

# Albemarle County Stores

THEIR HISTORY AND COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEIR PRESERVATION



ALBEMARLE COUNTY'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



Current stores or stores that have remained operational serving the Rural Areas such as Wyant's Store in White Hall.



Adaptive reuse store buildings that have been adapted into other commercial uses or as residences such as James River Rafter's in Hatton.



Threatened Stores which are closed and in disrepair or in transfer without specific plans such as Page's Store in Batesville.



Lost stores which have been razed or in ruins such as S.A. Payne's Store in Esmont.

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the County's re-evaluation or study of the Rural Areas Plan, it was realized that there is a historic commercial component. In the fall of 2002, Albemarle County's Historic Preservation Committee decided to take on the project of a preliminary recording and historical context of the country store - both in general and in the County. This resulted in many months of work by Committee members. In particular, I'd like to thank the following members:

*Charles Lowry Able*, for his suggestions and participation; *Garth Anderson*, for creating the web site and designing this booklet; *Christine Devine*, for doing some documentary primary research; *Jamie Gibson*, for his suggestions and contributions to print a brochure; *Margaret Maliszewski*, County Design Planner; for being unbelievably supportive and helpful with the Committee on this project; *Steven Meeks*, for sharing his vast knowledge of the County's country stores and surveying and compiling the list to date; *Lewis Nelson*, for the presentation, recognizing the importance of this project and directing teams of his students out in the countryside to record five structures; and *Bob Vernon*, for the digital mapping expertise.

This list is not complete or fully documented. It is hoped that the generations of families

who have been involved with rural commerce will help augment the information. A thorough examination of the subject would be a wonderful academic exercise for a university student.

We have categorized Albemarle County's country Stores into four groups: Current stores or stores that have remained operational serving the Rural Areas (some may have been expanded from their original plan or rebuilt), Adaptive reuse store buildings that have been adapted into other commercial uses or as residences, Threatened Stores which are closed and in disrepair or in transfer without specific plans, and Lost stores which have been razed or in ruins.

The Committee's research has consisted primarily of a windshield survey, with some research into historic maps, store ledgers, and photograph collections. This research should not be considered exhaustive.

We hope our interest and enthusiasm for the County's rural commercial properties will extend to you, who hold Albemarle's *past* and *future* in the balance.

Sara Lee Barnes, Chair

# ALBEMARLE COUNTY STORES: THEIR HISTORY AND COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEIR PRESERVATION

Albemarle County has a long history of rural life. But the county's rural character—so central to our history and our identity—is daily eroding. We applaud the Board of Supervisors for supporting initiatives that seek to protect our rural areas and we encourage the Board to consider one important but often neglected component of rural life, the country or general store.

The country store is a long-neglected building type that has an important place in American history. Unlike Old World market towns which provided a common center for commercial activity and supported the diversification of merchants by commodity type, from the Colonial period, rural America adopted a commercial pattern of general stores. In contexts that supported only a handful of merchants, like rural America, the general store was born.

Recent research by historians and archaeologists suggests that the country store was

one of the most diverse and dynamic spaces in rural places well into the middle of the twentieth century. What is particularly remarkable about stores in Virginia is the simple fact that in a landscape characterized first by slavery and then segregation, the country store is the one space made equally available to all. One historian argues that general stores were the only public spaces utilized by a broad cross section of society—rich and poor, black and white, slave and free, and men and women. Furthermore, the store was of critical importance to smaller farmers unable to both grow and market their produce.

Through the imported and manufactured goods available on its shelves—textiles, ceramics, farm tools, chocolates—the store was also a rare window into the world beyond tobacco fields, bank barns, and cow sheds.

The rural country stores that still dot Piedmont Virginia appear to have evolved from two types of stores: the plan-

## Stores Adapted to Re-use



Blackwell Store



Shifflett Store



Green Creek Store



Keene Store



Nortonville Store



Unknown



Purvis Store



Brick Store



Kennedy Store



Powell's Store



Foster Layman Store



Hatton Store

## Threatened Stores



Bank and Store

Carousel



Paces Store

Porter's Superette



Harris Store

Johnson Store



Old Maupin Store

W.R. Lewis Store



Shadwell Store

Maupin Store



Lindsay Store

Heard's Store



Ney's Store

Sinclair Woods Store

tation store and the cross-roads general store. The plantation store, the older of the two, was a critical place of meeting between slaves and free whites. Much of the eggs, meat, and produce consumed on any plantation may very well have been grown by slaves, tended in their free time, and sold to the plantation store, serving as the one vehicle by which slaves could generate their own income. The cross-roads store tended to serve a slightly more diverse community, offering for sale most of the goods necessary to support a farm. Research in shop daybooks from Piedmont Virginia suggests that slaves traveled to stores in groups near the end of the day on weekends, probably hoping to meet and socialize with groups traveling from other plantations. Furthermore, slaves most common purchases were alcohol, cloth and adornments, suggesting that the store was critical to facilitating slave social life and entertainment. It is important to note that recent research suggests that among slaves, men had greater access to stores than women. Thus, the store was a place of meeting, a critical fixture in the rural economy, and a window from the plan-

tation into the world abroad for both blacks and whites. The architectural form of the store in Virginia appears to have developed along a fairly typical path. The earliest stores were narrow, deep buildings that usually had a front store room and a rear counting room or office that allowed for the private exchange of money. The store was most easily distinguished from the rest of the vernacular landscape by its large windows on the front showcasing the goods available. Usually the long side walls were devoid of windows allowing for more shelving on the interior. Often the second floor was outfitted as a living space for the clerk or shop owner and his family. One of the difficulties in preserving country stores is that they often have a history of shifting back and forth between entirely commercial, mixed-use commercial/residential, and entirely residential, often cycling between these uses numerous times in only a few decades. By the end of the nineteenth century, the store had changed form slightly. The front elevation was now almost entirely consumed by the door and flanking windows. The gable roof was

now hidden behind a raised, false façade. Often a side addition was added for storage and the processing of new merchandise. The arrival of the automobile changed the appearance of the store by the early 1930s, when they began offering gasoline for sale along with automotive parts and often repair service as well.

Once the country store was an established community center, it persisted in that role in Albemarle County and elsewhere through the twentieth century. Information contained in the extant ledgers of country stores reveals a broad network of trade that helped shape communities in Albemarle County and reflected the county's social and commercial ties with other localities. Recent research undertaken by the members of the Albemarle County Historic Preservation Commission has revealed that these buildings served as a center of the community into the twentieth century in a variety of ways. Some storeowners offered their spaces for community dances, while others provided services to local residents, such as shoe and farm tool repair. Unfortunately, a recent survey under-

taken by this committee suggests that a large percentage of these historic community centers have already been lost and that we have not yet identified a country store in the county that predates the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The preservation of these remaining examples is of critical importance; the loss of these stores signals the demise not just of a building type, but of a way of life, community, and memory that once characterized a majority of our county. As the County begins to assess the adaptive reuse of these surviving stores, it should take into account their historically multipurpose use.

The Committee believes that, with the County's encouragement, country stores can be both preserved and reintegrated into our plans for the future. The May 2001 draft of the Rural Areas Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan states that there are many buildings located in the crossroad communities that are vacant and could have local significance. The plan further states that these buildings could be renovated to maintain the rural character of the community and to provide a valuable service to the immediate local area

## Threatened Stores



Cobham Store



Store Rts 681 & 631



Unknown



Unknown



Steed's Store



H.I. Davis Store



Greenwood Store



Unknown



Unknown



Eubank's Store



Unknown



Unknown

## Lost Stores



Old Baber's Store



Tapscott Store Site



Warren Ruins



Earlysville PO



R.N. Estes Store



Unknown



Warren Store Site



Unknown



Alberene Store



Keswick Store



Crossroads Store

(page 16). The plan recommends the preservation and rehabilitation of these historic buildings. Country stores—those purpose-built structures with a history of commercial use in a rural context — are among these important yet threatened historic resources.

The Albemarle County Historic Preservation Plan, adopted by the Board of Supervisors in September 2000, identifies the protection of the County's natural, scenic and historic resources in the Rural Areas as a primary goal. The Historic Preservation Committee has conducted research to better understand this issue. At the outset of our research it became immediately apparent that country stores were seriously threatened. The Committee's research to date indicates that no stores constructed during the first 130 years of the County's history survive. Only a handful of stores remain that date to the late nineteenth century. The earliest known store to survive is Craig's Store, which dates to the third quarter of the nineteenth century. At least 22 country stores have been lost in recent decades. Furthermore, at least 26 stores are currently standing

vacant, threatening to join those already lost to conscious demolition or neglect. Approximately two dozen stores are still operating in their traditional role. In an effort to preserve these buildings, we have begun a comprehensive list of all those buildings in the County (See Appendix A). This list includes buildings erected by 1950 and later buildings that replaced earlier stores in kind. The list is divided into four categories: 1) those stores that have persisted in their original use; 2) those stores that have been adapted for other uses; 3) those stores that are now threatened (closed, in disrepair, in transfer without specific plans for reopening, and/or empty); and 4) those stores that have already been lost.

Following our review of the "Rural Commercial" section of the draft revisions to the Rural Areas chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, and based on our surveys and research, it is the Committee's recommendation that the County should be more proactive in allowing the re-use of country stores. We have identified four potential measures for reintegrating our country stores as vital and contributing components

of our county's rural landscape.

1) For all country stores on the list, we recommend that the requirements for parking be revised to allow exceptions to accepted practice when the confines or limits of the property of one of these historic stores do not allow for the standard requirements.

2) We recommend that there be a requirement that additions to country stores on the list be designed in accord with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards numbers 9 and 10.

3) We further recommend that the County allow for the consideration of multiple uses (in addition to the country store use) in any of the buildings on the list.

4) For buildings on the list whose rehabilitations are completed in accordance with all ten of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, we recommend that specific property tax abatements be instituted, for the structure only, to serve as incentives to shop-owners to open or re-open commercial enterprises. (Some additional discussion on each of our recommendations is included in our Position Statement.)

Albemarle County's historic country stores were once a vital component of our county; they are today an eroding memory of our local heritage. If Albemarle County intends to preserve its distinctive character, these important and distinctive historic buildings must receive the special attention they deserve.

Country stores are one component of the built environment in the rural areas. We have addressed stores first because they are the rural resources with the greatest potential to be impacted by blanket policies and regulations. However, responsible preservation planning is required for all historic resources in the rural areas. The Historic Preservation Committee will continue to study the rural areas and would like to continue to update the Board of Supervisors as other important rural commercial structures are discovered. Also, the Committee hopes that the Board will remain open to the concept that previous surveys and future discoveries could expand the current list of historic country stores.

## Current Stores



Simeon Store

Piedmont Store



Maupin Store

Earlysville Store



620 Market

Buck Island Store



Baber's Store

Briar Fork Store 2



Woodridge Store

Wyant Store



Advance Mills

Boyd Tavern

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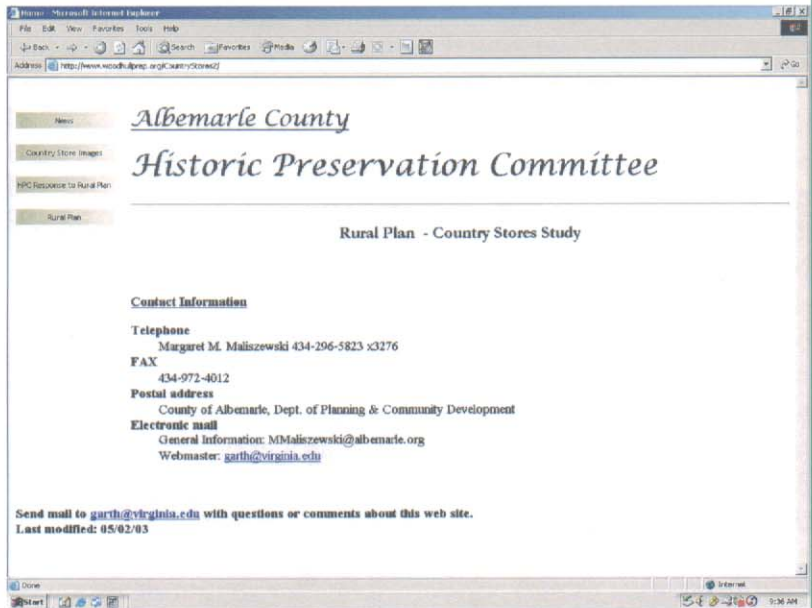
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## COUNTRY STORES WEBSITE

The Committee has a website with images of Albemarle's country stores. Please visit::

[www.woodhullprep.org/CountryStores2/](http://www.woodhullprep.org/CountryStores2/)



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