

Occoquan

Thursday, June 30, 1977

*Old and new,
quiet and busy
...a hometown*

By BONNIE REISS

Occoquan is an old town and a new town, a quiet town and a busy town, a tourist town and a hometown. In fact, Occoquan fits just about any kind of description there is for a town.

When Nathaniel Ellicott recorded the plats for the town of Occoquan in 1804 it had already been a commercial center for more than 50 years. There was a mill, a ferry to cross the river and a pier for shipping out copper and tobacco.

It is only speculation, but entirely possible, that George Washington may have stopped in town for many a tankard of refreshment during his horseback treks from Alexandria to Fredericksburg.

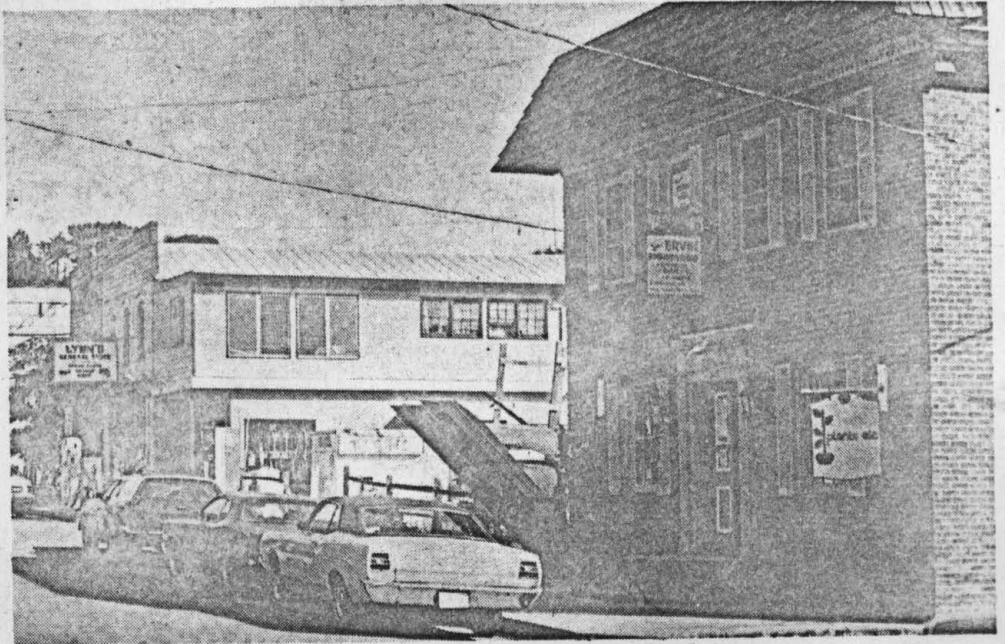
More recent history is the defense of the Confederacy against the Union troops by General Wade Hampton, whose headquarters were in the Hammill Hotel at the corner of Union and Commerce Streets. The building is still in use today and known now as the Beech-

wood Apartments.

The empty lot next to the Town Hall on Mill Street, site of numerous craft shows, antique sales and art displays, will be the location of a brand new structure called Waldon Place, the first completely new building in downtown Occoquan for several decades.

One of the main corners in town is taking on an entirely new look with the extensive remodeling of the Porter building at Union and Mill Streets. The addition of bay windows, new doors and stripped and varnished floors and stairways all blend together to make the old and the new better for the six shops housed there.

It takes a lot of vision and creative know how to restore and rehabilitate buildings, buildings that some said should have been torn down, and end up with a charming complex such as the Ferryman's House and the Ferrylanding with the connecting brick walkway and pleasant gardens.



The Ballywhack Building (right) is bustling with new activity.

The soft flap-flap of the flag as it is stirred by a gentle summer breeze is often all that a person can hear as one sits on a bench in Mamie Davis Park or on the adjoining public wharf.

Sometimes the quietness of the Country Kitchen garden is broken only by the occasional call of a bird in the surrounding trees or the crunch of the gravel stone underfoot.

Boats of all sizes, from the canoes and jonboats for rent at Lynn's Store to the 26-foot cruisers that dock at the Prince William Marina, ply the waters of Occoquan River.

The Ballywhack Creek, which flows through town under cover, not only has made necessary heavy construction to repair the flood damage of recent years but also has given its name to the Ballywhack building on Mill Street which is bustling with new activity as an artist's co-op, called The Ballywhack, houses five other businesses already in the building.

There is plenty for a tourist to see in Occoquan, the Mill House Museum and Rockledge mansion near the foot bridge at the dam, the old cemetery at the corner of Locust and Washington Streets and the many varied and unique gifts shops, each specializing in a different type of merchandise.

Two restaurants offer diverse menus even though both specialize in sea food. One can enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the Occoquan Inn or later in the evening join friends for a while in the downstairs General Wade Hampton lounge.

Dining in Blackbeard's Crab House, which floats on the river, is a novel experience. The crabs, piled high on platters, are served along with handy pliers with which to crack the shells.

Historic Occoquan Inc., the local historical society, is doing much to preserve and document the history of Occoquan and the surrounding area for tourist and residents alike.

The bank, the post office, the ice cream parlor, the two churches, the cozy front porches of the homes which invite friends 'to come in and sit a spell' all help to make Occoquan the perfect hometown, not only for the people whose families have been long time residents, but also for the many newcomers who love Occoquan and want to share in its peace, its beauty, its past and its future.



The Ballywhack Branch project is nearly complete, carrying the stream under these Union Street buildings