

WARRENTON

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED

by
Phil Audibert



Main Street Warrenton has changed little despite pressure from Northern Virginia. (Photo courtesy of Partnership for Warrenton Foundation)

“The real story is what hasn’t changed,” says longtime Fauquier resident Andy Soyars. “I think that’s what makes Warrenton exceptional. It’s not a place where you come back 15 years later and you don’t know where you are. Downtown Warrenton is still a small town and it still has its

identity. What I love about it is that strangers still speak to each other on the street.”

Welcome to Warrenton, Virginia and what hasn’t changed rather than what has. Soyars has lived here since the late 1970s. He marvels that a community so close to the People’s Republic of Northern

Virginia has managed to avoid being gobbled up. “Yes, there’s been a lot of build-up, a lot of commercial activity and a lot of cars coming through, but the old part of town, once you get off the beaten track, it’s changed little. The countryside is still pretty pristine.”

Soyars credits “good government

Picturesque dry-laid stone walls bordering country lanes are almost commonplace in western Fauquier County. (Photo by Phil Audibert)





Great Meadow attracts many different kinds of events, including the Virginia Gold Cup, which can draw up to 40,000 at its spring and fall meets. (Photo courtesy of the Virginia Gold Cup)

Ernest and Betty Oare came to the equine epicenter that is Warrenton in 1965 to pursue a life-long passion for horses. (Photo by Phil Audibert)

and well held land, as the reason we are still who we are.” He notes that surrounding Fauquier County has more acreage under easement than any other county in the state. A look at a county roadmap bears this out. Backed by the neighboring exurbs of Manassas, Gainesville and even Fairfax poised on its northeastern border, a wedge of development known as New Baltimore has driven straight towards the town of Warrenton. And, like the Union army of almost 150 years prior, there it stops.

Then look at the rest of that county map. With the exception of a few villages such as Marshall, Remington, Bealeton and Morrisville (service areas where the growth has been carefully and purposefully channeled) it’s mostly open countryside. And by the looks of it, it’s going to stay that way.

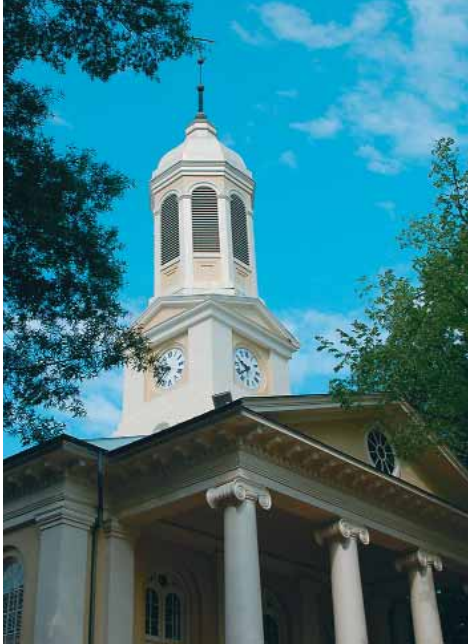
A drive, particularly through the northwestern section of the county on stone

wall-lined roads that were traveled by, yes, Stonewall Jackson himself, is a journey to a former, more gracious era. It is a world of old families living on the same land for generations, of understated elegance, classic architecture, and horses – *everywhere* horses.

One of those farms, just down the road from the truly magnificent Waverly (and an easy hack from North Wales) is EMO Stables. It belongs to Ernest and Betty Oare, and despite its glorious neighbors, this barn is impressive enough in its own right. “All of our clan wound up here in 1965,” says Ernest from the comfort of a leather armchair in his wood-paneled office. Ernest, who trained for Betty’s father, the legendary J. Arthur Reynolds, shrugs, “The reason we *came* here was horses.”

Betty chimes in with her sparkling





Fauquier County courthouse (Photo courtesy of Partnership for Warrenton Foundation)

smile: “It was just such a great central location for the horse business in general. It had everything: hunting, showing and steeplechasing. There’s something for everyone.”

The Oares have served on “too many” local, state and national equine committees and boards, including the Virginia Thoroughbred Association and the National Steeplechase Association. Ernest was appointed to Virginia’s first racing commission by then Gov. George Allen. Currently the Oares keep some 30 horses of various disciplines on two adjoining farms totaling maybe 115 acres. Another 15 are resting up at the Middleburg Training

Center after a busy season on the track.

Horses are a big deal in Warrenton. “Huge,” says Fauquier’s tourism coordinator, Catherine Payne. “The equine industry is the largest sector of agriculture in terms of revenue.” We are seated at a table in the Iron Bridge Wine Company in Old Town, nibbling the best french fries I have ever tasted; they cook them in duck fat or something. What are the locals talking about right now at this tony Main Street eatery and watering hole? “Horses, polo, foxhunting,” unhesitatingly responds Amy Gable, who is Catherine’s counterpart at the Partnership for Warrenton Foundation.

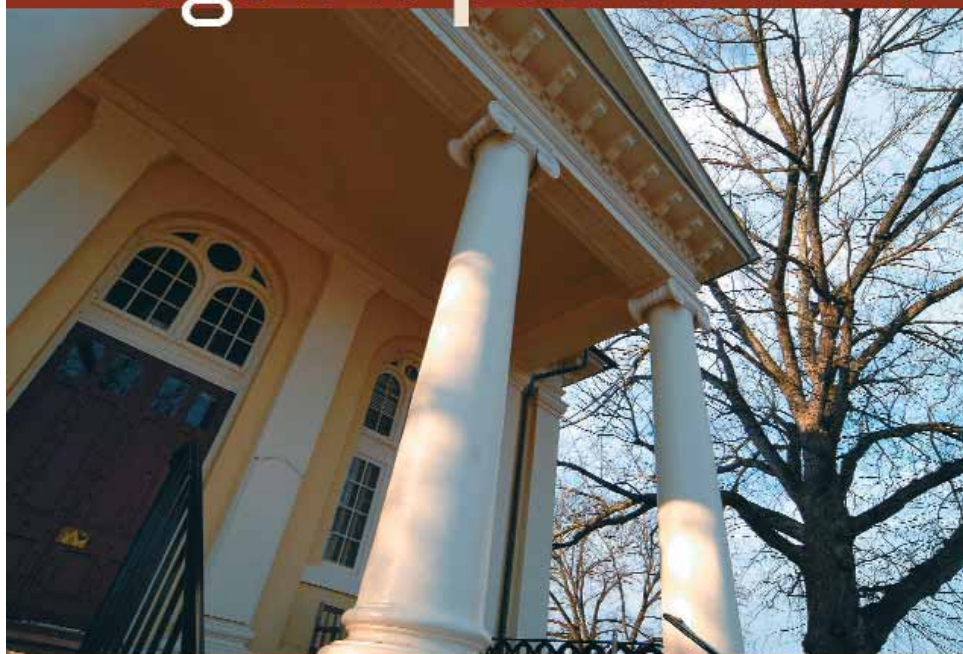
Amy has lived in Warrenton since she was three years old. And yes, she’s seen changes, but as far as the town is concerned, it has not been rendered unrecognizable – far from it. Okay, there’s no hardware store here on Main Street anymore, and the A&P is now something else. But, she points out, the Shoe Center “has been a cobbler here for 60 years.”

More importantly, there are no empty storefronts. Take a walk down Main Street and you’ll encounter Berkley Gallery with its superb collection of sporting art, including the work of English sculptor Belinda Sillars. The gallery has expanded to a second storefront across the street.

The British Isles are well represented here. Scoti sells “everything Scottish and Irish,” and when you’ve worked up a thirst, you can quench it at Molly’s Irish Pub. There’s a wonderful feeling of community here; banners hanging at Molly’s honor co-owner Laurie Enwright’s service to her country as a C-130 pilot with multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We walk past Rhodes Drug Store, now a gift shop, and an Orvis store. Amy remembers sitting as a child at the soda fountain next door where the Main Street Grill is today. The old firehouse, which was abandoned for more spacious quarters in the mid ’70s, has now been converted to

aged to perfection.



With over a fifty specialty shops and restaurants and more on the way, Old Town Warrenton is the “in” place to be. Old Town is the most diverse shopping and dining destination in Fauquier County and our shops offer something for everyone from fresh baked bread and fine wine to jewelry and gifts. We invite you to browse our shops in person and online at www.historicwarrenton.org. Come explore why Warrenton is the place where old is in.

Old Town
Warrenton
virginia

retail space. The old playhouse, thanks to the vision of Malcolm Alls, has been converted into loft apartments and offices. The Blue Ridge Building houses, appropriately enough, the Piedmont Environmental Council and the Virginia Gold Cup. Talk about horse events, that alone draws as many as 40,000 to its semi-annual meet at Great Meadow!

Down towards the leafy residential portion of East Main Street, past the Baptist Church where the Tiny Tot Daycare Center has a three-year waiting list, we come to the John Mosby Museum and Educational Center. This was the post-Civil War home of the Gray Ghost, John Singleton Mosby. Something of a hothead (he shot and wounded a fellow student at UVA for bad-mouthing him) he organized a mounted guerilla fighting unit that developed the highly successful tactic of swift nighttime raids on Union supply lines. Mosby's Rangers were based out of Rectortown in Fauquier County.

There is a famous story that he awakened federal Brigadier General Edwin Stoughton in Fairfax with a stiff thwack on the rump by a flattened sword, prompting the indignant general to exclaim self-righteously, "Do you know who I am?"

"I reckon I do," coolly replied Mosby. "Did you ever hear of Mosby?"

"Yes," responded the groggy commander. "Have you caught him?"

"No," said the Gray Ghost, "but he has caught you."

By the end of the war, Mosby's Rangers had grown from 15 to 800 men and were so reviled and feared by the Union that standing orders were given to hang captured cavalymen on the spot without the benefit of a trial. In November of 1864, the Union launched The Great Burning Raid through Loudon and Fauquier Counties in an effort to flush out Mosby and punish his local sympathizers.

Mosby's Rangers were disbanded at Salem, which is today's Marshall. He is buried in his adopted home town, although



The home occupied by John Singleton Mosby after the Civil War is now an education center. (Photo by Phil Audibert)

A statue of Supreme Court Justice John Marshall stands in front of a district court building on Main Street Warrenton. (Photo by Susie Audibert)

not as a result of an assassination attempt at the Warrenton train station in 1876. That train station stands today, on what's left of the old Orange and Alexandria line. It is now an upscale restaurant named Claire's. A look at the eclectic menu prompts a note to self: *Have dinner here tonight.*

But you won't be able to stay at the nearby Warren Green Hotel. The historic structure now houses government offices. Still, it is here that the Marquis de Lafayette addressed a crowd of 6,000 in 1825. And it is from these steps that General George McClellan bade farewell to his staff after being replaced by the even more disastrous Ambrose Burnside. And it was also





Fauquier County is dotted with quaint villages such as The Plains, which boasts a gourmet restaurant and a vibrant artists' community. (Photo by Phil Audibert)

Three Fox Vineyards is one of the 16 wineries in the countryside around Warrenton. (Photo courtesy Three Fox Vineyards)



here that Wallis Warfield awaited her divorce papers from the hapless Mr. Simpson.

No, you will have to spend the night in any one of the seven inns and four chain hotels here in Fauquier. Our first

choice would be The Inn Spa at Poplar Springs. The following morning, be sure to drop in on Warrenton's latest sensation, the Red Truck Bakery, for freshly brewed coffee and pastries. Poor Warrentonians had to forego fresh home-baked bread for

three months while the owner renovated the old service station into a café.

Time to make a loop out into the countryside. Be sure to check out Great Meadow, which hosts all manner of events, equestrian and otherwise. And, don't miss the fairytale village of The Plains with its new upscale restaurant, the Railstop. The good ol' boy mom and pop that used to be here has now moved to the Fauquier Livestock Exchange. It's still good. For a hamlet its size, The Plains boasts an impressive array of museums, galleries and artist studios.

Continue on to Marshall, past the Northern Fauquier Community Park made possible by the Paul Mellon Foundation. Marshall, is named after Supreme Court Justice John Marshall who helped define the role of the high court during the nation's infancy. He was born at Oak Hill, not far from Free State, where, during the Civil War, a lawless community of anarchists



The mid-August Hot Air Balloon Festival in Bealeton is one of many annual events that attract visitors to Warrenton and Fauquier County. (Photo by Susie Audibert)

refused to pledge allegiance to North or South!

Head ‘em up and move ‘em out to the Marriott Ranch. This 4,200-acre (that’s 6.5 square *miles*) of western-style cattle ranch, hunting preserve *cum* executive retreat and event facility, is almost too big to believe. With 1,000 head of cattle, including a contingent of longhorns and cowboys to wrangle them, this place offers everything: trail rides, cattle drives, stocked spring-fed pond and trout stream fishing,

whitetail deer hunting from 50 established stands – and now, quail hunting January through April on a newly planted preserve. And to think that the Marriott family of the hotel chain fame liked to come here for a little getaway every now and again!

Traveling south through Hume and Orlean, we pass several of Fauquier’s 16 wineries. Wineries are “a nice fit because they’re an agricultural business. They are bringing visitors into the county and they have a nice trickle-down effect,”

says Payne. “Visitors come, they stay, they drink wine, they go to restaurants to eat, they maybe shop.”

They also attract other businesses. She points to Vintner Chef, which caters to wineries by serving food with which to demo wine. What a perfect match! Speaking of perfect matches, there’s an on-line business here that links up buyers of fresh in-season produce with growers of fresh in-season produce. You e-mail in your order, they find it locally, and you pick it up

at a refrigerated warehouse.

Asked to sum up Warrenton in 25 words or less, Amy Gable says, “a quaint small town with metropolitan hues.” She tells a story about how the gas crisis of '08 taught many locals to not drive to Fairfax for shopping and dining. They could find it all here, closer to home. But it's more than that. Folks, living in the faceless, nameless

residential developments poised at the county's border, hunger for a sense of belonging. They come to Warrenton precisely because it has *not* changed; it is their Main Street, because they have none at home. It has become their adopted community.

Amy Gable ticks off just a few of the many local festivals and events that happen every year in and around Warrenton: the Virginia Gold Cup, the Flying Circus and Hot Air Balloon Festival in Bealeton, the Father's Day Car Show, the Fourth of July Parade, the Spring Festival, Evening Under the Stars, the Virginia Scottish Games, twilight polo matches at Great Meadow, various horse shows at Upperville and Warrenton, all the point-to-points put on by the hunt clubs. The list goes on and on.

But none can match the delight, the magic, the tradition, the sense of community, where “strangers still speak to each other on the street,” of Warrenton's Little Christmas. It's not so little; 4,000

come just to see Santa! Every Friday night in December, Main Street is closed to traffic and is taken over by horse-drawn hayrides, carolers, hot chestnut stands, popcorn vendors, a live Nativity scene. “It's very Norman Rockwell,” says Amy animatedly. “It's such a feel of an old historic town. The town square where we have the ballet classes, they do the Nutcracker at night, and different school orchestras and choirs play and sing. It's just fabulous!”

And that's what Andy Soyars meant when he said, “The real story is what hasn't changed in Warrenton.”

Phil Audibert has been writing and shooting photographs since he was 16. Recently, he won several first-place awards from the Virginia Press Association. His wife, Susie, is also a photographer. Please visit them at AudibertPhoto.com.



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