

*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.*

Ashland Is Back Online

This historic railroad town on Route 1 is in a new heyday.



by Deborah Huso,
Contributing Writer

The first thing you'll notice about Ashland if you're driving into town on England Street from Route 1 is that a railroad runs right through the middle of town, actually dividing the village's main street, which is, appropriately enough, named Railroad Avenue.

But that's no surprise. This is, after all, a railroad town that gained prominence initially as a mineral springs resort destination for Richmonders. "This area was originally known as 'The Slashes' because it was so swampy," says 88-year-old lifetime Hanover County resident Sumpter Priddy with a chuckle, though he remarks the town was well-known at one time for Clay Springs.

"The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac (RF&P) Railroad moved here in the 1830s," Priddy continues, "and they built a hotel, gambling hall, and race track. In fact, Race Course Street here in town was part of that track."

Priddy ought to know. Not only was he born and raised in Hanover County,



Born and raised in Hanover County, Sumpter Priddy is a font of knowledge about the area. Priddy initiated the publication of the county's first comprehensive history. The 88-year-old spent 34 years representing the state's merchants in the Virginia General Assembly.

he was also responsible for initiating the writing and publication of the county's first comprehensive history. Former president of the Virginia Retail Merchants Association, Priddy is as feisty as ever, and you can see the energy of the lobbyist in him despite the fact he is now confined to a wheelchair. Even though he is officially retired, he hasn't stopped working. His latest project involves the purchase of 17.5 acres in town that was once home to an old filling station that has been closed since the 1950s. Priddy hopes to turn the old station into a restaurant. He gave 10.5 acres to the town of Ashland to make into a recreational park and bird sanctuary. And Priddy still keeps up with his family farm even though he has since moved to town. "It's still a working farm," he says with a chuckle. "It works me over."

It's really not Priddy's nature to sit still. "I've had more fun than anyone else in the world," he remarks.

His wife Robin smiles at this and tells me, "He was known as the 'Dean of

Lobbyists.’” That’s no surprise either. Priddy represented the state’s merchants in the General Assembly for 34 years.

These days, however, he spends most of his energy focused on Ashland. “The railroad has always been a focal point of the town,” Priddy says. “The first three presidents of the RF&P lived here.” Priddy also explains that it was because of the railroad that Randolph-Macon College moved to Ashland. “The railroad offered the college land if they came to Ashland,” he explains, “because the railroad wanted the traffic the college would bring.”

Now a lot of traffic comes into Ashland via Route 1 and I-95. Priddy can remember when Route 1 was first built. “Each county had its own road construction company,” Priddy notes. In neighboring Henrico County, the contractor was Charles Luck (of Luck Construction). Priddy recalls one time the Virginia State Police caught Mr. Luck driving his Lincoln on the unfinished road and stopped him since the highway was not legally open to vehicle traffic. Priddy chuckles, “He told those police, ‘This road hasn’t been paved yet, so it’s still my road.’”

FOLKS STICK AROUND

It’s not an unusual thing for people like Priddy, who have grown up in Hanover County, to stick around. Hugh Joyce, owner of the newly opened Gallery Flux on England Street, has lived in Hanover County all his life and went to school at the University of Richmond. While Joyce is himself an HVAC contractor, he has always loved art, despite his own self-proclaimed lack of talent for it. “My mother was an artist, and my sister is an artist,” he explains. “I didn’t get the gift, however.”

Joyce had always liked the building where his gallery is now located and decided it would be the perfect place for an art gallery. “385 gallons of white paint later, I had an industrial gallery space,” he remarks. He opened Gallery Flux only last year but has already had several artist shows and receptions, often drawing as many as 150 to 200 people. Most of the artists featured in Joyce’s gallery are from Virginia, and one of them is his former elementary school art teacher Nancy Cozart.

Joyce relies on Nissa Lipowicz, a Richmond native, to run the gallery on a day-to-day basis, and, interestingly enough, Lipowicz is a photographer

(Right) Randolph-Macon College moved to Ashland because RF&P offered land. The railroad wanted the traffic the college would bring. (Below) The train tracks run down the middle of Railroad Avenue, which is lined on both sides with quaint shops and restaurants.



The newly opened Gallery Flux is located on England St., which runs perpendicular to Railroad Ave. and is the other main thoroughfare in Ashland. Hanover County native Hugh Joyce (left, right) owns the gallery and relies on Richmond native Nissa Lipowicz (left, left) to run it on a day-to-day basis. The gallery has been well received, with shows often drawing as many as 200 visitors.

currently doing a project on old Route 1. Using film photography, she travels the road looking, as she explains, “for repetition, things that repeat themselves in different areas.” For example, she’ll take a series of photos showing American flags or trailer parks all along the old highway.

Right now Lipowicz’s photography isn’t for sale. She’s still finding her wings but has decided being a commercial photographer probably isn’t her gig. “The first time I shot a wedding, I stepped on the bride’s dress,” she chuckles.

As for Gallery Flux, Joyce doesn’t expect to get rich running an art gallery, but that’s not the point either. “We just want to be connected to the community,” he says, “and I felt like a gallery was the right kind of restart for a redo of Ashland.” ■



IF YOU GO ...

The **Ashland Visitor Center** (112 N. Railroad Ave., 804-752-6766, open daily 9-5) is located in the heart of town in the old Ashland Train Station. Right behind the train station are the most historic digs in town at the **Henry Clay Inn** (114 N. Railroad Ave., 804-798-3100, www.henryclayinn.com), which is named after Hanover County native, Sen. Henry Clay, known as “The Great Compromiser” for his roles in formulating the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Compromise of 1850. The inn has 14 comfortable and homey guest rooms, though if you’d like to stay here, make your reservations soon. The inn is closing permanently in October.

With the railroad passing right through the center of town, Ashland is a nice little weekend spot for Washington metro area residents taking Amtrak into town. Along Ashland’s main street, Railroad Avenue, are many shops and restaurants, including the **Iron Horse Restaurant** (100 S. Railroad Ave., 804-752-6410, www.ironhorerestaurant.com), which has sidewalk seating, a full bar, and excellent lunchtime sandwiches, including its Pullman Club Car, which I highly recommend having with a cup of the restaurant’s tasty paprika-spiced pumpkin soup. Across the street is **Cross Brothers Grocery** (107 N. Railroad Ave., 804-798-8311), an old-time independent grocer selling everything from hats and mittens to steaks and charcoal. More good eats can be had at **Homemade by Suzanne** (102 N. Railroad Ave., 804-798-



8331, www.homemadebysuzanne.com). Sumpter Priddy claims people come from all over Virginia to eat here and notes that Mitt Romney dined there two or three times while campaigning last year.

Ashland is slowly gaining some prominence as an arts destination, too. While you’re in town, check out **Gallery Flux** (307B England St., 804-752-3540, www.galleryflux.com), **Cross Mill Gallery** (13405 Independence Rd., 804-798-8237, www.crossmillgallery.com, open by appointment only), and the **Flippo Gallery** (804-752-3018, www.rmc.edu) on the campus of Randolph-Macon College.

Find some truly unique “reloved” furniture at **Thrill of the Hunt** (315 England St., 804-368-0184, www.thrillofthehuntva.com), a family-owned retail business that “up-cycles” used and antique furniture. And if it’s antiques, you’re after, Ashland has nearly a dozen shops selling pre-loved treasures, such as **Hickory Creek Antiques** (427 England St., 804-798-0202, www.hickorycreekantiques.com). ■



(Top) Ashland Visitor Center is located in the heart of town. (Above, left) The Henry Clay Inn, named for the Virginia statesman and Hanover County native, is scheduled to close in October of this year. Future plans for the building are yet to be announced. (Above, right) the Iron Horse Restaurant and (below) Homemade by Suzanne are two of several popular eateries in town.



“Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death”

If you're like millions of other former American school children, there are probably still bits and pieces of Patrick Henry's famous address to the Second Virginia Convention in March 1775 floating around in your head. I remember having to recite the speech in Mrs. Davis' fourth grade Virginia history class. To this day, I still recall the final lines: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

If you're lingering along Route 1, consider following in the footsteps of this great American statesman, starting with a visit to St. John's Church on Broad Street before you leave the confines of downtown Richmond. This is where Henry delivered his famous speech, and Sunday afternoons late May through early September, you can see living historians re-enact the convention beginning at 1 p.m.

"If there ever was a bell ringer for the American Revolution, it was Patrick Henry's speech at St. John's," says Ashland resident Sumpter Priddy, who also likes to claim the Revolution had its start in Hanover County with the Parson's Cause, the case over the Two Penny Act that made Patrick Henry famous in 1763. You can visit the historic Hanover Courthouse where the case was tried just a few miles off Route 1 east of Ashland. And after checking out the courthouse, hop across the street for dinner at the Historic Hanover Tavern. (For better service and a cozier atmosphere, dine in the downstairs tavern rather than in the dining room.) After dinner, you can take in a show at the tavern's Barksdale Theatre.

Just a few miles west of Ashland in the rural countryside of Hanover County is Scotchtown, the plantation that Henry called his home from 1771 to 1778. He lived here with his first wife Sarah Shelton, with whom he had six children, and was residing in the home when elected governor of Virginia.

According to Scotchtown site coordinator Anna Reid with Preservation Virginia, Henry acquired Scotchtown for a deal,

buying it from owners who needed to settle debt. "Henry really didn't go for the city life," Reid explains. But while Henry saw Scotchtown as a retreat, his wife (whose family owned Hanover Tavern) did not. In the basement of the house is the room where Sarah resided after being diagnosed as mentally ill. "Her quarters here were a good deal better than where she had been previously—chained to a wall in a public hospital," Reid explains, adding that mental illness was poorly understood in the 18th century. Given that Sarah was the mother of six children, potentially suffering from postpartum depression, isolated in a rural area, and married to a man who was committing treason, Reid says, "She had a lot to be stressed about."

Henry was not particularly easy on his wives either. Reid remarks that his second wife bore 11 children while married to him. The consummate lawyer and politician, however, had a lighter side. He was an accomplished musician and songwriter, though he reportedly destroyed all the music he wrote. "He did not," Reid explains, "Wish to be known for 'frivolous' things."

To fully explore the haunts of Patrick Henry in Richmond and Hanover County, take the *Road to Revolution*, a guide that can be found at www.roadtorevolution.com.

SECRETARIAT'S MEADOW

Even if you're not a horse racing enthusiast, you've probably heard of Secretariat. This famous racehorse, who won the Triple Crown in 1973, was born right off Route 1 in Doswell, on a farm that has since been turned into The Meadow Event Park and home of the Virginia State Fair. Group tours of The Meadow are available April through November and offer visitors access to the foaling shed where Secretariat was born, the farm's horse cemetery, as well as videos of Secretariat's Kentucky Derby, Preakness, and Belmont Stakes wins. As it happens, Sumpter Priddy is a racing fan and, in fact, used to announce at the now-defunct Camptown Races. For more information on tours, visit www.SecretariatsMeadow.com, and visit www.meadoweventpark.com for details on other farm events as well as the State Fair of Virginia, which runs this year from September 27 through October 6. ■



(Top) Scotchtown, Patrick Henry's home from 1771-1778, is just west of Ashland. (Above) Meadow Farm Park, where Secretariat was born, is off Rt. 1 in Doswell. (Left) Historic Hanover Tavern, a few miles east of Ashland, is home to the Barksdale dinner-theatre.