

Villagers Prep For Invasion

Track, Disney On Horizon

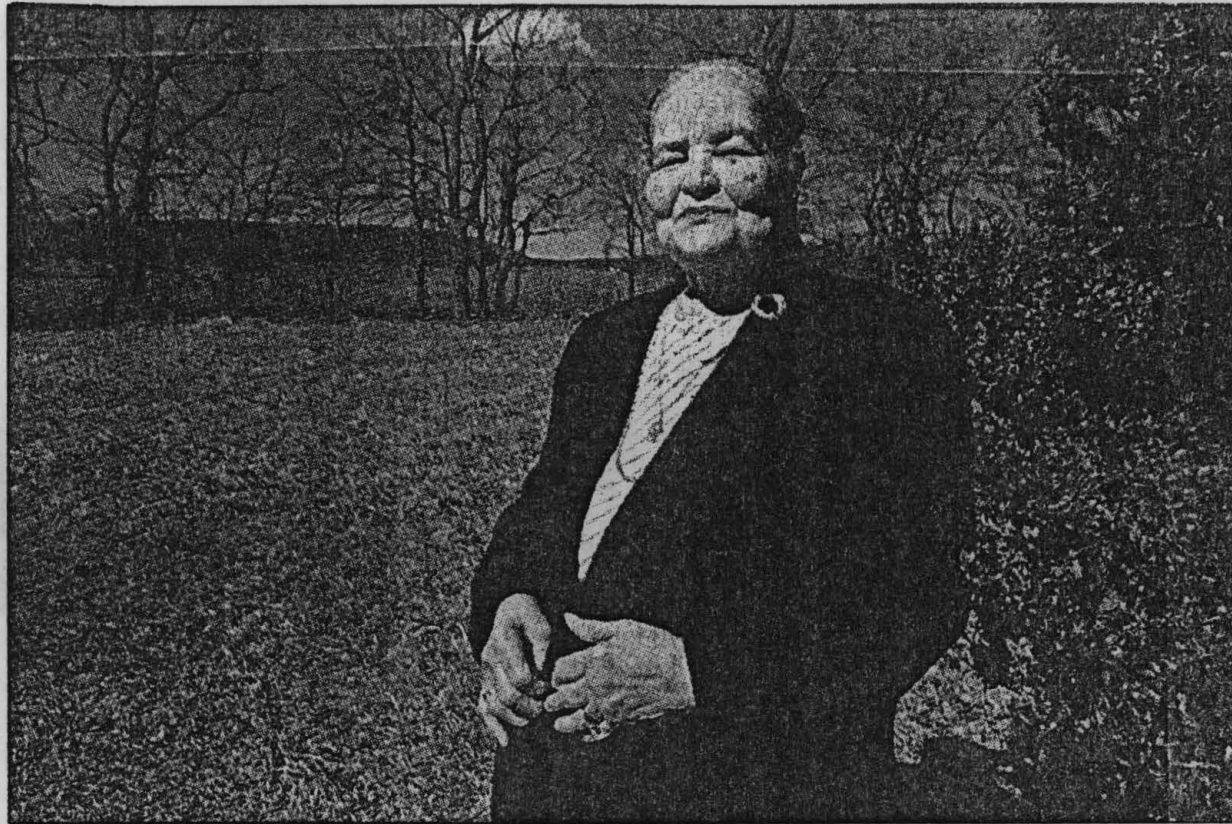
By LAURA RUBY
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

The residents of the village of Thoroughfare believe their community is a piece of heaven.

It's a place where everyone knows everyone else, criminal activity and traffic jams are non-existent, and tranquility prevails across the countryside.

The 100 or so residents of the community are a tightly-knit bunch and their unity only stands to help them as they engage in a fight for the collective life of the village. Their opponent — the Virginia Jockey Club — hopes to construct a 660-acre equestrian sports center adjacent to the heart of the village.

The proposed Dominion Downs, while centered around flat thoroughbred racing, would also offer a year-round steeplechase training center,



Times-Democrat Staff Photo/Scott Ferrell

Marie Primas despairs of Thoroughfare's lifestyle if a racetrack goes in beyond the trees.

polo, eventing, show jumping, cross country and trail riding.

Struggling to gain approval from the Virginia Racing Commission to construct the park off Route 55, the VJC is one of six applicants vying for a license to operate what most ob-

servers think will be the sole racetrack in the Commonwealth.

The Racing Commission held public hearings across the state over the last two weeks to receive input from those who would be most affected by the proposed racetracks;

the five commissioners got an earful from the approximately 20 residents representing Thoroughfare.

Though most were soft spoken and seemed to address the panel

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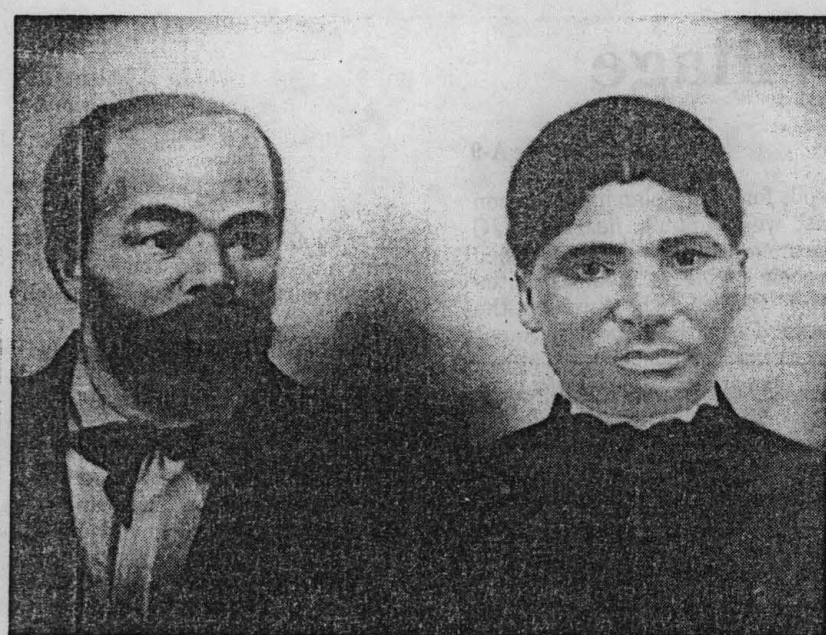
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Times-Democrat Staff Photo/Scott Ferrell

Mrs. Primas' grandparents by marriage, Thomas and Elizabeth Primas, helped found Oakrum Baptist Church.

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more in sadness than in anger, their message came through loud and clear — if the track comes to Prince William County, their village, their lifestyle, surely disappears.

Thoroughfare, several of those speakers pointed out, was founded by freed slaves after the Civil War, nearly 130 years ago. It may well be the last such village still in existence in the nation.

Residents of the area say that the track will destroy the 130-year-old village, which is centered around the Oakrum Baptist Church, the only real landmark in the village. The church was built in 1865 and still stands as the heart of the community.

An old country store, no longer in operation but a reminder of the gatherings it used to hold, and a smattering of houses occupied by

black families make up the rest of the ancient village.

Most of the residents are elderly blacks who were born and raised in Thoroughfare, though over the last several decades the village has drawn newer residents to the region and back to their roots.

Marie Primas, 81, said that she and her husband moved to Thoroughfare from Washington, D.C. after retiring. They had spent a great deal of time in the area even prior to their return because of family ties here.

The younger black families drawn to the community in recent years are families, Mrs. Primas said, who spent a lot of time examining places to live and settled on Thoroughfare because it offers them a good place in which to raise their children.

"Those of us who live a peaceful, quiet life like this are very loath to see hoards of people come in," Mrs. Primas said.

Mrs. Primas owns property on Beverly Road. Beverly Road backs

up to the proposed racetrack, putting it, quite literally, in her backyard.

This is cause for concern and Mrs. Primas, along with the rest of the residents of the village, has spent a great deal of time researching the VJC proposal.

Through countless hours on the telephone and in libraries, Mrs. Primas has come up with a considerable list of concerns about her potential new neighbor.

Topping that list is the increase in traffic through the village that is inevitable. But the traffic increase, she insists, broadening the argument, will affect everyone in the region.

Road improvements offered by the developer may not be enough, she said, to offset the already problematic traffic situation in the area. Manassas, she pointed out, has the eighth longest commuting time in the country.

The racetrack, even with the proposed road improvements, will only worsen this situation, she said.

Racing in and of itself, she said, causes residents of Thoroughfare to worry; to worry about the type of people who will be traveling the roads in front of their homes.

Racetrack gambling, she said, can become an addiction and she worries about other behaviors to which addictions can lead.

Residents worry about drunk driving on the roads leading to the track and about the school children who attend the four elementary schools that flank the road.

"Anyone who thinks that crime won't increase in this area really doesn't have their screws in too tight," she said.

They worry about the smell of the horses, the cars, and the crowds of people and their waste — an issue that has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the residents. The VJC plan calls for spray irrigation, on site, of treated wastewater, though opponents called the suitability of

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the soils for such a plan into question at last week's public hearing. VJC spokesmen said they are satisfied with their engineers' studies on site.

Mrs. Primas, who lives on the downward end of a slope that comes from the track, is concerned that water will run off the site and affect her drinking water.

"There is no arrangement under the sun to take care of all of the urine from those horses," she said.

"It seems like some crazy thing out of *Gulliver's Travels* that no one with any common sense or understanding ... (could support)," she said. "It boggles the mind and boggles the imagination.

"I don't see any advantage to us and even to the county and state because of the expenses the racetrack will necessitate," Mrs. Primas said.

The VJC has estimated local annual tax revenues of \$2 million from the racetrack, she said, but taxpayers in this region may still be asked to fund the brunt of road upgrades. The VJC has proffered 13 transportation improvements to Routes 15 and 55, all at company expense.

"It is interesting to note that the people who want the track, two things, either don't live too near it or they have things they want to gain personally," Mrs. Primas concluded.

But perhaps the saddest part of the battle that Thoroughfare resident are fighting is that there is another opponent waiting in the wings — Disney's America.

Although it's further away than the proposed racetrack, the theme park, located just across Route 55 and Interstate 66 from the village, could be the final nail in the community's coffin, with or without Dominion Downs.

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Gov. Mouse Criticized

To the Editor, *

Governor Mouse and his minions have won. The Taxpayer Bank of Virginia is giving a blank check against your account to Disney for their Haymarket theme park development for roads, advertising, promotion, and so on even though Disney is expected to earn almost \$1 billion dollars this year alone.

A secondary battle has loomed nearby. This time it will be up to five commissioners to decide whether or not, in addition to Disneyville, Inc., we will also have Virginia's first horse racing track along with 20,000 estimated patrons per 200 plus racing days near Thoroughfare Gap.

A formula one car racing track is going down in the middle of the Brandy Station Battlefield in Culpeper County. Why not have the ponies run around the Henry House?

Enough is enough! There is no water for the area. There is no water and sewer for the track, and we all know that our streams and ponds run dry. Congestion on rural roads that are in bad shape will be incurable. What about noise and sewage from people and animals? Watch small historic nearby towns disappear.

The track will have a liability problem — barns have been burned in nearby Fauquier county, horses killed, and those responsible have gotten away with it. Our taxes will go up even more and our quality of life will go down.

If you want good water to drink and some remaining peace and quiet, tell the Racing Commissioners to move the horsey set up near Dulles Airport where all the infrastructure is in place, or somewhere else.

HENRY WHEELWRIGHT

The Plains