
The Pike Packet

News from The Snickersville Turnpike Association

March 2008

Hibbs Bridge Dedication

On November 16, 2007, the “new” Hibbs Bridge was formally reopened to traffic on Snickersville Turnpike. Ahead of schedule and under budget the circa 1828 landmark was dedicated to the memory of Kathy Mitchell, former Chairman of the Board of the Snickersville Turnpike Association and tireless advocate for the preservation of the bridge.

Blue Ridge Supervisor Jim Burton and former Supervisor Eleanore Towe handled the ribbon-cutting honors before a crowd of about 50 area residents on a cold and windy day. The ceremony was a culmination of a 13-year political and bureaucratic struggle to restore the venerable old span over Beaverdam Creek.

Following the ceremony, a reception and celebration was held at Whitestone Farm. After the champagne was uncorked, local dignitaries, VDOT officials and contractors were recognized for their efforts. STA Board member Marvin Watts was eloquent in recounting the story of Hibbs Bridge, its historical significance and remarkable rebirth. What follows are just a few of the excerpts from his remarks. His full speech from that occasion can be found at the STA website at www.snickersvilleturnpike.org.

“At all events Hibbs was a magnet for life, hence a love for it. Children waded in pools, dogs swam, and horses drank. A grist mill sprang up and by 1835 a sawmill was added. Stephen and William Hibbs bought the mills, a dwelling house, and the land in 1857, whereupon the bridge became known as Hibbs Romances frequently commenced when strangers met in stagecoaches on these old turnpikes, and I think Hibbs, with its sudden rise, must have given ‘lift’ to such courting. When I was first writing about Hibbs in the mid-nineties, Benny Malloy, a Loudoun native, remembered growing up with Hibbs Bridge. ‘We would get our driver’s license and head for Hibbs at 35 mph. (Continued on Page 3)

2007 Bike/ Hike-the-Pike

Sunday, October 14th dawned cool and sunny in Bluemont, Virginia, a fine day for the Snickersville Turnpike Association’s second annual Bike-Hike-the Pike.

The event began with morning registration of hikers and cyclists at the Bluemont Community Center. Bicyclists departed as a group at 10 a.m. from the Community Center to take the 10-mile round-trip bike route from along the state scenic byway Snickersville Turnpike to its intersection with Colchester Road. Hikers left shortly thereafter on a three-mile course also starting at the Bluemont Community Center and returning about an hour later. The group included people of all ages and ran the gamut from casual strollers to serious bikers. Quite a few families completed the course together. Volunteers from STA were stationed at intersections along the route to show the way and help provide a safe biking/hiking environment.

When the hikers and bikers returned to the Community Center they were hungry, thirsty and ready to relax to music provided by Cletus Kennally and Lori Kelley, talented local singer-songwriters. Hamburgers and hot dogs were catered by the locally famous Mr. B, and served with chips and soft drinks. All of this was provided to participants at no charge by the Snickersville Turnpike Association.

Those who participated agreed that it was a great time, a fine autumn day for biking or hiking down the beautiful and historic Snickersville Turnpike. Plans are already in the works for a fall 2008 event. If you’d like to get involved as a volunteer, please contact a Board member or e-mail info@snickersvilleturnpike.org.

Land Conservation Easement Dinner

Michael Kane, a Land Conservation Officer with the Piedmont Environmental Council, will present “An Introduction to Conservation Easements” at Oatlands on April 30th from 6 – 7:30PM, followed by a light supper outside, weather permitting. STA had agreed to be a sponsor. The cost will be \$10 per person to defray expenses. You are invited.

Cell Tower Dilemma

The April 2002 “Strategic Plan for Wireless Telecommunications Facilities” is a useful document for the County planners, but it has a basic flaw. It offers cell tower companies the option of proposing high multi-user towers or single-use 80-foot or less towers. Unfortunately, once the multi-user tower is approved and built, it rarely houses more than a single user. In the May 2007 “Supplement”, statements are made that gaps in cell coverage “north of Route 7, Leesburg and east of Route 621” can be met by 40 to 80 foot “poles”, but south of Route 7 and west of Route 621, “many more facilities are needed to provide wireless service.” Again, the flaw is the assumption that all four of the major cell companies must have complete coverage in this rural area and that the County should approve each tall multi-user tower proposed.

At the February 25, 2008 Transportation and Land Use Committee meeting, new Board of Supervisors members questioned each other about their reasoning behind their vote regarding the six applications for new cell towers in western Loudoun. Supervisor Sally Kurtz mentioned the option of using existing electric distribution poles in keeping with the Telecommunications Plan to first use nearby existing structures.

Regarding the status of Nextel’s proposed 106-foot pseudo-silo on Watermill Road, the County is awaiting a response to their January 16, 2008 query for a time extension. Nextel was observed in January performing tests at the Philomont Fire Department.

Two different applications are underway on Cobb House Road, just off Snickersville Turnpike near Aldie. One is a 140-foot Verizon monopole at Stonewall Farm Lane, and the other is a 100-foot monopole by Invisible Towers. The small antennas recently installed on top of the Bluemont elevator are believed to be commercial broadband.

Turnpikes and Rustic Roads

In 1785, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law appointing nine commissioners to a non-profit turnpike trust and instructed them “to erect one or more gates or turnpikes across the roads leading into the town of Alexandria from Snigger’s [Snickers] and Vesta’s [Keys] Gaps.” This was not the first law authorizing a toll road in the United States, but this road was the first recorded turnpike in operation, opening by the end of 1786. The Little River Turnpike, a private corporation chartered in 1802, realigned and improved the portion between Alexandria and Aldie. In 1810, the Commonwealth appropriated \$20,000, and the Snickers Gap Turnpike Company was founded. This “improved” road was completed in 1818.

A turnpike, or tollgate, is a barrier preventing passage on a road until a toll is paid. A tollhouse was originally just the roadside booth, but later was the nearby house occupied by the toll keeper. The Snickers Gap Turnpike had at least three tollhouses. Just recently two photographs, taken in 1900, were discovered, showing a horse and buggy at the Snickers Gap tollgate. The tollhouse in the photographs is no longer standing but operated as late as 1915. The tollhouse at the intersection with Mountville Road is also gone. However, the tollhouse in Aldie at the intersection with the Ashby’s Gap Turnpike (Route 50) is still standing, but in deteriorating condition. In 1935, when VDOT designated it as State Route 734, the road was renamed the Snickersville Turnpike.

And speaking of roads, Western Loudoun has many gravel-covered dirt roads. Most drivers have no idea that the speed limit, almost always unposted, is 35 MPH on gravel roads. Representatives of the Beaverdam Creek Historic Roadways District are working with VDOT to rectify this and to minimize the occasional prohibited widening of these roads by grading equipment.

**ROADSIDE SPRING
CLEAN UP !**

**SEE BACK COVER FOR
FOR DETAILS !**

(Hibbs Bridge Dedication continued)

It was the highlight of our lives.’ It seems quite natural, then, that so many citizens rushed to defend Hibbs.”

“It was a mark of advanced civilizations that beauty be important in the construction, so the earliest engineers built structures so they appeared correct to the eye. The results were more pleasing in appearance, as with Hibbs, than today’s coldly scientific steel and concrete slabs, which have the additional flaw of collapsing unexpectedly.”

“Hibbs was saved chiefly by the love for it by ordinary citizens. They loved it not just for its simplicity and natural beauty, but also its eccentric hump, democratically available to anyone with a vehicle. Hibbs has been a part of the fabric of Loudoun lives for 180 years. So in saving Hibbs, we prevent that tear in community fabric suffered whenever an historical or natural feature of our mutual experience is razed. We thus husband and protect our own humanity in the interests of posterity. That’s a triumph for all Loudoun citizens, for all Virginians, including the Virginia Department of Transportation.”

“When you lift your glasses for a toast, lift them to Hibbs Bridge, good for another 200 years, to the Loudoun citizens who would not forsake their bridge, to those instrumental in Hibb’s rebirth, and to lovers young and old who may yet enjoy a little exhilaration crossing Hibbs.”

Virginia’s Oldest Agriculture Institute

A mile north of the 1st Massachusetts Civil War monument on the Snickersville Turnpike is a picturesque reminder of the first agricultural school in Virginia and one of the first schools of scientific agronomy in the United States. The 3 1/2 story stone and stucco mail building was erected just prior to its opening in 1854 as the Loudoun Agricultural and Mechanical Institute. The school, fronting on Oatlands Road, was once part of Oak Hill estate of President James Monroe.

The forerunner to the Institute was the Agricultural Society of Loudoun which was
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(Virginia’s Oldest Agricultural Institute continued)

organized in 1842 by prominent Loudoun landholders and scientists Hyde Benton, Harmon Bitzer and James Gulick. In later years, the Agricultural Society of Loudoun also sponsored the County Fair.

An ad for the Agricultural and Mechanical Institute in the September 1854 edition of the Leesburg Washingtonian stated that “thorough instruction is given in all the branches of mathematics and science useful to the farmer and the man of business. The students are made acquainted with the phenomena of nature, taught the properties of soils, the requirements of plants, the composition of minerals, the utility of different kinds of roads, laws of mechanical forces, and calculations of the cost.” Despite its forward-looking approach, the Institute failed to thrive and closed its doors in 1860.

One of the original founders of the Institute, Mr. Gulick, continued to be part of the local lore and landscape. On July 17, 1863, John Singleton Mosby noted, “it was a very hot day and we stopped a while to rest under the shade of some trees and refresh ourselves with some buttermilk at the house of a farmer named Gulick. Presently we heard artillery firing over toward Aldie, which indicated a collision of the enemy’s cavalry with ours. In an instant every man was mounted. From a commanding position on the mountain, which we reached in a few minutes, I could see clouds of dust rising on every road.” This was the first day of the running five day Cavalry Battles of Aldie, Middleburg and Upperville.

In 1916, the former Agricultural Institute became the headquarters of the National Beagle Club, which added a number of rustic-style log cabins to house their members during the annual beagle trials. The Snickersville Turnpike Association plans to erect a roadside sign on the Turnpike recognizing the significance of this, the earliest agricultural school in Virginia.

Learn more about the Snickersville Turnpike Association’s monthly meetings times and days at: www.snickersvilleturnpike.org