

## **Village of Shepherdstown: Past to Present**

Shepherdstown Associates LLC proposes to develop Hillcrest at Shepherdstown, a neighborhood of high-end townhomes on a nine acre tract that has been assembled on the edge of the village of Shepherdstown, adjacent to the Shepherdstown Historic District. The intent of the developer is to create a neighborhood that is complementary to the adjacent Historic District and surrounding community. Research was undertaken at the Cumberland County Historical Society to learn the origin and evolution of the village of Shepherdstown.

Although the first settler of Shepherdstown was a widow named McFall, the village was named after William Shepherd in 1828. The village was never incorporated. Jack Davis, a civil war historian who owned and resided at the Union Hotel before donating it to Virginia Tech in 2004, published “What’s in a Name: Shepherdstown” in a 1993 “Cumberland County History” journal published by the Cumberland County Historical Society. Davis describes Shepherdstown in 1845 as being a quarter mile long and anchored by two hills, with “life differing little from that of other small villages.” The 1886 History of Cumberland County called Shepherdstown a “post village” of 175 inhabitants. This certainly included much of the surrounding area. For example, in his 2004 book Listening to Nature, Ray Crist reminisces about being raised from 1900 to 1911 on an 80 acre family farm in “Shepherdstown,” for which the fields bordered Williams Grove Road, which is well over a mile from the Gettysburg Pike. Davis observed Shepherdstown in 1993 by writing “all that remains are the private residences, some twenty-five of them, most dating to 1860 and earlier . . . In 1976 Shepherdstown was declared a township Historic District by the Upper Allen Heritage Committee.” On the one hand, Davis suggested that Shepherdstown is the Historic District, which has 15 houses, and in the same context, he suggested Shepherdstown consists of about 25 houses. Either way, with the loss of the Post Office and emergence of the identity of Upper Allen Township as the municipal government, during the twentieth century the identity of Shepherdstown gradually retracted from the expansive countryside to the area in the immediate vicinity of the Historic District.

A prominent historian theorized that the layout of Shepherdstown along some of the highest ground in Cumberland County was not the result of good community planning, but instead resulted from an unsuccessful attempt by locals to resist the development of a new road between Harrisburg and Gettysburg that was mandated by the state legislature in 1810. Those resisting the “intrusive” road thought that by laying out the proposed “State Road” along the highest ground, actual construction of the road might be discouraged. The early resisters of State Road were most likely of Scots Irish decent, who early historians referred to as “a resourceful and truculent people” who were encouraged to settle in the Cumberland County frontier to avoid political conflict with the peaceful Quakers. The irony of the sabotaged location of State Road, now known as Gettysburg Pike, is that the location of Route 15, chosen in the mid-twentieth century, avoided hills with its location only a few hundred yards east of the old State Road.

One of the first establishments in the village was that of Joseph Bowseman, who opened a store in 1822. The store passed through various owners before burning to the ground in 1871. In 1846, historian I. Daniel Rupp noted that Shepherdstown, by that time the largest village in Upper Allen Township, consisted of 18 dwellings, one store and one tavern. Shortly after Rupp’s historical account, Andrew Bear served Shepherdstown as a wagon maker, according to a

“day book” ledger he kept from 1846 to 1852. The nearest community to Shepherdstown in 1846 was Center Square, located a mile south, which included 8 dwellings, several shops, a tavern and a store. The 1886 History of Cumberland and Adams Counties reported that early non-agricultural industry “a short distance from Shepherdstown” included mining of hematite, over fifty lime kilns, and distilling of whiskey.

Two significant events contributed largely to the development of Shepherdstown in the second half of the nineteenth century. First was the construction of the Union Hotel in 1860 by Abraham and Mary Zook. According to the “statement of significance” for the National Register nomination for the Union Hotel, believed to be authored by Jack Davis, it was typical for such a hotel to occur in a village such as Shepherdstown every four or five miles along the State Road. The hotel served to provide overnight food and lodging for the travelers and their animals, as well as longer term accommodations for the salesmen who stayed longer to do business with surrounding farms. The construction of the hotel was at the northern limits of the village, providing panoramic views, and a strategic location to appeal to weary southbound travelers just after they climbed a long hill. The hotel and village thrived until the onset of Prohibition in 1920. Anticipating the devastating impact of Prohibition on profitability, Adolphus Busch of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Co. sold the Union Hotel for only \$600 in 1918.

The fact that the early Union Hotel was located at the outer fringe of Shepherdstown was amplified by Rupp’s 1846 account that “near” Shepherdstown was a Union church, which also served as a school. Records indicate that church was built in 1843 at the southwest corner of what is now known as York Road and Gettysburg Pike. That church facility and community evolved from early roots in the Brethren in Christ denomination to what is now the Shepherdstown United Methodist Church. The other prominent church now in Shepherdstown is the Daybreak Church, affiliated with the Christian Missionary Alliance. Daybreak is located along aptly named Old Hollow Road, on the east side of the Gettysburg Pike along Route 15. Daybreak acquired the property from the West Shore Evangelical Free Church, which relocated to Williams Grove Road. Daybreak has discussed with Shepherdstown Associates the church’s ambitious expansion plans for its rapidly growing congregation.

Although there is no record of Shepherdstown being inhabited by famous people, or being the site of any historically important events, certainly many prominent people did pass through on their travels between Harrisburg and Gettysburg. Some unappreciated northbound travelers were straggling Confederate soldiers, who apparently forced locals to cook for them. A Shepherdstown resident whose surname was Strong was reported to have doped his horses so they would not appeal to the Confederate foragers.

A second major event in Shepherdstown was the arrival of a Post Office under the care of Postmaster Samuel R. Coover in 1875, who was referenced in the Biographical Annals of Cumberland County as “one of the substantial citizens of this area of the County.” An interesting fact is that Coover’s rank declined from sergeant to corporal to private over his two years of service in the Union army from June 1863 until June 1865, perhaps initially coinciding with his transfer from the volunteer cavalry to the musician corps, with his ultimate rank reflecting his peace-time status. The detailed ledger for Coover’s general store shows his presence in Shepherdstown as a merchant from 1871 to 1876, during which time he often

bartered his merchandise for goods and services such as wine, plastering and masonry services, and use of horses. It is probable that Coover benefited from a business opportunity after the former Bowseman store burned to the ground while owned by H. B. Lamb & Company in 1873. In 1875, Coover built a “large” shoe store opposite the Union Hotel. As the recording secretary for Shepherdstown’s Union Brethren in Christ church, in 1905 Coover noted that he and other church leaders voted to repaint the roof and belfry. Church records show that Coover was the church’s major donor, giving the church \$600 per year. Coover’s pension records show that, by 1919, he received government pension from both the Postal Service and military totaling \$660 per year, which would have compared in nominal GDP value per capita to over \$40,000 per year today. Coover’s letter of resignation as Shepherdstown Postmaster in 1906 recommended that M. E. Spahr be named his successor, noting that Coover had sold his store building to Spahr, and that it was the “only store building” at that time in Shepherdstown.

Not much has been written about the village of Shepherdstown from its decline in the 1920s until being declared a Historic District in 1976. The former Union Hotel went through many owners during that time period, when it was mostly used as a private residence. For a period of time prior to Davis’s ownership, it was known as the Hill Top Inn restaurant, renowned for its chicken and waffles. Davis wrote that the small grocery store and post office were closed by 1950. The Union Hotel is the only property on the Federal Register of Historic Properties, to which it was added in 1989. Cornelia Appleby restored the Union Hotel in 2007 as a bed and breakfast; and in 2008, it is the only business establishment in Shepherdstown.

Even as the population of the area surrounding Shepherdstown grew modestly throughout the twentieth century, the availability of automobiles enabled consumers to drive to Mechanicsburg for goods and services. To the extent that retail or other commercial establishments desired to locate in Upper Allen Township, until recently there was no shortage of available nearby commercial land with less challenging topography, and available public water and sewer. In the mid-1950’s, the new Route 15 was constructed, effectively allowing traffic to bypass Shepherdstown. For those reasons, commercial growth did not occur in the village during the twentieth century, a trend which is likely to continue.

In 1999, the Upper Allen Township Comprehensive Plan published a Future Land Use Map. It identified much of the area in and adjacent to the Shepherdstown Historic District as appropriate for Medium Density Residential. The Plan also noted that scenic views are “important to residents from the standpoint of maintaining property values and quality of life,” noting that “preservation of scenic views to the extent possible is key to maintaining the Township’s character.”

The location of the new Route 15 and old State Road has isolated a nine acre tract of land on the hill just south and east of Shepherdstown. The land offers what historian I. Daniel Rupp described in 1846 as a “commanding view of Cumberland County,” and what the 1999 Comprehensive Plan referred to as “some pretty vistas to the west looking towards Monroe Township.” The vacant land is not-suitable for agriculture and recently has been farmed for hay by the Wingerts, as much as a favor to their neighbors as for the value of the crop.

Shepherdstown’s half-acre-sized home lots from the nineteenth century were sized large enough

to accommodate on-site drinking water and septic, as well as the challenging topography of living on the crest of a hill. The home lots of the Shepherdstown Historic District are quite modest in size compared to the typical 80 acre “Shepherdstown” Crist farm. Providing interesting insight into early twentieth century farm life, Crist recalled that his family’s farm had 10 cows, 100 chickens, 12 ducks, 80 hogs, 4 horses and fields of wheat, hay, corn, oats and potatoes. Crist said that his family’s rather typical farm life revolved around the horses, which ate one fourth of what was grown, and who were used for general transportation, as well as cultivation of fields which were fertilized with their manure.

Whether Shepherdstown residents of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were not economically able to live on an 80 acre farm, or whether they were making lifestyle decisions about how they chose to live, is not evident by a review of available literature. It is probably reasonable to assume that both economics and lifestyle decisions contributed to their decisions. Similarly, depending on the resident, a twenty-first century choice of a smaller home lot over a larger one might also reflect economic and lifestyle considerations.

The layout of State Road in the nineteenth century and Route 15 in the twentieth century did not consider the effective land use of the residual land left in between the two roads. This is evident in the many irregularly shaped or constrained lots from Shepherdstown down to the Yellow Breeches Creek. The irregular shapes, challenging topography, road noise and visibility, and lack of public sewer have discouraged residential developers from implementing the Township’s Comprehensive Plan for medium density housing on this nine acre tract. With the recent introduction of public water and public sewer to the Shepherdstown neighborhood, development of proportionally smaller lots is now possible. Even Verizon’s main fiber optic phone and data line between Mechanicsburg and Dillsburg is located along Gettysburg Pike, just as the main telegraph line was placed between Harrisburg and Gettysburg two centuries ago.

Shepherdstown Associates LLC wants to promote the Route 15 convenience and Shepherdstown’s commanding views by catering to a specific niche of the housing market. People with a penchant for convenience and indoor living will be unaffected by the Route 15 road noise and the topographical limitations to backyard recreation. Attached homes on smaller lots can be strategically clustered and terraced on the hillside to get maximum benefit and enjoyment of the magnificent views. Open spaces on the neighborhood’s margins can be used to provide landscaping screens from Route 15 and its road noise, and of benefit to adjacent neighbors in the Historic District.

The 1976 publication Early Architecture in Upper Allen Township, which refers to the Shepherdstown Historic District and its 16 houses as “a catalog of early building types.” Although the Union Hotel has long been the most prominent and public structure in Shepherdstown, the Wingert log home, the Victorian former manse of Shepherdstown United Methodist Church, and several of the Georgian style homes are all lovely and significant, reflective of the architecture of the time in which they were constructed. The accompanying photos illustrate some of the details of the existing Shepherdstown homes and their landscapes. Hillcrest at Shepherdstown will incorporate some of these architectural details in a neighborhood that will be adjacent to, but separate from, the Shepherdstown Historic District. What Hillcrest and the Historic District will share is neighborhood pride for a distinctive community.