



This year *Cooperative Living* is taking a road trip along Route 360 as it crosses Virginia from the Chesapeake Bay to North Carolina. Each issue, correspondent Deborah Huso will relate her experiences along the way.

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Whispering Pine and Whistling Locomotives

Route 360 south of Richmond passes through flatlands of pine and row crops, roughly following the rail lines of Norfolk Southern.

My journey south of Richmond on Route 360 takes me through flat and repetitive landscapes of corn fields and scrappy pine trees with little interruption in the landscape save for a small town here and there. A world more barren than the mountains in which I was raised, it nevertheless has its own play on serenity, some of which may be found on the grounds of Whispering Pine Plantation bed and breakfast, just outside Amelia Court House, a little town centered around a courthouse square lined with a bank, barber shop, a couple of mom-and-pop restaurants, and antique shops.



The Amelia County Courthouse centers a courthouse square lined with a bank, barber shop, local restaurants and antique shops.

SERENITY AND HISTORY IN THE PINES

At Whispering Pine, owners Tyrone Ashman and Carla Hoffman welcome guests alongside a farm operational for the last four generations. Ashman had no plans for a B&B when he built the house seven years ago, but he and Hoffman decided about a year ago to make better use of the seven-bedroom residence. “We had a big house, and it was just the two of us,” Hoffman says. “Both of our kids are grown.”

With upper and lower verandas wrapping around the house on two sides, its rooms offer views of pine trees and glistening green corn and bean fields. Ashman’s brother still farms the family land, which the brothers’

great-grandfather purchased more than a century ago. “My great-grandfather came here in a covered wagon from Michigan,” Ashman explains, “and my brother lives in the house our grandfather built.” The family farm originally covered 1,000 acres; now it’s down to about 700.

Ashman, who runs a trucking company hauling local grain and milk, notes that his great-grandfather lived to age 98, and his grandfather to 102. “My grandfather always said, ‘hard work never hurt nobody,’” Ashman chuckles. During the Great Depression, Ashman’s great-grandfather rented a portion of his farm out as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp at a rate of \$1/acre.

Roots here run deep and strong for the Ashmans, who stay connected over family meals. “My granny used to say I was born hungry and never got full,” Ashman laughs, recounting how his own mother still cooks a full-course lunch every day, and he, his dad, and his brother always partake.

Just down the road, the historic Grubb Hill Church, built in 1750, remains another connector for the family. “All my family is buried in the cemetery there,” Ashman says.

THE LITTLE TOWN THAT COULD

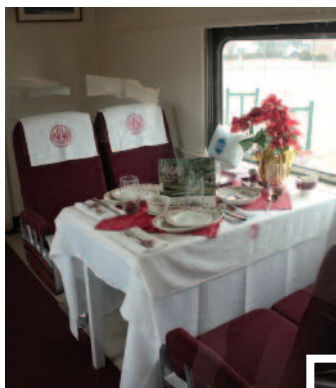
As Route 360 wends its way southwest, it roughly parallels Norfolk Southern rail track, making it appropriate that the town of Crewe, just off the main highway in Nottoway County, should be home to a railroad museum.

Jeff Fuller, who chairs the Crewe Railroad Museum Association, spent 44 years working as an engineer on the Norfolk & Western, which merged with Southern Railway 25 years ago. “I worked the railroad right out of high school,” Fuller says, noting that he served as a carman, brakeman, and clerk before he began driving locomotives. “Most of my work was yard-work,” he explains, “working the line from Roanoke to Crewe and Crewe to Norfolk.” When Fuller first started working the railroad in 1955, the locomotives were still all steam. After a stint in the U.S. Air Force, he came home to find the N&W completely converted to diesel in 1961.

Whispering Pine (right), a seven-bedroom home with upper and lower verandas wrapping around the house on two sides, became an inn two years ago. The view from the inn (below, right) bespeaks its name’s origin. Owners Carla Hoffman and Tyrone Ashman (below) welcome guests to the inn, which sits alongside a farm operational for four generations.



Jeff Fuller (left), chairman of the Crewe Railroad Museum Association, spent 44 years working on the Norfolk & Western Railroad. The pride and joy of the museum is the restored 606 N&W steam engine (above), which arrived at the museum as a heap of rusted metal and was restored for a cost of \$50,000.



Interior shots of the model dining car (left) and a passenger car (below) at the Crewe Railroad Museum. The restored cars reflect an era when rail travel was luxurious.

Exterior shots of the N&W dining car (left) and the Crewe Railroad Museum (upper left), in the town of Crewe.



Crewe was founded in 1888, at the same time the first track was laid through town, stretching all the way to City Point. Until 1963, the town was also home to an N&W roundhouse, which was torn down with the advent of diesel locomotives. The museum, however, houses a model of the original roundhouse.

Originally started in an N&W caboose and boxcar, the Crewe Railroad Museum was the idea of former Air Force pilot and local resident Wirt Cory, who, with the help of volunteers, decided to honor the railroad history that had put Crewe on the map.

"Most of the stuff in the museum has been donated by former railroad employees," Fuller explains. And retired railroad employees also make up the majority of the docents who staff the museum, which is now housed in a former N&W depot.

One of the key features of the museum is a model railroad exhibit, the design of which reflects the old motto of the N&W: "From the Mountains to the Sea." Also on-site are an old passenger car, a portion of which has been modeled to look like a dining car. Passenger trains, outside of Amtrak, became a thing of the past as of 1975, however. Other railroad memorabilia include locks, oil cans, lanterns, and place settings from dining cars.

The museum's pride and joy, however, is its restored 606 N&W steam engine, which arrived at the museum "in a heap of rusted metal," says Fuller. The museum restored it for a cost of \$50,000.

Fuller, who served as mayor of Crewe for 12 years, says he's seen the town change a lot in his lifetime. As the N&W and its successor Norfolk Southern have taken more and more railroad employment away from Crewe, its population has continued to dwindle. Today it stands at a little over 2,000. "There are so many houses for sale here now," Fuller says. "You can

buy a house here for anything you want to pay for it."

And while passenger service through Crewe is long gone, the Norfolk Southern freight trains continue to rumble through town, carrying mostly coal, automobiles, and pulpwood. ■

● IF YOU GO ...

Before you hit Route 360 through Chesterfield County, check out the visitor information available online through **Chesterfield Economic Development** (visitchesterfieldva.com). Pick up fresh-from-the-fields produce at the **Chesterfield Berry Farm Market** (4800 Market Square Lane, Midlothian, 804-739-2404) or visit the **Chesterfield Berry Farm** (26000 Pear Orchard Road, Moseley, www.chesterfieldberryfarm.com), where the market's produce is grown, and pick your own berries in season.

Home to **Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historic State Park** (6541 Creek Road, Rice, 804-561-7560, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sailors-creek.shtml#general_information), the last battle of the retreating Army of Northern Virginia only three days before Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, **Amelia County** (www.ameliacova.com) is a peaceful landscape of cornfields and pines. The county seat

at **Amelia Court House** is a typical small southern town scene with the requisite Confederate statue surrounded by a town square with barber shop, bank, and cafes. Good eats while you're passing through include Mexican fare at **Mi Jalisco Amelia** (16241 Goodes Bridge Road, 804-561-2317, www.mi-jalisco.com) and **Mario's Italian** (15415 Patrick Henry Highway, 804-561-6100). Spend the night adjacent to a working commercial farm at **Whispering Pine Plantation** (12641 North Lodore Road, 804-561-0434, www.whisperingpineplantation.com).

The next morning, head south on Route 360 into **Nottoway County** (www.nottoway.org), and visit the **Crewe Railroad Museum** (111 West Virginia Ave., Crewe, www.crewe-railroadmuseum.org), which is open Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. Crewe gets its name from a railroad town in England that also once produced Rolls Royce motor cars. ■