

# CHAPTER 8

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

---

### INTRODUCTION

---

Local history and culture provide a context in which people understand their community. Citizens can be instilled with a sense of pride associated with their heritage, and civic pride often manifests itself in local projects. A shared understanding of the past helps communities plan for the future in a more realistic fashion, making history and culture important considerations in the Comprehensive Planning process.

Campbell County has developed a rich inventory of historical events and places since its founding in 1781. The County has much to offer residents and tourists alike. Significant historical events, cultural celebrations, and unique places can all be used to encourage tourism and foster civic pride. This chapter outlines the history and culture of the County and how it might be used to our benefit.

---

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

---

**GOAL 1: Increase awareness of properties and structures in Campbell County that are significant from an architectural, historical or archeological perspective.**

Objective 1: Support organizations concerned with historic preservation in Campbell County.

Objective 2: Encourage owners of historic properties to preserve and maintain them using all available funding sources.

Objective 3: Promote compatible land uses in the vicinity of recognized historic properties.

**GOAL 2: Promote the County's history, culture and tourism**

Objective 1: Encourage events and activities that celebrate local heritage.

Objective 2: Coordinate tourism activities that complement the efforts of local historical and cultural organizations.

Objective 3: Support public and private efforts to enhance awareness of the County's historical significance.

Objective 4: Work cooperatively with the Campbell County Historical Society to promote planned activities and exhibits related to the Historic Courthouse Museum in Rustburg.

---

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INVENTORY

---

### HISTORY

Campbell County was formed in 1781, the first Virginia county formed after the American Revolution. Land for the new county came as a result of the division of Bedford County, and the name was chosen in honor of General William Campbell, a hero of the battle of King's Mountain in the Revolutionary War. Originally inhabited by the Monacan Indians, the area was visited by explorers as early as 1670. The earliest settlement in Campbell County was established in about 1736 at Hat Creek by a group of Scotch-Irish pioneers from Pennsylvania.

New London, located in the northwest corner of the County, was the seat of Bedford County prior to the formation of Campbell County. The village was the scene of several important historical events, including the Hook Case. The famous orator and statesman, Patrick Henry, launched a tirade against John Hook and his New London Tory friends during the American Revolution. A substantial weapons arsenal was also located in the village of New London. Out of fear of having the weapons captured by the British and their local sympathizers, local patriots moved the arsenal to Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). This was the very same arsenal raided by abolitionist John Brown in 1859, just before the Civil War.

Rustburg has been the County seat since 1784, when Jeremiah Rust donated land for a courthouse. Rust donated 50 acres of his meadowland, and the village that grew up around the courthouse and jail became known as Rustburg.

The Town of Brookneal was founded in 1800 when John Brooke established a tobacco warehouse at a ferry crossing on the Staunton River. The Town was officially established by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1802. For many years after its founding, Brookneal was a center of agricultural activity, especially tobacco trading.

Henry L. and John E. Lane, contractors on a project to extend the Virginia Railroad along the Staunton River, founded the Town of Altavista around 1907. The Town was chartered by the General Assembly in 1912, the same year that the brothers commenced operation of the Lane Company, originators of the renowned Lane cedar chests.

When a railroad serving Altavista and Brookneal was constructed in the southern part of the County in 1907, the two towns began their development as manufacturing centers. With the rail system for transportation and the Staunton River for hydroelectric, the towns became important locations for industrial activity in the County.

Manufacturing has been an important influence on Campbell County. With its concentrations of industrial activity in Altavista and Brookneal and its proximity to the City of Lynchburg, Campbell County emerged from a predominantly agricultural area into one characterized by a strong manufacturing sector and growing residential suburbs. Recent economic shifts have led to a more diverse local economy.

The City of Lynchburg, currently 51 square miles in size with a total population of more than 75,000, began as a small Campbell County community overlooking the James River. The Lynchburg area provides the residents of Campbell and the other nearby counties with many of the employment, shopping, entertainment, health care and other opportunities available in the region.

## **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES**

Campbell County's many historic and cultural features serve as points of interest for County residents and tourists alike. The features commemorate significant historical events, showcase past modes of transportation, and illustrate and preserve the richness of the County's heritage.

Campbell County is home to many properties and structures on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. All of the following listings are on both:

- **Altavista Downtown Historic District** – Encompasses approximately 14 acres in the heart of the Town of Altavista and includes the original commercial and governmental core.
- **Avoca** – Located in Altavista, the home site of Colonel Charles Lynch is open to the public.
- **Blenheim** – Built before 1782, this house is located on the Falling River near the tiny mill community of Mike.
- **Brookneal Historic District** – Encompasses approximately 55 acres in the commercial and residential core of the Town of Brookneal in Campbell County. Character-defining features of the district include intact residential and commercial architecture dating from the early nineteenth century through the middle twentieth century, and town lots arranged in a linear fashion along roadways that historically led to ferry and bridge crossings of the Staunton River.
- **Historic Campbell County Courthouse and Museum** – Built in 1848, it has its original courtroom ornamental ceiling. In May 2006 the Campbell County Historical Society established a museum in the Historic Courthouse in Rustburg.
- **Caryswood** – Built circa 1855 for the Saunders family and situated on the southwest slope of Willey's Mountain, east of Flat Creek and the village of Evington in Campbell County. The resource occupies a 15-acre tract on the north side of Colonial Highway (Virginia Route 24), and is largely buffered from its surroundings by a perimeter of mature hardwood forest.
- **Cat Rock Sluice** – Part of the Roanoke Navigational Canal, near Brookneal.
- **Federal Hill** – Located near New London, James Steptoe built it prior to 1880. Mr. Steptoe was the Clerk of Bedford County for 54 years.
- **Green Hill** – Located near Long Island on the Staunton River, Samuel Pannill built this home in 1797.
- **Mount Athos** – Includes the Robertson family cemetery and the Mount Athos slave cemetery.
- **Oak Grove** – Located on Gladys Road near Altavista, Oak Grove is an historic property with architecture dating back to the 1750s. Oak Grove remains much as it was in the time of Philip M. Payne, the son of the original owner. Five outbuildings also survive-a

smokehouse, a slave quarter, a grain shed, a hay barn, and a privy as well as the remains of a kitchen and an icehouse.

- **Shady Grove** – Located on Mollies Creek Road near Gladys, the home was built on property inherited by Spotswood Henry, son of Patrick Henry.
- **Six Mile Bridge** – Formerly used by the railroad to cross the James River near Mt. Athos.
- **Walnut Hill** – Near Lawyers Road, noted for a cemetery, farmhouse and agricultural outbuildings of the 1800s.

One historically significant site that is just outside of the County in Charlotte County is **Red Hill**. It was the last home and burial place of Patrick Henry, the famous orator, statesman, and five-time governor of Virginia. Listed as a National Historic Landmark, the site is a public shrine dedicated to the memory of Henry and his compatriots.

Other notable sites within Campbell County include:

- **Lynch Tree** – located near Wards Road on the Avoca property, the old walnut tree under which Colonel Charles Lynch and others held informal court. Tories and criminals were tried here in 1780. From this evolved the term “Lynch Law.” Tories were hung from a limb by their thumb until they cried “liberty forever” three times.
- **Nickup** - former tavern where Patrick Henry rested on trips between his homes and now is a private residence.
- **White Hall** – the 1810 plantation that still contains two original construction native stone servants’ quarters.
- **Timberlake** – an early example of a planned lake and subdivision.
- **Oxford Furnace** – Pre-Civil War iron furnace company located on Richmond Highway

The County’s communities and towns not only feature historically and culturally significant sites and structures, but these areas are also important in their own right. Many settlements were established prior to the American Revolution, including the **Hat Creek community**. Hat Creek is located six miles northeast of Brookneal and is the County’s oldest settlement. **Naruna** and **Leesville** were centers of trade during this time. **Evington** was the site of a mill and a tavern providing a resting-place for travelers. The tavern later became the location of the train station. **Concord** was one of the earliest settlements and later became an important railroad stop. The train depot was the target of a Union Cavalry raid in the Civil War. **New London** was the county seat of Bedford County before the formation of Campbell County in 1781.

**Rustburg** has been the seat of local government since 1784. The central government complex, together with a number of businesses, schools, and residential areas, make the village a center of activity. **Brookneal** has been an incorporated town since 1802. **Long Island** came into existence with the coming of the Virginian Railroad in 1907 and became a bustling community in the 1920’s. It is now the site of a recreational park and boat landing. **Altavista** was the first planned community in the County. Founded by the Lane brothers in 1907, it has a number of popular annual events and the largest population among the area towns and villages.

In 2007 Campbell County participated in the Virginia 2007 Community Program which

commemorated the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Jamestown.

Both natural and man-made water features played an integral role in the economic development and settlement patterns of the County. The **Staunton (Roanoke) River** was a critical asset to settlers in the southern portion of the County and to the towns of Altavista and Brookneal. The **Kanawha Canal** once served as a primary source of commerce and transportation along the James River in Central Virginia, while the **Cat Rock Sluice**, located near Brookneal, was part of the Roanoke Navigational Canal. Today, **Leesville Lake** is the smaller of the two lakes that make up the Smith Mountain storage and hydroelectric project. The scenic and recreational opportunities provided at Leesville Lake make it a popular destination.

---

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION PLAN

---

Campbell County will continue to promote its history and culture through these strategies:

1. Discourage the destruction of properties of historical significance during highway and public utilities construction, as well as residential, commercial, and industrial development.
2. Encourage local groups to visit both the Historic Courthouse Museum in Rustburg and the New London Museum in Evington and assist in promoting their ongoing events, exhibits and activities.
3. Promote local history and tourism through the Department of Economic Development.

### SUMMARY

Campbell County residents have opportunities to study and celebrate their heritage. The County hopes to increase the awareness of available resources and also protect and enhance them through the policies and strategies presented in this chapter. In addition, it is hoped that additional opportunities will be developed that will promote a greater understanding of local history and culture. These opportunities will not only serve local residents, but also attract visitors interested in sampling the rich and diverse heritage of Campbell County.