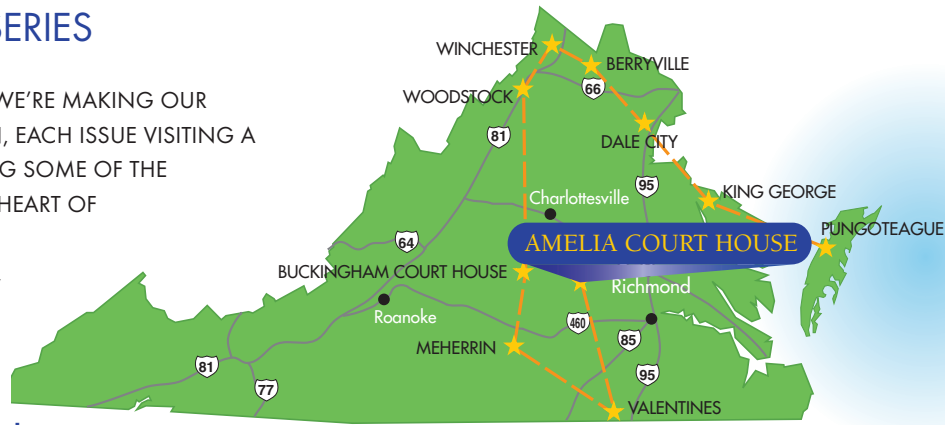


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2010, 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 FIRST STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

AMELIA COURT HOUSE

Story by Wayne Russell and Jeanette Porter, Amelia Bulletin Monitor; photos courtesy of Amelia Bulletin Monitor

Amelia Court House, an unincorporated village, is the business and political center of Amelia County.

The county was founded in 1734. Named for Princess Amelia, the youngest daughter of Great Britain's King George II, the county then included what is now Nottoway County.

Among the county's most prized documents, many of which date from its founding, is an Oath of Allegiance signed by many county residents in 1777. This document recognized and affirmed those early Amelians' beliefs in democracy.

The village was not the site of the county's first courthouse, but when Nottoway was formed in 1788, Amelia's courthouse was moved to a nearby

site, chosen because it was centrally located and near the railroad. By 1793 a courthouse had been built on the present site. Today's courthouse was built in 1924 and the clerk's office about 1850, both on the sites of the previous buildings.

Today the core of the village has been given over to law and other offices, gift and antique shops, banks, churches, the county's main post office, the

James L. Hamner Public Library and the Amelia Historical Society's library. Many businesses have located along Business Rte. 360 (Goodes Bridge Road), the route of old U.S. Rte. 360. Other businesses have located on modern U.S. Rte. 360 (Patrick Henry

Highway), a four-lane divided highway that bisects the county east to west. Village Square Shopping Center, at the intersection of Goodes Bridge and Patrick Henry Highway, is where the county's only traffic light is located.

Amelia is still growing, and there will likely be other traffic lights sprouting on the busy highway soon. One probable site is at the entranceway to the Industrial Development Authority-sponsored business and industrial park, where two of the county's main industries, Superior Walls and Old River Cabinets and Granite, Inc., are located.

HISTORY

While Amelia County was founded in 1734 and saw action during the Revolutionary War, its place in history was established on April 6, 1865.

On that day the rearguard of the retreating Army of Northern Virginia, under the command of Gen. Robert E. Lee, fought a desperate battle against Union forces.

The Union troops had already stolen a



The core of the old Amelia village is home to offices, gift shops, banks, churches and other concerns. (Inset) Today's courthouse, in the village's picturesque courthouse square, was built in 1924.



1

AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 12,808 (Amelia County estimate, July 2008)

ELEVATION: 381 feet at Amelia Court House

LAND AREA: 356.8 square miles (Amelia County)

FACTOID: The last major battle of the Civil War was fought at what is now Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park in Amelia County.



2



4



3

1. The Hillsman House served as a Civil War Union field hospital during the Battle of Sailor's Creek. **2.** Cattle are a part of the landscape in Amelia County, which is eighth in farm income in the Commonwealth of Virginia. **3.** Grub Hill Church is one of many historic houses of worship in Amelia County. **4.** Winterham Plantation Bed and Breakfast, located on Grub Hill Church Road, is a meticulously restored antebellum Italianate mansion built by a cousin of Thomas Jefferson.

march on the Confederates, blocking their route to Danville (they had intended to follow what is now basically U.S. Rte. 360) at Jetersville. Lee turned northwest, following the modern Amelia Springs Road. The pursuing Union troops caught up with the rear elements of Lee's army in the area that is now Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park. In a series of battles, nearly a quarter of Lee's army was killed, wounded or captured; approximately 7,700 men including eight generals. Known as the Black Thursday of the Confederacy, this was the last major battle of the Civil War and resulted in Lee's surrender 72 hours later at Appomattox Court House.

The park's Hallowed Ground includes the Hillsman Farm House Museum, a late 18th-century farmhouse that served as a Union field hospital, where the wounded from both sides were treated. Newly furnished in period furniture in accordance with eyewitness accounts of the battle, the Hillsman House is tentatively scheduled to be open Wednesday to Sunday beginning in April. It will supplement the new Sailor's (sometimes spelled Saylor's) Creek visitors' center scheduled to open in the spring.

Sailor's Creek, formerly a part of Twin Lakes State Park, has recently been designated as a "stand-alone" park and is now under

the management of noted Civil War author **Chris Calkins**.

There are seven other Lee's Retreat stops in Amelia, including the courthouse site itself where legend has it Union Gen. George Custer placed a guard on the building, thereby saving its records when many other Southside Virginia courthouses were burned.

In addition to stops on the Lee's Retreat tour route, there are two sites on the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail. One is the Russell Grove Presbyterian Church and School site, the site of an early post-Civil War school for freed blacks. The other is the site dedicated to Mrs. Samantha Jane Neil, a



A pie-eating contest is just one of the many fun-filled festivities that take place during the annual Amelia Day celebration.



IF YOU GO...

Amelia County celebrates its 275th birthday this May at the **25th Annual Amelia Day**, held Friday and Saturday, May 7 and 8. Friday afternoon there is a parade, and Friday evening an outdoor dance. Saturday is for crafts, clowns and entertainment on the Courthouse Square. "It's like a county reunion every year," says long-time emcee **Don Shreffler**. For more info call 804-561-3039, visit the Amelia Day page at www.ameliamonitor.com, or go to the Amelia Day Committee's Facebook page.

Other seasonal events include the **County Fair** scheduled this year for Sept. 8 through 12, the annual **Beef Festival** on Saturday, July 31, **two bluegrass music festivals** held at the Amelia Family Campground on Military Road (Rte. 153) set for May 13-15 and Aug. 19-21, and the annual **Amelia County Christmas Parade** scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 4.

The **Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail** commemorates Virginia's struggle to achieve equal rights in education for all its citizens. There are two markers in Amelia. Download the brochure, including the map, at www.varetreat.com/civilRights.asp, or call 1-800-6-RETREAT for information on either trail.

Amelia also boasts **Virginia's smallest historical park: a one-acre monument to John Bannister Tabb**, who was a blockade-runner in the Civil War. More info online at

The Amelia Day Festival

www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/tab.shtml.

If you want still more information after all that history, check out the **Amelia Historical Society Library** in the Jackson Building on Church Street. Call 804-561-3180 for hours or to make an appointment.

The **Virginia Veterans Cemetery at Amelia**, located at 10300 Pridesville Road (Rte. 681), is the final resting place for many of Virginia's veterans.

There is a popular public hunting and fishing area in the county, the state-owned 2,217-acre **Amelia Wildlife Area**, accessible from Kennons Lane (Rte. 652) and Chula Road (Rte. 604) in season.

On Grubb Hill Church Road (Rte. 609) is **St. John's Episcopal Church**, where services are held on special occasions. On the church grounds is **Grubb Hill Church Cemetery**, the resting place for many Amelians including politician Joseph Eggleston of Revolutionary War fame. Gov. William Branch Giles' home, **The Wigwam**, is located in the county.

Visitors to Amelia will want to see **Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historic State Park** on Sayler's Creek Road (Rte. 617). Call the park at 434-392-3435 or check www.virginiastateparks.gov for hours (they change seasonally) and special events.

Sailor's Creek Park is a stop on the Lee's Retreat Route. There are seven other Lee's Retreat stops in the county, part of a self-guided tour that allows motorists to experience the retreat from Petersburg to Appomattox. Download the brochure, including the map, at www.varetreat.com/lee.asp. ■

Union widow who came to look for her husband's body and stayed to establish classes for freed slaves. These classes eventually gave birth to six African-American churches, three of which merged to form Zion Hill Presbyterian, which is still active today.

TODAY

About a quarter of Amelia's working population is in the trades, and many of them start their day at an unofficial county landmark, Busic's Restaurant. In 1953 **Ernest Busic** got a job at the service station/diner on the corner of Amelia Street and what is now Goodes Bridge Road (Business Rte. 360). In 1955 he bought the business and, except for a short period when he sold it and then re-purchased it, the Busic family has been running the business ever since. Although it retains the name, Busic's Service Station no longer has its fuel pumps and mechanic's lift. Instead, the dining and grill area has been enlarged and it carries a large selection of hunting and fishing supplies. Busic's, now run by Ernest's son, **Wayne**, is the oldest business in the village still owned by the same family.

Across the street from Busic's, the Hotel Amelia is a popular spot for lunch. It is located in a 150-year-old, extensively renovated building that served as a hotel during the post-Civil War period, then later as a private home. Winterham Plantation Bed and Breakfast is another Amelia gem, located on Grub Hill Church Road. It is a meticulously restored antebellum Italianate mansion listed on the National Register of Historic Places, built by a cousin of Thomas Jefferson's and also used as a hospital during the Civil War.

Amelia is eighth in farm income in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and sixth in the state in the number of milk cows. The county is tenth in production of flue-cured tobacco, although its producers grow much less tobacco now than in past years. The county's 455 farms occupy approximately 40 percent of the county's land area.

When not working, Amelians are active in their community. The Masons, Ruritan, Lions and other service clubs all have year-round projects, including the Amelia County Christmas Mothers/Fathers program that serves families in need and brings churches, civic groups and volunteers together each year. The county's Parks and Recreation Department has activities for kids all year, including football, basketball, cheerleading and soccer. Adults can take Tae-bo classes or just walk indoors in the War Memorial Building, which houses the gymnasium and the recently refurbished weight room.

Amelians also enjoy their festivals. In addition to the annual homecoming that is Amelia

Day, the Beef Festival — a fundraiser for a local private school — is very popular and takes place on the last Saturday in July every year. The annual Arts and Crafts Show and the annual Christmas Parade are always the first Saturday in December. Amelia Family Campground proprietors present the Central Virginia Bluegrass Festival every year in May and August, drawing visitors from all over the country.

Amelia's historic character energizes the Amelia Historical Society, which maintains the Jackson Memorial Library, open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Genealogical and historical researchers have found it an invaluable resource.

Amelians also like to shop. The county abounds in thrift and antique shops, including the eponymous Amelia Thrift Shop, which is staffed entirely by volunteers and contributes all of its proceeds after rent to Amelia charities. Jerry's Now and Then is a noted source of Civil War artifacts as well as a great place to pick up a vintage picture frame. Owner **Jerry Morris** is one of many Amelians who can trace his ancestry back to an 18th-century recipient of a land grant from King George II.

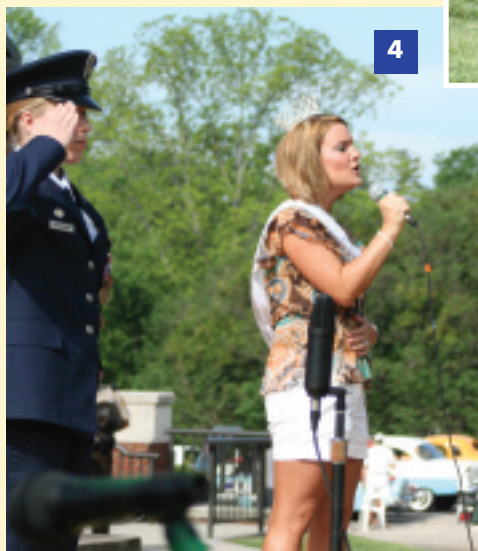
Frank Harris is the chairman of Amelia's board of supervisors. He is also the public and member relations manager of Southside Electric Cooperative (SEC), which serves much of Amelia County.

Harris notes that SEC serves 18 counties. Most are similar to Amelia in that they are largely rural with a county seat and village area. SEC is "very involved with economic development" in Amelia and the other localities, aiding with their Industrial Development Authorities' and other projects. SEC likes to help the counties "enhance their resources and attributes that are already there," Harris says.

Amelia is the state's eighth-largest producer of agricultural products. "We promote that," Harris notes.

"I want to let folks know we have good things going on in Amelia," he continues. Amelia has successfully demonstrated that localities can retain their rural charm and beauty while accommodating business, industrial and residential growth with the appropriate tools. "With the proper planning and tools such as zoning and subdivision ordinances, that can happen," Harris notes. "Amelia is a prime example.

"Looking at the county from a historical prospective, with Lee's Retreat and Sailor's Creek and other historical landmarks, especially for the Civil War or history buff, Amelia is an ideal place to visit," Harris adds. "This is the place to learn about the early history of our great nation." ■



1. Wayne Busic tidies up behind the counter at Busic's Restaurant, the oldest business in the village of Amelia still owned by the same family. **2.** Frank Harris is chairman of the Amelia County Board of Supervisors, as well as manager of public and member relations for Southside Electric Cooperative. "I want to let folks know we have good things going on in Amelia," Harris says. **3.** The Amelia County High School Junior ROTC presents colors at the annual Amelia Day festivities. **4.** Amber Hayes, Miss Amelia County Fair 2008, sings the National Anthem at the annual Amelia Day Festival. **5.** Civil War battle re-enactments are conducted periodically at Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historic State Park in Amelia County.