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HISTORY

WATERFALL

THE VILLAGE IN THE 'VALLEY OF PEACE'

Once a bustling commercial center, Waterfall today stirs many memories
by: John Toler



Looking back into the history of the small villages in Western Prince William County, one is struck by the feeling that this region was once "much larger" than it is today.

Due to the poor roads, most of the communities were somewhat isolated and self-contained. As a result, some of the early families remained in the area and intermarried, creating lasting bonds, and traditions established that continued for generations.

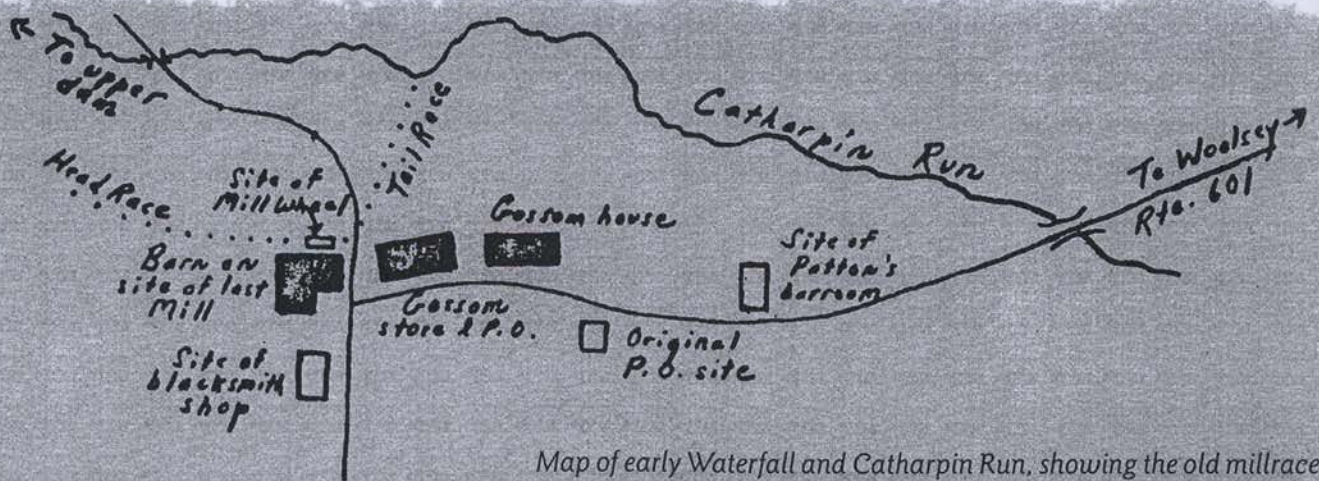
The village of Waterfall, located on Waterfall Road (State Route 601 west of Haymarket) is one of the early settlements that has managed to retain its identity, although greatly changed from over the past 50 years.

The most striking reminders of the old village are the "Waterfall House" and the old store on the sharp curve on Route 601 where the road narrows, and Antioch Baptist Church, west of the village center.

"The history of Waterfall dates back to the early 18th century. There were two grist mills in Waterfall," according to Peggy Ann Pickett Gardner, 80, a native of Waterfall who grew up in the Waterfall House. "The name 'Waterfall' came from the water (of Catharpin Run) falling over a steep precipice. It was such a

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Mrs. Peggy Gardner holds a treasured painting of the Waterfall House and store as it looked when she lived there done by her daughter, Bonnie Gardner Burke.

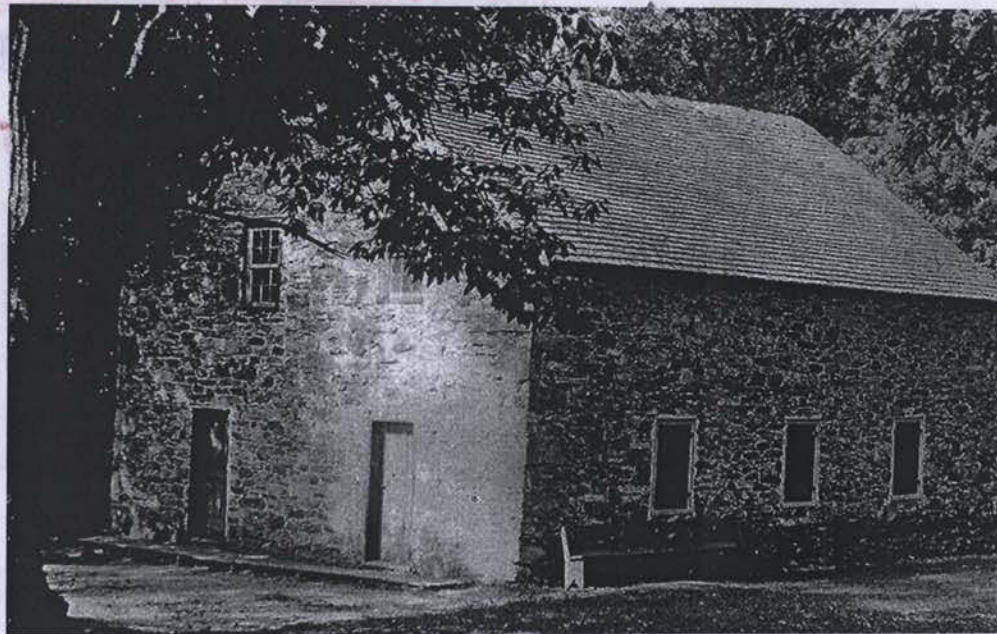


Map of early Waterfall and Catharpin Run, showing the old millraces and the buildings at the intersection of Jackson Hollow and Waterfall roads. Courtesy of RELIC.

beautiful sight that people started calling the village "Waterfall."

John Brown is believed to have built two gristmills and a sawmill on Catharpin Run in the late 1790s. Benoni Harrison of "LaGrange Farm" later owned the mill located at the intersection of present-day routes 601 (Waterfall Road) and 680 (Jackson Hollow Road), and George G. Tyler owned the mill on Route 601 in the village, located between the present-day "Waterfall House" and the store.

In the early days, Waterfall was known as a "...rough place to live, with many rogues roaming the countryside," according to Mrs. Gardner. "There were killings and stealing, a very troubled area."



The c. 1838 Antioch Baptist Church was built of stone and had the traditional two entry doors, one for men and one for women. Courtesy Bull Run Regional Library, Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center (RELIC).



Before the Waterfall Post Office was moved to the George "Allie" Gossom Store in 1904, it was located in this old building nearby. The man on the bicycle is identified as Fred Lepper. Courtesy of RELIC.

Benjamin Dean bought Tyler's mill in 1811, and in the 1840s Enoch H. Foley acquired the property. For several years, the Foley family ran the operation as "Waterfall Mills." Mr. Foley also ran the store until his death under suspicious circumstances at Hopewell in 1872, according to Virginia historian Eugene M. Scheel in *Crossroads and Corners: The Villages, Towns and Post Offices of Prince*

William County, Past and Present (1996). At that point, his daughter-in-law, Mary Jane Foley, took over.

Other merchants in Waterfall included N.B. "Bill" Henson, James Thorp Smith and George "Allie" Gossom.

Allie Gossom was one of the enterprising Gossoms who operated stores and grist mills in Western Prince William County, a family tradition that began in

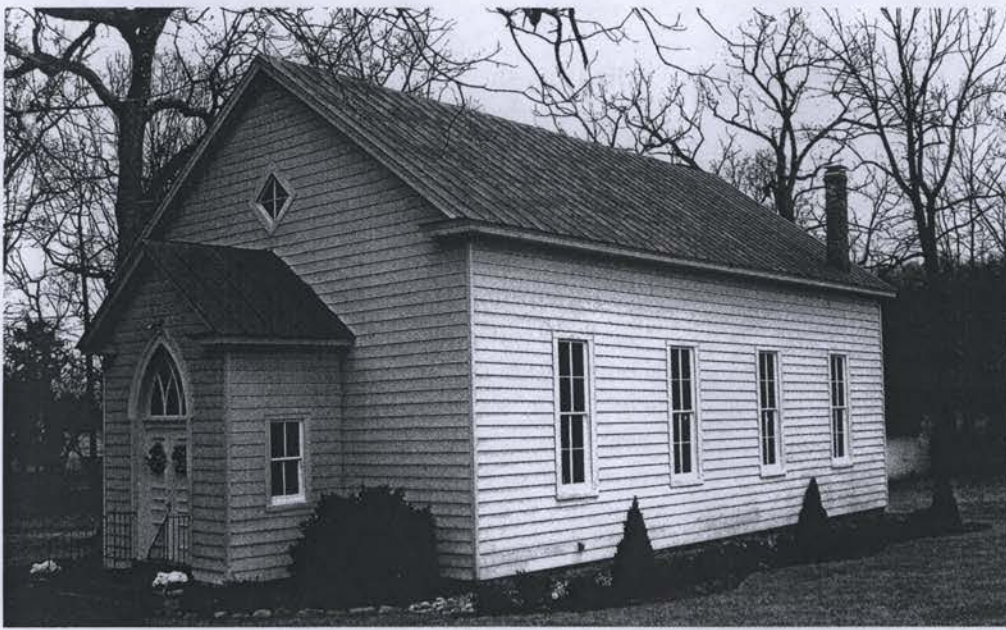
the late 1850s," according to the survey of the Waterfall Store and Post Office, done for the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission in the 1980s.

Mrs. Gardner's great-grandfather, James Philip Smith, was appointed Waterfall's first postmaster in 1874. A colorful man, Mr. Smith joined Capt. John S. Mosby's Partisan Rangers before he was 17, and participated in the famous "Greenback Raid" on a federal payroll train near Harper's Ferry. According to the family history, along with his share of the Yankee money, he got a box of fine cigars. It is recalled that his brother, William Randolph Smith, 22, was killed during June 1862 in the Battle for Frazier's Farm.

The post office was originally located on the south side of Waterfall Road east of the existing store building; later on the north side of the road in J. T. Smith's store; and finally in Gossom's store.

"At times, Messrs. Foley, Henson and Joseph M. Patton ran bar-rooms, which gave the village a bad name," wrote Mr. Scheel. "The first saloon closed after Enoch Foley was bludgeoned at Hopewell Gap. Virginia Prohibition closed the other two in 1916."

In 1920, Allie Gossom built a new barn on the old stone foundation of the Harrison mill. It survived until burned by vandals in 1989. The Waterfall House and G. A. Gossom Store left the family in 1961.



The original Antioch Baptist Church Building was replaced by a larger wood frame building completed in 1901. Rev. Dr. Billy Tatum has served as pastor of the church since 1996.

The Waterfall House and Store

Tyler's mill was demolished, and the "Waterfall House" built on the old millrace by Bill Henson around 1887. The house was originally a two-story frame structure with six rooms and a basement, and had a 44-foot porch across the front, facing the road. The new store was also built about that time.

Henson sold the property to Brooke Rector in 1896, and on May 18, 1904, ownership passed to Allie Gossom, who "...enclosed the back porch, making four more rooms, and added a bathroom," according to Mrs. Gardner. "The house had electric service from a Delco plant that was in the basement until the 1940s."

Allie Gossom served as the postmaster of Waterfall from 1904 until 1942, at which time his daughter Ruth took over as Waterfall postmistress and proprietor of the store. She would serve in this capacity until 1954, when the post office was closed.

"The decision to close the post office had been President Eisenhower's – one of a myriad of rural post offices he closed that year," wrote Mr. Scheel. "Ruth Gossom's store followed suit a few years later."

Thinking back to her early years in Waterfall, Mrs. Gardner recalls that during the 1930s and 1940s, some of the larger homes in village – including the Waterfall House – were operated as bed-

and-breakfasts. Her mother, Mary Gossom Pickett, was widowed in the early 1930s, and in addition to working during the week in Arlington, helped open the Waterfall House for "summer boarders." Others operating B&Bs included Flora Smith and Howard Bell in Waterfall, and Randolph Smith at Hagley, east of the village.

"In the late 1930s, Pres. Wilson's daughter came to stay with us," recalled Mrs. Gardner. "She arrived in a black limousine. My grandfather (G. A. Gossom) met her at the gate, and she saw me and asked who I was. He told her I was the boss here!" Their gracious guest stayed for dinner, and gave Mrs. Gardner a present – a "True View" slide viewer.

Waterfall offered much to attract the "summer boarders," many who came to escape steamy Washington, D.C., but also from surrounding states. Her grandmother, Dora Gossom, advertised the Waterloo House in New York, as well as attracting visitors from Louisiana and Missouri. Guests were treated to hayrides in the Gossom's 1936 Chevy dump truck, picnics at Carpenter's Boy Scout Camp at Hopewell, and other pleasant, bucolic adventures. Over 30 guests could be accommodated at the Waterfall House, being served meals in shifts of about 15 persons.

Mrs. Gardner recalls a visit by members of the Washington Redskins football team

who stayed at her aunt Flora Smith's house in the 1940s. In addition to the restful pursuits, the players "...kicked a football around in the meadow by the house," she remembers.

Of course, the store played a large part in the community. In the early days, Allie Gossom would drive to Washington, D.C. for supplies, but later dealt with vendors who came to the store and made deliveries.

When her aunt Ruth ran the store, she would come to the house to eat lunch. If patrons happened to come by, they would knock on the door and Ruth would stop eating and open the store. Her help was paid 50 cents for a half-day's work, and they would usually spend their wages before they left. "But then, a loaf of bread was seven cents, and a gallon of gasoline 17 cents," said Mrs. Gardner with a chuckle.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Rutter purchased the Waterfall House and the store from Dr. and Mrs., John C. Lange about eight years ago. A lifelong resident of the area, Mr. Rutter grew up in a home across the road from Antioch Baptist Church, and recalls the old millraces and other parts of the village that have been lost, or greatly changed.

He notes that the previous owners did significant work on the Waterfall House and store, and that he and his wife "... have lots of dreams for the property," but the improvements they have made up to this point have been mostly cosmetic. They enjoy living in the historic home, and currently use the old post office/store building for storage.

Antioch Baptist Church

If the old village of Waterfall has a soul, it is Antioch Baptist Church. It was organized on April 22, 1837, by former members of Long Branch Baptist Church at Halfway, meeting in a small log building on the property on Route 601 that still exists today.

A stone church building was completed in 1838. It served until 1901, when it was replaced by a larger frame structure, which cost \$860.77, according to church records. Pews were added in 1909 at a cost of \$12.50 each.

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The Flora Smith house, known as Twin Oaks, was located on Jackson Hollow Road in Waterfall. This house burned around 1920 and was replaced by a new home, which retained the original name. Courtesy of RELIC.

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The cemetery beside the church is the resting place for many members of Waterfall's families, including the Foleys, Gossoms, Smiths and Picketts. Veterans of America's conflicts back to the Civil War are also buried there. A stone wall, erected in 1952, surrounds the church and cemetery.

Services were held regularly at Antioch Baptist Church from 1838 to 1962, except "...during times of distress such as the Civil War," according to church documents. Due to low attendance, the church was closed in 1962, used only for homecomings in August and occasional weddings and funerals. However, the church was reopened in 1996 under the dynamic pastorate of Rev. Dr. Billy Tatum, with a "...renewed commitment to spreading God's word in our community and around the world."

Surveyed in the 1980s for the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, Antioch Baptist Church is described as "...monumental; it is actually quite massive, though it appears to be small in its present setting, against a stand of large old trees. It would be hard to find a more bucolic setting, or more pleasantly old-fashioned church than this at Antioch, situated as it is at the foot of the Bull Run Mountains, beside Little Bull Run. The building and grounds are exceptionally well cared for by the church's members."

Peggy Pickett Gardner is a life-long member of Antioch Baptist Church, recalling that her mother brought her to services there when she was just six months old, and that she was baptized in Catharpin Run.

In 1950, she and Charles Gardner of Gainesville – whom she had first met on one of those long school bus rides to high school in Manassas – were married there. Allie Gossom was superintendent of the church for 65 years, and Dora Gossom was the church organist at Antioch for 65 years.

On Sunday, March 13, 2011 – the day before Mrs. Gardner's 80th birthday – she was honored by the congregation of Antioch Baptist Church and her four children at a special service. Her aunt, Ruth Gossom, who will celebrate her 100th birthday this summer, also participated. A special message was delivered by her daughter, Ann Gardner Pace, and Rev. Dr. Tatum.

The Village Schools

It is believed that the first school in Waterfall was built for white students in the 1870s, and was located on property purchased from Mrs. E. H. Foley behind present-day Olive Branch Baptist Church. When black students outgrew the old Antioch (or Murray) school in 1880, they were moved to original Waterfall school and a new schoolhouse built for the white students.

The second school was built by J. P. Smith, and cost \$125. It was only used for about seven years, at which point W. G. Shirley purchased it for \$25. At that point, the School Board decided to build a third school closer to the center of the village on Waterfall Road, and E.C. Taylor was hired to build it.

Of wood frame construction with a rubble stone foundation and a cross-gable roof, the one-room schoolhouse was completed in 1887. As the number of students attending the school continued to increase, a second room was added in 1915. Mrs. Gardner recalls that her mother Mary attended this school.

While the schoolhouse was in use, it served as Waterfall's community center. The school's Parents Group organized ice cream socials, plays and baseball games.

All this came to an end in 1927, when the School Board decided to close the Waterfall School and send the students to the Haymarket School. The last teacher at the one-room schoolhouse was Mrs. Selina T. Wilson, according to Lucy Walsh Phinney in *Yesterday's Schools*. Like the closing of the schools in Haymarket that came decades later, the loss of the community center and the long bus rides that the Waterfall students had to endure were the price of "progress."

In 1928, the school property was sold at auction, and purchased by Allie Gossom for \$600. "The building was converted into a house in the 1930s, and a porch added," according to Mrs. Phinney. "Linoleum now covers the pine flooring and modern paneling covers much of the tongue-and-groove paneling." Surrounded by a chain link fence, the old schoolhouse still stands as a private residence.

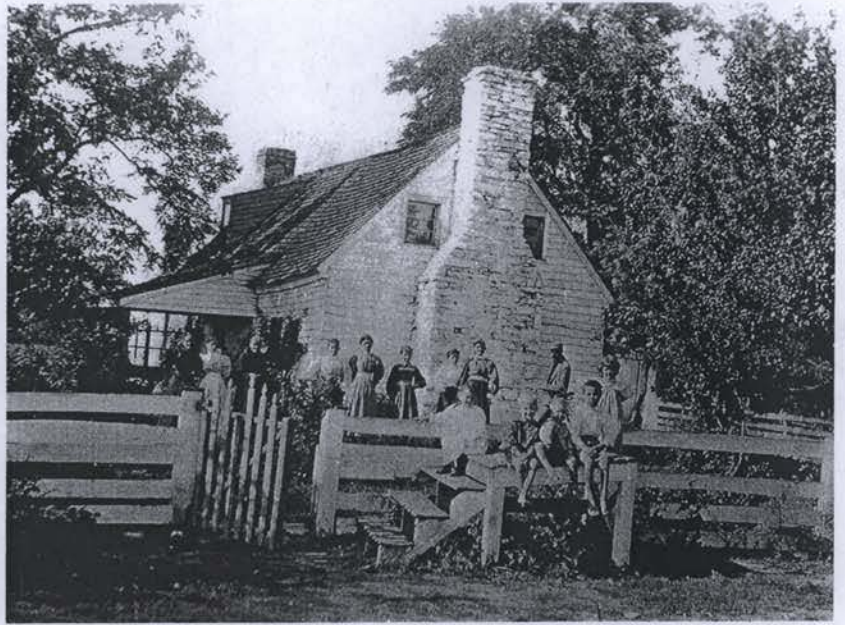
Remembering Waterfall

After living briefly in Norfolk while Charles was serving in the Navy, the Gardners returned to Prince William County and built a new home in Gainesville, where they raised their four children. They would live there for 53 years.

The Gardners remained close to their friends and relatives in Waterfall, as well as their church. In 2003, they moved to a new home in Evergreen, in sight of the historic Evergreen Manor. The house is filled with antiques and other family treasures brought from the home and store in Waterfall, including the original post office boxes, a Waterfall postcard display, and the carved wooden coin bins used in the store by the Gossom family.

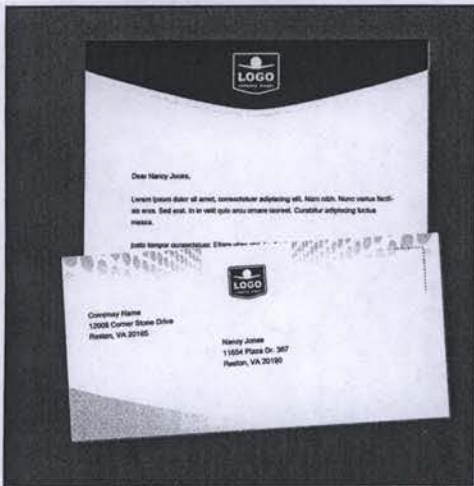
Over the years, they have seen many changes in the area, including the new neighborhoods built along Waterfall and Jackson Hollow roads. Still, fond memories remain.

"To find a place of tranquility is to know the valley of peace, with its green meadows and running brooks," wrote Mrs. Gardner in 1969. "A little girl who loved to play in the fields and climb over the hills ... Oh yes, I remember it well. The winding road that led to the church in the dale, where you met your friends and sang the hymns of God's praise."



Hagley, the Randolph Smith homeplace on Waterfall Road east of the village, as it appeared in 1896. Courtesy of RELIC.

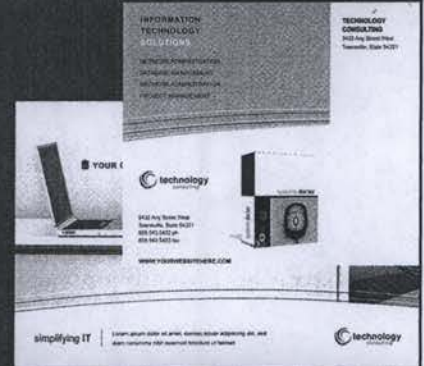
Author John Toler is a writer and historian and has served Fauquier County for over 50 years, including 4 decades with the Fauquier-Times Democrat. He has written and lectured about many legendary characters in Fauquier County's history. Toler is the co-author of *250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story*, and author of *Warrenton, Virginia: A History of 200 Years*.



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