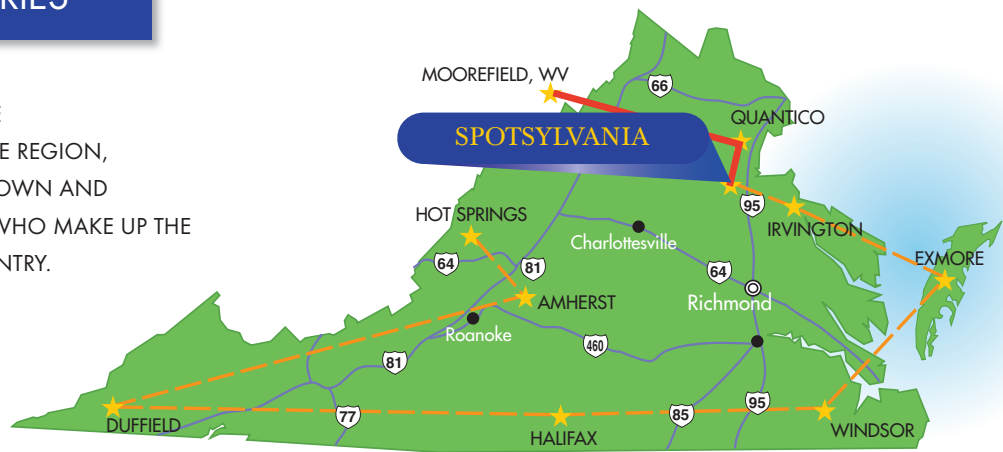


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2007, 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 THIRD STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

SPOTSYLVANIA

BY PAUL SULLIVAN, CONTRIBUTING WRITER • PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL SULLIVAN

A COMMUNITY
DEFINED BY BOTH ITS PAST
AND ITS FUTURE

Once upon a time, as they used to say in children's books, there was an old wagon road from the town of Orange that crossed a large county called Spotsylvania where another dirt road from Fredericksburg joined it.

Nothing much happened at that sleepy intersection until an inn was built there in 1838, followed by the establishment of the county courthouse at that site a year later.

The crossroads became an important stopover on what was then a long trip from the outlying rural counties to the state capital in Richmond.

Life was good in the center of this stable farming county until May of 1864, when the sky fell on it.

From that day and for the next two weeks, the full brunt of one of the most terrible bloodlettings in American history came down on Spotsylvania Courthouse and became the first defining event in its history.

The second one began quite peacefully in the last two decades of the 20th century and is ongoing. It is no less than a transformation of the county and the courthouse community at its center.

The common denominator, the thread that links the horror of the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse in 1864 with the literal reconfiguring of this scenic 411-square-mile county and the community at its center is the people who live in and around it.

For reasons no one can quite remember, this small town of a few hundred to as much as a thousand or more souls (depending upon where some imaginary line is drawn) has never been incorporated and is not one of Virginia's official towns.

Never mind. It is very much a community, a place whose residents love it and can't imagine living anywhere else.



AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION AND LAND AREA:
Uncertain, as there are no firm town boundaries. There are probably a few hundred residents within half-mile of the key intersection.

ESTABLISHED: Unofficially in 1839 when the first county courthouse was established at the site.

ELEVATION: Approx. 300 feet.

FUN FACT: The county slogan is "Crossroads of the Civil War." Three major Civil War battles were fought on Spotsylvania soil.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 1) The Spotsylvania Courthouse has a long history, originating at Germanna Ford on the Rapidan River in 1722, when the still-large county extended considerably further west. The present structure was built at the turn of the 20th century after the war-torn building constructed here in 1840 was condemned. 2) The Christ Episcopal Church, built in 1840 in the Federal style, has been lovingly preserved and among its displays is a Bible dating to 1754. 3) Lone Confederate Sentry guards the graves of more than 600 mostly Confederate soldiers buried in the cemetery half a mile north of the old courthouse.

And while Fredericksburg, much larger and perhaps more widely renowned for historical events lies just 10 miles to the north, long-time county residents (as opposed to the flood of new arrivals elsewhere in Spotsylvania) strongly identify with their county and with the courthouse community of the same name.

Leota Pendleton, who is 84, moved to Spotsylvania Courthouse with her husband, Jim, in 1950. They "bought a little filling station-grocery store." Business was good, they raised a family and ran the store, expanding it and building a hardware store on the same site over the years.

The family sold the grocery some years ago but Pendleton's son, **Bob**, continues to operate Pendleton's Hardware, a classic example of the independent hardware stores once found in small towns across America.

Pendleton talks with a reporter about the



prospects for his business in a time when big chain stores are taking over. As he talks, a customer comes in and holds up an inch-long rubber part, needing a replacement.

The veteran hardware man not only knows what it is but what the man needs to make the repair, and tells him precisely where he must look for both the model and serial numbers he needs. And in that genial moment Bob Pendleton makes the case and seals the bid for keeping those independent hardware stores in the game.

Pendleton and many others seem well aware of the second invasion of Spotsylvania and know that this one is changing the county permanently.

Just down the street from Pendleton's, behind the venerable Chewnings store at the crossroads, next to the new county

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 1) Spotswood Inn was built by Samuel Alsop in 1838 and was a popular stopping place situated on the road from Fredericksburg to Richmond and Williamsburg. Today the building houses law offices. 2) The Spotsylvania County Museum is housed in the Old Berea Christian Church, which dates back to 1856. Behind the museum is a small, Colonial-era cemetery. 3) Visitors to the old county jail, built in 1855, can still see preserved bits of graffiti on its otherwise barren walls. 4) Local businessman Bob Pendleton knows the courthouse community as well as anyone, having run both a grocery store and now a popular hardware store where customers can get helpful tips on solving household problems along with their purchases.



ABOVE: Bob Kurtinitis of the Spotsylvania Visitor's Center shows a monument to the spot where Gen. Robert E. Lee is said to have camped on the grounds of the Circuit Court in 1864. BELOW: Jane Marra provides a historical perspective to the several thousand artifacts on view at the Spotsylvania County Museum, located in the Old Berea Christian Church. The 1856 church itself is well worth a look.



IF YOU GO...

Visitors to Spotsylvania Courthouse should start at the **Visitor's Center**, where a map and brochure of the historic district are available. Take a few moments to look at exhibits and view the film there, as well.

Two of the 10 historic sites are just outside the front door of the visitor's center. They are the **Spotswood Inn**, no longer an inn but private law offices, and the **historic courthouse of the circuit court**, opposite the visitor's center. Peek in the front window of the courthouse and look at the old bell, rescued from an even older courthouse on the same site.

Walk the courthouse lawn and take a look at the **old county jail**, built in 1855. Tours are offered occasionally and the thing to look for in the jail is Civil War-era prisoner graffiti.

Continue walking along Route 208 past the old jail and note the **Spotsylvania County Museum** on the opposite side of the street. The museum is a highlight, housed in the graceful Old Berea Christian Church, dating to 1856. If time allows (or the museum is closed) walk around back and look at the small **Colonial-era cemetery**. Let the museum guides know any personal areas of interest so they can point out relevant artifacts.

Further down Route 208, crossing back to the north side, check out **Christ Episcopal Church**. Inside, there is a lectern Bible printed in 1754. See if you can spot Civil War battle damage to this beautifully preserved church.

There are two other sites located at the far eastern end of town, outside the official historic district but well worth seeing. With no sidewalks to them, it's best to drive the quarter mile or so to: the **One Room School**, a 1930s-era legacy of the days of segregated schools. It was moved to the courthouse from elsewhere in Spotsylvania.

Last but by no means least on this end of town is the handsome **Zion United Methodist Church**, built just prior to the Civil War and, like Christ Episcopal, still in use.

Heading north along 208 towards Fredericksburg, don't miss the entrance to the old **Confederate Cemetery**, a silent sanctuary for Southern war dead and their relatives.

As for places to eat, there are several restaurants serving breakfast and lunch in the vicinity of the courthouse. For dinner or a place to spend the night, it is only necessary to motor some seven or eight miles to be in the midst of a large number of restaurants, as well as half a dozen or more motels. Dining choices in the Four Mile Fork, Southpoint and Cosners Corner areas are too numerous to cite, ranging from fast food to fine dining. New places appear to open almost daily in these areas, which are loosely clustered around the Massaponax interchange on Interstate 95.



Local museum guides can be helpful in pointing out areas of personal interest.

tourism center, several acres of land have been scraped bare.

Bob Kurtinitis, a retiree who loves history and works with tourists, points out the bulldozed site, where a new shopping center will soon be built.

Between there and the woods to the north of it – hallowed, untouchable land of the Spotsylvania portion of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park – Kurtinitis says a new bypass is to be built.

A visitor standing on the steps of the historic Spotswood Inn at 5 o'clock on any weekday afternoon looks straight down a long line of backed-up traffic at the town's single stoplight. The people in those vehicles are, for the most part, recently arrived commuters heading home to subdivisions west and south of the courthouse.

Will the bypass hurt business? Pendleton says probably not much.

CHANGE ON THE HORIZON

So much change is happening or poised to happen so fast in Spotsylvania that it is hard to keep up. In the five years from 2000 to 2005, Spotsylvania was the second-fastest-growing county in Virginia, with more than 116,000 residents, and a growth

rate of 28 percent. That kind of change keeps the county government scrambling, and the little L-shaped town where Robert E. Lee once camped with his army is the nerve center of that government.

The county board of supervisors must try to keep pace with an enormous demand for new infrastructure and services, which also means a bigger government to operate the whole thing. That translates into building major new facilities for courts, law enforcement, fire and rescue and other services at the courthouse.

Doug Barnes, deputy county administrator, says the county is making a major effort to plan this expansion with a campus master plan, a historic-preservation district and citizen commission. Among many improvements called for is a sidewalk to facilitate walking in a part of the district, due for construction this spring.

The new walkway will end just past the Spotsylvania County Museum, where guides enjoy explaining hundreds of artifacts and exhibits, many of them tied to the nearby 1864 battle, which turned the area into a killing field as some 30,000 fell.

Depending on the visitor's interests, guide **Jane Marra** can show items as diverse as the fife of a New Hampshire youth who died

after the Spotsylvania battle, quilts that pre-date the Civil War, the huge cast made from the track of a dinosaur in a county quarry, or an item from the Navy's Aegis missile cruiser Chancellorsville.

Visitors come from far and wide, says Marra, "but it's a little slow in wintertime."

The Rev. **Jeff Packard**, rector of Christ Episcopal Church, says there is a strong sense of community among four local churches and their members. Packard, who says he grew up in a small and isolated town in Pennsylvania, notes that it is the members who make a church, "and the people here are great."

"I was attracted to the whole area," he says, "It is a beautiful area and it's kind of fascinating to be connected to the battle here.

Packard says Christ Church, built in 1841, was turned into a battlefield hospital and still shows damage from the fighting.

Supervisor **T.C. Waddy**, whose Livingston District includes the courthouse area, is a native of Spotsylvania. "It's a nice place with nice people," says Waddy, a former sheriff in the county.

"The town goes way back before the Civil War," says Waddy. "It was a crossroads then and it is still a crossroads for many people." ■