



The Pike Packet

News from The Snickersville Turnpike Association

March 2017



BACON FORT

This past December 2016 an historical marker describing the French and Indian War era Bacon Fort was installed on Snickersville Turnpike at Portrait Vista Lane.

With the structure gone, its origins are obscure. In one book detailing 81 colonial Virginia forts, Bacon Fort is absent. No property deeds of the period record the fort because structures were seldom mentioned. Also, no monies were appropriated for its construction, so it was not built as a fort.

There is no historical evidence of a direct Washington connection. Col. Washington intensely disliked small forts as being indefensible. When the House of Burgesses funded and ordered Washington to build 23 small forts on the perilous frontier north of Winchester, he resisted and was nearly sacked for insubordination in early 1756. Reluctantly, he complied. He needed forts in a hurry, so the majority were simple dwellings stockaded to become "forts." That is undoubtedly the case with Bacon Fort, as well. There is no record it was ever tested as a fort.

The first factual verification of Bacon Fort is its appearance on a July 1757 Loudoun map. In the famous Fry and Jefferson map of 1755, Bacon Fort is absent. The Loudoun map located the fort on the north side of the Mountain Road (now Snickersville Turnpike) above a branch that flows into the Beaver Dam Fork of the Goose Creek. The 1932 Washington Bicentennial Commission confirms the location as well on its map recording all of Washington's visitations in Virginia.

What's the origin of the name? Some think the fort was named for Nathaniel Bacon of Bacon's Rebellion. He had urged forts be built (much farther east) in the mid-1600s, but that seems a stretch. Sometimes structures in Virginia were named for food storage. There is a Bacon Church, for example.

After Bacon Fort became an ordinary in 1760, it served patrons into the 19th century. When Washington finally stopped in for refreshment in 1788, he was just months away from taking office as America's first president.

The structure has long since vanished, but now there's an historical marker to commemorate the fort.



THE GENERAL STORES OF SNICKERSVILLE TURNPIKE BLUEMONT GENERAL STORE

This is the third in a series of articles featuring the three general stores on the Pike – Philomont, Airmont, and Bluemont. In this newsletter we will highlight the Bluemont Store.

Bluemont, the charming village at the western terminus of Snickersville Turnpike, has a rich and diverse history. And for the past 171 years the Bluemont General store has been at the hub of this fascinating community.

Bluemont saw its beginnings in 1797 when Amos Clayton built Clayton Hall at the intersection of the Mountain Road (later to become Snickersville Turnpike) and the old alignment of the Leesburg to Winchester road (now known as Clayton Hall Road). Bluemont was first known as Punkintown (a generic term in Virginia at that time that referred to any backwoods or rustic location. For example, nearby Paris spent a brief time as a Punkinville – a confusing situation for mapmakers and government officials in general). The village officially became Snickers Gap (named for the gap in the Blue Ridge just a short distance to the northwest) in 1807 when its first post office was established. Later, in 1830, Snickers Gap became Snickersville.

The first known general merchandise store in Snickersville is mentioned as being run by Timothy Carrington in 1820. By the mid 1830's, Snickersville, with a population of 98, was thriving. Along with many other businesses, there were two general

(Bluemont General Store cont.)

stores, rising to as many as four in the period following the Civil War.

The present day location that houses the Bluemont General Store was built in 1846 by James Stephenson and operated as a mercantile by Meshack Silcott and Archibald Chamblin. It has operated as such continuously since then. Snickersville was a busy place during the Civil War. As many as eight cavalry skirmishes took place in or near the village. Financial records for the store during the war were transcribed in three currencies – U.S., U.S. military, and Confederate. The store also served as the town bank in the 1870's.

John W. Silcott, after likely building a new structure on its old foundation in 1888, ran the store until about 1907 when it was purchased by Wilber and Bushrod Price. The still standing E.E. Lake Store, across the pike and down the block, provided the major competition to the general store until Lake's went out of business in the twenties. The turn of the century also brought about a new name for the village – Bluemont. The executives of Southern Railway envisioned the mountainous hinterlands of western Loudoun County as a cool getaway from the summer heat and humidity of Washington, D.C. They decided that the name "Bluemont" was more appealing than "Snickersville" and, much to the chagrin of many locals, forced the name change. Bluemont as a tourist destination didn't last long. The popularity of the horseless carriage around 1910 was the beginning of the end for the tourist trade as road conditions weren't nearly as practical for the automobile in that neck of the woods. The once seven daily train trips dwindled to one and eventually stopped in 1930.

The village and general store, despite the collapse of tourism, continued to prosper, albeit modestly. After the Price brothers came the Reids as owners during the 1920's. Other longtime owners included Walton and Mary Emma Mann from 1948 through 1974. Today's Bluemont General Store is owned and operated by Broad Run Veterinary Service, whose offices share the same building. Regarded with affection by locals and visitors alike, Bluemont General Store continues to serve its community.

(Bluemont General Store cont.)

References:

Plaster, Henry G., *An Historical Look At Bluemont Houses, 2005*

Scheel, Eugene M., *Loudoun Discovered, Communities, Corners and Crossroads, Vol. 4, 2002*

Smith, Johnson and Hoffman, *From Snickersville to Bluemont, The Biography of a Virginia Village, 2003*

(Williams Gap cont.)

Snickers at Williams Gap." Later that year Williams Gap became Snickers Gap.

With this extensive history of Williams Gap Road, it is of the utmost importance that it not be paved.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A lot was accomplished during 2016, highlighted by the end-to-end resurfacing of the Pike. The flashing lights at the intersection of the Turnpike and St. Louis Road were repositioned onto a higher, overarching pole with increased brightness. The damage to the one lane bridge on the Turnpike west of Airmont has recently been repaired with a brief road closure.



In December, the Bacon Fort historical marker was installed east of Airmont, focusing on our truly rural area during the mid-1700s. We have been asked by the Friends of Bluemont to procure and erect for them a historical marker on the Turnpike for the 1825 Snickersville Academy. As our representative on the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition's Rural Roads Committee, I have worked with the County, VDOT, and western Loudoun landowners toward the proper maintenance of our local gravel roads and bridges.

The ability to maintain the historical rural character of the area is threatened by clustered housing development and pressures on County Supervisors to find non-agricultural uses for our open spaces. If you would like to join the Snickersville Turnpike Association's Board of Directors, please contact me directly.

Henry G. Plaster

WILLIAMS GAP

Today, most residents of Loudoun County know nothing about Williams Gap, even those living on Williams Gap Road (Route 711). Knowing who "Williams" was, why a gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains was named for him, and why the rural character of historic Williams Gap Road should be preserved are all significant to our heritage, particularly to those living in Western Loudoun.

In the early 1700s, settlers moving west sought farmland along the old Indian trail roads. In 1731, Robert "King" Carter took out a land patent for his thirteen year old son George.

In it, the "Indian Thoroughfare" (now Snickersville Turnpike) was described as running from "Williams Cabin in the Blew Ridge" to the Little River, at now Aldie. The fact that there was a squatter's cabin at the Gap means that it was there before 1731. In 1743, George Carter owned 2,941 acres as part of the Manor of Leeds "at the lower thoroughfare of the Blue Ridge known by the name of Williams Gap, alias the Indian Thoroughfare of the Blue Ridge, including the same and the top of the ridge."

In 1748, sixteen year old George Washington accompanied George William Fairfax to survey Lord Fairfax's properties in the Shenandoah Valley. On his return trip in April, he wrote "Tuesday 12th. We set out of from Capt. Hites in order to go over Wms. Gap."

A connecting road from Williams Gap to Leesburg was established in 1764. Known as the Williams Gap Road, it later was called the Leesburg Turnpike. After the Revolutionary War, Edward Snickers' Shenandoah River ferry was reestablished by the Legislature in October 1786 on "the land of Edward

The Snickersville Turnpike Association

P.O. Box 452

Philomont, VA 20131

www.snickersvilleturnpike.org

DID YOU KNOW?

During Bluemont's heyday there was a makeshift theater that showed movies bought out on the train from Washington twice a week. From 1908 until 1920 the people of Bluemont were treated to the latest silent films.

ROADSIDE CLEANUP – APRIL 2017

The Snickersville Turnpike Association will be assisting Keep Loudoun Beautiful by picking up trash alongside historic Snickersville Turnpike. Your help is greatly needed. You are probably aware of our Adopt-a-Highway signs. Together, with the help of Bluemont Citizens Association (west of Yellow Schoolhouse Road) and Mountville Farms (and Mountville), the entire 14 miles of the Turnpike is covered. Once again, we are in need of volunteers to help make this year's effort a success. Let your section leader know your selected area.

Orange trash bags can be picked up at the Philomont Community Center. Once filled, please call your section leader to notify them as to the location of the bags. They will notify VDOT for pickup. You can also obtain the orange bags directly from VDOT.

Let's keep the Pike clean!

SECTION LEADERS

Route 50 to Route 690.....Glenn Raiden 540-338-4157

Route 690 to Yellow Schoolhouse Road.....Henry Plaster 540-554-8591