



The Pike Packet

News from The Snickersville Turnpike Association

Spring 2024

THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY OF OLD STONE WALLS

By Emily W. B. Southgate



Who can ignore the window into the past offered by a stone wall buried deep in a forest? No one would build a wall in the middle of the woods, so we know right away that sometime in the past the land was farmed and there were fields on at least one side of the wall.

Stone walls tell a story if we look at them carefully. Stand on a stone wall, or in a gap where the trail passes through it (an old gate between two fields) and look along its length. If the trees along the wall are large with gnarly old branches or branch scars low on both sides of the trunks, this wall separated two open fields when the trees were small. These trees are younger than the wall, or grew after the clearing of the fields. Big trees on one side only, leaning over the wall, were reaching out toward sunlight in a farmer's field from their wooded side. Sometimes we see several ages of trees as we gaze away from the wall, with older trees closest and younger ones farther away. This tells us that the farmer allowed shrubs and trees to grow by the wall, perhaps to give shade to a pasture or to provide a cool place for his lunch breaks. Sometimes there are two or more differently aged sections, indicating a gradual abandonment of the field.

The wall itself can tell you a lot about the past, too. A wall is not just a long pile of stones thrown in a pile haphazardly as a field was ..

cleared. In the early 19th century there were wall-building contests to see who could build a good wall to a certain height the fastest. Farmers built walls with care, expecting them to stand for many years as fences. Sometimes they were made higher by wooden fences, as we see on the new walls built in many areas around northern Virginia.

Once the wall was built, it began to develop character. Lichen spores landed and found small crevices or depressions with enough water to germinate and grow. Most of the stones used to build walls probably did not already have lichens growing on them, as they had been partly or wholly buried in soil or leaf mold before the farmer began clearing the land. Since some lichens grow concentrically, they give us an idea of how old they are and we can use them to estimate the age of the stone wall.

Other lichens blend with the stone so the color you think is stone is actually lichen. If you chip off a piece you will reveal the stone's true color and perhaps see an orange "weathering rind" on the surface of the broken stone.

Once lichen has trapped enough dust to form a very small bit of soil, ubiquitous moss spores germinate and the rock sprouts a cushion of moss. Look at a wall carefully to see how many different kinds of lichens and mosses have taken up residence. A few ..

common ones are easy to identify, such as the dark green bed of rock cap moss (*Dicranum*) and the lichen with red tops, called British soldiers (*Cladonia cristatella*). Sometimes enough soil accumulates to support ferns and other vascular plants, especially as the wall collapses and larger crevices appear in its structure.

Walls are also home to a myriad of animals, only some of which are big enough for us to see. Between the stones are spiders, ants, and other arthropods. Snakes, mice, and chipmunks make their homes in the walls, though not in the same place for long! If I have just seen a chipmunk scurry into a hole in a wall, I clamber over it with confidence knowing I will not encounter a snake. Birds, too, forage for seeds that have collected amongst the rocks and some will nest in stone walls.

When Robert Frost said "something there is that doesn't love a wall," he was speaking metaphorically and reflecting on how the passage of time will ultimately topple a wall. He saw walls as barriers, but we can look at them as relics of the past that survived to our day and as special habitats harboring beauty and life throughout the woods of Loudoun and elsewhere. Where rocks are found at the surface of the ground, we know people once carried them as they tamed the land from woods to pastures or farmland. Next time your trail crosses an old wall, stop for a few minutes and enjoy its special beauty and diversity and marvel at the history it stores.

THE VILLAGE OF PHILOMONT ADDED TO NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

December 4, 2023 - The Village of Philomont was approved by the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places in national recognition for its role in Loudoun

County's agricultural and commercial industry through the 19th and early 20th centuries. The application was sponsored by the Philomont Village Foundation and compiled by historic preservationist Jane Covington who worked with Philomont's generational resident and historian Laura Pearson, the "keeper of the records". The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) approved the Village of Philomont for Virginia's Landmark Register in March 2023.

"Those who came to Philomont and settled on the much-traveled turnpike, especially after Hibbs Bridge was finished in 1829, supported the surrounding agricultural industry with their many tradesmen, such as leather tanners, blacksmiths, doctors, and carpenters," according to the application. Hibbs Bridge was added to the National Register in March 2011. Philomont was the midway point along the 15-mile turnpike. Travelers stopped in the village to pick up supplies at the General Store, get equipment repaired and other services.

We celebrate the village's historical role as a commerce center along a major western Loudoun throughfare - the Snickersville Turnpike, which was added to the National Register in June 2022. Today, the turnpike follows its original 19th- and 20th-century alignment, serving the local community, farmers, and tourists alike.

Today, many of the original homes, some dating back to the late 1700s, remain. Some of the original log cabins are still visible from the outside, some only visible from the inside of the homes that have had stone and/or wood frame additions, then stuccoed. As many as 12 log cabins can be identified within an approximate one-mile radius.

At the heart of the Village of Philomont are the General Store, the Firehouse, and the Community Center, a former school dating back

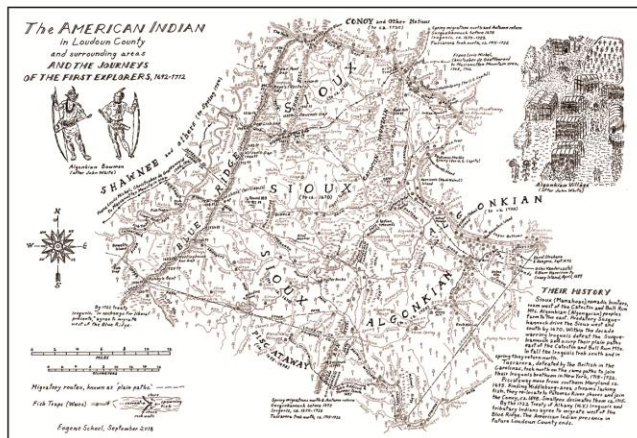
to 1919. Within a short walk are Roszell Chapel, which was moved and rebuilt in 1890, and still holds Sunday services to this day and the Philomont Horse Show Grounds, home to one of Loudoun County's oldest horse shows (1957) and the only community greenspace along the historic Snickersville Turnpike.

Madeline Skinner, President
Philomont Village Foundation

PLASTER MUSEUM SUMMER 2024 EXHIBITION

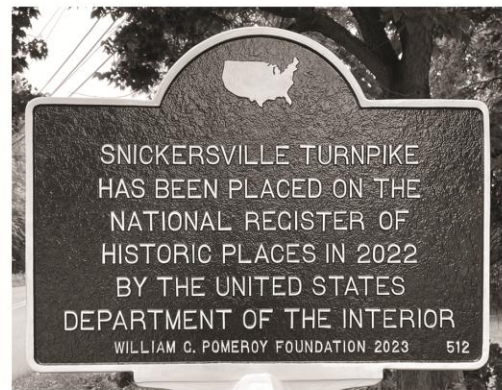
"NATIVE VOICES OF LOUDOUN
COUNTY, PAST AND PRESENT"

Discover the rich legacy of the Indigenous Peoples of Loudoun County, Virginia and celebrate the enduring presence of Native American communities in the region's past and present. This Annual Exhibit titled "Native Voices of Loudoun County Past and Present," is hosted at the Plaster Museum of Bluemont Heritage, and is open Sundays (only), from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. from approximately May to October 2024. The Plaster Museum of Bluemont Heritage is located in the E.E. Lake Store at 18351 Railroad Street, Bluemont, VA 20135. Join us for this year's enlightening exhibit, dedicated to celebrating the history, culture, and contributions of Indigenous, Native American communities here – then and now. This immersive experience offers a unique opportunity to learn, reflect, and honor the rich heritage of the first stewards of this land.



SNICKERVILLE TURNPIKE ADDED TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER.

Eugene Scheel and Marvin Watts were the eloquent guest speakers at the August 13th celebration of Snickersville Turnpike being accepted on the National Register of Historic Places. Hosted by the STA, the official unveiling of the historic marker on Henry Plaster's property is in recognition of his dedication to preserve the Turnpike for future generations.



NEW TO THE COMMUNITY? JOIN THE SNICKERSVILLE TURNPIKE ASSOCIATION AND SUPPORT OUR MISSION.

To ensure that the road maintenance and improved safety can be achieved on Snickersville Turnpike, without taking irreversible measures, such as the removal of historic stone walls, stone bridges, and century-old trees, and without sacrificing the pastoral beauty and aesthetic value of this scenic Virginia Byway.

Snickersville Turnpike Association is committed to addressing transportation issues that affect Snickersville Turnpike and to promoting the rural character of our community.



Snickersville Turnpike Association
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STONE WALLS

Stone Walls — also known as "rock fences" to some - are one of the most identifiable and well-known features along the turnpike and throughout western Loudoun. They help distinguish our landscape for all who reside and visit here, yet there are sections of wall that are in desperate need of repair. Historic stone walls are consumed by development, road-widening, and neglect, are hauled away, buried or ground into rock. There is a severe shortage of skilled dry stone masons compounded by scarcity of proper how-to information and training.

STA has teamed up with the Dry Stone Conservancy (DSC) to help preserve stone walls along the turnpike. The Dry Stone Conservancy's mission is to preserve historic drystone structures, to advance the craft of drystone masonry, and to create opportunities for training and make available expertise across the country. A drystone wall workshop will be held this fall (September, most likely) led by a certified instructor from DSC. The workshop consists of an introductory...

..classroom component and a 2-day hands-on session where participants will dismantle a failed section of stone wall and fully rebuild it. Please email the STA for more information info@snickersvilleturnpike.org if you're interested in attending.

ROADSIDE CLEANUP

The Snickersville Turnpike Association continues to assist Keep Loudoun Beautiful and asks that those fortunate folks that live along the turnpike help us keep the litter picked up. If each homeowner will collect the litter at their property line on the turnpike it would be a great help. We work in conjunction with the Bluemont Citizens Association which helps to clean up the roadway west of Yellow Schoolhouse Road, and Mountville Farms, which covers Mountville. We count on our generous membership and landowners along the pike to assist with the remaining 10 miles. We thank you all for the wonderful work that you do in keeping the Snickersville Turnpike the most beautiful roadway in Loudoun.