

HISTORY OF BLUEMONT, VIRGINIA

Snickersville 1769

Bluemont 1900

Bluemont, known for more than a century, reaching back from the year 1900, as Snickersville, a little hamlet of some forty-five dwellings, the terminus of the W. & O. D. Branch of the Southern Railway, is located at the eastern end of that noted pass of the Blue Ridge Mountain - Snickers' Gap. Occupying an elevation of 1,000 feet above tide-water, it enjoys the distinction of standing, in this particular, a head and shoulders higher than any other village or town in Loudoun county.

The period of first settlement at this point is shrouded in the impenetrable shadow of the dead past. Local tradition does not extend so far, and no record known to the writer, exists to declare its birthday. The peculiar location of the village would seem to justify the belief that, long before the Declaration of 1776, the pioneer settler had built his log cabin beside the trail, trodden by Indian and deer, leading through the great pass from our beautiful Loudoun Valley to the great valley of the Shenandoah.

In relation to the land on which this village stands, we learn, from the records of the County Clerk's Office, the Lord Fairfax, who, it is generally known, was at one time the Lordly Proprietor of the vast territory lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers, granted to Geo. Carter 2941 acres of land lying along the Eastern side of the Blue Ridge. Geo. Carter transferred this patent to John Augustine Washington, who by deed dated July 26th, 1769, conveyed 624 acres of this tract to Edward Snickers. This 624-acre tract is described as lying at the foot of the Blue Ridge, on the Main road from Winchester to Washington, and bounded on the south by the northern line of "The Manor of Leeds."

And another fact is, by this language, made apparent, viz: that Snickers' Gap had, at this time, become an important thoroughfare; and from this we reach the conclusion that the first settler's cabin at the foot of the pass had neighbors and the natal day of the village had come and gone prior to July 26, 1769. Edward Snickers, by deed dated June 5, 1777, conveyed this 624 acres to Richard Wistar, of Philadelphia, and by Dr. Caspar Wistar sold it to William Clayton.

Edward Snickers had previously become the owner of 1045 acres of Loudoun land, lying on the south fork of Beaverdam creek, three or four miles south of Snickers' Gap, and bounded on the west by "The Manor of Leeds." This was one-half of the Col. Benj. Grayson patent of 2090 acres, dated August 5th, 1742. Edward Snickers' deed is to 1770. Snickers afterward conveyed this same land to Benj. Grayson 3rd, son of Benj. Grayson 2nd. Grayson 3rd and his wife, Nancy, conveyed the same land to William Snickers, October 18, 1789. By the way, tradition credits this same Billy Snickers with conveying the first bushel of wheat across the Blue Ridge.

I have cited these facts incident to the Snickers family to make plain the reason for christening our village Snickersville. A somewhat euphonic name, which despite the sneers of strangers, clung to it through good and evil reports for more than a hundred years. The prominence of the Snickers family in the Shenandoah Valley enabled them to stamp the name on ferry, gap, and village. Though modern sentiment has despoiled them of part of the honor, changing Snickers' Ferry to Castleman's Ferry, and Snickersville to Bluemont, I trust, in justice to these gallant old pioneers, the rugged gap in the Blue Ridge will carry the name proudly down through the coming ages.

William Clayton, another personage whose family was prominently connected with the history of our village, acquired the Snickers land presumably about the close of the Revolutionary War. This presumption is strengthened, if we credit the story often repeated in this locality, viz: that Wm. Clayton remained loyal to King George when the Colonies broke away - in other words, was a Tory, and, as such, was in great measure responsible for the massacre of the troops of Gen. Wayne at Paoli, Pennsylvania. Under these circumstances it is probable Pennsylvania was made rather hot for him and he beat a hasty retreat to the then wild section of Virginia. Here he built a dwelling house near a fine spring, known for many years as Clayton's spring. This spring's locality is between the stone church and public school house on the south side of Snickers' Gap and Alexandria Turnpike. The turnpike was doubtless located years after the house was built, and runs between the house and spring. The old house stood opposite the school house and was occupied up to about ten years ago; and a portion of the building yet remains. From Clayton's coming until near the end of the Eighteenth Century nothing is known as to the development of the village.

In 1797 Amos Clayton (son of William Clayton) built the large stone house which stands at the junction of the Leesburg road with the turnpike, now owned and occupied by the heirs of the late Townsend M. Osburn. About this time the old log school house was built on land donated for the purpose by Amos Clayton and was used as such until 1872 when it was superseded by the existing public school house. However, it is still well preserved, and is occupied as a tenant house on the T.M. Osburn farm. I have no information as to the time of Wm. Clayton's death. The land seems to have passed into the possession of his children prior to 1797, though the records show that it was conveyed by Richard H. Henderson, Adm'r of William Clayton, deceased, to his heirs, Amos, Israel, William and Martha Clayton, and others, by deed dated January 10, 1820. The next stone house (now owned and occupied by the heirs of Ashford Meadon) was built by Timothy Carrington, in 1807 or 17. The date marked on the gable is partially obliterated, leaving only first, second and last figures; 13-7.

In the early years of the 19th century the village had grown to an active little business place, with tavern, stores, blacksmith, wheelwright and other shops of artisans, such as at that day were needed to supply the wants of the neighborhood. Transportation of the products of the Shenandoah Valley, through Snickers' Gap, had grown to such proportions that many Loudoun farmers employed their teams in this business. This was

the day of the famous teams of "Hamilton and Pelter" of which I have heard many stories from contemporary generation of old wagoners. Fifty-five barrels of flour were hauled by Hamilton at a single six-horse load, from valley mills to Alexandria, aggregating with necessary feed for horses, six tons.

To accommodate this traffic came the necessity for a better road and while the nineteenth century was in her teens, the turnpike from Snickers' Ferry to Aldie was constructed. A Post Office had been established in 1806. The first Post Master was Lewis Stevens, who served until October 1, 1813 and was succeeded by Notley C. Williams, then doing business as a merchant.

About the latter end of the 3rd decade of the 19th century, the road leading from the District of Columbia, through Leesburg was completed to this place, and a stage route established which carried mail and passengers through in both directions, daily from Washington to Winchester, passing of course through Snickersville. Our mail facilities were thus rendered about equal to any place in the country at this time and, for many years afterwards, there being no Post Office at Round Hill, Silcott Springs and Paxson, added much to the life and importance of the place.

After the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio canal reached Harpers Ferry, most of the traffic through the gap, was directed to that channel and indeed much of the wheat grown in this region found a market at Smart's mill on the Potomac, thence to the canal. The village, however, trudged along, as most villages do that haven't enterprise, stimulated by exceptionally favorable locations, communicating readily with the great centers of trade. Many individuals from village and adjacent country joined the great caravans of emigrants to the middle Western States from 1830 to 1845 and thus retarded growth and population.

The writer settled here in 1852. At this time there were two taverns or hotels, kept respectively by Joah Osburn and A. Mason Moore; two stores of general merchandise, Silcott & Chamblin, and T.V. B. & T.M. Osburn were the styles of these respective firms, and a thriving business was done by each.

The character of the inhabitants of the village and surrounding country was rather unique. Those of the Piedmont region were mostly sturdy, independent farmers, possessors of broad acres and an abundance of good cheer; socially inclined, given to dancing, and free and easy enjoyment of the goods the gods had given them generally. It is impossible to rate them as a professedly religious community. The people of the mountain were primitive in manners and modes of living, full of fun, frolic and light, and often whiskey. They were wont, on frequent occasions, to paint the town a vivid red. This condition of things was not discouraged by the two open bars at the two taverns that dispensed intoxicants to all comers. In 1849 or 50, the people of the village and neighborhood built a church, the first and only one in the village. This is what is called a free church, belonging to no Christian denominations. But one denomination, the Methodist, has had regular stated service here since the church was built. They have had for the last fifty years, regular service here on alternate Sundays, throughout the year. As I

have indicated, Snickersville in former years was by no means a great religious center. The preachers from Hillsboro circuit had a sort of Mission here, prior to the building of the Church, and held services in the old log school house and preached to a little society of less than a dozen members, and such others as were inclined to attend. The Baptist churches at Ebenezer and Short Hills seem to have been the center of interest to our Piedmont citizens. At the present day witnesses a somewhat modified condition in this respect. The membership of the Methodist worshipping here has gone up to over a hundred members, and draws large, interested and intelligent congregations.

But I must ask the reader to go back again to the Halcyon days of "Befo' e wah" - to Snickersville, of the stage coach and horse-back riding - the days when Fadely's splendid teams of four and six horses were wont to dash into our village every afternoon, drawing the great lumbering Concord coach, winging on its many-piled leather springs, loaded often with passengers, inside, outside, and on top, to the number of fifteen to twenty, and the Washington mail. The arrival of the mail coach caused more of excitement among the scores of horses and horsemen lining the streets, as well as among the villagers, than the whistling and roaring approach of the railway train of the present day. Horsemen, galore, from all parts of the wide district receiving mail at this point were on hand to greet the incoming stages. With what pleasure the writer recalls those scenes. The spirited steeds, the flowing taces. Distinguished among them I remember Doctors Grady and Gibson of the elder horsemen - both splendid riders - and knowing a horse from foretop to fetlock, and their boys, and Jno. Levin Powells, a trio from each house, everyone a thorough horseman, and scores of others. Our section was essentially a section of fine saddle horses and splendid riders.

During the years 1850 to 1860 the village saw perhaps its most prosperous days. Steadily improvements were being made in dwellings and people. Then the war cloud burst over our heads; for four years we were torn and beaten by the pitiless storm. At the end the wreck was appalling. The farms adjacent were stripped of fences, barns were burnt, all livestock driven off, and means for providing for future wants exhausted. For miles around extended a treeless, prairie-like plain. The peculiar location of this village subjected it to unusual spoliation. Twice the vast hordes of the Northern army, sweeping along the eastern side of the Blue Ridge, camped here. Each time for many days, forces were retained at this point to guard the great pass, for Lee tarried in the valley opposite, and much skirmishing and some rough fighting took place between the opposite forces. In 1862, after Antietam, Hood's Division was thrown across, and established and held for some days a line on the eastern slope of the mountain, thus covering Snickers' Gap. A monument of his presence in the shape of a light breastwork of stones, extending for perhaps a mile on either side of the turnpike, remains to this day. In and around the village many engagements between White's, Mosby's, and other small bodies of Confederates were had with Mead's men and scouting parties of other Union forces. Pillage of inhabitants, of course, accompanied these incursions. The end came in 1865. The wearied and tattered soldiers came back to their isolated homes to take up again occupations hurriedly forsaken four years before. With indomitable will the work of restoration was resumed and in a few years most marks of the war were obliterated, and our village was prospering as never before.

The Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad was being pushed forward and we expected soon to have the mountain tunneled and railroad connections with the great outside world. But after completing the grading to within one mile of us, work on it was stopped short by the financial troubles of 1873. Yet, after the lapse of some years, the railroad reached Round Hill, four miles short of us, and while proving of much benefit to the surrounding country, to the village proper it was simply disastrous. Trade and business were drawn away, and the village left stranded in a motionless eddy, while the sparkling current swept rippling by. However, city people who followed up the railroad, seeking renewal of health and energy, in the high lands of upper Loudoun. Reaching the mountain at Snickersville, the mountain itself was explored, and many sought and obtained Summer board at cottages on the summit itself. Prof. Joseph Kaspar, of Washington, became so enamored with the grand scenery and exhilarating atmosphere of the region near the famous "Bear Den Rocks" that he determined to have a Summer home there. Others followed. A fine hotel was erected near the Gap for the accommodation of Summer visitors, and hundreds of people sought board in our village and neighborhood yearly. This state of things attracted the attention of the Southern Railway people and measures were put on foot by them to extend the W. & O. D. Branch to the base of the mountain. Snickersville and vicinity raised some \$5,000.00 to secure the right of way, etc., and the Railway Company built the road to that point. The first train of cars reached here July 4th, 1900.

This date marks an epoch in our history. The quaint little village becomes a railway town. The railroad people named the station Bluemont. The general post-office authorities changed the name of the post-office to Bluemont. Thus, after a century-and-a-half's existence, a re-christening. Hence we close the 19th, and commence the 20th century as BLUEMONT. Under suspicious conditions we start on a new career. An extensive section of land adjacent to the Railroad Station has been laid out in lots and streets - The Loudoun House, "two dwelling houses, a commodious storehouse, and a large warehouse and elevator, have been built and are now occupied. Since the building of the hotel in the Gap, eight new houses have been built on the summit of the mountain, in the immediate vicinity of the village, and four more are now in the course of erection. We have now in the village three well-equipped stores, selling general merchandise, one millinery establishment, one concern at the elevator, dealing in wheat, corn, fertilizers, flour, meal, feed, grass-seeds, etc., a livery stable and three hotels, all doing a lively business, and seemingly prospering. Also blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters and harness shop. Two physicians and a dentist are prepared to do needed repairs to the human machine.

This, Mr. Editor, brings our history up to date, and the end.

Resp'y.

George E. Plaster, M.D.
Father of Dr. Henry G. Plaster,
and Mrs. A.P. Osborne

May 12, 1902.