



Leland Park

**Leland Park-** As you drive towards Orange, the turnpike will be running along the base of the southwestern mountains to your right and the Plank Road will continue roughly where Rt. 20 is today. Just before you get to Nasons, you will see Leland Park on your right. Although this is not the site, it commemorates James Madison's March 1788 meeting with Baptist Elder, John Leland. The Baptists were not happy with this new Constitution Madison had written and which the Convention had sent to the states for ratification. There was talk in Virginia of not ratifying it at all. In exchange for their support, Madison promised to make amendments to the document. One of those changes was the Freedom of Religion amendment. Right here in Orange County.

**Poor Folks and Preachers-** Remember that railway cut that Billy Mahone exploited in the Battle of the Wilderness? It was for a narrow gauge railway called the Potomac, Fredericksburg and Piedmont that linked Orange to Fredericksburg. The war had interrupted its construction. But now the war was over. Completed in 1877, and with 15 stops between the two towns (the passenger station in Orange is where Cuttin' Up hair salon is today on Byrd Street), the PF&P always seemed to be on the brink of financial ruin...hence the nickname "Poor Folks and Preachers." There's a story of a salesman who grew tired of waiting for this train. He set out on foot. When the wheezing engine finally caught up to him, the engineer asked if he wanted a ride. The reply was, "No thanks, I'm in a hurry."

**Bloomsbury-** Look on the right hand side of Route 20, just past the airport. See that grade running parallel? That's the old PF&P rail bed. Beyond, up past Booster's Park is Bloomsbury, the oldest house in Orange County. Still privately owned and in the same

family, this house was built by Colonel James Taylor II who was the first to successfully "seat and plant" a patent before it expired in Orange County. He did this in 1722, just six years after he went on that junket with Spotswood and the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe. So, the move to get the British off the beaches and push westward was working. By the way, two Taylor children became grandparents of U.S. Presidents (James Madison and Zachary Taylor).

**Poor Land Means**

**Poor People-** There is a belt of highly fertile Davidson Clay Loam soil in Orange County that runs southwest by northeast, roughly west of Rt. 15 from Gordonsville to Orange and on to True Blue on the north side of Rt. 20. It is no coincidence that the shakers and movers, the men with money and power snapped up this land first. Colonel James Taylor II staked out his claim where the Town of Orange sits today. He turned over another patent to the men who married his daughters: Thomas Chew and Ambrose Madison, the grandfather of the fourth President of the United States. These men were no dummies, and their success both as plantation owners and statesmen can be, in part, attributed to the fact that they owned rich land.



Bloomsbury

**Stop # 3- The Town of Orange**

Be sure to tour the James Madison Museum (Monday-Saturday 10-4, Sundays 1-4, 672-1776) and then take a walk down Main Street. Paul Verdier owned a hotel where the courthouse stands today before being run out of town on the brink of financial ruin to establish Verdiersville (where J.E.B Stuart lost his hat.) Verdier built the oldest existing building in Orange today, Peliso in 1819. Other existing old buildings, built on lots that Verdier sold, include the Holladay House, the Sparks building on Main Street, and Spring Garden, that white brick building across Madison Road from the McDonald's.

At the turn of the 1900s, Orange was a rollicking railroad town with nine bars and saloons. In 1908, a veteran of the Battle of the Wilderness and a regular frequenter of these establishments, was smoking in his bed...a box full of torn up newspaper. It caught fire. Towles Terrell made it out alive; a large portion of the town around Railroad Avenue didn't.

**St. Thomas Episcopal Church-** St. Thomas' Parish was formed in 1740. The Old Brick "mother" Church was originally located on a portion of Meadowfarm (there are those Taylors again!)

Because it was the Anglican Church, it was the official church of the colonies, and everyone, by law, had to attend, even if they were separatist Baptist or Scots-Irish Presbyterian. In fact the church leaders were also the political leaders of the community: the sheriff, the gentlemen justices, the clerk of the court. By law parishioners could be fined, flogged or locked in stocks for not going to THIS church. Naturally, after the revolution, all that changed. The Church of England arose from the ashes as the Episcopal Church.

The original building in town was a brick box, built in 1833. By 1853, however, the church had prospered enough for Jefferson scholar and brick mason, George W. Spooner to extend the front, add the Doric portico and some windows, and push a chancel out to the rear. There is a Tiffany window in this church; it is the last one on the left beside the front pews.

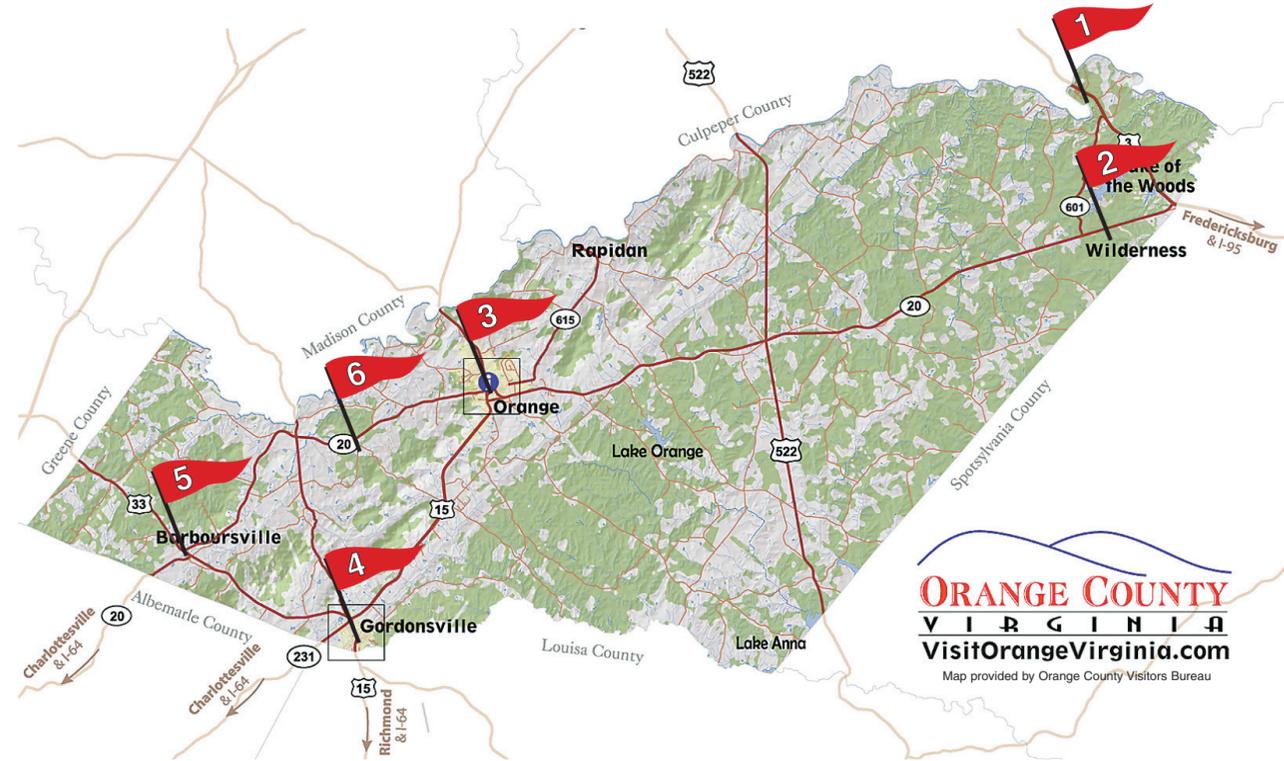
During the Civil War, the church served as a hospital. Fannie Page Hume's diary refers obliquely to bloodstains on the floor despite numerous cleanings. The stains exist to this day hidden by a new floor that was laid over it. Robert E. Lee regularly attended St. Thomas during the winter of 1863-64. By the way, he spent the winter in a tent on the other side of Route 20 from where the Country Town pool is today! And in letters to his wife, he suffered terribly.

At St. Thomas' his original pews sits in a room off of the chancel; its position in the church is marked, and the great great great grandchild of Traveler's Locust tree, to whom Lee tethered his horse, is still growing in the same spot. Right here in Orange County!

*And so the first half of our tour concludes. Keep the map on Page 1. You'll need it to continue with the second half which will be published in the next Insider, due out May 1. We'll start where we left off, right here in the Town of Orange. See you there!*



St. Thomas Episcopal Church



**ORANGE COUNTY**  
VIRGINIA  
VisitOrangeVirginia.com  
Map provided by Orange County Visitors Bureau

# Right here in Orange County: part I

Over the past two years I've had the privilege of making the friendship of Orange County historian Frank Walker. I've read his book, *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia*, and I attended and recorded several of his lectures at the Orange County Historical Society this past winter. I am also being mentored by Frank, who due to failing eyesight, hopes to pass on his knowledge and his tour business to a younger generation of guides.

Impossibly big shoes to fill. Recently, Frank, working almost entirely without notes, conducted one of his legendary Orange County Heritage tours. Everyone on that tour (mostly folks from Lake of the Woods) was not only bowled over by the gold mine of information that resides in Frank's head but by the sheer depth and breadth of Orange County's history. In fact a comment was made that every elected and appointed official should go on this tour as a prerequisite to holding office. It would be nice if every county resident could, but regrettably, the tour bus can only seat 50 or so.

So, I decided to recreate an, albeit, abridged version of this tour that you, average Orange County citizen, can follow



Photos by Phil Audibert  
Frank Walker has dedicated the past 14 years of his life researching the history of Orange County. He is the author of *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia*, and he has created a tour guiding company that focuses on regional history. For more information, call (540) 672-9414 or go to his website: [www.tourguideltd.com](http://www.tourguideltd.com).

with the help of the above map. Due to the sheer magnitude of this project, this will have to be accomplished in two *Insider* articles.

The first starts at Germanna and ends in the Town of Orange. The second starts where the first left off, at the Town of Orange and goes to the western end of the County before circling back to Orange. So, save the map that is on this page; you're going to need it for both installments.

Plan on making a day of it...or two. Load up the kids, the parents, the grandparents. Designate a driver who does not have to read and drive at the same time and let's follow Orange County's history, not in chronological order but in the order that you will encounter it as you travel down the road.

You will soon come to the realization that Orange County's history is not only one of the richest in the region, or the state, but in the entire nation. It can be argued that the birth of the industrial revolution, the early push for westward expansion, the building blocks of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and a major turning point in the Civil War can be traced to people and events, right here in Orange County!

**Stop #1- The Germanna Visitors Center**

It is only fitting that the story should start here, because this is the beginning of recorded history in Orange County. A map made by Captain John Smith of his 1608 exploration up the Rappahannock River as far as he could go (the falls at Fredericksburg) shows a Manahoac Indian settlement called Shackaconia along the Rapidan River. It is believed that this is the site of today's Indiantown near Flat Run, right here in Orange County. Native American history runs earlier than that, of course; Clovis spear points and a Paleo Indian tool-making jasper flint quarry, uncovered by Route 3 road construction, date back to 10,000 BC.



**The Germanna Visitors Center**

But as far as the beginning of modern recorded history is concerned, the date is generally believed to be 1714 with the arrival of Governor Alexander Spotswood. Interestingly, Spotswood encountered few Indians here; the local Sioux-speaking people may have already retreated over the mountains back towards the plains. They would run into the white man again soon enough.

Something of a mover and shaker, a man who would today be quoted as saying, "either lead, follow, or get out of the way," Alexander Spotswood established Fort Germanna about ¾ of a mile across Route 3 from the Visitor's Center. Frank Walker says this site, from an archaeological standpoint, "is the last major historic venue in the Commonwealth of Virginia to be developed."

In 1714, Spotswood imported German indentured servants—metal workers, actually—to work iron ore deposits that had been discovered in the area. Never mind that the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, known as the Board of Trade back in England had deemed that the colonists could not manufacture anything. 'Send us the raw materials; we'll send them back to you as finished goods,' they ruled. The colonists grumbled, 'we're selling to you wholesale and buying it back at retail.'

Always believing that "getting forgiveness is a lot easier than receiving permission," Spotswood went ahead with his iron ore smelting operation without the Board of Trade's permission. He argued and the Board of Trade had to agree that it was preferable to cut down Virginia's forests to fuel these furnaces and save England's forests for her wooden navy.

During one furnace's heyday, two acres of woodland fell to the axe every day to make charcoal. By 1750, six furnaces were running ultimately mowing down 70 square miles of Orange, Culpeper

and Spotsylvania forest. "It was here that the great quantities of cheap pig iron began to be produced," continues Frank, "and you can argue convincingly that right here in this area is the birthplace of the American industrial revolution." Right here in Orange County.

By the way, the Germans, after whom Germanna is named, worked off their obligation to Spotswood and fled across the Rapidan to form Germantown in Fauquier County and later the Hebron Valley settlement in Madison County. To this day, a look through the phone book reveals those original German names with Madison County addresses, many of whom occupy positions of economic and political power and influence: Blankenbaker, Clore, Lohr, Utz, Hoffman, Wilhoit, to name a few. It is estimated that six million Americans can trace their roots today to these German settlers.

Spotswood also organized the expedition of the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe in 1716. This journey over the Blue Ridge Mountains, complete with champagne toasts and gun volleys, was really a thinly disguised publicity stunt to spark interest in westward settlement. A look at Spotswood's guest list shows the names of all the shakers and movers of that time. The Board of Trade back in London wanted the British to "get off of the beaches" and claim some property to the west before the Spanish to the south and the French to the north could. What better way to achieve that than to organize a junket with some land speculators in tow to the Shenandoah Valley.

Back in those days, the King owned the land. If you wanted some, then you had to petition the King through his agents, to be issued a "patent" for that land. If you could "seat and plant," a patent before it expired, the land became yours. Part of this process involved building a structure, usually a log cabin, 16' X 20'. And to this day, several old manor homes in Orange County bear traces of the original "patent" house within their walls. A splendid example of a 1733 patent house has been reassembled inside the Agricultural Hall at the James Madison Museum.

However, instead of a log cabin, Spotswood built what became known as The Enchanted Castle, a brick mansion 85 feet by 35 feet. The footprint for this remarkable structure, (considering it was out in the middle of nowhere), has been discovered, partially excavated and protected. Spotswood, who was described as being "able and imperious," went on to many other accomplishments, one of them being that he tracked down the infamous pirate, Edward Teach, aka Blackbeard, and put his head on a pike at the entrance to Hampton Roads.

*Okay...time to load up and head east on Route 3.*

As you drive down Route 3, consider as you pass Lake of the Woods, that there used to be a gold mine at the bottom of this lake. Gold mining was an active industry in the county for more than 100 years starting in the 1830s. There were some 15 operations, none of whom produced any significant amounts of gold. Frank Walker points out that, as in most mining operations, it was more profitable to mine the pockets of the investors than it was to mine the ground.



**Ellwood**

*Turn right onto Route 20 south.*

As you approach the intersection of Rts. 3 and 20, fast forward to May 5th and 6th, 1864. Where the MacDonalds and Sheetz are today was a bustling wagon park connected to Wilderness Tavern on the median strip further up Rt. 3. Close your eyes (not the driver!) and imagine the confusion, noise and dust as Federal troops marched back and forth; caissons and supply wagons rattled by, horses reared, men cursed. Welcome to 'behind the scenes' at the battle of the Wilderness.

As you go up the hill on Route 20, known then as the Orange Turnpike, consider that on your right was located the headquarters of the recently appointed commander of all Union armies, Ulysses Grant. He spent both days of the battle sitting here on a stump smoking cigars and whittling. On your left is Ellwood, the Horace T. Lacy plantation house that had already seen its share of history, having hosted, among others, Lighthorse Harry Lee, the Marquis de Lafayette, generals and wounded on both sides of the Civil War, and most notably it marks the burial place for "Stonewall" Jackson's amputated left arm almost exactly a year prior.

**Stop #2-The Battle of the Wilderness**

*Drive on Route 20 south through the clearing that is Saunders Field. Make a left on Hill-Ewell Drive, park, get out of the car and cross the little wooden bridge that leads into the field.*



**Ewell's earthworks**

Consider that the south side of this "ragged uneven old corn patch" was on fire. Cartridge boxes of some of the wounded were exploding. The turnpike itself served as a fire break. What one diarist termed "blizzards of lead," were being exchanged across this clearing. In the tangled undergrowth around it, units became separated, lost and confused. More fires broke out and throughout it all roared the din of battle...what one soldier aptly called "the concert of death."

You are now standing on ground that was literally soaked with American blood. Paddy Ryan's 140th New York advanced towards you through this field with 529 men; only 268 made it back. You can clearly see Ewell's earthworks snaking along the edge of the field. Erected rapidly, these ramparts were a "force multiplier." One man behind these earth and log walls could hold off four to five attackers, as long as he didn't run out of ammunition.

Saunders's Field is the setting of the famous fistfight. According to diaries on both sides, two men, one Confederate the other Federal, were stranded in the swale that runs perpendicular to Rt. 20. The shooting stopped as bemused soldiers on both sides watched the two men duke it out in the middle of the turnpike. Apparently, the Confederate won the contest, took the Federal prisoner, and escorted him unmolested to his own lines before the battle resumed with renewed ferocity.

A few preliminaries: you already know why this is called the

Wilderness; it's because of those iron mines more than a century prior. Remember those 70 square miles of woodland had been clear-cut, and because it is located on some of the poorest soil known to man, it came back as an "impenetrable thicket."

Ever since the spring of 1862, the de facto border of the Confederacy was the line made by the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers. Robert E. Lee has been holed up right here in Orange County since his retreat from the Gettysburg disaster in July of 1863. His troops have spent the winter glaring across the Rapidan River at a Federal army, twice their size. They don't always glare and snipe; there are stories of fraternization across this narrow band of water, trading tobacco and whiskey for coffee and newspapers, even paying each other clandestine social visits.

Not so today. Union General George Meade, with Grant perched on his shoulder, is trying to accomplish what so many other Union commanders have failed to do (Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville), namely cross this river for good and pursue Lee to Richmond. He just wishes it wasn't happening in the Wilderness. But his line of 4,300 wagons, 60,000 horses and 120,000 well-fed and somewhat out-of-shape troops, have bogged down here before they can reach open country.

The Confederates have watched all this from atop Clark's Mountain. In those days, there were two major east-west roads in this area. Confederate General A.P. Hill advances up the Plank Road, today's Route 621, and Richard Ewell comes up the Orange Turnpike, today's Rt. 20. Most of the first day of this battle is fought here and in the woods to the south.

*Time to hop into the car and travel slowly down Hill-Ewell Drive.*

It is here in these woods that the confusion is most profound. Visibility is limited to a few feet in some cases. At one point you will pass Permelia Higginson's farm. Known sarcastically as the "backwoods beauty of the Wilderness," it is she who taunted retreating Federal soldiers with her witch-like cackling laugh.

*At the stop sign turn right onto Rt. 621, the old plank road.*

On your right is the widow Tapp field, where on the second day of fighting, the Confederates were routed, only to be saved at the last moment by Longstreet's Corps, who had marched part of the previous day and all night from Green Springs! This is where the other famous story of this battle took place. A clearly agitated Lee tried to lead Longstreet's Texans into battle. Amidst calls of "Lee to the rear," the men refused to advance any further until their beloved leader retired to safety.

Meanwhile, Billy Mahone, a railroad man who was familiar with Orange County, located an abandoned railway cut that ran roughly parallel to the Plank Road. His and three other brigades flanked the Federals. Later, their commander, Winfield Hancock said the maneuver "rolled me up like a wet blanket." It looked like the Confederates might win the day.

But disaster struck. Longstreet, riding down the road with South Carolinian troops wearing brand new dark charcoal gray (blue?) uniforms, was mistakenly fired upon by Mahone's men. Longstreet was struck by a minie ball to the neck. And, by the way, there is nothing mini about a minie ball. Deadly accurate at 400 yards, it is as big around as my index finger. The next day, Longstreet was taken to his quartermaster's home, Meadowfarm outside Orange, and miraculously he lived to tell about it.

But his wounding, so eerily similar to what happened to Jackson just down the road a year earlier, caused the Confederate rally to sputter. Lee launched an attack on a burning barricade at the crossroads of the Brock and Plank Roads to no avail. Other than a diversionary tactic on the eve of Appomattox, it was the last frontal attack

Lee would ever order in the war.

The Battle of the Wilderness claimed 23,000 killed, wounded or missing...a bloody draw. Federal troops marched that night. As they approached the crossroads of the Brock and Plank Roads, cheers rippled down the line, as the troops realized that they finally had a leader who would not run back across the river, a leader who, like a dog with a bone, would relentlessly pursue Lee. Still, it took Grant 11 months. And for Lee, the Battle of the Wilderness, right here in Orange County, was the beginning of the end. (For more information on this battle, check out the *Insiders* of May 4 and May 11, 2006)

**Plank Roads-** So, why is it called a plank road? Simply put, because it was built of planks, using the trees that were being felled to make room for the road. According to Frank Walker, long stringers



**The Turnpike Trace**

were laid down first, and then sturdy planks were laid across them. Earth filled the middle of the road for better footing for draft animals and the wagon wheels rolled on the planks. Bump, bump, bump, bump, bump.

*So you are now traveling in the bed of the original Plank Road, Rt. 621.*

**Mine Run-** so named not for the iron nor the gold in them that hills but the promise of silver. Spotswood, on his 1716 expedition of the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe camped one night where Mine Run empties into the Rapidan. An Indian guide told him there was silver at the headwaters of this stream. It was

*named Mine River that very day (later Mine Run), even though no silver was ever found.*

**J.E.B. Stuart's Hat-**August 18, 1862, J.E.B. Stuart is taking a nap on the front porch of the Catlett Rhoades house right here at the intersection when he is surprised by Federal cavalry and has to make a run for it. He left, among other things, his plumed hat, considered quite a prize by the Federals. Later, Stuart captured Union General, John Pope's dress uniform and offered to exchange it for the hat, but Pope had no idea where the hat was and couldn't make the trade.

*Now we come to New Verdierville, the intersection of Rts. 621 and 20. Turn left towards Orange on 20.*

**Lafayette Slept Here-**June 8-9, 1781, the Marquis de Lafayette and his army camped here. Having retreated to Culpeper County where he received reinforcements, Lafayette was on his way back towards Tidewater seeking to engage Lord Cornwallis. "The drive towards Yorktown began here in Orange County," says Frank Walker. That's why Route 669 is called Marquis Road.