

Charlottesville's History of Growth and Development

1762-1887, As a Town

Before learning of the population, structures and development of Charlottesville, it is important to note that the original inhabitants of the area were the Native Americans, specifically the Saponi, who were part of the Monacan tribes. They had a town named Monasukapanough near the north fork of the Rivanna River, but were migrating out of the immediate area as the first English settlers arrived. The Monacan people continue their proud heritage in parts of Central Virginia to this day.

Early British families such as the Jeffersons, Frys, Cabells, and Meriwethers made land claims here in the 1720s and Albemarle County was formed in 1744. It was still very much a frontier area, when the legislature passed a law on November 12, 1762 to start a new town in honor of Queen Charlotte of England.

The leading figure in the effort to establish Charlottesville was Dr. Thomas Walker of Castle Hill, a member of the House of Burgesses. Walker can be considered the founding father of the town because he set aside the 28 acres in a series of numbered lots along an ancient Indian trail called Three-Notched or Three-Chopt road. South Street was the southern border and (Peter) Jefferson Street was the northern border of the town. Just north of this grid was Court Square. Within a year most lots were sold and a wooden courthouse was erected.

Within the original footprint of the town a dozen houses were built in the 1770s and a blacksmith shop and a tavern (i.e. hotel). That tavern was probably the Swan Tavern, situated across the street from the entrance to the courthouse (which at that time faced east on Park Street). Several homes were built on Jefferson and Sixth Streets that also served as shops for making watches, cabinets, selling liquors and other wares. The oldest house standing today within the modern boundaries of the city was built in 1770 by Nicolas Lewis at 309 12th Street. The Lewis Mountain Meetinghouse (near today's St. Anne's Belfield) was built by Baptists within a few years, but has disappeared.

In 1790, High Street was added to the original town grid and the city population numbered around 300. Eagle Tavern opened on Court Square sometime prior to that year. This hotel was the primary place for public dances and political celebrations, with its large public hall that could seat 200 people. Many peddlers sold products on its long porch during monthly court days. Court Square was enclosed by a fence in 1792. It also had a pillory, stocks and whipping post. The town was officially incorporated on January 19, 1801 and the wooden courthouse was replaced by a brick structure in 1803, and is the oldest public building standing today. The "common temple", as Thomas Jefferson later called it, served as a meeting place for legal and political matters, but also for worship and other purposes.

By the 50th anniversary of the town in 1812 the population reached about 500 people. Colonel John R. Jones built his home on East Jefferson Street and named it "Social Hall." It remains there today opposite Lee Park as one of the oldest homes still standing in the city. Col. Jones's 1820s-era shop at Main Street and Third Street NE today remains as the oldest standing building on the Downtown Mall. An inter-denominational meetinghouse for worship was erected on Jefferson Street by 1817. William Woods drew

a survey map for a new layout of town blocks on December 17, 1818, with 18 acres in the area around High Street added.

Although never officially part of the town's land, a new college began to form that would become a major part of its cultural life. The Central College laid a cornerstone of its first "Pavilion" with a Masonic ceremony on October 5, 1817, attended by former United States Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and then President James Monroe. Before Central College began classes, it changed its name to the University of Virginia when given a charter by the General Assembly on January 25, 1819. The presidents were part of its board of visitors. The University added much to the economic development of the town. The University Bookstore, opened the year Jefferson died in 1826.

Charlottesville's most famous early visitor, the Marquis de Lafayette, came on November 5, 1824, and spoke at the Central Hotel on Market Street and at the University. The first bridge was erected that year over the Rivanna River. A school for boys opened and a subscription library and a newspaper began called the *Central Gazette*.

Charlottesville's population grew to about 800 people by 1830, with several hundred slaves included in that number. This population led to a need for burial places, so Maplewood cemetery opened in 1827 and the University cemetery in 1829, due to an especially high death rate from a typhoid epidemic that year. The town by then included the north downtown neighborhood and a portion of Starr Hill and Ridge Street.

Development was increasing rapidly. Besides the church buildings, courthouse, and tavern, there were about 200 homes, three hotels, two bookstores, two drug stores, and about 20 other mercantile establishments, mostly near the Court Square commercial center. "Number Nothing" was built on Court Square as a mercantile business and also in 1832 a brick structure built on the previous site of Swan Tavern. Slaves would be sold at many points on the square, not just one auction block.

The first new area of commercial development was on the west side of the courthouse facing westward on a street that ran along what became known as the McKee block (now Jackson Park). This new business district got its name from Andrew McKee's home and hat shop. John Cochran's home stood on East Jefferson Street next to Magistrate Opie Norris' home (formerly the Edward Butler home). By the 1830s businesses in the city also included: one printing office issuing a weekly paper, four tailoring establishments, three tan yards, three saddlers, one tin plate worker, two cabinet makers, three wheelwrights, one chair maker, one house and sign painter, two coach and gig manufacturers, two jewelers, two shoe and boot factories, one hatter, two confectioners, one brick yard, two book binders, six attorneys, six physicians, and three surgeon dentists.

Alexander Garrett built the Midway Hotel and developed Ridge Street about that time. Garrett Street is named for him. The first woolen mills opened on the Rivanna River during this period. In 1831 Professor John A. G. Davis built his new home on 12th Street and named it "The Farm." It still stands today as one of the city's oldest homes.

There were 957 people as of 1835, of whom 550 were white, 59 were free black, and 348 were enslaved. Free people of color such as Nancy West were significant owners of businesses and property in the town (more African-American history is presented in subsequent articles).

The Charlottesville Savings Institution was incorporated in 1838, and in 1840 the city's first commercial bank opened, called the Farmers Bank of Virginia. Several lines of daily stagecoaches passed through in the 1830s, but William P. Farish started the Farish and Company stagecoach business in 1845. Farish bought the Eagle Tavern property on Court Square and erected a new brick building in 1854 that still stands today. The Farish Hotel became a major stagecoach stop.

John Marchant opened a wool clothing factory about that time. The Charlottesville and University Gas-Light Corporation was chartered on March 18, 1856, and first began to operate in 1857. The first official fire company was organized on May 12, 1856. In 1855 all burials within city limits were restricted to the public cemetery, and the town began plans for brick paving of streets for the first time.

The new Town Hall opened in 1852 on Court Square. In 1859 a new front section was added to the courthouse facing south in the direction of the new commercial center of the city, on Main Street, closer to where the new railroad line opened in 1850. A new railway line connecting to points south opened in 1860. In 1860 the town tripled in size when it annexed 118 new acres, and opened the new Oakwood cemetery.

New immigrants took a leading role in developing the main street commercial district. In 1852 the German-Jewish Leterman brothers started a business on Main Street. The Oberdorfer and Kaufman families also started businesses in late 1850s. John H. Cocke built the Delevan Hotel in 1856 on West Main Street and helped with the Sons of Temperance chapter to raise the money to build Temperance Hall at the University Corner.

By the eve of the Civil War the population stood at about 2,500 people, (not counting the additional 500 university students. The war turned Charlottesville not into a battlefield, but a medical center—a place of refuge and healing. The Charlottesville General Hospital opened on the Grounds of the University on July 15, 1861. About 21,000 soldiers were cared for over the course of the Civil War using every conceivable public building: including at the University, the courthouse, town hall, hotels, and churches. Dr. J. L. Cabell and Dr. Orianna Moon, one of the nation's first female physicians, briefly oversaw the hospital and nurses respectively. Over the years of the war, 1,097 soldiers were buried in the University Cemetery, most of them dying of wounds or disease.

The war caused train tracks and canal locks to be destroyed and the Woolen Mills burned down, but slowly after hostilities ended, the town began to rebuild. Local business also began to grow again. A disabled Civil War veteran named Henry Clay Marchant restarted the Charlottesville Woolen Mills on December 18, 1868, eventually becoming the first large scale industry in the town. Charlottesville received a new charter in 1871, and in 1873 the town annexed 44 acres to add to its existing 174. The government purchased property at the corner of High and 5th Street NE for a new town hall. Public schools began to develop separate from the county. A new jail was built in 1875 that still stands just off of Court Square.

The African American community used their new freedom to start churches and build other cultural institutions. The population of the city in the 1870s was about 3000 people of whom half was black, but numbers began to gradually decline due to migration to Northern states. Those that remained began to concentrate in the Vinegar Hill area. In 1873 the first black cemetery was begun called Daughters of Zion.

The Monticello Wine Company was begun by William Hotopp. Moses Kaufman started a clothing store. H. M. Gleason and Company began in 1871 and was the town's oldest business until it closed recently. The oldest firm still in business today is Keller and George Jewelers. Others in the 1870s were Newman's Men's Wear, Peoples National Bank, Anderson Brothers Bookstore near the University, Charles King and Son, Holsinger's Photography, S.C. Chancellor and Company, and Page Florist. Miller's Drug Store opened in 1885 (a restaurant today). Union Station railway terminal was built in 1885.

After the Civil War ended a Ladies Benevolent Association was begun in 1858 by Anne Leaton Meade so that the poor could have better medical care. It eventually created the Piedmont Hospital in 1886. Many houses of worship were erected in the 1880s that still stand today (more on religion in later articles).

But up to this time everything was in a town that was still part of the County of Albemarle. A new era began in 1888 when Charlottesville became an independent city. And due to migration of blacks to the north that was also when the white population outnumbered African Americans for the first time.

1888-2012, As a City

On June 14, 1887, Robert P. Valentine opened a horse-drawn street rail that ran between downtown and the University. In 1888 another 564 acres were added to city as it officially became independent of the county. The city of 782 acres then included the new neighborhoods of Fifeville, Martha Jefferson, Woolen Mills, Belmont, Ridge Street, 10th and Page, Venable, Rosehill, and Barracks-Rugby. The population was about 5000 not including about 1000 students at the University. Moses Leterman, one of the founders and leaders of the Chamber of Commerce in 1888, eventually opened the largest department store in city.

Business was booming. Oberdorfer and Sons opened a store in 1888, Jarman's Company and the Charlottesville Hardware Company in 1889. Timberlake's Drug Store opened in 1890, as did Hanckel-Citizens Insurance Company, and in 1890s came Martin's Hardware and the Charlottesville Lumber Company. George Inge, an African American leader, started a grocery in Vinegar Hill in 1891, now a restaurant on West Main Street.

The first electric streetcars began running in 1895 from downtown to the new Jefferson Park Hotel, Fry's Spring and Wonderland. The Charlottesville Hose, Hook and Ladder Company was chartered by the city in 1895. The Michie Company began in 1897, as did the Albemarle Telephone Company, and Gilmore Furniture the following year. African American Rinaldo Cox started an advertising company that continued in the 20th century under ownership of William E. Jackson. From this point there are too many businesses to mention them all. J. P. Ellington became the first owner of an automobile in the city in 1906. Streets began to be paved and individuals started having phone service.

Medical services were among the greatest advancements in this period of the city. In 1899 Magruder Sanitarium opened, and the University hospital followed with 25 beds on March 1, 1901, led by Dr. Paul Barringer. Martha Jefferson Hospital opened on July 11, 1904, led by Dr. Charles Venable, Dr. Halstead Hedges, and others. Robinette Thompkins was the first trained nurse in Albemarle County and among the first licensed nurses in Virginia. The last quarter of the 19th century marked the most significant period of development of business and health care in the town's history. The buildings that emerged at that time along Main Street remain as the primary architectural landscape of the today's downtown area.

By the time of the city's 150th anniversary in 1912 the population had grown to 6,765 people, not including about 1,300 university students. The city annexed 1,700 more acres in 1916, tripling of the size of its previous 800 acres. Horses were still a major form of transportation but automobiles were becoming commonly used, and Ford and Chevrolet dealers had set up shop in town.

The first local airplane demonstration took place on April 6, 1912, when Beckwith Havens flew a Curtis bi-plane to a height of 1,800 feet at Lambeth Field. But it was almost 20 years before the first passengers by air began to occur. The armory on Market Street (built 1891 on the site of the current parking garage) was replaced by a new armory built in the next block, in 1925, now a recreation center.

The Virginian Restaurant opened in 1923 and is the oldest restaurant still operating today. Monticello Hotel opened on Court Square in 1927 with the world's largest searchlight on its roof. Despite the Great Depression and economic struggles, some new businesses continued to appear. In 1931 the Young Men's Shop made its appearance. Gasoline-powered buses replaced street cars in 1935.

The Gleason Hotel, built in 1897, became the Albemarle Hotel in the 1930s, and an illegal bordello was opened by Madam Marguiretta de Crescioli in the 1920s, south of the tracks on 5th street, and not shut down by police until 1949.

Another major expansion of the city occurred just prior to World War II. In 1938 another 1660 acres were annexed, including the neighborhoods of Fry's Spring, Barracks Road, the Meadows, and Greenbrier. The new airport was dedicated in 1954. Sperry Piedmont Company began in 1955.

A regret and sadness is still felt by the black community today after the demolition of Vinegar Hill and subsequent urban renewal in that area in 1962. Also about that time, Interstate 64 and the U. S. 250 Bypass were built and U. S. 29 widened. The Belmont Bridge was constructed.

By the 200th anniversary of the city in 1962 the city population stood at 29,427 people (not counting about 5,000 University students), and this made it virtually the same size as the county for the first time. Then came annexation of 2500 acres of county land in 1963 on the southwestern side of the city. Five years later more was annexed north of the 250 bypass. The present City Hall was built in 1969, and in 1976 the Rotunda at the University was restored. The American Institute of *Architects* recognized the University's Academical Village in 1976 as the *nation's* proudest *architectural* achievement in its first 200 years, and was named a World Heritage Site.

In 2000 and 2006 the University completed major expansions of its football and basketball facilities, respectively. Much retail activity moved from downtown to Barracks Road Shopping Center when it was completed in 1959, but Main Street downtown was closed to vehicular traffic to create a pedestrian mall completed in 1976 that gradually gave rise to local shops and restaurants and an increasing variety of entertainment venues and galleries, movie and live theaters, an ice-skating rink, hotels, and the Pavilion.

In the second half of the city's history (since 1888), it grew dramatically from about 5000 of which half were African Americans to over 43,000, with 70 percent white, 21 percent black, 4 percent Asian, and 4 percent Hispanic. The University grew fourfold in the last 50 years from about 5,000 to 20,000 students. The development on balance had been good enough so that by the 250th anniversary in 2012 Charlottesville had been named by several national publications s one of the nation's best places to live.