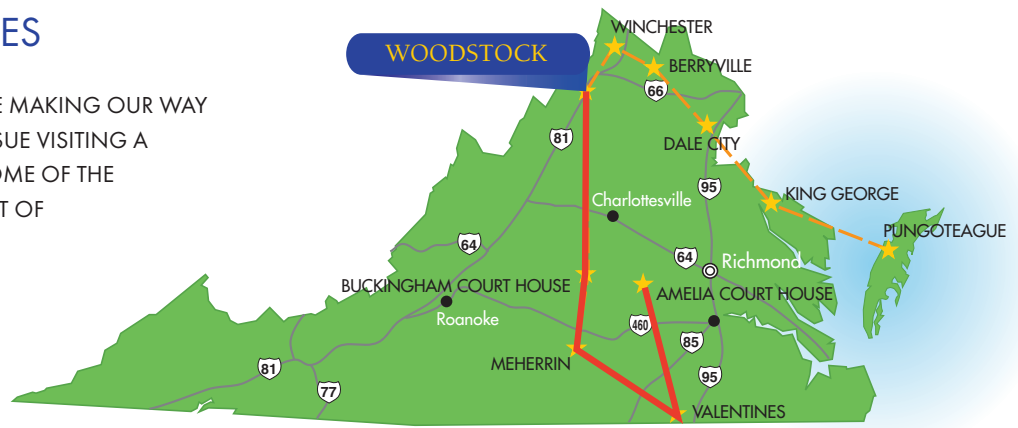


## DOWN HOME SERIES

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 FIFTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



## DOWN HOME IN

# WOODSTOCK

Story and photos by Doug Cochran, Contributing Writer

The town of Woodstock anchors the northern Shenandoah Valley firmly between the waves of Allegheny Mountains to the west, and the more adventurous Massanutten ridge to the east.



The stone 1795 Shenandoah County Courthouse (above) stands on Main Street just across Court Street from the 1975 courthouse (right), and remains the oldest courthouse in Virginia in continuous use. The old courthouse houses the General District Court. The Circuit Court is in the new building.

The town's indecisive neighbor, the fabled North Fork of the Shenandoah River, swerves dramatically east and west in giant bends on its reluctant journey north, to lose itself in the Potomac near Front Royal.

The river nudges Woodstock's town limits, but doesn't enter the town proper. And that tenuous relationship seems just fine with the folks of this historic town. Besides, the town's residents are quite focused on the business of simply being Woodstock.

Woodstock has no single industry or business that dominates its economy. It takes pride in being the county seat for Shenandoah County, but otherwise concentrates on just being a great place to live.

One thing about being a great place to live ... people don't leave. Carolyn Baker observes, "Best thing about Woodstock and places like it is that the same people have been here forever ... At least as long as I've been alive," she smiles. A waitress at the Walton & Smoot Drug Store lunch counter, Carolyn smiles a lot. She can trot out a sandwich with remarkable speed, but locals say the counter's crowning glory is its milkshake, the old-fashioned kind blended in front of you and served with the "extra" giant metal cup holding that special second helping.

Walton & Smoot has held a place on Woodstock's Main Street for more than a century, although it did move across the street in 1962 for more space.

Today the patent medicines in the store are giving way to gifts and souvenirs, but the pharmacy counter remains busy. Displays of store history mark the back walls, and a few tables in no-man's land between the lunch and pharmacy counters are frequently filled with local folks exchanging views on the world, acknowledging passersby, or just enjoying a shake.

Walton & Smoot is directly across Main Street from the historic old Shenandoah County Court House. You have to add that "old" in describing it, because it stands





## AT A GLANCE...

**POPULATION:** 3,952 (2000 Census) 2010 Est. 4,700

**LAND AREA:** 3.8 square miles

**ELEVATION:** 791 feet above sea level

**ESTABLISHED:** By House of Burgesses, on motion of the Hon. George Washington — March, 1761

**FACTOID:** Name Woodstock is said to have been given by George Washington, possibly named after Woodstock, England, a town near the Washington ancestral home.



**1.** The picturesque Woodstock Post Office. **2.** A bust of the Rev. Peter Muhlenberg in front of the old courthouse commemorates his famous 1776 “time for war” sermon in a Woodstock church calling residents to join the fight against England. **3.** The Walton & Smoot Pharmacy occupies the old Woodstock Hotel on Main Street, and has long been a local gathering place.

close beside the “new” Shenandoah County Court House ... just across Court Street. The older of the two courthouses, built in 1795, is the oldest courthouse in Virginia still in use. It houses the General District Court. The new courthouse, built in 1975, holds the Circuit Court.

There’s a large bust in front of the old courthouse. A few feet away a statue of the same man is draped in bronze robes that almost seem to flow with the wind. To understand the double honor paid this man, you have to know a bit of Woodstock’s history.

In 1752, a German immigrant who had settled temporarily in Pennsylvania managed to obtain 400 acres of valley land, land now in Woodstock. Over the next few years, Jacob Miller added to his holdings and laid out a town. The area

was then part of Frederick County, so he had the area’s member of the House of Burgesses — a gentleman named George Washington — sponsor legislation creating the town of Woodstock on his land. The act passed in 1761. Washington may have become known as the father of his country, but he had a more direct paternal relationship with Woodstock.

However, the monuments at the courthouse are not of Washington, nor of Miller.

In 1772, Woodstock became the county seat of the newly created Shenandoah County. That same year Peter Muhlenberg arrived in town. A Lutheran pastor later ordained in the Church of England so he could preach in Virginia’s “Established Church,” the Rev. Mr. Muhlenberg quickly became a Woodstock

community leader ... but not necessarily in a religious sense. He became an outspoken American patriot and leader of local Revolutionary discontent.

On Sunday, Jan. 23, 1776, Muhlenberg took his sermon from Ecclesiastes and its assertion of “a time for war and a time for peace.” He concluded firmly that “the time for war has come” and, throwing off his vestments dramatically, stood before the congregation in the uniform of a Continental soldier. He had placed a drummer boy outside the church to muster recruits for the army. By the end of the war, the “Fighting Parson” became a general and commanded all Continental soldiers in Virginia. Today Woodstock remembers him with the two monuments at the courthouse, with a street, and with a place on the town seal.





**1.** Carolyn Baker, who manages the Walton & Smoot lunch counter most mornings, whips up a fantastic milk shake, at least according to perennial patrons. **2.** Mike Beasley can stand on the front porch of his real estate firm, ERA Beasley Realty, and see most of downtown Woodstock. **3.** Alma Hottle, Woodstock vice mayor until July 1, has 28 years on Town Council, and spends her days promoting Woodstock as the only employee of the town's Chamber of Commerce. **4.** Barbara Kesser, a local antiques dealer and secretary of the Woodstock Museum, tries out the original lock from the 1795 Shenandoah County Courthouse, now in the museum. The lock works. **5 & 6.** The Massanutten Military Academy, established in Woodstock in 1899, is a coeducational college-prep facility for grades 7-12 and one postgraduate year. **7.** The Woodstock Museum is housed in the historic 1772 Marshall House. Thomas Marshall, father of Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, is said to have rented a room in this house.

A generation later, the Civil War once more brought notables to Woodstock. Many of the most famous generals for both the North and South stayed in the town as the war flowed up and down the Valley. Union General Phil Sheridan, after destroying Valley farms and crops to deny food to the South, telegraphed from Woodstock his famous declaration "I have made the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia so bare that a crow flying over it would have to carry its knapsack." Obviously the Valley recovered. Crows no longer need camping gear.

## HISTORY STILL KEY

History remains important in Woodstock today. The substantial Woodstock Museum, with two buildings a block off Main Street, is crowded with local relics, and memories.

Barbara Kesser, the museum's secretary and owner of Spring Hollow Antiques downtown, is proud of the collection. "People are impressed by the museum," she notes. Most museum artifacts are in the Marshall House, a house where, it is said, Thomas Marshall, father of the Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, rented a room while serving as clerk in the nearby courthouse.

The other part of the museum, the nearby Wickham House, dates back to just after the Revolutionary War. Kesser notes, "We have it set up as a home would have been in the early 1800s." She observes that the bedroom and kitchen are furnished with the actual furniture that was there in that house at the time.

Kesser has enjoyed working with the Woodstock Museum for about 10 years. "I like the history behind things here. They all have a story to tell," she says. "I think you can actually read that story in the wear on furniture, for example."

Like many in Woodstock, Kesser visited the town, liked it ... and just stayed. She smiles, "We escaped from Southern Maryland about 25 years ago."

Jean Sherrad, co-owner of the Woodstock Café & Shoppes, moved from Tennessee. "We came here for the beauty of the area. We visited when our kids were little, and said we wanted to retire here. And we did."

Sherrad reports her coffee-and-sandwich shop has benefited from the influx of new people, a lot from Northern Virginia. "The shop has really exceeded our expectations. The people here, both the locals and new people, are different, are willing to try new things."

Alma Hottle is one of the locals. Indeed, she is a local institution. "I was born here, right down the street," she says from her office in the Chamber of Commerce, just across Main Street from the Woodstock Municipal Building. That proximity is convenient, because Hottle is winding up 28 years of service on the Woodstock Town Council and a term as vice mayor.

Looking out her office window, Hottle recalls, "My father worked right across the street, rebuilding old batteries." She reflects a moment. "He was good at it, too. He was offered a better job, but he would have had to move. He stayed here."

Hottle too has had opportunities to leave, but hasn't. "I like the people here. I like them a lot. I also like the slow pace of time here."

Working out of a small office — equipped with a typewriter, but no computer — Hottle finds promoting her town straightforward. "Working for the Chamber is easy. Woodstock sells itself."

Laughing at her age, Hottle boasts she spent 55 years with the Woodstock Fire Department Auxiliary, "And now my daughter is president of the fire department." She smiles, "I'm so old I'm even president of the museum."

"I've seen change," Hottle admits. "We have more businesses now, and different businesses."

## CHANGE MEANS MORE

County Clerk Denise Barb-Estep agrees that "more" is the biggest change. "There are more people now, in part because we are so convenient to Northern Virginia." Growth in Shenandoah County's population over recent decades has prompted expansion of county facilities in Woodstock. The county is about to build a new facility for the courts now housed in the "old" courthouse. But the future of the old structure is uncertain. Apparently the family who originally donated the property for county use put a stipulation in the deed that, if the courthouse is abandoned, it must revert to the descendants of the donors, even more than two centuries later. A decision is expected sometime, but time moves slowly here.

Woodstock is a true mix of natives and newcomers, and all seem quite happy to be residents of this historic Shenandoah Valley community, and willing to share it.

Hottle sums it up for many. "You get to know this community, you get to belong. When you're here there are lots of people you know."

"You're home." ■

## IF YOU GO ...

### EVENTS:

#### Music On Main

Free concerts are held in the Main Street Park, 221 Main Street, on select summer Fridays. The concerts are held from 7 to 9 p.m. and are open to all. The Bill Vaughan Band will be featured July 2, with the Amanda Wilkins Band scheduled for Aug. 20. John Richards and the Virginians will be featured Sept. 10.

#### Vintage Woodstock Festival

Held in Woodstock's Court Square, the annual event features dancing in the streets, arts and crafts, food, wine tasting, and children's activities. The 2010 festival will be held 5 to 10 p.m. Friday, June 25, and will feature the eclectic music of the Robbie Limon Band.

#### Independence Day Fireworks

Big firework display is set for 9:30 p.m. Saturday, July 3, at the Shenandoah County Fairgrounds in Woodstock. Rain date is Saturday, July 10.

#### Route 11 Yard Crawl

More than 43 miles of yard sales and other bargains along U.S. Route 11 — the Valley Turnpike — through Woodstock and other Shenandoah County towns on Saturday, Aug. 14. Sales begin at 7 a.m. and go until ... Information — 540-459-6227.

#### Halloween on Court Square

Fall festival from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 30, on Court Square, featuring mask-making, pumpkin-painting, monster mural, inflatable maze and more. There will be live music and trick-or-treating of area businesses.

#### Shenandoah County Fair

Virginia's "Friendliest Fair" will be held Aug. 27 through Sept. 4, 2010, at the fairgrounds in Woodstock. The annual event will have the full variety of county fair and agricultural activities, and is known for its high-quality entertainment. Last year Kenny Rogers headlined the grandstand music. To check out the 2010 offerings, visit [www.shencofair.com](http://www.shencofair.com).

### PLACES TO SEE:

#### Woodstock Museum

With rooms full of unusual antiques and memorabilia from Woodstock's past, the museum is open from noon until 4 p.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The museum's primary facility is the Marshall House at 104 South Muhlenberg Street,



Relics from the Schmidt Drugstore founded in Woodstock in 1824 are displayed at the Woodstock Museum. The drugstore continued in business until 1944.

and admission is free. Tours of the nearby Wickham House, a home furnished as it was almost two centuries ago, are conducted from the Marshall House. For more information, go to [www.thewoodstockmuseum.org](http://www.thewoodstockmuseum.org) or call 540-459-5518.

#### The Shenandoah Germanic Heritage Museum

Two early homesteads and a museum are located at Mt. Olive, just north of Woodstock. The museum is open to the public on weekends from May through October. Admission is free. For information or directions, call 540-436-8016.

#### Tom's Brook Battlefield

Located between Woodstock and Strasburg, the battlefield is where Federal forces under General Phil Sheridan attacked the Confederates of General Jubal Early in fall, 1964. Let history come alive.

#### Crystal Caverns at Hupp's Hill

Crystal Caverns in Strasburg is considered the oldest documented cavern in Virginia. The first visitors to Crystal Caverns were Native American tribes, and arrowheads and other artifacts have been found in and around the cave. Call 540-465-8660 for information, or visit [www.crystal-caverns.com](http://www.crystal-caverns.com).

For more information on these and other area attractions and events, visit the town's website at [www.townofwoodstockva.com](http://www.townofwoodstockva.com), go to [www.shenandoahtravel.org](http://www.shenandoahtravel.org), or call 540-459-6227 or 888-367-3965. ■