

## FROM SPRINGFIELD TO ZACK

By D. E. Brady

Fortnightly Club, March 1986

*See page 7 for a map showing where these communities were located.*

### Springfield 1

SPRINGFIELD WAS LOCATED just south of High Bridge Church, about two miles from the Botetourt County line, along the Old Valley Road, which was used by settlers moving west. The town was founded about 1797 by John McConkey, who had been a captain in the Continental Army. The village was an active place in its earlier days. On Lot Number 1, H. L. Northern ran a tailor shop; there was a tavern on Lots 16 and 17; George Hill operated a blacksmith shop on Number 13, and he also made charcoal and had a coal yard. Number 38 had a boat factory; 39, a wagon and rope shop; and on Lots 21 and 22 lived C. Taylor.

According to John McClelland, a raconteur of note, there are some stories attached to the above facts. Mr. McClelland and his family were the last to occupy the tavern. He tells that Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk and Martin Van Buren used to stop there on their travels. The wagon and rope shop was operated from 1812

Douglas E. "Pat" Brady was mayor of Lexington from 1965 to 1971 and a town and city council member before that. He was a leader of Historic Lexington Foundation, Rockbridge Historical Society, the Stonewall Jackson House and Hospital and the Red Cross. Owner during his lifetime of Buffalo Forge, a National Historic District, he died in 2001.

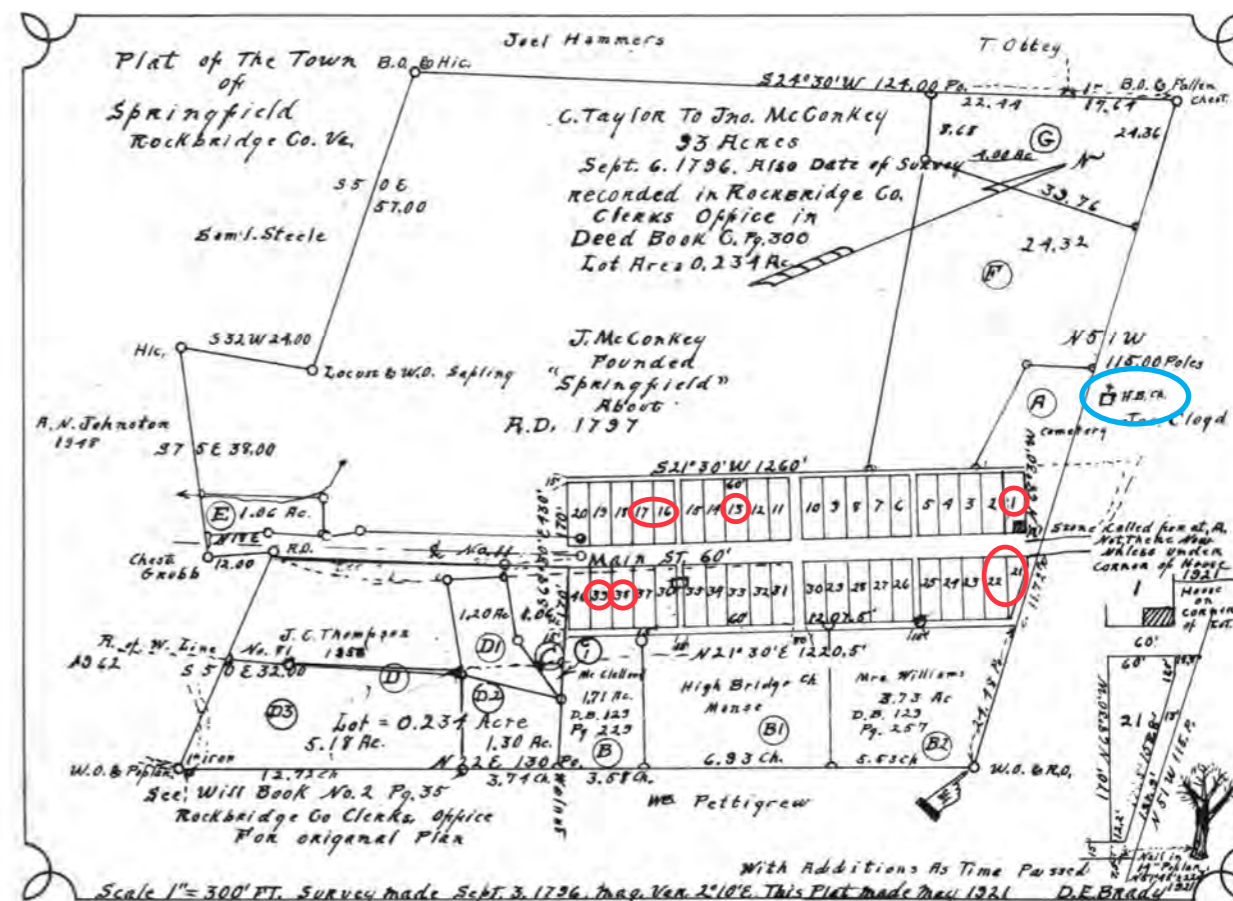
to 1862 by one Daniel Hech, who was the father of the first Ford dealer in Lexington. Credence is added to this story when one learns that Mr. McClelland's middle name was Hech. The shop made wagons that rolled to all parts of the west, eventually reaching California. Of special interest is the trip of one wagon, used by David Hech, Harvey Self and Jonathan Icenhouser. These men migrated to Ohio and there founded Springfield, named for their hometown in Virginia.

The boat shop made batteaux that were hauled to Pattonsburg, the part of Buchanan on the north side of the James River, where they were launched and used in the river trade. (One wonders why they would have been constructed so far from the river.)

The gun shop was run by a German named Jacob Siler. He is supposed to have made a gun for Daniel Boone. When Boone's cabin was burned by Indians, the gun was ruined and Boone returned it to Siler for repair.

At the south end of town stood a stone house, built by Audry Paul, who operated a store across from it. Audry Paul was the brother of John Paul Jones, the "Jones"

Plat of Springfield, drawn in 1921 by D. E. Brady Sr. (1882–1971), the author's father. The site of the present-day High Bridge Presbyterian Church is indicated here by a blue circle, and red circles identify the specific lots the author mentions (page opposite). From the Brady papers, Rockbridge Historical Society (housed in Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University).





High Bridge  
Presbyterian  
Church, 2017.

having been added by John Paul. (McClelland spelled his name Audry, not Audley as other historians did.) Audry's daughter married the C. Taylor mentioned earlier and the Taylors were said to be the parents of Bishop William Taylor of Methodist missionary fame. The C. Taylors may have been his grandparents. I have no confirmation of the John Paul Jones story, although dates match up reasonably well.

Near the village was a large cherry tree that was considered to be the geographical center of Virginia, which then included West Virginia. On the tree were signs: Abingdon 200 miles; Harpers Ferry 200 miles; Wheeling 200 miles; and Albemarle Sound 200 miles. We must have claimed part of North Carolina.

High Bridge Church was organized in 1770 and still exists. In doing so it has watched over the rise and fall of Springfield. Shops went out of business, the Old Valley Road was widened and paved and became U.S. 11. The tavern and stone house remained and except for a gasoline station the town was a rural, residential community. In mid-1960s, Interstate 81 was constructed and Springfield was wiped out, leaving High Bridge Church as the only reminder.

## Zack 2

ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF ROCKBRIDGE, on the upper reaches of Walker's Creek, is Zack. It is located in moderately good, although hilly, country and appears to have started from Kennedy's Mill, which operated from 1808 until 1940. The community is probably as prosperous now as it ever was. The downside is that the mill is in ruins, the



little store/service station operation is closed, and the two-room school is now a residence. The upside is that there is a firehouse with an active department that serves as a community focus.

There are two churches. Immanuel Church (Presbyterian), founded in 1879, still functions; the other, now Methodist, is a freshly painted, now weatherboarded chapel. The fresh exterior hides a much older log structure that has sheltered a school and the congregations of several other denominations. The small store building replaced a larger one, above which was an International Order of Odd Fellows lodge hall. That building probably housed the post office that gave the place its name, for the post office was established when Old Zack Taylor was president.

While not the liveliest place in town, Immanuel Cemetary makes for an inter-

esting walk. The oldest gravestone is dated 1898. There is the grave of Edmonia R. Reed, who died at age 28 in 1901 and is memorialized thus: "She sleeps beneath / Her native earth / And near the spot / That gave her birth / Her youthful feet trod / Flowers that bloom / In beauty o'er her early tomb."

The epitaphs of Alexander and India Reed are almost identical. Alexander's: "Sleep brother dear / and take thy rest / God called thee home / He thought it best." India's: "Sleep, dearest one, and / Take thy rest / God called thee home / He thought it best."

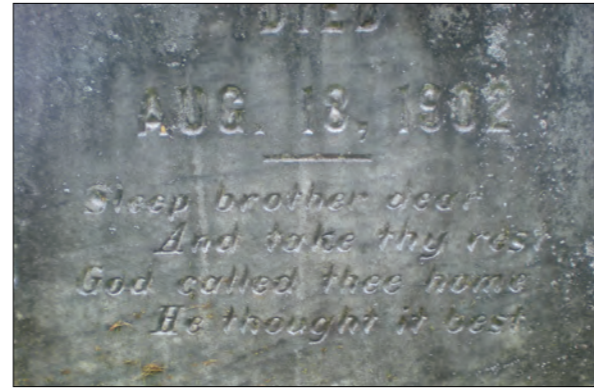
Liddie Rejulia Patterson died in 1901. One should not even think that Rejulia might have had a twin sister named Julia.



McCray's gasoline station in Zack, now abandoned.



Immanuel Church, Zack.



In the Immanuel Church cemetery, headstones for Liddie Rejulia Patterson and Alexander Reed.

The narrow, twisting road from Zack to Brownsburg traverses steep hills, passing farmsteads tucked into narrow valleys. Occasionally a spectacular view opens across the rolling farmland and on to the distant Blue Ridge, giving ample reason for the chalet and rustic-type houses that dot these hillsides.

### Rapps Mill 3

**A**CROSS SHORT HILL from Springfield and on the headwaters of South Buffalo Creek is Rapps Mill. In this almost-mountain community are several homes and the old general store building. James Parsons lives in and is restoring the home of his ancestor Mathias Rapp, the patriarch of the village.\* Mathias Rapp ran the mill, gave the land for the chapel, was an inventor, and of course supplied the village name. The Rapp home has an unusual construction feature: Several walls are made of stacked 2-x-4s, providing solid wood walls four inches thick. The mill race ended near the front of the house; from there the water was carried to the mill by an overhead trunk. The race was of the “Down by the old mill stream” type. On it was a rowboat in which one young man had his marriage proposal accepted.

Besides the grist mill there was a shingle mill and, in 1903, a marble plant. The marble plant was an unusual industry for Rockbridge. Stalactites and stalagmites were mined from a cave and brought to the mill, where they were sawn into slabs. From these were made various decorative and/or useful items. Some of these slabs found their usefulness as hold-down lids for crocks in the local spring houses, and some pieces may still be found in the area. The material was not actually marble but was probably a form of calcite. The venture was not a financial success and did not continue very long.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, the store was operated by a native son, Newman Acklerly. He moved away and was probably the last person to run the

\* James Parsons died in July 2017 at age 95.

Rapps Mill Church.



store. The village is now a residential community for farmers and loggers, and does have an identifying highway sign. Mathias Rapp in 1870 obtained a patent on a turbine-like water wheel. It apparently operated successfully, for he used it in his own mill and contracted to install it in others. His mill burned and today the site is not easy to identify.

### Murat 4

**W**HERE SHORT HILL ENDS at Buffalo Creek lies the little village of Murat. There was once a mill there known as Bolivar Mills with a few houses then and a few now. The tiny post office, now gone, gave the place its name, supposedly named for one of Napoleon’s officers who sought asylum in this country after the emperor’s defeat.

### Summers 5

**L**OCATED ON THE PLANK ROAD about two miles from the Buffalo Creek bridge, it too had its mill, store and post office, plus the added distinction of a schoolhouse. Early maps show Lavelle’s Mill, but in this century [20th], it was known as Ackerly’s Mill. All of these structures are gone now, one by fire, one by flood, and the rest by decay. The community has the distinction of having been the birthplace of Lucy Ackerly, a longtime teacher of Lexington children.

### Oak Bank 6

**T**HIS COMMUNITY AND FANCY HILL have intertwining histories. Oak Bank was and is at the I-81 interchange north of Natural Bridge. It had a store, post office and several homes. Fancy Hill had a school, which eventually moved to Oak Bank, and its name went with it. Oak Bank became known as Fancy Hill for many years until the sign “Fancy Hill” was installed at its proper place. Now poor old Oak Bank is practically nameless.

## Old Balcony Falls 7



The Old Balcony Falls dam, above, was removed in 1973, after Hurricane Camille. Photo from the Brady papers, Rockbridge Historical Society (housed in Special Collections, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University).

**O**LD BALCONY FALLS probably just grew. Its lots and lanes have stone walls as their principal boundaries and there is a history of contention over property lines. The village was located on the mountainside between U.S. 501 and the James River just as the river begins its passage through the Blue Ridge range. A series of rapids at this point gave the village its name. When the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad located a station about a mile upstream and called it Balcony Falls Station, “Old” was added to the name of the original village.

Let us assume a man, Simon Shuffleberger, who, being a person of foresight and enterprise, opened a tavern about 1800 in this area. Here batteauxmen could get a bit of rest and recreation before starting their dangerous trip down the James.

The fainthearted could get liquid refreshment to lift his sagging courage and the more seasoned boatman could find food and rest. Simon’s foresight was good, for in the 1820s the Blue Ridge Canal was built, with a dam right at his front door. A cement plant came into being and workers built houses. In the 1840s, the James River and Kanawha Company improved the Blue Ridge Canal to handle larger

boats. That canal was extended up the James River and a new one was built to Lexington. Now Balcony Falls was a terminal.

The Civil War and floods came, and the cement plant suffered damage and ceased operations. The community hung on during Reconstruction and received a boost when the railroad built tracks replacing the canal and the Virginia Public Service Company installed a hydroelectric plant.

Truthfully, I have no record of Simon Shuffleberger and his tavern, but they should have existed.

In 1827, Claudius Crozet, principal engineer of the Virginia Board of Public Works, carried out a survey from Lynchburg to Lexington with the idea of building a road. This road would have gone near the village; when it was actually built, the so-called Lynchburg Road went through it. Today the site is an interesting place to browse. Only two houses are left and they do not appear to date very far back, but along the river are remains of canal locks and ditches; some of these works certainly date back to the Blue Ridge Canal. The stones in the structures almost all have identifying stonemasons’ marks and are of sandstone. The stones farther up the James and Maury Rivers are usually limestone and do not have the marks. The dam was removed in 1973 to reduce the danger of flooding at Glasgow. Now about the only activity at the site is track maintenance by the railroad. At Balcony Falls Station is an enclave of buildings that predates the development of the town of Glasgow, of which it is now a part.

## Landings on the Maury (North) River

**A**LONG THE CANAL, the equivalent of a railroad station was called a landing. Three by that label existed on the canal to Lexington: Miller’s Landing, serving the Buffalo Creek area; Thompson’s Landing, near Wesley Chapel; and Moomaw’s, at the upper end of Buena Vista. Other sites served a similar purpose without the “landing” designation: Loch Laird, South River and possibly Reid’s Dam. Some of these sites are now hard to locate and few gained village status.

Collier’s Creek.



## Collierstown 8

**T**ODAY COLLIERSTOWN is almost as much a state of mind as it is a place. While the Collierstown of yore



“W. P. Painter & Son,” by James T. Miller, undated.. Special Collections, Washington and Lee University.

stretched for nearly two miles along Collier’s Creek, now, if you live anywhere within the Collier’s Creek watershed you are tagged as living in Collierstown.

Iron was once mined and smelted on the west side of North Mountain. Many people, called colliers, were engaged in making charcoal for the smelting process. It is said that these people chose to live in the valley east of the mountain, and their village came to be called Collierstown. Unfortunately for the folklore, however, the record shows that one John Colyer was granted 212 acres on a branch of Buffalo Creek in 1746, and in 1759 Colyer sold 44 acres on that branch, by then known as Colyer’s Creek.

Collierstown is much the same type of community that it was in earlier times. Schools, mills and stores have come and gone, churches have come and remained, and so do two stores. Close by is Lake Robertson and Collierstown is today a land of good farms, although many of its residents commute to jobs away from the community.

### Buffalo Bend 9

**B**UFFALO BEND TODAY is a village of eight houses. It sits along U.S. 11 just north of the Buffalo Creek crossing. Most of the existing houses are of recent vintage and so are the people. Usually in any village there is someone who is interested in and knows stories of its history. Here I never did find that person.

There is an 1849 deed for a piece of land, stating that the land had been for a long time the site of a tavern. In those days the Old Valley Road passed through.

Nearby was a mill, the usual store, and a school. These are all gone, leaving almost no trace, the old Valley Road being the easiest to find. In 1850 Jacob Siler sold to R. R. Barton land known as the Tilt Hammer Tract. Never having heard of anyone named Tilt Hammer, I assumed that a small iron works may have been there. The site, if it existed, would have been under present U.S. 11, powered by the small stream that comes down from the north. I have not been able to find a tilt hammer operation in the census of the period but Barton could have been a farmer who did that on the side. This village history needs more work.

### Old Buena Vista 10 11 12 13 14 15

**S**HOULD BUENA VISTA BE INCLUDED in a list such as this? The community that we know as Mountain View was once called Buena Vista, named for the Jordan-built furnace of that name around which the village grew. Mountain View School was several miles north of the present site and when the new school was built the name came with it. After the establishment of the present city of Buena Vista near the end of the 19th century, the village was for a time known as Old Buena Vista, before Mountain View came into common usage.



The iron works consisted of a furnace and a forge, both of which were powered by a long mill



race from South River. There was a tramway to the Maury River for transporting the iron to the canal, where it was loaded onto boats. Union General David Hunter’s forces destroyed the iron works during the Civil War and it was not put back into operation, although the Jordans

Remains of the furnace at Old Buena Vista.



continued to mine ore and ship it downriver to another furnace.

In the area is an extensive deposit of marl.\* The Jordans used it as flux in their furnaces and in this century, the family of E. O. Huffman mined, bagged and sold it for fertilizer. The railroad put in a spur that crossed South River not far from Colonel Morrison's Old Mill. Chemical fertilizers put the operation out of business, since marl is a rather low-grade material for that use.



The village of South River deserves a paper of its own. Beginning at the mouth of the river there was the canal dam and lock complex. Later the railroad had a station there, called South River, and a village grew up. Going up the South River were Old Buena Vista and then the stations with villages along the Norfolk & Western Railroad: Riverside, Cornwall, Midvale, Marlbrook and Vesuviu. In addition to the usual farm products, the valley shipped iron from Old Buena Vista and Vesuvius, lumber and tin ore from Cornwall, flour and manganese ore from Vesuvius, and of course the marl from Buena Vista.

Below: Cornwall; Vesuvius.



## The B&O Railroad 16

ANOTHER STRING OF COMMUNITIES lies along the old B&O Railroad line, including Lexington, East Lexington, Timber Ridge, Decatur, Fairfield and Raphine. If you go to Decatur you will see two names on the road sign, Decatur and Aqua. Aqua was the post office, so named because nearby was the tank from which locomotives were watered.



\* Defined by Webster as "a loose or crumbling earthy deposit (as of sand, silt, or clay) that contains a substantial amount of calcium carbonate," which in turn is the distinctive component of marble and limestone.

## Denmark and California 17 18

AT SOME POINT IN MY EARLY YOUTH I was happy to come on bragging rights to a bit of trivia: I had been in Denmark and California on the same day.

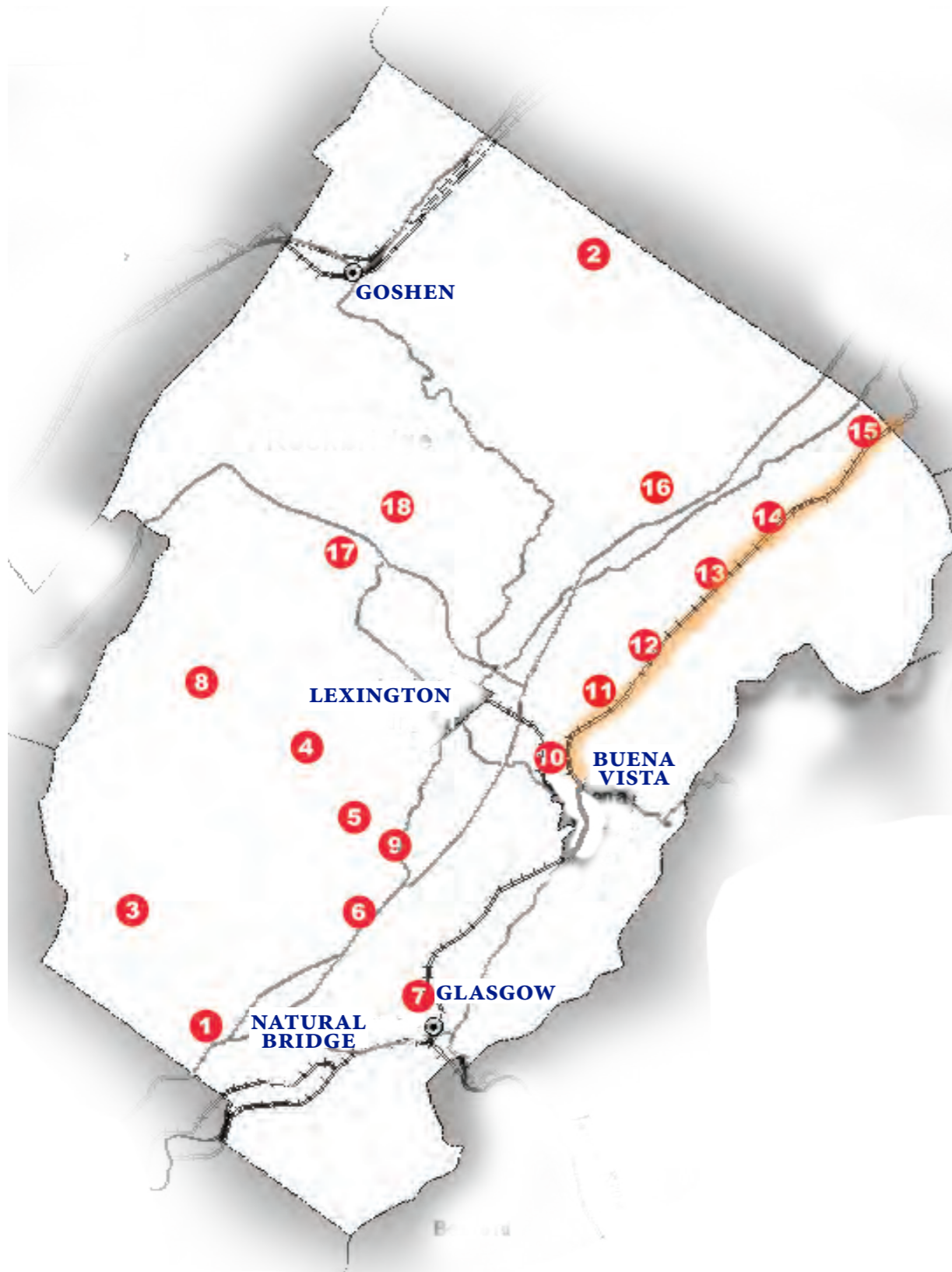


Denmark is at the foot of North Mountain, on the east side. If you travel U.S. 60 you may miss it, but if you take the Lake Robertson road you will see a neat village now being restored after the flood damage [caused in 1985 by Hurricane Juan]. There once lived in Denmark a lady named Aurora Borealis Linkswiler, who lost her life while attempting to cross a flooded stream.



California is on the other side of the mountain, where the Bratton's Run road and the Alum Springs road cross. Also known at times as Pettytown, it owes its existence to iron. Three furnaces — California, Mount Hope and Jordan's — have operated there. There was a considerable mining and ore-washing operation nearby. Today it is a farming community.

*Author's note:* Among the records at Buffalo Forge are those of surveyors spanning a period of more than seventy-five years. This paper, about a number of Rockbridge communities, uses these records as its initial source.



1 Springfield; 2 Zack; 3 Rapps Mill; 4 Murat; 5 Summers; 6 Oak Bank; 7 Old Balcony Falls; 8 Collierstown; 9 Buffalo Bend; 10 Old Buena Vista; 11 Riverside; 12 Cornwall; 13 Midvale; 14 Marlbrook; 15 Vesuvius; 16 Decatur; 17 Denmark; 18 California. The orange shading indicates the Shenandoah Valley Railway, which in 1890 merged with Norfolk & Western and is now the Norfolk & Southern line.