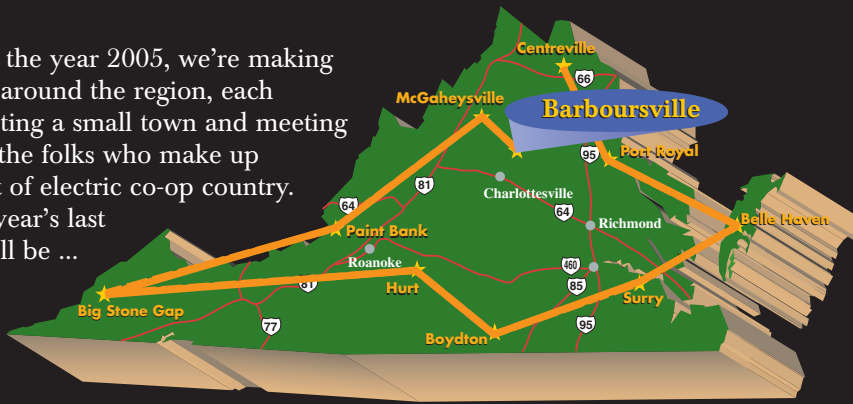


Today, Barboursville's "downtown" (right) features the Nichols Gallery Annex, the Nichols Studio, Sun's Traces Gallery, the community post office and Masonic Lodge.

Again in the year 2005, we're making our way around the region, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's last stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN

# BARBOURSVILLE

by Jeff Poole, Contributing Writer

## AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** Barboursville Post Office serves 4,025.

**LAND AREA:** Barboursville has no formal boundaries.

**INCORPORATED:** : Part of Orange County, Barboursville is unincorporated.

**ELEVATION:** 510 feet.

**FUN FACT:** Barboursville is the birthplace of Zachary Taylor, the 12th president of the U.S.

For people traveling through central Virginia, Barboursville is pretty much on the way to wherever they're going. Intersected east and west by Route 33 and north and south by Route 20, Barboursville has long been recognized as a stop on the way – whichever that way was.

But something happened about 30 years ago that woke up the charming, rural community at the western end of historic

Orange County. **Gianni Zonin** planted grapes and during the next three decades, Barboursville cultivated a rich blend of arts and culture and reaped the benefits of rural tourism.

Barboursville is named for former Virginia governor, statesman and diplomat James Barbour, who lived among the rolling hills between influential neighbors and friends James Madison (Montpelier)

and Thomas Jefferson (Monticello). Barbour's home was built in a neoclassical Jefferson design that strikingly resembled the more famous home to the south in nearby Albemarle County.

According to local historian and author **Ann Miller**, at its completion in 1822, Barboursville was the most elaborate plantation in the county, valued at \$20,000, twice as much as Madison's Montpelier.







PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEFF POOLE



In the years following the Civil War, nearby Gordonsville remained the commercial center of the county. But toward the end of the 19th century, local railroad companies sought a more direct connection from Charlottesville to Orange and found a viable route through Barbourville and Somerset. Bypassing Gordonsville suddenly shifted the commercial balance in the county toward Orange, with Somerset and Barbourville as immediate beneficiaries, according to **Frank Walker**, author of *Remembering: A History of Orange County*.

In his design of Barbour's residence, Jefferson employed an architectural signature that now symbolizes this estate — a central, octagonal parlor the vineyard honors with the label of its premier wine, Octagon. Barbour's home, once considered the finest in the county, is a local historical site (left) and home of the Four County Players' summer Shakespeare at the Ruins series.

Mark Johnson is active in the rural community. He's a member of the fire company, president of the Ruritan Club and represents Barbourville and the surrounding area on the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

As traffic increased along the Rockingham Turnpike (now Spotswood Trail, Route 33) Barbourville became a popular stop on the new rail line. With the trade formerly bound for Gordonsville suddenly stopping in Barbourville, the small crossroads community became a modest commercial center. That prosperity lasted into the mid-20th century, when Barbourville suddenly became a victim of highway construction.

"Barbourville had been a boomtown," says **Beth Nichols**, of Nichols Gallery in "downtown" Barbourville. "It had the railroad depot and was right at the intersection of Route 20 and Route 33."



Frederick and Beth Nichols work in the couple's Barbourville studio. Nichols' silkscreen prints, watercolors and oil paintings capture the beauty and depth of landscapes throughout the region.

But the depot closed and traffic found faster, more direct routes with Interstate 64, a four-lane Route 29 and the Route 250 bypass.

"Charlottesville got the depot and the crossroads," Nichols notes. "By the 1970s Barbourville was a dying town."

Left behind were empty storefronts, vacant buildings and little hope.

In 1976 Zonin, president of the largest private wine company in Italy, visited Jefferson's Monticello while touring the



**B**arboursville is best experienced over a weekend. That provides visitors enough time to enjoy all it has to offer from wine, to art, to the fabulous food at Palladio Restaurant.

First, check the calendar. Make sure the weekend is one that features a performance by the **Four County Players**, the community theater group based in Barboursville. The troupe presents popular Broadway plays and musicals in a restored schoolhouse in the heart of Barboursville. Performances are scheduled Saturdays and Sundays.

In December, the Players will present *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. Weekend performances are scheduled Dec. 2-18. In the spring, the classic Rodgers and

Hart musical *Babes in Arms* will take to the stage weekends March 10 through April 2. The company's summer Shakespeare at the Ruins series is a fantastic way to spend an evening under the stars at the nearby **Barboursville Ruins** at the Barboursville Vineyards. Call (540) 832-5355 or visit [www.fourcp.org](http://www.fourcp.org).

Long before they attend the play, visitors will want to sample the award-winning wines at **Horton, Barboursville and Burnley Vineyards**. All are located within a few minutes of each other.

Horton features world-class wines made from the Viognier grape, a French grape that seemed ideally suited to Virginia's climate. Tours and tastings are available seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call (800) 829-4633 or visit [www.hvwine.com](http://www.hvwine.com).



Barboursville Vineyards' tasting room is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Winery tours are available Saturday and Sunday from 12-4 p.m. or by appointment. Visitors can also see the historic and scenic ruins of Gov. James Barbour's home.

Burnley Vineyards is a family winery in nearby Albemarle County. From April through December, the winery is open daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. From January through March, the winery is available for tastings Friday through

area. During his visit, he learned of Jefferson's unsuccessful, but repeated attempts to grow European grapes in central Virginia's soils.

Zonin purchased the remains of the original Barboursville plantation to establish a winery in the United States. The fire-ravaged remains of the plantation's original house were part of the purchase and became the trademark of Barboursville Vineyards – the first commercial winery in the region.

"Thirty years ago, that was something new," Barboursville Vineyards' General Manager and Winemaker **Luca Paschina** says. "I'm sure somebody had a good laugh about it."

But Zonin's vision opened the door to

wineries throughout central Virginia and slowly, Barboursville's renaissance began.

As the grapes grew, so did Barboursville's appeal.

"There was a lot less happening then," Paschina admits. "But we were already on a path of tourism from Montpelier to Monticello. By producing a high-quality wine, we were able to create greater visibility and generate that attention."

Soon, Barboursville became a destination again.

"A lot of small towns shrivel up and wither away," says **Mark Johnson** of Johnson Tire. Johnson serves as the chairman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and represents the county's western district, including Barboursville.

"Barboursville hung in there and got through the tough times."

By hanging in there, Barboursville discovered its identity. No longer simply a transportation crossroads, Barboursville became a crossroads of art, culture and community.

Like many communities throughout Virginia, Barboursville is an area, not an incorporated town. It has a "town center" that includes the popular D's Market convenience store, the Barboursville Ruritan Building, the Four County Players' Playhouse, the Barboursville Community Park and the Barboursville Volunteer Fire Company. Barboursville's "downtown" features the Nichols Gallery, Sun's Traces Gallery, the Masonic Lodge and the post office. A historic freed-slave community –

Monday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call (540) 832-2828 or visit [www.burnleywines.com](http://www.burnleywines.com).

Between winery stops, visitors should offer their palates a break and their eyes and senses a visual treat. **Nichols Galleries** include the gallery, studio and printmaking workshop of landscape artist Frederick Nichols. Nichols' silkscreen prints, watercolors and oil paintings capture the beauty and depth of the region's scenery. The gallery is open Thursday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and by chance or appointment. Call (888) 994-3733 or go to [www.frednichols.com](http://www.frednichols.com).



No visit to Barboursville is complete without a delightful meal at **Palladio Restaurant** at Barboursville Vineyard. Palladio promises delicious cuisine paired with world-class wines from both the Barboursville Vineyards and affiliated Italian wineries. Palladio is open for lunch Wednesday through Sunday from 12-3 p.m. Reservations are suggested. The restaurant is open Friday through Saturday for dinner from 6:30-9:30 p.m. Reservations are required. Call (540) 832-7848 or visit [www.barboursvillewine.com](http://www.barboursvillewine.com).

If time permits, visit nearby **Montpelier**, home to fourth U.S. President James Madison, the Gordonsville Exchange Hotel Civil War Museum, the James Madison Museum and the historic town of Orange. ■

From left: 1) Barboursville Vineyards cultivates 150 acres of grapes for production of its world-class wines. The estate winery and vineyards are located on 830 acres of beautiful rolling hills. 2) Four County Players is Central Virginia's oldest, continuously operating community theater. The Players have delighted audiences for more than 25 years. The company hosts its productions in the former Barboursville School House. 3) In a historic building that once housed the Barboursville Hotel, the Nichols Gallery Annex features the works of the region's finest artists. 4) Stunning stone underground cellars, views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and a wonderful vaulted ceiling tasting room are the highlights of Horton Cellars winery (inset: Dennis Horton).

Careytown – and the wineries are just down the road.

“There is a nucleus of activity that keeps the town going and growing,” Johnson notes.

Between Barboursville Vineyards and nearby Horton Cellars, nearly 100,000 visitors arrive in Barboursville annually to sample the fruits of the vine. Thousands more visit the Nichols and Sun's Traces art galleries and even more come to Barboursville for the impressive community theater productions presented by the Four County Players.

Their summer Shakespeare at the Ruins series, hosted annually at the romantic and scenic remains of Barbour's home, represents a culmination of Barboursville's history, agriculture and cultural tradition.

“We all really complement each other,” Nichols notes.

“It's unique that there are three wineries just within minutes of each other,” says **Dennis Horton** of Horton Cellars.

In fact, just west of Barboursville in Albemarle County is Burnley Vineyards.

“Some people think it's competition, but it's worked out very nicely,” Horton notes. “We have a good relationship with each other.”

That relationship fuels not only Barboursville's economy, but the county's.

“It's not just the money we take in,” Horton notes. “A high percentage of the people who visit us stay at local bed-and-breakfasts. They buy gas and shop here.”

“More and more people are putting us on their list of places to go and things to do,” Nichols adds. “If one person has a good experience, they'll tell others. And Barboursville is a unique experience.”

“There's no other place in the state like Barboursville,” says **Jason Capelle**, president of Friends of Barboursville, a community advocacy group. “It's got a historic African-American community, the vineyards and it's in a national historic district. Barboursville is in position to take advantage of its tourism industry. I see huge potential for Barboursville. I think it's just starting.”

When Paschina moved from northern Italy to Barboursville 16 years ago, people thought he was crazy.





Barboursville Vineyard cultivates 150 acres of grapes on the former Barboursville Plantation. Barboursville Vineyards General Manager and winemaker Luca Paschina (above, left) came to the winery as a consultant to owner Gianni Zonin (above, right). The Zonin family has been making wine in Italy since 1821. Paschina spent two months in Barboursville and loved it so much he moved there.

“How could you trade the beauty of living in Italy for Barboursville?” they’d ask. “They don’t realize how beautiful it is and I do.”

Even with its steady flow of visitors from across the state, Barboursville has remained true to its roots.

“We still have the feel of rural countryside,” Paschina says, “because it’s maintained by people who are really true to the agricultural aspects of this community.”

The art galleries and community theater support that as well.

“It’s really a unique combination and experience with very historic roots,” he concludes. ■