

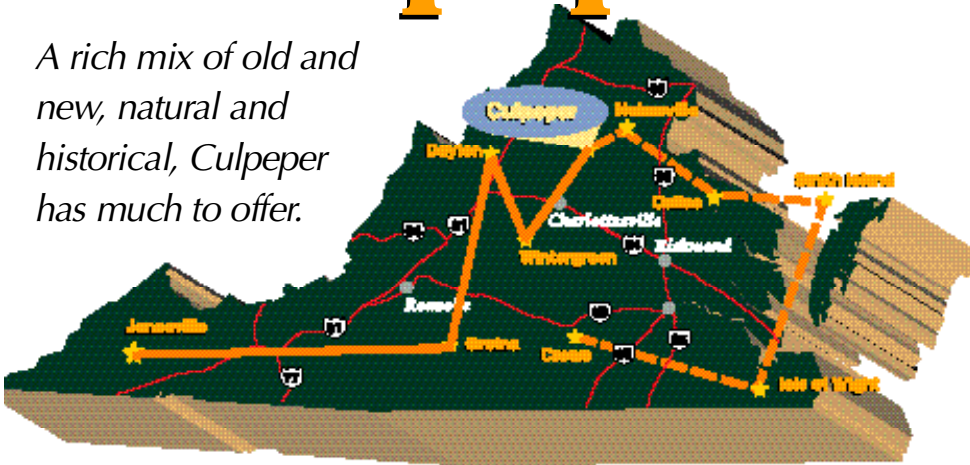
## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Allison Brophy,  
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 fifth stop, we'll be ...*

# Down Home in Culpeper

*A rich mix of old and new, natural and historical, Culpeper has much to offer.*



ALLISON BROPHY PHOTOS

**East Davis Street in downtown Culpeper is chock full of cool shops and eateries.**

Surrounded on all sides by the bluest of Blue Ridge Mountains and a patchwork of fertile fields, the town of Culpeper, established in 1759, has successfully achieved a rich mix of the old and the new. Located on the fringes of the bustling Northern Virginia sector, the town (population 10,000) quietly maintains its heritage and high quality of life while embracing a constantly expanding downtown and a wealth of natural attractions.

Home to another 25,000 citizens, the county of Culpeper provides a lush agricultural setting steeped in history. In 1749, a 17-year-old George Washington was commissioned as surveyor for the new county, a position he would hold for three years. Enabling legislation, founding the county in 1749, described Culpeper as having a "high and pleasant situation." The hills of the Piedmont lend a rolling feel to the expansive acreage, rising from an elevation of 300 feet in the east

and 600 feet in the west. The town and the county were named after Lord Thomas Culpeper, colonial governor of Virginia from 1680 to 1683.

### The Past Is Important

As evidenced by the professional look and feel of the Museum of Culpeper History, the past is important to Culpeper. Museum Director **Zann Miner** pointed to the significance of Culpeper's Civil War heritage, its Native American history, and footprints left behind by dinosaurs, discovered in a quarry in the region of Stevensburg.

"The museum has one set of more than 4,000 dinosaur tracks that was unearthed in

**The main house at the Inn at Kelly's Ford, built in 1779, now houses lodging, a pub and a quality restaurant.**







**A major Civil War battle was fought on the grounds of the Inn at Kelly's Ford.**



**The recently built movie theater, located on Main Street, maintains the integrity of the downtown area.**



**This interactive topographical map found in the Museum of Culpeper History tells visitors all about the town's Civil War battles.**

"Local people are proud of this museum that they can say belongs to them. Visitors are astounded that such a small community produced such a remarkable institution."

After visiting the museum, take a stroll up Main Street and meander onto Davis Street and adjoining avenues in Culpeper's downtown district, to explore a variety of specialty shops, antiques stores, art galleries and restaurants. At each end of Davis Street are the town's two anchors: the renovated train depot, that houses the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center to the east; and the Culpeper County Courthouse to the west. Questions about what to do and where to go can be

the late 1980s," Miner said. "It is considered a world-class find because it is the largest number of tracks found at any site in the world."

Besides a lively indoor gallery chronicling the life of Virginia's Monacan Indians, the museum also features an evolving Native American village on its grounds, complete with a wigwam and a log canoe. A local family of Monacans work the village May through October on the first and third Saturday of each month.

The museum's Civil War gallery weaves a detailed story of Culpeper's battles along with civilian life during the tumultuous time. Miner described Culpeper as "fraught with turmoil" during the war, a town desired by both sides.

"More than 160 battles were fought on Culpeper soil and it was also the site of the largest encampment of the war. About 120,000 Union soldiers spent the winter here from late 1863 to spring of 1864," Miner said.

The museum offers a variety of guided tours, a well-stocked gift shop, and several interactive displays spanning Culpeper's story from prehistoric times to modern day.

"Culpeper history is sort of a microcosm of American history. You can come in here and get a glimpse of what life was like for most rural Americans during the first 250 years of our country's growth," she said.

**The Culpeper County Courthouse on West Davis Street was the site of much Civil War action.**





# If You Go...

Spanning 389 square miles and located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the county of Culpeper with the town of the same name at its center is easily accessible to and from four major interstates: I-66, I-95, I-81 and I-64. Just 60 miles southwest of Washington, DC, and 45 miles north of Charlottesville, a trip to the town of Culpeper fits into any itinerary. A smart first stop would be the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center located downtown. Here you can find a complete list of Culpeper's enchanting bed and breakfasts, as well as commercial hotels and motels. For more information on accommodations and services, check out [www.visitculpeperva.com](http://www.visitculpeperva.com).

**Culpeper County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center.** Stocked full of brochures featuring local, state and national attractions, the renovated depot (circa 1904) also serves as the headquarters for the local chamber of commerce. Learn all about Culpeper's finest eateries and wineries here, as well as local golfing opportunities. The necessary steps to open a new downtown business can also be found here. A bright red caboose outside ensures that you're at the right place. Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and weekends 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Contact: (540) 825-8628.

**Culpeper National Cemetery.** Located downtown and open 365 days a year from sunrise to sunset, this regal burial ground dates back to 1867. Special ceremonies are held on Memorial Day and Veterans Day and are sponsored by the local VFW or American Legion. The site has six monuments and 912 unknown soldiers, most likely Civil War veterans. The cemetery's office is open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Contact: (540) 825-0027.

**Minuteman Minimall.** Hailed by the Culpeper County Chamber of Commerce as its biggest tourist attraction, this 18,000-square-foot business is an antiques, crafts and collectibles heaven. People from all 50 states and 20-plus foreign countries have visited this minimall, where reasonably priced treasures are in such abundance that there's something for everyone. A family-run operation, 200 vendors offer their wares, specializing in Virginia-made products. Open Monday-Saturday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday noon to 5 p.m. Contact: (540) 825-3133.

**Civil War Walking Tour of Downtown Culpeper.** This two-hour tour is narrated by Virginia Morton, local author of *Marching Through Culpeper*, a popular Civil War novel in its fifth printing and under consideration as a Hollywood movie. Her tour chronicles Culpeper's fighting during the Civil War, interwoven with real stories of its people. Stops along the

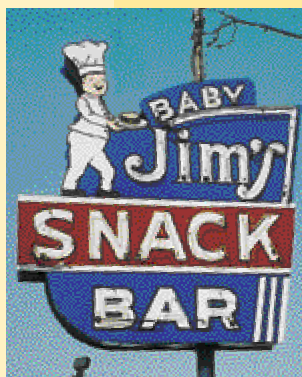
way include the train depot, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, the Culpeper County Courthouse, and the Hill Mansion. Tours are held at 10:30 a.m., the first and third Saturdays from June-October. Contact: (540) 825-9147.

**Baby Jim's Snack Bar.** A downtown tradition since 1947, Baby Jim's purposely hasn't changed much through the years. Family owned and operated for more than five decades, this hamburger joint continues to

thrive despite being surrounded by commercial fast-food establishments. Walk up to the window for a tasty selection of favorites, like steak sandwiches, fried shrimp or chicken, BLTs, or bacon and eggs for breakfast. A neon sign outside lends 1950s charm to an all-American eatery that prides itself in staying the same. Limited seating. Open Monday-Saturday 4:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**The Museum of Culpeper History.** Interactive, educational and entertaining. Open Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. May-October, Sundays 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Contact: (540) 829-1749.

**The Burgandine House.** Right next door to the museum on Main Street, this quaint structure is Culpeper's oldest home, built around 1749. Historical stories swirl around the Burgandine House, including the fact that General Grant used it as his headquarters in 1863. Many Union troops camped out here, crowding the house, while even more slept on the porch and in the yard. Guided tours are conducted by appointment; open the same hours as the museum. ■



Baby Jim's Snack Bar



The Burgandine House

answered at the Visitors Center, making it the prime place to start a downtown excursion.

Aboriginal wares, scrumptious sweets, wines, silver, Middle-Eastern gifts, a variety of cuisine, original art and antiques galore await those who come to downtown Culpeper. The side streets are lined by immaculately restored homes encompassing 14 architectural "high styles," including Federal, Greek Revival and Victorian.

## Speaking From Experience

Town of Culpeper Mayor **Waller Jones** knows first-hand the strides made downtown in recent years, as he was proprietor of Lerner's Department Store, located on Davis Street, from the early 1950s until its closing in 1985.

"When I moved here in 1951, the downtown was made up of local merchants who prided themselves in the daily lives of Culpeper's families," Jones said.

He said the arrival of the shopping mall forced many of these merchants to abandon downtown businesses, but formation of Culpeper as a Virginia Main Street Community in 1987 brought new life to a fading district.

"We are vibrant right now and with all the improvements made, it has become a beautiful downtown once again," Jones said. "It is certainly worth a day trip and I think people are beginning to find this

out."

The efforts of the Culpeper Department of Tourism, along with Culpeper Renaissance Inc., have made Culpeper a popular destination for those seeking escape from the metropolitan Washington, DC, area. Tourism Director **Susan Pakies** affirmed Culpeper's top three attractions as the museum, the downtown and its scenic beauty.

"We have a lot of scenic highways and byways and gorgeous vistas of the Blue Ridge Mountains. On a clear day, the views are just breathtaking," Pakies said. "Our quality of air, the fall foliage attracts people who just want to get away."

For those seeking to relish this serene natural beauty, take a winding ride to the Rappahannock River Campground in



Town of Culpeper Mayor  
Waller Jones

Richardsville. Owned and operated by **Steve and Katy Walker**, the 52-acre campground offers tubing, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, fishing and camping on the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers. Set in an untouched wilderness setting, a variety of water trips are available spanning four miles to 50 miles.

"You can ride on the river for a few hours or four days," said Steve. "There are more white-water rapids on the Rappahannock River than any other river in the state."

Open for business from April to November, canoe trips conclude at the end of the summer as the river recedes. There are 45



**Katy and Steve Walker, owners of Rappahannock River Campground, show off the many canoes their facility offers for rent.**

primitive campsites set in a peaceful setting of pine trees, which produce a soft bed of pine needles. No electricity or RV hook-ups are present at these sites that are intended for tent camping only. Hot showers are available and a camp store sells items that may have been forgotten and left at home.

"When I first visited this place in 1997, I just fell in love with it. One of the first things I noticed was that it was so clean," Katy remarked.

Just a short jaunt up the road, the Inn at Kelly's Ford offers elegant lodging and dining for those who aren't feeling up to an evening in a tent. Proprietors **Bill and Linda Willoughby** decided to open an inn on the lush property after learning of the area's extensive history. The inn's main house was built in 1779 and was the original home of the Kelly family, who settled in the area soon after the American Revolution. The family established Kellysville, a town on the Rappahannock River that boasted a mill, woolen factory and blacksmith shop.

The Kelly home was one of the few structures in the area that survived the Civil War. It was used by Union forces as a headquarters, a hospital and even a pub. The house eventually received a brick facade and adjoining land was farmed. When the Willoughbys pur-

chased the property in 1999, the brick was removed from the 18th-century homestead and they were astounded at the "beautiful old house" underneath. Original fireplaces, made of stones from the nearby river, are still in working order. Preservation of original features was top priority.

Featuring French Continental cuisine with a local flair, the inn's restaurant specializes in Angus beef and seafood dishes. Pelham's Pub occupies the basement and there are two lavish suites on the second floor. Additional lodging includes six cottage suites as well as a two-level honeymoon suite in a renovated silo.

The inn is well known for its recreational facilities, including an expansive equestrian center with an outside riding ring 180 feet by 300 feet, and an indoor arena. A series of open horse shows are held in the center each year, and visitors to the inn can take riding lessons, venture on a guided trail ride via horseback, and there are even ponies for the kids. Canoeing, fishing and mountain biking are also offered.

"Come enjoy the casual elegance of Virginia hunt country," encouraged Inn Events Coordinator **Nicolle Isaacs**.

Old and new, natural and historical: Discover all that Culpeper has to offer. It may take more than a day. ■