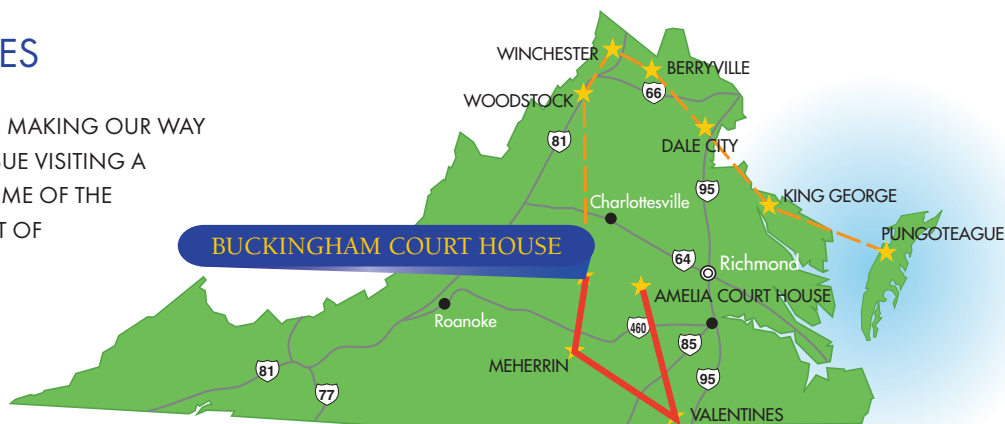


## DOWN HOME SERIES

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 FOURTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



## DOWN HOME IN

# BUCKINGHAM

Story and photos by Tana Lane Knott, Contributing Writer

Got a few minutes? Great. Come ride with me. I want to take you to Buckingham Court House. We'll turn off the GPS and I'll be your guide, with or without a fake British accent.

Why go? Well, because — because Buckingham rests comfortably in the geographical center of Virginia, where country living reigns and history comes alive.

Moreover, the quaint, unincorporated village district of Buckingham Court House has it all — historic homes,

churches, shops, and museums. And, there's a courthouse that's steeped in Jeffersonian architecture and history.

Need more? Well, Buckingham is the twelfth largest county in the state yet it only has two stoplights. How rural is that?

Headed west on U.S. Route 60 from Richmond, Sprouses Corner offers the first sighting of the Blue Ridge. Those familiar with this exquisite view know the welcome mat is out and Buckingham Court House is right up the road.

Just past the intersection of Routes 60 and 15, which long-ago served as a major cross-roads, is one of Buckingham's newest enterprises, Sprouses Corner Ranch.

Managed by LaRue Sprouse Dowd, the ranch offers a symbolic representa-

tion of Buckingham's rural nature while reinforcing that agriculture is alive and well.

After working the horse-racing circuit as a physical therapist, Dowd, with degrees in equine therapy and veterinarian technology, returned home in hopes of owning her own horse farm where she could raise, train, and board horses, offer riding lessons, and provide programs for youngsters.

Her hopes were fulfilled when her grandmother suggested, "Why don't you start it over in the pasture?"

Gazing across the gently rolling land that has been in her family for generations, she says, "I want to see this farm flourish. I've always dreamed of this."

And, see that gigantic water tower bearing a huge, red heart? That reiterates the county's location in the heart of Virginia while subtly marketing its capability to provide water utilities for new homes and businesses.

### EMBRACING ALL AGES

Farther west we pass Buckingham Middle School, which opened in 2003 and offers a concrete statement about this community's commitment to its youth and public education.

Not far from the middle school is Buckingham County High School, bordered by the Vo-Tech Center and a recently revitalized athletic field.

Plans are currently underway to renovate and expand two schools on Route 20. Once completed, the facility will include lower and upper elementary schools that share a media center and cafeteria.

All six of the county's schools are accredited and provide a nurturing environment for their students.



On clear days, the Blue Ridge Mountains can be seen from Sprouses Corner, the intersection of U.S. Routes 15 and 60. Buckingham Court House is right up the road, where the courthouse building (right) is steeped in Jeffersonian architecture and history.





## AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** 16,152 (Buckingham County estimate, 2008)

**LAND AREA:** 582 square miles (Buckingham County)

**FOUNDED:** 1761 (Buckingham County)

**FACTOID:** Buckingham was the most notable gold-mining region in the country before the California Gold Rush in 1849.



**1.** Maysville Manor, built circa 1815, now serves as a bed and breakfast. **2.** On the fourth Saturday in July, Lee Wayside hosts Cowboy Day, in celebration of the National Day of the American Cowboy. Buckingham's "Tom Mix Rangers" and cowboys from across the country, including silver screen look-alikes, offer a fun-filled day for kids of all ages. **3.** Katie and Bryan Davis enjoy a buggy ride at the Historic Village at Lee Wayside.

Linda V. Paige, a retired educator and administrator, says, "Buckingham is a rural area with people who really do care about the children and the county." She continues, "If you would like for your child to be in a small community school with personalized attention and instruction, Buckingham County is the answer."

Paige is an unofficial ambassador for retirees and loves to point out that Buckingham offers an abundance of volunteer opportunities.

Describing Buckingham as a community where people take time to speak to one another, Paige says, "It's so nice when you are out and about and are greeted by people who are smiling and so friendly."

Buckingham is also attracting young professionals looking for a rural setting within commuting distance of Charlottesville, Richmond and Lynchburg.

One such couple is Katie and Bryan Davis. Although each is from neighboring states, they relocated in Buckingham and have purchased a home in the courthouse area.

"We love living in Buckingham because of the people and good old-fashioned values," notes Bryan. Buckingham is a supportive community where everyone knows everyone."

Agreeing, Katie adds, "It's a perfect place to raise a family if you like a little slower pace of life and rural living."

### LIVING HISTORY

Our next stop is Lee Wayside. For years, this wayside has offered travelers — including its namesake, Gen. Robert E. Lee — respite. A monument marks the area where Lee's tent was

pitched on April 12, 1865, following the surrender in nearby Appomattox.

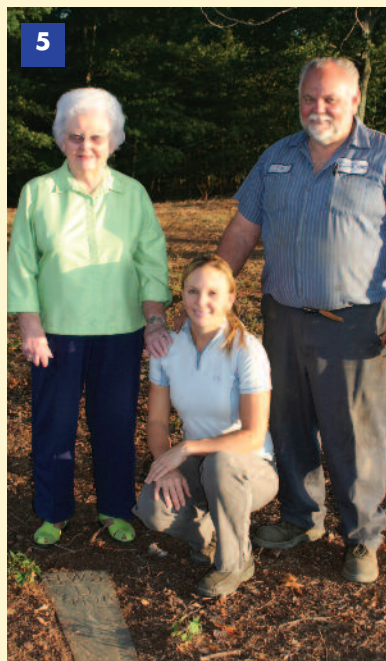
Accounts of what is called Lee's "most painful journey" contend that the general was invited to stay at Rose Cottage, a nearby tavern, but he chose to camp with his troops.

Rose Cottage was destroyed by fire in the late 1980s; and, the United Daughters of the Confederacy donated the property to Historic Buckingham, Incorporated (HBI), the county's equivalent of a historical society.

The donation included 40 acres that comprise the Historic Village at Lee Wayside, a unique living-history project of HBI.

Thus far this extraordinary grassroots effort has yielded a park that contains eight relocated buildings, including a post office, an office from the slate quarry, a tobacco barn, corn crib, privy, smokehouse, general store, and a one-room schoolhouse, which is on





**1.** Gwynn Tyler (right) of the Virginia Dept. of Forestry recognizes Buckingham's Allen Gooden as one of a select group of Virginia forest landowners nominated and certified as a Forest Steward. **2.** Rebecca Carter has worked for the county since 1986 and was appointed county administrator in 1995. **3.** Buckingham supervisor Dr. Brian Bates (right) tours the Bear Garden Power Station with Dominion's Stu Gitchell. **4.** Always offering a smile and a hug, Linda Paige is vice mayor of Dillwyn, the county's only incorporated town with a population of 447. **5.** While working to restore the family farm, LaRue S. Dowd (kneeling) found the gravesite of her great-great-grandfather. With LaRue are her father E. B. Sprouse and her grandmother Ruth. **6.** Martha Louis is often out in the community promoting Historic Buckingham, Inc., and the Historic Village at Lee Wayside. **7.** During a meeting of the newly formed tourism committee, (from left) Sandra Moss, Janet Miller, and Marty S. Martin map out local attractions.

the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail. A blacksmith shop and carpentry shop are currently under construction.

Open every weekend, the park also hosts special events such as Civil War and frontier encampments, and Cowboy Day.

Martha Louis, a local historian and preservationist, presides over and energizes HBI.

"The purpose of Historic Buckingham, Incorporated is to foster and create an interest in historical and literary events — past, present, and future of Buckingham; and to promote and preserve all historical aspects of the county," says Louis.

Along with the Historic Village, HBI operates the Housewright Museum located across from the courthouse.

### COUNTY SEAT

Slowing to the posted 35-mph speed limit, we enter the one-mile stretch of Buckingham Courthouse.

We'll stop at the county administration complex where County Administrator Rebecca Carter has been at the helm since 1995.

"Our county offers the best of both worlds," she says with pride, "an easy-going lifestyle with convenient access to Virginia's leading cities, the nation's capital, and other major markets on the East Coast."

Offering that Buckingham is rich in natural resources — land, minerals, timber, and water — Carter stresses that the county's most important resource is its people, "people with integrity and an old-fashioned work ethic."

"Easy living and opportunity are traditions we like to share," says Carter, noting that the county's wealth of outdoor recreational activities complements that lifestyle.

Carter's administrative skills and budgetary vigilance, along with those of the board of supervisors, were recently revalidated during the annual audit report that demonstrated the county's sound financial standing, even in this difficult economy.

Moreover, the county anticipates a boost in revenue with the construction of Dominion Resources' new 580-megawatt, natural-gas-powered facility, Bear Garden Power Station.

According to Dominion, which purchased the site from Tenaska in 2008, the \$619 million project should be completed by the summer of 2011. Dominion anticipates the facility will generate approximately \$1 million annually in property taxes.

The construction is creating approximately 500 temporary jobs. When the power station begins operation, it will provide about 25 full-time positions.

Dr. Brian Bates, a member of the board of supervisors who initiated talks with

Tenaska, says, "This is the biggest investment anybody's ever made in Buckingham — nobody's come close."

He adds, "I am proud of the way the community embraced this project. And, because of this project we are able to move forward with the school renovations."

Our next stop is Buckingham Courthouse. Flanked by the Housewright Museum and Maysville Manor, two buildings that are part of the Courthouse Historic District, the courthouse is indeed a jewel.

Finding something lost, especially if it's revered, is exciting and rewarding. And, sometimes the story of that find turns into a treasure in its own right. Such is the case with the revelation that Thomas Jefferson did indeed design a truly spectacular courthouse for Buckingham.

The discovery, a result of an archeological dig in 2003, uncovered the footprint of the original courthouse. That evidence has yielded an interpretive landscape of the actual layout of one of Jefferson's architectural masterpieces.

Now, with the aid of colored bricks and pavers along with some of the original column bases, visitors are offered a sign-guided walk into an illustrious era of Buckingham's past.

Built circa 1824, the Jeffersonian courthouse obviously laid the groundwork for its replacement that was completed several years after a fire gutted the original in 1869.

However, for decades some experts contended that the replacement did not match the description of the design found in letters written by Jefferson.

Others pointed out that the existing courthouse did not bear the distinctive characteristics seen in buildings designed by Jefferson.

Dr. Brian Bates, director of the Longwood University Archeology Field School (and, yes, he's also on the board of supervisors), oversaw the dig that confirmed oral history was correct.

Bates and his students dug for the truth and found it when they uncovered some of the foundation from the original structures.

"What we found in the ground is now represented in the interpretive landscaping," says Bates. "And we can see that the front portico of the Jefferson courthouse would have been a much more substantial structure than what we see today both in terms of its depth and its width."

## PROMOTING BUCKINGHAM

Working hand-in-hand with HBI and other organizations to promote Buckingham are the newly formed Tourism Commission and its sponsor, the Chamber of Commerce.

Janet Miller, president of the chamber and a member of the commission, explained, "The

## IF YOU GO...

### Historic Village at Lee Wayside

— Located off Routes 60 and 690 at Lee Wayside, this living history park is open every weekend from 1 to 4 p.m. Admission is free with the exception of a limited number of events. Volunteers in period costume serve as guides. Annual events include Civil War and Frontier Encampments; Native American Relics Show; Antique Gun Show; and Cowboy Day, which is held on the fourth Saturday in July. [www.leewaysidevillage.com](http://www.leewaysidevillage.com).



The Historic Village at Lee Wayside offers free carriage rides during some special events.

### Buckingham County Arts and Community Center

— An old schoolhouse, built circa 1916, serves as the Arts Center and home for the Arts Council. Located on Rt. 60, the center hosts exhibits; classes; meetings; social events; and an art camp for area youth. It also houses the Court House Café, open weekdays for breakfast and lunch.

**Housewright Museum** — Built circa 1840, this home is headquarters for Historic Buckingham, Inc., and includes a museum and repository for historical books and records. Open April through the first week in December on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m., the museum is on Rt. 60 across from the courthouse. Free admission; visit Historic Buckingham at [www.historicbuckingham.org](http://www.historicbuckingham.org).

**Buckingham Courthouse** — Enjoy a self-guided walking tour of Thomas Jefferson's Lost Courthouse. Also on the courthouse green is a war memorial honoring county residents who made the ultimate sacrifice in WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Across the road is a monument erected in 1908 to honor Confederate soldiers from Buckingham.

**Maysville Manor** — Built circa 1815, this unique H-shaped Federal structure, located adjacent to the courthouse, was primarily used as a hotel and a residence, but has recently evolved into a bed & breakfast and events center. Call (434) 969-2162; (434) 221-8942; or [www.maysvillemanor.com](http://www.maysvillemanor.com).

### Horsepen Lake Wildlife Management Area

— Just west of Buckingham Courthouse on Route 638, this WMA offers hiking trails, fishing, and hunting on 2,910 acres surrounding Horsepen Lake.

**Railroad Excursions** — The Old Dominion Chapter of the National Railway Historical So-

ciety offers spring and fall excursions along the Buckingham Branch Railroad from its Depot in Dillwyn to the James River. There's also a Santa Train in December and an Old West-themed excursion on Cowboy Day. For more information and tickets, visit [www.odcnrhs.org](http://www.odcnrhs.org).

**James River State Park** — With three miles of river frontage, three fishing ponds, and 15 miles of hiking trails, the park offers campgrounds, cabins, picnic shelters, a canoe launch, and a trailer boat launch. Visitors may bring their own horses and stay at a primitive group horse campsite for up to 20 horses.

**Yogaville** — Situated on the banks of the James River, this spiritual center/Yoga community encompasses over 600 acres and includes the Light Of Truth Universal Shrine, LOTUS, an interfaith shrine celebrating the unity behind the diversity of the world religions. For reservations and info, call 800-858-9642; [www.yogaville.org](http://www.yogaville.org).

**Ellis Acres Memorial Park** — A multi-use nine-acre community park is currently under construction at the site of Buckingham Training School in Dillwyn. Built in 1923, BTS was the county's first secondary school for African-Americans. Use of the park and its picnic area is encouraged. Check it out at [www.dillwynva.org](http://www.dillwynva.org).

**Hatton Ferry** — The nation's only poled ferry still in operation, Hatton Ferry crosses the James River from its landing on Rt. 625, Hatton Ferry Road, to a landing in southern Albemarle a few miles from Scottsville. The ferry operates on a weekend schedule from April to October.

**James River Batteau Festival** — This eight-day event features authentic replicas of the shallow-draft merchant boats that carried tobacco and other products downriver to market. Beginning in Lynchburg, the boats float to Maidens Landing, camping each night along the way. Several stops are made in Buckingham during the journey. See [www.batteau.org](http://www.batteau.org) for details. ■



tourism industry could be one of our most lucrative and attractive industries. We see our work with the commission making it easier for businesses here to survive.”

**Sandra Moss**, one of the founders of the chamber, says, “One of the main goals of the chamber is to make people aware of all county businesses, not just the 95 businesses and professional offices in Dillwyn and immediately south of the town.” She adds that the chamber felt funding the creation of the commission would, in turn, expand and strengthen the county’s business hub.

Miller concludes, “Buckingham has a lot to offer — there are many multi-generational, family-oriented kinds of things to do here.”

### **ONE MORE INTRODUCTION**

At 95, **Allen Gooden, Jr.**, continues to manage his cattle operation and tree farm. After serving in WWII, Gooden came to Buckingham with his bride Christine to visit her parents.

“I came for two days,” notes Gooden. He stayed a lifetime.

Focusing on the width of his driveway, Gooden talks about his native Alabama and noted, “I never lived on a place any bigger than this. And I wanted to do whatever I could so this would be at least an acceptable place.”

Looking at the home he designed, the fields he plowed, and the forest he continues to manage, it is far more than “acceptable”: picturesque and pastoral easily come to mind.

He and Christine taught school. He became an administrator and, after retiring, served on the school board. They raised seven children. All earned college degrees and most achieved advanced degrees.

“Whatever I’ve accomplished I’ve done with the help of people in Buckingham County,” notes Gooden. In turn, he felt it was imperative that he help others. And, he has.

Gooden served on the board of the Central Virginia Health Center during its formative years; he received national recognition for his work with Boy Scouts; and he was appointed by three governors to serve on the Virginia Board of Social Services. Moreover, he is credited for his role in the school division’s smooth transition during integration. And, this is just one paragraph from his good-works file.

Truly personifying the spirit of this community, Gooden says, “Life has been good and the people here in Buckingham County have been very, very good to me.”

Okay, so there you have it — friendly, caring people living easy is what we’re all about down home in Buckingham Court House. Hope you’ll come back real soon. ■