



## Historical Context



The physical landscape of the Shenandoah Valley has been shaped by natural and cultural forces for millennia. Geological strata, associated soil types, patterns of drainage, hydrography, and topography have combined to sculpt and shape a complex landscape that American Indians, settlers, military strategists and 20th century industry have adapted to their activities. As settlers and entrepreneurs exploited and developed the land and its resources, road systems evolved, populations grew, and towns and marketing centers formed.

Despite the threat of increasing encroachment by modern development, the park area is unique in that the historical landscape provides the nation with a vivid and continuous historical record of the region known as Virginia's Lower Shenandoah Valley, an area that extends from Winchester on the north to Middletown and Strasburg on the south, with the natural boundaries of the Blue Ridge to the east and the Allegheny Mountains to the west.

The Lower Shenandoah Valley has a long, rich history. The Warriors' Path became the Great Wagon Road, then the Valley Turnpike, U.S. 11, and I-81 – all variations on a north-south corridor that moved people, crops, and armies throughout the Valley.

At the time of European contact American Indian groups, including Piedmont Siouans, Catawbas, Shawnee, Delaware, Northern Iroquois (Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and later Tuscarora), Cherokee, and Susquehannocks, are thought to have been active in the park area. Some had developed permanent and semi-sedentary villages along the broad flood plain levees where the best, most workable soils in the region were to be found. The native peoples routinely cultivated maize, beans, and squash, and also utilized the abundant natural resources of the area to sustain their communities.

After 1690, the Virginia colonial government encouraged European settlement beyond the Atlantic seaboard and tidal rivers, in part to secure land against French encroachments and American Indian incursions. The first settlements near the park area were located near Opequon Creek. Most of the first Europeans were German and Scots-Irish moving south from Pennsylvania.

The Lower Shenandoah became a settled landscape consisting primarily of small towns and dispersed and enclosed farms. In 1738 the first two counties west of the Blue Ridge were formed—Agusta and Frederick.



The celebrated first European settler of the region was Jost Hite, who came to North America in 1709.

After settling in the Germantown area of Philadelphia, Hite received a land grant from Virginia Governor Sir William Gooch in 1731 and led a group of 16 families to Virginia. Hite built a cabin and fort at Opequon Creek, near present-day Springdale along U.S. 11.

In 1732 German pioneers George and Mary Hite Bowman settled on land bounded by present-day I-81 and Cedar Creek about 0.8 miles southeast of U.S. 11. About 1755 the Bowmans constructed a home on the property, later called Harmony Hall. Hite and his son-in-law George Bowman had large families, the members of which acquired extensive landholdings in the area and became important in the social and political life of the region.



Harmony Hall

## After the Revolution

Following the War for American Independence, the Lower Shenandoah experienced significant economic, political, and social change. Among the changes were improved road systems. Now the subsistence farms of the Lower Shenandoah could transport cash crops to outside markets. These developments had a profound impact on life in the valley as the farmers became commercial wheat and livestock producers.

In 1783, Hite's grandson, Isaac, Jr., married Nelly Conway Madison, sister of James Madison. Upon his marriage, Isaac, Jr.,

received a 483-acre tract along the Great Wagon Road near Middletown from his father. As he prospered, Hite's holdings grew to more than 7,500 acres on which he developed Belle Grove, one of the largest plantations in the Lower Shenandoah and one that was enmeshed in the national and global market economy.

What emerged in the region was a diversified economy in which the majority of the Valley's inhabitants were German-American and Scots-Irish farmers, entrepreneurs, small businessmen, and merchants rather than slave-owners. Thus, the Lower Shenandoah economy veered away from the tobacco-driven plantation slave society that prevailed in the Tidewater regions of Virginia. What resulted by the eve of the Civil War was an increasingly hierarchical community composed of an elite of white slaveholders, and a large population of

farmers and freeholders, entrepreneurs and small businessmen, and slaves. Pre-Civil War free African American communities in the area also made important contributions to the region's economy.

## War Calls Again

After President Abraham Lincoln's call for troops on April 15, 1861, most residents of the Shenandoah Valley joined their fellow Virginians in supporting secession of the Southern states from the Union and establishing the Confederacy. A considerable number supported the Union and some remained indifferent.



Wartime demands and war weariness increasingly alienated almost all elements of society as they saw livestock taken by both sides, crops burned in the fields, and sons and husbands reported dead or missing. Among the dissident elements were those of German ethnicity, many of whom were members of the region's historic peace churches who conscientiously objected to participation in war.

During the early years of the war, the productive granary in the Shenandoah Valley had served as the Breadbasket of the Confederacy, but regular conscriptions of food and livestock had slowly impoverished local landowners. Displays of Confederate support included soldier recruitment, intelligence gathering, provisioning of Southern units, and guerrilla activity against Union forces. The strategic as well as the agricultural importance of the Lower Shenandoah meant that it became the locale of many skirmishes and battles, thus devastating the landscape and leaving the area a wasteland at the war's end.

On October 19, 1864 the Confederates, under Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early, surprised the Federal army at Cedar Creek and routed the VIII and XIX Corps, implementing a masterfully



The area's rich farmland destined it to become both a vital resource and a fiercely contested area.

conceived and brilliantly executed tactical plan. Sheridan arrived from Winchester, rallied his troops, and in the afternoon, launched a crushing counterattack that succeeded in recovering the battlefield and in wresting control of the Shenandoah Valley from the Confederates.

The Battle of Cedar Creek was a crucial Union victory that nearly annihilated Early's Confederate army and coupled with Sherman's March to the Sea helped Lincoln secure his reelection at a time when the northern populace was divided over the war. As a result of the large-scale destruction of farms and mills during the Civil War, grain and livestock production declined drastically in the Lower Shenandoah, recovering only by the early 20th century. At the same time, the Lower Shenandoah experienced a phenomenal rise in apple production as

apples and apple products replaced wheat as the primary cash crop.

## Rebuilding and Restoring

The Lower Shenandoah underwent a revolution in land and labor because of the Civil War. The destruction of slavery forced whites and blacks to reconstruct social, political, and economic relations in a world of free labor as former slaveholders reconstituted themselves as



Confederate forces unleash a barrage of cannon fire.



A line of Union troops preparing to move.



a new ruling class in a new world in which freed people were allowed to buy and sell their labor and exercise their political rights as full citizens.

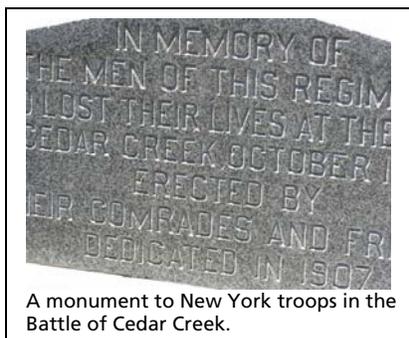
During Reconstruction, African Americans made considerable social and economic progress, articulating a version of freedom that clashed with the interests of most whites who desired to create new forms of labor and social suppression. After the war, many emancipated slaves moved north and west, creating a labor shortage in the Lower Shenandoah, and bankrupting many whose fortunes had been tied to the prewar slave-based economy. A Freedmen's Bureau facility was established in Winchester, however, and some blacks remained in the region. African American equality, however, was challenged during the late 19th century with the codification of Jim Crow legislation and enactment of the separate but equal doctrine into law, thus creating a sanctioned lower class and rigid racial segregation.

The historical landscape of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park testifies to the South's reincorporation into the United States during the post-Civil War era in two important ways. First, the New South movement of the late 19th century was an attempt by Southern leaders to rebuild the former Confederacy with the cooperation and capital of Northern businessmen.

During Reconstruction, northern companies successfully obtained charters and ultimately built a railroad line through the entire length

of the Shenandoah Valley. In 1867, the Winchester and Strasburg Railroad connected Harpers Ferry to the rail line stretching south to Harrisonburg. The rail line, which was constructed west of the Valley Turnpike in the park area, eventually became part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad network.

The New South campaign also complemented a national reconciliation movement that sacrificed the rights of African Americans in exchange for sectional reunion and white Southern home rule. Crucial to this process was the commemoration of Civil War battlefields as places where Americans showed their manly spirit and bravery on behalf of ideals for which they fought rather than as killing fields where the nation engaged in massive bloodletting over slavery.



A monument to New York troops in the Battle of Cedar Creek.

At Cedar Creek, three monuments were erected as event organizers interpreted a new past lacking the bitterness and controversy that animated the actions of Union and Confederate soldiers in the fall of 1864. For example, former Union Col. Henry A. DuPont, then serving as a U.S. Senator from Delaware, gave a sensitive and moving rendition of Maj. Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur's death at Belle Grove during the dedication of the Ramseur Monument in 1912. In death, Ramseur was portrayed as a valiant soldier doing his duty while engaged in an apolitical cause, its goal of disunion and slavery ignored. Thus, DuPont's dedication speech reflects how the Cedar Creek battlefield was transformed into a memorial landscape



where Northerners and Southerners came to commemorate their wartime actions and spread the message of sectional healing and reunification as the people in the Lower Shenandoah adjusted to the powerful racial and class changes of the post-Civil War years.

## Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

During the early 20th century, mining for limestone, shale, sand, and crushed stone became important industries in the Lower Shenandoah, resulting in development of numerous quarries. Forested lands along the uplands, south of the Valley Pike, became fragmented from extensive clearing for agricultural and pasture use.

In 1918 the Valley Pike was incorporated into the first state highway system. Designated initially as State Route 3, and later changed to



The Old Valley Pike Road.

State Route 11 in 1926, the road, which was realigned and

widened in 1929, remained the regional north-south thoroughfare throughout the mid-20th century. As a result of the expanding population of Middletown during the 1910s-1930s, increasing development occurred along State Route 11 and secondary routes that terminated at Middletown.

During the latter decades of the 20th century, agricultural production in the Lower Shenandoah continued to decline, resulting in reforestation of many areas. The growth of Middletown and Strasburg, along with highway development and limestone mining expansion during recent decades has resulted in the loss of open space and elements of the park area's rural character.

These developments in turn have provided the backdrop for efforts to preserve the area's significant cultural landscape resources and historical legacy culminating in establishment of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park.



The Belle Grove Manor House as it stands today.