

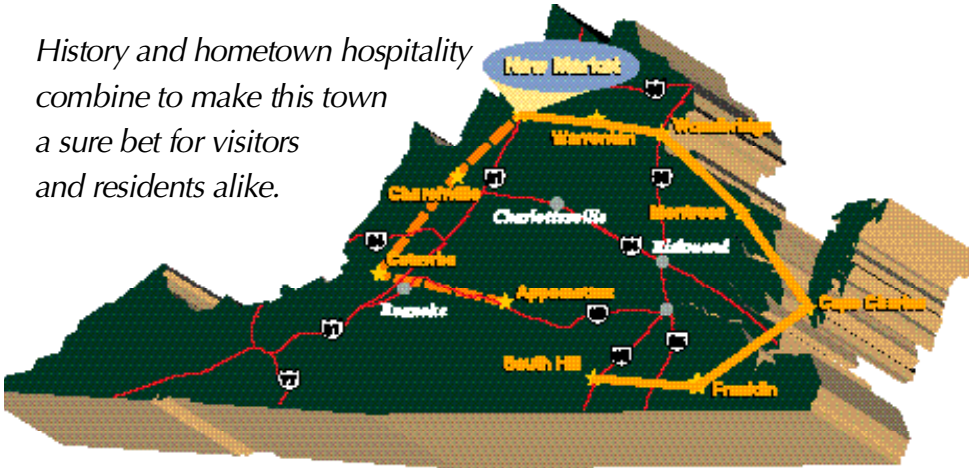
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Nancy Sorrells,
Contributing Writer

During the year 2001, 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 seventh stop, we'll be ...

Down Home in New Market

History and hometown hospitality combine to make this town a sure bet for visitors and residents alike.



hours from Washington, DC, and two hours from Richmond.

Despite being one of Virginia's smaller incorporated municipalities — there were 1,637 residents on census day April 1, 2000 — the town is progressive, according to Click. "In the past nine or 10 years we have undertaken some major projects as far as utilities, wastewater treatment, and water filtration. We are working on ensuring ourselves of an adequate water supply."

Community involvement and communication are the keys. Despite the small number of residents, there is a town council, boards and commissions, a police force, a volunteer fire department and a volunteer rescue squad. There is even a monthly town newsletter that garnered a Virginia Municipal League Achievement Award.

From ballfields to battlefields, there are plenty of reasons to get off the interstate and stay for a while in New Market, explains **Mayor Ripley Click**. Without a moment's hesitation he lists history, recreation, scenery, entertainment, and a gentle hometown atmosphere as positive aspects guaranteed to please visitors and locals alike.

"I don't think there's just one thing. It's

a combination of the citizens, who are nice, good, hard-working folks, the historical aspects of the town and the beauty of the surrounding area. I don't think you will find a more scenic place in the world than right here, and yet there is proximity to larger metropolitan areas," he says. The town, located in the Shenandoah Valley at the southern end of Shenandoah County, is less than two



Local resident Charlie Tharpe relaxes with his daughter, Rebecca Swanson, and granddaughter, Annie Swanson, outside of Rebecca's video store.



Historic downtown New Market is lined with quaint shops.





New Market Mayor Ripley Click pauses in front of the town's government building.

southwestward into Virginia via the Great Wagon Road. New Market was situated at a crossroads along that wagon road. Later, after the road was upgraded and improved, it was known as the Valley Pike and was the main thoroughfare through the town. Today that road is called U.S. Rt. 11.

The road brought commerce and growth, so much so that in 1796 the town was chartered as New Market through an act in the Virginia General Assembly. One of the earliest businesses in the area was a trading post operated by famous frontiersman John Sevier, who is given credit for founding the town. Sevier's career shifted from merchant to politician after he

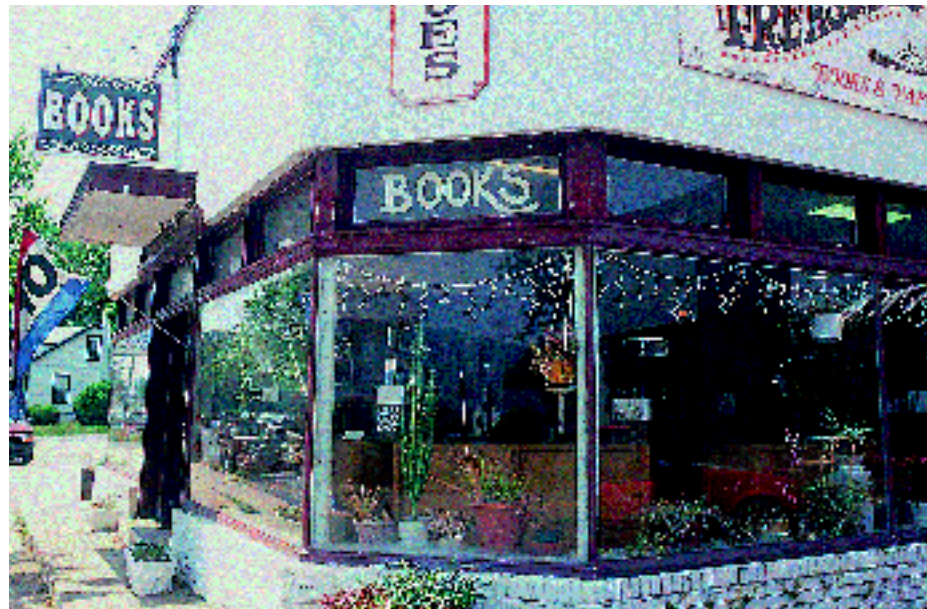
moved west to Tennessee and became the first governor of that newly formed state.

Yet another early New Market business was the Henkel Press, a printing company that catered to the German-speaking population of the region. Today, Henkel books command a pretty penny among collectors. Chances are, however, that if you are interested in acquiring one, **Mike Lewis** will have it at his downtown business, Paper Treasures. Lewis started in the used- and rare-book business 15 years ago in a 12-by-12-foot room. Today more than 50,000 books and nearly a quarter-million other paper items — postcards, prints, comic books, and advertisements — fill the rambling building that was once a Ford dealership.

"People see stuff in here that they've never seen before," he says while looking at a Henkel catechism book dated 1816. "We supplement our used books with local history titles. This is a pretty fascinating area for local history," he says, adding that his business thrives during rainy days in the summer when people who come to the area to enjoy the great outdoors can't get out and hike or bike.

Lewis is not exaggerating when he speaks of the vast amount of history that exudes from New Market. Downtown is a collection of mostly 19th-century buildings erected when main streets, not malls, were filled with hustle and bustle. New Market's time-capsule collection of build-

Paper Treasures, a used- and rare-book store with over 50,000 books and nearly a quarter-million other paper items, opened 15 years ago in a 12x12-foot room.



Fueling the economy of New Market are tourists. Some come to enjoy nature at nearby Shenandoah National Park while others go underground — to the caverns, that is. Two caverns, Endless and Shenandoah, are located just minutes outside of the town limits, while Luray Caverns is nearby. Each of the three offers a unique hook to bring visitors to their doorsteps.

Many visitors come for the history of the area, which stretches back well over 250 years. Most of the mid-18th century settlers who put down roots in this land between two mountain ranges were German-speakers having come originally from Europe, then to Pennsylvania and finally



Barber James Steptoe, Jr., shown with customer Keith Tondrick, has been at the same shop for 40 years. At right is New Market Battlefield Director Scott Harris.





The Taylor family — (l-r) Rebekah, Jonah, Tracy and Benjamin, enjoy a day at New Market Community Park.

ings is so special that in 1972 the entire town was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the early 1990s, overlay ordinances were established to ensure that the historic integrity of the district remains for future generations.

A number of businesses, both old and new, anchor the downtown area. The town library is located in the Henkel House, built by Dr. Solomon Henkel in 1802. On the other side of the street, **James Steptoe, Jr.**, goes about his business providing haircuts and shaves just as he has done for over 40 years, and as his family has done in the same building for 80 years.

There's nothing fancy about his barber shop. On the exterior the gray peeling paint and the red-and-white barber pole speak of time and tradition, while on the inside the equipment still includes an old-fashioned leather strop. There are no appointments in this barber shop where generations of residents have come in for a shave and a haircut.

"I was born and raised in New Market. At first I was too poor to get away. I took over my father's business after he died in 1960 and now I stay out of pride and because you couldn't find a better place to live than New Market. It's special. The people are friendly and they all know each other," says the 69-year-old barber.

A stroll down the main street reveals a variety of businesses in addition to Steptoe's barber shop. There are several restaurants offering local cuisine, antique shops overflowing with eclectic Americana, and even a museum, Bedrooms of America Museum and Pottery. Not all of the businesses cater to the tourist. **Rebecca**

Swanson opened her video store four years ago in response to requests from the local populace. "We did a survey and quite a few people wanted this. People are good here. This is a good town," she said.

Another newcomer to New Market is **June Fournier**, who recently acquired a cabin just outside of town. She and her Pekinese, Amy, enjoy sitting at a sidewalk table outside the Coffee Mouse. "I like this town. It's fun to come downtown and watch the activity," explains Fournier.

Locals like the Taylor family can also stroll a few blocks off the main drag and enjoy the New Market Community Park, built with funding from public and private sources including the Virginia Outdoor Fund and the people of New Market. A pool, ball courts, ball diamonds, playground equipment, fitness trails, and picnic shelters are all found there. **The Taylor children — Benjamin, Rebekah, and Jonah** — as well as **their mother Tracy** make regular use of the facilities. "It's the most beautiful park in the world," exclaims four-year-old Rebekah, while seven-year-old Benjamin points to a bent tree with a crook perfect for climbing and sitting as his favorite aspect of the park.

A Summertime Staple

For those who would rather watch a ballgame than play one, there's Rebel Park, home of the New Market Rebels. Valley League baseball has been a summertime staple in the Shenandoah Valley for four decades. The eight-team NCAA-sanctioned conference is one of only nine wooden-bat leagues in the country. More than a few Big Leaguers made a stop in the

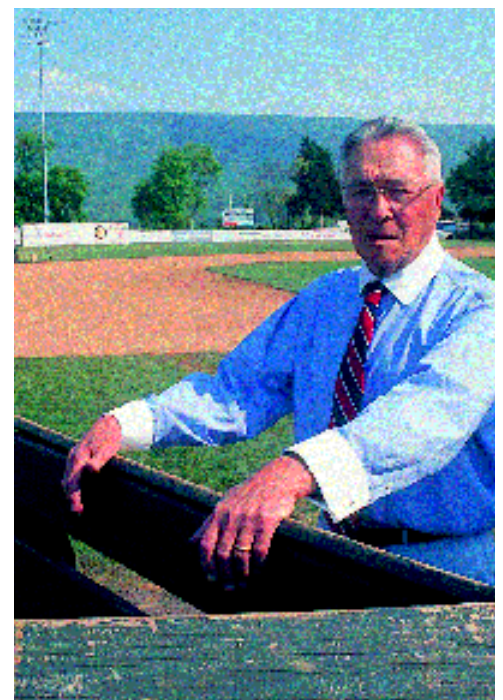
Valley League before moving on to the limelight of Major League Baseball.

In New Market, however, the Rebels represent a unique endeavor in the sports world — a not-for-profit baseball team. "We are the smallest town in the league and the only one that doesn't have a newspaper or TV or radio," says head coach **Mo Weber**. A self-described baseball nut who claims that if it wasn't for his wife baseball would be number one in his life, Weber coached in New Market in 1978. He returned again in 1990 and 1991, and then after retiring as the head coach of the College of William and Mary baseball squad, he returned to stay in 1996.

"We have the best lights in the league. They are brand new, on 80-foot poles, and cost \$140,000. We also have a new press box and a new 36-foot-by-10-foot scoreboard," he says, while giving an impromptu tour of the gleaming facility with stands that will hold close to 1,000 people. Even Mother Nature has conspired to enhance the field, as Massanutten Mountain looms close beyond the outfield.

On game nights, which run from early June until early August, an entire volunteer corps shows up to run the complex. "We sell a lot of hotdogs and hamburgers and they are good. It's all volunteer help and we turn all the money back into the facility," Weber adds.

The battles on the New Market ballfield pale in comparison to the battle that came



Coach Mo Weber stands outside Rebel Park, New Market's state-of-the-art baseball field.

to the crossroads hamlet nearly a century and a half ago during the Civil War.

For New Market, May 15, 1864, is a date that will always be remembered as a time when Union and Confederate forces struggled for control of the Shenandoah Valley, also known as the Breadbasket of the Confederacy.

"New Market had seen the effects of war before 1864. The Valley Pike had been an avenue of military movement. Many of the area's sons and husbands and uncles had gone off to fight while the women kept things together on the farms and fed them. There was a familiarity to war already," explains **Scott Harris**, the director of the New Market Battlefield State Historical Park.

War on Its Doorstep

Then on May 14 Union forces moved in and "brought war onto the doorstep." The next day the Confederate forces arrived and the town found itself in the middle of a battle. "The townspeople saw artillery shells landing in the streets and bullets shattering their windows. One family tore up the floorboards and hid their baby there. The Bushong family took to the basement because the battle was literally in their backyard," Harris says. Victory for the day went to the South after the teenaged Cadet Corps from Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in Lexington rushed into the fray and turned the tide. Afterward, every available space in the town became a hospital and many of the dead were buried in local cemeteries.

The war moved on to other places, but the day's bloody clash and the boyish heroism of the VMI Cadets were forever connected with New Market. In 1967 the battlefield was opened to the public, and in 1970 the associated Hall of Valor Museum was opened. Almost 2 million visitors have stopped by since and many make it a point to attend the annual battle reenactment held each May.

"The battlefield is not only part of New Market's past, but it is very much a part of its present and future. We have a mission to preserve and commemorate, but we are also a cultural and economic resource for the town," says Harris in reference to the 40,000 or so travelers who come to the battlefield each year.

Harris sees New Market as a community that has retained its sense of place and its relationship to its physical surroundings and its heritage. To Mayor Click, it's even simpler than that. "It's the greatest little town in the state of Virginia," he says. ■



History buffs won't want to miss the Hall of Valor Museum.

If You Go...

There are three motels and two bed and breakfasts in New Market, and two motels and one bed and breakfast nearby. There is also a campground just outside the town.

If you are hungry, make sure you stop at the **Southern Kitchen Restaurant**, which drips with simple Virginia hospitality. The business has been operated by the **Newland family** since 1955.

Golfers don't even have to leave the city limits to test their skills at the 27-hole, PGA-sanctioned **Shenvalee Golf Course** (540-740-3181), while hikers have nearby **Shenandoah National Park** for communing with nature.

History buffs won't want to miss the **Hall of Valor Museum and New Market Battlefield Historical Park** (540-740-3101 or www.vmi.edu/museum/nm). In addition to the museum, the Bushong family farm is used to interpret the lives of one 19th-century family that saw their home surrounded by war. The farmhouse and the battlefield park are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Two other military museums can be found at New Market. **The Museum of the American Cavalry** (540-740-3959) tells the story of the cavalry from Jamestown to 1946, while the **New Market Battlefield Military Museum** (540-740-8065) interprets the history of American servicemen from 1776 to the present.

Downtown New Market is host to the **Bedrooms of America Museum and Pottery** (540-740-3512). The museum, housed in a historic structure, features 11 bedrooms furnished in the style of different periods of history.

It's easy to find history in New Market and several walking or driving tours of the historic districts are available free to visitors. To obtain a brochure in advance of your visit, contact the **New Market Chamber of Commerce** at 540-740-3212.

No visit is complete without a visit to **Paper Treasures**, where 250,000 items from books to postcards to records are waiting to be discovered. If objects are more to your liking, then visit the 8,000-square-foot **Nickelodeon Antique Mall**. Both businesses are in the historic downtown.

Going underground is easy for visitors to New Market. Three caverns, each with their own claim to fame, are nearby. **Shenandoah Caverns** (540-477-3115) is four miles north. It includes an elevator to take visitors to and from the caverns. **Endless Caverns** (540-740-8065) is one of the largest and most natural of the state's caves. A little further away is **Luray Caverns** (540-743-4531) which features the world's only "Stalacpipe Organ."

Just south of New Market and only a few yards off of U.S. Rt. 11 (the old Valley Pike) is the longest remaining covered bridge in Virginia. **Meems Bottom Covered Bridge** was built in 1892 to span the Shenandoah River. It is 200 feet long. Also south of New Market is **Art Studio Pottery**, featuring a variety of clay pieces, all original works of art (540-896-4400). ■