

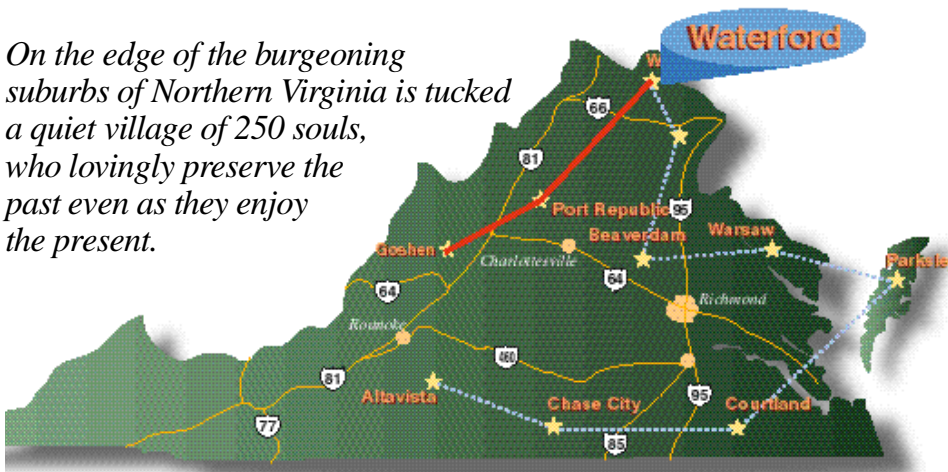
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Bennie Scarton, Assistant Editor,
Manassas Journal Messenger

During 1999, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this, our third stop, we'll be...

Down Home in Waterford

On the edge of the burgeoning suburbs of Northern Virginia is tucked a quiet village of 250 souls, who lovingly preserve the past even as they enjoy the present.



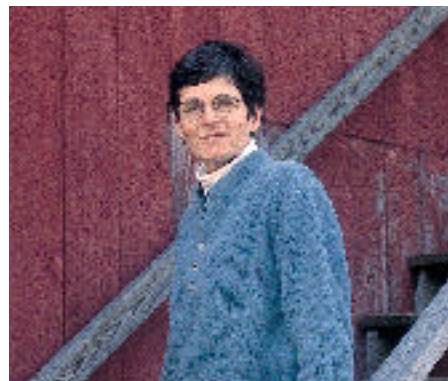
Much like the mythical town of Brigadoon, the sleepy little town of Waterford comes to life once a year — hosting a festival that attracts 30,000 people during its three-day run.

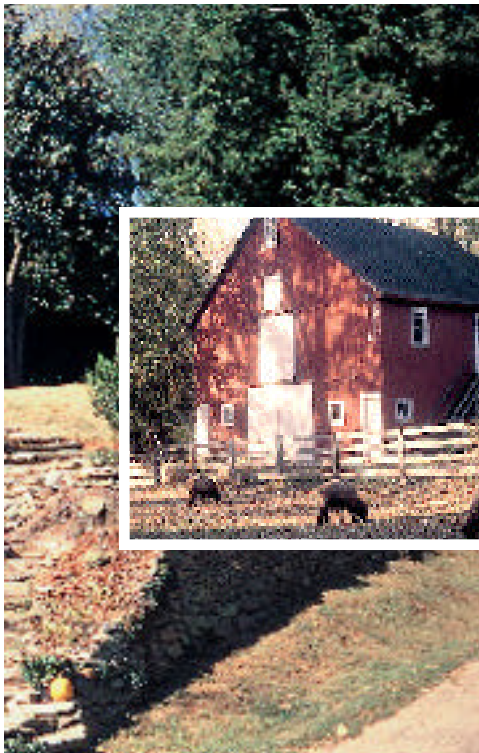
Located near Leesburg in Loudoun County, the town is one of the state's most picturesque. The community's residents, old and new, work year-round to preserve the character of the village, with the climax being the fall fair.

The Waterford Homes Tour and Crafts Exhibit is the official name of the festival, put on each October. The proceeds help to pay for the expenses of the Waterford Foundation, Inc., a group devoted to preserving the town, which has the appearance of being in a time capsule in the sprawling, urbanized Northern Virginia region.

Unlike the better-known historic town of Williamsburg, which has been turned into a tourist mega-attraction, Waterford is still a town first and foremost. Its homes are still inhabited. The village is a Loudoun County Historic and Cultural Conservation site and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks since 1970.

Clockwise, from left: 1) Postmaster Marie Sandra Skyta, right, with long-time resident Jill Beach. 2) Bronwen Souders, president of the Waterford Foundation. 3) Waterford Market owner Linda Landreth.





BENNIE SCARTON PHOTOS

Today, Waterford's buildings and rolling fields look much as they did a century or two ago. The village, rustic and beautiful, makes visitors feel like they are strolling back in time. At right, Ralph Gates gives a broom making demonstration during the town's annual festival.

Today, Waterford's buildings and rolling fields look much as they did a century or two ago. The village, rustic and beautiful, makes visitors feel like they are strolling back in time. A pot-bellied stove in the town's only retail store and the old post office both serve as meeting places for the town's residents to catch up on the latest tidbits of news.

Many of the centuries-old buildings still house events for the fair, which has been staged for the past 55 years, drawing spectators and participants from all up and down the East Coast.

"Since 1943, our goals have been preservation and education. First-time visitors will find the same high quality and variety of our 145 demonstrators, craftsmen, musicians, reenactors and home tours that veteran fairgoers have come to expect," says **Frances Holmbraker**, chairman of last year's event.

She adds: "One of the earliest objects of the Waterford Foundation was the revival of the early handicrafts. With this goal in mind, the early fairs featured the works of artisans and artists and encouraged their participation.

"Today, revival of traditional crafts and appreciation of their value is fairly universal. With the abundance of handmade goods available, keeping the roots of craftsmanship

alive and well is crucial. The fair today is less a revival and more a celebration of the best in traditional crafts."

An old mill, school, barn, churches, stores, and homes — scattered throughout the town — become exhibit areas for the fair, ranked as one of the nation's best.

According to **Bronwen Souders**, president of the Foundation, Waterford was settled in 1733 by Amos Janney, a Quaker from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Janney was soon followed by others and Waterford became the thriving center of a community of small farms.

Because the Quakers were cereal farmers, a grist mill was very important to them and the first settlement included a mill near the site of the present structure, with a few houses clustered nearby. The settlement that would become Waterford grew around Janney's Mill.

The Quakers were joined by Scotch-Irish craftsmen from Pennsylvania who were responsible for much of the construction of the village.

Few residents took part in the Revolutionary War, and those Quakers who did were outcasts for violating the Quaker principles of

Joe Ayers and The Tuckahoe Social Orchestra (authentic 19th-century music) perform on the porch of the Corner Store.



non-violence. After the American Revolution and through the first half of the 19th century, Waterford grew rapidly, with a wide variety of businesses taking care of the needs of the farms around the village. Many of the buildings standing today date from this period.

Known as Janney's Mill until the 1780s, the early commercial center then became the village of Waterford. The name comes from the Irish town of Waterford, the native town of Asa Moore, who built his house in the Virginia community in 1733. By 1835, the settlement had grown into a thriving village, serving as a commercial hub to the surrounding farms. Waterford's mills were providing products for a wider market.

Barrels of flour were hauled to Point of Rocks, Maryland, 10 miles north of Waterford, where they were loaded onto C&O Canal barges on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to be taken to the lucrative markets of Washington, D.C., Alexandria and Winchester.

The Civil War's Toll

Following the Civil War, which devastated Waterford's economy, the mills continued to operate but the village never returned to its former commercial success because area farmers and village residents could now import machine-made goods. However, enterprises supporting agricultural needs — blacksmiths, wagon builders and harness makers — remained working in the village until the early 1900s.

One of the earliest objectives of the Foundation was the preservation of the community as it appeared in simpler times — such as calming of traffic through the town and the burying of utility lines. The funds from the fair are still used for this purpose.

Events at the fair are still housed in 10 buildings owned and maintained by the Foundation. These include a grist mill built in the 1820s on the site of an earlier mill; the Corner Store, a turn-of-the-century general store that now houses the office of the Foundation; the tin shop built in 1868 to manufacture Waterford's tin roofs; the Hardware Store built about 1880 to manufacture chairs; and the old school built on top of a hill and whose Greek portico is visible for miles.

Souders says that "as exciting as the fair is, we hope that people will visit us in quieter times as well. Over the rest of the year, we feature a popular Sunday concert series, as well as walking tours of the village and periodic lectures on a broad range of topics."

The town presently has about 95 stone, brick, wood and log historic structures,

almost all in perfect, restored condition, dotting tree-lined streets with brick sidewalks and names like Main, Second, High, Big Hill, Butcher's Row and Factory.

Linda Landreth runs the only retail establishment in the community — the Waterford Market. She is also the president of the Loudoun Valley Sheep Producers and raises several dozen sheep just outside her market in the heart of the town.

Two of her biggest-selling items in the store are penny candy for the youngsters and fresh country lamb sausage, a big seller fried up and served in a biscuit during the fair.

"A few years ago, Waterford was a dying town, as many of the old-timers had died or moved away. But in recent years a new breed of young couples are coming into the town and remodeling and settling in the old homes," Landreth says — noting that the town's once half-empty elementary school is now bursting at the seams.

Her grocery store, with a pot-bellied stove and a dog sleeping nearby, and the Waterford Post Office serve as the town's daily "meeting spots" for the 250 residents.

Postmaster **Marie Sandra Skyta** says the town residents were recently given a chance to receive mail delivered to their homes but nixed it because they still want to come to the post office "to do a little socializing."

Skyta takes pride in pointing out that the post office has been in the same building for over a century — believed to be the first in the state to merit that distinction.

One of the town's residents dropping in recently to pick up her mail was **Jill Beach**, who has lived in Waterford for 30 years. "Waterford has got to be one of the friendliest and most beautiful places in the United States in which to live," she says while chatting on the front steps with Skyta.

Old, Rural, and Charming

Martha Baine, whose family has lived in the community since 1964, agrees. "While it's old and quite rural, it's also charming... and where else in Northern Virginia can you wake up in the morning and hear the mooing of cattle?" she asks.

To be sure, dozing between the gentle hills that roll down to rich lowlands along a lazy creek and standing on narrow lanes, Waterford's historic structures still have the look of an 18th- or 19th-century mill town.

Like **Kitty Rose**, a resident of the village for 18 years, says, "We are living in a community that is rich in living history...but which maintains its character for current residents." ■

If You Go...

Park your car and take a leisurely tour of one of Virginia's most historic and picturesque villages. Predominantly residential, Waterford is a good example of a little-altered 18th-19th century mill town. It was first settled in 1733 by Quakers from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and it still maintains its country character.

Be sure to take in the Waterford Homes Tour and Crafts Exhibit held the first weekend of October each year for the past 55 years. The entire town takes on the appearance of an old-time county fair, with demonstrations, craftsmen, musicians, reenactors, food and home tours. Call (540) 882-3018.

From the standpoint of the history of the village, the Old Mill is the most important building in Waterford. It symbolizes both the economic life and the reasons for the existence of the village, as well as the close relationship of Waterford to the surrounding farmland.

The Corner Store now houses the nonprofit Waterford Foundation, Inc., which currently owns and maintains 10 historic buildings in the community. They include the store along with other shops, barns and schools. The Foundation was established in 1943 to encourage restoration of old homes and buildings and to stimulate a revival of arts and handicrafts. Call (540) 882-3018.

Waterford Market looks much like a turn-of-the-century grocery store, with a pot-bellied stove in the middle and a penny candy counter as a big drawing card for the children. Call (540) 882-3631.

The Pink House Bed and Breakfast has one suite available at \$100-plus. Call (540) 882-3559.

Waterford Concert Series features performances at the Waterford Old School auditorium during the summer, with world-renowned performers. Call (540) 882-3018. Guided walking tours of the historic buildings and homes are also held during the summer months, as well as lectures and living history exercises for elementary school children. (540) 882-3018.

The Waterford Post Office has been in the same building since 1897, believed to be a first in Virginia in which a post office has been in the same structure for over a century.

To reach Waterford from Washington, D.C., take Route 7 west towards Leesburg to Route 9 and then Route