

SHENANDOAH COUNTY HISTORY

The first white man to enter the Shenandoah Valley was probably a Jesuit priest who traveled there to convert the Indians, but he did not document his travels. Credit is given, therefore, to John Lederer, a medical practitioner from Hamburg, Germany, for the first official discovery and exploration of the Valley. On his first trip from Williamsburg, beginning in March, 1669, he reached Swift Run Gap in Madison County by traveling what came to be known as the Germanna Trail. His second trip along the same general route began in May, 1670. He was accompanied by an Indian guide and a group of Englishmen headed by Major Harris. The English had their fill of exploration upon reaching the Blue Ridge Mountains and returned to Williamsburg. Major Harris assumed that Lederer would not return, so he spread the story that Lederer had died enroute and that his tales of the mountains with the broad valley beyond were false. When Lederer did return to Williamsburg, no one believed what he told, including the Royal Governor, Sir William Berkeley, who refused to reimburse his expenses as promised. Lederer went to Annapolis and obtained financial support from Lord Calvert for his exploration. His third and last trip to the Shenandoah Valley began in August, 1670. He surveyed the Valley from the heights above what is now Front Royal and surmised that he had found, in the Shenandoah River, a water route to the Great Lakes. Lederer returned to Annapolis where Sir William Talbot translated his notes of the exploration into English. These were published in London in 1673 (Dohme 1972:1-5).

Lederer was followed by Louis Michelle, a Swiss explorer who traveled by way of Harpers Ferry and Winchester at least as far as Powell's Fort in Fort Valley between the crests of the Massanutten Mountains. Through Fort Valley was found the Migratory Trail used by various Indian

tribes. Those Indians seen by explorers in the Shenandoah Valley included Iroquois, Nabyssans, Oenocks, Oustbacks, Ushery, Massawomacks and Pamunkey along with three branches of the Algonquin Tribe (Dohme 1972:5-7).

In 1716, Sir Alexander Spotswood, the current Royal Governor, headed west with a small army along the Germanna Trail. Many contracted German measles along the way, but Governor Spotswood and a small party continued on and crossed the Blue Ridge at Swift Run Gap. The Governor forded the Shenandoah River and buried a bottle on the west bank. This bottle contained a note he had written which claimed all territory west of the mountains to "The River of the Spaniards" in the name of and for King George I of England. After the French were driven out of the Ohio Territory, the claim lasted until the end of the American Revolution (Dohme 1972:9).

Settlement was soon to follow. Van Meter, a trapper, held a 10,000 acre tract in the Shenandoah Valley which he had acquired from Lord Fairfax. A condition of this sale was that one hundred German families were to settle in the Valley. Van Meter sold this land to Joist Hite of eastern Pennsylvania in 1727. Hite proceeded to search for one hundred German families, and, in 1731, the group headed for the Valley. Enroute, they encountered Robert McKay and his group of Scotch-Irish settlers from the coast. They perfected a plan to pool land and money so that they could eventually obtain more land from Lord Fairfax. They purchased 70,000 more acres over the next two years and determined a plan for dividing it. The Scotch-Irish were to settle the eastern half from Winchester to Luray and Hite's Germans would occupy the western portion from Winchester to beyond what is now Strasburg. Hite erected a house five miles south of Winchester

along what was to become the "Valley Pike" (U.S. Route 11). Two of his grandsons built much larger homes along Cedar Creek near Strasburg a half century later (Dohme 1972:13-14). His son-in-law, George Bowman, settled along the south side of Cedar Creek in what is now Shenandoah County in 1731 or 1732. Another son-in-law, Paul Froman, settled along the creek eight or nine miles northwest of Bowman (Wayland 1927:49).

Other settlers were soon to follow. Benjamin Allen, Riley Moore and William White arrived from the Monocacy Valley in Maryland and settled in the area of what is now Mt. Jackson. Jacob Funk bought 2,030 acres between Fishers Hill and Strasburg, including part of the present town of Strasburg, from Henry Willis in 1735. By 1738, many people had settled what was to become Shenandoah County (Wayland 1927:49-55).

Shenandoah was included within several other counties before it was established as a county in its own right. Between 1720 and 1734, it was a part of Spotsylvania County. From 1734 to 1738, it was included in Orange County. In 1738, the area of Orange County west of the Blue Ridge Mountains was separated to become the new counties of Augusta and Frederick. Until 1753, Shenandoah was partially included in both counties. At that time, the dividing line between Augusta and Frederick Counties was made to coincide with the Fairfax line. This placed Shenandoah entirely within the boundaries of Frederick County. On March 24, 1772, a new county was formed from Frederick County which was to be known as Dunmore. In 1778, its name was changed to Shanando. The name has been spelled a number of different ways through the years (Wayland 1927:33).

From its formation until 1836, the County of Shenandoah was much larger than its present size. During this period, Shenandoah included one-half of present day Warren County and two-thirds of what would become

Page County. Page County was formed in 1831 and Warren County in 1836. The total area of Shenandoah County at that time was almost 800 square miles. Today the area is 507 square miles (Wayland 1927:33).

The first Indians which the settlers encountered were friendly, and the two groups lived together peacefully for about 20 years. In 1753, the Valley Indians began meeting with those across the Allegheny Mountains and, soon thereafter, disappeared to the west. There was good reason for the tension that grew in the Valley with the westward migration of the Indians. Within one or two years, raids began upon the Valley settlers and the French and Indian War started. Numerous stories are told of Indian raids upon the early settlers. In 1758, fifty Indians and four Frenchmen came to the home of George Painter near Shenandoah, nine miles below Woodstock. Painter was killed there along with four babies before the house and stable were burned. Forty-eight people were taken prisoners. Two of Painter's sons and another man who hid were the only ones to escape capture (Wayland 1927:65). It is said that on June 1, 1764, thirty-two people were killed by Indians in the vicinity of Strasburg (Souvenir 1972:68). One day in 1766, five Indians attacked the Sheets and Taylor families as they traveled to the fort at Woodstock. The men were killed immediately, but the wives picked up axes and managed to save themselves and the children (Wayland 1927:72). This was probably one of the last Indian raids, for none are recorded after 1766.

Many of Shenandoah County's citizens were involved in the American Revolution. In June, 1774, citizens met in Woodstock, with the Reverend Peter Muhlenberg heading the meeting. He was elected Chairman of the Committee on Resolutions which issued the statement:

"That we will pay due submission to such acts of government as His Majesty has a right by law to exercise over his subjects, and

to such only.

That it is the inherent right of British subjects to be governed and taxed by representatives chosen by themselves only, and that every act of the British Parliament respecting the internal policy of America is a dangerous and unconstitutional invasion of our rights and privileges.

That the enforcing the execution of the said acts of Parliament by a military power will have a tendency to cause a civil war, thereby dissolving that union which has so long happily subsisted between the mother country and her colonies; and that we will most heartily and unanimously concur with our suffering brethren of Boston, and every other part of North America, who are the immediate victims of tyranny, in promoting all proper measures to avert such dreadful calamities, to procure a redress of our grievances, and to secure our common liberties. (Wayland 1927:198).

Muhlenberg was appointed colonel of the Eighth Virginia Regiment in December, 1775. One Sunday in January, 1776, Muhlenberg delivered a stirring farewell sermon to his congregation and left for battle with his German regiment. The men of Shenandoah were experienced wilderness settlers and made a major contribution to the war (Wayland 1927:201).

According to the Census of 1783, there were 1,302 families residing in Shenandoah County. Existing towns were growing, and others were soon created. Shenandoah County was beginning to develop. By 1820, the population was 18,925, although this still included part of the present Page and Warren Counties. Total population in 1840 was 11,618.

Woodstock was established in March, 1761, while Shenandoah was still contained within Frederick County. When Dunmore County was created in 1772, Woodstock became the county seat. By 1820, the population of the town was 740. This number grew to 950 by 1835. Included in the town at this time were:

118 dwelling houses, three churches (Lutheran, Methodist and German Reformed), a Masonic Hall, a handsome brick academy, three other schools, two sabbath schools, one printing office, five

mercantile stores, two taverns, three tanyards, four saddlers, two hatters, five boot and shoe factories, five house joiners and carpenters, three wheelrights and chairmakers, four tailors, two smith shops, a tinner, two saddle tree makers, two saddle tree platers, two bricklayers and masons, two plasterers, an earthenware factory, a stoneware factory, a watchmaker and a wagonmaker.

The Shenandoah Herald weekly newspaper was first published here on December 24, 1817 (Souvenir 1972:47).

Strasburg began when Peter Stover purchased 438 acres from Jacob Funk for the purpose of plotting a town. It was established in 1761. Strasburg became known as Pot Town because of the business which developed there. James Greem, a German potter, started his business there in 1787, and there were, at one time, as many as six potteries operating. The business continued until 1908. Though pottery dominated, other businesses developed in Strasburg. Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia states that, in 1835, Strasburg contained:

78 dwelling houses, three churches (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Free), three schools, including an academy, three mercantile stores, two taverns, an apothecary shop, four tanyards, two gunsmiths, five cabinet-makers, four blacksmith shops, a tinner, a factory making stoneware and earthenware, a plasterer, three bricklayers, five tailors, four cooper shops, six boot and shoe factories, and a population of 470, including six regular physicians. (Souvenir 1972:68).

Edinburg, in 1803, consisted of a few cabins along Stony Creek. In its early years, the town was known as Stony Creek or Shryock. It is said that it was also known as Edenburg before it became Edinburg (Souvenir 1972:36). Edinourg developed a little later than Woodstock and Strasburg. In 1835, the town consisted of: "17 dwelling houses, 2 merchant stores, a house of public entertainment, a rifle factory, a blacksmith shop, and a population of 130, including one physician." It was incorporated in May, 1852 (Wayland 1927:144).

The smaller villages of Toms Brook and Maurertown developed

somewhat later than the larger communities. In 1852, there were only four houses in Toms Brook including the old stagecoach tavern (Wayland 1927:154). At one time, however, Toms Brook had as many as three mercantile stores, and a lime kiln was built there in 1894 (Souvenir 1972:66). By the late 1800's, Maurertown had developed to include two mercantile stores, two blacksmith shops, a carpenter shop, a chair factory, a sawmill, a shoe shop, a tin shop, and an ice house (Wayland 1927:156).

After the Revolution, industry and commerce began to develop in Shenandoah County, and it increased rapidly during the early 1800's. Emphasis was on agrarian commerce, as the major products exported included lumber, hemp, grain, wool, leathergoods, flour, meat products, and tanbark from the sumac tree for curing hides (Dohme 1972:59). The lime and limestone industry and iron mining and smelting also developed in the County, however. The iron industry began before the Revolution and developed to at least seven furnaces. In addition, the 1884 survey for Lake's Atlas shows an ore bed at Locust Grove Schoolhouse near Fishers Hill (Wayland 1927:235-236).

Increased settlement and trade in the region called for an improvement in the roads. In March, 1834, the Valley Turnpike Company, Incorporated, was authorized to build a 68-mile turnpike from Winchester to Harrisonburg. What had been known as the "Great Road" for wagons probably followed the route of the old Indian trail. The Valley Turnpike (present U.S. Route 11) was completed along this route by 1840 (Wayland 1927:262, 292).

Another boon to commerce and public transportation occurred when the Manassas Gap Railroad was extended to Strasburg in 1854. In 1856, it reached Woodstock, and in 1859, the first passenger train came to

Mt. Jackson. Construction was soon interrupted when the Civil War reached the Shenandoah Valley (Wayland 1927:293).

Slavery was not a major issue with the citizens of Shenandoah. In the census of 1840, the slave population only accounted for 9% of the total population. Most of the slaves were found where the English and Scotch-Irish resided, for the Germans had few slaves (Wayland 1927:34). Defense of property was another matter, and the people of Shenandoah became very much involved in the war.

The County's citizens were involved from the beginning of the Civil War, but the fighting reached the area with Jackson's Valley Campaign in the Spring of 1862. During this year, Jackson and his men spent at least 46 days in Shenandoah (Wayland 1927:306). On May 15, 1864, the Battle of New Market was fought with the cadets of VMI joining in the defeat of the Yankee forces. The Battle of Fishers Hill occurred on September 22, 1864. On October 6 and 7, 1864, Sheridan and his men were responsible for the burning of the barns and mills of the Valley. There were very few that escaped the torch. At the end of the two days, Sheridan made the statement that a crow would have to carry his knapsack to cross the Valley (Wayland 1927:340).

It did not take the citizens of Shenandoah County long to rebuild after the Civil War. The furnaces which had been destroyed were rebuilt, and two or three operated into the 1900's (Wayland 1927:235). The Orange, Alexandria and Manassas Gap Railroad was completed to Harrisonburg in 1868 (Wayland 1927:348). In 1870, the B & O Railroad was extended to Strasburg, and rail traffic grew until the B & O alone made eight passenger stops a day in Strasburg (Souvenir 1972:68-70). The limestone industry around Strasburg was well developed around the early 1900's and still exists

there today.

Land boom speculation hit Shenandoah County as it did many other areas. The Strasburg Land Development Company bought land on the western side of town where large buildings were erected, including a horseshoe factory (Souvenir 1972:70). Development never reached the proportions the speculators expected.

As the machine age developed, many of the small commercial enterprises in Shenandoah ceased to exist. Tourism developed as a major local industry. The George Washington National Forest was established in 1917, and the first leg of the Skyline Drive, along with the Shenandoah National Park, opened nearby in 1936. Commercial planting of apple orchards started around the turn of the century and is currently a thriving enterprise. A number of small industrial plants are located in and around Shenandoah County. Limestone is still a thriving business in the Strasburg-Middletown area (Dohme 1972:91-92). Throughout its history, however, Shenandoah County has been an agrarian area and is one of the leading agricultural counties in Virginia today (Shenandoah County Comprehensive Plan 1990:5).

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