

Newport, Virginia — A Crossroads Village

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Newport, Virginia, a crossroads country village, is located at the foot of Gap Mountain in Giles County, Virginia. It serves as the home of three of the remaining covered bridges in Virginia, which, beyond their historical value, symbolize a blending of cultures and generations. Over the years, those families who cleared the local lands by the sweat of their individual and collective brows worked side by side with newcomers who offered their talents to provide a unique village, where theory and practicality often met. Newport with its bridges has literally served as a crossroads and as a junction for ideas. This article revisits the colorful past of this former saloon town that was once described as “Hell’s Half Acre” and provides insight into a village that remains a blend of individuals from diverse backgrounds who share an appreciation of and respect for time-honored traditions.

Geographically, the village is located near winding Sinking Creek that begins near the Continental Divide in neighboring Craig County and makes a subterranean exit prior to reaching the north-flowing New River in Giles County. Some of the valleys adjacent to the town of Newport were formed along ancient fault lines, and there are indications that some of the slopes may be a part of the largest prehistoric landslide in North America.¹ Native rock formations contain the fossilized remains of bryozoan and brachiopods — indicators that in ancient times the area was under water and perhaps part of an inland sea.

The abundance of Native-American artifacts gives credence to stories that this was a prized hunting area in prehistoric times, and confirms a pre-European presence in the area. Stone implements found throughout the area provide evidence that mountain springs, streams, and creeks were frequented by hunters and gatherers perhaps as far back as 8,000 to 10,000 BC.

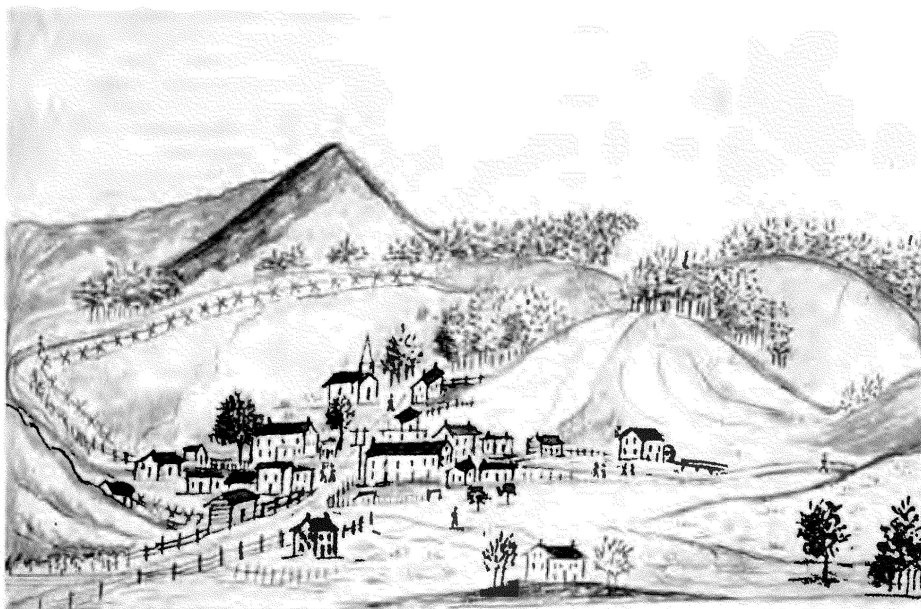
In the mid-1700s European explorers and settlers made excursions into this area. Noted American frontiersman Christopher Gist documented his discovery of nearby Mountain Lake on May 11, 1751², and Adam

Harman has been listed as living at Gunpowder Springs (nearby Eggleston) as early as 1749.³ It is known that some of the early European settlers in the Newport vicinity fought in the Revolutionary War; however, their immediate ties to the area are sketchy. Some historians established 1779 as the starting date for the Newport community, which was known at one time as Crossroads and later on as Chapman's Mills.⁴ The name "Newport" was used as early as January 1836, at which time Tyree G. Newbill was given permission to retail ardent spirits at his store in Newport.⁵ In the early 1800s, the first roads began to tie together small communities later known as Clover Hollow, Spruce Run, Maybrook, Mountain Lake, and Sinking Creek with Newport proper, and the location was a natural hub as early settlers established roots and laid claim to fertile lands. The town served as a crossroads and stagecoach junction for the Salt Sulphur Turnpike that ran from Christiansburg, Virginia, to near what is now Union, West Virginia, and the Fincastle-Cumberland Turnpike, later known as the Blue Grass Trail, that ran east-to-west. Some speculate that indeed this was a "new port," thus the name "Newport."

Census reports in the early 1800s reveal crafts people and farmers occupying the Newport area. Families with surnames such as Adkins (Atkins), Epling, Fry, Harless, Kessinger, Lafon, Link, Lucas, Price, and Vaught carved out their niche, and vestiges of their presence still remain. Later, black families with last names of Moss, Webb, Johnston, Page, and Oads, among others, also located in the area — some free and some as slaves — and they made their contribution to the growth and development of the area as well. Some individuals with Melungeon surnames may have been a part of the early fabric of this town and adjacent communities.

Early outsiders traveling through the area captured the essence of Newport life through their sketches and paintings. In 1853, Lewis Miller, an itinerant artist, provided a graphical illustration of the town of Newport and adjacent areas in some of his drawings. Artist Edward Beyer likewise captured nearby Mountain Lake in his paintings. Such drawings document the presence of various types of mills, hotels, and churches and confirm the pristine beauty of the area.

As the town and area began to take on an identity in the mid-1800s, however, the national issues that were so divisive became local realities as young men answered the call to arms. There were a few who sympathized with the northern cause, while many considered the Civil War as one of Yankee aggression. Captain William Payne, a Newport resident, described as "... a man of exemplary habits, well-educated, of dauntless



An 1853 sketch of Newport by Lewis Miller, artist. Picture courtesy of Abbey Aldrich Museum.

courage — a strikingly handsome, fine-looking soldier”⁶ was killed while leading his Confederate troops down the Coal River in Raleigh County, West Virginia. In the nearby Maybrook community, only one of Mary Atkins’s three sons serving the Confederate cause made it home from the war. Oral history is that the Butler family in Newport left a candle burning in their window for their young son, who never returned from a trip to town, the speculation being that he had been conscripted into service. There were depredations as the Yankees traveled through the area, and an actual skirmish occurred over the town of Newport when General George Crook, following the Battle of Cloyd’s Mountain, came through Newport on his way to the friendlier confines of the North. As General Crook and his troops scaled nearby Salt Pond Mountain during a cold and rainy spell in May 1864, they had to discard some of their possessions in order to reach the summit. As a result, there are countless tales and legends about buried cannons, gold, and other valuables they supposedly left behind. Continued findings of Civil War relics give credence to the presence of Civil War activities in the area, and reviews of Civil War records confirm the supreme sacrifices made by Newport native sons on many Civil War battlefields.

After the war, the town of Newport took on a more formal demeanor. There were ties to a small college, later to be known as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, then just emerging across the mountain in Montgomery County. This land-grant college was founded on March 19, 1872, and Newport residents were among the early students. The Newport community has continued its close ties with the university, and its citizens have served in many faculty and staff positions.

Coincidentally, Newport became the first incorporated town in Giles County at about the same time that the university, originally known as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, was founded. George Hines, a returning Civil War veteran, was named the first mayor, and the town council included other returning veterans such as the popular medical doctor Christopher Wingo. Chapter 129, Acts of the Virginia General Assembly, 1872, identified the first town officials, outlined the official boundaries of the town, and addressed other such issues as taxing powers, law enforcement, and related matters. (See Appendix I for the complete "General Assembly Act to Incorporate the Town of Newport".)

Grist mills and sawmills decorated the landscape, and an iron foundry was in production, confirming the resurgence of industrial activity after the war. The Johns Mountain Iron Company in Newport was typical of new industry in the area. This company, founded in 1872 with Mr. E. P. Williams of Berryville serving as president, operated on present Route 42 and, after having been closed for several years, was reactivated by J. Wilcox Brown. Power to operate the iron company was supplied by a large dam constructed on Sinking Creek; the land for the dam was leased from Mr. Giles M. Dowdy at an annual rental of \$250.00 plus a royalty of 10 cents per ton of iron. The pig iron from the iron furnace was transported by wagon to the intersection of the Newport-Blacksburg road near the top of the mountain at the Gap, then on to the railroad at Cambria, Virginia, some 18 miles away. Six horses supplied the power to move the heavy loads over two mountains. Coke to fire the Iron Furnace was hauled in from nearby Clover Hollow.

In addition to post-war building, the Newport community showed an intellectual flair. While their social value was questioned in the press, scholarly debates provided evidence of keen minds and competitive spirits. One such light encounter was reported in the *Pearisburg Virginian* of April 1, 1870:

"Heavy" Debate ! — The Grand Question Finally and Forever Settled!
— The World Breathes Free once More! — Newport the Scene of Action, etc., etc. - - The much agitated question, "Which deserves more credit, Columbus for discovering America or Washington for defending

it?” was debated in Newport on Friday night last. It seems that Messrs. Hines, Banks, and Porterfield, the renowned champion “Stumpers” of Newport, accepted a challenge made by Messrs. Williams, Jones, and Williams, the learned and able orators of Craig County, to meet upon the rostrum of deadly contest, upon any subject that might be selected. Newport maintained, manfully, the affirmative and Craig the negative side of the question. After a long, heated, and bloody combat, the judges awarded the “palm of victory and crown of thorns” to the champions of Newport.

We have, from our earliest recollections, been taught to look upon Newport as a famous place for “rock battles,” — especially on election days — but never for oratorical debates upon such momentous and powerful subjects.

Sporting events provided another outlet for energetic and ambitious citizens. Jousting tournaments were important events; the winner had the honor of escorting the queen to the dance that typically followed. Baseball became a local as well as a national pastime. In 1892 those “college boys across the mountain” played their very first baseball game against Newport. The score was recorded as a 15 to 5 victory for the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College team. Coincidentally, one hundred years later in 1992, Mike Williams, a collegian, Newport native, and future major league pitcher, threw the first pitch at the newly dedicated English Field at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He went on to establish baseball records in the early 1990s as a mainstay of the university pitching staff. He also became the second person from Newport to reach the major leagues — Bob Porterfield having distinguished himself in the early 1950s as a pitcher for the Washington Senators, Boston Red Sox, New York Yankees, and Pittsburgh Pirates; he was also selected as the major league “Pitcher of the Year” by “The Sporting News” in 1953.

Early Education

The value of a formal education was ingrained into the early Newport community, and many families went to great effort to assure that their children had access to educational opportunities. Hattie Miller in *The Story of Newport and Its People* documents that a Latin School was located in Newport between 1839 and 1855⁷. In 1872, four free schools were located in the Newport area.⁸ There are reports of private schools in the area, and there is mention of Reverend Stickley, a Lutheran minister, having a school in Newport from 1873 to 1875. In 1884, a Newport Academy headed by J. Porterfield offered “higher branches” in



*Rocky Sink
one-room
School,
c 1916.*

addition to the regular course of study.⁹ Higher branches could be offered only on the authority of the district board, and the higher offerings could not interfere with instruction in elementary studies.¹⁰ The many one-room schools that dotted the area had personalities and stories of their own. When pesky students at the Rocky Sink School locked their teacher, J. Claude Link, out of the building, he climbed onto the roof and stopped up the chimney. Reports of students who cut the saddle cinches on the teacher's horse, put pig tails in the ink well, salted the principal's sandwich, or went skinny dipping in the school spring assure that the educational process was not a dull one. Teacher responsibilities went beyond the "Three 'R's"; one early contract read:

He would teach for \$25.00 a month for five months if the money lasted that long. He was to build fires and clean the building. The contract initially read that cleaning material would be furnished but that clause was changed to read that the teacher would provide the cleaning supplies.¹¹

Greater opportunities for formal education for all children evolved as the emphasis on education gained political and practical popularity. A new high school built in 1911–12 successfully prepared students for advanced education. The first graduating class of twelve students in 1915 included four businessmen — one the general manager of a coal company — an entertainer/farmer, six teachers, and a government worker. The first high school was replaced by a new school, built in 1932 as part

of the WPA program; this school initially offered eleven grades and continued the emphasis on academic excellence.

Religion

Religion was an integral part of early Newport life. Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Lutherans were among the early denominations in the area. Ministers and others tried with varying degrees of success to reform the “sinners” of the area. Some progress was reported by one minister: “I know of no place where there is dancing... I think that there is not one fourth of the drinking in Newport that there was one year ago.”¹² Local preachers also provided some educational opportunities, offering basic educational material along with a Biblical message. Many ministers made lasting contributions to the community by serving as stabilizing forces in times that were often chaotic, and some of the ministers or their children married and remained in the community, where their progeny continue today as respected contributors to the community’s quality of life.

While, as an institution, religion was presented as an integral part of community life, personal visits by the preachers could be stressful events.



Old Lucas Memorial Christian Church, Maybrook, Virginia, c 1918.

Family members were expected to be on their best behavior, scrumptious meals were the order of the day, and in some homes the Bible quickly replaced the Sears and Roebuck catalog in a prominent location. Family members were attired in their better outfits and possibly given a quick lesson on social etiquette. In one such incident, all of the requirements listed above had been met, but some of the younger boys playing outside decided to entertain themselves by tossing the family duck into the air to watch it fly. For some unexplained reason, the duck descended into the chimney, causing the house to be filled with smoke. A ladder was quickly dispatched to the top of the house and the duck was rescued — singed but alive. It is unknown whether salvation was accorded to any other family members on that day.

After the Civil War, the Newport area was again discovered by outsiders, and local-color writers were writing about the natural beauties that had been depicted by earlier artists. However, some writers did not fully appreciate the attitudes of local folk, and their observations and writings were, in part, responsible for an Appalachia stereotype that still persists in many parts of Southwestern Virginia, Eastern Tennessee, and Eastern Kentucky. Edward A. Pollard, writing for the “Virginia Tourist” observed in 1871 after leaving Blacksburg,

... a pretty village which boasts a ‘college’ of some sort ... the sun had been set about a quarter of an hour when we reached Newport, a settlement of twenty or thirty board houses on a little pad of soil at the bottom of a funnel-shaped cup formed by the high hills or mountains. ... The night was gathering, the sky had become overcast with clouds, but we determined to press on (to Eggleston Springs) in view of the cheer that awaited us, much to be preferred to that suggested by the tarnished signboard of the Newport Hotel that creaked dismally over our heads.¹³

Indeed, the town was getting a reputation. Local saloons attracted outsiders who admitted to filling their pockets with rocks on their way into town so as to start a fight if one was not already in progress. Barn burnings were methods of retaliation, and fist fights and gun fights were the means to resolve disagreements. Some of the “best rye whisky” was available for local use or for export, and Civil War veteran “Pent” Taylor was known far and wide for his peach brandy. Cadets from the “college across the mountain” came to Newport to study (according to them) the unique hinges found on the gates in Newport. There is even one report of local pigs getting access to the “best rye whiskey” mash, doubtless some of the more festive pigs living in Newport at that time. With four distilleries and three saloons, it was definitely “Saturday Night Live” in Newport.



Smith Hotel and Saloon, c 1890, Newport, Virginia.

During this era, Newport personified the phrase “gay nineties”. Residents published several newspapers, Falls Manufacturing Company was in operation on Sinking Creek making farm equipment, buggies, guns, furniture, and kitchen utensils, and a woolen mill was in operation in the town. Local merchants met many of the needs of Newport residents and those of adjacent communities. A chicken wagon visited the farms to buy produce to be sold locally or exported to outlying areas. Other trips were made to connect with the rail lines that made stops in nearby Eggleston and Pembroke. One of the wagon drivers, it is reported, had a tendency to over-imbibe; it is also reported that the horse knew the route and could make the trip and proper stops without the assistance of the inebriated driver. Perhaps this is the 1800s version of the current “smart road” concept, where the vehicle utilizes the sensors in the road and other variables to assure the safety and comfort of passengers.

The festive demeanor, the bawdiness, and the personality of the town itself received a telling blow on the night of March 31, 1902. Although the cause is still debated, a fire fanned by March winds destroyed the main part of town, and on April 1, 1902, the town lay in ruins. Some travelers heading into town on April 1 thought that they were the victims of a bizarre April Fool prank. *The Roanoke Times* confirmed the worst, reporting,

TERRIFIC FIRE

Town of Newport, Va., Entirely Destroyed - Heavy Loss

Eggleston Springs, Va., April 1,- Special - At an early hour this morning Newport, Giles County, Virginia, famous for doing more business than any other inland town in the state, was practically wiped out by fire. Every store in the place was destroyed; two hotels and the best residences were leveled to the ground. The fire originated from an unknown cause in a shed back of Dunklee & Martin's big store. The wind was blowing a gale and the flames spread quickly from the shed to the store which was also a mass of flames in a few minutes. From there the wind scattered the fire in every direction. Before the horrified inhabitants realized what was happening, nearly every house in the immediate neighborhood was in flames. The loss is estimated to be over one hundred thousand dollars with little insurance. The principal losers are: McPherson's four-story hardware establishment and twenty-five thousand dollars stock; Dunklee and Martin's store and twenty thousand dollar stock general merchandise; Miller & Sons' store and fifteen thousand dollar stock general merchandise; Hunter's Hotel, Smith's Hotel and Mrs. Martha Price's handsome residence. Every one in the town is naturally depressed but the merchants all say they will rebuild at once and in a short time will be doing as much business as formerly.

Newport, which is located in Giles county is well known to most people in this section of the state, and is regarded as a business-like progressive inland town. It is situated about six miles from the nearest point on the New River division of the Norfolk and Western which is Eggleston's. Fortunately, there are a great many wealthy people in the place, in so far as wealth is usually credited to country people, and for this reason, the great loss will not be so heavily felt. (*Roanoke Times*, April 1, 1902).

Newport citizens were rugged individualists, and rebuilding began. New stores emerged, civic organizations made their contributions, and rebirth was under way. Prominent families such as the Dunklees, Millers, Masons, Martins, Prices, Williams, and Farriers were joined by newcomers, and this blend revitalized the area. Churches provided a spiritual base for the community, and circuit riders supported by lay leaders created an outreach program that had social as well as spiritual implications. The 1905 diary of a local Lutheran minister, Reverend Levi Spraker, provides insight into the community in addition to glimpses of the personal life of a minister. He had fallen in love with one of the young women on his circuit, and his diary contains poignant passages that blend the duties of a minister who must cover a fifty-mile circuit on horse-



Newport, Virginia, on April 1, 1902, the day after the fire.

back with the romantic inclinations of a young man in love. In one passage, he wrote that “She had him so upset that he went deep into the woods and smoked a cigar.” When she accepted his marriage proposal, he recorded that she had made him the happiest man on earth. Other entries document a typical work day in the life of a minister with chores such as planting the garden, setting the chickens, fixing a saddle, and visiting those in need.

Turn-of-the-century enthusiasm, rebirth and revitalization after the fire, and technological advances made an impact on the Newport way of life. The first high school complete with indoor plumbing was built in 1912. At the same time, the Bradley Covered Bridge eliminated the need to ford Sinking Creek on the way to Mountain Lake, and in 1916 a second bridge spanned Sinking Creek to allow access to the Clover Hollow area without the necessity of fording the creek. Newport personalities were actively involved in county and state affairs. Mr. Henry Farrier from Newport became superintendent of schools for Giles County and served in that capacity for many years. Mr. Maurice Puckett, also from Newport, was the overseer of bridges for the county and was a moving force behind the three public covered bridges built in the Newport area over a short span of time. He may have assisted in building the fourth bridge (a private one) that still exists on the Reynolds property off route 42. Three of these bridges remain, making Newport the home of covered bridges for the Commonwealth of Virginia.



Covered bridge built in 1916, Newport, Virginia. Photo courtesy of Donna K. Martin.

The agrarian emphasis continued around Newport; farming was the way of life for many people. Threshing hands made their rounds from farm to farm to help with the harvest. Each season had its unique and specific needs, and many of the farming activities — such as sheep shearing, apple butter making, and molasses making — involved many in the community. At times, livestock was herded by hoof over long distances to market. Hattie Miller recalls one time when sheep being driven from Newport to Christiansburg chose one of the stores in town as a place to rest from the heat. The sheep owner had to pay for damages to the store.¹⁴

Mills

Mills were an integral part of early Newport, as the early name of “Chapman’s Mills” indicates. Local mills provided access to many necessities and luxuries. Farmers raised their own livestock, grew their own grain and other crops, and used lumber cut from their property. Local mills were, in essence, the processing plants. Wheat, corn, oats, rye, and barley were transformed into food products for human and animal consumption, and logs were converted into finished lumber. In Newport proper, Fry’s Mill ground corn into corn meal and ground the chop, a



Threshing hands, Lucas Farm, Clover Hollow, c 1916.

food for livestock. In earlier years an oil mill that gleaned oil from flax seed was in operation. Zell's Mill and the Price-Leffel-Givens Mill, both built on Sinking Creek, were multi-purpose mills. Zell's Mill was a combination grist mill and sawmill, and the Price-Leffel-Givens Mill provided electricity for the Newport area for a period of time and, among other items, manufactured chicken coops. The Echols Mill also functioned as a grist mill for the area. The community now known as Maybrook frequented Brown's Mill, also known as Wysong's Mill, and the Spruce Run community was served by Cook's Mill. Some local residents still reflect on their trips to the mill. At times small children were responsible for transporting grain by horseback to the local mill for grinding into meal or flour. Such trips could provide some time to visit with playmates before returning home with the finished products. Mills also provided access to other items such as oil for lamps, a primary source of light in pre-electric times. Sometimes the oil would seep into the flour during the trip home, so that biscuits sometimes had interesting flavors.

Throughout the history of the Newport community, many individuals have excelled in their chosen professions. Many citizens displayed a strong crafts orientation; their ingenuity was evident as the first water lines were installed, as the telephone and accompanying switch board came into the community, and as the various mills and factories provided services to Newport and adjacent communities. Newport has also been benefited by a strong matriarchal network. Mrs. "Fan" Miller was the first principal of the high school, built in 1911-12, and served on the Board of Visitors



*Zell's Mill,
Newport,
Virginia.*

at Radford College; Mary Kinzie excelled at Roanoke College as one of the top basketball free-throw shooters in the world; and Mrs. Aggie Bradley served as a local midwife for an extended period of time. In later years, Mrs. Mila Sibold was recognized as the “State Mother of the Year”; Eva Reynolds Helms was cited as one of the top educators in the Commonwealth; and Alberta Williams staffed the local switchboard for many years. Among Alberta’s duties were sounding the fire alarm when needed and turning on the street light. Local resident and historian Hattie Miller officially guided community improvement efforts in 1952-53, and she has remained a valuable resource and a valued friend to many. Present-day visits to such local residents as Vena McElrath, Emma Phlegar, and Mildred Walker provide refreshing insight into past practices. These individuals and many others combine a knowledge of the past with an infectious and optimistic enthusiasm for the future.

Modesty is a way of life in Newport. Yet even a cursory look into the individual personalities often reveals extraordinary accomplishments. Soldiers from the area were at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War; some were heroes, POWs and casualties during the Civil War; and others distinguished themselves in the World Wars of the 20th century. Many Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars, Commendation Medals, and other symbols of distinction are tucked away in individual archives. Among the many notable efforts are those of Noble Porterfield at Pearl Harbor; Joe Givens, who lost his life at Okinawa; Hal Farrier, who disappeared on British soil; and Harry Taylor, who was recognized by President Sigmon-Ree for his military efforts. A person from Newport received a Bronze Star for service in the Korean conflict, and there were a number of Viet

*Adam P.
"Pent" Taylor,
Civil War
veteran and
noted brandy
maker, with
grandson
Albert Kinzie,
c 1890. Photo
courtesy of
Billy Kinzie.*



Nam-era veterans, including one specifically chosen for a special rescue mission into North Viet Nam. Newport residents continue in service to their country in many ways, living lives of "quiet dignity".

Changes

The Newport community has had to act and react to changes internally and externally. Area industries such as the Radford Arsenal (Hercules Powder Plant) in Radford and the Celanese Plant in Narrows drew workers from the farms to an industrial setting. Local workers boarded company buses, such as the "Green Hornet" for trips to the Powder Plant or the Celanese bus. Relocation of US route 460 bypassed Newport, so that traffic no longer travels through the heart of town. Newport residents, while receptive to change, have not hesitated to speak their minds on issues concerning the quality of life in the area. The later discovery of an Internal Revenue Service lock gives credence to an early story that town residents were not overly inclined to pay tax on whiskey, with the result that some places that were dispensing liquid refreshment were locked up by the IRS. Currently, village members often act in con-

cert on environmental concerns and other issues that threaten the fabric of life in this crossroads community; this thread of community pride has been evident throughout its history. The village, including adjacent areas, is under consideration as both a state and a national historical district.

Events

A common denominator in evidence for many years has been an appreciation and inclination for festive occasions where there is time to “meet and eat,” with the eating sharing at least equal billing with the meeting. Some of the events have been unique occasions such as the 1976 Bicentennial wagon train, the 1939 dedication of the Blue Grass Trail, and the Masonic Hall dedication in 1869; other events — such as the Newport Fair, the July 4th parade, and a recently instituted Harvest Dinner — are annual occurrences.

Saturdays in Newport around the turn of the century were market days. Farmers from surrounding areas brought in produce for sale — an early version of the farmer’s market. Residents of nearby Christiansburg and other areas came to purchase not only produce but also locally raised mules that were later sold for use on farms or in the coal mines. On May 13, 1996, Paul Walker, just prior to his death, described townfolk in 1915 as they assembled in town to await the arrival of colts and mules destined for the trading block. Robert Farrier, another Newport patriarch, recalled selling ice cream for five cents a cone on the days the colts and mules were brought to town.

Since 1935, the premier annual event in Newport is “The Fair.” Planning for this event is a year-long activity that combines talents across generations and blends newcomers with old-timers. The organization of a fair in Newport was the idea of James H. Copenhaver, who came to Newport High School in 1935 as an agriculture teacher. The first fair was sponsored by the Newport High School, with the Agriculture and Home Economics Departments sharing the responsibility. C. B. King, principal, was elected President; Mildred Lancaster, Home Economics teacher, was named Vice President; and Jim Copenhaver served as secretary-treasurer and general manager. With the help and cooperation of the entire community and the aid of student teachers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the first fair was held in the school in September 1936.

Classes were established for livestock, grains and grasses, fruits, vegetables, canning, sewing, flowers, antiques, and school exhibits. No money prizes were awarded — only ribbons for the first three places. Entertain-

ment consisted of bingo and an amateur contest. Over the years, horse shows, beauty contests, greasy-pole climbing, wood chopping, horse-shoes, and tobacco spitting have been among the attractions. The fair provides the setting for meeting friends and neighbors and renewing acquaintances.

Where Are We Now?

In her *Story of Newport and Its People*, Hattie Miller recalls that many years ago the Newport postmaster received the following letter:

Dear Sir:

Christian Science Monitor today gives account of your town as without taxes, mayor, council or other governing body and yet enjoys paved streets, concrete walks, modern schools, churches, etc.

Will you please place this letter in the hands of someone in your town who will inform how you conduct your town affairs?

I will appreciate a reply.

Ben C. Dunbar
Danforth, Maine¹⁵

Mr. Dunbar's inquiry is still applicable today. Perhaps the answer is that throughout the history of this community, individuals, civic organizations, churches, and other groups have worked to provide continuity, motivation, and leadership. The local Masonic lodge, established prior to the turn of the century, and churches nearly 150 years old combine with newer churches and clubs, such as the Newport Ruritan Club and the Newport Women's Club, as functional organizations to provide rallying points for community activities. The board of directors for the Newport Fair, a Village Council, a fire department, a rescue squad, Scouting programs, and a garden club combine with a viable sports program to address many community needs.

Newport in many ways remains a crossroads town. New families in the outlying areas blend with established families who trace their Newport roots back six or seven generations. There is local resident Melvin Smith, former dirt-track star who was still racing cars past his 70th birthday, living across the road from Robert Tuckwiller, a noted artist, and their new neighbor, Ake Renqvist, an accomplished musician from Finland. A new post office welcome visitors to the community. Restoration is underway for the old woolen mill — one of the few extant industries in Southwest Virginia. Newport citizens serve as members of gubernatorial cabinets and corporate boards, and work with equally talented, if less prominent, home folk to improve their community. Former notable New-

port residents include Helen Farrier, who served as a missionary in Africa, and the successful Nashville songwriter, Michael P. Huffman.

On October 15, 1996, nearby Eastern Elementary and Middle School became the first school in the world to have wireless access to receive communications via satellite. Perhaps it is fitting that a town and community that were considered “wired” in the 1890s because of the free-flowing liquor are participants in one of the first wireless programs in the 1990s. The devotion, dedication, independence, and sense of history of the individuals who make up the Newport community allow it to continue to be a crossroads town, a blend of new ideas and time-honored traditions.

Endnotes

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6. Miller, *Newport and Its People*, p. 25.
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8. *Giles County, Virginia History – Families, 1982*. Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1982, p. 43.
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13. Edward A. Pollard, “Virginia Tourist.” 1871.
14. Miller, *Newport and Its People*, p. 56.
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Appendix: Chapter 129, Acts of Assembly, 1872

An ACT to Incorporate the Town of Newport, in the County of Giles
In force March 4, 1872

1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, That the village known as the town of Newport, in the County of Giles, laid off within the following described boundaries, beginning at a white oak tree, a corner of David B. Price's and John P. Martin's lands, marked with four chops; thence running south thirty-three degrees, west one hundred and fifty-five poles, crossing the turnpike leading from Newport to Blacksburg, to an apple tree near a line fence between Gustavus A. Butler and William H. Martin's lands; thence north forty-nine degrees, west eighty one poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to Scott's ferry, to a red oak tree on a line fence between Christopher C. Wingo's and Sarah D. Payne's lands; thence north twenty-five degrees, east one hundred and fifty-five poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to Pearisburg, to a poplar tree in the aforesaid David B. Price's lot; thence south fifty-two degrees, east one hundred poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to New Castle, to the beginning, shall be, and is hereby made a town corporate by name and style of the town of Newport, of the county of Giles, and by that name and style shall have and exercise the powers hereinafter granted; and that George W. Hines is hereby appointed mayor thereof, and David B. Price, William R. Gitt, William Keister, Flayl P. Payne, J. Addison Logan and Christopher C. Wingo, are hereby appointed councilmen thereof; and the said mayor and councilmen shall have and exercise all the powers hereinafter granted to said officers, and remain in office until their successors shall be elected and qualified according to law, a majority of whom shall form a quorum for the transaction of business.

2. The said mayor and councilmen shall be elected annually on the fourth Thursday in May by the electors of said town of Newport, qualified to vote for members of the general assembly according to the general election laws of the commonwealth. The person so elected mayor of the said town as aforesaid shall be and is hereby invested with the powers and authority of a justice of peace within the corporate limits of said town, to have and exercise the like jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever originating within said limits as a justice of the county now has or may hereafter have by law, but acting upon the general laws of the land. It shall be the duty of the mayor to suppress all disturbances, riots and disorderly conduct within the bounds of said town. He shall have the power to issue process, hear and determine all prosecutions, cases and controversies arising under the by-laws and ordinances, and issue executions, giving to parties the right to appeal to the county court of Giles in all cases where the fine or other matter in controversy shall exceed ten dollars. Said appeal shall be taken in the same time and manner and upon the same terms that appeals are now taken from judgments of a single justice.

3. The mayor, or any two of said councilmen, shall have power to call a meeting of said council as often as occasion may require.

4. The said council shall have power and authority to improve the street, walks and alleys of said town; to prevent and punish by reasonable fines, the firing of guns, or running or riding horses at an unusual gait in said town; to license and regulate shows and other public exhibitions, and tax the same as they may deem expedient; to appoint all such officers as may be necessary for conducting the affairs of said town not otherwise provided for in this act, and allow them such compensation as they may deem reasonable; and finally, to make all such by-laws, rules and regulations as they may deem necessary and proper for the good government of said town: provided, they be not contrary to the laws of this state or the United States, and the same to amend, repeal or enforce by reasonable fines and penalties not exceeding for any one offense the sum of twenty dollars, to be recovered with the costs in the name of the mayor of said town.

5. The said council shall have the power to assess and collect annual tax within the said town for the purpose before mentioned on all such property, real and personal, as is now subject to taxation by the revenue laws of this commonwealth: provided, that the tax on said real and personal estate shall not exceed in any one year fifty cents on every hundred dollars value thereof, and a tax not exceeding fifty cents in any one year on all male inhabitants over twenty-one years of age within said town; and moreover, it shall be competent for said council to conduct and distribute water into and through said town, upon a request of a majority of the qualified voters of said town, such request to be made in such manner as the said council may deem best calculated to obtain full expression of opinion upon the subject.

6. The said council shall appoint annually a sergeant or town collection, who shall possess the like right of distress and powers in collecting the said taxes, service and return of process in pursuance of it, and shall be entitled to like fees and commissions as are allowed by law to constables for similar duties and services. Said sergeant shall execute bond with approved security in such penalty as said council shall deem necessary, payable to them and their successors in office, conditioned for the faithful discharge of his duties and payment over of said taxes and moneys collected and received by him in virtue of his office, and he and his securities, his and their executors or administrators, shall be subject to such proceedings, by motion or otherwise, before the county court of the county of Giles for enforcing payment of such taxes and other moneys by him collected or received as aforesaid, at the suit or motion of the said mayor or other person entitled, as collectors of county levies are by law subject to for enforcing payment of the levies by them collected.

7. All fines, penalties and amercements, and other moneys received and raised by virtue of this act and not otherwise directed to be applied shall be at the disposal of the council for the use and benefit of said town.

8. This act shall be in force from its passage.

Acts and Joint Resolutions passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at its Session of 1871-72, pp. 107-108.