

Charlottesville's History of Politics and Government

1762-1887, As a Town

“Be it therefore enacted by the... General Assembly... (that) hereby (is) established a town, to be called and known by the name of Charlottesville. LAWS OF VIRGINIA, NOVEMBER 1762”

Charlottesville was approved by the colonial legislature on November 12, 1762 and then legally created by the signature of Virginia governor on behalf of the King of England on December 23.

The leading figure in the effort to establish Charlottesville was Dr. Thomas Walker of Castle Hill, already famous for being the first Englishman to explore the Kentucky territory to the west. Walker can be considered the founding father of the town.

Living outside the town boundaries at the time was the most famous person associated with Charlottesville — Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was a young lawyer and member of the House of Burgesses when his home in Shadwell burned down in 1770. He moved to Monticello, married, and became a vestryman in the Anglican Church by 1772. The minister of his parish, Rev. Charles Clay, became a magistrate in 1771—one of Charlottesville's early government leaders. Another of these early magistrates was an Italian wine-maker named Filippo Mazzei.

The War for Independence and Early Politics

Jefferson said that the effect of the 1774 Fast day was “like electricity” and spawned a meeting of the freeholders of the county three days later in the courthouse. There they agreed on a resolution to unite and resist the tyranny of Britain that was then endorsed by the Virginia House of Burgesses, helping spark a national movement of resistance and unity.

In the following year, 1775, Dr. George Gilmer and Charles Lewis organized the Albemarle Volunteers and marched them to Williamsburg to protest against actions of the governor. Gilmer led these “Minute Man” companies of soldiers and also organized a local Committee of Correspondence to discuss political issues. Gilmer was recognized as the area's foremost patriot leader. Gilmer lived and is buried at Pen Park, now within the bounds of the city.

When the War for Independence began in 1775 Jefferson was elected as a delegate for Virginia to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. The following year he was asked to draft the Declaration of Independence, which the Congress adopted on July 4th, 1776.

This one eloquent act is the single most significant reason that he became one of America's most respected Founding Fathers, in whose memory hundreds of thousands still annually visit the area.

The person who actually submitted the Bill for Religious Freedom in the legislature was another delegate to the Continental Congress in 1777—Col. John Harvie. Harvie learned of the need for a remote place to quarter about 4,000 British and Hessian soldiers who had surrendered on October 17, 1777 at the battle of Saratoga in New York. So Harvie offered his land. The Convention Army war prisoners began arriving on January 16, 1779.

A town of about 100 citizens must have felt nervous having so many prisoners nearby, because Gilmer soon led the effort on April 21, 1779, to get all of the local citizens to sign the *Albemarle Declaration* of allegiance to the patriot cause and to the Commonwealth.

Also that year, news arrived that a native of the county named George Rogers Clark had conquered the Northwest Territory (Illinois area) for the Continental Army.

In 1780 women became historically visible in their efforts for the cause when Martha Jefferson organized patriotic ladies associations to provide the practical needs of the soldiers. Mildred Walker, wife of Dr. Walker, and Lucy Gilmer, wife of Dr. Gilmer, helped the cause, with Lucy's expensive jewels leading the donations.

In late 1780 the prisoners were moved away. Then in 1781 when British forces attacked Richmond, the state legislature moved its meetings temporarily to Charlottesville, on May 29.

British Lt. Colonel Banastre Tarleton attempted to surprise and capture them by sending his light dragoons on an overnight raid on Charlottesville. But during the night of June 3-4, Charlottesville resident Jack Jouett saw them passing in Louisa County and rode ahead of them to town and warn the delegates. Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Thomas Nelson, Richard Henry Lee, and most all others escaped. Several were captured, including Daniel Boone, a delegate from the county of Kentucky. Tarleton was widely feared by American citizens, but Lucy Gilmer had the uncommon courage to force her way into Tarleton's headquarters at the Nicholas Lewis home to ask for permission to give medical treatment to his prisoners. To everyone's amazement, he assented to her request. The local supplies and some county records were destroyed, but Charlottesville largely escaped the impact of the Revolutionary War.

James Madison turned to writing the new U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights between 1787 and 1789 and served in Congress. Although Madison did not live in Charlottesville he frequently did business here, especially when he served as the University of Virginia's rector in later years.

Another person who moved to Charlottesville in 1790 was James Monroe. He lived downtown on Market Street and then had a home and office on land now owned by the University of Virginia. In the same year that he moved to town, Monroe was appointed to the U.S. Senate by the state legislature. He bought Highland near Monticello in 1793 and moved there in late 1799.

William Wirt moved to Charlottesville to practice law for a few years before moving to Richmond and eventually becoming the longest-serving U.S. attorney general in history, as well as a presidential candidate. Monroe and his wife Elizabeth returned to Highland from France on November 23, 1799, and he was elected governor. Jefferson became the third president of the United States on March 4, 1801. The little town of Charlottesville was starting to have national impact.

In 1803 President Jefferson sent James Monroe to France to negotiate the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, and then commissioned county resident Meriwether Lewis to lead an expedition through this new part of the country. Lewis returned to a celebration dinner in the old stone tavern on Market Street in 1806.

In 1808 James Madison was elected President and Thomas Jefferson returned to the Charlottesville area. James Monroe was again elected Governor in January 1811, but on April 2 he became the nation's seventh Secretary of State.

On the 50th anniversary of the city the community was preparing for the War of 1812, declared by President James Madison, and led by the secretary of war—Charlottesville's own James Monroe. Thomas Jefferson had retired back to the Charlottesville area in 1809 – a place that had become decidedly Republican (or Democratic-Republican, i.e. anti-federalists) in politics over

recent decades. Major James Bankhead assembled war recruits near a well on Main Street, where Central Place is today. As the war came to a close in 1814, people began to resume normal community-building activities.

In 1816 Monroe, Secretary of State at the time, was elected the fifth president of the United States, thus extending the dominance of the young Democratic-Republican Party in national politics. The influence of Charlottesville, still a tiny town of about 600 people, upon the nation and the world was unparalleled. A governor elected in 1819 was another Charlottesville citizen—Thomas Mann Randolph.

The highest offices in the nation were still held by Central Virginia leaders. Furthermore, former resident William Wirt had become U.S. attorney general in 1817 and served longer than any other in the nation's history.

University of Virginia was given a charter by the General Assembly on January 25, 1819, and six years later on March 7, 1825, sixty-eight men enrolled in the first class on "the grounds." One student who entered on February 14, 1826, was Edgar Allen Poe, who later became one of America's most famous authors.

Jefferson died in 1826 and Madison became the new rector of the University, and (along with his wife Dolley – one of the most influential women in America that era) was thus more regularly connected with the city until his death in 1836.

The first Temperance Society was formed in 1830 to discourage abuse of alcoholic beverages. John Hartwell Cocke, one of the University's board members, became the vice president of the American Temperance Society and university professors such as McGuffey, Minor, Wertebaker, Cabell, and others formed the Sons of Temperance chapter locally.

Even though Charlottesville's control of the presidency ended when Monroe retired in 1824, the area continued to have a political impact with William Cabell Rives' election as U.S. Senator in 1832. A University of Virginia graduate named Robert Hunter became speaker of the House of Representatives in 1839 and later secretary of state of the Confederacy. A former speaker, Andrew Stevenson, moved to the area at this time and later became rector of the University in the 1850s. In 1840 Thomas W. Gilmer was elected governor, but died in a tragic accident soon thereafter. The town became aligned first with Jacksonian Democrats and later with the Whig Party in its politics.

Although there had always been short-term military volunteers in the Revolutionary and 1812 wars, in 1832 a peacetime military unit was organized called the Jefferson Guard (previously called the Charlottesville Blues). It served in the Mexican War in 1846.

A change in the state constitution in 1851 caused a huge increase in white male voters after property restrictions were removed, and in February 25, 1854, Charlottesville had its first election for a mayor and four aldermen on its town council. Drury Wood was elected the first mayor with 75 votes. The council met in the new Town Hall that opened in 1852 on Court Square. One of its first ordinances was the prohibition of hogs being raised in the city except on lots of one acre or more. It also began to develop a police force. George Slaughter became the first police sergeant.

John Bowie Strange opened the Albemarle Military Institute on Ridge Street in 1856, but he was

later killed in the Civil War. The Jefferson Guard changed its name to the Monticello Guard on May 9, 1857. The guard was on duty in 1859 at the site of the execution of John Brown for organizing armed insurrection.

Students at the University broke into the Rotunda and raised the Confederate flag above it on February 26, 1861, two months before Virginia decided to secede. After secession Charlottesville operated as part of a new nation—the Confederate States of America, and recognized Jefferson Davis as its President. The Charlottesville and University Battalions were formed, and the Monticello Guard and Albemarle Rifles (led by R. T. W. Duke) were organized as part of the 19th Virginia Infantry (led by John Bowie Strange) in Pickett's Division of the Confederate army. Captain J. C. Culin and Lt. C. C. Wertenbaker also became notable military leaders from Charlottesville.

Some families were divided, with members fighting for opposing sides in the Civil War. An example was in a prominent Jewish family: Isaac Leterman fought for the Union while his brother Simon fought for the Confederacy. The battle of First Manassas in July 1861, with its large casualties, shocked everyone as to the reality of a much longer war than anyone had imagined.

In 1862, on its 100th anniversary, the town of Charlottesville was part of a new nation and in the middle of a Civil War. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and his army camped in western Albemarle on May 3-4 and, later on June 21 Jackson and Dabney passed through the town on a train. John S. Mosby had become a scout for Jeb Stuart, R. T. W. Duke had become Colonel of the 46th Virginia Infantry, and J. M. Jones of Social Hall had become a brigadier general. But the war had only just begun.

Some 1,600 men from the area served in the 19th Virginia Infantry over the course of the war. Charlottesville's main contribution to the war effort was as a medical center. The Charlottesville General Hospital opened on the Grounds of the University on July 15, 1861, and after the first battle of Manassas in July, many wounded were sent to the area.

In 1863 the body of "Stonewall" Jackson passed through the town on a train, on its way to Lexington with many spectators paying their respects. But of more concern was the news of defeat at Gettysburg; with at least one local man, Colonel J. B. Magruder, dying there. In 1864 General J. M. Jones was killed in battle and buried in Maplewood cemetery. In the course of the war 483 UVa students and faculty at the University lost their lives.

The closest that any fighting came to Charlottesville was on February 29, 1864, when a skirmish occurred at Rio Hill, and George Armstrong Custer's Union troops burned down the Rivanna bridge. About a year later, on March 3, 1865, Mayor Christopher Fowler surrendered the town to General Philip Sheridan, and Custer accepted the surrender at the top of what is now Carr's Hill. This pro-active capitulation to 10,000 Federal forces preserved most of the town from damage, although the Woolen Mills were burned down because they made uniforms for the Confederate army. Custer set up headquarters at "The Farm" on 12th Street and at "Piedmont" near the University. While the Union army occupied the city for a few days, probably the most celebrated local in the war—Col. John Mosby, who was visiting his mother in town at the time—managed to escape unnoticed. Earlier in 1853 Mosby had lived in town and shot a local man and had spent time in jail. Custer captured Captain Thomas Farish, but spared his life.

The war came to an end that spring and the 11th Pennsylvania Calvary arrived on May 14, 1865 to provide the military government of the city. William Criddle was appointed constable of Albemarle by Military Order 379 from Head Quarters, First Military District.

On October 5, 1869 the state was allowed to have an election which returned the Democratic Party to power after five years of Reconstruction military rule. The state was readmitted to the Union on January 26, 1870, and Col. R. T. W. Duke was elected to Congress. Micajah Woods was elected Commonwealth's Attorney.

About this time John Massey, a Baptist clergyman, purchased James Monroe's Highland home and renamed it Ash Lawn. Massey was elected in 1873 to the legislature as a member of the new "Conservative Party." He also became a leader of an uncommon biracial "Readjuster" political movement that cooperated with the small Republican Party to capture the legislature from the Democrats in 1879 for four years.

Virginia instituted its first state system of public education in 1870. The town's first local public grade schools began on September 4, 1871 (on Garrett Street) and in 1878 the school principal was James Lane. Moses Kaufman, a Jewish businessman was a member of the town school board.

Construction began on a new jail on September 16, 1875 (which still stands today adjacent to Court Square). The first telephones were demonstrated on January 3, 1878, in Town Hall. In 1877 the largest telescope in the world at that time was donated to the University by Leander McCormick.

The movement against alcoholic drinks emerged immediately after the war when the Charlottesville and University Temperance Councils were formed on January 8, 1867. Then, in 1882, Charlottesville became home of one of the first chapters in Virginia of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. It's national president Frances Willard spoke that year in Charlottesville's Methodist Church and was also supported by the Disciples of Christ pastor.

In 1886 the town mayor abolished fireworks on Christmas holidays and someone set off dynamite near his house in retaliation.

1888-2012, As a City

In 1888 the legislature chartered Charlottesville for the first time as a city independent from Albemarle County—with a mayor, four wards and a 10-man city council. An election was held on May 25, 1888, for many positions. In 1892 the city schools also became independent of the county and Midway became the city's public high school for white students.

The Democratic Party became the majority dominant political force in the city from the Civil War to this day. In 1903 the Virginia Anti-Saloon League opened a chapter in the city, and in 1907 the city was the first in the state to adopt prohibition—putting 16 saloons (including the Log Cabin Bar) out of business and forcing the Monticello Wine Company to cease in-state sales. Local political leaders also influenced the state Democratic Party to back a "dry" candidate for governor, and thus brought the Anti-Saloon League's support to the Democrats for the first time.

Charlottesville began to return to the map of national politics as well. Presidents began to make Charlottesville a common destination. President Grover Cleveland visited the city on October 24, 1895. President William McKinley visited from a train station platform on April 28, 1901. President Theodore Roosevelt visited the city in 1902 and spoke at U.Va. on June 16, 1903. He then purchased property in the county and visited more during his term in the White House. But it was a young 37 year old losing Democratic candidate for President, William Jennings Bryan, who in 1897 spoke at the University to a huge crowd of about 20,000 on the Lawn.

Local political leader Mayor Samuel McCue was charged and tried in 1904 for murdering his wife, and became the last person to die by public hanging in Virginia on February 10, 1905. He was executed in the yard of the Albemarle County jail.

In 1912, the year Charlottesville turned 150, former U.Va. law student, Woodrow Wilson, became the new president-elect on November 5. One of the local Democratic leaders, Thomas Staples Martin, had become the most powerful person in state politics. He was elected by the legislature to the U.S. Senate in 1893 and in 1912 he became the leader of Senate Democrats. They became the Senate's majority party the following year, and remained so until Martin's death in 1919. Thus, a Charlottesville leader was again one of the most powerful men in the nation's government. With Martin ruling the U.S. Senate and Wilson in the White House, Central Virginia's national impact continued to be profound.

National suffrage leader Rev. Anna Shaw spoke at the University in 1910 and again in 1917. In 1912 the Equal Suffrage League local chapter was formed through the efforts of Roberta Wellford and its official leader Nancy Marshall. About a hundred members from the city and another from the University lobbied political leaders and organized events such as the Equal Suffrage Day in 1915 at Court Square. While segregation and disenfranchisement of blacks grew worse, women's suffrage finally was achieved in 1920 when the national amendment passed, thus overruling Virginia's legislature that had blocked it.

Changes in local government also were approved by voters in 1920, creating the position of city manager. A new charter was adopted two years later. The city's first fire chief, T. J. Williams, who had served since 1853, died in 1921.

World War I began in Europe in 1914, and the United States entered it in April 1917. The Monticello Guard and Base Hospital 41, formed at the University of Virginia, served in France in the 116th Infantry of the 29th Division. John C. Marsh of the Monticello Guard was a local citizen who received a Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry in the war. Davis B. Wills received the same. University graduate James McConnell who died serving in the Lafayette Escadrille in France, was later remembered by a statue at the University. On November 11, 1918, Charlottesville's celebration of the end of World War I was held at Midway School. The new Memorial Gym honoring soldiers who served in World War I was dedicated in 1924.

The U.S. entered World War II in 1941 and the scheduled city-wide blackouts in 1942 helped conserve resources for the war. The USS Charlottesville was a ship christened by Mrs. Gleason—wife of the mayor—in 1943. The Monticello Guard, as part of the 116th Infantry, 29th Division, participated in the 1944 D-Day invasion, at Omaha Beach. Another unit from Charlottesville that served was Evacuation Hospital 8. Three locals received the Congressional

Medal of Honor: Demas T. Craw, Frank Peregory and Alexander A. Vandegrift (who also became the first four-star Marine general). Carl D. Profitt received the Distinguished Service Cross. In 1945 Navy Ensign Horace Heath was awarded seven medals. After the war, retired Admiral William Halsey, Jr. moved to the area in 1947 to lead U.Va.'s development campaign.

The Korean War followed in the 1950s and likewise called many local men into distinguished service. Except for the Civil War, local citizens faced battles and sacrificed more in this period of history than any other 50 years in the city's story.

As Charlottesville celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1962, the nation's President was John F. Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic to hold that office, and the mayor was Louie Scribner and Virginia's governor was Albertis Sydney Harrison, Jr. All were Democrats. Women were able to vote, but most black citizens were still disenfranchised due to race-based voter restrictions. The first real observance of the anniversary of the city's founding was celebrated with a week-long program in July that included an outdoor pageant at Lane High School called *Let Freedom Ring*. Events of this final period 1962-2011 were told through newspapers, radio, and the new medium of television and the Internet.

America entered the Vietnam War and student protests increased at U.Va. after Yippie leader Jerry Rubin spoke there in 1970, resulting in the arrest of 67 students. However, many from the area proudly served in the Vietnam War, including William A. Jones, III, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1968. An emerging passivist movement began to influence city politics and re-emerged during the Iraq war after the turn of the century.

Historic breakthroughs followed in the city for blacks and women. In 1970 Charles Barbour became the first African American elected to city council. Jill Rinehart was the first woman elected in 1972; Barbour became mayor in 1974, followed by Nancy O'Brien in 1976. Grace Tinsley became the first black woman on the school board in 1976, and Cornelia Johnson became the first black female police officer. Democrats were widely credited for encouraging these developments. Black religious leaders, the Rev. E. G. Hall and Rev. Alvin Edwards, were elected to City Council and Edwards also as mayor. Mary Ann Elwood became the first female president of the Chamber of Commerce.

Even Republicans won elections for the first time for City Council, and a popular one was Darden Towe. Republicans also produced some mayors of Charlottesville: G. A. Vogt in 1968 and Lawrence A. Brunton in 1978. By the 1990s Republicans had taken majority control of the state legislature for the first time. Local Republican George Allen represented the area first as state delegate and then as congressman, eventually becoming governor and then U. S. senator.

The trend toward greater diversity within the city's leadership continued: in 2007, an Indian immigrant of the Sikh faith, Satyendra Huja, the current mayor, was elected to City Council. Teresa Sullivan became the first female president of the University of Virginia that same year.

In this final 50-year period of the city's history, Virginia became an election battleground state and Charlottesville was visited by multiple Republican and Democratic presidential candidates and sitting presidents including George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

But perhaps the most significant story of the city era is the story of the African American community and the struggle for civil rights. We will look at that now as a whole.