



# The Pike Packet

News from The Snickersville Turnpike Association

March 2018



## NEW ALDIE FIRE STATION

As the inexorable march of development continues west on Route 50 in the Dulles South corridor, the historic village of Aldie is feeling the pressure. Ten years ago, Loudoun County officials decided that the burgeoning population to the east and the fact that the current fire station, built in 1971, was located on the Little River floodplain, justified a new station. What followed was a decade of false starts and bureaucratic gaffes in the search for a new site.

At a town hall meeting this past November, the county unveiled their plans for a massive 18,000 square foot fire station located just east of the current facility and burrowed into the side of Aldie mountain. Two huge parking lots would flank either side of the new station. Three historic buildings in the Aldie Historic District would be razed, four million dollars worth of extensive excavation and grading would take place on what is the core battlefield area of the Civil War Battle of Aldie.

The village of Aldie, at the southeastern terminus of Snickersville Turnpike, grew up around a mill established by James Mercer in 1764. The "new" (and present) mill was built between 1807 and 1809. In the 19th century village life in Aldie was centered around the mill and prospered, growing to a population of 260 (more than half that being slaves) in 1830. One of the three historic buildings slated for destruction, Woodburn, dates to the early 1800's and is one of the oldest structures in Aldie. For a time Woodburn housed a tavern and legend has it that a neighbor from nearby Oak Hill, former President James Monroe, spent an occasional evening there.

When the Civil War broke out, Aldie was on the front lines of guerilla warfare. John S. Mosby and his band of southern partisans operated freely in the Aldie area. It was said that Union cavalry who rode west of the gap at Aldie were gambling with their lives. Aldie was strategically important for its location at the junction of Ashby's Gap Turnpike and Snickersville Turnpike, both routes being gateways to the Shenandoah Valley. June 17, 1863 is inarguably the most momentous day in Aldie's history. As a prelude to the battle of Gettysburg, Pleasonton's

*(New Aldie Firehouse cont.)*

Union cavalry was ordered to locate Lee's Army which was on the move and somewhere west of the Blue Ridge. J.E.B. Stuart was given the job of screening Lee's movements. The two armies met at Aldie on a hot and humid day. The opening shots of this battle, the second largest cavalry clash of the Civil War, took place in the heart of Aldie. (It was here that a Captain George Armstrong Custer of the 6th Ohio Cavalry and known as a bit of a "dandy", took an involuntary mud bath as he attempted to cross the Little River on his mount.) A three day running cavalry battle that involved over 3500 men and resulted in 500 casualties and losses ensued. Stuart had successfully delayed Pleasonton's troopers and the Army of Northern Virginia remained undetected for the time being.

At a standing room only meeting held on February 15, 2018 the community turned out in force to learn more of the history of the village and to voice their concerns about the project. A petition opposing the present plans has collected close to 5,000 signatures. The meeting was attended by Loudoun County officials. Due to overwhelming community concerns, the county has now put a hold on the project as the search for a new site outside the village continues. Stay tuned.

## SNICKERSVILLE TURNPIKE FOUR CENTURIES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

*Today, the Snickersville Turnpike is well into its fourth century of providing the stage to view the historic growth and evolution of America from its very beginning. This article will cover the first century, the 1700s, in a series.*

Prior to the Treaty of Albany in 1720, when the Iroquois agreed to move their hunting to west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the trail leading from the gap in the Catoctin Mountains at (now) Aldie to the gap in the Blue Ridge was known as the Shenandoah Hunting Path. In the early 1700s, settlers moving west sought farmland along the old Indian trail

*(Snickersville Turnpike - Four Centuries cont.)*

roads. In 1731, Robert "King" Carter, owner of 2,941 acres of the Manor of Leeds, took out a land patent for his thirteen year old son George. In it, the "Indian Thoroughfare" was described as running from "Williams Cabbin in the Blew Ridge" to the Little River. The fact that there was a squatter's cabin at the Gap means that it was there prior to 1731.

The Carter family believed that there was copper on their property and began in the early 1740s developing the road westward from Colchester, the main Tidewater seaport prior to Alexandria. In 1748, sixteen year old George Washington, with his recently deceased father's surveying tools, accompanied George William Fairfax, using this same "Mountain Road," to survey Lord Fairfax's property in the Shenandoah Valley. On his return trip in April, he wrote "Tuesday 12th. We set out from Capt. Hite's in order to go over Wms. Gap."

In April 1756, during the French and Indian War, 24 year old Col. George Washington to Gov. Dinwiddie "Desolation and murder still increase. The Blue Ridge is now our frontier." At the first Loudoun County Court session on July 12, 1757, Bacon Fort, a dwelling that had added a stockade as protection against marauding Indians, was twice mentioned as a highway surveyor's landmark. After the Revolutionary War, George Washington, in June 1788, wrote in his diary "Halted at a small tavern Bacon fort."

In 1786, what is now Snickersville Turnpike became the first recorded operating turnpike in America, endorsed by Thomas Jefferson prior to his becoming President. In the late 1790s at the intersection of the Turnpike and Colchester Road, a still standing stone farmhouse operated as the White Pump Drivers Tavern. In order for farmers to move their livestock to market they "drove" them along the Turnpike.

*(Yellow Schoolhouse cont.)*

Schoolhouse (now the nearby village's Community Center) was opened in 1932, and the Yellow Schoolhouse's final semester was Spring of 1931.

After the Loudoun County School Board sold the building at public auction in 1933 to Ray and Ora Fields (for \$105!) it was rented as a tenant's house for the adjoining dairy farm. In 1938 the farm and old schoolhouse were sold to Otto Kelley. Later the structure was used for farm storage and began to slowly deteriorate. In 1987 the old building underwent a major restoration both inside and out. Today it remains in the Kelley family and is fully functional and obviously lovingly maintained, a real jewel of western Loudoun County and Snickersville Turnpike.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Snickersville Turnpike remains Loudoun County's "favorite road." It was even a feature article in a recent state-wide publication. The resurfacing of its entire length was capped off by VDOT's decision to double-yellow-line most of it. We work closely with VDOT in removing dead trees to avoid the occasional fallen limbs. On a number of occasions, local citizens actually moved them off the roadway prior to the arrival of the maintenance crew.



The last two planned historical markers – "Bacon Fort" and "Snickersville Academy" – have been erected. The Turnpike Association continues to be involved in area preservation activities. The paving of Williams Gap Road is still to be decided, and the latest concern is where the new Aldie Fire Station should be located. Upcoming is the relocation of the Philomont Fire Station. With the planned opening of Bluemont's Lake Store on May 20th as a Welcome Center, local produce growers and artisans will be asked to participate in warm weather weekend "markets."

The Association has a new aphorism to capture the breadth of our mission – "Snickersville Turnpike – Four Centuries of American History."

Henry G. Plaster



## PLACES ALONG THE PIKE YELLOW SCHOOLHOUSE

What catches one's eye when you first glimpse the tidy small structure on the southwest corner of Yellow Schoolhouse Road and Snickersville Turnpike is the canary yellow paint job. A closer look reveals a somewhat odd structural feature – side by side dual front doors. It couldn't be anything but the Yellow Schoolhouse, one of western Loudoun's more famous old landmarks.

Built in 1852, the Yellow Schoolhouse joined a small mill and store nearby at the crossroads known then as Humphrey's or Brookmoor, now known as Paxson Corner. Storekeeper Thomas L. Humphrey donated the land for the school to five neighbors who were to act as trustees.

Yellow Schoolhouse was probably first called Humphrey's School. There is unproven speculation that the schoolhouse was burned by Union cavalry during Merritt's Loudoun Valley Raid in 1864 and rebuilt on the same spot after the war ended. By the 1880's the school officially became the Paxson School. To locals, however, it was known simply as the Yellow Schoolhouse because of its distinctive color. Between thirty five to fifty "scholars", as pupils were then called, attended. The school held grades one through seven, the kids walking to school from up to three miles away. Boys sat on one side of the room and girls on the other. Hence, the two entryways. Teachers generally stayed two to three years. In the early 1930's half day schooling commenced with the teacher's day split between the Yellow Schoolhouse and nearby Airmont School. Although still rural in nature, the area population was beginning to outgrow the one room school. Bluemont

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## DID YOU KNOW?

An Italian born cavalry officer won the sole Medal of Honor at the Battle of Aldie after being released from arrest and returned to combat by his commanding officer. Colonel Louis P. DiCesnola of the 4th New York Cavalry had been arrested early in the day by his superiors for protesting the promotion of a less experienced officer to brigadier general. When his unit faltered and balked at charging a crucial gun battery, DiCesnola was reinstated, rallied his troopers and, despite serious wounds, turned imminent defeat into victory. He was also captured by the enemy, spent less than a year in a Confederate prison, returning to action later in the war (as a brigadier general).

## ROADSIDE CLEANUP – APRIL 2018

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 of 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