

## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Bennie Scarton,  
Contributing Writer

*Again in the year 2002, we're making our way around Virginia, 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 sixth stop, we'll be ...*

# Down Home in Nokesville

*... Like a little time  
travel to the past ...*



While Nokesville sits smack in the middle of Northern Virginia's Prince William County — one of Virginia's fastest-growing counties — the small town has managed to maintain its friendly, down-home atmosphere where visitors are always welcome.

With enormous growth all around it, Nokesville has remained almost untouched

for the past 137 years. It is still country. It is green and peaceful with no noise and no traffic problems.

Outside of Fitzwater Drive, the main street through the town, land stretches as far as the eye can see, with horses and cows grazing under a big sky. It's like the community is stuck in a time capsule and offers the visitor a little time travel to the past.



BENNIE SCARTON PHOTOS



**Rob Miller oversees the Kelmill Farm, a dairy farm with 260 milking cows located on over 270 acres on the outskirts of town.**



**Scott Calder is one of 10 career firemen with the Prince William County Fire and Rescue Department, which covers 64 square miles, the largest amount of any unit in the county.**

Straddling Virginia Route 28, Nokesville is a neat, orderly little village where you will find old frame houses neatly painted with yards manicured, a few businesses and a block of churches. It's the kind of place anyone would be proud to call their home.

Although new and large subdivisions are springing up throughout Prince William County, rural Nokesville residents think it's a big deal when a new house is erected in town.

Nokesville officially became a town on Aug. 28, 1865, when its U.S. post office was established. It was named for U.S. Marine Capt. Norvel Nokes, who purchased a 100-acre farm that is now part of the town, and named it White Hall.

*Cooperative Living/July 2002*





**With enormous growth all around it, Nokesville remains green and peaceful.**

The clusters of houses and firms that evolved into the town began sprouting up in the late 19th century, and by the turn of the century had formed a thriving hamlet. Through the years, the town's businesses have changed, but families of the original owners have stayed on.

"This is a really special town and everyone who lives here really loves it," says Postmaster **J. Jacobius**, who has been at the post since 1994 and greets nearly all his patrons by their first name. Instead of a country store, the post office, like those in most small-town communities, serves as a meeting place for the town's residents to catch up on the latest news.



**A mural depicting dancing farm animals welcomes you to town.**

seems everyone knows everyone else."

Swanson has three part-time employees and 25 volunteers. "We couldn't keep the library open without them," she adds.

The main street of the community has seen drastic changes through the years. At the turn of the century, the main street through the town was home for such old-time enterprising shops as a blacksmith, butcher, millinery, farm machinery, department store, bank, garage, saddlery, restaurant, distillery, saloon, watch maker and jeweler, along with a boarding house and bandstand.

Through the years these enterprises gradually closed down and Nokesville today, still neat and appealing, has as its present commercial occupants home builders, auto-repair shops, antique shops, professional offices and salons.

The post office, with its 10 employees, has 443 mail boxes and 2,266 other residents and businesses are served by rural carriers.

Another popular spot in town is the Nokesville Neighborhood Library. **Dona Swanson**, supervisor at the library since 1997, says, "Lots of folks just stop by to check the community bulletin board for upcoming neighborhood activities, to see if their favorite author has written another book, to pick up their favorite magazine to take to the dentist's office, or to become library volunteers themselves.

"Many residents come to visit the library for a little quiet time, but may end up chatting pleasantly with a friend or neighbor who also enjoys the library as much as them. It

**(Left) First Baptist Church is one of many in the community. (Below) Veterans work with recruits at the Prince William Police Training Academy.**





# If You Go...

The big event in Nokesville is “**Old Fashioned Nokesville Days**,” which is put on by the Ruritan Club as a fund-raiser each June. It includes a parade in which nearly everyone in the community participates or comes out to watch. Other attractions include crafts, refreshments and fun games for the children (703-594-2595).

For the golfers, **Bristow Manor Golf Club** offers 18 holes of championship golf over a picturesque course (703-368-3558).

The **Golf Academy at Broad Run** provides a par-35 championship nine-hole course complete with lighted practice facilities, driving range, putting practice areas and miniature golf pro shop with deli (703-365-2443).

The only restaurant in town is **Joe's Pizza and Subs NY Style**, located in a little shopping center at 13075 Fitzwater Dr. (703-594-2126).

Youth for Tomorrow, founded by former Washington Redskins' coach Joe Gibbs, puts on a big fall festival — “**Country Fair/Auction**” — each year with upwards of 5,000 people showing up to participate in a live and silent auction, entertainment, food, games, rides, antique cars and visits by celebrities. The date for the 17th annual event this year is Oct. 5 (703-368-7995).

Nearby is the **Manassas Regional Airport**, one of the busiest airports in the state. Temporarily housed in the main terminal is the Freedom Museum, which is a collection of memorabilia and pictures, honoring all the men and women who have served in all of the United States military conflicts in the past 100 years (703-393-0660).

A busy spot in the community is **Nokesville Park**, operated by the Prince William Park Authority. The 97-acre park includes two equestrian rings and trail, youth and adult baseball and soccer fields, volleyball court, playground, picnic pavilion with grills and tables, and comfort station (703-792-7060).

For the history buffs, the 5,000-acre **Manassas National Battlefield Park** is about 15 miles away and visitors can explore the fields and hills where the bloody battles of First and Second Manassas were fought. Reenactments are held each summer (703-361-1339).

**Old Town Manassas** offers a walking tour of its history and heritage, and maps and printed guides are available at the **Manassas Museum** (703-368-1873) or the **Historic Manassas Visitor Center** (703-368-6599).

The history of early 20th-century fire-fighting techniques can be found at the **Manassas Volunteer Fire Company Museum** (703-368-6211). Antique equipment includes a 1909 hand-drawn hose cart and a 1909 Howe horse-drawn pumper.

Not too far away from the town is **Prince William Forest Park**, which sports 37 miles of timber-lined trails that skirt creeks, ridges and peaceful valleys. Fishing, camping, biking and bird watching are other activities that will occupy your time at the park (703-221-7181).

For other information, drop by the **Prince William County-Greater Manassas Chamber of Commerce** at 8963 Center St. in Manassas (703-368-4813). ■

One of Nokesville's most unique businesses is the Lacey Lane Carriage Company, owned by **Nanne Clarke** and **Wilbur Wright**. The company provides horse-drawn carriages for weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, or any special occasion, creating memories that might last a lifetime.

“I used to ride and show, but my back won't let me do it anymore,” notes Clarke. “I wasn't going to get rid of my horses, so I started doing the carriage rides three years ago. I really get a lot of pleasure doing it, particularly seeing the reaction of unexpected passengers when they see me and my Brabant mare arriving. I think the senior citizens enjoy the rides the most, as many times it reminds them of days gone by. It's a great feeling for me, knowing I've made someone so happy.”

Among the first stores to locate in the town was the W. R. Free Jr. Store, which sold hay, grain, fertilizer, plows, field fencing, pine and oak lumber, and railroad ties. Another was the Farmers Union Store, which stocked groceries, fabrics and building materials.

One thing that has remained constant through the years is the number of churches in town — the community's main street is dominated by them. An annual event in the town is the gathering of churchwomen, who get together and make laptop quilts for shut-ins.

Also, many of the old homes are undergoing modern renovation, with the sound of hammers and electric saws now ringing out daily.

One resident who has witnessed the changes that have taken place in the community through the years is **J.**

**Robert Beahm**. He was born in Nokesville in 1920, one of eight children, and grew up on a farm in the community.

Last year he published a book, *Nokesville: The Way It Was*. Beahm, who worked for the federal government for 37 years, mostly as a rural letter carrier out of Nokesville, says writing the book was “both a

pleasant, and sometime frustrating experience. Written records relative to the town are almost non-existent, and the men and women who lived the early history have passed on.”

However, assorted records he found in an old trunk belonging to a resident

who lived in Nokesville during parts of two centuries provided much of the material for his book. Old newspaper articles and letters were another source of facts and data.

Beahm says he decided to write the book, which took him nearly three years, “so present residents will come to see Nokesville the way it was and come to hold a deeper appreciation for the old town.”

Nokesville owes its existence to the railroad — without it, there probably would never have been a town. For decades, starting at the beginning of the century, trains transported workers, students and shoppers, as well as mail, baggage, grain, cattle, and sometimes fresh fruit and vegetables to and from Washington, DC. Before a high school was built, students went to school in Manassas by commuter train.

Until the 1930s, trains also hauled farmers' milk to the city each day, after horses and, later, trucks were used to bring the milk to the railroad station. The train depot, torn down after the railroad's heyday, was indeed a vital part of early Nokesville, as farmers received equipment and machinery by way of the station, as well.

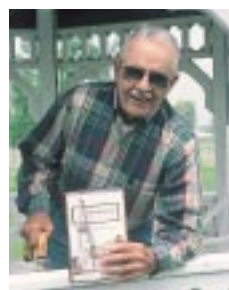
## Nokesville Notable

One of Nokesville's former residents is now in the national limelight for something he is doing that also goes back to the turn of the century. **Ken Hyde**, who graduated in 1957 from Brentsville District High School in Nokesville, is building an exact replica of Orville and Wilbur Wright's 1903 Flyer, used in the first manned flight. The plane, which will

be completed this December, will be the centerpiece of the 100th-anniversary celebration of the birth of aviation at Kitty Hawk, NC, in December 2003. The plane will be flown to duplicate the feat achieved by the Wrights. Now a resident of Warrenton, Hyde recalls his early days in Nokesville “pitching

hay on one of the many farms that outlined the town.”

One resident who has a love of the open spaces that Nokesville offers is **Rob Miller**, 35, a fourth-generation farmer in the community. He oversees the Kelmil Farm, a dairy farm with 260



**Robert Beahm**

milking cows hovering over 270 acres on the outskirts of town. "I could never leave the farm ... it's more than just a job. It's a way of life for me," says Miller of the dairy business that has been in operation since 1916.



**Jay Blankenship**

**Jay Blankenship**, 63, discovered Nokesville 34 years ago while working as a construction inspector for the Fairfax County school system.

"It was the kind of community I was looking for ... kind of quiet with friendly neighbors," he says. Now retired, Blankenship enjoys gardening and mowing about four acres of grass with his Case riding mower.

The first fire-department building was erected in the town in 1945 and has been providing service to the community since then. "We cover an area of 64 square miles, the largest amount of any unit in the county," says Technician **I. Scott Calder**, one of 10 career firemen with the Prince William County Fire and Rescue Department. The department provides fire coverage from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week. Some 50 volunteers are on call during the evening and weekend hours. The fire hall also features a community room where bingo and other community functions are conducted.

Nokesville Park provides a sport venue for youth and adult sports such as soccer and baseball, along with a horse-riding trail.

A high school and elementary school provide the education of the students while also providing recreation for adults. The first secondary school in town was Hebron Seminary, a full three stories high. It was administered as a private school but welcomed students of all faiths. After 15 years, it closed its doors in 1924 as public schools began to open.

During the period 1914-1920, the Nokesville Cornet Band provided entertainment from a bandstand located in the center of town. In the 1920s, Nokesville was home to an agricultural fair. The White Hall farm accommodated the event with its large, red barn serving as the center of activities. A destructive tornado on May 2, 1929, completely demolished the big old barn and no effort was made to relocate or continue the annual event.

Nokesville's rural roads make it pleasant for bike riders such as 28-year-old **Brian Shaw**, a resident of the community. "I try to get out and ride 15 miles or so a day ... it's

really refreshing and a great way to exercise," he says while pausing to take a break on a back road.

Nokesville is located about eight miles south of Manassas, where most of its residents go for entertainment and to shop, not by train anymore, but by private cars and pickup trucks. ■