

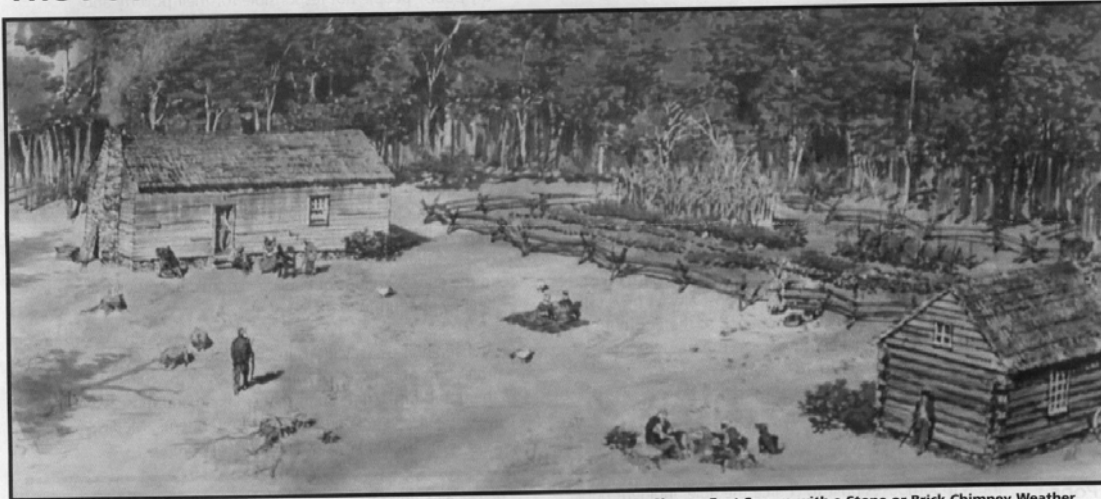
Prince William Forest Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

18100 Park Headquarters Road
Triangle, VA 22172
www.nps.gov/prwi



The Poor House - 1794-1927



In 1793, two local landowners constructed a "poorhouse" that was to be "a framed House Sixteen Feet Square with a Stone or Brick Chimney Weather Boarded & Covered with Shingles." It would serve Prince William County from 1794 - 1927. Drawing courtesy: The Louis Berger Group, Inc.

Overview

In 1794, the Prince William County Poor House began operating in what is now the northwest corner of Prince William Forest Park. The county's poorest White and African American residents were housed there until 1927. Though the age of poor houses has long passed, the problem of an unwanted and misunderstood homeless population is as alive as ever. Historical records and recent National Park Service (NPS) archeological digs at the site shed some light on the treatment of the poor and mentally infirmed in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.

A Revolutionary Idea

When the American Revolution ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783, aid for the poor differed in varying states. In Virginia, which recognized the Anglican Church as its official church, Anglican parishes distributed relief. In 1785, with the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, Virginia's parishes lost this responsibility as the state ceased recognizing an official church. Instead, the poor became charges of county governments.

Like parishes, counties provided cash or in-kind payments to poor people living in their homes (a type of aid known as "outdoor relief") and some supported almshouses or poorhouses. The resulting poorhouses, which were a form of "indoor relief," became more common in Virginia and in other states during the 1790s and early 1800s. Prince William's County's poorhouse was one of the first ten built by a Virginia county government.

Poorhouses were intended to be Spartan and uncomfortable; living conditions were supposed to convince paupers that only through hard work would they escape the atmosphere of penury. However, overseers were late to realize that few inmates were capable of hard work. During the nineteenth century, almshouses also served as places to which masters sometimes emancipated elderly or disabled enslaved laborers and gave counties the responsibility for their upkeep. These former slaves were representative of the typical poorhouse inmate. As this 1794 list of residents shows, most were simply aged or physically or mentally incapable of working and not idle loafers.

*William Miliner deaf and a very old man
James Wilky a very deaf old man
William Martin deaf and blind
Celia Wilkinson very infirm
Ann Lunceford and Child . . .
Arrabelle Baze a blind troublesome old Woman
Elizabeth Wood an insane Woman
Elisabeth Doughty to Assist in Washing*

Creating The Poor

Subsistence agriculture dominated the local economy between the 1790s and 1930s. Some residents owned farms, while others worked as tenant farmers or enslaved laborers before the Civil War, or as sharecroppers afterwards. Large tobacco plantations were established during the early 1700s, but by the end of the century most local planters became subsistence farmers, replacing soil exhausting tobacco with crops requiring fewer nutrients, such as corn (maize) and wheat. Even with the shift from tobacco to other crops, agriculture did not bring economic growth. Between 1790 and 1860, the county's population fell from 11,615 to 8,565, while the state's population grew by nearly 54%. Many people emigrated to new western states and territories. Those who remained supplemented their incomes by selling fish from the Potomac or through operating blacksmith shops or small dry-goods stores.

The Civil War significantly affected Prince William County. Two major battles occurred near Manassas in 1861 and 1862, and a primary route between the capitals of Richmond and Washington passed through the county. High inflation devastated the local economy; extensive troop movements destroyed livestock and crops.

In the early twentieth century, the county's population remained low; census-takers found only 13,951 residents in 1930. Federal impressions of local poverty were contributing factors in the 1935 creation of Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area by the Resettlement Administration. During the final years that the poorhouse operated near Independent Hill, its neighbors worked on their own small farms and supplemented their incomes through jobs at local military bases.

Poor House Residents

In some areas of the United States, nineteenth century poorhouses housed all sorts of people, from young orphans to the destitute elderly. However, county overseers of the poor distributed cash or in-kind payments to approved able-bodied poor. They remained in their communities and did not live at the poorhouse. The amount of the allowances varied over time. In 1820, payments averaged \$11.40 per year, while in 1860 they were \$16.22, rising to \$47.42 in 1874. In 1912, individuals on the county's poor list each received about \$34.28 per year. Taxes and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, timber sales, funded these welfare programs.

Most individuals who lived at the county poorhouse were elderly or disabled women without the means (or close family) to support themselves. Individuals applied to the overseers of the poor for admission and only gained entry to the poorhouse if they were deemed to be "worthy poor," people not responsible for their poverty and incapable of improving their own life. Children sometimes lived at the poorhouse for short periods, but the overseers usually apprenticed them to a farmer or tradesman. Most nineteenth-century welfare officials opposed allowing children to live in almshouses and be exposed to the 'idleness' of paupers.

Poor House Life

While it always had many more white residents than African-Americans, the poorhouse was racially integrated. However, integration does not imply equality. Records from before the Civil War rarely provided African-American residents the small dignity of listing their surnames. African-American residents were almost always physically or mentally disabled. What happened at the poorhouse during the war that freed the slaves is a mystery; none of its records from 1861 to 1874 survive.

Able inmates, together with a few hired farmhands, grew most of the food for poorhouse residents. However, most residents were unable to work due to age and illness; of the 17 residents listed in an 1858 annual report to the state's Auditor of Public Accounts, only four were healthy enough to work.

Archaeological excavations in 2001 found harmonica fragments and pieces of tobacco pipes in the ruins of the poorhouse, suggesting that smoking and music were leisure activities for some poorhouse residents. Medical care came through a contracted local doctor.

The Poor House Legacy

Today, poorhouses built to coerce the able, indigent poor into working are gone. In Virginia, a system of district nursing homes for chronically ill poor people superseded its almshouses. Several programs created as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, such as Social Security and Medicare, supported (and continue to support) people with low incomes in ways similar to nineteenth-century 'outdoor relief' programs.

In the 1910s, the Virginia legislature considered several bills to consolidate county almshouses into district homes for the indigent elderly. At that time, most county poorhouses had fewer than ten residents and were in remote locations. Their superintendents were poorly trained and did not provide the needed level of medical care. Legislators believed that merging poorhouses into regional facilities would save local governments money by brining a larger number of needy to one location with a higher quality of care than counties could provide individually. The legislature enacted a law allowing consolidation in 1918.

Prince William County was one of five counties that merged their poorhouses to create the first district home. Together with Culpeper, Fairfax, and Fauquier Counties, and the city of Alexandria, it opened a new residential facility - today known as Birmingham Green - in Manassas on 28 January 1927. After the opening of the district home, Prince William County sold its poorhouse property of 296 acres for \$2,000.00.

By the early twentieth century, healthcare professionals viewed poorhouses as dumping grounds for the unwanted elderly, "characterized by poverty, disease, and filth. At least one description of the Poor House survives, written in 1926 by a welfare reformer:

Poor farm located 13 miles south of Manassas, way back on poor, cutover land, off any traveled road, in a woods. Very few know that such a place exists. The poorhouse is an old frame shack, one story, about 14 x 84 with 6 rooms, some without doors, windows boarded up. Fertilizer sacks filled with straw and old buggy cushions for mattresses on broke-down beds. Bed covers are rags— parts of old blankets or quilts, very filthy. An old man, clothes ragged and filthy, asleep on a pile of dirty rags, in a vile room swarming with flies and vermin. Poor and insufficient food; poor, filthy clothing; no music, amusement or religious services. No medical attention whatever; no screens, the place reeking with bedbugs and body lice. Well water, filthy outside privies used by both sexes, no sewerage, slop and garbage just thrown through the doors. Contaminating diseased inmates use same bedrooms and toilets as do other inmates, and their clothes go into a common wash. Men's and women's bedrooms adjoin.

When poorhouse residents died, the county buried them in the poorhouse's cemetery. A 1996 survey found nearly 30 graves, though only 13 are marked with headstones or footstones. The county also provided coffins for dead poor people not resident at the poorhouse. An onsite superintendent managed the poorhouse; research shows that at least one superintendent, John J. Carter (1865-1928), is buried within today's park boundary. The poor house cemetery is one of over 45 cemeteries in Prince William Forest Park. The cemetery and foundations of the Prince William County poor house are protected by federal law. Removing of any artifacts or disturbing the site is punishable with a fine of up to \$5,000.00



A NPS Archeological Dig exposed the poor house chimney. Photo courtesy: NPS.

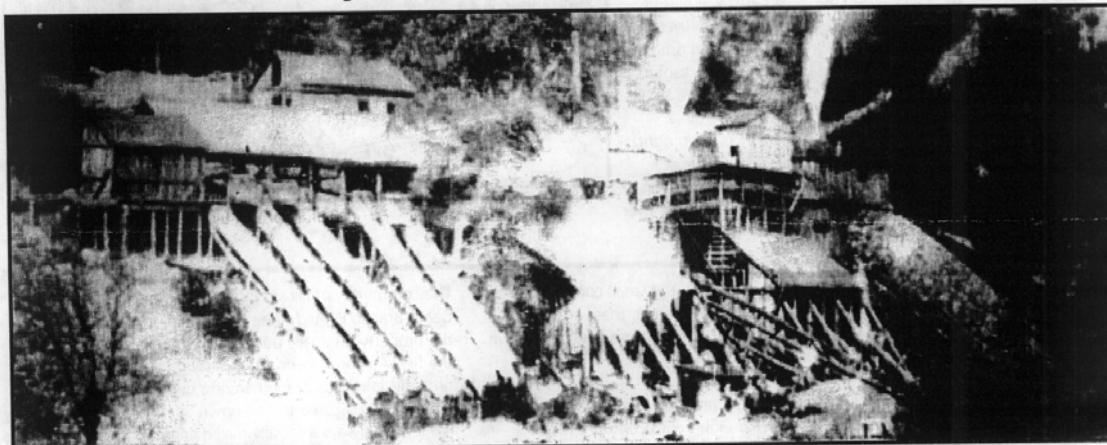
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The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine



The mill at the old Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine in full operation in 1907. Turn over this brochure to see a photo of this same hillside today.
Photograph courtesy: National Park Service.

Overview

Today, Pyrite Mine Road, North Valley Trail, and Cabin Branch Mine Trail all lead to a peaceful place where trees grow, birds sing, and Quantico Creek trickles by. From 1889 to 1920, a person in that very spot would hear the chugging of a narrow gauge railway, the grinding sounds of a mill, and the hoots and hollars of miners hard at work. The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine employed up to 300 men and children and was the backbone of the local economy. When the mine closed its doors due to local and international events, it scarred the community and the environment.

The Perfect Place to Mine

The Detrick and Bradley families formed the Cabin Branch Mining Company in 1889. Oral histories tell us that Mr. Detrick saw the sparkling glitter of pyrite, or 'Fool's Gold,' and made a 200 foot deep shaft in the ground. His efforts were rewarded. The pyrite ore lens at the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine was huge - over 1000 feet long and 1000 feet wide, with an average thickness of 14 to 18 feet. In 1916, the American Agricultural Chemical Company began its 4 year ownership of the mine.

The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine was the only pyrite mine in Prince William County and the greatest boost to the local economy in over 100 years. It provided a reliable source of income to both African American and Caucasian families living in the area and new businesses, such as boarding houses and saloons opened up in Dumfries to support the mine and its workers. By 1917, Virginia produced more pyrite than any other state in the union, making up 37% of all US production.

Why Mine Pyrite?

The soils of Virginia contain many important minerals and ores, including iron sulfite, or pyrite (FeS_2). By the turn of the 20th century, Pyrite had long been one of the major sources of sulfuric acid, an important chemical agent of the time. The sulfuric acid was released from the pyrite by heating or "roasting" the crushed pyrite ore in a chamber to which air is introduced. At high temperatures, the sulfur in the ore vaporizes and joins with the oxygen to form sulfur dioxide. The gas was then captured and purified into sulfuric acid.

The sulfuric acid was then used in the manufacture of glass, soap, bleach, textiles, paper, and medicine. It was used for cleaning and refining precious metals and, probably most importantly, gunpowder. As the US entered into World War I, pyrite became as important as ever. Prices per ton soared and the workers at the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine were so needed by the war effort that they were exempted from military service. Ironically, the war that caused the largest demand for pyrite in history would soon bring about its demise.

How do you Mine Pyrite?

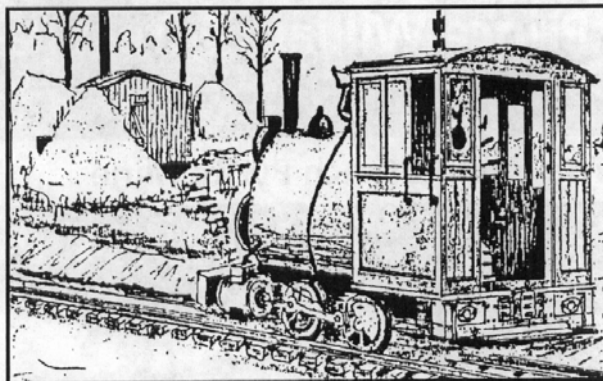
Most historical sources record the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine as having had three shafts. Whether all three were worked for the entire 31-year history of the mine, or only one at a time is not clear. More recent archeological surveys have found up to 13 depressions at the mine site that could have been additional shafts.

Two of the known shafts at the site were nearly vertical and one was on an incline. The inclined shaft was reported as having been sunk to 1000 feet in 1907, 1800 feet in 1917 and 2400 feet in 1920. Elevators transported the ore and men in the vertical shafts and the men would walk directly into the incline shaft. Typically, the miners used 2 1/2 inch machine drills and sometimes hand drills for thinner ore.

Mining pyrite was dark, dirty, and dangerous work. Miners labored in 2 and 3 shifts a day for 6 days a week, with only the light from their lamps (see an example in the park visitor center) to guide them. Shifts were usually 10 hours long and lunch was eaten underground. There were multiple injuries and even deaths. Morse Reid, who is buried in the park, was recorded to have died from inhaling 'damp gas' in the mine. Another man was decapitated after grabbing onto a moving elevator. Miners' children often worked in the mine as well; making 50 cents a day they sorted pyrite ore into small, medium, and large piles. Once the pyrite was removed from the earth, sorted by the children, and milled into a fine powder, it was transported by a small gauge railway.

How do you Mine Pyrite?

At all periods of the mine's operation, a narrow-gauge railroad ran through the site, delivering coal to the boiler room, moving ore between buildings and binds, and picking up loads of ore for shipment. The main track ran six miles along Mine Road, through the town of Dumfries, and out to a siding at Barrow Point (also known as Barrow Siding or Possum Point) on the Potomac River. There the ore was either loaded onto railroad cars headed for Fredericksburg or shipped out onto boats. Three small steam engines, the Dewey, Virginia Creeper, and Little Dinkey (shown right) pulled the railroad cars. Whenever possible, children or miners would hop on the railroad to head down to the river to fish or just for a fun ride.



The "Little Dinkey" steam engine. Drawn by Lee Lansing, Dumfries VA.

The Cabin Branch Community

Most of the mine workers lived in the small communities of Batestown and Hickory Ridge. Together, these small clusters of homes, schools, churches and stores became known as the Cabin Branch Community.

Free African Americans were present in Prince William County as early as the mid-eighteenth century. After the Civil War, freed slaves joined other African American families in a community which developed near the Cabin Branch Creek. Batestown, as it came to be known, was located on the eastern boundary of the park, along the road currently known as Mine Road. Betsy Bates, considered the matriarch of the family, was born around 1795 and was the first of the Bates in the area of Cabin Branch creek. By end of the 19th century, Batestown counted 150 residents; by the beginning of 20th century, 75 residents called Batesville home. Descendents of the Bates family and Batestown community continue to reside in the area.

The community of Hickory Ridge developed west of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine near parking lot D. It grew out of the property originally purchased in 1869 by Zeal Williams, the first African American property owner in the area. Over time, his land was divided among heirs, sold to relatives, and eventually came to be known as Hickory Ridge. Hickory Ridge was always a racially mixed community but its leaders were African American. Some of prominent families were the Williamsses, the Kendalls, the Reids, and the Byrds. Local residents of both Batestown and Hickory Ridge remembered 'foreigners' coming in to work at the mine as well. These Italian and Irish immigrants from the northern cities married into many of the local families in Hickory Ridge and Batestown. Most of the properties in Hickory Ridge became a part of Prince William Forest Park during the 1930s and 1940s.

Life in a Mine Town - before & after the mine

The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine ran day and night. The day shift drilled and removed the ore, while the night shift removed water and waste materials. On-site housing was provided with several free standing dwellings for white workers, and small dormitories for black workers. Both the Cabin Branch Mining Company and the American Agricultural Chemical Company ran a company store where miners brought food and goods. Information on miner's pay varies widely. Typical pay ranged from \$3.50 to \$4.25 a day, though wages were often given out in script that could only be used at the company store. This helped the mining companies control the purchases of their employees and often created an employee who was dependent upon the credit of the company store.

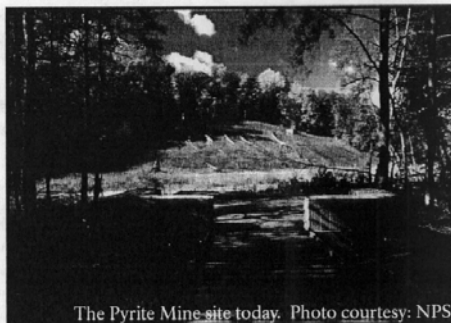
Several factors contributed to the closing of the mine in 1920. Demand for gunpowder dropped sharply after the war. At the same time, cheaper sources of sulfur were being discovered elsewhere in the US and overseas through the new 'global' economy as a result of World War I. Closer to home, the miners, unaware of global markets and events, threatened to strike. The mine superintendent is reputed to have said: "I'll let the shafts fill in with water and the frogs jump in before I reopen the mine." Mine workers sought work elsewhere, at the Marine Corps Base at Quantico, at the waterfront in the town of Dumfries, or by timbering and working their own lands. The economic downturn started by the collapse of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine foreshadowed the "Great Depression" to come just ten years later.

A Defacement of the Earth's Surface

When the American Agricultural Chemical Company abandoned the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, they seem to have simply walked away. Much of the machinery was sold or scrapped, but buildings were left vacant and the large piles of pyrite tailings (debris) were left behind. Unbeknownst to the mine owners in 1920, the pyrite mine site would be left to create sulfuric acid for the next 60 years. This time however, the sulfuric acid was not bottled in a plant or used in soap making. Instead, with each rainfall, it would trickle into the Quantico Creek. By the time the National Park Service (NPS) tested the creek in 1971, the pH was 2.0 - the same as vinegar.

When the NPS began looking at the area as a recreation spot in 1935, they described the following scene, "Spoil banks, shafts, stray bits of mine equipment, and habitations of hangers-on to former subsistence plots form a picture of a defacement of the earth's surface." In truth, the large piles of spoil left behind by the mine opened an ecological can of worms that the National Park Service would spend over 30 years attempting to correct.

In 1995, the NPS, Environmental Protection Agency, and Virginia Department of Minerals and Mining began a large scale reclamation of the site. Covering the pyrite piles with sewage sludge and lime, the site is now considered 'healthy' and stream life has returned. The average pH has returned to around 5.5-6.0 (7 is considered normal) and school students study the site. Visit it today!



The Pyrite Mine site today. Photo courtesy: NPS.

Prince William Forest Park

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Triangle, Virginia



Hickory Ridge and Batestown: Local Life Before the Park



Little Union Baptist Church, Batestown,
2003. (NPS photograph)

The Cabin Branch Community

Before the creation of Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area in 1933, the lands of Prince William Forest Park were not heavily forested. Instead, hundreds of small-scale farmers, laborers, and others lived in the area. Two communities - Hickory Ridge, which developed west of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, and Batestown, to the mine's east - were home to many locals; others lived in the Joplin area in the southwest of the park. Batestown, established by African-Americans following the Civil War, still exists, but the creation of the park and its use by the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War brought an end to Hickory Ridge.

Agriculture, Population and Labor

Tobacco ceased being an important cash crop in Prince William County during the late eighteenth century. Soil fertility fell, and bulk transportation became difficult as siltation closed the port of Dumfries. The few large tobacco plantations broke into smaller farms, and wheat and vegetables became primary crops. Slavery remained part of local life until the Civil War (1861-65) and emancipation.

The county's population did not grow with the state's, as local residents took advantage of opportunities in the expanding western territories of the U.S. Between 1800 and 1940, the county's total

population increased only 28%, from 12,733 to 17,738, while the state's grew by 66%. People of African ancestry composed 45% of the county's population in 1800, but only 14% in 1940.

Virginia was the site of great devastation during the Civil War and of extensive rebuilding afterwards. Employment opportunities in southeastern Prince William County were few, though the opening of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine in 1889 and of the Marine Corps base at Quantico in 1917 provided nonagricultural blue-collar jobs to many local people.

Hickory Ridge: A Village for the Mine

People could raise their animals, raise their food, it was how they lived. Former resident, 1990s

During its zenith in the 1910s, nearly 300 people lived in Hickory Ridge, west of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine (near parking area D). Hickory Ridge, established after the mine opened in 1889, included an Odd Fellows hall also used as a church and primary school by local blacks; a store, homes, and small crop fields that supplied local tables. People sold extra produce at markets throughout northern Virginia and Washington. The community obtained water from streams and wells. Light came from kerosene lamps. Residents conducted most local

business through barter. The Great Depression had few effects on the area's economy.

Blacks and whites owned property in Hickory Ridge and were neighbors, though Virginia passed a law forbidding integrated public facilities in 1924. Both races worked at the mine, but whites usually held better-paying, higher-skilled jobs. Life in Hickory Ridge, however, was different; there, African-Americans had leading places in community life. Among the notable residents was Mary Byrd, an African-American midwife. People recognized Byrd throughout the Cabin Branch area for her skill and expertise.

Batestown: Freedom Near the Quantico Creek

The Cabin Branch Community was an isolated, yet self-contained, community . . . Local resident, 1990s

Batestown began after the Civil War as a community of former slaves and free blacks from the family of Betsy Bates (fl. 1850), the local matriarch. It is possible that a local white landowner donated the village's land to the Bates family. In the 1930s, many Batestown residents were her descendants, living in a hamlet considered the "black" section of Dumfries in that segregated era.

As in Hickory Ridge, the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine provided jobs to many Batestown men, who also farmed and harvested timber. Women with outside

employment usually worked as domestic servants or, occasionally, as teachers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Batestown had approximately 150 residents; at the beginning of the twenty-first, nearly 75 people called it home.

Many Batestown residents worshipped at the Little Union Baptist Church - which also attracted people from Hickory Ridge - and sent their children to a small primary school on today's Mine Road. Older children from the Cabin Branch area attended more distant high schools in Occoquan or Manassas. Young and old shopped at the Thomas family's store and at businesses in Triangle and Dumfries.

acquired 9/09

Life in Hickory Ridge and Batestown

Many residents of Hickory Ridge and Batestown were nearly self-sufficient, growing or hunting most of their food and making most of their clothing. Locals also held jobs at nearby military installations, at the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine (until it closed in 1919), or did odd jobs to earn needed cash; the average local annual cash income in 1933 was \$536 (equivalent to about \$7,500 in 2003 dollars). Few paved roads crossed the landscape, and the existing rutted roads made extensive travel difficult.

Stores were important institutions in the local communities. Among local shops were the W.W. Payne store in Hickory Ridge - the company store

for the pyrite mine - and the Thomas Store across from the Little Union Baptist Church in Batestown. They sold goods that local residents were unable to grow or make themselves. These stores, and businesses in nearby Dumfries and Triangle, also served as places where people socialized, catching up on community news.

The church was a key social institution in both communities and still is in Batestown, where the Little Union Baptist Church, built in 1903, ministers to its faithful. Church rituals - from baptisms to funerals - and holiday celebrations added to the sense of community felt among local residents.

The New Deal and Change: Chopawamsic RDA

In 1933, the new administration of President Franklin Roosevelt launched dozens of programs and agencies intended to alleviate the hardships of the Great Depression, including the Resettlement Administration (RA). Led by economist Rexford Tugwell, the RA wanted to move poor farmers from small, "marginal" plots to more fertile locations, while creating recreational areas for the urban poor. RA officials identified 15,000 acres (6,070 ha) 30 miles (48 km) south of Washington, D.C., as "marginal" land, prime for urban recreation.

The Resettlement Administration used the creation of Chopawamsic RDA as an example for relief administrators across the country to follow by publishing a booklet about the site's development in

1936. In this pamphlet, the RA asserted that the people of Joplin, Hickory Ridge, and Batestown needed the help of the U.S. government to escape poverty. Nevertheless, many local residents did not think of themselves as poor and were not interested in leaving their homes.

The Department of the Interior acquired title to most of the lands of the new park through purchase or condemnation. Officials from the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, the agencies charged with developing the RDA, slowly began removing residents from the new park. With the entry of the United States into the Second World War in December of 1941, this changed.

The Second World War and Legacies

Initial federal acquisition of lands for Chopawamsic RDA proceeded slowly, and some residents of Hickory Ridge had not relinquished their properties before the U.S. entered the war. However, the park's location, close to Washington, yet rural, and its five cabin camps, capable of housing nearly 200, made it an ideal location for military officials to place secret intelligence training camps.

From 1942 until 1945, the Office of Strategic Services trained spies and radio operators in the park's cabin camps. People who had not yet moved from their homes within Chopawamsic RDA were forced to leave, some within two weeks of notification. Some people moved away from northern Virginia; others relocated to land on the borders of the park. OSS

training activities destroyed what remained of Hickory Ridge. Plots of Virginia pines near parking area D and Pyrite Mine Road now mark the locations of village structures. Several cemeteries containing the remains of Hickory Ridge residents are located near the site of the community.

While its residents no longer rely on small farms and timber harvesting for their sustenance, the Batestown community still exists. Centered around the Little Union Baptist Church on Mine Road near Dumfries, many of the community's residents are descendants of its founders.

Resources for Further Study

Few books or articles analyze life in Hickory Ridge or Batestown. However, these studies and others provide historical context for the communities:

Heinemann, Ronald L. *Depression and New Deal in Virginia: The Enduring Dominion*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983.

National Park Service, *Prince William Forest Park*, <<http://www.nps.gov/prwi>> (May 2003).

Parker, Patricia. *The Hinterland: An Overview of the Prehistory and History of Prince William Forest Park, Virginia*. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1986.

Payne-Jackson, Arvilla and Sue Ann Taylor. *Prince William Forest Park: The African-American Experience*. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2000.

The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine issued scrip coupons such as these to its employees in the early 1900s as part of their pay. Workers used scrip for purchases - often at inflated prices - at the company's store.

Courtesy Weems-Botts Museum, Dumfries, Va.

50 Cents on this page.



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The CCC and Prince William Forest Park



CCC Company 2349 in Prince William Forest Park with canvas tents in background. Photo courtesy: NPS.

The CCC: "We Can Take It"

Between 1929 and 1933, unemployment in the United States jumped from approximately 3% to more than 25% as the Roaring Twenties crashed into the Great Depression. Among the young, the rate of joblessness was even higher. Soon after taking office in March of 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established his "Tree Army," the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), to reduce unemployment, conserve natural resources, and provide skills to unskilled men.

Roosevelt's Tree Army

From 1933 to 1942, 5% of U.S. men - more than two million - served in the CCC, one of the most popular of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Roosevelt sought to get young men off of America's streets and improve their health and morale while boosting the nation's economy. CCC "boys," usually 18 to 25 years old, earned \$30 per month and were provided room and board. Of this \$30, they were required to send between \$22 and \$25 to their families. Men with supervisory jobs made slightly more money.

CCC enrollees worked on projects in every state and territory and built dams, and stocked streams with fish. The primary goal was creating outdoor recreation areas for public use. They cut new trails and built campgrounds, fought fires and built visitor facilities. Catocin Mountain Park's Shangri-la, later the Camp David presidential retreat, was first built by the CCC as a retreat for federal employees. All in all, men worked in 791 CCC camps in 94 national parks and 881 state or local areas. Many parks near Washington - including Prince William Forest - are CCC creations.



Firefighting crew from CCC Company 2349, 1940.
Photo Courtesy: NARA

Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area and the CCC

The NPS supervised CCC enrollees who developed Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs), an innovative program designed to make outdoor recreation available to inner city residents. Looking for a site near Washington, D.C. to create a sample of an RDA for states and local governments to follow, NPS officials identified 15,000 acres they considered "agriculturally submarginal" about 30 miles south of the nation's capital.

Named for a local creek, the Chopawamsic RDA was quickly abuzz with CCC activity. Hundreds of men from Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Virginia lived at three different camps within the park. They built the roads in the park and the five rustic cabin camps for use by urban youth groups and welfare agencies. The young African-American boys of "Camp Lichtman" from the 12th Street YMCA-DC were the first organizations to use the cabin camps as a summer retreat. The CCC built the cabin camps using natural materials found in the park as well as materials left behind by relocated residents.



CCC enrollee building cabin, 1936. Photo Courtesy: NARA



Mess Hall set up for Company 1374. Photo courtesy: NPS.



Camp SP-22, CCC Company 1374 in 1936. Today this area is the ballfield at Cabin Camp 1. Photo Courtesy: National Park Service.

Life in a CCC Camp

Do you get up to the sound of reveille at 6:00 am each morning? CCC enrollees rose with the bugle every workday. After dressing and 15 minutes of exercise, they ate breakfast in the camp dining hall. It often included fruit, cereal, pancakes, eggs, ham and coffee; this was a fine meal for the Great Depression. Camps were run by Army officers, and the men made their beds and cleaned their barracks before heading to their worksites at 8:00 am.

Whether cutting brush, building stone walls, doing trail maintenance, or putting a roof on a camping cabin, CCC enrollees worked hard until 4:00 pm. They did break for lunch, which was usually cold sandwiches, pie, and coffee.

Leisure time for sports or other activities was available after work and before supper. Each camp had a well stocked recreation hall. Enrollees had to change into dress uniforms for the evening meal, held between 5:00 and 5:30. Food was usually plain but filling, with plenty of second helpings available.

Afterwards, enrollees took part in educational or vocational activities. Every camp had an education coordinator to help enrollees improve their literacy or learn job skills they could use after their service. After classes, enrollees could do as they wished in camp. "Lights out" was usually around 10:00 pm, soon after followed by taps.

CCC Living in the Park

Three CCC companies were assigned to construct the Chopawamsic RDA. The hard work of Companies 1374, 2349, and 2383 are visible today. Their first task was to erect canvas tents while they built their own CCC barracks.

Once completed, each CCC camp contained 4 barracks, a recreation hall, mess hall/kitchen, officer's quarters, an administration building and foreman quarters. Most of the buildings were heated with coal-burning stoves.

CCC Co. 1374

Company 1374 was the first to arrive at the park in May 1935 and they established Camp SP-22. It was situated in the northeastern edge of the park, off of Dumfries Road, north of Cabin Camp 1. Company 1374 built Cabin Camps 1 and 4 and remained on the site until April 1939. At that time, the CCC site was converted into a ballfield for Camp 1. The enrollees of this company focused their efforts on grading and constructing access roads yet they also performed other important duties such as quarry work, dam and bridge construction and saw milling. After they completed their work at Camps 1 and 4, they assisted in the building of Cabin Camp 3.



Crew and Foremen at Cabin Camp 1 in 1937. Photo Courtesy: NPS.

CCC Co. 2349

Company 2349 established Camp SP-25-VA in July 1935. This CCC camp was located near the western edge of the park, off of Joplin Road, just west of where Cabin Camp 2 sits today. The "boys" of Company 2349 built Cabin Camps 2 and 5, operated a stone crushing plant for road surfacing projects, constructed the lake at Cabin Camps 2 and 5 and the concrete dam. When they vacated the site, the area was converted into a ballfield for Cabin Camp 2. Like Company 1374, when their assigned work was ultimately completed, they assisted in the construction of Cabin Camp 3. In 1937, Company 2349 converted to Company 2383.



Baseball at Camp NP-16 (Co. 2349), 1940. Photo Courtesy: NPS.

CCC Co. 2383

Company 2383 established Camp SP-26 in August 1935. This CCC camp was located just north of today's Cabin Camp 3. They built several miles of foot trails and helped in the construction of Cabin Camps 3 and 5. This was the only CCC camp converted from state park (SP) designation to national park (NP) status in October 1939 changing its designation from SP-26 to NP-16. Some remnants of this camp remain today and include a parade ground and an education building. They are located at the maintenance yard adjacent to Cabin Camp 3. By 1941, the only remaining CCC camp was NP-16 which was converted into defense camp NP (D)-12. This company remained in the park to build quarters for the Office of Strategic Services.



Men of Company 2349. Winter 1940-41. Photo Courtesy: NPS.

Prince William Forest Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

18100 Park Headquarters Road
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www.nps.gov/prwi



Spies in the Park: The Office of Strategic Services



OSS recruits learn to use radio equipment at "Area C", the communications training camp located at today's cabin camps 1 and 4. Photo courtesy: National Archives and Records Administration.

Overview

From 1936 to 1942, underprivileged youth of metropolitan Washington, D.C. enjoyed the natural beauty and health benefits of summer camp at Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area (now Prince William Forest Park). But World War II changed this quiet retreat built for children into a secret military installation with guard towers, patrol dogs, and nameless recruits on their last stop toward making history. It was not until after the war was over in 1945 that childhood laughter was again heard echoing in this forest.

The OSS is Born

Before 1941, the United States had no single agency responsible for intelligence. Instead, diplomats, soldiers, and others gathered information on sensitive topics during their normal activities. When World War II broke out in Europe in 1939, U.S. intelligence operations were splintered among nearly a dozen different federal agencies, many of which were suspicious bureaucratic rivals accustomed to competing with each other for the past two decades between the wars.

In July of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Coordinator of Information, which was soon after renamed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). OSS Director Colonel Bill Donovan quickly faced the daunting task of training America's first non-military intelligence operation. Using British models, his own highly decorated military background, and his strong personality, Donovan and his staff searched for the perfect locations to train their new recruits.

Spies in the Woods

In early in 1942, Colonel Donovan's scouting staff determined that Catocin Mountain Park in southern Maryland and Chopawamsic Park (now Prince William Forest Park) would make excellent sites for the paramilitary training camps of the OSS's Special Operations Branch. The hilly 15,000 acre Chopawamsic Park with its 5 cabin camps was selected. The cabin camps were broken up into two training areas - "Area A" for Advanced Paramilitary Training and "Area C" for Communications Branch training.

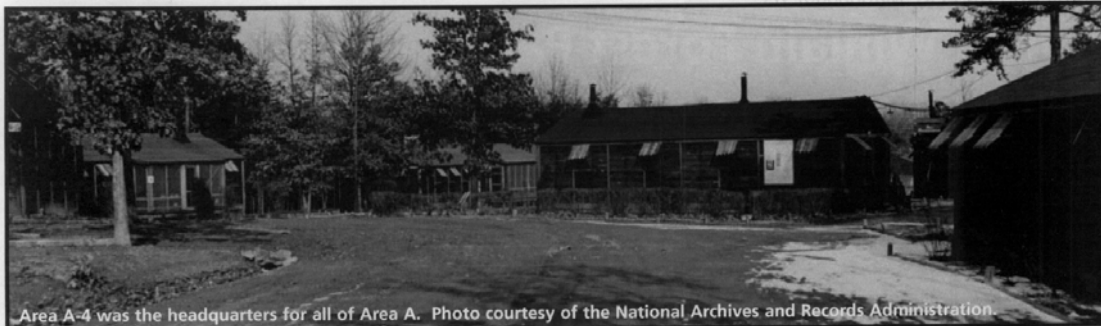
As barbed wire and guard dogs appeared, rumors began flying of camps for conscientious objectors or German POWs. Ira Lykes, the park manager who lived on the Chopawamsic grounds, was given strict instructions to remain silent regarding this new use of the park. During the half century that followed World War II, it was the common knowledge of park staff and area residents that the "military" or the "army" occupied the park during the war. The use of the park by the OSS, and the important role Chopawamsic played in America's victory during World War II was only recently re-discovered.

A Note About Safety

Varying levels of evidence were left behind from the days of the OSS training camps. Many of the OSS training exercises used live ammunition and their detonation training was conducted on farm houses that were left standing from the early days of the park. There have been many surveys of the park land that have removed undetonated bullets or shells left behind by the OSS to create a safe environment for off trail hikers.

However, if you should come across any visible evidence of OSS activities here in the park, please contact a park ranger and do not attempt to collect the item. Not only is it illegal to collect any artifacts found in Prince William Forest Park, but your safety is of our utmost concern.





Area A-4 was the headquarters for all of Area A. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

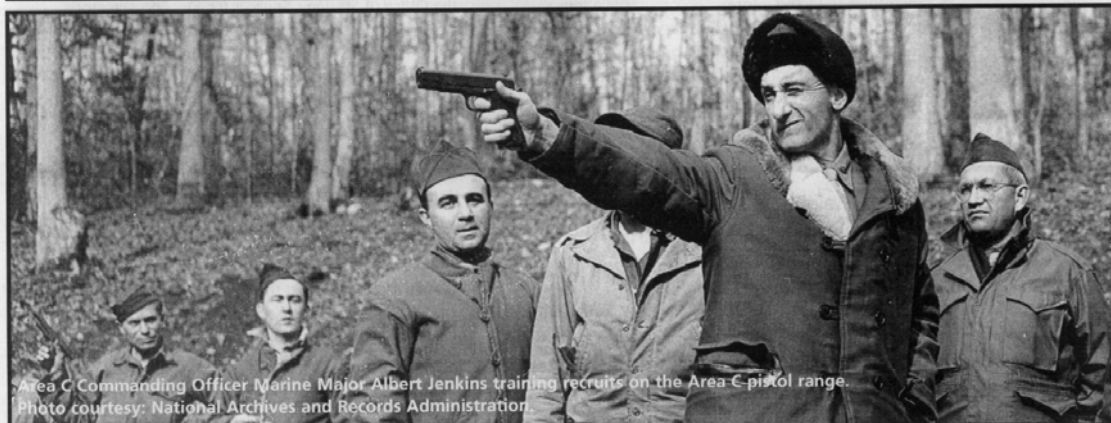
Area A

Area A consisted of the current day Cabin Camps 2, 5, and 3 and the park maintenance yard. Area A-4 (shown below) was the command and maintenance center for all four subcamps, and it sometimes also served as a training camp for advanced Special Operations. A-4 had two large classrooms, holding 50 students each as they learned from lectures and training films about fieldcraft, weaponry, and demolitions, plus a smaller classroom for 25, where recruits learned code.

Area A-2 (current day Cabin Camp 2) was first opened in April 1942 for advanced training in Special Operations. Later, a course was offered there in basic military training beginning in spring 1944. A-2 was also used as a training area for Operational Groups (OG) in 1943-44 or for a holding area for personnel awaiting their assignment overseas. The kinds of military training facilities at A-2 included a structure built specifically for the OSS, a 20 by 40-foot indoor pistol range (call the pistol house). Nearby, engineers also constructed an outdoor pistol ranges, a submachine gun range, and a 150-yard, jogging-type obstacle course. Nearby, there was also a map and fieldcraft training area. In the first part of 1944, A-2 was being used as a basic training camp for all OSS military personnel who had not had basic training (the Army required that any army personnel sent into overseas war theaters have had basic training including familiarity with weapons).

Cabin Camp 3 became OSS Area A-3 in late 1943 to provide trainees from the Special Operations and Morale Operations (psychological warfare). The several of the camp craft lodges were turned into classrooms holding 40 men and the men also enjoyed a recreational hall and post exchange, a the dining hall and infirmary. One small building was converted to a code room.

Area A-5 served as a "finishing school," basically a holding area for OSS personnel finished with their training and awaiting assignment overseas. The purpose of the finishing school was largely to keep them in top physical and mental condition, and consequently, much of the activity was in physical exercise, weapons use, and field exercises. There were a number of military facilities erected near Area A-5. These included an extensive firing range for rifles and submachine guns (a 275 yard range with 20 silhouette targets of the advanced, pop-up type), convenient crater and wood demolition ranges, a demolition area for using charges on steel objects; and east of Area A-5, a map and fieldcraft training area. For outdoor and indoor pistol practice, students from A-5 had access to the pistol house and outdoor pistol range and other firing ranges at A-2 only half a mile away. For the Special Operations trainees, the lake was used for practice in clandestine water crossings and boat landings.



Area C Commanding Officer Marine Major Albert Jenkins training recruits on the Area C pistol range. Photo courtesy: National Archives and Records Administration.

Area C

In 1942, Cabin Camp 1 and 4 were selected to become the Communications Branch training camp, or "Area C." With a total capacity of 357 officers and enlisted men, each cabin camp had an administrative building, a lodge, and a dining hall as well as groups of cabins each clustered around an open area and a washroom/toilet house. At that time, communications was part of the Special Operations Branch. They would receive nine to thirteen weeks of fundamentals of electricity and radio, Morse code, cipher, radio set maintenance, under cover procedures, field security, weapons, close combat, and field problems.

Area C-1 (or cabin camp 1) appears to have served as the headquarters, accommodations, and maintenance facilities. However, C-1 was also used for a variety of training purposes from brief communications training for agents in

operational branches such as SO, SI, or MO, to a basic army training course, to a lecture series on the Far East, to service as holding area for men awaiting further assignment, whether returning from abroad or awaiting shipment overseas.

Camp C-4 was the main training facility at Area C. It was known as the Communication School, and its students were men who had shown a definite aptitude for radio work. At Area C, SO agent learned Morse code, secret ciphers, and clandestine radio techniques that they would use when they were sent behind enemy lines to facilitate the work of espionage, sabotage, and guerrilla leadership that Donovan envisioned.