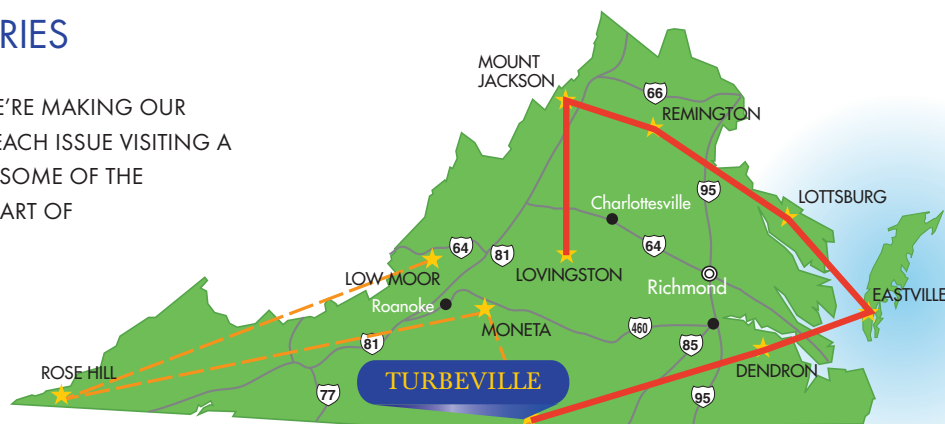


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2009, 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 SEVENTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

TURBEVILLE

Story and photos by Beth Robertson, Contributing Writer

A crossroads since the early 19th century, Turbeville continues to serve as the area's hub with farmers, residents and travelers, creating high-volume traffic along Turbeville and Melon Road as they converge in downtown Turbeville.

U.S. Highway 58 bisects the crossroads, which once boasted five stores and a post office, often gathering places for news and tall tales delivered around a warming stove.

Although only Mt. Carmel Antiques — once H. L. St. John's general merchandise store and the Turbeville Post Office — is open today, the multi-bay Turbeville Fire and Rescue building, the nearby Ruritan

Club, a ball field and a summer vegetable stand still draw area residents and travelers to the Melon Road/ Turbeville Road intersection with the four-lane highway.

Known for its incredible soil, "the perfect mix of sandy loam ... and deep," Turbeville is also the birthplace of the Virginia Cantaloupe Festival, which premiered at John Wade's farm in 1981 and drew 4,200 visitors during its heyday, according to Halifax Chamber of Commerce President **Nancy Pool**.

"John Wade's farm was in the heart of cantaloupe country," recalls Pool. Wade also had

a horse ring with lights in the field. "And, he was generous enough to allow us to hold it there, to donate it."

Until 2000, the festivals were held at the Wade farm. Serenely nestled between ponds and fertile fields, visitors settled in each fourth Wednesday in July to listen to The Embers, The Chairmen of the Board and a host of other headliners while enjoying the famous cantaloupe, pit-cooked beef and other homegrown and homemade delicacies.

Due to its success, the event was moved to the Halifax County Fairgrounds in 2000, where Little River Band was a headliner, but with the sweet cantaloupe still king.

Twenty-eight years after its inception, the Virginia Cantaloupe Festival continues as a major fundraiser for the Chamber of Commerce.

While time has altered the Turbeville merchant image, the strong character and fabric of the community remain intact, as does its name, which natives of the area credit to the Turbeville family.

"Charles Turbeville bought 'Bloomsburg' in 1850 and sold it in 1887," according to Halifax County Historical Society President **Barbara Bass**, tying the Turbeville name to one of the historic homes.

Turbeville also got its neighbors' attention.

"In 1925 there was a Kiwanis Club in South Boston, and they declared a Turbeville Day," adds Bass, "because the club was impressed with the history of Turbeville."

Obviously, firsts were the norm at the historic crossroads.

"Turbeville can boast having the first woman's club in the county, which won a national award later in 1927," says Bass. "It



"Downtown" Turbeville lies at the intersection of Turbeville Rd. and U.S. 58, a.k.a. Philpott Rd.

AT A GLANCE...

ESTABLISHED: Established in the early 1800s, the community was originally known as Bloomsburg.

ELEVATION: 530 feet.

FACTOID: Ten miles east of South Boston, Turbeville is the birthplace of the Virginia Cantaloupe Festival.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Turbeville Elementary School, an area landmark, closed in 2007, and was purchased by Kevin Puryear Properties LLC. A company spokesman says plans for the school are incomplete at this time. • Mt. Carmel Antiques, formerly H.L. St. John's store and the post office, is the sole remaining store in the community. • Hilton Hudson, the first president of the Turbeville Cantaloupe Growers, checks one of the famous cantaloupes on the vine. Original group members were Bill Moore, James Solomon, Bob Long, John Wade, Rita Kathryn Moore Herbert, Jack Stephens and Hudson.

had the first men's social club in the county and one of only two agricultural high schools in the state. During the 1920s it was the first, through the commitment of the parents and the woman's club, to have hot lunches in the school," adds Bass. There's even a tribute in song to the community, although Bass is unsure of its composer.

While much has changed, Mrs. J.E. Oliver III, whose father, H.L. St. John, ran a store at the crossroads from 1944 "until probably the late 1970s," can name previous store owners along the busy intersection. The Johnson family, Mr. D.W. Lea, Mr. and Mrs. King, and a second Johnson man ran nearby stores, according to Oliver.

Irvin Richardson first owned the store Oliver's father later operated. During St. John's tenure, part of the store also served as the post office, and his wife, Viola Jones St. John, served as postmistress.

St. John's store opened at about 7 a.m. when the mail came in, according to Oliver, but she said her father did not keep the store open too late at night. After St. John closed his store, the post office continued to operate. Mrs. Jack Stevens followed Mrs. St. John as postmistress, serving until the post office was permanently closed.

Philip Satterfield remembers merchant D.W. Lea and his native Turbeville with affection. "He was the old aristocrat in my day and time," he says of Lea. "He was very active in the political community and chairman of the draft board calling folks up for World War II." Satterfield and five of his brothers served in WWII, and two brothers served in the Korean Conflict.

"My father was a farmer, a rural mail carrier, and he worked in one of the South Boston tobacco warehouses," adds Satterfield. "He was Edward Satterfield, known

as Ed. He also was a deputy sheriff under Sheriff Tune and Sheriff Thomas Coates."

Today, only the St. John building is occupied. Edith and Tom Stutts maintain a charming antique shop there, Mt. Carmel Antiques. The old St. John's store sign, as well as the Turbeville Post Office sign with its 24596 zip code, still hang as fond mementos.

The Stutts' collection ranges from primitives, including a spinning wheel, chairs and antique school desks, to a very handsome game table from Tennessee, a chest of drawers, tables and an assortment of collectibles. "We look for antiques when we travel," explains Edith, a retired businesswoman. However, she is not tied to the shop.

"The nature of the antiques business is not to have steady hours," she notes with a smile. "My number is on the front door, and my home is nearby. If I'm at the beach, I will see you when I get back."

IF YOU GO...

HALIFAX COUNTY ATTRACTIONS

Berry Hill Resort – Stellar retreat featuring a two-story Greek revival mansion and 92 guest rooms.

Bob Cage Sculpture Farm – More than 70 wood and metal sculptures by world-renowned artist Bob Cage.

Buggs Island Lake – More than 55,000 acres; one of the premier bass fisheries in the country.

The Prizery – Community Art Center in South Boston featuring a 250-seat theater, art gallery and banquet facilities.

Chastain Theater – Located in The Prizery, providing professional and semi-professional entertainment.

Crossing of the Dan – Exhibit of the military maneuvers of Nathanael Greene during the Revolutionary War. Located in The Prizery.

Noland Village – Charming restoration of American crossroads community.

Staunton River Battlefield – A 300-acre Civil War historic site including battlefield, earthworks, walking trail, and visitor center.

Staunton River State Park – Access to Buggs Island Lake offering swimming, cabin rentals, camping, trails, tennis courts, boat launching.

South Boston-Halifax County Museum – Permanent and rotating exhibits trace the history of Halifax County and the region.

South Boston Speedway – Exciting NASCAR-sanctioned short-track racing.

Town of Halifax – Historic district includes classical-revival courthouse housing records that date to 1752. A great resource for genealogical researchers.

South Boston Historic District – Wonderful examples of Victorian architecture; walking tour.

Virginia International Raceway (VIR) – A 4.2-mile natural-terrain road course featuring a season of vintage and motorcycle racing.

ANNUAL FESTIVALS & EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Mid-February in South Boston.
Crossing of the Dan Revolutionary War Reenactment.

MAY

First weekend in May

Halifax County Heritage and Antique Machinery Festival at Halifax County Fairgrounds is a 3-day event that highlights rural and agricultural heritage.

Second weekend in May

Noland Village Day. Located in Providence, the event features stew, country music, crafts, antique furniture and farm machinery, vintage cars, plant and herb sales, and a house tour.

Third Saturday In May

Ducks on the Dan Derby Duck Race in South Boston.

Saturday of Memorial Day weekend

Virgilina Summer Fest. Parade, arts & crafts, music, food, bands, games and rides for the kids. Street dance 7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Last Saturday In May

Faith Fest held in South Boston's Constitution Square. A non-denominational day of family, fellowship, and Christian music.

JUNE

Third Saturday In June

Battle of Staunton River Bridge Commemoration Ceremony. Confederate encampment, cannon firing, UDC medal presentation, wagon rides, guest speakers and more.

JULY

Scottsburg 4th of July Parade & Celebration. Parade, food, fireworks and music featured.

Fourth Friday in July

Virginia Cantaloupe Festival. Food, music and beverages at Halifax County Fairgrounds.

SEPTEMBER

Last Saturday In September

Harvest Festival in South Boston. Crafts, games, food, concerts.

Third Saturday In September, Even Years

Tobacco Ball held at The Prizery.

OCTOBER

First Week In October

Halifax County Fair with live concerts, a midway, exhibits and food.

Second Week In October, Odd Years

Art Show at The Prizery in South Boston.

NOVEMBER

Second Weekend in November

Holiday Living Show in South Boston.

For details and directions to attractions, visit www.gohalifaxva.com; for visitor information, call (434) 572-2543 or toll-free (866) 464-2543. ■

The philosophy apparently works, with old customers returning to her shop and new ones traveling Hwy. 58, perhaps for the first time, finding her.

The Stuttses, who moved to their Turbeville farm in 1989, love the area.

"Turbeville is a friendly, peaceful, and just a wonderful place to be. It takes you into a different state of mind when you come home to Turbeville," Edith says.

Mrs. Oliver, who commuted to teach business at a Danville high school and at Averett University during her career, agrees.

"The people in the area are very warm and welcoming," she observes. "I think it is pretty here, and a convenient location. With its proximity to South Boston and Danville, you can work either place. I like living out from towns," she adds, "because life is simpler."

GOOD SOIL, GOOD PEOPLE

"This is the most peaceful place in the world to me," says cattle producer **James Edmunds**, as his pickup truck negotiates the rain-soaked lane leading to his cabin. "Pretty much all you hear are the song-birds, the hum of the tractor, the turkey's gobble and sometimes a coyote."

Edmunds and his father, the late Paul C. Edmunds, have farmed in the Turbeville area for about 70 years. The Edmundses have raised cattle, wheat, hay and loblolly pines. A lifelong hunter, James Edmunds also leases accommodations and land for hunting.

"This is wonderful soil here, and along the Dan River, pure low-ground top soil brought down through millions of years of flooding," he explains.

Halifax Water and Soil Conservation District Manager **Bruce Pearce** agrees. "I wish I had 1,000 acres of it on my place," he says of the rich soil. "It was moved here as a result of water millions of years ago. The good thing is it's a very deep, sandy-type soil that's good for growing any kind of plant."

More recently, several decades ago, a severe flood uncovered a prehistoric Indian site along the Dan River on Edmunds' property. A university archaeology team spent weeks examining spear points, arrowheads, pottery and other artifacts. "The whole village was uncovered," recalls Edmunds. "The fire pits were intact, like they just picked up and left in a hurry." Today, once again, fields cover the site.

Edmunds' love of the land mirrors that of his neighbors, men who want to see the rich land in production.

Hilton Hudson, one of the original Turbeville Cantaloupe Growers members serving as a catalyst for the first Cantaloupe Festival, with three of his five sons, **Thomas**, **Steve** and **Jonathan**, continue as prime producers of the famous melon. About 25 acres are devoted to the melon this year, according to Hudson, who also grows tobacco and seed wheat. His son Thomas raises cattle.

During harvest, the family has a melon-and-vegetable stand at the crossroads that Turbeville Volunteer Fire Dept. & Rescue Chief **Ricky Hicks** describes as very popular. This will be the third year **Ann Hudson** and family have operated Hudson's Farm Produce at the crossroads. The stand is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on Sunday from 1-6 p.m.

Hilton and Ann Hudson moved to Turbeville in 1964. It is where they reared their family, made lifelong friends and planned their future, securely bound by a strong work ethic that continues today.

"They're always working," observe two of the Hudsons' neighbors. Neighbors **Lucy** and **James Solomon Jr.**, both Turbeville natives, are also well acquainted with the demands of farming.

James Solomon worked on his father's farm as a boy and today runs a cattle operation. At one time he also produced tobacco and cantaloupes, but stopped producing the melon and tobacco years ago.

Lucy Wade Solomon, a daughter of the late John Wade, was reared just across the road from the Solomons' new home. As a youngster she helped with her father's tobacco crop, first handing leaves and "then moving up to stringing," which she laughingly describes as "a big-time" promotion.

There were two sisters and one brother in the family, and all four children helped on the farm, including the garden. "There have been so many changes in farming, from plowing with a horse to tractors. So much that was manual is mechanical now," says the retired Virginia Power employee.

While Solomon doesn't recommend farming as an easy life, he does not hesitate to describe it as a good life.

He also plans to "keep on keeping on" with his Angus herd at the Turbeville farm.

"The one thing that is great here is the people," says Solomon of his community.

Neighbors get along, both emphasized. "It is just a great place to be," she adds.

Mary S. Medley's life is firmly tied to the Turbeville soil and family. Her father farmed, and her husband, Joe, farmed until he died 20 years ago. The family, with the four children helping, raised tobacco, watermelon



TOP TO BOTTOM, L-R: Area cattle producer and Turbeville native James Solomon Jr. raises Angus beef. • Lucy Solomon's garden frames a scenic vista that includes the Dan River and beyond along historic old River Road. • James Edmunds examines a new cornfield at his Turbeville farm. • Mt. Carmel Antiques owner Edith Stutts doesn't keep regular hours, so she keeps her phone number on the front door. • Mrs. J.E. Oliver III's father, H. L. St. John, ran a general store in what is now Mt. Carmel Antiques, and her mother, Viola, was Turbeville postmistress.



Native Mary S. Medley “does for everybody,” according to her neighbors.

and cantaloupe. Medley also worked at JP Stevens for several years.

Although her own life is full, her neighbors describe Medley in a special way. “Mary Medley does for everybody,” says Lucy Solomon.

And apparently she does it well.

She’s active in her community and her church, and is a member of the Turbeville Ruritan Club. She is proud of her home.

“It’s a nice place to live because everyone gets along, and most everybody knows everybody,” says Medley, who was born on a nearby farm. “We’re just one big family up here. If anyone new moves in, they are welcome. I would say this is the best neighborhood ...”

She’s also proud of the children who grew up on Story’s Creek Road. “They were smart children,” she said, noting their many accomplishments. Of her four, one is a consultant with IBM, one works for ABB, one serves on the Richmond Police force, and a daughter has been teaching in Georgia for 20 years.

TURBEVILLE FIRE & RESCUE

A vital part of the community, the Turbeville Volunteer Fire & Rescue building dominates the crossroads landscape where Melon Road meets Hwy. 58.

The department serves about 75 to 80 square miles and about 2,500 residents, according to Chief Ricky Hicks.

There are about 45 active volunteer members. “With the ambulance transport and volunteers working during the day, sometimes it was hard to get calls covered,”



Chief Ricky Hicks, right, and department treasurer Carroll Collie are active members of Turbeville Fire & Rescue, which serves about 80 square miles and 2,500 residents.

says Hicks. Now, paid personnel provide coverage 12 hours a day during the week.

“It has worked out pretty well,” says the chief. “We have volunteers on weekends, and we’ve been able to cover our calls during the week.”

Only Turbeville and North Halifax join the Rescue Squad in providing ambulance transport, a service Turbeville began providing about eight years ago, according to the chief. “We respond to between 275 and 300 calls, both fire and EMS (annually),” adds Hicks. “The majority are ambulance calls.”

In addition to its ambulance, the fire department has two engines, a tanker, and a brush truck. A smaller truck can serve as backup for emergency calls if the ambulance is already out on call, added Hicks.

The fire department is a community lifeline. “People look to it as the helping hand,” says Hicks. “If you don’t know who else to call, you call the fire department. Sometimes that just means putting them in the right direction with advice, and occasionally people stop by and want you to take their blood pressure. We try to be here for the community because they support us so well.”

Since Turbeville Elementary School’s closure in 2007, the department has acquired adjoining land and organized an Emergency Services Softball League for Sunday afternoon games. “Often we only see each other at tragedies, so we came up with this,” explains Hicks. The county’s fire departments, the sheriff’s department, rescue squad and police departments participate in the Sunday games, which began in May.

For EMS and firemen, new state regula-

tions coupled with a staggering amount of paperwork demand more and more time to keep abreast. “There are a lot of good people here,” says the chief. “One person can’t do it. Our treasurer, Carroll Collie, spends countless hours on the paperwork,” adds Hicks. “We have the same regulations a big city has.”

But Hicks is optimistic about the future, the training and the commitment demanded of the young volunteers who must one day fill the shoes of retiring members. No doubt he remembers his own teenage years. “I started when I started driving,” recalls the chief.

In addition to First Cross Roads Baptist, Cross Roads Baptist, Mt. Carmel Presbyterian and Olive Branch United Methodist Church, the Turbeville Ruritan Club, located off Melon Road, also serves the community. “Our mission is community service,” says long-time member and club treasurer D.H. “Mac” McDowell.

One of the club’s projects is scholarships, with four awarded earlier this summer. All four recipients are planning careers in the medical field, McDowell says.

Tragic fire victims, the Patrick Henry Boys Home and the Halifax County Library Fund have also received Ruritan support. The club has barbecue suppers and sponsors a booth at the annual Heritage Festival as fundraisers.

About 49 years old, the club is located off Melon Road within sight of the Turbeville Volunteer Fire & Rescue building.

“Good people, a good community, close knit, and the fire department’s members serve us well,” says McDowell. “It’s just a good community.” ■