



**UPON LEARNING THAT A TOWN
EXISTS IN VIRGINIA CALLED
UPPERVILLE**

By John Updike (1961)

*In Upperville, the upper crust
say "Bottoms Up!" from dawn to dusk
and "Ups-a-daisy, dear!" at will
I want to live in Upperville.*

*One-upmanship is there the rule,
and children learn, at school,
"The Rise of Silas Lapham" and
why gravitation has been banned.*

*High hamlet, but my mind's eye sees
Thy ruddy uplands, lofty trees,
Upsurging streams, and towering dogs,
There are no valleys, dumps or bogs.*

*Depression never dares intrude
upon their sweet upswinging mood;
Downcast, long-fallen, let me go
to where the cattle never low.*

*I've always known there was a town
just right for me; I'll settle down
and be uplifted all day long —
Fair Upperville, accept my song.*

Accept My Song . . .
Upperville

**Story and Photos
by William T. Semple**

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge is a hamlet consisting of four churches, an English pub, one B&B, one country inn, an auto repair shop, a small library that opens once a week, an antique store, a day care center, a small business center, a country lawyer, a gas station, a volunteer fire department, a shop that sells stone products, the proverbial country store, and a cluster of historic houses - a description that could easily apply to any number of villages throughout the Commonwealth.

Mention its name and to some, it evokes images of rolling horse and cattle

farms, famous and wealthy landowners, foxhunting, horse shows, four-in-hand carriages, equestrian sports, and a history steeped as much in mystique as in reality.

Mention its name and to others, it reminds them of a reserved lifestyle hidden from view but without the physical walls or barriers so often required to separate public and private lives: a state of being, which to be understood is to be shared - blending the old with the new, allowing everything to remain the same.

Mention "Upperville, VA," and at the very least, it is an unincorporated village



Sandy Lerner’s Ayrshire Farm was represented with a team driven by Paul Maye.

Photo by Liz Callar

exactly 50 miles from downtown Washington and eight miles to the west of Middleburg. Mention “Upperville, VA,” and at the very most, it is a fascinating paradox - a domain more than a town, whose boundaries are not physical but spiritual. To understand Upperville is not to understand it so much as a destination “where” as a destination “who” and a destination “why.”

Five-year resident Paul Hasse believes that Upperville deserves some credit for being a destination “where.” “Upperville represents what rural country, small-town living used to be like,” Paul observes. “The town is listed as a Virginia Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places - blessed with one of the region’s richest collection of preserved eighteenth century houses. Three Civil War battle were fought locally. Trinity Church is an architectural wonder. And Hunter’s Head Tavern is quite suc-

cessful. It’s also worth noting that the Citgo and the country store serve decent pork barbeque and egg sandwiches. On a nice day you can grab a country lunch and sit at the picnic tables overlooking the battle site, which is right next door.”

Unlike Middleburg, where carriage trade storefronts stack up like domi-

noes, the village’s quaint blend of commercial and residential spaces doesn’t compel the average tourist to stop. The “main street” is Route 50, (*i.e.* The Ashby Turnpike, or the John S. Mosby Highway) which is so busy that a coalition has been formed to calm the burgeoning traffic. “Upperville looks like a highway with buildings on each side, instead of a town

Trinity Church



with a main street,” the coalition’s website laments. “There is nothing to indicate to motorists that they are in a village except a speed limit sign, which is largely disregarded. Upperville is affectionately called the town that is ‘a mile long and an inch wide.’ ”

But there is a beneficial side effect. The residents and its neighbors find peace and privacy behind this wall of quaint invisibility. As a confirmed Uppervillian, Hasse himself acknowledges that it is not the town’s mission to become a tourist attraction. “That’s why we like it the way it is.”

The town’s origins began when the ubiquitous George Washington bought what is now the 1763 Inn, about a mile out of town towards Paris to the west. The inn was then part of over 2,768 acres that he had purchased from the estate of George Carter. The original tract, over which Route 50 now passes, straddles the Fauquier-Loudoun line. In 1790, Josephus Carr acquired and then converted 177 acres along Pantherskin Creek into 50 lots and named his creation Carrstown. The first buildings in Carrstown were a mill on Panther Skin Run and one house to the west.

An Act of the Virginia Assembly in 1819 inexplicably changed the name to Upperville and placed the new village on 30 acres. Upperville flourished and soon became Fauquier County’s second-largest town. The Civil War visited Upperville, somewhat briefly. The owner of nearby Oakley Farm recalled in her diary how she had stood on her balcony watching the armies charge and countercharge. A road marker succinctly records the most significant battle, which took 400 lives - ironically about the size of Upperville’s current population.

The life that most of today’s resi-



Llangollen Farm

The Upperville Colt and Horse Show (Photo by Jane Fogleman)



dents know probably began when Paul Mellon in 1960 contributed the money to build Trinity Church, designed in the French fourteenth-century tradition, and by any measure the most beautiful structure in the village. The church serves as the nexus of the community’s social life. It houses a marvelous music school for children, and its facilities are constantly in use for various types of meetings, social engagements, rehearsals, and of course, religion Episcopal style.

The other significant change has been the Hunter’s Head Tavern, housed in John Carr’s original home (c.1750) the brainchild of Sandy Lerner, the co-founder of Cisco. She arrived from California to restore a historic 42-room mansion on the 800-acre Ayrshire Farm on Trappe Road and to dedicate herself to producing the best in organic farming. When she proposed the idea as an outlet for her meat and

produce, the residents took up arms in their quaint way, sporting bumper stickers on their cars: *Don’t Middleburg Upperville*, but between them and Ms. Lerner, they arrived at a workable compromise, and the Tavern has been a smash success without changing Upperville one iota.

Which brings us to the destination “who” - the people who inspired John Updike to write a poem about them. We must start with Paul Mellon, who died in 1999 at the age of 91, but whose kind widow Bunny continues to quietly exert the Mellon influence on the region. Mellon was a noted philanthropist and founder of the National Gallery of Art, and he devoted his life to racehorses. His farm, Rokeby Stables, has been home to numerous stake horses and Triple Crown winners and is the highlight of the annual stable tour. His greatest gift to the community, however, appears to have been Trinity Church.



Bee Lefferts

Other famous residents or P.O. box holders include Jack Kent Cooke; Joe L. Allbritton of the Riggs National Bank; Roy Ash, co-founder of Litton Industries and Director of OMB, Management; Sandy Lerner; Mr. & Mrs. Bertram Firestone, whose devotion to Grand Prix showing jumping is legendary; the deButts family, one of whom served as chairman of AT&T during its heyday; and Mrs. Thayer Randolph, Master of Foxhounds for the Piedmont Hunt, who for forty years ruled the hunt country with an iron hand. And we can't overlook Jackie Onassis, who regularly rode with the Piedmont Hunt, or nearby resident General (then Colonel) George Patton.

But equally important are the local families and personalities who have contributed so much to Upperville's colorful history: the Slaters, the Fletchers, Gordon Staples, Robert Smith, Dodge Sloan, Tim Dudley, Mary Stokes, Shelby Bonnie, Jimmy Wofford, and the two founding members of the local volunteer fire department, Dr. Walter Williams and Scott Nesbit—a list of storied lives to which one can readily add any of the 400 current day residents.

Jud Glascock says, "When people come here, they either stay a year or two, or they stay forever." Bee Lefferts, who with her husband Leff owned Horsefields

on the "outskirts" until he died a couple of years ago, reminisces. "We weren't looking to live there," she says. "We rented this place in the early 1990's in such disrepair our heating bill was in the thousands of dollars. But after two years in Upperville, we loved being part of the intimate community so much we decided to stay. It is hard to describe what bonds resident together, but I think it is a shared experience that inspires everyone, without pretense or privilege, to protect and preserve this special environment."

The post office, of course, is the social center. Although the town has no formal structure, residents spontaneously join together when needed, anteing up to preserve the historic Buchanan Building or turning out to volunteer for the fire department when it was first organized in 1955. The dinner and party circuit calendars are irregular, and known just to the invited. Except Jud Glascock recalls the days when telephone calls were routed through a rural system affectionately and somewhat nervously called "the killer-diller line." The two phone company operators who then controlled the town switchboard regularly listened in on the conversations.

How, then, does one learn to truly appreciate Upperville without living there? We now come to the destination "why." If you are one of those who have scooted through town and, after the two-minute drive, said, "huh?" to yourself, consider my suggestion to attend events that Upperville residents organize. You might meet a few of them.

You already missed one extraordinary happening this past October, a gathering of more than thirty-one road coaches and an equal number of gleaming 4-horse teams pulling them with their nattily attired coachmen, whips, brakemen and passengers all dressed to the nines, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of

Middleburg's National Library. Purportedly the biggest gathering of road coaches since the original was held 100 years ago in England, the event gathered at the Upperville Show Grounds. Sandy Lerner's Ayrshire Farm was represented with a team driven by Paul Maye.

For the 42nd time, The Upperville Garden Club will host its annual Daffodil Show at Trinity Church (there's that church again) from April 4-5.

Trinity Church also hosts the famous Hunt Country Stable Tour, the 46th version of which will be held as always on Memorial Weekend. The tour provides a fascinating glimpse into the wealth, glamour and style of the equine tradition in the region, and includes the magnificent stables at Rokeby, where stands a statue to Mellon's favorite horse and English Triple Crown winner, Mill Reef.

From June 6-12, the oldest horse show in the country, The Upperville Colt and Horse Show, will involve over two thousand horse-and-rider combinations from young children on ponies to leading Olympic and World Cup riders and horses.

But if you are one of those who *feel* the countryside, I would also suggest traveling the byways, such as Trappe Road, Greengarden Road, Delaplane Grade Road, Rokeby Road, or Willisville Road. Stop in at the Hunter's Head or visit an antique store. Attend a Sunday service. Soon enough, what is special about Upperville may become increasingly apparent. So the next time you are tempted to disregard the speed limit sign on Route 50, who knows, you may stop again and stay for good.

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