

*This year **Cooperative Living** is taking a road trip along the length of U.S. Route 1 as it crosses Virginia from the North Carolina border to Washington, D.C. In each issue, correspondent Deborah Huso will relate her experiences along the way.*



by Deborah Huso,
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Vintage Fredericksburg

Known best for its Revolutionary and Civil War history, Fredericksburg's 20th-century history often goes unnoticed by visitors. Not so anymore. Come along for a vintage tour of this historic town.



It's the perfect day for ice cream, about 80 degrees, full sun, and I am driving north on Route 1, sunroof open, sunshine raining down on my hair. Then it appears on the left — I've heard about it — this vintage ice cream stand from yesteryear, Carl's. I pull into the parking lot, see a line snaking up to the plate-glass windows, and realize I have just driven into 1955. It's all here — the bright, oversized neon sign on top of a flat roof, replete with a giant neon ice cream cone.

This throwback to the '50s ice cream stand has been at this location north of downtown Fredericksburg since 1947

Located just north of downtown on Princess Anne Street, Carl's has been drawing a line of patrons since 1947.

when Carl and Margaret Sponsellor opened Carl's Frozen Custard in an old gas station and restaurant. The couple built the current structure with its signature mid-century Art Moderne commercial architecture in 1953. Carl's is still a family operation, and the chipper and speedy teenagers and college students working the stand in summer still use Carl's original frozen custard and ice cream recipes, making cones, sundaes, and shakes with the original 1940s Electro-Freezer ice cream machines!

When I see the long line of people in front of me, I figure that this little road stop is going to take awhile. Not so. I'm up to the window in five minutes, and before I can even get my change back into my purse, a smiling attendant is handing me my root beer slush float and moving on to the next customer.

THE NEWER HISTORY OF FREDERICKSBURG

You'll find a lot of places like Carl's along this stretch of Route 1 through Fredericksburg. In fact, much of Fredericksburg's growth in the 20th century, particularly north of the historic downtown area, happened because of the construction of Route 1 (the major north-south route from Maine to Florida) in the 1920s. Today, Old Route 1 follows Fredericksburg's Princess Anne Street through the city.

"Princess Anne used to be Route 1," Tramia Jackson, education coordinator at the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center, explains. "The Rappahannock River was the first main form of transportation in town until the railroads came through. Then came Route 1."

Jackson, who is a native of neighboring Stafford County, leads me through the transportation exhibit at the Fredericksburg Area Museum, which today occupies the buildings that once served as the city's town hall and as the 1927 Planters National Bank.

And if you want to get an overview of the transportation history of Fredericksburg and its environs, this museum is the place to start. Here you'll see pictures of the 1942 flood where the Rappahannock River rose 42.5 feet above normal levels and inundated Fredericksburg's Caroline Street and put the town of Falmouth (on the Rappahannock's opposite bank) underwater. Once upon a time, the Rappahannock formed the major transportation route in



(Left) The friendly, efficient staff at Carl's is adept at moving quickly through a long line of customers. (Below) Another iconic Fredericksburg eatery, the 2400 Diner has been in business since 1955. In addition to standard diner fare, the restaurant serves acclaimed Greek and Italian dishes.



(Above) The transportation history of Fredericksburg is detailed in one of many interesting exhibits on display at the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center. (Right) Tramia Jackson is the museum's Director of Education and Public Programs.



and out of town. Then came the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad, which connected the city with Quantico in 1837, and then with Washington, D.C., in 1901.

Just under two decades later, Princess Anne Street was incorporated into Route 1, connecting Richmond and Washington, and bringing new prosperity to town, as restaurants, hotels, and businesses shot up along this new concrete highway that would later be christened as the Jefferson Davis Highway.

PRESERVING THE RECENT PAST

In fact, Fredericksburg probably owes the growth of its history tourism, mainly centered on the American Revolution and Civil War, to the construction of Route 1.

"Fredericksburg wanted the traffic," explains Emily Taggart Schricker, who works for Dovetail Cultural Resource Group but is also the volunteer coordinator of the Vintage Route 1 Tour of Downtown Fredericksburg (see sidebar). "It brought tourism. People set up tourist homes. People were building gas stations. Tourist attractions started to grow. The city's Civil War history started to get emphasized." If you drive Route 1 through downtown, you'll notice that the visitor center for the Fredericksburg Battlefield is right off this old north-south thoroughfare.

All the signature attractions of Fredericksburg, the places I remember visiting on class field trips as a child, like Mary Washington's House and the Hugh Mercer Apothecary, gained notice and greater veneration with the construction of Route 1.

Schricker is largely responsible for the new attention the city is giving to its 20th-century history, though she came to the role of coordinating the Route 1 tour for the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation quite accidentally. "I used to want to be a stunt person," says this Pennsylvania native, who spent several years in Los Angeles trying to break into the industry. In fact, it was her drive across the country that spawned her interest in mid-century architecture.

"When I drove across the country to L.A., I started to notice 20th-century architecture, and L.A., too, has great mid-century buildings," she explains. Once she realized she was getting older and that getting a gig in the world of stunts was no easy task, she decided to pursue her growing interest in historic preservation by coming back east to study at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg.



(Above) Take a trolley tour of the city's mid-20th-century architecture at the annual Vintage Route 1 Tour & Fredericksburg Community Day, sponsored by the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation. (Below) Emily Schricker is the tour's volunteer coordinator.

While studying at Mary Washington, Schricker began volunteering for the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation. "I was just planning to make a small walking tour of mid-century architecture on Caroline Street because people here thought history ended after the Civil War," she says. "But when the executive director of HFFI said he thought people would 'dig' a tour of Route 1, the event grew."



A CHANGING ROADSIDE LANDSCAPE

It's lucky that individuals like Schricker are starting to notice the more recent history of Old Route 1 because as you progress north, evidence of the road's early- and mid-20th-century history becomes less and less obvious. Jenny Holbert, owner and innkeeper of Lavender Heights Bed and Breakfast in Falmouth, just across the Rappahannock, says she has seen the area change dramatically in the last three decades. A former U.S. Marine Corps colonel, Holbert first came here in 1978 for Officer Candidate's School at Quantico. A public affairs officer, Holbert served at the Marine base three times. "Fredericksburg is all developments now," she remarks, as she pours coffee and orange juice for guests one morning at her inn.

She retired to the Fredericksburg area in 2008 to be close to her children and friends from her years in the Corps. She opened her three-room and one-suite bed and breakfast in Falmouth only a year ago. "It's good I'm on this side of the river," she says with a laugh. "Because this is where the Yankees were in 1862." Holbert, who has a long history of military service in her family and many family heirlooms decorating her inn, was born in Alaska and grew up in Oregon.

She, like so many who knew this region decades ago, can hardly recognize the landscape along Route 1 today, as it stretches north from the Rappahannock River into northern Virginia. Today, this four-lane highway is lined with extended-stay hotels, restaurants, and housing developments, a world away from the vintage world of Carl's Ice Cream Stand. ■

Take a Vintage Tour of Fredericksburg

If you're interested in learning more about the mid-century history and architecture of Fredericksburg, head into town on Sept. 7 for the second annual Vintage Route 1 Tour & Fredericksburg Community Day, sponsored by the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation. You can take a trolley tour of the city's mid-20th-century architecture, see exhibits on

mid-century history at the Masonic Lodge, participate in a vintage fashion show in Market Square, or stroll among the classic cars at Riverfront Park.

There will be activities for the kids, too, including a Junior Archaeology Lab. All activities are free except the trolley tour, which is \$20/person. For more information on this year's event, visit www.hhfi.org. ■



(Above) Take a taste trip to the French Quarter at the Café New Orleans on William Street. (Below) After a busy day of sightseeing, Lavender Heights Bed and Breakfast offers a restful escape on the heights of the Rappahannock River overlooking Fredericksburg.



IF YOU GO...

The **Fredericksburg Visitor Center** (706 Caroline St., 800-678-4748, www.visitfred.com, open daily 9-5 Monday-Saturday, 11-5 Sunday) is located in the heart of Old Town one block east of Princess Anne Street (Old Route 1). If you want to see a good sampling of what Route 1 looked like in its heyday, drive Princess Anne Street north of downtown. Look for **Carl's Ice Cream Stand** (2200 Princess Anne St., 540-371-0000) and the restaurant that housed Hardee's in the 1970s at 2100 Princess Anne.

If you're looking for more sophisticated eats (or at least something to eat before you devour an ice cream cone at Carl's), try the **Café New Orleans** (216 William St., 540-374-0404) with its eclectic lavender walls, velour-covered chairs and booths and Creole- and Cajun-inspired fare. It's right across the street from the **Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center** (1001 Princess Anne St., 540-371-3037, www.famcc.org), which is the best place to get a grounding in the city's history as well as see footage of the Virginia Department of Transportation's building of I-95, the interstate that would replace Route 1 as the East Coast's major north-south corridor.

Spend the night across the Rappahannock at **Lavender Heights Bed and Breakfast** (419 Forbes St., Falmouth, 855-820-5340, www.fredericksburgvabedandbreakfast.com), and lounge away the evening in the beautiful gardens that surround the inn. In the morning, consider visiting the nearby **White Oak Civil War Museum** (985 White Oak Road, Falmouth, 540-371-4234, www.whiteoakmuseum.com), which houses an extensive private collection of Civil War artifacts gathered by museum owner D.P. Newton, who despite all the honors he has received for what historians have noted to be one of the largest locally oriented Civil War collections in the country, shies away from interviews and recognition. ■