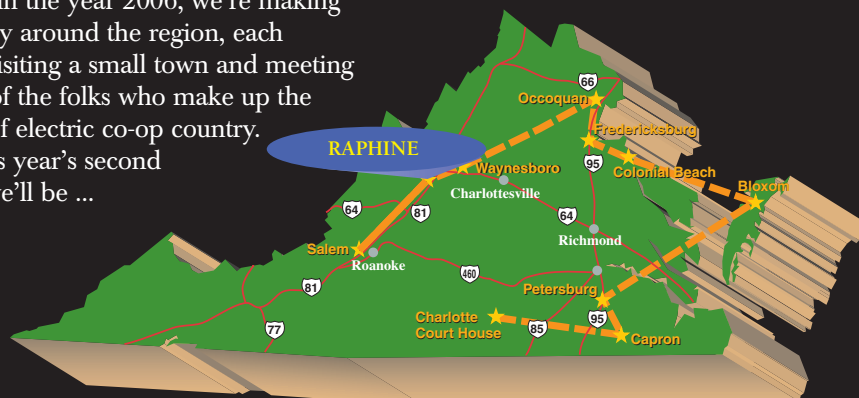


Again in the year 2006, we're making our way around the region, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's second stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN

# RAPHINE

*by Deborah Huso, Contributing Writer*

## AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** The Raphine post office serves around 1,200 customers.

**LAND AREA:** Raphine is an unincorporated community in the rolling hills of the Shenandoah Valley's Rockbridge County.

**FOUNDED:** Raphine was established in the 1880s when the B&O Railroad finished its north-south line between Staunton and Lexington.

**ELEVATION:** Approximately 1,855 ft.

**FUN FACT:** Raphine is named after the family farm of James Edward Allen Gibbs, inventor of the first chain-stitch, single-thread sewing machine. Raphine is derived from the Greek word raphus, which means "to sew."

While anyone who travels Interstate 81 through Virginia's Shenandoah Valley with regularity probably knows White's Truck Stop, midway between Staunton and Lexington, as an Interstate landmark, there's a lot more reason to hop off the highway at Exit 205 than a hamburger and fries. Just west of the

interchange is the little village of Raphine, home today to a post office, community bank, and a smattering of historic houses and bed-and-breakfasts. On the surface, it is a sleepy little town that may very well owe its existence to a sewing machine.

In the 1880s, when the B&O Railroad finished its north-south line between

Staunton and Lexington, it spawned the growth of several little railroad towns between the two valley cities. When Rockbridge County resident and inventor of the first chain-stitch single-thread sewing machine James Edward Allen Gibbs donated land for a depot, he initiated the development of Raphine, named after his family







farm, which was, in turn, named for the Greek word *raphus*, meaning “to sew.” While Wilcox & Gibbs sewing machines remain on the market today, the railroad that once chugged through Raphine is long gone.

Raphine persisted beyond the heyday of the railroad, however. **Alice Patterson**, who grew up in Raphine in the 1950s in the residence that now houses the Back in Thyme Bed and Breakfast, says she can remember when the town had three coun-

try stores, a feed store, and even a car dealership. “It was a lot of fun to grow up here,” she says. Patterson recalls how the local Chevy dealer parked the cars for the new year on her family’s property to hide them from the public before the big introductory sales event each fall.

The owners of that dealership were the Fulwider brothers, one of whom was the father of longtime Raphine resident **Margaret Mynes**. Mynes, who at 85 years of age continues to reside in the home where she was born, says Raphine was once a booming town. “It’s changed an awful lot because there’s so many new peo-

(Top) Jim Young (inset) and his wife Georgie moved to Raphine and restored Wade’s Mill, a 250-year-old working gristmill that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Carole and Guy Griffin (above, left) said goodbye to city life to return to Carole’s native Rockbridge County, where they own and operate Orchardside Farm and Orchardside Yarn Shop. (Above, right) Guy enjoys tending his resident flock of ducks and geese.

ple moving in,” she notes. “I’m the oldest resident of the village, and I don’t know a lot of the people here anymore.”

Buffalo Springs Herb Farm offers a variety of events of interest to both cooks and gardeners.



Raphine may be a small community, but it has a lot to offer the casual visitor. Come prepared to spend the day. A perfect place to begin is the **Buffalo Springs Herb Farm**, where you can enjoy walks through the herbal gardens free of charge, take a tour of the Museum of Garden History, and participate in a variety of seasonal workshops and events from herb-based cooking classes to May Day celebrations. The herb farm is open April through December, Wednesday through Sunday. Call (540) 348-1083 for hours, or visit online at [www.buffaloherbs.com](http://www.buffaloherbs.com).



Next door, **Wade's Mill** has a retail shop offering stone-ground flour products of all sorts, from grits to buckwheat pancake mix. While miller Jim Young normally operates the mill only after hours, his wife Georgie holds cooking classes almost weekly, specializing in easy-to-prepare meals for entertaining friends. The mill also hosts special events throughout the year, including musicals, apple-butter festivals, and wine-tasting events in cooperation with Rockbridge Vineyards. For a full schedule of upcoming events, call (540) 348-1400, or visit online at [www.wadesmill.com](http://www.wadesmill.com). The mill is open April through December, Wednesday through Sunday.



Neighboring **Orchardside Farm** offers pick-your-own berries July through early fall, Wednesday through Sunday, and depending on the season, you can gather raspberries, blackberries, or blueberries, and enjoy the resident ducks, geese, and peacocks that happily come when owner Guy Griffin summons them. His wife Carole will teach you how to knit a scarf if you stop by the **Orchardside Yarn Shop** and sign up for one of her workshops. All the materials you need are available for purchase

But that hasn't stopped Mynes from reaching out to friends and neighbors. Until she injured her leg and knee in an auto accident, Mynes held an open house at her home each Christmas, inviting the public in to view her 30 themed Christmas trees. "I used to be known as 'The Christmas Tree Lady,'" she smiles. "People used to stop me on the street and say, 'Oh, you're the Christmas Tree Lady.'"

While the main street through Raphine has lost most of the businesses that Mynes and Patterson remember, there's a lot of new growth in this community, most of it geared around a thriving tourism base just west of town center. Here Raphine natives and newcomers alike have developed a cluster of busi-

nesses that prosper on the community's agricultural roots.

Among them are **Orchardside Farm** and **Orchardside Yarn Shop**, owned and operated by **Guy** and **Carole Griffin**. Carole, a native of Rockbridge County, moved back to the area in 1987 from Richmond with her husband, both of them deciding to leave behind deadline-oriented, high-stress careers in graphic arts. While Carole initially opened her Yarn Shop in Lexington as a remake of the business her mother once ran in Staunton, she and Guy decided to move the knitting shop to their farm along Hays Creek about two miles outside Raphine in 1996.

Guy says moving to the country where Carole grew up was a big risk. "Our first year out here we had a combined income

of \$12,000," he says, "but we've never regretted our decision." It didn't take long for the Yarn Shop to take off. "Carole has a reputation with her customers," Guy explains. "Her selection of inventory and customer service have earned her shop a reputation among knitters as one of the finest yarn shops in the mid-Atlantic."

On a blustery winter day, the Yarn Shop is warm and cozy, the walls lined with multi-colored yarns, several ladies knitting alongside a craft table in the center of the room, Carole smiling joyfully over the work she loves. "It's wonderful to be able to turn a hobby into a living," she says.

While Guy has learned the ropes of knitting to help Carole in the business, he also initiated a business venture of his own on

on site. The berry farm is open (in season) Wednesday through Sunday, and the yarn shop is open Tuesday through Saturday year-round. For more information, call 1-877-NIT-YARN, or visit them online at [www.oysyarnshop.com](http://www.oysyarnshop.com).

Don't head home, however, without stopping by the **Rockbridge Vineyards** for some wine tasting and to pick up an aperitif. Jane Rouse says the vineyard shop is open for tastings all the time. Be



sure to try the vineyard's surprisingly sweet white Riesling. The shop is open with tastings available Monday through Sunday year-round. Call 888-511-WINE, or check out the vineyard online at [www.rockbridgevineyard.com](http://www.rockbridgevineyard.com).

And if you're staying in town for the evening, you can sleep in the Victorian farmhouse where Alice Patterson grew up (before it was a lodging inn, of course) at the **Back in Thyme Bed and Breakfast** and enjoy nightly turndown service as well as a full homemade breakfast each morning (877-977-9271, [www.backinthymebb.com](http://www.backinthymebb.com)). Or stay overnight at **Willow Pond Farm Inn**, a colorful, whimsical Victorian bed-and-breakfast (540-348-1310, [www.willowpondfarm.com](http://www.willowpondfarm.com)). ■

From left: 1) Enjoy a walk through the herb garden at Buffalo Springs Herb Farm free of charge. The farm is open Wednesday to Saturday, from April through December.

2) Georgie Young holds cooking classes almost weekly in the commercial kitchen at Wade's Mill, specializing in easy-to-prepare meals for entertaining guests.

3) The gift shop at Buffalo Springs Herb Farm offers a variety of herbal products and gifts.

4) The Rockbridge Vineyards is open for tastings year-round, where Jane Rouse and husband Shep serve samples of their award-winning wines.

their six-acre farm. A lover of gardening, he decided to start a pick-your-own berry farm. "I have southern exposure here," he says, "a creek for irrigation, land suitable for berry plants, and nobody else was doing it." In 2000, he opened Orchardside Farm to the public, offering red raspberries, black raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries. "The two businesses work well together," Guy says, "and now we have multiple points of sale on the property. We're unique in our setting, and it's pleasant to be here."

The Griffins and their customers aren't the only ones who find this little community a pleasant place to be. In 1989, newcomers **Don Haynie** and **Tom Hamlin** purchased a 220-acre farm just down the road from the Griffins, restored the 1790 stone

and brick farmhouse there, and began an herb farm named in honor of the buffalo that once roamed the Shenandoah Valley. The business partners searched for years for a place to start an herb-related business and ultimately settled on Raphine. "There was something about the spirit of the land here," says Haynie.

Today Buffalo Springs Herb Farm is a popular spot for gardeners, cooks, and even a few random tourists. It features 10 themed herb gardens, a nature trail and labyrinth, as well as a barn gift shop with herbal products and gifts. "We're sought out by people who like offbeat destinations," Haynie explains.

Next door to the herb farm, neighbors **Jim** and **Georgie Young** have developed a tourist attraction of their own with the

restoration of Wade's Mill, a 250-year-old gristmill that these Washington, D.C., natives continue to operate just as four gen-

erations of Wades did before them. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the old mill is still powered by a 21-foot water wheel fed by an adjacent stream and produces high-nutrient flour on millstones.

The Youngs never really intended to be millers. They claim when they purchased the mill 15 years ago they were just looking for 10 acres on some water in the country. "We just stumbled across this mill," Jim says, "and bought it three days after we looked at it."

The mill was operational when the Youngs purchased it and the equipment was in great shape, but the couple spent a year restoring the structure itself as well as the house next door, which they now use as their home and as a commercial kitchen for Georgie's cooking classes.

"There are very few of these mills left in the U.S.," Jim explains. "It's hard work, and you wouldn't do it if you didn't love it. We didn't want to make this place cute. We wanted to make it a mill."

And so they have, grinding their own flour in the evenings when their retail shop is closed. Most of the flour they sell retail. Jim says they knew they had a gem on their hands that tourists would enjoy. "The secret was just getting people here."

The secret of getting people to Raphine appears to be secret no more for these country businesses. Even Rockbridge Vineyards, little more than a mile east of Wade's Mill, has developed a following among wine enthusiasts who take a short jaunt off I-81 to sample their award-winning DeChiel Merlot and bittersweet V d'Or, an ice wine that pairs perfectly with desserts. Winemaker **Shep Rouse** started the vineyard in 1989, returning to his native Virginia after several years of winemaking in California. A graduate of Washington & Lee University in Lexington, he remembered the rolling countryside of Rockbridge County. "He loves Rockbridge," says his wife **Jane**, "and we like the weather here, the fresh mountain feel, and the small neighborhood."

The Rouses' vineyard is actually located on land that once served as a dairy farm for the Mynes family, and their wine storage and retail shop are located in the old dairy barn. Today the couple has 18 acres of vines in production and produces over 8,000 cases of wine each year. It's a dream come true for Shep and Jane. "We're now living off this business," she says.

Never mind that the railroad depot is

gone. Raphine is still going strong. "We've been truly blessed in being here," Guy Griffin remarks, as he watches Carole knit a new scarf. "If there's a problem or accident here, people look out for you, bring you food. Neighborhood watch takes place here automatically."

Margaret Mynes, who has had the good fortune to watch children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren grow up around her, says, she's not really sure what the big attraction is in Raphine, but remarks with a shrug, "It's a really nice place." ■