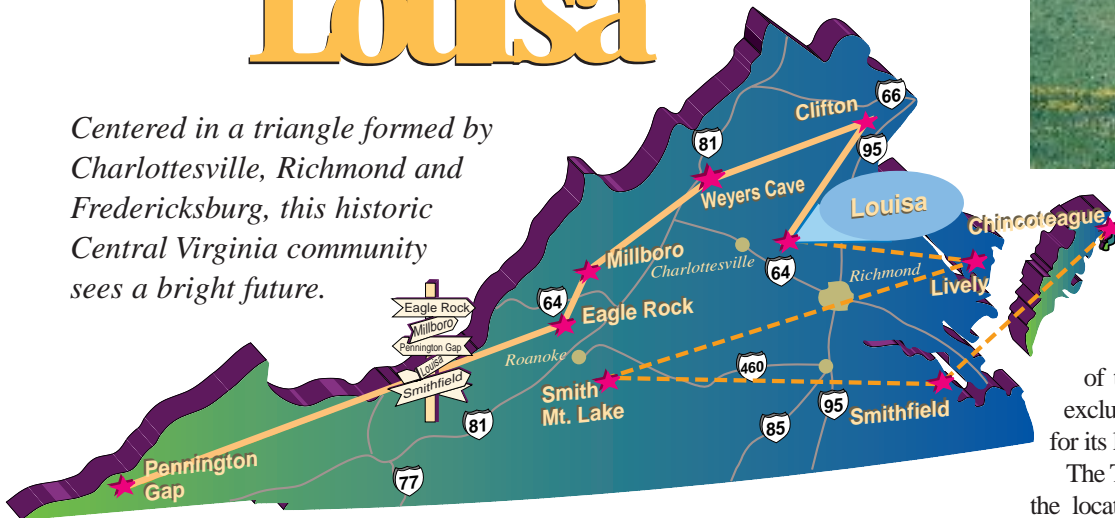


by Cathy Collins
Contributing Writer

During the year 2000, 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 Louisa

Centered in a triangle formed by Charlottesville, Richmond and Fredericksburg, this historic Central Virginia community sees a bright future.



Interstate 64, built in the late 1960s, makes an east-to-west sweep through the county with interchanges at three locations, contributing to the changing landscape of this area that once depended almost exclusively upon farming and lumbering for its livelihood.

The Town of Louisa is the county seat and the location of Louisa County government and related offices. The present courthouse, built in 1905 in the Classic Greek Revival architectural style and recently remodeled and expanded, is an imposing focal point on Main Street. Courthouse Square also includes the former Louisa County Jail, built in 1868, which now serves as the Louisa County Historical Society Museum. An even earlier building, the Crank Building, built in 1833 as a commonwealth's attorney's office, stands next to the historic courthouse and is being updated to serve as a center for record storage and genealogical research data, operated by the historical society.

An Architectural Showcase

A large collection of fine homes around the Town of Louisa, built from the mid-1800s through the turn of the century, showcases the interesting and intricate architectural detailing of these periods.

Just a few blocks separate seven churches within the Town of Louisa. Meticulously maintained and rich in history, five date to the 1800s and one to the early part of the 20th century — Memorial Baptist Church, 1849; Louisa Christian Church, 1851; Louisa United Methodist Church, 1852; St. James Episcopal Church, 1881; First Baptist Church, 1883; and Louisa Presbyterian Church, 1911.

Louisa United Methodist Church served as



Enos L. "Pokey" Southard greets passers-by from the porch of his Main Street Louisa home in his favorite reading chair.

Comfortably positioned in a rocker on his front porch, **Enos L. "Pokey" Southard** has literally had a front row seat, watching the Town of Louisa's gradual metamorphosis from a sleepy little burg into a thriving community, particularly within the last three decades.

"It's quite a bit different now than it used to be, not only in the town, but also in Louisa County," says Southard, an octogenarian and native Louisan who was born in a house on Main Street, just a few blocks away from where he now resides.

"I think a lot of the change is due to our location," explains Southard, who served three terms as Louisa town councilman. "It's brought us growth."

Uniquely centered within a triangle formed by the cities of Charlottesville, Richmond and Fredericksburg, Louisa is attracting new residents, many of whom make a daily commute to these areas, as well as tourists who have discovered the community's diverse assets.

Greg Ferguson, Louisa town manager from 1994 until he left to take a job in North Carolina July 1 of this year, said the town's population was 1,088 in 1990 and he won't be surprised if the census surpasses the current estimate of 1,400. The county population is projected at over 24,000.



JENNIFER FULLMER PHOTOS



Phyllis Johnson, owner of Fabric Hut and Gift Gallery on Main Street, is president of the Louisa Retail Merchant's Association.



Town of Louisa Mayor Don Gallihugh (l) and former Town Manager Greg Ferguson in front of the Louisa Town Office.



(Top) The stately Louisa County Courthouse, a Virginia Historic Landmark, overlooks Main Street. (Above) The former Louisa County Jail, built in 1868 on Courthouse Square, now serves as the Louisa County Historical Society Museum.

a hospital following the Battle of Trevilians, considered the largest all-cavalry battle during the Civil War. The Battle of Trevilians was fought at several locations just a few miles west and north of the Town of Louisa on June 11 and 12, 1864. The battle occurred when General Phillip Sheridan attempted a raid on the Virginia Central Railroad as a strategy to break General Robert E. Lee's vital supply line from the Shenandoah Valley. About 13,000 caval-rymen were involved in the battle, and 1,619 were either killed or injured.

At nearby Oakland Cemetery on West Street, 94 marked graves serve as a memorial to the unknown victims of the Battle of Trevilians. One interesting stone, an obelisk, is a memorial for the three sons of one family killed during the Civil War. All were cavalry soldiers, one was mortally wounded at Trevilians, and all died within the space of about a year.

"Plans are underway by the Trevilians Station Battlefield Foundation (TSBF) to develop an enhanced driving tour of approximately 10 spots to cover the main events of the two-day battle," says Ferguson, who also served as a member of the Louisa Tourism Council, which is working to establish a visitors' information center manned by a coordinator and staffed by volunteers. The TSBF is in the process of purchasing portions of the battlefield, and the state is studying the feasibility of forming a state park to showcase the battlefield's history.

Louisa County was formed from Hanover County in 1742 and named for Princess Louisa, daughter of King George II and

Queen Caroline of England and wife of King Frederick V of Denmark. The Town of Louisa was incorporated in 1873, almost 35 years after the Louisa Railroad reached Louisa Courthouse. The railroad brought growth and gave the community of Louisa a greater connection to the outside world.

The *Virginia Business Director and Gazeteer* by Chataigne and Ellis reported that at the time of its incorporation, the Town of Louisa had 250 residents and 27 businesses. There were four churches, a hotel, seven lawyers, one druggist, one saddler, one milliner, one confectioner, one flour mill, a music store, seven general stores, one general merchandiser, one liquor dealer, one grocer, a distiller and a tinsmith.

The first street lamps were installed in 1878 when 12 oil lamps on posts were placed around the business district. W.H. Vaden made his rounds each morning carrying a small ladder, a pair of scissors to trim the wicks, and a can of oil and tissue paper to clean the globes. He'd return at dusk to re-light the lamps.

Long-Standing Businesses

A fire in January 1888 destroyed one whole block of Main Street across from the courthouse, and rebuilding the business dis-

trict was a slow, but successful, process. Several of the businesses founded around the turn of the century are still in operation today.

Until the early 1900s, sidewalks along Main Street were mostly plank, and there were tanbark walks in the outlying sections. Gradually, these were replaced by cement sidewalks in the business area, and merchants paid a proportionate share of the cost. A bond issue in 1906 brought the cement sidewalks and put a finishing touch to the town's corporate area.

Along with an identifiable downtown, a park and several bed-and-breakfasts, Louisa also has three small shopping centers, located on the east end of town.

"Visitors to the Town of Louisa will find a pleasant combination of the benefits of rural Virginia with many conveniences of larger cities and towns," says Louisa Mayor **Don Gallihugh**, who is director for the Consolidated Farm Service Agency. "We have a number of small and medium businesses that provide a good selection for town citizens and visitors to take advantage of, including arts and crafts and specialty stores to essential food needs."

Gallihugh believes that, as urbanization approaches from the west, east and north, growth is inevitable for the town that covers

1.88 square miles.

To prepare for this growth, the Louisa Town Council has expanded the regional sewage treatment plant, which was doubled to 400,000 gallons daily capacity; expanded and improved existing water and sewer lines; and endorsed a new connecting street to move traffic through town more easily.

"I've seen a tremendous difference in local shopping habits over the years," says **Phyllis Johnson**, who is president of the Louisa Retail Merchants Association (LRMA) and has owned a gift and fabric shop on Main Street since 1972. "In those early years, about 85% of my business was fabric sales and 15% was gifts. Now the focus has switched and gifts account for the greater part of sales. People who used to sew no longer have the time because they have had to go into the job market."

To strengthen small businesses in the town and to provide greater potential for sales opportunities, the LRMA holds a "Spring Fling" in May and a Christmas festival, combined with a parade, in December.

From the late 1890s through the 1920s, Louisa gained a reputation as a summer resort. Several ladies who had large homes took in summer boarders, and the Louisa Hotel, now the Cooke Building on Main Street, also welcomed visitors. People would come from Richmond to Louisa to escape the city's summer heat and enjoy good country food.

Now visitors come to nearby 13,000-acre Lake Anna to enjoy water-skiing, boating, swimming and other water sports, as well as some of the best fishing in the state. Fishing tournaments are held throughout the spring and summer at several marinas that border the lake. Camping is also popular around the lake

and the community.

Virginia Power's decision to build a nuclear power plant in Louisa County in the late 1960s has had a tremendous impact on the community. The additional revenue has enabled the county to build several schools and a county office building, a new library, as well as to improve existing facilities while maintaining a low tax rate.

The Louisa Industrial Air Park, about one mile east of Louisa and 12 miles from Interstate 64, consists of 350 acres where nine businesses are located. The county is currently marketing a shell building as a potential location for a manufacturing industry.

Richard E. "Dicky" Dost, owner of Chips Inc., which manufactures wood products at Zion Crossroads, just off I-64, west of the Town of Louisa, is the chairman of the Louisa Industrial Development Authority. He

If You Go...

The sounds of **Nashville Bluegrass** find their way to Louisa County at least twice every year. Christopher Run Campground on Lake Anna hosts a festival every summer, and this year, the **17th annual event will be held at Walton Park in Mineral, about six miles outside the town of Louisa on July 13, 14, and 15.** Old-fashioned bluegrass will be performed by 18 bands, highlighting some of the best artists in the industry. Tickets available at the gate.

The **Louisa Volunteer Firemen will hold their fair during the week of July 3-8**, including a parade on Main Street on July 6.

Louisa's rich agricultural heritage takes center stage during the **Louisa County Agricultural Fair, held at the Louisa Firemen's Fairgrounds in the Town of Louisa on Aug. 11 and 12.** The fair features judged exhibits in a variety of categories including homemaking, vegetables, photography, crafts and more. Members of the 4-H Livestock Club will be exhibiting their steers, hogs and lambs during the livestock show. Jack Russell terrier races, a pet show, games for all ages, demonstrations and exhibits are part of the fair tradition. A horse show is scheduled for Aug. 10.

Every September, the **Louisa Industrial Development Authority presents an Air Show at Freeman Field**, just east of the Town of Louisa. A family-oriented event, the air show includes static aircraft displays, airplane rides and aerobatics along

with a car show and lots of good food. The show is Sept. 9.

To view a large assortment of the newest firefighting apparatus, as well as vintage fire trucks, don't miss the **Mineral Volunteer Firemen's parade along Mineral Avenue, in the town of Mineral, about six miles east of Louisa on Oct. 6.** An annual carnival, with rides and games of chance, is also part of the firemen's event from Oct. 4-7. A juried arts and crafts show and demonstrations will be held at **St. Jude Catholic Church in Mineral on July 15**, and **St. James' Episcopal Church will hold its annual fall festival and craft show on Oct. 7** in the town of Louisa.

On Dec. 1 and 2, the **Louisa Retail Merchants Association (LRMA) will host their annual Christmas Festival**, an arts and crafts sale on Main Street. **Santa Claus will be coming to Louisa for the LRMA's annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 2.**

Just About Anytime...

Wine connoisseurs can visit **Lake Anna Winery** and **Cooper's Vineyard**, or watch skydivers at **Freeman Field**, golf at two locations within the county, and during baseball season, catch a game at **Luck Field** in Mineral or the **Louisa Little League Field.**

The **Louisa Historical Society Museum**, located on Courthouse Square, is open Saturdays and Sundays through October and showcases Louisa County during an earlier time.

Tours are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., at the **North Anna Nuclear Information Center**, located about 14 miles from the Town of Louisa. The center offers an energy museum with electronic interactive displays as well as a picnic area.

Call 540-894-4394 for more information.

The center is closed on major national holidays.

Historic markers have been placed throughout the county at points of interest including **Cuckoo, the ancestral home of the Pendleton family.** From there, over 200 years ago on June 3, 1781, Louisa's unsung hero of the Revolutionary War, Jack Jouett, made a 40-mile moonlight ride to Monticello to warn Governor Thomas Jefferson that British Colonel Banastre Tarleton and his men planned to capture him.

Visitors can take **self-guided walking tours around the Town of Louisa.** There's also a **scenic driving tour around the Historic Green Springs District** where 35 homes can be viewed from the road. Call 540-967-0096 for more information. The **Louisa County Public Library** on Davis Highway, between the towns of Louisa and Mineral, is also a good source of information, as well as the Louisa County Web site, www.louisacounty.com

Information on events and activities around the Town of Louisa and Louisa County can be obtained at selected downtown merchants or at the Louisa Town Office, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

If you're staying around Louisa, contact the **Whistle Stop Bed and Breakfast, Ginger Hill** or **Prospect Hill.** Arrangements for camping can be made at **Small Country Campground** near Louisa, **Christopher Run Campground** and **Lake Anna Family Campground** on Lake Anna. ■

believes the air park is unique because of its airport, Freeman Field.

“The role of the IDA is to bring good business to add to the tax base and we want to emphasize the park,” Dost explains. “Our air park is one of the most modern of the rural counties. I think that Zion Crossroads and Gum Springs will also be phenomenal for business and industrial growth in the next 10 years because of where we’re located.”

About eight miles west of Louisa lies the historic Green Springs District, which offers glimpses of the Blue Ridge mountains along country roads that wind around a distinctive blend of 18th- and 19th-century homes. In 1974, these 14,000 acres became the first agricultural area in Virginia to be designated a

National Historic Landmark District. The district contains 250 original buildings including Boswell’s Tavern, considered one of the most complete ordinaries in Virginia; Prospect Hill, an early plantation that serves as a bed-and-breakfast; Bracketts Farm, circa 1791; Green Springs Plantation; Kenmuir, a Downing Gothic Revival cottage; and Grassdale.

The Town of Louisa and Louisa County are rich in history and have maintained their rural characters while keeping up with modern changes.

“Our citizens welcome visitors, and new residents are our greatest asset,” says Gallihugh. “They reflect the Louisa of today and build the Louisa of tomorrow.” ■