

■ DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2011, 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 tenth and final stop, we'll be ...

DOWN HOME IN

EDINBURG

by Deborah R. Huso, Contributing Writer • Photos by Dorothy Stephenson



There is a bench under large oaks that tower over smaller trees. A dirt slide in front of the bench slopes gently into nearby Stony Creek where ducks sit at the water's

edge. Despite a recent heavy rain, Stony Creek is calm and flows slowly, similar to the traffic moving in and out of town on the Route 11 bridge overhead. Soft laughter comes from a

couple playing with their daughter under a tree in front of the historic four-story mill nearby. Welcome to Edinburg, Va.

This small town nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Shenandoah County was first called Stony Creek and then renamed "Shryock" after Jacob Shryock, a local settler who owned much of the land that now makes up the town. It was later renamed "Edenburgh" as a reference to the Garden of Eden. By

1835, the village contained 17 dwellings, two merchant stores, a house of public entertainment, a rifle factory, a blacksmith shop, and had a population of 130. Covering an area of 7.1 acres, "Edinburg" adopted its current name upon incorporation on May 24, 1852.

Modern Edinburg still pays homage to the past, especially in the days and weeks leading up to its Old Time Festival, which takes place during the third week-end of September and celebrates the town's heritage arts, crafts, food, and entertainment. "We're focused on our heritage tourism," says town Mayor Dan Harshman,

The town was first dubbed Stony Creek after this gently meandering stream, which flows under the Route 11 bridge on the outskirts of Edinburg.





AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 1,014

LAND AREA: 490 acres

ELEVATION: Around 2,000 feet

FOUNDED: 1852

FACTOID: The earliest recorded residents of the Edinburg area were the Senedo Indians, the origin of the word "Shenandoah" for which the Valley is named.

who has been putting in his own share of work at the restored Edinburg Mill, which will soon house the town's visitor center and museum, as well as retail stores and a 100-seat restaurant.

European settlers first began moving into the Shenandoah Valley in the 1700s, and the area that would become Edinburg first began to develop in 1805, when settler Philip Grandstaff built a dam to provide power to a gun factory that supplied weapons for the War of 1812. In 1848, Grandstaff's son George fol-

lowed in his father's industrious footsteps, constructing a large roller mill (the present-day Edinburg Mill) on the south side of town where Scots-Irish settlers came to work.

German settlers from Pennsylvania arrived in the mid-18th century by way of the old Indian Trail known as the "Warrior's Path," which would later become the Great Wagon Road — the most important frontier transportation route in Colonial America. Along with the local Dinky Railroad, this road (the predecessor to Route 11)

1. The historic Edinburg Mill, which will soon house Edinburg's Visitors Center and museum, is scheduled to open to the public by the end of 2011. It will also feature retail shops and a restaurant that will open at a later date. **2.** Edinburg's Shenandoah Vineyards is the third oldest winery in Virginia. **3.** Eleven varieties of grapes are grown on 15 acres under vine. Tours and tastings are offered 10 a.m.-6 p.m. daily.

opened western Virginia to settlement and offered transportation of goods produced in the area, including iron ore. By the mid-1800s, Edinburg was a thriving town.

Edinburg managed to escape much of the devastation that plagued the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War. When Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan was ordered to burn anything in the Valley that could aid the Confederate cause during his Valley campaign of 1864, his orders included destruction of the Edinburg Mill.



1. The Edinburg Gallery, located on North Main Street, showcases fine arts and crafts. **2.** Cynthia Morris and her husband Jim operate The Edinburg Village Shop, which sells everything from vintage toys, books, and records to old bottles and dishes, quilts, and afghans. **3.** According to Edinburg Mayor Dan Harshman, the town is focused on its heritage tourism. **4.** Route 11 becomes Main Street Edinburg and is a great asset to local businesses. **5.** Emma Randel and her late husband James opened the award-winning Shenandoah Vineyards over 30 years ago. **6.** Native Libby Rocco of Wightman Insurance Agency is pictured next to a painting done by her husband, artist Keith Rocco. The Roccos are also members of the local band *Jump Alley*.

According to local legend, Sheridan and his troops set fire to the mill while Grandstaff's granddaughters pleaded with Sheridan to spare the building. Out of respect for their grandfather, Sheridan, who served with Grandstaff during the Mexican War, allowed the girls to call for help. Townspeople formed a bucket brigade and smothered the fire; however, charred wood is still visible in the mill today.

ROUTE 11 DELIVERS VISITORS

Present-day Route 11 continues to be a great asset for Edinburg's residents, including area small business owners like Cynthia and Jim Morris, who operate The Edinburg Village Shop, which sells everything from vintage toys, books, and records to old bottles and dishes, quilts, and afghans. Before they moved to the area in 2001, the former D.C. residents occasionally visited the town, eyeing a Victorian home on Piccadilly that they eventually purchased, opening their store two years later. "It's like going backwards," Cynthia says about living in Edinburg. "I love it!"

Just up the street, Libby Rocco of Wightman Insurance Agency works in her office alongside her oldest son, Justin. Rocco grew up on a small farm in Edinburg. "I remember playing games here as a child," says Rocco. "Kids would meet up in the fields and play softball. It was an ideal place to grow up." Rocco taught music until 1985 when she started selling crop insurance to stay home with her family.

But Rocco hasn't let her music degree fall by the wayside. In addition to directing the senior choir, youth band, and junior band at Wakeman's Grove Church of the Brethren, Rocco also plays keyboard and sings in Jump Alley, a seven-piece band playing 1940s and 1950s tunes, with her husband, Keith, who plays guitar. The band performs at events around the area including the recent Old Time Festival.

Like the Roccos, Harry Murray, the local pharmacist, has also figured out a way to turn a hobby into an income-producing passion. Murray is known for more than his position behind the counter of People's Drug. He is also a fly-fishing expert and owns Murray's

Fly Shop, which hosts seminars and classes on everything from fly fishing for beginners to casting and rigging.

Murray's family roots run deep in Edinburg. Six generations of his family have resided in the town, including his grandfather, William, who inspired Murray's interest in fly fishing. "It was a nice area to grow up in," says Murray. "It is a good Christian community where everyone knows everyone."

Edinburg also appealed to former New Jersey resident and Woodstock native Emma Randel, who moved to the area full-time after her husband, James, passed away in 1985. During a visit with Emma's mother in Woodstock, James read an issue of *Commonwealth Magazine* that featured a story about a man experimenting with wine grapes. "My husband said 'We can do that,'" Emma says. "He had a philosophy that you could do anything you wanted to." The article sparked the idea to start Shenandoah Vineyards, which Emma still operates today. In 1976, while the couple still lived in New Jersey, the planting began. They obtained grapes from neighboring vineyards to create their first batch in 1977, and opened their doors to the public in 1979.

Today the 26-acre vineyard — 15 acres under vine — is the third oldest in Virginia. Medals from state and national competitions decorate the sales room and are a testimony to their many different wines, including Chardonnay, Riesling, and the vineyard's signature wine, 2009 Founder's Reserve Chambourcin.

COMMUTERS ENJOY THE SMALL-TOWN CHARM

Aside from area small business owners and those who work for local companies, such as Shentel, a communications company serving Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland, Harshman says most residents in this small town are retired or commute to larger nearby cities like Harrisonburg, Winchester, or Washington, D.C. "There are a great number of people that are attracted to living here that get up at four or five in the morning and hit the road," says Mayor Harshman. "I think people enjoy the small-town charm." ■

IF YOU GO...

Stop by **The Filling Station**, a Christian-based coffee house located on Main Street in Edinburg, on a Friday and Saturday evening for music, coffee, food, and an open-mic night. This coffee shop is a little different than most. First and foremost, The Filling Station is a ministry. All money received and donated through the shop helps support the business, other local ministries and churches, and community emergencies.

Theater Shenandoah, which practices at the Old Opera House in Edinburg, also enjoys giving back to the community in the form of family-friendly plays like *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Peter Pan*, and *Sylvia*. If you're going to be in town, check out their show schedule and ticket information at www.theatershenandoah.com.

The cast of Theater Shenandoah performed recently during the **31st Annual Edinburg Old Time Festival**, which takes place every fall during the third weekend of September. During the festival, the historic Edinburg Mill opens for tours, bands and musicians perform, and people gather on Piccadilly Street on Friday evening for a street dance. In addition, there is an "Old Timers Basketball Game," Karaoke at the VFW, a 4K Fun Run/Walk, a parade, crafters and artists, and entertainment provided on three different stages.

But if you're not in town during this busy weekend, don't worry. There are still plenty of things to do in Edinburg. **Gallery 201**, located at 201 South Main Street, features original paintings, prints, and handcrafts made by local artisans. Meanwhile, over 65 vendors selling antiques, collectibles,

books, and all kinds of odds and ends are set up at the **The Flea Market**, an indoor market open Friday through Sunday year-round, at 164 Landfill Road.

And be sure to explore the **Edinburg Mill**, which will soon house Edinburg's Visitors Center and museum. It is scheduled to open to the public by the end of 2011, and will also feature retail shops and a restaurant that will open at a later date.

For wine connoisseurs, **Shenandoah Vineyards** is open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with tours every day on the hour. The vineyard also hosts an annual fall Harvest Festival featuring wine tastings, crafts, pony rides, wine seminars, live music, and a grape-stomping contest.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Edinburg Chamber of Commerce

101 Town Hall Ave.
Edinburg, VA 22824
540-984-8521
www.townofedinburg.org

Shenandoah County Historical Society

P.O. Box 506
Edinburg, VA 22824
540-984-7842
www.shenandoahcountyhistoricalsociety.org

Shenandoah Vineyards

3659 South Ox Rd.
Edinburg, VA 22824
540-984-8699
www.shentel.net/shenvine

Theater Shenandoah

107 Center St.
Edinburg, VA 22824
540-984-3972
www.theatershenandoah.com ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARRY MURRAY



Local pharmacist Harry Murray is also a fly-fishing expert and owns Murray's Fly Shop, which hosts fishing seminars and classes. Visit online at www.murraysflyshop.com.