **A HYPE FOR HISTORY, PRESERVATION, AND TOURISM**

In 1975, I was given the opportunity to serve on the Bicentennial Committee of the Eastern Prince William County Chamber of Commerce. That experience was personally very rewarding and I had a chance to participate in quite a number of projects aimed at raising the visibility of the colonial heritage so prevalent in the eastern end of the County. But it was also an eye opener to me to see how much underdeveloped potential the entire County had for restaurant, lodging, entertainment, and other service industries connected with tourism.

During the recent election campaign, it was very gratifying to see some of the candidates for County Supervisor articulate concern for historical preservation and tourism. For reasons not at all clear, Prince William has never seemed able to take full advantage of its historical heritage and strategic location to reap the financial benefits of this clean industry.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has a national reputation for its tourist attractions, most of which are historical in nature, e.g., Jamestown, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Monticello. Fairfax County, our sister county to the north, has been cited as a national leader in investigating her local history and the initiation of numerous historical preservation projects. Prince William County deserves to get a bigger piece of the total tourist revenue pie.

Prince William County represents a microcosm of more than 370 years of recorded Virginia history. It was visited by Captain John Smith in 1608; land was patented in Woodbridge in 1653; and an Indian fort was built on the Neabsco Creek to protect the pioneers as early as 1679. It shared in the golden age of plantations and two outstanding examples survive today, i.e., “Bel Air” and “Rippon Lodge”.

History records many outstanding contributions made by Prince William County citizens in both the American Revolution and Civil War. Two Revolutionary War heroes born in the County went on to high political office. “Light-Horse Harry” Lee, a brilliant cavalry commander under General Washington, became governor of Virginia and later served in the House of Representatives. William Grayson served with high honor during the Revolution and went on to become one of the first two senators to represent Virginia in the U.S. Congress.

Even though every part of Prince William County played a significant role in the Civil War, only partial recognition has been given to her contributions by the creation of the Manassas National Battlefield Park. Much more tourist revenue yield should be

pulled in by innovative use of that facility. Additional recognition should be given to the Potomac River areas used in the Confederate blockade of Washington and the significant battleground areas in Bristow.

The present day towns of Dumfries and Occoquan represent two very historical port facilities in Prince William. The interest of “King” Carter in copper ore put Occoquan Landing on the map in 1729. But tobacco warehouses gave both ports their real reason for existence and brought Dumfries into being as the County’s first chartered town in 1749.

Dumfries and Occoquan are both quaint in their own special ways, each has a historical society, and both have interesting museums. There is an unlimited potential for tourism for both of these spots. Each needs a larger museum display area and visitor information complex. Occoquan needs something about the size of “Rockledge,” and Dumfries needs a building like the “Stagecoach Inn.”

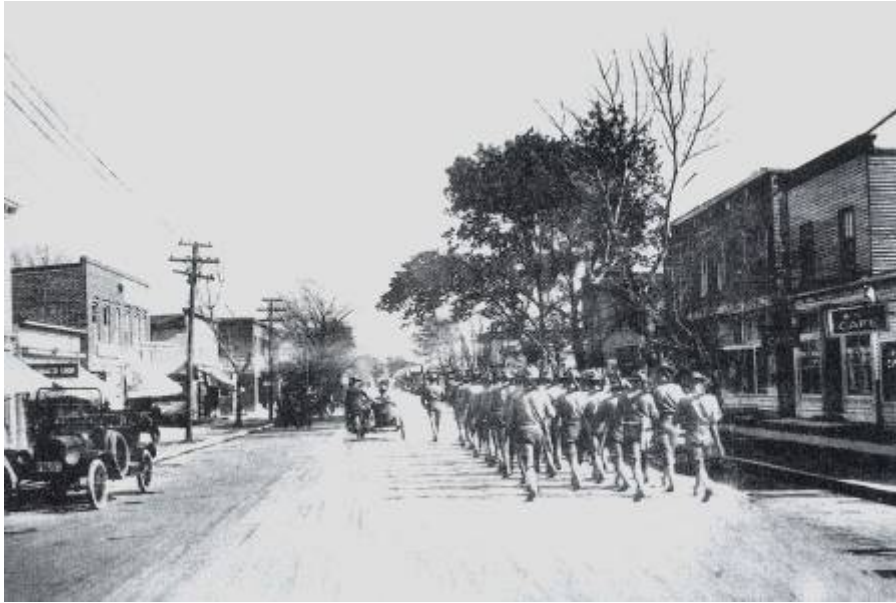


William's Ordinary, also known as “Stage Coach Inn” in Dumfries around 1935

And just look at the possibilities for Quantico. Here is an area that was chartered as a town in 1788 with the name of Carrborough. The charter was created in a vain effort to save the shipping trade being lost to the silted harbor at Dumfries. During the Civil War it was a major Confederate blockade battery known as Evansport. In 1872 it became a railroad town and resort community called Potomac. The Marines finally landed in World War I and the area became incorporated as the Town of Quantico shortly thereafter.

We are lucky enough to have the Marine Air Museum located at Quantico and that is good for tourism. But we lost the regular Marine Corps Museum a short time back. Prince William County should do everything in its power to make Quantico the focus of

all major Marine activities in the Washington area — including those wonderful Friday night retreat parades that the tourists so love.



Marines marching toward the Potomac River in Quantico around 1920

When the new Board of Supervisors organizes its game plan for the next term, it ought to give serious thought to the connection between history, tourism, revenue yields, and community pride. Tourism should be actively courted as a viable and clean industry.

Prince William needs to give more of a hype to the Civil War sites throughout the County and certainly optimize the attraction of tourists to the Manassas Battlefield. We need to bring the State Park located on the old colonial plantation of “Leesylvania” on-line for public use and enjoyment as quickly as possible. Every effort should be made to cultivate the authentic historical themes of Dumfries and Occoquan. And we need that recreational lake and water impoundment project in historic Prince William Forest Park.

Incidentally, the Marine Corps History and Museums Division has produced a book entitled “Quantico: Crossroads of the Marine Corps.” It is a marvelous document and is on sale by the Superintendent of Documents, GPO. The cover shows a photograph taken of Quantico in 1925. The “USS Archibald Henderson,” a Marine troop ship, is pictured in the foreground docked at the old pier. Archibald Henderson was the fifth Commandant of the Marine Corps and was raised in Dumfries.

December 28, 1979

## OLD NEABSCO MILLS

A good deal of Prince William County history is being kept alive by the outstanding efforts of such organizations as the historical societies of Dumfries, Occoquan, and Manassas. And even the County Government is doing its part by funding the projects of the Prince William County Historical Commission aimed at raising the visibility of our local heritage. But, more needs to be done by the housing project developers in the County to protect historic sites and retain the names of prominent places and people in the County's past.

In various parts of the County large construction projects have overlaid sites of prominent old plantations, Civil War campgrounds, important old roads, and numerous burial grounds. Only occasionally have builders given proper recognition to nearby historical points by incorporating appropriate names of places or people into their structure of project or street names.

One such historical site that needs to be protected and remembered is "Neabsco Mills." This unique piece of property is situated just west of Interstate 95 on the south side of Neabsco Creek along Route 610 (Old Neabsco Road). It contains the remains of ancient iron ore processing, a grist mill, and slate mining operations. The acreage is presently owned by Hylton Enterprises.

From the very beginning of the Colony of Virginia, there seemed to be a fixation on the search for crude iron ore that could be smelted down to pig iron. The very first iron furnace in the Colony was built in 1622. It ran only for a very short time and was destroyed by Indian attack.

Governor Alexander Spotswood gave iron furnace operations a shot in the arm when he moved German immigrants into an area along the south side of the Rappahannock River in 1714 to work iron ore located in that region. That particular effort came to be known as "Germanna", a name used in that vicinity even today.

As settlers moved into the area that we now know as Prince William County, Colonel John Tayloe opened the iron ore beds along Neabsco Creek. He had attempted to get "King" Carter, a man of considerable wealth in the Colony, to join him in the venture. Carter seemed more interested in copper ore discovered north of the Occoquan River.

Tayloe proceeded to obtain some 5,000 acres in the Neabsco Creek area. This new land had the needed iron ore deposits and trees for charcoal. His water source, Neabsco Creek, did not go dry in summer and was not subject to destructive floods.

To establish his blast furnace, a sturdy stone and brick tower was built with sloping walls on a rectangular base. The tower enclosed an egg-shaped chamber into which fuel, iron ore, and flux was dumped in layers. The entire mechanism was top-loaded from a platform built into a hillside.

Molten iron was run off at the bottom of the furnace into sand molds in the form of finished pigs. The furnace fire was blown by a big bellows worked by water power provided by Neabsco Creek. The flux contained oyster shells easily obtained from great mounds left by Indians all along the Potomac River.

The fuel of the iron furnace was charcoal. This product was produced on the scene by burning wood with a restricted air supply. This process would evaporate nearly all moisture, drive off unwanted gasses, and leave a more or less pure carbon. The virgin timber lands around the furnace were scalped in the production of this fuel supply.

The first County Seat for Prince William County was built in 1731 at Woodbridge on the south side of the Occoquan River. When Fairfax County was split from the lands of Prince William in 1742 it became necessary to establish a commission to select a new site for the second Prince William Court House. The meeting place for that commission was established as the iron mines at Neabsco.

The Neabsco iron works, which came to include both a blast furnace and forge, continued to operate for most of the Eighteenth Century Thomas Jefferson spoke of Tayloe's forge on Neabsco operating during the Revolution. On early maps the area is referred to simply as "Neabsco Mills."



Colonial iron furnace complex

Present plans call for high density construction in the area surrounding the old iron works. It is essential that the County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors protect this old Colonial site. Since the location runs along Neabsco Creek in the shadow of Dale City, it would make a perfect location for a new "Neabsco Mills Mini-Park."

January 30, 1980

## **FREESTONE AND STAFFORD COUNTY**

Stafford and Prince William Counties share a common heritage. The territory of present day Prince William was a part of Stafford County from 1664 to 1731. Both counties made significant contributions to the birth of our Federal Government which too few people are aware of today.

For example, Stafford County figured importantly in the construction of buildings in the new Federal City — Washington, D.C. Freestone, a type of sandstone used by Virginia's early settlers in building plantation houses and churches, was obtained from the Aquia Creek area to build the Capitol of the United States.

When this Nation won independence from Great Britain at the end of the Revolutionary War, there was no planned site for the Federal Government. In 1783, some six years prior to the ratification of the Constitution, action was begun to deal with that problem. Even at that time, rivalry was so intense between North and South that a suggestion was made to have two seats of government. Legislative action in 1784 forbade such an absurd course of action.

Between 1774 and 1789, the Continental Congress met in no less than eight different cities. After adoption of the Constitution, the U.S. Congress met in New York for a little over a year and in Philadelphia for almost a decade. On November 17, 1800, the Congress was able to meet in its own permanent quarters in Washington, D.C.

President George Washington was a uniquely skilled politician and proved to be a great boon to the real estate interests of Northern Virginia. He owned four other farms contiguous to the famous Mount Vernon tract that covered some 8,000 acres in total. Through his skillful leadership, Maryland and Virginia agreed to donate generous portions of land along the Potomac River for establishment of the Federal District.

The new seat of Federal Government originally encompassed 10 square miles of land. The first survey cornerstone was placed at Jones Point in Alexandria, Virginia on April 15, 1791. At one point, the present hilltop site of the Masonic Temple was considered as a potential location of the Capitol Building. As it turned out, all of the initial Federal construction was done on the Maryland side of the Potomac.

Virginia petitioned for retrocession of her portion of the District of Columbia in 1846. This piece of land roughly includes Arlington County and Alexandria City today. That particular decision was one of the best made by Virginia in the Nineteenth Century.

Shortly after President Washington engineered the brilliant deal to locate the Federal City near his home, an eleven acre tract of land was purchased in Stafford County to operate a freestone quarry. The purchase amounted to some \$6,000 in 1791, a real steal by any standards.

The new Federal Quarry was located near the mouth of Austin Run, about three miles northeast of Stafford Court House. Slaves and indentured servants had dug stone all along the Aquia watershed in colonial times for construction of the great plantations built along the Potomac River. The Federal Quarry operated only with free white labor.

Freestone seems to have been given its name by virtue of the ease in which it could be carved and cut. The large beds that abounded in the area ranged in color from cream to light reddish brown. The stone was used as primary construction material in some buildings and ornamental in others. Often in colonial homes you will see it used to strengthen brickwork.

As you look at the Capitol Building today it is a series of five sections. The first building module was the wing joining the rotunda area on the north. It was started in 1793 and was the space occupied by the Congress in 1800. The initial sections used freestone brought some 40 miles up the Potomac by boat from Stafford County.

Not long after the British torched the Federal City in 1814, the Stafford quarry went out of business. Some effort seems to have been made in the 1920's to revive use of freestone for neo-colonial construction. But the great depression put a final end to the operation.

Freestone from Stafford County was also used in constructing the White House, Mount Vernon, Custis-Lee Mansion, Gunston Hall, and the Pohick-Aquia-Christ Anglican Churches. It even made its way from the Federal Quarry to Virginia Beach to build the new Government Lighthouse at Cape Henry in 1791.

As Stafford County is subjected to more and more development, the Board of Supervisors ought to establish a program aimed at identifying, protecting, and promoting the many historic sites that exist in that jurisdiction. Like Prince William County, Stafford deserves a bigger piece of the Virginia tourist revenue pie.

February 27, 1980

## **HISTORICAL COMMISSION STEWARDSHIP REPORT**

At the risk of starting a rash of stewardship reports to the public on County authorities, boards, and committees, I would like to highlight some of the accomplishments of the Historical Commission in the last several years. An opportunity to reflect on this matter was provided just recently when the Fairfax County History Commission and the History Department of George Mason University cosponsored a regional conference of history groups in Northern Virginia.

The first meeting of the Prince William County Historical Commission was called to order in May, 1969. Mr. R. Jackson Ratcliffe was the first elected chairman of that pioneer group. Admiral Richard B. Black was elected vice chairman. By February, 1970, provision had been made in the Prince William Code for the establishment of a permanent Historical Commission.

Essentially, the Historical Commission exists to advise and assist the Prince William Board of Supervisors in its efforts to preserve and protect historic sites and structures throughout the county. Other goals have been to raise the visibility of our rich local heritage and promote revenue-producing tourism.

An early project undertaken by the Historical Commission was the design of an appropriate historical plaque to be affixed to structures or sites designated as County landmarks. A professional product was produced and has been awarded to more than 30 historical structures around the County in the last few years.

The high-water mark of activity within the Historical Commission came during the bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution. During that delightful period the Board of Supervisors appropriated monies to build memorials to two outstanding sons of Prince William County who were leaders in the Revolution. These projects were:

- Construction of a memorial gazebo dedicated to Colonel William Grayson. This public meeting facility is located behind the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries.
- Erection of a marble obelisk dedicated to General "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. This marker is located on U.S. Route 1 at the Gar-Field County Administration Building.



In addition to these construction efforts during the bicentennial, a number of other projects have been undertaken by the Historical Commission. Chief among them are:

- Publication of a tour guide of Prince William County. These colorful and informative guides are available free to the public and can be obtained from local Chambers of Commerce offices, and museums located in Dumfries, Occoquan, and Manassas.
- Publication of “William Grayson, a Political Biography of Virginia’s First United States Senator” by James E. Du Priest, Jr. This document may be purchased at the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries.
- Publication of the pamphlet “Confederate Batteries Along the Potomac” by Mary Alice Wills. These documents were distributed free to the public through the County library system. Additional copies are available from the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries.
- Erection of several new highway history markers throughout the County to pinpoint the location of famous old plantations, important troop trails and camps, famous graves, etc.



Prince William County Historical Commission marker

- Preservation and relocation of “Ben Lomond” dependency near Manassas, and support of efforts to retain “Liberia” in the City of Manassas.
- Initiation of a comprehensive professional survey of historic sites and structures in the County under the auspices of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and Northern Virginia Planning District Commission. This survey is still in process.

- Development of an audio-visual orientation package on the history of Prince William County to promote the profound heritage of the area.
- Compilation of a highway history marker guide for future free distribution to the public.

Perhaps the most complicated and frustrating project touched by the Historical Commission has been the acquisition of the 500 remaining acres of “Leesylvania Plantation” for use as a State Park. This beautiful waterfront property represents the last unspoiled playground left to Prince William citizens on the Potomac River.

As it stands now, title to the Leesylvania tract is being held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, an element of the Commonwealth of Virginia. A request for Land and Water Conservation Fund assistance has been requested by Governor John Dalton from the Secretary of the Interior.

If you are interested in preserving history, protecting our last remaining areas of open space, or promoting better water-oriented sports on the Potomac River, please write Congressman Herbert E. Harris, II, and ask for his support of Virginia’s request for Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund assistance for the acquisition of this new park property. Help strike a blow against the blight of scalped earth, wall-to-wall housing, asphalt parking lots, and silted tributaries in Prince William County.

March 28, 1980



Ben Lomond dependency

## **BURIED TREASURE**

My interest in cryptography, computers, and history recently brought me into contact with an interesting story about buried Virginia treasure. I've spent a little time digging for treasure in Prince William County, usually in the form of arrowheads, bullets, and belt buckles. But in Bedford County, Virginia, they are looking for almost 3,000 pounds of gold and over 5,000 pounds of silver stashed away more than forty years prior to the Civil War.

In 1817 a Virginian by the name of Thomas Jefferson Beale joined a 30-man hunting party going into the Missouri Territory. Records indicate the group left St. Louis in the spring of 1817 and arrived in the Santa Fe, New Mexico area that fall. Here the group had the good fortune to discover gold and silver. A short time later the "Santa Fe Trail" was etched across the American landscape.

For some 18 months the hunting party mined large quantities of the precious minerals. Mr. Beale and ten of his companions returned to Virginia to hide half a ton of gold and almost two tons of silver. The deposit was made in an excavation six feet deep "in the County of Bedford about four miles from Bufords." Two years later another ton of gold was returned to Virginia and added to the cache along with half a ton of silver, and \$13,000 worth of jewels. Some gold had been traded for jewels at St. Louis to lighten the load a bit.

During these return trips to Virginia, Mr. Beale had become acquainted with Robert Morriss, proprietor of the Washington Hotel in Lynchburg. He entrusted Morriss with a strongbox as he made his last return trip to the west in March 1822. A little later, Beale sent a letter to Morriss from St. Louis asking that the box be opened if he did not return to Virginia within ten years. This was the last time Beale and his party were heard from. It is thought that hostile Indians butchered the entire party.

Beale's letter from St. Louis was dated May 9, 1822, and is an interesting piece. He talks of his new adventure to the plains "to hunt the buffalo and encounter the savage grizzlies." He expected the new expedition to last about two years. But if he did not return to Virginia by June 1832, a friend in St. Louis would supply a cryptographic key to decipher documents contained in the strongbox being held by Morriss.

June 1832 came and went without any further communication on the matter, and after several more years, Morriss entered the box, inside were found several sheets of paper covered with numeric code and two letters that told of the discovery of the precious ores. Instructions were given to divide the buried Virginia treasure into thirty-one equal

parts. One part would go to Morriss and one would go to the next of kin of each man in the hunting party.

Three cryptograms or ciphers gave the location of the treasure, the contents, and the names of the next of kin. Without the source code, solving the puzzle seemed impossible. One cipher was broken by using the Declaration of Independence as a key. Beale had numbered each word from 1 to 1322 and had used the word's number as the cipher equivalent of its first (or sometimes last) letter. The cipher indicating exactly where the treasure is buried remains unbroken to this day.

Interest in the "Beale Papers" continued well into the late 1880's. In 1952 interest was again aroused when information on the Beale ciphers was deposited in the Roanoke Public Library. About this same time large electronic computers started to come on the scene. Dr. Carl Hammer, a brilliant computer expert at UNIVAC, later entered the picture. He pioneered the use of computers in the statistical analysis of ciphers.

There now exists "The Beale Cypher Association". This non-profit organization of scientists, engineers, and other interested persons is dedicated to the task of solving the Beale ciphers and claiming the buried treasure. At current prices, the gold, silver, and jewels are worth well over thirty million dollars.

If you are interested in this effort, you can learn more about the Beale cryptograms by contacting The Beale Cypher Association, Post Office Box 216, Medfield, MA 02052. The experience gained may even help you discover a buried Confederate or Union payroll here in old Prince William County.

April 30, 1980

## NEED FOR COUNTY TOURIST COUNCIL

Folks in Prince William County and especially the Board of Supervisors, ought to pay attention to an idea being hawked by Leslie Eastwood, Promotional Sales Director of the Triangle Ramada Inn. She is calling for the creation of a much needed County Tourist Council.

Such a body would be composed of representatives of the motel and restaurant industries, Chambers of Commerce, County and Town Governments, Park Authority, Interior Department, Quantico Marine Corps Installation, and other appropriate groups. The goal of this group would be to optimize tourism in Prince William County and increase the revenue yield from that very clean industry.

The strategic location of Prince William County, her unique historical heritage, and the worsening gas price crunch all combine to present a rare opportunity for potential business expansion. Planners predict that people will take shorter vacation trips in the future due to the high cost of fuel and general economic conditions. Folks from the high population centers near Prince William may very well find it worthwhile to spend some time with us if we advertise our wares properly.

People may generally associate Prince William County with the Civil War because of the First and Second Battles of Manassas. But is there enough promotion of the Manassas area to attract them to the area to stay for a night or two? Do they know about the Confederate blockade of the Potomac River and the location of the fortifications? Is there enough promotion of Civil War battle activities in the Bristow area? A County Tourist Council could help focus attention to these present deficiencies.

The recorded history of Prince William County parallels the history of Virginia. The very next year after Jamestown was established Captain John Smith visited the Occoquan River. Indian hostilities encountered in the area were much the same as elsewhere in the Colony. Prince William experienced the plantation boom and made significant contributions to the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. All of these facts need to be given an organized hype. A County Tourist Council can help do that.

The County needs to also give visibility to her important historical places and people by naming major highways, schools, parks, shopping centers, etc. in honor of them. Examples of overlooked places and people are:

- *Neabsco Mills* — An early Colonial Village organized around water powered industry on Neabsco Creek in the shadow of Dale City.

- *William Grayson* — Established the first military unit in Prince William preparatory to the Revolution. Later appointed as Senator from Virginia to the first United States Congress.
- “*Light-Horse Harry*” *Lee* — Born at Leesylvania Plantation; earned a gold medal from the Continental Congress for his heroic performance in the Revolution; elected as Governor of Virginia and member of the House of Representatives. Most important of all, he was the father of General Robert E. Lee.
- *General Richard Ewell* — Lived in Prince William County prior to the Civil War; lost a leg during the fighting at Groveton; and later replaced “Stonewall” Jackson as a Corps Commander in Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.



General Richard Ewell  
1817-1872

- *Camp Fisher* — A military camp located in Montclair during the Confederate blockade of the Potomac in 1861—62. Occupied by the 6th North Carolina Infantry Regiment.
- *Alexander Henderson* — Prominent local merchant in colonial times, member of the Virginia General Assembly, and representative to the Mount Vernon Conference. He was the father of Archibald Henderson, first general officer and long time commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps.

Tourists flock to Virginia to visit her historical attractions, recreational areas, and places of natural beauty. Prince William can tap much more of that activity if the area is packaged and promoted in a more professional way. Certainly the efforts underway to organize festivals are a good example of what can be done.

Just look at what a crowd well-advertised activities in Occoquan can generate. Occoquan is an attractive town, well situated to Interstate 95, and people seem to genuinely enjoy visiting there. Dumfries enjoys a high degree of success in drawing crowds, especially when she promotes her rich ties with Scotland. Manassas should continue to get a lot of mileage on the Civil War connection and a special boost with the completion of Interstate 66.

Perhaps a County Tourist Council could find a way to get more military attractions located at Quantico. The local community would love for this installation to become the total showplace of the U.S. Marine Corps. More retreat parades, hardware shows, and sports events would be appreciated by the public. The Air Museum is an excellent step in the right direction, but air shows really turn the public on.

The activities undertaken by the Prince William Forest Park are pretty much on target. Perhaps more publicity is needed to make a greater number of people aware of what is offered there. An awful lot of County history is represented in the acreage of that beautiful park.

Prince William is lucky to have a most interesting Potomac River shoreline. When the Leesylvania State Park comes on line for public use it should be considered as a potential site for an amphitheater of the "Wolf Trap" class. No finer location could be imagined.

It was always hoped that by raising the visibility of Prince William County's history it would give the burgeoning community a sense of continuity and pride. But with the proper use of professional talent and a little organization it can give the citizens even more than that. It can lead to economic benefits and increased tax revenues. Tourism is a \$24 billion industry in Virginia. Let's get our piece.

June 4, 1980

## **HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY, PRINCE WILLIAM**

As the tempo builds to have a summer festival in Prince William, I hope the planners will not overlook an appropriate celebration of the County's 250th birthday. Mike Pomper should get the honor of lighting each candle on the cake.

Just as soon as the Indians were neatly tucked behind the Blue Ridge Mountains by treaty in 1722, pressure began to build to carve a new county and parish from old Stafford County. In 1726 this was nearly accomplished with a suggested name of Hartford County. The proposal went down to defeat, but "King" Carter was so convinced of the success of the bill he referred in his will drawn that year to lands along Bull Run as being in Hartford County.

A few years later, enough support had rallied behind the need for a new county and parish in Northern Virginia that two bills became law on July 9, 1730. One bill created Hamilton Parish and the other established Prince William County. The County name honors William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, second son of George II.

Showing a keen insight and excellent taste, the inhabitants of Prince William opted to locate their new county court along the Occoquan River on property owned by George Mason, III. The courthouse, prison, pillory, and stocks were built on a 534 acre plantation that later carried the name "Woodbridge."

Some 130 years later, Prince William County damn near ended up in the new state of West Virginia, thanks to the Civil War and Yankee chicanery. Civil government ceased in Prince William from March 6, 1862 to July 31, 1865, during armed occupation. The area later returned to the bosom of the Union on January 26, 1870.

By any standard, this County has experienced a history that boggles the mind. The problem is that too few people know the story. The Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge Campus, is going to try to do something about that. During the month of July a family oriented course will be given to introduce folks to local history. Lynne Asmuth, Community Services Program Developer, deserves accolades for the effort she has put into this project.

For those people who would like to learn more about Prince William at their own pace, there are several excellent books available. For example:



- “*Prince William, The Story of Its People and Its Places*” — Originally compiled in 1941 by workers of the Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration — 261 pages.
- “*Landmarks of Old Prince William* “ — An extremely comprehensive product written by Fairfax Harrison in 1924 — 724 pages.
- “*This Was Prince William*” — Written by R. Jackson Ratcliffe with an excellent collection of old photographs in 1978 — 132 pages.
- “*Bull Run Remembers*” — Must reading material on local Civil War events, written by Joseph Mills Hanson in 1957 — 194 pages.
- “*The Confederate Blockade of Washington, D.C., 1861 -62*” — Outstanding coverage of the Potomac River blockade in Eastern Prince William County, written by Mary Alice Wills in 1975 — 194 pages.

If you have not done so, take the opportunity to visit the fine Virginiana collections at either of the Prince William County libraries. Don Wilson supervises this unique assortment of reference materials with a special form of professionalism and personal attention.

The Virginiana section of the library also contains valuable documents for use in doing genealogical research. Especially useful and handy is a brochure entitled “Searching for Your Ancestors” compiled by Diane Salman, Reference Librarian.

After all is said and done, I suppose I am hooked on Prince William County. It is hard not to be when your family has lived in the area since 1701. I might even stay a while longer if the County gets its traffic problems solved.

Prince William has an awful lot of potential for the future, but careful planning is the key. Hurry with those “Do IT in Prince William” bumper stickers, Mike.

July 4, 1980

## REVOLUTIONARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Not only has Mike Pomper shown a genius for organization in his work on the 1981 Prince William County festivals, but he has also demonstrated a remarkable sense of timing. Next year will mark the 200th anniversary of the great “Yorktown Campaign.” This process will bring a close to the Bicentennial activities in Virginia.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is spending lots of money to give this anniversary event the hype. Think of all the tourists and dollars that will be passing through Prince William because of the Yorktown activities. The right kind of festivals within the county will give those folks a real good reason to stop and visit with us for a spell.

Very early in the Bicentennial celebration the Virginia Highway and Transportation Commission designated U.S. Route 1 in Prince William as part of the official Washington-Rochambeau Highway. This action was taken to commemorate the journey of General Washington and Comte de Rochambeau south to Yorktown in 1781.

In the summer of 1781, Washington met with his French ally, Rochambeau, outside New York City. Their considered judgment at that point was that the British hold on New York was too strong to break. It seemed more practical to go after the British forces under General Cornwallis in Virginia. Washington was also counting on the French fleet moving into the Chesapeake Bay from the West Indies.

Preparations were immediately made to move the American and French Armies down the coast to the Yorktown area. Most people know that the two armies, along with help from a powerful French fleet, converged on Cornwallis and forced his surrender. For all practical purposes this marked the end of an era of English rule in the American Colonies.

What is not well known is the role that Prince William County played in moving the American and French troops southward. General Washington did some very careful personal planning in this process and correspondence on that matter may be examined today in any good reference library.

Prince William County had distinguished herself by playing an early role in putting the Colony of Virginia into a posture of defense. She contributed several military leaders (e.g., “Light-Horse Harry” Lee and William Grayson) to the cause and supplied quite a number of rank and file soldiers.

When the Royal Governor, Lord Dunmore, fled Williamsburg in 1776 for his own safety, he went immediately aboard a British warship. There followed a series of heavy military actions at Hampton, Great Bridge, Norfolk and Gwynn's Island. Heavy casualties resulted from these engagements.

Dunmore then took to conducting raids along the Potomac River. He burned several plantations and shelled others, including Leesylvania Plantation here in Prince William.

At one point it is believed that the dyspeptic Dunmore intended to capture Lady Washington, and destroy Mount Vernon Plantation. A heavy storm and the actions of the Prince William Militia, under the command of Colonel Harry Lee, frustrated Dunmore's plan. The British intentions floundered at the Occoquan and they were forced to retreat.

Prince William County was spared any further significant military action until General Washington called upon Colonel Lee to open a route through the County for the movement of cavalry, artillery, wagons, and cattle belonging to the American and French Armies. This call came in early September 1781 to support the Yorktown Campaign

General Washington ordered that a route be cut across the Occoquan River, thereby avoiding troop use of the inconvenient ferry between Colchester and Woodbridge Plantation. Colonel Lee engaged the County Militia in a pioneer effort to open a road from Wolf Run Shoals on the Occoquan to the port town of Dumfries. For this important fatigue duty under emergency conditions the militia was excused from further service in the Yorktown Campaign.

Many portions of that original troop route still exist in Prince William today. After crossing the upper ford of the Occoquan River, the road winds past Bacon Race Church, through Hoadly, skirts the edge of Dale City, cuts through the heart of Minnieville, and winds its way through Montclair to Route 234 just above Dumfries.

So, as the Commonwealth of Virginia closes out her Bicentennial activities next year with concentration on the Yorktown exhibition, Prince William County can also look back with pride to her Revolutionary War contributions. Mike, hurry with those "Do IT in Prince William" bumper stickers.

August 1, 1980

## LEESYLVANIA IS OURS

After many years of effort involving County, State, and Federal governments, the Leesylvania State Park is at last a reality. This beautiful and historic property now belongs to the people. Funds are presently available to construct a residence, employ a full-time ranger, purchase necessary maintenance equipment, and prepare a master plan for the area.

No other piece of real estate in Prince William County has a more interesting history than the Leesylvania Plantation. The original land patent was established in 1658 and tobacco was being grown on the soil well before the end of the Seventeenth Century. By 1675 ownership had passed to the famous Lee family of Virginia.

Not too long after the establishment of Prince William County, Henry Lee II built his family home high on a hill overlooking the Potomac River. It was on this spot that "Light-Horse Harry" Lee was born. This man was to become the most legendary son of Prince William County.

During the Revolutionary War, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee was General Washington's most daring cavalry commander. Lee later went on to become a major-general, Governor of the State of Virginia, and member of the United States Congress. Most important of all, he was the father of General Robert E. Lee.

Leesylvania Plantation figured prominently in the Confederate blockade of the Potomac River in 1861-62. The batteries installed at Freestone Point were the most northern gun positions in the chain of heavy coastal ordnance installed in Prince William and Stafford Counties.

After the Civil War, portions of the Leesylvania property were timbered by Quakers. The mansion house tract was later used as a hunting and fishing preserve. And in the late 1950's it became the home of the S.S. Freestone, a gambling and liquor-by-the-drink ship moored in Maryland waters. Swimming pools, bath-houses, concessions stands, a miniature train, and parking lots were also constructed in the area. When slot machines were phased out by the State of Maryland, the entire enterprise went down to ruin.

Now that all land acquisition problems have been solved, it is the responsibility of the Virginia Department of Conservation, Division of Parks, to budget funds for the new park entrance road, archaeological surveys, and other developmental needs. It will be up to local members of the General Assembly to watch over this matter quite closely.

The new entrance to the park will be called Daniel K. Ludwig Drive, in honor of the previous owner of the property. Perhaps one of the most interesting uses of the property has been offered by Delegate David Brickley. He has suggested that an amphitheater be constructed of the “Wolf Trap” class. Such a facility could be put to good use by the Prince William Symphony. Thought should also be given to the creation of an original play based on the life of “Light-Horse Harry” Lee for repeated presentation in such an amphitheater. A successful play of this sort could become a local tourist attraction.

Prince William County is extremely fortunate to have large and beautiful parklands such as the Prince William Forest Park, Manassas National Battlefield Park, and Leesylvania State Park. Not only do these facilities present tremendous recreational opportunities to citizens of the County, but they can also enhance the tourist revenue produced within our borders.

Within the next few days, Leslie Eastwood will present to the County Board of Supervisors a proposal calling for the formation of a “Prince William County Traveler and Tourism Development Council.” She deserves accolades for such enthusiastic work in this area, and her professional proposal deserves serious attention. Funding a tourism council would benefit the entire County and tie nicely into Mike Pomper’s dream of successful festivals throughout the region.

October 10, 1980



Freestone Point on the Potomac River in Leesylvania State Park

## YANKEES COME TO PRINCE WILLIAM

While it is a fact that Prince William was occupied by Yankee Forces from early 1862 until Virginia was readmitted to the Union in 1870, it is also true that many Northerners came to the county for more peaceful purposes several decades earlier. During the 1840's an active advertising campaign was conducted in the states of New Jersey and New York aimed at attracting farmers to Northern Virginia.

Economic conditions in the early 1800's were not the best in Prince William County. A long agricultural depression followed the Panic of 1837 and by 1842 a severe money shortage ravaged the entire state of Virginia. Quite a number of native Virginians moved westward looking for better opportunities on virgin farmlands.

One of the first Northerners to settle in nearby Fairfax County was Lewis Bailey, an upstate New Yorker and the son of Hachaliah Bailey of circus fame. By 1837, Bailey was in need of a place to keep his circus animals during the winter months. For this purpose he bought hundreds of acres in the area now known as Bailey's Cross Roads. Portions of this land were later turned into prosperous dairy farms.

Here in Prince William County several Northerners bought land in the Minnieville/Dale City area. Included were such family names as Dane, Alexander, Waldon, Chamberlin, Clark, and Robbins. Most of these enterprising fellows were interested in dairy farming and raising horses.

One ironic example among these migrating Yankees was a young man by the name of Thomas R. Alexander. He was born in Saratoga County, New York in 1823. By 1846 he had followed other New Yorkers to the fallow fields of Prince William County to make a name for himself.

Within two years Alexander had married into a landed local family and won a commission with the Virginia State Militia. When the Civil War broke out he made the decision to go with the Confederate Army. Not all of the relocated Northern dairymen did so.

Alexander served as a First Lieutenant with the 40th Virginia Infantry Regiment. During a clandestine visit to Union-held Prince William County in December 1863, he was arrested as a "dangerous and disloyal person".

The first Union prison Alexander was confined to was known as the Old Capitol Prison. This building was located at the present site of the Supreme Court in Washington,

D.C. The name of the prison came from the use of the building as a substitute Capitol after the British torched Washington in 1814.

Following a short confinement in Washington, Alexander was then moved to the Union Prison at Point Lookout, Maryland. The land is today used as parkland at the confluence of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

In July, 1864, Alexander was ironically transferred to the notorious Elmira Union Prison in his home state of New York. This prison has often been referred to as “the Andersonville of the North” because of the severe living conditions and the bad treatment received by the prisoners.

By October, 1864, Alexander’s health had broken and he was prepared for prisoner exchange at Fort Monroe, Virginia. He died prior to the exchange and the last record available on him is a register of effects of deceased soldiers turned over to the Confederate Army Quartermaster.

Following the war and return of Virginia to the Union, life again went on in Prince William County. By 1884 a young farmer by the name of DeWitt Clinton Alexander was operating a large spread which included a post office called “Minnieville.” The post office was named after his daughter Minnie Alexander, the granddaughter of Lieutenant Thomas R. Alexander, CSA

I came by these little known facts on the origin of Minnieville while doing genealogical research on my family. The amount of detailed information available in the National Archives, Library of Congress, DAR Library, and local Virginiana Rooms concerning our heritage is absolutely amazing.

If you are the least bit interested in your “roots,” you will never find more information on the subject than exists in the Washington area. This is so regardless of what part of the country your family is from. Give it a try.

November 7, 1980

## **THE USS HENDERSON (AP-1)**

If you have an interest in Quantico or the U.S. Marine Corps, a book entitled “Quantico: Crossroads of the Marine Corps” is must reading. This marvelous document was produced by the Marine Corps History and Museums Division in 1978. It is on sale by the Superintendent of Documents, GPO, in paperback.

The cover of this well-written publication shows a photograph taken at Quantico in 1925. In the foreground one sees the magnificent “USS Henderson (AP-1)” docked at the Potomac River pier. This famous old Marine troop ship is named after General Archibald Henderson, one of the most illustrious men raised in Prince William County.

“Archie” Henderson was born January 21, 1783, at Colchester, a small tobacco port town located directly across the Occoquan River from Woodbridge Plantation. The Henderson family built a home in Dumfries shortly after Archie’s birth. His parents are buried in the Lake Montclair area.

After being raised in the Dumfries area by a father who had emigrated from Scotland and became a prominent merchant, young Henderson decided to enter the Marine Corps as a second lieutenant on March 3, 1807. During the War of 1812 he saw action aboard the USS Constitution and emerged as something of a hero for his role in the capture of two British vessels.

Henderson was appointed Commandant of the Marine Corps on October 17, 1820. He served in the field during the Indian Wars and held the post of Commandant for more than 38 years, longer than any other man. Additionally, he was the first general officer appointed in the Marine Corps.

General Henderson died on January 6, 1859, bringing to a close the “Henderson Era” of Marine Corps history. During his term as Commandant he served eleven administrations. His funeral at the Congressional Cemetery was attended by the President of the United States, his cabinet, and ranking officials of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps.

Some fifty-seven years later, the USS Henderson (AP-1) was launched at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in General Henderson’s honor. Miss Genevieve W. Taylor, General Henderson’s great-granddaughter, was the sponsor. The ship was immediately engaged in World War I activities.



The first mission assigned to the new vessel was movement of American troops from New York to France. She was able to carry in her holds 1,500 men and 24 mules. Although the Henderson made many trips across the submarine infested Atlantic, she was never hit.

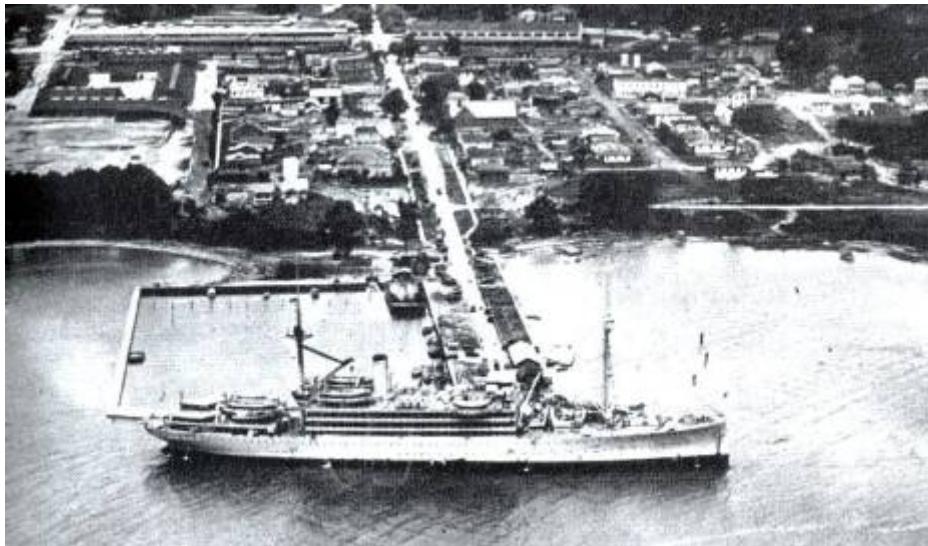
After World War I, the Henderson took up duty as a troop rotation ship for Marine units in the Caribbean. In the conduct of this mission, she carried Marines, their dependents, and supplies to bases in Cuba, Haiti, and other islands. Perhaps most important of all, she participated in mock amphibious invasion exercises that helped develop techniques so important to Marine victories in World War II.

When the big war finally broke in 1941, the USS Henderson took up duty as a transport between California and Hawaii. She made over 20 such voyages with fighting men, civilian passengers, and cargo for the Pacific War effort.

The USS Henderson was decommissioned October 13, 1943, for conversion to a hospital ship. Her new name became "Bountiful" and she cared for a lot of Marine invasion casualties in the Pacific until the end of World War II. After observing the atomic tests at Bikini Atoll, the famous old vessel was decommissioned on September 13, 1946, and was subsequently sold for scrap by the Maritime Commission.

General Henderson was a hell of a Marine and the USS Henderson was quite a ship. Prince William County ought to be proud of both of them.

December 5, 1980



The *USS Henderson*, named after the longest serving Commandant of the Marine Corps, Col. Archibald Henderson, shown docked at the Quantico pier in 1925

## EARLY CATHOLIC SETTLERS

While it is true that the Church of England was the only legal and official religion of the Colony of Virginia, a Catholic settlement was begun on lands now part of Stafford County in the late 1640's. By 1688 Stafford had the unique honor of being represented by the only Catholic member of the House of Burgesses.

Giles Brent, a member of a prominent, Somersetshire Catholic family, migrated from England and played a large part in the early colonization of Maryland. His marriage to the daughter of an Indian Chief incurred the wrath of his cousin, Lord Baltimore, when a claim was made to half of Maryland in his wife's behalf.

Following this curious turn of events, Giles decided to quit Maryland and move across the Potomac River to lands just north of Potomac Creek in present day Stafford County. The new plantation was called "Peace".

In 1651 Giles was joined by his sisters, Margaret and Mary. They took out local land patents and established the first Catholic settlement in Virginia. Margaret was also the first woman in the new colony to ask for "voyce and vote". Thus began a movement for women's suffrage that took two hundred and seventy years to accomplish.

At about this same time, George Brent, the nephew of Giles, also immigrated from England and seated himself on lands along Aquia Creek. His new plantation was known as "Woodstock". George went on to become a prominent surveyor, lawyer, militia captain, and member of the House of Burgesses.

In 1687 George joined with three London businessmen in obtaining a huge grant of 30,000 acres of land from King James II. This parcel was to be a sanctuary for people of all faiths. The tract was known as "Brent Town". Most of the original boundaries are now within present day Prince William County.

The basic settlement plan called for each new colonist to live on an acre of land in Brent Town and own a hundred acre farm in the countryside. Even that generous allocation did not result in settlement of the tract. The land descended to the heirs of the original partners who established the grant in four 7,500 acre parcels.

The 7,500 acre parcel on which Brentsville is located today belonged to Robert Bristow of London, England. This "alien" property was confiscated after the Revolutionary War and escheated to the state of Virginia in 1779. Litigation over the property continued for many years.

In 1820 a decision was made to move the Prince William County Court House from the silted tobacco port of Dumfries to a more populous part of the county which included land owners of the largest political influence. The new site chosen was part of the original Bristow tract of Brent Town.

Two years later, the General Assembly directed that 50 acres of land then “the property of the Commonwealth at the court house in the County of Prince William” be laid out for a new town to be called Brentsville. In the charter seventy lots were plotted, three acres were reserved for a public square, and three were set aside for a tavern.



1820s Plat of the Town of Brentsville

Today, one may view a crucifix commemorating those early Catholic pioneer settlers in Stafford County on U.S. Route 1, just north of Aquia Creek. And the public may also visit a mini-historical park surrounding the old Brentsville Court House located on the northeast corner of the original Brent Town tract.

January 13, 1981

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, GENERAL WASHINGTON**

I am always amazed to find that so many people living in this area have never taken the opportunity to visit “Mount Vernon.” There would be no finer way to celebrate George Washington’ 249th birthday than to make this short and enjoyable trip. If you visit on February 16 the entrance fee will be waived.

When you do visit Mount Vernon keep in mind that the present day exhibit area constitutes only a fraction of the original plantation lands. At peak the Mount Vernon plantation totaled over 8,000 acres.

The plantation was divided into five separate farms, each an independent unit with its own overseer and slaves. These farms were known as: Mansion House Farm, Union Farm, Muddy Hole Farm, Dogue Run Farm, and River Farm.

General Washington did not rely exclusively on tobacco as his main crop. He grew wheat and produced flour and meal from a mill located on Dogue Run. You may visit a reconstruction of the original mill run by the State of Virginia. He also operated a distillery nearby.

It also helps to know a little about the immediate family relationships of George and Martha Washington when you visit Mount Vernon. In addition, this information will help you to understand the “Woodlawn Plantation” and “Custis-Lee Mansion” connections.

George Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, a widow with two children, in 1759. Mount Vernon was their first and only real home. One of the step-children, a girl, died at sixteen years of age at Mount Vernon.

The remaining step-child, a boy, grew to maturity, married, and lived at a plantation called “Abingdon,” now the location of National Airport. Unfortunately, this young man died at Yorktown in 1781 leaving several small children. George and Martha adopted two of these children, a boy and a girl.

The girl, Eleanor Parke Custis (familiarily called Nellie), was later given 2,000 acres of land by General Washington upon her marriage to Col. Fielding Lewis of Fredericksburg. We know this plantation today as Woodlawn near Ft. Belvoir on U.S. Route 1.

The boy, George Washington Parke Custis, married and became the owner of a plantation across from Washington, D.C. Arlington Cemetery now covers much of the original acreage and we know the house today as the “Custis-Lee” Mansion. His only child, a daughter, married General Robert E. Lee.

General Washington was basically a planter at heart and enjoyed the outdoors. In those happy years spent at Mount Vernon prior to the Revolution, there was a great deal of visiting with plantation owners in Prince William County. Numbering among his close friends were: the Lees of Leesylvania, the Blackburns of Rippon Lodge, Parson and Mrs. Weems of Bel Air.

As every school child in America knows, Washington was Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Forces during the Revolutionary War and President of the new United States from 1789 to 1797. He died at his beloved Mount Vernon in 1799. In his will General Washington freed his slaves. His wife followed in death three years later.

In the years following Washington’s death, the farm fell into an unprofitable condition. Large tracts of land were sold off and the buildings deteriorated badly. The Mansion House property was offered to both the State and Federal Governments for preservation. Both refused to buy.

Then one of the finest examples of the involvement of women in historical preservation work took place. Just prior to the Civil War, a small group headed by Miss Ann Pamela Cunningham came to the rescue of the sacred shrine. The organization, known as the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, made an offer of \$200,000 to save the old mansion and 200 acres of the original plantation.

It is a curious fact that the father of our country had no natural children of his own. But he was perhaps the most outstanding Virginian that this world will ever see. Please don’t miss seeing his home — it gets more visitation than any other historical shrine in the United States.

February 13, 1981

## VIP TOURS AND TOURISM

The inclusion of Prince William County in the recent Northern Virginia Legislative Tour was a rare and much needed sign of political maturity for this area. Our delegation to the General Assembly and the Chambers of Commerce in Prince William are to be congratulated for their outstanding work in this regard. I appreciated the opportunity to play a small part in the narration of the tour.

By every reasonable measure of effectiveness this tour process seems to have been marked a success. In a February 11, 1981 letter, Lieutenant Governor Robb said that he had heard nothing but praise from the downstate members of the General Assembly who participated in the tour. The goal of increasing understanding and awareness of the Northern Virginia area may well have been achieved.

In prior visits by state officials and legislators to the counties of Arlington and Fairfax, and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church in 1960 and 1970 each participant was given newly printed books on area history. The 1980 visit was no exception to that tradition and ample historical resource materials were supplied to the visitors.

On this visit the Governor, his department heads, and members of the General Assembly saw a lot of new concrete, glass and steel high- rise construction to the north of Prince William County. But the tour also took the time to visit such sacred historical spots as Custis-Lee Mansion and Mount Vernon. A fair amount of time was spent in an old seaport chartered the same day as Dumfries — it is now known as the City of Alexandria.

When Prince William received its turn at bat with the six busloads of dignitaries, we had the opportunity to show them our County from Manassas to Quantico. It has always seemed to me that these two places have the highest national recognition factor of any of our communities thanks to the Manassas Civil War connection and the importance of Quantico in the total Marine Corps experience.

In addition to pointing out the two main corporate tax revenue producers in our area, i.e., IBM and VEPCO, an effort was also made to acquaint the visitors with some of the problems associated with being a bedroom community in a rapidly growing metropolitan area. Mentioning that there is no four lane road connecting eastern and western parts of Prince William County raised more than a few eyebrows. Hearing of rush hour traffic jams extending bumper-to-bumper for over twenty miles seemed to leave them at the threshold of complete disbelief.

Not to be outdone by our neighbors to the north, a good amount of effort went into advising our visitors of the historical significance of Prince William County. Since Virginia will celebrate the bicentennial of the Battle of Yorktown this October, it seemed appropriate to dwell on the Revolutionary War ties of the area.

As we moved down Davis Ford Road from Manassas, the location of the old troop trail cut through Hoadly and Dale City was pointed out. This interior road was ordered built by General Washington to move French and American forces through the County to Yorktown in 1781.



Bacon Race Church near the Old Troop Trail in 1937

In the process of taking the tour through Dale City, an excellent example of a modern planned residential community, the location of Neabsco Mills was also pointed out. This old colonial iron manufacturing site along Neabsco Creek Was used to produce material for use in the Revolutionary War.

As the tour buses entered U.S. Route 1 and headed south to Quantico, an opportunity was presented to provide the group with some background on the historical significance of the new Leesylvania State Park. This park will mark the birthplace of General “Light-Horse Harry” Lee, Revolutionary War hero and Governor of the State of Virginia.

There is no doubt in my mind that the day spent in Prince William County by the Legislative Tour Group left an indelible impression on their minds. It included the presence of demonstrators at the UOSA Facility — the first such activity the group had encountered in the three day visit to Northern Virginia. In its own special way this was a positive feature on the tour.

But the highlight of the entire time spent in Prince William had to be the outstanding ceremony provided at the Quantico Marine Base. The luncheon and rousing military activities provided by Lieutenant General Carey were superb. No finer ending could have been provided the Governor, his executives, and members of the General Assembly as they completed their tour of Northern Virginia and returned to the Holy City of Richmond.

In talking with members of the VIP tour group I was reminded of the fact that so many folks in other parts of Virginia have tended to overlook our ties with the great heritage of the Commonwealth. We suffer from a lack of visibility and thoughtful promotion. Prince William County deserves better.

The Prince William County Chamber of Commerce has recommended that the Board of Supervisors establish a countywide Office of Tourism Development. Leslie Eastwood has worked tirelessly on this proposal for over 18 months. This matter will again come before the Board of Supervisors for action in the next few days.

Tourism is big business in the State of Virginia and brings in big bucks. Prince William County ought to bring a professional approach to the matter of getting a bigger piece of that tax revenue pie.

March 6, 1981



## THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL

We in Prince William County are fortunate to live so close to the Nation's Capital for many reasons. Chief among them is the opportunity to visit at our leisure so many fine tourist attractions. You may have visited the White House, Capitol Building, or Supreme Court, but have you visited the National Cathedral?

As you approach Washington, D.C. from Virginia you will see the magnificent Gothic structure of the Cathedral looming on the horizon at the west side of the City. The top of the *Gloria in Excelsis* tower is the highest point in Washington. At 676 feet above sea level it is closer to heaven than the Washington Monument.

If you visit the National Cathedral as a Virginian, the experience will have a very special significance for you. The structure is replete with honors to great men in the history of the Old Dominion.

The greatest Virginian of all, General George Washington, was the first person to plan a "great church for national purposes in the capital city." Almost a century after the death of Washington the U.S. Congress finally got around to granting a charter creating the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral foundation. In 1907 the foundation stone was laid.

Like some of the old Anglican Churches in Virginia, the imposing structure is built in the shape of a cross. Its architecture is pure fourteenth-century Gothic. When completed, it will be the sixth largest Cathedral in the world.

The huge structure of the Cathedral is completely devoid of structural steel. Amazingly, intricate flying buttresses balance the outward thrust of the limestone walls. The interior contains soaring arches, delicate vaulting, stately piers, intricate wrought iron, and beautifully stained glass windows.

As you walk through the principal entrance of the Cathedral you come into a huge nave. It is one-tenth of a mile in length and ends at the high altar. Construction of the nave was completed during the American Bicentennial year. Both sides of the nave are lined with memorial bays. Appropriately, one bay is dedicated to our first Chief Executive, President George Washington. Another bay is jointly dedicated to Generals Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson. Stained glass windows in this bay contain scenes from the lives of those famous Confederate leaders.

Only one President of the United States is buried in Washington, D.C. and he is a Virginian. President Woodrow Wilson is entombed on the first floor of the Cathedral. The stained glass windows of the Wilson Bay depict war and peace.

Yet another memorial bay contains stained glass windows that honor the Lewis and Clarke expedition to the northwest territory. The impressive marble floor of the Cathedral contains inset seals of the fifty states and the District of Columbia, the great seal of the United States, and the seal of the Cathedral. And there is even a War Memorial Chapel that serves as a tribute to all men and women who served in our armed forces.

When you do visit the National Cathedral please do not be in a rush. Articulate and well-informed tour guides are available to show you around. Take the time to see the crypt floor level and walk around “the close.” This is what the grounds upon which a cathedral is located are called.

The close for the National Cathedral covers some fifty-seven acres. It contains, among other things, a medieval walled garden, herb cottage, and greenhouse. Nearby is also a fine equestrian statue of George Washington.

On Saturdays at 4:30 p.m. the carillon is played. Organ recitals are often held on Sunday afternoon. The ten-bell peal can be heard following the eleven o’clock service every Sunday.

The National Cathedral is located at the intersection of Massachusetts and Wisconsin Avenues. You haven’t seen all of the Nation’s Capital until you have toured this imposing piece of architecture. Bet you can’t stop at just one visit.

April 6, 1981

## THE MONUMENT TO WASHINGTON

Good news — the National Park Service has again opened the 898 steps of the Washington Monument to the public.

This graceful monument to the greatest of Virginia's sons has an incredible history that too few folks are aware of. It has two cornerstones, one over 150 feet in the air. At one point a construction stone from the Pope was seized by a very unpleasant political party and dumped into the Potomac River. The construction period spanned 36 years of America's growing pains and caused the obelisk to take on something of a two-toned look.

As early as 1783 the Continental Congress passed resolutions planning a memorial to honor General George Washington's leadership during the American Revolution. The idea at that point was to erect an equestrian statue on a marble base, but nothing came of it.

Following President Washington's death in 1799, the U.S. Congress resolved to build a different kind of monument to his memory. The idea at that point was to construct a great marble and granite mausoleum in the form of a pyramid. The structure was to be 100 feet square and of suitable height. An appropriation for construction was passed by the House but failed in the Senate.

After a long series of Congressional debacles, action was taken by a group of public-spirited citizens to propose that the monument be constructed by private subscription. Thus began the Washington National Monument Society which called on all patriotic citizens to subscribe one dollar. Another outstanding Virginian, Chief Justice John Marshall, was elected as the Society's first president.

Contributions moved slowly and in the first 14 years only \$87,000 was collected. But work began anyway and a nationwide contest was held for a proper design. The winning layout was submitted by architect Robert Mills. His plan bears little resemblance to the current monument. He had in mind a Greek temple 250 feet in diameter and 100 feet high. Beneath the building were to be catacombs for the remains of Presidents and other great deceased Americans. A central shaft was to rise 600 feet only to end in a blunt point.

Since Mills' plan was so complicated and money so scarce, a decision was made to concentrate on the central shaft and catch up with the rest later. In 1848, permission was obtained from Congress to choose a site and begin the construction. The original

cornerstone ceremony took place on July 4, 1848 with President Polk in attendance. The cornerstone weighed in at over 12 tons and contained a copy of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, 1840 U.S. Census, and all coins from the half-dime to the golden eagle.

Construction went well for the next 6 years and a height of over 150 feet was reached. At this point, the citizens in the State of Alabama offered to send prepared stones in place of cash donations. The Society liked the idea and invited contributions from everyone, including foreign countries. Among the stones arriving from abroad was one from the Pope. Now begins a most curious period.

In the 1850's this Country gave birth to a faction called the American Party, more popularly known as the "Know Nothings." The group was anti-foreign and anti-Catholic. When the party leaders heard that the Pope had sent a stone for the Monument they came unglued. On the night of March 5, 1854 some of the members slipped quietly into the Monument grounds and stole the marble block that came from the Vatican. The stone was apparently dumped into the Potomac River and was never recovered.

A great deal of excitement followed the news that the Pope's stone had been stolen and disposed of. There were several near riots which overflowed to Europe. There was a suggestion that the Vatican be asked to send a new stone, but nothing seems to have come of it.



Washington Monument around 1860

Based on this scandal and the adverse economic cycle in the country at that time, contributions to the Monument fund fell off to a trickle. The Society then decided to ask Congress for an appropriation of \$200,000 to continue construction. Before the measure

could be passed the “Know Nothings” struck again. On the eve of Washington’s birthday in 1855, a group broke into the Society’s offices, stole the books and records, and elected themselves the new officers.

After taking over the Monument Grounds by force and replacing the construction superintendent with their own man, the “Know Nothings” sent out an appeal for contributions to complete the structure. On their own, they added two layers of stone to the Monument from materials that had previously been discarded at the site as unsuitable. These layers had to be taken off when sanity was restored three years later.

When the Civil War broke out all activity on construction came to an end. The stump of the Monument stood dumpy and desolate for 20 years. This is the reason that the Monument has a clearly distinguishable line at the lower quarter level.

The second cornerstone was laid at the 150 foot level in 1880. It was now time for President Hayes to officiate. Work finally progressed steadily and four years later the 3,300 pound capstone was positioned. The final touch was an aluminum tip, which was the largest piece of the comparatively rare metal cast up to that time. When completed in 1884, the 555 foot Monument was the highest building ever erected.

Although the Pope’s stone was stolen, there are 202 tribute blocks from various states and organizations set along the stairway in the shaft’s interior. Displayed are contributions from the battlefields of Bunker Hill and Long Island, the ruins of ancient Carthage, and the former tomb of Napoleon at St. Helena.

So, if you didn’t get a chance to walk up the steps of the Washington Monument when you were younger, you now have the opportunity to walk down them with more dignity courtesy of the National Park Service. Knowing a little more about the tortured history of construction may make your visit a bit more interesting.

May 1, 1981

## **THE WASHINGTON-ROCHAMBEAU BICENTENNIAL MARCH**

Celebration of the American Bicentennial in Virginia will come to an end this fall with an extravaganza planned to honor the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown. The Revolutionary War lasted six long years and essentially ended with a decisive victory over the British at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781.

Quite a number of special activities and exhibits are planned in the Yorktown area in the next few months. On September 5, 1981, there will be a Battle of the Virginia Capes celebration with an international naval review scheduled. This event will mark the 200th anniversary of the naval battle in which the French fleet, under the command of Admiral Francois de Grasse, gained control of the Chesapeake Bay. This victory at sea was a major factor in sealing the doom of the British land forces at Yorktown.

Perhaps one of the most unusual and ambitious archaeological projects in the country is now being planned for the Yorktown area. The Virginia Marine Research Center for Archaeology received the money needed to go ahead with a commitment on the so-called "Cofferdam Project." The Virginia General Assembly has also provided resources to help with the effort along with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The plans call for the construction of a 45x90 foot wall, or coffer-dam, to be built around one of the British ships sunk off the Yorktown waterfront during the 1781 battle. Water within the cofferdam will then be filtered crystal clear, thus allowing divers to conduct delicate excavation work without being hampered by debris and tricky currents.

Planning also calls for the design and construction of a pier from the Yorktown waterfront to the cofferdam which will allow the public to walk out to the project site and see the work in process. It is hoped that government cutbacks in various funding programs will not jeopardize the construction of the pier in time for the October celebration in Yorktown.

Very early in the Bicentennial Celebration, the Virginia Highway and Transportation Commission designated U.S. Route 1 in Prince William County as part of the official Washington-Rochambeau Route. This action was taken to commemorate the journey of General Washington and Comte de Rochambeau south to Yorktown in 1781. The route generally followed the old Potomac Path and facilitated carriages over the ferry on the lower Occoquan River.

In the summer of 1781, Washington met with his French ally, Rochambeau, outside New York City. Their considered judgment at that time was that the British hold on New York was too strong to break. It seemed more functional to go after the British force under General Cornwallis in Virginia. Washington was also counting on the French fleet moving into the Chesapeake Bay from the West Indies.

Preparations were then made to move the American and French forces down the coast to the Yorktown area. Prince William County was destined to play an important role in moving these troops southward. General Washington called upon the elder Colonel Henry Lee, Prince William Militia Commander, to open a route through the County for the movement of cavalry, artillery, wagons, and cattle belonging to the American and French Armies.

In September, 1781, General Washington ordered that a new route be cut across the upper Occoquan River, thereby avoiding heavy troop use of the inconvenient ferry operating between the port of Colchester and Woodbridge Plantation. Colonel Lee engaged his militia in pioneer duty that opened a road from Wolf Run Shoals on the Occoquan River to the port town of Dumfries. For this duty the local militia was excused from further service in the Yorktown Campaign.

Many portions of that original troop road still survive today following heavy use in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. After crossing the upper ford on the Occoquan River the road winds past Bacon Race Church, through Hoadly, meanders through the heart of Dale City, crosses over Minnieville, and winds its way past Lake Montclair to Route 234 above Dumfries.

As an important part of the Yorktown Celebration there will be a recreation of the Washington-Rochambeau march. Present plans call for nearly 800 soldiers and over 400 camp followers in five regiments to move from Newport, Rhode Island to Yorktown, Virginia during the period October 9-16, 1981.

Parades, ceremonies, and educational programs are being planned in towns and cities all along the route. One of the largest events will be in Philadelphia where President Reagan will be invited to review the passing troops. In Virginia special events are now scheduled for Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and Richmond.

Prince William County ought to give consideration to some participation in this exciting Washington-Rochambeau event. Not many counties along the way can claim two Yorktown routes — one for the high ranking brass and one for the field troops and cattle. Involvement by Historic Dumfries, Inc., and the Prince William Park Authority at Locust Shade Park would seem to have the most potential since they are both located directly on the Washington-Rochambeau Route. The festivities are being coordinated by the Washington-Rochambeau March Committee, Armory of Mounted Commands, 1051 North Main Street, Providence, R.I., 02904.

June 2, 1981

## RECOGNITION OF LOCAL HISTORY

Some counties in Virginia have been very successful in naming their schools in a way that reflects local historical background. For example, Arlington County has named many of her schools for famous Virginians or homes in which they lived. Other counties have done the same sort of thing in identifying major streets and highways.

Unfortunately, Prince William County seems to have a knack for confusion and chaos in naming new public facilities, especially schools. The County Board of Supervisors ought to establish a policy on this process. To the extent that it can help in identifying historically significant names for consideration, the Prince William County Historical Commission would be happy to help in any new procedure adopted.

There are a number of famous sons of Prince William County that have not been honored locally by having a public facility named for them. Examples that come to mind are:

- *William Grayson* — Local lawyer, Revolutionary War hero, and first of the Virginians to be sent to the newly formed U.S. Senate.
- “*Light-Horse Harry*” *Lee* — Outstanding Revolutionary War cavalry commander, Governor of Virginia, U.S. Congressman, and father of General Robert E. Lee.
- *Alexander Henderson* — Local merchant, creator of chain stores in America, and father of Archibald Henderson, first general officer in the U.S. Marine Corps.
- *Richard S. Ewell* — A professional soldier with strong family ties to Prince William County who served as a Lieutenant General in Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, replacing “Stonewall” Jackson as Corps Commander in 1863.

It is interesting to note that in 1792 both William Grayson and “Light-Horse Harry” Lee had counties in the State of Virginia named in their honor for meritorious service in the Revolution. However, their home county has done but little to perpetuate their memory.



With the new roads being constructed in the Dale City area, a rare opportunity is now afforded to recognize historical people and places associated with that vicinity. One good example of a historical place that should not be overlooked is Neabsco Mills.

The first John Tayloe of the colony of Virginia opened iron surface mines along the present day border of Dale City and by 1737 had in operation the famous Neabsco Iron Furnace. This site provided equipment to Virginia's naval and military forces during the Revolution. This industrial area, known as Neabsco Mills, was given post office - status at one point during the last century.

The Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge Campus, is again offering a summer course entitled "Discover Prince William County". It is being presented as a part of the Prince William Summer Festival. A great deal of information will be provided about the roots of our County.

As originally planned, the course is family oriented and costs \$15 a person or \$30 for the entire family. Sessions will be held on Wednesdays, July 8-29, from 7:30 to 9:00 PM. Subjects covered will be as follows:

- July 8 — "Overview of the County's History"
- July 15 — "Excerpts from Early Court Records"
- July 22 — "Rippon Lodge"
- July 29 — "Our County's Black Heritage"

The speakers will be R. Jackson Ratcliffe, Lee Lansing, Admiral Richard B. Black, and the Reverend C.N. Bennett. Having a chance to hear these folks is a rare treat that you ought not miss.

Incidentally, there has been more than a passing interest expressed about the origin of the name "Smoketown." Following the Civil War a great deal of timbering went on along the Neabsco Creek watershed. No less than three boat landings existed on the Neabsco to handle the shipping of firewood, lumber, barrel staves, railroad cross ties, etc.

The hundreds of acres of thickly wooded lands located on the north side of Neabsco Creek, through which Smoketown Road runs today, was at one time owned by Washington lumber and firewood companies. During the period that heavy logging operations went on in the area a heavy cloud of smoke hung over the crags and hollows due to continuous burning of brush. Thus the name Smoketown was given the area.

Prince William County abounds in big and little pockets of history and folklore — let's not let them be forgotten.

June 29, 1981

## THE RAPE OF THE OCCOQUAN

To truly appreciate the worthwhileness of wilderness conservation and historical preservation, one has but to study the past and present states of the Occoquan River and the Town of Occoquan. The rape of the glen adjacent to the Town of Occoquan by water dams, quarry operations, water storage tanks, and other hideous man-made constructions is enough to boggle the mind.

As far back as 1760, people were struck by the natural beauty of the Occoquan area and were moved to write artful descriptions of the environs. One traveler of the period observed the following:

“It was a delightful valley about two miles in length and a quarter of one in breadth, between high and craggy mountains covered with chamoedaphnes or wild ivy in full flower. Through the middle of the valley glided a rivulet about eight yards wide, extremely lucid, and breaking into innumerable cascades: and in different parts of it stood small clumps of evergreens, such as myrtles, cedars, pines and various other sorts.

The action of the water in the course of ages has washed the earth from the channel, and the rocks lie in its bed in every rude variety of position. The banks of the river here present every where jutting rocks and sometimes great precipices. The pine finds sustenance among the crevices and gives a relief and a grace to scenery that would otherwise be savage ... The traveler moving along the plains of lower Virginia, his eye accustomed to the tame prospect of the alluvial country, suddenly finds himself in a ravine, descending to a hill, the precipitous ridges of which inspire him with terror.”

With this word picture clearly in your mind, you ought to walk the area today on the Prince William County side of the Occoquan between the footbridge and the new dam. Look across the river at the deep quarry operation and try to imagine the profile of terrifying Mount Vision, a prominent landmark during Civil War operations in the vicinity. What a change “progress” has made to this area during the Twentieth Century.

Man seems always to have been inclined to make use of the Occoquan Glen in industrial ways. Early Indians used the natural boulders of the area for making mortars to

crush meal. English colonists took cobblestones from the riverbed for street construction in their new towns.

It appears that the area really got on the map in 1729, two years prior to the establishment of Prince William County, when “King” Carter built a landing there to ship copper ore to England. A little later, in 1736, a public tobacco warehouse was constructed nearby.

John Ballendine is credited with starting a serious industrial complex at the fall line of the Occoquan River in 1750. He constructed forges, water grist mills, tolling mills, bake houses, saw mills, storehouses, and dwellings.

By 1828, Occoquan had one of the first cotton mills in Virginia. The structure was built by Nathaniel Janney. Within the four story building ran 1,000 spindles. The mill was later destroyed by the Union Army during the Civil War. The massive flour mill had a 150 barrels per day capacity.

Things were going so good in the early part of the Nineteenth Century that plans were made to construct a turnpike between Occoquan and Warrenton. This project was later abandoned in favor of a proposed canal to improve the navigation along the Occoquan River and Broad Run up to Thoroughfare Gap. All of these plans went down the drain with the construction of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, now known as the Southern Line.

Prior to the Civil War, ship building began in the Town of Occoquan. The industry specialized in schooners and long boats which were used for trade up and down the Potomac River. In addition to cotton mill products and flour from the grist mill, trade was beginning to take place in cord wood, fish, and river ice.

Following the Civil War, there was a phenomenal boom in the growth of the City of Washington. Trade along the Occoquan increased dramatically to supply this new market. A stone dyke was built in 1880 to protect the vessels using the facilities in the Town of Occoquan. A portion of this dyke is still visible today.

The first commercial ice storage house in this area was constructed in Occoquan. River ice in the area was harvested every winter and stored for shipment to Washington. Ice cut further up the Potomac was in danger of contamination by sewage. As Washington grew, people seemed to dump every kind of thing into the Potomac.

Even into the Twentieth Century fisheries and packing houses for herring, shad, and sturgeon lined the shores of the Occoquan River. It is recorded that as many as twenty fishing schooners were tied up at a time in the area. There was even an oyster shucking house and turtle farm in operation. Wood products shipped increased to include wooden piles for use in bridge and wharf construction, firewood, railroad ties, and barrel staves.

Thanks to efforts by local merchants and Historic Occoquan, Inc., the Town of Occoquan is now getting the recognition it so richly deserves. Great care must be taken in the future to protect, the unique historical character of the area. One can only hope that some way can be found to save the centerpiece of the Town of Occoquan, magnificent old Rockledge, from the jaws of destruction.

July 30, 1981



View of Occoquan with Rockledge on the hill around 1935

## **“LIGHT-HORSE HARRY” LEE’S TOMB**

Prince William County has now moved an important step closer to having the new Leesylvania State Park on-line with the contract award for site planning work to Land Planning and Design, Inc., of Charlottesville, Virginia. This firm has done outstanding master planning on other parks in Virginia.

The creation of Leesylvania State Park will honor the County’s most prominent son “Light-Horse Harry” Lee. He was born at Leesylvania Plantation, Prince William County, in 1756. At the age of nineteen he was commissioned a captain in the Virginia Cavalry. For his outstanding performance during the Revolutionary War, he was awarded a Congressional Medal. No other American officer below the rank of general was so honored.

Following the Revolution, “Light-Horse Harry” was elected to the Continental Congress, became the Governor of Virginia, and entered the United States Congress. As a Congressman, he wrote the funeral oration declaring George Washington to be “First in War, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” But perhaps most important of all his contributions, he was the father of General Robert E. Lee.

In past columns, I have attempted to identify a few of the historical sites in Virginia that connect with the Prince William County branch of the famous Lee family. For example:

- *Sully Plantation* in Fairfax County — This subsidiary plantation was originally operated by “Light-Horse Harry’s” father from his mansion at Leesylvania Plantation. Nearly destroyed in building Dulles Airport, it is now open as a park.
- *Matildaville* in Great Falls Park, Virginia — This ancient canal company town was named for “Light-Horse Harry’s” first wife. She died in childbirth. The canal company was founded in 1784 with George Washington as its first president.
- *Shirley Plantation* on the James River — This lovely old home is located on State Route 5 below Richmond. It was the home of “Light-Horse Harry’s” second wife, Ann Hill Carter. She was the mother of Robert E. Lee.
- *Stratford Hall Plantation* on the lower Potomac River in Westmoreland County — This rare old operating plantation is owned and maintained by the

Robert E. Lee Memorial Association. It was here that Robert E. Lee was born in 1807.

- *Custis-Lee Mansion* in Arlington Cemetery — This 1,100 acre plantation was the home of Robert E. Lee at the beginning of the Civil War. The best painting available of “Light-Horse Harry” is now displayed in the mansion.

Not to be overlooked in a pleasure trip to nearby special places connected to the Prince William County Lee line is the beautiful small southern town of Lexington, Virginia. It is here that “Light-Horse Harry” is entombed — along with Robert E. Lee and “Stonewall” Jackson.

After the Civil War was ended in 1865, Robert E. Lee became the president of Washington College in Lexington. This distinguished private non-denominational school traces its origins back to 1749. The central group of campus buildings has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

The chief Lexington attraction for a citizen of Prince William County should be the Lee Chapel located on the Washington and Lee University campus. The building was constructed during Robert E. Lee’s administration. After his death in 1870, the Chapel was extended to provide a crypt and vaults for Lee and members of his immediate family. “Light-Horse Harry’s” remains were moved to this site in 1913.

While in Lexington, you will want to visit the impressive campus of the Virginia Military Institute. It is the nation’s oldest state-supported military college and dates back to 1839. This campus has been designated a National Historic District. The George C. Marshall Research Library and Museum is also located here, Marshall graduated from this post as a cadet in the class of 1901.

Lexington is easily reached off Interstate 81 at the U.S. 60 exit. The Lee Chapel is maintained on behalf of the American people by Washington and Lee University and the Virginia Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy. Like most other historical attractions in this enchanting place, there is no admission charge.



In addition to giving their names to the fine old University in Lexington, there is a family connection between Generals George Washington and Robert E. Lee. Martha Dandridge married Daniel Parke Custis when she was nineteen years old. They produced two surviving children, Widowed at the age of twenty-six, Martha married George Washington.

Martha’s son died of camp fever during the siege of Yorktown in 1781. General Washington, having no children of his own, adopted the two youngest grandchildren.

One of these grandchildren was George Washington Parke Custis, the builder of the plantation at Arlington Cemetery. His daughter, Mary Randolph, married Robert E. Lee at the mansion in 1831.

So you see, there is a relationship between these two famous Virginians of different generations through Martha Washington. Her grandson, the adopted son of George Washington, was the father-in-law of Robert E. Lee.

Virginia genealogy was never meant to be a simple subject to master.

September 7, 1981

## YORKTOWN VICTORY CELEBRATION

On October 19, 1781, General George Washington sent the following message to the President of the Continental Congress:

“I have the honor to inform Congress, that a Reduction of the British Army under the Command of Lord Cornwallis, is most happily effected. The unremitting ardor which actuated the Officers and Soldiers in the combined Army on this occasion, has principally led to this important Event, at an earlier period than my most sanguine Hopes had induced me to expect.”

For all intents and purposes the Revolutionary War ended with that victory over the British at Yorktown, Virginia. Some 7,247 British officers and soldiers, along with 840 seamen, surrendered at Yorktown and Gloucester Point. The French were invaluable allies in this effort.

Celebration of the American Bicentennial will essentially come to an end in Virginia with a four-day observance of the Yorktown victory. Activities will run from October 16-19, 1981.

Some 4,000 uniformed soldiers from historic military units from the 13 original colonies will encamp at Yorktown during the festivities. Many French tourists, representing patriotic societies and military organizations, are expected to be in attendance.

The Yorktown Bicentennial will be the third such commemoration by the United States. As a part of the centennial in 1881, the cornerstone was laid for the imposing Victory Monument at Yorktown. The sesquicentennial (150th Anniversary) was held in 1931 with some 40,000 Americans in attendance.

Major activities for this year's celebration will include a re-enactment of the first passenger train trip from Richmond to Yorktown. This event will take place on Friday, October 16. Governor John Dalton and members of the General Assembly will ride a special train to Lee Hall. Special opening ceremonies will be held on the battlefield to begin the festivities.

The second day of the celebration, Saturday, October 17, will honor the role of soldiers and sailors in the 1781 victory. The Secretary of Defense has been asked to preside over events of that day which will be known as “Military Day”.



On the third day, Sunday, October 18, religious services and exhibits of colonial life-style and agriculture are scheduled. This day of prayer and thanksgiving will include an inter-faith service on the battlefield.

The final day, Monday, October 19, will include a re-enactment of the British surrender. President Reagan is expected to follow the example set by President Hayes in 1881 and President Hoover in 1931 by being the climatic speaker of the celebration.

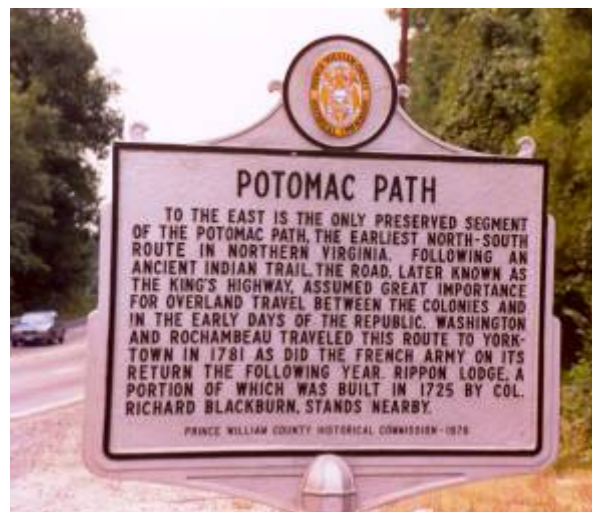
So, if you have thus far failed to get into the celebration of America's Bicentennial this will be your last big chance. Do not miss the 12-minute film shown by the visitor's center at the Colonial National Historical Park. It is a brilliant piece dealing with the colorful grounding of arms by the defeated British forces.

When you visit the famous battlefield at Yorktown, do not fail to consider the contributions made by the citizens of Prince William County to the Revolutionary War. Recall such leaders as "Light-Horse Harry" Lee and William Grayson, many other officers, and numerous soldiers.

Two roads in Prince William County were used to move officers, men, and supplies south to Yorktown in September, 1781. One of these roads was designated as part of the Washington-Rochambeau Route by the Virginia Highway and Transportation Commission very early in the Bicentennial celebration. The route generally follows present day U.S. Route 1.

The second and least known troop road was ordered cut by General Washington on the upper Occoquan River. This alternative route was needed to avoid heavy troop and supply train use of the inconvenient ferry operation on the lower Occoquan at Woodbridge. This road runs through Dale City, Minnieville, Lake Montclair, and Dumfries.

October 9, 1981



Prince William County Historical Commission marker

## **HAPPY 250TH ANNIVERSARY, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY**

To honor the 250th Anniversary of Prince William County, the Historical Commission wanted to relocate the old stone monument marking the first courthouse location in Woodbridge so as to allow the public better accessibility. The native rock marker had been replaced improperly following the construction of the new U.S. Route 1 bridge over the Occoquan River a few years ago.

The successful movement of the original courthouse marker came about as a result of the tenacious efforts of Kevin Stockdale, a member of the County Historical Commission. Special thanks are also owed to Messrs. Lycom and Partenheimer of the County Public Works Department for their assistance in the project.

It was with great pomp and circumstance that the Woodbridge courthouse monument was initially dedicated as the centerpiece of the 1931 Prince William County Bicentennial Celebration. In perhaps the last great act of unity between the eastern and western parts of the County, a strikingly patriotic program was performed for some 1,200 spectators on September 25, 1931.

From newspaper accounts of the period, it appears that a great deal of hard work went into the celebration of the County Bicentennial. A committee was formed with Wade H. Ellis, the restorer of Rippon Lodge, as chairman. Other important officers included Roger D. Wharton, G. Raymond Ratcliffe, Mrs. Annie Shumate, and Miss Beatrix Clark.

The Woodbridge courthouse marker was constructed of rock taken from the old cotton factory ruins located in the Town of Occoquan. The 1828 cotton factory had been destroyed by Union soldiers during the Civil War. A plaque on the monument indicates that one hundred and fifty yards east of the marker stood the first courthouse of Prince William County organized in 1731.

As a result of efforts by Reverend A. H. Shumate, the Quantico Marine Band played at the Bicentennial festivities and the citizens of Prince William County were allowed to picnic on the historic old Corgin Thompson farm. School children from all over the County participated in special vignettes of history.

Mr. Linsey Dawson, Chairman of the Prince William Board of Supervisors, accepted the courthouse marker on behalf of the County. Mr. Howard W. Smith, U.S. Congressman, 8th District, was one of the several speakers at the dedication.

One of the speakers had the presence of mind to comment on the wonderful work done by the women of the country and cited specifically work done by the Ladies' Association in preserving Mount Vernon. One could now also add to that example the work done to save Stratford Hall, the birthplace of Robert E. Lee, and numerous other projects undertaken by the Daughters of the American Revolution and United Daughters of the Confederacy.

In order to improve public access to the Woodbridge courthouse marker, the stone monument is now clustered with three metal highway historical plaques just north of the Thornton Gas Station on U.S. Route 1. There is a small pull-off area provided along the highway.

The other markers in the cluster deal with the history of the Occoquan River, early land patents and the origin of Woodbridge Plantation, and the establishment of Prince William County. Local museums and the Chamber of Commerce have available copies of a Prince William County historical marker guide that gives the location and messages contained on other markers throughout the area.

When the Woodbridge courthouse monument was commissioned in 1931, reference was made to a \$450 sum that was to be made available for landscaping, sidewalks, benches, etc. These improvements were intended to make the Woodbridge site the "most unusual marker between Richmond and Washington on the Jefferson Davis Highway (U.S. Route 1)."

It would be wonderful if the current Board of County Supervisors could find out where that \$450 went over the years. Most certainly it did not go for landscaping, sidewalks, benches, etc., in the vicinity of the courthouse monument.

Perhaps some element of the County government, patriotic group, or public minded flower and garden club will step forward and help reach the worthy goal established by the Bicentennial Committee over 50 years ago. Prince William County and cluttered U.S. Route 1 would be the better for it.

November 9, 1981

## THE HISTORIC TREASURY

In previous columns I have commented on how lucky we in Prince William County are to live so close to the Nation's Capital. Not only does our strategic location make life interesting by being so near the center of world power, but it also gives us a great number of historical places to visit.

A good number of local folks have taken the opportunity to visit the Capitol Building and tour the White House. A few even realize that the original building stone for both of these important structures came from government quarry operations located in old Stafford County.

But very few people have visited the third oldest Federally occupied building in Washington — the Treasury Building. It is located next door to the White House on five acres of ground bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, 15th Street, Alexander Hamilton Place, and East Executive Avenue.

The Treasury Department was organized in 1789 by act of the First U.S. Congress. The Secretary of Treasury ranks second in the President's Cabinet after the State Department.

The first U.S. Treasury Building was torched by the British in 1814. The current building was built in several separate wings during the period 1836 to 1869.

During the Civil War period, the Treasury Building was the point of last defense for the seat of Union government. The basement was literally converted into a fortress. Federal troops were permanently billeted in the south wing of the building.

When the famous Confederate General Jubal A. Early attempted to enter Washington in 1864 by attacking Fort Stevens, a trained force of Treasury officials and employees left their desks and marched to the aid of the Union Army. President Lincoln visited the fort during this encounter and was shot at by a Confederate sniper for his trouble.

The following year, one of the offices on the third floor of the Treasury Building was used by President Andrew Johnson immediately after Lincoln was assassinated. The space was used for 55 days in order to allow Mrs. Lincoln ample opportunity to move her family from the White House.

In the north end of the Treasury Building there is a marvelous two story hall called the Cash Room. The walls, window frames, and door areas are built of solid marble. This impressive structure was used for President Grant's first inaugural ball.

During World War II, the massive vaults in the Treasury Building were provisioned and kept in round-the-clock readiness as a bomb shelter for President Franklin B. Roosevelt. The old building was dedicated as a National Historic Landmark on October 18, 1972.

Always remember when you visit the White House or Treasury Building area that early planners had the entire official Federal City facing the canal that flowed through downtown Washington. That canal is now filled and we know the route today as Constitution Avenue. You can still see one of the old lock houses at Seventeenth Street. So, the south entrances of the White House and Treasury Building are the true front entrances.

If you will take a ten dollar bill from your, billfold and look on the back of it, you will see an old engraving of the Treasury Building showing the southern exposure. By looking closely, you can also see the statue of Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, which is located on the south patio of the building. His picture is, of course, on the front of the ten dollar bill.

There is a Treasury Department museum open to the public at the East Executive Avenue entrance to the Treasury Building. It is located directly across from the east entrance of the White House. It contains interesting exhibits on the various elements of the Treasury, e.g., Internal Revenue Service, Secret Service, Customs Service, Mint, Controller of the Currency, etc.

Perhaps the most fascinating Treasury tour to take can be found at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, located at 14th and C Streets, S.W., just as you enter Washington from Virginia. Here you can see the process that produces paper currency. After the tour, you can buy sheets of dollar bills in blocks of 16 and 32 at the unique gift shop.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Because we are located so near the "tourist mecca" of Washington, D.C., Prince William County has a tremendous potential for sharing in a major windfall of revenue dollars from tourism. Arlington County has been able to generate more tourism dollars than any other spot in Virginia, due in large measure to its nearness to the Capital City.

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors is to be congratulated for funding a new Tourism Council. The selection of Bernadette Plunkett to lead this professional effort, working with the County Chambers of Commerce, should pay dividends in the months ahead. Bernadette seems to possess the right mix of expertise and enthusiasm needed to get the program moving.

December 8, 1981

## **A NEED FOR MORE PUBLIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

Most of us are aware of Henry Ford's contribution to America's affair with the automobile. But few know the profound contribution he made to the historic preservation movement by pioneering the concept of museum villages in the United States.

Henry Ford was born near Detroit, Michigan just a few days following the awful Civil War battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg. He quickly advanced from a farm boy with a mechanical knack to one of the world's most wealthy industrialists. By 1905, he began collecting Edisoniana, e.g., Edison phonographs and other experimental devices. A little later he began his acquisition of McGuffey Readers, classic teaching tools of yesteryear. Ford's search for Americana became something of a preoccupation in the 1920's.

Our very own Williamsburg, Virginia offered herself to Ford for \$5 million in 1924. Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, father of the colonial capital restoration plan, was hoping to find a well-heeled backer to restore the many historic buildings on their original site. By this time, Ford had too many other projects underway and declined the offer. A little later, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., came to the financial aid of the dream and gave us the jewel we all love today.

In 1929, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Thomas Alva Edison's invention of the electric light, Henry Ford dedicated Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. The President of the United States attended the ceremony and toured a museum village that included historic buildings relocated from various parts of the country.

Original buildings included Edison's Menlo Park Compound which was moved from New Jersey, the Abraham Lincoln Courthouse from Illinois, and Luther Burbank's garden office relocated from California. Other buildings have been added over the years, and the count of village exhibits has risen to well over 100 today. These structures from various periods of history blend together in a most pleasing manner.

It was Henry Ford's intention to create a living textbook of human and technical history that would stress the pioneer virtues of independence and hard work that made America great. The Greenfield Village that you see today meets those goals in a very effective way. You can view in operation sawmills, cotton gins, glass blowers, forges, coopers, blacksmiths, carders and weavers, etc.

During a recent visit to Detroit, I toured this museum village and was pleased to find an exhibit from Virginia. On display was a walking beam engine made in England about 1845. The device was used to drive mining machinery at the Vaucluse Gold Mine near Fredericksburg, Virginia. The mine was abandoned after the Civil War, having suffered heavy damage from fighting in the area. Henry Ford bought the property in 1931 and moved the engine to Greenfield Village.

Special events are also held at Greenfield Village at certain times of the year. Included are such activities as a Civil War muzzle loader's festival, and a fascinating old car festival. New attendance records seem to be established each year for these festivities. Mike Pomper would do well to include these events in his Prince William Summer Festival. There are special resources for these subjects located nearby.

We in Prince William County badly need more historic properties open to the public. Although the County has a colorful history to tell, there are too few buildings for the public to view on a regular basis. We badly need a Chatham, Sully, Castle Hill, or Wakefield for tourism.

Ford was quite correct in his belief that people learn more from seeing and touching history than they do from simply reading books. To that extent, the museums in Dumfries, Occoquan, Manassas, and Quantico meet specific goals. But, we need more buildings and operating exhibits open to the public.

Perhaps we can take a page from the Greenfield Village book and move period homes and dependencies to public park properties in Prince William County. Locust Shade Park, a County facility, or Leesylvania Park, a State facility, would seem to be suitable locations for such a project. Both were locations of colonial plantations in their heydays.

If you happen to be in the Detroit area in the future, be sure to visit Greenfield Village and the adjacent Henry Ford Museum. The property is conveniently located between the airport and downtown Detroit. You are sure to enjoy the unique experience.

January 12, 1982

## SOME CONFEDERATE THOUGHTS

In the course of my study of the Civil War and genealogical research, I was very distressed to find such poor handling of the remains of men killed in battle. After some of the larger engagements, the local civilian population was expected to play a major role in disposing of the bodies. To meet this task, wells were filled to overflowing with casualties, and shallow graves were the order of the day.

Since more than half of all Civil War battles were fought on Virginia soil, the landscape soon became pocked with makeshift graves. Within the year that elapsed between the First and Second Battles of Manassas, the effects of rain and erosion made the local shallow burials a repulsive sight. By the end of the War, heavy fighting had made these conditions common to most of Northern Virginia.

Shortly after the Civil War ended, the citizens of Prince William county acted to restore respect and dignity to the Confederate dead. On November 2, 1867, Colonel and Mrs. William S. Fewell deeded land to the Ladies Confederate Memorial Association of Manassas to be used to deposit the remains of Confederate soldiers "scattered over the Plains." The following year 250 bodies were gathered and re-interred within the Manassas Cemetery.

In 1873, action was taken by the Virginia General Assembly naming the Ladies Confederate Memorial Association as a corporate body and custodians of the Manassas Confederate Cemetery. A few years later, action was begun to erect an appropriate stone monument at the Cemetery. To aid in this effort an appropriation of one thousand dollars was granted by the General Assembly.

The final and crowning touch was added to the effort in 1892 with the dedication of a bronze statue of a Confederate soldier at the top of the tall stone monument. No southern town worth its salt should be without such a Confederate memorial. These silent sentinels are usually found in front of the Courthouse, however.

As a gesture of good will in 1900, the United States Congress permitted a Confederate section to be added to Arlington National Cemetery. Several thousand Confederate dead were gathered from Virginia and put into a common area. Mass graves of such magnitude are not without strong impact to the viewer.

President Taft also granted permission to the United Daughters of the Confederacy to erect a Confederate Memorial. The bronze monument is crowned with a woman, symbolic of Peace, facing the South. Around the center of the shaft, a circular



frieze depicts Southern civilians bidding farewell to Confederate soldiers leaving for the War.

Prince William County, like most of Tidewater Virginia, has a long and interesting history. But her most exciting, and best documented, chapter came between 1861-65. In the short term, the Civil War theme has the best potential to develop for tourism.

The Manassas National Battlefield Park should be a tourist drawing card equal to that of Gettysburg. The Yankees can worship their success in Pennsylvania, and the Southerners ought to glorify their victories at Manassas. More has got to be done to increase the visitation rate and extend the duration of each stay. Completion of Interstate 66 should help to some extent in reaching more people.

I was surprised to find in some research done a few weeks ago that there was so much interest in local Civil War activity that an enormous mural was constructed in Washington in 1885. The old landmark, known as the Manassas Panorama Building, was a huge sixteen-sided show business structure. It was razed in 1918 to make way for World War I tempo buildings constructed at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue.

Manassas, Dumfries, Occoquan, and Quantico all have important Civil War stories to interpret for tourists. When the Leesylvania State Park comes on line, action will be taken to present the story of the Confederate blockade of Washington in 1861-62. The opportunities are tremendous.



Confederate Cemetery Monument  
Manassas

If you have not visited the Manassas Confederate Cemetery, it can be found in the City near the Southern States Cooperative dealer on Lee Avenue. The Confederate Memorial in Arlington Cemetery can be viewed at Jackson Circle near the intersection of McPherson and Farragut Avenues.

January 25, 1982

## **LIBRARIES: A COUNTY ASSET**

I was born and raised in rural Prince William County during a time when there were no public library facilities available. The only library I was able to use at all was a small collection of books in the old Occoquan District High School. It was only later in life, when college-level research papers were required, that I began to understand what a handicap that earlier experience really was.

Public libraries have in recent years evolved to essential community information centers. Not only are their collections of books and reference materials necessary for successful completion of high school and college work assignments, but these efficient institutions also help newcomers obtain information about local facilities and activities. Valuable data and assistance regarding voter registration and tax return preparation can be obtained there at appropriate times of the year. And the community room facilities are a godsend to many public-spirited organizations and clubs.

I consider myself to be a major consumer of the Prince William County public library system. To feed my hobby interests in history, genealogy, and archaeology, I spend a lot of time with reference materials from the Virginiana Collection. Don Wilson does an outstanding job in managing this special element of the local library system.

Most of the individuals who make serious use of the public library could never afford to buy all of the books they have an interest in, let alone store them. Nothing is heavier, and harder to handle in moving from place to place, than a good collection of books. And no person could afford to subscribe to the fantastic range of periodicals available in the public library.

Prince William voters are now being given the opportunity to improve public library facilities on both ends of the County. A new regional facility would be constructed on Davis Ford Road, and a branch facility would be built on Route 15. I sincerely hope that the voters of eastern Prince William County learned a lesson from the Court House referendum and will not sit on their hands this time around.

Out of all the money spent on local government programs, the expenditures on public library facilities have got to be among the most worthwhile. Mary Jo Detweiler has directed the Prince William County public library system in a highly professional and efficient manner. She is even bringing automation to the book check-out function.

So, do yourself and your family a favor by voting “YES” for the Prince William County library bond on March 2. Above all else, don’t count on the other person to vote the right thing for you.



Prince William is rapidly becoming a leader among Virginia counties in the field of documented Civil War history. The Prince William County Public Library has just added a new volume to its shelves entitled “History of the Forty-Ninth Virginia Infantry, GSA, Extra Billy Smith’s Boys.” This interesting book was copyrighted in March, 1981, by Laura Virginia Hale and Stephen S. Phillips.

This volume is especially important because it covers in some detail two combat companies drawn from old families in Prince William County. One company, called the “Quantico Guards”, was mustered into service at Dumfries on July 16, 1861. The second unit, named “Ewell’s Guards”, in honor of Confederate General Richard S. Ewell, was enlisted at Brentsville. The Regimental Commander was a 64-year-old Ex-Governor by the name of William Smith. He is one of the most colorful men in the long history of Virginia.

If you are merely interested in general Civil War events, this book will give you interesting details about a Confederate Regiment that fought at First Manassas, Seven Pines, Frazier’s Farm, Malvern Hill, Second Manassas, Harper’s Ferry, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Winchester, Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Belle Grove, Petersburg, Saylor’s Creek, and a few other places in between. On April 9, 1865, some 53 men surrendered at Appomattox Court House. The group was then brigaded by no less a person than Henry Kyd Douglas. William Smith was by this time again Governor of Virginia and busy with the problems of moving the government from Richmond to Danville.

On the other hand, if you are in search of some good genealogical data on relatives that may have fought with the Forty-Ninth Virginia Infantry, this book is just your ticket. I had several ancestors in this old regiment and the recently compiled history gave me some new facts and leads.

The volume is based primarily on diaries kept by Lt. Robert D. Funkhouser of the “Warren Blues” and Lt. William J. Kincheloe of the “Fauquier Guards.” It contains a good collection of rosters, photographs, and excellent notes.

If you have never read a Confederate Regimental History, I commend this one to you as a starter.

February 22, 1982

## VIRGINIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ROUTE

Now that the weather is turning good, it would be an excellent time to hit the road and see some of the truly great historical sights elsewhere in Virginia. You might want to consider the Presidential Route, and visit some of the houses and museums not too far from Prince William County which are connected to seven Virginians that became President.

Right next door in Fairfax County, along the Potomac River, is the home and burial place of the first President, George Washington, and his wife Martha. This historical plantation gets more tourist visitation than any other single attraction in Virginia.

The George Washington Birthplace National Monument on Route 3 in Westmoreland County is much less known than Mount Vernon. This quiet plantation re-creates many of the colonial sights, sounds, and smells common along Pope's Creek when Washington was born there in 1732.

A visit to Virginia cannot be considered complete without touring Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, our third President. This unique plantation home is located on a mountaintop just outside Charlottesville within view of Interstate 64. Jefferson designed and built the mansion house over a 40-year period. He is buried on the property.

James Madison was our fourth President. You can visit the James Madison Museum in Orange on Route 20. It contains items from Montpelier, his nearby home. Included in the museum is an audio-visual presentation on Montpelier. A Hall of Agricultural Progress also features special exhibits.

In nearby Fredericksburg, you can visit the James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library. Monroe was the fifth President of the United States. The old law office displays court costumes, French furniture, objects from the White House, and the desk on which the Monroe Doctrine was signed. Thousands of books and manuscripts are contained in the library.

As you visit Monticello, you can also visit the nearby home of Monroe. It is only a couple of miles from Jefferson's home. The plantation, known as Ash Lawn, has been restored by the College of William and Mary. Unique features include extensive boxwood gardens, peacocks, and spinning and weaving demonstrations.

One of my favorite roads in Virginia is Route 5, just north of the James River. Here you can visit two more plantations connected to American Presidents. Berkeley Plantation was the birthplace of William Henry Harrison, the ninth President of the United States. This beautiful old mansion was also used by General McClellan as a battle headquarters in 1862, and “Taps” was composed there during that period.

Almost next door is Sherwood Forest Plantation, the home of John Tyler. He was our tenth President. The old frame home is the longest in the United States and contains magnificent original furnishings. The grounds contain five furnished dependencies and Sherwood Tavern (1820). It is open by appointment for tours, teas, receptions, luncheons, and business meetings.

And then there is Woodrow Wilson’s birthplace in Staunton, just off Interstate 81. He was our twenty-eighth President. A guided tour is available of the twelve-room house which re-creates the lifestyle of mid-19th century Staunton. Even Wilson’s old Pierce-Arrow is on display.

It boggles the mind to reflect on the fact that four of the first five United States Presidents were from Virginia. What a tribute that was to the quality and influence of the Old Dominion. Where are those kinds of leaders now that we need them so?

Meanwhile, enjoy the Virginia countryside as it comes into one of its prettiest seasons and absorb a lot of American history.

April 26, 1982

## THE OCCOQUAN RF&P STATION

A number of people have wondered about the old concrete bridge that crosses the RF&P Railroad near the Thornton Gas Station in Woodbridge. This one lane arch, built in the 1920's, and a few old homes along Railroad Avenue are all that remain of a once bustling rail station complex originally designated as Occoquan Station.

The original passenger station, located on the east side of the rail tracks, and the freight station, located on the west side of the roadbed, were thoroughly graceful buildings. The passenger station had just enough gingerbread molding to make it interesting to people of all ages.



RF&P Station at Woodbridge around 1920

Over the past 110 years the RF&P Railroad has been an important fixture on the landscape of eastern Prince William County. At the end of the last century it made a significant contribution in putting the economy of Prince William back on its feet following a devastating Civil War.

The Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad Company was chartered on February 25, 1834. Originally, the line was intended to operate a steam railroad from Richmond, northward through Fredericksburg to a suitable wharf area on the Potomac River. To complete the trip to Washington, steamboats were employed.

By the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, the RF&P was operating as far north as Aquia Creek in Stafford County. When the Confederate Army withdrew from Prince William and Stafford Counties in March, 1862, the steamboat wharf area and three miles of track leading south were destroyed.

The Union Military Railroad Command soon moved into the area and reconstructed the rail system. The Yankees operated the line rather successfully to supply four major battles in the Fredericksburg area. They floated railroad freight cars filled with military supplies on large barges from Alexandria to Aquia. There the freight cars were put on the old RF&P roadbed.

After the Civil War, the RF&P moved further northward into Prince William County. By 1872 tracks were extended to Quantico, then called Potomac, and launched that area on a short binge as a resort town. By the turn of the century, double tracking was completed from Richmond to Washington. This was a vast improvement over the single track connection constructed in eastern Prince William after the Civil War.

The railroad was a boon to dairymen and farmers in Prince William County during the 1870's. It allowed them to reach the new markets in Washington, a city that had grown tremendously following the Civil War years. During this important growth period, the RF&P honored Prince William County stations by naming individual steam locomotives for Occoquan, Neabsco, and Quantico.



RF&P Station at Quantico around 1920

Only after the U.S. Marines had landed at Quantico preparatory to World War I did the true importance of the RF&P in national defense become apparent. And all RF&P records for traffic and revenue were broken when World War II came along. By then, RF&P steam locomotives were constructed so large that they could not safely cross the Potomac River into Washington.

Prior to World War II, the RF&P acquired “General” class’ 4-8-4 steam locomotives for freight and passenger service. These huge engines were named for Confederate General Officers, e.g., Robert B. Lee, “Stonewall” Jackson, J. E. B. Stuart, and A. P. Hill. They weighed in at 842,940 pounds.

The next generation of RF&P steam locomotive was defined as the “Governor” class. They were slightly lighter and named for Virginia Governors Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Nelson, Benjamin Harrison, James Monroe, John Tyler, Fitzhugh Lee, and William Smith. The last one of these beautiful old workhorses was sold for scrap at Richmond in October, 1959.

The RF&P even made a major contribution to Prince William County folklore by contributing a fatal derailment and collision at Cherry Hill on December 6, 1933. A landslide in the cut north of Cherry Hill derailed a freight train in the early morning hours. Just a short time later, a passenger train slammed into the derailed train killing two people and injuring 14 others.

Railroads are very much a part of the history of old Prince William County. It is a shame that the colorful RF&P station at Woodbridge got away from us. Let’s hope that a similar fate does not fall to the old Southern Railroad Station in the City of Manassas.

Now that local tourism and festival planning efforts are getting professional attention, thanks to imports such as Bernadette Plunkett and Mike Pomper, maybe some activity for railroad buffs can be considered in the future. There seems to be a lot of those folks around and they have a lot of steam.

May 11, 1982



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