

BICENTENNIAL SECTION

WELCOME to Sperryville!

MAIN STREET

— EST. 1820 —

July 1820: “A town laid off by me in a flat on the River between Pass Mill and Thornton Gap on the Turnpike.”

BY DAPHNE HUTCHINSON

Two centuries ago, that mention by Francis Thornton, Jr. marks the beginning of Rappahannock’s gateway village to the Blue Ridge. This Presbyterian minister sent from Fredericksburg to establish a church in the town of Washington was a grandson of the Francis Thornton who gave the F.T. Valley its name, and he inherited the land around what would become Sperryville from the brother of his first wife, Jane Washington Thornton.

Growth came quickly. Lots were sold, a license was granted for an ordinary, and a saloon served stagecoach travelers stopping at the tavern and stage office on the route between the Culpeper Court House and New Market. Just a year after Francis envisioned a settlement on paper, an 1821 map of Culpeper included “the village of Sperryville.”

As to the name, there’s no definitive tale of origin. In his “Rappahannock History: Fact, Fiction, Foolishness and Fairfax Story,” Ned Johnson writes that maybe a man named Sperry built the first house there, although he notes that the Sperry name doesn’t show up in land or tax records. An alternate theory is that a Mr. Sperry ran the stage house located where Routes 600 and 1001 (today’s Main Street Sperryville) intersect, or maybe he was a friend of Francis Thornton’s and lived in one of his houses. And there’s yet another possibility. Johnson also writes that the 1820 census lists Nichs. Sperry, likely the same Nicholas Spiry who was the first postmaster

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CAPTIONS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE; “WELCOME TO SPERRYVILLE” ARTWORK COURTESY OF ROBERT ARCHER

A SPECIAL SECTION IN THE RAPPAHANNOCK NEWS, CULPEPER TIMES & INSIDENOVA.COM

A Rappahannock County village in the shadow of the Blue Ridge turned 200 on July 17.

More about visiting Sperryville & Rappahannock County:

sperryfest.org
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PULLOUT SECTION

Doc Amiss talked turkey

Dr. W.H. Amiss, who practiced in Sperryville during the Civil War, is credited with the following saying: "A turkey is a very inconvenient sized bird — too big for one and two small for two." (By all accounts, Dr. Amiss was an enormous man with a hearty appetite.)

He carried a small black case full of glass vials — two for strychnine (powdered and tablet forms), and one each for calomel, digitalin, anodyne and podophyllin. In a larger case, the doctor packed pills and powders sorted by ailment: headache, bowels, liver, kidney, stomach, constipation, gas, malaria and indigestion.

According to local lore, Rappahannock's two doctors during the Civil War years, William Amiss and D.D. Miller, drew lots to determine who would go to war to care for soldiers and who would stay behind to care for the home folks. Dr. Amiss won; he became Gen. Stonewall Jackson's physician.

It's said that during the Civil War, a fatally wounded Yankee was brought to Dr. Amiss while he was home on furlough. He and his wife buried the dead soldier in their backyard (across the street from what is now the post office) and sent his watch and papers to his family in the north. Years later, the dead soldier's relatives reportedly came to Sperryville to search for the grave but they never found the burial site.

—Daphne Hutchinson



Old Sperryville's evaporating plants (on the lot that's now the Rescue Squad) sent barrels of apples across the country and the Atlantic. The plants were part of a village apple center that expanded to include packing, cider and cold storage and helped Rappahannock rank third among Virginia counties in apple production. Dried apples, canned tomatoes, apple juice and apple sauce carried the Sperryville label. (The fellow balanced on the roof peak on the right is Harry Woodard, the uncle of former Sperryville postmaster Aline Johnson, who lives on Thornton Gap Church Road.)

HISTORY

From Page S1

at Thornton's Gap. The town may have been named for him, albeit with a misspelling, since that post office served the area until 1840. The post office could

have been in his home and maybe he was exempted from local taxes as a result, which would explain why his name doesn't appear on the tax rolls, Johnson speculated.

RAIDS BUT NO BATTLES

The 1860s brought war. No battles were fought in Rappahannock but Union and Confederate forces crisscrossed the county on marches, wounded soldiers in both blue and gray recovered or died in make-shift hospital beds in local homes, and troops from both sides plundered horses, livestock, food and supplies from farms. Sperryville mustered the 49th Virginia Volunteers Infantry, Company K, dubbed The Sperryville Sharpshooters. The names of the enlistees are the same familiar family names of today's Sperryville: Atkins, Brown, Bruce, Dodson, Dwyer, Eastham, Fincham, Frazier, Jenkins, Leake, Menefee, Sisk,

Spicer, Weakley and Woodward.

Aylette H. Buckner, Jr., who lived in the F.T. Valley and served 32 years on the Rappahannock Board of Supervisors (1936-1967), grew up listening to his father's tales about Yankee soldiers raiding the farms around Sperryville. The son wrote down the elder Buckner's words as he spoke, and in 1977 he shared those stories and more tales from the county's past with Laurie Marshall, an artist and teacher, who recorded and transcribed Buckner's stories for "Voices of Rappahannock."

The senior Buckner was just 14 when Union troops rode through Sperryville and into the F.T. Valley in early December of 1863. For months, folks had been yelling "The Yankees are coming, the Yankees are coming!" just to scare people into hiding valuables and rushing horses into the woods. And as with the boy who called wolf, the warnings soon drew

ON THE FRONT PAGE From top to bottom:

- The house at 31 Main in the late 1800s, next door to today's Before & After cafe. The shed in the backyard is still standing today.
- Mrs. Pauline Bruce, likely in the late 1930s, on the steps of Sperryville School, where she taught English and Latin. A 1930 Sperryville graduate, she first taught at a one-room school in neighboring Warren County. Before returning to teach high school at Sperryville, she spent two years at the three-grade Amissville School, earning an extra \$5 a month for the principal's duties, which included sweeping floors and lighting morning fires.
- Aline Brown, ready for the 1947 May Court. This was Sperryville School's signature annual event. (More on this on page S4 and next week.)

Happy Birthday, Sperryville!



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Main Street, Sperryville, around 1840.

➔ little attention. But this time, young Aylette heard something in the voice that made him uneasy. So he saddled up to check and in no more than a half mile, he spotted two Yankees. He drew his pistol, yelled "Halt!" and the soldiers galloped away. Knowing more troops would be nearby, Buckner wheeled and raced for home with the sound of hoofbeats echoing in pursuit. The road was full of Yankees, they started firing, and Buckner fired back as he rode for the shelter of the woods. Then, all of a sudden, the horse he was riding — a Union army horse that had been captured by the boy's uncle, Ned Gibson, one of Mosby's men — stopped dead still, neighing, and wouldn't move. Buckner jumped off and ran for the trees, as his mother cried, "My Lord, my Lord, they will kill my boy. He's just a mere child!" And a Yank yelled back, "Well, he can shoot."

That morning, Buckner's father had taken a team up into the mountains for a load of brandy. The boy intercepted his return to warn of the Yankee incursion. In the dark, they could see the campfires of the Union troops so the senior Buckner took his load of apple and peach brandy elsewhere to stash for the night. But instead of seeking safety with his dad, the boy turned towards the enemy's bivouac. Snow was falling fast. Moving slowly and cautiously, Aylette Buckner crept to the picket line, just 30 feet from the guards traipsing back and forth, rifles on their shoulders. Cattle milled behind a fence 20 feet away. The



The boys who worked for Harry Smoot at the Sperryville Locust Pin and Cooperage Company. *Top row, left to right: Luther Compton, Gilbert Compton, Blue Brown, C.F. Johnson, Mr. Smoot, Will Hyde, Roscoe Bruce, Will Johnson, Charlie Brown.* *Second row, left to right: Harry Woodard, Gilbert Heaton, Stockton Bywaters, Aubrey Johnson, Henry Squinch Brown, Leo (Kitty) Brown, Tom Hilton, Clifton Menefee.* *Front row seated, left to right: Allie Kendall, Joe B. Johnson, Cleveland Jefferson, Ashby (Scott) Johnson, Pete Hilton, Worsy Jefferson.*

boy dismounted, quietly let the fence down, remounted and with kicks from his booted feet and nips from the horse, drove the livestock into the woods and a mile and a half up the mountain. By morning, the snow had obliterated all tracks and the Union troops pulled out without searching for the herd.

The news of 44 liberated cows

spread fast, and farmers whose stock had been looted by passing Yankees made their way to the F.T. Valley to claim their animals. Young Buckner drove the 10 unclaimed cattle 50 miles to Charlottesville for safe keeping, finding feed and shelter on the journey by fooling farmers into believing they were "government cattle." ➔

Camp #27

During the Depression, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp #27 was home and livelihood for single men unable to find work. Today, Beech Spring is the site of Hearthstone School, but almost a century ago, it was barracks, mess tents and equipment sheds — the base for about a hundred young men, mostly Virginians with a sprinkling from Rappahannock County. They were paid \$30 a month, but the government wanted to ensure that the public works money wasn't squandered on weekend fun in "out town" — local lingo for downtown Sperryville — or the more cosmopolitan Luray over the mountain, so \$25 of that was sent back home to the corpsmen's families. The typical term of service was six months, and during that time, the men from Beech Spring built a road across the Hazel River and roads and trails in Mack Hollow, Jenkins Hollow and Piney Hill. For decades, until it was blown over in a storm, the giant beech tree that gave Beech Spring its name bore hundreds of initials carved by the men who passed through that camp.

—Daphne Hutchinson

Opening mid-July 2020, physical therapist Christian Co is excited to launch Rappahannock Physical Therapy: a private clinic, located in historic Washington, VA.

We provide one-on-one treatment for active clients striving to improve core strength, dynamic balance, postural awareness, and flexibility.

Also, in collaboration with Stonewall Abbey Wellness in Sperryville, VA, Chris offers an enhanced therapy experience in a modern gymnasium with top quality equipment and a commitment to quality of life.



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Sperryville!

➔ Those 10 cattle and 100 pounds of tobacco — disguised as a bed and hidden in plain sight in the corner of a room — were all the Buckners had left at conflict's end.

GROWTH CONTINUED THROUGH CONFLICT

Despite the trials of war, the village of Sperryville continued to thrive and grow. In the 1860s, the Smoot family laid out more lots and built C.C. Smoot & Sons Tannery between the two branches of the Thornton River, now known as the River District. By 1880, the village boasted four churches, seven distillers, two hotels, a woolen mill, four general stores, one saloon, a doctor's office, a wheelwright and, within a short wagon ride, 10 flour and corn mills.

By 1890, Sperryville's population topped 350. With the turn of the century came a Mason Hall. The lodge meetings were held upstairs, and downstairs the community gathered for traveling shows, local entertainment and, later, movies. Seventy-seven-year-old Manly Bruce, who went to elementary school in Sperryville, remembers his father Jack, Rappahannock's legendary master of hounds, recalling with admiration the keyboard artistry of Cathryn Trescott Cooper, who played the piano for silent movies as well as for the Episcopal Church. "The screen was on the stage, and she had to look up so she could see the action and know what kind of



Sperryville High School's senior class of 1928. Left to right boys: Alfred Armstrong, Robert Estes, Stanley Golden, Charles Morse Sours and Thomas Williams. Left to right girls: Edna Bennett, Beulah Brown, Pauline Compton (class president), Kathryn Cornette (secretary-treasurer), Annie May Dodson.

music to play," Manley recalled from his dad's stories.

By 1911, business was booming in Sperryville. There was a jeweler and watchmaker, blacksmiths and wheelwrights, a doctor, a dentist, a furniture maker, five general stores, five flour and corn mills, a saw mill, three music teachers and a barber.

But that same year, the tannery closed and between 40 and 50 folks lost their jobs. Some followed that business to North Carolina, others simply moved on to look for work elsewhere. Then in 1918, the Rappahannock

Evaporating Plant brought employment opportunities back to Sperryville and gave orchardists an outlet for crops, sending barrels of dried apples as far off as England, when it began operations on the lot where the Rescue Squad building now sits.

A tomato canning plant also operated for a few years near the old tannery site. Aline Johnson, a lifelong Sperryville resident, remembers tagging along with her mother, who worked at the plant. Born in 1929, Aline was the youngest of 12 children — eight girls (two died as babies from whooping cough) and four boys. "The rest were in school, so I went to work with my mother," recalled the spritely and active nonagenarian, who still has a twinkle in her eye and only abandoned her bike two years ago because it needed new tires. "I thought it best for me to give up riding," she added. But back in the day at the Sperryville tomato plant, the energetic preschooler sat quietly on a stool for hours behind her mom as she peeled, peeled, peeled tomatoes . . . and she still has the ancient tomato knife her mom used on the job.

NEW DEAL PROGRAM BRINGS HELP TO SPERRYVILLE

In the aftermath of the Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps Camp at Beech Spring also gave Sperryville a boost by providing farmers with a nearby market for produce, meat, milk and eggs to feed the 100 or so corpsmen housed in barracks there. Unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 25, most from Virginia and a few from Rappahannock, the CCC crew was paid in "real money," and on their free weekends, the cash was a welcome injection into a local economy that had become heavily dependent on barter.

A second evaporating plant and a pin factory opened where the electrical plant is now. The pin factory was definitely a niche business, manufacturing the threaded wooden pins that glass insulators screwed into at the tops of power line poles. Neither pin maker nor evaporator stayed in business for long. Then in 1936, local orchardists got serious, combined their efforts and built the Sperryville packing house, cold storage and juice plant at the site. At about the same time, highway improvements and the opening of Shenandoah National Park brought

COMING UP

• **Rappahannock's Tooth Fairy of a different sort:** Mary Botts Miller Quaintance Snead left her mark on Sperryville and the county, ensuring that a generation of children had access to dental care.

• **Lessons from the Depression:** Teamwork a lesson for today.

In next week's Rapp News and, for those in Culpeper and Nova, at rappnews.com



roadside attractions to Sperryville — lunch rooms, motels, restaurants and stands selling fruit, produce and trinkets. Homemade ice cream on Sundays at the Lee Highway Hotel and fried chicken at the Cab Inn were big draws for locals and visitors alike.

Carolyn Thornton's family owned Piedmont Farm in the F.T. Valley. Her father, Klaus Tholand, had his business office in New York City until 1960 and was gone during the work week. "When he returned home, the first thing he wanted was fried chicken from the Cab Inn!" she recalled.

Another less talked about draw was moonshine. Back in the hollows, mountain folk grew "corn ears as long as your arm," according to Charles Estes, who with his wife Dot operated the Cab Inn of fried chicken fame. Some of that corn was diverted to stills, and many families were moonshiners, making whiskey for medicinal use, drinking and sale. The best came from Hazel and Nicholson Hollow, according to Estes. On weekends, moonshiners and their families would come down from the mountain with their jugs and sit along the highway, the illegal booze tucked under the skirts of the mothers and daughters, waiting for customers to drive out from the city.

The combination of the new park's wild beauty, the Skyline Drive, fresh-picked apples, moonshine and old fashioned hospitality worked to revitalize Sperryville. As Charlie Estes remembered: "One day folks just looked out and saw cars bumper to bumper going to the drive."

Today, Sperryville has a new take on rural charm. B&Bs have replaced tourist homes. Breweries, wineries and a distillery sell legal spirits. Roadside stands have given way to family farm and community-supported agriculture markets. The village is reinventing itself as an arts and antiques center and a mecca for foodies. But the sounds of happy children playing, neighbor greeting neighbor and locals welcoming visitors to this little gateway to the Blue Ridge still echo through the streets of Sperryville.

Even after 200 years, some things never change.

Daphne Hutchinson is a former editor of the Rappahannock News and author of "On the Morning Side of the Blue Ridge: A Glimpse of Rappahannock County's Past," published in 1983, when the county turned 150.



RAPPAHANNOCK'S LIVING ROOM

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Mary Botts Miller Quaintance Snead left her mark on Sperryville and Rappahannock County

She was the Tooth Fairy of a different sort

BY DAPHNE HUTCHINSON

Teacher and principal at Sperryville School from 1929 to 1969, then principal of the new Rappahannock Elementary School until her retirement in 1977, Mrs. Quaintance touched the lives of thousands of youngsters. She taught them science, English and math, coached them to excellence on the basketball court, gave them lessons — and an example — in deportment, manners and responsibility. But her lasting legacy also flashes bright in the broad toothy smiles of long-time Rappahannock folks in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s who were in her classrooms and schools and learned to brush, floss, swish and keep regular dates with a dentist.

She was the Tooth Fairy of a different sort, ensuring that children had access to dental care under their pillows. It's not too much of a stretch to say that plenty of locals have teeth instead of gums and dentures, thanks to Mary Botts.

She was a Hollow girl. She grew up dueling with dried corn stalks, playing tennis, swimming and riding horses in Gid Brown. She attended the one-room Smedley School, and her teacher from first grade until high school, was her cousin, Bertie Lib Moffett. Mary Botts rode a carriage to Washington on weekends to visit her grandmother at The Meadows; on weekdays, she rode her horse to town for high school. After college, she taught in Arlington for two years before coming home to Sperryville in 1929.

She returned with a new awareness. "It was obvious to me that most of our rural children were healthy except for their teeth. It was a shame to see a beautiful boy or girl with rotten teeth," Mary Botts recalled in an 80th birthday interview with the Rappahannock News.

And so a cause was born.

She persuaded three Culpeper dentists to provide free dental care for youngsters from the Sperryville School. She squeezed kids into the rumble seat of her car and hauled them 25 miles to offices in the next county. When the load grew too big, she used a bus. When the free services were no more, a wealthy landowner gave money to continue the dental care program, his generosity spurred by



Mary Botts Miller in the Roaring Twenties. "We had dances all the time, even in the horse and buggy days. These were the days of the big jazz bands. We'd go anywhere to a dance — Culpeper, Luray, Front Royal."

Mary Quaintance Snead at 84, retired but busy. She was a regular visitor to friends who were homebound or in senior homes, an ardent bridge player and active member of the Episcopal Church Women and the Retired Teachers Association.



gratitude for the assistance of Ruby Jenkins, Extension Office secretary and one of Mrs. Quaintance's partners in the dental hygiene campaign. The tooth fairy then recruited new dental school graduates to take on young Rappahannock patients at starter rates. Next she found a retired dentist to bring his own equipment and set up a little dental office in the Washington School. When he returned to private practice in Northern Virginia, he left an office full of equipment behind. So she tapped Public Health Nurse Francis Thornton, another partner on behalf of Rappahannock's children, for a share of her space to continue the school dentistry program with young dentists that she recruited.

The big deal at Little Washington

High School was County Commencement, and to take the spotlight there, kids needed good grades. The big deal at little Sperryville High School was May Day, and to be part of those festivities, kids needed good dental care.

Through it all, Mrs. Quaintance continued her person-to-person tooth fairy work behind the scenes. Carolyn Thornton, who rode to school from Piedmont Farm in the F.T. Valley in a woody station wagon driven by teacher Pauline Bruce, remembers hearing a talk through the principal's office door left ajar. Mrs. Quaintance was speaking to a little boy from the mountain. "These are yours," the principal said, handing the child a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste. "You take them home, you use that toothbrush twice a day, and you do not share it with anyone!"

(Carolyn also remembers Mrs. Quaintance's Board of Education, a

legendary paddle with holes about the size of dimes. It was employed only in the direst of disciplinary circumstances, and Carolyn swears she was never on the receiving end, but she does own up to having to write "I will not talk in class" 500 times on the blackboard).

Sally Latham Haynes remembers two punishments from her four years at Sperryville: "The entire school was required to come outside and watch. Mrs. Quaintance and the miscreant would be up on the porch, and we'd be standing on the ground. She had the boy bend over a desk, and she whacked away. The paddle punishment was for fighting, I think. I don't know where cheating and lying fell. For cussing, she had the kid wash his mouth out with soapy water. A whole glass of it.)"

But Mrs. Quaintance was much more focused on keeping the peace so learning could happen than on imposing punishment when the peace was broken. In the early 1930s, before the establishment of Shenandoah National Park evicted families from the mountains, poorer children would sometimes show up for class in torn and worn clothes unsuited for school, attire that drew attention in unwanted ways. So Mrs. Quaintance set up a school loan closet — clothes and shoes to be donned for the day and returned before the children walked home. And she saw to it that smudged kids washed first. "I know that's true," affirmed Aileen Johnson. "I know because my older sister helped. Mrs. Quaintance did so much for so many. No one will ever know all that she did."

In addition to employing the legendary Board of Education, Mary Botts posted a legendary record — 15 years *undefeated* as coach of Sperryville's girls' basketball team. Aline Johnson, a 1947 grad of Sperryville high, recently looked back on life in the village from her front porch at Chestnut Cove. She recalled bumping over the mountain and down the valley to Harrisonburg for one memorable game, the team packed into Mrs. Quaintance's car. "Three of our girls came back over the mountain that night with scholarship offers from Madison College," she remembers.

In another memorable victory over Charlottesville High School — a true David versus Goliath, 100 enrollment against 1,000 enrollment — the Sperryville girls held the giant scoreless for the entire contest. Not a single goal was scored by the opponents. With characteristic modesty, Mrs. Quaintance attributed the success to the natural ability of her girls. But in a 1991 Rappahannock News interview, a former player had another explanation: "You know →

→ the way she blinks those eyes. We were afraid to mess up!”

Blinks aside, in most times for most things, Mrs. Quaintance relied on strength of personality and breadth of knowledge. She knew where kids hid out when they skipped school, and she sent the custodian to collect them. She knew the families in crisis. She knew the parents and the grandparents, the aunts, uncles and cousins. She knew the children who needed extra watching or extra comfort. She knew the children who could give comfort and keep watch. She knew where and how to find help. She could say the right thing at the right time in the right way for a young person to hear . . . and remember.

Named principal for Sperryville’s elementary grades in 1950, she shouldered those “part-time” duties while keeping the books, doing her own typing, and teaching seventh grade English, math and physical education. In 1967, Mrs. Quaintance became the first principal of the new consolidated elementary school, and thereafter until her retirement in 1976, she could be found most days walking the halls for 15 minutes after the first bell and 15 minutes before the last bell — the best times for observing classrooms and seeing where help might be needed, she maintained.

Her husband, Dike Quaintance, died in 1972, and she remained a widow for 15 years. In childhood, Mary Botts Miller had been best friends with John Snead, also born and raised in Gid Brown Hollow. One Sunday the Millers would visit the Sneads and the next, the Sneads would visit the Millers, and in between the kids played together. Her brother and the Snead boys did the typical country pranks, like shooting out windows with BB guns, and she and her sister put on performances of original plays for the often impatient boys. They went to different elementary schools but the same high school, different colleges but they both returned to Rappahannock to teach. After one year, John gave it up for med school. Following graduation and an internship in Abington, he opened an office in Sperryville. He and his nurse bride, Lydia “Pinkie” Crabbe Snead, became great friends with Dike and Mary Quaintance, and for decades, they moved in the same social circuit.

In 1986, Dr. Snead was also a widower who had devoted a lifetime to caring for Rappahannock’s children, and the two old friends began keeping company. Aileen Johnson remembers the call from Mary Botts one morning, likely in late 1986. “She asked for Carson (Aileen’s husband, another Hollow boy of that same generation) but he was out, so I offered to take a message. She said she was getting married and wanted Carson to give her away! I thought it was a joke, that she was kidding me.” But it seems Dr. Snead invited Mary to go to Florida with him. Aileen remembers Rappahannock’s educator for a half century saying that she explained to Rappahannock’s country doctor of 39



The Sperryville May Court of 1957. Left to right: Peggy Smoot, three girls Doris Ann Dodson, Betty Kay Kilby, Alice Wood, Tish Kilby, Diane Bruce, Sally Latham (Haynes), Dorothy Payne (Clater), Molly Smith (Snead) and Linda Rowzie (Hahn). Their excellent dental care was motivated and facilitated by Mrs. Quaintance, and their lovely dresses were made by their moms.



Sperryville’s 1947 May Court, all certified to be practicing good dental hygiene. Left to right: Myrtle Burke, Betty Jo Black, Jane Butler, Caroline Jenkins, Aline Brown, Ella Mae Atkins, Peggy Pruitt, Joan Kelly Aylor, Rhoda Herrell and Jean Brown. The little attendants are (left to right) Nancy Brown, Judy Hawkins and two unidentified children.

NEXT WEEK

• **Lessons from the Depression:**
Teamwork a lesson for today.

years: “I can’t do that! What would all the children think of me? What would they say?” He responded, “Well, what if we were married?”

And that was that. They wed on Valentine’s Day, 1987, and they went south to Boca Raton for the winter. She was 81, and he was 80.

Corduroy roads and convict crews

Roy Atkins grew up in what is now Shenandoah National Park and started working for the Highway Department in 1948 at the maintenance shed in Sperryville. Interviewed in 1982, he remembered when Route 211 was just a dirt road from Sperryville to Beech Springs and the only traffic was horses and mules pulling buggies, wagons and slides (wooden flat beds on runners for hauling corn, apples and whatever else that needed moving from one place to another.)

Convict crews built the first hard surfaced roads in Rappahannock in the early 1930s, and one of the prison camps was on the outskirts of Sperryville at Beech Springs, near Atkins’ boyhood home. Convicts hauled rock from quarries on Luray Mountain, hammered the stone into three or four inch pieces for the road base, heated tar in kettles over wood fires, and then poured the hot tar over the base. Those first blacktops weren’t much of a road by today’s standards. Atkins recalls his father heading out for the tannery in Luray before dawn with a load of wood, a journey of about 20 miles. “He’d leave one morning and stay overnight, return the next day with a load of hay.” Trips were never wasted — haulers always had a load each way.

By the time Atkins started working for the Highway Department in the late 1940s, crews were using kerosene burners instead of wood fires to heat tar to 300 degrees, and “corduroy” roads were disappearing. (So named because they had the uneven surface of waled cloth, these old roads were built by laying small logs side by side, then covering them with dirt in a vain attempt to smooth the bumps.) The Sperryville crew boasted two surplus Army trucks for a maintenance fleet. “That was it. That was what we had,” remembered Atkins. Everything was loaded by hand. Crushed rock to fill mud holes on rutted roads was dug with shovels from creek beds; a favorite spot was between Five Forks and Rock Mills where the water had dropped and left gravel in a pile. In the winter, the crew mixed sand and chemicals, then spread the mix on icy spots — all by hand. Roy’s first job was with a brush crew, cutting back weeds and thickets from road shoulders, again by hand, with a sickle . . . for 55 cents an hour.

— Daphne Hutchinson

A few years later, after Dr. Snead’s death, Aileen took a call and another message from Mrs. Quaintance. This time, “Mary wanted to ask Carson to do her funeral. She said ‘He gave me away to my second husband. I want him to help lay me down for the last time.’”

And that was the Sperryville tooth fairy, beloved teacher, winningest basketball coach and performer of good deeds who served in loco parentis for so many of the county’s children. No fuss. No nonsense. Just Mary Botts Miller Quaintance Snead.

Sperryville teamwork is a lesson for today

BY DAPHNE HUTCHINSON

The Depression came a little late to farm and mountain communities — fads and fashions, social trends, economic phenomena, slang, new products and new ideas took more time to travel back then. And it didn't make a huge difference in Rappahannock. Not the life shattering difference it made elsewhere. In fact, old timers would insist the cataclysmic event barely registered here. According to H.B. Wood, the eighth generation of his family to farm on the slopes of Red Oak Mountain, the county was already depressed and always had been, with people subsistence farming, depending on each other and living off the land. But the hard times, such as they were, lingered in Rappahannock while the rest of the nation raced to recovery.

In the mid-1930s, there were still families in the foothills above Sperryville and tucked back in the hollows who didn't have enough food. Pride and fierce self-reliance kept them from complaining, "so the rest of us didn't know," recalled Aubrey Keyser, in a 1983 interview.

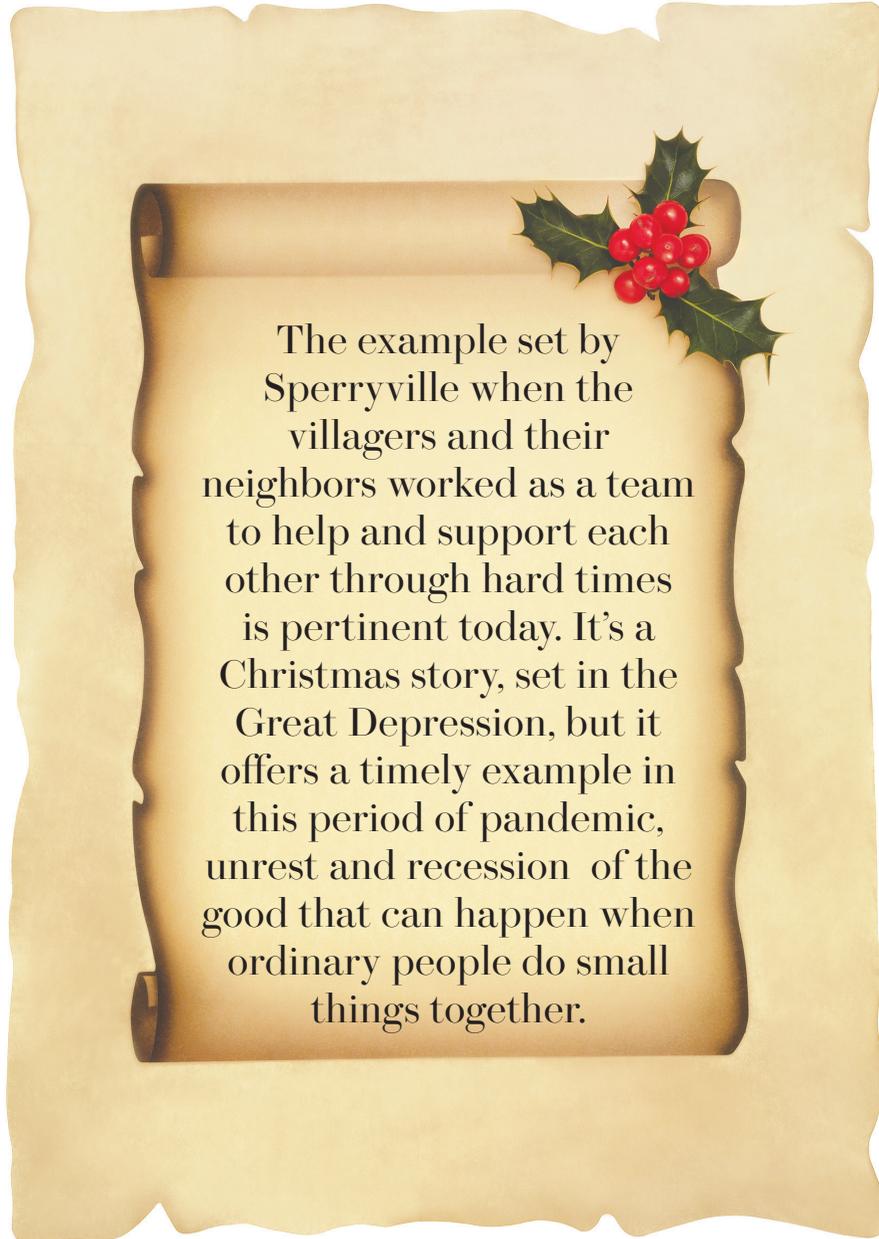
His wife, Anne Keyser, who taught at the Sperryville School for 33 years, remembered when the silence was broken.

It was lunch time in early December, 1933. There wasn't a cafeteria or a school lunch program. Those who lived nearby went home, while most of the children and their teachers brought lunch pails — biscuits and jam, biscuits and sausage or ham, biscuits and beans — and dined together in classrooms. "We were all eating, except for this one little girl who had her head buried in her arms on her desk. I asked the child if she was sick. 'No, ma'am.' I asked if someone had said something mean and hurt her feelings. 'No, ma'am.' I said I knew something was wrong, that she must tell me. 'I'm hungry. We didn't have anything to eat this morning. We didn't have anything to eat last night either.'"

While the other children shared their lunches with the little girl, Mrs. Keyser shared those words with her fellow teachers. They turned to the children for guidance. And the hungry children spoke.

"We found out that there were families that really had no food, no food at all," Mrs. Keyser related. "We found out there were families where the fathers weren't working because they didn't have clothes to wear. It was winter, it was cold, and they didn't have coats."

Christmas was just two weeks away when Sperryville folks spread word through Rappahannock that hunger was stalking the mountains.



Nobody had much of anything but they all shared the little they could spare. "We gathered up clothes. We gathered up toys. People donated what they could," Mrs. Keyser remembered.

Farm families gave meat, home canned goods and long-keeping fruit and vegetables for immediate delivery to the destitute. More was set aside for distribution on Christmas Eve. Women sewed clothes, knitted scarves and gloves and fashioned dolls. Aubrey Keyser chopped a 15-foot evergreen at Rock Mills and pulled the windshield out of his old Ford to haul the tree to Sperryville. "People didn't know what was going on," he recalled, chuckling. "I had the trunk sticking out of the front of the car. It looked like a tree going down the road. They couldn't see me behind the wheel driving!"

The tree went up catty-cornered from the Corner Store in the village center. "Bill Varner wired it for lights," Mrs. Keyser remembered. "Everybody got into the spirit. They brought decorations, it was so beautiful. And then we gathered to

sing carols."

Under the tree were clothes, candy and gifts for the children, clothes for their parents, cases of canned salmon, bags of meal and flour and much more.

"But we didn't know if the people would come," Mrs. Keyser continued. "We'd gone up the mountains to invite the children, to tell them that Santa Claus would be in Sperryville with goodies for them. But we didn't know if their parents would bring them down that night."

As the carols floated up, the families came down. And they returned home Christmas Eve bearing gifts.

Boley Lillard played Mr. Claus. "He could be Santa without any make-up, without a costume," Mrs. Keyser noted, smiling. "I believe he got more pleasure than the children out of it."

Kindness and generosity didn't end with the holidays. Sperryville villagers continued sharing until everyone could put food on their tables again, until their neighbors in the mountains were secure once more.

Walking down country to Richmond

Luther Warfield Brown was only 15 when he set out walking from Sperryville to Richmond to enlist in the Spanish-American War of 1898.

According to his daughter, Aline Johnson, former village postmaster and lifelong Sperryville resident, Brown tried to join the 3rd Virginia Infantry's Company B but because of his age, he was sent back home to get his parents' permission. "He used to say that he wore out a pair of shoes that were thin to begin with on that walk."

With his folks' approval, Luther joined 22 other Rappahannock men in Company B. The leader took a fatherly interest in the boy and kept him busy running relatively safe errands as an unofficial orderly. "That's all I can remember my father saying about the war. He wasn't in more than a year. He couldn't have been much older than 16 when he got out," Mrs. Johnson concluded.

The name's the thing

A young man in love with Roberta Holland of Sperryville went west to seek his fortune and ended up building a hotel in Seattle. He named the eight-story edifice the Holland Hotel, after his lost love in Virginia, according to "Rappahannock County: Fact, Fiction, Foolishness and Fairfax Story." "Not many people know that a hotel in Seattle, Washington, is named after a family in Sperryville," noted author Ned Johnson.

Or maybe this is a bit of the foolishness Ned refers to?

— Daphne Hutchinson



ONLINE

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The Big Stink

How Sperryville got a sewer system

BY DAPHNE HUTCHINSON
Special to the Rappahannock News

The story of a sewer system might seem an odd chapter to feature in 200 years of village history. But without that sewer system, there likely would be no village — at least not the vibrant and bustling Sperryville of today.

It's a suspenseful tale 30 years in the telling. It has danger, threats, false starts, mistakes, missed chances and every-day heroes. And it ends well . . . with clean wells and a clean river, thanks to plenty of persistence from community-minded local officials, piles of federal money and a little bit of the luck of the Blue Ridge.

Flood plain, septic tanks and soil percolation rates were unknown terms and unfamiliar concepts when Francis Thornton laid out the village of Sperryville in 1820. There was no zoning, no land use planning, no Health Department and no building inspector. Homes and businesses popped up wherever along the banks of the Thornton, without a thought to wastewater or sewage.

And so it went for almost a century and a half.

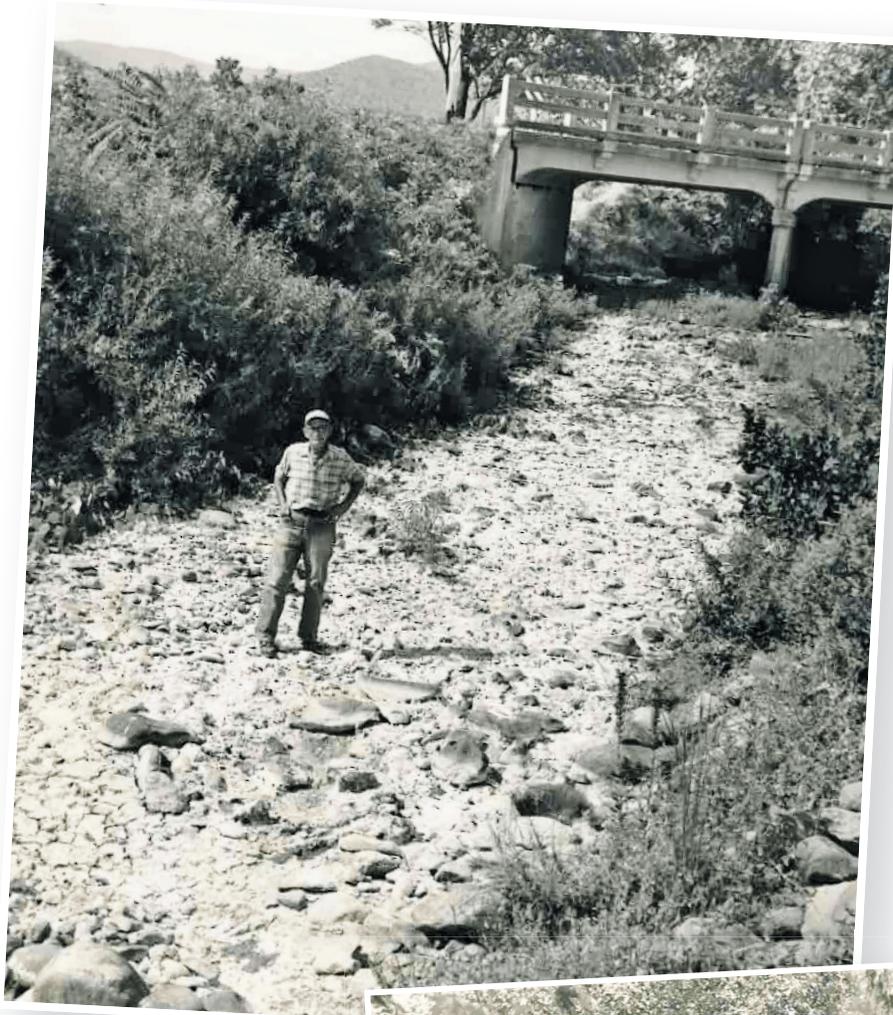
Pollution no secret

It's not that the problem was invisible. Everyone knew the river was polluted. The water was too foul for fish life. During low flow periods, it smelled, and the black sludge of sewage was visible. Folks now in their 60s and 70s who grew up around the village remember being forbidden to swim or wade in the river when they were kids. "Don't you dare go near that water!" was the standard admonishment when children headed for the playing fields around the Sperryville school.

Official recognition of a problem dates back to 1954, according to a grant application from the '60s for building a sewer system. But there's no mention of who did the recognizing and to what end. At any rate, no corrective action was taken.

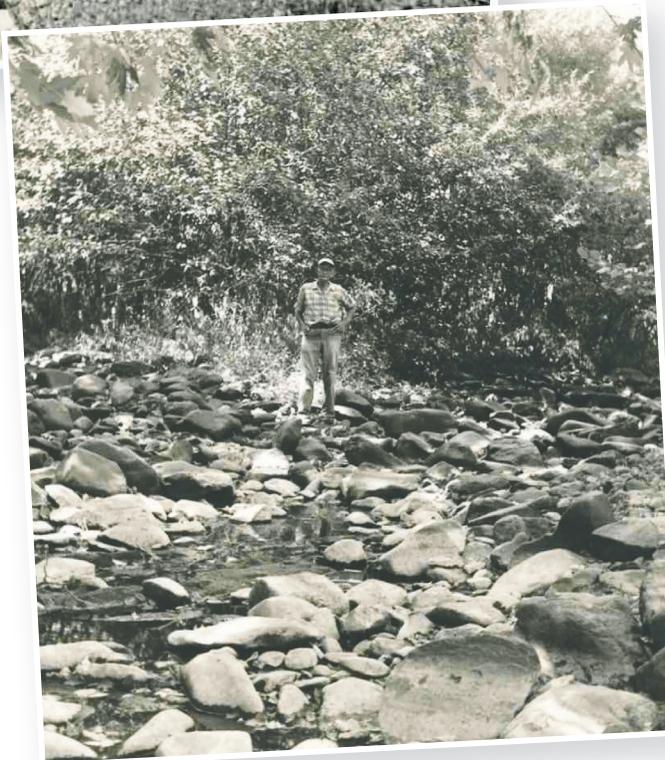
Then in 1964, a Health Department survey found sewage in the Thornton, and in 1966, the State Water Control Board was advised that dairy cattle drinking regularly from the river were aborting their calves.

In 1968, a study proposed building a \$300,000 sewage treatment plant, with almost half the cost covered by federal grants, leaving the local share at \$165,000. But Rappahannock's Board of Supervisors made it clear that the problem was Sperryville's and there would be no general fund tax dollars



After the summer drought of 1966, this was the Thornton River in September. Jack Woodard, 72-year-old Sperryville resident, told the Rappahannock News it was the first time he'd seen the river that dry. He recalled the opposite extreme, in the fall of 1942, when the Thornton burst its banks, flooded all the bottom land in the area and washed away a house and a shed. Here, Woodard stands near a bridge on Rt. 211 where the river passed under the highway.

Right, Woodard at the fork where the branch from Old Hollow joins the river. Dead fish, many as long as five inches, littered the dry bed in the 1966 drought.



RAPPAHANNOCK NEWS FILE PHOTOS

directed to the solution. That left the funding to a village that was already financially depressed.

Eighty percent of Sperryville's residents were low or moderate income and many were widows, dependent on World War I widow's pensions and Social Security. Based on income

levels, the most they could afford for sewage disposal was deemed to be \$10-\$12 a month.

The Rappahannock Water and Sewer Authority was created in May 1968 to figure out how to construct, maintain and operate an affordable sewer system to serve the village of

Sperryville and the populated portion of Rt. 211 west of town. The legal ad proposing the WSA's establishment outlined a collection system with lagoon treatment and set a tentative budget with projected connection fees, user fees and maintenance costs for 20 years with little capacity to serve additional growth.

From the outset, the solution envisioned by local leaders was a correction to the existing problem — nothing more.

Commonwealth's Attorney George Davis, one of the prime movers behind the county's first zoning and subdivision ordinances and its first comprehensive plan, voiced the universal concern: "We don't want a developer to come in and demand hook-ups."

But he stressed the need for a solution. "Banks won't lend for development or mortgages in Sperryville if the illegalities aren't corrected," he warned.

Davis wasn't alone in his concerns. There was consensus on avoiding overbuilding and excess capacity. State Water Control Board representatives, Health Department officers and county officials confirmed repeatedly that any

system would be intended as "no growth," designed to serve the designated area in Sperryville with sewer problems.

Windmill to a lagoon

Between 1968 and the mid-70s, engineers assessed a community septic field, an aerated sewage lagoon, windmill power to supply electricity, a sand mound and more conventional package facilities. The innovative alternatives were rejected as insufficiently tested or unreliable in a flood plain. The \$300,000 sewage treatment plant, even with partial federal funding that left Sperryville covering only \$165,000, was deemed too expensive.

Meanwhile, Health Department representatives continued to "bend over backwards" — their words — in issuing the permits that allowed restaurants and other businesses serving the public to stay open despite evidence of contaminated drinking water.

Dr. R. S. Legarde, the county health officer, described the forbearance as "grandfatherly" when he warned →

➔ the Rappahannock Board of Supervisors that the patriarchal approach could not continue. By 1975, a new Health Department survey pinpointed 24 pit privies piping directly into the Thornton and 40 malfunctioning septic fields leaking into the water table and contaminating wells with fecal coliform bacteria.

Nine out of 10 wells tested were fouled, and not a single Sperryville well — even those without fecal contamination — met Health Department standards. Continuing to grant permits for businesses to operate clearly violated state law, LeGarde noted.

Speaking on behalf of the county, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Newbill Miller, assured the county's health officer that the "board won't be critical of any officer who enforces the law . . . I won't tell you to close down Sperryville, but I'm not going to tell you to violate the law."

Others noted that Sperryville lies in a flood plain, where the county's zoning regulations preclude or limit further development. Said E.P. Luke from the Planning Commission, Sperryville didn't need a big system for just 40 malfunctioning septic fields and 24 pit privies. "We need only to solve their problem, not plan for more houses."

Gen. Daniel Noce, then chairman of the Planning Commission, agreed: "There are real estate men with their mouths drooling. We don't need any kind of a big project. It's in a flood plain."

So progress pattered and stuttered along as meetings, studies, grant applications, design proposals and debate continued. Meanwhile, ten commercial establishments in Sperryville were notified that they were violating Virginia health regulations and three food-related businesses were closed.

The chips are down

In July 1976, with water resources under increasing scrutiny, the Health Department raised the ante. The Federal Clean Water Act and the State Water Control Law had been enacted, and Virginia's James River was so despoiled by the industrial chemical kepone that the governor closed 100 miles of its length. Back in Rappahannock, Dr. LeGarde advised the supervisors that "the chips are down," with more Sperryville business closures AND condemnation of residences to begin in six to 12 months.

In August 1976, Dr. Malcom Tenney, the regional director for the Health Department, upped the ante further, cautioning that the state "will proceed against each property owner discharging raw sewage into state waters . . . If the community refuses to work on the problem, the State Health Department will hold individuals responsible. It can't go on."

The Board of Supervisors responded by establishing mandatory hook-ups for whatever system was eventually constructed, and in 1977, at a community meeting, Sperryville residents chose the design by show of hands — a STEP (septic tank effluent pump) and secondary package treatment plant.

From a \$188,000 grant from Housing and Urban Development for piping, \$10,000 was set aside to help 27 families with pit privies install bathrooms. Sperryville was expecting a \$785,000 construction grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, and affordable user fees of \$10-\$12 a month were projected to cover maintenance and operational costs.

The facility was to be built on 4.986 acres gifted by the Miller family, whose neighboring Mt. Vernon Farm predates the village by a century. (According to the agreement, should the plant close for more than 24 months, the Millers have the option to purchase the parcel and its 20-foot easement right-of-way).

It looked like everything was falling into place. Instead, it all fell apart.

Cost of clean water

Construction estimates had soared and funding was \$1 million short, thanks to inflation and "very, very optimistic cost estimates" by the project engineers. WSA chairman Maurice Biddle was still sure the system was coming "but it's going to be a while yet," he noted. If the shortfall was to be covered by a

. . . and the village had a new sewer design plus the money to build it. The Environmental Protection Agency was contributing \$690,000, based on the health threat, funding priority and innovative design. Housing and Urban Development was on the hook for \$188,000, due to income levels in the service area. Together, the two grants brought close to 100 percent funding for the sewer system with monthly bills projected in the \$10-\$12 range.

Initial hook-ups were for 21 businesses and 136 residences, with an estimated 200-225 gallons of wastewater a day expected from residential users.

But the innovative mound system wasn't suited for a flood plain; it would be flooded and inoperable 20 percent of the time. "Needs more reliability," held the State Water Control Board, rejecting the design. And the \$188,000 HUD grant — awarded five years earlier and still unspent — was cancelled.

For the local activists pushing for a pollution solution, this had been considered the only affordable sewer design for Sperryville. Now, it was back to the drawing board to find cost reductions in the package treatment plant alternative. The circumference

bureaucrats on the receiving end who didn't pick up the phone to say, "Hey, you forgot something."

But there was little time for finger pointing. A week later, the State Water Control Board announced that Sperryville's \$1.4 million construction grant would be deferred, as the project couldn't proceed without both grants. A shake-up in the WSA came next. Chairman Maurice Biddle resigned, citing his year-long inability to gather a three-member quorum. More resignations followed.

With a new chairman, new members, the support of state agencies and good odds for funding in the next grant cycle eight months away, the Water and Sewer Authority focused on dotting i's and crossing t's on its 1983 applications to HUD and EPA.

The State Water Control Board reconfirmed Sperryville's spot as Virginia's #5 health hazard and its 5th ranked priority for funding. The Health Department reconfirmed the public health threat from raw sewage. Eric Barsch, director of the department's Division of Water Programs, called Sperryville's pollution "one of the worst in the state," so well documented that additional surveys were unnecessary.

And he also promised there would be no danger of Health Department enforcement while the county waited for the decision on the grants.

The stakes were alarmingly high. The Reagan administration was lowering the federal share of pollution abatement projects like Sperryville's to only 50 percent the following year, and that would put a sewer system out of reach. Period.

Cause for optimism

But confidence was also high. "Now we know exactly where we made our mistake and we won't do it again," said WSA member Bob Dennis, adding the State Water Control Board, Health Department and Housing and Community Development agreed that the outlook was good for Rappahannock. "I feel even more optimistic about our chances," Dennis noted.

And this time, the optimism was well founded. Grants were awarded in August 1983 — \$1,531,000 by EPA and \$520,100 funneled through the state from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Together, the grants covered nearly 100 percent of the cost, making pollution's end affordable.

Six years later, with the new system in operation — 32 years after the search for a pollution solution began — Sperryville was finally pumping and processing. Fish and the macroinvertebrates that signal a healthy waterway returned to the Thornton. Businesses flourished, Main Street got a face lift and the village again attracted tourists and travelers.

"A heckuva gift," is how Dr. William Strider, executive director of the Planning District Commission, termed the federal largesse bestowed on Sperryville. "It will never happen again. Those days are gone forever."

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Farmers Home Administration loan and amortized with user fees, those fees would top \$50 a month.

So despite the dire warnings of enforcement, the Health Department agreed to hold off on condemnations while the Water and Sewer Authority explored cost reductions and more grants.

Supervisor Chairman Pete Luke, Col. Biddle and WSA member Carson Johnson drove to Richmond and talked their way into Gov. Chuck Robb's office. They managed to gain an audience without an appointment, according to Johnson's widow, Aline. Robb knew the rural county and its gateway village to the Blue Ridge. His wife, Lynda Bird Johnson Robb, was a long-time family friend of the Sommervilles, whose farm was between Washington and Sperryville, and the Robbs spent time at The Shade while he was campaigning for governor.

When the trio left Rappahannock for Richmond, a sewer for Sperryville ranked #125th on the state's project priority list for funding. After they returned from the caucus with the governor, Sperryville's sewer ranked #5.

Too dirty to drink

By 1981, the water in 75 percent of the wells in Sperryville was classified as unsafe for human consumption

of collection pipes was reduced by a few inches, and the plant design was scaled down, with the town of Culpeper agreeing to take the solids pumped from individual septic tanks for processing — 30,000 to 40,000 gallons per year for 20 years.

The Rappahannock Board of Supervisors guaranteed front money for planning until the almost-for-sure grants were received — about \$1.5 million expected from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in October with another \$900,000 Community Development Block grant to follow.

But the first week in December 1982, the almost-for-sure EPA grant was denied. It was a major "OOPS." The grant application was not filed under "imminent health hazard," and the omission cost the Sperryville project 150 points, leaving it with 625 points in EPA's ranking system. The lowest rated project approved for funding in that cycle scored 723 — Sperryville would have topped it easily with those lost points.

The blame for the failure to declare as a health hazard was divided between John Capelle, the executive director of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Planning District Commission, who filled out the grant application; the Water and Sewer Authority members, who reviewed the application prior to submittal; and the