

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early European Settlement:

For 12,000 years prior to English Settlement of the Shenandoah Valley, a sparse population of Native Americans lived in the area, but many more traveled through these valleys on the "Indian War Path" from New York and Pennsylvania to winter in Georgia and South Carolina. The first Europeans to come through the Shenandoah Valley were Jesuit missionaries in 1632, and the details of this wilderness area were first mapped by French explorer, Samuel de Champlain.

The first private English ownership of Frederick County was the Virginia Company, which was tasked with the settlement of the Virginia Colony by King James I. Ownership of the area returned to the Crown in 1624 when the Virginia Company's charter was revoked. In 1649, King Charles II granted seven royalist supporters the land "bounded by and within the heads" of the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. By 1681, Thomas, the Second Lord Culpepper, owned most of this original land grant. After he died in 1689, his daughter married Thomas, the Fifth Lord Fairfax, and later, their son Thomas, the Sixth Lord Fairfax, inherited the entire land grant.

Englishmen settled the Piedmont, then pushed west by foot and horse through passes in the Blue Ridge, and many more German and Scots-Irish settlers came down through the valleys from Philadelphia and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Some of the earliest settlers of this area were Quakers who built the Hopewell Friends Meeting House, which still stands near Clearbrook and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These settlers were attracted by the fertile soils and the abundant forest and water resources.

Initial Settlement and Organization:

The Colonial Government of Virginia wanted this wilderness settled as quickly as possible, as a buffer against the Native Americans; but Robert "King" Carter, Lord Fairfax's agent, was settling Fairfax's land slowly in large plantations. The Government of Virginia had chartered counties in the land grant as settlement spread up the Northern Neck and west through the land grant. Virginia began to argue that Fairfax's land grant ended at the Blue Ridge, and began granting up to 1,000 acres each to settler families west of the Blue Ridge.

Abraham Hollingsworth settled near the site of Abrams Delight, now located within the Winchester City limits, in about 1729. Owen Thomas and Jeremiah Smith came to Back Creek in 1730 and settled on 806 acres granted in Thomas' name. Smith left and returned with a wife before 1741. His log cabin is now part of a house west of Back Creek and south of Route 50. In 1732, Jost Hite settled 16 families on his 5,000 acre "grant" and built Hite's

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Fort at Bartonsville, located on Route 11, approximately two miles south of Winchester.

The “Indian Path” became the Great Wagon Road to Philadelphia and Native Americans were dispossessed westward by treaty and force of arms. Frederick County was created from western Orange County by the House of Burgesses on December 21, 1738, and was named after Frederick Louis, the Prince of Wales and son of King George II, and originally spanned from the Blue Ridge Mountains to current day Ohio. In 1744, James Wood, County Surveyor for Orange County, platted a town at the County seat, which he named Winchester, after his birthplace. It consisted of 26 half-acre lots and three streets within 1300 acres, which he claimed as wilderness land owned by Virginia. Those streets are now Loudoun, Boscawen and Cameron. Winchester was officially chartered in 1752.

County government in Virginia was originally by self-perpetuating courts. Frederick County's Court was proclaimed and organized in 1743, and its officials took their oaths of office on November 11th of that year. The Frederick County Court first met at the surveying office of its clerk, James Wood, at the site on which he later built his estate, Glen Burnie.

The original Frederick County has since been divided into the following Counties*:

In Virginia:

Dunmore (now Shenandoah) - 1772
Page – 1831
Warren – 1836
Clarke – 1836

In West Virginia:

Hampshire – 1753
Berkeley – 1772
Hardy – 1776
Jefferson – 1801
Morgan – 1820
Mineral – 1866
Grant – 1866

*from Frederick County, Virginia: History through Architecture by Maral S. Kalbian

By the mid-1740s, the Frederick County Court had acknowledged that Lord Fairfax's land grant did include Frederick County, despite previous arguments that the Fairfax lands ended at the Blue Ridge Mountains. At the age of 16, George Washington was a member of a surveying party that came to Frederick County for Lord Fairfax in 1748. In 1749, Lord Fairfax moved to Frederick County and built his home, Greenway Court, at White Post, in present-day Clarke County. He accepted Wood's 1,300 acre claim and other additional lots at Winchester. Eventually, 11 other counties would be created from the 3,824 square miles included in the original Frederick County.

George Washington maintained a relationship with Winchester and Frederick County during and after his surveying expedition for Lord

Fairfax. Early during those years, Washington operated his surveying office in Winchester and oversaw the construction of Fort Loudoun. Washington's first elected office was as a representative of Frederick County in the House of Burgesses 1758. He served in this post for 15 years. During the French and Indian War, he was given a Commission by Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia and was later promoted to Commander in Chief of the colonial forces with headquarters in Winchester. The location of the headquarters for the western campaign helped to stimulate growth in Winchester throughout the French and Indian War which in turn led to improvements along trade/travel roads, the creation of additional lots in Winchester, and the formation of Stephensburg, which is now Stephens City.

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The American Revolution in Frederick County:

Although there were no battles or military engagements in Frederick County during the Revolutionary War, the area was very important in the effort. Prior to the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, a group of protesters met in Winchester to protest King George's taxes on the colonies. They drafted the Frederick County Resolves and promised not to purchase English wares until their grievances were resolved. During the war, General Daniel Morgan, who lived in eastern Frederick County (now Clarke County), and his "Long Rifles" played a prominent role in many battles of the Revolutionary War, including the Battle at Cowpens in South Carolina. His regiment of expert riflemen was one of two from Virginia. Several local citizens furnished the troops with food and supplies, including Isaac Zane Jr. who supplied the army with ammunition made at his ironworks in Marlboro. Many prisoners captured during the War were held in Winchester and Frederick County. By 1779, the number of British prisoners held in Winchester had increased beyond the capacity of the existing prison and a larger one was built. A barracks was built four miles west of Winchester to hold these prisoners whose number had increased to 1,600 by the year 1781.

After the Revolution, the trade routes established during the French and Indian War continued to develop and provide avenues for trade between farmers in Frederick County and those in Eastern Virginia. Winchester grew as a travel and commercial hub in Western Virginia.

Early National Period:

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, life in Frederick County centered on small family farms and transportation and trade routes. By the 1770s, the Indian Warpath through Frederick County had transformed into the Great Wagon Road and forms what is now US Route 11. In addition to Route 11, other major roads were established through Winchester including what are now Route 50 West, 522 South, and Route 7 East. These four major roads provided avenues of transportation and made trade possible across the state of Virginia as well as major cities North and South of Virginia. As a result, Winchester and the surrounding area grew in terms of residential occupants and commercial occupants.

Economic life was centered around Winchester and other local towns including Stephens City, Middletown, Kernstown, Gainesboro and Gore, which remain centers of economic and community growth today. There were a large number and diversity of craftsmen and merchants in these towns. The strongest influence on the local economy was the Great Wagon Road which carried settlers and travelers from Philadelphia, south through the Valley and to the west. Activity associated with this road made Winchester one of the largest towns in western Virginia.

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Farming in this region focused on several main crops which grew well in the soils of the area. During this period, wheat production became the center of the local economy, along with cattle farming, and by 1810, Frederick County was one of the largest producers of wheat in Virginia. Economic growth in the area was predominantly encouraged by agricultural activities and their industrial counterparts, such as milling and transporting of the locally grown products. By 1820, there were fifty flour mills in Frederick County along with numerous sawmills, tanneries, and other business activities.

Growth in the area continued into the mid-nineteenth century, when the County was faced with Civil War and the turbulence that this area felt as a consequence of its location at the crossroads of many major roads and railroads.

The American Civil War:

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, issues were brewing in Frederick County which mirrored those across the Nation. As agriculture developed in the County, a clear division formed areas east of the Opequon (current day Clarke County), where slave labor constituted a majority of the population and areas west of the Opequon, where small family owned farms were the agricultural trend. In 1836, Clarke County split from Frederick County, largely over this issue.

During the Civil War, Frederick County played a significant role, primarily due to its location at the intersection of many major roads. The northern Shenandoah Valley supplied food, livestock, horses, and soldiers to the southern cause. The Valley was also important because of its strategic location in relation to Washington D.C. The Town of Winchester changed hands about 70 times during the course of the war, an average of once every three weeks, for four years.

Major local battles included the First Battle of Kernstown in March of 1862, during which General Stonewall Jackson suffered his only tactical defeat during the Valley Campaign. However, Jackson did succeed in keeping Union troops in the Valley from leaving to reinforce McClellan on the peninsula. This was the first major encounter of the War in this area. In May of 1862, Jackson's army defeated the Union troops at the First Battle of Winchester.

In the Second Battle of Winchester in 1863, confederate troops successfully attacked and defeated Union troops occupying forts on the western side of Winchester. The most critical effort of the campaign was the battle at Stephenson's Depot and a portion of the battlefield still remains intact today. Union troops were again defeated at the second battle of Kernstown in 1864.

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Belle Grove and Cedar Creek Battlefield National Historic Park:

In 2002, the National Park Service created the Belle Grove and Cedar Creek Battlefield National Historic Park in an effort to protect the integrity of this important Battle of the Civil War.

All park facilities remain under the operation of the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation and the Belle Grove Plantation or private ownership. The Battlefield Foundation sponsors reenactments of the Battle of Cedar Creek and other battles of importance throughout the year. Belle Grove operates as a history museum and guided tours are available.

At the Third Battle of Winchester, General Philip Sheridan's Union troops successfully attacked confederate troops at Winchester. With the high numbers of losses on both sides, a new war of attrition was to begin in the Valley from which the southern forces would never recover. For three weeks in 1864, Sheridan's troops undertook the infamous "Burning" to end Confederate strength in the Valley. Virginia's richest valley was left desolate.

In October of 1864, Jubal Early's Confederate troops were entrenched south of Cedar Creek. General Sheridan's Union troops were encamped just north of Cedar Creek. A surprise attack by the Confederates drove the

Union troops to the north. General Sheridan, arriving from Winchester upon hearing of the attack, rallied his troops and launched a massive counter attack which drove Early's troops back across Cedar Creek. The Confederate defeat at the Battle of Cedar Creek meant the loss of Confederate control of the crucial Shenandoah Valley for the remainder of the war. Thomas Buchanan Read wrote a poem, "Sheridan's Ride," to memorialize the stoic trip from Winchester to the battlefield. This Union victory, in combination with General Sherman's victory in Georgia, helped to win President Lincoln the reelection.

The Civil War took both a physical and economic toll on Frederick County and the surrounding area, as the primary "bread basket" of Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley was affected more by the Civil War than any other war fought on American soil.

Reconstruction:

After six major battles and countless minor skirmishes, the Civil War brought much destruction to Frederick County. Many farms, mills, and dwellings were damaged or destroyed by the cannon fire from the battlefields or by soldiers raiding for food and supplies, and the county's economic productivity was greatly reduced. This period was characterized by a slow economic recovery from damages suffered, but by the 1880s economic stability gradually returned. After the war, old economic activities resumed and new activities began. New businesses included the emergence of the apple production, tanning, dairying, machinery production, and shipping industries. These new avenues of commercial growth allowed the County's economy to rebound at a steady rate and by the 1880s some of the County's agricultural crop production levels had returned to those prior to the war. By 1890, Frederick

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County had 37 mills, eight woolen factories, a steam elevator, two iron foundries, four glove factories, a boot and shoe factory, ten broom factories, four tanneries, a large paper mill, three newspapers, a book bindery, eight cigar factories, three marble yards, and two furniture factories.

There was also a tremendous building boom in the county between 1880-1900. In addition to new construction, older structures were often enlarged and updated using modern building techniques and styles. This growth occurred in both rural areas and in small communities that had previously developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. New communities were also formed as a result of newer, more advanced transportation systems. Among the communities that experienced growth during this period were Meadow Mills, Hayfield, Gore, Mountain Falls, Mount Williams, Gravel Springs, Gainesboro, Albin, Brucetown, White Hall and Armel. Centers of African American culture also developed during this period as a result of the segregation which followed the end of the Civil War. Communities such as Cedar Hill, Freetown, and Leetown became cores of the African American culture in Frederick County. To mediate the impact of segregation on daily activities, these communities developed public buildings and facilities such as schools and churches for their own use.