

# Haymarket's name a mystery

## Events and personalities lend names to area towns

By REBECCA JARAMILLO  
JM Correspondent

The origin of a town's name is illuminated by events and personalities from the past which give important insight into its history and character. This is certainly true for the towns of Haymarket, Gainesville and Nokesville. These events, from a hundred years ago and more, reveal interesting facts about the early time and residents of these communities.

Haymarket is the oldest of the three "villages." An early owner built a log cabin, and later a home and a second inn (called the Hay Market Inn) along what was a trading route in the mid-eighteenth century.

The town itself was chartered in 1799 by the Virginia General Assembly on the land of William Skinker. The area had previously been known by the name of "Red House," after a stagecoach inn already built on the land before the Skinker family bought it. When the original hand-written request for a charter had been submitted, Skinker had modestly proposed "Skinkerville" as a suitable name for the little village.

Somehow, between the time of the original request and the formal charter, however, the name ended up "Hay Market." Sarah M. Turner, the Chairwoman of the Haymarket Historical Commission explains that his is one of the great mysteries of Haymarket.

Who changed the name? Did someone diplomatically suggest a more melodious name? Perhaps William Skinker was persuaded that at least the town would be named after the Inn his family had built instead of after the Red House Inn. And why had he named his inn the Hay Market?

Turner has come up with one theory. The Skinker family had come from England where "Hay market" is a common location name. In fact, in Bristol, the Skinker family's home town, there is a "Hay Market Square." Perhaps the Skinkers had a nostalgic tie to this address.

As of yet, however, the issue of how Haymarket got its name has not been settled. Turner plans a trip to England hoping to learn more about this fascinating footnote in her town's history.

While Haymarket grew around a busy thoroughfare, Gainesville became a town because of the growth of local railroad lines as did many of the surrounding towns.

According to "Prince William:



Haymarket may have been named for towns in England sharing the same name. The town is home to St. Paul's Episcopal church, which is apparently the oldest church which has been in continual use in the United States. (Rebecca Jaramillo, Journal Messenger)

The Story of Its Places and Its People," published in 1941, Gainesville is named after an early prominent landholder, named Thomas Gaines. The ending "-ville," which indicates its origin as a village, is a common ending for many towns in Virginia from this time period.

Thomas Gaines apparently was a shrewd gentleman who owned the land that was needed for right-of-way by the builders of the Manassas Gap Railroad. Therefore, Gaines not only insisted that all trains stop on his property, but also that he be named for him.

Nokesville, which shares its name with no other town in the United States, was not named until after the Civil War, according to local resident Robert Beahm. It is another "ville," or village, that was named after prominent landowner.

The Nokes family owned most of the land that now makes up the area known as Nokesville (which is currently not a legally incorporated or chartered town). Many long time residents including Mildred Gay, and some written accounts, indicate that the village was named in honor of Marine Captain Norval Nokes, a son of the original owner, but this is unclear as the records show that his half-brother, George Nokes became the local Postmaster around the time the village was officially named.

Many believed that it was the opening of the Post Office that necessitated a formal name for this little train stop nestled in the middle of farms with gentle rolling hills and winding streams.

So these are the mysteries, twists of fate and coincidences involved in named the towns of Haymarket, Gainesville and Nokesville. They add to the rich history of Prince William County which was named after . . . well, that's another story!

Rebecca Jaramillo is a Journal Messenger Community Correspondent for the Gainesville, Haymarket, Nokesville area.



Outside of the Haymarket Town Hall, the Colonial Roads historical marker reveals history of the small Prince William County town. The issue of how Haymarket got its name is still unresolved. (Rebecca Jaramillo, Journal Messenger)