





Middleburg

Old-Fashioned Rural Living for the New Age

By
Lauren R. Giannini

Photos by Jim Poston

Westward Ho! From Alexandria, Virginia, Route 50 used to take covered wagons to the Cumberland Gap, but it's a lot easier with modern horsepower, especially after you get beyond urban and suburban sprawl. The drive acquires new character after Gilbert's Corner at the intersection of Routes 50 and 15, where the topography begins to roll and rise up into the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The picturesque village of Aldie nestles in a valley just west of the trucker's weigh station, which played a major role back when the road was a turnpike with a toll—and a major route for smugglers. Just about a mile later, John Mosby Highway begins its ascent, exciting the senses with views on both sides of horse farms, cow pastures, wineries and estates. Suddenly the sign says it all: Relax — You're In The Village

Middleburg attracts people from all over the world: some to visit, others to settle within or close to the incorporated small town with its unique atmosphere. It's a place where you're not just a number; you're a real person with a name. The village even has its own book by local author Vicky Moon, and *The Middleburg Mystique* satisfies anyone hungry for the inside scoop about everything from John and Jackie Kennedy and the affluent to internationally renowned equestrians, to stars of entertainment and politics.

Best of all, Middleburg and its



Gloria Armfield at the Windy Hill Fashion Show this Fall

environs boast an intensely loyal cadre of people, hailing from all walks of life, who love the countryside and its old-fashioned flavor.

"It's probably one of the most wonderful places in the world to live," said Gloria Armfield, who matches up new owners with homes, grand and cozy, throughout the Piedmont area. "It's a community effort, and newcomers learn right away how much the people love Middleburg. It's like entering another world, a step back in time. It's really a special way of life, a special feeling—and it's infectious."

That special feeling dates back to 1728 when Joseph Chinn built an inn one day's trek by coach or horseback between Alexandria and Winchester on what is now Route 50. The land around Mr. Chinn's establishment at a little crossroads



The Red Fox Inn (left) on East Washington Street

belonged to the sixth Lord Fairfax and a Baron who preferred his cabin on the Shenandoah River over palace life in London.

In 1787 Levin Powell, statesman and Revolutionary War Lieutenant Colonel, purchased Chinn's Crossroads as well as another 50 acres for the new town of Middleburg. It's hard to believe he paid only \$2.50 per acre! A very young George Washington was a frequent visitor to the area. The founding father allegedly slept in several locations, thereby enhancing the historical value of many homes, both lavish and simple log cabin.

Middleburg, then as now, enjoyed prosperity and earned a sporting reputation for foxhunting, horse breeding and horse racing. The inn known as Chinn's Ordinary grew to 35 rooms in 1812 when it became the Beveridge House. During the Civil War, it served as a meeting place for General Jeb Stuart and Colonel John Mosby, who staged guerrilla attacks with his Mounted Rangers. There are those who insist that, on moonless nights, you can still hear the tattoo of galloping hooves from Mosby's Raiders

along Route 50 between the village and Upperville. When fierce battles raged in the surrounding countryside, the Confederates used the inn as a hospital and headquarters.

Renamed the Middleburg Inn in 1887, the historical building and landmark nearly came to an abrupt end in 1937 under a wrecking ball. However, a local citizen bought the building and engaged an architect from the village, William Dew, to remodel what is still known as the Red Fox Inn. However, it isn't the only game in town: your choices include the Coach Stop, French Hound, Back Street Café, Market Salamander, Teddy's Pizza and Subs, Red Horse Inn, Hidden Horse Inn, and Home Farm Store. Coffee lovers visit Cuppa Giddyup or the Upper Crust Bakery where the Steeplechase Bars offer a toothsome chocolate fix.

Today Middleburg and the nearby countryside list a treasure trove of entries on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Year-round special events that welcome visitors include the Hunt Country Stable Tour,

Garden Tours, and Christmas in Middleburg, as well as cultural and artistic activities. The Middleburg Community Center, a beehive of performances, classes and youth activities, provides a great hall that's ideal to rent for private soirees, receptions and fundraisers.

"It's the people," stated Cricket Bedford, mother of two and a real estate agent. "The people take care of each other. All the time, there are the people to catch you before you break. We laud each other's triumphs. The affluent are good people. They come here for the same reasons as the rest of us. Houses come and go on the market, but the people don't change.

"I loved Hill School when I went there," she added. "Now it's for my pony-crazy daughter who's five, and my son, who's eight. They're being taught what was taught to me about the outdoors, the countryside, the crops and the trees, and our responsibility to take care of the land and its people."

Ms. Bedford grew up in the area. She admits that she tried living in New York City and Charlottesville but couldn't resist Middleburg's siren song. She gets



Steeplechase meeting at Glenwood Park

involved in everything – from the Virginia Fall Steeplechase Meeting at nearby Glenwood Park, to coaching field hockey at the Hill School, to fund-raising. It's not just Middleburg, although the village is at the epicenter. She's talking about people in Upperville as well as points north and south of Route 50: the whole glorious domain known as Horse and Hunt Country.

"My dad, Erskine Bedford, always called this area God's Country," said Ms. Bedford.

Even the locals find themselves drinking in the views that come upon them at various twists and turns of the back roads. One moment you're driving through a tunnel of trees, and the next moment you glance to the west at a panorama of horse and cow pastures or a stately mansion, often graced by a backdrop of the Blue Ridge, sprawling north to south like sleepy

dragons. If you drive west from Middleburg toward Upperville and Paris Mountain, the road rolls up hill and down dale, constantly changing, often filling your windshield with an unbelievable view of the Blue Ridge. Great photo opportunities abound at every turn. No wonder the area attracts artists and writers. In addition to firing up the creative juices, the countryside can also heal the soul.

One very charming aspect of Middleburg involves the fact that visitors and residents alike can park their cars: all the shops, galleries, and restaurants are within easy strolling distance. Dr. Margaret New moved from Wisconsin 22 years ago to serve two years as director of development at Foxcroft, a local school with an international reputation. She put her background in counseling, marketing and fundraising to good use: teaching at two

universities, writing a monthly column about love and work issues," Ask Maggie," for the *Loudoun Times-Mirror*, and founding The Middleburg Group to counsel business leaders about career and performance goals.

"I stayed because it's beautiful," said Dr. New. "I stopped riding about 10 years ago, but I'm a social member of the Middleburg Hunt. I play tennis at the Middleburg Tennis Club, and I hike—my favorite place is the Appalachian Trail in Shenandoah. I keep an apartment in the city, because it's easier on me than that daily commute during rush hour, but once I get home to Middleburg, I park my car and leave it until Sunday night. I walk everywhere, and at night it's dark and we can see the stars."

"That's one of the reasons why Middleburg captivates me so much," she added. "It's still a small town. I walk to the



Phil Thomas, whose family goes back five generations

post office or the grocery store, and I see friends and we catch up on the news. It's a very comfortable feeling, like an extended family. For visitors, it's a wonderful day trip: park your car, go shopping, have lunch. It's a step back in time. It's so easy to live here. I mean, where else but the Fun Shop can you buy tapers (candles) or paper doilies or lamp shades? People still dress in preppy or country clothes. It's like living in the sixties."

The era of Camelot came to Middleburg when President Kennedy and his wife Jackie bought a rural retreat. John rested his aching back and escaped the pressures of the White House while Jackie, Caroline and John-John enjoyed their horses and ponies away from the urban crush of media attention. Sightings of the First Family added to the magic of Middleburg, which ended up a magnet for paparazzi. Marshall Hawkins put the village on the map when he sold a photo of the First Lady taking a tumble at a post-and-rail fence during a foxhunt with a local pack of hounds.

Since then, other members of the "famous club" have graced the village and the surrounding countryside. Robert Duvall got involved to fight Dominion Power, whose proposed path of power towers would destroy the beautiful views, scar the countryside forever, and destroy many

historical homes and landmarks. Willard Scott, Elizabeth Taylor when she was courted by her next husband Senator John Warner, Ambassador Pamela Harriman, Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke, billionaire patron of the arts and horses Paul Mellon: that's just dropping a few names. The list grows all the time.

"Middleburg is a great tourist attraction because of the history," cited Phil Thomas. "We had the founding fathers of America who lived in Virginia. The area is pleasing to the eye because people started putting property in easements years ago. This makes the area attractive because there is a sense of protection that the beauty of the land will last."

Mr. Thomas harked back to growing up on Hunter Mill Road when Reston was still country. His family goes back five generations. His father C. Reed Thomas served as the Fairfax master of foxhounds in the 1930s when they rode all over Reston. He recalled the days when Fort Myer had a cavalry, and the likes of General "Skinny" Wainwright and General George Patton hunted with Fairfax. In the mid-1940s, his father bought Ovoka Farm, and that's when he moved to the earthly paradise that embraces Middleburg, The Plains, Upperville, and Paris.

"I didn't ride in my reckless youth

- I was a disappointment," admitted Mr. Thomas. "I love horses and horse-people, hunt breakfasts and steeplechase meets. I love good restaurants and ice cream."

People flock to Middleburg, even if they're just passing through. There are specialty stores selling gourmet foods, naturally raised beef, lamb, pork, and poultry as well as antiques and jewelry. Tack and feed stores cater to the needs of thousands of horses and the people involved in this mega-buck industry. The Middleburg Training Track shelters Thoroughbreds who race on the flat and over fences. The Middleburg Swim Center offers aqua therapy and exercise for horses and dogs.

Just out of town, past the site for Sheila Johnson's Salamander Inn & Spa, is the historic trust of Glenwood Park, which hosts spring and fall steeplechasing, three-day eventing, the North American Field Hunter Championship, Middleburg-Orange County Pony Club, the MOC Beagles, Region 3 Connemara Show, and the Middleburg Hunt Point-to-point, to name just a few of its equestrian events. Polo clubs have sprouted up all over the place again, and through the summer there are grass matches and arena games every weekend.

A few miles south in The Plains, the International Gold Cup and Virginia Gold Cup races take place in the fall and spring at Great Meadows while Delaplane, southwest of Middleburg, hosts an annual Strawberry Festival.

The Middleburg area boasts its fair share of world-class equestrians such as show jumpers Katie Monahan Prudent and Joe Fargis, and the three-day event team of David and Karen O'Connor. Karen made history this summer with the super-pony, Theodore O'Connor when they won double gold medals at the Pan Am Games in Brazil.

Just up the road from the village, the Upperville Colt & Horse Show, the oldest one in the country, takes place every June on two historic farms on both sides of

Route 50, where grass rings and the views of the Blue Ridge delight horses and riders alike. There are bed & breakfasts where Washington and other great names in history rested their weary heads after days in the saddle, dashing about in the name of freedom. Visitors will discover more than they can visit in one day: vineyards, glorious gardens and the manor house at Long Branch. Just north of Gilbert's Corner, Oatlands Plantation offers year-round events such as the Middleburg Kennel Club's all breed dog show, theatrical performances, Civil War reenactments, and racing over fences.

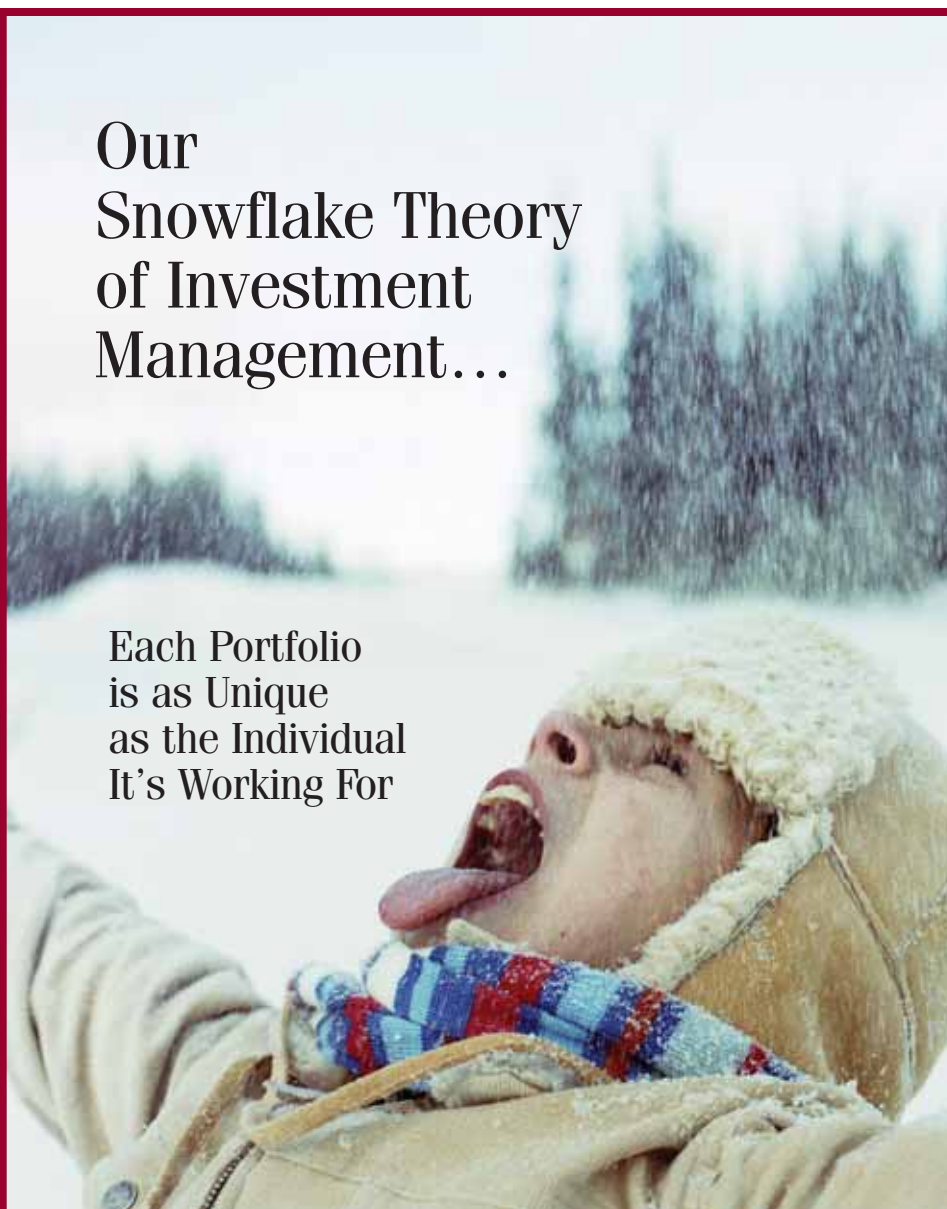
It's all here, whatever makes your heart sing: great views, history, hiking trails up mountains hanging like blue haze on the horizon, charitable organizations, conservation, or just a peaceful place to call home. Middleburg, like heaven on earth, has something for everyone.

For information: www.middleburgonline.com or www.middleburgmystique.com or just park your car in the village and explore: satisfaction guaranteed.

Lauren R. Giannini works and plays in the heart of Virginia's horse country as an equestrian journalist/photographer. For the past 15 years she has been a regular contributor to *In & Around Horse Country*. Her stories and photos can be also be found in *Sidelines*, the equestrian news magazine, *Middleburg Life*, and other equine-friendly publications. She is a card-carrying member of the International Alliance of Equestrian Journalists and has been approved for press credentials for horse sports at the 2008 Olympics.

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