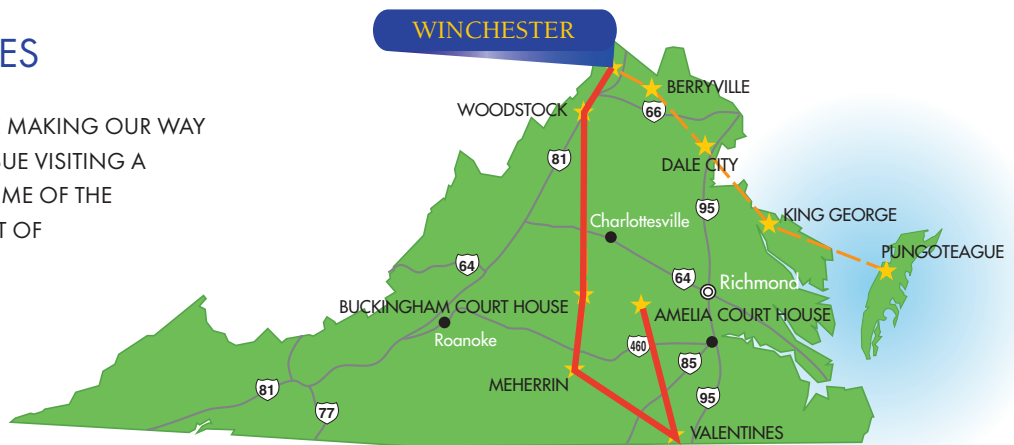


DOWN HOME SERIES

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 SIXTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

WINCHESTER

Story and photos by Robin Couch Cardillo, Contributing Writer

On a sunny Friday morning in May, the Visitor Center on Winchester's Pleasant Valley Road is unusually busy. A middle-aged couple from Lynchburg stops in to ask about biking paths in the city. The phone rings and the caller inquires about Patsy Cline attractions. Joggers trot along the center's walkways, and visitors walk their dogs under the shade trees of an adjacent historic home.

Like many Shenandoah Valley locales, Winchester and surrounding Frederick County are merging two worlds: the richly storied past of the area, which is a natural

magnet for history buffs, and the recreation-filled future, which caters to the nouveau tourist. That's why alongside the Civil War museums and battlefield markers now reside intricately mapped bicycle and walking paths, a nationally recognized golf course, a state-of-the-art fitness center, even a dog park.

Making the transition isn't easy, but the colorful vision of the townspeople drives Winchester forward.

"Winchester has always been a crossroads, both geographically and historically," says Adrian O'Connor, the editorial page editor of *The Winchester Star*. The newspaper has been a staple in the community since 1896. For more than a decade, O'Connor has written a local history column, learning first-hand of Winchester's growth from many perspectives.

"I started talking to old-timers in town, to hear stories about Winchester from the early to mid-20th century," he says. "I learn even the most innocuous details, like where people used to go out to dinner and how that changes over time."

At the five-year-old Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, the administrators understand their audience is diverse, too. The complex includes an 11-gallery museum showcasing Shenandoah Valley artifacts, the elegant Glen Burnie Historic House, and six acres of exquisitely landscaped gardens lush with herbs and vegetables, canopying vines, and trellised roses.

Glen Burnie was the home of the founder of Winchester, Colonel James Wood, who came to the area as a surveyor in 1735 and applied for a 1,200-acre land grant. Eventually, he laid out 26 half-acre lots on what's now the walking mall in Old Town Winchester, establishing Frederick Town, or today's Winchester.

Years later, Wood's descendant, Julian Wood Glass Jr., inherited Glen Burnie and began renovating the deteriorating house. When Glass died in 1992, he left the estate to the city of Winchester. Today, the house is filled with Glass' expansive collections of furniture and artwork — by such renowned artists as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gilbert Stuart, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, and Rembrandt Peale — as well as his antique china, silver, and books.



The editorial page editor of *The Winchester Star*, Adrian O'Connor collects tales from Winchester's past for his local history column.



Winchester's downtown includes the beautiful architecture of such buildings as Rouss City Hall (center).



AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 26,000 (Winchester); 102,000 (Winchester and surrounding Frederick County)

LAND AREA: 9.3 square miles (Winchester)

ELEVATION: 791 feet above sea level

FOUNDED: 1744 as Frederick Town

FACTOID: According to local historians, control of Winchester changed hands more than 70 times during the Civil War – and 13 times in one day!



1. & 2. Judge John Handley, a native of Scranton, Pa., so liked the Winchester area when he visited that he left part of his fortunes to build a library – Handley Regional Library – and endow a local school – now John Handley High School. Both are architecturally stunning. **3.** One of the most romantic spots in the Glen Burnie Gardens is this long, vine-covered walkway leading to a graceful sculpture.

Franny Crawford, the museum's acting executive director, says the board has ambitious plans for the Winchester property: "We've done a great job on the inside of the museum. Now we're focusing on the outside. We're beginning to create history and nature trails. And we plan to recreate a frontier environment with a 1760s cabin, develop outdoor classrooms, recreate a Civil War encampment, and establish a native wheat field and a rock garden."

FINE ARTS, FINE DINING

For performing arts patrons, the city offers a local acting troupe at the Winchester Little Theatre, and both students and professionals share their talents at Shenandoah University's Ohrstrom-Bryant Theatre. The latter is hosting a 2010 Summer Music Theatre schedule that includes such favorites as *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!* and *Seussical*.

In the spirit of community, the Little Theatre lends its parking lot to area farmers to sell freshly harvested produce to locavores and area restaurants several days a week.

Ed Matthews, chef and owner of One Block West, routinely treks to the Farmer's Market from his upscale bistro near the Old Town walking mall. On a recent Saturday, he stocked up on locally grown rhubarb, mesclun, green garlic, and Chinese broccoli. "Asparagus and strawberries are the gems of May in this area," he smiles. By July, he'll horde herbs, squash, early tomatoes, early stone fruits, and local berries.

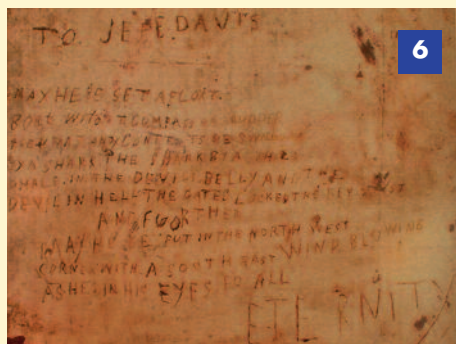
"We're so close to the producers here that we get the best-quality products before they get to market in the metro D.C. area," Matthews explains. "And we have a burgeoning farm-to-table movement that's seeing more and more producers and consumers focused on local prod-

ucts. It's a great time to be in the food world in Winchester."

Even with the newfound emphasis on the arts and outdoors in Winchester, history hounds won't be disappointed.

On the Old Town walking mall stands the Old Court House Civil War Museum. Built in 1840, the courthouse was used as a hospital and prison during the Civil War. Today, an 1800s courtroom is recreated downstairs (last year, abolitionist John Brown's trial was reenacted here), and more than 3,000 Civil War relics are on display upstairs.

"We have one of the best artillery-shell collections you'll see anywhere," brags Mari-col Miller, manager of the museum. According to Miller, the Old Court House is not only a historic landmark but also a research center, with ongoing exploration into the prisoners who were held there. Examples of the soldiers' graffiti are still visible on the walls.



1. Interim Executive Director of Tourism Sally Coates says the top three tourist magnets for Winchester are its Civil War history, Patsy Cline, and outdoor activities. **2.** The George Washington Office Museum details Washington's years in Winchester, first as a surveyor at the age of 16 (the bronze statue is of a young George) and later as commander of the Colonial forces as they fought the French and Indian War. **3.** Leading to the downtown walking mall is this walkway filled with whimsical artistry celebrating the area's history and provided by area students. **4.** On warm days, Winchester's downtown walking mall is filled with visitors and residents. Al fresco dining establishments and colorful boutiques line the pedestrians-only brick street. **5.** Ed Matthews, the chef and owner of One Block West, takes advantage of local, seasonal foods he finds at the farmer's market. **6.** This Civil War graffiti, a curse on Confederate President Jefferson Davis scrawled by a captive soldier, can be seen at Winchester's Old Court House Civil War Museum.

One of the most fascinating scrawls is a fiery curse on Confederate President Jefferson Davis, written in 1863 by a Union prisoner (forgive the spelling and punctuation): "To Jefe Davis: May here set aloft a boat without compass or rudder then that any contents be swallowed by a shark the shark by a whale whale in the devils belly and the devil in hell the gates locked the key lost and further may he be put in the northwest corner with a southeast wind blowing ashes in his eyes to all eternity."

Indeed, the passions ran high in Winchester during the Civil War. Local lore says the town changed hands between Union and Confederate forces more than 70 times — and, by some accounts, 13 times in one day!

The grueling First, Second, and Third Battles of Winchester took place here, as did the First and Second Battles of Kernstown, the Battle of Cool Spring, and the nearby Battle of Cedar Creek at Frederick County's Belle Grove Plantation. Throughout the engagements, Generals Jubal Early, George Custer, and Philip Sheridan walked Winchester's streets.

Confederate General Stonewall Jackson actually lived in Winchester during the winter of 1861-'62. He planned the famous Valley Campaign from his headquarters in a home on Braddock Street loaned to him by a local, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Moore. Today, the home is a museum displaying Jackson's family and staff artifacts.

Also open to the public is George Washington's Office Museum on Cork Street. Here, a small log building was used as a military headquarters during the French and Indian War. As commander-in-chief of the Colonial forces, Washington planned the construction of Fort Loudoun in 1755 and 1756. (The original well remains at the site of the fort on the outskirts of town.)

Few people realize that Winchester played such a pivotal role in Washington's formative years. The first U.S. president arrived in town at the age of 16 to survey what he then referred to as "a vile outpost." Later, he purchased land here and eventually was elected to the House of Burgesses representing Frederick County, his first political post.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Winchester's beauty and history — and undoubtedly its resilience — have attracted friends from around the country. *The Winchester Star's* O'Connor points out that the city is "the recipient of the generosity of a number of people who aren't even from here."

For instance, Judge John Handley, a wealthy native of Scranton, Pa., was so enamored with Winchester on a visit that he left his fortune to endow a large high school and to build a magnificent library, both architectural masterpieces. Likewise, Charles Broadway Rouss, a Marylander who attended Winchester Academy in the late 1800s, contributed large sums of money to fund what's now Rouss City Hall and the city's fire companies.

Possibly the most famous Winchester supporter was Patsy Cline, born Virginia Patterson Hensley. The Winchester native made her mark in country music before tragically dying in a plane crash in 1963. According to O'Connor, she always introduced herself to audiences with the words, "I'm Patsy Cline from Winchester, Va." Memories of Cline can be found throughout the area, from her childhood home on Kent Street, which is undergoing renovation, to her gravesite on the edge of town. Even Gaunt's Drugstore, which boasts employing Cline behind the soda fountain, still pays tribute. Near the prescriptions counter is an old-fashioned jukebox loaded with Patsy Cline singles — "Crazy," "Walkin' After Midnight," "I Fall to Pieces" — and the walls are covered with photos of the singer as she climbed country music's ladder.

According to Sally Coates, the interim executive director of tourism, Patsy Cline fans are a major component of Winchester's tourist crowd, second only to Civil War devotees and just outnumbering the influx of outdoor enthusiasts. But Coates' personal favorite is Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Willa Cather, who was born in Frederick County and who used the rural setting in her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

"In my opinion, Cather is one of the most famous people who ever came from Frederick County," says Coates. A Willa Cather exhibit, sponsored by Winchester-based Shenandoah University, is on display in the Visitor Center throughout the summer.

The politically prominent Byrd family also has long been influential in Winchester. Richard E. Byrd, a speaker of the Virginia State House of Delegates from 1908 to 1912, was editor and publisher of *The Winchester Star*. Harry Byrd Sr., one of his three sons, served as governor of Virginia and later a U.S. senator, while another son, Admiral Richard E. Byrd II, was a famous polar explorer. (A statue of the latter graces the grounds in front of Winchester's Joint Judicial Center.) **Harry**

IF YOU GO...

The Museum of the Shenandoah Valley with the Glen Burnie Historic House and Gardens — An absolute must-see. The museum is eye-opening, the house is fascinating, and the gardens are gorgeous. Don't miss the breathtaking Pleached Allée and the Pink Pavilion. The Gardens at Night program, held throughout the warm season, is romantic. A revealing photography exhibit — "Elvis at 21: Photographs by Alfred Wertheimer" — opens in July. 540-662-1473 or 888-556-5799; www.shenandoahmuseum.org.

Civil War Orientation Center — This educational display area, complete with maps and guidebooks, is located within the Visitor Center at the Winchester-Frederick County Convention and Visitors Bureau. 540-542-1326 or 877-871-1326; www.visitwinchestervva.com or www.shenandoahwar.org.

Stonewall Jackson's Headquarters — More Civil War history to soak in at this home loaned to General Jackson during the Valley Campaign. Take a look at his prayer book and camp table. 540-667-3242; www.winchesterhistory.org.

The Old Courthouse Civil War Museum — Find more than 3,000 Civil War artifacts, including the largest collection of artillery around. The museum, located on Winchester's Old Town walking mall, was a hospital and prison during the war and offers soldiers' graffiti-covered walls to prove it. 540-542-1145; www.civilwarmuseum.org.

George Washington's Office Museum — A tiny piece of real estate with huge significance in our nation's history. Washington used this site to devise his military strategy during the French and Indian War. See artifacts as well as a bronze statue of a young George Washington who first came to Winchester as a surveyor. 540-662-4412; www.winchesterhistory.org.

Everything Patsy Cline — Take a self-guided tour that tracks country music legend Patsy Cline's life in Winchester: her childhood home; the FM station where she belted out her first song on the radio; her gravesite. Ask for your itinerary at the Visitor Center and learn more about Winchester's plans to honor Cline. 888-608-2726; www.celebratingpatsycline.org.



Gaunt's Drugstore looks much the same as it did when Patsy Cline worked behind the soda fountain as a teenager. The store celebrates Patsy's life with photographs and a working jukebox filled with Cline's country music hits.



This sanctuary in the Glen Burnie gardens, known as the Pink Pavilion, is the perfect spot for local events.

Civil War Walking Tours — Organized by the Winchester-Frederick County Convention and Visitors Bureau, these hour-long guided meanderings through Old Town Winchester reveal local Civil War secrets. 540-542-1326 or 877-871-1326; www.visitwinchestervva.com.

Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival — The flagship event in Winchester, the annual Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival routinely attracts more than 200,000 visitors to celebrate the beginning of the apple-growing season, typically in late April. The weeklong festivities include two parades, a carnival, the coronation of Queen Shenandoah, and dozens of celebrity-filled events. Look like a regular: Wear pink and green! 540-662-3863; www.thebloom.com.

Belle Grove Plantation — This 283-acre farm and Federal-era manor house was central to the Battle of Cedar Creek and was used by Confederate General Philip Sheridan as his headquarters during the Valley Campaign. Events are frequent: An annual reenactment of the Battle of Cedar Creek is held on the third Wednesday in October; "Of Ale and History," a daylong festival of microbrew tasting, occurs each May; and the National Sheepdog Trials come to the plantation for the first time on September 18 to 26, 2010. 540-869-2028; www.bellegrove.org.

Rock Harbor Golf Course — Take a break from sightseeing to play 18 holes on this beautiful course designed among the apple orchards. 866-273-1934; www.rockhargolf.com.

Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum — It's hands-on simple science for the children in your crowd. A full-sized ambulance is in-house, as is a Native American hand-harvested home. What fun! 540-722-2020; www.discoverymuseum.net.

The 2011 Cal Ripken World Series of Baseball — It's quite a coup for the Winchester area to land the World Series for 10-year-olds. If you're a baseball fanatic, plan to be at Jim Barnett Park on August 13 to 20, 2011, for the Babe Ruth World Series. 540-662-4946; www.winchestervva.gov/parks.

Third Battle of Winchester Bike and Walking Paths — A local sports store developed a map to guide your bike (and you) on a five-mile trek through land that once was part of an important Civil War battle. Get your directions at the Visitor Center. 540.542.1326 or 877.871.1326; www.visitwinchestervva.com. ■

Byrd Jr. took his father's seat as senator when the former died in 1966 and eventually took over the reins at the Winchester newspaper.

"Senator Byrd, now 95, still comes to the paper almost every day," reports O'Connor. "And he doesn't just sit around. He lets his feelings be known," he adds, laughing. Today, **Thomas Byrd**, Richard E. Byrd's great grandson, publishes the newspaper.

WINCHESTER 2035

Where will Winchester be in 25 years, as it continues to meld the old and new?

At the sprawling grounds surrounding the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, the organization's vision places preservation at the top of its priority list.

"We have 250 acres within our complex," explains Director Crawford. "It's the largest green space in the city. So it's part of our job to take care of it, to follow our mission to 'learn something new, see something beautiful, and protect that which cannot be replaced.' I certainly think our settlers came to Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley because they were drawn to it. Now it's our duty to preserve it as best we can." ■