

HISTORY

For 12,000 years a sparse population of Indians lived in this area, but many more traveled through on the Indian Path from New York and Pennsylvania to winter in Georgia and South Carolina. The first Europeans to come through the Shenandoah Valley were Jesuit missionaries in 1632, and details of this wilderness area were first shown on a map by a Frenchman, Samuel de Champlain.

English ownership of Frederick County was originally by the Virginia Company but was taken over by the Crown in 1624. In 1649, Charles II granted seven royalist supporters the land "bounded by and within the heads" of the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. By 1681, Thomas, the Second Lord Culpeper, owned most of this original land grant. After he died in 1689, his daughter married Thomas, the Fifth Lord Fairfax, and later, their son Thomas, the Sixth Lord Fairfax, inherited the whole landgrant.

By the 1650's various traders, trappers, and explorers were coming to the Shenandoah Valley. Dr. John Lederer from Hamburg Germany documented his visit to the Valley in 1670 in his diary. English colonel, Cadwallader Jones, explored the central Valley in 1673, and in 1716, Governor Alexander Spotswood and his fifty "Knights of the Golden Horseshoe" crossed into the Valley through Swift Run Gap and returned with glowing accounts.

Englishmen settled the piedmont, then pushed west by foot and horse through passes in the Blue Ridge, and many more German and Scotch-Irish settlers came down the valleys from Philadelphia and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Some of the earliest settlers were Quakers who built the Hopewell Friends Meeting House which still stands near Clearbrook. These settlers were attracted by the fertile soils and the abundant forest and water resources.

The Government of Colonial Virginia wanted this wilderness settled as quickly as possible, as a buffer against Indians, but Robert "King" Carter, Lord Fairfax's agent, was settling Fairfax's land slowly in large plantations. The government of Virginia had chartered counties in the landgrant as settlement spread up the Northern Neck and west through the land grant. Virginia began to argue that Fairfax's landgrant ended at the Blue Ridge, and began granting up to 1,000 acres each to settler families west of the Blue Ridge.

Virginia gave particular developers the right to recruit settlers and sell them up to 1,000 acres per family within a general "grant" area. Each parcel would revert to Virginia unless settled with a house and orchard within two years.

Abraham Hollingsworth settled near the site of Abrams Delight in about 1729. Owen Thomas and Jeremiah Smith came to Back Creek in 1730 and settled on 806 acres granted in Thomas' name. Smith left and returned with a wife before

1741. His log cabin is now part of a house west of Back Creek and south of Route 50. In 1732, Jost Hite settled 16 families on his 5,000 acre "grant" and built Hite's fort at Bartonville.

The Indian Path became the Great Wagon Road and Indians were dispossessed westward by treaty and force of arms. Frederick County was created from western Orange County by the House of Burgesses on December 21, 1738 and was named after the Prince of Wales.

James Wood, County Surveyor for Orange County, platted a town at the County seat, which he named Winchester, after his birthplace. It consisted of 26 half-acre lots and three streets within 1300 acres, which he claimed as wilderness land owned by Virginia. Those streets are now Loudoun, Boscowen and Cameron Streets.

County government in Virginia was originally by self-perpetuating courts. Frederick County's Court was proclaimed and organized in 1743, and its officials took their oaths of office on November 11 of that year. It first met at the surveying office of its clerk, James Wood, at the site on which James Wood's son Robert built Glen Burnie.

By 1743, the Frederick County court admitted that Lord Fairfax's land included the County. At the age of 16, George Washington was a member of a surveying party that came to Frederick County for Lord Fairfax in 1748. In 1749, Lord Fairfax moved to Frederick County and built his home, Greenway Court, at White Post. He accepted Wood's 1,300 acre claim and other additional lots at Winchester. Eventually, eleven other counties would be created from the 3,824 square miles included in the original Frederick County.

George Washington was associated with Winchester and Frederick County between the years of 1748 and 1765. Early during those years he maintained a surveying office in Winchester. During the French and Indian War, he was given a Commission and later made Commander in Chief of the colonial forces with headquarters in Winchester. Washington held his first elective offices representing Frederick County, having been elected to the house of Burgesses in 1758 and 1761.

Winchester played an important part in the American Revolution. Local riflemen under the command of Daniel Morgan were among the first to join the fight.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries life in the current Frederick County area centered around small family farms. Local farms tended to be smaller than farms to the east. During this period wheat production became the center of the local economy, along with cattle production. In 1820, there were fifty flour mills in Frederick County along with numerous sawmills, tanneries, and other business activities.

Economic life was centered around Winchester and other local towns including Stephens City, Middletown, Kernstown, and Gainesboro. There were a large number and diversity of craftsmen and merchants in these towns. The strongest influence on the local economy was the Great Wagon Road, which later became Route 11 south and which carried settlers and travelers from Philadelphia south through the Valley and to the west. Activity associated with this road made Winchester one of the largest towns in western Virginia.

Frederick County played a significant part in the Civil War. The northern Shenandoah Valley supplied food, livestock, horses, and soldiers to the southern cause. The Valley was also important because of its strategic location in relation to Washington D.C. The town of Winchester changed hands in the war about 70 times, an average of once every three weeks for four years.

Major local battles included the First Battle of Kernstown in March of 1862, during which General Stonewall Jackson suffered his only tactical defeat during the Valley Campaign but did succeed in keeping Union troops in the Valley from leaving to reinforce McClellan on the peninsula. In May of 1862, Jackson's army defeated the Union troops at the First Battle of Winchester.

In the Second Battle of Winchester in 1863, confederate troops successfully attacked and defeated Union troops occupying forts on the western side of Winchester. Union troops were again defeated at the second battle of Kernstown in 1864.

At the Third Battle of Winchester General Philip Sheridan's Union troops successfully attacked confederate troops at Winchester. With the high numbers of losses on both sides, a new war of attrition was to begin in the Valley from which the southern forces would never recover. For three weeks in 1864, Sheridan's troops undertook the infamous "Burning" to end Confederate strength in the Valley. Union troops burned 2,000 barns, 120 mills, and a half a million bushels of grain and confiscated 50,000 head of livestock in the Valley. Virginia's richest valley was left desolate.

In October of 1864, Jubal Early's Confederate troops were entrenched south of Cedar Creek. The Union troops were encamped just north of Cedar Creek. A surprise attack by the Confederates drove the Union troops to the north. General Sheridan rallied his troops and attacked, driving the Confederates back across Cedar Creek. This victory helped boost Union morale and helped President Lincoln win reelection.

After the war, old economic activities resumed and new activities began. New businesses included a tannery, dairying, farm machinery, and shipping. A variety of agricultural activities continued. Fruit growing and processing became particularly important early in the twentieth century. Economic activities continued to diversify in the twentieth century to include a number of manufacturing activities including plastics, automotive products, containers and other products. Activities continued to be based on the accessibility of the area and on north-south travel along the route that was once the Great Wagon Road and is now Route 11 and Interstate 81.

Historic Preservation

There are a number of historic sites in Frederick County. The following sites are listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register:

Belle Grove
Hopewell Friends Meeting House
Monte Vista
Springdale House and Mill Complex
Willa Cather House (birthplace)
St. Thomas Episcopal Church (Middletown)

There are a number of other historic sites in the County. There are also several Civil War battlefield sites that played an important role in that conflict. The Civil War Sites include the following:

Battlefields:

First and Second Battles of Winchester
Third Battle of Winchester
First and Second Battles of Kernstown
Cedar Creek

Fortifications:

Star Fort
Collier Redoubt
Parkins Mill Battery

Entrenchments:

Nineteenth Corps Line
1864 - 1865 Winter Line

There is a need to clearly locate, recognize, and designate all significant historic sites in the County. As the County develops, there is a need to find methods to protect the most significant sites.

The Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society is undertaking an inventory of local historic resources. This project will permanently record the location of all sites. Such sites could be recognized by the County through the awarding of historic resource plaques to property owners using an individual application process. The County would review such applications annually using specific criteria. In addition, the extensive structures and land related to the Civil War should be recognized through appropriate documentation and signs.

In addition, a Historic Resources Advisory Committee could be established which would provide detailed information on historic resources to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Zoning or other regulatory methods could be used to help protect the most important resources. In addition, the County should consider any tax incentives allowed by law for the rehabilitation, adaptive reuse or restoration of historic structures.

Care should be taken in the design and provision of streets and utilities in historic areas to maintain the historical integrity and character of historic areas. The protection of historic areas should be carefully considered in establishing new roads. Land use patterns should be planned that are harmonious with the historic environment.

Historic preservation can play an important role in economic development. Tourism is an important local industry. The possibility of improving the attractiveness of the area to tourists should be considered in a systematic manner. The protection of historic resources will play an important role in this effort.

Historic Preservation Policy

A number of historic preservation issues have been identified, including the following:

The need to identify and designate historic sites

The economic importance of historic resources

The need to develop methods to protect historic resources.

The following are policies for historic preservation.

Goal 1 - Protect the historic resources in Frederick County.

Strategy 1 - Inventory and designate historic sites in the County.

Strategy 2 - Study and adopt methods to preserve historic resources.

Strategy 3 - Incorporate historic resources in efforts to promote tourism.

Strategy 4 - Carefully consider the impacts of land use, development and facility decisions on historic resources.

Implementation Methods:

1. Undertake a complete investigation, documentation, evaluation, registration, and recognition of historic sites. Recognize sites with a process of plaques and signs.

2. Establish a Historic Resources Advisory Committee to assist the County with information and recommendations on historic resources.
3. Study possible methods for protecting historic resources including the designations of historic districts, zoning methods, tax incentives, and impact analysis. Voluntary methods and methods involving incentives are preferred. Carefully consider the impacts of decisions concerning land use, roads, utilities, and facilities. Develop design standards for historic areas and locations. Strong support should be given to private initiatives.
4. Include concerns for historic preservation and tourism in economic development strategies.